

### Snapshots:

Tali Sroka: <https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/members/14782/snapshots/2676/4710>

Zodac Polcim: <https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/members/15674/snapshots/2828/5002>

## Ordam'd if you don't

"I have a bad feeling about this."

"Vait, this vas *your* idea!"

"Doesn't mean I have to feel good about it," Zodac Polcim muttered as the groans and clanks of manipulator clamps echoed through the cramped hull of the boarding shuttle. He eyed the hatch perimeter warily, trying to gauge whether or not the sealant foam had been dispensed correctly or whether the atmosphere inside the shuttle would be sucked out the moment the hatch opened. He felt cautiously optimistic it might not, which was better than he felt about their mission.

"The reason I trustetd you vas because you saidt you hadt experience in these types of things," Tali Sroka grunted with exasperation. "Didn't you say you hadt kidnappedt several officers from right under their bridge crews' noses?"

"Killed, love. I said I'd *killed* many an officer aboard their own ships," Zodac corrected, pulling out a pair of heavy slugthrower pistols and bracing a foot against the side of the hatch just in case.

"But the mission ve got vas—"

She was cut off by the sudden deployment of the breaching charges as a powerful hissing of plasma cutters sliced through the *Ocaejar's* hull to allow their illicit entry. Slivers of smoke trailed from the red hot wound in the Dreadnaught's side as the hatch finally retracted, letting the pair of Arconans catch the first glimpse of their hunting ground.

Zodac grunted as he jumped through, keen to put a solid airlock between himself and the ominously hissing sealant foam that struggled to mate their boarding craft to the *Ocaejar's* underside. The moment he emerged inside the laundry room, his guns did most of the introductions.

Tali sighed at the sound of gunfire — accented by a trio of hard thumps — before following the veteran mercenary inside the Collective warship. The laundry was a steaming collection of cheap uniforms and unsettling piles of polishing rags for maintaining cybernetics. Lying on the

floor were the durasteel corpses of three menial droids, bleeding electric embers onto the decking.

"Think they hadt time to soundt the alarm?" Tali inquired cautiously, hands reaching for her sabers.

Zodac made a pronounced gesture of cupping the side of his helmet and shook his head. "Don't think so, or we'd know about it."

Tali suppressed the urge to quip back and straightened her posture. "Goodt, then ve can slip into something a bit more uncomfortable andt see how long it takes for them to notice a few new additions to the crew."

"Go right ahead, I'll watch."

"*Keep vatch.*"

"Yeah, *watch.*"

"Ugh..."

The man snickered a bit as he turned to change into his disguise. It pained him to part from his beloved armor- especially his poncho. But, it had to be done. There was no way in hell he was going to let himself get riddled with holes, better yet get caught in this mess and become a prisoner.

After taking off his gear and shifting through the uniforms to find the proper fit, he tucked his slugthrowers into his waistband and looked to Tali, as if he was expecting her to lecture him.

"I ain't goin' anywhere without 'em, I'm sure you gathered that much."

Tali rolled her eyes and shook her head. What had she done to be sent on a mission with such a seemingly unruly man?

"And, I'll let ya take the lead on this one. I'm sure you'll fare a helluva lot better than I ever could. 'Specially with all that Force mumbo jumbo." He flared and wiggled his fingers around.

"Yeah." She muttered, shaking her head. "Right. Ve shouldt be able to get through to Ghafa very easily, as long as ve don't bring *too much* attention to ourselves." She raised an eyebrow and crossed her arms, looking at the old man. "Andt, ve vill capture Ghafa."

Zodac recoiled. "Kill. We've been through this. It ain't the most smart idea to be lugging this bastard through his own damn ship, 'less we're lookin' to fight our way out."

"We couldn't get a lot more information from him if he comes with us. *Alive*. It'll be worth the hassle." The Twi'lek crossed her arms and straightened herself.

A glare was all he was able to muster, throwing whatever gear he didn't plan to take with him under a pile of laundry. "If I get sight of him, I'm gonna take the shot. We'll wipe our hands and be done with it."

"But the information we can get-!"

"Listen," he growled, "He is to be killed or captured, that is what we got told, is it not? If he really was *that* important, would we have not been told to bring him back alive? Am I right, or am I right?"

"Hmph," Tali scoffed, growing tired of this philosophical debate. "Alive or dead, we need to *find* him first. I figure the Collective must follow at least *some* similarity with the Imperial Navy, so I hope your rank tabs are higher than mine. Just do the salutes and whatnot to keep the suspicion down, ok?"

Zodac grinned. "Yeah, sure. Lemme see if I still remember how..." He laboriously raised his hand to a sloppy salute. "Ooof, that really took some doin'!"

The Twi'lek was looking distinctly unimpressed. "I see you managed to get it up? I hear that becomes a problem with old age..."

The veteran was stunned speechless for a moment, his mind needing a few long seconds to fully comprehend the Twi'lek's retort. "Hey now, that was uncalled for," he sulked bitterly.

"Yeah, well get going if you don't want a whole physiology lecture about the ravages of age," Tali said, adjusting her collar and checking she looked 'presentable'. Some ticks were hard to shake.

Zodac straightened his uniform jacket patted down the sides to make sure the slugthrowers weren't poking out conspicuously, and opened the door into a standard hallway that could have been aboard almost any warship built during the last hundred odd years. The pair exchanged one final glance and ventured forth, hoping their equally utilitarian garb would hold up to scrutiny.

The first test came almost immediately when a runner of some sort bumped into them. Rounding the corner at speed, the young lad slammed into Zodac with enough speed to almost send him tumbling to the deck. Had it not been for Tali's preternatural reflexes, she wouldn't have caught him in time.

Yet, before she'd even fully braced herself to support his weight, Zodac was blasting off at the man, spewing such a tirade of brimstone and insults that the poor lad looked like he was about to soil his slacks or pass out, or both. A string of apologies and placative gestures followed, the hapless fellow bowing down so low he might have kissed his own boots, and having played his part to a fault, Zodac let him off with a dismissive grunt and reminder to 'never let that happen again'.

When the runner rounded the corner and disappeared from view, noticeably more carefully this time, Tali couldn't hide her look of surprise any longer.

"That vent, better than expectedt," she admitted.

"Ha, chewing up greenhorns? That I can do in my sleep!" the Human scoffed. "It's when there's someone *above* my rank that things'll get — interesting."

At that very moment, the *Ocaejar* shuddered from the unmistakable impacts of turbolaser fire and the sharp cracks of a concussion missile salvo raked her port side. Klaxons began wailing and the illumination, flickering momentarily as the shields drew more power to resist the turbolaser volley, dimmed to a bloody crimson.

*"—HANDS TO BATTLE STATIONS! REPEAT, ALL HANDS TO BATTLE STATIONS! COMMANDER ORDAM TO THE BRIDGE. REPEAT, COMMANDER ORDAM REPORT TO THE BRIDGE,"* a droning voice sounded over the PA system.

The pair glanced at each other. "Vell, at least ve know where he is."

"Yeah, too bad the bridge is at the *opposite* end of a Dreadnaught."

"You're one to always foundt the raincloudts amidst my silver linings..." Tali sighed. "C'mon, ve're under attack. Time to act like it," she said and broke into a solid jog.

"Yeah, well I didn't live this long by just lookin' at clouds all day," Zodac muttered and followed suit.

"Here's the plan- bridge is definitely going to have guards posted, either side of the door, inside 'n out. It would be... unwise," he admitted, "to kill them. Unless we plan to shoot our way out, which I am not opposed to." He suggested with a rather nefarious smile.

Tali scoffed as she shook her head. "Ve do not have to kill, unless the vorst comes. Until then, ve shall use diplomacy, if that is okay with you." She said in a rather mocking tone, a firm smirk growing on her face.

“Oh har har. If things start to get hairy, or something happens I don’t like, imma start blastin’ folks.”

The alarms blared, and groups of soldiers and personnel alike ran past them in a hurry to get to their station. And, as it dawned on him, Zodac began to pick up the pace. “C’mon. We gotta make this quick, before we end up blown to bits. There’s a five credit beer night next week, and I’d love to attend.”

“Ah, I’m glad you have such motivations in life.” Tali quipped.

The structure of the dreadnaught was certainly similar to those he had been on before. The corridors twisted and turned as they always did, but emerging from the laundry room, then passing by barracks and the mess hall was all too familiar. It wasn’t until they passed the officer’s mess hall that he knew they were drawing near, and when he began to slow himself. “Don’t salute any of the officers. We’re in combat... Returning the salute is the least of their worries.” He stated under his breath, just as a pair of officers walked at a brisk pace beside them. The Human and the Twi’lek watched as the pair turned at a junction, and disappeared around the corner.

“Come on.” Zodac commanded, his light-heartedness fading, and a more soldier-like tone arose. “You can do the thing that Jedi do, right? The mind trick?”

“Yes. Quite easily.” She looked down at herself, straightening her uniform to look as presentable as one may.

“Then you already know what to-” Just as they turned the corner, a rather tall man crashed into Zodac, dropping the datapad he had been gazing upon. “You sonva-!” The man caught his tongue just before he began, quickly realizing it wasn’t just some greenhorn. It was an officer, certainly a young one, as the insignia on his collar would suggest. The fire in Zodac’s eyes were snuffed, and the ugly, twisted expression the officer’s face presented spelled out the condemning of a lifetime. Just before words were able to escape his ugly lips, Zodac pinned his forearm across the man’s neck and stapled him to the wall, the men beginning their grapple. As the officer struggled to breathe, he tried to claw at the arm that kept him pinned, and the face of his aggressor. Zodac’s head pulled back, looking to his ally.

“Do the thing!” He nearly shouted. Had the alarms not been masking the sounds of the struggle their stealthy approach would have certainly been botched.

Tali’s hand raised and slid across the air, soft words muttered beneath her breath. The struggle subsided, and Zodac released the young man as he stood with a near blank stare. The veteran took a step back and returned a stare of his own, then looked to Tali. “That’s... really effective. Wish I could do that. Glad you haven’t done it to me, either.”

Tali grimaced. "That doesn't mean I haven't tried. Did you really have to do that?" She crossed her arms, staring down the human.

His head recoiled, and a moment passed. "I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that. And, what are ya upset about?" He gestured to the young man. "I've just got us our ticket to Ghafa!" A grin spread across his face, slowly bending to pick up the data pad that had been dropped. "And, I just got us a little bit of intel." He stuffed it under his arm and pointed to the corridor just a few steps away. "Bridge's door is just right there. Just as long as this young lad says we're with him," Zodac slapped his back rather hard, "we *should* be fine."

Tali huffed and rolled her eyes, but didn't protest. At least there *was* a plan. She closed her eyes for a moment and whispered the right words into the young man's pliant psyche, before nodding to Zodac and setting off in the slack jawed lieutenant's wake.

The Bridge security was surprisingly lax, or perhaps Ghafa Ordam had a habit of accepting urgent dispatches personally. Either way, the guards let the trio pass, though only the young lieutenant was allowed to approach Commander Ordam. Tali watched intently as her puppet walked up to the seated Nautolan, bowed, and began reaching for a datapad to deliver to him.

A datapad which he no longer possessed.

Her brow furrowed. The man's face twitched. She'd seen that tick before, one of Lucine's thralls when they began questioning reality. The Sith had a knack of lulling them back under her spell, but...

"C-commander... L-look out!" the young man managed, fighting against Tali's control.

She had no time to react when Zodac had already made his move. The slugthrowers were drawn and firing, the veteran moving out to present a harder target while gunning down security guards attempting to stop him. Tali hissed a curse in tune with her igniting saber, deflecting a blaster bolt that would have ended the man's illustrious career and *shoving* a pair of frightened bridge crew against their consoles with an ephemeral push.

The staggered lieutenant was still fumbling with his sidearm, struggling to draw it from its holster, when Zodac caught up to him and slammed the butt of his pistol into the man's face. He crumpled to the ground with a broken nose, wailing in agony, but his warning had been enough for Ordam to make a break for it.

Quicker to the draw, the Nautolan fired as he ran towards a side entrance, forcing Zodac to abandon his pursuit and seek cover behind the very chair his quarry had previously sat in. Bolts seared deep gouges into the durasteel frame, spitting molten embers onto his purloined uniform and singeing his greying hair.

Taking the moment to reload, Zodac was about to snap something at the Twi'lek when a blur of purple dashed past him, deflecting Ghafa's shots as she closed the distance. The Nautolan realized his peril and reached for a grenade, but by then it was too late. Golden plasma flashed before his eyes, the severed barrel of his blaster pistol spitting electric embers, while a wet *thump* announced the loss of his left hand as it hit the deck — still clutching a flashing thermal detonator.

"Surrender," Tali spat sharply, holding the man at saber point.

He grimaced through the pain, clutching at the stump of his forearm. The Nautolan's eyes shifted, noticing the explosive by his lost limb. "U-until every cage..." he retorted laboriously.

Tali furrowed her brow, and never saw Zodac coming as he tackled her through the doorway and out of the bridge proper a second before Ghafa's grenade blew. The next moment the world around them was lost in a cacophony of violent sound and concussive shock.

When they both came to, the lights aboard the *Ocaejar* had taken on a drastically darker tone. The wailing of sirens had also grown more pressing, and the calls to abandon ship sounded over the failing intercom. Behind them, the bridge was a broken ruin, ablaze and choked with smoke. The pair glanced at each other and headed for an escape pod, limping and struggling to stay upright with bleeding cuts through their cheap uniforms from shrapnel.

As the pod launched into space, Tali plugged her datapad into the guidance computer and hoped the cracked screen wouldn't impede its function. After the tensest seconds of her life, it booted to a fragmented AIN logo and the text 'Extraction Deployed' flashed on the screen.

"Gotta hand it to ya, for a Jedi, you're awfully good at blowing things up," Zodac grunted as he pulled a piece of metal from his thigh.

"Andt for a former Imperial, you're an awfully sharp shot."

"Yeah well..." Zodac began, before realizing there was no barb to speak of. "...thanks. And thanks for saving my life." He offered his hand for a shake.

"Likewise," the Twi'lek replied, taking his hand and gripping it firmly as the *Ocaejar* finally succumbed to her injuries.