Defenders of Jedha

Competition Entry

Seer Raziel

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Pin 11584

The music in the sealed tunnel was loud, there were no two ways about it. Being in a contained environment within solid stone walls made for amazing acoustics, but it also meant that conversation was more than a little difficult.

“Which album was this?” Revak all but shouted to his current work partner, Raziel.

“What?”

“I SAID WHICH ALBUM?!” Revak repeated himself, his voice raising higher in a vain attempt to cut through the staccato and heavily distorted synthstring and bassline currently entertaining them. For anyone else, it would have been an aural assault, but these two weren’t just anyone else.

“DANGEROUS DREAMS!” Raziel shouted back.

“WHAT!?” Revak replied, turning to face Raziel more fully.

“Stang,” Raziel snapped, and paused the music. “THE ALBUM NAME,” he began, still shouting. “The album name is Dangerous Dreams,”

Revak picked up the music disk and inspected the cheaply produced labeling. “Was this their first album?”

Raziel nodded. “Yeah, and it was a hell of a tour. I traveled with them on three planets for the tour. This was right when the Empire banned them. If they thought it was going to tame them, they were dead wrong.”

“So, did you ever get to meet the band?” Revak asked, knowing well the mystique surrounding the Anti-Imperial punk band.

“*Nobody* got to meet Red Shift Limit. I *did* get to hang out with Starburst one night. The tour’s security manager wanted somebody to keep an eye on them while they partied,”

“What was that like?” Revak asked, suddenly even more curious. These were bands touring right around the time he was born, and there was quite a bit of legend and hype surrounding the music scene during the Civil War.

Raziel was about to answer when something caught his attention. Just within the nearby airlock, he could feel a familiar presence, and the aura that was attached to it wasn’t exactly reflecting anything good. “Boss lady,” he finally said, zeroing in on who he was sensing.

“Yeah, I felt her too,” Revak stood up and dusted his trousers off and waited on the Consul to enter their sealed off section of tunnels. “She feels bothered, and she’s not hiding it,”

“Eh, we probably just had the music up too loud.” Raziel replied, but followed suit in coming up to his feet. Despite psychometric reading of artifacts being an excellent reason to be on his duff while working, there was no reason to keep on the ground.

The airlock cycled, revealing Aura, who stepped into their workspace. It was an interesting bit of evolution, the Zeltron species, specifically their hip and leg muscles, and the bones they connected to. When a Zeltron walked, there was a swing of the hips that had sent more than a few people some seriously mixed signals. Mercifully, the two men in the room were more than capable enough to read her feelings before reading her body language

“What’s wrong?” Raziel asked.

“More raids,” Aura replied, taking a seat on a flat rock. “And they’re growing bolder. I think the people in charge of these gangs are deciding to test us.”

“I can handle this,” Revak offered, his hand resting casually on the pommel of his lightsaber.

“And I appreciate it, but you’re needed here,” Aura replied, giving him an apologetic look. “Besides, this isn’t up your alley, it’s up Raz’s.”

That was enough to perk his ears up. Raziel was blind, not deaf, after all. “I’m listening,”

“Dorn Company is doing humanitarian service, take two platoons and head to Ai-jed. One of the gangs started taking slaves from an outlying village, and the citizens are starting to arm themselves to fight back. Respectable, but it’s going to get them slaughtered. Whoever these gangers are, they’ve proven tougher to handle than your average raiders.”

“I’m on it,” Raziel answered, his expansive and conversational tone completely replaced by a calm as icy as the blade of his lightsaber.

With a nod, he bade the two Jedi a silent good evening and dug out his commlink. “Soona, it looks like I need my armor after all. Swap the power cells in that and my blasters please, I’ll be at the port in a few minutes.”

Soona’s voice, tinny and staticky from the signal interference, still carried her concern. “Should I be worried?”

“No,” Raziel replied, seeing Aura’s shake of her head. “Just keep to the ship and have a commlink handy,”

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It was a half hour of rapid prep work and mobilization, frenetic and hasty, but that effort was showing in progress. Raziel stood holding onto one of the straps attached to the safety bar that ran through the LAAT/I that carried the two Desh Company platoons and himself towards Ai-Jed. His other hand held a small holoprojector that showed the layout of the city.

“Details are sketchy,” Raziel said, addressing the two platoon commanders. “So we need to be prepared for anything. All I know for sure is, these gangs are acting a lot more organized than your average punks.”

One of the lieutenants, a Duros named Tredle, nodded, an introspective look on his face. It was clear he was already cooking up battle plans. “We’ll hold them off. I’ll take my men and we’ll herd the civilians here and here,”

The Lieutenant illustrated his point by gesturing into the holo, towards a fair sized cluster of larger buildings. “Looks like storehouses, which means we can set up fortification and defenses.”

His colleague, a human woman named Lieutenant Mindolyn Krees, pivoted around on her foot to get a better view, but also pointed into the holo as well. “I can split my people into two fire teams and post them here and here,” At this, she motioned towards the North and East sections of town, the two places not bordered on by mountains. “We’ll have the LAAT/I keep concealed in the hills. Odds are good these slavers are used to just strolling into town to take what they want, so it’s a calculated risk.”

“Yeah, do that. We can’t have this bird using its guns inside the village; it’d be too easy to rip through infrastructure. If we make these people homeless, they’re an even bigger target for the slavers, with less cover and concealment than before. We’ll have the crew keep on hot standby to cover the mountains for us.” Raziel replied. “The slavers have been working on a pretty predictable schedule, so we’ve got three days before they should be coming in again. Aura said the villagers are arming themselves, so we can make use of that.”

“Jedha has a proud tradition of armed insurrection; we might have some talent to work with,”Tredle remarked. “I want to keep the people willing to fight near the forward lines. I can’t trust people I don’t know to not shoot friendlies in the back when the furball kicks off.”

Min could only agree with that assessment. “Yeah, I’ll spread my fire teams out, we can tell the civilians to hold fire until we start shooting. There’s probably a couple of crack shots, these country villages tend to always have one or two, but I get the feeling they’ll just be suppressing more than anything else.”

“Probably for the best anyway,” Raziel commented. “A lot of folk don’t have the stomach for a fight. Telling them to fire on areas to funnel the enemy to where we want them is a lot more palatable to your average person.”

“Sir, what will you be doing through all of this? We need to plan accordingly,” Tredle asked, fully addressing Raziel. The emotional undercurrents coming off of him spoke plainly as to how unfamiliar he was.

“I’ve got a rifle like everyone else, and I’m fairly skilled in Battle Meditation. Do you have any experience working within it?”

“No sir,” Min answered, and Tredle shook his head as well.

“It’s a Force technique that will help organize us and simultaneously break the will of our enemies. You’re not going to feel it like some tingle or whatever, that’s all holodrama nonsense, you’ll just notice people working in better concert than usual. I’ll be working defense of the civilians so I can concert the forward lines without much trouble.”

“That would be helpful, and there’s just us. Either we handle this, or we have to evac, and the other two LAAT/I’s are an hour and a half away.” Tredle said, still so introspective. He was a definite strategist. “What’s our Omega?”

“If I have to light up and walk into the fight, things have gone horribly wrong. I don’t want to ditch the villagers, but if the alternative is a full wipe, I will in a heartbeat. I’ve also got my ship on standby if we need to run a full evacuation, she can get here a lot faster than LAAT/I’s can, but the pilot, well, she isn’t much of a pilot, so it needs to be safe enough for the droid to put her down.”

“Okay, so it sounds like we’ve got a pretty clear picture of what we’re doing,” Min said, and glanced at Tredle. “You handle the villagers, I’ll handle the static defenses,”

“Sounds good to me. Do you want to brief the men?”

Min was about to do that very thing when the co-pilot leaned out of his seat and yelled into the back compartment. “Yeah I’d wait on that, we just got a call on the comms, they’re raiding early!”

“Stang,” Raziel mumbled as a scowl crossed his face. “One of these days things are going to go my way. One of these days,”

“Not today sir,” Tredle replied darkly.

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The LAAT/i swept around the village over the heads of the gangers, gun pods lighting the area up in an act of suppressive fire even as the pilot dropped altitude to release the troops. Already they were firing, a line kneeling and discharging their weapons while a line behind them stood up doing the same, though their shots were aimed at the gang members themselves. The red and green energy lit the air up bright in the setting sun, and what had started as a planned easy raid had become Hell on Jedha.

“Keep to the basics of the plan. Third platoon guards the villagers, fifth platoon spreads out in fire teams,” Raziel shouted over the din of blaster fire. “Keep this bird in the air for now and try to keep the slavers out of city limits if you can!”

“Roger that!” the pilot yelled, his voice as calm as his hands on the control yoke. “If they’ve got rockets we’ll have to peel off, but we’ll post up in the mountains and wait on the comm call!”

“Do that, but don’t be shocked if you have to evacuate the villagers.” Raziel shouted, before deciding things had indeed already gone very wrong. “This is my stop,” he informed Lieutenant Krees, before grabbing his lightsaber and taking a step back. “I’ll cover the drop.”

That step back wasn’t an act of cowardice, but instead an effort to get a little more room to do exactly what he did next, which was to take a flying leap out of the LAAT/i, which was still several meters in the air.

A quick Force push cushioned his landing, though he still rolled with it to turn a minimal impact into a negligible one. Immediately he was on his feet with his lightsaber ignited, and already in the process of turning and whipping the blade in orbits around his body. Ideally, seeing the well-known weapon lit up and in use would demoralize the slavers. Ideally anyway.

Behind him, in the safer zone he’d created, fifth platoon dropped out the facing side of the LAAT/i, while third began their egress on the opposite side, heading towards village center to begin securing the villagers.

While Raziel swatted blaster bolts back, addressing as many as he could as ‘return to sender’, he relaxed into the Force, letting it guide his movement as much, if not more, than muscle memory. This bought him the time and focus necessary to begin his Battle Meditation.

“First squad to the left, second to the right. Third and fourth spread out further to keep them from boxing us in. Try to hem them forward!” Min called out over the din of her own blaster rifle. As ordered, her squad leaders began marshaling their people into movement, going towards effective cover and concealment.

All the while, the racket of the blasters began fading away in Raziel’s ears, leaving only his calm, measured breathing and his steady heartbeat as the beat he set his own rhythm to. If he began purely reacting to his enemies, he allowed them to set the pace, and if they set the pace, they set the terms, and if there was one thing his master had taught him so many years ago, it was always fight on your own terms.

Fortunately, his Battle Meditation allowed him to dictate his terms in ways that simply fighting couldn’t. All around him, part of the greater whole, the two platoons accompanying him sank further into that single entity. Their weapons, carbines and light repeaters, continued to add staccato barks to the drumbeat of the conflict.

Ever advancing, the cold ground upon which Raziel strode, crunched beneath his boots. Quieter whines behind him told him that third platoon were also joining the fray, their weaponfire becoming a deterrent that further pushed the slavers.

Another two swats of his lightsaber brought it’s thrumming into the orchestra of war. At this close range, the auras of the slavers began shifting as many began losing their taste for the fight. Clearly they were expecting defenseless villagers, not two full platoons of trained, professional soldiers, with a lightsaber wielding juggernaut at the front.

“Ow.” Raziel grunted when a lucky shot got past his defenses. It struck his armor and superheated the spot where it hit, leaving a nasty burn. Survivable, but uncomfortable, and that discomfort added a discordant note to the symphony.

With a snarl and a swipe of his arm, that lucky shooter found his weapon flying away from his grip. He ducked behind his swoop bike and watched in terror as the armored monster kept advancing, still swatting or sidestepping bolts.

“Run little Nerf,” Raziel said calmly, though that calm did nothing to conceal the sheer spite in his voice. Immediately, that particular aura began hastily pushing backwards on the ground before scrambling up to his feet to turn tail, as he was politely instructed to do so.

At the lines the slavers had set up, it was easy to see why they’d been harder to deal with than the usual raider gang. Several of them were calling out orders, mustering their numbers to help fight back against the sudden onslaught. There was leadership here, and more than adequate too. What passed for the police on Jedha couldn’t have been prepared for the level of organization that the slavers were exhibiting.

Another shot, this one from behind, struck Raziel’s armor, and this one hit hard enough to pause his push, driving him down to a knee. “I’ve had about enough of this,” He spat, the vocoder in his helmet doing a wonderful job of amplifying his words.

Being the horror holo slasher, moving slow but deliberate had worked to a point. That point was where the professionals were still alive, and the less-than-professionals had died or fled. It was time to shift tactics.

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Min was dragging one of her wounded soldiers back behind an old shipping container when the entire tide of the fight changed. At first she couldn’t see it, entirely too focused on her man’s safety, but she could definitely feel it. There was something in the air that felt like lightning that was seconds from striking. When she could see that the private was safe and capable enough to dress his own wounds, she got back into the fight, and what she saw was simultaneously awe-inspiring and outright terrifying.

On one knee, their armored ally, rose from where the slavers were trying to hem him in. His icy lightsaber was moving almost furiously to deflect their weapon fire, and for a minute, it looked like it might not be enough. For a moment anyway, because once he’d found his feet, he was back in motion, and moving faster. So much so that she lost his charcoal gray armor in the dying sunlight, and could only track the movement of his lightsaber.

Within a second or two, that ice blue blade went from controlled motion to a maelstrom, zipping and darting within a several meter area, nearly illuminating it entirely in the cold light it shed. She could still make out those orbiting maneuvers she’d seen before, but it was as though she was watching a holo being played in high speed. A few blaster shots and more than a few screams met her ears, intermingling with the fire from her people’s weapons, before all of that noise fell to silence, so quiet it was deafening.

It was several long, agonizing moments before more of the crunching of Raziel’s boots met her ears. Daring to really take a good look, she saw a few more blaster scorch marks across his armor, but his pace was still measured, and seemed just as smooth and confident as when she’d first met him.

“LT, I think the fight’s over,” Raz said to her, doffing his helmet. Immediately, steam began rising from his head in the bitter chill of the night, and that did absolutely nothing to make her feel safer. When he produced a small Bacta canister from his pack by way of Force Telekinesis, that terror became almost oddly tempered. “I’ll see to your man, take your people and put some binders on the ones smart enough to surrender.”

True to his word, Raz knelt down by the wounded trooper and began rendering additional first aid. Feeling more dumbfounded than she had since basic training, Min could only nod and motion towards her nearest squad leader. “Yessir,”

After she’d began walking away, Raziel focused on the trooper he was helping. “What’s her deal? It’s like she’s seen a ghost or something.”