

A Blind Man's Gambit

Dandoran Space Port

Doran System, Hutt Space

39 ABY

A Zygerrian stood in the docking bay, awaiting the remaining of her entourage to arrive. The mission was mostly simple. Go to Dandoran, find a way to the vault, and get out with the crystals. Having Marick on board with her would make this mission a walk in a park. The sooner they finished, the sooner they would be back home and enjoying a nice and relaxing drink.

In the distance, Zig Kaliska could see Marick Tyris Arconae walking slowly towards her with his usually stoic expression. She gave the Hapan a smile and a wave, but something seemed off. Zig could spot a silhouette of a familiar person walking behind him. It was Kaled Atros. The Zygerrian didn't have a chance to talk with young Miraluka, but Zig remembered him well enough from his attendance at the Voidbreaker meeting where he had an argument with some strange, orange Twi'lek girl.

"Well hello there, gentleman!" The Zygerrian greeted them with a smile. "Odd for you to bring a friend with you, eh boss?"

"Hmm..." Hapan nodded.

Kaled stood silent. On his face, there was a clear sign of nervousness that he was obviously trying to hide but to no avail.

"Hello," The young Arcanist stepped closer to Zig, giving her a slightly odd smile and a wave.

"Hey there! You must be Kaled right? My name is Zig Kaliska. But you can just call me Zig."

"Kaled Atros, Ms Kalis—I mean Zig. Excited to be here—"

"—Hey Ziggy!" a familiar voice cut off the young Miraluka's sentence. Wyndell Tyris stepped off the boarding ramp and patted Kaled on the shoulder while moving to similarly pat Zigs. The Zygerrian narrowed her golden-rod eyes at the long-haired Human.

“What? I’m here to help make sure this job goes off without a snag. What could *possibly* go wrong?” Wyn grinned.

Kaled frowned, and thought: *why do I have a bad feeling about this?*

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Earlier

Dandoran Space

Star Courier: *Encanis*

“What do you mean you won’t help with the mission?” Marick questioned the miniature, holographic figure of the Captain of the *Voidbreaker II*.

“I mean, I can’t, sorry, boss.”

“Can’t, or won’t?” Marick asked, weariness already starting to leak into his voice.

“Can’t, won’t, either. Best I can do is give you some tech, but I really need to stick with the Voidbreakers that chose to support the Harmonist Party. Someone has to watch their backs while you go play hero,” the Zygerrian explained.

“Very well. We’ll rendezvous at the docks, and I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“Copy that, see you soon.”

Marick disconnected the call and leaned back against the wall of the star courier.

“Tired already?” Wyn asked as he stepped up beside his brother. The Tyris siblings exchanged a glance, but Marick simply shrugged.

“You’re worried,” Wyndel corrected himself, not taking his eyes away from Marick.

“Someone has to be,” he replied curtly. “But Atyiru was adamant I take the boy with me. She said he could use time around a good role model. No idea what she thinks I qualify as such,” Marick explained, his voice even and never quite elevating above conversational tone regardless of his emotions.

Wyn placed a hand on his brother's shoulder, and then gestured towards the datapad the Hapan held. “Gee, I wonder why.”

On the datapad was a video feed of Kirra—Marick and Atyiru’s—daughter, back home on Selen. Satsi Tameike had agreed to watch over the baby while the Tyris’ were gone. To be fair, Marick could not think of anywhere safer to leave his child. Satsi was one of the most capable—albeit retired—assassins that he knew beyond himself. You could do much worse for a caretaker.

The tiny baby was smiling and giggling in her crib, playing with a stuffed animal Cythraul and some aurebesh letter blocks. Outside the crib, Fela, his actual Cythraul stood vigilant guard, by which she was laying on her back and *definitely* not taking a nap.

Marick grunted, but Wyn smiled. “You’re good with her, and will be with him,” the Human brother made a vague gesture towards the direction of the crew quarters.

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Present

Dandoran Space Port

“This carry case should have all the tools you’ll need. I modified a few spikes and left a few other things that should come in handy,” Zig finished explaining to Marick.

“Understood,” Marick nodded.

“Alright, well, luck, boss,” Zig said with a grin as she jogged off to meet up with the rest of the Voidbreaker team.

Marick turned back to face his remaining team. Wyn had an unwavering grin that offset Kaled’s apparent concerns.

The Miraluka remained silent. The unnerving thought was lingering in his mind, and he had to tell Marik that *she* would be here soon.

“Alright,” the Hapan broke the silence. “We have the intel that the crystals are being held here planetside. There are going to be hostile targets all around us, tensions high. That’s why Zig and I came up with a plan.”

As Marik finished, the Miraluka slowly raised his hand in the air.

“Hmm? What is it, Kaled?” Marick asked, clearly seeing that the young Arcanist was troubled by something.

“Yes. Well...You see, I really need to—”

“—HELLOOOO BOYS!”

Before Kaled was able to finish his sentence, he was suddenly interrupted by the familiar voice of a certain Twi'lek with a knack for bad timing and trouble. It was Aayla, cheerfully jumping along as she came closer to the group wearing her usual revealing attire that left no room for imagination.

Marick frowned as he saw the Twi'lek approaching. From what Hapan had observed in limited exposure, she had only caused trouble for Kaled ever since she arrived.

But Wyn didn't share his brother's concern. He looked at her with excitement and a devilish smile.

“Well, well hello there yourself.” Wyn started. “It seems this mission won't be dull after all.”

Aayla giggled at Wyn's comment. Kaled on the other hand let out a deep sigh, knowing that having her here would only cause trouble. But she was a good fighter, as she had demonstrated well enough when they had dueled a few weeks back.

“Master Marick, I'm sorry. I did try to tell you but...she insisted.” Miraluka said, lowering his head down in shame.

Marick's too-blue eyes flitted over towards the Twi'lek woman. He assessed her posture, stance, and choice of weaponry while ignoring her more obviously attention-grabbing assets. Instead, he took note of her lone weapon being a Journeyman-issued Lightsaber. The retired spy-master absently recalled reading Aayla's file that she was indeed Force-sensitive, and had chosen to follow the path of the Shadow. While her presence in the Force was faint, there was promise. “It is alright, Kaled.” Marick nodded politely to Twi'lek. When he glanced towards his brother, however, his eyes began to narrow. Wyn noticed the look and immediately put his hands up into the air to preemptively declare his innocence.

“What!?! I was just saying ‘hey’, don't give me that look,” Wyn whined.

“What look!?” Aayla asked, stepping nimbly as a dancer besides Wyn and joining him to study the more serious Tyrus. “Oh, the one where he looks like he's chewing an undercooked nerf steak, but doesn't want to be rude to his host?”

“Oddly specific...but I like where your head-tails are at, kid,” Wyn grinned.

While Marick’s face showed no reaction to being teamed up on, the muscles in his jaw did shift slightly as he ground his molars.

Kaled, meanwhile, hid his face behind his hand.

“We don’t have much time,” Marick continued, his voice already starting to sound weary. “Let’s go over the plan one more time, and see how Aayla can best assist.”

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Garganta Galleria Casino Hotel
Casino Floor

The firefighting from earlier had ceased, but evidence of the conflict was still blatantly apparent. To the credit of Hutts, their enforcers did well to clear the dead bodies and mop away the blood stains. Professionals, to be sure.

The only reason any of this plan was possible, really, was that even with a potential skirmish between two rival organizations, the Hutts did not want to have any downtime for their lucrative businesses. It was not uncommon, afterall, for fights like these to break out this far away from the core worlds. For Py'zah the Hutt, it was probably just another day.

Marick and Kaled did not have to change their apparel that much. Marick wore his typical grayscale robes—nondescript with his hood down and his lightsabers concealed beneath his cloak and the folds of his clothing. He let his Sith Dagger, however, remain visible on his hip. The Hutts were still allowing weapons, and while the guards had patted him down before entering, none of them seemed inclined to start trouble with someone carrying three lightsabers.

Unfortunately, it also meant that security had been tripled.

Fortunately, when security was implemented in too much haste, there was likely to be an opening.

Marick studied the patterns of the guards as they rotated positions. He idly slid credits into the slot machine and pulled the lever when the machine started to beep at him impatiently.

“Kaled,” Marick spoke quietly, his voice lilting towards the young Miraluka but not much further. Kaled seemed to stick out a bit more than Marick, his head

constantly on a swivel as he took in all the different shapes and colors around him. His proximity to the Elder Force Disciple seemed to be enough to deter a few hungry looks from patrons that might have seen him as an otherwise easy target.

“Do you see how the guards that replaced the ones by the turbolift are carrying more heavy armaments than the ones earlier?”

Kaled’s brow furrowed around his blindfold. “Um...I can’t really...uh, *see* the difference...” he chuckled a bit nervously.

Marick blinked a few times, then exhaled slowly through his nose. “Right. How could I forget,” he said more to himself than to the young Miraluka. The Hapan thought of Atyiru, and all the times she had tried to play ‘Eye-Spy’ with him despite the fact that doing so with a Miraluka could prove to be incredibly difficult. At least he had gotten used to it again over the past year.

“Alright, try reaching out instead with your senses. You can’t track details the way I do, but that does not mean you can’t get a feel for *intent*,” the Master explained. “You should be able to sense that these guards are more heavily armed but probably have less experience—more experienced guards don’t exude such bluntly malevolent energy. Professionals know to keep that killing intent sheathed so that they can draw it efficiently if things do escalate to violence. These ones are definitely more green.”

Kaled nodded his head in confirmation, listening to Marick’s every word. With the Hapan’s guiding words, the Miraluka concentrated. Everything around him suddenly silenced down. Kaled let the force guide his senses and it seemed that Marick was right. The guards were distant, yes, but their emotions, intent, were clear to him. The first of the two seemed fiery than the other, itching for violence and conflict. The other was calmer, focused. But with the lack of his vision, Miraluka couldn’t tell how armored those two were.

“If there is anything I can teach you, Kaled, is that you should always think with your head before your lightsaber. I’ve stayed alive as long as I have because of my awareness, not my talent for taking life. You, too, can be much more than just another blade.

“I understand.” Kaled finally spoke. “I don’t condone violence, but I’m no stranger to it. Master Aru did his best to teach me how to defend myself if push came to shove.”

The Miraluka stayed silent for a bit, thinking back on that incident a while back.

“I made a promise,” Kaled said, exposing a red feather that was tied up in his hair. “that I will never again kill an innocent being or anyone for that matter. I want to be... well, *more* than I am now, but...I do have my doubts.”

Marick was quiet for a moment as he considered his next words carefully. He had trained a generation of operators and agents for the Inquisitorius, let alone those that had fought alongside him in Arcona and his mixed bag of former apprentices and students. He thought of how he himself had been trained, what Timeros of Sashar would say here. He quickly went in the opposite direction, and instead thought about what would help Kaled the best.

“Life before death,” Marick spoke quietly. When Kaled tilted his head like a curious cythraul, Marick explained further. “It’s an expression, from an old set of oaths written by an errant band of Jedi from the days of the Old Republic. Atyiru taught me about them.”

“But what does that mean?” Kaled questioned.

“That’s a loaded question, isn’t it? I don’t think there is a simple answer, unfortunately,” Marick mused. “For me, it’s going to be different because of my past, my history. I don’t have the ability to sit here and say ‘I will never kill again’. That would be a lie. What I can do, however, is make a commitment to doing better, and to take responsibility for all that I do. That I can work to preserve those that are living instead of worrying about the wishes of the dead.”

The Hapan’s eyes moved towards Kaled’s socketless eyes, even from behind their veil from his eye wrap. He was one of the few Miraluka, it seemed, who knew how to look directly into a Miraluka’s soul without having to rely on formal eye contact.

“All that matters, Kaled, is that you are true to yourself. If you do not wish to kill, that is your choice. But when you fight to protect those you care about, it will not always be that simple. Nothing is black, or white, but your choices are yours, and yours alone.”

The Hapan finished speaking, and then returned to his quiet survey of the guard details, leaving Kaled alone to his thoughts.

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Garganta Galleria Casino Hotel
Upper Level

Aayla and Wyn slowly made their way inside the Garganta Casino Hotels upper levels, where the higher rollers were said to be. She made herself more presentable for the occasion. Wyn didn't see much change in her attire, only that she added a makeshift necklace with some shiny stones around her neck. The music in the background was not too loud, she could clearly hear people chatter and laugh and having fun.

Wyn noticed a few guards passing by as they entered. It seemed that the security was raised as Marick said, but that didn't change the plan.

Twii'lek slowly made her way down to the ground floor with her charming new companion. She wrapped herself around his arm pulling him closer to her body. This was a nice change for her. Usually, she spent time around Kaled who was constantly meditating or training which bored her to her very core. But this was more of her scene. People drinking, cheating, scheming, having fun! Now, this was life.

"Tell me," Aayla whispered to her Human companion. "how long do you know puppe-I mean Kaheid? No...Kaled? Nailed it!" She snapped her fingers as if congratulating herself. "And is that Maris, Mkir...ahh boss fellow always such...Hmmm, straight face? I thought he was going to take a dump. I make that face when I'm thinking of taking a dump. Also three guards on the balcony and that guy on the pazzak table on the right, definitely cheating." Wyn chuckled and shook his head slightly. "Yes, that's his resting dump face. But, he has his reasons, like any of us, for why he is that way. When you start from rags and are given a purpose, a mission, and are then trained to be a weapon, it's not so easy to erase old habits that kept you alive all those years," the Human explained, deftly taking a dance-like step to the side to avoid a drunk patron from bumping to them.

As a result, Wyn pressed closer to Aayla, but the Twii'lek did not seem to mind. "Huh, still looked a bit concentrated...constipated...concentrate, yeah, that's it!" Aayla smirked, her lekku bouncing slightly.

"I've known Kaled only through proximity, but I know that he's been working hard to become stronger so he can protect those that are important to him." Wyn nudged his elbow into the Twii'lek suggestively, studying her face to see if she would react. "He's important to you too, isn't he?"

Wyn continued. "Marick is like that for me as well. Neither of us were given a lot to work with in this life, and neither of us have much family besides each other. So, I trust him, and you should too."

The pair walked in silence a bit more, faking banter with one another and pointing at different things around the casino. Finally, they settled into a spot where they saw one of the patrol guards getting ready to take a bathroom break.

“Alright, you’re up. That’s your mark,” Wyn pointed at the guard. “Shake what ya’ mama gave you, girl, and get us that keycard.”

“And while I do all the work, what are you going to be doing, doll?” Aayla tilted her head cutely and batted her eyelashes.

“Don’t worry about me, this is what I was born for,” Wyn winked at her and flashed a finger gun at her.

The two parted, with Aayla towards her mark, and Wyn circling off on his own and disappearing into the crowd.

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Things didn’t go well for Aayla. Today just wasn’t her day.

“I’ll take it from here,” a large, brawny man in a black suit said.

“Jensen? I thought you left for the day,” the guard holding Ayla questioned.

“And who are you, comrade questions?” Jensen replied. “I was about to head out but then Martin asked if I could cover him for an hour. He took a shot to the ribs earlier and has been working since the incident. Figured I’d give him a spell.”

The guard seemed to process that information, all of which lined up with what had actually happened. “Okay, but this one here was trying to get my access card, and ‘boss said to lock anyone up that tried to get into the vault.”

“Right, so let me take her down to hold. You’re already working a double, did you take your fifteen yet?”

The guard’s eyes did seem a bit tired. “Yeah, but...”

Jensen waved his hand casually, as if he was dismissing it. But there was a ripple in the air, some kind of change that was detectable through the Force. Aayla’s eyes widened slightly as she realized what was going on.

“You’ll release the girl to me, and forget we had this conversation,” Jensen’s voice suddenly changed into the more familiar tone of Wyndell Tyris.

“I’ll...release the girl to you, and forget we had this conversation,” the guard nodded, his eyes now a bit glossy.

“Brilliant, cheers mate,” Wyn said as he grabbed a hold of Aayla’s arm and jerked her away.

As the two continued to walk away at a brisk pace, Wyn murmured under his breath. “You swiped his card just before I grabbed you, right?”

“What kinda aemature do you take me for!?” the Twi’lek hissed at the Human. She produced the card between two long fingers. “Of course I did.”

“Great, then it’s time for Phase 2,” Wyn grinned as they two went to rendezvous with Marick and Kaled.

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