



Patterns



*Severian Principate Intelligence reporting series of **planned assaults**
...the Doran system...casino, gunfight at the casino auction
Hutts demanding answers...**sub factions formed**...Restoration
...conflicting reports between the AIN and the DIA
Tenixir Revenants divided between expansion and revenge—
Brotherhood forces scattered —Screeching Osprey making landfall
Dwipp Bruskers—Tenixir Revenant ring leader...
Avoid collateral damage...*

He had been here before. Patterns.

Hmm.

Marick Tyris Arconae absently sifted through the concurrent streams of information as he checked over his equipment. He did not bother to hide the pair of lightsaber hilts on his belt, but his *Shaed* cloak did well to conceal the rest of his weapons more out of habit than need. The situation was already spiraling out of control, even before the Brotherhood arrived to stick its head into *another* sensitive conflict. The time for subtlety had passed. He should not have been surprised. The galaxy was just a continual sequence of patterns, after all.

This time, at least, Marick would not be held back by his position among the Dark Council.

Dandoran had a temperate climate, not too different from Arx or Selen. It was a stark difference from the circulated air of the *Voidbreaker II*, or his lodgings on Port Ol'val. The scent of ship repulsor engines and mobile machinery was beginning to overpower the cool, clean air. The terrain beneath his boots was soft yet sturdy, allowing his steps to fall silently without much need for subterfuge.

The staging area for the Imperial Harmonst Party forces, planetside, was loading in troops from transports. It was not yet a formal Forward Operating Base, but the Principate had been granted permission from the Hutts to set up shop just outside Tipool City. Marick made his way, alone, towards the site.

He realized, idly, that he couldn't remember the last time he had actually gone anywhere truly alone. Everything had been done with Atyiru, the *Voidbreaker* crew, or his daughter, Kirra. As her name entered his mind, he felt a pang of guilt for leaving her. She was safe as any child could be, back on Selen, but still he worried.

"So, you're Tyris," a dry, feminine voice drew the Hapan's attention.

Lately, Marick had come to expect the worst—reflexively—when hearing a woman reference his surname. Wyndell, too, had his patterns.

Fortunately, Marick's eyes quickly tracked towards a tall, lean woman with dark skin and pale blue eyes. Her long, sandy hair was tied back into a tight bun, leaving a singular, arched forelock free to frame one side of her face. She wore a personalized variant of police armor favored by those that patrolled the underworld. The plating showed its signs of wear, but favored her athletic frame well.

"I thought you'd be...more gaunt and, well, *evil*?" the woman said with a wry grin.

"Amara Cirrus," the Arconae greeted with a polite headnod. He knew the former Chief of Security for the Lyra-3k-a colony by reputation alone, but her file was easy for the former Voice to recall. "Sorry to disappoint you, but I'm retired now."

"A shame, but you still showed up."

"Had to," the Hapan explained.

"And why's that?" she pried, her eyes searching for him with the attention of someone who had made a career of assessing threats. She was trying to see if she could trust a 'retired' Dark Councilor.

"My wife," Marick replied with a faint shrug.

Amara snorted and shook her head. "Right, so you're here to 'help' because your wife told you to?"

"Yes," Marick answered without blinking, his face serious. "She's very convincing." His eyes went a bit distant, remembering. "Life before death, journey before destination," he recited, seemingly from a memory.

"Ah, spiritual stuff...got it. Isn't that more of a Jedi than a Sith thing?"

"I'm not a Sith," Tyris corrected. "And no, she just genuinely believes in saving everyone. We both agreed that from what we can best tell, the Harmonist Party seems to want to save lives and avoid senseless bloodshed."

"Yeah...Vairyra is the real deal," Cirrus nodded along. "Things got messy after the Lyra-3k-a incident."

"Mhm," Marick nodded as he folded his arms across his chest. The former Voice had handled the debriefings for the events that had been recorded as the Thirteenth Great Jedi War. Amara Cirrus had been in the wrong place at the wrong time and repelled a false-flag attack from the Collective that caused chaos and confusion for the Severian Principate controlled system. In the end, the Collective plot was revealed, but the aftermath to the entire affair was a logistical nightmare for all parties involved.

Marick did not force Cirrus to rehash the memories of brainwashed soldiers killing her own. He knew first hand that she was a capable and deadly combatant in her own right. It would be good to work with a professional.

"I was put on ice once the dust settled. Fortunately, the Triumvir of Oaths seemed to actually read the reports from the colony's defense and pulled me out and transferred me to her personal task force. We were targeting a rebuttal to the Collective but...well, you all seemed to take care of that one for us."

Marick nodded solemnly, his eyes going a bit distant at the memories of Arx under siege, a planet-wide ritual, and the—*allegedly*—death of Rath Oligard and his vision for the galaxy.

"Hooray for small miracles," Amara mused. "But, that brings us back to my original question. Why are you really here?"

"I was sent here to help aid your forces," Marick explained, "while my wife—Atyiru—provides healing and first aid for injuries on both sides of this conflict."

Amara read the Hapan's deadpan delivery as dry humor, and burst out laughing. She cut herself off quickly, however, when Marick tilted his head slightly at her. "Oh...you're serious. She—"

"—Precisely," he replied with a ghost of a smile.

"Alright then," Amara conceded as she unslung her Sonn-Blas F-11D Blaster Rifle and rested the barrel over one shoulder. "Well, if you really are here to help, we have a lead on Dwipp Bruskars."

"The Rodian? One of Hawee's original captains, right?"

"That's our guy," the woman nodded. "We tracked his band of insurrectionists to a camp on the outskirts of the Dandoran Imperial Depot. Should be a pretty straight forward raid."

"Alright, lead the way."



Dusk settled across the skies of Dandoran. Amara wanted to use the fading light to their advantage. The manner in which she had praised this strategy seemed to be in a vain attempt to flatter the Dark Brotherhood's top assassin's preferred conditions. The Arconae did not correct her, omitting the fact that he was no longer an assassin, really. Nor did he reveal that his Hapan heritage actually made it harder for him to see at night. However Marick identified, the irony was still not lost on him.

Fortunately, the Elder Arcanist could simply cheat to get a clear picture of his surroundings. The Force augmented his vision, granting him a clear line of sight of the rest of the strike team as they weaved through the forest.

Never let a mundane soldier know your weakness. They will always assume you can do things beyond their scope. Even if you can't, never let them know that. Distant words danced across the back of his mind. Timeros, his former Master, pairing away weakness and instilling a sense of mechanical precision into the boy that would become both a paragon and renegade for his Clan.

Amara had selected a squad of her best soldiers—personally recruited from the Principates disparate divisions by her own hand.

They came to a halt just outside an outcropping that gave way to a hastily fortified camp. Long lengths of wood had been sharpened into pointed tips and banded together with thick rope and then driven into the ground to form makeshift stockades.

"Alright, this should be the perimeter to their scouting. Can you...detect how many might be there with your midi-whatsit-Force powers?"

Marick blinked once, but offered no other reaction across his stoic face. He might have narrowed his eyes slightly, but it was hard to tell in the dark. Instead, he closed his eyes and reached out with the Force, stretching his awareness to get a picture for what lay ahead.

"Four, maybe five sentries in the trees," Marick spoke, his voice clear but barely a whisper. "Five more inside the camp, three sets of two on guard posts near the openings." Marick frowned. "That does not include droids," he quickly added.

"Understood. Jackson?" Amara said softly as she turned to make a hand gesture to the soldier to her left. "Take your team and approach from the east. Eyes out for that sentry." Amara turned and gestured more orders with hand signals. "Tracer, see if you can get a bead on the sentries. Jenson, make sure—"

Something hissed in the distance. Warning klaxons flared across the Arcanist's awareness. Danger, incoming.

Marick was already in motion by the time any of Cirrus' soldiers could shout in surprise. Stretching out with one hand, the Elder Disciple caught hold of the incoming rocket with the Force, pitting his will against the projectile's momentum. Instead of fighting it, however, he simply bent the rocket's trajectory and sent it back in the direction it came.

The rocket detonated in the tree line without any real aim. The exothermic reaction from the detonation, however, illuminated Amara's entire strike team in ochre light. A sentry screamed, flailing as their entire body became engulfed in flame and they fell to the floor like crackling kindling.

Shouts and cries of battle erupted against the formerly tranquil night air. Smoke began to rise as the treelines lit up and spread with wildfire.

So much for subtly.

"CHARGE!" Amara bellowed, her voice resonating and firm despite the knowledge that she would most likely lose many of her soldiers tonight.

Marick did not wait for the soldiers. He did not try to cloak or move with the shadows. He no longer needed them. The Elder Arcanist simply sprinted forward, natural agility accelerated with the Force.

His lightsaber snapped to life in his hand, moon-white light shrouding the blackened core as it hummed to its standard length. His shoto lightsaber, meanwhile, was cast aside as if he were discarding it. Before the shorter hilt could hit the ground, however, Marick's willpower took hold and suspended the cerulean blade mid-air. The Master quickly broke off a piece of his mind and tasked it with puppeting the telekinetic shoto lightsaber to guard his back.

Before him, the first volley of blaster bolts started to let loose in his direction to try and halt his progression. Good, let them focus on him. Marick's preternatural precognition and freakish reflexes allowed the Hapan to weave his lightsaber in tight coils to deftly deflect the storm crimson dashes that came his way.

The Arconae cleared the first line of defenders before Amara's soldiers could begin to exchange fire with them. Behind him, the shoto lightsaber ventured out on its own and cleaved through one of the Tenixir Revenant guards arms at the elbow. The guard dropped their weapon and clutched at their seared stump of a hand and screamed in pain before collapsing to the dirt.

Realizing that blaster fire was wasted on the lightsaber wielder, the Revenants adjusted their sights to the rest of Amara's strike force. In their place, two Togruta pirates rushed out from the center of camp, each attempting to strike at Marick from different sides. The Togruta on the

left—bearing blue montrail patterns—brandished an electrostaff. The one on the right—bearing red montrail patterns—held a riot baton held in a reverse grip.

Tyris grunted, halting his forward dash and twisting to parry the first strike from the tip of Blue Montrails' electrostaff. The static tip met Marick's lightsaber without buckling, and the Master was forced to backpedal slightly as he blocked the follow up slash and stab from alternating edges of the quarterstaff.

Red Montrails was waiting for him and drove the cackling edge of his riot baton into Marick's shoulder blades. The Hapan hissed as his armorweave cloak attempted to soften some of the impact, but he still felt his back muscles spasm and twitch. He swayed slightly, but managed to keep a grip on his black-cored lightsaber and locked 'blades' with one end of Blue Montrail's electrostaff.

Red Montrails was so emboldened by his success that he failed to register Marick's floating shoto lightsaber. The telekinetically manipulated blade pinwheeled through the air and neatly severed Red's head free from his torso.

"MARCUS! NO!" Blue Montrails cried out as the other Togruta's head bounced against the earth and rolled away. In a fit of raw rage and emotion, Blue Montrails overpowered the smaller framed Hapan, leaning into his electrostaff and trying to bury him into the ground.

Marick should not have been able to resist. The wiry muscles in his arms were still tingling from the shock of the riot baton and trembled. The Master grit his teeth in defiance, bent the Force to his will, and gave himself a temporary surge of strength. It wasn't overt or flashy, but it allowed Marick to match Blue Montrails superior weight and positioning.

The Hapan dropped to one knee and let his lightsaber slide away from the lock with the electrostaff. In his thirst for revenge, Blue Montrails never realized he had overcommitted until it was too late. In a blur of ashen hair and dark robes, Marick circled around to the Togruta's back and made a quick, single cut with his lightsaber.

Blue Montrails gasped as the Master's black-cored lightsaber pierced through his back and straight through his chest cavity. The former Assassin had done him the mercy of a swift death, as Blue Montrails slumped forward crumpled bonelessly to the ground to

When we take a life, we take nothing of value... a distant voice whispered in Marick's mindscape. He ignored it. There would be time later to ponder philosophy. For now, his hesitation could lead to the death of those he had agreed to support. Life before death.

Disjointed firefights continued to erupt all around the forest. Flickers of flame and the screeching of blasterfire illuminated the peripherals of his vision. He no longer needed to

enhance his vision with the Force, so he let that part of his mind refocus on the next set of Revenants that tried to get in his way.

The first one, a Falleen, tried to snare him with a net launcher. Marick made a dismissive gesture with his free hand and reversed the projectile's momentum so that it instead entangled the second Revenant rushing him from his flank. The Revenant let out a surprised yelp as their limbs became twisted inside the net and toppled over awkwardly.

Before the first Revenant could reload, Marick's telekinetically orchestrated saber zipped towards the Falleen. The azure blade made two bisecting cuts in the shape of an 'X'. The humanoid's green, scaly skin became pale before their body simply slid apart in four separate slabs of cauterized flesh.

Marick felt sweat beading across his brow. His breathing was steady but he could feel the edges of fatigue start to tug at the corners of his energy.

He suddenly remembered how the sleepless nights of being a father differed from those that he'd simply forgotten at the height of his career and as a Dark Councilor.

Don't worry, Kirra. Papa will be home soon. Then we can make more progress on painting the walls together, even though you seem to only want to paint outside the carefully outlined lines I tried to provide you with...

Marick might have been tapping the Force with less restraint than he was accustomed to. But he was still in control. The Elder Arcanist fell into the flow of battle, connecting with the living Force all around him. He felt his reserves replenish themselves, a sudden surge of power washing over him as he continued towards his target: Dwipp Bruskars.

He did not have time to track or help Amara's team. He had to trust in the former Security Chief's abilities. She'd weathered worse storms. *This* was where he could do the most good for them, anyway.

Two more pirates tried to stand in his way, but both clutched at their faces as a series of throwing knives hurled with supernal speed turned their respective faces into pincushions.

With a line of bodies trailing in his wake, Marick came face to face with a yellow-skinned Rodian he knew to be his target.

"Arrogant fool, you are no match for Dwipp Bruskars!" the Revenant leader declared as he lobbed a spherical device into Marick's path.

The Hapan swiped his hand to the right, and the concussion grenade mirrored the motion. The explosive detonated harmlessly to the side, but the brief flash of light caused Marick to blink and lose track of Dwipp for just a moment.

The Rodian capitalized on the distraction and hurled a series of throwing knives at Tyris. The Master recognized the incoming danger through the Force and spun on instinct, launching himself into a sidelong roll and coming up smoothly in a hunter's crouch, lightsaber up in front of his face in a guard position.

"Tch," Bruskar hissed, as he hurled his blaster at the Hapan's head in a veiled attempt to distract him. Marick sliced the weapon in half and did not blink, but Bruskar rushed in anyway with an impact grenade primed in his hand. Perhaps he assumed that Marick would panic at the alleged kamikaze maneuver. Perhaps he was simply down to his last option.

Marick would never find out. A single, precise blaster bolt struck the impact grenade while it hovered besides Dwipp's ear. The explosive detonated, the force of it splattering the entire top of the Rodian's body into tiny, pulpy pieces that flew everywhere. Some sinew and bits of bone landed on Marick's cloak, which he tried to brush off.

Rodians gave off an odor as it was. In death, it was somehow worse. Marick wrinkled his nose as his ears adjusted to the sounds of slowly wilting blaster exchanges. His too-blue eyes traced the origin of the shot that had ended Dwipp Bruskar's life, and saw Amara Cirrus lowering her blaster rifle. She padded over towards the Hapan, specs of blood and sweat matting her dark features. Surprisingly, the forelock of sandy hair remained in place just off the side of her face.

"Nice work," she said with a faint smile.

"Yeah," Marick replied quietly as he took in the carnage around him. He knew he was partly to blame, and he felt no guilt or remorse. Still, he reflected on it, because that was what separated him from the other killers in the galaxy. If you can always isolate *why* you are doing something, it is easier to process and continue on.

Peace may have been a lie that was built upon the dirty deeds of the damned, but it was still worth fighting—and sometimes killing—to see a brighter future and a better galaxy.

Amara and Marick gathered the remaining troops, took a few captives that had been left alive with implicit orders to allow them to be treated fairly for surrendering to face trial. Both Cirrus and Tyris studied what was left of Dwipp Bruskar's body.

"Well, that's one of them at least. The benefit to the Revenant's command structure—if you could call it that—though, is that someone else will step in to fill his place without much fanfare."

Marick simply nodded in agreement. There was always another fight. Always another target. Remove one head of a hydra, and another would grow back in its place. The cycle would continue.

Patterns.

