

Vendetta 2024 – Fiction Comp Week Fortnight 1
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MRD Andrew

Operation Phantom Shadow

“No red tape?” Andrew thought as he made his way down the central passageway of the FRG Star of Hades. *“I’m not so sure he’ll back that statement up when he learns what I have in mind.”* The private meeting with Legion Ordo and the other brothers of the Secret Order left him eager to begin the reclamation of this newly discovered Sith Holocron. *“These Sith artifacts should only be in the hands of dark side users, those with true power. Not locked away in some collectors chest, especially one that belongs to the sleazy crime families running the Red Sun Syndicate.”*

The frigate orbited above Aurora Prime, its tracking beacons pointed toward New Imperial City. Aurora Prime, an ancient planet long thought to be the home of the Jedi Order, was now filled with those who relished in the violence and corruption within the city’s walls. *“How the Jedi would be so displeased.”* Unfortunately, too many crime families had seen the advantages of its location and had begun to call the place home—especially those involved with the Red Sun Syndicate. And as everyone knows, too many people can quickly turn into an unwanted crowd.

The Gambler’s Entrance

After docking his personal craft at the nearby pad, Andrew decided to make some observations on the casino floor before making any major moves. Known for his cunning and subtlety, he entered *The Syndicate* with two other members of House Palpatine, dressed in sleek civilian attire that blended seamlessly with the casino’s upscale clientele. They assumed the roles of wealthy gamblers, complete with falsified backstories as eccentric, high-stakes players eager to wager their credits. The facade immediately drew attention from staff and other players.

The first two floors of the Syndicate were a chaotic spectacle of bright lights, laughter, and flashing machines designed to empty pockets as quickly as they lured new players in. The ground level opened into a sprawling arcade, lined with games ranging from holographic pinball to immersive battle simulators, each drawing crowds of loud, intoxicated patrons. Further back, an extravagant swimming facility, with glistening pools and waterfalls, exuded an artificial serenity that felt out of place amid the high-energy floor. As Andrew observed the casino’s indulgent offerings, a sense of disgust settled in, knowing this lavish playground was funded by the blood-stained credits of piracy and smuggled arms. The Syndicate may refuse to deal in narcotics or medical supplies, but that hardly made their profits any less tainted.

Upon reaching the casino’s second floor, Andrew discreetly activated a small cloaked drone programmed to project low-level digital illusions. The probe darted under the nearest holotable, using the cover of passing patrons to slip over to the security counter, which was manned by two burly Mandalorian guards. The drone then projected an image of a small pile of Imperial credits spilled onto the ground, diverting the guards’ attention just long enough to insert a data spike into the casino’s security feed. Before the quicker of the two guards could reach the coins, another group of patrons unknowingly stepped over the projection, dispersing it, and the guards, bewildered, returned to their post reluctantly.

The spike disrupted the security cameras for a brief, unnoticed moment, allowing the Dark Jedi to map out key locations and guard routines across the first two floors. Once they confirmed the layout, the group proceeded to gamble, establishing themselves as regular patrons over the next several hours and even striking up conversations with other guests and dealers. They knew from prior intelligence that one Red Sun clan, the "hara," was responsible for the Holocron's transport and only those guards would be allowed to enter the vault. Spotting a lone Mandalorian guard in a discreet break lounge between shifts, Andrew leaned over to his fellow House member at the Pazaak table and whispered, "I think it's time for a disguise within a disguise."

A Strategic Diversion

Using a Force Mind Trick, they persuaded the guard to step into a secluded restroom, where they swiftly incapacitated and disarmed him. With the guard's gear now theirs, Andrew changed into the Mandalorian armor, adopting the clan insignia of "hara."—two crossed Phoenixes over a twisted red branch. To cover for the guard's absence, the other Dark Jedi used a communicator to inform security of a "temporary reassignment," allowing Andrew to blend smoothly into the Mandalorian ranks.

Disguised as a Mandalorian, Andrew made his way to a service lift reserved for security personnel, leading down to the casino's restricted underground levels. On the first floor underground, just above the vault, he left a small explosive device—non-lethal but loud enough to create panic in the building. After its detonation, alarms blared and additional guards rushed to secure the floor, Andrew then descended to the lower vault floor, now entirely unmanned thanks to the diversion.

The vault was a long, dimly lit corridor with a treasure trove of artifacts spanning from floor to ceiling. The air was thick with the presence of mystery, each item holding untold stories from every corner of the galaxy. Along the walls, shelves were cluttered with peculiar relics. Some were immediately recognizable: a damaged Jedi lightsaber, its hilt scorched and wiring exposed; ancient Mandalorian helmets, worn and cracked from battle; a Tusken gaderffi stick decorated with ceremonial engravings. Though his knowledge was vast, some of the items defied his understanding, their shapes and auras hinting at origins far beyond his reach.

Large holoprojectors also lined the far walls, displaying rotating images of Red Sun Syndicate leaders. Two were familiar: grim visages of the "dini'la aliit" and "hara" clan heads staring forward with a look of deadly authority. But a third face appeared—an older figure with striking features, bearing the insignia of a clan the Secret Order has collaborated with in the past. This revelation hit Andrew like a sudden chill, confirming rumors that the Syndicate was even more deeply rooted in the galaxy's criminals networks than anticipated.

After making his way to the end of the vault he spotted the Holocron resting on an illuminated pedestal, and surrounded by a protective energy field. Through careful manipulation of the Force, Andrew distorted the energy field, allowing him to lift the Holocron without triggering the pressure-sensitive alarms that surely awaited below.

The Quick Escape

Grasping the Holocron, he felt the powerful secrets it held within. Though he couldn't decipher the information, he sensed a unique force that resisted containment. Andrew concealed the Holocron within his armor and exited the vault. Returning to the casino floor, he passed by security personnel still reeling from the diversion. Spotting his fellow Dark Jedi, he noticed they played the part of bewildered guests particularly well, feigning astonishment and arguing with the dealer to let them continue playing. Andrew quickly discarded the Mandalorian armor in the restroom with the still incapacitated guard and rejoined his allies at the table, resuming his gambler persona.

It became clear that the casino staff had begun the process of shutting down operations completely. The bright lights of the arcade had gone dark, leaving the machines lifeless, their glossy screens reflecting the dim, residual light. Nearby, the pool lights had faded as well, leaving the water eerily still as the artificial waterfalls slowly slowed dripped to a stop. The three joined a line that had formed at the exit where the remaining patrons were being patted down by guards and ushered out to local law enforcement. Those guards not busy with guests hovered by strategic points around the doors and lifts, their stances tense and eyes sharp as they scanned the crowd for lingering patrons.

The Dark Jedi glanced around, weighing their options, they knew they would need to stage another diversion to make it past the guards at the exit. One of the brothers considered activating his cloaked drone to stage a small disturbance near the closed Fathier track, perhaps triggering a malfunction with the sound system or lights. Such a distraction could draw enough attention for them to slip out one of the side doors unseen.

It was at that moment that luck—or perhaps skill—was on their side again. The casino manager, a stout man likely unaware of the Syndicate's darker dealings, approached with an apology. "Gentlemen, I deeply regret the abrupt end to your evening at *The Syndicate*. Several of my table managers mentioned your lively personalities, and I'd be honored if you returned soon. May I have my men here escort you to your personal crafts?"

The trio exchanged satisfied smiles. Their hours of gambling and flamboyant performance had paid off, and they were escorted back to the docking pad with the Holocron safely in hand.

Aftermath and Tolls

With a sense of satisfaction, Andrew placed the Holocron on his ship's console, its dark energy pulsating faintly in response. Taking a moment to study its ominous glow, there was another thought that weighed more heavily on his mind. He knew he had to tell the other members what he had seen in the vault.

The image of the third clan leader, unmistakably familiar, was a stark reminder of the hidden web of alliances and betrayals woven throughout the galaxy. The Secret Order had dealings with this unknown clan in the past, unaware they were part of the Red Sun Syndicate. This revelation was as valuable as the Holocron itself. Andrew now held something even more dangerous: knowledge that could reshape the Order's strategies and potentially expose vulnerabilities in allies they once trusted.