

Justice Part 3.1

This fiction is written in honour of my son, Drake Nathan Wright.

I love you, and I miss you. Now, forever, and always.

28th January 2018 – 15th April 2023

Ethereal Realm

Fortress of the Unchained

41 ABY

Draca *felt* it. A ripple in the air unlike anything he had ever felt in his life. He hunched over, sweat dripping down his face. He covered his ears, begging for the screaming to stop. It wouldn't. It was like the Force itself was crying out in pain, bleeding, *dying*.

Mercifully, his senses returned to him. He dusted himself down, stood up straight and took a deep breath. He glanced at his hand, trying to get it to stop shaking. He only had one question: what in the name of the Force was *that* supposed to be!?

That was when he saw it and he paled at the sight. The *Chain* was *breaking*. By the Force, **The Father** had actually done it. The sky above had turned a crimson-red as the air around him became almost intolerable in its humidity. The smell around him was nauseating.

What had Draca done? What had he enabled? He *never* wanted this. He never wanted to cause suffering to anyone or anything, spirit or not, and if *he* had felt it, then everyone in the Ethereal Realm probably did too.

It was yet another mistake to add to the list he had made in his life. He thought joining the Children of Mortis would give him an escape from the traumas and misery of his past. What Draca could see, feel, touch, taste and smell right now was anything but serene and good. He needed to make it right, even if it killed him. For everyone he loved, he *had* to try.

His senses worked in overdrive as he stormed through the Fortress of the Unchained, a never-ending maze of crystal growths no matter what direction he went.

He could hear the conflict outside, the Brotherhood doing their damndest to break in with all their might. It wouldn't be long until they did.

Reinforcements were on the way. That brought with it a small measure of comfort, but would they be too late? Draca had done everything he could to make sure they could get in.

Draca barged into a large, oval antechamber that was supported by two rows of emerald columns that stretched from the floor to the ceiling. A cold breeze wafted past him, sending a shiver down the young man's back. He couldn't remember the last time he'd felt it go from hot to cold in quick succession, but he was thankful for the relief nonetheless.

He went numb when he saw the large set of double doors at the far end of the room. That was the way to the *Chain*, the way to fixing everything. Realisation dawned on him. He may never leave this place.

"I'm so sorry..." he mumbled as he raised his hand towards the door. He took a deep breath. Behind them, his destiny awaited.

"What do you think you are doing, Draca?"

The young Zabrak froze as the hairs on his arms stood on end.

He was suddenly flung backwards, a hard tug on him forcing the air from his lungs. He crashed along the ground, rolling to a stop on his back at a pair of black boots. Looking up, he saw the disappointed visage of a middle-aged Human male.

"Mr Loremi, sir! I..."

Draca choked again before he was flung into the air like a ragdoll. He had no control over himself as he began to fall. He flailed his arms and legs in a desperate attempt to do something, *anything* to prevent a hard landing. His feet barely touched the floor before Loremi thrust forward with an open palm.

The Jedi gasped as a wave of energy slammed into his chest. He careened towards the nearest column, smashing into it with spine-rattling force. Draca fell face-first onto his hands and knees.

He coughed, his body tensing, arms trembling. Shockwaves descended down his body as feeling slowly returned to him.

Draca forced himself to look up at the approaching form of Loremi P'sum, the Arbiter of Truth, shaking his head.

"You were ordered, as were we all, to not interrupt the ritual once it began," Loremi raised a hand over Draca, lifting the young man upright with the Force. "Anyone who attempts to do so is to be destroyed. No exceptions."

Loremi clenched his hand. The slow, methodical movement made the grip around Draca's throat grow tighter and tighter. He couldn't scream, he couldn't speak, and no matter how much he attempted to claw at the Arbiter, it made no difference to his suffering. Draca flailed desperately to try and break free. He could hear his hearts thumping harder, struggling, desperate for his next breath. The ringing in his ears was almost unbearable as his vision began to fade.

The Force answered Draca in his moment of need. It flowed through every vein in his body, pouring into one location, building and piling up until he let it explode out of him like solar waves from a burning star.

"Gah!" Loremi staggered back.

Draca clutched his throat and scowled at Loremi. After everything that Draca had done for the Children in the last few months, this was how they treated him?

He'd had enough! When Loremi opened his mouth to speak, Draca's instincts kicked in and before he realised what he was doing, he spun, his leg extending towards the Human's jawline.

Loremi leaned back away from the kick as the sole of Draca's boot came inches from his face. He then narrowly ducked under the next kick as the Zabrak's leg swooped over his head. Draca didn't stop, getting faster and faster like a podracer with the finish line in sight. The Force flowed through him like adrenaline in his blood, empowering his every move, directing him like a focused storm of flurried attacks. He was too fast now, like bottled lightning unleashed. There was no way that Loremi could dodge.

Draca felt his foot connect with something hard, but it wasn't his opponent. He smacked what felt like an invisible bubble, one designed by Loremi to protect him, and it put a stop to the momentum the young Jedi had built up.

Draca halted when he heard footsteps behind him. He turned his head, expecting a new enemy, or maybe an ally to come help him. Yet, he couldn't see nor sense anyone.

It was a trick! A simple, yet effective illusion had turned his attention away for half a second, enough time for the Arbiter to retrieve his blaster. Draca's hearts leapt up into his throat. He recognised that blaster and what it could do.

Draca slapped Loremi's fist away, altering the angle of the deafening shot as it tore through his cloak. He winced, the sound echoing throughout the room, sending vibrations through his body.

He felt numb, weak, and powerless. The Soulsorn pistol's power taking effect. Loremi, however, appeared unfazed by the shot. Wasn't it meant to affect *everyone*? Was this the effect of the Fortress, the Ethereal Realm or *The Father* himself?

Draca growled under his breath. His ears *hurt*, affecting his balance. He watched Loremi's lips curve into a smirk as he lined up another shot. He wanted nothing more than to wipe that smirk from his face. Loremi somehow *knew* Draca would avoid the shot, but did it anyway. He was clever, much more so than the young Zabrak was prepared for. Sweat dripped from Draca's brow as he stared down the barrel of the blaster. He needed a way out. What would Anders do?

He hitched a breath, memories of their recent battle in the Shattered Plains surging to the forefront of his mind. He grabbed his cloak, tore it off of himself and threw it at Loremi. A muffled gasp escaped the Arbiter's lips as he stepped back and yanked the offending garment from his head.

Draca seized the opportunity, thrusting his hands forward and summoning as much power as he could into his palms. The Arbiter soared back as his comeuppance struck him hard and true, rolling to a stop at the other side of the room.

However, Loremi's blaster had slipped through his grip when he was hit. Draca eyed the weapon with a horrid disdain. He hobbled over to it, retrieving one of his lightsabers from his belt.

Snap-Hiss!

He cleaved the weapon in twain with his cerulean-bladed weapon. The blaster seemed to hiss like a snake as smoke rose from the remains. Draca immediately felt his strength return to him.

The hairs on his arms stood on end when he heard a slow, mocking clap come from the other side of the room. Draca retrieved his second lightsaber, holding the twin blades in a brace position as he faced his opponent.

Loremi stopped clapping. "It's a pity. You had such potential. Unfortunately, betrayal appears to be in your past, present, *and* future."

"What are you talking about?" Draca shifted his feet. "I did everything I was asked. You lied to me about your intentions. You all did. I never wanted any of this."

"Ah, but you see. What *you* want is inconsequential. I saw your future the day you joined us. I knew in advance what you would do and informed *The Father* of your upcoming treachery. I know what you did in the Shattered Plains. Anders lives, does he not? What were you two discussing telepathically before you stabbed him? A way for him to survive? How to eliminate us from the inside out? How long do you think it will be until the Brotherhood will be here in this very room all thanks to you? So many questions with so few answers..."

Draca began to circle Loremi like a hungry predator stalking its prey. His fists tightened on his lightsaber hilts. The Arbiter matched the young Zabrak's steps with him until they were faced at opposite doorways, the Arbiter guarding the entrance to the *Chain* like a loyal dog.

"I did exactly what I was ordered to do. I've been nothing but loyal. I avenged my enclave. I killed Anders."

"You are a terrible liar," Loremi said, but then shrugged his shoulders. "But it does not matter. The Brotherhood may storm this fortress and tear it to shreds if they wish. *The Father* will become the Force itself. He will crush all those that oppose him, starting with the Brotherhood and those who serve him shall be enlightened by his power."

"It doesn't have to be this way," Draca pleaded. "Please. I don't want to fight. There's been enough death and destruction. He's using you. You have to see this is *wrong*. All of it!"

"And that is why you will not beat me. You are weak. You lack the necessary conviction to do what must be done. You are little more than a puppet in another's game and for that, I am truly sorry, young man. I wish it did not have to end this way, but unlike you, I am no slave to the whims of another."

Draca couldn't believe the gall of Loremi. How can someone be so intelligent and yet so blind at the same time? The man was rambling like he was hypnotised. With heavy hearts, Draca braced himself to do the inevitable. He poured the Force through his body. The warmth filled him, invigorating him as he launched himself forward.

Loremi made a gesture with his right hand. His lightsaber flew towards Draca, the white-bladed weapon igniting with a flick of the Arbiter's wrist. Draca leapt over the weapon, it coming just inches from severing his head from his shoulders. He let out a breath he didn't realise he was holding once his feet touched the ground, then continued his advance towards Loremi. His target was in sight. With athleticism few could ever dream to match, Draca leapt from column to column, pushing

himself off of them like a hawk-bat descending upon its prey. His lightsabers swung faster than blaster bolts towards Loremi's head and chest.

The Arbiter grimaced as he sidestepped the attacks before they could cleave him in twain. Draca's lightsabers missed him by *inches*, crashing and ricocheting off the column.

The Force crashed through the Jedi's subconscious, warning him of impending danger. He mentally cursed when he saw Loremi's lightsaber surge towards him.

He didn't have time to block it. All Draca could do was shift to the left as the lightsaber grazed his right arm. He hissed as the burning sensation shot through him instantly, searing him like he'd been splashed with scalding water.

Loremi stretched out a hand towards Draca, once again wrapping him in a grip he commanded with the Force. Draca had no time to break free before he was flung at the nearest column at high velocity.

CRACK!

He slammed into it. Draca felt a distinct *popping* that radiated down his arm. He fell to the floor, forcing himself to his knees as glanced at his shoulder.

He paled at the sight of it.

It was sunken out of place and the pain was unlike anything he had felt before. He bit his tongue to stop himself from screaming and grabbed his arm. He'd hoped to pull it back into its socket but the gentlest touch sent shockwaves down him that felt like he was being stabbed.

Loremi let out a heavy sigh amidst ragged breaths. "Now, Draca. It appears this is the end. You may take solace in the fact you will be reunited with your enclave shortly."

The Arbiter targeted the column that Draca had collided with. He reached out with a hand as the crystal growths at the bottom of the columns Shattered like fragile glass. The Ethereal Realm gave all those who worshipped *The Father* incredible strength in the Force, a strength that Draca witnessed first-hand as the column began to lift and tip towards him like a tsunami threatening to crush him under its waves.

Draca, resigning himself to his fate. He lowered his head, lamenting everything he would never get to do. He would never get the chance to say sorry to Anders. He would never get the chance to see Melissa again and tell her how he felt.

He would be gone far too soon.

"I'm sorry..." Draca mumbled again under his breath. He felt trickles of water gently fall down his cheeks.

Then, there were *Whispers*.

Whispers of his past came flooding to the forefront of his mind. Children. Many of them were children with voices he recognised as his friends from when he was a young boy at the enclave. They asked him to not give up. They pleaded with him to keep going. They begged him not to die here.

Then he heard a distinct voice ring out in his mind.

'JUMP, DRACA!'

Draca's eyes shot open. Something lit a flame within the young Zabrak as he leapt away from the falling column before it could crush him. The ground underneath him shuddered from the impact. His arm screamed at him in pain like a tortured soul.

Loremi summoned his lightsaber back to his hand, the white blade humming ominously as he stood over Draca's prone frame. He wiped his forehead with his sleeve.

"A valiant effort, but otherwise pointless," Loremi raised his weapon to prepare to strike Draca down. "I thank you for your services. Consider this your official termination. *The Father* will become the Force. The only way he is to be disturbed is over my cold, dead body."

A small smirk etched onto Loremi's face, but it quickly disappeared when he saw Draca smiling back at him. Footsteps were heard echoing from behind the Arbiter.

"That can be arranged."

Snap-Hiss!

Loremi paled at the sound of a lightsaber igniting behind him. He spun, coming face to face with a set of burning crimson eyes that were matched by the hum and glow of the weapon in their hand. The blue-faced man they belonged to lunged forward, intending to stab Loremi in his heart.

The Arbiter muttered panicked curses under his breath as he batted away the offending lightsaber with his own. It was clear to Draca that Loremi was far from a proficient duelist. The Arbiter was immediately put on the defensive, swiping at the crimson blade with hopes of keeping it from striking him down. The blue-faced man was like a predator on the hunt, lunging back and forth, tearing apart Loremi's defences bit by bit like they were made of paper. He was like a shark that smelt blood in the water.

Loremi's lightsaber was flicked out of his hand. He thrust forward with an open palm in a desperate act to save himself with the Force.

Draca winced when the crimson blade pierced through Loremi's abdomen. The middle-aged Human's eyes nearly bulged out of his skull from the shock and pain. He collapsed to the ground when the lightsaber was pulled from his gut.

"Arbiter of Truth, was it? Well, the truth was I had little expectations of you in a duel and you *still* managed to disappoint me. Well done."

Draca forced himself to his feet, hobbling over to the crimson-eyed man whilst cradling his damaged shoulder as best he could.

"Anders," Draca gave a small nod.

Anders glanced at him, nodded in acknowledgement and then promptly whacked Draca around the back of his head.

"Ow!" Draca shuddered. "What was that for?"

Anders pointed a finger at him. "You would have perished if I hadn't told you to jump. Do you have a death wish?"

"Draca!"

Another voice, one with the ability to make his hearts leap out of his chest. Draca smiled upon seeing the silver sheen of her hair and the concerned look in her shimmering eyes.

"Melissa..."

She went to hug him, but stopped herself when she saw his arm. "By the stars! Draca, what happened to you!?"

"He decided to be an imbecile and nearly get himself killed."

Anders answered for him. Draca and Melissa both gave the Chiss a hard glare. "We need to hurry. The ritual is already underway. If *The Father* completes the ritual..."

"It will spell doom for us all," the air was sucked out of the room by the arrival of the Brotherhood's Deputy Grand Master, Dacian Victae. He was flanked by a myriad of the Brotherhood's most elite from the seven Clans.

Most notably, a Mandalorian woman that Draca recognised accompanying Anders in the Shattered Plains. Meshita, he seemed to recall her name. On her shoulder was perched a small BD-Unit droid that Draca knew all too well. The little droid hopped down and ran towards him, only stopping a few inches away as it tapped its feet excitedly beside the Jedi.

Draca smiled. "Hey, Buddy. How are you doing?"

"I think the better question is how are *you* doing?" Meshita strode forward, her hands on her hips. "What the kriffing hell happened to your arm!?! Right, hold still. This will only take a second..."

Draca didn't get a chance to protest before Meshita grabbed a hold of him and struck his shoulder, *hard*. Tears flooded Draca's eyes. He bit his lip, trying not to scream. The ringing in his ears drowned out all sound as he clenched his eyes shut.

"Draca!" Melissa grabbed hold of his face, forcing him to look at her. His arm was numb, *very* numb, but it didn't hurt anywhere near as much.

Meshita brushed her hands. "There. That'll do for now. I've put your shoulder back in its socket, but you need to get it into a sling before it..."

Darkness.

It overwhelmed everyone in the room. Even those who were not touched by the gifts of the Force felt the shivers crawling through their bodies. The heavy pressure felt like something had snapped.

Draca felt an ominous wave crash into him. "No..."

Loremi slowly turned his head. "You... are too late..."

He began chuckling ominously, much to the chagrin of those in the room. Anders lunged forward with his lightsaber, cleaving Loremi's head from his shoulders to cease his cackling. Draca fought against the conflict within him. On one hand, he was the enemy, but on the other he was defenceless...

No. Now was not the time to be so sentimental. There were bigger things at stake.

"We need to proceed immediately," Dacian chimed in. "Is the boy able to fight? If not, he needs to leave before he gets in our way."

Draca stood tall, burying the pain in his shoulder. "I can still fight."

"Are you certain?" Anders asked.

Draca hardened his gaze. "I've never been more certain of anything. I need to finish what I started."

Anders watched him for a moment like he was studying him, then smiled. "Then he has my endorsement, Deputy, sir."

"Very well. Then we proceed. We are wasting time with this idle chatter!" Dacian tore the hinges off of the door with the Force, allowing his troops to march onwards towards the *Chain*.

Anders made a gesture towards BUDD-E, the little droid happily hopping up onto his shoulder. "Come, Draca. It is time we end this."

Melissa was at his side instantly to give him support with Meshita not far behind. Draca steadied himself and clenched his fists.

"Yeah," Draca said, his voice laced with renewed determination. "This ends now."

-END-