| Killing the Joke  Shanree Argentin - 3729 |
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The two brutes carried Shanree in under the arms and dumped him on the stone floor before another Man, a Human, who looked down at him and then up at the brutes with confused disinterest, “What is this?”

“Lord Arbiter, the Seer sends this prisoner with her regards”, one answered.

Shanree picked his face and chest up off the cool stone tiles and pushed himself into a kneeling position. A Miraluka, he lacked physical eyes with which to see, but he managed in his own ways. His People were blessed with a sort of Force Sight, that while not exactly analogous to visual sight, could still be described in terms familiar to the sighted. He saw no colors, no shadows, but also cared little if it were light or dark out. Shanree could see clues and details of past events in a place unseen and invisible to his sighted colleagues, but he’d never read holosign. The Force surrounded and penetrated all living things, binding them together, and so he saw those things and people and animals with great clarity in a way that defied explanation to non-Force Sensitives. Where the Force was stronger, so too were his senses; it made identifying other individuals gifted with an affinity for the Force exceptionally easy to identify and make out. On the other side of that however, things that had no life were all but invisible to him– though Miralukese children learned very early how to interpret the voids and empty spaces before them by the way the Force surrounded them.

With his Force Sight Shanree studied the Man before him, a Human, and saw that he was Force Sensitive as well. He glowed brightly in Shanree’s Force Sight and Shanree saw much about him through that, “You’re the one I was looking for.”

The Man looked down at the kneeling Taldryanite, in his matte black light armor, with a small show of surprise and interest, “Oh? And what will you do, now that you’ve found me?”

“I came here to kill you Loremi”, Shanree answered him with an even voice, his empty vestigial eye sockets staring straight into the Man’s own, “but I seem to have misplaced my Lightsabers.”

Loremi P’sum looked up at the two brutes who had carried the bold man in, a moment earlier, with a raised eyebrow to which the one who had previously spoken raised two lengths of polished but gnarled wood. The Arbiter reached out and the two lengths leapt from the brute’s hand, through the air, and to him. He caught one in each hand, examining them with some subdued interest.

“What is this? Wroshyr wood?” Loremi turned one length over in his dominant hand, surprised by its weight despite being longer than his forearm.

“Got it myself defending Kashyyyk.” Shanree watched him study his weapons patiently, “You’re wondering why they’re so long?”

The Arbiter shrugged, shifting his attention from the two Wroshyr wood lightsaber hilts, “They look like kindling to me.”

“They’re modeled off of Teras Kasi fighting sticks”, Shanree let the words hang in the air a moment, but when they failed to catch Loremi’s interest he continued, “You’ve never seen Teras Kasi in action, have you?”

Bored, and growing impatient Loremi exhaled heavily and made to turn away, “No.”

Shanree lurched forward, springing off the balls of his feet which had been coiled beneath him as he’d knelt. Caught by surprise, Loremi turned back to face Shanree only to find the Miraluka’s body lunging past him. Shanree’s hands grabbed both of the lightsaber hilts from the Arbiter’s grasp as he passed. He rolled over his shoulder, landing on one knee and one foot. He looked up at Loremi, who stood three meters away and now suddenly very interested. Shanree stood up to his full height as Loremi waved the two brutes off. Those two busied themselves by retreating out of the chamber, suddenly remembering more important tasks they needed to attend to.

Shanree spun each saber hilt, flexing his wrists and warming up his arms, “I started learning Teras Kasi about fifteen years ago, at a temple hidden away on–”

Loremi P’sum surged forward, a lightsaber hilt materializing in his hand and igniting with a snap-hiss, “Show me.”

The Arbiter’s red saber arced towards him, but Shanree was like water and moved out of its path. He spun, using his own momentum to carry him back towards his attacker. He threw himself into a flying knee-kick which the Arbiter juked out of the way of inexpertly. Shanree did not let up the assault when he landed, his saber hilts lashed out in a battery of attacks that the Child of Mortis swatted away in succession with his saber. Loremi backed away from Shanree as he did so, caught on a backfoot as the Taldryanite continued to defy his expectations. The Arbiter’s red saber continually met the Wroshyr wood of Shanree’s saber hilts with a short-lived cackle, yet the wood did not cleave or even singe. Numerous times the Man had blocked a strike, expecting to hear the clatter of wood upon the stone, only to find himself again trying to keep from getting hit by the dense wood of Shanree’s fighting sticks.

It was clear to Shanree that this fight was his to lose. The Arbiter was as described in the dossier: unarmored, untrained in combat, and self-possessed. Taldryan had been tasked with this hit, and the Army Special Activities Group had tasked him with its completion. A Colonel in the Taldryan Army, Shanree was also a highly trained and experienced martial artist almost without peer– certainly within the Taldryan Republic. Loremi lone saber struggled to match pace with Shanree’s dual handed attacks.

Shanree never let his saber hilts strike the Arbiter’s red blade dead on, but rather used his own attack momentum to bounce off of it or to redirect its path onto a new vector. The Wroshyr wood, he knew, could take that punishment all day. Knowing he needed to break Shanree’s momentum and change the paradigm, Loremi backflipped to gain distance from the Taldraynite. He drew his blaster as he did, firing three bolts before his feet touched the ground. Emerald blades erupted from the Wroshyr wood hilts a heartbeat before intercepting and blocking those shots.

Loremi spun, placing a large stone pillar between himself and Shanree, “I don’t know why you’re wasting your time with me. My Father is completing the ritual as we speak, and my death would do nothing to stop it!”

Shanree tried to circle around the pillar to the right but Loremi shifted accordingly to keep it between them, “My orders say you die. Someone else is taking care of your Daddy.”

“You dare blaspheme his name!” Loremi ducked out from behind the pillar to aim several more blaster shots at Shanree.

Close as they were Shanree’s reaction time was as near to instantaneous as physically possible, but the pull of Loremi’s trigger was ever so slightly faster. A single bolt slipped through his defense and planted itself dead center on his matte black chest plate. The air was punched out of his lungs. Instinct threw him behind cover, even as his diaphragm heaved to fill his chest cavity. A spray of blaster bolts cascaded into the stone wall beside Shanree confirming the idea to take cover had been the right one. He gasped to fill his lungs with air as his hands scrambled to tear his armor fastenings free. The spot on his armor where the blaster’s bolt had hit smoked and smelled offensively of ozone and burnt plastic and it was very warm against his chest bordering on hot.

Tearing it free and able to catch his breath he smiled to himself, “You almost had me there Loremi.”

The Arbiter’s voice spat back, filled with venom, “You’re going to die slowly, worm.”

Shanree glanced around. The Room was largely stone and therefore dead to the Force, but there was so much of the Force flowing through this location, so close to the Children’s ritual site, that he was capable to distinguishing the chamber’s shape and the location of the pillars, supporting a tall roof above, they were both covering behind. The Chamber was circular, with a square of fluted stone pillars ringing the center where the Arbiter and Shanree had been introduced. He formulated a plan and gathered himself for the coming exertion; he took some deep breaths and summoned the Force to fill him once again.

“I’ll do you a favor, I’ll kill you quick”, Shanree stowed one of his sabers over his shoulder and then tossed his ruined chestplate left, out from behind his pillar.

It clattered there, drawing Loremi’s fire. So distracted Shanree launched himself from cover and fed the Force into his legs. With inhuman speed he sprinted across the space between them. The Arbiter realized his mistake and backed away from his pillar but it was too late– Shanree was already upon him. The Arbiter’s blaster barked twice before an emerald blade slashed through it, taking several of Loremi’s fingers with it. He yelped in pain but Shanree could see anger flash across his entire being with his Force Sight. Still holding his own lightsaber he attempted a preemptive lunge to catch the Taldryanite by surprise but it was an amateur move by an untested fighter.

He moved under and around the Arbiter’s attack with ease, his years of using Teras Kasi’s unusual movements to redirect his momentum on full display. His movement put Shanree behind the Arbiter’s left shoulder and with his right handed saber held to the Man’s throat. Loremi froze, the green glow of the saber at his neck illuminated his face for an audience of none, but Shanree could see the waves of anger and fear crashing over him in twists and turns through the Force.

With a small quiver in his voice Loremi laughed lowly, “You said you would make it quick.”

Shanree nodded, “We need to have a quick talk, now that you have nothing to lose.”

Confused, Loremi turned slowly to face Shanree, “What do you mean?”

“I am extending to you an opportunity to surrender to Clan Taldryan. I have been given assurances that your good conduct could lead to… Possibilities beyond death or incarceration, lets say”, Personally the Colonel found the idea distasteful and bound to end in bad news, but he’d been given very clear orders by the Supreme Chancellor herself.

It was a kill mission, as given by the Iron Throne, but if they reported him dead and the Arbiter came to work for them, “And why would I take that offer from you, or anyone? If I die here, I die a martyr to the cause. I’m prepared to meet my end because I know that you will witness–”

Something in Shanree’s lack of concern caused Loremi’s words to peter out. Shanree grinned ruefully, as though in apology to be the one to deliver bad news, “Things aren’t going well for you guys.”

“Liar”, Loremi spat over the saber held to his neck, “You were captured by my colleague. It can’t be going that poorly if she sent you to me…”

“I allowed myself to be captured, it's called a ruse.” Shanree’s voice was flat, “Listen, I’m happy to end your life right here and make every world a better place, but all I have to hear you say is: No, I don’t want your deal.”

Loremi P’sum stared into the face of the Miralkua. He wasn’t sure what he was searching for, he had no eyes he could read. The Taldryanite’s force presence was as neutral as to suggest only that he stood before him, nothing else. The lightsaber’s thrum filled his ears and upper chest with its vibrations as the green light threatened to almost blind him at this range. Loremi was no stranger to a lightsaber, even if he wasn’t as devoted to it as some, but for the first time it struck him as odd; the lethal saber at his throat emitted no heat. He swallowed and considered his options. He was willing to die, but if it was truly as this stranger said then perhaps living to see another day might allow him to somehow resurrect the Father’s ideas.

The Arbiter opened his mouth to answer when out of the corner of his eye he saw a figure at the entrance to the chamber. He was filled with hope, and immediately regretted it as Shanree saw the shift in his emotions. The figure at the entrance, one of the Brutes returned out of curiosity, fired his blaster. Shanree turned and with his entire body threw his saber at the Brute, and propelled by the power of the Force it speared the man to the wall before he knew he was dead. Shanree held his hand out before him, holding that position for a moment.

Behind him he heard the Arbiter shift his weight in preparation to attack, “Don’t.”

Loremi ignored him and lunged forward to assault Shanree from behind. Shanree stepped out of the way contemptuously, a leaf upon the wind, revealing what it was that his outstretched hand was holding in-place: Buzzing angrily in the air was the Brute’s lone blaster bolt, suspended in one spot. Lacking the body he had expected to crash into, Loremi fell forward past where Shanree now stood. He had a good, long second to stare at the angry glow red bolt before Shanree released his hold upon it. In less than a heartbeat the bolt intercepted Loremi’s skull and buried itself there with a small puff of white smoke.

The Force left the Arbiter’s body, though some of his presence persisted for a while as all living things that had recently died did, “Quick enough?”