

GJW XI: Round 1 - Fiction

Standing Outside the Fire

Halcyon Rokir Taldrya - #43 - Clan Taldryan

Everything is burning and for once I can say it wasn't my fault. Ok, well, not completely my fault. I may have had a hand or two in the pot, as it were, but really, not all my fault. Me? The name's Connor Grey; con-man, liar, magician, thief, and plenty of other names have been used to describe me. People can call me what they want, so long as I get what I want.

And what do I want? Well now, that fire over there may give you a clue or two.

Korriban
5 Hours Ago

"Excuse me, Mr. Grey?"

"What is it, lad?" I kept my back to whoever it was calling for me, so they couldn't see my face. Did these apes want me to do something wrong and bring everything down on their heads? Morons, the lot of 'em.

"Colonel Skybender wishes for an update, sir."

"Does he now?" I could feel the lackey stiffen at my response. I made no attempt to hide my scorn for his Colonel, or what I thought of him. "You may tell your Colonel I will be up shortly."

The other man turned away wordlessly, and I let a small smile play across my lips. The damn grunt did nearly cause something disastrous to happen, but it wasn't his fault that his commanding officer was a barking idiot. The thing's one puts up with for a little coin.

It took me a few minutes more than I wanted to extract myself from the work I was doing, but I couldn't rush energies like this. I had hit the gold mine, as it were, but I wasn't going to let these crackpots know it just yet. They may have hired me to crack open this nut, but it didn't mean I have to go giving away everything I find.

Ok, hired may not be quite the right word. Threatened would probably be closer to what actually occurred, but I had been promised credits as well, so hired is the moniker I shall cling to. It took nearly half-an-hour to get back to the main entrance of the Academy. There were

caverns upon caverns in the old place, and the Sith did love their little hiding places. They also loved traps even more, and there were some truly inventive ones littered all over the place. You'd think that after all the raiders and other crazed folk that have been through these halls that most of the deathtraps would have been triggered, but you'd be wrong. I found the real prize, though, and now I just need a way to keep it.

Sunlight, or what passed for sunlight on this godforsaken world, poured in through the archway. The pack of cigarettes was already in my hand, and felt much lighter than it should have been. This job seemed to be more stressful than I gave it credit for, and I'd need a top-up soon. The barking sounds of the Colonel could be heard just a ways away as I clenched the lit cigarette between my teeth and made my way towards the noise.

"I want these frakking fortifications in place now, or so help me I will rip your spine out and feed it to the damn rats!"

And that, in a nutshell, is Skybender. He'd be the poster-boy for army recruiting around the galaxy, and I'm sure his limited repertoire of commands and insults would be fawned over by most military establishments as well. He must have sensed my approach, as he was already turning long before I could make my presence known. I knew he had some modicum of talent with the Force, so he wasn't always the easiest person to sneak up on. I had my own set of skills in that area, along with various trinkets I had picked up along the way, but I wouldn't waste them on a fool like him. No, I preferred ensuring he knew just how I felt.

"Sah! Connor Grey reporting, sah!" I yelled out, coming to a stop and throwing up the sloppiest salute I could muster. One didn't need the Force to feel the anger radiate off the Colonel, and his hands twitching by his sidearm confirmed the fact. Me? I made sure my cigarette didn't fall out from the smile I gave him.

"Grey!" Skybender screamed, the only volume level he knew, "the Grand Master wishes to know what is taking so long!"

"The Grand Master knows very well why it is taking so long, and he of the glorious hair and beard can come down himself if he believes he can do better."

For a second I thought I had miscalculated and I would find a blaster bolt through my head, but I was still breathing a few seconds later, even though a noticeable twitch had blossomed on the side of Skybender's face.

"Grey, Esoteric's forces are inbound and the rebels have broken through our blockade. We need everything the Academy can give us and we need it now!"

Yes, our little organization, and I use that term very loosely, is currently embroiled in a civil war. I'm sure no one could expect a bunch of crazed Sith and whatever other orders people

bowed to would turn on one another. Yet, here we are, along with a third party that seems to want to wipe us out too. When it rains, it pours, and all that.

“Aye, aye, sah!” but I was never able to get a salute off again before a mortar round landed a few meters away, sending Skybender and I flying through the open air. I tried to tuck into a roll before I hit the unrelenting ground, and managed enough of one to not break anything. Skybender wasn’t quite as lucky, as I could hear the sound of his shoulder shattering as he landed, but it never seemed to faze him one bit.

“How the hell did didn’t we see them!” he screamed out, ignoring his limp left arm as he searched for one of his men. He marched off into the smoke and fire, and I could hear more of his yelling, but couldn’t make out the words. My ears rang from the blast, but I was still in one piece. My coat had managed to stay in one piece as I brushed off the dirt from it. If you ever meet a good tailor, you hold onto them. Nothing beats well-tailored clothing, I say.

Blaster fire and more mortar rounds started filling the air. I could barely see through all the smoke, but I had a rough idea of where the Academy entrance lay, and I was doing my damndest to get to it.

“Halt, human! My master has need of you.”

“What in the bloody hell are you?” I whispered as a skeletal-droid appeared out of nowhere. Some form of blaster-canon was pointed right at me, and its eyes glowed a deep-red. “Oh, you’re one of those damn vong-droid-things, aren’t you?”

“Surrender, human, and come with me.”

“C’mon, I’m sure we can work something out?” A droid may not be as susceptible to my wide-ranging charms, but they were susceptible to a .48 caliber Enforcer. It kicked like a mule, but the gun had saved my skin more times that I’d want to admit. The slugs slammed into the droid, all eight of them, toppling it to the ground.

My arms shook as the adrenaline started to die down. I’d sell someone’s soul for a cigarette and a shot of whiskey right now. I’ll have to settle for getting back to Bane’s tomb in the Academy and finding a way to get the power that lay down there.

“You have made my angry, human,” the droid calmly stated as it rose inhumanly back to its feet. I could see where my slugs had hit it, but the areas were already healing over. It was now pointing it’s elbow at me, as something seemed to be protruding from the limb.

“Bollocks,” was all I could manage as a grenade was launched my way. Instinct is a wonderful thing, and it saved my ass again as one of my trusty barriers had been erected

moments before impact. I may not be some sort of lightning-slinger around here, but if I know one thing it's how to save my own rear-end.

The barrier laughed at the grenade as it exploded harmlessly in front of me. It was the second grenade and follow-up mini-rockets that weren't quite as funny for the barrier, or me. I was as good at pissing off droids as I was idiotic Colonel's, as the barrage sent me careening backwards. I slammed into something hard and unforgiving. The stars were out in full bloom it seemed, as they twinkled before my eyes, as darkness slowly overtook me. Two brilliant columns of blue-light appeared just as I passed out.



"Mmmm...that feels good, luv. Don't stop," I moaned, before my mind caught up to the rest of my body. I jerked awake, remembering where I was, or at least where I should be. Jerking anything after being hit by rockets is not the smartest thing in the world, and my body said as much as it threatened to send me back into the inky abyss.

"Shh, it's ok Connor." I knew that voice. My eyes were adjusting to the darkness. I was inside somewhere, and there were others around me. I focused instead on the familiar voice and the hands that it belonged to.

"Miss me that much, Nalia?"

"It's not too late to send you back out there, Connor!" another, yet nearly identical voice, said in response.

"Missed you too, Rhiaen." The Ust'essi sisters were, like most Twi'lek woman I've met, both beautiful and dangerous. They were also identical twins, and like any male I had more than my fair share of fantastical thoughts about the two. They were the same in nearly every manner, except for how they thought of me. I never said my charm worked all the time, just most of the time.

"You are lucky they saved your worthless ass, Grey," another familiar voice grumbled not from where I lay. That voice got me through the haze quickly as I actually forced myself to see who was standing there. As I thought, the pissed-off visage of one Keirdagh Cantor Taldrya stared right back at me.

“Yacks, you’re still not angry about that thing at Sparky’s, are you?” It was an innocent enough question, considering the circumstances, but I must have been off my game still as I felt my throat constricting from an invisible hand.

“You do not get to call me that, you weasel,” Cantor rumbled in response. “The sisters say we need you, but my patience is already gone. Do not push me further.

I felt my throat suddenly loosen as I bent over and nearly coughed out a lung. How was I to know that the Eye of Rivan would turn all the alcohol in his bar to water? I kept that comment to myself, however, and instead worked on getting back to my feet. I finally had a chance to look at who else was in this little cavern. There was Halcyon, his green hair being a dead giveaway. Between you and me, I’m pretty sure that’s a dye-job too. The man in the middle was the bearded mountain-man Cantor and beside him was another man with beady little eyes. They almost looked bear-like, but he was human, and old at that. I wasn’t sure who he was, but I could feel the Force flow from him easily and he was an equal to the other two.

At the very end was a meek little guy, at least compared to everyone else in the room. He was trying not to be noticed, but I knew he had something to say. I put on one of my best smiles, seeing if I could goad this man out of his shell.

“Mr. Grey!” The charm-offensive worked as the man suddenly exploded in energy. “My name is Rathus Marr and it is a true honour to meet you!” The man came right up to me, grabbing my hand and shaking it vigorously. “I’ve read all of your reports, sir. That job on Dantooine was masterful. And the collection of works you brought back from Tython? Astounding!”

The man was positively beaming at me. I think I put a little too much offense in that charm offensive, but at least I had a fan in this group.

“Thank you, Rathus, if I may be so bold. Please, call me Connor. Now, since you all seemed to have saved my skin, what may I do you for?”

“You were working for Muz inside the Academy. Why?” The question came from Halcyon, thankfully. I don’t think my throat could have taken any more “questioning” from the likes of Cantor.

“Trying to dig up anymore trinkets that may be hanging around still. You know Muz and his love of the shiny baubles. Managed to find something, that I could use a little help on.” I could almost feel the elation coming off of Rathus.

“Mr. Grey...er...Connor. My specialty is ancient Sith artifacts and languages. I’d be glad to lend any assistance I could!”

“That would be lovely, Rathus.” I could feel the other shift uncomfortably, but they needed to know what Muz was after, and I was the man who could lead them there. “I’m assuming you found another way into the Academy, so I will just say goodbye to the lovely sisters, and we can be one our way.”

“They had other business to attend to,” Halcyon stated plainly, and I could clearly see the two of them had managed to slip out without me being the wiser.

“Then off we go,” I said with a shrug of my shoulder and a smirk in Rathus’ direction.



Darth Bane’s tomb, he of the “only a Master and Apprentice there shall be”, was not exact spot that contained what I wanted. No, what I wanted lay beneath the tomb itself. Rathus and I had managed to squirm our way underneath, while the three other Taldryan stood at the top, all scowls and glares.

I don’t really care about the philosophy Bane was espousing, but he did do something right. This was where he did who-knows-what to all sorts of Force-users. Their very essence was imbued in the walls. The inscriptions carved into the stone said as much. Bane was on the precipice of something great, before he was taken out by his own Apprentice. Yeah, what a surprise there.

“Rathus, you said languages was your specialty, right? I’m a little rusty myself, so wondering if I could pick your brain on an area I’m having trouble with.”

“Not a problem, Connor. Just point the way.”

I almost felt bad for the kid. Almost. I pointed to the inscription that was giving me “trouble”. I knew what it said. It would unlock everything, but I wasn’t going to be the one standing at ground zero when it did. Nope. Mr. Marr would have that pleasure.

I could hear him mumbling the words. I poured everything I could into keep his senses muddled from everything else. I ensured he felt utter joy at what he was doing at this very moment. Never once did he notice the tendrils of energy that had begun snaking in from the walls. The worked their way towards Rathus, creeping up his legs. As he finished the incantation, all hell broke loose as the room filled with inhuman light and washed into the young man.

There was commotion above us, but I had left the other three a little present to deal with. They'd overcome it soon, but not in time. I watched as Rathus was filled with the energies of fallen jedi, light and dark. His body glowed with the power, but I could see the pain and anguish that it caused him. Power like this could not be handled by one person, but it took a person to unleash it. We all have to play our roles, and Mr. Marr was doing wonderfully.

Timing was crucial. I had lied before. There was one other artifact of note in the Academy, and that was the very vessel that could hold the power. A cred if you could guess who had this little trinket.

I dug into my coat pocket, producing the container. It was fairly unremarkable in appearance, seemingly made of some dark stone. It wasn't the material that was important, but what was written all around it. You needed a keen eye to see it, along with a touch of the Force and the knowledge to know what to look for. I whispered the ancient words and felt the stone warm inside my hand. For a moment nothing happened, and then suddenly the stone felt a thousand degrees warmer. I wanted to scream, louder than ever in my life, but it was over before I even had a chance and the stone was once more cold to my touch.

Rathus fell to the ground wordlessly. He was still breathing, but who knows for how much longer. As for the stone, I knew what it contained. I could feel it whispering to me already. Oh, the sweet, sweet words it was blowing into my ear.

The ground suddenly shifted under me, and it wasn't due to the anyone in the immediate vicinity. The stone whispered to me. It knew what was happening. I knew what was happening as it opened me up to everything. For a brief moment I was everywhere. I could see the battle raging outside the Academy. The rebels had come in force. The sisters had brought them, and now they swarmed over what remained of Muz's forces and Esoteric's. A band of Esoteric's men were focusing on the Academy, trying to bring it down so that no one could have the secrets it held.

"Time for me to go," I whispered to the stone, before disappearing.



I watched it all burn. Oh, I played a part, but technically speaking, I'm not the reason the Academy was burning to the ground. No one could find me here, not this far out. They were all ants, scurrying about their little hole. It appeared the rebels would win this round, but Korriban was awash with battle.

From the flames I saw four figures come out. It appeared little Rathus would survive this ordeal. Nice kid, that one. I guess I don't have to feel so bad now. I'll be staying away from the others however. One of them looked my way. Not my general direction, but directly at me. It was Halcyon. Those emerald eyes burned in anger. Yes, I would be staying away for now, and the stone agreed with me.

There was more to do here. The stone concurred. I have a little wink and disappeared again. There were more fires to start.