

“He’s too pretty.”

“So?”

Timeros Entar Arconae made a dismissive gesture with one hand. He then held up his fingers and folded each one down as he went down his checklist. “His eyes are the wrong shape. His hair is too dark. He’s only a Journeyman. He hasn’t even been Knighted yet. And yet, you want to trust him with a new team?” The Director of the Dajorra Intelligence Agency shook his head slightly.

“I need you to trust me on this, Tim ,” Sashar Erinos Arconae retorted coolly.

Timeros looked over the burly mandalorians shoulder at the lean Hapan male standing just out of earshot of the Arconae’s conversation. Fresh out of the Shadow Academy, the boy couldn’t have been older than eighteen. He looked like he weighed no more than a buck-fifty, wet, and had Sashar had apparently pulled the boy out of thin air. His records were non-existent other than the fact that he hailed from the Hapes Cluster. Sure, he had shown signs of talent within the Force and had proven himself resilient in his first combat mission defending the Citadel from the alleged “coup.” Before leaving, Arcturus had seemed to think well of him, but the former Battleteam Leader hadn’t stuck around long enough to complete the boys training. Indeed, he was an unknown variable, and Timeros did not deal with variables he could not fully control.

“What do you expect me to do, then?”

Sashar grinned knowingly and patted Arcona’s Red Right Hand on the shoulder. “I’m sure you’ll figure it out.” He paused before walking away. “As you like to say, ‘What could possibly go wrong?’”

The Erinos chuckled to himself as he padded off, leaving Timeros alone with the boy. The Entar blinked a few times before nodding once to himself.

“What’s your name, boy?” Timeros spoke with detached nonchalance. The Entar’s dispassionate, glacial eyes locked onto the Hapan, the look bringing to bear the full weight of Timeros’ will.

The boy shivered visibly as a mental chill overwhelmed his senses. The primal part of his brain told him to run. To get as far away from this man as possible. Instead, he furrowed his brow, bit down hard on his molars and refused to break eye contact with Timeros.

“Marick,” he replied evenly through grit teeth. “My name is Marick.”

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*From Rags to Power*

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I cannot tell you how exactly I ended up in the Broken Bantha on the far side of the Spaceport. Like many of the core worlds in the Hapes Cluster, there was only one way off the rock that had been my “home” for so many years. So I had made my way there, not knowing where else to go. Fear was a powerful motivator, but as my adrenaline faded, I came to the all too realistic revelation that I had no idea what I was going to do. Dexter was gone. I just knew I couldn’t go back. Not then, not ever.

I huddled into a corner with some rags draped around my wafish shoulders. My eyes were red and puffy because, well, I had my reasons. I was barely 17 years old, afterall. I was sniffing and had to keep wiping my nose with a tattered sleeve. My muscles felt heavy like lead and my lungs still burned as my pulse struggled to keep its cool. But every noise seemed to jostle my focus and attention and my eyes always seemed to check the door. I knew that somehow, some way, my sister or one of her lackeys would burst into the quiet little pub like they owned it. Then people would get hurt.

That was what I feared more than anything. While my survival instincts told me the notion was foolish, I could not help it. The owner of the pub did not ask me any questions and had let me take up a seat in the corner out of the way while I weighed my options. I liked him. There was also a lack of female workers, an oddity for a Hapan establishment. This made me feel even more comfortable.

As I mulled over my situation, I picked up the edges of a conversation from a table nearby. It was a group of Bounty Hunters I’d seen come in earlier.

“...so there we were, surrounded by those glow-bat wielding bastards.” The speaker was a tan-skinned Human with a noticeable pale red “X” scar that stretched over his face. He wore a unique kind of black combat suit with exposed sleeves that showed off burly arms. He had a quarterstaff of some kind strapped to his back and had his Scatterblaster resting casually on the table in front of him as he told his story.

“Me and Skawl here,” the scarred Human continued, jabbing his thumb at the hulking Barabel that stood next to him, “we knew we were in a pickle. There were two of them and two of us, but we knew that we had to act quick. So, I whipped out my Scatterblaster and--”

“Piss off. Like hell you did, Darius--” the third Bounty Hunter countered, but was cut off by a hiss from the Barabel.

“Wasss to the Jediii, Chriss,” Skawl affirmed as he cracked the knuckles of his clawed hand. The hand had a unique scar of its own. When I looked closer, I saw that it was actually a mechanical replacement.

My attention perked at that. The Jedi were just a myth. There was no way...

“Anyway, like I was saying,” Darius continued, “Skawl let out one of his feral jungle roars and the first Jedi shied back. The second didn’t seem to mind, but I wasn’t keen on him. I threw a conc’ grenade at the first spun on the second with the Scatterblaster. He dodged out of the way, of course. Must have sensed it or something, but Skawl was on him like...well, a Barabel on a scrawny looking Jedi. Got his claws on him, he did. High pitched scream and everything. I guess that glowbat isn’t much use when you got those teeth dug into their neck. The first one was still stunned, but recovered quickly and came at me with his glowbat. I rolled away, but the clever bugger anticipated it and managed to cut my old Scatterblaster in pieces. He then pushed me backwards somehow, with just his mind. I swear I seen it on holovids before, but never thought anyone could do something like. Anyway, I paid a bunch of credits for that one, so naturally I returned the favor by ringing his clock with my boot and cracking his neck with a good, old-fashioned right hook. Those glowbats sell good on the market--”

“Yea yea...”

The rest of the story soon faded away as my mind began to race.

If what the Bounty Hunters spoke was true, the stories were not just fables. I wasn’t alone. The strange “powers” I had only just discovered a year prior were not some freak accident. They were a gift. The Force. The Jedi. They were real! And if they were real, it meant that there was a place I could go to learn more about them. I could get away from here.

I looked over my meager possessions. I had managed to lift a small purse with a few credit chits in it. It wasn’t much, but maybe I could strike a deal with the Bounty Hunters...

I never got to ask. Just as I mustered the courage to approach them, the doors to the Broken Bantha burst open, and three women in full body armor stormed in. Del’abbot Royal Guardsman. Erin was not with them, but I knew that they were the same three that had been on my tail since I fled the estate. I had no idea how they caught up to me. I thought I had been careful.

Almost on instinct, I scrambled under my table and dug myself into the corner of where the bench seats connected. I tried to make myself as small as possible, while still keeping an eye on the scene unfolding in the pub.

Marrus, the owner of the Broken Rancor, offered a polite bow. “My ladies. To what does my humble establishment owe the honors--”

“Quiet male,” the first woman spat. “I will do the speaking here. No talking.”

“But of course,” Marrus apologized.

“We are looking for a boy,

“Well, I might have seen one come in here earlier, but it’s hard to tell, been a busy night. Maybe a few credits would jog my memory...” he trailed off.

The leader of the three women actually scowled and spit on Marrus’ bar. She took a step forward, reached over it, and grabbed a hold of Marrus’ shirt, pulling his face close to hers.

“You will tell me what you know, or I will have your tongue.” Her sneer turned into a feral grin and I saw Marrus cower and wince.

I looked around and noticed that the scarred human, Darius was looking over at me. He seemed to take in my state, and saw me even from my hiding spot from under the table. As our eyes met, I could not help but think he was going to turn me over. I’d have to go back to that place. All the stories I’d heard about Bounty Hunters was their loyalty to their purses. My mind raced to think of something, anything...

The Bounty Hunter winked at me. He turned his attention back to the three women and go up, Skawl and the other human, Chis, following. Darius waltzed right up to the woman who had grabbed Marrus and tapped her shoulder.

“Pardon me, babe,” he said as he slid his hand to the small of her back. “I couldn’t help but notice you were looking for a boy. How about a man instea--”

The woman shoved Marrus away, pivoted and slapped the Darius right across the cheek. Hard. The slap echoed out, but the Bounty Hunter only chuckled.

“You hit like a girl,” he said with a grin as he grabbed a hold of the woman’s arm and in one deft, fluid motion launched her over his shoulder and into the wall. I’d never seen someone with that kind of raw strength and coordination. The other two women sprung into action, but the Barabel roared and leaped for the farthest. Chris already had his blaster drawn and began to trade shots with the third, both strafing and ducking for cover behind tables.

Chaos erupted. Bottles were thrown and angry shouts echoed from the other patrons. Skawl tried to grab a hold of the woman he was fighting, but she slipped his guard and jabbed her stun batons into his sides. The Barabel laughed as his tough skin barely registered the shocks as more than a tickle.

Chris and the second woman continued to trade shots, and the first woman recovered and came at Darius with a nasty looking curved blade. Darius met her head-on with his quarterstaff, eventually getting past her guard and throwing her again towards the other side of the room.

"I'd get out of here, kid," Darius said. It took me a few confused moments to realize that he was talking to me because his attention was still on the developing brawl that seemed to swallow the rest of the bar's occupants. "I don't know who you are, or what you're running from, but let's just say I know a thing or two about rags and being on the run."

My body was giddy with adrenaline, fear, and excitement. I started to mouth words, but none came. I simply nodded my head in a sign of acknowledgment and scrambled for the exit.

I'd like to say I made a sneaky, dignified exit. But that would not be the truth. I tripped, cut open my knee, and made a very high pitched squeak when someone touched my shoulder to help me to my feet outside the space port.

I don't remember how exactly I ended up in the cargo bay of an outgoing ship. All I knew was that when I collapsed in the supply crate I had smuggled myself into, my last thoughts were on leaving home, a better life, and the Jedi.

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"OSIK!" someone shouted over the bark of blaster fire. I jerked awake and banged my head against the side of the crate. Instead of racking into focus, my vision blurred a bit before finally settling. I had lost track of how long I'd been in that crate, but I felt a familiar lurching pain in my stomach that told me I was starving. I honestly couldn't remember the last time I'd eaten anything.

And so it was, on the day I met my first Dark Jedi, that instead of being afraid of the sounds of dying men, searing plasma, or the whines of blaster fire that I was instead focused on my stomach.

As the fighting died down, I heard footsteps nearby. I held my breath as best I could, but my stomach let out a low grumble that betrayed me.

"Hey. Sazhar. Over here," a reptilian voice hissed.

"What is it?" a second voice said as I heard the footsteps grow closer.

A beam of light spilled into my create as the top was removed and I burrowed myself as tightly into the corner as possible with my arms protectively held over my head.

“Huh, would you look at that,” the man said as he reached into the crate. Not knowing what else to do, I swatted at his hands. He laughed, and then I felt an unseen hand slowly lift me out of the crate. At first I thought he’d simply grabbed me, but then I realized that I was floating. I was excited and terrified at the same time.

The man motioned with his hand and I felt myself float towards my feet. I landed awkwardly and came up in a crouch, looking up at a tall (to me at that time, at least) mandalorian Human and an even more towering Barabel. This one was different than the Bounty Hunter I’d seen before, but cut from the same cloth.

I looked to my right and noticed the first dead body. I skidded backwards a few steps and then felt something nudge into the side of my temple. Without realizing it, I closed my eyes and let my senses reach out around the ship. I suddenly became aware that four bodies lie littered about. Dead. That was all. When I opened my eyes, I saw that the mandalorian was studying me intently.

“Interesting,” he said as he idly drummed his fingers against the hilt of his lightsaber.

“Are...are you...Jedi...?” I asked, stupidly, my eyes locking on to the cylindrical piece of metal I’d only heard rumors of up until then.

“Heh. Something like that,” he said easily. “My name is Sashar Erinos Arconae. This is my compatriot, Zakath. We are part of Clan Arcona, home to many with talents such as yours.”

“And this ‘Arcona.’ It can teach me to do the things you did?” I gestured at the dead bodies and looked back over at my stowaway crate.

“That, and much...much more,” the Barabel replied with a toothy grin.

My stomach growled loudly. I weighed my limited options. It was not a hard choice to make.

And for all the pain and blood and strife and turmoil and sacrifice that have followed me along the path I chose, I am grateful that Sashar found me that day. Arcona showed me what true family was like, and gave my life an aim and purpose.

For that, I will always be grateful.