

You know, when I was a kid things seemed so much simpler. We went to school, we ran around the play area during recess, and things were peaceful. For the better part of my childhood days, it was nice. The days of the Empire lording over the Corellian citizens were over before I could remember, little more than ghost stories as far as I cared back then.

We had struggles like the grownups, even if the adults didn't understand while they were so important to us. It was all harmless fun in the end, and we managed to make up by the time the bell rung. Well, all up until one day.

There was this one boy, Zachary O'Maille, who stood at least a head above the rest of us. He always seemed a little faster and a little stronger than the rest. He didn't take the lead in all our games, but he certainly gave the smaller children a run for their money. He was kind enough to the younger children. It was so frustrating though. Every time it was the two of us, he seemed to best me.

Time and time again he would end up snatching victory from what appeared to be certain defeat. It frustrated me, but I tried to just keep playing. Losing was a part of our play as far as I was concerned. I looked forward to the day when I would stand victorious, the day I won the race, the game of tag, or whatever little game we devised. One day though, it became all too much.

I remember the race well enough, I had run the circuit enough times. Around the edge of the ball field, through the jungle gym, around the tree in the corner of the school yard, and back to the fence. It was a simple sprint and I was pumped up. O'Maille calmly stretched as we waited for the yell that would signify the start of the race. After he winked at me, he crouched down slowly into a ready position, stretched forward like a great cat.

The holler of go rang in my ears, and I pushed forward with everything I had, my footsteps pounding the ground as I ran. The footfalls of my classmates died away quickly, until only two sets of footsteps could be heard. I did not even look back, as I knew he was behind me. So many times we had been in this same situation, but this time our positions were reversed. I could not allow myself to let up for even a moment. I was in the lead, and as I rounded the edge of the ball field, I was losing none of my momentum.

I must have had quite a look on my face, as a child dove aside as we peeled through the jungle gym and drew closer to the tree. With a whoop, I grabbed the tree that served as marker and spun around the outside to set my direction of travel. I could hear his labored breathing as the larger boy pushed harder. It did not matter though, I had pushed ahead, I had fought and soon the sweet taste of victory would be mine!

The world seemed to slow for a moment. My breathing slowed and my vision seemed to narrow as I concentrated on the fence which served as my finish line. I could practically feel as I pulled away from Zachary, making distance between the two of us. On sheer momentum, I was going

to get there first. Suddenly, it was as though something grasped my right leg. Before I could shift my weight to compensate, I felt the leg jerked from beneath me. Now staggered, my footing slipped and I did not so much as stumble as slam my face into the hard cement below. I heard the whoops of the other kids my head bounced off the ground. Cheers followed as O'Maille passed me and my heart dropped.

Several moments seemed to pass as I lay on the ground, too ashamed to lift my face. I could hear footsteps as someone slowly approached me. "Well, looks like I win again, Bentre. Do you need a hand up? Looks like you bashed your head pretty hard when you slipped." His voice was full of condescending. The other kids heard concern, but I could picture his subtly smiling face. Peeking up from the ground, I saw him extend a hand.

With a small growl, I reached up, and allowed him to help me to my feet. I wasted no time as I came up, however. Still in pain, I drew back a fist and drove it hard into his jaw. The boy reeled back slightly with the blow, before planting his feet on the ground. "What the hell?" There was anger in his eyes. Falling back slightly, he lifted his hands. As I jumped forward to rain blows upon him, O'Maille swept my leg, and began to pummel me. Several blows caught me in the nose, in the jaw, and then he maneuvered an arm around my throat, holding me firmly. "What are you doing!?"

I could taste blood, but it did nothing but serve to excite me. Without heeding his requests for explanation, I reached up, plunging a finger into his eye socket. The larger boy yelled out in pain, releasing me enough to allow me to escape. As he crouched to the ground, I reeled back a kick and delivered a sharp blow to his ribs. The kick caused him to double over. I heard the yelling of an adult, and the rest of the recess was a blur. I was taken to the school administrator, and I know I faced hell that night when my father heard I had been fighting.

I do remember one thing, however. As I waited to see the administrator, a nurse attended to Zachary, and was examining his eye. I only could smile as I licked coppery fluid from my own lip. When he glanced at me, there was still shock in his eyes. As he had done so many times after winning, I merely winked at him. I had learned something new today, something fun. Fighting was more exciting than winning some schoolyard game. I might not be able to beat him on the schoolyard, but fighting was so much more fun.