

Justinios Drake had enough experience joining new groups to know that it was always a difficult task to assimilate into the new culture however, in this case, there was an added level of challenge because the group in question was mourning the loss of so many people they cared for. As a fresh Jedi recruit out of the Shadow Academy, the Aleena Jedi was assigned to Clan Taldryan, which meant very little to him when he departed Lyspair. In preparation for his meeting with his new peers, Justinios read through the publically available reports regarding the recent events in the Karufr system. Even in the white-washed, Dark Council approved reports, it was apparent that many lives had been lost with most of the casualties being on the Taldryan forces and allies.

Now, as the new Jedi student sat across from Taldryan Rollmaster Vodo Biask Taldrya, the lingering malaise that he felt since his arrival within the reeling fleet manifested itself in the stink of anger and hate in the Rollmaster's office. The diminutive blue skinned Jedi sat silently as his Twi'lek host continued to intently review his datapad. Justinios had been waiting for some sort of a greeting or reaction out of Warlord Taldrya for at least five minutes, but he just kept staring at the datapad. A few more moments passed before the Rollmaster spoke, "So why are you here?"

"This is where I was sent, from the Shadow Academy. There was no indication that I had an option in the matter," Justinios responded somewhat confused. He thought to himself that this couldn't possibly be the first time a new recruit was assigned to Clan Taldryan. It was far more likely to be a question of motives and not sequence of events leading to that exact moment but knowing that tensions were running high. Justinios went with the most basic response he could formulate.

Vodo stood up to get a better look at the Aleena Jedi. Shaking his head he spoke again, "Farrin must think this is some sort of joke. First we lose Karufr, along with countless lives, and to bolster our forces we are sent a tiny professor."

Justinios did not take the interaction personally, emotions were at a fever pitch within the fleet. Even with basic training he felt as if the anger, hatred, disgust and sadness made the air itself thicker to walk through. As an Aleena he was also well aware of his physical limitation and it was those limitations that led the rollmaster to believe a recruit with more combat potential

would have been timely for the forces of Taldryan. This was not the first time that his stature was an impediment to his progress. As Justinios progressed through his academic career, from prep school through his graduate program, he had faced a near constant uphill battle gaining the respect of his peers. His newest peers may wield the power of the Force, but hard work and dedication tended to earn esteem in most organizations, as did the power of aligned incentives.

“Warlord I know that times are dark right now and I can’t begin to understand what you and the rest of the clan are going through at the moment,” Justinios paused briefly before continuing, “I may not be the great warrior you desire but I believe my abilities can be of great use when it comes to rebuilding this Clan. I can only speculate but maybe the Headmaster sent me here for just that reason.”

Vodo sat back in his chair and looked back down at his data pad. “You have a doctorate in advanced particle physics, which I will admit is intriguing, but you have no experience in leadership, combat or really anything outside of the marble halls of academia. I am *excited* to learn just how you plan on contributing to our resurgence.”

“Well I have a theory that there is even more of a connection between the Force and physical matter than anyone could even realize.” The Twi’lek sat up a bit in his chair with his attention now fully on Justinios who happily continued, “The simplistic version of my hypothesis is that this connection results from a split that could be traced back to the creation of space-time and if measured and understood fully could lead to entirely new ways of manipulating Force energy and physical matter.”

“Hmm,” Vodo sounded as if he was scoffing at the idea but simultaneously contemplating its merits. “Theory is great but we need action now, this clan will want to know if you are ready to stand shoulder to, uh, knee with them. Even if your theory holds promise, at this moment in our history we can’t afford to have you in a lab playing scientist.”

Justinios knew when he joined that combat was going to come with this new experience and he would have been lying to say he wasn’t afraid. The Rollmaster clearly expected that an Aleena who spent his entire life within the academic world didn’t see much, if any, combat and he couldn’t have been more right. Justinios hadn’t been in much more than a scrum between

siblings during his years of life before he began studying the Force. The aspiring Jedi was also aware of the power symbols could have on others and his bravery in the face of mortal danger, even if it was feigned, could help send a powerful message to his new allies.

“I understand that during times like these that my experiments will need to be delayed, if you tell me where I am needed I shall give this Clan all I can.” Justinios told himself that the meat grinder of combat could itself be a phenomenal medium for experiments, it's too bad survival would take up much of his attention. “If I must prove my worth on the field of battle to continue my life's work that is a sacrifice I am willing to make.”

The Warlord began to furiously swipe, tap and type on his datapad. Having apparently found the information he was searching for, he made a single additional action before setting the device back on his desk. “Our forces in House Dinaari could use a little assistance,” Vodo chuckled to himself at the accidental pun and continued, “your deployment information has been transferred to your datapad.”

The tiny blue Jedi lept off the chair and pulled out his own datapad as he exited the Rollmaster's office. The shuttle that would take him to meet with House Dinaari leadership wouldn't depart for another two standard hours which, along with his new access to Taldryan reports, should allow for enough time for additional review of the reports on all of the events that had transpired these past few weeks. Reading through the files, the scope of devastation was made much more apparent and Justinios began to realize just what he was being asked to face. The Jedi-in-training reminded himself that it was better to die trying to uncover the mysteries of creation than to live a long life knowing the truth lay out of reach. Gathering his meager personal belongings, he made his way towards the docking bay his shuttle was going to depart from completely, cutting a tiny path through the dark emotions that filled the hallways.