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3/6/2017

Get down and give me 20!

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Pollus Paratus
12436

On a balmy day on the Circle, in between training sessions, Pollus, his brother Castor and Azmodius are sitting around a table, nursing drinks and telling old war stories. The talking shifts to Pollus, who smiles and shakes his head as Castor nudges him about his time in training, more specifically, the time he got caught sneaking into Kul'tak's office.

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Pollus gives in and takes a drink before continuing, "Okay, so it's training, I'm training with twenty-four other guys and girls, all force users. Normally, the clan doesn't give training to mercenaries. They kind of expect us to be ready to hit the ground running, but I never had any sort of training in anything outside of laboratories and lecture halls.

Just to give you an idea of how I ended up at the Circle, Castor beat up a couple of journeyman on Aliso, amused and impressed the Dread Lord, and vowed his allegiance to the Clan in exchange for my life. So, the Dread Lord wanted to put me to work and since I'm a tiny Aleena, I can go places where others can't. Perfect fit for the Mercenary track. That and I'm too tiny to be stuck in any life support gear for combat duty in the Loyalists.

So, we're here at the Circle, we've been given the whole 'Only four of five will walk out of here. The fifth will be carried out' speech. So far, it holds true. It's only the second week of training and we've had three major injuries. The squad is demoralized and getting beat up mercilessly since we're in the ramp up phase when all the weaker ones are being weeded out. The class doesn't know when the abuse will stop and Kul'tak's having us do drills every fifteen minutes for what seemed like three days.

After the latest rounds of drills, the class gets the idea to sneak into his office, find out what his schedule is, get intelligence so we can beat him at his own game. I mean, if you know what he has planned, you can plan for it too. Naturally, the class looks at me because I was 'The Puntable.' I was tiny enough to shuffle around in the airshafts and I felt I wasn't pulling my weight at that time, so I agreed to do it.

Getting into the office was not an issue. The airshaft was a joke. I found the intelligence I needed. Kul was going to make us do three more rounds of drills and he had surprised parties scheduled for three of the four nights. I hated those surprises. It could be a gas attack and all the force users are turn blue from a nerve agent that doesn't affect me or it could be a skill's check when you're absolutely tired. His favorite was force pushing a student into the transparisteel windows at 3 in the morning and finding out which students were agile and coordinated enough at that hour to dodge it.

But before I could back up to the vent, the door opens. My classmate was supposed to alert me of movement, but she fled when Kul found her standing across the hall from his office. Some lookout, she should never have been in plain sight. The force was not strong in that one and she was dropped shortly afterwards.

I jumped into the waste disposal and tried to stay quiet. It may have even worked if my classmate hadn't tipped Kul off. I think he was expecting a bomb, for his students to try and kill him, but all he found was a frightened Aleena with incriminating plans, his plans. He laughed and took me down to the interrogation room, telling me I would be sorry for getting caught."

Azmodius leaned in, "What happened next?"

"The next week was bad. I wish I could say I passed out through the pain or the exhaustion, but the interrogation droid wouldn't let me. The first thing the loyalists did was

hook me up to an IV and explained that I would kept alive, hydrated, and conscious. The hell that followed, they weren't kidding. Anytime I spiked, there was a drug for it. I remained fully conscious for every second of it.

I thought I was going to die, but the droid wouldn't let me. It wasn't even an interrogation, there weren't any questions. It was just pain, pain that wouldn't stop. After a day of it, I caved in. It was pointless. I was going to suffer for however long Kul wanted it to go on for and there was no way out of it.

When the loyalists came back to unhook me, I gave them a smile and told them to come back later, that I was enjoying this too much. I saw the fear in their eyes, the way they recoiled when I moved a hand towards them. They quickly escorted me to the medical wing to get checked out and then left without even a glance back.

I was back in training the next day, but even my fellow recruits could see a difference in me. When we went into close quarters training, there was a ferociousness that wasn't there before. I'd go for the jugulars without hesitation before my classmates could react.

I went from being 'The Putable' to being team leader in the final exercise a few months later. Even though I was a mercenary and they were force users, they paid for every victory they took from me. There wasn't a doubt in anyone's mind that I would see the mission to the end.

As for Kul'tak, I thank him for that. He trained me well. A few days after they let me out of the punishment, he came in pretty beat up. Instinctively, I knew what had happened from the size 1 Aleena footprint on his black eye. He never held that against me."

"Wait, you kicked his ass? When?" Azmodius tried to stifle a skeptical laugh.

Castor raised his hand, "This is my part of the story. When I came back from the nine-day mission I was on and found

out, I was furious. In hindsight, Kul'tak should have seen what came next, but he was probably too focused on training the novitiates. From the way I saw things, he was a bully who was taking his frustrations on my brother who, no offense to you Pollus, is no match for a trained force user. I was going to give him the pleasure of facing another force user.

Unlike my brother, I can create illusions and cloak myself. Like Pollus said, it's easy enough to break into the office through the airshaft, at least for us. He came in one morning after I had been sitting there for a couple of hours and it was a slaughter. Whether he thought that no one would dare attack him on his station or his mind from elsewhere, he never saw the punches and kicks until he was staggering around dazed.

After that, it wasn't hard to get him down, tie up his hands and activate my lightsaber to his throat. I even gave him a halfway decent shave on his pretty Zabrak throat to pass some time. After he had regained some sense of active consciousness, we had a conversation. I told him I was doing this for my brother, that I wasn't going to let anyone beat up on Pollus. Then I asked him why I shouldn't kill him now. Funny thing is, Kul'tak wasn't afraid or desperate. He didn't even look angry. He looked like he was explaining things like a professional, that I'd understand the stupidity of my actions.

He said, *'You said you're doing this for your brother. Well, what happens when you kill me? Did you think about that? You will be hunted until the day you die. You think running to one of the other Clans will save you? They'll never respect or trust you. COU? COU's weak. Look at Xolarin, he came to us.'*

Look at you! You jumped me a few days after I caught your brother. If you think you can protect him forever, on the battlefield or where ever the Clan sends him, you're wrong. The best thing you could do for your brother is to walk away.

Your brother will be an amazing asset to this Clan. The Dread Lord has taken special interest in his skill set. But he needs to learn to stay alive to be useful to the Dread Lord. His mistake was that he got caught. If a week of discomfort means he'll remember the cost of failure next time, in a real situation and it protects him, I've done my job as his trainer. ”

Castor shrugged his shoulders and sighed, “That’s what he said. He was right though. I jumped back up through the airshaft and we didn’t speak of it again. But if you ever go to that office, look up. There’s bars all over the airshaft duct. There’s even more sensors and poisonous gas in the vent to detect and prevent anymore unexpected visitors.”

Pollus looked at Azmodius, “What about you? What did you ever do behind Furios’s back?”

Azmodius chuckled, “Now that’s a story for another day.”