

An Apathetic Hero

DP-20 Corellian Gunship - *Audacity*
Nancora System

Justinios Drake was attempting to use the Force and his targeting computer simultaneously to destroy as many of the incoming quadrijet space tugs as he could, but the explosions that were wracking the *Audacity*, a DP20 Corellian gunship in service to the Clan Taldryan Navy, indicated that his efforts were only delaying the inevitable. The space battle around the Collective stronghold of Nancora had been raging for over a standard hour with a stalemate forming between the unified forces under Rath Oligard's leadership and the disjointed forces of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood's combined Clans. Each Clan had been holding their own individually, but there was little coordination between them so far.

The military leadership of Clan Taldryan had been prepared for the suicide bomber tactics before jumping into the system, and developed a plan to deal with the unorthodox tactic. Commander Rhy lance had ordered the Force Sensitives among their ranks to either take to a starfighter or a gun turret to help with point defense. When Justinios, who's piloting skills were average at best, refused to take flight he was assigned to a quadlaser turret aboard the *Audacity*. The Corellian Gunship was promptly deployed at the vanguard of the fleet along with the fighters and other frigate class vessels to form an anti-suicide bomber screen in front of the larger cruiser and carrier class ships.

A near endless stream of red-orange light had been spewing out of the gun turret for as long as the Aleena Knight inhabited the emplacement. For just a moment, Justinios became aware that the alarm klaxons had changed pitch and tone even if he was unaware when the change took place. While continuing to fire at the incoming tugs Justinios commed his newly acquired KX-series droid. "Kilo talk to me, what do these alarms mean buddy?"

The normally studious Jedi had not spent much time learning proper naval procedures before being launched headlong into his first major engagement. Justinios instead opted to spend the little time he had while the fleet was preparing for departure studying the morsels of intelligence reports being fed from the Inquisitorious regarding the Collective's very advanced technology. The consequence of this decision was that he had no clue what the latest cacophony of sound and flashing red lights actually meant which forced him to rely on the information that K1-L0, who Justinios had nicknamed Kilo, relayed to him from whatever dataport the droid had been able to plug into.

"I see you didn't even skim over the synopsis I put together of naval regulations. That's nice. I spent thirty standard seconds putting that together. I am glad you take the time of a droid like myself completely for granted as if my processing power is simply a commodity to be used and discarded." It came as no surprise to Justinios that the droid chose to display some of his trademark insecurity before offering up any useful information.

"Kilo you know I appreciate the fact that you put the summary together and I promise to study it in full if we live through this battle, but right now I need to know what those klaxons mean." Justinios

appreciated the operational information that Kilo added to combat situations, not to mention the fact Kilo was able to see what was on the high shelves in the lab, but the droid was very easily distracted if he thought he was underappreciated. "I'll even submit to the test that I know you put together once we are safe, I won't even eat first."

Without further hesitation the droid responded, "Those klaxons mean we have taken significant damage and that Captain Morg has ordered a full evacuation."

Unstrapping himself from the seat of the quadlaser turret Justinios let out an audible growl of frustration and then immediately checked that his comlink was not currently transmitting to Kilo. A tiny wave of relief washed over him when he confirmed the transmit button was in the "off" position. The droid would have absolved himself of any part in delaying the Jedi's the reaction to the evacuation alarm by pointing out the exact page and paragraph in which the droid's guide would have informed Justinios as to the meaning of this exact alarm code. Being blown up or sucked into the void of space were already terrible ways to expire, and adding a scathing lecture from an insecure droid would only make dying that much worse. As he jumped out of his chair another explosion rocked the ship and although the Aleena didn't have a lot of experience with space battles or naval vessels he couldn't help but feel that this blast came from within. That was quickly confirmed when the corridor lights went out and were replaced only with emergency lighting.

"Kilo meet me at the escape pods. It is time to get off this hunk of junk. I am not missing my chance to get to Nancora's surface and my shot at recovering some of that sweet Collective tech." Smaller aftershocks of the larger explosion continued in the aft section of the ship as Justinios made best speed towards midship and the turbolift that would carry him to the escape pods. Picturing the corridor two levels up containing the rows of identical hatches made the Aleena think of something to add to his previous statement, "And before you ask, yes I am aware of where the escape pods are on this vessel."

Prior to the battle, Justinios attempted to tactically take up residence in a turret very close to the escape pods but was redirected to a station two levels below the lifesaving capsules. As he rounded the corner to the turbolift that would carry him to safety, he saw that six other gunners were mashing the buttons of the seemingly non-responsive unit in a panic. Inside his own head Justinios laughed at them, they all knew that no amount of poking and prodding was going to magically bring the lift back to life if power was lost, but in a completely illogical manner they continued futilely mashing keys. The scenario quickly became much less comical when the Jedi realized he was also stuck at the bottom of an unpowered turbolift shaft.

"The lift doesn't work." One of the six human crew members yelled down the corridor by as Justinios trotted up it on his tiny blue legs. Justinios had no idea what the gunners name was. There had not been much time for the blue-skinned Jedi to learn the names of the crew, and he also didn't have much desire to learn them even if time had allowed.

"That much is already apparent," Justinios responded derisively. "Might I suggested redirecting your energy away from the clearly out of service control panel and instead to locating any other way that the

six of you could cut through the lift door and ascend two levels?" Each of the gathered crew members looked around at each other as if to convey that they were disappointed none of their compatriots had taken charge and suggested that very same thing. "Fine I am feeling charitable so I'll get you louts started and cut a hole," he said while pulling his lightsaber off of his belt, "but you six will have to figure out how to climb up two levels all by yourselves."

Murmurs began to circulate before another of nameless crew members spoke up. "If you have a lightsaber that means you're a Jedi of some sort right? Can't you just push us all up with the Force or something?"

"I could do that but I don't want to. That would take time, time which is going to precipitously increase my own chance of not making off this ship. While Taldryan command won't be happy if they have to replace a half dozen gunners, my abilities, and more importantly my mind, are of much greater value in this conflict than six enlisted gunners."

Judging by their reaction that wasn't what the crew members wanted to hear. Their response was to, in unison and without speaking a word, move towards the diminutive Jedi as if ready to attack. There was enough space between the miniature mob and the Aleena to allow Justinios a moment consider his options. The fastest route would be to quickly cut down the six crew members before continuing with his own as-yet-to-be-developed plan to ascend the turbolift tube. But leaving six crew members behind to die willingly was already a pretty bad look, and killing them outright would mean a lot of time talking with command if anyone found out.

Sighing to himself, Justinios pulled out and activated his lightsaber. None would need to die by his hand today if he could half-shame and half-intimidate them into stopping their assault. "I would suggest that instead of being brainless brutes and allowing your base instincts to control you, instead take a moment to see if you can find some items around here that will allow you to save yourselves. I can use this blade to cut into the lift's hatch or all six of your torsos, you pick."

The condemnation, along with the sight of a lit lightsaber, stopped the ill-conceived attack cold. The crew scattered, but not without hurling just about every curse word a spacer had ever come up with towards Justinios. The former Professor had no desire to see any of the crew perish, but if it was between their lives and his own, well, so long suckers. As he stood in front of the now abandoned turbolift door, Justinios used his weapon to cut an opening. He was even courteous enough to take an extra few moments to cut a hole big enough for the contingent of human crew to fit through comfortably.

Content that he had done his good deed for the day, the Grey Jedi poked his head through the opening to see just where the lift car had stopped before the power went out. The situation was as good as it could have been, and turning back towards the scrambling gunnery crews, Justinios shared the bit of good news, "The lift car itself is stuck up on the highest level, we have a clear shot at the main deck." None of the six crew members gave any indication they heard the update, but Justinios felt quite a bit of

relief from this discovery. Less durasteel to cut through meant it was more likely he could make it off the ship before it completed the transition into space debris.

“Kilo what is the situation up there?” Now standing at the bottom of the lift tube and staring at closed doors two levels up, Justinios knew he would need the help of his droid companion to overcome that particular obstacle.

The droid promptly responded, “Only two escape pods remain un-jettisoned. I have sufficiently advised Captain Morg that if he attempts to abscond with one without waiting for your arrival that I will ensure he meets the same fate as the ship in which he has done a such poor job commanding. I’ve also made the ship’s senior officer aware that had he appreciated the tactical data I was feeding to him, of my own volition I might add, this ship would not currently be in the processes of tearing itself apart.”

The fact that the droid was able to threaten the poor Captain with death while simultaneously insulting his ability to command a naval ship was quite impressive. However, Justinios was concerned that Morg wasn’t hanging back out of fear for his life. Staying aboard a quickly disintegrating ship was still more risky by any measure than upsetting Kilo. The Captain needed something, and the most logical assumption was that he needed Justinios to save someone that was important enough to ask for help in person, rather than from the relative safety of an escape pod. For now that was a problem for future Justinios to handle, present Justinios had to get himself to the main deck first.

“Kilo I need you to help me open the doors to the lift tube on your level so I can jump through them. If you can pry them open from your end I can try to assist you from the bottom with the Force.” The droid didn’t even acknowledge the request, and the only indication that Kilo had heard it was when a small crease became just barely visible in the shaft doors as a sliver of the emergency lighting bled through. Kneeling down at the bottom of the turbolift shaft, Justinios focused all of his willpower on that crease and visualized it becoming larger and larger. Slowly but surely, the *KX*-unit’s servo powered mechanical arms along with the telekinetics of the blue-skinned Jedi forced the turbolift door wide open. “Great work Kilo, I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“You would have remained down there until the ship exploded in a fireball that would have pelted your fragile organic body with a combination of blunt force and piercing trauma caused by an almost unmeasurable level of shrapnel which likely would have caused your death long before it froze from exposure to the cold vacuum of deep space.” In an odd way, Justinios appreciated the droid’s morbid bluntness but not as much as the statement that followed. “Your appreciation has been noted. I will help you ascend the turbolift shaft offering myself up as an anchor.”

Smiling to himself, Justinios knew that the droid’s unprompted offer to assist in his ascent was the largest show of gratitude he’d likely ever see out of Kilo. Rising back to his feet, Justinios took a moment to look back at the now highly motivated crew. The group of them had together gathered all sorts of implements in which to fashion a long, but what looked to be flexible, ladder. He was impressed with their plan, long and flexible meant that they might be able to attach a weight to one end in which to toss up to survivors at their target level. The Aleena was proud of himself, he had done two good deeds in

one day. Not only did he save these beings lives by cutting a larger opening in the turbolift door than he needed for himself but with some of his tough love the six gunners found the power within to save their own lives. *The more people that can help themselves the fewer that will constantly be looking to me for assistance*, he thought.

Further explosions reminded Justinios that it was also time to finish his own self-directed rescue before Kilo's very correct prediction for how he would die aboard the *Audacity* came to pass. The droid was already laying down prone with about a quarter of his frame hanging out into the lift shaft. It was a position that could not have been easy for Kilo to get into with both arms reaching as far down the turbolift shaft as he could manage without losing his own balance and tumbling down to the bottom. Without asking the droid if he were ready, which Kilo would only assume meant Justinios thought him not ready, the Knight took a deep breath and held it. As Justinios exhaled a few heartbeats later he closed his eyes and focused on the bottom of the lift as if he were pushing against it with all his might. Physically leaping with his diminutive blue legs, he used the picture in his mind's eye to launch off the durasteel floor as if he were a rocket. As he opened his bulbous reptilian eyes the outstretched hands of his droid companion were rapidly approaching. As he regained his bearings, Justinios realized the opening to the main deck was approaching a little too rapidly and it looked like his trajectory would take him past the outstretched arms of Kilo.

Kilo must have also reached the same conclusion and the droid snatched the flying blue alien by the ankles as he zoomed past by articulating his arms in a way that would have been impossible for most organic beings. It became one fluid motion as the *KX*-unit let the rearward momentum of his mechanical appendages continue which, as he let go of Justinios' ankles, resulted in Justinios tumbling across the durasteel floor. The altogether ungraceful somersaulting continued until Justinios stopped right in front of the seated form of Captain Winnik Morg. Pulling his round, hairless head out from between his own legs, Justinios quickly noticed that the Captain had a splint on his left leg and un-bandaged gashes all over his face. The human male was obviously in rough shape, which made it all the more concerning he hadn't yet left the dying frigate.

"Knight Drake it is good to see you alive. Your droid has been an... interesting companion as I awaited your arrival." The Captain's thinly veiled critique of Kilo's personality was one Justinios had already heard multiple times since the droid joined his company. Above all he preferred results, and Justinios would not risk performance with a full memory wipe in order to eliminate some of the droid's quirkiest traits.

Looking back at Kilo, it seemed he had already taken to assisting the crew members still two decks below with their ascent. Paying no further mind to their situation, Justinios decided it was time to confirm his fears on why the injured Captain was still aboard the *Audacity*. "What dangerous task are you going to ask me to undertake instead of allowing me to escape this death trap?"

"Right to the point, so be it. Know that I only ask this of you because of how important this person is to me." Justinios noticed that a wetness began to form in the Captain's eyes as he spoke. "There is someone very important to me left aboard this ship." Captain Morg broke down completely as he

continued, speaking through tears. "It is my girl... and she is trapped in a sensor room... and there is debris blocking the hatch... and your droid couldn't clear it... please you have to do something, anything, please!"

Morg's further words were lost to hysterics. Justinios knew he had no skill at comforting those in distress, and he had long ago learned not to try. Another explosion rocked the ship, it was a bit larger than the more recent ones, but smaller than the massive initial blast. The Aleena's eyes darted between the fore of the ship where the sensor room contained the trapped human female and the aft section of the ship that seemed to be blowing itself apart. His preference would have been to leave both Captain and child behind, but the mental image of Commander Rhyllance's smug visage, convinced of his own intellectual superiority, was enough for Justinios to decide he had enough time to be savior and stay among the ranks of the living. The Chiss Consul would have to wait another day to pompously explain how someone of *his* intellect would have resolved the situation. Letting out a massive sigh, the Jedi turned his attention back to the still sobbing officer.

"I'd love to know why you brought a child aboard a warship Captain but I'll save us both the time and assume it was because of some absurd ideal about honor, glory or some other nonsense." Without waiting for a response from the ship's commander, Justinios turned toward the dimly lit corridor and shook his head in annoyance at how far out of control the entire situation had developed.

Still in front of the turbolift shaft, Kilo spoke loud enough so that Justinios could hear the droid as he helped the first of the crewmembers up from their makeshift ladder, "Don't worry I promise to toss every one of these ungrateful clods back down the shaft if they even insinuate leaving you aboard this ship. Do you know not one of them has yet shown me an ounce of praise for my role in their extraction?"

Content that Kilo would admonish the rest of the survivors to death before they could make off with the last escape pods, Justinios ran towards the sensor room as fast as his little Aleena legs could carry him without aide from the Force. Although he was only vaguely familiar with the ships layout, his objective was easily identified by the impressively large chunk of durasteel blocking the hatch. Once again Knight Drake's blue lightsaber snapped to life and he began surgically cutting through the large piece of metal. He only took the time to cut a hole big enough for himself, justifying that a child would not be much bigger, and time was of the essence. The debris was thicker than the turbolift shaft but after a few minutes a hole approximately a meter in diameter had been hewn into it. Justinios crawled through the newly created opening to cut a similar one into the unpowered sensor room door and was immediately terrified that he had found and saved the wrong person.

Waiting for Knight Drake on the other side of the door was no child. It was a fully grown adult human female who was also wearing a Taldryan Navy uniform and looked to be closer to the Captain's age rather than childhood. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" the human officer said as soon as Justinios entered the sensor room, arms extended as if to embrace her savior.

“Nope, nope and nope,” Justinios said while putting a hand up. “I don’t have time for this I was supposed to be saving Captain Morg’s daughter and since you aren’t her I need to find her and get that over with as soon as possible.”

“Daughter? No we are in love!” Justinios was already exiting through the openings he had previously made as his frustration turned to seething rage. “Ours is a love forged in battle....”

Justinios let the human’s words fall from his focus as she continued to ramble on. Without saying a word the Aleena immediately stomped his way back towards the escape pods. It was very likely that the female, who was most assuredly a sensor officer, was still explaining her forbidden love but the words fell on deaf ears. As the corridor containing the escape pods came back into view in the dim emergency lighting, Justinios caught a glimpse of Kilo pulling the manual release on the first of the two remaining pods which, if everything was going to plan, sent the six surviving gunners off the dying frigate. As the droid turned around Justinios could see the *KX*-unit’s yellow photoreceptors pointed right at him.

“Just as you asked, the six gunners have all crammed into a single escape pod and I have kept one readily available for ourselves...” the droid stopped himself and his tone changed to one of confusion, “but it seems you did not recover the Captain’s daughter.” It was a small relief, Kilo seemed to have also assumed that when the Captain used the term “girl” the ship’s commanding officer was referring to a child. “Are we rescuing this officer instead?”

“Not instead, there is no daughter Kilo.” Justinios attempted to make eye contact with the captain as he spoke but Morg’s attention was elsewhere.

Having noticed the female sensor officer following behind Justinios the Captain sprung up as fast as his broken body allowed him and called to her. “Justane, my love, I was afraid I’d lost you!” As Captain Morg spoke, the other officer ran at him with arms outstretched clearly planning on embracing him fully as she ran towards him. Justinios, whose patience had long been surpassed, had other plans.

The Aleena put his blue body between the two and lit his lightsaber. “You,” he said pointing the blade towards Justane, “stop this holoivid nonsense and get into the escape pod *now!*” There may not have been much intimidating about an Aleena to most beings, but one that was clearly angry and brandishing a glowing blade of superheated plasma was at least enough to convince the sensor officer to skulk into the awaiting escape pod and promptly buckle herself into a seat. The Jedi then turned his attention back to the Captain, “And you are lucky I don’t have the time to express my extreme displeasure regarding the fact that you intentionally misled me.”

“I read your dossier, I just didn’t know if you would...” the Captain attempted to stammer an explanation before being cut off not by Justinios, but instead by Kilo.

“After all I have done for you and your crew, you have the nerve willingly deceive us?” As the droid was reprimanding the senior officer he was also picking him up underneath his shoulders and carrying him into the escape pod. “Very ungrateful,” Kilo continued as he strapped Captain Morg into a seat opposite

the love interest Justinios had risked his life to save. "If I have anything to say about this entire situation you should expect to lose rank over this Captain. I shall be providing senior command with a complete tactical analysis which, in my opinion, is lackluster enough to demote you back down to Ensign. The data shows that your irregular firing patterns alone accounted for a 0.6% loss of combat efficiency. That alone should be quite enough to send an ingrate like yourself back to the academy."

Knight Drake deactivated his weapon and took up residence in the seat between the two romantic partners. As the Aleena was doing his best to tighten the restraints around his undersized body, Kilo was interfacing with the escape pod computer from the inside in order to coax it to separate from the Corellian Gunship. The firing of the capsule's rocket boosters confirmed that the self-contained power unit aboard the pod was working and none of the organic occupants had to worry about suffocating to death before being rescued. The only remaining worry now was if Taldryan forces would get to them before the Collective vented them into the void. As if his thoughts were being broadcasted to the fleet, the comm unit aboard the pod answered.

"Escape pod 11J9 this is Recovery Team Delta inbound. ETA 15 minutes."

Justinios was overjoyed. If a recovery team was only 15 minutes away, it meant that the space around them must for the moment be clear of hostiles. Despite everyone else's efforts to the contrary he was going to live through the ordeal of the *Audacity's* destruction and the pained process of being forced to save so many other lives before securing his own wellbeing. The only roadblock to his own happiness at the moment were the kissy faces Captain Morg and his love interest were making at each other as the escape pod rocketed through the vacuum of space. Clearly Kilo's scolding did not douse the amorous spirit the two naval officers shared. Having no desire to subject himself to that for the next fifteen minutes, Justinios thought of a quick way to end the disgustingly romantic situation.

"Kilo why don't you go ahead and deliver that debrief you plan filing with Taldryan Command while we wait." Never before in their short time together had the tactical droid's overly technical ramblings about thrust velocity and power plant usage seemed so comforting. "Spare us no details."

