

Saving Roark.

This is an entry for the Fiction Competition: **[GJW XIII Phase II] Fiction - Multi-Objective Prompt**

Written by Padawan Appius Wight of Clan Vizsla.

[Objective 2]: DEFEND YOUR CLAN LEADERS

'Deputy, beware. Collective agents have infiltrated the Severian Principate as stormtroopers. Planning assassination of Brotherhood diplomats.'

- A message to Evant Taelyan from his ship, The Affinity. Which is connected to the Brotherhood's Inquisitorius Network.

Chapter 1 - Fade to black.

Location: Unknown

He couldn't help but wonder if this is what it felt like.

Death.

Cold, numb, and despite lying in a pool of his own blood it was almost painless.

Almost...

He could hear calls and shouts around him in the chaos and inferno but it echoed in his ears. His bodily functions were beginning to fail him and there was nothing he could do now. The Force couldn't heal a wound this great.

"Appius!"

His name. Yes, that is his name. He recognised it even as his chest tightened. Breathing was difficult for him now.

"Stay with us, Appius!"

That plea meant nothing now. He could feel his blood exit his body like water out of a tap. He waited for death's sweet embrace.

"Appius!"

His name would be the last word he heard before his world began to fade to black...

Chapter 2 - Starting again.

Location: Moon of Thillon

11:32 hours

"Again."

Considering the masses of cuts and bruises scattered across Appius' flesh and body right now one might understand when that single word cut through him like a lightsaber through Tauntaun flesh. He has been rigorously training with his master for the last two hours on this harsh wasteland of a moon with no sign of life for miles around but no matter what he did nothing seemed to make any kind of progress against him despite his master's limp. Appius was vastly outpaced, outmanoeuvred and outmatched in close combat in every single way and so far it only landed him in a world of pain. Nonetheless, he was urged to carry on and carry on he shall. But just who was his master?

Farrin Xies Tarantae, the heir of Tarantae and former headmaster of the Shadow Academy himself. He is a thirty six year old skinny and relatively small man standing at five foot six compared to Appius' slender frame at six foot four. He presents reddish brown hair with patches of grey beginning to show along with his beard which was beginning to look unkempt and untreated. His pale skin, much like Appius', revealed a man who preferred the indoors to the outdoors and the missing notch on his right ear was certainly hard to miss. But his most defining characteristic, at least to Appius, was his eyes. They shone with an intelligence and intensity that the young Jedi Padawan hadn't experienced before. Farrin wore Chief Inquisitor Armor, black in colour much like Appius' Jedi Robes and kept an array of blasters and lightsabers on him at all times to defend himself. He was the kind of man that liked to be prepared for any situation.

He is also the kind of man that demanded nothing but excellence in his apprentices. He watched Appius with great intrigue from his time in the Shadow Academy to joining Clan Vizsla and was impressed by how far he had come in a short space of time. He watched Appius as he sparred and dueled with others in the academy so he knew of the problem he possessed with close quarter combat and was intending to fix it but he never expected the problem to be this severe.

Appius lacked discipline, coordination and actual spacial awareness of his surroundings. On top of that he lacked power in his strikes which Farrin deduced was due to a lack of willingness to actually harm others. Appius is a twenty-seven year old Mandalorian human Jedi with green eyes and buzz cut brown hair that he liked to keep short in order to hide the fact that his hairline was receding. It didn't work half the time, but he didn't know that. But he was a kind and emotional soul and didn't like conflict in any shape, way or form and Farrin thought that might have something to do with the problem.

Regardless, Appius *attempted* to lunge at Farrin with the wooden training sword he had been given though that extra height he had over his master meant absolutely nothing. Farrin blocked the attempt and using Appius' own momentum against him he whacked the aspiring Jedi across the left shin with his own wooden sword, causing yet another painful bruise to form underneath the clothing. Farrin was a master of the Shien variation of form five of lightsaber combat which focused on the redirection of an opponent's momentum to fling it back at them. Primarily, Shien was used against blaster fire though did have some applications in duels which Appius was now learning the hard way.

The Apprentice dropped to one knee and tried to return to his feet though the toll on his body was beginning to be a little too much. That little confrontation was brief but decisive.

"Are you done?" Farrin asked, disappointed in his Apprentices efforts.

The lactic acid build up in Appius' limbs and muscles prevented him from moving along with the compiled list of stings and burns from his cuts and bruises. Suddenly, Farrin disappeared from visible sight and Appius was alarmed by the presence of the Force warning him about his master's strike at him, Farrin specialized as a Shadow and preferred working out of sight and out of mind and despite the warning from the Force Appius was battered, bruised and in no condition to dodge and as such when his master revealed himself from the concealment of the Force he took the full power of Farrin's horizontal swing across his ribs. An audible crack could be heard, causing him to recoil over in pain, clutching his side and trying not to voice his physical torment. Though the tears in his eyes were a dead giveaway of the agony he was in.

Now, the reason for all of this was that Appius was a user of form zero. A lightsaber form that wasn't known for its use in combat situations. It was there to teach students how not to cut their own limbs off with a lightsaber. It was slow and clunky and on top of that his apprentice had no former martial arts training either. In a close quarter environment he was pretty much like a hot meal for a Wompa on Hoth.

Farrin unceremoniously dropped his wooden training sword to the ground in frustration.

"Heal yourself, Appius. I will talk with you in a moment."

Words could not describe the relief that washed over the young Jedi Padawan at hearing those words. Farrin banned him from using his abilities in the Force during their training session whilst he was allowed to use his as this was meant to be a test of Appius' skills in close combat fighting alone. He had warned him that if the thought of using the Force against him so much as entered his mind he would, in Farrin's own words, *receive a punishment worse than death*.

He didn't know what this punishment was, all he knew was that he didn't want to find out.

Thankfully, Appius is proficient at using the Force to heal both himself and others and now with Farrin's permission he began to heal his own wounds immediately. He could feel the

pain in his ribs dissipate as the cracks that were once quite literally a pain in his side begin to fill and the plethora of cuts and bruises he received over the course of the training session begin to smooth over. Ripped flesh patched itself and bruises began to fade. It wasn't perfect and he still felt sore all over but he was in much better condition than he was a few minutes prior.

He rose to await what his master would say, though was a bit upset and embarrassed both at how brutal and relentless Farrin had been against him and at how poorly he did but understood it was all in pursuit of bettering him. His master stood with his left hand on his hip and his right hand on his beard, a telltale signs that he was deep in thought. After a moment he turned to face his apprentice.

"Do you know why I'm being so hard on you?" Farrin asked him directly. His tone of voice indicative of his serious nature.

"Because you're a sadist?"

Truthfully, Appius only intended for that comment to be a joke though Farrin didn't seem to appreciate the remark. But he seemed to just brush it off this time.

"No, Appius, I did it to gauge how proficient you are in close combat and I have to say I am not pleased. Who trained you originally?" Farrin questioned diligently.

"My father. He was a Jedi Knight." Appius said, sweat dripping from his face from a combination of exhaustion and nervousness.

"Well, I would like to meet the man so I can discuss his training methods because quite honestly this isn't good enough."

Appius' heart sank. Memories from times he tried to keep suppressed rose back to the surface.

"You can't meet him." He said solemnly.

Farrin was slightly taken aback, Appius hadn't openly denied any of his wishes since they become master and apprentice so this act of defiance came as a surprise.

"And why not?" He questioned once again, there was a subtle tone in his voice that told his apprentice that the reason had better be a good one.

"Because he's dead."

Farrin paused for a moment and took in this new information. They haven't been master and apprentice for long and the two men were still learning about each other. Appius in particular hadn't mentioned much of his backstory due to it being unpleasant for him to bring up. Farrin sighed and spoke to his apprentice once again.

"Look, I apologize Appius. Life is cruel sometimes but you have to see where I'm coming from. You are a Sorcerer and have an uncanny knack for using more advanced abilities in the Force than most I've seen yet you struggle with something as simple as feeling your surroundings. You're close combat abilities are atrocious and it seems to me like you have done everything in reverse which... astonishes me that you have lived as long as you have... Do you remember what your father intended with your training?"

Appius looked down to the ground, trying to recall on his memories from his time with his father on Mandalore.

"Not exactly. It's been about twelve years since he died but I think he was intending to start my training in a lightsaber form." Appius was trying hard to remember whatever he could. Honestly? He had tried his best to push these memories to the back of his mind and Farrin could tell the young man was struggling with his feelings.

"Do you remember which one specifically?" Farrin asked, pushing to get as much information as possible out of his apprentice.

"I think... he was good with both aspects of form five. So maybe Djem So and Shien but he seemed to want me to do something different? I don't know..." Appius was beginning to struggle with his words. Everything he could remember was blurry as he was subconsciously trying to suppress his memories, though his body language gave him away and facial expressions gave him away. Farrin once again stroked the hairs on his chin, deep in thought and concerned about Appius' emotional state.

"Well..." he started and paused for a moment to consider how to change the subject. Appius could see the gears turn in his master's head. "I can tell you one thing for certain. Form five will not work with you. In fact most of them won't. You lack the willingness to be aggressive and put your full power into a swing until you are angry and at that point you just lose control of yourself. Power is useless without control after all."

Farrin mused for a moment until a spark of inspiration entered his mind.

"Tell me, does this stance look familiar to you."

Farrin called his lightsaber from within his Robe to his left hand and drew the blade in a one handed stance angled forwards. A white light erupted from the lightsaber hilt which was almost blinding. He slipped his dominant foot back and his spare arm outstretched almost like a challenge. Appius had to think for a moment, both on what he learned from his own knowledge of lightsaber forms as well as what his father showed him until something clicked together.

"That's form three's opening stance. Soresu, The Resilience Form, the way of the Mynock."

Appius stated from compete memory as if he were reading a page from the holonet. He studied the doctrines on lightsaber combat forms and knew how to recognize them when he saw them.

"Correct and if I were a betting man, I would say this is what your father was planning to teach you. Form three is perfect for you. It's the ultimate form for those who do not wish to harm others and is considered the ultimate Jedi's form because of how pacifistic it is. Tell me, have you ever heard of Darth Zannah?"

Appius recalled his time at the shadow academy reading through the many textbooks and entries on the history of the Brotherhood as was encouraged. Farrin in particular was a very learned and educated man, as is expected of a headmaster.

"Yes, she was a dark lady of the Sith during Darth Bane's rule of two era." Appius answered.

"Yes, but just like you she was A Sorcerer. She specialized solely in Soresu and her offensive capabilities lied in her ability to use the Force while defending herself. She was deadly because of it and I think that could be the direction for you to go in."

Appius was impressed at this analysis and became excited at the prospect of what he could become. He made sure to take a mental note to do more research on Darth Zannah when he was back at the Shadow Academy.

"That sounds awesome! And I think you're right. That might have been what my father was planning."

Farrin skilled at him approvingly. Happy at his apprentices newfound enthusiasm..

"It seems like your father was a smart man."

Appius just nodded his head sheepishly but smiled. His emotional torment a few moments prior was now replaced by stoic contemplation and even a fond smile at the memories of his father.

"He was."

Farrin approached Appius and stood next to him.

"Appius. I am not here to replace your father."

When he spoke he successfully broke Appius out of his train of thought. Almost startling the young Jedi Padawan.

"I didn't say..."

But Appius didn't get the chance to finish his reply.

"I'm not finished. I don't know what happened when your father died but I hope one day you will trust me enough to tell me. I have had students before you and I never failed them and I don't intend to fail you either. My training is brutal, harsh and at times you will regret being my apprentice. But I promise you, under me you will rise to be the kind of Jedi that everyone can be proud of. That your father can be proud of and most importantly, *you* can be proud of."

Appius smiled and nodded at his Master. His vigor rejuvenated at the older man's speech.

"Thank you, Master Farrin."

Farrin returned Appius warm smile with one of his own.

"Your welcome. But enough talking, now it's time to start your advanced training. Copy me, do exactly as I do. I'm no master of Soresu but I know the basics to get you started."

Appius complied and followed his master's instructions as he attempted to copy the Soresu opening stance. He drew his lightsaber from his robes as a green blade erupted from the basic hilt he received as a novitiate. As he tried to reach the stance, Farrin scrutinized over him, correcting any little flaw that he could see.

"No, angle your blade forward, your feet need to be further apart."

It took several minutes and a lot of prompting from Farrin but Appius finally reached the desired footing. It was difficult considering he was still sore from their training earlier but he could feel the defensive capabilities just from the opening stance alone along with the readiness for combat. He could only imagine the possibilities once he perfected the form.

"That's it! Remember that feeling and you will always know when you've correctly entered that stance. Now you have to get there on your own from a standing position."

Suddenly, Farrin was interrupted by a frequency being emitted by the Advanced Inquisitor Comlink he wore on his left sleeve.

"Excuse me for one moment, Appius. Start practicing, I will be with you in a moment to check your progress."

Farrin proceeded to distance himself a few feet away so he could receive the transmission without interrupting Appius, who had now become solely focused on getting into the Soresu opening stance on his own.

Farrin addressed his commlink and a small holographic image of a black and red robed figure wearing a concealing mask came to life in front of him. It was a member of the Inquisitorius.

"This had better be important." Farrin stated bluntly. He was the kind of man that hated interruptions especially when it came to training. He was a high ranking member of the Inquisitorius himself however and was normally one of the first in line to receive any of their information.

"Sir, we have come across evidence that the Clan Leaders are in danger of assassination from Collective forces. Declan Roark in particular is being targeted by M'eero Trippani. A Zygerrian explosives expert. We believe he is attempting to lure Roark out personally with a fake bounty on his own head."

Farrin's heart dropped at that comment. This was very serious. Especially for Clan Vizsla, the Clan both he and Appius were a part of. A loss in leadership so early in the Clan's life could have devastating consequences

"Have you managed to contact the other clans?"

"No sir, we tried contacting all the leaders but our communications with them are jammed. You are the first one we've made contact with. We believe they have dispatched Shikari Huntresses among them."

Farrin thought about this for a moment.

"Do you know where Roark is?"

"We believe he's taken the *Shriek Hawk* down somewhere near your location on the Moon of Thillon."

Farrin nodded slowly in thought, at least he wasn't too far away from them. The *Irena* should be able to pick up on the *Shriek Hawk's* frequency if he is close by.

"It figures that communications are jammed. Leave Declan Roark to me, I'll make sure he's free from harm. Continue trying to get in contact with the other clans."

"Yes sir."

With that, the hologram disappeared and Farrin quickly rushed back to Appius as fast as he could despite his limp.

"Change of plan. I'm leaving, continue practicing and I'll be back soon."

Farrin quickly made his way to the *Irena*. A Delta-class JV-7 Escort Shuttle named after his mother that was painted as black as night in order to camouflage it in the void of space. It was owned personalised ship as he marched towards it his path was blocked by Appius.

"Why? What's going on?"

His question paused the elder Force Wielder for a moment. He considered lying to him in order to keep him out of harm's way or maybe not even tell him at all but then again, Appius has managed to survive up till now on the skills and abilities he has, so maybe bringing him along and throwing him into a combat situation could be a good test of his strengths. Plus, he had literally just given a speech about trusting him and if he didn't tell him it wouldn't be a very good start to get Appius to confide in him.

You have to give a little to get a little sometimes.

"Roark is targeted to be killed by the Collective. I'm going to stop it."

"Then I'm coming with you."

He had a feeling Appius would say that. He was the kind of person that would do anything to help those he considered friends and allies even despite his own weaknesses. This is the reply Farrin secretly hoped for. He didn't want to train a coward.

"Fine, But on one condition. You must listen to everything I say. If I tell you to stay where you are, you stay. If I tell you to run, you run. If I tell you to use the Force you better damn well use it. Am I clear?" Farrin was firm, he had to be sure Appius would be obedient. This was quite literally a matter of life and death.

Appius nodded his head affirmatively.

"Yes, master."

The heir of Tarantae smiled back at his apprentice, pleased at his response.

"Good. Let's get to the ship, I'll fill you in on the way."

And that was exactly what they did. They boarded the ramp onto the *Irena* and left their makeshift training ground behind, the only clues they were even there were the wooden training swords they left behind. Their destination? The *Shriek Hawk* located on the moon of Thillon. Their mission? Save Declan Roark from a Collective assassination attempt by M'eero "Trip" Trippani.

It sounded easy when they put it that way.

The engines of the *Irena* flared to life as Appius took his seat next to his master in the passenger side of the craft. The engines kicked up grey dust and dirt from below them, obscuring their vision for a moment before taking off into the air. The ground below became smaller as elevation gave them a much clearer view of their surroundings.

"Do you think he will be ok until we find him?" Appius suddenly said, concerned about the Vizsla leaders wellbeing.

"Roark's a tough bastard. I've never met anyone as stubborn as him. It will take a small army to take him down." Farrin replied reassuringly as he set their coordinator to the location of the *Shriek Hawk*.

Appius could only hope he was right.

And that they weren't already too late.

Chapter 3 - One man and his guns

Location: Moon of Thillon

11:59 Hours

Several minutes later.

Declan Roark is a man of many talents. He is the leader of a Clan consisting of men and women from many varying backgrounds. He is a connoisseur of deadly weaponry which includes, but is not limited to, dual WESTAR-35 "Phoenix Edition" Blaster Pistols, Thermal Detonators and even a Sith sword and if you asked him yourself he would tell you he plays a pretty good game of Sabaac. Though some argue his success is due to an unscrupulous deck of cards but he won't tell you that.

Because anyone who accused him of such normally ended up dead.

He is a forty one year old male human Mandalorian weapons specialist and is in peak physical condition due to the years of military service he did prior to becoming a Mercenary. His form has often led to people referring to him as a 'Viper' always ready to strike. A short black beard, white at the chin adorned his face whilst his steel gray eyes give a lot for intimidation. He also has short thick black hair, not that his enemies could ever see it under the Elite Mandalorian Armor equipped with helmet he wore to complete the Mandalorian look. It was often the last sight most would see before they met their end at his hand.

But here he was now. On the Moon of Thillon completely surrounded outside one of the abandoned mining cave entrances by a group of ten consisting of Collective Shikari Huntresses which was unusual considering they were trained to fight force users specifically, not bounty hunters. But most importantly was the man which the HUD within his helmet had managed to identify as his target. M'eero "Tripp" Trippani.

"Tripp" as he was known by many is a Zygerrian infiltrator and demolitions expert. He is thirty years old and has tanned colour skin which is covered somewhat by grey coloured fur which gave him sideburns along his cheeks. He has large round ears that present a single pierced ear lobe on his right along with cat like golden yellow eyes. He wore a simple mining costume which clearly was intended to help him blend in with the other workers that inhabited the mines on the moon itself.

This was the man he was here to kill accompanied by a battalion of Shikari Huntresses, likely the best the Collective could send and Roark quickly realized what this was after he reached the cave entrance.

A trap.

They surrounded him and blocked his way back to the *Shriek Hawk*, his personalized Kom'rk-class Fighter and despite the jetpack he wore he knew if he ascended to the air he would be shot down immediately by one of the many Shikari Huntresses that cornered him. They may have only carried bows, but the stories spoke of their incredible precision with them. On top of that, the mine entrance and the area around it was laced with explosives, no doubt to cover up his body after he died.

Now, normally Roark most definitely wouldn't mind the prospect of being surrounded by a group of beautiful women but he was a man of business here to do a job. Regardless of whether that job was a set up. He had to wonder why the Inquisitorius hadn't warned him of this but that was a matter for another time.

Why? Because he quite frankly he *hates* being played.

"Declan Roark! Legendary bounty hunter, Consul of Clan Vizsla and overall weapons specialist, how are you on this fine day?" Spoke M'eero from atop the cave entrance looking down at the surrounded man like he was prey to a hungry group of predators.

A silence occurred between them and all that could be heard or felt were the slight growls coming from the women that had him circled and the slight cool breeze in the wind. Anyone who came upon the situation would be able to inhale the stench of killing intent in the air.

"Nothing to say? That's a shame, the silent ones are always so cliché."

M'eero kept talking and sounded quite disappointed. He hoped to have a little bit of fun with the man before he ordered his execution. all the while whilst he talked Roark analysed his surroundings, this wasn't going to be an easy escape, if he even could, any scenario he thought up in his head lead to his own death but one this is for sure, if he's going to die here he's going to make damn sure he takes that Zygerrian down with him.

He will return to the Clan with his shield or upon it in a manner of speaking.

"Any last words?" M'eero said as he raised his right arm. Roark could see all the Shikari Huntresses raise their Nightsister Energy Bow in perfect unison. They were like a well oiled machine, not a single one was indistinguishable from the other in their red Nightsister Armor.

But Roark wasn't intimidated. Death was a frequent occurrence in his line of work and he had faced down situations that would make the hardest of men shiver. As a matter of fact, he did have something to say to M'eero.

"You talk a lot for a dead man."

Roark's voice was rough and coarse. But the intent was noted and felt by the opposing Zygerrian. M'eero's smile that adorned his face only moments prior vanished and was replaced by a frown. He was prepared to give his order to shoot to kill and set both Roark and the mine asunder in a glorious display of fire and explosions until something distracted him out of the corner of his eye.

A jet black Delta-class JV-7 Escort Shuttle loomed overhead their position, making its presence known to all those below.

It was the *Irena*. It flew overhead circling and causing a distraction above. They had found the Clan Vizsla leader and he was still alive!

This distraction was exactly what Roark was hoping for. In the midst of the enemies confusion he withdrew a thermal detonator from his utility belt and clicked down on the switch, starting the timer for the deadly device.

Three.

He threw the device into the dark cave entrance as hard as he could, making damn sure it was amidst the myriad of explosives planted within. Amongst the chaos of the *Irena* flying above, M'eero failed to notice the deadly device enter the cave below him.

Two.

The *Irena's* landing ramp lowered revealing Appius holding the steel railing with his left hand to keep him steady whilst outstretching his right hand trying to signal to Roark to jet up to them. The young Jedi could feel the intensity of the wind around him roar like an angry Sarlac and the pressure made it hard to breathe.

"Shoot them!"

M'eero realised fairly quickly that this ship was here to reinforce Roark so he barked his order to execute the man he was sent to kill but it was far too late.

One.

Tranquility died in the moment as a cornucopia of death and destruction consumed everything around it. The fiery roar of the explosion could be heard for miles around, creating a sonic boom that even shook the *Irena* high in the air. Causing great grief to Farrin who was struggling to hold the *Irena* steady and even to Appius who was clinging on for dear life trying not to fall out of the ship.

M'eero however, was caught in that very explosion, his body torn apart by the forces that he himself planted. In a way it was ironic, but on the other hand, if M'eero was going to die then the Zygerrian infiltrator didn't want it any other way.

He did love a big boom. Art just like life to him was an explosion. Fast, uncontrollable and gone in the moment.

As the dust and debris settled it was clear nothing remained of the mine entrance. Everything laid in ash and rubble and fires continued to rage on. M'eero, as well as several of the nearby Shikari Huntresses were now dead, their numbers dwindled and completely caught off guard.

Roark took his opportunity and activated his Jetpack and rose skyward. He landed on the ramp of the *Irena* and was helped further onto the ship by Appius who still remained there waiting for him.

Considering the mission a success, the young Jedi Padawan shouted back towards the cockpit of the ship.

"I've got him, master! Let's get out of here!"

Farrin heard his Apprentice and the Augur was prepared to turn the ship around but was immediately stopped in his tracks by a single word.

"No!"

The response came from Roark himself who had now steadied his footing aboard the ramp. His rough voice sounded grainy but harsh as he too tried to yell over the sound of the engines and wind they were exposed too.

"No? What do you mean?" Asked Appius,

"They've got my ship. I'm going back for it."

It was then that it all made sense to Appius, Roark had come up to get a view of the surrounding area, trying to get a better look at his ship above the dust and debris below.. Now that he'd found the *Shriek Hawk* he was determined to go back for it.

For if there is one thing in this universe that is as important as credits to a Mandalorian it's their ship.

He fell backwards out of the *Irena* and as soon as he did his jetpack flared to life giving him great speed as he descended towards the ground below.

Roark didn't have a reputation for working well in a team after all.

"Roark! Master, we need to go after him!"

But the reason for Appius' concern? Despite the massive explosion that occurred below them there were still Huntresses alive down there. Both he and Farrin could sense it in the Force though Appius' feeling of the situation was dire, like the Force was warning him of something via his emotions but it wasn't clear at all.

Farrin wasted no time in targeting the *Irena* towards the location of the *Shriek Hawk*, moments later they landed nearby within the harsh smoke and flames that resides within the dust cloud then when they landed they kicked up even more dirt and debris than previously before. Appius launched himself off the landing ramp and ran towards what little he could see in front of him.

"Wait, Appius!"

He ignored his master's order, knowing he would probably regret it later but knowing Roark needed their help and time was of the essence. The dust in the air pained his eyes and his muscles still ache and hurt from his training session with Farrin earlier on. But he could just about make out the bright lights in front of him. He made it to the *Shriek Hawk* just in time to catch Roark dispatch of one of the few Shikari Huntresses that had surrounded his vessel with a headshot from his blaster. However what the Clan Consul had failed to realise was the presence of one more Huntress that had survived the life ending explosions. She drew back her bow and prepared to fire just as Roark realised the life threatening danger he was in.

He had no time to react as the Huntress released her deadly weapon at him, the arrow poised to crash directly through Roark's heart. Appius reacted quickly and reached into the Force and immediately clasped his hand together tight and dug his feet into the ground below him. He could feel the power of the Force course through him as he willed it to protect his Clan leader.

As the arrow reached one foot away from Roark it would have seemed to the unknowing that he was being protected by some spherical bubble. The arrow seemed to crash into an invisible wall as the plasma simply dissipated around the Mandalorian Bounty Hunter and the pointed metal projectile fell to the floor and a small clink could be heard.

No wasting any time, Roark dropped his out of ammo pistols to the ground and primed his WESTAR-M5 Blaster Rifle and proceeded to gun down the Shikari Huntress without so much as a shred of mercy. Laser bolts impacted her body, tearing flesh apart and revealing bone and muscle tissue underneath. She collapsed to the ground moments later, completely unrecognisable to anyone else anymore.

Roark turned to Appius and nodded his head slightly in approval. He wasn't stupid, he knew of the Force and what it could do in the hands of those gifted with it which is why he trained so diligently to learn how to fight those that wielded that mystical power. But he also knew

that the Jedi Padawan saved him from a potentially life threatening injury and was at least somewhat grateful.

Appius had created a Force Barrier around the Vizsla leader which was able to protect him from harm from most projectiles. The downside to using that ability for Appius was that he had to remain motionless whilst he maintained the barrier, plus he didn't have the time to set up a barrier for himself either. Thankfully there were no more enemies about.

Or that was at least what he thought.

The Force tried to alert him of the impending danger and he tried to move out of the way but a plasma arrow embedded itself into his left side, penetrating through Appius flesh and muscle all the way through his left kidney and causing a gusher of blood to spill out of him. Hot plasma splattered across him and internally began corroding and dissolving the organ it pierced through. He collapsed to the ground in an instant, gasping for air.

Roark looked in the direction where the arrow had come from and spotted what was the last of the Shikari Huntresses that were sent to kill him behind Appius, but before he could react two bright silver lights viciously pierced through her abdomen in front of her as all of a sudden she was staring into the intensity of emerald eyes.

It was Farrin.

He used the Force to conceal himself and strike when the opportune moment presented itself. Without hesitation he slashed horizontally both to the left and right with his dual blades, effectively cutting the woman in half. Contrary to popular belief lightsabers do not instantly cauterize wounds and true to form, blood did spill out onto the ground from his brutal swing. He retracted his lightsabers and sheathed them back within his Armor and turned his attention to his apprentice who lived on the ground motionless and vomiting blood.

Appius really had lost a serious amount of blood and honestly?

He couldn't help but wonder if this is what it felt like.

Death.

Cold, numb, and despite lying in a pool of his own blood it was almost painless.

Almost...

He could hear the calls and shouts around him in the chaos and inferno but it echoed in his ears. His bodily functions were beginning to fail him and there was nothing he could do now. The Force couldn't heal a wound this great.

"Appius!"

His name. Yes, that is his name. He recognised it even as his chest tightened. Breathing was difficult for him now.

"Stay with us, Appius!"

That plea meant nothing now. He could feel his blood exit his body like water out of a tap. He waited for death's sweet embrace.

"Appius!"

His name would be the last word he heard before his world began to fade to black...

Those words came from Farrin, who had now become concerned for his Apprentices wellbeing after witnessing the carnage that had happened to him.

Declan Roark, as stated is a man of many talents, one of which is basic first aid, he knelt next to Appius' and yanked the Arrow out of his body, causing blood to flow like a river out of him. He instantly both his hands over his wound to apply pressure and slow the bleeding.

"He won't last long. We need to get him to a bacta tank immediately. Help me get him on my ship, I'll have Rekan 1-75 keep him stable until we reach the cruiser."

Farrin was skeptical considering that droid had a reputation as an assassin rather than a medical droid but under the dire circumstances he knew better than to waste time arguing with Roark. Appius needed proper medical attention and if the Clan Vizsla consul said he would take care of him then he would have to trust his words. What other choice did he have?

The heir of Tarantae reached out with the Force and felt it grip onto Appius' body. Slowly but surely he began to lift off the ground at a pace that Roark could keep his hands on him around the gaping holes left in Appius' sides from the arrow. They made their way up the ramp of the *Shriek Hawk* and onto the nearest flat surface they could find within the ship which just so happened to be a recreational table at the rear of the ship.

"Rekan 1-75, keep him stable, Farrin, get to the *Irena* and follow us." Roark gave his orders to both his Droid and his Clan Vizsla subordinate.

Farrin did not hesitate, he made his way back to the *Irena* as fast as he could and left the Moon of Thillon behind. As Appius' master he felt a personal responsibility for his safety and wellbeing so they would need to be fast if they were going to save his life. But there was still one thing gnawing at the back of the Force Disciples mind.

Appius should have listened to him.

Chapter 4 - The Aftermath

Location: Vizsla Immobilizer 418-class Heavy Cruiser medical bay
15:02 hours

The feeling inside the medical bay is often a cold one. A myriad of medical personnel and droids filled the metallic wards moving from room to room as patient needs required of them. The air felt icy and heavy among the machinery and surgical equipment that dotted the hallways.

Two men stood in a private room overwatching a young Jedi Padawan suspended in a tank filled with Bacta fluid. A very visible scar now stretched across the left side of his body. He was unconscious and floated within the liquid almost peacefully.

The two men overwatching him are Farrin Xies Tarantae and Declan Roark. The men he was with at the time of his injury. Farrin stood with his arms crossed in front of his chest whilst Roark stood with his clasped behind his back.

"Thank you for bringing him here." Spoke Farrin directly, not taking his eyes off the tank that held his apprentice within it like a cage.

"Your welcome, Mr Tarantae. Besides, you both saved me. We're even now." Replied Roark, his hoarse voice emanating in the spacious room. He had ordered for Appius to receive the best medical treatment possible upon arriving at the Vizsla cruiser. He was a code red, literally knocking on death's door and if they were a couple of minutes late then the Jedi Padawan would be in an early grave right now.

The two men stood in silence for a moment. The only sound coming from the occasional medical droid entering the room to maintain the Bacta Tank and check on Appius' vitals.

"But you wanted to see me?" Roark asked breaking the pause between them.

"Yes, I want to request permission to take time away to train him."

Roark rubbed his left hand in his beard, clearly he hadn't expected this.

"You do realise we are in the middle of a war, Mr Tarantae. Granting time away is not as simple as asking for it, especially for someone with your reputation."

Roark was referring to Farrin's previous status as headmaster of the Shadow Academy. Despite specialising as a Shadow it wasn't like he could just get up and go wherever he pleased without attracting some attention. Besides, in Roark's mind this war was a good chance to make some great profits for the Clan and the more powerful members he had at his disposal the better.

"I realise that, Mr Roark."

Farrin started, ready to make his case.

"But you saw what he is capable down on the moon when he protected you. He's raw and undisciplined but with my guidance I believe he could be one of the best of us."

Roark's gaze was drawn to Appius who still remained motionless within the tank with his eyes closed. On the one hand he needed as many good hands on the battlefield as he could. War was profitable after all and he needed all his best members at his disposal, though on the other hand, having yet another powerful Jedi within the ranks of the Clan could do wonders for spreading Vizsla's influence throughout the systems. They were still a young Clan and the more that knew of them the more work they could get which meant more credits.

"Do you truly believe this?" He asked Farrin seriously, expecting an honest answer.

"I do." Farrin stated back affirmatively, causing Roark to sigh deeply. He made his decision.

"Very well. I will see to it that you get the time to train him but only on two conditions. Firstly, if I need you I can call you or him into action as per requirement."

Farrin nodded his head slowly, it was understandable considering, as Roark stated, they were in the middle of a war.

"And the second requirement?" Farrin asked, causing a small smile to appear on Roark's face. The Clan Vizsla Consul pointed at Appius.

"The next time I see him I want him ready for knighthood."

Farrin simply nodded once again at the Clan Consul and followed him as both men began to leave the room behind them.

"Of course, you know me. I don't demand anything but excellence." The Augur replied.

"Good, in that case I shall get Mr Cole to see to the details."

Those were the last words that were said when both men left the room, leaving Appius alone to recover. One thought entered Farrin's mind as he left the room.

His Apprentice had better be ready for the Hell he was about to bring to him. Especially for disobeying him back on the moon of Thillion.

Appius could feel himself being brought back to life moment by moment as his energy returned to him. The cooling liquid around him soothed him and numbed any pain he might have.

Suddenly his green eyes opened and he took a big gasp as bubbles formed out of his breathing tube, alerting the nearby medical droids who scurried away to inform the nearest person of importance that he was awake.

He was alive... and he was healed.

He almost couldn't believe it. He assumed he was a lost cause but clearly the Force must have felt he was still needed in this universe.

He pressed his hands against the glass and focused his energy into a small telekinetic push which was enough to shatter the fragile casing of the tank he was in setting off an alarm causing red light to flash in his private medical room. The Bacta fluid slowly poured out as he descended to the bottom of the tank. He pulled off his breathing tube and stepped out carefully trying to avoid the broken shards beneath his feet. Once clear he gave himself a look over.

Arms, hands, fingers, legs, toes and ears. Yep everything was accounted for. Though he couldn't help but notice the massive scar that was impossible to miss on the left side of his body.

Memories recalled to him as to what happened and what caused it and all of a sudden his face went pale at the sudden realization of what had happened to him.

"My kidney!" He yelled out in horror.

But there was nothing he could do now. He took a moment to let the fact he was now missing an organ sink in and sighed deeply. Maybe he could get an artificial replacement? He retrieved a set of Jedi Robes from a side table which had his lightsaber lying atop it and got himself dressed before anyone arrived. He needed to be presentable after all.

All he knew was that someone was undoubtedly coming to see him and if it was his master Farrin?

Well, he was going to be in a lot of trouble.

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