

The Path To Darkness.

A submission to the fiction competition: "**Boggart**"
Written and submitted by Knight Appius Wight of Clan Vizsla.

Chapter 1

Out of all the contracts Appius accepted since he joined Clan Vizsla this one was by far the strangest.

A strange creature has been discovered in the Arx system and brought to the Shadow Academy for further study and experimentation.

It was codenamed the "boggart" and despite the quite frankly **ridiculous** name it was causing terror and distress to the students at the Academy.

Most in Clan Vizsla assumed it was some kind of elaborate hoax set up by one of the students with too much free time on their hands. Nothing more than a waste of time, money and resources. Appius thought this too but nonetheless, being the apprentice of Farrin Xies Tarantae, the former headmaster of the Shadow Academy itself, his curiosity got the better of him and now here he was. His footsteps echoed loudly down one of the many dimly lit and empty hallways towards the Academies medical bay, the chill in the air sent shivers down his spine as he reached a large set of double doors that even despite his six foot four size were still able to tower over him majestically.

He inhaled a deep breath as he prepared himself for what was on the other side. He already did his research on what the boggart attacks had done to the mental state of the students, but to Appius, it was a case of seeing is believing.

He opened the double doors and entered the large medical bay of the academy. Six identical beds lay separated from each other with the bodies of the students that so far had been the subjects of the creatures terror.

Five of the students lay motionless in their beds, possibly asleep but more than likely unconscious due to the lack of reaction to the screams that echoed from the far end of the room. In the very final bed a male nautolan student was being held down forcefully by a couple of academy professors. His shrieks and cries pierced through Appius' ears like a wild banshee and he could feel the shockwaves roam through his body. They injected the student with a hard anaesthetic and after a few moments his body dropped back limp onto the bed.

Overseeing the proceedings was the man Appius came to see first. He was a tall man with broad shoulders and was remarkably well built for his age.

"Headmaster Stephens." Appius said, grabbing the older man's attention. His hazel eyes glared back into Appius' blue and spoke of the experience the man held over him. Appius may have been a Sorcerer, but his knowledge of the universe paled compared to the master of dark lore before him.

"I assume you are here for the contract I sent to Clan Vizsla. Is that correct, Appius?" Daniel Stephens responded, seemingly unsurprised that the former Jedi was here in the first place.

"Yes, it is."

The Headmaster, perhaps better known as '*Seraphol*', turned to the two professors in attendance.

"Leave us."

Without a moment's hesitation, the professors gave a bow to their superior and immediately left the room. Neither Appius nor Daniel said a word to each other until they couldn't hear the echo of their footsteps anymore.

"I would have expected Farrin to join you." The Headmaster stated with a raised eyebrow.

"He's preoccupied on another mission. He's asked me to keep him updated though." Appius said, his tone of voice was softened as he spoke to the man that succeeded his master at the Shadow Academy.

"Of course. I didn't ask for Farrin anyways. I asked for you. I still remember when you bested a team as they ran away from a Wampa that escaped confinement, yet you held firm in the face of danger." The Headmaster said as a curved smile adorned his face.

"How many times do I have to say I'm sorry about that?" Appius replied as he rubbed the back of his head sheepishly as he felt the blood rush to his face.

The headmaster chuckled at the young Sorcerer's response.

"None at all. I appreciated the help then and I appreciate the help now. What do you know of the boggart?"

Considering Daniel "Seraphol" Stephens was often the kind of man to get straight to the point, Appius gave his response as quickly as he could, lest he end up on the man's bad side.

"Not much other than what was in the contract. I know it's been terrifying academy students and shapeshifting into their worst nightmares."

The headmaster nodded slowly at him.

"And do you know *how* it's doing it?" He questioned which caused Appius' thought process to halt for a moment.

"No, I don't actually." The Knight responded. Truthfully he hadn't thought about that up to this point. He just assumed it was some kind of new shapeshifting creature.

Daniel Stephens wagged his finger and beckoned Appius to follow him back towards the entrance towards the academy medical bay. Even as a knight the Headmaster couldn't resist trying to teach him another lesson. They stopped at the first bed where a pale skinned and ginger hair student laid. His skin looked pale and waxy and as a result of his shivering.

Appius' felt the hairs on his arms stand on end and his heart rate increase. His eyes softened as he struggled to find the will to look at the poor state of unfortunate soul in the bed.

"This was the student that let the boggart out of its cage. He thought he could use the Force to control the creature like many other beasts we keep in the academy for training purposes. He wanted an edge over his fellow students and paid the price for it. Karma is beautiful like that."

He paused for a moment as his eyes darted to the ceiling to take in the serenity of that moment.

"The creature uses the Dark Side of the Force to conjure illusions of horror upon its target. It seems to feed off the negative emotions of others."

Appius' eyes suddenly shot open and his jaw loosened at what he just heard.

"Wait, hold on... it uses the Force!?" Appius asked, wanting clarification which the older man gave with a slow tilt of his head. He knew from his time in the academy that certain creatures had an almost symbiotic relationship with the Force. The Ysalamiri for example, were lizard like creatures that created a bubble around themselves to protect themselves from the Force.

But actively using it? Now that was incredible.

And frightening...

"Does it know it's using the Force?" Appius asked only to receive a shrug from Daniel Stephens in response.

"Hard to say. It might, or it might just be pure instinct. All I know is it's causing hell in the hallways at night and attacking students. These six in here are all the victims so far."

Appius pondered for a moment before looking back at the man he was speaking with.

"Looks like I'm going on a hunt then. Don't worry, I'll make sure I get it for you." It was like a fire was lit in his eyes as he turned to walk back out of the medical bay. He reached the large doors when he was stopped by the Headmaster's voice.

"Appius."

He turned back to face the Headmaster to see the man smiling back at him.

"It's good to have you back."

Appius returned the gesture in his own face as he felt a warm feeling overcome him. His own mouth arched into a smile of its own.

"Thank you, it's good to be back." Appius said as he disappeared out of the medical bay. He closed the large doors behind him and ran his hands through his short buzz cut hair. He took a deep breath of the chilled corridor air before activating his Inquisitorius Comlink.

"Lawrence, meet me inside the Academy, I'm going to need your scanners."

Immediately whirs and beeps could be heard through the Comlink and Appius could only roll his eyes at the unmistakably sarcastic comments the little astromech was making.

Chapter 2

Slow and steady footsteps echoed down the dark hallway as both the Sorcerer and the astromech droid traversed the dark passageways of the academy and looked for any sign of the elusive creature.

Appius could hear and feel his own heartbeat in his own ears as he tried to steady his breathing. Lawrence's scanners circled around three hundred and sixty degrees and each time he watched it closely waiting for a sign.

But in the last two hours there was nothing.

There was a reason the boggart was so hard to capture. Every time it changed image its presence in the Force changed with it making it impossible to trace.

So Appius resorted to good ol' fashioned scanners and as they entered the main dueling hall of the academy his eyes scanned the room hoping to find any clue to its whereabouts.

But once again it was a dead end...

At least that was the case, until a loud scream shattered through the deadly silence. Lawrence's scanner went haywire as the little astromech beeped and danced on the spot to alert its master what it found.

Appius moved as fast as he could, his heart outpaced his feet as he ran towards the source of the scream and even in the cold academy corridor he could feel the heat being emitted from his body.

Eventually, he reached the source of the scream. Followed very quickly by Lawrence.

A female student laid in a fetal position shivering and eyes bulging out of their face, cold sweat formed on them as they rocked back and forth from the position they were in.

Appius rubbed his thumb along his index finger and slowly approached the body, he knelt down and stared into the bloodshot eyes of the young student to the presence of a numb feeling overtaking his body. Her body was pale and icy to the touch. The young student shivered and muttered quiet inaudible sounds under her breath.

"Where is it?" Appius asked firmly. The student responded with a slight cry and pointed in the direction of a small patch of darkness in the corner of the room.

Appius glanced in the general direction of where she pointed before looking back at her again. He placed a hand on top of hers and smiled gently.

"Don't worry, your safe now. Lawrence, stay with her."

He stood up and tried to ignore the sound of her whimpering as he took a couple of steps forward to allow Lawrence to move in front of her as she fell unconscious.

The Sorcerer carefully placed a hand on the cylindrical metal hilt attached to his belt and cautiously took another step. His blood rushed around his body and his heart rate timed itself with each step he took towards the darkness.

The knight suddenly stopped at the sight of red liquid trickling on the floor from out of the shadows.

'Blood?' He thought.

Acting on instinct as a result of his training with Farrin, he slipped his left foot back and kept his dominant foot forward. He tightened his grip on *Redeemer* and took several deep breaths as he tried to ignore the thunderous pounding in his chest.

"There is no emotion, there is peace."

He may not be a Jedi anymore but even so, there was still something reassuring to him as he spoke the old code his Father taught him as a young boy. He let go of some of the tension he held in his body and focused himself as best he could.

That is until he heard a response answer him.

"Peace is a lie, there is only passion."

The Sorcerer's eyes darted quickly into the darkness at the sound of a voice that was incredibly familiar to him. The air around the hallway became heavy and thick, like gravity was pushing down on him.

"There is no ignorance, there is knowledge."

The Knight's speech increased in pace ever so slightly as his voice began to crack.

"Through Passion I gain Strength."

He felt like he was being suffocated as he heard footsteps approach him out of the darkness.

"There is no passion..."

Appius could not control the sudden trembling that came over him as he gazed at what appeared to him.

"Through strength, power. Through power, victory."

He felt the faint touch of water in his eyes as he failed to turn away. His body frozen in place.

"There is no..." He tried as hard as he could to summon the will to speak the words but the tightening in his throat prevented him from doing so.

"And through victory, my chains are broken."

Yellow eyes pierced into his soul, gripping onto him as he felt his very being turn within him.

The Force shall set me free."

It was like looking into a reflection. The creature had manifested itself into his worst fear and now he failed to summon the energy to act upon what he saw.

Himself.

Or rather, the man he dreaded he would become.

His yellow eyes reeked of the Dark Side of the Force. The corruption was evident by the sickening smile that forced Appius to turn away for only a moment.

That was his first mistake.

An inhuman screech pierced through Appius' eardrums causing him to lose his footing for a moment before his imposter was on him. The blood from the floor evaporated around them making the atmosphere thicker and hotter as the Dark Side version of himself grabbed the side of his head and forced him to look into his eyes.

Appius grabbed at the wrists of the being and tried with all the strength he could muster to pry the creature from him. His muscles burned and tightened all over his body as he tried to free himself but failed. He dug his fingernails into the beings flesh and veins but even that had no effect as the pressure on his skull increased with each passing moment.

He was trapped like a caged animal. He tried to reach for *Redeemer* but no matter how hard he tried he couldn't summon the strength to call the blade to his hand. He called upon the Living Force to strengthen him and give him the power he needed but even with all the midichlorians in his bloodstream reacting to him it still wasn't enough to free him.

The Sorcerer's heart sped at unprecedented speed within him. The sense of helplessness made him weak in his confidence. As weak as he was when his father died...

As weak as when he had to leave his wife behind on Dantooine...

Suddenly, he released his grip from his opponents wrists and dug his nails into his own flesh as something triggered within him. Deep inside his solar plexus something burned like raw fire as he felt his organs inside him react to the sudden feeling.

"THERE IS NO PASSION!"

Appius eyes glared back into the sun crisped yellow of his own self and let out a monstrous roar as he sent a wave of energy directly into the sternum of his would be assailant. The boggart soared into a nearby wall as a sickening crack was heard from the impact.

But Appius wasn't done, far from it.

The Sorcerer's pupils dilated as a small curved smile formed from his lips, this feeling of power was exhilarating to him. He focused on what felt like pure molten lava in his body into the fingertips of his left hand and did not hesitate to pour the streaks of white and blue that formed with it. The lightning struck its target with deadly accuracy as it's victim writhed in anguish before dropping to the ground. Appius wasted no time as he hurried and stomped his boot into the middle of his opponents chest. His own breathing was heavy and a faint growl could be heard coming from him as once again he twisted the Force within him to lance the jets of power from both of his hands.

Shrieks and cries were drowned out by the sounds and lights of electricity pumping through the area only to be replaced by sudden maniacal laughter.

"Is that all you've got? I expected better."

The beast's sudden words sent a tremor through Appius' core. In response, he scowled, gritted his teeth and continued to stream as much power as he could muster. The beast's face began to disfigure before his eyes, becoming pale and twisted, scarred and burnt. A monster in every way, shape and form.

He continued his in continuous bursts until the beast exhaled its last breath and even then he didn't stop. He blasted the corpse with wave after wave of lightning until he collapsed onto his hands and knees as he tried to control what felt like his own lungs trying to break his ribs. He gasped and wheezed through the hard taste of iron in his mouth until he finally found the strength to pull himself back onto his own feet.

Maybe it was the fatigue that was the cause of the sudden cold sweat he broke into, but as he looked down at the disfigured corpse next to his feet his entire body went numb and his gut began to ache and pain.

Chapter 3

The female student was admitted into the medical ward shortly afterwards and Appius had the unfortunate task of explaining what happened to the headmaster. The Boggart used the Dark Side against him and in return he was forced to kill it in order to defend himself. That was how he explained it.

Thankfully, Daniel Stephens understood and despite being slightly disheartened at the news he deemed the creature far too dangerous to be kept alive. Autopsies would be conducted to learn as much about its genetic makeup in order to prevent events like this from happening again.

Though as the Sorcerer approached *The Sterion*, his personalised M3-A Scyk Fighter, he couldn't shake the pit inside him that formed after the confrontation with the boggart inside the academy.

It appeared that he was the only living being at the academy landing zone and Lawrence was already locked into the Sterion ready to guide Appius back to Zsoldos after another mission successfully completed.

But even so, Appius couldn't shake the image of the boggart's corpse from his mind. The shrivelled deformity of the dark side version of himself reminded him so much of the legend of Luke Skywalker. How upon the second Death Star he defeated both Darth Vader and Darth Sidious.

That name, Darth Sidious...

Appius, as well as all students of the academy studied that man extensively and remembered seeing an image of the old emperor of the Galactic Empire and couldn't help but strike the resemblance between how his deformed self looked and that very Sith Lord.

"What have I done?" He muttered under his breath.

Was that the man who he was meant to be? Was that what he was meant to become? His destiny?

He shook his head and tried to rid himself of the sinking feeling falling within him. He placed his right hand on the side of his ship and gazed down towards his feet. He sighed deeply.

He didn't have a choice, it was the only way he could justify it to himself. It was either give in to the Dark Side just a little bit or become another of the boggart's victims.

Beeps from above brought Appius back to reality, if only for the moment.

"I'm fine, Lawrence." Appius muttered only to receive some more comments from his sarcastic little astromech.

"I said I'm fine, Lawrence!" He snapped as his blood ran hot. Immediately, he felt numb again as regret filled throughout his body. He was never the type to snap at anyone or anything, so why was now any different?

After taking a minute to calm himself he climbed into the cockpit of his fighter.

"I'm... sorry, Lawrence. Today's not been a good day. Just do me a favour and don't tell anyone about any of this. Please?"

Silence dropped between the two for a moment before a sentence appeared on the command console in front of him.

'Oh, of course I won't... if I get an oil bath when we get back to Zsoldos?'

For the first time since his confrontation with the boggart, Appius' mouth curved into a sincere smile and as he read the comment over again he couldn't help but chuckle to himself. Lawrence was one constant in his life that could always put a smile on his face, even if the little astromech was annoying sometimes.

"Yes, you can have an oil bath. Thanks, Lawrence. I appreciate it."

The Sterion launched from the Academy landing zone and ascended into the unforgiving darkness of space which made the Sorcerer wonder briefly if it was a sign of the future to come.

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