

# Home is where the heart is.

A submission for the **competition:End of the Akk days.**

Written and submitted by Knight Appius Wight

## Prologue

One lone, jet black M3-A Syck Fighter aptly named *The Sterion* leapt out of hyperspace and into the vast darkness of the galaxy, right into view of one single planet below.

Zsoldos.

A virtually lawless planet with varying biomes from harsh, heated deserts to frozen, ice cold tundras and even lush tropical rainforests that could stretch for miles inhabited by a myriad of wildlife both predator and prey. Many were driven here to escape the rules and restrictions of modern society, to escape the shackles of law and make their lives and their fortune their own way. Perhaps this was the reason the planet was home to Clan Vizsla, the newly formed mercenary style clan of the Brotherhood that made a name for themselves during the recent Great Jedi War in the Lyra 3K-A System. One thing is for certain, Zsoldos may be virtually lawless, but with Clan Vizsla's presence no-one with a price on their heads was stupid enough to grace their presence there.

Well, it may not be much, but there's an old expression that states '*home is where the heart is*'.

And this single planet located in the outer rim territories was where he called home. At least for the time being.

*The Sterion* was piloted by Appius Wight, the newly promoted twenty seven year old Jedi Knight and Sorcerer who was currently making his way home from the Lyra 3K-A System after a long and brutal war effort.

"Yes! I know we took a wrong turn earlier, but need I remind you that *I'm* the pilot and *you* are the navigator." Appius said both exasperatedly and defensively to Lawrence, his personal Lothal Astromech Droid attached to *The Sterion* to help Appius navigate his way back here from the Lyra System itself.

The droid made some computer esque whirs and beeps before a message appeared on Appius' main console. He didn't understand Droid Speak, so this was his only way to communicate with the little astromech. He looked down at the monitor to read the message in front of his eyes.

*'Typical human master blaming the Droid... Need I remind you the shortcut was YOUR idea!'*

Appius' cheeks reddened at the statement and he struggled to think of a retort because honestly? It was true. He tried to rush home, ignoring the coordinates Lawrence had provided to him and all it had achieved was getting him lost.

It was then he heard the monitor before him sputtering another message from Lawrence.

*'And I am the one that got us back on track if you recall. So a little gratitude would be nice.'*

Appius smiled softly at Lawrence's comment, feeling a little downhearted at how he reacted to him. Even if he is a Droid, Lawrence still wanted to be appreciated and it was his role as his owner to ensure that he was.

"You're right, Lawrence and for what it's worth I'm sorry. Thank you for helping me get back to Zsoldos." Appius said wholeheartedly with a slight smile and for a moment nothing happened between the two until another message appeared on his monitor.

*'You're welcome. See? Was that so hard?'*

Appius chuckled at the little astro droid's comment.

"No, not it wasn't." He smiled as they descended through the Zsoldos atmosphere towards the Jasper Spaceport and into the cloud filled, overcast afternoon below.

### **Chapter 1 - A happy landing.**

"This is Knight Appius Wight in *The Sterion*, requesting permission to land. The landing codes are Echo, Yavin, Hoth, Delta."

There was a silence for a few moments before a faint buzzing filled the cockpit of the M3-A Syck Fighter that came from the Comms system, a man's husky voice responded to him.

"Roger that, Appius, you are clear for landing. Welcome back to Zsoldos."

He approached the hangar where a myriad of fighters, speeders and other forms of transportation were being kept, no doubt mostly Clan Vizsla forces that were making their way back home after fighting in the Lyra System. Appius slowly descended down to his designated landing spot, all the whilst being guided down by some of the Spaceport personnel. As he touched down, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"There we go." He muttered to himself. Slightly relieved at being able to land without any problems. He unbuckled himself from his seat when Lawrence suddenly began moving agitatedly as a message appeared on his monitor.

*'Hey! What about me!?!'*

Appius laughed at what he read on the screen. As if he would just forget about the little astromech though he had to admit, Lawrence's sudden frantic panic was quite humorous.

"Don't worry, I haven't forgotten about you. We'll get that chrome of yours cleaned up and how about an oil bath? You deserve it."

He heard what he assumed were happy beeps and opened the hatch of his ship to the outside world. Immediately his nostrils were assaulted by the smell of spilt oil, cheap electrics, burning metal and not to mention the cold air that sent a shiver down his spine upon feeling it.

Clearly, in Jasper's desert landscape good central heating was essential.

A steel ladder was already provided to him to aid him in his descent to ground. He stood and reached out to grab the frigid piece of ice cold equipment in his hands. He climbed down and met the concrete platform beneath him when he turned to see a face he hadn't seen for a very long time staring back at him with a small, yet subtle smirk.

"Drax?" Appius asked, his mouth opened agape as he was completely stunned and shocked to see him.

The man he was speaking to, Drax, to put it simply, he and Appius had a history here on Zsoldos. It was just before the war started that Drax, a Male Chiss mechanical and computer specialist attempted to steal a ship and sell it in order to make some quick money.

That ship, happened to be piloted by Appius back when he was an Acolyte. Drax hacked the ship and attempted to kill him but instead was spared his life by the human Sorcerer, even going so far as to have a heart to heart talk with him.

It was from that fateful conversation that Appius learnt that Drax's wife is unable to have children due to a condition known as the Neutre Virus. A lack of money to go travelling to find a cure drove him to do what he did. Nonetheless, Appius forgave him and even put a word in for him to the Clan and suggested his particular set of skills could be valuable. Though Appius never did find out what happened to him afterwards.

Until now.

The five foot nine Chiss male held his left hand out to Appius in a gesture of good will which the Jedi accepted graciously.

Compared to Appius' six feet four pale skinned and slender frame he was smaller and indeed much skinnier, so much so that the Chiss man still looked like a stick stood next to him but despite that he was still considered handsome to many.

Appius couldn't help but notice the dirty and singed Iron Navy uniform, no doubt proof of Drax's hard work and labour as well as the engineering backpack he carried around with him on his back which carried a variety of tools for his trades. However, it was his distinct red eyes, blue skin blue hair that gave him away the most as they were the most defining and characteristic features of his people.

"I'd wondered what happened to you!" Appius stated excitedly with a big smile. "How have you been? What even happened to you? Why are you back here in Jasper Spaceport?"

The questions fired one by one and began to overwhelm the Chiss engineer. He waved his hand in front of Appius, signalling him to calm down so he could speak.

"To answer your questions, Clan Vizsla took me in and made me in charge of the Clan vehicle maintenance. Naturally, that places me back here at Jasper Spaceport but this time I've been paid *very* handsomely for my services. My wife and I are planning on traveling soon and..."

He looked Appius dead in the eyes and smiled subtly once again. His words had all been articulated perfectly.

"I'm very good thank you, Appius. How are you? How was the Lyra System?"

Appius' heart sank at that simple question because memories came flooding back of the devastation of Lyra Colony, how buildings burned and shattered into rubble around him. How flames scorched the streets as he tried to help the innocents that were given an unjust death sentence.

He remembered being honoured to become the apprentice of Farrin Xies Tarantae, a previous member of the Dark Council and former headmaster of the Shadow Academy itself.

He remembered being ambushed during a training session together and taking a plasma arrow to his left kidney, courtesy of a Shikari Huntress. The projectile destroyed the organ and nearly ended his own life from blood loss as a result. It left a permanent horizontal scar across the left side of his body. Forever a reminder that despite his skill in the Force when in a war you are never safe.

And lastly, he remembered making history as the first to be knighted in the newly formed Clan Vizsla. He was recognised for his efforts during the war and was granted the honour of knighthood...

He looked to Drax and smiled bittersweetly.

"It's war."

That was all he said at first. In fact it was all he needed to say as Drax simply nodded his head in response, understanding war was never pleasant. Nonetheless, Appius, ran a hand through his short, buzz cut brown hair and continued his response.

"A lot of things happened, some good and a whole lot of bad. But that's just war in a nutshell, Drax. Everyone will just keep killing each other until one side is victorious or they do what they should of done in the first place. Sit down and talk." Appius stated.

"As far as I'm aware that was what they did, Appius. But it didn't matter in the end." Drax said as he looked over to *The Sterion* to see a crane carefully lifting Appius' Lothal droid out of it. He was meticulous in his work and under his command everything would be done properly.

"That little droid, is it yours?" Drax asked, changing the topic quickly as to not upset the Sorcerer stood next to him.

Appius glanced over to Lawrence who was slowly being lowered towards the ground.

"Ah, yes! I don't suppose you could do me a favour and arrange an oil bath for him, could you? I... kind of promised him." Appius asked with a cheeky smile.

"For you, Appius, I'm sure it can be arranged." Drax chuckled in response as the two men began to make their way toward the airy spaceport entrance.

"I need a way to get back to Saga. I don't my Speeder Bike is ready is it?" Appius asked carefully, not wanting to make Drax think he was taking advantage of his position here at the Jasper Spaceport.

The Chiss placed his left hand under his chin, thinking intensely for a moment before a flash of inspiration crossed his red eyes.

"Yes, I do believe it is. It's locked up just outside just a few minutes away.

Appius patted him on the back gently as a sign of gratitude.

"Thanks, I appreciate it. Oh!" Appius said, stopping in place for a moment as a sudden realisation came to him.

"I almost forgot! There's one thing you should know about Lawrence..." Appius said hesitantly, pointing at the little astromech droid that had just landed on the concrete floor safely, causing curiosity to enter Drax's mind.

"What about him?"

"Well..."

Suddenly the spaceful hangar was filled with two very high pitched screams coming from behind them back at *the Sterion*. The two men turned to the sight of a couple of Bothan workmen twitching on the ground next to a remotely still Lawrence who was starting to reboot after releasing an electric charge.

Drax looked at the human incredulously, to which the Sorcerer could only chuckle whilst rubbing the back of his buzz cut brown hair nervously.

"That... it's an electric defence grid and he *really* doesn't like being touched by anyone other than me."

A bead of sweat dropped down Drax's face at Appius' statement.

"Good to know..." Drax muttered.

"They'll be fine, it only knocks them unconscious for a few minutes." Appius said reassuringly, referring to the downed engineers.

"Thanks... I suppose." Drax said, not at all reassured. Eyeing up Lawrence, he made a mental note to be cautious of that droid when he returned as the two left out of the massive entrance the foggy world outside.

## **Chapter 2 - Celebrations**

People all over the universe have different ways of dealing with the end of war. Some embrace their loved ones, some take time away from everything to recuperate and some turn to alcohol.

Considering the lawlessness on Zsoldos there were no prizes for guessing which one it was on this particular planet.

Ebon Ridge itself was infamous as a gambling den, bar and cantina for scum and villainy all over Jasper. Naturally, the end of the war brought about an unnecessary amount of drinking and drugs in the area. Lowlifes preying on those looking to celebrate Vizsla's efforts in the war as well as those looking for any excuse to get intoxicated. Whether to drown their sorrows or because of addiction.

Fog penetrated the area making the distance a blur to all. It was rare, especially in the desert. But with Jasper being so close to the coastline it wasn't unheard of and certainly a welcome difference to the scorching heat they'd feel otherwise.

Appius threw up the cowl of his Inquisitorius Armor and wrapped himself around with his Armorweave Cloak to make himself as discreet as he could as the pair made their way to Appius' vehicle through the fog past the stench of alcohol and vomit that drenched the area.

Their way to remain inconspicuous failed however, as the sight of a robed figure being escorted by a Chiss in Iron Navy uniform was going to draw attention no matter what they did. Very quickly, the pair were approached by a gang of five. Three average sized human males, a Twi'lek female with a scar on her face and a bulky, pale skinned Zabrak surrounded them. The stench of sweat and alcohol surrounded them and their intimidating presence garnered the attention of the surrounding civilians.

"Well, well, well, what do we have here?" Said the Twi'lek, obviously she was the leader of said gang.

"A Chiss, and someone who *really* doesn't want to be seen. What you got under that cloak?" She seethed as she cracked her knuckles.

"We don't want any trouble." Said Appius defensively, all the while preparing himself should the worst occur. He looked for a way out but a small crowd was beginning to form around them, making a quick escape very difficult. The last thing they needed was an all out street brawl to break out. Drax kept close to the Jedi, both for protection as well as to keep an eye on his flank.

"Whatever you've got, I just want to see it, pretty please?" She jested, causing snickers in her posse.

The Force Wielder sighed and decided to comply, if only to appease her. He opened the left side of his Armorweave Cloak to reveal *Redeemer*, his lightsaber attached to his left hip.

Even in the fog, he could see the expression of the Twi'lek drop and pale.

"He's a fracking Jedi!" She yelled, causing alarm to spread to the rest of her gang and murmurs to spread through the crowd around them. Upon feeling the tension escalate between them, Drax placed his hand on his Scout Pistol, ready to withdraw it.

"Drax, don't!" Appius yelled at his Chiss comrade after feeling the sudden shift in the Force.

But it was too late.

Being one to shoot first and ask questions later, Drax drew his pistol and fired a deadly laser bolt directly at the Twi'lek's abdomen. The shot echoed in the mist as she gasped and recoiled in pain before dropping to the ground

"Zella!" The zabrak yelled in horror before anger took over him.

"You'll pay for that!"

He ran straight at Drax like a wild animal hunting its prey and outstretched his hands to try and grab him, though his attempt was cut short when Appius, seeing this and realising he had no other choice, reached out with the Force to grip around *Redeemer* tightly and

summoned it to his right hand from his waist. A green blade erupted out of the hilt, Appius quickly swung the blade to slice the zabrak's arms off at the elbows causing a sputtering of blood to fall to the floor, but before the zabrak could react to the sudden pain of his missing limbs he felt himself pushed by what felt like a powerful gust of wind by the open palm of the Sorcerer's left hand as he fell back several feet and bumped the back of his head on a nearby sandy stone, taking him out of the rest of the fight.

The three humans then attempted to rush them thinking they had the numbers advantage, but as they quickly approached Appius felt the power of the Force flow through him, he closed the distance, making sure Drax was safely out of the way and focused the power he felt into the palm of his right hand. He slammed it into the ground releasing a powerful pulse of energy which in their slightly intoxicated state was more than enough to knock the three men off their feet as they landed ungraciously onto the floor with a thud. Seeing the opportunity before him, Drax primed his Scout Pistol, ready to execute the would-be attackers for daring to threaten them but before he could, he felt the pressure of what he could only describe as hard gravity push his weapon towards the ground, causing his shot to miss and hit the ground beneath his toes.

It was Appius. This time he was prepared, he called upon the Force and pushed Drax's weapon down causing the deadly weapons bolt to miss its target.

The three men staggered to their feet but instead of attacking, they instead ran through the crowd out of fear to escape from any further harm.

Drax looked at Appius slightly annoyed.

"They tried to kill us." He attempted to reason though Appius' was having none of it.

"Of course they did! **You** shot first." He retorted angrily. Remembering they were in the middle of a watching crowd and sensing their apprehension, he decided to move things along. "Come on, let's get out of here."

The two of them proceeded to make their exit and after that display of power, no-one in the crowd was willing to get in their way as they left the immediate area.

After a couple of minutes the pair reached a small lockup holding a few vehicles ranging from landspeeders to a variety of Speeder Bikes. One in particular stood out the most that belonged to Appius. His blacked out Mandalorian Speeder Bike with Ion Afterburner. Seeing it sent memories of Mandalore flooding back to his mind and he smiled faintly. It was the whole reason he bought the damn thing in the first place.

He mounted the vehicle and turned to Drax.

"Will you be ok getting back to the spaceport?" Appius asked.

Drax clasped his left hand over his holstered Scout Pistol in response. "Yes, I'll be fine."



Appius glanced at the pistol for a moment before making eye contact with Drax, his blue eyes met with his red as his emotions took over.

"I'm just going to say this Drax, I'm not happy with what you did. *At all*. Be careful of that itchy trigger finger of yours. It will get you killed one day."

Not giving Drax anytime to respond, he powered up his Mandalorian Speeder Bike and vanished into the distance through the desert fog. Leaving Drax behind to think about his actions.

### **Chapter 3 - It Never Ends.**

Ullr was a lot like Jasper if you had never seen Zsoldos before. Especially on a day like this when the Saga drinking hall saw more than its fair share of patrons doing the exact same thing as in Jasper. Drinking, celebrating, quenching their substance addictions. The usual for a weekend on Zsoldos if one was perfectly honest.

He made his way carefully through the streets of Ullr around Saga's drinking hall, being sure not to hit any of the pedestrians as he passed, the fog had thankfully subsided, likely due to the fact he was no longer in the desert but in one of Zsoldos' more tepid forest regions. Eventually, he reached the outskirts of the town and reached a small wooden shack out of the way of would be intruders.

He dismounted his blacked out Speeder Bike and made his way to the front door. The area was unkempt, grass was overgrown and looked like it hadn't been disturbed in months.

'*Typical...*' Appius thought, making a mental note to get a protocol droid to look after the place when he was gone in the future.

He opened the wooden front door into a rather quaint looking set up. It was fairly basic which was to be expected as Jedi were not known for carrying much in the name of possessions. A small kitchen situated to the left, a dining room and lounge to the right with access to the holonet and a bedroom and bathroom situated against the far wall. A thin layer of dust covered everything due to the neglect of not being cleaned whilst he was gone.

'*Well, this is lovely...*' he thought to himself sarcastically and slightly appalled at the state of the place. He made sure to make another mental note that getting a protocol droid is a must when he gets another lump of credits. Nevertheless, he walked inside and made his way into the bedroom where he sat down on his single bed, the only bit of furniture in the room other than a wardrobe.

He paused for a moment and pulled two chains from around his neck, the first was a pendant of the Jedi Order which was a gift from his father and the only possession he still had that reminded him of the man.

He took the pendant and stared at it for a moment. The war had made him disheartened with the Jedi way, their dogma, their code and even their way of life didn't make any damn sense in a universe full of strife and corruption.

He knew what had happened. The war had opened his eyes, matured him, made him see things in a different light. Their traditions may have worked thousands of years ago during the time of the Sith Empire but not now. The universe had evolved around them whilst the Jedi remained the same which was ultimately what led to their downfall in the first place.

Plus, Vizsla was made up of members that lived life in a carefree manner and showed Appius a freedom he hadn't experienced before. He wants to explore this newfound freedom himself, away from the shackles and restrictions that he followed up until this point.

He was a new man now. And this new man? Well, he still strongly followed the Light Side of the Force but he wasn't a Jedi...

Not anymore.

He placed the pendant in a small wooden box for safekeeping. It was still a part of his life, but it didn't have the same meaning to him now as it once did.

Now, the second pendant, however?

To put it simply, it meant more to him than the universe itself.

It was a family heirloom and a gift from his wife.

He scoured the small rectangular wooden object with his thumbs and rubbed over the initials spelling A.W and T.S.

Upon joining Clan Vizsla and reaching relative security he attempted to return to her on Dantooine only to find she'd been evacuated off world. He hasn't seen her since.

He clenched the heirloom and could feel the well of emotions overwhelm him. No-one, not even his own master or closest friends in Clan Vizsla knew what this heirloom meant. He felt soft, warm liquid trickle down his face thinking about it.

He missed her...

She meant everything to him and even the most powerful of Force abilities unleashed upon him couldn't compare to the pain he felt not knowing where she was. Is she ok? Is she safe? These were just a couple of questions that plagued his mind frequently.

He clenched the heirloom in his fist gripped it tightly. It hurt a bit but that didn't matter to him.

"I *will* find you. I promise." He swore. He was a Knight now and was a lot more powerful than he was before he joined the Brotherhood. He didn't need to run away. Not anymore. He felt his resolve harden as he slowly released his tight grip on the heirloom.

It was then that he was brought back to reality by a transmission coming from his Inquisitorius Comlink.

"Appius Wight, you are requested at the Vizsla HQ in Yuanming. Come immediately."

And just like that the transmission cut out. He stood up and dusted himself down for what was to come.

*'Well, no rest for the wicked.'* He thought to himself as he placed the heirloom back around his neck and walked back out the front door, making sure to close it behind him.

He mounted his Mandalorian Speeder bike and sped off into the distance in the direction of the Vizsla Headquarters.

He swore an oath to find his wife. He could feel it in the Force. Somehow, someday, he would be with her again. He just knew it.

But for now, he was part of Clan Vizsla.

And it was time to get to work.

**---END---**

