

A chance at Redemption

A submission for the fiction competition: **[Unsteady Ground Phase 1] Knives Out**, as part of Unsteady Ground.

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Chapter 1

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...

Unsteady Grounds

With the rising conflict between Chancellor Ky'Lian and Council President Kain Eriston and the seeming inevitability of open war, Taldryan's Clan Summit is presented with two opportunities to gain the advantage in the imminent hostilities.

The Office of Secret Intelligence has uncovered a plot to have mercenaries assassinate Chancellor Ky'Lian after she leaves the capital moon of Chyron for her personal estate on Elysia. Meanwhile, SRI has determined that the superintendent of the Caelus government's fuel station at Iosan is a Collective sympathiser, and that eliminating their control over the station would prevent the Caelus Patrol Fleet from supporting the Collective in a battle against the Taldryan Navy.

The current political situation prevents Taldryan from acting openly, and the Clan Summit's contacts in the Caelus government only have enough influence to guarantee the secrecy of one operation, forcing Taldryan and its supporters from other parts of the Brotherhood to choose which battle they'd rather fight.

The decision has been made to protect the Chancellor and Proconsul Seraine Ténama has created a deal on the table for other Clans of the Brotherhood to aid in this endeavour...

A single, jet black SoruSuub 3000 Space Yacht approached the atmosphere of Elysia and left the starry void of space behind it. Its painted camouflage became useless in the clear blue sky of the moon's cloudless afternoon. It approached a large star shaped platform located on the western rift of the mostly ice covered surface and the ship rocked with the slightest of thuds as it landed. Immediately upon touching ground, a battalion of Caelus security guards crowded both sides of the platform and surrounded the ship. The landing platform to the SoruSuub 3000 Space Yacht opened to reveal two individuals. A tall, middle

aged man with pale white skin and a much smaller woman. Thin and tanned skinned, she was also much younger and had a rather uneasy look about her.

Both individuals wore the uniform of the Caelus security force upon them. Smart, pristine, truly a sight to behold to their enemies and as they stepped down the ramp onto the landing platform they quickly inspected the surrounding perimeter, both for defences and safety before the tall man's lips etched into a smug grin.

"You see, Zimà? I told you nothing bad would happen." He said as he folded his arms and turned to his female compatriot to present his toothy smile.

"You know better than to let your guard down Ashba." The young Zabradi woman replied as her eyes darted all around, searching for anything that might have been out of place. Ashba drops his arms by his side and he hunched his shoulders defeatedly.

"Always suspicious, aren't you?" He asked, he tried to keep his cheerful mood alive before he realized he was just wasting his energy.

"You don't trust them do you?" He asked quietly. His tone of voice took a deeper turn than normal. His question was met by a small shake of the head by Zimà.

"Taldryan's performance in the Lyra system was appalling and now they've resorted to asking other clans of the Brotherhood for help. It feels like they can't even look after themselves anymore." She replied as she crossed her own arms and looked towards the ground.

"And then there's that recording on the news..." she continued quietly as she shuddered. The images appearing in her head played through her mind constantly.

"Oh... *that* recording." Ashba replied. It was no secret at this point. The recording of a Force user slaying what appeared to be Anti-Taldryan sympathisers was a hot topic throughout the Caelus system at this moment in time and the media was pretty much obsessed with it. Ashba then held out a finger and smirked almost triumphantly.

"Taldryan said that wasn't one of their members." He said matter of fact before smiling, convinced he had won their little argument.

"And you believe them?" Zimà responded with her eyes slightly wider open. Despite nearly being nearly twice her age, Ashba presented a naivety to her that she rarely ever saw in men his age. The older man's mouth twitched at the question. He took a few moments but then slowly nodded.

"I do, actually. It's not like they can act openly at the moment with the situation being what it is. Especially with the Chancellor and the Council President butting heads with each other." He replied and Zimà nodded her head slowly. She had to admit, she couldn't fault that piece of logic.

"Speaking of the Chancellor, I think it's safe to assume this landing platform is secure. I'll go give her the good news!" Ashba clapped his hands together jovially and the spring in his steps could be heard as his loud footsteps could be heard walking back up the ramp into the ship.

Zimà took in the beauty of her surroundings for a moment. Most of Elysia was covered in ice yet the Western Region lied upon the equatorial line. Creating the best place for a tropical retreat such as the one that they had landed on. The warm, sea salted air did wonders for her as she took a deep breath in through her nose.

'At least there's no Force Users here...' she mused to herself. Her thoughts were broken by the sounds of footsteps approaching from the ramp behind her.

"Thank you, Ashba. You know I always appreciate the work of the Caelus security force." A woman descended down the ramp in the most business like manner Zimà had ever seen. She wore a black suit complete with shoes to complete the businesswoman appearance she was going for. She was dark skinned and her brown eyes displayed a confidence the young Zabrak couldn't help but admire.

"Not at all m'lady." Ashba said, smiling as he escorted the Chancellor onto the landing platform to her private resort.

"Have Taldryan representatives arrived to greet me?" She asked as she herself inspected the set up the security force had accomplished.

"No, m'lady. They haven't, I'm afraid. Rest assured though, we are here to protect you should anything happen." Ashba placed a hand on his heart and bowed his head. A sign of respect to his superior. Yet despite the negative answer, the Chancellor, to her credit, kept her composure strong and simply smiled.

"No matter, I'm sure they will arrive shortly. Thankfully it seems the supposed mercenaries hired to kill me are nowhere to be seen." She said calmly and with a slight chuckle. Even with threats against her life she was able to see the bright side of most situations.

As she and Ashba walked passed Zimà the middle aged man turned to his Zabrak companion and gave her a wink. A subtle 'I told you so.' undertone laced within it. She grunted in response but nonetheless followed her duty and paced behind them.

It was only after a few seconds, however, that a faint humming rang in her ears. It was subtle, but it caused her to stop where she was. Every second it grew louder and louder until the noise caught the attention of her, as well as the surrounding guard. Her eyes blinked rapidly as she spotted three Rogue-class Starfighters approaching from the distance. It didn't take her long to figure out the ships intentions and she ran towards Ashba and the Chancellor as fast as she could.

"Get down!" She cried.

Immediately a horde of blaster fire from the offending fighters targeted the landing platform. The SoruSuub 3000 Space Yacht and the pilots still within were the first targets to die when the fuel tanks were shot, causing the vessel to explode and debris to be sent flying across the area. Laser fire burst across the landing platform and Zimà leapt at Chancellor Ky'lian and Ashba, forcing them to the ground and saving them from an early grave. Carnage and destruction rained around them as the guard here to protect them were mowed down bit by bit. Ashba leapt to his feet moments later.

"Don't just stand there! Shoot back!" He commanded, his voice turned harsh and the man's years of experience began to show. Green laser fire retaliated against the red produced by the enemy starfighters. Though it was blaster rifles Vs enemy starships and despite their numbers they were clearly outgunned and outmatched.

"Get the Chancellor inside immediately, Zimà!" He yelled. Given the circumstances, the young Zabrak woman was not about to argue with him. She grabbed the Chancellor by her left arm and ran towards the nearest elevator down into her private estate. As she glanced behind her, she felt an overwhelming sense of relief to what appeared to be the enemy fighters retreating into the distance.

Chapter 2

Are you seriously watching that again, Appius?

For the seventeenth time that flight the young Sorcerer watched the recording of himself slaughtering Collective forces. Not that they were called that in the Caelus system.

"Anti-Taldryan sympathisers... what a load of kark." He muttered to himself as he watched himself electrocute another poor Collective scumbag. Of course the news would focus on his brutality. Could you blame him? Did they not see the pit of dead citizens they had left in their wake? No, of course not. Political agenda will always reign supreme to those in power compared to the truth.

He finally watched himself choking his last victim and finally turned it off again. He slammed his head back against his seat and exhaled a deep sigh. No matter how he tried to justify it a knot remained in his gut from the experience. He knew it was wrong. He acted before he had a chance to think and even despite what the Proconsul of Taldrya said, he couldn't help but think he made things worse. So when the opportunity arose for him to take a mission back into the Caelus system he grabbed it with an open palm.

Finally. You know... sometimes I wonder if I should just go into public transport. It seems to be all I do for you these days.

Appius chose to ignore the R3 units little quips as they approached their destination. The private tropical resort of Chancellor Ky'lian. The mission was simple. Protect her from a

suspected attempt on her life by hired mercenaries. But as the 'DeathHunter', his personalized ship, approached the designated location the young Force User couldn't help but feel he was already too late.

Uh, Appius?

"Yes, I know Lawrence. I see it too." He stated, eyes wide open and mouth slightly agape. In the not so very far distance he could see ash coloured smoke ascend into the sky which formed a knot in the Sorcerer's stomach.

'Sithspit! I'm not too late already, am I?' He thought, though as he flew overhead he could see the damage done was primarily to parts of the landing platform and what seemed to be the burning wreckage of a transport vessel below. He landed his ship carefully nearby in a secure area and stepped out onto what remained of the landing platform.

"Lawrence, stay with the ship." Appius commanded.

All around the deceased were being carried away, the wounded being bandaged and repairs trying to be made so that the platform didn't collapse into part of the resort.

As he walked further into the platform the occasional glance was spared his way and whispers and murmurs waved around him. Clearly he was a well recognised figure right now but no-one was in a position to challenge his presence here. Besides, it looked like they needed all the help they could currently get at this moment in time and thankfully it seemed Taldryan support arrived just before he did.

He approached two individuals he could see taking charge of the area. A middle aged human male in Caelus security uniform and someone he recognised rather well from his last adventure in the Caelus system.

"You." A tall, physically imposing Twi'lek male spoke bluntly. His yellow eyes gazed back at him. His pale skin as a result of the corruption dark side made the man stand out even amongst members of his own race. The scars across his face were particularly hard to ignore. Where his legs once were stood powerful metal prosthetics that looked intimidating even at the best of times.

"Hello, Vodo. Nice to see you too." Appius tried to the cold gaze he was greeted with. The middle aged man looked back and forth between the two Sorcerer's before a conclusion came to his own mind.

"So, you two seem to know each other?" He asked cautiously, not wanting to incite any anger from the Darksider next him. After all, Clan Taldryan was providing help and backup at this moment in time.

"Indeed, he was recently here in the Caelus system. The Proconsul found him and I'm honestly surprised to see him back. But you, captain Ashba, probably know him best as the

man on the news." Vodo spoke in a complete monotone and almost seemed disinterested. But the gears in the Caelus security captain's head began to whirl and turn until his eyes shot open and his face paled.

"Oh..."

That was all he said. He looked Appius up and down before taking a deep breath and placing two fingers on the bridge of his nose.

"I know he probably wasn't what you were expecting captain but Clans of the Brotherhood don't often jump at the chance to help each other. At least he's from Vizsla so we know he'll see his mission through." Vodo stated calmly before the Sith glanced back at the Force Disciple.

"As long as they are paid that is." He finished before he began to walk away.

"Oh, I have a message for you from the Proconsul. If you have to kill someone make sure you kill the cameras first. Otherwise you might end up on the news again."

His statement caught Appius attention. He knew that was aimed at him. He was just damn lucky that Seraine Ténama could see the positives in his actions after he had committed them.

"I'm going to ensure the Chancellor is safe in her estate. I trust you are capable of handling everything that happens."

It was more of a statement rather than a question and as the Sith disappeared into the elevator, the captain then turned to Appius.

"We suspect more of them are on their way. It makes the most sense. They didn't complete their mission." Ashba stated, evident concern adorned his features and he shifted on his feet uneasily in the Sorcerer's presence.

"I don't know why you did what you did. But clearly you are capable at fighting so I'll take all the help I can get." The captain said and Appius raised an arm to object until he was interrupted.

"I'm not interested in your reasons or excuses. I'm interested in how you can fight. We need a plan for when they come back otherwise we might as well dig our own graves now and save them the trouble."

The words he spoke were ominous and did enough to show the severity of the situation to the Force User. He would do what he could to help, for this would be his chance at redemption.

"Fair enough." Appius replied with a slight nod of his head. "Tell me what you need and I'll do what I can to help."

Chapter 3

Unfortunately for all involved it wouldn't be very long at all until the mercenaries hired to kill Chancellor Ky'lian returned and in greater numbers. Only two hours passed and they had managed to at least build some small fortifications and barricades along the landing platform. It provided some small protection against the potential starship attack that could come but much to their dismay it wasn't starfighters they were dealing with this time.

Five Low Altitude Assault Transports landed on the very end of the platform to release a swarm of mercenaries with only one intention in mind. To kill and destroy everything in their paths. The split second one of their feet hit the platform blaster fire rang out between a combination of the mercenaries, the Caelus security force and Taldryan forces. A display of green and red shot across the landing zone as casualties on all sides began to rise in numbers.

"Don't let up! Give them all you've got!"

The words of Captain Ashba roared across the platform. He was flanked by Zimà as well as Appius behind one of the makeshift barricades. The Force User decides to follow his Mandalorian heritage for the moment and withdrew his WESTAR-35 Blaster pistol. Smoke grenades penetrated the visibility of everything around as he fired his blaster shots towards the horde in front of him. Only occasionally hitting a target through accuracy and more often than not through sheer luck.

It was then a thermal detonator landed nearby a group of Caelus security personnel. The timer ticked down on the deadly weapon but the group were far too distracted with what was in front of them to realise the danger they were in. Appius dropped his WESTAR 35 and as it clipped the ground he stretched out with the power of the Living Force to grip around the closest member of the security group like a rope. He pulled back and instantly the young man flew backwards, helpless against the power that he was subject too. However, just as he landed behind Appius, the thermal detonator exploded and whilst that particular living being was spared, his comrades were not so lucky. Blood and organs poured from above and scattered across nearby turning the grey concrete a disturbing shade of red.

'Come on guys, where are you'? He pleaded internally. If things continued the way they were going they were likely going to end up dead before backup could arrive.

He was broken up by his musings by Zimà shooting her blaster at two mercenaries about to descend on Appius. She pulled him up and rushed him to the nearest cover she could find.

"How long?" She questioned, her breathing was hard and her eyes full of panic. But Appius remained silent because he honestly didn't have an answer for her.

Thankfully he didn't have too. The roar of engines, whilst faint at first, grew louder and louder until it was on top of them. Quite literally. A jet black Kom'rk Class fighter descended upon them as one more flew past and unleashed deadly laser fire upon the Mercenary forces.

"Don't worry, Appius. We got this."

The voice of a young male Zygerrian flared to life on his comm link. Filled to the brim with confidence and excitement.

"Hector, I don't think I've ever been so happy to hear your voice!" The Sorcerer responded with great relief evident in his voice.

The ramp to the Kom'rk Class fighter above them opened up and immediately a small battalion descended into the landing platform. One in particular stood out, a Mandalorian armor wearing man in grey and orange Beskar armor with an average sized build and jetpack landed next to him. He withdrew his WESTAR 35 Blaster Pistol and proceeded to unleash as much Hell as he could possibly create.

"Thanks for coming, Kano." Appius said, gratitude emanated from him. His fellow Mandalorian looked at him briefly through his T-shaped visor before blanking him entirely and going back to doing what he did best. He immediately rushed to the nearest victim he could find and shoulder charged him in his solar plexus, knocking him off his feet before the Mandalorian stomped his boot down onto the being's torso and fired his pistol into the scumbag's face.

Another Mandalorian caught his attention, Dral Falgorth donning Mandalorian armor quickly threw a thermal detonator into a crowd of nearby Mercenaries. Bodies went flying as a single scream sounded from one particular individual who fell from the landing platform. Dral then wasted no time in drawing his MWC-35c Repeating Cannon and began to mow down enemies bit by bit. This display inspired others around him as the opposing forces began to be driven back.

Battleteam Deathwatch had arrived and the Mercenary forces they were opposing very quickly began to find themselves overwhelmed. The combination of the Caelus security force, Clan Taldryan troops and now Deathwatch was more than they could handle and they quickly found themselves on the back foot. Appius called his father's lightsaber to his right palm and a brilliant blue blade erupted out of the hilt. He didn't specialize in a lightsaber form that allowed him to be walking target practice for blaster fire, but it wasn't enough of a deterrent to try and stop him helping his team when they needed their leader.

Electricity crackled between the fingertips of his left hand as the emotional stress coursed through him. Lightning lanced out his hand towards his closest target, a mercenary soldier that decided to try his luck on a member of *his* Battleteam. Not on his watch. A bloodcurdling scream overwhelmed the sound of explosions and blaster fire as his corpse burnt to a crisp before dropping lifelessly to the ground moments later. Appius then reached out with the Force and lifted the corpse and flung it into the nearest group of enemies he could see.

It wasn't long before the Mercenary forces began their retreat. They attempted to climb aboard their Low Altitude Assault Transports only for them to be destroyed by a barrage of Kom'rk Class fighters swarming on them. They were cinders in mere moments. Courtesy of Hector Ricmore's piloting skills.

It wasn't long until they finally met their execution. Cries and screams erupted through them as their lives were put to an end like a flame extinguished on a burning candle. At the last breath and last bodies soul leaving the land of the living cheers roared across the landing platform. They did it, they had won.

Appius breathed a sigh of relief. It was all over. Casualties were lost on both sides, but the surprise appearance of Battleteam Deathwatch managed to turn the tide of the battle. Though as he surveyed the dead around the area, he had to wonder if all this conflict was truly worth it. He had to hope so in the long run. What else could he do?

Chapter 4

"So, that's what happened."

Appius sat inside the personalized Z-95 Headhunter he arrived in, speaking to the blue hued outline of House Wren Quaestor, Rulvak Qurroc. Vizsla's first Knight just finished explaining the situation that happened around him in regards to his mission and indeed, why he felt it necessary to pull the Battleteam away from their duties of house security. The half Sephi said nothing for a brief few moments and Appius felt a small bead of sweat form on the tip of his brow. He tried to keep his breathing steady so as not to look concerned.

"Very well. Count yourself lucky that the Clan is being paid for your actions, Appius. Return to Zsoldos with Deathwatch immediately."

Immediately the communications cut out and Appius released the breath he was holding. He looked out the window and saw Elysia fading into the distance. Upon the end of the fight, Chancellor Ky'lian returned to Chyron, deeming it necessary to try and unite the people. Especially with the news the Caelus patrol fleet defected to the Collective...

Nevertheless, his mission was complete, the Chancellor was protected from the Mercenary forces attempting to kill her. All that remained now was to see how the Caelus system news interpreted what happened at the Chancellor's private resort. The DeathHunter and two jet black Kom'rk Class Fighters then vanished into a vortex of blue. Their destination, the Zsoldos system.

==The End==

