

Deathwatch Rising

A submission for the fiction competition, **[Celebration: Mandalorians] Become The Hunter**

Written and submitted by Knight Appius Wight of Clan Vizsla.

Chapter 1

Coruscant
1800 hours

"That's it, Lawrence take us in nice and slow..."

Even as the sun set upon the skyline of the city planet beneath them, the ever looming darkness did nothing to deter the Vizsla Sorcerer from the breathtaking sights around him. Orange covered the tall majestic city sprawl like a warm blanket over the hustle and bustle of the many vehicles and citizens below him. He was honestly at a loss for words at the beauty of it all. Out of all the planets and world's Appius travelled too in his young life from wild space to the core of the galaxy, Coruscant was never a place he had experienced. Stories of the former Jedi Order remained fresh in his mind from both his father's tales and teachings at the Shadow Academy.

It was a shame then, that searching the old temple was not his reason for coming here this evening. He was here on an important mission to locate one Manu Maurfai and bring him in for questioning on the whereabouts of several clan representatives, as well as the Deputy Grand Master of the Brotherhood.

"The DeathHunter" slowly approached one of Coruscant's larger landing platforms located on the higher levels. It's pilot, Appius Wight, could make out the faint silhouettes of three jet black Kom'rk-class Fighters below him. His personalized Z-95 Headhunter landed with a soft thud and Appius felt himself relax and breathed a sigh of relief.

"There we are, another happy landing." The Sorcerer said with a slight smile on his face.

Yes. Because I landed us. If you tried we'd be a stain in one of the nearby buildings.

Appius rolled his eyes at the little astromechs comment. It appeared on the centre console but it was not a feature he needed to understand his mechanical companion. The cockpit to the ship opened and immediately the airiness of the Coruscant atmosphere washed over him, sending a shiver down his spine. Immediately, a crew of Mandalorian armor clad personnel in blood red pulled a ladder to the ship to allow Appius to descend. Lawrence, his R3 astromech was detached shortly afterwards and despite the wave of similarly looking individuals and ships around him, one person stood out to him among the others.

"Drax." The Sorcerer said. Addressing a young Chiss male in a black iron navy uniform.

"Hello, Appius. Good to see you again. Or should I call you *sir* now?" Drax responded with a small curved smile gracing his face. The Sorcerer felt the blood in his body rush to his cheeks. Recently, he became the inaugural leader of House Wren's first Battleteam and the news travelled throughout the rest of Clan Vizsla quite quickly. It was something he was still getting used to.

"No, no. Appius will be fine." The Battleteam leader responded. "How goes the effort on this platform?"

The Chiss glanced around at the small force Appius assembled for this mission. Each member armed with a pair of WESTAR-34's, Repulsor Dart Shooter, Mitrinomon Z-6 Jetpack and a BlasTech A280C Blaster Rifle. It was certainly an impressive looking force despite being only small in numbers. Something which Vizsla's first Knight assumed concerned the Chiss greatly judging by the tense look on his face.

"Are you sure this is going to be enough?" Drax asked suddenly. The Battleteam Leader glanced around at the small team of heavily armed men, women and even droids setting up camouflage, communications and jamming sensors to their surroundings. Pride filled him at the sight and he slowly nodded his head.

"It's enough. They're trained and hungry to prove themselves. This has to be a small operation, my friend. Too many would attract too much attention. Both from the Collective and Coruscant law enforcement." Appius responded confidently. He'd gone over the details of this mission with Amira Lux, the House Wren Aedile and someone well versed with this kind of mission. "Do we have information on Maurfai's whereabouts?"

"Yes." Drax answered and motioned the Sorcerer to follow him with a wag of his finger. They stepped quickly towards one of the many edges of the landing platform.

"I took the liberty of hiring someone to locate him." The Chiss continued. "This is Runa Sinbox. Runa Sinbox, meet Appius Wight, leader of Battleteam Deathwatch."

Appius was suddenly graced with the presence of an average sized Neimodian male wearing black robes. He was hunched over and barely seemed to possess a shred of confidence within his own body. His noseless face seemed to shimmer slightly in the sunset as a result of how oily his skin was.

"Appius Wight, a pleasure to meet someone in a position of power such as yourself." Runa spoke appreciatively, only glancing at the Sorcerer briefly to make eye contact before offering a hand. Appius shook it cautiously. As something about the slimy man in front of him made him feel uneasy.

"I hope to be paid handsomely for my work." The Neimodian said. Once again glancing at the Force user in front of him.

"Of course. Assuming your information is correct you will be paid for your service. So, where is Manu Maurfai?" Appius asked, his tone of voice firm and authoritative which caused Ranu to give his response quickly.

"I've observed his day to day life patterns over the last few days and every night around this time he likes to relax in a place known as... The Twirling Twi'Lek."

"The what?" Appius' voice suddenly increased in volume at hearing the name. Mental images ran through his mind at what a place called that could be.

"It's a gentleman's bar in the mid levels." Drax interrupted amidst Appius' confusion.

The Sorcerer didn't know what surprised him more. The fact that a high valued Collective agent frequented such a place or that Drax knew what it was in the first place. Appius shook his head slightly to shake that immediate thought from his mind.

"Do we know what he looks like?" He asked.

"Indeed. Runa has already given me the information we need and i've transferred the information gathered to your datapad." Drax responded. He specialized as a scavenger. An expert in slicing and as a result, computers and technology were of little obstacles to him.

"Wonderful! Then I shall be taking my payment and I will be on my way." Runa spoke jovially as he clapped his hands together. Appius held out his right hand to the Neimodian once again, to which Runa accepted and shook gladly. But as he tried to release himself from the grasp the young Mandalorian had over him he struggled to do so. If looks could kill, the hard glare Appius sent to the man would have had him pushing up daisies.

"What are you doing?" Runa asked, his voice suddenly increased in pitch ever so slightly, his heart raced and his body language displaying the panic and concern that radiated through him.

"You really think I'm just going to let you go that easily?" Appius said, his tone of voice deepened and his grip grew tighter causing a small amount of pain to enter Runa's wrist joint.

"Assuming this information is correct you will be allowed to leave *after* we have Manu Maurfai in our custody." He continued, making sure every word he spoke entered the Neimodian's ears. Runa tried to release himself but as he tugged against Appius' grip even harder it proved fruitless. Being Neimodian, he barely had an ounce of strength in his own body. The Sorcerer took advantage of this and pulled him close until his own face was just inches away from Runa's.

"But if it isn't... you will answer to Deathwatch *personally*." He suddenly released his grip on Ranu and he stumbled back a couple of places, rubbing over his right wrist with his other

hand, he was suddenly aware of the range of blasters pointing at him. Even Drax, the man who hired him withdrew his Scout Pistol and prodded it into his back, causing a pathetic whimper to leave the frightened Neimodian's mouth.

"You can't do this!" Ranu suddenly blurted. Tears began to form in his eyes and sweat dropped down his face.

"Actually, I can and I will." Appius retorted strongly. "You know too much and I refuse to let you put this Battleteam in danger. Drax, take him away. I'm sure you and Lawrence can keep him company while we're here." It was then that Drax signalled for two Mandalorian Armor wearing men to approach. They grabbed Runa, stuffed a cloth into his mouth and dragged him relentlessly across the landing platform as the Neimoidian flailed and struggled futilely against their strength. Lawrence, the R3 astromech droid followed suit afterwards and beeped his profanities to Appius as he did so, to which the Sorcerer could only once again roll his eyes at his little droids sarcastic quips.

Drax then turned the leader of this current operation and asked the one question on all of their minds.

"So, What are your orders, Appius?"

Chapter 2

Coruscant
2015 hours

The Coruscant mid levels were always a sight to behold for those who didn't know the planet very well. Much like up above, the streets were crowded with citizens and pedestrians that barged past one another with no inhibition for each other and Appius had to keep his wits about him so he didn't get knocked off his feet. Vehicles sped down the many highways, never ending even in the dark. Neon lighting from the nearby bars, restaurants and stores illuminated the walkways and paths. All in all, Coruscant truly was a metropolis that never rested.

The Sorcerer kept his Armorweave cloak around him. Blood red Jedi armor tends to catch the eye of those around him if he's not careful, yet, he was amazed by how busy life on Coruscant was for the average person living here. But he shook the thought from his mind quickly. He was here to do a job after all and he scoured the nearby bars until he finally came upon the one he was searching for. The Twirling Twi'Lek.

It was located at the corner of the street he was traveling. The signs on the building all pointed to it's entrance and did nothing to hide the content of which remained inside. There seemed to be no security, odd for an establishment such as this but Appius was not about to deny a gift from the Living Force when it presented itself to him.

He carefully walked into the establishment and immediately the bright lights clawed at his retinas as he was forced to squint to adjust to his surroundings. When his vision came moments later, he was greeted by the sight of a lavender coloured hexagonal room lit by the most extravagant display of lighting Appius had ever seen. Everywhere he looked he saw regular patrons enjoying the services and view of barely clothed and beautiful females of various races. Humans, Chiss, Zabrak and even Zeltrons were all present. But the most numerous by far were the Twi'lek women that pranced about luring and seducing men into handing over their credits in exchange for a 'better look' at their bodies. At each side of the room curtains covered up private viewing areas. A large rectangular bar stood dead centre, allowing the barkeeper to keep tabs everywhere he looked.

'This place smells like dead tauntaun.' The Sorcerer mused to himself as he scrunched his face at the near overwhelming smell of sweat that entered his nostrils. Still, he steeled himself and reminded himself that if he ever found his wife to never tell her he was in a place like this.

He began to search throughout the area and very quickly he noticed one of the viewing area curtains was open and contained a pale green skinned, overweight twi'lek male sat on a long purple sofa enjoying the company of two women either side of him. One human and the other a Twi'lek just like himself.

'that's him.' Appius eyes widened and his heart thudded in his chest. Finding him had proven easier than he had suspected so far. The information on his datapad had described the man he was looking for perfectly. He carefully approached the booth, glancing either side of him before he was stood just a couple of feet away from his target. Thankfully, the pale green skinned Twi'lek was so preoccupied with the service of the two women he was with that he failed to notice Appius approach. The young Mandalorian faked a cough in order to grab his attention which unfortunately didn't work.

"Manu Maurfai." Appius said loudly over the music of the bar.

"Yeah, who's asking? Can't you see I'm..." Manu began to reply but as his flabby face turned to look at the man addressing he gasped loudly as he came face to face with symbols he didn't want to see. The symbols of Clan Vizsla, House Wren and of Battleteam Deathwatch that was engraved on Appius' Armor.

"Oh no..." sweat dropped down the side of his face and Appius could have almost sworn he watched the Twi'lek's brown eyes retreat back into their sockets. Appius waved off the two women currently accompanying the man and feeling something was about to happen they were all too happy to do so. Now it was just Appius and Manu. The hunter and the hunted.

"You are wanted by the Brotherhood for information regarding the whereabouts of several clan representatives as well as the Deputy Grand Master." Appius stated which caused Manu to scoff at him as he tried to dig himself further into the sofa he was sitting on.

"I'm the Collective's head of intelligence! What makes you think I'll come with you so willingly?" He seethed back at the Sorcerer. Even face to face, the man's pride refused to let him back down.

"Well, you can either come with me willingly or I can take you by force." Appius said calmly, not allowing Manu to get the mental edge over him. "I don't want to cause a scene, Manu. But don't underestimate me. Please, just make this easy on us both."

Suddenly, the overweight Twi'lek smirked as he glanced at something behind the Clan Vizsla member in front of him. "I think it is *you* that should be wary about underestimating me."

Immediately, the Force whispered its warning to Appius and he spun around to come face to face with a male Collective enforcer preparing to fire a KYD-21 Blaster Pistol at him. But the Sorcerer was just that little bit faster than he was and he wasted no time in summoning the emotional stimuli he needed. Anger, rage and hate bubbled in his very being and he drove that lava like feeling through his body to the tips of his fingers. He barely beat his enemy on the draw, but the warning from the Force was just enough as electricity darted out of his right hand towards the Collective agent's heart. He shrieked in agony as the electricity that coursed through his body sparked and blended into the lighting of the room. He was dead in moments. His scorched body dropped to the carpet below and smoked the immediate vicinity.

Seeing his opportunity, Manu withdrew his BlasTech DL-44 Heavy Blaster Pistol from within his golden laced robes and prepared to fire the deadly weapon. But he was unaware of the Living Force once again providing Appius with a warning of the danger his life was in. Without a second thought, the Sorcerer spun and called upon the Force to call his father's lightsaber to his hand. Cylindrical metal flew to his right palm and before Manu could pull the trigger a brilliant blue blade erupted and sliced through his extended wrist like a vibroknife through string. The appendage, along with the weapon it was holding flew through the air and landed several feet away. The Twi'lek could only gasp at and clutch his wound. The horror of his now missing limb tightened his throat and prevented him from shrieking as the wound bled out before cauterizing after a few seconds.

Appius held the hilt of the lightsaber in both hands and looked around to see if there were anymore Collective forces inside. He couldn't see or feel anymore danger for now though he had the bars complete and utter undivided attention. He deactivated his weapon and holstered it back onto his belt.

"Brotherhood business, go back to your drinks." He stated and after a few more moments of silence the music flared back up and patrons went on ignoring the situation around them.

"Get up. We're leaving." Appius said as he aided Manu up onto his feet by his left arm. Unable to fight back, The Director knew he had lost this battle and complied with the Force user's wishes. They carefully stepped around the charred, smoked body at their feet and left out of the entrance. But the sight that greeted Appius was not one he wanted to see. The pathways had been cleared by a group of seven Collective soldiers. Six males, three stood

at each side of one female who's amber eyes perceived a terrible scowl. She was young looking and tall with tanned skin and her blonde hair remained in a ponytail behind her head. She commanded an air of authority and clearly, she was the leader of this group. Citizens remained at a distance, giving them all the space they needed.

"We appreciate you looking after Maurfai for us. But we will be taking him back now." The woman said. Her tone deep and soldier like. Maurfai gladly took his chance and left Appius' side to join them. He glanced back to the Sorcerer and a wide, smug grin appeared his face.

"Thank you, Larrisa." The flabby Twi'lek said. It was now eight on one side and just Appius on the other.

"Take his weapon." She ordered and immediately one of her Collective soldiers approached Appius and snatched the lightsaber of his belt all the while pointing his blaster rifle at him. He retreated back to the safety of his troupe before handing the lightsaber over to Larrisa. She inspected the weapon over before her tanned face looked back at the Sorcerer. The three symbols on his Armor as well as the Brotherhood insignia on his robe gave away his allegiance to her immediately just as it did for Manu.

It was clear to Appius now that the rumors of Maurfai being overwatched by the Collective were true, both from the agent inside the bar and this small unit tasked with ensuring his safety. They said nothing to each other, but as Larissa raised her left hand the myriad of blaster weaponry aimed directly at the young Force User.

Yet he remained calm. His breathing remained steady and his hands remained by his side. His face was stern, yet showed no sign of the current danger he was in. He used the Living Force to get a feel of his immediate surroundings and felt the presence of several individuals amongst the nearby rooftops.

'Any moment now...'

"Fi..." Larissa never got the chance to order his execution. Several small metal darts ripped through the air and embedded themselves into the flesh on the necks of both herself and the rest of the Collective force. They each clutched at the nipping sensation on their bodies before collapsing to the ground moments later. They clutched at their stomachs in pain and moaned in torturous agony. The darts were laced with type IV poison and was incredibly debilitating the second it makes contact with the skin or bloodstream and as a result they writhed on the ground as Manu was left agape at what had suddenly just occurred next to him. Seconds later the activation of several jetpacks filled the area as several Mandalorian armored beings landed around them. Manu was immediately apprehended, gagged and cuffed to prevent him from screaming and escaping. The Sorcerer called upon the Force and called his father's lightsaber back to him as it returned to his hand from Larissa's side just a few metres away. They were prepared for such a confrontation if the need presented itself. He closed his eyes and focused the power of the Living Force through his body to the palm of his right hand once again. They needed an escape without being seen. No doubt Coruscant's law enforcement would be on them shortly.

"Jiviar lo hurdisi!" (*Visors into blackout!*) commanded Appius in Mando'a. Thankfully, the Deathwatch members understood and followed the order exactly and as a result were spared from what felt like a flashbang going off around the crowd of citizens around them. Appius used the Force to create a blinding flash of light around them giving them the opportunity to escape with Many Maurfai as their prisoner. The people covered their eyes and groaned as the burning sensation of the light attacked them. By the time vision returned to them minutes later. Appius and the Deathwatch had already left the scene behind them and took Manu with them.

Chapter 3

Space above Coruscant

21:30 hours

Four ships entered the deep blackness of the vast open galaxy. Three Kom'rk-class Fighters aboard one of which contained a frightened, handless Manu Maurfai. The DeathHunter remained ahead of them, leading the way to their next destination as the City planet of Coruscant behind them began to grow smaller and smaller as they distanced themselves from it.

"And he's in your custody?" A holographic image of a half Sephi male spoke into the cockpit of the blood red ship. He was Rulvak Qurroc. Quaestor of House Wren and was one of the two individuals along with Amira Lux who placed Appius in charge of Battleteam Deathwatch.

"Yes, Rulvak. The mission was a success. We are setting coordinates for the Arx system now." Appius responded dutifully.

"Excellent, myself and Amira will meet you there. House Wren is about to make an impact on the galaxy. Good work, Deathwatch."

The holographic image of the House Wren Quaestor suddenly cut out and Appius then turned his attention to his Chiss comrade in one of the nearby Kom'rk-class Fighters. There was something niggling at him at the back of his mind.

"Drax, you did remember to let Runa go didn't you?"

He was met by a stone cold silence. After a few seconds the sound of nothing began to be a cause of concern for the young Sorcerer.

"Drax..." Appius called his name again. "What did you do?"

After a few moments silence the cackling of the DeathHunter's comm system flared to life.

"Don't worry, we let him go like you asked. We just left him on the platform. I'm sure someone will help him down... eventually."

Appius groaned and slapped his right hand to his face. He never wanted to hurt the Neimodian so at least he wasn't in any harm. Nonetheless, they had a mission to see through to its conclusion for House Wren and the Brotherhood. He just had to trust Drax on this occasion.

"Never mind, we have a mission to finish. Is everyone ready to jump?"

Affirmation came from each ship and Appius let a small smile come to his face.

"Lawrence, are we ready?" Appius asked the metal astromech attached to his ship.

'Yep. All set whenever you are. Honestly... what would you do without me?' Lawrence beeped in response to his human companion. The message blared to the centre console though Appius' didn't need to pay it any attention.

"Excellent. Deathwatch, enter Hyperspace. Time to finish what we started." The Sorcerer pushed forward a lever situated on his right. Stars began to zoom pass as black was replaced by blue as the four ships left the comfort of Coruscant space behind them.

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