

Aggressive Negotiations

A submission for the Multi Objective fiction competition during the Clan Feud between Vizsla and Plagueis.

Objective 2: Negotiations

Written and submitted by Mystic Appius Wight.

The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.

Daemunn

38ABY

Vizsla Outpost

A hard, Force imbued kick slammed the wooden door nearly off its hinges before one person stormed out of the hole in the wall that was left.

He quickly ran down the stairs of the Daemunn outpost hallways and barged past any living being in his way until he reached the warm air of the outside world, the sunset sky beamed down on him through the gaps it can find in the endless sprawls of trees Zsoldos' moon contained, and yet it did nothing to calm the fire within his soul that gnawed and sparked within him like an open flame. He gripped the sides of his Mandalorian helmet before letting out a cry of exasperation, he punched the nearby wall of the hotel as hard as he could with his right fist. It hurt, and he could feel his knuckles bleed ever so slightly but thankfully the adrenaline in his bloodstream numbed the feeling quickly. Naturally, this act of aggression caught the eyes of some of the Vizsla patrol squadrons and guards as they passed by the makeshift Vizsla structure and they, rather wisely, became inclined to try to avoid him as best they could.

The tall man paced back and forth in front of the entranceway, muttering something incoherent to himself as he did so. His voice was deeper than the usual tone he normally had and as he gripped the back of his head with his hands, he tried to crush the Mandalorian helmet with all his might. Failing miserably, he threw his hands down by his side and took several deep breaths to try to ebb away the molten river that raced through the centre of his chest and caused the Mandalorian irritation at the slightest sounds and sights. It was after a few moments he realised his fists were still clenched and his back tensed under the pressure of his own emotions.

Each breath he exhaled he could feel his steamy breath against his visor and it reminded him vividly of Dreadbringer Wrathus, the monster that had confronted both himself and Battleteam Deathwatch with Oppress Squadron. He shook his head and tried to erase those

thoughts as best he could and tried to focus on something, literally anything other than what happened ins.

There is no emotion, there is peace.

That was what his father used to say to him before he died. He did his best to release the tension throughout his body, arms and legs as they began to feel weak from his current state of mind washing over him.

"Appius?"

A familiar voice brought him to his senses and a slight relief came to him like the calm in a storm. He focused on it and turned to see an old friend in the doorway to the Daemunn outpost.

"Drax."

The Chiss approached him and his red eyes made contact with the Force User's through the blacked out visor.

"Are you ok?" He asked softly.

"I'm fine. I just need a few minutes."

Drax folded his arms and waited patiently for a couple of minutes for Appius to respond. In his own time, he knew the Sorcerer would come around and open up to him.

"That was an absolute load of sithspit."

And he was right.

"Plagueis are being completely unreasonable in their demands. They want Zsoldos? Our base planet and home. Who the hell do they think they are? They think Vizsla will just let them walk all over them, hand over the keys and say 'here you go, sorry about the mess. Is there anything else we can do for you?' Bunch of Imperial wannabes is what they are. That's what."

Drax observed the young Sorcerer as he sarcastically explained his frustration with Vizsla's current enemy.

"And don't even get me started on *him*."

The Chiss let out a small chuckle which caught the human's eye. The man he was referring too, was of Course, the Plagueis head of diplomacy they sent to talk with him.

"He's very... stuck in his ways isn't he?"

Appius looked away for the briefest of moments back inside Yuanming.

"Stuck in his ways? I've known loth wolf's with better negotiation skills than him. And Sith that are better listeners and trust me, that's saying something. He spent most of the time saying absolutely nothing and refused to work with us on this."

"And you didn't like that, did you?" He said as he watched Appius' body movements carefully.

"Of course I didn't, but are you surprised? You saw what happened there. Trying to get Mandalorians and Imperials to talk to each other is like getting a rancor not to smash things. They're both as bad as each other."

The Scavenger's smile disappeared.

"Then why are we doing this, Appius? Mandalorians are warriors by nature. Fighting and conflict is in their blood. In *your* blood."

Appius head snapped towards his friend.

"If that's what's in my blood then I want nothing more to do with it," the Sorcerer quickly snapped at him. The two were silent for a few precious moments afterwards as Drax very quickly realised he had crossed a line somewhere in what he had said.

"I'm sorry, Appius. I didn't mean to upset you. You know how I am with people. I don't even know why I'm on Vizsla's diplomacy team, we *need* this to go well."

Drax never received his answer. Instead, he just watched as Appius barely moved, looking at something invisible, trying his best to avoid eye contact.

"I know we need this to go well, Drax. The alternative is... not something I want to think about. I want to believe so badly that we can resolve all this without anymore bloodshed and violence unlike everything else we do in the Brotherhood. Roark put me in charge of these talks when I returned to Zsoldos to find a peaceful resolution but I'm losing hope. There's already been so much death..."

The smaller blue skinned man placed his right hand on the Mandalorian's left shoulder to which Appius' reflexive reaction was to instantly shrug it off. The Chiss faked a cough to try to defuse the tension between them.

"We had best get inside. No doubt they'll be getting impatient."

"If they aren't already, can you get me a bit of extra time? I just need to gather my thoughts," reluctantly replied the Sorcerer. He shook his head and tried to prepare himself for the inevitable back and forth that was to come.

The Scavenger sighed. "I'll do what I can, just please don't be too long. Those Plagueians make me nervous."

"Just turn on the old Chiss charm and you'll be fine," said Appius as he completely deadpanned the smaller man next to him.

"Oh, and Drax? Thank you."

Drax responded by giving Appius a soft smile before retreating as casually as he could back inside the wooden building.

Appius pressed himself against the nearby wooden wall and folded his arms.. His head dropped and he kicked a nearby stone hard with his left foot.

The most difficult thing in any negotiation, almost, is making sure that you strip it of the emotion and deal with the facts. And there was a considerable challenge to that here and understandably so.

Vizsla Outpost Conference Room 38ABY

It had taken the young Sorcerer an estimated fifteen minutes before he decided to remove himself from the wall and return to the conference room. His surroundings were serene and had kept him in place longer than he expected. The sun began to set and the once hot winds were beginning to change into a calmer breeze which helped to settle the young man.

Nonetheless, he knew it was only for so long that Drax could hold them at bay. The Chiss wasn't lying when he said he wasn't exactly much of a people person. So with much effort, Appius pried himself from the wall and returned inside the dark, dank hallways of the Daemunn outpost. Far from luxurious, it was only constructed for these negotiations after all.

The area was heavily guarded by Mandalorians of various builds and sizes, with access to the higher level conference room granted to himself, Drax and the Plagueis representatives to discuss negotiations in relative privacy.

Upon reaching the room on the outside of the door he could faint hear the words and mutterings coming from his Chiss companion to those across the table from him. The Sorcerer placed his hand on the wooden doorknob, took a deep breath, and turned the handle.

The room was exactly as he left it, which came as a welcome relief to him. Rectangular in shape, the windows provided the only source of light that basked over the large oval table that stood majestically in the centre.

Sat at his seat with his feet upon the table, was the House Tyrannus Aedile and selected Plagueis chief negotiator. Gaius Julius Caesar. His pale complexion was not at all aided by the sunset as the aged man's wrinkles became all the more clear. Stood beside him on the table itself was an Ewok slightly shorter than most of his kind, by the name of Teebu Nyrrire. Appius thought it was initially a joke from Plagueis at first, sending this being to discuss matters of importance such as these when most of the Ascendant Clan consisted of high-ranking Sith seemed like a giant middle finger to his entire clan. The feeling of which filled him with an uneasy dread. However, Teebu had been as problematic and as stubborn as Gaius, if not more so.

"About bloody time. I was hoping to have these negotiations done by now."

The Tyrannus Aedile's arrogance did not surprise Appius, but that didn't make it any less irritating. He clenched his fists and shoved his dignity aside for the moment.

"Apologies about that." Responded Appius. "I needed a few minutes to think."

"And you couldn't have done it here, in front of us instead of showing your obvious weakness and storming off like a baby? Not much of a tactician are you?"

Teebu's words, whilst slightly high-pitched, weighed heavily like solid beskar had just dropped on the Sorcerer's shoulders. It began to feel like he was being double teamed on by the two Plagueis members and the sudden urge to fling the tiny creature across the room with the Force like a stuffed children's toy was a tempting one. Especially for how hilarious it would look. Nonetheless, he looked down at the table below him, tapped his index finger on the hard wood, swallowed his pride like an unappetising meal and spoke.

"I've been thinking about our current situation and I think we all know there is no way in hell we will accept Plagueis' demands. Zsoldos is our home, and we'd sooner mark our graves on it than hand it over to you on a platter."

Out of the corner of his eye, Appius could just make out Drax shifting uncomfortably next to him, worrying about the outcome of what the Wren Aedile just declared. Across the table, Caesar simply folded his arms and shrugged nonchalantly.

"In that case, we have nothing more to talk about. If Vizsla will not meet our demands then the war will continue until Plagueis bathes this planet in Mandalorian blood."

The elder man slammed his feet back on the floor and rose dramatically from his seat. The gesture of which did not go unnoticed by Drax or Appius. The former of which startled back and the latter raised his right hand towards him, palm out.

"Wait. I'm not done yet."

"We have our orders from the Dread Lord herself. If Vizsla won't listen to our demands we are to return to the Ascendant fleet and continue the war. Come, Teebu. This was a waste of time."

"Clearly."

Appius watched as his way of ending the war between Vizsla and Plagueis began to take their leave. He couldn't let them, he needed them. But short of using the Force to make them stay there was nothing he could do as that would only make things worse. He was helpless, useless, he could only have stopped this war if only he could control himself. He felt his emotions burn inside him, rising through his skin like an osmosis reaction, a supernova ready to burst.

"WILL YOU LISTEN TO ME FOR TWO FRACKING MINUTES!?"

His voice boomed and roared like an angry wampa. All four beings in the room stood silently. Either out of shock, disbelief or curiosity. Appius had their attention.

"Just give me two minutes to change your mind. That's all, just two minutes. If you are still not happy after that then you can take me as your prisoner to Aliso."

"Appius!" Drax interjected before the Wren Aedile could go further. A hand gesture from Appius silenced him and prevented him from saying anything more.

"I know Wrathus, your Dreadbringer, would be particularly pleased to see me again." The Sorcerer finished and once again the room fell silent. It was a standoff and Appius tapped into the Force to gauge how the pair of Non Force Users across from him were going to react and to his relief, their inward feelings of anticipation did not reflect their outside irritation and anger. They were testing him, that was what the Sorcerer concluded. The Lieutenant Colonel casually walked back to his seat, pulled the chair out and sat back down at the table, this time with his feet firmly planted into the floor and his arms resting on the table. The aged man pointed at the Mandalorian.

"Two minutes." He said as he placed his arm back down and motioned for Appius to start.

"Thank you." He said calmly. "As you already know, there's just simply no way we can accept handing Zsoldos over to Plagueis, and I get the feeling you knew that when you came here."

Appius waited to see how the man sat in front of him would but to his credit, he barely moved, instead just keeping eye contact and not revealing a single thought to the Force User.

"So, I've been thinking about our current situation and I've come up with a solution. Firstly, from Plagueis, Vizsla will gain acquisition of the Instigator."

"No."

Gaius suddenly interrupted with a stern tone in his voice. A vein began to bulge at the top of his white-haired head though he managed to keep his calm. He was about to object when Appius interfered.

"I'm not done yet. House Tyrannus is new just like Wren right? Well from House Wren you will gain one of our Raider II-Class Corvettes..."

"So we are just swapping Corvettes? That seems hardly worth it." Teebu interrupted with a voice that sounded like an angry child. Keeping up his irritated façade.

"As well as a set of House Wren's Kom'rk-class Fighters, and from Plagueis, Vizsla will acquire three Low Altitude Assault Transports which roughly equal the same value. Then we can end this war peacefully without any further bloodshed."

As Appius finished, the room went silent once more for a brief minute before Caesar glanced at the Mandalorian across from him straight in his helmet and smiled subtly.

"It is an interesting offer, and we will take this to our Dread Lord for further discussion."

They couldn't see it, but for the first time in a long while, Appius smiled behind his Mandalorian helmet.

"That's all I ask."

Night will fall and drown the sun when a good man goes to war.

Daemunn
38ABY
Vizsla Outpost

Under most circumstances, Appius could be considered an extremely patient man. But even he had his limits. Two hours passed since both the Lieutenant Colonel and his Ewok companion left Daemunn and the longer he waited, the worse the feeling in his gut became.

"You are going to leave a trail in the floor if you keep pacing like that."

Appius absorbed what Drax said but nonetheless it did nothing to put him at ease. They'd told Roark almost immediately after the Plagueis representatives left and both the Sorcerer and the Scavenger were ordered to stay and await the news.

Suddenly, the Holo-communicator Appius placed in the middle of the table flared to life and the large blue hued image of a man in Beskar Mandalorian Armor emerged out of nonexistence. The only thing missing was the helmet which as a result, showed the man's wolf grey eyes perfectly.

"Appius, I want to speak to you in private."

Without needing to be told, Drax rose from his lean against the nearby window and left without a fuss. After all, denying the orders of Vizsla Consul Declan Roark was never a smart idea.

"Mr Wight. Firstly, I'd like to thank you personally for your hard work in this matter. No doubt you are curious about whether the negotiations succeeded or failed." Roark said, his voice as rough and grainy over the communicator as it was in person.

"I am, it was tough going, but I'm hopeful that..."

"Stow it, the wars back on."

Appius almost buckled under the sensation of his heart dropping down to his feet. His body went cold and he struggled against the numbness in his throat.

"Why?" He managed to force out the word.

"We ended the ceasefire."

Appius didn't respond immediately, not until the sudden sense of dread overcame him and a sudden realisation dawned.

"Wait, we ended the ceasefire?"

"Correct."

"But why?" The Sorcerer asked, the confusion evident in his voice.

"We never wanted peace and neither did Plagueis. We were just smart enough to strike first."

Appius placed a hand on his Mandalorian helmet and tapped his left foot on the floor uncomfortably. He could feel his breathing get faster and harder as his heartbeat echoed in his ears.

"If neither side wanted peace then what the hell was the point of all of this!?" Appius questioned with each word increasing in volume. In response, Roark simply smirked at the Force User.

"Tactical advantage." The Vizsla Consul spoke slowly. Letting each word sink into the Sorcerer's head. "My god, you are naive. Return to Zsoldos at once, I need you to mobilize House Wren with Rulvak for the upcoming plan."

He received no response from the Wren Aedile.

"Sorry, Appius. But this is the way."

The image of Grand Master Declan Roark disappeared from sight and Appius could barely contain the trembling in his fists. He screamed and pulled his helmet from his head and threw it across the room, consequently, right through where Roark's image was seconds prior, into the wooden wall before dropping to the ground in a thud.

Appius spent the next few minutes collecting himself before slowly walking over to the side of the room where his helmet lay. Stretching out with his right hand, he used the Force like an extension of himself to grub around the helmet like a vice. Slowly, it rose from the ground and once it was in arms length Appius reached out with both hands and carefully took hold of it. He looked deep into the T-shaped visor, thankfully undamaged, before taking a deep breath and placing it back on his head.

"This is the way." He said reluctantly, feeling the weight of his words sink to the pit of his stomach. He understood now, that this was something he was just going to have to accept, whether he liked it or not and it tore at him like a wild animal scratching with its claws.

He left the room, wondering if his philosophy, his combined Jedi and Mandalorian way, could even work in a universe like this. In a clan like Vizsla.

But for now, there was a war to fight.

Credits, not words.

He should have known better.

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