**Trials of Ullr**

*Written by: NOV Darra Sathille*

The raising sun of Zsoldos shined with vigor over the wild forests of Ullr. Darra shifted her eyes trying to get a better understanding of her surroundings on this bright morning. Questions about the reasons and intentions of this trial have flooded her mind. Confusion found the way to her thoughts as she was not given many details or expectations, or even what was she supposed to accomplish in this forest.

The twi´lek looked back at the shuttle bearing marks of Clan Wizsla. A tall man appearing to be a human came out half way down the ramp for her dispatch. He wore a black robe that didn’t reveal any details. Darra did not recognize the voice of the man. It has only been a few days since she has been admitted into the Wizsla Clan.

“Your Master Kalan Amak has accepted this year´s trial of Ullr on your behalf, and therefore you shall undertake it right now. “ - The man announced with a low tone of voice without the faintest emotion. – “You are to make your way from here to hall Saga. You have 10 hours to do it. “

Darra took a deep breath and released it slowly still unsure of the identity of her dispatcher.

“And who are you again?”

The mysterious man was wearing a deep hood, and not one inch of his face was seen. He shook his head slightly, turned back and walked up the ramp. Darra could hear his words before the gate closed:

“ Don´t get yourself killed just yet”.

With those somewhat doubtful words of encouragement, the violet skinned twi´lek glanced over her attire and equipment. It was embarrassing to say the least. A training lightsaber was all she had. There wasn´t much in terms of armor either: simple novice rank robes and leather boots that could protect her from stones and mud at best. Darra did not let any negative thought to her mind, quite the opposite. The vast forests reminded her a bit her home planet Onderon and that gave her motivation. Her face hardened and mind focused at the task at hand, shoving aside any memories or feelings.

A couple of hours had passed since Darra began wandering the forest. It was humming with life around her. The sun broke through the cracks shining up the outgrown roots, wild flowers and fallen leaves. The flowery scent flowed into her nose and lungs and it was all too familiar, she knew that plant quite well. The coma-bloom was a yellow flower, curved into a horn-like shape, known by those with proper knowledge to be highly poisonous. The contained alkaloids affected the brain powerfully if ingested. As she picked a few flowers, she felt a shift of energies in the area. She wasn´t sensible enough yet to say what was it, but it felt ferocious, primal, still some distance away. She clutched her fists and kept moving forward, and trying to keep her mind as clear of distractions as possible.

The tingling feeling on her back appeared out of nowhere and sudden realization that someone was right behind her came just a tiny bit too late to avoid the blow, but sufficiently on time to shift her body and receive the blunt hit to her shoulder, not her skull. The grim laughter she heard right after the hit belonged to a human of average height, whose unshaved face and dark eyes didn´t hide his intent.

“Pathetic and useless! You had no idea I was tracking you! No wonder they want you gone”

The man´s brown leather boot that had seen better times landed a kick into Darra´s stomach. She didn´t avoid that one. The man slowly was circling around her as she gathered her shattered dignity and hurting body back up. Just then she noticed the man was force sensitive in some small degree, but his trust was allocated into the black baton he had used earlier. The twi´ lek used this moment of distraction and charged the man with the hilt of her training lightsaber clutched in her hand. Her opponent has reached down to grab her by the throat, and would have been successful if Darra did not stepped on a muddy puddle that made her slip and fall down gracelessly. She did not hesitate to activate her weapon, trying to ignore the pain in her hip caused by the unfortunate fall and slashed at the man in his thigh cutting deep enough to cause the man fall onto one knee.

The shriek of pain escaped the man´s throat. Darra felt her adrenaline rush, but self control overcame the emotions. She realized well that the human would have all the advantage if he got up again. She couldn’t let that happen. Drops of sweat appeared on the novice´s forehead as she extended her arm and with all the strength she could muster, she channeled the force and telekinetically raised a rock from the mud. Pouring all the frustration and growing anger into the one last thing she could do, Darra crushed it into the skull of her enemy. The blow was not as powerful as she had wished, but good enough to knock him out unconscious.

The twi´lek´s hip and shoulder were in a bad shape. She was a trained healer but did not want to exhaust herself completely by using the Force to patch herself up. Even though the man was no longer a threat, the feeling she had earlier of the malicious, feral energy was still there. It was actually stronger now, and close enough to define as animal… or a beast.

Waking up by a horrible headache, and blood in his eyes Dar Quinn had discovered that his body was tied up to a tree by his own rope. The purple twi´lek woman was standing in front of him holding his hunting knife that she most likely had found while searching his belongings.

“Who wants me gone?” - she asked staring at a yellow flower she held in her hand.

Dar did not care much for his client´s confidentiality. “He was big, tall, dark clothes. Paid well”.

“That doesn´t narrow it down very much…. No matter. What does matter is that I am quite sure I am also followed by some sort of a beast. It is close… and I need to slow it down to my pace…” – Darra approached the man closely and ripped his shirt, just enough to reveal his chest, then she made a shallow cut. The human groaned from pain.

“What in the hell are you doing?!” – Dar for the first time felt fear of the twi´lek.

“Only what I must.” She responded quietly, focused on crushing the petals and squeezing their nectar onto the wound. Darra moved away from the man.

“Look…” - she began to explain – “This flower will affect your blood, the toxin will be carried to your brain… when the beast will get here, it will eat you. The toxin will affect it as well, as your flesh and most likely brain will be in his system. I know I will have to face it, and when I do, I need that advantage.”

Dar´s eyes became bigger, his heart rate accelerated rapidly. “YOU… You can´t do this!! Kill me or let me go! This is not right!”

Darra sighed…”I am not a Sith and do not need killing to feel satisfaction. I am not a Jedi either to let you go and give another chance. No. First of all you deserved everything that is happening to you.Secondly… I do it, because it is the best logical move to get out of this alive.”

The man´s screams continues, but it was actually an advantage to Darra. Perhaps the beast would find him easier that way.

The sun was sinking down beneath the tops of canopies. The light streaked through the boroughs in both brilliant and shadowy beams. Another few hours passed, the forest became quieter, and Darra could distinguish a particular sound… a movement. Very, very near.

First she saw a tail from above the bushes. Then the head, which was large with two rows of sharp teeth, the animal had two tiny eyes and a sleek, brown body. To the extent of the twi´lek´s animal knowledge it must have been a type of a salamander. The creature was under the influence of the toxin. The walking pattern was not straight, but rather sluggish. It´s tongue was hanging out of it´s mouth with no control what so ever, and a yellow goo was quite visible and leaking out of it´s eyes.

By the time the poor creature arrived to the Novice´s feet it was exhausted and tormented by pain and confusion. Even Darra´s training lightsaber did the job by putting the creature out of it´s misery. It was not a great victory, it was a bitter lesson. If Master Amak wanted to serve her a lesson of humiliation, then she was grateful that at least it wasn´t the public type of humiliation.

The day gave in to the night by the time Darra Sathille had reached the drinking hall Saga. A shuttle was waiting with open door on a nearby platform. Her master and several other clan mates were chatting at the entrance. As she approached in her ripped and dirty with mud clothes, conversations stopped. Kalan Amak acknowledged his apprentice´s return and walked with her into the shuttle saying,

“Your journey has only begun”.