

A sudden rustle in the forest branches startled Daro Zapal. The pale-skinned, red-bearded bear of a human tightened the grip of his war axe, the only weapon he had been permitted before being dropped into the middle of nowhere. A thin shirt, pants and worn boots were the only clothing on Daro's person as he shivered in the dusk air. He knew the way home, back to Saga, where the promise of freedom awaited him. The human could leave this planet and walk away from his crimes, no questions asked. All he had to do was make it back to the great hall before the sunset on the third day. Easy right?

Another branch shook and a nearby group of birds took off. Something was following Daro, be it animal or something else he was not certain. Few of the condemned survived the trials of Ullr to gain their freedom and he was determined to be the only one this year. The fresh air sure beat rotting in that duracrete cell.

A pair of amber eyes and a devilish fanged grin appeared in the faint light ahead, up in the trees. Daro froze, summoning his courage to face the demon in his path.

"Stay back or I'll split ya in two!" the human shouted into the darkness, raising the glistening war axe with both hands.

The mysterious eyes narrowed with deadly focus as the unknown assailant dropped from the trees and calmly walked into the fading daylight. Daro's resolve faltered as he saw the visage of a tiger emerge from the treeline. Not a tiger, a Togorian, tall as a Wookiee and from the looks of him just as strong. The feline intruder had only black pants and boots custom fit for Togorian feet. The tiger appeared armed only with a dagger sheathed at his hip. Daro glanced down at his axe, calculating his odds of survival.

"I SAID STAY BACK!" The human pointed the blade of the axe directly at his foe who continued to advance unabated. Was this Togorian insane or just extremely confident in his strength? He made no attempt to draw his dagger that Daro could see. The brute just kept walking, empty-handed

The human made a split-second decision to take the initiative before his feline foe could attack or draw his own weapon. A sharp axe still cut flesh and fabric, no matter how big you were. Daro charged forward, axe above his head poised for an overhead blow. He'd bury the head of the weapon right between the eyes of this overgrown beast.

The tiger reacted with almost supernatural speed and side-stepped away from the falling axe. Now perpendicular to the assaulting human, the Togorian gave a strong open-handed shove with both hands directly into the right shoulder of Daro, knocking the criminal off balance. It was in this moment that the human realized his gravely he had miscalculated.

Daro toppled onto the forest floor with his left shoulder blade first. The human struggled to keep control of his weapon but had to release one hand from the hilt to brace his fall. *Damn this cat is*

*strong*. Before he could even react, the criminal felt his opponent grab the axe and yank it from his grip with a single swift motion. A foot with crushing weight behind it pushed Daro's chest back and held him down.

The Togorian examined the axe for a moment, turning it right and left in the remaining dusk light. Daro struggled to move, to breath, to do anything. He grasped as the Togorian's leg in vain, trying to relieve the pressure on his chest.

"I guess live bait will work better" the Togorian calmly stated before striking Daro in the temple with the unbladed end of the axe head.

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Rajhin took no pleasure in these trials but the great hunt was a necessity if he wanted to garner any sort of respect in his new home. While he had fought valiantly against the Clan's enemies in the recent invasion and pursued targets efficiently he knew this would not be enough to stay in the top tier of the bounty board if he sat out the trials. This was a Mandalorian dominated clan after all and their culture had certain requirements to be considered a true warrior. Respect meant jobs and jobs meant credits. So while he'd rather be spending his funds in a Yuanming luxury suite, getting his signet for armor he didn't even wear was a crucial business function.

Raj looked down on the unconscious and bleeding human slung over his shoulder. Killing the condemned littered through Ullr for the trials was frankly beneath his skill and unworthy of a signet. Local legends told of a lost Rancor that lived deep in the woods. Rumors said the Rancor belonged to a local crime boss who's successors found difficult to keep after ousting him. It escaped, violently, when some hapless fool tried to sell it and has lived in the woods every since. Or so the local gossip went.

Rajhin intended to hunt this great beast and drag it's skull back to Saga. His limited knowledge of Rancors told him that they preferred larger prey and humans fit the bill. It helped that this particular ape had decided to be rude to him upon their first meeting. Who knows, Raj might have enlisted this criminal's aid. Rancors tended to stick close to large caves and places where the dark side of the Force was strong. Using the Force probably went against the spirit of the trials but as soon as he could get this over with the sooner Rajhin could go back to living his life.

The Sith had spent the first day of the trial scouting the area, trying to find where the dark side was strongest. He had found a clearing, leading to a small system of caves carved out by a thin river. It was as good a place as any to set up the "bait" he had collected. Raj tied the human to a tree overlooking the clearing with makeshift ropes crafted from vines. He pulled on the criminal's hair and slapped him on the cheek.

"Time to wake up! You were making a lot of noise earlier, no sense in stopping now."

Daro blinked, his head throbbed with pain. "What have you done, untie me!" Suddenly he realized how powerless he was in this situation. "Look, I have credits. If you untie me we can work together. I can help you on your trial or whatever just let me go."

"Oh, you're already helping me," Raj retorted as he sauntered off to his pre-selected blind up wind.

The better part of an hour passed with Daro struggling to free himself and yelling and pleading for Raj to release him with no response. Suddenly a deep beastly roar in the distance signaled the arrival of the true prey.

A dark purple Rancor thundered out of the cave and toward the free meal. Daro's screams became more desperate as the beast approached.

"NO NO NO, WE CAN WORK TOGETHER, SAVE MEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

The Rancor reached down and plucked the human from the tree effortlessly. Daro threw his now free hands up fruitlessly in an attempt to shield himself. The Rancor bit the criminal's head and shoulders off his body with a mushy crunch.

Rajhin wasted no time, dagger in hand approaching the Rancor from behind. So far so good. He crouched down to leap onto the beast's back when a warning through the Force shot down his back like a bolt of lightning. The former Obelisk dove the ground on his belly just in time to avoid catching a Rancor swipe to the face.

The beast roared and tossed the half-eaten Human aside. Raj leapt to his feet and channeled the dark side into his legs for a powerful jump. The Rancor took another swipe at him and the Sith jumped above the arc of the swing to avoid it, then bounced off the ground toward his foe's right shoulder. Rajhin found his mark and dug into the Rancor flesh with his trusty Sith dagger. The beast roared in pain.

The Togorian prepared to jump again with the Rancor threw itself into a nearby set of trees to try to shake Raj off. The Sith broke free but the flailing Rancor struck him, sending the Togorian flying into a solid oak with a thud.

Raj had the wind knocked out of him and fell face-first down the remainder of the tree before hitting the ground. Even for a being as tough as Rajhin, a Rancor was no joke. He tried to pull himself back up but the beast was quicker. Raj rolled out of the way but caught a glancing blow from the Rancor, leaving a painful gash across his face.

Rage took over as the Sith rose. He reached out his hand and sent a translucent blast of pure Force energy knocking the beast back. Raj dropped his dagger and focused all his hatred at the Rancor. Cerulean tendrils of Force lightning danced across the flesh of the stunned Rancor. The

beast roared with pain. Raj reached out his hand and called his dagger to him. With a single motion he leapt to the downed Rancor and drove his dagger into the beast's exposed neck and slashed across with all his might. Hot blood gushed all over him. The Rancor thrashed to fight for survival but to no avail. Rajhin had his trophy.