

Revenge

A story for the fiction competition: **[Aggressive Expansion Phase 2] Multi-Objective Fiction Prompt**

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Unknown Location

39 ABY

Lady Krea smiled to herself within her personal chamber. The bright and warm sunlight beamed in through the few crevices that she allowed to exist within the old temple. She basked within it, a luxury she allowed herself as the Unchained Master revelled in her recent success.

Taldryan fell for it. Hook, line, and sinker. Even with their seers, the once-mighty Clan of the Brotherhood was no match for the superior tactical capabilities that she had spent years creating. The Twi'lek Sith never expected many to defect to their side; if it were that easy she would have attempted it already. Besides, the very few who did were promptly slain by the hands of her servants, or redesigned for *other* purposes. After all, Krea's new Sith Empire had no place for the weak and cowardly. The Sith of old, such as Exar Kun and Vitiate themselves would be proud of what she would achieve. Of that, she had no doubt.

Soon, she mused to herself as she swirled a glass of fine Correllian wine in her hands and brought it to her dry, cracked lips. The liquid burned down her throat and brought sweet relief to her throat. The dark side did many things to those that were steeped in its power, but with that power came great consequence. For Krea, it gave her an unsatisfied thirst for power. No matter how strong the Unchained became, she would never be content. She needed more. *Wanted* more. She'd clawed her way into the position of power she was in and destroyed her Master with her bare hands to take it.

The old fool. I hope he rots in hell.

In her mind, her master, Xifux, was always too focused on the Arcane. He was always too preoccupied with the mundane and "what if's?" rather than using his power to take what they rightfully deserved. Krea was all too happy to plunge her lightsaber through his throat.

Under her leadership the Unchained prospered, gaining bit by bit until the time was right. That time was now, and they would prove their might by destroying the Dark Brotherhood. Their heresy would be eradicated, one Clan at a time.

Krea suddenly felt a shift in the Force, causing her to divert her attention to the large set of doors at the far side of the room. Right on cue, they burst open as a large, physically imposing man entered under the archway.

"Lord Flaq."

The well-built Human stopped several feet away from the throne in which Krea was sitting. His face was pale in complexion, yet the unnatural wrinkles left a marred and horrific visage. Scars littered his cheeks along with piercing blood-red eyes that spoke of his devotion to the dark side of the Force. His facial tattoos, if you could call them that, were disjointed and broken apart on his face from years of battle and strife. He placed his left hand over his heart and gave a slight, yet courteous bow.

"My lady," Flaq spoke respectfully.

"Rise, Lord Flaq," Krea ordered. "I trust your experiments are proceeding as planned?"

"Better than planned. The weapon will be ready very soon," the Sith Lord answered.

"Excellent, that is wonderful news and yet..." Krea paused as she focused her gaze upon her right-hand man. His face was scrunched and his stare was hard, filled with the fire and furiousness of the dark side. "I sense there is more?"

The Human did not attempt to hide the scowl in his features.

"I wish to go to Chyron," the towering man stated bluntly.

"Oh?" Krea said coolly, indignation evident in her voice. "Pray, do tell me what has sparked your ire, Lord Flaq."

"Our forces have discovered the one responsible for Trebin's death. I simply wish to take what is mine."

"Revenge?" the Unchained Leader responded. "Need I remind you we have bigger priorities."

"I understand, my Lady. Trebin was a fool, a coward, a weakling and a failure. But he was still *my* apprentice. I desire to take responsibility for his sloppiness and take the vengeance that is rightfully mine."

"As you should," Krea stated, her words laced with ice and venom. Her eyes glistened with red iris' circling a yellow-crusted outer ring, yet she smiled at her fellow Sith. It was a sight that sent chills into the core of lesser beings. "Very well, Lord Flaq. You may take your leave for Chyron. I wish to inspect the results of your experiments myself."

"As you wish, my Master."

Flaq took a low bow before turning to leave. His strides were large as he walked with the guile of a man on a mission. The Sith Lord left the chamber, carefully closing the doors behind him to leave Krea in silence.

The Elder level Sith rose to her feet moments later and left her majestic throne to head to the experimental chamber. It wouldn't be long now. The Unchained were scattered among Ostara, Chyron, and the perimeter of the Caelus System itself in an attack many only dreamed of putting together. Taldryan's forces were once again too slow and spread too thin. Soon, her reign of dominance would stretch across the Brotherhood. Everyone will know the might of *her* Sith Empire and bow before her as a servant, or a slave.

Caelus System

Chyron

39 ABY

On any given day the Chyron skyline was a sight to behold. Skyscrapers littered the landscape as far as the eye could see whilst slowly, but surely, the swamps and boglands underneath were ebbed away as part of the ongoing construction project by the Caelus Government. Unfortunately, today was not one of those days. The usually clear sky was blackened by smut and ash that roared below. Flames of orange, red, and blue heated the smoldering metal and wood below, creating smoke that rose into the air above them. Red-plated troopers wielding their Blastech rifles scoured the streets. Plasma left the barrels of their weapons and crashed into any moving living being. Blades of crimson-red tore through flesh with ominous swings and hacks of their deadly weapon. The hooded figures who wielded them revelled in the bloodshed as bit by bit, Chyron was being ripped apart in a sea of blood and those who weren't slain were dragged away into the unknown.

"HELP US, PLEASE!" screeched a young blue-skinned woman. The Pantoran clung to the bundle in her left arm whilst dragging a small boy with her right. Her face was sullen and marked with cuts and dry tears. Her clothes, and that of the small boy, were ripped from dragging themselves across a narrow battlefield. Not that they cared with explosions and blaster fire raining from all around them.

The ear-piercing scream did nothing to deter the monstrous entity that chased them. A huge, furred creature raised its snout and howled into the black sky, red lightsaber humming in hand. Yellow-stained, canine teeth showed along its jawline and saliva dripping from its mouth. It snarled at the retreating Pantorans, and the Shistavanen's pupils shrunk as the stench of fear penetrated the beast's nostrils, prompting it to lick its lips like they were a hungry meal waiting to be devoured. The dark side poured through the beast's veins and its muscles bulged at the sensation of power. The canine mammalian bent its knees and lunged at its prey, ready to claim them for its Unchained mistress.

The Pantoran woman screamed and the small boy closed his eyes from sheer terror.

The beast never caught them.

It was slammed hard to the ground by a tall, crimson-armoured Mandalorian that landed on its spine, jetpack flaring and roaring, forcing the Shistavanen's momentum into the dirt below a few feet from its target, bruised and groggy from the sudden impact. The dark sided monstrosity didn't realise what was happening before an emerald coloured blade pierced through the side of its skull.

The Mandalorian rose to his feet, a tall man with a saberstaff in hand. His armor was distinctively red all over except for the striking golden lightning bolt upon his chest. It made him inconspicuous, that was for sure, and he certainly stood out amongst the crowd. Whether that was a good thing or not remained to be seen.

The remaining Pantorans stopped running, panting and heaving from exhaustion.

"Th-thank you," the woman audibly muttered through heaved breaths, to which she received a casual thumbs up from the Mandalorian in response.

The Force suddenly alarmed through the heavily-armoured man's subconscious. He reacted by turning towards the threat and pressing the second ignition switch on his lightsaber.

Snap-hiss!

A second green blade ruptured out of the other end of the lightsaber as two Sith troopers emerged out of fog and dust. Red plasma flew across the distance between the troopers and the Pantorans with the Mandalorian stood in-between. With a series of deft wrist flicks, the Force user spun his saberstaff in front of him to create a *circle of shelter* for himself and the citizens behind him. The blaster bolts collided into the green blades of the saberstaff and careened off aimlessly above, below and to the sides of the Mandalorian and out of the way of the Pantoran family.

Sensing a lull in their rate of fire, the Mandalorian took his opportunity and summoned his anger through his body to the fingertips of his left hand. Lightning lanced across the distance towards the closest Sith trooper, crashing into the one closest to the Force user before dispersing into their comrade beside them. They dropped to their knees and grunted in pain, dropping their rifles in the process. The Mandalorian seized his opportunity and activated the jetpack attached to his back. The flames sizzled and erupted into existence and propelled the Mandalorian to the first downed soldier, his lightsaber humming in the wind as he decapitated the Unchained trooper with a single swing. He then turned to the second with lightning as lightning coursed out of his left hand and into the second red-armoured trooper. It screamed as the torment overcame every nerve in its body, screaming for it to stop. Seconds later it did, but only when it's life was successfully snuffed out.

The Mandalorian took a deep sigh before turning back to the Pantoran family. Instantly the sensation of fear and dread poured into him from what the Force told of their emotional state.

They were frightened of him. Who could blame them? His display of violence horrified them, especially the young boy, no older than five, who clung to his mother's side for dear life.

A warzone is no place for a family like them.

The Mandalorian couldn't blame them, far from it. Fortunately, violence was something of a daily occurrence in his life so he was used to it at this point.

"Hello! My name is Appius. No need to be alarmed, I'm here to help," the Sorcerer waved to them. "You need to head for the Taldryan Sector! There's safety there and you..."

He never finished his sentence, for he sensed the presence of two others behind him. Appius turned to face the threat as it appeared. Two Sith emerged from the darkness and smoke brandishing crimson bladed lightsabers. They were hooded, and their facial features were hidden from plain sight.

"Ugh, it just never ends, does it?" the Taldryanite commented as he withdrew his saberstaff once again. "So, what shall I call you then? Stooges? Minions? Whipping boys? Come on, give me something to work with!"

After not receiving a response from the dark-hooded figures, the Taldryanite quickly snapped his head back to the Pantoran's behind him.

"A bit of advice for you. RUN!"

Not at all deterred by the Quaestor's attempt at insulting them, the pair of dark siders in union threw their palm forward towards the Mandalorian. It sent a wave of air crashing into his chest, sending him careening into a nearby pile of rubble.

As his senses returned to him, the Ektrosis leader caught sight of the two robed figures approaching the Pantorans. The mother staggered back in a feeble attempt to gain some distance over the looming figures that approached them. The small boy climbed up a mound of collapsed stone and tried pitifully to pull her up with him. The blue-skinned woman kept hold of the bundle in her left arm, which now exposed a mess of soft, dark violet hair beneath it along with light, unblemished skin. Appius climbed out of the rubble he crashed into, his armor dusty and scratched, but otherwise undamaged. He grunted as he pulled himself free and his heart plummeted into his gut when he saw the bundle for himself.

A baby!? I swear things just keep getting worse and worse! You owe me for this, Rian!

Appius summoned the Force through his body and immediately the sensation of power overcame him. The Sorcerer bent his knees and propelled himself into the air and landed directly in-between the two dark siders.

"Hello, guys! Did you miss me?"

The Force immediately warned him of the incoming strikes, and he activated his saberstaff to deflect the blades of crimson that threatened to end his life. Yet the effort exerted was barely minimal if that as the Quaestor recognised their direct and blunt pattern of attack. He wouldn't have believed it was Shii-Cho if he hadn't seen it with his own eyes. Yet here he was, deftly spinning his saberstaff from one side to the other without breaking the momentum of his weapon.

"A shame, I was looking forward to a challenge. Clearly, I'm not getting one from either of you!" the Sorcerer prodded.

The insult seemed to do the trick as the pair of Unchained members increased the rawness of their strikes. Simple, deceiving, yet predictable. One attack overextended ever so slightly and presented the opening Appius needed. The

Ektrosis leader released his left hand from his weapon and grabbed hold of the wrist of the Unchained. The Taldryanite allowed his enemy's momentum to carry him into his blade, severing the armoured being's head from his shoulders. Appius spun and quickly placed both hands on his hilt and faced the remaining threat. The Unchained Force user recoiled at the loss of his comrade and tightened his grip on his lightsaber.

Appius tapped into the spectrum of the Force and felt the being's trepidation and fear, but that wasn't everything. There was another presence nearby. One familiar and powerful. The Taldryanite smirked behind his helmet and relaxed his fighting stance.

"I'm not the one you should be worried about," the Sorcerer advised. The Unchained Sith cocked his head to the side. Confused until he became suddenly aware of someone behind him. When the black-clad spun to face the threat, he was sliced in twain by a yellow-bladed lightsaber. The man wielding it was a tall, physically imposing Miralian with olive tan skin. He was the leader of Taldryan's community outreach, a son of Taldrya, an Elder of the Brotherhood, and the former Consul of Taldryan. Rian Taldrya.

"Nice of you to drop by, Rian," Appius commented cheerily.

The hulking Miralian offered the Quaestor a small smile and sheathed his weapon. The Elder carefully approached the Pantoran family behind the Sorcerer and offered a hand to the mother.

"Are you ok?" Rian asked. "It's ok. You are safe now."

The Pantoran accepted his hand and cradled her baby close to her. The young boy clung to her leg as his eyes darted back and forth between the Mandalorian and the bulky man in front of him.

"Head for the Taldryan sector. There's food and shelter there. The way is clear," Rian finished.

"Thank you," whimpered the Pantoran as she disappeared out of sight with her children in tow. Rian glanced at the chaos that surrounded them. Flames cackled and debris littered the floors from the fallen structures. Corpses littered the floor, and the burning waft offended the Miralian's sense of smell. The former Consul shook his head before addressing the Mandalorian.

"We should go too," Rian suggested. "This area is lost."

"Agreed. Maybe we can come up with a new plan?" Appius inquired, following his fellow Taldryanite out of the makeshift battlefield.

Taldryan Sector

Chyron

39 ABY

The scars of battle all over Chyron were present everywhere anyone looked. The area was thankfully unmarked by the conflict that raged across the rest of the planet, but survivors arrived in droves and occupied whatever little space they could acquire. Tents littered the pathways and streets for citizens without a home to return too. People clung to whatever possessions they could muster together, mostly credits, whilst many others lined up at the various food stalls set up by Rian's Community Outreach to reach the cold and hungry. Many grieved for the loss of their loved ones, either declared dead or missing.

Members of Taldryan's military patrolled the sector. Both to keep the peace, ward off any attacks, and break up any infighting that occurred. With tensions and worries high, that was a more frequent occurrence than the Taldryanite's would like to admit.

The old Taldryan Citadel was not much better. Any available space was to be taken for those with nowhere else to go and, with Consul Erinyes' permission, that space included the lower floors. The top levels were highly restricted and only to be accessed by members of the summit. The Citadel itself was mostly barren and empty thanks to the move to Ostara, so it provided a little extra room for those that needed it most. The last time Appius remembered seeing so many people in one place was the war with the Collective in the Arx System, but they were Force-users trained to fight, Mercenaries and Loyalists armed to the teeth with weapons. Not ordinary people.

"I'm doing the best I can, but I'll be honest, I'm working with a third of what Erinyes promised us," Rian informed.

"I understand that, Rian. You were Consul at one point, surely you understand the problem Erinyes has? She had to divide the Clans assets into three. Between the attack on Ostara, in space above us, then here too, I'm surprised she's not pulling her hair out," responded Appius with reasoning.

That's assuming she hadn't already. The Sorcerer mused to himself. Glancing around the old Taldryan Citadel cafeteria, the two Force Disciples were privy to the ruminations of the public. Many simply sought after a place to rest their heads,

whilst others looked for food in their stomachs. Taldryan officers and Loyalists kept the peace to prevent fistfights and thefts from occurring. The massive hall felt the size of a shoebox considering how cramped it was with all the citizens inside.

"You are the Ektrosis Quaestor," the Miralian Juggernaut stated bluntly. "Can you not call on other members of the House for aid?"

"Already tried that. Andrelious and Rakhai were supposed to return not too long ago, but they haven't. They likely got caught in the conflict above, and quite frankly, I don't trust Andrelious as far as I can throw a lightsaber. Dasha is on Ostara on Xolarin's *stupid* orders, and Ben is with her trying to be..." Appius raised his fingers into quotation marks. "The *great detective* he thinks he is. Crysenia is aiding the forces here on Chyron too. Shanree is assisting the Consul. Aay'han and Tracinya are here, though they are in a personal competition trying to kill as many unchained as they can frakk knows where."

"That's good at least?" Rian suggested, trying to find the silver lining. "What about Raistline?"

The Ektrosis Quaestor shrugged.

"Last I heard he was with Ben getting up to whatever shenanigans he gets up to these days. Nihlus is with Xolarin and the SRI because they are best friends forever or some kark. As for Zxyl! Frakk knows what he's doing. One minute he's here, the next minute he's not, and then he's back again. I can't keep track of him anymore."

"That is the way?" Rian said with a wry smile. The former Taldryan Consul observed Appius give him a sideways glance. The Miralian couldn't see the Mandalorian's face behind his visor, but he could assume he was less than impressed with the Juggernaut's attempt at light humour.

"This is why I told Erinyes and Zxyl a while back that Ektrosis needed its own military in case anything like this ever happened! Every other House in the Brotherhood has one, but not us. Apparently, we are too good to have one!" Appius crossed his arms and grumbled something incoherent under his breath. The language was unfamiliar to Rian, but judging by the tone of the Sorcerer's voice, he could tell he wasn't pleased about that topic.

"So, it's just us, then? Brilliant." The Elder said. The situation certainly seemed dire. How was he supposed to care for the citizens of Chyron if he didn't have the resources to do so?

Suddenly, they were interrupted by an Auburn haired woman that marched towards them. She strode past and barged through everyone in her wake until she was finally standing before the two Force users.

"Captain Orainn, a pleasure as always," Appius said, addressing the Loyalist. Crysenia gave both men a quick salute.

"Quaestor Wight, Rian, there's a situation outside," the Auburn haired woman informed

"Isn't there always?" Appius joked, receiving a glare from the Weapons Specialist in return.

"I'm serious," Crysenia continued. "Ships are touching down outside the Taldryan sector and everyone is concerned."

Chyron

39 ABY

Taldryan Sector

Rage, hate, fury, and malice. This was the difference between the meditation of a Jedi and Sith. Whilst light side meditation was usually calm and serene, like a tranquil river flowing by. Sith meditation was the opposite, like a tsunami that struck within their souls. The feelings festered and swirled within Lord Flaq like a dam ready to burst.

They would, once he had the source of his ire in his sights, revenge would be his, and the Unchained will rise to dominance. Lady Krea's right hand man would set the example. The people would kneel and submit, or the roads would be pathed with their blood.

Peace is a lie, there is only passion.

"Lord Flaq," the artificial voice of a pilot droid echoed throughout his personal chamber. "We have arrived on Chyron."

The Dark Lord didn't voice his approval and simply rose to his feet. The ramp to his personal Sith infiltrator lowered to the polluted Chyron air as the Sith donned his space-black helmet. When his feet crunched onto the soil, he was greeted by the sight of a hoard of mutated monstrosities that were his own to command. Citizens of Chyron the Unchained captured became his personal experiments. Twisted,

corrupted by the dark side, and most of all, brainwashed. Destined to obey only Flaq and his orders.

"Troopers, spread out and attack."

The order was simple, yet the beings at his whim obeyed with loyalty only General's could instill in their troops. Many ran into the darkness of the burning Industrial Sector, whilst some ran straight towards what remained of the population where the Taldryanites made their domain.

Flaq proceeded towards the Taldryan Citadel. The magnificent structure lay in his sights in all its glory. The Sith Lord would capture it and prove the Unchained dominion reigned over all else.

Chyron
Taldryan Sector
39 ABY

It did not stop.

At one moment, a flock of Sith Infiltrators and troop transports descended from the skies above. The next they knew the Taldryan sector was under attack by wave after wave of mutated beings that had no awareness and value for their own lives.

What remained of the Taldryan military gunned them down as they came in a smorgasbord of blaster fire. Appius and Rian aided innocent bystanders inside the Taldryan Citadel, though they were quickly swarmed and bystanders were captured, injured, or killed in the carnage.

"Rian!" Appius called out, drawing the former Consul's attention to him after the Miralian sliced through another Sith trooper. "Buy me some time!"

The Sorcerer's jetpack thundered to life. The flames propelled him into the air and he landed on a nearby ledge, just out of the way of the conflict. He tapped a series of codes upon his wrist communicator and waited for an answer. Truthfully? Appius didn't want to make this call. The Quaestor wanted to believe above all else he was capable of handling the situation. Perhaps it was more his ego that demanded it, to prove it to himself and the rest of the Taldryan summit. Yet, as Appius peered down to the surface below, he understood it would be a terrible mistake not to call the Taldryan summit's big red emergency button.

The Mandalorian Sorcerer kept trying to receive a connection, but after the third try, he received nothing.

"Come on, Zentru'la. Ankira gave me this number, I know it's yours!"

Almost as soon as he was done cursing at the device, a holographic image of an aged Twi'lek with perhaps the most magnificent chin in existence. His eyes were hard, and his skin a light greenish-yellow adorned with scars and wrinkles.

"Finally! General, I'm in dire need of your help," Appius exclaimed.

"Whatever it is can wait until Tavros is done with the contract at Bespin," the Elder Twi'lek stated with a harsh and slightly irritated inflection.

"Zentru'la, if you don't come here as soon as possible there won't be a Taldryan left anymore," the Sorcerer pleaded. "I need help, Taldryan needs help, and the people of Chyron need your help!"

An awkward silence passed between the two men before finally, Zentru'la let out a deep sigh.

"Fine. We are on our way."

With that, communication ceased, and the blue-hued image of the General disappeared. After taking a moment to collect himself, Appius' jetpack roared and lifted him back into the air.

Rian was a monster of a man on the battlefield. The Miralian Elder and former Consul was a force of nature not to be reckoned with. With the call of the Force on his side, he was able to harden his body at will and withstand the myriad of explosions and quakes that threatened to knock him off his feet. The former Consul finished cleaving through a Sith trooper just as Appius landed beside him.

"Now look who's dropping in," Rian couldn't help but say. "Crysenia is rounding up whatever Forces we can muster to mount a defense."

"Excellent. Tavros is on the way. We just need too..."

The Force screamed through the two Force user's minds as red plasma soared towards them. Appius activated *Ner Ara*, the weapon in his hand as twin emerald blades reflected the blaster bolts back to the shooter. The *Deflecting Slash* proved to be fatal in this case.

The blaster fire got more and more intense by the second and for a brief second, it looked like the Taldryanites were going to be overwhelmed. Then out of nowhere, everything stopped. The red-clad soldiers were more like an army of Super Battle

Droids, idly following the command of a tall, lone figure that stepped forward into sight. The dark side seeped through every part of his body, and no attempt to hide his strength. His arm was raised high into the

"Mandalorian," a strong, deep, and raspy voice sounded amongst the crackling of embers around them. "You are the one who destroyed Trebin."

The lack of question in what the Sith said was not lost on either Taldryanite. The Sorcerer glanced to his left, then to his right before he pointed back to himself.

"Who, me? Well, that depends who's asking," Appius retorted, maintaining a tight hold of his saberstaff.

"I am Lord Flaq of the Unchained, and Lady Krea's right hand man."

"Oh, so you're Krea's loyal dog?"

The Unchained Lord of the Sith barely did anything to respond. Not a twitch of a finger, nor an anger-filled intake of air. Flaq simply remained where he was, staring at the red-armoured Mandalorian like a man possessed by a new trophy.

"I challenge you to the Mandalorian right of combat," Flaq pointed to Appius. The Mandalorian's arms dropped to his side, and if anyone could see behind his visor, they would have been privy to his jaw going slack.

"Are you serious?" Appius deadpanned.

"My troops will not fire upon you without my command. I seek revenge for the death of my apprentice, and I intend to take in myself with my own two hands. Your honour demands that you accept the challenge."

"Trebin was your apprentice?" The Ektrosis Quaestor asked. "Then I'm not expecting much out of you. Rian, head inside and protect the civilians. I'll handle this."

"A-are you sure?" stammered Rian. The Mirilian wasn't sure if Appius was just confident in his abilities, brave, stupid, or a mixture of all three. The former Consul wanted to stay and fight, but even with his reputation, it was unwise to defy a direct order from a member of the Taldryan summit. The son of Taldrya understood and respected that too much.

"Yeah, what's the worst that can happen?" Appius joked, shooting the Adept a thumbs up and stepping forward to accept the challenge.

"You could die," Rian answered bluntly.

Appius shrugged in response and turned to face his fellow Taldryanite.

"Then if I do, tell Ankira I'm sorry, and... *Kar'taylir gar.*"

"*Kar'taylir gar?*" Rian repeated back, receiving a nod from the Quaestor.

"She knows what it means."

With hesitation weighing heavy in his heart, Rian retreated back inside the Taldryan Citadel and left Appius alone to face the Unchained Sith. The Sorcerer wasn't the smartest man in the galaxy

"So, Flaq was it? How about we... hey!"

The Mandalorian Force user never finished his sentence before the Force screamed a warning in the back of his mind. With a harsh, distinctive snap, a crimson-coloured lightsaber, Flaq cleaved at the Mandalorian with lethal intent and with as much physical strength as the Sith could pour into his arms. The Sorcerer was only narrowly able to avoid being hit as the blood-red blade pierced into the wall behind him. Appius slapped the Sith's arm away from him with his spare hand, though Flaq was faster than the Taldryanite expected. The Sith used the momentum to lunge at Appius again. Green clashed into red with sparks dancing from the blades, humming dangerously as the Unchained Lord kept battering and battering at the Human's impenetrable defense. To Appius' credit, he was holding up. Swinging one end of his saberstaff to parry one strike, then allowing the momentum generated to deflect the next attack with the other end.

The Mandalorian was defending himself fine, however, there were two major problems. Firstly, Appius was fatigued from all the fighting he'd been a part of up to that point. Secondly, Flaq was absolutely no push over. He was nothing like Trebin, which made finding an opening against *this* Sith all the more difficult.

Appius ducked under a horizontal swing aimed directly at his neck and activated his jetpack. The Mandalorian recognised the Unchained Sith's style as Djem So, the fifth form of lightsaber combat, and decided to use the form's lack of mobility against him. The Sorcerer launched himself up and over the Elder Sith and landed behind Flaq with a hard thud. Unfortunately for the Sorcerer, Krea's right hand man correctly predicted this, and booted the Quaestor hard in his sternum with his left foot. The action staggered the Taldryanite back.

The red-clad Mandalorian gritted his teeth. Flaq was much better than he gave him credit for. The Juggernaut amplified his strength through the Force, giving him the

might of a rage-fueled rancor. Appius had to be careful not to be hit, lest the more powerful man break his defence.

Sensing an opportunity, Appius slipped by Flaq's side when the Sith hacked at the Sorcerer's torso with big, heavy swings. The Quaestor allowed the Unchained mistress' second in command to slip past him before he bent the dark side to his will. He leapt back out of arm's reach and landed on a pile of rubble some ten feet away. He'd done it. Appius secured an elevated position against his opponent.

Lord Flaq was unperturbed by this notion. In fact, he was hardly winded by the conflict up to this point at all. The Sith stood at the bottom of the pile and waited for the Taldryanite's next move.

"What... are you waiting for?" Appius said between gasps for air, goading the Miralian Sith to take action. "I dare you to come up here!"

However, the Sith remained where he was. Despite the dark side swirling inside of him, he knew better than to risk life and limb in an idiotic attack that could harm himself more than his opponent.

"Come on, Flaq. What's the worst that could happen?" Appius taunted from up top. "Is the Dark Lord too afraid I'll do to him what I did to his apprentice?"

Flaq didn't respond, but tightened his grip on his lightsaber. The Taldryanite could feel the hot malice building up in the Sith, so he prodded further.

"Ironic isn't it? The master is as much a coward as his apprentice. I see where Trebin gets it now. You two have so much in common."

"I am *nothing* like Trebin. He was a fool and a coward," Flaq seethed venomously.

"Like I said," Appius continued. "You both have so much in common."

Dun Möch was the ancient Sith art of smack-talking your opponent into making a mistake. The Sorcerer certainly achieved that. The Quaestor's opponent broiled at his words, but unfortunately for Appius, it didn't quite have the outcome he hoped for.

Instead of leaping up to attack as Appius expected, the Unchained Sith stretched out with the Force like a tether, wrapping it around the Mandalorian before yanking him down to the concrete below.

The Force pre-warned the heavily armoured Quaestor of the impending attack, though he was unable to do anything to evade it due to his fatigue. He landed with a

hard thud on the floor and only rolled to a stop when Flaq's boot pressed into his hip. With the Force in hand, the Sith pried Appius' helmet from his head and tossed it aside, revealing a set of blue eyes and messy light brown hair beneath it.

The Sorcerer's lightsaber fell out of his hand during the fall and left Appius without a weapon. The Human Taldryanite panted and winced from the pain of the battle. Yet this Sith, whatever he was, still seemed as fresh as when the battle started.

"Your death marks the start of a new era. An era for my Master's new Sith Empire to take hold. You can consider yourself lucky. You fought valiantly, and can die with your honour intact."

Flaq raised his saber above his head and readied himself to cleave the other Human's head from his shoulders.

"You can kill me if you like. I'm sure there's a few people that would more than likely want you too. But you are an idiot if you think my death means the start of the Taldryan's demise. If anything, it will make us stronger, make *them* stronger. Taldryan would sooner be wiped into oblivion than submit to the likes of you!" Appius spat the retort with what he assumed would be his last few breaths.

The Mandalorian's act of defiance, whilst admirable, meant absolutely nothing to the Sith. Yet, he hesitated. Not because Appius' words affected him, but because he felt the presence of something approaching in the distance. The Quaestor felt it too as a small smirk graced his face.

"Tell me, Flaq. Have you ever heard of the Vornskr Battalion?" Appius asked.

"The who?"

The Sith had his question answered when high powered lasers pounded into the ground where his troopers stood. A squadron of Z-95 Headhunters soared above with the Sith troopers shooting at thin air to try and attack them. Bit by bit the Unchained were picked off as the squadrons firepower tore about the ground around them. Some of Flaq's military strength diminished in seconds, forcing the Elder Sith to turn and address the situation.

Appius sensed his opportunity when the Juggernaut turned his face away from him. The Sorcerer summoned the dark side within him and pushed forward that energy with his right hand. Flaq crashed into a nearby wall as rubble toppled on top of him.

Suddenly, a Baleen-Class freighter appeared in the skies above, coveting the ground in a large shadow like an eclipse. The Sith tore himself out of the rubble and focused his gaze on Appius, unperturbed by the appearance of the massive vessel.

The Mandalorian staggered to his feet, his chest pained him with every breath. Still, he couldn't stop now. When was the Taldryanite going to get another opportunity like this? It was time to live up to his namesake. Appius pushed what he could of the dark side of the Force through his body. The chaos and anger swirled within him as the Sorcerer brought it all to the surface. Streaks of blue and white lanced out of the fingertips of both of the Force Disciple's hands, colliding into Flaq as the energy enveloped him in tendrils of pain and torment. The lightning hissed and crackled as the Sith could do nothing more than endure the torture as it cooked his body inside and out.

A few seconds later, the first stream stopped. Unfortunately for Krea's apprentice, Appius was far from done. He sent stream after stream of lightning at the Sith. The hate and rage the Sorcerer felt for what they had done to Chyron fueled the fire in his soul, amplified further by the dark side's influence. Finally, Flaq's eyes rolled into the back of his head as his corpse was nothing more than a twitching mess on the floor.

The Ektrosis Quaestor collapsed onto his knees. His fingers burned painfully hot, and his lungs felt like they would cave in at any moment. His vision blurred, his body unable to support itself, gradually getting weaker until he rolled onto his sides and closed his eyes.

Troop transports shot out of the Baleen freighter and towards the ground below. One, in particular, led the group and when the hatch opened it revealed a man in glistening white armor. Lekku dropped behind his head as he gripped his blaster rifle tightly.

This was General Zentru'la, leader of the Vornskr Battalion.

"Circle the perimeter and protect the survivors. Keep in formation and do not let them anywhere near the Citadel!" the aged military man commanded.

Swarms of blaster fire erupted from the companies of troops the General had at his disposal. As his transport lowered him to the ground, he addressed his personal team for this endeavour.

"Aylin, I need a defence network set up in the Citadel at once. Get those security systems online," Zentru'la ordered.

"You got it!" the green-skinned woman said, giving a hearty salute before running into the building.

"Lilina, aid the injured and wounded. Masakado..."

The hound-like creature snarled at the Twi'lek General, but otherwise did nothing to defy him.

"Keep Lilina safe whilst she works."

That seemed to appease the Shistavanen. Madakado's illness relied on Lilina to stay stable. So the closer he was to her, the better.

"Ankira, you are with me. We..."

Zentru'la never finished his order before the Chiss Mandalorian's jet-boots activated and launched her across the torn battlefield. Ankira landed at Appius' side and gently shook him.

"Appius?" the Chiss shook him gently.

"Appius!?" this time she was louder, with panic evident in her voice.

"LILINA!"

Ostara

Taldryan Temple

39 ABY

Two days after the battle of Chyron

It may have been the worst quick response Taldryan ever conducted, but at least it was a response.

Consul Erinyes swirled the bottle of Tsiraki in her hand and took a good, hard swig of the strong liquor in her hand. She didn't bother with a glass. Why would she? It was just another obstacle between herself and her favourite beverage. At least this way she could cut it out.

Nighttime on Ostara was almost as beautiful as it was during the day. The silhouette of Chyron filled the sky, making it appear much closer than it was. A myriad of insects chirped across the forests and jungles that inhabited the area around the new Taldryan Citadel.

All in all, considering recent events, things could have been so much worse. Taldryan forces on Ostara and in space above were successful in pushing back the Unchained. There was damage to certain ships, and of course, casualties were

taken, but considering they were fighting a war on three fronts, the Zeltron would take their victories wherever she could take them.

Chyron was a different story. Most of the planet lay in ruins after the attack, save for the Taldryan Sector. Whilst Erinyes certainly appreciated that, much to the behest of the Caelus Government, it did nothing to help the Clans public image.

Still, they won, if you could even call what happened on Chyron a victory.

Beside Erinyes stood the Taldryan Proconsul, Xolarin. The Human's arms were folded across his chest as his eyes darted to the door across the other side of the room. The Taldryan Consul's reach of the Force detected the same thing as a man in red Mandalorian armor, sans helmet, entered the room.

"You wanted to see me, Erin?"

"Appius! Yes, come in. Take a seat."

The Mandalorian's eyes darted from the pink-skinned woman to the older Human beside her.

"Erin. Whatever you've heard, Xolarin started it."

The Proconsul rubbed the bridge of his nose at the Quaestor's response and sighed indignantly.

"Appius, sit down," Xolarin requested. The Sorcerer was almost tempted to retort, though Erinyes seemed to be in a good mood considering recent circumstances. So, he decided not to do anything to change that, and did what he was told.

"How are you feeling?" the Taldryan Consul inquired.

"A bit sore, though I've had worse," Appius answered with a slight shrug.

"Good. We need to discuss what happened on Chyron. I've read your report, and whilst I'd normally get him to do it for me," Erinyes pointed to the Human beside her, who rolled his eyes at her statement. "I decided to take a look for myself. I found some things very enlightening."

"Oh?" Appius inquired.

"Indeed, such as the section where you comment about Ektrosis' lack of military," Erinyes finished, placing her elbows on the desk and resting her chin on her hands. All of a sudden, the Ektrosis Quaestor couldn't help but bite his lip.

"We've been over this, Appius. We've been over this again and again. The answer is still no," Xolarin interjected.

"Say's you! You've been in Taldryan for how long? A week?" the Mandalorian quipped.

Xolarin groaned at his statement.

"Appius, I am fed up of arguing with you. What do I have to do to convince you that I'm not your enemy?"

"Enough. Both of you."

They dropped silent at Erinyes' order.

"I normally find the banter between you two amusing, but right now, I don't care. Appius, I brought you in here because I've thought of a compromise," a small smile graced the Consul's face when the Sorcerer raised a brow. "You are familiar with Zentru'la now, correct?"

"Yes, we," Appius paused as he searched for the right word. "Are acquainted, I suppose."

"Excellent!" the Marauder chirped. "Congratulations, Appius. The Vornskr Battalion are now contracted to you. Anything Ektrosis needs in terms of military strength can now be sourced from them directly."

"Wait, what? Are you serious?" The Quaestor asked in shock.

"Very," the Taldryan Consul answered. "All the administration will be passed to you and Ektrosis will be their new priority client. Is that acceptable to you?"

A momentary silence elapsed as the Consul and Proconsul waited for Appius' answer. The Ektrosis Quaestor sighed deeply, knowing full well even if he said no, it probably wouldn't get any better than that. It was one more thing to take care of administratively, but at least he could secure the safety of the House. Especially for that brand new Headquarters he was planning on having constructed.

"I agree."

"Wonderful! Then you may take your leave," the Consul instructed rather than ordered, though Appius knew better than to stick around. As soon as the door

closed behind the Ektrosis Quaestor, Xolarin addressed the pink-skinned woman beside him.

"Do you think he'll be satisfied?" the Arcanist asked.

"Knowing Appius? Probably not. He'll be back next week with something new he wants for the House," the Zeltron grabbed her bottle of Tsiraki and helped herself to another mouthful of the intoxicating liquid. "Still, the Vornskrs aren't my problem anymore. Let him deal with it."

The Consul smirked, satisfied at the newly gained amount of free time she had on her hands.

== END ==

