

## Once An Empire

A fiction submission for the RoS Competition: **[RoS: Escalation Phase II] Fiction - Combat Writing**

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**Dandoran**  
**Tipool City**  
**39 ABY**

He *ran*.

That's all he could do amongst the carnage that surrounded him on every corner. Buildings crumbled to the ground as the supports melted under intense fire, scorching the earth around him. The once glorious brainchild of Py'zah the Hutt was nothing more than a shattered dream. Shards of what once was laid across the city like a broken mountain trail. Screams echoed in every direction followed by bleak silence. Civilians, Principate and Revenants alike were the victims of a slaughter. Hatred seeped into every shot fired by those looking for vengeance or law and order, whilst the fire and smoke offended his nostrils. Others sought escape and peace. He didn't care. What he *did* care about was the crystalline monstrosity that followed behind him every step of the way from the heart of the main battlefield.

For he was a Tenixir Revenant, a pirate, a man that craved freedom and for that reason, he deserved to die.

The pirate took a sharp turn around the corner as three consecutive blaster bolts soared past his head and into the nearby building.

"Sithspit!" the Revenant cried out. He never wanted this, to flee for his life in the middle of a broken street. That was when the pirate stumbled over some hard debris that had fallen from the nearby rooftops. He crashed straight onto his chest, and despite the pain, the pirate scurried forwards on all fours before turning onto his back to face his pursuer, who marched towards him with their blaster rifle in hand like a servant of *Bogan*.

"Frakk! No!" the former Tenixir prisoner exclaimed as he fumbled for his sidearm. He reached out with his DL-44 and pulled the trigger, not bothering to aim first. Bolts of plasma crashed into the crystalline figure and bounced off of it like he was a wall of durasteel. It failed to stop the attacker in his approach, and when they closed the distance they kicked the blaster out of the pirate's hand as it bounced far out of reach. The monstrosity pointed its rifle at the pirate, who closed his eyes, gritted his teeth, and braced for the inevitable.

It never came.

Instead, a powerful, hissing noise penetrated his ears, like uncovered circuits had been cut from a data terminal and exposed to water. When the pirate opened his eyes, he was shocked to see a streak of flashing white and blue lightning in front of his eyes, the source of which came from directly above. It staggered the monstrosity back a few steps as it growled in pain. A heavily armoured Mandalorian in red suddenly appeared in between them, like a guardian from *Ashla* itself.

"Hope you don't mind if I *drop* in!" The heavily armoured man said with a thumbs up before turning to face the red-crystallized freak of nature before him.

It was corny as all hell, but quite frankly, the pirate didn't give two damns. This Mandalorian had intervened at the right moment and saved his life, and that was all he cared about right now.

"Are you ok?" Asked a second voice which made the pirate turn his head to the side, gazing upon a Zabradi Jedi that knelt by his side. "Are you hurt?"

The pirate shook his head, and the Zabradi man returned the gesture with a warm smile.

"Appius, he appears to be unharmed!" The Jedi shouted to the Mandalorian.

"Good. Get him out of here, Ria'd. I'll take care of... whatever this *thing* is," Appius instructed as he gazed upon the Restoration Trooper. Blood-red crystals extended out of various ligaments, leaving just enough room for the being to use its equipment. Their eye sockets had been replaced by crystals, and the way they extended made it look like they had been stabbed through them. They were easily over seven feet tall and wore heavy armor, stained with blood which trickled from where the crystals protruded from their body. Even their jaw had been penetrated by the crystals, making it unhinged, impossible to talk, and horrifying to look at. By the looks of the small number of facial details that the Taldryan Proconsul could see, it appeared the Trooper was a Human male, though how much of their biology remained was up in the air.

"Are... are you sure?" Ria'd inquired as he gazed upon the freak of nature. The Jedi felt the dark side around them, the corruption seeping out of every crystal and it unnerved him.

"Yeah. I kinda want to see what it can do. Besides, what's the worst that can happen?" Appius responded haphazardly like it was just another day at the office. The rumors of artificially enhanced Principate super soldiers had the Taldryan Proconsul curious.

"You can't be serious..." the Zabradi said with wide eyes and with disbelief lacing each word. Ria'd seriously hoped his old friend was joking, though recent times showed how much the Mandalorian had changed compared to a decade ago when they were on a team together.

That was when Appius felt it, a shift in the Force that alerted him of sudden danger. The abomination raised its blaster rifle towards Ria'd and the pirate, pressing its fingers against the trigger. The Mandalorian activated his jetpack and launched himself at the towering figure with as much momentum as he could get. The Arcanist raised his knee and connected with the crystalline creature's nose. Appius felt the crack under his attack, though the

Trooper remained on its feet as its head and back bent backwards. It pulled the trigger of its rifle, the shots firing into the air and away from their intended targets.

The Mandalorian Force User landed on his feet and raised both hands towards the overly crystallised monster. The Trooper floated in the air like gravity had no hold of it before Appius launched it towards one of the many columns that made up Tipool City's architectural design. They slammed into the circular structure spine first before dropping onto the ground, yet still landing on its feet. Appius responded to this resilience by wrapping his hold of the Force around the column like a rope. The Taldryanite strained for a few seconds as he yanked the heavy structure off of its supports, forcing it to fall on top of the Trooper. The column loudly smashed on top of the crystalline monster and pummeled it into the ground. The wreck kicked up all manner of dust and debris, all of which covered the Trooper like a makeshift grave.

Then silence. The three men stared at the wreckage whilst Appius took a deep breath, his heart thundering in his chest.

"Is... is it dead?" The pirate asked sheepishly. It looked like it was dead, no mortal being in the galaxy could survive a weight like that being dropped on it, though a cold shiver sped down his spine when the Mandalorian gave his answer.

"No."

Suddenly, the rocks that piled on top of the crystalline abomination's body began to shift as one, long, blood-red arm emerged from the rubble. The pirate went wide-eyed and shook as fear gripped hold of his head and heart.

"Ria'd, get him out of here!" Appius ordered and yelled. The Jedi wasted no time and grabbed the pirate, escaping out of sight and out of mind around the corner. The Restoration Trooper emerged from the wreckage seconds later, blood covering the few Human features Appius could see, but otherwise, it was undamaged and unharmed. The crystals that adorned its body were noticeably unscathed.

"Well, hello there. What should I call you? Tall, dark, and ugly?" The Mandalorian asked sarcastically. Unfortunately, the Restoration Trooper was not impressed. With its rifle buried somewhere under the rubble, it instead brandished its sidearm and fired from beside its hip. Shot after shot rapidly flew towards the Mandalorian. Three plasma bolts pinged against Appius' beskar armor before the Proconsul activated his jetpack and propelled himself into the air to avoid the next four.

This was the moment the Trooper was looking for. Underneath part of the crystal armor on its arms lay a set of vambraces familiar to Mandalorians. A thin, near-invisible tether shot out of them and wrapped around Appius' torso, stopping him from going any higher.

"What the hell!?" The Arcanist exclaimed, but before he could work out what was happening, the Crystalline Trooper yanked on the tether with all its strength and plummeted Appius over its head, forcing him to crash into the rubble of the column behind the Trooper.

The Proconsul had braced for the impact, but it didn't stop the ringing in Appius' ears as he landed flat on his chest. For a few seconds, the Mandalorian found it hard to breathe as he tried to pull himself up from the jagged stones he landed on. Unfortunately, the Force Disciple would not get the moments of reprieve he was hoping for. The Trooper pulled the Mandalorian towards it, dragging the Force User across the rough, unforgiving wreckage until he lay in front of the crystalline figure.

"Ow..." Appius managed to weakly say. He flipped over onto his back with some effort so he could see as the abominable Restorer forcefully removed the beskar helmet from the Taldryanite's head. In a raw display of power, the Trooper began to bend the beskar in his hands. It was slow, but soon the helmet was nothing more than a creaky, crumpled mess in the hulking monster's hands. A bead of sweat dripped down Appius' forehead as he watched the feat with his own eyes, a terrible, knotting feeling formed in his gut as the Savant realised just how much trouble he was in.

"Hey! Do you have any idea how expensive that was!?" The Mandalorian scolded. The crystalline figure responded by pulling an arm back, the Force alarming Appius through his subconscious.

*Sithspit!!!* The Arcanist thought to himself as he moved his head out of the way of the incoming fist. It slammed into the stone slab beside Appius' head, cracking it in the process. In an act of desperation, he summoned the tendrils of the Dark side to his fingertips. Hate, pain, loss, grief and fury became his closest ally as he poured all those feelings and lanced them out towards the Trooper. The abominable creation became engulfed in a smorgasbord of lightning that coursed throughout the body. The Trooper recoiled in pain, its unhinged jaw became loose, like it wanted to scream but couldn't. The flesh, what little there was of it, bubbled under the intense heat and cooked like it was on an open fire. The smell of burning meat filled the air around them as Appius used the opportunity to retrieve his weapon from his hip. The Mandalorian pressed the ignition switch as a bright, green blade ruptured out of one side of the hilt. Appius cut the tether that kept him bound to the crystalline being and slowly returned to his feet. The Savant took a deep breath after deep breath as he steadied himself.

"Ok, note to self. Letting that thing near me is *bad*," the Arcanist commented more for his own peace of mind rather than anything else. Not that it mattered. Appius was confident he had the advantage. There weren't many that could take a full power blast of *Force Lightning* from point-blank and walk afterwards, much less fight.

The Mandalorian Force User was consequently aghast when he not only watched the Restoration Trooper remain upright, standing, and staring at him as its mouth curved into a twisted smirk, but the wounds Appius inflicted slowly healed. Within seconds, the Trooper was back in pristine condition whilst the Taldryanite gasped for breath.

"What the hell did they do?" Appius asked himself. The Mandalorian understood the Restorer Bloc of the Severian Principate wanted the Tenixir Revenants dead and destroyed at any cost, but witnessing it was disturbing to say the least.

"Once an Empire, always an Empire..." the Mandalorian mumbled. He needed to end the fight quickly if he had any hope of winning. The Trooper's reserves might have been infinite, but even as an Arcanist, Appius' were not, and the longer this dragged on, the worse it was going to get for the Proconsul.

The Mandalorian was alerted by the warning of danger blaring through his subconscious. The Trooper thrust forward its arm, sending a jet of flames propelling towards the Arcanist. Appius thrust his left hand forward and summoned the Force through his body. The fire slammed into an invisible wall and dispersed around the Mandalorian, heating his armor to scorching temperatures, but otherwise avoiding the Arcanist altogether.

Appius gasped and grunted, struggling to maintain his concentration. Finally, the flamethrower emptied and the Arcanist was relieved to be able to let go of the strain. He dropped to his knees, sweat dripping down his face from the intense heat moments earlier and Force fatigue setting in. The ringing in the Taldryanite's ears returned, and he barely registered the round, circular object that bounced towards him until it clanged against his armor. It beeped and flashed red in front of the Mandalorian as panic overcame him.

"FRAKK!" Appius bellowed, activating his jetpack and attempting to leap out of the way of the incoming explosion. The resulting shockwave sent the Mandalorian flying off the fallen Column and down to the city Street below. He hit the stone road with a hard thud and failed to stop his momentum. Crashing through a set of wooden stalls that were set up and abandoned at the side of the road, when he finally rolled to a stop seconds later, he felt the taste of iron in his mouth and a faint trickle of red dripped from his face. The side of his head was charred by the blast, and the Mandalorian could feel the splinters in his flesh. He'd managed to save himself by leaping back in time, though the damage the thermal detonator inflicted was now taking its toll. The Force User's lightsaber had rolled out of his hand in the fall and was out of reach a few feet away. The Arcanist placed one hand on the ground and tried to force himself up. The Mandalorian managed to pull himself onto his knees just in time to witness the Restoration Trooper slowly walk towards him. Every part of his body burned and ached like he'd been stretched out on a rack. The destruction around the two sang the story of their fight, which was coming to its unfortunate end.

The Mandalorian tried to call his weapon to his hand, but he couldn't summon the Force to his will. His reserves had run dry, and right now he was nothing more than heavily armored target practice. However, the Loyalist Trooper stopped in its approach when it stepped next to Appius' lightsaber. It bent down and picked up the weapon, activating the ignition switch as two emerald blades erupted out of both sides of the hilt.

"Kark..." the Expansionist member swore. It looked like he was going to be killed by his own weapon. Appius scrambled for something, anything that might at least hold the crystalline Restorer at bay. The Taldryanite tried to activate his jetpack, which unfortunately was damaged in his first fall and rendered useless. That was when the Savant's right ankle tapped against something he didn't realize was there. When he reached back, the Mandalorian grabbed hold of the blaster that belonged to the pirate they had rescued. Appius pointed the weapon at the Trooper and he pulled the trigger once, twice, three times, but his aim was downright awful and not a single shot hit its mark.

Appius threw the infernal weapon at the Restoration Trooper out of frustration and desperation. The blaster clanged against the blood-red crystals adorning the Restorer's chest before dropping to the floor. The crystalline Human stomped on it as it walked past, snapping it in twain.

The Mandalorian could do nothing else but wait. Death and destruction continued to rain upon the city of Tipool as Appius closed his eyes and remained on his knees. With nothing else he could do, he tapped into the power of the Living Force. The Arcanist could feel it, all of it. The lives of those that fought and died in the city being snuffed out like they were flames flickering on a candle. He felt the walls that tumbled down around him, the Force that flowed through the crystals of not just the Trooper, but selected beings across Dandoran.

*I can't die... not yet... I refuse!*

Thoughts of Ankira and Shi'Kar, their Foundling, powered him as the Force flowed through his veins. The Expansionists that sought peace. Ria'd, Aylin, Vrakit, Rian, he couldn't fail them. Just when he finally was getting his life back on track, it was about to be taken away again.

*Come on... get... up!*

The Trooper towered over the Arcanist and pressed its blaster against Appius' forehead. Cold and uncaring, but loyal to its cause. All those who supported the Tenexir Revenants were to be destroyed, without question. Good soldiers follow orders. The crystalline monstrosity pressed its jewelled finger over the trigger when the Mandalorian's eyes snapped open wide, the Force fatigue he experienced now gone.

"NOT TODAY, YOU ABOMINABLE FREAK!" Appius roared and thrust forward with both arms as a quick, painful burst of lightning shot out of his fingertips. It was only a rapid jolt, but it was enough to force the Trooper to relinquish its hold on Appius' lightsaber as it recoiled from the shock. The hilt dropped to the ground in front of the Arcanist, who grabbed hold of the weapon and forced himself onto his feet, limbs searing with pain from his injuries. The Mandalorian Force User pressed one end of his saberstaff under the Restorer's chin whilst it was still dazed and activated the ignition switch. A single, jade coloured blade pierced through the crystalline monster's jaw through its flesh and bone and out of the top of its skull, narrowly avoiding the crystals that lay atop its scalp. He retracted the weapon and staggered back, letting the hulking figure collapse to the floor in a crumpled mess.

The Savant carefully inched towards the corpse with ragged breathing and pain wracking his body. Appius was almost certain it was dead. The Arcanist couldn't sense any life from its body, but he'd been surprised more than once today, and Farrin always told him to expect the unexpected.

Once the Proconsul was satisfied that the Restorer wasn't suddenly going to come back to life, he proceeded by giving the body a stiff kick with his right foot.

"That was for my helmet, *di'kut*," Appius seethed, venom lacing each word. Explosions and blaster fire echoed in the distance like the warnings of an approaching storm. It seemed the

fight between the Severian Principate and the Tenixir Revenants had escalated further and were closing in quickly on Appius' location.

With no time to lose, the heavily armored Mandalorian hobbled away from the scene, hoping to find somewhere to have a chance to recover before he had to fight again.

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