

OTHERSPACE

A fiction submission written by Appius "Zappius" Wight of Clan Taldryan.

Wild Space
Unknown Area
39 ABY

If there was one thing Appius had learned in the last two years, it was that things were never quite as simple as they appeared on the surface. From Vizsla to Taldryan and even his tenure as one of the Headmistress' staff members, there was always a little *quid pro quo* attached to every position he'd ever had. The Mandalorian's time as Magistrate was no different, and Ciara was not the kind of woman to let something slip through her fingers if it still proved useful to her.

That was why Appius was here, not in the Caelus System leading Clan Taldryan as its new Consul, but here in the middle of Wild Space piloting an acquired X-Wing for the sole purpose of experimentation. They needed a somewhat capable pilot and Appius, Annoyingly, fit the bill.

'Why can't you get Erinyes to do it?' He'd wanted to protest. She was the kriffing Praetor for crying out loud! It'd be good for her to do something other than sitting at her desk drinking glass after glass after tsiraki until she went, dare he say it, *pink* in the face!

Alas, Erinyes, even intoxicated, was the type of person to actively avoid being someone's errand girl if she could help it. If it didn't involve alcohol, dancing girls, lightsabers, or a mixture of all three in some capacity, it was near-impossible to get the Zeltron to give a damn.

"At least they gave me an astrodroid to keep me company..." Appius mused to the happy beeps of the little, yellow R-3 astromech unit attached to the craft. "How are you doing, little guy?"

After a few more beeps and boops, a message appeared on the central computer.

'I am very good, master! I'm looking forward to serving you in the best capacity I can!'

"You are certainly enthusiastic!" Appius chuckled, a small smile forming on his face. "Well, I'm Appius, R-3. I'm looking forward to this little adventure with you!"

"I'm glad to see you two are getting along."

The voice came through on the centre console, snapping Appius to its immediate attention. The voice was male, and the new Taldryan Consul recognised it as the voice of the man that replaced him as Ciara's Magistrate.

"Xantros," Appius replied. "I was starting to think you had forgotten about me."

"Nonsense. I was simply making final preparations."

The voice of his replacement boomed through the cockpit in its usual matter-of-fact tone.

'I swear... I was SO much more fun when I was on the staff...' Appius mused to himself.

"The objective is as follows; your X-Wing has been fitted with a new experimental type of hyperdrive said to be able to traverse between dimensions. You are to make the jump to hyperspace and emerge from the other side. R-3 will then take an immediate recording of your surroundings, then you will initiate the jump once again and return as soon as the objective is complete. Is that clear?" Xantros instructed like he was reading from a datapad.

"Crystal," Appius responded with his usual bout of confidence. "What's the worst that could happen?"

"You could be incinerated, crushed, blown up, or suffocated. Depending on the situation," Xantros answered bluntly.

"Wonderful... so, the usual then?" Appius retorted sarcastically, allowing himself a small chuckle. Working for Ciara always did present itself with its fair share of challenges.

He still remembered the SARLACC...

The R-3 unit beeped and booped, allowing another message to appear on his centre console.

'Don't worry, Master! I won't let anything bad happen to you! I have been involved in the prototype test runs for this mission, and they've only had to repair me six times!'

That did not fill Appius with confidence.

"If you would, please engage the thrusters on the X-Wing and prepare for the jump to hyperspace," Xantros ordered as the Taldryanite complied and prepared himself. *"Initiate the jump in five..."*

Appius placed both hands on the centre console.

"Four..."

The Consul flicked several switches as all power diverted to the hyperdrive.

"Three..."

Buzzing, whirring, and clanging could be heard from behind him.

"Two..."

R-3 beeped and chirped excitedly, ready for its next big adventure.

"One..."

Appius took a deep breath...

"Enter Hyperspace!"

As the X-Wing vanished from sight.

Hyperspace was one of the features of interstellar travel that was often overlooked by the masses of the universe. In hours, one could travel at lightspeed from one side of the galaxy to the other in relative comfort. These were usually trips that would take eons without access to this level of technology.

Normally, the whirling blue vortex that greeted those that travelled through the makeshift wormholes was the immediate sign that one could lower the power to the rest of their ship, turn off the lights, and maybe get a little shut-eye.

Instead, the sight that greeted Appius was unlike anything that the Mandalorian saw. The X-Wing shook like a toddler was playing with its favourite toy. The usual blue of hyperspace was tainted with a collection of reds, purples and greens, like the Force itself was bleeding. R-3 shrieked something fierce, even over the blaring alarms that filled the fighters' cockpit. Appius scrambled to do something, *anything* that could stop it before the pressure tore the ship apart and he became a clump of guts and organs travelling through the universe at lightspeed!

Thankfully, his prayers were answered when they left hyperspace. Though, immediately, the Taldryan Consul could tell something was very wrong. The usual, endless starry universe was gone. The little lights had been flickered out like someone had snubbed out the galaxy. What existed was a sheet of black with only one planet, one single lone planet in this endless abyss. The only light came from the huge, gravitational entity that the planet seemed to be swirling around. It was no sun, though Appius had no idea what it was.

*'A BLACK HOLE! A BLACK HOLE! IT'S ABSORBING THE LIGHT OF THIS DIMENSION!
THIS IS AN INCREDIBLE FIND!'*

Appius observed the message on the centre console as R-3 jittered and jumped with excitement.

"I have a bad feeling about this..." the Taldryan Consul muttered to himself. Something definitely felt off about the place. Probably the massive Black Hole that threatened to crush them if they lingered too close. "Right, we got what we needed. Mission accomplished. Let's get out of here."

Appius readied to initiate the jump to hyperspace, but instead of disappearing into the vortex of red, green, and purple like before, nothing happened, save for the dying whirring of machinery behind his ears.

"Oh, that's not good..." Appius commented.

"Hyperdrive is damaged, we will need to land so I can make the necessary repairs. Don't worry, Master! I had to repair the X-Wing thirteen times during early testing! Who knew crash landings could cause so much damage?" The R-3 unit chirped happily.

"Please don't remind me," Appius requested as sweat dripped from his brow.

Suddenly, the X-Wing shook as the planet's gravitational pull drew the ship towards its darkened surface.

"Sithspit!" Called Appius as he tried to steady the ship on its descent. "R-3! Do something!"

The little astromech screeched and made a myriad of noises that could have deafened those with sensitive ears. Unfortunately, Appius had no time to look to the computer screen for a translation as the X-Wing crashed onto the planet's surface. It skidded and ground across the soil before coming to a stop amongst a selection of dead trees.

"You know what, R-3? I've had worse landings," the Consul stated as he opened the hatch to the fighter. The little astromech launched itself out the X-Wing's astromech port and circled round to the side of the ship.

"It's a bit dark. Let's see if I can do something about that..." Appius input the commands on his armor as the golden lightning bolt on his chest began to glow brightly. "There we go! They always told me my armor looked stupid, but look who's laughing now! It's not only stylish, but practical too!"

If R-3 could pull a concerned look, it would have done right there and then.

"Right then, let's take a look..."

Appius took note of the myriad of scratches and dents the X-Wing now had. Wires hung out of the sides, disconnected from the rest of the ship. The Mandalorian kicked the side of the ship with his foot as part of the durasteel plating fell off.

"Yep. Definitely broken," Appius confirmed. It was times like this he wished he had Aylin's skillet, or even Aylin just here herself. The Taldryan Consul knew next to nothing about ship repairs, and Ankira was going to skin him alive if he didn't manage to get home to help look after their Foundling.

Getting on Ankira's bad side was the last thing Appius wanted. She was scary when she was mad. He then turned to the little astromech at his side. "Think you can fix it?"

R-3 gave a happy chirp as it set about doing its repairs to the ship and the hyperdrive. It occurred to Appius that the little astromech was simply programmed to enjoy helping its master, whoever that may be at that current point in time. It was a pleasant change of pace from most astromechs he had the displeasure of having to work with.

"Hey, R-3? How about when all this is said and done you come with me? I could use a little helper like you around the Taldryan Citadel."

The astromech chirped happily, giving all the confirmation Appius needed. It would be nice to have a little helper around. Especially with the long hours he spent in his office. As much as he hated to admit it, he got lonely. Especially when the few people he *did* see only wanted something from him.

Such were the joys of leadership...

SNAP!

A tree branch snapped just a few feet away and brought Appius attention behind him. Reaching out with the Force, the Taldryanite could indeed sense the presence of something circling them. It wasn't just one either, it was like a colony of ants had descended upon their location. The Mandalorian retrieved the Darksaber-inspired lightsaber from his hip and pressed the ignition. An emerald blade pierced through more of the darkness as Appius readied to defend himself, his heart thundering in his chest as he waited for any sign of danger.

What leapt out of the darkness could only be described as a creature straight out of a horror holofilm that Appius and Ankira occasionally watched together. An arachnid-like being with four arms jumped out of the darkness towards the Taldryan Consul, spear in hand, looking to impale the Human.

"SITHSPIT!" Appius cried out. Luckily, the Force warned him of the impending strike. The beast was massive, and thus was unable to avoid the Force User separating its torso from the rest of its body as it fell to the ground in two pieces beside the X-Wing.

R-3 let out a frightened shriek as distinctive chanting could be heard amongst the darkness. Even the light emitted from both Appius' armor and lightsaber couldn't reveal the beasts until they all jumped him together.

"Frakk! NO!" the former Magistrate cried out. Appius did the only thing he could do in this situation and activate his jetpack. Once airborne, he drew his power into the palm of his hand and began to descend at a rapid pace. The Mandalorian Force User slammed his hand into the soil below, creating a massive shock wave that sent the group of monstrous beings off their feet.

"R-3! Are you done!? We need to get out of here, NOW!"

Appius was a confident warrior, but even he knew fighting against the endless horde that began to arrive was the equivalent of asking to be killed. The little astromech beeped and danced on the spot, rocking back and forth, which the Taldryanite took as confirmation.

The Taldryan Consul launched himself into the cockpit and awaited R-3 to dock himself where all astromechs usually go in this type of craft. That's when Appius heard the violent screeching coming from the nearby woods. One of the spider-sequence beings scurried towards the astromech like a furious scorpion, metal clanging against the rocks as it closed the gap between itself and its target. R-3 let out a horrifying shriek as it was impaled by the metallic spear in the creature's hand. Sparks flared and burst from the astromech unit's torn circuitry before it was tossed aside, broken beyond repair.

"R-3!" Appius shouted, wide-eyed at the destruction of his short-time robotic companion. "SITHSPIT!"

Heat began to rise within the Mandalorian. One not seen since his turn to the dark side. Anger at the loss of a companion, someone he was supposed to take care of, and grief that he was powerless to stop it. It rose and rose until Appius could do the only thing he could do.

The Mandalorian powered up the X-Wing and took flight before the ship could be swarmed. He needed to inform the Brotherhood of this place immediately. Unfortunately one of the hideous creatures leapt up onto the nose of the ship, destabilising it in its ascent.

"Oh no you don't!" Appius exclaimed as the latch to the cockpit opened and exposed the Consul not only to the outside world, but the arachnid monstrosity hell-bent on putting his head on a pike. With one hand extended towards the creature, the Mandalorian Force User channelled the Force through his body like a superconductive battery. Lightning hissed and sparked violently as it lanced out of the Consul's fingers and into the monster on his ship. It shrieked violently as electricity coursed through each and every part of its body, cooking it inside and out. The arachnid fell off the X-Wing and slammed thirty feet into the ground below.

With no more resistance, Appius closed the hatch and turned back in the direction from which he came.

'I really hope this works...'

He initiated the hyperdrive, prayed that R-3 had fixed it, and then shot off into the vortex of blue, green and purple.

Shadow Academy

Arx

39 ABY

"It sounds like what you encountered were members of the Charon species. They are known for their violent and unpredictable nature."

"What makes you say that? The fact I was attacked or the fact that R-3 didn't make it back?"

Appius responded to Xantros' statement with his usual quip of sarcasm. Given recent events, Appius had half a mind to give Xantros a healthy dose of *Force Lightning* for putting him through it all. Alas, he did not want to face the wrath of the Headmistress and her Praetor, both of whom were Elders of the Brotherhood, the latter of which was also the former Taldryan Consul. It had been twenty-four hours since the Mandalorian had returned to this realm, and he was immediately brought to the Shadow Academy for questioning.

Xantros sat at a desk that Appius was very familiar with. It was the one that he himself used when he himself was Ciara's Magistrate. A long wooden desk, carefully carved with the insignia of the Shadow Academy carved into its maroon-coloured wood. It was the desk for the Academy's Magistrate of Lore.

"Both," Xantros answered Appius' question bluntly, not allowing himself to be goaded by the Taldryanite's taunts. "However, I have passed this up to Ciara and she is pleased with your findings. Future expeditions into Otherspace will have to be arranged."

"Wait... Otherspace? You frakking KNEW where I was going the whole time, didn't you!?" Appius accused, rising from his seat. To Xantros' credit, he remained calm and stoic.

"Of course. Would you have agreed to venture forth in this expedition if you knew about the perils?" Inquired the noseless Duros. When Appius didn't immediately retort, he had his answer. "Exactly. You are dismissed for now, but we may require your services in the future, Consul. The Shadow Academy appreciates all the hard work you continue to do."

"I'm sure it does..." Appius grumbled as he left the office. His next stop was the nearest place that sold some form of alcohol, preferably string so he could forget about this whole ordeal.

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