

## **Best Friends**

A Fiction written and submitted by Appius "Zappius" Wight.

---

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to kill your best friend? That certain somebody whose shoulder you leant on in your darkest hours when tears threatened to drop. That certain somebody you laughed with, cried with, shared philosophies and ideals with, and was someone you considered a brother or a sister?

Ria'd had. The questions raced through his mind like they were stuck on repeat as he stalked the hallways of the Taldryan Citadel. Weeks of preparation had been leading to this exact moment, and Ria'd's master had painstakingly observed every Taldryan patrol inside and outside of the Citadel to determine the best time to sneak in undetected. Naturally, it was nighttime, and with Taldryan still feeling the effects of recent security breaches, now was the best time to infiltrate amongst the chaos. Darkness consumed the jungle moon of Ostara, but it might as well have been the middle of the afternoon with how awake the Zabrak was. Adrenaline poured through his body as his twin hearts thundered in his chest like they threatened to break his ribs.

*Tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump.*

Over and over again they beat, and the Jedi could swear he felt it in his ears.

*'I can do this. I **have** to do this for the sake of the galaxy.'*

The Jedi's attempt at self-encouragement drive him forward as he slowly made his way towards his target. Their signature in the Force felt oh so familiar to him, yet different at the same time. It was heavier, and more intense than the Zabrak ever remembered, like a fire was burning inside of the man in question. It was more damning evidence of what Ria'd had suspected. Appius Wight, his old friend and Jedi comrade, was willingly using the dark side of the Force. As such, he needed to be destroyed.

This would be the Zabrak Jedi's ultimate test for his beliefs and ideals. If he could do it, if he could slay his best friend, a former Jedi who had turned to the dark side, then Ria'd would know he was on the right path, that he was strong enough to realise his dream of a galaxy free from the evil of the dark side of the Force and all those who used it.

He finally reached the Consul's office at the very heart of the Citadel. It was heavily guarded by stormtroopers, of course, but with the Jedi cloaking himself in the Force, he was easily able to slip by undetected.

Inside was just about as extravagant as one would expect for Taldryan's Head of State. Scarlett-coloured carpet stretched from one side of the room to the other whilst the side walls held a myriad of relics from time immemorial. Ria'd had no clue what the majority of them were, nor did he care. The Jedi's prize was standing in front of him in a set of crimson Mandalorian armor, sans helmet, talking with what appeared to be a blue-skinned Aleena who stood atop a desk of pure majestic mahogany. Ria'd clung to the nearby wall and did what he'd been doing up to this point, concealing his signature in the Force and hiding in plain sight.

"Teebu has informed me that things are proceeding as planned. Oh, and Crysenia thanks you for her two squads of X-Wings, by the way. I don't see why we couldn't have just gotten some new TIE Fighters instead. They are much more efficient," the Aleena couldn't help but comment. "House Thanatos are planning to scour the remaining temples here on Ostara for any sign of the Unchained."

"Good. The last thing we need is to get blindsided *again*. Thank you, Justinios. We'll reconvene tomorrow and go over our plans for the next few months. Hey! Maybe I'll get some sleep tonight? You never know!" Appius declared with a small smirk. A look that Ria'd recognised from nearly a decade prior.

"With a toddler in your life? I doubt it," Justinios responded. "See you in the morning. Are you sure you don't want any help dealing with our unwanted *guest*?"

Ria'd's eyes widened. Had he been caught?

"No. Whoever or whatever it is, I'll deal with it. Gives me a chance to stretch my legs," Appius answered.

With that, the Taldryan Proconsul hopped off of the desk and left the room, leaving Appius alone with his potential killer. This would have been the perfect opportunity for Ria'd to enact his plan and strike first whilst the Consul was unaware of the Jedi's presence. Hell, if this went well, Appius would be dead before he knew who had killed him, but something the Aleena said gave the Zabrak pause.

*'A toddler? Appius has a child?'*

Ria'd's suspicions were confirmed when the blue-hued image of a Chiss woman appeared above Appius' desk. In her arms was a small Pantoran girl with lilac hair and the sweetest smile on her face.

"Daddy!" the girl cheered, holding out her arms out towards the Mandalorian as if she could touch him.

"Hi, Shi'Kar! Have you been good for your mother?" Appius responded with a smile equally as big as the little girl's, though at his question, the girl's face faltered.

'Mother?' So many questions raced through Ria'd's mind. If Appius was the father, and the Chiss was the mother, then how was the child Pantoran? Unless of course, she was adopted.

"No... I played with mummy's blasters again," Shi'Kar lamented with a pout.

"And what have your *buir* said about that?" the Chiss woman spoke.

"Don't play with them," the girl mumbled softly, though Appius couldn't repress the small chuckle that escaped his lips.

"You have her wrapped around your fingers, Ankira. You're a great mother," the Mandalorian said, and if Ria'd didn't know any better, he could have sworn he saw a slight purple tint in the Chiss' cheeks. "I'm nearly done for the day, so I'll be home shortly."

This was it. If the Jedi was going to act, he needed to do it now before Appius goy away. Ria'd would have preferred no one to witness Appius' death, especially an innocent girl, but the Zabrak knew he wasn't going to get another chance like this.

*'The least I can do is make this swift and painless, for their sake.'* Ria'd finally mused, unclipped the curved hilt lightsaber from his waist and let it rest comfortably in his hand. The *Sithslayer's* white blade ruptured out of the hilt as Read revealed himself from the cover of the Force and lunged towards Appius' aiming for the Mandalorian's heart.

"Appius!"

"Daddy!"

Appius spun after hearing the sabers ignition, and managed to grab hold of the Jedi's wrist before the lightsaber could make contact with his armor.

"Ria'd!?" Appius exclaimed.

The Zabrak responded by pouring the Force into his body, bending his knees, and delivering a swift, hard kick to the golden lightning bolt on the Taldryan Consul's armor. Thanks to the added strength behind the attack, Appius was knocked over

the elegant desk and over to the other side, kicking up the ever-growing mountain of paperwork.

"Appius! Hold on, I'll be right there!" Ankira shouted as communications ceased.

Ria'd stretched out with the Force and wrapped that mystical power around the desk itself like a crane. He slowly gestured with his left hand as the mahogany piece of furniture began to lift into the air before the Jedi promptly launched it out of the giant, glass window.

Shards of glass rained down on the carpet surrounding the Taldryan Consul. Appius quickly returned to his feet, just in time to see Ria'd thrust forward with his lightsaber. The Mandalorian quickly grabbed hold of the hand holding the lightsaber and snapped it back, forcing the Jedi to relinquish his hold of the deadly weapon. The Force Disciple then pulled the Zabrak towards him and locked Ria'd's dominant arm so he couldn't use it. As Appius readied to deck Ria'd in his nose, but the Zabrak retaliated with a swift, open-handed jab to the Consul's throat.

The sudden pain and inability to breathe jolted Appius and made him release his grip on Ria'd. The Zabrak reached out with the Force and summoned the *Sithslayer* back to his hand, but that action gave the Mandalorian the moment he needed to pour the Force through his body and tackle Ria'd on, and then subsequently through the mahogany desk. Wood splintered and shattered on impact as Ria'd gasped for air.

"What... in... the HELL IS THE MEANING OF THIS, RIA'D!?" Appius scolded, being the first to return to his feet. "So, you're the infiltrator!?"

The Consul staggered away from the wreckage of wood, glass, and paper, giving himself some distance from the Jedi.

Ria'd slowly returned to his feet, a small trickle of blood seeping out of a small cut just above his left eye. Regardless, his face remained almost expressionless.

"I am simply doing what needs to be done," Ria'd answered, stepping out of the wreckage.

"What needs to be done? What are you talking about?" Appius inquired.

"The dark side is a plague on this galaxy that needs to be eradicated. Anyone who uses it must be destroyed if we are to know true peace."

"Peace? Is that what you call this, Ria'd? Attacking your old friend, trying to kill him in front of his family in cold blood is an act of peace!?" Appius snapped back,

though the Consul did notice the Jedi's body tense slightly under his words. "Who put you up to this? You aren't a murderer, or at least you weren't once upon a time. What happened?"

"Nothing of concern to you," the Jedi retorted. The only thing that matters now is that the dark side, and all those that use it, are destroyed."

The Taldryan Consul's eyes widened. "Is that what this is about? Ria'd, using the dark side doesn't inherently make one evil!"

"Enough of your lies!" the Zabrak spat, breaking his usual calm demeanour. Ria'd seized his opportunity and stepped forward into striking range of Appius.

Suddenly, the Force rang through the Jedi's subconscious. On instinct, Ria'd raised his saber just in time to absorb the stream of lightning that shot out of Appius' fingertips. The electricity hissed more violently than any snake in the known galaxy, and the harmful intent behind it was all the more clear.

This display of anger, hate, and darkness justified everything to Ria'd. Now he knew he was on the right path.

Now he knew he could kill his best friend, for the good of the galaxy.

Seconds later, the lightning stream stopped. Appius was all the more willing to try again, but the Jedi had already put his plan into motion. Instead of the violent storm that manifested from the Taldryan Consul before, it was much tamer, and easier to guard against. Ria'd advanced despite the shock on Appius' face. The suppression had worked, and the Mandalorian tapping into the Force was like trying to drink a glass of water through a very thin straw. Not impossible, but extremely difficult.

Appius had no choice but to draw upon his Darksaber-inspired lightsabers if he had any hope to defend himself. If there was anyone who could find the weak points in the Mandalorian's beskar armor, it was a Makashi specialist.

Despite how many times the two of them had scarred together in their late teens, Appius had never managed to defeat Ria'd. Niman in particular was simply ineffective against the quick, precise strikes and elegant footwork that form two possessed. However, Appius had trained diligently under Farrin Xies Tarantae, and was able to hold his ground with his expertise in Jar'Kai. It was a fact that surprised Ria'd when, for the first time, the Jedi found himself on the backfoot in a lightsaber duel with his former comrade. Green crashed against white, sparking and slicing into the walls as Appius kept up his haphazard assault. Ria'd found it incredibly difficult to find an opening, and whenever there was one, the Mandalorian Force

User would make up for the momentary lapse in judgement by using his second weaponto defend himself. The Jedi might have been slightly faster, but that didn't mean anything if he couldn't hit his mark. Still, without the Force, Appius quickly found himself at a disadvantage, and he had to disengage before Ria'd's weapon cut through his lightsabers.

Suddenly, the doors to the Consul's office burst open, and in entered a woman in Mandalorian armor almost as white as snow, barring the two red streaks that dropped down her right side. She was accompanied by a small battalion of Taldryan Stormtroopers who surrounded the office, blaster rifles primed and aimed at the Zabrak intruder.

"Ankira..." was all Appius managed to say before the Chiss Mandalorian shot the Zabrak in the thigh with her Westar-35. Ria'd dropped to the ground, clutching his now damaged leg and gasped in pain.

The Jedi managed to cast a look towards his attacker as she stomped towards him, the barrel of her blaster pointing between his eyes.

"Wait, Ankira! Don't kill him," Appius pleaded.

"Why not?" the Chiss Mandalorian demanded to know.

"Remember when I told you about Ria'd?"

Ankira looked down at the fallen Zabrak and then back to Appius.

"Are you serious? That's him?" She questioned, getting a nod from Appius reluctantly, and with a heavy sigh, she relented and joined Appius at his side.

"Are you OK?" Ankira asked softly.

"Yes, I'm fine," Appius answered pressing his forehead to her helmet.

"Sir!" One of the Stormtroopers stepped forward, their armor glistening in the light of the office. "What are your orders?"

"Have him taken to the Ektrosis Tower for questioning, but I want him unharmed. I wish to deal with him myself," the Taldryan Consul ordered without taking his eyes off his injured comrade.

Ria'd was escorted out of the Consul's office by the Stormtroopers, but not before giving Appius a look, the kind of look that said *'you will regret not killing me.'*

The Consul took one last look in his office for the evening.

"Before I forget, have someone clean this mess up," Appius ordered, finally leaving the office with Ankira in tow.

**-END-**