

The Force was often both a blessing and a curse.

His physical senses perceived the unfurling bedlam in a veritable cacophony of shrieks of terror mixed with the burnt-rubber scent of blown out circuit breakers, recycled artificial air growing thick and stale, and the fading light all across the underwater city. Through the Force, however, he could *feel* the sharp, crystalline, cut-glass clarity of *chaos*.

It had actually been quiet for what could have been thirty seconds or ten minutes as the collective city held its breath. Everything would be okay if the backup generators kicked in...

They hadn't.

That was when it started. Voices cried out. Panic detonated like a stormcloud crashing into an otherwise sunny summer day. Frantic footsteps, dialects from different species now confronted with the very real, mortal understanding that power was out in an underwater bubble beneath the oceans of Selen.

Local law enforcement should have been jumping to take control. Except they weren't, or perhaps they were simply overwhelmed just like everyone else.

Marick Tyris Arconae stood alone amidst the growing miasma of fear and uncertainty like an ancient cliff face weathering the onslaught of a tsunami. Ashen hair shifted as too-blue eyes looked around, taking everything in, a cloth canvas shopping bag gripped in one hand just beneath his dark cloak.

And then the sound of transparisteel smashing pierced the shouts and screams, almost like a starting bell that would surely be followed by the sound of blaster bolts and martial unrest.

Marick sighed. The retired spymaster and former Shadow Lord was no stranger to crisis. He had just secretly been hoping for a little more time...a little more time to enjoy his new life and the opportunity he had been given. He mutely glanced down at the bag, and the sparkling stuffed animal that was peeking its twin-horns out.

Apparently, Celeste had been the only place in Dajorra that had any remaining stock of the *My Little Arconie* character called "Parity", so Marick had made the trek to purchase one for Kirra. It was her favorite show and he regretted knowing all the words to the introduction song. The Hapan slowly shifted the canvas bag until it was securely moved to the small of his back and beneath his cloak.

Then, as if on queue, the last remaining auxiliary power faded and everything around him was plunged into darkness.



You Can't Save Them All



Celeset City
Entertainment District
Selen
40ABY

Outside one of the more lavish hotels, which happened to be across from the large shopping mall, Marick *was* able to spot two unlikely faces. He did not even pause to consider or ask why the two of them were wearing nothing but towels. His protective instinct at seeing them both in this newly erupted powderkeg scenario seemed to take preference in the organizational structure of his rapidly processing mind.

“Socorra, take my cloak,” he said matter of factly, taking it off in one smooth motion and draping it around her shoulders. Before she could reply or say anything he turned to the second person, his brother, and placed a hand on his shoulder. “I don’t know what’s going on, but this is not just a brownout. Something else has happened, but I can’t reach anyone at the Citadel. Can you keep Socorra safe and get somewhere where you can try to reach someone on the surface?”

“Well, yeah, obviously but—”

“—great, if you find something, send me a note telepathically.”

Wyn blinked a few times at that. He was only wearing a towel, but apparently that wasn’t exactly out of the ordinary for his brother. “Wait, what makes you think it works like that?”

“I know it works that way,” Marick replied flatly.

“I mean sure, there has been some shifting around of how that ability works, but okay sure, I’ll let you know.”

“Great. Just keep her safe.”

“I can, but also I’d been meaning to tell you—”

“—just keep her safe, Wyn,” Marick cut him off curtly, his tone leaving little room for pushback or negotiation.

Before Socorra could say anything, he looked her in the eye, a flash of guilt creeping through his otherwise calm, reserved mask and a hint of hidden pain behind his own at having her put in harm's way, again. Especially with local law enforcement being stretched thin with the now cases of looting to factor in.

And then he was off, the hilts of his lightsabers now revealed on his belt without the cover of his cloak. Bidy, his BD-unit droid tittered nervously from his shoulder and glanced down at the canvas bag bounced just at the small of his back.



Sometimes, Marick wished he had been more like his mentor, Timeros. The elder Arconae had been a master at projecting an aura of omnipresent terror. People just organically tended to get out of his way. Marick, of course, had never picked up the skill for it. In his youth, he’d relied on his training as an Assassin and his natural alacrity to weave through crowds unnoticed or to take to the rooftops.

Contrary to his faded gray hair, he was still in peak physical condition. Parenthood might have prevented the tired lines under his eyes from truly dissipating even in retirement, but he still maintained his own personal standard of fitness. So Marick simply tapped the Force for a preternatural burst of balance as he danced his way through the crowds, following his picture-like memory towards the local hospital.

That would be the place that needed help the most in a crisis like this. It was likely already getting overwhelmed, and if the auxiliary generators weren’t kicking in, people were going to die.

Not on his watch. *Life before death*, Atyriu had instilled into his mind. *I will protect those who cannot protect themselves.*

As he approached the hospital building, which was indeed being protected by a hastily erected perimeter of local law enforcement officials, someone bumped into the Hapan, hard, and almost knocked the canvas bag off.

“Ay’ watch it!” the frenzied citizen sneered. Marick whipped his head around to meet the man's gaze and felt a flash of anger surge through him. It quickly passed as they

were already gone. Bidy beeped something that almost sounded angry and loosely translated in Marick's ear as "go fork yourself", which was probably a swear the little droid had picked up from his wife. He wanted to smile at the thought as he idly checked to make sure the plushie was still there. The smile never came as he reached he focused on the reality at hand and pushed his way towards the side entrance to the hospital and was stopped by an armed guard.

"Let me through," Marick stated.

"Are you a medic or first responder?"

"No, but I can help—"

"I'm sure you can, but we aren't letting anyone else in—" she replied, raising one hand while keeping her E-11 blaster gripped in the other.

There was no time, and his patience was already stretched thin. Marick narrowed his eyes, and without so much as lifting a hand took a telekinetic hold over the officer's weapon. As if gripped by an invisible hand, the gun jerked suddenly and was pointed instead at her fellow guardsman. Likewise, the two flanking officers weapons pointed at each other.

"*Please* let me through. I can help," Marick repeated, never breaking eye contact with the officer.

A look of fear raced across the woman's face. She swallowed hard, nodded once and then stepped aside. As she did, the telekinetic hold on the officer's weapons relented and they visibly relaxed their clenched postures.



Marick stepped into the hospital and was immediately hit with the familiar, antiseptic smell of a medical ward. Nurses were wheeling patients on stretchers or beds with different apparatuses and intravenous drips out of their assigned rooms and towards what was likely the emergency ward. They were likely consolidating as best they could.

Other aides were busy dragging out large, bulky generators from storage closets and working in teams to push them towards where they could be hooked up to the essential systems.

There was shouting and yelling everywhere. The staff was trained well, but a crisis like this would come down to more than just willpower and organization.

Marick stopped one male nurse as they passed him.

“Hey, where are the wounded being moved to. Non-critical injuries,” the Hapan asked.

“If you’re looking for a friend, I’m sorry but I don’t know where they are...” he explained while still walking. Marick followed him.

“No, I am a...healer, I can help with injuries so that your staff can focus on the more severe cases...” he reached into his belt pouch and pulled out the license for him and Atyiru’s medical clinic on Port Ol’val.

The Force was a powerful tool, but running his own clinic with his wife, the real healer, had given Marick a unique perspective of how the hospital would prioritize things. He could perform basic surgeries, but his abilities were best suited for first aid and obvious wounds. Not for those on life support or dealing with complex disorders or diseases.

“Okay, okay, down this corridor, third room on the left. It used to be the cafeteria but they’re converting it to a trauma center.”

“Thank you,” Marick replied calmly with a nod before setting off.

When he arrived, there were indeed a plethora of beds and cots set up with various species with different degrees of injuries—broken bones, blaster grazes, severe gashes from broken glass or being thrown through a window. Blood everywhere.

He remained calm and pulled out a nerf-wool towel. He had become accustomed to carrying them thanks to his one-year-old daughter. He found the closest cot, a knife stab to the hip. No vital organs.

He grabbed a pair of latex gloves, then placed a hand over the injured Bothan and focused. The Force answered his call, the healing energy that connected all living beings bending to his will and helping to knit together bursted blood cells and bleeding skin. The nurse on standby watched with a mixture of hope, fear, and awe.

Start with the first one. Do everything you can. Move on. This was more helpful right now than his lightsabers.



Hours later, Marick's gloved hands were covered in dried blood, bodily fluid, and alien organ matter. His nostrils had gone numb thanks to his ability to control his body's functions with the Force. He continued to heal, but oftentimes the patient was too far gone even for the Force to help. He used his own medpack and its contents when he could. He stitched a few people up, fingers working with an assassin's precision guided by a mind of iron focus and an encyclopedic knowledge base.

Fortunately, the Master Arcanist had been able to pull from the Force itself to refuel his reservoirs of energy anytime they started to dwindle. Even so, he was just one man. He'd lost a few patients. There was just nothing he could do. This was a reality he knew all too well. Doctors made impossible decisions sometimes, and they were drilled early on in a core principle that you *can't save them all*. They tried, sure, and even with the Force and bacta tank technology it was still a science and not fully magic. But Bacta tanks wouldn't be working with the power outage, and there was only a finite supply of bacta patches.

A little girl was wheeled in and the Hapan froze in place. She had tan skin and a mess of white curls and bright blue eyes. Faint freckles across her nose. She had to be at least five or six years old, but it almost felt like he'd been shot with a bullet from the future of what his daughter would grow to be.

Marick moved mechanically towards the new patient being wheeled in. As he got closer, he could see she was small and waifish and looked to be frail. But he did not see any overt, outward wounds.

"What's wrong with her," Marick asked one of the aides who had seemed to realize that funneling patients to the mysterious Hapan was the best way to save potential lives.

"She has a rare kind of blood poisoning as a result of a toxic alchemical metal..." the aide explained.

"S-sorry to be a burden to everyone," her tiny voice was just above a whisper as she coughed.

Marick knelt down beside her and gently touched her head. "It's okay. We are going to do everything we can to help you," he said, repeating the phrase Atyiru had so often used time and time again.

She actually looked up at him, and it was then he realized that her eyes were glossed over. She was blind. He felt something inside of him crack, but a lifetime of training and dissociation with his emotions kept his face calm and stoic as a statue. "It's okay

mister,” she nodded slightly. “There are others that need help,” she continued. She was well spoken for someone so young.

Marick shook his head and grabbed the datapad attached to her bed. His eyes scanned through the file with all the skill of a retired spymaster, every note and detail burning itself into his memory with clarity.

As he finished, he realized she was right. He had heard Atyiru mention diseases such as hers. No amount of Force healing seemed to be able to cure it. Almost as if it had been somehow *manufactured* to do so. Blindness was one of the more common side effects. It made his stomach churn. For all their medical advancements in science, they still simply couldn't save everyone.

But the little girl, Rose, as her file listed, did not seem upset though. As he probed through the Force, he could tell she felt lonely, but not oddly there was not a hint of fear. Just a lingering concern for the other patients.

Marick felt his shoulders grow heavier, and it had nothing to do with fatigue. He slowly shifted and turned his canvas bag around and reached in slowly to pull out the *Parity* plushie he had purchased for Kirra. He looked at it for a moment, frowned, but then pulled it free and slowly handed it to Rose.

The small girl's face lit up as her fingers felt around the stuffed animal, taking in its shape and the texture of it. Then her tiny fingers ran over the horn and she seemed to recognize it immediately. “Is that a special edition Parity plush?” she asked.

The room must have gotten dusty. Something caused the corner of Marick's eye to dampen and he wiped it away with the nerf-wool towel. “Yes, it is, last one they had,” he explained.

“Wow...thank you so much mister...?” she said.

“Marick,” he said his own name slowly, as if it were an alien sound.

“Thank you, Marick,” she smiled at him and hugged the plushie close.



The power eventually did come back. Marick did not stop working until he got a message from Wyn and Socorra through the Force.

Rose passed away quietly before the power had made it back. It was peaceful, and Marick hadn't even noticed until he'd turn back to check on her after stitching up another knife wound. She looked peaceful, quiet, and restful, her arms around the plushie. She had a smile on her face, even as the apparatus attached to her was no longer beeping or showing signs.

On his shoulder, Bidy made a sad beep.

Marick looked at the *My Little Arconie* plushie resting in the deceased girl's tiny arms. He stood up, ran his hand through the girl's hair and then left the medical ward without so much as a goodbye or word to anyone else.

While he'd left the way of the Shadow behind him, old habits die hard and Marick had little issue slipping away to link up with Wyn and Socorra to return towards the surface to help the Clan face down the ones responsible for...all of this.

May Ashla and Bogan turn a blind eye to what awaited the followers of Alla'su and the so-called goddess herself by the time he would be done with them.