

Death in the Darkness

A Submission to the Competition:
All-In! Taldryan vs Scholae Palatinae



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40 ABY

Unknown Location

Rhun awoke with a start. He glanced around him, for a moment unsure where he was. Slowly, details came back to him. He had been on a shuttle to the destination of his contract, somewhere deep in Wild Space. The journey had been uneventful until something caused them to drop out of hyperspace early. Something was wrong with the ship, but the crew couldn't figure out what it was, so they tried to guide the vessel to the nearest planet in search of aid. Unfortunately, despite their best efforts, the shuttle was harder to control than expected given damage incurred and it crashed onto the surface.

I must have lost consciousness, the Ewok mused silently.

He rubbed his head as he stood, grateful that he had been strapped in at the time of the crash. Although it was dark, the Force aided his vision, able to glean details despite the low light levels. A glance around the interior showed that some other passengers hadn't fared as well. They were either dead or unconscious, with a wide range of injuries visible. His small size likely saved him from the brunt of the danger. Gathering his belongings, he made his way to the rear of the shuttle, where the cargo was stored. His short limbs belied a well-trained athleticism, quickly scaling the cargo that was small enough to stay with the passengers and vaulting over seats. The shuttle had crashed and rested on its side; the floor was sloped. But that didn't deter the furry assassin as he finally stood in front of the doors to the cargo bay. They wouldn't open in his presence. He got on his toes and jabbed a finger at the manual override, but still nothing happened.

Rhun reached to his belt and drew his lightsaber, thumbing the ignition switch. The dark interior was bathed in crimson light as the weapon came to life. He plunged the plasma blade into the door and cut a small hole into it – just large enough for him to fit through.

A faint plaintive whine and buzzing could be heard coming from deeper in the cargo hold. He deactivated his saber and strode towards the point of origin, finding the cage that his companion had been stowed inside. The can-cell's wings thrummed in recognition, head pressing up against the bars. Rhun extended a hand and laid it upon his head.

"Be calm, Zephyr. I'm here now," he told the large insect. Soon calmed once more, Rhun removed his hand and opened the caged. Zephyr hopped out and stretched his wings out before folding them against his body.

Rhun made his way toward the rear of the craft, finding the manual override for the cargo bay and pulled the lever. There was a whine of motors before a ramp was lowered. Very faint light streamed in as the opening grew wider. It appeared to be twilight, not quiet either day or night. The Ewok motioned for Zephyr to exit, the winged creature following him outside. He was greeted by a forest, with high hills off in the distance, and the lights from what could be a city further beyond.

“Looks like we’re stuck here for the mome—”

The sound of a large explosion filled the air.

Rhun instinctively ducked then stretched his mind outward from his body, focusing. He found many life forms nearby. Feelings of anger, confusion, and hunger filled his mind. Something was going on.

Ever the curious one, he signaled for Zephyr to take to the skies as he drew the Force around himself like a cloak and crept into the forest. With a beat of its wings, Zephyr flew off, but made sure not to stray too far in case he was needed. Rhun gave an appreciative nod, despite knowing that the can-cell could no longer see him. He couldn’t have asked for a better companion. Remaining alert, he continued on.

After traversing the forest, Rhun came upon a skirmish. Making sure to stick to the shadows and the outskirts of the conflict, he used the Force to enhance his vision. The dim light was made a bit brighter, the details clearer. Figures in robes and others in armor were engaged with other robed and armored figures. Curiously, Ewoks were in the mix. The first group of robed figures and people in white armor were attacking his brethren.

At first, he was concerned for them, but then realized such emotion was pointless. They weren't his tribe; he didn't know them. He owed them nothing. Instead, a different plan was taking form in his mind.

This is a perfect opportunity to test my skills.

He pulled on his vibroclaws and continued toward the melee. If anyone sensed his presence, they gave no indication, caught up as they were in their fighting. Suddenly Rhun dropped the invisible cloak he had gathered around himself and leapt upon the back of the nearest person, legs clamping around his neck and shoulders. The claws on his gloves sank deep into the man's exposed neck, tearing as they were removed, the vibration generators leaving a larger wound than there would have been otherwise. Blood spurted out and a gargling sound issued forth from the man's mouth.

Rhun hopped off and rolled as he hit the ground, springing up and darting into the trees, using the low foliage as cover. He could feel the confusion from the fighters, but they continued on, almost as if they were possessed by a need to fight. That was something Rhun could use to his advantage. He raised an arm and took aim at a new target, firing off a dart from his wrist-mounted launcher. The figure jerked suddenly right before impact, the projectile sailing past, lost to the forest. The assassin swore to himself and took careful aim, firing another dart. This one struck true. The woman clutching at her neck.

"They're in the trees!" she shouted, plucking the dart from her skin and tossing it to the ground. Rhun wasn't surprised – the toxin often needed time to take effect. But the tactic had worked as intended. A small contingent of the fighters trained their blasters in his direction and opened fire.

He ran through the brush, staying ahead of their fire and dodging any bolts that strayed too close thanks to an early warning from the Force. He then popped up and ignited his saber, heading for the group again.

The red blade was a blur as it cut through branches and body limbs alike. But just as suddenly as he had appeared, he was gone again, deactivating the blade once more. The fighters cast furtive glances around, wondering where their mysterious new foe had gone. Rhun allowed himself a small smile. He drew his fingers to his lips and issued a sharp whistle before setting off again.

Blaster fire rained down on where he had been, but it was no use. He kept moving. Before long, Zephyr could be seen among the foliage and the Ewok jumped up onto his back,

digging in lightly with his heels to signal the insect to fly. The pair soared towards the group. Lightsaber igniting once more as he swiped at the group, hacking away as Zephyr streaked past. He made no distinction between foes as he moved onto the other Ewoks. Darts were fired as well, his furred brethren's movements slowing due to the effects of the toxin.

Some of the fighters in white armor cheered, moving in on the Ewoks. Someone gave Rhun an appreciative nod, but he ignored it. He hadn't done them a favor. He merely wanted to hone his skills.

"Whoever you are, thank you," a voice called out into the growing darkness. "Okay men, let's make quick work of these stragglers and head home with our prizes. Ewok's on the menu tonight!"

Eating Ewoks? How uncivilized, Rhun thought as he and Zephyr climbed higher into the sky, trying to find cover in what few clouds could be found. Once out of sight, they turned and headed towards where the city lights were off in the distance. He hoped he'd be able to find passage away from here and back on track to complete his mission. While this had been a fun diversion, the job always came first, and once he accepted something, he made sure to see it through to its conclusion.