

"I didn't know a bunch of murderous zealots were allowed to have a sense of style. I thought all the crushed velvet and lace might get in the way of the self-flagellation."

"You would know something about that, wouldn't you? A poor, lost hurt Tapani noble, caught forever in war. Traumatized... haunted... broken."

Ryan winced slightly. Jezora had studied Ryan's dossier just as well as Ryan had studied Jezora's. It stood to reason that both sides had intelligence capabilities. What else did this enemy know?

"Ah, literacy, the mark of a cultivated man." Ryan quipped, a smile returning to his face as his lightsabers flashed bright blue, igniting to a steady hum as he flourished slightly into an inviting stance. Ryan's Soresu was at times inviting, beckoning, then with masterful defense and a whirlwind of blades blades he would close the opening and through a masterful riposte lay an opponent low. Too many practitioners expressed Soresu like a perpetually closed gate which while it let no offense in also let no offense out. Especially against such a cocky and aggressive opponent, according to his dossier at least, Ryan could not afford to be a gate just waiting to be battered down, but he also had to be patient.

"I don't need words on a page to read you, Hawkins" Jezora's lightsaber snapped to his hand and to life, an emerald blade hissing out like a serpent striking from darkness. His other hand had more decorum, slowly sliding a sword from an ornate scabbard. Its blade was silvery metal, but it shone strangely in the sunlight. Cruel looking runes were visible as the blade cleared that seemed to twist in agony in green hellfire as Jezora's saber reflected in the polished surface.

Ryan knew enough Ancient Sith to recognize that they were runes of that arcane tongue, but the distance was too great to discern more. The Odanite recognized the danger such alchemical Sith blades possessed and dreaded its touch. Jezora menaced with the point of his lightsaber, smiling with all confidence in the world, while he held the Sith sword over his head, ready to follow with a brutal, cleaving cut. He seemed steady, but through the Force, Ryan sensed a subtle change in his stance, a shift in his weight. He was on the attack.

With superhuman speed Jezora surged forward and gave a powerful thrust towards Ryan's eyes with his lightsaber. Ryan deftly stepped aside, and with a powerful parry redirected the thrust well wide and left his attacker off balance. Jezora whirled with an incredible cleave of the Sith sword, which whistled like a hunting raptor as it whirled around trying to catch the Jedi, but without sure footing Ryan was able to step back and let the blade's screaming death go by.

Ryan's blades resumed their guard, tighter this time, ready to stand impenetrable against a renewed, enraged, onslaught. This required little patience as Jezora regained his footing nimbly then brought both blades around in powerful arc, slamming into Ryan's guard. Ryan drew on the Force and his muscles swelled as he met the blows head on with two quick parries, weaving his blades into a barrier as the combatants' weapons clashed with tremendous force. Neither was used to fighting an opponent who could match them in muscle and expressions of surprise crossed their faces as they stepped back from one another as the sound of their clashing blades still rang in their ears.

Ryan stepped in as Jezora readied another combination of powerful attacks, stuffing Jezora's momentum by closing the distance before his attacks could gather speed and shoving with a strong parry which caused Jezora to step back a few steps to avoid falling to the ground.

Jezora quickly lashed out with his fist in the air and a wave of unseen, battering power surged out and struck Ryan square in the abdomen, followed by several more Force blows as Jezora closed, hammering Ryan with the Force like a pugilist on a heavy bag.

Ryan rooted himself in his sturdy stance and between muscle conditioned from years of hard martial arts, his armor, and the power of the Force stood firm and rolled with the telekinetic punches, tensing his abs as he was struck and presenting his sabers again in a defensive guard. Jezora's advance somewhat slowed in surprise at the limited effect of his telekinetic assault giving Ryan an opportunity to return the favor by moving forward, parrying Jezora's increasingly angry attacks which grew stronger and stronger with both combatants matching each other in strength. Ryan knew that Jezora would be unlikely to tire before he did, however. He could not force a mistake from fatigue and instead would have to Force one from overextension or overconfidence.

Ryan pushed forward once again with his parries into Jezora's space, this time sending a powerful kick into the side of Jezora's knee, causing it to buckle but not break. Jezora rooted himself strongly and wound up to strike again. Such a large wind-up for an attack, although powerful, often gave an opportunity for a skilled opponent to take advantage. Ryan then delivered a second kick to Jezora's other knee flowing seamlessly into a stomp to the zealot's foot that Ryan could tell inflicted some pain even as Jezora's face grew more rage-filled. Jezora, however, stood strong as always as the two solid walls continued to battle without breaking. Changing to the methods of another style, Ryan suddenly went from an immovable wall to a fluttering leaf as he leapt backwards acrobatically though a bit awkwardly in his armor and landed with a clunk and a slight stumble, his sabers returning to a defensive posture. Now out of range, the whistling and hissing of Jezora's Sith sword and lightsaber found nothing but air.

Both parties breathed heavily from the stress, the excitement, and the sheer fatigue of pitting their strength against one another. Ryan could tell his opponent was growing impatient, but not as fatigued as the Jedi wished. The Force seemed somewhat with the Jedi however as the Child of Mortis came forward once more in a rage but seemed to be less sure on his legs due to pain and damage. Jezora's legs seemed to grow surer and steadier as he came forward, however, perhaps Force- or drug-powered healing, or adrenaline continuing to surge. Ryan had to press his opportunity while remaining patient. Again, Ryan stepped in to meet his aggressive opponent.

Jezora swung a rapid flurry once more, trying various attacks and angles to overwhelm Ryan's defenses flowing gracefully but with tremendous force into a spinning kick as Ryan's sabers locked with Jezora's weapons. Before the kick could reach him Ryan slammed forward with his shoulder into Jezora's body, continuing to rob his attacks of momentum and delivering another hard, stomping kick to Jezora's supporting leg before he could lower his kicking leg back to the ground. Unable to root himself as well without both feet planted, Jezora fell to the earth.

The Jedi and the Lightbringer remained locked, their weapons still trying to find advantage, but Ryan quickly took advantage of his opponent's prone state, to deliver several crushing stomps to the knee and dropping his own knee hard on Jezora's groin. Jezora roared but with Ryan now over him with the advantage of gravity, he felt it difficult to keep the Jedi's blades from pushing the lock further and further towards his body, sapphire, emerald and alchemical Sith steel singing a humming song of death as they inched closer and closer.

Jezora's rage turned steadily to fear as he struggled in vain against the pinning weight of the Wruushi master. Ryan suddenly forced a powerful, crushgaunted hand past the warrior's collapsing guard, and rather than driving his saber through his opponent's face Ryan instead channeled the Force, gravity, might, and skill into one blow that impacted Jezora's face with the crunch of tooth and bone. Jezora's guard gave way and his sabers became unignited as his grip released, his eyes widened and grew glassy as he tried to maintain consciousness. Ryan unignited his sabers in return and delivered a second blow, just as bone crunching as the second. Rearing back, but feeling no movement from underneath his pin, Ryan held back a third blow and resisted the urge in the heat of battle to pound Jezora's face to nothing. He stood up, taking Jezora's weapons, and watched for a while to ensure he was still breathing.

After several moments, Ryan could see Jezora's chest was rising and falling and that he did not appear to be choking on his own blood. That was a consolation, even if no one would judge Ryan for killing in war or similar circumstances, a killing never got easier to bear.

Rolling him gently to his side after ensuring he was still alive, Ryan simply stood and stretched as he watched the fight burn through his memory, his successes, his mistakes, his questions as to whether the second punch was truly necessary. Returning his sabers to his side he took the arms of his fallen adversary and walked away.