

Death always had the same smell. Like too many flowers, thick pollen obscuring everything else in the air. He tilted his head, as he stepped through the gate, changing his field of view of the battleground. His helmet hung on a strap at his back, the dust from a million decaying stars coating his armor.

A tickle in the back of his mind encouraged movement, his hand twitching, fingers grasping at the invisible threads of reality. He narrowed his eyes, focusing on it. Was it a mortar, a grenade, some sort of improvised weapon? It didn't matter much. It didn't have his name on it, but the weapons addressed 'to whom it may concern' were more dangerous in that way. He flicked his mind in a heartbeat. The explosive changed direction, spiraling away. A shower of rock and steel flew into the sky with the sound of detonation, the scent of burning air wedging its way through the overly sweet scent that seemed omnipresent.

He could hear the shouting, the men adjusting fire, blaster bolts flitting from one target to another. The razor hum of energized saber blades sang their angry dirge ahead of him, the tattered robes somehow familiar as the wearer stood up.

"What have you done?" The voice cracked, fear dancing behind the rage.

He recognized this man. Beneath the grime of the battlefield, under the weight of everything that was happening here, it was still the man he had helped to train, who he had fought beside too many times to count. He recognized the saber, a long-hilted weapon with a brutal emitter. His mind raced back, recalling sitting with the man on the Spear, in his workshop, watching the Sith build it.

He stepped forward, the blade raising in menace. "You're not worthy to wear... his armor." The words came out raw, and he could see the frenzy building behind his eyes as he threw himself forward, clouds of dust billowing out with each heavy footfall.

The distance between confusion and action wasn't much, but it was always enough for a blade.

Muz shifted his weight sideways, lowering himself out of the way as the man's blade drew a red line against the beskar. The grime caught flame, smoke rising to his nostrils. With a thought, his own blades sparked, violet and crimson claws shining in the perpetual dusk. The man carried through his movement, eyes widening as he saw the blades, his lip curling as he brought his blade around for a second strike.

Muz blinked, parrying away the blade as words flew from his mind to the Sith, finding no purchase there. Muz shifted his weight, catching the Sith's saber with his other blade, the golden corona where the crimson blades met constricting their pupils. Muz shifted his mind as quickly as he shifted his blades, reaching into the Sith's mind.

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There was no room for him in that mind. Muz pulled back, his offhand committing a tightly constrained circle that caught the very tip of the Sith's blade and carried it far off balance. The violet blade seethed in his left hand, pale smoke rising from the blade as muscle memory drew it close to the Sith's head. Killing was rote, and it took an effort to stop himself and force words through his lips.

"Darkhawk, it's me." The words came gutturally, raw and hoarse. They felt like he hadn't spoken for months. It occurred to him that it was possible he hadn't.

"You lie!" The Sith dove backwards, low and to the left, his blade sparking against Muz's as he moved, then breaking free into the dust where it melted stone and earth. "I saw him ten hours ago! More Mortis lies..."

Muz straightened his back, letting the golden hilts drop behind him, activating as they spun in the air. He blinked, and they buffeted the Consul, tracing defensive velocities in the air between the two. He turned his head slightly, and heard something beneath the din, a faint scuffing sound. He looked down, pulling his chin down to his chest. An eyebrow went up as he saw what Darkhawk saw, a long beard, the dark hairs chased with a silvery grey that reached down his breastplate. How long had he been in that gate?

Darkhawk spun to the side, evading one of the golden blades as he tried to bisect another. Muz recalled them with a twitch of a finger, the weapons coming to heel quickly, then lazily drifting in the air behind him. He deactivated the weapons in his hands, stepping forward. "Remember Nar Shaddaa? Ida?"

Darkhawk stepped back a half pace, his blade still pointing at the man. "That was a long time ago..."

Muz gave a single nod, raising a hand to the beard that had appeared on his face, his senses scrambling to feel what else might have changed in the gate. Darkhawk's face softened, his weapon lowering, the crimson pointing to the ground now. "How in the hell?"

Muz shook his head with a half shrug. There was more to worry about than that right now. His eyes darted to the stone outcropping beyond Darkhawk, the flutter of movement trying to stay obscured from them. The time for theorizing would have to come later. Muz raised a hand, three fingers up and motioned behind. Darkhawk spun on a heel, taking advantage of a boulder for cover as the blasters fired at them. Golden blades intercepted the blasts, sending them screaming off into other directions, one of them directly into one of the already fallen foes.

He watched one of them step out into the open, a grayish green blade spilling into the air. The sound of other blades igniting echoed from behind the outcropping, the Children moving out behind their brother as Darkhawk stood and brought his own blade up in a salute. Muz ignited

the blades in his hands, a half smile creasing his lips as he beckoned them forward. This was what he loved most.

"Come, bleed with me."

—

Muz Ashen Keibatsu, 3714