

SBM Kz'set - DJB #13299
Clan Plagueis

"Sir?"

The voice of one of his trooper escorts broke Kz'set's near trance. Despite all his time with the One Sith, this was the first time the Verpine had set foot on the dusty surface of Korriban. Given the history of the place, it was hard for anyone trained in the ways of Sith not to be at least a little reflective. The moment he stepped off the shuttle he could feel something in the air and in the ground. The Dark Side was everywhere and in everything, ebbing, pulsing, calling. Kz'set couldn't help but let it continue to seep into him...

"Sir!" The trooper repeated more forcefully. " We need to get moving. Ashen's forces are closing in and we need to get to this Synin before they arrive."

Kz'set simply nodded and gestured towards the imposing structure of the former Sith Academy in the distance. As the sound of a dozen sets of boots, the clanking of a dozen B2 BattleDroids, and the imposing stomps of a pair of SD-10s started sounding, Kz'set gave a slight sigh before moving to catch up. When Synin's name first was mentioned as the purpose of his mission, Kz'set wasn't sure whether to be excited, concerned, or just plain scared.

Synin Torin was a reminder of a past the Verpine had wanted to forget. Any memory of his time with the one Sith was a memory of either pain, suffering, or defeat. If that wasn't enough, Synin was an unstable individual and was unpredictable even on his best days, even and most especially to those who knew him well. Despite all that, the Bpfasshi was one of the few people Kz'set could relate to in the One Sith ranks and perhaps the only one to show him any real degree of respect. It could be argued that Synin had treated Kz'set better than any other organic life form, though for Synin that didn't take much effort. Organics were, in his words, 'imperfect pond scum', so for one to be even considered worth his time was a compliment, even if a half hearted one.

Lost in thought as he trudged towards the Academy, it took several minutes to get from the landing zone to the grand entryway to the building. Under other circumstances, the Verpine would have stared in awe of the immense structure and probably meditated before entering the building. With Ashen closing in and Cotelin likely not far behind, all Kz'set had time to do is take a deep breath and then stroll into the ruin. He took quick stock of the tactical situation before turning to the sergeant in charge of the detachment.

"Hold this area. You should have plenty of cover and good firing positions from the galleries. Any contact from the *Ravager*? "

“They finally found a suitable landing zone and are on their way down,” the sergeant replied. “However the LZ is a considerable distance away. Best estimate, thirty to forty-five minutes before meaningful reinforcements arrive.”

Kz’set nodded as the news was as he had expected. “Air support?”

The sergeant shrugged. “Voulge Squadron is on station, but it’s starting to get tricky up there.”

“Understood.” Kz’set acknowledged and then gestured to the two SD-10s. The pair of massive droids took up flanking positions as he moved deeper into the academy. The sergeant looked back and said with a bit of surprise in his voice.

“You’re taking them? We might need them to...”

“You might need them, I know I’ll need them.” Kz’set interrupted. “Synin’s the sort you always need protection around.”

Without another word, Kz’set and the droids pushed further into the former Academy. While they had been told that Synin was in the building, even Esoteric didn’t seem know what he was up to in the ruin. While the building was large, there was only a handful of areas that would hold any interest to the Bpfashi. The Archive seemed like the most logical place to start, so Kz’set started in that direction with droids in tow. It didn’t take long for him to notice something moving in the distance. Pulling a light from his belt, he shined it down the corridor and caught a glint of something before it dashed back into the darkness. A less perceptive person probably never would have even noticed it, much less had any clue what it was. Kz’set, however, wasn’t so easily fooled, especially considering he was familiar with the likely culprit.

“I know you’re there Goldie. And I’m actually here to help this time.”

Kz’set could hear a flutter in the distance and then the familiar form of Synin’s modified ASN courier droid floated into the light. The floating gold droid seemed to examine before responding in a high pitched mechanical tone.

“Ah. Kz’set. Wasn’t expecting to see you here. Master said Esoteric might send someone, but you...left.”

The Verpine nodded, “I’m surprised he’d even notice, though Skulls would have.” He couldn’t help but twitch an antenna at the thought of the reaction the always dour YVH unit would have to his return.

“So why would you come back?” The ASN asked the question Kz’set knew was coming and hadn’t quite yet come up with an answer to. Why did his clan ally with their once enemy? Why

would he, of all people, be asked to extract an important asset? Esoteric had to have his reasons, but as always they were opaque to everyone but Esoteric. Even though that was one of the reasons Kz'set had left in the first place, it didn't matter now. After an awkward couple seconds, the Plagueian finally answered.

"It's a longer story than I have time to tell right now. Darth Ashen's men are inbound and we need to find whatever it is Synin is here for before they arrive. So, you can either take me to Synin or..."

The droid didn't need to wait for Kz'set to finish the sentence. It gave what passed for a nod and then started floating off in a direction away from the nearby Archive. At first, Kz'set wasn't sure where it was leading, nothing in that section of the building should be of interest to Synin. There was no archives and nothing that might be a technological artifact. It was only when it floated down into a lower level of the building and into a large room that Kz'set couldn't help but realize where he was. The towering statue behind what looked like a stone sarcophagus meant it could only be one place.

The Tomb of Darth Bane.

Before he could readily spot Synin, the familiar and still intimidating form of his YVH-1 unit strode over to Kz'set with a confidence not generally seen in a droid. Though it was nominally supposed to be serving Synin, anyone beyond a casual observer would question whether Synin was in fact serving the droid. The skeletal looking droid glared directly at Kz'set and spoke in a direct and challenging tone.

"What are you doing here, traitor? Master Synin is doing important work here and must not be disturbed."

Kz'set gestured back to the two SD-10s behind him who reflexively trained their weapons . "Skulls, if you're planning on stopping me, well, I think you're smarter than that. And since I know what you're probably thinking, I'm not here to kill him, but some others might be soon."

The droid backed down from his challenging stance but was still blocking Kz'set's path deeper into the tomb. "Then why are you here? If Esoteric thinks we need *your* help, I'm going to be very..."

"Displeased?" Kz'set interrupted with a chuckle. "Despite what you might think, we're actually on the same side. Circumstances have both changed and accelerated and my people and Esoteric have reached an understanding. Further, Darth Ashen moves on Korriban and his forces will arrive soon. So you and Synin have two choices, accept my assistance or answer to Ashen when he arrives. If you choose the later, well, I wouldn't."

“Skulls, what’s going on over there? I told you I needed quiet!” Synin shouted from the back of the tomb.

The droid looked at Kz’set. “Fine, but if you harm him, you will find it unpleasant.” It then turned back towards where Synin’s voice came from. “Master, Kz’set has returned and offers his assistance. He states that Darth Ashen has mobilized a force to the planet and that you need to hurry.”

“Kz’set?” Synin asked with a hint of confusion. “Oh, the Verpine, yes, yes, bring him back. He might be just the one I need.”

As Skulls led the way towards the back of the tomb, Kz’set looked to the droid again. “Since we’re low on time and we both know how he is, what exactly is he working on back there?”

Since he first met Synin, Kz’set knew that it was much easier to get a straight and truthful answer about what Synin was up to from Skulls. Synin was known to get very deep in his work and often times Skulls had far more awareness than the Bpfasshi did.

The droid replied promptly. “He says he found something on Bhargebba that suggested some sort of object of power or weapon was buried with Darth Bane. We’ve searched the tomb and found a hidden door in the back that he’s been trying to open for days.”

“Indeed I have Skulls, but we would have already if you just would fetch me the equipment I asked for!” Synin chimed in without turning around.

Kz’set could see his former master now, hunched over a door covered in runes with what looked like a control panel on either side. He looked like he hadn’t eaten in days, a condition that Kz’set had found him in many times before when he was too absorbed in his work.

“I brought the equipment thirty-six hours ago master.” The droid said after what passed for an exacerbated sigh. “It wasn’t any help. But perhaps Kz’set will, if you’ll let him.”

“Kz’set? What use would he be? If I couldn’t figure this door out he couldn’t. Well, maybe, but didn’t he leave?”

Kz’set shot a quick glance to Skulls to which the droid shrugged in reply. Synin’s attention span was often short when it came to anything other than the present focus of his work. As soon as he spoke his eyes shot back to the door. Kz’set studied the door for a moment himself before speaking again.

“Synin, I’m here now. We can tackle this together, just like we did the intelligence archives on Dromund Kaas.”

Synin thought for a moment. “You were useful then, yes. But I haven’t found something to slice into here. There’s no locking mechanism to speak of. I first thought it needed power, but there’s no powered mechanism. It’s baffling, but I know something’s back there, something major!”

It was always like Synin to assume there was something mechanical behind everything. Despite being skilled in the Force, he never considered all the ways it could be applied. Kz’set studied the door some more and noticed several sets of scorch marks on it. That quickly led Kz’set to a conclusion.

“I take it cutting through with a lightsaber didn’t work.”

“No, fifth thing I tried.” Synin responded, frustration clear in his voice. “Must be cortosis or something in the door. Blasters didn’t do anything appreciable either. Ruled out explosives as well, place isn’t stable enough to trust them. But there must be some way through!”

Kz’set put a finger to his chin and stroked it as he thought. What could Synin have overlooked? He was a genius and despite his eccentricities and diminishing sanity, Kz’set had never seen a problem he couldn’t crack. There had to be something he was missing, but what? It took Kz’set several minutes of deep thought before he came up with something. Figuring Synin wouldn’t know, he looked to Skulls to ask something.

“I know he doesn’t know his runes, but I’m assuming Esoteric or someone in his employ does. Did you get a translation?”

“Yes.” The droid answered. “They couldn’t get all of it just on an image and Synin, as you would guess, wouldn’t let anyone else down here. What they could translate said something about only those who obey the Rule can enter.”

Kz’set quickly surmised that this referred to the Rule of Two, the most famous teaching of Darth Bane. One master, one apprentice, the only way he thought the Sith could survive given their past tendencies of infighting and betrayal. It was an idea that was proving true again in the skies above them right now. But what did have to do with this particular door? Kz’set worked it through his mind and after a few moments, it hit him. The opening panels, there were two of them.

“Synin, what have you made of these panels?” Kz’set asked.

“Those?” The Bpfasshi replied? “Well, they don’t have a power source or any where to put one. They seemed to respond to the Force, but there was no way to activate them both at once. It’s maddening! Who builds a door with no way to open it.”

“I think, “ Kz’set hesitated as he didn’t want to propose an idea to Synin that wouldn’t work. Synin was known to punish those who wasted his time with incorrect hypothesis. But Kz’set was sure of this solution. “I think Synin, you need two people to open this. A master and an apprentice. That’s how Bane would have wanted it I believe.”

For the first time, Synin turned around and looked Kz’set in the eye. Stress and frustration were clear on his pale face. He looked like he was about to shout, but then sighed. He was about to say something that was really hard for him to say to anyone but Skulls and given what he’d been through, it was particularly problematic.

“You, you might be right. Bane was really big on that Rule of Two thing. Master and apprentice, yes, that might be it. But, but I have no apprentice.”

Kz’set was not really surprised to hear Synin say that. Their relationship wasn’t exactly like that as most of the time Kz’set was considered a slave or simple minion. Synin might not have realized it, but he had taken Kz’set in and taught him. He protected him from the other One Sith and despite the fact that his attitude was more that of an owner and his favorite pet, Synin had shown him respect. It was hard to acknowledge for Kz’set as well, but when one looked at it in an objective fashion, Synin mentored Kz’set. They were master and apprentice, plain and simple.

Before Kz’set could respond, one of the SD-10s, which had remained near the tomb’s entrance shouted across the room.

“Sir, contact with the enemy has been reported. Our troops are holding, but overwhelming numbers are inbound.”

Kz’set quickly shot a look back at the droid. “Request air support and extraction.”

The droid silently acknowledged as Kz’set turned back to Synin. “We need to hurry.”

Synin got a frantic edge in his voice. “Well, unless you somehow acquired an apprentice, which I doubt, and they’re here, I don’t see a way forward.”

Kz’set sighed and responded. “While I do have one, there’s no time for that. I guess your apprentice will have to do.”

Synin was on the edge of outright rage. “You moron! I don’t have one!”

Kz’set’s response was almost resigned, reluctant, but also relieved. “Yes Synin, you do. Me.”

Synin gestured like he was about to fly into a tantrum but something seemed to hit him right before he did. The same realization Kz'set had just experienced in all likelihood. He calmed down quickly and gave Kz'set a look kinder than the Verpine had ever seen before.

: "I guess you are, aren't you. I never thought about it that way, but I did teach you a few things, didn't I. At the very least it's worth a shot, especially since we seem to be low on time. Focus on the panel over there." Synin gestured to the panel on the right that was set slightly lower than the one on the left. "Think about opening the door and channel that through the Force, that's what got the reaction last time."

Kz'set nodded and stepped in front of the panel as Synin did the same to the one on the left. Both Sith reached into the Force and channeled it towards the door. At first, nothing happened, but after a few seconds, the panels began to glow slightly. After a few seconds more, the door began to slowly grind open, revealing a small chamber beyond. Synin shouted excitedly and rushed in, Kz'set close behind. Inside the chamber, which was covered with matching sets of glyphs, was an ornate durasteel container about two meters square. Synin went to open when an explosion rocked the Academy.

"Guess there's no time to study this here." Synin quickly concluded. "Kz'set help me move this thing out of here."

"With pleasure, Master."