

Death was coming.

It had hung over his connection to the Force for the past week now, like clouds of smoke seeping under a door, slowly getting thicker and thicker with each passing moment. And in an odd way, the knowledge of his death had only strengthened his ability to draw upon his power, as if the Dark Side was granting his silent wish to go out in a blaze of glory.

And now, kneeling on the floor in deep meditation, Zakath could sense another dark presence approaching. Another few minutes, and it would be here. The Barabel felt a slight twitch of a smile touching his lips.

He would not leave this room alive.

As he kept his body poised in a meditative stance, he allowed the luxury of his thoughts to wander for the last time.

*Nath*

His sole apprentice, the one that he had chosen to pass his knowledge on to, had flourished and was now out in the galaxy pursuing her own secretive agenda. The two had an often prickly relationship, and had clashed more than once, but over time, a mutual respect developed, and even affection of a sort came to be.

*Would she miss me, I wonder? Would she discover the cause of my death and extract vengeance, or would she merely shrug, accept, and move on?*

The Barabel shrugged internally to himself. It really didn't matter in the end, he supposed. Nath's mind, even after years of training, working on missions together, and fighting in glorious battle, still defied his attempts to understand how it worked.

*Another reason I chose her. From the start, she was marvelously complex. She will carve a wonderfully bloody mark upon the galaxy before her end.*

Reaching out with a light touch of the Force, Zakath noted the progress of the intruder as it drew closer.

Another minute left.

*Arcona*

The Clan that Zakath swore loyalty to for so many years. Having trained in the traditions of the Sith, he was taught that loyalty to anything but himself was a chain meant to be broken. To be

loyal to anything but oneself was a weakness. Better to use a group as a tool to propel one's ascent to power, and then cast it aside when its usefulness was at an end.

*Yet I remained loyal.*

And that loyalty paid off in more ways than one. Arcona had led Zakath to many glorious battles. Countless Jedi and Dark Jedi alike fell to the Barabel's crimson blade, and he had left a long bloody path behind him.

*And friendship.*

Even now, that was still a mysterious feeling for him, albeit one that he had tried, in his own way, to nourish. Arcona's members, from Marick, Atty, Kordath, Uji, and so many others, had offered tokens of friendship and expecting nothing in return except the same things they gave out.

*And it made me stronger for it.*

Zakath nodded slightly to himself. He had made many mistakes over the years, and instead of being cast aside for them, the members of Arcona forgave him, taught and corrected him, and raised him up. A life without the Clan would have left him a lesser man. A les-

"And here you are." A cold hissing voice interrupted his thoughts.

*And now it is time to die.*

Zakath's eyes snapped open, taking in the cloaked and masked figure that now stood within the doorway.

He smiled slightly and rose to his feet.

"Here I am." Zakath agreed with a sibilant hiss, his rancor-tooth lightsaber now in hand, but remaining unlit for the moment. "And here you are, at last."

"Yes." The black cloaked figure replied as he slowly withdrew his own lightsaber. "Your time of tormenting the One Sith ends today."

"Yez." Zakath said, his eyes beginning to glow like hot purple coals as he began to draw upon the Dark Side for the last time.

"You know how this ends." The figure said as he cocked his head slightly. "You can kneel, and I will grant you a quick merciful death."

“I am Sith.” Zakath hissed as he ignited his lightsaber, the bloodshine blade springing into existence. “I will not go quietly. When I die, it will be in combat.”

“As you wish.” The cloaked figure nodded slightly as he ignited his own lightsaber, a similar bloody blade rising up to rest gently against Zakath’s.

Zakath smiled.

It was a good day to die.