

Sides of a Coin

Seridan Brehevik, #13767

The great dome of the Weequay pirate base loomed ahead. It was misshapen, with some parts having been replaced by sheets of various metals, dented hulls of trashed ships, and Seridan even saw some places covered only by a grim, mint-green tarp. In front of the building, the flat canyon now was home to what could only be called a ship-graveyard. As overgrown as an arid canyon could get, rust-covered ship carcasses littered the elliptical space. Spindly weeds grew tall among the decaying wrecks, now not much more than the useless hunks of processed metal that couldn't be repurposed. The functioning ships were kept at the chokepoint leading into the cemetery. They stood out like a sore thumb, being the only 'complete' ones. Some were a combination of ships strewn together, whilst the elite ones stood out more, with obvious care taken regarding the appearance. On Florrum, where dust ravaged anything on the surface, such effort put into appearances was noticeable. It meant that the ship was powerful, and important. And that meant, in turn, that is either guarded, or armed. Neither was good, when you were looking at infiltration, through the only easy entrance. However, that also meant the pirates were smart enough to set up defenses when two opposing armies entered their area, which makes sense, as most pirate bands didn't last for more than a decade - Ohnaka's gang had a history spanning at least 5 decades.

So, the easy way was blocked - Seridan had figured as much. He had, rather slowly, scaled the canyon wall, with occasional assistance from the Force. As he moved his left foot into a near-vertical crack, his right handhold gave way, and he was left with two points of contact - his left hand, and his right foot. Their relative positions on the rock-face were absurdly unstable. As his hand flailed away, crumbled rocks fell to the dismal weeds far below, and his foot fell into the crack, ensuring another contact point. Seridan breathed, and looked up. He was only a few more feet to the top. He reached up to a small handhold which looked like it could handle his weight. A harsh, metallic sound filled the air, and a slug of metal punched into the handhold, scattering loose pebbles and decimating the handhold.

Acting on instinct, Seridan poured Force energy into his thighs and jumped upward. His left foot slid downwards in the crack, but after a moment, there was enough force to propel Seridan upward. He caught the edge and used his momentum to push himself up, rolling forward onto the flat, eroded top of the canyon. Another slug whizzed past his ear. Seridan flinched, and continued searching for an opponent. Oddly, the slugs were coming in the opposite direction of the pirates'

base. Whilst his opponent may be a pirate, he also had a fair chance of being a Plagueian. Neither was very fortunate, as both knew how to deal with a Jedi.

I hate Slugthrowers, Seridan thought, wistfully. He threw out his vision in the Force, finding his enemy immediately - a lone prick of life. Keeping his senses sharp, he ignited his saber and ran forward. No need for stealth, when you were on a flat plain and your opponent has already spotted you.

Holding his saber in his off-hand, he focussed a telekinetic punch to his enemy's slugthrower, knocking it out of their hands. The figure moved, and a gust of wind blew their cloak back. The underlying armour was accented with purple, and had a lilac Plagueis insignia embossed onto its front. The figure was slender, probably female. She moved fast, bending to recover her weapon quickly. Amidst the confrontation, Seridan's comlink beeped - he ignored it. As she stood back up, Seridan waved his hand, knocking her slightly off-balance. The slug she'd fired missed. Seridan swapped his saber into his dominant hand, pulling her towards him as he ran towards her. As he closed the distance, she recovered and unsheathed a long hunting knife from her belt.

Seridan slowed slightly, and raised his double-bladed saber, one end tucked under his arm. He swung at her midsection, to test her skills. She ducked under the blade smoothly, and stabbed upward at the Miraluka's side. The Ranger easily sidestepped, pivoting his saber so that it cut through the knife. As the Plagueian spun herself out of range, he pushed against her left foot, causing her to stumble backwards. The Jedi swiped his blade again, severely cutting through her left arm. Even through the helmet, he heard her scream - it sounded so young, so innocent to pain. As she fell to the floor, the Ranger's right hand lashed outwards, catching the front of her visor. This served twofold. It forced her nose slightly into her skull, which would make her dizzy and more susceptible to knock-out punches. It also accelerated her fall to the ground, meaning that her impact would serve as enough, resultantly, to knock her out.

The wind had started to pick up. The fine dust which had polished Seridan's skin was now a coarse, grainy exfoliation. He pulled his hood over his head, but it didn't help. The wind was punishing, and his face, even under his forehead-coverings, was becoming temporarily gaunt. He looked to the pirate base again, and saw the dark line on the horizon. Storm. He had to get into Weequay base and rescue A'lora quickly. Time was of an essence.

As he ran against the wind, his cloak billowing behind him, his comlink beeped again. He accepted, and the hardened face of Tonraq appeared.

"Soldier, we need you in the plain due west of the ion cannon. Our squads are getting picked off by a sniper. We need every man we've got. Get down here, stat."

"Tonraq, I'm sorry but I'm a few kilometres away by Weequay base, and trying to rescue A'lora."

"On who's orders? I sent someone else. Now get down there - they need you. You're being reassigned."

"Commander Traund. Surely it would be more bene--"

"I'll face Traund if I need to. My man will get Kituri, but I need you to get that sniper."

"Tonraq, sir, I really think--"

"Soldier, stop arguing. Our men are dying down there. Get to the front line, man!"

Seridan tried a number more times to reply, but Tonraq ignored him. Sighing, he turned and ran towards the canyon.

Reassigned? That's a new one. I'm not a grunt, to be tossed around on the whim of some coin.

Somewhat far to the south, around a kilometre west of the ion cannon, there lived a family of rodents. Native to the planet, these weasel-like creatures lived in burrows, and scavenged the canyon floors for food during sunlight.

Meek's morning had started splendidly - the Bright in the Up took extra long to become hot this morning, and as the Bright rose above the canyon walls, Meek had rushed to his regular

food-places. He'd rushed from rock to rock, nose thoroughly searching each tiny-place, and lapping up the bugs with his long, cylindrical tongue. Meek's current mate had been doing the same, to the West. As he finished his rounds, he'd smelt Kalari beetle, and went in search fervently - it had been months since he had made a Kalari catch. There was a small, snout-wide hole in the rock face, a recently dislodged weed lying just below it. Meek caught a subtle change in the scent - the Kalari had noticed him. Meek scurrying forward rapidly, snout expertly shoving itself into the hole. His whiskers brushed against the beetle as it rushed to escape the hole, but his right paw darted forward and pinned it down. His snout then dashed to the side, the small, sharp teeth piercing the exoskeleton.

Carrying the beetle in his mouth, Meek had scurried back towards Home, and Kids. With the other competition in the area, not to mention the territorial Beasts, he went as fast as he could, keeping to the canyon walls, brushing past the weed-life there. Bright had not yet touched the walls, and so it was difficult to see him.

Having shared the meal with Kids, Meek stood sentinel by his hole. His mate hadn't returned, and there were Signs. Faster winds, higher humidity, more dust. Storm. But also there were Booms. Vibrations running through the Down, shuddering their burrow and dirtying his Kids. Great sounds pierced Home, sharp and harsh.

Meek left, heading West. He needed to find his mate. As he went further, the air around gradually grew darker and darker - so gradually that Meek didn't notice, until he could look plainly at Bright and not flinch. Some dark air was moving and flowing, obscuring the big Open ahead. Meek, on the wind, caught his mate's sweet scent among the sour air. He rushed forward, to the Open. Ahead, there were more Booms. Great sounds deafened his sensitive ears. In the distance, streaks of light punched to the Up. His mate's smell came from the Booms. He carried on forward.

Through the dark air, he saw tall animals, throwing Bright at each other. Some fought each other with bolts of Bright. Meek was terrified: These animals had harnessed Bright and killed with it. More streaks of light flew into the animals from a distance, throwing them to the ground, dead. A

huge flying beast seared past, another animal riding it. Meek was tossed to one side, and caught a good look at the animal - it wore short fur all over its body, even its eyes. How could it see?

As he contorted himself back to his feet, he saw his mate lying within the animals. He scurried forward, entering the cloud of Bright-wielding animals. Their feet pounding on either side, he dodged Bright and plunged forward, where the dark air was thickest. His mate was just ahead. Meek only now noticed that she was smoldering - her neck fur was singed. He scurried as fast as he could. His mate was only a short distance away, and Meek could smell her distinctive, sweet pheromones. But he never made it. A stray blaster bolt hit his rear, and the pain put his nervous system into critical. The impact contorted his spine, snapping a vertebrae. This combined with his heightened stress level, resulted in an aneurism.

Once more, he crept along the canyon-top. The area was flatter, with very little cover. **Crack**, as another bolt was unleashed. A distant cry reached Seridan on the latest gust of wind. He'd had to climb the rock-face some distance away, and attempt to creep up on the sniper from behind. So far, it was working. There was a small rise in the rock just ahead - the sniper bolts were originating from that area. As he approached, the Ranger could see that the rocks were slightly cracked; eroded by the harsh geography of this place. **Crack**, this time louder. Each shot allowed him to more accurately pinpoint the sniper's position. He crouched lower, slinking towards the rock formation.

Now only a few metres away, he cautiously rose. Ahead, there was a large rift in the rock, allowing the sniper to use it as a trench. She was poised and ready, sighting her next victim. Seridan reached out in the Force, looking to subtly disfigure the trigger mechanism, so that it wouldn't shoot. However, as he reached his hand out, the sniper turned, drawing a pistol from a side harness. Seridan, surprised, rolled to one side as a bolt barely missed him. It was if she already knew he was there, but he was also very sure that he'd made minimal sounds. Igniting his lightsaber, he deflected two more shots, before waving his hand, and knocking the sniper back. The sniper fell against the hard crack edge, and his pistol went flying. The sniper didn't move,

presumably knocked out by the impact. The Miraluka jogged over to the sniper, removing her ammunition and throwing it. The sniper was down. As he bent to check the sniper's vitals, there was a rough voice behind him.

"Undesirable Jedi Scum. Do not contaminate that poor girl with your filth."

Seridan sent a pulse out in the Force, illuminating his surrounding area. The sniper before him was indeed alive, but was also showing signs of fatigue, and tiredness. Almost definitely knocked-out. Behind him, by about 10 metres, stood a Duros male, lean, tall, and strong in the Force. Also, who wanted to kill him.

And so he turned, throwing off his outer-clothes and igniting his saber. The brisk winds picked up then, ripping through him. The dark storm-clouds were fast approaching. In front of him, the Duros could only be the infamous Brin Khufus. Khufus stood still, his lightsaber hilt in his hand.

The Ranger spoke, then, "Who are you to call me Undesirable? You wish to kill me? So be it - I will fight. But my death will solve nothing, my demise will be your undoing. Each death angers us, and you just killed billions. You use anger to fuel your untamed powers. When we Jedi are angry, it builds up, enhancing our disciplined skills. One death too many, though, and we do tend to explode. Even one such as yourself does not want to witness such a thing."

Khufus smirked, and then laughed. It was a strong, derogatory guffaw. "You zealot! Rage is not only our fuel, but it is our life. You think you are 'disciplined'? You are the ones who cannot control your own anger. You want to fight, Jedi? I suspect what I call 'fight' is much different to your definition. You may have been able to take out a sniper, but that does not qualify you in the slightest to question my abilities in battle. I am the mighty Brin Khufus, veteran of a thousand battles, and undefeated. I have fought Jedi such as you my entire life. I accompanied the Grand Master as he 'toured' your planet, razing it to the ground. I can squash you like I did your brethren. So, Jedi. Try to kill me, if you dare."

Seridan unbuckled his sword belt, the sheath dropping to the ground. It would be too much weight anyway. He held his saber with one end pointing towards the sky to the left, and the other pointing beneath his right arm. An easy position to block, but not to make the first move. He started moving forward, making sure his footwork was solid, and secure. Khufus lit his saber, a wicked crimson. No sooner than the **snap-hiss** of the saber had reached his ears, Seridan spun, using the momentum to reinforce the telekinetic punch that hit Khufus square in the face. The Sith blinked, showing signs of a small impact. As the Ranger followed through his punch, he felt the energy sucked from the air, as if the telekinesis itself had been absorbed.

Khufus, not even slightly disgruntled, started striding forward. As they neared, the lanky Duros leaped forward, saber slashing overhead. Seridan moved to the right, saber swiping left to deflect. Then, he lunged forward in riposte, but it was dodged, and Khufus' blade swung back towards Seridan in a counter-attack. Seridan ducked, using his blade to redirect the swing. Seridan rolled to the side, and swept out toward Khufus' unguarded left flank. The Sith was preternaturally quick, but his saber was still following through on the last attack. Sure that it was going to connect, Seridan amplified his muscles, and the blade moved all the faster for it.

Khufus' left hand smashed into the blade, a glowing barrier covering his fist. It redirected his saber, and knocked each of them off-balance. Seridan stepped back, giving them both some space. As soon as he was ready, Khufus struck. It was an overhead swing. The Duros' advanced height also gave him a whole lot more reach. Seridan raised his own saber, catching the blow in a lock. The two blades sparked against the other, contrasting flashes of colour onto both faces. Khufus was stronger than Seridan - much stronger, and so he gave out first, tipping his blade to the side, and spinning out.

The winds had picked up again, this time in one continuous gale. Dust was now obscuring the surroundings, hiding the furious battle from anyone. The dark storm-clouds were starting to cover the sun, its light dimming.

They continued to duel, Seridan deflecting and dodging Khufus' aggressive, strong manoeuvres. After the first few clashes, the Ranger started to dodge more often, taking advantage of his foe's wide slashes. But Khufus was not slowing down. The dodges and rolls that Seridan was doing were starting to take their toll, his muscles starting to feel the ache of fatigue. He started to choose when best to roll, and was deflecting the slashes and swipes more often. But Khufus' strength was formidable. Each deflection was starting to propagate a shudder through his body, numbing his hands ever so slightly. And yet, Khufus was starting to show signs of exhaustion too - slightly slower counter-attacks, blows that weren't quite as powerful as they had been a few minutes before. They were fairly well matched, but Khufus' strength and stamina were better than the Miraluka's. He was going to lose.

And so, he started to retreat back towards the ridge, looking to make haste, away from his doom. He would leap the ridge where the sniper stood, and then use the last of his energy running to the canyon edge, where he'd half-jump, half-fall to the bottom, where he'd asked some soldiers earlier to meet him. Then he'd be safe. As he moved back, Khufus followed him easily, eager to finish him off.

Khufus swiped to the right. Seridan slashed upwards, diverting the blade over his head. The Sith pivoted his wrist, bringing the blade back round. The Jedi rolled backward toward the crack. At the same time, he reached out and perverted the perception of Khufus, making Seridan appear to be hit, cutting through a significant portion of his upper arm. The Ranger leapt the crack and looked back. The Warlord grinned massively, staring intently at the created image before him.

The Jedi turned back, and made to move off, but instead fell forward, a sword sticking out of his right ankle. He barely felt it, adrenaline and cortisol running through his veins. Behind him, the sniper had regained consciousness and wielded his own sword as he was distracted. Seridan hit her with the Force again. This time, she cried out and disappeared into her crevice. The Sith's illusion had shattered, and he now narrowed his eyes at the downed Miraluka.

The adrenaline was wearing off. Fatigue flooded through his system, along with two other debilitating effects: pain and fear. Khufus began to stalk toward him over the gravelly stone.

Seridan turned and earnestly clawed his way forward, the cliff-edge now only a few feet away. He just needed to get over that edge.

A *crack* filled the air, a bolt of lightning smashing down ahead. Deafened, momentarily blinded, and severely wounded, Seridan felt a final pang of fear, and then, he made his peace with the universe.

As he finally accepted his fate, his fingers found the edge of the canyon-top. Hope for the future rekindled, he pulled himself over the edge. He rolled some of the way down, and scraped the rest. Clothing torn and bloody, he rolled over onto his back. All he needed to do was alert the nearby soldiers. He opened his mouth, but only a weak gasp came out. The storm-clouds seemed to completely cover the local Sun. Combined with the strong gusts of dusty wind, it was difficult to hear or see anything.

Another bolt of lightning struck just ahead, lighting up the sky. It revealed a sinister silhouette, of a tall, lean Sith. Khufus walked out of the blackness, scowling with intense hatred. Seridan struggled to raise his arm - and keep it raised - in protection, but it did not matter. Khufus walked over Seridan, then span. His lightsaber danced over Seridan's body, severing his limbs. Only a feeble gasp left the Miraluka's mouth. It wouldn't have mattered anyway - the wind was howling, and a scream could be lost in such a thing. He reached down and tore Seridan's eye-bandages from his face as a trophy, leaving some gory scratch-marks. Only then, did the Sith feel ready to finish the job.

Alone in the storm, the Sith ended the life of the Jedi.

Word Count: 3415