

Deon Duska was a nobody for almost all of his life, all thirty-five years of it thus far. A native of Selen, Estle City in particular, the Human had spent his time serving Arcona in the janitorial field. It wasn't glamorous work, but it paid the bills and because he worked the night shift, there was virtually nobody around to annoy or bark orders at him. All that mattered was that the rooms he was assigned to got cleaned up. He got little respect from most people he did encounter, but otherwise was largely left alone.

The quiet monotony of his life was broken one day when he picked up his assignment sheet for the month and found himself assigned to the notorious *Bulkhead*, the secret prison hidden within Port Ol'val. Having heard of tales of the cruelty of the prison overseers, Deon had approached his assignment with trepidation. But being a loyal servant of the Clan- and preferring to remain on the Force Users' good side, he kept his mouth shut and went.

The first month was the worst, as Deon settled into the *Bulkhead* and learned the ropes, particularly cleaning up after the grisly interrogations that went on at times. But soon enough, he adapted to the sight of bodily fluids and the sickening stench of terror that emitted from the former occupants of the cells he was assigned to clean up. Soon, he had no trouble at all in keeping his stomach at bay, so long as he was able to smoke a cigarette before and after his shift to settle his nerves.

That all changed one day.

Deon had punched in for his shift as normal, the burning odor of tobacco still fresh inside him, and had just grabbed his equipment cart and wheeled it down the complex, heading for his first room of the night, Interrogation Cell Twenty-Five. His first time doing so, as for whatever reason, it was assigned to the most senior janitor on staff at the time, although the attrition rate for that cell was high, with many janitors quitting as soon as they finished their first assignment in that cell.

But as he neared the cell, his stomach began to twist up inside him, and his face broke out in a clammy sweat. Deon couldn't quite put his finger on it, but that cell felt... *wrong*.

"Okay man, you got this..." Deon muttered to himself as he breathed in deeply, trying to calm himself before forcing himself to slap the door release.

As soon as the door whisked open, he realized just why so many janitors quit after their first time. Dark blood was splattered everywhere, almost coating the walls, and the sheer stench of terror was prevalent. Even worse was the icy feeling of sheer evil that pierced through him as he stepped tremblingly into the room.

A few seconds later, he lost his dinner as he vomited all over the floor. The bile and half-digested food surged out of him until he was dry-heaving, at which point he crawled out of

the cell to get away from the vile sight. He staggered to the opposite wall and slumped down, panting and trying to breathe in the relatively fresh air.

“Hm. I suppose we will need a new janitor soon.”

Deon startled and looked up to see a huge alien staring down at him, the grey scales almost black in the dim lighting. The most ominous thing however was his eyes, which were glowing a bright violet, almost like hot coals being stoked. As soon as Deon made eye contact with the alien’s glowing orbs, he could feel the sheer depth of terror that it inspired, and instantly knew that this being was the cause of the sheer evil that occurred in the cell.

“I... no. N-No, you won’t,” Deon stuttered as he scrambled to his feet. “I j-just need a respirator mask.”

“I won’t?” The alien cocked his head, and for the first time, Deon saw the large thick tail that coiled up around the alien’s leg, moving as if self-aware. “Hm. We’ll see.”

With that, the alien moved on, soon vanishing from sight as he departed the complex. Deon felt a release and breathed in the fresher air, feeling as if whatever was constricting his lungs had released him as soon as the alien disappeared.

He got his respirator mask and then got to work, only vomiting once more during the shift. The cleanup work took hours and lots of different chemical applications before the room was restored to a spick-and-span appearance, and as soon as Deon’s shift was over, he was out of there and lighting up a cigarette.

And the pattern became established for almost the entire next year, with Deon vomiting at the beginning of the shift as soon as he stepped into the interrogation cell and laid his eyes on the gore that would inevitably greet him as the alien continued his grisly work. Then he would eventually man up and begin the clean-up. He didn’t see the alien again after that.

One day, he stepped into the cell, and was hit with a massive sense of icy terror as he suddenly realized that the cell was... *occupied*.

A Human male was strapped down to the table with thick leather straps, nude with no scrap of clothing. The alien that he saw before was now leaning over the Human’s face, his violet eyes blaze as he stared down at the prisoner. No words were spoken, but after a moment, the Human broke and began sobbing, blubbing out whatever it was that the alien wanted to hear.

Deon stared in horrified silence as the alien began asking questions, alternating with veiled threats. After a moment, the alien looked up and beckoned to Deon.

“Enter, you need not stare. You may start on the wallz,” The alien gave Deon a toothy smile before glancing down at the sobbing Human. “I am almozt finizhed here.”

“I... yes sir,” Deon gulped and wheeled his cart in, mechanically beginning to get to work, blocking out the horrifying screaming as the interrogation continued.

After a half hour, the walls was just about cleaned up when the alien spoke to Deon again.

“You didn’t vomit thiz time,” The alien noted as he wiped his claws with a rag, removing the slick blood. “And you are still working for uz. Interezeting.”

“How... how so, sir?” Deon stammered slightly as he turned to face the alien.

“Mozt janitorz quit after their firzt time in my interrogation cell. You stuck it out. That iz... imprezzive,” The alien said as he tossed the rag onto the table. “Your name iz... Deon, yez?”

“Yes sir,” Deon replied, his eyes widening as he realized that the alien knew who he was.

“You may call me Zakath,” The alien chuckled gravelly. “I will be re-azzigned soon, so you will soon not have to clean up after me. Unlezz...”

Deon gulped, his throat constricting as he stared up at Zakath.

“If your pay iz doubled and a staff azzigned to you, would you like to follow me to my new azzignment?” Zakath finished his trailing sentence. “A janitor who keepz hiz stomach iz a rare thing for me, and very uzeful.”

“I...” Deon’s eyes grew as big as dinner plates at the thought. “You... you’re willing to double my pay? Not ju-just order me to do it?”

“You serve uz, but you are not a slave,” Zakath let a low chuckle escape. “You do your job well, and you will be rezpected there. Any dizrezpect that I am aware of will be dealt with... severely. That iz how I operate. No more, no lezz. So no, I am not ordering you. If you follow, it will be of your own volition.”

“I... see.” Deon glanced down at the bloodied and unconscious Human, wincing at the gruesome sight.

Double his pay and actual respect in exchange for cleaning up after the sinister Zakath’s interrogations. Was it worth the risk of losing his stomach every time he entered the Dark Jedi’s torture chambers?

But actual respect from the Dark Jedi was a prize that most Mundanes that served the Clan craved but almost never got. And Zakath was offering- no, have given Deon just that.

He had earned the Dark Jedi's respect.

"I accept," Deon said at last, meeting Zakath's glowing eyes for the first time and feeling a flicker of pride at not flinching.

Zakath smiled a toothy grin and nodded slightly at him. "I will make the arrangementz. Finizh your job here tonight. You will have the rez of thiz week off, paid. I suggezt you pack up, we will be leaving shortly."

Before Deon could reply, the Dark Jedi swept past him and departed, leaving the stunned Deon alone in the cell with the prisoner.

He got back to work with a smile hidden behind his respirator, as he fired up the pressure sprayer to begin scouring the floors.

Actual respect from a Dark Jedi. One of the true powers behind Arcona.

Actual respect.

Who would've thought?