

Zakath had spent most of his adult life as a bounty hunter and mercenary. It wasn't as exciting as the holovids made it out to be, with dramatic gunplay and aggressive questioning of suspects and witnesses, and seducing the opposite sex. Especially for one such as himself, being of the Barabel species, and thus being considered unattractive at best, and very intimidating at worst. No, most of his time was taken up with tracking his prey, quietly questioning witnesses and hiring proxies to handle the more delicate work of trailing suspects and slicing through computers.

Most prey, when finally cornered, were usually persuaded to give up without a fight, especially if Zakath's employers were of the more legitimate kinds, such as corporate security or planetary governments keen to get their hands on criminals.

But those wanted by the underworld, especially the Hutts, did not go quietly, knowing the painful fate that awaited them if they were taken alive. So, like most mercenaries, Zakath trained himself in the basic usage of explosives and various kinds of blasters, eventually coming to prefer an acquired BlastTech E-11 blaster rifle, often seen in the hands of the stormtroopers of the Galactic Empire. It wasn't the most accurate rifle on the market, but for someone like himself who tended to aggressively charge in, relying on his armor and blaster-resistant scales, it was a weapon that suited him.

But his mercenary days were now past, and now he found himself in service to the Dark Brotherhood, and like most Force-Sensitives, was beginning to train in the ways of the lightsaber. He had spent several months practicing and perfecting the basic fundamentals of using the weapon, the so-called Form Zero, and now he was learning the beginning movements of the Contention style, the Mashaki form.

But it was... difficult.

The short and precise movements of the Mashaki form did not come naturally to Zakath, and the Barabel frequency overcompensated on his thrusts and slashes, leaving himself exposed to painful counterattacks during training sessions. Virtually every training session ended with Zakath retreating to his assigned quarters to brood and lick his wounds.

He did eventually grow to understand the basic concepts behind the Contention form, but compared to his fellow students, who excelled in their chosen forms, he was very much behind, which frustrated the Barabel to no end.

"Stop."

The order came too late, and Zakath let out an agonized bellow as his opponent's training saber neatly undercut the attempted slash and smashed into his ribcage, the energy discharging and

giving him a painful shock. The Barabel reeled backwards and let out another snarl, raising his training saber for a wild attack.

“I said ENOUGH!”

The instructor’s voice cut through Zakath’s enraged mind and he blinked as the Human stood in front of him, waving away his opponent.

“Hunter Daranaris, that’s enough for today. Go.” The Human, waving away the other trainee before turning her attention to Zakath. “You stay. We need to talk.”

“About what?” Zakath growled as he set down his training weapon, wincing as his ribcage spasmed with each breath he took.

“Your lightsaber form,” The instructor said bluntly, her sapphire eyes glaring up with icy coolness into Zakath’s own emerald eyes. “Makashi is not working for you. I admire the fact that you chose to stick with it despite not picking it up fast, but it’s not for you.”

“But it’s the best way to counter a Jedi!” Zakath protested. “Everything I’ve been told by my trainers said that Makashi is the best style to duel a Jedi in!”

“Oh karking hell,” The instructor sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. “I really need to talk to the Headmaster about this load of hooey those idiots are spooning you babies with.”

“Instructor?”

“I should’ve talked to you sooner,” The instructor sighed. “I didn’t realize that the new people were being fed this nonsense. I’ll put it direct for you, Zakath. Makashi is all well and good for dueling Jedi, that’s true, but it is not for you. You’re too strong and direct for it.”

“I... don’t understand,” Zakath admitted, cocking his head as he stared down at the instructor. “Makashi is not the best form to kill Jedi?”

“Not for you,” The instructor said, poking her finger into the Barabel’s heavily muscled chest. “You’re too strong and direct. Makashi is meant to be a form that is used for very precise attacks, using speed as its primary method of delivering attacks. You don’t do that, you use strength.”

“But... the harder I hit, the more my enemy would crumble,” Zakath said, his rumbling voice holding a hint of confusion in its tone. “Is that not a good thing?”

“Not for Makashi,” The instructor paused and considered the Barabel for a long moment, looking him from head to toe. “I think Shii-Cho is more your style.”

“The Simplest Form?” The Barabel blinked. “But it is... simple.”

“Yes, it is,” The instructor admitted with a slight smirk. “But just because it is simple, doesn’t make it any less deadly than Makashi. And with the way you’re built, I think you will perform very well in it, indeed. Report to me here tomorrow morning, and we’ll begin your retraining.”

Zakath stared down at her for a long moment, and then nodded slowly.

Over the next few months, Zakath began his training in the ways of the Simplest Form. Much to his surprise, he picked it up quickly, and was able to use his strength and size to considerable advantage. The direct and forceful blows that Shii-Cho utilized was perfectly matched to the Barabel’s temperament, and his prowess in practice duels began to increase rapidly.

“Enough!”

The Barabel’s eyes glowed with dark power as he leveled his training saber at his opponent’s throat. Looking up, Zakath grinned fiercely at the instructor, who smiled and nodded to him in approval.

“Very good, Zakath, I believe the point is made,” The instructor called out to the small cluster of students who had gathered to watch as Zakath dueled Daranaris in a rematch. “Let this be a lesson for you all. Makashi is a fine style and very useful for countering the lightsaber of a Jedi... but it is not the only one.”

The instructor placed a slim hand on Zakath’s muscled shoulder.

“Zakath’s body was not suited to the speed and indirectness that Makashi demanded, so he found a style that did work for him,” The instructor continued on. “Shii-Cho may be a simple form- indeed, one of the simplest, but in a hands of a master, it is a very powerful form. Remember that! Always respect the potential of every form!”

The instructor turned to Zakath and smiled up at him.

“I understand your Knighting trials are coming up soon. I wish you the best of luck, and will be watching your progress with great interest.”

Zakath nodded slowly and then bowed at the waist.

“Thank you, instructor.”

