

Embracing Darkness

A Submission to the Competition:
Extinguishing the Light, Burning the Darkness



Written by
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Reiden Karr was beginning to come to the end of his training under his first master Kadain Thorne. They had made a stop on the planet Kashyyyk. Kadain had wanted to give Reiden some more survival training. Reiden's powers had grown much stronger since their initial stop on Dantooine where he was taught the very basics. And after his calling upon the Force on Nar Shaddaa, their training had only intensified. Kadain had told Reiden that he was a Gray Jedi in the ranks of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood. He had taught that Gray Jedi fought a constant battle within, toeing the sometimes razor-thin line between the Light and Dark sides of the Force. Always seeking balance between the two opposing forces. After Reiden had informed Kadain about his experiences on Nar Shaddaa, the older man had talked to Reiden at length about all of these things. He emphasized balance yet again, that it was important to have it both in life and in combat. Reiden tried his best to uphold that balance, but there was always anger in him. No matter how hard he tried to quell that particular fire, it was ever-present.

That anger was, in fact, part of the reason why Kadain had chosen Kashyyyk as the next step in their journey for training. He had hope that the serene wilderness surrounding them would help serve to calm his young apprentice. There was a struggle with it initially. However, after several days, the anger finally seemed to be abating. It may have only been a small step in a much longer journey, but Kadain would consider it an accomplishment and continue working on it as time allowed.

With an abundance of resources around them, Kadain taught Reiden how to construct a suitable shelter and prepare a fire. Reiden had already learned of such things during his time at home on Corellia, but he let the older man instruct him regardless. It was always a good idea to supplement one's knowledge. One day, Reiden was out collecting materials with which to build his own shelter, to show Kadain that he had learned how to do so successfully. While dragging a rather large branch through the jungle, Reiden heard voices approaching from somewhere ahead of him. Unsure of what to do at first, he dropped the branch and quickly found cover behind the trunk of a nearby tree. He cautiously peered around the trunk and spotted a group of three men making their way towards him through the dense forest. The men in the front and the back were both Human, while the one in the middle was a Zabrak.

"Come on, lads," the taller man in the lead said. "My source tells me that there should be a Wookiee village not much farther from here."

"Oh, really? Care to share the name of that friend of yours, Metz? Following the word of an informant is all well and good, but it'd be helpful if we knew he could be trusted," the heavy-set man in the rear questioned.

"Shut it, Henssler. I've had enough of your whining on this little trip already," Metz snapped in reply.

"Both of you need to be quiet, right now," the Zabrak, growled lowly. "Make any more noise and those walking carpets will know we're coming, and we'll have lost the element of surprise." Based on how the alien's words immediately stopped the petty bickering, Reiden guessed that the Zabrak must be the one in charge. He clearly commanded authority. "Keep your eyes peeled, the both of you. It's possible that we might stumble across a furball at any moment now. Got it?" The Zabrak added, looking between the two.

“Yeah, sure thing, Oberon,” Henssler said softly, showing deference.

“Copy that. Sorry, boss,” Metz replied. His tone was angry but he made no further argument.

Based on the trio’s armament, Reiden found it hard to believe that it was purely for self-defense. And they certainly were no men of science. Yet their reason for stalking through the forest still eluded him. That is, until they got closer and he spotted a necklace of bones ringing the Zabrak’s tattooed neck – most likely from fingers, judging by their length and shape. They must be slavers or hunters. Reiden knew that people still traded in Wookiees, and others collected their pelts. He couldn’t help but feel a brief wave of revulsion swell within him, followed quickly by a flare of white-hot anger. He was confident enough in his abilities that he could easily take them all, especially when aided by the Force. However, he decided it might be best to not get involved and simply observe them for the moment.

He watched carefully from his hidden position as the hunters moved on. Once they had moved out of range, Reiden cautiously and silently made his way after them. He made sure to stay close enough to overhear their conversations while still maintaining a safe distance away so as not to be detected. He reached out with the Force and pulled it around himself like a cloak, masking his presence to the hunters just to be safe. Reiden continued like this for about twenty minutes longer before the three men suddenly stopped short. The Zabrak had advanced to the lead and held up a clenched fist, signaling for his men to stop. He pulled his blaster rifle from his back. Reiden stopped short, worried that perhaps he hadn’t been as quiet as he had hoped and that the alien had heard something. A brief moment of relief followed when Oberon took up a firing stance and held his eye to the scope, scanning the distance ahead of them.

“What is it, boss? You seeing anything yet?” Henssler questioned.

“Can it, big boy,” Metz scolded. “Keep your mouth shut and let the man concentrate.”

Oberon growled. “Both of you, be silent already. There’s a little one up ahead, coming closer.”

Reiden pulled out a slim pair of macrobinoculars and followed Oberon’s gaze. In the distance he spotted a juvenile Wookiee advancing towards the group’s position. He directed his attention back to the Zabrak, a cruel smile slowly creeping upon his countenance. The young Wookiee drew closer and was in sight range of the trio. It turned towards them, curiosity getting the better of it as he came nearer. Oberon’s finger tightened on the blaster rifle’s trigger and he took a breath. Slowly exhaling, the Zabrak took aim and squeezed the trigger. A crimson blaster bolt seared into the small space between the Wookiees eyes and it crumpled to the ground, dead.

Rage erupted within Reiden’s chest. He wanted to scream out in anguish but knew that would only turn the hunters on his position. Instead, he pulled his knife from its sheath and drew his arm back, ready to hurl it at the Zabrak. Just as he was about to throw the blade, a firm hand clamped down on his shoulder, staying his assault. At the same time, another hand covered his mouth. Reiden’s head whipped about to look at the hand’s owner and found his master crouching beside him. Kadain withdrew his hands and gestured for Reiden to remain quiet.

“Do not get involved, my apprentice,” the old man instructed.

“But why not, master? They can’t be allowed to get away with this!” Reiden complained.

Kadain shook his head slowly, his eyes full of remorse. “Sadly, this kind of thing is not uncommon. And our intervention would not bring the poor creature back to life. Besides that, it would draw unnecessary attention to us. As I’ve told you before, we must go about undetected, whenever possible. Force wielders are not always safe. Despite all our powers and training, we are not invincible. I was sent out to find potential recruits for my Clan within the Brotherhood, and I am not about to jeopardize a promising member like yourself by allowing you to stop these hunters.”

“Yes, master. I understand,” Reiden relented, heeding his master’s wisdom.

They could hear the three men whooping with glee at their newfound prize, bragging about how many credits they could possibly get for bagging a juvenile Wookiee. A roar was heard next, and Reiden turned to find the source. An adult Wookiee was barreling towards the hunters. Oberon gave another wicked smile and shot the creature, his two partners joining in. Once it was dead, Metz and Henssler went to drag the beast over to their leader. More celebratory conversation was made. Anger flared within Reiden once more, but upon his master’s urging, he pushed it down as best as he could. The pair turned away and crept back to their shelter to resume their training.

Reiden fumed as he constructed his own shelter, as he had initially planned to do before encountering the hunters. He recognized the wisdom behind his master’s words, but he couldn’t help but remain angry at the atrocities that he had just witnessed. Despite all his efforts to be calm and maintain a balance within himself, he found it to be a losing battle. His anger was winning. It was at that moment that he made the decision to be different from his master. If he saw something like that happen again, he would not stand idly by. He would take action. If possible, he would even try to stop it before it occurred. He let a seed of rage and darkness take root deep within himself, which he would slowly nurture over time until it blossomed in fruition. He would harness that resulting power and make use of it when the time was right, whatever the need may be in the future.