

Sencara A'theri laid in the air, atop a pillar, high in the gleaming dark. The air was heavy and stale, and each breath seemed to have the weight of at least three. The ancient Jedi-fanboy temple was not a pleasant place to be, but she'd waited in worse. That was mostly what her job — any sniper's job — was.

Hours of boredom followed by minutes of panic. Or in her case, excitement.

And as she listened to the clatter of footsteps drawing near, her heartbeat picked up in exactly that. Finally.

A figure emerged, eventually, from one of the tunnels that was lit up, not that the Umbaran sniper needed the light. It wasn't short, but not overly tall either, armored, bulky enough that male or female wasn't obvious. Sencara smirked.

She tracked the figure in her sights, counting breaths, waiting. It was dark in the temple ruins, sure, but Sencara had the best eyes of anyone in Capital Enterprises, and not just because of her nightsight. Her gaze was the sharpest in the Collective. The best eyes and the best shot. Everyone else was a freaking *plebian*, and this kill would just be one more for her tally. When she lined up the perfect shot, that was.

The figure — a woman, and dumb enough to take off her helmet so she could squint around more easily at that — moved along the outer edge of the chamber, hugging the walls. She left a little glowing blue and green trail in her wake, those crystals reacting to something living nearby. They literally drew Sencara a map. It was *so easy* she was getting *more* bored.

The woman made a lot of scowling faces. Funny. And had a lot of scars. Features kind of in the shape of some Epicanthix, though not quite; and Sencara couldn't make out her *coloring* much in the sink, even if she could otherwise see clearly. But still. The woman seemed really intent, or really confused. She kept looking around, head on a swivel, twitching with every echo of her own footsteps bouncing back at her. The acoustics in this place really were atrocious.

Not so much for Sencara, but for anyone not wanting to be spotted by a sniper, maybe. Even an amateur sniper.

The woman finally left the walls — good, the curve could've messed up her shot — and started for the center of the concentric chamber, kicking up dust plumes as she went. She stopped dead, abruptly, when she got to the middle, cocking her head and shaking it like a confused canine. Like she had flies buzzing around. She stumbled out of her spot and Sencara almost laughed, but she was disciplined, so it came out as barely a breath.

Still. Those acoustics.

The other woman froze again and whipped about, a knife appearing in her hand. She bared her teeth.

"Who's there?" she snarled, as if actually expecting someone to answer her. Snipers didn't *answer people*. What was this, a holo?

Sencara realigned her sights, focusing on the woman's head, then dropping a steady gaze to her torso, on the midline. The blaster bolt would tear right through her chest, put a hole in her lungs and heart and other important bits. One shot, one kill. *Boom, baby*.

Surprisingly, despite the lack of response, the other woman lashed out with her blade, slashing through empty air, as if she expected someone to just appear in front of her. Mystified by the sheer stupidity and very comfortable with her shot, fixed over the woman's sternum as it was, she smirked and yelled loudly, knowing her voice would boom all over the place.

"YOU BROUGHT KNIVES TO A GUNFIGHT!"

—*ight, ight, ight*, rang the echo.

The woman jumped, violently, flinching at the soundwaves bouncing around them, spinning in place and trailing dirt. Her gaze was wild, and her hands moved, and—

A gunshot crack-crack-*cracked* through the air, and the rock nearby Sencara exploded with a shower of dust and gravel from a small-impact round munition. The agent froze for a heartbeat, wondering if she'd miscalculated. But she was never wrong...

"I brought knives and guns and *grenades* to a gunfight, bitch. Why don't you come out and play?"

"Oh, sure, I'll *absolutely* do that. Your tactic of calling me out to abandon my superior position with petty goading is *so* effective. I'm awed. Awed I say."

She watched the woman scowl again through the sights of her rifle at her comment. The Human's inferior eyes were tracking around, flitting over Sencara a couple times, but not fixing on her despite the earlier close shot. Clearly it had just been luck. She had this.

"You think you're funnier than you are."

"Maybe, but I'm *right* and isn't that what really matters, scarface?"

The frown deepened. The woman looked feral, kept moving, like a caged animal, like she knew she was being watched and hunted and was already dead. It was great.

"Fine then. Who are you for? Principate? Collective? One of the other clans?"

"I represent the Sencara Is Always Right Foundation. All donations go to yours truly."

"Sencara..." A pause, eyes widening with recognition. "Sencara A'theri? You're with Enterprises. We've heard of you."

*We, huh?* Sencara thought, sweeping her scope over the woman's armor. It didn't have any symbols on it like some of the Brotherhood members tended to wear way too loudly.

"Tell me more, I love hearing how amazing I am. Bet your files say I'm a great sniper. Bet you're looking for me right now. Bet you're trying really hard, but you can't 'cause you can't tell where my voice is coming from and of course you can't see me. Bet you're real scared."

She chuckled, high-pitched. The woman's *face*. Amazing. She loved being right.

"Maybe," spat the other, palming her knife, fear evident in her stance despite the way her face twitched like she was controlling her expression. Good try, but Sencara saw *everything*. "Or maybe not. Maybe I'm just crazy."

Then, the woman's scowl morphed into an expression like a smile that definitely wasn't a smile, and suddenly the entire view through her scope was filled with a blinding flash of white.

Sencara *screamed*. She jerked back and instinctively slapped a hand over her right eye, the left blinking away tears and fuzzy color. Her ears rang from the din that reverberated through the temple chamber, and her teeth ached with it, but the worst was definitely the eye she'd been spotting with. The agony was terrible, and even as she blinked some more to clear her vision, only one side of her view partially returned after whole minutes of panicked waiting. When she closed her left eye, the seared right could only show her grayish-black blurs.

Realization through her pain was fast and hard: the crazy scarred holo-villian wannabe had set off a flashbang in her own hand. That *had* to have burned, and even if she'd shut her eyes, which Sencara had definitely seen through the scope before things exploded, the other woman was certainly deafened at such a range. Maybe permanently. In fact, she'd probably be on the ground right about now, unconscious, which was why Sencara was still fine despite the time it took for even one eye to clear. It had been a stupid move. Too stupid to be clever.

Gritting her teeth, Sencara clenched shut her right eye and peered once more through her rifle's sights with her left, rubbing at it briefly. Things were fuzzy. But...The spot where the rifle was pointed, where the woman had been before, was empty.

The agent gaped, but recovered quickly, swiveling around slow and careful. She swept the floor and the nearby area in her sights, spotting blood easily. Drops of it, and a small trail, headed...

...towards her perch.

*Oh, ka—*

The sniper felt fingers close around her ankle and shrieked as she was dragged backwards. Her chin slammed into the stone while one of her nails got left behind in the rock as she scabbled to keep from being pulled off the top of the pillar. It wasn't any use though; the grip on her leg was *strong*, and her legs and hips were quickly yanked over the side. Gravity made it easy then, as she fell into a heap on top of another body.

Adrenaline screeching through her veins, the sniper drove her elbow back in a brutal strike to the solar plexus, aiming to neutralize the threat. Her bone snapped against heavy plate, however, softening the blow that already wasn't very powerful. Her attacker only grunted, a sound that was maybe half-moan, and then those hands were grappling hers again and the hips underneath hers were twisting and they were rolling. Sencara's shoulders impacted the dust-caked floor *hard*, sending a cloud of particles puffing up around them. She got a glimpse of bared teeth and a glare bordered in burst blood vessels, blood dribbling down either side of her chin and neck from her ears, before the other woman reared back and cracked a punch into Sencara's face.

Agony blossomed, the way her nose blossomed like a flower opening, smushing and spreading across her face in a spray of crimson. Mucus and tears and blood flooded her sinuses, her throat. She choked, gurgled, felt the sudden stab of fear that *wasn't being able to breathe—*

Then another blow came, and everything went very fuzzy again, whining and ringing and slow-swimming. Her head throbbed, and she tasted metal and the flavor of her own mouth. Vaguely she knew she was lifting her hands in reflex, trying to protect her face while lashing out with her knuckler-covered hand, the one she didn't use for trigger-pulling. She felt an impact, a drag and give of pressure. The vibro-spikes sinking into flesh and bone. She heard the Human wail. But then another hit slammed into her stomach and Sencara was in motion again, this time jerking upright by muscle reflex alone to vomit down her own chest.

A little bit of sense came back when she sat up, even as she gasped and spat and gagged, needing air, any air, blackness threatening to consume her. The weight holding her down lifted, and she knew a second of relief, but only long enough for fingers to knot in her hair, ripping out her ponytail and shaking her by her roots. That pain was bright and sharp, unlike the punches to her face, and it shocked her into blinking.

"—coming with me you smart-mouthed Hutt-slime," the woman was slurring, loudly, very loudly, like someone who couldn't hear themselves talking. And that was it, wasn't it? She couldn't hear. The blood, the grenade— even if her trick *had* worked, she *had* blown out her own ears, and Sencara could still use that.

"DRK-1!" Sencara barked, summoning her Probe droid from where she had left it in an adjacent hallway, monitoring the exits and the generators that kept the archeologists' lights live. "Ram her!"

The droid was simple, made for repairs and reconnaissance, but it was programmed to obey any single line command, so it did. The woman started to drag Sencara through the dust by her hair, and the probe floated over, gaining speed as it went. Well, some speed. The thing was slow on its repulsolifters but it was dense and heavy enough that when it came right on up hovering behind her captor and slammed into the back of her head, the other woman went down.

Sencara seized her opportunity. She scrambled free as soon as the hold on her skull loosened, leaving behind a few raven tresses. She only spared a moment to glance back at her attacker and former target; the damn woman was already climbing back upright, swearing and spitting — yes, those were teeth. She was spitting teeth and there were slashes in her cheek so wide and raw that gums and incisors and tongue were all visible. And yet she still tried to get up. Sencara shrieked as the woman staggered and lunged for her on hands and knees, crawling and stumbling away. She was shaken from being caught and from her broken nose, from her possibly *blinded* eye — oh, hell, *her* eye — and as a result she was so very much not up for dealing with the clearly enraged bull-rancor of a crazy woman currently spewing blood and spittle at her through the gaps Sencara had put in her face.

Sencara wobbled up, tossed the smoke bomb on her belt towards her assailant, and *ran*. She heard the deafened woman shout with rage when the grenade exploded, only to fall into a terrible coughing fit that promised at least a few moments of safety.

The agent didn't waste it going back for her rifle. She just sprinted — hobbled, really, as her ankle had been twisted when she was pulled down — back through the ruins, stopping only long enough to use her wrist-laser to slice through the cables of the generators; complete darkness and lack of hearing would *have* to slow even the wounded madwoman. Her droid was good enough to guide her the rest of the way outside, leaving the figure behind.

It didn't even bother her then that she was fleeing. Sencara knew better, and when to cut her loses. Besides, it wasn't *really* a loss.

She hadn't fired a shot, so her motto held true.