

Sera Kaern Character Snapshot:

<https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/members/15689/snapshots/1733/3269>

## SHROUD OF LIGHT

### Ordu Aspectu Temple

#### 1923 Hours

There was a Zabrak in Sencara's cave.

She was young; younger than the sniper was, and shorter too. But, she didn't look weak; much the opposite, in fact. The young woman who found herself on the bad end of A'theri's scope looked *strong*, with a wiry and muscular frame that spoke of a formidable fighter. Even in the deep, near-unrelenting darkness of the cave, Sencara could see the Zabradi's maroon tattoos shifting with her flesh, the gleam of her blue eyes...and the white shine of her teeth, bared in a smile. She was *smiling*.

Silently, the Umbaran shifted in her crouch, prowling to a new position as the stranger passed behind a screen of stalagmites. The new spot gave her a good vantage point on the cave's central chamber; an excellent killzone, muffled and dim as it was. Capital Enterprises had sent her down here for the specific purpose of silencing the temple's archeologists, and any Brotherhood schmucks that were sent in after them... not that she really knew why, of course. She was getting paid to kill, not to poke into things that were above her pay grade; and she had a very high pay grade.

Settling down into her new position, prone underneath the bulk of a fallen pillar, Sencara pulled her sights back up onto her prey, watching, waiting for the moment. Smoothly, one finger slid down to squeeze on the trigger. Slowly, surely, pressure was added, as the sights lined up over one of those piercing blue eyes...

The rifle gave a sharp report, the bright red of the plasma-burst temporarily dazzling the Umbaran's vision. Blinking the moment away, she pulled her scope back up, surveying the damage...

Only to find that there wasn't a body to be seen. Only a few new scorch-marks, blasted into a pillar.

One violet eye widened slightly in response, but otherwise the sniper gave no indication of her admittedly enormous frustration. Instead of raging, she rose up into a crouch, and faded back into the shadows, falling to her Plan-Besh position; a pile of rubble, close to the verge of the smooth temple-center. Her footsteps came like featherfalls; soft, inaudible, and totally smooth. There wasn't any way that the Zabrad could have figured out where she was in the first place,

let alone tracked her down. The sound couldn't have given her away, not with the echo of the cave. In fact, the report of the blaster rifle was still echoing, muffling Secara's steps in its reverb.

And yet, there was a prickle riding across the back of Sencara's neck, a slight rise of flesh that she did her best to fight down. There was no way in hell that she should have missed that shot; everything was right, every factor in her favor. The Zabrak should have been sizzled by now, flesh blackened and steaming as her hearts beat their last. Instead, she was alive, active, alert, and quite possibly on the offensive.

This wouldn't be the first time she had killed a Brotherhood soldier. And, if the slight, acrid taste at the back of her mouth -- the built in sense of the Force, moving around her -- was right, then it would mean that the Zabrak would make for another Force-wielder pelt, metaphorically hanging from Sencara's belt. And yet, she was off-balance, for the first time in recent memory. She didn't like it. Not one bit.

Quietly, the sniper slid into cover, brought her rifle back up, and peered back into the temple center... just to see the tip of a suppressed blaster-barrel poke around a pillar, directly at her position. Plasma bolts were loosed simultaneously, and there was a sudden, burning feeling in her palm. Pulling back, the Umbaran cursed; not only was she off balance, but now *she* was the one getting surprised, a new and wholly unfamiliar feeling. The sensation only got worse as her rifle - her precious, custom A280 - fell apart in her hands, dripping molten plasteel from where the Zabrak's blaster bolt had caught it in the central mechanism. That was great. Just great.

After a minute of gritting her teeth, Sencara drew her X-8 and rose, doing a quick, naked eye visual scan. A smoldering scrap of puddling metal and plastic at the other end of the temple clearing was almost enough to repair her mood; a Merr-Sonn Model 57 Heavy, blasted to pieces. It seemed like her and her opponent had made a lucky sort of exchange. If her memory was right, that left the Zabrak mostly unarmed; that one blaster had been all that she had seen when she'd first spotted her entering the temple. Good. Even though she still had her dagger, the loss of a blaster was an effective declawing; at least for as long as she was able to keep the Zabradi at range. Something that would probably be much easier said than done.

And that was without bringing in that the younger woman seemed to have completely disappeared. Sencara searches everywhere, scanning over the room, peering behind every pillar still standing, dashing between them like a mudhen running from rorks. It was that last thought that finally stopped her; she wasn't just hunting down the Zabrak anymore. She was getting in her own head, losing her cool, acting like *prey*. She had everything that she needed with her; held in the palm of her hand. The hair on Secnara's neck stood up once more as she raised her Night Sniper, peering through the thermal-enhancing sight; a sort of premonition.

The Zabrak was standing no more than five feet in front of her.

Several things happened at once, right then. The cloak that the Zabrak was holding faded as her mind flipped to a new focus; casting the the dagger held in her right hand, flipping smoothly from her grip. At the same time, she grit her teeth, and started an entirely new movement, bringing her free hand up, as if she was trying to summon an invisible shield; a barrier. Two of Sencara's shots managed to slip past the translucent armor before it came fully up, however, the rest dissolving into the field; one skimmed right past her horns, painfully burning the tips of two of them away. The second pocked right into her side; a grazing, painful wound, staggering her backwards. But, Zabradi were masters of pain tolerance, and this one seemed to be even more durable; she barely even flinched for more than a moment.

Sencara did much more than flinch when the thrown knife cut into her body, slicing through a seam in her armor to pierce the soft skin of her lower abdomen. The wound wasn't deep, but it was painful, jarring; Sencara couldn't remember the last time she'd felt her own blood spilled, not since the moment that she'd received the scar on her cheek. It shook her; and it pissed her off. Shot after shot was poured into the Zabrak's barrier, without effect, before the Umbaran realized what she was doing; wasting time, while the girl advanced ever closer, a long, gleaming dagger held in hand.

The sniper was better than her. Faster, smarter, far more experienced. She'd had the Zabrak on the run almost the entire fight. Now...what was happening now was that she was getting into her own head again, tensing up, *losing her head*. She was better than this; brute force wasn't what she needed right now. Breaking through the darkening clouds of her mind, Sencara found tranquility... and a solution to her problem. With her free hand, the sniper drew her fragmentation grenade from her belt and activated the electronic fuse; three seconds count was all she needed, no more, no less, and then the throw...

The Zabrak's eyes widened, but she didn't flinch. Instead, one hand shot forward and caught the grenade in the air between them. Both of them were still in the blast radius. Two pairs of eyes met, and two women's mouths opened to curse in tandem, echoing endlessly in the cave.

"Kriff!"

\*"Katkera!"\*

The grenade detonated in a shower of fire and sparks, and the cave went dark. Sencara felt weightless, bodiless, as if she were out, floating in the vacuum. Then, the feeling of the stone beneath her drew back into focus. She drew a sharp, shuddering breath, coughing at the tenderness in her ribs, where her armor had caught bits of shrapnel from reaching her flesh. Then, there was the tiny, red-hot pin-pricks where the armor hadn't caught a damn thing; her hands, her lower legs, her face. Worst of all was her right arm; the muscles of the elbow hurt like an inferno, bringing a low groan to her mouth, and prompting a probing touch. The fingertips came away red and bloody, prompting a low groan as the sniper pulled herself to her feet.

The Zabrak was already standing, tottering slightly on her feet. Scratches and bloody pock-marks lined her arms, with one deeper gash across her cheek leaving a bloody mess that trailed all the way down her chin, dripping onto the floor. Her eyes, however, remained totally clear, completely focused, single minded in their determination; and she even managed another smile. "Good...good fight so far, Ankara. I'm...my name is Sera Kaern. You?"

A talker. Great. Sencara loved talkers; they were always the easiest to surprise, the simplest to take down. Sera, in particular, seemed exceptionally naive; if she could just keep her talking, this entire thing could be turned around. "Sencara A'Theri. I would call it a pleasure, but...well, I can't say I've really enjoyed this much. The sight of my own blood isn't what I'm getting paid for." As she spoke, the Umbaran gave a low, dark laugh, slipping a hand into her back pocket...and closing her fingers around her vibro-knuckler. If she could just get close and clock the Zabrak a good one, she would have plenty of space to blast her with her wrist-laser; even with her right arm karked, all she needed to do was point and squeeze. So, slowly, she took a step forward.

"I'm sorta getting used to it. Pretty place, at least."

Sencara took another step forward, as Sera's gaze drew away, studying the cave around them. The sniper was almost in the perfect position now. She was sure of it. "Yeah...you really can't beat the view."

The vibroknuckler whirred to life in her hand, the buzz almost silent. Sencara smiled then, just as wide as Sera; bright, charming disarming.

The old, acrid-taste returned to her mouth, and the kyber crystals embedded into the landscape around them brightened, dazzling her vision, making her flinch with the light... and Sera's smile melted away into a growl.

The force. Damn the Force. Lightning fast, Sencara whipped the vibroknuckler from her pocket in a powerful backhanded slap, trying to salvage what she could of her element of surprise. The blow caught Sera in her wounded cheek, opening up a new line of slashes, and staggering the Zabrak backwards with a shout of pain. But, she caught her feet fast, bright blue eyes turning on Sencara, burning through her.

A bead of sweat trickled down the Umbaran's cheek, and the Zabrak rushed forward, catching A'Theri's wrist as she brought it up to put a laser through Sera's eyes, pulling it towards the ceiling; a quick flurry of shots burst against the stone far above, one laser catching an especially large kyber crystal just as the wrangling women pushed into the center of the temple. The jewel caught the light within it, shining, and refracting it outwards in a suddenly intense glow, which was in turn caught by the rest of the temple's multi-colored crystals. Suddenly, the air was filled with a dimly-swirling chromatic light.

Sencara flinched again, her eyes starting... and Sera pressed the advantage.

Both of them were tired, weakened, exhausted from a gruelling bout and the many, draining wounds that they had incurred upon each other. Sencara was a master of Mandalorian Core techniques, striking brutally at Sera's throat, her eyes, her wounded side and cheek. But, she was consistently pushed backwards, the Zabrak's lightning-fast blows coming down in a steady pour of jabs, shoves, elbow-strikes, and worst of all, the kicks. She was given no room for offense; all of her energy was spent, blocking, dodging, doing her best to evade one more blow, keep her guard up for one more punch. But, they just kept coming. Sera didn't just know K'Thri, as A'Theri had assumed she would. She knew Core as well; how to counter it, and how to attack with it. At range, she could play her game; up close? She was outmatched, for once in her life, and it was killing her. Driving Sencara back into the center, Sera jumped forward, and finally caught the Umbaran with a string of hefty, painful blows; a stomp to the intsep of her foot crushed her toes, even through her boots, followed quickly by a crushing strike to her gut.

Sencara doubled over, staggering back. For once, Sera didn't follow right away, taking a moment to catch her breath, get her balance back. She was bruised, bloody, panting; half-dead from exhaustion. But she hadn't given up. She hadn't given in. She hadn't allowed herself to be defeated, or to run...even when she could have, when she'd gotten her Force Cloak up. No, she had refused. For her honor. For her pride.

It made it all the more sweet to finally drive her boot into Sencara's face in a graceful, spinning kick, knocking the sniper out cold. Her still body flopped to the ground, falling into a pool of light produced by the cave's kyper-ward.

For the Brotherhood, it was one victory in many. For Sera? For Sera... it was her first. Her first that she could call her own.

Sighing, the Zabrak bent and took the body by the ankles, dragging it slowly through the temple, the cave...and back up, into the light.