

Both familiar and unfamiliar buildings blurred past the edges of his peripheral vision as he darted through the streets of Estele City. The capital city of Selen had been through a lot in the years since he'd been away, but even with the alleged attack from giant robots and the more grounded attacks from Collective splinter groups things were not looking good. Aurebesh street signs were hanging off of their hinges, creaking in the eerily quiet streets.

Quiet save for the half-Hapan's rapid breathing, in and out through his nose, carefully regulated thanks to his natural athleticism and periodic boosts from the Force.

Rule 1: Cardio, Marick absently reminded himself. He had grown accustomed to being on his own, and while he missed the company of his Cythraul, Fela, he was thankful that she had stayed with Wyn, Ace and the others back on the *Encanis*. He had come alone to Selen, knowing the potential dangers.

Once known solely as Marick Arconae--Shadow Lord emeritus--Marick had envisioned his return to Selen in many different ways. This had not, in truth, been one of them.

Fortunately, the former Voice of the Brotherhood had not let his time confined to his office in the Dark Ascent affect his recurring routine of physical training. The body was nothing without the mind, but so too was the mind lost without a body to execute its desires.

A crackle of static sounded in his earpiece. *Mar...Marick...come in.*

"Little busy right now, Ace," Marick's lightly lilted accent responded through breaths as he hurdled over a series of toppled supply crates.

I'll...tssss...be quick. They are some kind of sssssss.....symbiote. No other data I was able to find, but one thing is for s...csssssss...sure: those infected are not your friends anymore.

"If I kill the parasite--"

--Symbioate"

"Symbiote," Marick corrected himself flatly. "Does that free the sentient from control?"

There was silence on the feed.

I don't believe so.

"Understood," Marick replied before coming to a sudden halt and ducking under the swing of a flailing limb.

The attacker was a Zabrak, or used to be. Their eyes were vacant, their clothing torn and their muscular limbs staggered at awkward, feral angles. They made a grunt as drool began to come out of their mouth.

Marick didn't hesitate. *When we take a life, we take nothing of value.*

A violet beam of light with an obsidian core sprung to life from the hilt of his lightsaber. The Hapan sprinted forward, made two quick cross-cuts with the humming blade, and halted his momentum once he had passed behind the Zabrak. His lightsaber disengaged, nearly as quickly as it had been ignited. The Zabrak crumpled to the floor in two separate pieces, limbs twitching awkwardly as a bug-like creature leapt from its neck and lunged for the new potential host that had killed its former one.

A stiletto blade jutted free from Marick's left wrist bracer. His too-blue eyes focused on the bug-like symbiote as he timed its arc through the air and positioned his hidden blade like a skewer. The symbiote screeched as it impaled itself on the blade like a kabob.

Rule 2: Double Tap

Marick took a quick glance around, focusing his sphere of awareness in conjunction with the rest of his five senses. Sensing no immediate threat, his eyes focused on the towering Citadel not too far in the distance. He had to make it to the Citadel. Whatever survivors or resistance had surely formed would be there, if anywhere.

"Wrrrraaagghhhrr," a booming cry from the alleyway to his left drew his attention. Even with his finely honed assassin's awareness and his focus safe behind the veil of his zen-like resolve, something cold crept from the pit of his stomach.

A towering Wookiee with gray fur emerged from the shadows, a tell-tale white circle around one eye with a streak going back towards the base of its skull.

"Oh no," Marick whispered, as he turned to face Kelviin.