

“Get down, sir!” The partisan shouted as he grabbed Konnus by the shoulder and pulled him down behind the crate just as a large slug impacted the wall above them, sending sparks spraying behind them.

Konnus Dreen looked up from his crouched position. His company had been tasked with taking out the communication center for the starfighter hanger. Their intel had said that it would be defended by a small, but highly skilled, division of Brotherhood troopers. With how quickly they had attacked, the damned heretics should have been on their back foot. But they'd been dug in and ready when his forces had breached the docking bay. Now they were pinned down and making no progress. All the while, the Nesolat's fighters were free to harrow the Collective's ships in orbit.

He peeked out from behind the crate and scanned the docking bay. He just needed something to start forming a plan.

“Come on, give me something, anything.”

His eyes darted back and forth. There. He spotted a pair of service droid tunnels. ‘Those should go straight to the communication center.’ He turned to the trooper who had saved him and grabbed his shirt.

“Take three men. Go secure one of those service tunnels. We'll cover you. Go.” He was pulling the grenade off his belt as he gave the order and tossed it over the crate. He ducked back down and waited for the explosion that would follow. Six seconds later, it reported back. But way too close and in a different direction from where it was thrown. He was about to look over the crate, when he watched as a trooper began levitating into the air scratching at his throat. As his body fell to the ground with a wet thud, Konnus knew what had happened. The nature of this fight had just changed. In that moment he was acutely aware of the fact that the near constant blaster fire had stopped. For a moment all was quiet, but then a voice rang out.

“Konnus Dreen! I know you're out there! You want to wipe my kind out, don't you? Well, I'm standing right here. Come, do what you came to do. Or was all that just talk to convince the traitor Oligard that you were loyal?”

The man's voice was calm but commanded respect. None of that mattered; his words were more than enough to bring Konnus to his feet.

He was quickly beginning to see red when he spotted the man; younger than he, standing brazenly out in the open, no weapon in hand. Wearing the trappings and colors of the Sith, and of the Brotherhood's darkest clan.

“Ah, there he is. The dead man.” Aleister spoke with a calm, almost dispassionate tone. “Well, come on, then. You want to kill Force users, don't you?” The young Sith made a beckoning motion with one hand. Taking a somewhat lazy side stance and placing his left hand behind his back in a fist.

Everything about the Sith made Konnus's blood boil. He wanted this man dead. He was better than anyone. He knew it. So it was time to make this foul Sith understand that. Striding confidently up to the man he unclipped the strip of leather that held his rapier in place. As he stepped within a meter of the man, his instincts kicked in at just the right moment and stopped in his tracks. Just as the Sith's leading right leg snapped up in a side snap kick aimed at his face. Another step forward and he would've been kicked in the face. The Sith simply chuckled and lowered his leg.

“Good, good. Your reflexes are sharp. Almost as sharp as some of the apprentice's in the Academy. That's good, I so detest fighting those who can't keep up.” Aleister calmly took a step back, taking the same lazy side stance. “Come on. Let us begin.”

The Sith's nonchalant stance and attitude solidified Konnus's resolve, he was going to kill this Sith, then he slid free his blood red blade. He took up an oddly similar stance to the Sith; sidelong, with his sword arm forward and his free

hand extended to the side and back. He began taking slow deliberate steps to the side as the pair began to circle each other.

Aleister lazily stepped foot over foot in a circle. The Collective man may have prided himself on knowing how to fight a Force user, but like all inferior beings, he easily fell prey to simple goading and prodding. It was almost too easy to bring people like him to blows. Simply insult their skill, or loyalty, and they go to pieces. Looking the Falleen up and down, Aleister had to admit, the man clearly knew how to wield that blade in his hand. But that sword is meant for one thing, a single lethal stab, not a swordfight. After a few minutes of circling, Konnus broke first and rushed. Red blade flashing forward, the tip of his razor thin blade shot for Aleister's exposed neck. The Sith simply spun out of the way and playfully hopped away.

"Come on, then. Surely you can do better than that!" Aleister called out mockingly.

Konnus rounded on the man. The Sith had bounded just out of the reach of his rapier. Just standing there, taunting him, inviting him to get closer. Konnus snorted in anger and quickly closed the gap and let fly a slew of swipes and stabs with his blade. Infuriatingly, Aleister simply dodged and spun away from the lethal blade. Every time he failed to find his mark, Konnus grew more and more annoyed with the man who seemed to be taking him as seriously as one might a small pup. This made him even angrier, and finally, he stepped in and aimed a stab at Aleister's chest.

The Sith was too close to dodge completely, but he was able to duck under the stab. But Konnus felt his blade make contact as the Sith dove past him. With a confident smirk, he spun with Aleister and swung his blade in a wide arc. Feeling the blade bite into flesh he finished with a flourish.

"Ha! You're a deadman now," Konnus proudly declared.

Aleister stood from where he'd rolled to avoid the initial stab. He felt the exposed skin of his left bicep and his hand returned stained with his blood. He chuckled and wiped the blood on his robes.

"And what makes you certain of that?" Aleister calmly asked, without the mocking edge.

"Because soon, you won't even know which way is up. My blade is poisoned," Konnus retorted.

"Ah, I see. Well, then, since you use a coward's weapon, you will die a coward's death." Aleister's voice had dropped into a dispassionate monotone. He slowly turned to face the man head on and slowly reached over to unclip his lightsaber from his hip.

Konnus examined the man for any clue as to the man's calm demeanor. Then he blanched, he saw it. The red fabric of the man's vest was stained and a long cut stretching over the shoulder, revealing brown leather armor also stained. The poison that had coated his blade was currently being absorbed by leather and fabric, rather than flesh and blood.

Aleister brought the hilt of his saber up in front of his face with one hand and activated the blood red blade. He swung the blade rapidly in the air, moving the tip in an X shaped pattern. Before turning sidelong with his right side leading. His saber was held in his right hand, and held near the face with the palm facing inward, the blade parallel to the ground pointed towards the Collective slime. With the feet shoulder width apart and his left hand held in a tight fist behind his lower back. Gone was the lazy attitude, gone was the relaxed stance. This was serious now.

"There is a simple difference between you and I, Konnus. When you strike with your blade, you hope that your blade will kill your enemy. When I strike with my blade, I kill my enemy. Now, come face your death with some dignity."

Konnus took a cautious step back, adjusting his grip on his weapon. What was this he was feeling? Fear? No, he knew enough to not fear a Sith. But something in the way this man spoke, it shook him to the core. He spoke of death and killing like it was nothing more than a simple fact. The same way one might speak of colors, or the weather. But this was death he was speaking about, surely one must feel something when killing, right? The Sith before him, spoke as though the act of killing was nothing to him.

Konnus shook these thoughts from his mind. He was smarter than fear, smarter than this heathen. And then Konnus Dreen made his mistake. He looked up to meet his opponents eyes, and he balked.

Aleister's eyes were the fiery orange and red of the dark side, but they were flat, cold, unfeeling. His eyes did not move or blink from Konnus's face. Alesiter watched as the Falleen warred with himself, would he attack, would he run, would he order his troops to attack? When his eyes went wide with anger and terror, Aleister knew what he would do.

Konnus howled his mightiest battlecry and rushed forward. Blade held high overhead, he lunged forward and thrust his blade for Aleister's face.

*'Too slow.'*

Aleister leaned his head out of the way and brought his saber across to block the rapier blade with the guard of his weapon. The thin ceramic blade shattered against the metal of his guard. Konnus should have been able to easily duck out of the way of the coming attack, but something rooted him in place, something froze him. Time seemed to dilate out as he, and his troops, watched Aleister step one pace to the side and decapitate him with a single strike. Konnus's head had barely hit the ground when Aleister called out.

**“Iron Legion! Kill them all!”**

Blaster fire erupted from every direction as the defenders of the Nesolat opened fire and cut down the stunned Collective soldiers. Aleister turned and calmly strode back through the door he'd entered from, as Konnus's headless corpse hit the ground with a dull thud.

*'That was disappointing.'*