

“The Count”

One step forward and I draw the hilt from my belt. With a snap hiss the violet blade comes to life, reaching from the silver hilt held between my fingers and extending through the chest of the Jedi before me. Respectfully I draw back the blade, her body going limp without ever facing me.

Two Dark Jedi enter into the Great Library just as I do. Our eyes connect and they are instantly mine to command. Years in a position or rank will do that. "Towards the door" my eyes tell them though my vocal chords never vibrate. There is but a moment when I see the connection, the recognition. They charge through the door in answer to my request.

Three slashes is all it takes. Some may call yet another strike from behind cowardly, but I see it as a way of saving time. A few short movements and the two Dark Jedi fall to the ground. Good. The sooner they fall the sooner I can move.

Four doors to the right and then through an alcove in the back. I've avoided both sides as much as possible, rushing towards my target. Striking only when I must. Each strike perfectly timed out. Slowly I come to the realization that I'm not alone.

Five times now I have heard him cry out. I try not to rush, there is time yet for two more epitaphs of pain. Instead I hum a slow steady beat, killing time in my hiding spot. I think it may have been to a game. My mind drifts to a memory, trying to place the tune. Finally I hear the death cry ring out and then I begin to count to thirty, waiting for the warrior to leave. He took too much of my time in every attempt before.

Six Jedi entered the dark chamber. Green and blue light illuminated on the leather bindings of the books before me. I hold the wing tipped pendant out before me, his blood not yet fully hardened upon the metallic edges. The Jedi are too late and they know it. Instead of engaging me they move on to their next objective.

Seven of them in total were suppressed in the knowledge of my presence. I kept the seven blind, noting how content they were to hunt their Jedi prey. This was the important part. I messed this up before. I glanced at my chrono. It was easier to just wait this part out.

Eight minutes they fought and for that time I let my attention wander to the background. In my failures I already knew the outcome of the fight down to the last second. The beauty of the destruction had been lost to me in the past, but now I look on with new appreciation. Shelves upon shelves of data cards smashed, burning or destroyed, their casings littering the floor of the Great Library. The invasion of the Dark Jedi was more devastating in the destroyed knowledge than in lives destroyed. My thoughts came back to reality when the timer went off on my chrono.

Nine steps forward. Slow and steady, that tune once again nagging at my mind. Behind me the sound of fighting dissipated as my feet stopped before my goal. I tried to ignore the tune, concentrating on the bookshelf before me. Almaneer, her almond binding still pristine along the spine. Pulling the ancient relic of the Force from the shelf, I release the book from the prison of Jedi knowledge. A shudder of accomplishment ran through my soul. Distantly, the tune played on in my mind, teasing to take my attention away.

Ten times my life seemed to crumble downward and my soul begins to wither away. Red illuminated through my chest. I look down and watch as the crimson light fades. My chest is burning. Panic takes hold as I realize I can no longer take breath into my lungs. Downward I crumble, collapsing to the floor, suffocating on my own cauterized esophagus.

"Zero!" Captain Creysenia Orainn growled at me into my headset. Her voice was devoid of emotion, bored of the living. I try to mumble a question, but I've already asked her the question before. No. My thoughts catch up to the situation, realization returning me to reality. No! I failed the training simulator the Shadow Academy sent out for testing. Laughing, now knowing how to finish the simulator, I signal to Captain Orainn to reset my score and start the simulation over. She glares at me as the simulation start begins to count down. The last thing I hear over the headset as the timer completes is her voice quietly saying "You have zero redeeming qualities."

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