
FRACTURE

The creature was impossibly fast. Sharp hexagonal crystals poked through the gaps in its armor. Even in the darkness of the tunnels below Caelestis City, errant streaks of light illuminated facets of the deep red prisms. The ghastly horror of the creature that the crystals emerged from stripped away the essence of their beauty. The arcane power that radiated from them was intense and volatile.

The ghoulish entity let out a bellowing roar. Harmonic rumblings at fifths and octaves above and below the principal tone harmonized the bloodcurdling cry. The primary sound was shrill, like the creaking of durasteel plates being pulled apart under immense tension combined with the shrieking whistle of an overboiled teapot. The sound was strained, like the screams of a deeply tortured soul. Before ascension, the shell of the monster was once a man. It resembled one now but little.

Twisted fingers gripped tightly around two cylindrical hilts, ichorous blood dripping from the knuckles. Its arm snapped back and forth, projecting the coiling lash of its lightwhip forward. The tendril of energy crackled as it left molten trails in the durasteel wall paneling. Thran watched the beast intently, as he continually backed away. Its' movements, swift as they may be, were limited by the tight corridor.

His standard defenses, under the ceaseless barrage of lashing blows and hammering strikes, were of little use. The Duelist's form was tailored for precision, accurate testing strikes, and being absent when the enemy struck back. He could not close distance to engage. If he did, it would be impossible sidestep the beast's omnipresent attacks. He kept his distance, luring the in Ascendant deeper into the industrial facility. It had been hunting him for some time, pulling him away from the remainder of his Clanmates. Isolated and alone, the Sith's only remaining ally was his own cunning.

Thran dashed between cooling pipes. The creature reeled back, slashing through each obstacle the Sith used to obscure himself. The gashes left the thin ducting ruptured, and spitting blasts of steam and pressurized coolant in the narrowing corridors. The heat was stifling and the sprays of coolant let off a sweet, but acrid chemical scent. Retreating with each lash of the crystalline thrall's lightwhip, a forest of felled conduits, beams and structural members extended backwards beyond the limits of Thran's vision. He had maintained the singular focus of the mutated soldier over nearly a kilometer through the reclamation and processing plant.

The Sith was uncharacteristically silent. There was no banter, no witty riposte of exchanged words, or domination of mind. He had quickly come to the realization that there was no controlling this "thing". There were no thoughts behind its' cold empty eyes, just a powerful lust for ruin. He wondered, for a passing nanosecond, who the soul that had occupied this shell was before calamity had befallen it. Try as he might, appealing to the intuitive direction of the Dark Side bore no fruitful information. It was as if the Force itself could not unwrap the secrets of the creature's unholy creation. It was trapped somewhere between life and death; held prisoner in a perverse warping of mortality. He almost pitied the creature.

He'd seen them before, on a half-baked adventure on a Hutt pleasure world called Dandoran. Though he had never seen them this close. They tore through the streets, cutting down soldier and civilian alike. The same was occurring on the streets above. Caelestis City was ablaze once again. The licking flames of the false flag civil war had just been quenched. Now, Scholae Palatinae's soldiers were fighting against a far worse foe. They were struggling in the early hours of the assault. He'd learned then that blaster fire was nearly useless, impacts were absorbed, dissipated, or simply bounced off. The few prodding strikes he'd been able to land against the abomination had proven the same was true of lightsabers.

The creature leapt forward, unleashing a flurry of chaotic and unprincipled attacks. The lightsaber clutched in its' claws swiped at him. The violent crimson blade narrowly missed Thran's head. He spun away, projecting his hand forward. An implosive force drew the thick air together, coalescing in a rushing wave that opened the space between the combatants once again. Occusus turned a small dial on his lightsaber. The fire orange blade expanded beyond the typical length of its containment field. Nearly double its original length, he could use it to maintain that space between them.

The beast gave no mind to defense, it rushed headlong forward. Swipes from Thran's lightsaber and hurled pieces of the crumbling ductwork would only halt the momentum for a fraction of a second. The Bakuran was growing tired. Beads of sweat stung his eyes. At the mercy of the creature's driving hunt, he was beginning to fear his curtain call was drawing near. The clanging of heavy machinery was getting louder with each step backward.

Caelestis City had been ravaged by war before appearance of the Children of Mortis' anathema. Reclamation and repair facilities had been established to convert the salvage of ruin to material for building a bright new future. Here, in this massive foundry, twisted durasteel girders and columns were being dissected, smelted and forged back into useful raw material. From what he had seen of the process, it completely consumed the metal material that was placed inside the vast blast furnaces. Those furnaces capable of putting out the thermal equivalent of a small star, required a massive looping maze of coolant to prevent them from consuming themselves.

A plan had developed, a last-ditch effort to halt the advance of the defiling foe. He knew little of crystals and their mineral composition, but the recent augmentations he had made to his own lightsaber had inspired the idea. His exploration and studies of the new functionality of his lightsaber had introduced the concept of thermal shock. When he had installed the dual-phase emitter into his beloved weapon, he was forced to upgrade the cooling circuits of his blade. The device's increased emission of energy caused the focusing crystals caused it to heat up. Special attention was to be given to cooling circuits. A breach of the circuit against the superheated crystal would result in violent and often explosive fracturing. He hoped that phenomenon could be applied here. He would need focus, strength and incredible timing to pull it off. He prayed it would work; he could not outlast the mineral aberration.

The crackling of the creature's weapons and the unearthly quintipartite sounds of its' screams were muted under the sounds of the blast furnaces. Their wooshing roars filled his ears as he emerged from the long tunnel that he had drawn the Ascendant trooper down. It brought an odd comfort to him. The vast open space was full of catwalks, massive crucibles lofted high on robust gantry cranes, towering furnaces, and a tangled course of conveyor belts. Thran leapt, aided by the strength of the Force, from the catwalk to the workspace below.

He landed below, among piles of scrap metal, rolling along on the conveyers. Now, in this exposed space, he would not have the luxury of maintaining distance between him and the crystalline horror. The confines of the tunnels had aided him in keeping it at bay. Here the creature could use its raw speed and power to bear down upon him. To meet the creature's power, he would need to match its aggression. He dialed back the length of his blade, keeping it slightly longer than normal but not held at its upper limit.

The Ascendant trooper had no regard for maintaining the integrity of the catwalk above. It burst, with raw power, through the railing, leaping down to the floor below in unyielding pursuit of its quarry. The ringing and whining scream that came from its mouth sent chills down Thran's spine. He looked back over his shoulder. A hundred meters off, the massive doors of a blast furnace opened revealing a white-hot flame inside. He raised his lightsaber over his head, readying the charge.

The creature thrashed its weapons about as it focused again on its prey. It moved with the scuttling alacrity of an arachnid, climbing over the piles of durasteel rubble with ease. The creature moved towards him at an unnatural pace. If he waited for it to be upon him, the grotesque brute would simply charge through him. Thran snapped into action, meeting the implacable creature mid-stride. His strikes were vicious and full of power. Each attack was deliberate, aimed at the bulk of the creature body.

Strike after strike, Thran's lightsaber clashed against the hardened armor and crystalline polyps erupting from the beast. Such a deluge of flowing chained attacks would have cut any one of his Sith rivals to ribbons. Not a mark or splinter of crystal was shed from the horror. The Sith dug deep within himself focusing his own mind. The philosophical alchemy of his belief in the Sith Code transmuted the fleeting feelings of fear and pity for the creature into a deep seething hatred. His heart roiled with intensity.

The Sith pushed himself beyond his physical limits. He moved with determination and precision. Where the beast would swipe at him with his crimson saber or flick a snapping belt of the lightwhip, Thran pressured through the attack. The Ascendant Trooper did not defend against the attacks, instead two offenses impacted against each other in a meteoric clash of orange and red. Thran glanced over his shoulder to see the furnace was still forty meters away.

Fueled by the all-consuming hatred for the beast and its creators, his offhand extended ripping massive beams from the adjacent belts. The chunks of metal accelerated through the scorching air towards the trooper. Thran spun between each projectile piece of debris, maintaining the pressure of his attacks. He alternated between dominating barrages of lightsaber strikes and chops and a thaumaturgic shower of metal fragments. As the metal parts came, the Ascendant carved through each of the piece with ease.

He summoned every bit of authority over his metaphysical strength that he could. Twisted chunks of durasteel and quadranium bombarded the Ascendant Trooper. No piece struck the beast, but the constant pelting of debris kept the beast focused on avoiding the impacts. As each piece came towards the creature it would obscure the line of sight between the combatants. This was the window Thran needed. The Sith counted in his head. The heat at his back was unbearable as the conveyor brought him within meters of the gaping maw of the furnace.

With both hands he summoned a slab of durasteel large enough to crush a small landspeeder. As the piece rocketed towards the crystal Ascendant, his muscles coiled like springs. He leapt over the unstoppable monster,

twisting himself mid-air to keep his face towards his foe. The furnace was but two meters from the creature now. Occasus reared back, sending every ounce of rage and hatred through his hands. The blast of energy pushed against the thick armor of the trooper. It stumbled backward into the waiting jaws of the hungry furnace.

"Bad news...You're fired." Thran said with a smirk.

The piercing scream of the beast filled the entirety of the foundry. It seemed to shake every piece of metal as it echoed off the cavernous walls. In a flash, the creature was immolated. Thran rolled to his right, falling into a small maintenance pit between the conveyors. He landed flat to his back. He looked up at the ceiling for a moment. He deactivated his lightsaber, clipping it back to his belt. The shrieks and screams from inside the furnace had not gone silent.

"You've gotta be kidding me..." Thran said.

He sprung to his feet. He rushed along the side of furnace, through the pit. Emerging from each of the gargantuan smelting machines were two channels of molten metal, flowing forward along the production line. The reckless pursuit and singleness of aim of the horrible mutant he had been fighting had brought it through the flame still bound to its blasphemous existence. It crawled through the molten slag. The nodules of crystal protruding from the creatures destroyed flesh glowed a burning red.

What was once the remains of the organic vessel that carried the crystal's malevolence was naught but a charred and smoldering collection of carbon. It shambled forward, still intent on capturing its prey. Thran cast his eyes upwards to the thick blue pipes that ran near the furnaces. Thermal shock, he recalled, occurred when rapid changes in temperature were applied to material. This is why special attention was to be given to the cooling circuits on his lightsaber.

Both of his hands extended upwards, and he pulled them back violently to his sides. The pipes burst open, pouring loads of a thin cyan colored liquid over the area. The broken pipe dangled from the support above, spewing coolant out over the channels of molten metal. A thick cloud of steam instantly filled the space, settling all around. Amber lights on the back of the furnaces switched to spinning red alarm lights, casting beams of red light through the building fog. Claxons filled the air and the clanking of the machines all ground to a halt.

"Hey...I think you need to cool off!" Thran yelled.

Thran paused, backing away from the rapidly freezing cloud of cryogenic material. He took a deep breath. His moment of respite was broken by the hair-raising shriek of the Ascendant trooper. Emerging from the frigid cloud, the shuffling shape of the creature appeared. The Sith sighed.

"sonofa...bitch" he murmured to himself.

His hand reached forward towards the nearest bit of loose rubble he could spot. With a flick of his wrist, he directed the scrap of durasteel at the creature. As the dull metal crashed into the aberration, it exploded into millions of tiny frozen shards. The corrupted crystals which seemingly drove the creature lacked any chatoyance. They were charred, frosted and covered in the effluent remains of the Ascendant trooper.

"Look at you...You've gone to pieces," Thran said, smiling to himself.

Thran turned to the catwalk behind him. The immeasurable disappointment that no one had been there to watch him deliver his one liners sat in his gut. He'd recount it to his clanmates in vivid detail later. He dusted himself off with his hands. When a suitable measure of the various particulate matter had been brushed from his robes, he strode towards the ladder and the exit.