

The platform was on fire, but it wasn't his fault.

Marick had been on a routine inspection. The Battleteam Leader had been tasked with seeing if he could use his talents to bolster the operational efficiency of the often-delayed construction for one of Arconas new potential orbital detection platforms. The platforms, once fully operational, would be able to help detect anomalies and threats inside of Dajorra space.

Which, if he was being earnest, would have been great in hindsight to help prevent the system's current predicament. The Children of Mortis had caught them by surprise by launching a surprise invasion of the Shadow Clans home system, and carved a deadly path towards Arcona's central seat of power: Selen.

Marick assumed that meant not *all* of the research crystals they'd acquired had been secured at Rhyllance's expensive new research facility. Because of course they weren't. The retired Dark Councilor knew keeping the things was a bad idea, but there was truth in the pursuit of knowledge to gain power. It certainly would not hurt to know more about the enigmatic crystals that caused quite a stir during the conflict on Dandoran.

This of course left the Elder Arcanist in a precarious position aboard a perishing platform that no longer needed his assistance in reaching completion or clearing a deadline. Because the project was definitely dead. And he would be, too, if he didn't find a way to a shuttle or his ship.

A low growl drew him from his thoughts. Marick glanced down to his left to see Fela, his three-legged Cythraul, lowering herself into a battle stance, nose pointed towards the long corridor they had just come from. His blue eyes swept from left to right, making note of the possible turns, exits, access ports, and the colored patterns of the warning lights. Klaxons droned in the distance but were getting louder as more and more systems inevitably began to fail.

"She says that there are bad people coming this way," a small voice explained at his side. The Hapan looked over to his right and took note of his daughter's calm composure despite the apparent bedlam breaking out around her.

"She's probably right," Marick agreed as he gently squeezed Kirra's shoulder. He should have felt immediately on edge, knowing that she was now in grave danger, but his outward calm was still that of a former Shadow Lord turned Dark Councilor. Plus, his daughter was already keen enough to sense something so much as trepidation from her father, who she believed to be some kind of superhero that was afraid of 'nothin'. "Is it okay if I carry you from here?"

Kirra Tyris Aarave nodded her head in agreement, her mess of stark white hair bobbing around her soft features, pointed ears, and faint freckles. Marick leaned down and picked her up and set her atop his shoulders.

Kirra loved this game because it made her feel big and tall. She let her feet dangle down on either side of Marick's neck, her hands resting atop his ashen head of hair.

"Giddy'up papa," she giggled.

The artificial air and gravity was still intact. The smooth metal plated flooring beneath his feet was rough and unpolished, providing good traction. Marick moved carefully but with purpose, Fela trailing obediently with her ears flicking wildly like radar antenna at every sound and alert.

And, since he'd need to keep one hand free just in case, Marick idly tossed each of his four lightsabers aside, but caught hold of each with a fraction of his will. He gave each part of his mind the task of maintaining a telekinetic hold on each lightsaber. The silent *Ghostfire* lightsaber sprung to life without a sound. Its sister blade, the *Radiant* lightsaber, growled to life. His shoto lightsaber was next, blue blade blazing, followed by his last lightsaber, the green blade blistering forth.

All four glowing blades floated in a protective circle around the Master Arcanist as he turned a corner and came face to face with a boarding party from the Children of Mortis.

"Papa, bad guys," Kirra chimed in from atop her fathers head. Fela let out a howl of agreement and smartly started to slink stealthily as an overgrown wolf could behind Marick's cloak, ready to strike and watch his back.

"In the name of the Father, kneel before—" the first Lightbringer, clad in full armor, started to declare before two black-cored lightsabers cross-cut at each side of his neck. Enhanced reflexes and a warning through the Force allowed the trooper enough time to slip away from the twin sabers bite, but was unable to dodge the Sith Dagger that wedged itself between the gap between his helmet and his chest-guard. Blood squirted free from the man's jugular artery, pooling out slowly down the front of his armor like lava rolling from a volcano.

Marick made a quick gesture with his left hand and his Sith Dagger returned to his grip. He flicked the blood off the matte-black blade and gestured for the other remaining Children of Mortis to finish the sentence.

"**Kill him!**" was the only response he was granted.

The command was followed by a storm of blaster bolts. Without so much as a hand gesture, Marick's green and blue lightsabers moved into defensive coils, batting aside and forming a protective bubble in front of the Hapan, his daughter, and his Cythraul.

Marick continued forward, and was met with a pair of spherical grenades being rolled under the guard of his telekinetic lightsabers. He blinked once, made a dismissive gesture with one hand, and both grenades reversed direction and detonated in front of their original casters instead of their intended goal.

From atop his head, Kirra clapped her hands at the pretty explosions.

Through the resulting fire and flames, Marick's twin black-cored lightsabers darted in again towards the lone survivor of the group, no doubt the leader. But they were actually repelled by a riot baton and sith sword—he assumed—combination. His helmet was broken and cracked, so a pair of red glowing eyes had become visible.

Marick tilted his head, almost impressed, and was actually forced to stop his forward momentum and retreat backward as the Lightbringer surged forward with preternatural speed and Force-fueled strength.

The Master Arcanist was ready, however, and was already reaching for something at his belt. The Hapan grabbed the pouch of blinding dust and waited until he was face to face with his attacker. Just before the Lightbringer would have skewered him through with a sith sword, Marick augmented his own speed, danced backwards to safety, but not before point-blank unloading the blinding dust into the man's crimson eyes.

The Lightbringer cried out in pain and anguish and reeled backward. Before he could retaliate or call upon the Force for healing and amplified sight, however, all four of Marick's lightsabers converged at once. The Lightbringer still managed to dodge away from the first lightsaber, but the remaining three found purchase in the spots between the plating where his armor allowed for range of motion.

He lurched awkwardly, staggering in place like a living pincushion, before collapsing forward.

Without any lingering concern, Marick stepped over the fallen body and proceeded towards the shuttle the Children had used to board the dying platform. Kirra did spare a glance behind them from her perch on Marick's shoulders, and frowned.

"Sorry, bad man," she whispered, closing her eyes and saying a small prayer for the departed, just like mother would have wanted.

Fela did a quick circle around the fallen bodies, squatted for a moment near them, and then trotted quickly to catch up with her master.