



MEASURE TWICE – CUT ONCE

*General Zentru'la*

The first night had fallen since the crystal pierced the sky.

Masakado lived in the darkest shadows of the deepest nights. The buildings around the impact zone had been reduced to piles of rubble. His sleek black cybernetics and mane of dark fur seamlessly blended in.

Electro-binoculars made the night clear as day as he watched a shuttle land in what might have once been a smooth field. "Masakado to Appius Wight." His voice was as smooth as sandpaper, a gravelly blend of synthetic and organic. "Twelve more Sith inbound."

"Acknowledged, Masakado."

"What was that?" Masakado crept around the destroyed building, away from the voice. By the time the Sith came to investigate, Masakado was on the remnants of another street. It paid for the scout to be the fastest thing on two legs.

He drew his electrobinoculars again as another shuttle landed a couple of hundred metres away. Another wave of Sith disembarked, heading straight towards his location. Among them was an unfortunately familiar sight.

The Ascendant Trooper might once have been a twi'lek, once, but little remained of her characteristic exotic beauty, with jagged red crystals protruding from her navy skin and black armour. Her legs were crooked and broken.

"More Sith," Masakado growled into a commlink. "And an Ascendant with them."

Appius' response was punctuated by the humming and clashing of lightsaber combat. "We can't deal with that! Can you slow it down?"

"Permanently."

Masakado cut the call and went back to observing the Ascendant – making notes of how it moved, where its armour was, where the crystals were, where it was in relation to the Sith squad it accompanied. A head-on attack was suicide. Masakado was not about to sacrifice himself to buy Appius more time.

Moving from cover to cover, the predator gradually closed in, every time making sure he kept track of where the entire squad was. He could make out the details now without the electro-binoculars. They were coming towards him.

Still in cover behind a destroyed building Masakado drew a shuriken and threw it with as much force as his cybernetic limbs could muster. One Sith clutched at his neck as the shuriken landed a glancing blow, the others drew their lightsabers. Masakado dropped a smoke bomb, obscuring his location in a plume of thick black smoke. They'd never see him move in the black of night.

He had taken cover behind the Ascendant. The Sith were still investigating the smoking building. Masakado flipped his sword into a reverse grip, broke into a sprint, leapt clean onto the roof, propelled himself through the air and jammed the sword deep into the Ascendant's neck, through a gap in the armour.

It didn't matter how much they had been enhanced. Nothing can fight what it can't see. One well placed stab from the was worth a thousand slashes in the light. The Ascendant fell to the floor in a heap.

The Ascendant's Sith squad immediately turned and charged. Masakado dashed away from them, and vanished into the night.