

“And tell me, who are you to challenge my right for me and my pack to hunt here?”

“I am the Master of this Ground... And you do not belong here, Youngblood. You have ruined centuries of work.. And you will pay for this with your lives. Defend yourselves, for your lives, and honor depend on it.”

“And who are you to issue such a challenge?”

“I am Zel’Nak Zak’lah and I will be your doom, Little Sucklings!”

Moments later, the sound of a sickening crack, followed quickly by a grunt of effort, filled the air, and the offending Youngblood's head was partially removed from its shoulders, left hanging barely attached by a hunk of bone and sinew. Sounds of outrage could be heard echoing from the two Youngbloods that had flanked their now deceased leader, and a series of amused mandible clicks filled the air from Zel’nak. “The war-axe... Such a delightful weapon... A shame you will never get to learn to wield it, Suckling...”

“Maybe now you will understand that when I say your lives depend on it, I mean to defend yourselves. Prove yourself not to be a disappointment to the clan of Mal’Thok, and raise your weapons!” The booming voice filled the air once more, and the clash of weapons could be heard, twin belowing roars drowning out the sounds of anything else, and a deep noise that could only be mocking laughter as the duel continued.

Duel... was a strong term. One Blooded Yautja versus three young-bloods? It was more akin to a massacre, with the first pair of young-bloods dispatched within moments, each blow intended to inflict as clean a death as possible... And once there was only one left, Zel’Nak would lunge forward, grabbing the base of the young-blood's sword, and cackling as the younger warrior desperately attempted to yank it away.

“Do you know how long it takes to grow a R’ka den, alongside their natural competitors? Do you know how many centuries I have spent on this planet, working to make sure that their growth would occur uninterrupted? To ensure the success of this hunting ground?” Zel’Nak’s voice was full of righteous anger as he *yanked* the young-blood’s weapon away, tossing it into the depths of the lake. “I have dedicated my life to this, and you, with one ignorant choice, have endangered all I have sought to create...” His eyes flashed, mandibles clicking. “Your skull will adorn my wall, Little Suckling.” He snarled, driving his knee into the young-blood's stomach, driving him to his knees. “You have alerted the Serpents to the true owners of this world, and that will change what I have created in a way that cannot be undone... And I can only hope that the sight of your miserable head on my wall will do something to soothe the rage I will feel for the rest of my life.”

“Al-Tak Mal’Thok will never stand for this!”

The young-blood’s words brought Zel’Nak pause, and he barked in laughter. “Do you really think

so? Do you really think that he would condone your actions?" He challenged, mandibles clicking in sheer amusement as he stared at the young-blood who dared to protest his fate.

"You do not have the right to end the lives of a war-party just because we.. disturbed some pet project of yours!" The young-blood protested, shifting, writhing in Zel'Nak's grasp, seeking freedom from what was his destiny.

"Oh, you foolish little suckling..." Zel'Nak shook his head, yanking on the dreads of the desperate creature in front of him, forcing him to turn his gaze to a patch of ground that was... strangely uniform. "Do you think that he would not watch your hunt? Do you think your elders would be so foolish as to let three little sucklings wander alone?" His words came as the tell-tale noise of a Yautja's bracer being inputted into filled the air, and the space in front of them filled with three different Yautja.. A Clan Leader and two honor guard.

"Greetings, Honored Clan Leader." Zel'Nak bowed his head in respect, though his grip on the young-blood would not falter in the slightest. "Tell me, do you agree with this Suckling? Have I brought dishonor to your clan through my actions? Or have I brought you redemption in a moment of dishonor?" He asked with a raised eyebrow, his war-axe resting on the back of the young-blood's neck, ready to be brought down at the smallest attempt at resistance.

"My my my..." A voice that conveyed the wisdom of the last two thousand years was filled with nothing but... disappointment as the Clan Leader stared at the situation in front of them. "Not only did you ignore our warnings to avoid the fifth planet from this planet's solar body, you then proceeded to disturb an entire R'ka nest... And draw them into the den of the Cazath... You are simply a disappointment to our entire clan..." The words were, of course, not directed at Zel'Nak, but the young-blood in his grasp. "And then you say that I would disapprove of an honor duel, at the odds of three against one? You may not be blooded yet, but you are still a warrior of Mal'Thok... Or rather... You were." The Clan Leader turned his gaze. "Zel'nak Zak'lah... You may take this disgraces head."

What could only be described as an outraged squawk escaped the young-blood's throat, only for it to be turned into a strangled cry as his head was separated from his shoulders, his body collapsing to the floor moments later.

"I.. apologize for the disturbance to your work, Zel'Nak." The apology from the Clan Leader was unexpected, and... perhaps unneeded with the vengeance that he had gathered with the three corpses at his feet.

"I do not blame you for the actions of the un-blooded. It is a tragedy about the state of the R'ka and Cazath.. But, perhaps it will strengthen the both of them... After all, we saw what it did to the both of them in their crucible..." Zel'Nak tsked, mandible's clicking and clacking as he debated what came next. "Now... If you would excuse me Honored Clan Leader... I have a Grounds in need of pruning."

Three Weeks Later, Fifth Planet from the Sun, Unknown System

“This is nothing but an unmitigated disaster,” Zel’Nak muttered, staring up at the sky at the sight of a pair of painfully white dropships with bright yellow markings on the side descending towards the edge of the R’ka nest. They had been awakened from their dormant state, and now the Ooman’s had come... Which only promised more annoying hassles for him to deal with. The last thing he wanted was for the hive to explode into a size that he could no longer contain it himself..

The canyons of the planet were second nature to him, and before long he was at the edge of the clearing where the Ooman’s had landed. There were twenty three by his count, half of which were the machines that were made in the Ooman’s image... It had always baffled Zel’Nak with the Ooman’s desire to create something in their image, rather than to let their creations shape themselves, especially with the level of intelligence they were given, albeit with shackles..

After all, what was the point of creation, if not to shape and nurture? Yes, of course there was the end goal, the desire for ones creation to reach a designated point.. But limiting ones creation in such a way was so... disappointing.

Zel’Nak had talked with one of them once. A machine that had introduced itself using some Ooman name that it had been given... It had not lasted long. A fine machine, an acceptable fight, and a discussion that bothered him just the smallest amount.. To create something in ones image and then enslave it.. Only caring about its.. What was the word that shiny headed Ooman had used... Money? It’s monetary value? Disappointing. Both of their heads now adorned his trophy room, as a reminder of the hubris of the Ooman’s... and as a resolve to do better when it came to his own Grounds, and the creatures that inhabited it.

Zel’Nak returned his attention to the camp in front of him, nestled away in a location that would be challenging for most sentient creatures to find, but not for the one who had shaped this planet over the last eight centuries. The camp had become a bustle of activity, with the machines already have been sent to the edge of the R’ka next, leaving only a dozen or so Ooman’s behind. From the snippets he had heard, their goal was to take one of the R’ka with them.. And he could not allow that.

The silence of the canyon would be rocked by four back to back explosions, each one forewarned by a soft whine that turned into a harsh crackle as energy bolts connected with each of the dropships engines, and, just like that, the Ooman’s were grounded, with no hope of returning to orbit... Not that there was anywhere to go, because moments later...

The sky was filled with a bright, violet light, as if the sun had suddenly rushed into orbit within seconds, only for it to fade away... And the sky to fill with molten debris as chunks of metal entered the

atmosphere. It turned out that having a Clan Leader who wished to undo the stain on his clans honor nearby, was VERY useful for dealing with problems that Zel’Nak had no desire to deal with.. He had not turned on his ships reactors in nearly nine centuries, and he had no desire to do so now... And now, no longer needed to.

If you knew what to look for, there was a pair of lights that were suspiciously close together, that after a few moments would disappear, and Zel’Nak let out a content sigh as he surveyed the chaos of the Ooman camp in front of him. It was now just him, and eleven Ooman’s that had nowhere to go...

That of course, did not mean that all of them deserved to be hunted. Some were nothing more than chattel, and those were dispatched with a lazy axe blow to the nape of their neck, their screams and confused shouts falling silent one by one by one...Some ran. Some attempted to come together, to rally and fight.. But none were truly warriors, and it was clear to Zel’Nak as he dispatched them one by one.

And then there were only two left, two Ooman’s that clutched their weapons to the point where it had to be painful, moving through the chaos of the Camp together. These two had clearly fought together, bled together... And now, they would die together, and perhaps, become trophies together, to be memorialized in aeternum together.

“B-Behind you!” The ratchy, echoey voice of a long dead Ooman cried out across the clearing, and as one, the duo turned.. Only for a cacophony of noise to assail them as Zel’Nak came rushing out of the smoke, axe raised in hand as he dashed at the two Ooman’s. Gunfire greeted him, and a bellowing laugh echoed from Zel’Nak as his axe cleaved the first one’s gun in two, the two halves clattering to the floor, the guns owner yelling in outrage.

Zel’Nak was already gone however, back into the billowing cloud of smoke that was enveloping what remained of the camp. The ruptured engines had leaked their fiery payload, and now the entire camp was a molten inferno, one that Zel’Nak navigated without issue, even as the gunfire came racing at him, the bullets cascading against him, each impact that bypassed his armor and dug into his flesh a reminder of what it meant to be alive.

Zel’Nak eyed the two of them, watching as they scrambled towards the central building, words screamed at one another as another explosion rocked the compound.. A supply pile had cooked off, adding to the chaos as Zel’Nak dashed back in, grabbing the Ooman who’s weapon had been destroyed, and with one *brutal* movement, Zel’Nak drove his fist straight through the Ooman’s skull, much to the outrage of their companion.

Zel’Nak only laughed at the anger of the second Ooman, who had tossed aside his gun in his emotion, and drawn his knife from where-ever it had been stored. Words that Zel’Nak couldn’t be bothered to even query the meaning of fell from his lips, only to be met with more booming laughter as Zel’Nak tossed his axe aside, and with a quick movement, deployed his scimitars from his bracers, raising them in a mock salute to the Ooman.

“Time to D-D-Die” The words played from his bracers in the voice of the corpse that sat at Zel’Nak’s

feet, and the Ooman in front of him bellowed in outrage and charged forward, only for Zel’Nak to meet him halfway, his blades matching the Ooman’s in a clash of metal that resonated in the small space they had found. The Ooman knew what they were doing, Zel’Nak was willing to give him that... And they were willing to stand their ground and die. But did that make them worthy of taking a trophy from? Zel’Nak wasn’t convinced.

And his disbelief at the worthiness of the Ooman being a trophy was changed moments later, as the Ooman shot out its free hand, retrieving and then pressing a high-calibre pistol to a gap in Zel’Nak’s armor and pulled the trigger. A inhuman roar of pain filled the camp, and Zel’Nak *slammed* his head forward, connecting it with the Ooman’s forehead and driving it to its knees.

“W-W-Worthy” The echoing voice from Zel’Nak’s bracer spoke again, even as he kicked the Ooman, sending it spiraling onto its back. A foot was planted on its stomach a moment later, even as Zel’Nak grabbed a fistful of its hair, yanking its head back to provide a clean cutting angle. The Ooman struggled. Its fight wasn’t gone yet, but at this point... It was all but dead.

“FUCK YOU, FREAK!” The Ooman yelled, and Zel’Nak only laughed as he stared down at the desperate Ooman. “T-T-Time to Die.” His bracer spat in response... and then the scimitar’s descended, cleanly separating the Ooman’s head from its shoulders, and the body went limp within seconds.

Retracting his scimitars, Zel’Nak would hold up the head, staring into the Ooman’s anger filled eyes. Even in the moment of its death, it had stayed committed to its anger, and not broken into a gibbering mess like most of the other Ooman’s... It would indeed make an acceptable trophy to mount in the hall, and Zel’Nak was content.

Zel’Nak would shake the head once, the tightly fitted white and yellow cap falling off and onto the pool of blood that had been amassing from the decapitated Ooman. Using the flowing hair, he would tie the Ooman’s head to his belt. A thought occurred to him, and he reached down to retrieve the Ooman’s pistol. An ugly little thing, but the Ooman had been clever with it... It would sit with the Ooman’s skull, and Zel’Nak placed it into his hunting pouch with a nod.

Zel’Nak glanced around the camp, convinced that everyone there was dead. The machines would lose power, and without their Ooman handlers, they would not be able to remove a R’ka from the nest, let alone off world... The danger caused by the Youngbloods was handled, and it meant that Zel’Nak could truly see how the world would change due to the issues of his lessers.. And the only lasting damage would be the scars that Zel’Nak would carry from this day. Which, all in all, was an acceptable price to pay.

With a noise that could be best described as a snort, Zel’Nak enabled his cloak, turned around, and disappeared into the smoke, leaving no signs of his presence but the corpses of eleven Oomans, and the burning husks of two dropships.... Not that anyone or anything that would care would ever find them. The system would be forgotten for all but the Yautja, and that was how it was meant to be.
