

## Beginnings

*Training Hall, The Citadel, Estle City, Selen, Dajorra*

Timeros knelt on the floor, eyes closed, trying to ignore the sharp, nose-prickling smell of ozone. Somewhere behind him, he could hear the clang of metal on stone as the training droid advanced cautiously, its two sabers alight and humming. Even without looking, without so much as stretching his power, the Adept knew the machine's stance: hesitant, careful. It had been defeated too often to believe a frontal assault would work, yet its programming offered it few other choices.

*Not that different from myself, I suppose.*

He knew, likewise, the coloration of its paired lightsabers, a dull red that with just the faintest discoloration that, to a trained observer, indicated a training saber. It paid to be careful; more than one Dark Jedi had lost limbs in overly ambitious training exercises.

It came to the Entar without warning, a sudden flare of nose, and the scrape of metal across concrete. A human opponent, of course, would have released a telltale flare of aggression, searing his intentions into the Elder's conscience long before any actual aggression. The droid, instead, operated in complete emotional stillness, not preceded by even the faintest ripple of emotion.

It availed the droid little; Timeros' own prowess with the Dark Side intervened, awareness exploding outwards into prescient knowledge as combat instincts whirled themselves into overdrive. His tendons, already wound tightly about his frame, sprang loose with moments to spare, propelling the Adept into the air just as the droid's strike came sizzling through the air.

He opened his eyes just as the droid's dual blades scissored in underneath him, crossing over each other just as the Entar himself vacated the space where his neck used to be. Immediately, the paired lightsabers switched course, their dull red blades gleaming ominously as they uncrossed in hopes of skewering the Adept in mid-air. He responded instantly, one hand snaking out and grabbing the droid by the wrist. He pulled on it immediately, using the machine's superior weight to his advantage and turning his aerial leap into a ball-on-chain yank that drove him safely over its shoulder. As he tumbled past the machine's head, he drove one of his bracers into what passed for its face.

He landed in a crouch, coming up with serpentine grace just moments before the droid behind him stumbled to the floor, its balance shattered by the sudden outbreak of violence. Yet as it fell, it seemed to collapse into itself, its servomotors whirring with intensity as it folded, then unfolded, coming up in a stabbing roll that suddenly faced the Entar again.

Timeros skipped up into the air again, crashing down on the droid's right hand with one booted foot, then flipping over its second lightsaber as it moved to cut him off at the ankles. Again, the droid spun on mechanical feet, the clangor of metal on concrete nearly drowning out the double-sabered hum as it adjusted its blades, trying to skewer the Adept in mid-air.

The Arconae's lightsaber leapt, suddenly, to his hands, flashing to light even before they settled in his grasp, their amethyst glow a sinister counterpart to the droid's red. He unscissored the blades, striking out to right and left in a wide, expansive gesture that broke the droid's two-fisted stab, scattering its blades to either side. The Dark Side came alive in him as well, its putrid touch seeming to set his veins alight with foreknowledge. By the time the droid's lightsabers had swept back into position, the Adept had already taken a step backwards.

And, by the time the machine had managed to bring its sabers up into a defensive position, Timeros had driven one of his own weapons straight through the training droid's metallic head.

The machine fell in a smoke-filled whine of failing servomotors, a high-pitched dying noise that signaled its final shutdown and destruction. As it did, the training sabers switched off, neatly

synced with the dying lights in the training droid's eyes and the simultaneous dimming of Timeros' own sabers.

"It's a shame you destroyed it," a voice rang through the training hall as the Arconae stashed his weapons. "It was just beginning to learn and understand your tactics."

"That's why it had to be destroyed," Timeros said, voice frigid. He turned his head towards the newcomer, wiping strands of long, blonde hair from his face as he offered a curt bow. "Your Excellency."

"Timeros," Marick said, voice level. The Consul was standing stiffly, his jawline clenched tight with repressed anger. It was a common sight, these days; too common according to some. The Consul had taken the loss of Ziost hard.

"Marick. How may I serve you?" the Adept offered, as he approached the Shadow Clan's leader.

"I need you to stop destroying droids," Marick said, without preamble.

Timeros' expression did not change, but mentally he raised an eyebrow. "Below your station. Too inconsequential to bother yourself with."

"I did not mean literally," the Primarch shrugged. "My meaning is, you should start training people. Take students. There is a war coming, Tim."

Timeros paused for a moment, trying to ignore the affective nickname. "There is always a war coming," he responded, voice more brusque than he intended.

"Yes," the Consul nodded, eyes alight with grim satisfaction. "And I mean to win it. Your blades cannot be everywhere, Tim, but if we're going to win this war, I want more than one of you. I want a dozen of you."

"Atyiru, yourself," the Adept said, shaking his head. "Students."

"We're barely ever with you," Marick shook his head. "What I need is a *Battleteam*. A group of people who train with you nearly every day. People who command personal combat and the Centre like they were born in it."

The Consul's face softened somewhat. "You would have complete control. Your own team, free from interference by either House. A group of Arconans who you can mold into the next generation of warriors. It bears thinking on."

The two Arconae gave each other a long, hard look. Finally, Timeros shrugged, turning away. "I will tell Socorra to start making preparations."