

Kra'xalth woke up, slowly blinking and opening his eyes. It was dark at night, and the air tasted bitter. He rose from his bed quickly and dressed himself with more energy and purpose than he had felt in his entire life as a youngblood aspirant; he knew this was the night. A youth of only 83, he had trained for many years in fighting pits against training dummies, lifeless targets and occasionally peers; though he never had the chance to prove himself to be quite so definitively their better. Tonight was different. He felt a burning passion welling up within him over the past few weeks, something he knew was his Yautja hunting instincts flaring up, bursting at the seams of his life to escape the pain of a warrior made subservient.

Confidently opening the door to his living quarters, he made his way to the training grounds he had seen many times throughout his life, but never entered. Under normal circumstances, such an area would be reserved for Clan Warriors recovering from injuries on-world while their clan was busy on a dangerous hunt. Recently, however, it was **technically** open to all Yautja outside of working hours to train for an upcoming tournament hosted by none other than the Loxzil clan, to be overseen by a delegation of blooded hunters despite their complaints at working with the menial class.

He made his way quickly to the grounds, arriving sooner than expected. Slowing down now, he made his way through dark corridors lit by weak red lamps, admittedly daunted by the prospect of overturning his life- No. He knew this was the *right* path for him, his muscular body yearned for the thrill of the hunt, and his mind begged to strum with the beating of his heart in battle. After passing through several more winding corridors, he arrived at the fighting pits deep within the bowels of the building. Stepping through the entrance hallway, he was assaulted by light and color. Yellow sand; brown wooden benches; but most remarkably the deep green color he knew of Yautja blood.

Hesitating for a moment, he continued towards one of the pits intending to observe a spar before getting into one himself. There was no need to train physic-

Flying headfirst into the pit, Kra'xalth tumbled through the air before crashing into the coarse sand in the pit. He pushed himself up and spun around to see his assailant - a massive, muscular Yautja jumping down into the pit after him. He landed with a heavy thud and began to yell, screaming "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, IN OUR SACRED TRAINING GROUNDS?! THIS IS THE DOMAIN OF THE HUNTERS, NOT SLAVES LIKE YOU!". Kra'xalth shivered, but stood his ground and crouched into a defensive fighting stance. The massive Yautja continued to bark, "DID YOU COME HERE TO FIGHT? TO TRAIN WITH THE WARRIORS? TO FIGHT AND DIE FOR THE HONOR OF PAYA? COME, THEN!".

Kra'xalth quickly threw up his arms in defense, letting his natural instincts take over the extremely limited fighting experience he had obtained in his youth. Quickly, the warrior lunged at him, throwing 2 quick jabs at each of his outstretched arms, before hooking around the right and punching him square in the face, causing Kra'xalth to stumble backwards. The titanic Yautja wasted no time in exploiting this vulnerability, flinging him against the wall and knocking him down onto his ass. At this, the giant chuckled and looked down upon his foe, sure that the young Yautja on the floor in front of him would be unable, or even unwilling, if he was truly as weak as he thought, to fight back.

A sudden jolt of electricity in his brain sent reflexes flying throughout Kra'xalth's bruised body, immediately flying to his feet with an energy he hadn't felt before. His thoughts came quickly like bullets, stained with bitter anger down his spine and into his pulsing muscles. He threw himself fist-first at his oppressor, sending a flying barrage of punches into the kidneys, under the ribs and straight into the thick mass of gut.

At this, the warrior bellowed a mighty roar, stamping on the ground like a bull and charging towards the direction of the sudden pain and throwing the pathetic little yautja in front of him up high into the sky, who flailed wildly before landing directly into the male's grasp. With two swift, brutal punches to the solar plexus and temple, the fight was over. The thoroughly beaten and exhausted Kra'xalth sprawled on the floor and breathed heavily as the victorious warrior bent over him and began to speak.

"You've got guts, sauntering into this arena in the middle of the night. What could've possessed a slave like you to break the rules you've lived by your entire life?" pondered the huge Yautja, speaking as much to himself as he was his foe.

"I..." gasped Kra'xalth, not sure of the answer himself.

The Yautja interjected, loudly exclaiming "Bah, nevermind. My name is Gro-Kax'thill Loxzil, and I wear it with pride. Go home and sleep off your injuries, come here again tomorrow night and I'll show you your mistakes. Tell me, what is your name?".

"Kra'...xalth." he spoke, suddenly inspired with confidence - he had been spared, and even given a new opportunity. Or maybe just a beating.

Gro-Kax'thill chuckled to himself, before climbing out of the pit, not waiting for further conversation with his defeated opponent.

Slinking out of the training grounds quietly, Kra'xalth mulled over his rapid defeat and the pain he felt, both physical and mental. To have been kicked down so brutally after just entering the arena left him bruised and tired. He started the trek home, walking out the red-lit corridors the same way he had come in, dispirited and alone.

For the second time that evening, Kra'xalth was snuck up on by somebody he had never met. Another Yautja walked up quickly beside him and began to speak. "You really need to work on your awareness." He scowled, and she giggled. "That guy really gave you a beating, Kra'xalth."

He turned to look at her, and she smiled and laughed again. The first thing he saw were her dreads; they were long and smooth, beautiful even, with a gold band around one at the front. Kra'xalth's mind hesitated for a moment - it was one thing into another: excitement, intimidation, defeat, and now... attraction?

She continued to speak as he subtly looked over her delightful features. "My name's Re'Ktet. You want to compete in the upcoming Loxzil tournament, right?" She did not wait for an answer. "So am I! Except... I didn't get beaten up like you. Don't lose again next time!" Kra'xalth stopped walking, but she had already left.

The next few days passed in a blur of fighting, training and growth for Kra'xalth. Spars with Gro'Kax-thill had become less one-sided, and he tutted at his past mistakes as a much more mature fighter. Though he searched, he could not find Re'Ktet; it seemed that she was training somewhere separate from the others and avoiding him. Kra'xalth attempted to ignore this fact, to make little note of it, to keep his mind on his training. Her visage still lingered in his mind each night, perhaps serving as additional motivation, until the inevitable reminder that there could be only *one* winner came back to him again.

Finally the day came. Today, he reserved his strength. He lightly stretched and flexed his now much-enlarged muscles, they were to be one of his keenest weapons as instructed by Gro'Kax-thill. Kra'xalth had not just trained his body, however. One's body and mind must be in equal balance, he resolved, as he began to gain an upper hand on the brutish Gro'Kax-thill using his wit to drive his body to more efficient usage. He was not alone in this mindset, having encountered and sparingly trained with other experienced Yautja, though some refused to train in the company of those they considered beneath them.

Kra'xalth stepped confidently through the entrance of the dojo again, following the simple red markings that led to the central arena, deep within the bowels of the building even though it occupied a massive area. Eventually, the winding corridor around the outside of the building gave way to a titanic indoor stadium, with hundreds of seats arranged in an oval around a central fighting pit covered with sand.

Before he could examine it in greater depth, he was interrupted by Gro'Kax-thill, yelling from a viewing box with the best view of the arena.

"There he is! My own son!" he guffawed, laughing to himself at his own joke.

Kra'xalth ignored the continuing jests of Gro'Kax-thill, who settled down after a while to enjoy the tournament's opening ceremony, hosted by none other than the promised Loxzil Elder,

proclaiming himself to be Elder Rok'go, a direct delegation from the Loxzil Clan Leader, a scintillating prospect for all the competitors.

"Until now", he boomed with a voice amplifier, "you have all lived unfulfilling lives. This I have been assured of." Gro'Kax-thill snickered tactlessly. "However, today is your chance to be born anew, aboard the Loxzil mothership, as a Youngblood Hunter. Only the very best will be personally selected by me, and the others will be left to rot in the factories. I hope this is enough motivation for you all to live up to your potential as Yautja."

Kra'xalth took a seat at random, and immediately began to search the stands. His gaze darted between each Yautja, identifying them by their mandibles, their dreadlocks, their eyes, all things he knew would immediately pick Re'Ktet out of the crowd. He saw all ages, all heights, widths and relative muscle densities - all far beyond that of a human. Eventually, in the first row of seats, closest to the action, he saw her, dressed in a new, polished body mesh. Her eyes wandered in the stands for a second, before immediately locking onto his, her mouth slowly blooming into a slight smile, instantly disarming him and cau-

His train of thought was interrupted by an extremely loud bell ringing, signifying the beginning of the first round. Rok'go explained the rules quickly, clearly disinterested in the first round - it would only serve to eliminate what he considered to be the weakest among the Yautja. A simple duel, fought with blunted combi-sticks. The first to be forced to the ground would be immediately eliminated from the competition, spare those who could put up a sufficiently entertaining fight before losing. Attendants quickly emerged from a door beside the viewing podium, selecting two Yautja seemingly at random and bringing them to the arena, handing them their weapons and skittishly running off. Another bell rang, and the fight began.

Just like that, the two Yautja pulled themselves up over a small crest of sand, and were away. The combi-sticks bashed together, grinding angrily against the other, trying to beat the other by sheer strength, or perhaps endurance. They wasted no opportunity against the other, each securing the occasional glinting hit followed by a furious riposte from their opponent. This brutal physical display continued for a few minutes, before the larger Yautja landed a direct blow to the other's chest, sending them collapsing to the floor with a crunch of bones.

A couple of young-looking attendants ran onto the court, quickly retrieving the injured, defeated contestant and dragging him away into an unseen backroom, to treat his injuries and return him to work after the contest was over - he would at least have the privilege to remain and spitefully hope for the later defeat of his opponent.

Kra'xalth's turn eventually came, against a much shorter, yet still muscular Yautja. The match proceeded uneventfully as Kra'xalth applied his strength to subdue his opponent's movement, a tactic personally advised by Gro'Kax-thill, who smiled from the podium like a houndmaster showing off his beast. He continued to push his favor as the bout proceeded, eventually forcing his opponent's feet into an awkward position and shoving them with his off-hand, ending the fight with a thud. He made sure to sit next to Re'Ktet when he returned, though she only gave

him an approving nod and nothing more.

At the conclusion of this first round, only a little less than half the original number of Yautja remained in the tournament, the others watching glumly from the back row of seats as Elder Rok'go began his next speech.

"Congratulations to those who have succeeded in their first trial - it is but one of many steps you will climb in the coming stages." He continued, with some vitriol in his voice, "To those who have lost - you may remain in the stands and observe for the rest of the day, or you may return to work." Snarling viciously before proceeding, he spoke ruefully, "There is no redemption for you now, you have failed."

Attendants shuffled through the stands quickly, offering small shards containing a tiny yet potent quantity of Thwei, to soothe the pain of wounds sustained by both victors and losers. None were significantly injured enough to prompt further medical treatment, save for one bulky yautja who received a shot of healing gel, and had his deeper wounds dressed. Some Yautja quietly slunk out of the building in shame.

Rok'go continued, now onto describing the next round as the arena mechanically reset itself, dissolving gel capsules opened and bathed the sand in a blue slurry which rapidly evaporated and left the sand as smooth and yellow as it had been before. The Elder spoke in the same booming, announcing voice as he had before, clearly amplified by a discrete technological insert worn around his neck.

"Welcome to stage two. This round will not be fought against your fellow Yautja, but against an opponent as timeless and woeful as the Ancients themselves." Some older, more traditional yautja sneered at such a frivolity, but Rok'go continued nevertheless. "I am referring to, of course, the Serpents!"

As he finished his statement, great roars erupted from the stands filled with brimming yautja and from cages within the arena's bowels alike. Rok'go spoke over the crowd, roaring the rules for the coming engagement. "There will be ten groups of four yautja, pitted against an equally sized group of personally curated Serpents, consisting of one Defender, one Sentinel, one Runner, and one Drone."

Kra'xalth grinned at his good fortune, having seated himself close to her - they would be grouped together for the coming engagement. He glanced around, sizing up his nearest fellow yautja as the attendants grouped people together with holographic tags attached to each yautja's shoulder. His team were a motley bunch, consisting of Re'Ktet, another male of similar stature and build to him, and the bulky Yautja he had seen being treated before. He bit his tongue as he weighed the task ahead of them - his team had no natural advantage over him, giving him a clear-shot route to an impressive performance, but also indicated the battle would be an arduous task with little cooperation between the bristling youths. The attendants told him that they would be the eighth team to fight out of the ten total, and one leaned in to speak to him. "Rok'go loves this matchup, he does it at almost every tournament... Let me tell you a little

hint.” The smaller yautja leaned in, almost whispering. “As the fights go on, the dead serpents release more and more pheromones. The first match is relatively easy, especially when compared to the *bloodbath* that the tenth or so tends to get, as the serpents get more vicious. Good luck.”

Kra’xalth could swear he heard the little attendant snicker as he hustled away, but made no comment. The first match was soon beginning, and Kra’xalth was eager to glean more details on the fight ahead of him. Each Yautja was armed with a small cutting dagger - they would struggle to pierce the thick armor scales on the defender, but would cut through the others easily. Little armor was provided, as Rok’go commented each Yautja was expected to defend themselves using only the strength of their bodies and, surprisingly, each other despite the Yautja and Serpents being equally matched.

Just as quickly as the first stage, each match proceeded with shocking ferocity on behalf of all participants, including the Serpents fighting thanks to their strong preservation instincts. Kra’xalth noted the mace-like tail of the Defender as it smashed into each Yautja - some suffered greatly from such an attack, whereas others seemingly shrugged it off by jumping backwards along with the direction of the force. In stark contrast, the lithe Runner opted to circle around the edge of the battle, literally pouncing at any opportunity to sink it’s short, yet sharp claws into each Yautja before tearing them away and continuing to circle. He had little opportunity to note the abilities of the other castes, as particularly bulky Yautja contestants had a habit of ripping them apart as they struggled, directionless without a clear leader to guide their attacks.

Soon, it came time for him to fight, as him and his team hopped excitedly into the sand pit, they were unceremoniously handed their daggers and the eighth Serpent cage was brought up from below. Kra’xalth immediately settled into a combat stance as the Serpents gradually inhaled the slurry of their own kind’s blood and death pheromones - they stiffened up, before growling and lunging towards his team.

Kra’xalth analyzed them, the Defender took a head-on approach towards the gathered Yautja, foolishly flinging itself into an all-out attack. The Runner and Sentinel opted to take a flanking route, using the Defender’s raw strength to distract the Yautja and attempting to take the female Yautja on the right. However, the Drone was missing. Kra’xalth’s eyes darted around rapidly, searching for the missing Serpent before relaxing, seeing the Drone curled up dead in the cage. The Yautja in the crowd had clearly seen this, and bellowed their complaints towards the fighting Yautja and Clan Warriors on the podium above, but Rok’go did not comment - the fight would proceed as normal.

At this, Kra’xalth threw himself at the Defender, deftly jumping over it’s whip-tail and landing a clean blow to the right side, causing acidic blood to spurt out over his knife, almost instantaneously dulling it’s edge and leaving him disarmed at the beginning of the fight. As this happened, the other 2 males wrestled with the Defender’s strong crest; the slower, bulkier Yautja took it straight on and was flung back several meters onto the floor. However, the other

Yautja struck his dagger against a fleshy gap where the Defender's body connected to the battering-crest, evoking a pained roar.

Meanwhile, Re'Ktet struggled bitterly against the nimble Sentinel and Runner, but was pinned to the floor by the Runner which rended deep cuts into her abdomen as the Sentinel doused her in Neurotoxic poisons. At this, Kra'xalth bellowed in rage and charged towards the Runner, seemingly absorbed in its own blood-frenzy. Unweighted by armor or equipment, Kra'xalth easily closed the distance and grabbed the Runner by its barbed tail and right forelimb, before forcefully throwing it into the ground and stomping on its head, covered only by relatively soft scale-plating, crushing it and killing the Serpent instantly. Kra'xalth reached down tenderly to pick up Re'Ktet, but was met with a fierce rebuttal of her fist as she flung herself to her feet towards the Sentinel.

The Sentinel and Defender hissed and growled furiously at the death of their sister, as the crowd of Yautja above roared in approval of this gladiatorial execution. Angrily, Re'Ktet tossed her dagger at the Sentinel, striking it cleanly in the mouth as toxins bubbled out of its now swelling glands. Shortly thereafter, she was on top of the injured serpent, smashing it into the ground with her fists. The bulky Yautja who had been struck before similarly launched an assault on the Defender, battering its crest head on with ferocious rage-filled punches, eventually cracking it open through sheer force and driving his dagger into the exposed viscera. At this impending victory, Kra'xalth kept watching her fondly as she showed off her strength, until he felt a deep pain searing through his stomach.

The Drone had gotten up. The Drone, of course, the Drone! Flashbacks of her words echoed through his mind: *"You really need to work on your awareness."*

He looked down just in time to watch the sharp spike of the Drone's tail recede from a newly formed gouge straight through his lower chest. He felt intense rage boiling in his blood and spraying out of his chest, and he bellowed a great roar as he turned around. In this time, however, the deft grasping claws of the Drone sealed around his left wrist as the sharp tail coiled back for another strike at his bare chest where his heart lay. This was no ordinary Drone. It had observed a similar fight occurring when it was still connected to its hive, and was intelligent enough, even without a hivemind, to play dead until the time was right to reveal its claws.

Again, Kra'xalth screeched a warcry laced with agony, as his team finished off their respective quarries and the crowd jeered at this bloody, impending victory for the last remaining Serpent. At this notion of defeat, Kra'xalth did his best to shrug off the blooming pain in his chest and bided the milliseconds of time he needed to in order to catch the spiked tail flying towards his vitals. Simultaneously, he wrenched his restrained hand free of the Drone's grip in order to place a second hand on the Drone's tail, swinging it around as the Defender had swung its tail before tossing it cleanly across the entire pit, crashing into the solid wooden wall and bouncing off lightly, dead.

Kra'xalth immediately felt victorious hormones and adrenaline rush through him; however the reduction in blood pressure caused his consciousness to rapidly fade, his vision became pin-pricks of light, and he passed out on the sand.

For a long time, colorful thoughts swayed through his mind across a sea of darkness among visions of each of the **serpents**, before settling on the **Drone**, an evil look plastered across its chitinous 'face'. He chased the **Drone** furiously, roaring at it and chasing it endlessly attempting to wrestle it to the floor, until he felt it drive a spike into his right arm as he reached out to grab it.

He awoke, confused, on a stone slab in the bowels of the arena - the sharp spike he had felt was a Thwei crystal, rapidly restoring his lost blood and closing his smaller wounds, though his chest still seeped thick blood, forming a pool beneath him.

"Don't worry about the tournament. Rok'go decided that you get to stay, even though the **serpent** almost bested you. Seems he approves of the way you killed that **Sentinel**."

Kra'xalth sighed in relief, and closed his eyes. How many more rounds of this would there be? Could he really keep winning? Doubts raced through his mind, but he quickly banished these thoughts as he regathered his composure. The attendants rapidly applied a poultice of mending herbs to his multiple cuts and an entire capsule of healing gel to his puncture wound from the **Drone**. After a deft application of the wound clamp, he felt the pain sear, and then recede. In no time, he resolved he would be ready to continue on in the tournament. It wouldn't do to look weak in front of **Re'Ktet**.

A few minutes later, **Rok'go** began another bitter speech, clearly in a state of some anger. Though **Kra'xalth** had won his match, he had been recovering for all of the rounds thereafter. His eyes darted around the arena before settling comfortably on her face, now somewhat more scratched and battered, evoking a throb of protective concern from his heart.

Rok'go bitterly began to speak, enunciating each word slowly and with an obvious bitterness. "Due to your collectively *pathetic* performance in the second round, many dozens of yautja lay dead or dying. As a result of this, **Gro'Kax-thill** has helpfully pointed out that we do not have enough so-called 'contestants' left for the third round." **Rok'go** shot a quick, distasteful glance at **Gro'Kax-thill** before continuing his embittered tirade. "Hence, unfortunately, we will be forced to skip the third round and move straight to the finals. I have already seen to it that any *cowards* have been removed from the tournament, leaving us with few enough contestants to move straight through to the final duels." At this, the crowd of Yautja in the stands began to murmur amongst themselves, though several remained silent, preparing themselves for what was to come. All went silent as the attendants brought out the holo-display with the standings; each slot in the bottom had a colored tag which matched the ones they had been given earlier.

Kra'xalth sighed a quiet breath of relief, still somewhat laboured by his injuries - he was the odd

one out of the contestants remaining, and would pass on directly to fight in the final duel! The crowd, now mostly losers and somewhat thinned by those who had died in combat with the **serpents**, immediately burst into screaming at this 'injustice'. **Kra'xalth** made no attempt to keep his head down as **Rok'go** screamed back in response, much much louder than they had, "**He fought more bravely than any of you weaklings!**". **Rok'go** stared in particular at one unscathed Yautja, and one other who was criss-crossed by claw marks, both of whom bowed their heads in shame.

Each fight of the quarter finals thereafter passed by in a flurry of violence, blood and rage. The sand was no longer being cleaned after each fight, leading to a terrifying dark green patina of rapidly oxidizing life fluids forming throughout the pit. The last few Yautja who were still fighting, having now settled into a battle trance throughout the tournament began to deliver more brutal injuries to their opponents - **Kra'xalth** watched intently as **Re'Ktet** outright killed her opponent by a rapid spear thrust, while several other contestants were left permanently disfigured or disabled. **Rok'go** particularly enjoyed this display, nodding and jeering on the vicious warriors from his podium above.

After **Re'Ktet**'s fight was completed, **Kra'xalth** quietly snuck down to the healing chamber to see her while the last few duels finished above them. Her treatment had been mostly completed, and the attendants had left the room. She sat up from the slab and looked at him, somewhat frayed by the fighting. "**I told you to pay attention!**"

Kra'xalth ignored her, softly rebutting "**Those serpents never should've touched you. I'm sorry.**" He approached her slowly, bobbing one of her dreads and picking up the mending herbs from the table beside the slab. Tenderly, he applied them to a few small cuts on her face, still silently amazed at her beauty. She did not brush off his touch, instead speaking quietly again. "**I'm not weak... I don't need your help..**", though she still allowed him to continue before **Kra'xalth** was forced to leave by the returning attendants.

Kra'xalth quietly sat down in his chair, and looked at the podium. One quick glance, and his heart sank in his chest. Next to his **blue** tag, was a bright **pink** counterpart. His eyes darted around looking for her, until he realized that she had already climbed down into the arena.

Had they been called to fight already? He hesitated, then climbed down into the pit again, struggling to accept the reality of his situation. This round was to be fought using a classic sword and shield, an ode to what **Rok'go** considered to be 'honorable human clan warriors'. **Kra'xalth** tried to steady himself, taking his weapons with gusto, hiding his true feelings about his opponent. He could barely see her face from behind the mighty wooden shield; so he tried to pretend that he was merely fighting a set of weapons wielded by some mysterious force. Anything would be better than the truth.

The bell tolled for the final time in the tournament, and she stepped towards him across the thoroughly bloodied wasteland that separated them. He took a deep breath and followed her lead, he could not give up now. As they drew closer, he realised his folly in his spectating

practice - he had no idea what kind of fighter she was, though he knew exactly how beautiful her face was, and how she would idly click her mandibles when she thought nobody was watching. These thoughts served him no advantage in the fight which was rapidly approaching, and he was caught completely off guard as she made the first move. It was a simple attack, really. A short thrust from the sword from around his shield, attempting to reach at the arm braced behind it. Instinctively, he thrust his shield in the direction of the strike to attempt to deflect the sword, but was met with no feedback. Instead, she had retracted the sword to strike through his center and catch him off guard while his shield was poorly positioned; but she had not considered what [Kra'xalth](#) was doing with his sword.

A part of [Kra'xalth](#) knew straight away that he should dodge and make his own attack while she followed through with the stab, a tactic which would undoubtedly leave her outstretched arm vulnerable, but another part of him looked up instead. He caught a glimpse of her face as she left her shield on the wayside; it could have been a sloppy mistake or a purposeful exploitation of his emotional response. Either way, he hesitated not only to make his attack but to dodge hers as his thoughts became stuck together in his mind, and her sword ripped open a shallow stab in his breast.

The pain woke him up from his trance as he jumped back, clearly too late to dodge the attack which had already landed. Nevertheless, his predator's brain had finally taken control, latching onto the sensation of the pain to drive his body despite the protests he found within himself.

The rest of the fight was fought ferociously by both [Kra'xalth](#) and [Re'Ktet](#), blow after blow collided either with the rasp of a sword or the thud of a shield. Every attack was met in kind by an equally powerful riposte as each of them spun around each other, graceful footwork met in kind with a rapid dodge or parry - it was as if they were actually dancing. This process of equal exchange was not to last, though, for the female still had her ace planted from the beginning of the tournament.

She lowered her shield once more, raised her face towards him, and shot him a smile. It was a peaceful gesture, there was no malice to be found in any aspect of it, and yet it proved to be false. [Kra'xalth](#) again ceded to the weaker side of himself, and was again found at the tip of a sword dulled by their duel. A clean blow to her shield arm sent it clattering to the floor, leaving her at a marked disadvantage as she reset her stance. [Kra'xalth](#) felt miserable, she held no punches on him. He was almost *proud* of her deceitful tactics to beat him. He knew now that his only chance to get the fight back in his favor was to fight riskily, as any attempt to regain his shield would undoubtedly cause her to attack him in the process. Instead, he lunged at her like [Gro'Kax-thill](#) would, like the bullish [Yautja](#) had, embracing the vicious, physical, *manly* side of himself.

Still, he could hardly bring himself to attack her as she relentlessly assaulted him with her sword, even allowing her to pick up her shield without any attempt to stop her. She landed another blow to his shield, and bounced off in just the wrong way - his training, instincts, stress all coalesced in his sharp stab to her off-balanced torso.

She roared in pain, sending shivers of pain down **Kra'xalth**'s spine as she redoubled her efforts. Her brilliant features now contorted into a hideous grimace, she slammed their shields together and lept onto him, forcing them both onto the ground. Savagely slashing at his face again with her sword, **Kra'xalth** snapped. Instead of biding his time, he rammed his sword up through her skull with impatience as her body went limp.

As she lay on the floor, **Kra'xalth** rose steadily from the ground, sneering at her as blood bubbled from her maw. Roaring in victory, rage, tension, a slurry of emotions, he raised his fist at **Rok'go** and extended his thumb in a neutral position, in mockery of the ancient human tradition.

Rok'go seemed extremely satisfied by this; he had probably known all about their relation anyway. **Gro'Kax-thill** was more reserved, yet still approving. He had grown close to **Kra'xalth**, and was truly worried for him. In kind, **Rok'go** jabbed his thumb outwards,

then snapped it downwards.