

Here we go for fun!

STAR

THE OLD REPUBLIC

WARS

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Chapter ?

Nox could feel as the furnace inside of him exploded with fury. As he flew through the air he tore down the mental restrains and emotional bulkheads that kept the annihilating energy inside at bay.

Friction signaled the end of his flight, briefly catching his back and grazing his vestments. His right hand whipped out and clawed into the stone floor and it took a single thought for his feet to teleport beneath him.

In a flash he leapt into an open Dun Moch stance. A telekinetic hailing murmured from his left hand, and less than a heartbeat later his lightsaber answered the call with a bloodthirsty leap. With a crimson warcry it flared to life, howling as it breathed a blood-red glow onto Nox.

Castige's possessed form calmly strode forwards, somehow he had already recovered from the titanic Force wave he had launched seconds ago. What were once the Pureblood's eyes carefully regarded the silver cylinder in 'his' hands. "It seems much has changed since my murder. Protosabers have truly come into their own."

Marking the end of his sentence was a hiss that signaled a challenge to Nox's own lightsaber. The Sith apprentice risked a glance to the right, scanning for his companion Khem Val.

Reassurance dared breath a hint of calm into Nox's mind as he saw the Dashade's clawed hand heave its massive owner back onto the parapet, with its inverted twin bearing the shadow-killer's wicked Sith sword. With a nod from Nox the reptilian being stole into the shadows, entering his element to wait for a chance to help his master.

The Force shrieked an alarm into Nox's mind and his attention arced back to the possessed form of Castige tearing through the air towards him. The Wraith let out a screech that burned with hatred as it slammed into him, Nox barely managed to shunt his vicious chop aside as he pivoted to the left. Castige's wild swing opened an angle at his exposed flank that Nox refused to ignore, hurling his entire body into a quick, decisive slash. Castige became a blur of motion as he struggled to interrupt the blow, carving the tip of his weapon across the previously immaculate floor in a wide ascending strike in a desperate gamble to catch Nox's blade. It's success rattled

Nox's left arm and he felt as the tendons and bones screamed, threatening to snap and break under the weight of the blow.

Nox recoiled and shoveled the pain into his mental furnace. Crackling rage pulsed in his every fiber and he channeled it into his limbs, his legs launched him into a retreating backflip as his blade fled from Castige's guard-shattering counterattack.

He landed squarely on his feet in a deep crouch two meters from his opponent, his left hand white knuckling its crimson charge as he prepared for Castige's advance.

Castige's blows were too strong, too powerful, to contend with. Electric rage flashed across Nox's eyes at the thought of it, but it was true. Nox couldn't match him blow for blow now that whatever or whoever the ancient Sith was had stolen his body.

But he was far from helpless. A lightning fast replay of seconds earlier blitzed through his head, his mind's eye dissecting every last frame down to the angle of the tile-hewing slash to the trajectories of droplets of sweat fleeing Nox's brow.

The Wraith granted Castige strength yes, but was there a cost?

Color seemed to leave the world as Nox focused and studied the obsidian Pureblood's approach, spacetime freezing the battle in stasis as Nox's mind worked.

Castige's stance was defensive, his weapon's hilt was practically pinned against his left hip and the blade pointed out, staring Nox down and daring him to approach it.

It was all wrong. At knowing *Castige*, it was.

Memories forced themselves into Nox's vision.

He was suddenly back at the Temple's open entrance, watching as the pureblood Sith engaging a pair of insane workers. The first he dispatched with a diagonal cleave that bisected him at the shoulder, all it took to end the other's was a leaping thrust that burned a hole through his heart. Castige reflexively dropped back in his stance, a one-handed grip characterized by whipping flourishes that practically screamed for Nox to take out the Sith's throat.

The Wraith's words echoed into the back of his skull. *Much has changed since my murder.*

And with that, the final piece clicked into place.

The spirit isn't empowering him. It's using him.

And apparently it had no clue how to use a lightsaber.

Castige's flawed stance was a relic of the past, a defensive pose dedicated to safeguarding the protosaber's biggest weakness, the life-giving power cable bridging the gap between the weapon and its battery pack.

The Wraith's own instincts and experience was fighting against him now.

Nox took a moment to glance at the parapet's edge where Khem Val had disappeared, but all he saw were the stone gashes marking where he hauled himself up from. A flicker in the far corner of his eye confirmed his hopes.

He didn't bother fighting the smile. The Force was on his side again.

Nox dropped the open and inviting Dun Moch stance for the more reserved and loose Dun Hask, and once again let himself bask in the inferno raging inside of him. He'd need that Fury to survive this next exchange.

He matched Castige's stride as he advanced, letting the engulfing flames of fury boil his blood. His jaw muscles tightened like a durasteel vice and it felt like a pressure cooker was about to go off inside of his skull.

The Wraith seemed pleasantly surprised. "Oh so you're approaching m-!"

A flash of crimson action silenced the Pureblood, and their blades cursed sparks at each other as they shrieked and clashed with each other's plasmic edge. Nox didn't give his opponent an inch of ground as he disengaged, instead ducking under Castige's hissing riposte and cast a jab at his midsection. Castige attempted to bat aside the weak yet potentially deadly stab but instead found

himself outmaneuvered as Nox's blade dove below the other man's defensive sweep, transferring his momentum into a more dedicated arc at Castige's throat. A roar of frustration from the Wraith bellowed out from the Pureblood's lips as he battered Nox's blade aside, launching into a rage-fueled flurry of devastating cleaves and hacks.

Each heartbeat was like a concussion grenade detonating in Nox's ears as he struggled to stay alive, he refused to block a single strike and instead angled his blade into parries and shunts whenever he could, launching Castige's vicious assaults out and away from him. What he couldn't (or wouldn't) parry he ducked and danced around, savoring the thrilling sensation of a lightsaber missing its mark (his head) by mere millimeters. Rage crackled inside of his chest as he was pushed back and back, closer and closer to the parapet's edge.

But he held it in check, feeling as it grew and slammed against his willpower. Just another second, just one more.

Surprise seized his heart in its frigid vice as his heel felt the ground disappear from under it. Behind him was solid nothing for thirty meters, nearly a hundred feet of air before the Temple's bedrock foundation caught him.

Castige saw this and knew that his prey had nowhere else to go and seized his chance with a bloodcurdling cry, smacking Nox's blade aside before charging up a massive downward chop that'd split Nox in two.

And then, the clock ticked.

Rage once more arced through Nox's limbs and his heart beat anew, pumping magma into his limbs as the chop fell.

Nox's blade blitzed into action, flying into an angled two-handed drop parry across its master's back. Castige's blow slammed into it like a furious rancor but all it did was skip across the angle straight into the lip of the parapet.

Nox flew into a counterattack, viciously swinging his arms, shoulders, torso, everything, into a horizontal slash racing towards Castige's right flank.

The Wraith realized his folly and flew into action, channeling his missed chop into a lightning-quick defensive slash he must've prayed would halt Nox's blade.

Just as expected.

Nox threatened to crack his own teeth as he bit down even harder, yanking his upper body off course and into a sudden right lean, relinquishing his saber to his right hand as it leapt above Castige's, throwing the rest of his body into a one-handed hack between the Pureblood's head and shoulder.

The possessed Sith's reaction came like lightning. Too bad even that was too slow.

Nox felt a surge of pride and bloodlust-driven ecstasy as he felt the saber bite into his opponent, Castige reared away from the lightsaber but it wasn't enough.

His left pauldron buckled and relinquished a searing chunk of itself to the crashing blade, which gnashed away at his torso as it streaked downwards.

A black fissure had been struck into Castige's torso, charred from shoulder to stomach in a diagonal streak.

Nox wasn't done. He moved like an Echani blade dancer on spice, ducking a slow but agony-fueled sweep and launching a flurry of his own against the now backpedaling Sith.

The Wraith was seemingly helpless, no matter how many blows he narrowly deflected or viciously battered aside, Nox refused to stop advancing.

A dark whisper from the Force cast the future into Nox's mind and he steeled himself for the onslaught he knew was coming.

Stars exploded into view as a sudden punch rocketed from Castige's right hand, catching Nox just below the nose, shooting a salvo of red-hot knives of pain into his skull.

Pressing the advantage, the possessed Pureblood seemingly learned his lesson regarding big, heavy chops and instead launched a quick jab with his blade at Nox's heart.

Nox had thought of twelve different counters to the stab, but only one had a special place in his heart.

Nox pivoted on the tip of his foot and threw himself into a spin, hurling himself away from the humming red blade while deactivating his own. Castige's face turned from one of triumph to bruised and bloody when the pommel of Nox's lightsaber came crashing against his. Nox respected the reflexive jab Castige's body launched at him the moment his pommel connected, but he too had muscle memory, and his neck yanked him clear of the swing at the last possible moment.

This was the Wraith's biggest mistake, challenging Nox to a brawl. The retort to Castige's missed punch came in the form of a vicious cross to his open throat, sparking a wide-eyed response from Castige and a frantic crosscut at his opponent's head. Nox's lightsaber leapt back into the fray with a flourish, catching and driving Castige's blade towards the ground. The Pureblood was weakening, and Nox could feel it.

The Sith apprentice calculated his chances at landing an elbow strike on the Sith's face when he felt a sudden surge of dark energy swell from his opponent.

Realization slapped Nox and he immediately broke off from the bladelock and swerved away.

Where his head had been a heartbeat ago erupted with a violent clap of invisible might, and a sizable crack sprung up in the face of the statue of the ancient Sith Lord Ergast below.

Nox had almost forgotten the magnitude of the raw power the Wraith wielded. Yet *another* advantage he couldn't contend with head to head.

Well, he'd been doing well so far, maybe it wouldn't be so bad.

Nox landed in a crouch a meter from Castige, stealing a glance at his foe and trying to guess what was coming next.

There was no need to guess, he could *feel* it.

The air around the possessed Sith crackled and writhed with power, the second Nox felt it he was in motion again. A bolt of purple rage thundered from Castige's splayed out fingers, vaporizing a chunk of the stone parapet Nox had occupied a second earlier.

Nox's head burned with anger as he cursed his stupidity, he'd jumped *away* from Castige. Now he was halfway across the parapet, ten meters from Castige, and the gap had only widened. The Wraith had probably hoped this would happen.

More fury thrummed alongside blood in his ears as he felt another surge of Dark side power radiated off his quarry.

He didn't bother looking, the alarms ringing in his skull and the warning screeches from the Force (not to mention common sense) told him what was coming. Nox channeled every ounce of emotion, every sliver and shard of hatred, into his legs as he once again threw himself to the side. Too slow.

A single tendril of jolting lightning struck him in the calf, erupting volcanic agony through his entire leg and triggering a series of twisting convulsions that threatened to tear him in half. He'd never felt pain like *this*.

Nox crashed shaking onto the stone floor, grappling with a gundark of pain threatening to crush him into darkness.

But Nox was a Sith. No beast, physical or mental, would best him. His elbows found themselves grinding against the smooth ground as he forced himself up, devouring the agony shrieking in his body and allowed the resulting fury to spark strength into his limbs.

He struggled back up to his feet, both physically struggling to make his feet obey him while mentally wrestling with the fact that things had turned so quickly.

One mistake. That's all it had taken. Had Nox stayed in lightsaber range, had he been quick enough to land that elbow, ah feth it he couldn't do this.

Considering all the what ifs and maybe possibilities wouldn't stop the Wraith from turning his corpse into a dehydrated husk.

Only he could stop that.

He felt as the Wraith, nestled comfortably inside of Castige's bruised and bloodied body, gathered his power once more.

Nox watched as the air around him began to whistle and crack. Soon and odd arc or two began to spit out from his form, and the very space around him seemed to depress and warp ever so slightly.

Nox could feel it. This one was identical to the last.

And all it took was brushing against that one to drop Nox to the ground.

Nox decided that if the Wraith was going to sit back and gather himself, then he might as well. He glared straight into Castige's possessed eyes. They still burned with the amber glow of the Dark side, that much had stayed.

But they were empty. The pride, the smugness, every unique and defining aspect that twisted Castige into the insufferable cunt he was had been gutted from him, transforming him into the Wraith's despicable puppet.

And the *Wraith*.

Some pathetic backwater second-rate Sith weak enough to get himself killed yet to stupid to admit it, clinging to whatever stack of remains more dust than bone by now. What was his plan? Shock Nox to death of course, but what after that?

Was he going to convert the Dark Temple into his own fortress, his own *palace*? Was he going to transform the hordes of skulking insane wretches lost to its depths into an army and storm Dromund Kaas itself?

Or was he going to resume Castige's life, returning to Vowran's side like the obedient lapdog he had possessed.

Vowran. Thinking of the decrepit Dark Councilor made Nox's choler shoot to the top of throat. Old, useless, weak, even Nox, a mere Sith apprentice, could snap him in half.

And speaking of apprenticeship, *Baras*.

Nox's seething halted, his mind and emotions frozen in carbonite-like stasis for a moment.

How would Baras react to this?

How would that infuriating, worthless, scheming kark too lazy and meek to get his own hands dirty react to Nox's demise?

How would he handle this?

What would my master do?

Well, for starters, he'd send his apprentice to handle it.

It was a good thing Nox was already there.

A flicker of movement behind Castige caught Nox's attention, it was as if the very shadows themselves stirred for a moment.

Then understanding dawned on Nox.

And once more, he smiled.

The flood of anger crashed against him once again, fury scorched and burned in his bones, rage crackled through his body, and hatred focused it all.

Nox had one last trick, one final gamble.

The Wraith too was finally ready.

Nox watched as Castige's arms shook and his fingers convulsed as he finally brought his power to bear.

The green-tinted chamber exploded into violet and a vicious wave of crackling lightning crawled across the parapet, each time it struck the floor it crawled across a new series of vicious fissures

erupted onto its stone face as the massive wave of Dark side lightning arced hungrily towards Nox.

When the first spindly arms of physical rage reached him they found themselves crawling across an invisible sphere, and no matter how ravenously the crackling storm tore at the Force shield none of them managed to slip through.

Nox grit his teeth as he labored to hold the bulwark together, his arms shook with effort and his hands cramped as he felt the lightning deliver cracks and dents into his shield. The Wraith wasn't having it, and Castige's arms shuddered anew as even more pulses of violent energy streaked towards Nox.

The invisible barrier began to shudder and shake, the cracks were accumulating and its integrity was on the verge of collapse.

Nox knew what he had to do, he'd just hoped to Hell he wouldn't have had to do it.

A primal scream clawed its way out of his throat as he shattered the shield, welcoming the lightning as it leapt at him.

His entire body was wracked by violent twisting seizures as enough lightning to power a Coruscanti tower for a month arced through his body, not a single muscle, tendon, nerve, or bone was spared by the Wraith's onslaught.

Agony blossomed where pain found purchase, but so many of his nerve endings were overloaded and fried at this point that there were only so many spots in which Nox could feel fresh pain. And he reveled in it.

The flames of the furnace were stoked anew as Nox forced every last ounce of screaming agony into it, breathing in the choking fumes of hate as he stared straight at the now surprised Wraith. His heart, briefly paused by its zapping, began to pump molten fury back into his body. Another sound came barreling out of Nox's mouth, only this one was a planet-shaking bellow. The strands of lightning themselves were briefly flung away by the powerful Force scream's wrath, but when they resumed their assault on Nox they found him once again out of their reach.

They electrically writhed and struck at the reborn bulwark Nox had summoned, only this time their vicious arcs didn't even manage to scratch the invisible dome Nox had wrapped around himself. The Wraith stared in mute hatred as his lightning abated and he began to stand still, staring at Nox.

"Why won't you die?" The Wraith spat.

Words were the last thing on Nox's mind as he stood there across the parapet from the Wraith. His arms hung at his sides like lead anchors and his knees had turned to paste long ago. He was honestly asking the same question to himself.

Castige seemed to grow angry at his silence, he raised a hand as he spoke once more, "I asked you a question whelp, answer m-" but he was cut short.

There was a sickening squelch as a gush of blood spat out from Castige's leg, Khem Val's sword sang silently as it completed its disabling cut.

Nox finally gave himself over to exhaustion and Dromund Kaas' gravity, dropping face first onto the floor.

A moment passed by as Khem Val's silent footfalls carried him to his fallen master's side. He promptly but gently turned Nox on his side, gazing down at his young master.

"What... Took you so long?" Nox was gasping at this point, his charred lungs laboring to hold any air.

Khem Val's even tone came in a form of heavily accented Old Sith, "I did not want to dishonor my master by stealing his kill."