Dromund Kaas (SF) - Fiction

By: Jac Cotelin, House Taldryan, PIN 6

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“Father?” The boy looked to either side as the door quietly hissed and shut behind him. He stepped into the small room, reveling in the old familiarity of it all. Nothing had changed; it even smelled of home: the somewhat dreadful smell of recycled air and a temperature a bit too high for anyone’s liking. The visitor lowered his hood and unfastened the knot at his neck, freeing and removing his cloak. He placed the clothing over the edge of nearby chair. He examined for a moment the table that the chair abutted, trying to recall only the best of memories they had there. “Father, are you here?” he called again.

“In here, my boy! In here,” the voice rang out from down the hallway. His parent’s room was that direction, as well as their office. His father would be in the latter; the old man had not slept in the bedroom since mother died. No one was even allowed in that room anymore. The hallway was small, and the boy, who was tall for sixteen, had to duck under multiple thresholds. He entered the dimly lit office, finding his father perched in a small arm chair, struggling to get up. The old man gripped the arms of the chair with each hand and grunted wearily as he tried to pull himself to his feet. His ragged face was red with exhaustion even from such a simple task.

The boy rushed to his side. “Stay seated, father! Don’t get up for me.” The man looked at his son with a dismissive look, and the younger knew there was no use in arguing. “Then at least let me help you to your feet.” He reached down to assist his elder, taking hold of the loose flesh on the man’s arms and pushing at his boney backside. The man breathed heavy for a moment after he was finally standing, and then dusted himself off before looking at his son. He smiled. “Ah, there you are, son!” The two embraced for a moment, the frail corpse of a man engulfed by the arms of his strapping lad.

The boy was attractive. Tall and well built, it was clear that he took care of himself. He had distinctive brown eyes and a defined jaw that made him look older than he truly was. The boy wore his hair pinned back, a different look than he had when he lived at home, where a short, cropped look was all that his mother allowed. While the old man could see images of his younger years in his son, no third party would ever make the connection. The elder was simply too far removed from his prime to look like anything but skin and bones. He was hunched over, as if his back would snap at a faint wind. The skin on his face was stretched thin, drooping under his eyes and hiding what was once a similarly defined jaw. His smile was the only thing that did not look aged, mainly because his artificial teeth remained pearly white.

“It is good to see you. Yes, good indeed, my boy,” the old man croaked and smiled. “My you have grown. They must be feeding you natural foods.”

“I’ve been travelling a lot, so no, I haven’t been eating well.” The young man smiled and let go of his father’s shoulders. The old man shuffled over to a table where he had previously poured himself a drink. He heartily drowned the draft as if he were young, and then poured another.

“Might I offer you one?” the old man asked, pouring a second drink without waiting for an answer. “It does me good to see you, son, but why have you come?” The boy, seeing his father struggle to walk with two drinks in hand, rushed over to grab the second cup.

He smiled at his elder, “I would not miss your birthday, father.”

The old man perked up. “Oh? Has it been a year already? That can’t be good. What does this make me now?” The old man shuffled over to a credenza where a datapad sat. He pulled up a date chart and looked surprised at what he saw.

“You are ninety, father. Don’t feign that you are surprised.” The elder laughed and coughed. The boy took a sip of the drink and coughed as well. The drink was terrible, some sort of spiced ale, not local. “How have you been, dad?” The question went unanswered as the old man fiddled with the datapad. The boy knew the answer. Sad and lonely. He had been sad and lonely for five years. They were silent for some time, the old man seemingly lost in the data at his fingertips. “How goes your training?” the old man asked.

“I am almost a Knight, father,” the boy said, hoping his parent would be pleased. “I’ve had a few setbacks, but I am well on my way.”

“Good.” The man’s response was cold. Silence followed again.

The boy knew it would be like this; excitement to see each other for a moment, and then back to a sadness and silence. Mother had always been the talker. “I can’t stay long, father. We ship out again this evening.” The old man continued to read something more important on the datapad. “And I’m not sure when I will be back,” the young man continued, knowing his father was listening. “I’m excited; they are sending us on missions into the old Sith regions. My detachment will be sent to protect a mining operation on Dromund Kaas. We’ll be there for a while.”

The elder slowly set down the datapad and turned to his offspring. The look was curious to the boy, as if his father were looking at him for the first time, studying him intently. He mumbled something to himself that the boy could not understand and turned away again. The young boy looked around the office while his father had his intention elsewhere. They had many great memories in this place. He could almost see his mother sitting there across the room, laughing at the antics of her men. The son looked back to the father, who was again drinking thoroughly. Something was wrong with the way the old man was acting. It was strange.

A moment later the elder turned and put down his drink. He walked back to his chair, some determination in his steps that the boy had not seen in a long time. The man lowered himself into his chair.

“Come, my son, stay awhile and listen.” The old man beckoned the boy to sit. He did, finding a nearby stool to prop himself up on. “For within my mind,” the frail little man continued, “dwells ages of knowledge that I must impart upon you.” The boy stared intently at the deep brown eyes of his father; he saw a fire and energy in his dad’s demeanor that he had not seen in a long time, not since before mother died. What this was about, the boy didn’t know, but he would listen to his father and appease him.

In a raspy, low voice, the wrinkled man continued. “I must pass what I know on before my end of days.”

“Your end of days? Come now, father, you are not going to die today.” The boy was dismissive. “Besides, what can you tell me that I have not learned in my studies?”

“You, my son, will not find your answers in your scrolls, your books, or any datapad. You will not hear these words from another mouth. I know truths and history that you cannot fathom, but that you must learn.”

The boy smiled at the joke his father was pulling. “Come now, what is this about? What are you talking about? Am I back to school now?” The boy chuckled, but was quickly interrupted.

“True history is not written down,” the old man insisted. “You learned nothing in school. History was experienced, and those that experienced it have or are quickly expiring. The victors write the history lessons.” The boy began to protest at the ramblings of an old man, but was chastised. “No--listen to me. The victors tell the stories, and I was not among the authors.” That got the lad’s attention for a moment. He bent toward his father, listening intently.

“You will know the truth, my son, from my mouth and without me holding back.” The man’s voice rattled in his throat. “You will know your heritage starting today. You are old enough and have seen your fair share of the galaxy; it is time for you to see your father and know him. I am not the man you think you know, nor the man your mother loved.”

“What are you saying, father?”

“I am old, my son. You laugh, but let me finish. I am much older than you know. You believe that I am ninety.” The boy nodded. “I will tell you now: the first time I approached the age of ninety was forty years ago.”

“Say again?” The boy’s face was screwed up with disbelief and curiosity. He didn’t believe a word his father was saying.

“I am one hundred and thirty years old today, my boy. One hundred and thirty.”

The boy got up. “Father, I don’t have time for th--”

“Sit down! Hear me out. You don’t believe me, I know. But listen, and you will soon understand.” The young man sat again, though he was obviously flustered by the conversation. His father looked at him intently.

“My life has been extended well beyond that of any mere human. By rights, I should have been dead an age ago by natural death; a hundred years ago by the unnatural.”

“What is this, Father? What are you trying to tell me?”

“My son: I feigned ignorance and surprise when the Jedi came for you so many years ago.” This was interesting, the boy thought. They never spoke of the Jedi; his father blamed the Jedi for his mother’s death. They had never talked of the day the boy left. “They identified your talent and showed up at our door to take you. I acted the part of an unknowing father that was skeptical of this mysterious power you held. I allowed them to take you and train you, knowing that your path would be different from mine, but not so different in talent.”

“Different from yours?” the boy was confused. “I don’t understand.”

“You are adept in the Force, my son,” the old man continued. “I am adept at hiding my power.”

The boy stood again, this time setting down his drink and taking a step backwards. “What are you talking about?”

Without pause, the old man continued, leaning forward in his seat. “It is beyond time that I reveal myself to you. I ask that you remain patient and hear me out. Can you do that?”

Strained by curiosity and without much other choice, the boy nodded.

The elder closed his eyes and let out a deep breath. Unlike earlier, without struggle or even effort, the man stood and outstretched his hands. The lights flickered and dimmed. Trinkets rattled on their shelves. The boy’s glass tumbled to the ground and shattered.

And like a veil was lifted, the boy could feel his father through the Force. His real father. Terrified, he turned to run. The boy made it but a few feet before his legs dropped from under him. He tried to catch himself but his hands and arms failed him. The young man’s face smacked the floor; he grunted in pain.

 “Do not run! Do not go! Son, I beg of you.” The old man pleaded with his offspring. “What you sense is no longer me! I have long discarded and hidden my past, but need you to know of it. Someone needs to know of it.” The boy lay there for a long while, the fear growing by the moment despite his father’s pleas. His world has turned upside down by this revelation, and sickness came to him. The boy wretched, but could still not force himself to his feet.

When it became clear that the boy was not going to relent from his flight, the tone of the old man when from pleading to command. “My son,” the man stated coolly, “I’m sorry, but you have little choice in this manner.” With a wave of the elder’s arm, the boy elevated into the air. his limbs hung limp and the wretch slid down his face. the boy floated to the arm chair where his father had sat, and he was lowered into it slowly.

 “Yes,” the old man said, satisfied, “there. Listen, please.” The boy still could not move, but he was resigned to listen. He tried to speak, but he was without words. He sensed something beyond what he had ever experienced, and he was terrified

“You sense it now, my son. Even after all of these years, there is no denying my true past. I have hidden it for so long, that I myself forgot of its potency. But the relief I feel in opening up my true self is tangible. I had almost forgotten what it was like to feel, as I, for so long, have feigned normalcy. But I am anything but normal.” As he spoke, the man looked more invigorated than his son had ever seen. The elder stood taller and spoke louder. He carried himself with renewed vigor. “My son, I was--I am--a Force user like you. You inherit my power, my great power.”

The boy said nothing. He didn’t know how to react. He still wanted to run, but could not move. He was frightened, but told himself that no harm would come. After all, this was his father. He knew the man, or so he thought.

“In my time,” the father continued,” I was known as a Grand Master, among the most powerful of all beings in existence. You can feel it, I know you can. I have felt the same potential in you, but dared not tell you of it until now. But now is the time you learn: you inherit your strength from me.”

The boy finally found his voice. “My strength?” The boy didn’t know how else to respond.

“Yes, your power,” the man paused, “but not your alignment.” Confusion in the boy’s face gave way to vague understanding. “I was not of your Jedi way, nor am I subscribed to it today. While I would have always considered myself independent or gray, by your standards, my son, I am dark. I was a Dark Jedi.”

From deep within, the boy found a strength that he did not know he had. the Force flowed through him as it had never done before and he erupted from his chair, pulling back control of his extremities. His hand darted to his saber and the blue blade erupted to a snap and hiss that the old man was all too familiar with. The boy held his lightsaber aloft in front of him, posturing defensively. The tip of the blade almost touched the ceiling, and the boy moved around hesitantly, making sure his back was to the exit.

“Put that away and sit!” the old man yelled. “Are you really going to kill your own father? You have heard nothing of what I have said nor of what I will say! Hold your judgment; we are only talking here.” It was true, the boy knew. If his father was truly a danger, it would have been easier to kill the boy without this discussion. “If you hear my words and then decide to turn on me, then we will see if you have the skill. But for all that I have borne you, put that away and let me speak!” Hesitating for just a moment, the young man lowered and deactivated his blade. He did not sheathe the saber to his belt, but rather, kept it in hand as he pulled the stool to him to sit. Every instinct made him want to run, but the boy was even more curious.

His father sighed. “Thank you.” The old man sat as well and lowered his head. “Where was I? Yes. I was a Dark Jedi, though your definition of that term differs from mine.” He looked up again and caught his son’s questioning and angered gaze. “I did not grow up on this colony, son, as you were taught and your mother thought. I have not always been ordinary. I can--and will--tell you stories that you will scarcely believe but hasten to hear.” The boy didn’t know what to think. He was shocked and angered and curious and sad all at the same time. He didn’t know how to respond, and so he listened. The man stood again and walked toward his datapad. “For instance, I’m sure you never suspected that your father was a Fleet Admiral in the Imperial Navy.”

“You were what?” the boy asked, a mix of exclamation and questioning in his tone.

“I was a Fleet Admiral in the Imperial Navy, well, back when it was the Imperial Navy.”

For a moment the boy forgot who he was and got caught up in excitement. He had always been a history buff, and was enthralled by the study of the Empire and its downfall. “I don’t believe it! When it was still the Empire? Were you at Endor?” The thoughts of Dark Jedi escaped the young one’s mind as his enthrallment with his father’s story took hold.

“I was there, yes, and I will tell you of that in due time. Not now though. I have much else to say that is more important.” The boy could not help but show his disappointment as the number of questions he had multiplied in his mind.

“I was in the service of the Emperor’s Hammer.” The old man was pleased to see his son knew of it. “Yes, that one. And during my time, I was brought among a group of powerful Force users. There was an effort by our leaders to corral the strong and build an army of powerful men to fight for the crippled Empire. We formed the Dark Jedi Brotherhood.”

The boy couldn’t help but laugh. “Could you have given it a more obvious name?” If it hadn’t been for all that he felt in the Force, the boy would doubt every word his father told him.

“Yes, a more clandestine name would have been good, but it was what they came up with. Look, I’ll tell you about that more later. My history in the Brotherhood will take time to unwind and it won’t be done this evening. I ascended the Brotherhood and led it three times. I was a Grand Master. My son, you will learn, but have no idea the extent of the powers I possessed.”

“How is this possible, Father? How could I not know this?” the boy became angry, despite his training. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“You were not ready, son, and I had abandoned those ways.” It was an unsatisfactory answer, but the boy did not push the subject.

“Did mother know?”

“No,” the old man said, dejected. “Your mother knew nothing. She didn’t even know my real name.”

“Your real name?” The boy pushed his anger from him, drawing on his training to remain calm. His father had betrayed him with lies, and his mother as well. The boy wanted nothing more but to kill the old man, but kept reserved for the sake of his Jedi training.

“Yes. She, and you, know me as Uffalo Cantor. My true name is Jac Cotelin. I’m afraid the history of your family is also fraudulent, son.” Jac leaned against his desk, again taking his drink in hand and sipping from it. “The Cantors are real enough, and I am one of a long line there, but of my blood-family, the Cotelins, I am all that remains.”

A moment of silence fell between the men. Jac studied his son intently, he latter not returning Cotelin’s gaze. “Come,” said Jac, “let me show you something.” With a flick of Cotelin’s hand, the desk he had been leaning on slid down the wall. Below was what the boy knew to be his father’s safe. Cotelin entered a code on the interface and the floor below it shifted down and to the right, revealing an opening below. “Are you going to come, or do I need to carry you again?” The boy hesitated. “Come.” Jac commanded, stepping into the hole and down a ladder. The boy looked back to the hallway and the exit, wondering if he should simply flee. But curiosity got the best of him, and he followed.

They entered a chamber almost the same size as the room above, though the ceilings were taller. Cotelin flipped a series of switches and the lights burst on, illuminating a secret trove of treasures, books and other belongings. If he hadn’t believed it before, the boy did now: across the room, mounted to the wall were a dozen lightsabers. Some were very basic, a standard casing that would be built by any Knight. But some were intricate, including three casings that appeared to be made of gold. The young man had never seen such a collection.

“Ah, yes.” Jac said. “My lightsabers. Well, not all mine. The two golden blades at the top, those are mine. The others,” Jac paused, “those belonged to good friends.”

The son looked around the room some more as Jac fiddled with a stack of papers and rolled up parchments. To the right of the sabers was a large display case that held a set of formal robes. All black with gold lining, the robes were impressive to behold. Along the walls thereafter were pictures, both printed on paper and on rotating image displays. The boy watched the displays as nameless faces flashed across. He saw a picture of a man in the robes; it must have been his father at a young age. His father had been old when the boy was born; he had never seen a picture of Jac in his prime. “Can you go back and show me some of those?”

Cotelin turned, “what, the pictures? I suppose, but later.” He turned back to his search and exclaimed when he found what he was looking for. “Here it is. Come, come.”

The boy ripped his gaze from the images on display and walked over to his father. The elder man cleared the table and laid a star map before him. The Jedi recognized the area he was looking at: Sith space.

“Let me make you understand why you are learning all of this today.” Cotelin looked up at is son. The boy’s face was still a mixture of confusion, curiosity, and apprehension. Cotelin, on the other hand, looked as energetic as the boy had ever seen. It was clear that the release of his powers was having an effect on the old man. “Before we digress into other stories; before you learn more about your old man, let me tell you of the glory days.”

“You mean when you were in charge?” the boy knew his father better than Jac knew.

“No. No - the golden age of the Brotherhood was not when I was in charge. I will tell you about those times later. You are headed to Dromund Kaas. But you have no idea of the history there. You have no idea whom the planet was taken from begin with.” Finally, the boy began to understand where this was coming from. “See? Now you are understanding.” It was as if the old man was reading his son’s thoughts. Cotelin smiled. “The Jedi have not told you the whole history. Forty years ago, that planet was ours. In fact, all of Sith space was ours.”

“What do you mean it was yours?” The boy was taken aback. He had studied every written article about his destination and the Sith regions. “The Dark Jedi Brotherhood controlled it? That’s not written in any tome I’ve studied,” the boy challenged.

“No.” Jac replied. “It’s like I said: history is written by the victorious. When your new ‘Federation’ defeated us, they realized the extent of our holdings and the army that had accumulated without their detection. Our military was massive. Our clans were strong, with thousands of Dark Jedi in control of them. We held dozens of planets and multiple systems. And when they found us and snuffed us out, they decided that all trace should be eliminated; even our history. You will never hear of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood other than from those that were in it. And those of us that are left dare not reveal ourselves, else we be hunted till the end.”

“And you trust me with this information?” The boy stood defiant. “I am but a call away from bringing down on you the might of my people.” His hand moved to his pocket where a comlink was ready to be used.

“Oh, I don’t expect that you would betray me like that, son.” Jac smiled, showing of his artificial teeth. “You have moved beyond curiosity at this point; you want to hear this.” Sure enough, the boy did not reach for his com. He didn’t nod, but he agreed. Despite his anger, despite his father’s betrayal, the boy had to know the history before he turned his father in. “And if someone were to find out,” Jac continued, “it’s not like I haven’t disappeared before. You have no idea the power I possess; I worry more of old age, which has finally caught up to me, than I do about your friends. I have sat here, under their noses, for forty years. They will not find me unless I want to be found.”

The boy stared at his father. The young man did not have the courage to follow his morals. He would not run to his allies.

“Look, that doesn’t matter,” Jac continued. “Do you want to know about your mission or not? What I will tell you about Dromund Kaas could very well save your life and the lives of your friends.” Silently, the boy nodded.

“Fine then, let me start back a ways. To understand what happened, you need to understand a bit of our structure. The Dark Council led the Brotherhood.”

Jac’s son laughed again, and Cotelin couldn’t help but laugh himself. “Oh, come on, leave me alone about the names. I didn’t make it up; that’s the way it was and we stuck with it. The Dark Council led the clans and houses of the Brotherhood. The DC, as we called it, was controlled by the Grand Master. I held that role three times, ascending once in my early years, then after we left the Hammer, and again shortly before our destruction forty years ago.”

“During my time in power, after the Exodus,” the boy screwed up his face, not knowing what the ‘Exodus’ was, “--sorry--after we struck out our independence from the Imperials. I’ll tell you of that later. I kept the Brotherhood isolated. We had our corner of the unknown regions, in a system where we could not be detected. We grew and warred amongst ourselves. My role was to establish the organization that would lead us into the future, and I did that and passed on the leadership role.”

“You passed it on?” the young man restated, questioningly. “I thought Dark Jedi simply killed each other for power.”

“You know little and less about true Dark Jedi. Not everyone follows the Rule of Two. Unlike your precious Jedi, we actually changed leaders quite frequently.” The boy shrugged, not knowing how else to respond. It was true that he knew little about the Sith beyond what he had been taught. He was looking forward to his studies on Dromund Kaas to learn more.

Cotelin continued. “Your namesake followed me as Grand Master.”

The boy was shocked; his face and tone showed it. “My namesake!?”

“Yes, Aristan, you were named after a Sith Lord.” Anger crept into the boy’s mind again as the insults kept coming. It took all of the boy’s control not to lash out. “You were named after a great apprentice and friend of mine named Aristan Dantes. We called him Sarin. Under Sarin the Brotherhood prospered and grew; he struck out with our men beyond anything that I could have accomplished, and I helped in any respect I could. Whereas most Grand Masters would retire and die off or disappear after stepping back, I stayed to help. I considered myself the protector of the Brotherhood, and Sarin used my skills to their fullest ability.

The boy wanted to wretch again. He turned from his father, hoping that the man would not see the boy’s reaction. He needed to keep his calm until a moment arose to call for help. “And what happened to this Sarin?” Aristan managed to ask.

“He was murdered by a man named Darth Pravus. But I don’t care to talk about that.” Jac moved on. “We trained a man named Muz Ashen to take the reins when Sarin left power. Ah, so you have heard of Muz? Yes, I do suppose it would be hard to strike that name from the history books.”

“Wait,” Aristan Cantor jumped in, trying to act engaged but also curious. “I want to know more about this Sarin person. Why would you name me after a Dark Jedi?”

“Later. You don’t have the time now to hear every tale. I will tell you more at the right time.” Jac took a moment to regain his thoughts. “Where was I? Oh, yes. Muz oversaw the drastic expansion of the Brotherhood. We took on new challenges and bore a new direction toward conquest. But we made new enemies. You have heard, I would hope, of the One Sith? Yes? Well, they were made into enemies, and they attacked us. They found us in our homes and bore their way into our ranks. When we were least expecting, the One Sith carried out a series of attacks aimed at killing our top leaders and attempting to decapitate our clans. They failed, miserably, and they incurred the wrath of the Grand Master.”

Aristan looked puzzled. “Why would they attack you? Weren’t you all working towards the same ends?”

“Some would later say that the attacks were staged, that it was too convenient a precursor to war and the expansion that Ashen desired. My friends never trusted the Dark Council and would not put that past our leaders; after all, the failure of the One Sith attacks was so wide-spread it either had to be sheer incompetence or by design. I think it was the former, but either way, the attacks started a war.”

“The Dark Crusade was what we called it.” The boy didn’t comment on the “Dark” name and kept listening intently. “We were going to destroy the One Sith and take back our ancestral worlds. Muz Ashen’s plan was that we would simultaneously take out our most fierce enemy, and at the same time secure the expansion of our interests. The Brotherhood was ready; our military might was great and our Force prowess was unmatched. We set out to conquer the Sith worlds, with our end sights on the Galaxy.” Cotelin gestured to the map. “Here, look.” The old man pointed to the Sith regions and drew his hand across a dozen planets. “We started here, Krayiss II.” Cotelin paused. “Well, that was where Taldryan started its conquest.”

“Taldryan?” Aristan asked.

“My clan. House at that point. The Brotherhood was split into factions. The greater factions were called clans, and beneath them were the houses. Taldryan was always one of the mightiest clans of the Brotherhood. The Crusade galvanized us, forcing our brethren back into roles that pushed the limits of what Taldryan could do. It was shortly after the Crusade that Taldryan was made into a clan, and it prospered until the end. And that started with Krayiss II; we devastated the One Sith on that planet and quickly moved through the systems. Other clans and houses simultaneously attacked different targets. The Brotherhood moved swiftly, conquering all of Sith space in less than a year.”

“But here,” Cotelin continued, “here was the last of the planets that Taldryan conquered alone. Dromund Kaas, the ancient seat of an ancient empire. I’m sure you have read its history, Aristan. You know that there was at one time a great Sith emperor that called Dromund Kaas his home.”

The boy replied: “Yes, I’ve read the stories. But the planet was supposed to have been abandoned for centuries.”

“The better part of centuries, sure, but we were not the first to reclaim the planet, nor were we the last. The One Sith was there. Then us, and now your Federation.” Cotelin leaned in to speak clearly to his son. “And you do not know what we uncovered in the depths of that planet. You have no idea what awaits you.”

“It’s simply a mine, father.”

“Electrum, I presume?”

Aristan did not respond immediately, but knew his silence was the same as an admission. “How did you know?” The boy could not help but begin to trust his father’s stories. Cotelin knew too much. Calling for help was a thought that faded from the boy’s mind.

“There is only one known deposit on Dromund Kaas, but it is large enough to sustain a massive operation. Electrum was once used in lightsaber construction as a sign of Force mastery. The Sith built right on top of the veins, and over the centuries there has been built layer upon layer of mining operations. Your men are simply taking over where the Brotherhood left off. Taldryan established its own mine on the planet, and we found perversions there that affected us until the end of days.” Cotelin shuffled past the papers and grabbed his datapad again. “Let me show you.”

Through a few flicks of the control dials, Jac brought up the image viewer on the datapad. He flipped through the pictures quickly, searching for whatever it was he wanted to show Aristan. The young boy wished to slow down and examine each image on its own, but knew not to try the patience of his father. Finally, Cotelin stopped on a portrait. Before a massive stone structure stood a dozen men posing. Each wore robes or combat attire, some held their lightsabers aloft, others held blasters or standard Bryar pistols. Jac was there in the center. He wore a gold-lined, tight-fitting tunic, both of the golden sabers dangling from his hips. In the image, Jac looked nearly identical to Aristan, simply older. “How old are you here?”

“Sixty or sixty-five. I can’t remember exactly.” Jac smiled to himself after examining the picture. “This was my family, my brothers. There was not a group of Dark Jedi in the Brotherhood that was more powerful. We were often sent into the thick of things where we would either decimate the enemy or barely escape with our lives.” Cotelin reminisced, almost talking as if he forgot his son was there. “We were despised. Well, as a group. The Council hated when we acted in concert, and during the Crusades we often found ourselves in unwinnable situations. We surmised that we had been sent to our deaths on purpose, but made it out each time.”

Jac pointed. “This man is Telaris. He was a great friend and ally, my Deputy Grand Master in my second term. And here, that is Howlader, our rock. He eventually became the Master at Arms of the Brotherhood, leading our armed forces until he was murdered by a jealous consort in his sleep.” Jac shook his head, as if still in disbelief that his friends were gone. “That there was our leader, Ben. That’s Halcyon, another former Deputy Grand Master. And there in the back, hanging from the building; that one is Tarax. He was killed in cold blood by a member of Clan Arcona after Tarax mocked a man one too many times.”

“Who’s this one? The serious one with the beard?” Aristan was genuinely curious.

“Ah, Keirdagh! That is your uncle, I suppose, along with Telaris whom was also a Cantor. Keirdagh Taldrya Cantor, known as Yacko. He led Taldryan in these times. He was the best pilot I had ever met.” Jac pointed to his collection of lightsabers. “The third golden blade is his.”

“How did he die?”

“I don’t know, son.” Jac stared at the saber in silence. “The saber was delivered to me without explanation. I like to think that he finally made his own path, away from the Brotherhood, but I do not know.” Cotelin turned back to the picture. “This one is Kir Katarn. Next to him is Chaos. This picture was taken before the two of them were married to each other. Beautiful ceremony on Karfur.” The two stood silent for a moment.

Jac broke the silence. “The reason I point this out is not for the people. See this structure behind them?” Jac pointed to the outline of a massive opening in the base of a mountain. The walls were intricately carved and the surround was reinforced by metal mining rigs. “That is the entrance to the main electrum mine.” Cotelin paused and looked at his son in the eyes. “It is also the tomb of seven Sith Lords.”

“Seven? Who?”

“Seven that we discovered. You would not know them. Most were minor lords, but powerful in their own rights. The spirits guarded the tomb, but over the years, electrum miners dug too deep and penetrated the tomb’s outer walls.” Cotelin was somber. “We learned of this the hard way. Hundreds of men died in those structures.”

Aristan was unimpressed. “This is why we have been discussing this? This is why you are all of a sudden telling me this? You want me to be afraid of some ghosts?” The boy scoffed.

“No, my son. No.” Jac was not amused by his son’s rebuttal. “No, I want you to be afraid of those that sent you. Your mission is a farce.” That statement got the boy’s full attention.

“These Force ghosts; they are attracted to power. They will attack and possess the most powerful in a group, using that being to destroy his companions. They possess that person until he is killed by another; and then they will jump to the next. We learned early after our conquest of Dromund Kaas that the tomb lent itself to an interesting form of study. We could, in a somewhat controlled environment, establish and combat minor Sith lords, over and over. We used it as a training ground.”

“And what’s this have to do with me?” Aristan insisted.

“I have kept tabs on the old Brotherhood holdings, including Dromund Kaas. The Federation is doing the same thing we did; they see the value in testing and training. You are not going to establish a mine. The mine is already there. Rather, you and your friends are the target.”

The boy was angry, but he did not know at whom to direct it. “How could you possibly know that?”

“Because my friends and I were the original targets and barely escaped with our lives. The Dark Council sent us to Dromund Kaas in the hopes that we would be subverted by more powerful, yet more controllable Sith spirits. And when we had the opportunity ourselves, we did the same thing. We took our non-performers, and sent them to the mines. And then we studied the results.”

It was beginning to make some sense to Aristan, but he was still not sure that this scenario applied to him. And then Jac made it clear: “I am going to venture a guess: you have been disciplined recently, and no one of your crew is either in good standing or one of the top students.”

Aristan could not fathom how his father knew such things. “I was disciplined, yes.”

“For what?”

“For speaking out. I was intent to study more powerful areas of the force, but was banned from it by my mentors. I was---,” before he could finish the words, Aristan knew that his father was right. It all made sense: the sudden reassignment, the hodge-podge grouping of Jedi, the vague details of the mission. He was the bait for a trap. “Father,” he paused, “you’re right.” The boy was getting emotional. He knew that what his father was saying was true, but he didn’t want to accept it. “Then what do I do? I won’t go; no I’ll stay here.”

“That’s not possible son. You are due to report back in just a few minutes, and they will suspect you, and kill your friends, if you do not report. This is not the Jedi Order that I grew up to despise; they cross the line too often for the ‘greater good’.”

“Then again, what do I do?”

“Don’t panic or let your friends do so when an old Sith Lord descends upon you. I will protect you.”

“Are you capable?” As the question left his mouth, an alarm sounded from Aristan’s pocket. “No!” Aristan exclaimed, frustrated. “That is my signal to get back to the ship for departure.”

“I understand.” Jac Cotelin looked at his son and smiled. “Look for me in a time of danger. I will be there. Do not warn the others, and when in the tomb, hide your abilities. Do not be the first to enter, and you will live.”

The boy wiped fresh vomit from his chin, apologizing for the mess as he recomposed himself. Jac smiled at him. “I will not be here, should you return with your so-called friends. This room will not exist. You will never see me again unless I want to be seen.” After a moment, the boy turned to the ladder. “One last thing,” Cotelin called. He opened a chest that sat under the saber display and pulled from it a rolled up cloth. He unwound it, and handed to Aristan Cantor a ragged sash, silver in color but faded. “Wear this in the mine. It will help you disguise your powers.”

Not knowing whether to trust his old man or not, Aristan took the cloth. “Father,” the boy said, resigned. “I don’t know how to accept this and don’t know if I will.” Jac nodded as if the statement didn’t need to be said. “I can’t believe that my mother would marry a Dark Jedi.”

Anger and then disappointment flashed in Cotelin’s face. The memory of Aristan’s mother made him slouch again; he looked old once more. “Your mother loved me, and I her. She didn’t need to know my past.” The former Grand Master looked up into his son’s eyes. “But you, on the other hand, carry her memory within. And I will not allow all that remains of her to be taken from this world.” The boy stared at his father. “Go, now. Go.” Aristan Cantor turned and left, more frightened and confused than he had ever been.

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Jac Cotelin stood before the holoprojector as he had daily for many, many years. The image of those he spoke to flickered to life, a bright blue light above the projector. He saw the same scene that he saw every day: eight men circled around a table. Engraved into the table was a simple star.

“It is done.” Cotelin stated coolly. They knew what he was talking about.

“Good,” replied a masked man, his robes lined with gold. “We will soon own the younger Cotelin as well. Our work at rebuilding is beginning to take form.” The Grand Master stood. “You have done well, Lord Cotelin.”

Jac Cotelin bowed low. “Thank you, my master.”