

DB History

The Shadow Academy

An
Elder's Legacy
SHORT STORY

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"This is the worst idea ever."

I was pacing back and forth across the floor in my master's study. We'd been arguing for the last forty minutes, according to the chronometer on the desk, and I was starting to wear through the fancy, imported rug that adorned the overly flamboyant office. I mean, seriously? Who hangs a bronzed buffalo head from their wall? Great power obviously didn't translate to great decorating sense.

My master, Jac Cotelin, heaved a weary sigh and shook his head. He was sitting behind his desk, in his usual suit—black with gold trim—and looking every bit the venerable Grand Master that he was. He may be far from his prime, but Cotelin was still a force to be reckoned with. His piercing, brown eyes followed me around the room.

"It's how it has to be, Aidan," he pointed out again. It was the same line he had been using since he first told me I had to join the Dark Brotherhood. The organization was home to hundreds of Dark Jedi—one of those few places left in the Galaxy where we could train our powers in secret.

"Kincaid'," I reminded him for the umpteenth time. See, only my parents ever called me "Aidan". I prefer being addressed by my surname as it keeps a healthy distance between me and whoever I'm dealing with. The Grand Master was the only one who ignored that rule.

See, Cotelin had taken me on as an apprentice years ago after he helped me escape from some One Sith assassins and my former bastard of a master, Silas. We had a good situation going, because I was unknown to the Brotherhood and able to move freely throughout the Galaxy as needed. I was Cotelin's secret weapon, unfettered by the rules and politics of the Dark Council, and able to ensure his will was carried out. Unfortunately, the Dark Crusade brought an end to my anonymity when I turned up on Dromund Kaas at the same time as members of House Taldryan fought the One Sith for control of the planet.

I was given two options. Either I joined the Brotherhood as a new recruit, or I would be hunted down and killed as a potential Sith spy. Neither was my preferred option, but they didn't leave me a lot of choice in the matter. Those Dark Council guys are even more paranoid and high strung than I had been told. The fact that Cotelin had a secret apprentice was apparently enough of an issue for them to make a big deal out of it.

Which is why we were having this argument.

"The Shadow Academy, though?" I demanded. "I think I'm a little beyond trials at this point." It was true. According to Cotelin, I was strong enough to contend with other Elders in

the Brotherhood. Putting me in the kiddie pool was just a waste of time for me and everyone else involved.

"Even so," Cotelin replied. "They want to test you. And they won't take my word for your ability."

Disgusted with the whole situation, I stopped pacing and turned on him. I slammed my hands on the surface of his fancy desk and leaned forward. "So be it," I growled. "But they're going to regret this."



A week later, I was wearing a grey training uniform and rubbing elbows with a batch of raw, Force-sensitive recruits. It was every bit as degrading and torturous as I had imagined... times a thousand. Less than half the kids there had any real power, and the rest were complete novices more likely to stab themselves in the foot than hit an opponent. I already had a pounding headache and it was just the first day.

The Academy had what seemed like dozens of instructors and trainers, each with their own subject that they "excelled" at. They took turns talking to our class and told us all about their skills and knowledge, demanding immediate respect for their authority. The only thing I got out of it all was that the Brotherhood had a lot of rules about conduct, chain of command, and cheating. Apparently, they liked to take all of the fun and challenge out of fighting.

It was weeks later before they even let us hold a weapon. We were run through lightsaber training, being drilled on the basics of the Forms in small, four-person groups. I had what amounted to a glowstick in my hand and was using it to beat the spit out of one of the other recruits in my group. It wasn't real training, in my opinion, but it served as a decent warm-up.

The "fight" was horribly one-sided. The kid had never held a lightsaber before, let alone taken a swing at someone, so he was all but defenseless. I rushed him with preternatural speed and rained down a series of vicious blows. Lucky for him, we weren't using real blades. A training saber had limited power and, though it stung like hell, it couldn't cause any real damage. After a few minutes, the kid was covered in bruises and burns, having been unable to keep up with my onslaught.

"Enough, Kincaid," our trainer shouted. "This match is over."

I ignored the command and raised my training saber to prepare for another attack. "He still has some fight in him," I said, taunting the apprentice I had been matched up with.

Normally, one wouldn't push an inexperienced opponent so hard in a training duel. But I had been taught differently. My old master, Silas, had been merciless and cruel. He conducted training exercises with real weapons... and his apprentices completed trials by fighting each other to the death. Years of living like that had hard-wired the instinct to dominate and destroy into me, and it was too easy to slip back into those old habits.

The other students weren't happy with my display of skill, though. They each activated their weapons in turn and ran to join their fallen peer. The game was starting to get interesting. I leapt high into the air, willing the Force to push me past my physical limits, and landed behind the three students. Before they could react, I spun and slashed my weapon to the left, smashing into the closest of them.

He barked out a curse in a foreign tongue as the blade dug into his side. The smell of burnt flesh and hair filled the arena and the alien went down. The other two spun around and swung at me, their weapons held clumsily. They were over-extended. I bolted forward and slashed at the one on the right while kicking at the one on the left. Both attacks hit home, and the pairs' lightsabers went sailing through the air.

I completed my swing and used the momentum to launch a low-angled slash at their midsections. The training blade caught them both, one after the other, and sent them falling to the ground.

"That's enough!"

I turned at the sound of the command. The instructor had ignited his crimson blade—a real lightsaber—and was running at me. I sensed his killing intent at the same moment I looked into his dark eyes.

"Back off," I warned him, muscles coiling in anticipation. I've never responded well to threats and figured it would be better to tell him to stop before things really got out of hand. Too bad he just kept running at me...

Instinct took over.

By the time the Royal Guardsmen showed up, a half dozen instructors and twice as many students had fallen around the training field. From what I had been told beforehand, the strongest instructor had been only at the level of a Knight, and the trainees were mere

Apprentices and Novices. The outcome of the battle had been obvious given my experience. But hey, I figured I did them all a favor. Nothing bonded people together like having a common enemy.

I wasn't sure who had contacted them, but the squad of armor-clad warriors had appeared just as the last body fell unconscious. It looked bad, sure, but I hadn't done any real damage. I mean, a training lightsaber can only do so much, you know?

"Drop your weapon and get down on your knees," one of the guards shouted.

"What?" I demanded as the guardsmen advanced. "I told them to back off?" A dozen lightsabers activated in unison. I guess they took issue with my explanation.

This was going to get messy.



"Conduct unbecoming. Sedition. Mutiny. Disrespect towards a superior officer... officers. The list goes on like this."

I was standing in the private office of the Justicar, an officious chamber with old, dark wood walls and a black, stone floor. There were hard, uncomfortable chairs positioned in a semi-circle before a large desk sitting atop a raised dais. It was a cold room, where criminals came to be accused, judged, and sentenced. Sitting behind the desk was the Justicar, Taigikori Aybara with his two Hands standing on either side of him.

The list of my various violations was being read aloud by the man on the right. He was a massive mountain of a man in his mid-fifties. His hair was a distinguished mix of brown and grey, and he sported a full, luxurious beard. We had only been briefly introduced a few days before and I knew him to be Keirdagh Cantor, Right Hand of Justice and Aedile of House Taldryan.

Judging from the piercing green glare he was giving me, he was definitely not a fan of mine. The harsh flood of anger I sensed through the Force had to have been about more than breaking rules. They came from someplace much more personal. Cotelin had once shared some stories of the past with me before I was inducted. Apparently, he and Cantor were close, having worked together in Taldryan for years. The fact that Cotelin had kept my apprenticeship a

secret even from his closest allies had not won either of us any favors. It seemed Cantor was happy to take his frustrations out on me rather than my master.

"That's quite the list," the Justicar said drily, one eyebrow arched imperiously. He was glancing back and forth between me and Cotelin, as if trying to figure out how events would play out. If I had to guess, I would think he was bored. He didn't seem to really care one way or the other about what was going on.

Really, they were blowing things way out of proportion. It was just a training exercise that had gotten a little out of hand. It's not like I had killed anyone. I glanced back at Cotelin to find his face twisted in a grimace. His eyes were closed and he was pinching the bridge of his nose like he was trying to prevent a massive migraine.

"I realize how this seems," Cotelin began, "but there are... extenuating circumstances."

"Seriously?" Cantor asked, bewildered. "This guy broke nearly every major rule we have laid out in the Covenant. He should be sitting in a cell, not getting special treatment."

It seems Cotelin had pulled some strings to keep this affair private and me out of the stockades. The fact that he was a former Grand Master was the only reason they were even willing to talk things out. The Left Hand remained mute, as Cotelin had nominated himself to be my advocate. I wasn't sure what good it was going to do, though. I had broken the rules and the Brotherhood loved its rules.

It wasn't my fault things turned out this way. I did warn him. The fact is, I'd spent the last twenty years of my life being trained by a sadistic killer and serving as his pet assassin. The Brotherhood, and especially the Academy, had too many rules and regulations that went against by training and instincts. Couple that with my own level of power which, not to speak too highly of myself, is far from apprentice level? It was a bad decision all around.

After a few hours of heated discussion, the members of my impromptu tribunal got up to leave. Cotelin had ended up talking to someone via holoterminal in heated whispers, most likely to the higher ups on the Council, and they had obviously come to some arrangement. Leaning back in my uncomfortable chair, I just zoned out and let the old man handle it. I knew he would. The power and influence the Grand Masters wielded was immense.

Cantor was the first one to sweep out of the room. "He's obviously dangerous, Jac," he muttered as he marched past us. "What the hell made you think bringing him here was a good idea?"

Cotelin had no response but a grim smile. Even I wasn't sure what made him induct me into the Brotherhood. I could have ditched Dromund Kaas and kept things as they were, but he had been insistent on bringing me into the fold.

When the others had left the room, Cotelin and I were left in silence. I pushed myself up to my feet and stretched. We'd been sitting there for hours. Somehow I had managed to remain a free and, thankfully, unkilld man. I wasn't sure how things would play out when I returned to the Academy. I had a sneaking suspicion that I would be unwelcome there now.

Cotelin got up and turned to me. "I've taken care of this situation," he said, leaning back against the desk. "It took more than a few favors, but given the... situation with the Academy, I have convinced them to elevate you to a rank deserving of your talents. "

Whoa. That must have taken more than a few favors. I hated owing the Grand Master anymore than I already did, but I was grateful not to be further subjected to the training and promotion system of the Brotherhood. "So what happens now?" I was curious. I had only had a basic overview of what the Brotherhood was and how it operated. The One Sith had focused on master and student teachings, with little oversight from the Sith Lords.

"You'll join Taldryan and remain my apprentice."

"Um... Taldryan?" I asked. I waved vaguely at the door where Keirdagh Cantor had left in a huff. "The place with the Aedile that hates me?"

"That place," Cotelin confirmed. "The Council would only accept you into our ranks if I kept a... close eye on you."

"Doesn't seem like much of an inconvenience," I pointed out. "You've got that surveillance thing down to an art form, huh?"

Cotelin didn't answer. Since we had joined forces, so to speak, he had always kept a careful watch over me. It was like he expected me to suddenly snap one day, and he had to be there to prevent it from happening. I wasn't a big fan of being treated like a ticking thermal detonator, but it wasn't like I could do anything about it. We were bonded. Always. We had a two-way street between us that kept us connected and constantly aware of each other.

"It's time to go." Cotelin walked towards the door, expecting me to follow him. I did.

"Where are we going now?" I asked, shuffling slowly after him.

"To your new home," he said without looking back. "To Taldryan."

I sighed and followed him out of the office. It was hard to imagine a warm welcome when we reached the House. Based on Cantor's reaction, and the whole "secret apprentice" thing, odds were I wouldn't fit in there anymore than I did at the Academy. Which was okay by me. I preferred working alone. Hopefully, being part of the Brotherhood wouldn't get in the way of my real goals. As we walked out into the cool, night air of the perpetually darkened Antei, I steeled myself for what would come.

I had passed the first trial. Now I had to get through the next one.

The End