**Experiment: 458**

**Manji Keibatsu Sadow**

The Consul of Naga Sadow's study, nestling within Sadow Palace on Sepros, was a dark, forboding place, illuminated only by a few red glow-lamps and the luminescence beaming from various alchemical containers scattered across the worktops. Behind an expansive desk that had seen any number of occupants, Macron Sadow sat, his scarred, ghoulish face lit up by the glowing datapad before him.

As he frowned, flicking through the latest batch of reports from his subordinates, a small symbol began to blink insistently on the upper corner of the screen. Macron's eyes flashed to the symbol, and widened- it was a call-sign that he hadn't seen in what felt like years. Tapping the symbol, the madman felt a giggle creeping from his vocal chords.

"You took your time, Master..."

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The stinking vista of Sriluur's capital city, Al-Campur, stretched out before Manji as he strolled down the landing ramp of the Kyataran fighter he'd 'appropriated' from the Keibatsu hangars. Wrinkling his nose in disgust, the Sadowan waved curtly at the rusting droids hovering nearby in case he needed refuelling.

"Fill 'er up," he shouted, raising his voice to be heard over the background thrum of the bustling spaceport. "You'll get the creds if she's still in one piece when I get back!"

Without waiting for a response, the Keibatsu continued walking, pulling up the hood of the oversized, dust-coloured cloak he was wearing as he pushed his way through the crowds of people pouring into the spaceport terminus. Humans rubbed shoulders with representatives of most of the other races of the galaxy- crime bosses that they were, the Hutts didn't discriminate, offering jobs to any being with the capacity to do them. Large, imposing Houk predominated, and armed Gamorreans stood at either side of the terminus as a makeshift security force, testament to that philosophy.

Manji couldn't explain exactly why now had felt like a good time to leave the house he'd built on the outskirts of Inazawa and to travel back to Sepros; he'd simply felt something in his bones, the lust for adventure, battle and danger. More than that, he'd felt a need for kinship, to reconnect with the friends he'd left behind. The feelings weren't new, but they'd been stronger than usual, and something had compelled him to leave Kyataru.

*Just a short trip*, he thought. *Maelous wants some help with this hunt- I'll bring him back his hounds, have a few drinks for old time's sake then get back to Kyataru.*

Manji was jolted out of his idle musings as the walls of the terminus receded around him, revealing the disgusting splendour of Al-Campur in greater detail. The Vong had left devastation in their wake, but he could see the skeletons of reconstruction- the Hutts had reclaimed Sriluur as theirs in the wake of the Vong invasion. Buildings were piled up on top of each other in a higgledy-piggledy fashion, covered with graffiti, rubbish and all the signs of people living a miserable existence. Plumes of smoke and fumes clouded the sky, the stink of 60,000 people creating vapour trails behind the few speeders and personal transports brave enough to zip between the overcrowded high-rises. The city stank like a cesspit, tainted by fumes from the copper processing plants that surrounded it, feeding off Sriluur's most abundant natural resource.

Masking his disgust behind another swathe of ragged cloth that covered his nose and mouth, Manji stamped down the grubby steps leading down to street level. He'd done his research on the flight over; Sriluur hosted a thriving black market, selling everything from prohibited blasters, to red sand, to the eggs of a menagerie of rare creatures. He was sure to find somebody dealing in dark wolves- and if not, they'd know where he could look. Warrior-born though the Keibatsu was, he’d spent enough time on Sepros to know exactly where he could find what he was after.

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The cantina looked like any number of others across the galaxy- a stained, dirty dive full of customers as greasy as the beakers in which the local foul liquor was served. The faded sign over the door, written in Aurebesh, gave no clues as to what the locals called the place. Heads turned briefly as Manji stepped through the door, pulling back his hood, then turned away when they realised the Sadowan was not (outwardly, at least) a threat. Striding to the bar, the Keibatsu caught the eye of the grizzled Weequay leaning against it.

"I'll have the least poisonous thing you've got," Manji smirked. The Weequay scowled in response, pulling a glass from under the bar and filling it with a brackish, foaming liquid.

"There y'go," he snarled in Huttese, slamming the glass down on the bar. "Only slightly toxic. For ***humans***."

Taking the glass, Manji perused it for a second, then his one-eyed gaze flicked back to the sneering Weequay.

"I was after something a little more... *exotic*," he said, lowering the glass. "Less... legal. If you follow?"

A strand of the Dark Side, snaking away from the aura that permanently surrounded the Keibatsu, trickled into the Weequay's head. His expression twitched into a frown.

"You mean... the Black Pit?" he muttered. "I don't know... the Hutts don't like-"

"What the Hutts don't know can't hurt them," Manji said, forcing his will into the bartender's mind. The Weequay's face relaxed, and he nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Follow me," he muttered, turning away from the bar and towards a steel door almost hidden between the shelves of alien liquor.

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Snarling, snapping creatures leapt up at the walls of their shielded pen, angrily trying to attack the bipedal beings holding them captive. Wiping a smear of dirt and grease from his face, the Houk beastmaster on the right side of the forcefield grinned widely at Manji, gesturing towards the dark wolves within.

"There y'are, *sir*," he growled. "Dark wolves, as you wanted. Will y'be wanting them wrapped up?"

Raucous laughter burst out from the insalubrious mishmash of aliens standing around this particular part of Sriluur's black market. All clad in makeshift armour or overalls and with an assortment of weapons through their belts, they were paying special attention to the robed figure in their midst. Without sparing them a glance, Manji turned to the Houk beastmaster, meeting his gaze.

"Deliver them all to my shuttle," he said quietly, his voice cutting through the aliens' hilarity.

"A-all?" the Houk spluttered, his expression darkening. "You know how much these beasts cost, offworlder?"

Behind the two men, the aliens exchanged glances, beginning to slowly move into a loose circle around the Keibatsu. The Houk continued unabated, waving his hands in the air.

"They're twenty thousand creds apiece! Now, if you've got that kind of money to burn, we can talk, but looking at you..."

Manji let out a barely imperceptible sigh. His hands shifted inside the voluminous sleeves of his robe, edging towards the hilts of his sabers.

"Twenty each is ridiculous," he said, lip curling into a sneer. "I'll give you eight for the five of them."

Silence dominated the room. Then one of the aliens, a bulky Trandoshan, stormed forwards and grabbed Manji by the shoulder.

"You insssult usss-" he managed to say, before the Pontifex whirled into action, a swirling black-and-silver vortex of death. The Trandoshan's severed arm dropped with a heavy thump to the floor, but before he could even draw breath to scream, twin lightsaber blades thunked into his eyesockets, ending his existence.

For a moment, only the deadly thrum of lightsabers filled the silence, then a torrent of blaster fire sprang into life as the aliens drew their weapons and opened fire. Manji leapt towards them like a black-cloaked shadow of death, his weapons carving intricate figures-of-eight in the air as he ripped them through flesh and bone alike. The Houk beastmaster cowered back against the pen, the dark wolves within unleashing frenzied barks and growls at the carnage going on outside their sanctuary. One by one, the aliens thudded lifelessly to the dusty floor of the black market, until only the Houk remained, the tip of Manji's blade hovering directly in front of his throat.

His face flecked with blood and grime, the Keibatsu grinned brightly at the beastmaster, his eyes wide and unsettling.

"So," he said, his voice jovial. "Eight thousand creds, yes?"

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Sweat dripped to the floor of the Ragnos Cathedral training room as Maelous went through his forms almost unthinkingly, the crimson lightsaber an extension of his body through the Force. As he brought the blade scything upwards to sever an imaginary foe cleanly in two, he heard hurried footsteps thudding towards him.

"Aedile?" said the worried-sounding servant, clutching his datapad like a talisman. "There's a delivery for you in the hangar, sir..."

Deactivating his blade, Maelous turned to face the servant with a scowl.

"Of what? And who from?" he demanded, irritated at having his workout interrupted.

"Dark wolves, sir. He said he was called... um... *Dokugan-Ryu*," the servant stammered, clearly ill at ease. "He said that'd mean something to you..?"

**KPN Manji Keibatsu Sadow (Krath) / House Marka Ragnos of Clan Naga Sadow**