

So this is how things go down. Bentre felt his body slip back into a familiar ready stance, his legs spreading slightly into the barest resemblance of a crouch. His eyes took in the features of the room. It was much akin to the training room where he had spent countless hours. It was in rooms just like this one he had slowly sharpened himself into a warrior, the crucible in which his earliest foundations had been laid by Daedric Turrelles. There was less of a determination in his eyes as his gaze returned to the figure standing before him. The Corellian's face was twisted in an obvious expression of irritation and disgust.

"Is this really how we are going to do this?" Stahoes practically spit the words out as he brought his lightsaber up. "I mean seriously, how **many** of these encounters with supposed dark doppelgangers does one Sith have to contend with in his lifetime?"

The not-Bentre tilted its head to the side at these words, with a mouth twisted in a tight smirk. It mimicked the Shadow's motions perfectly, but the weapon was yet unactivated.

"You really are quite a well-mannered little specter, you know that right?" The Sith shifted his hands on the unfamiliar hilt, and thumbed his weapon to life, bathing the surrounding room in a fiery red light. "I mean, a wolf strikes his prey before it can realize what is happening. Instead, you stand there as if you have nothing to fear. You are like an insolent child."

"The pot which called the kettle black," the raspy words were low and familiar. "You never give thought to the dangers which lie just out of sight. You believe you transcend your peers without question. You regard the weaker as dirt, and the stronger as mere obstacles. You have no sense of friend or ally, save the Twi'lek." Not-Bentre raised a weapon, identical to the one that The weapon ignited with a sapphire-blue blade. The copycat brought the weapon up, clutching it in a hammer grip, leaning on one leg as though ready to charge.

"What do you know about me, ghost? You are just another delusion conjured by some dusty artifact. You are no more unsurmountable than the visions in the Sunken Temple or the nightmares on Dentavii. You are nothing more than yet another bad dream. I have more than enough of such things to deal with right now and at least half of those are a lot scarier than you."

"Sometimes I forget how much I like to talk." Launching itself toward Stahoes, the ghost brought its weapon around in a smooth, wide stroke. Bentre brought his weapon up to block hard, causing sparks to fly between the two weapons. Acting quickly, the Sadowan tried to force his opponent back. He wanted to knock this thing off balance. He wanted to try and end this nonsense quickly.

As he pushed back, Stahoes found none of the resistance he had expected. His weapon passed harmlessly through the air. As quickly as it had struck the doppelganger had withdrawn to a point almost as far away as it had been before it had charged. It was still wearing a wide, condescending smile. The Corellian found himself loathing the same grin he had seen thousands of times in the mirror.

“Isn’t this a little cliched though, seriously?” Bentre spoke the words slowly, trying to gather his thoughts. “Isn’t the whole bit of ‘facing yourself’-” he spoke the last words with a dramatic flourish before snorting. “Isn’t all that nonsense supposed to be about showing the hero was a kriffing jerk he’s been? Aren’t you supposed to show him all the errors of his ways. I thought your sort were supposed to play the Jedi, trying to bring redemption around in the lives of folk? Otherwise, I would think you’d be trying to torment me for my sins or some jazz like that.” Shaking his head, the Human stepped forward, intent to strike out at the smirking apparition. The blow was easily deflected, as though Not-Bentre knew the attack was coming hours in advance.

“You assume this is all some tale of heroism?” The specter’s chuckle was gravely, and made Bentre want to grind his teeth together. “You believe I am some obstacle like your Atra, or some measuring stick like Tasha’ve! Or perhaps you think I am some ill-devised attempt at distraction?” It reached out and tapped the crimson blade of Stahoes’s weapon with its own almost playfully.

“You,” Bentre charged forward, his face twisted in anger, “are nothing compared to me.” Squaring his shoulders, the Shadow threw everything he had into the swing. For a moment, it appeared like the strike would make its mark. Perhaps it would silence this thing, so he could uncover the rest of the cavern.

At the last moment, Not-Bentre brought its weapon up in a fierce upward slash. It met the Corellian evenly, stopping both weapons where they had made contact. In an attempt to taking advantage of their close quarters, Bentre tried to force his weapon sideways. He felt if he could break the lock and duck his opponent’s lightsaber, he might be able to skewer it cleanly.

“That you see,” the specter forced the crimson blade back slowly, “is where we differ. I know what I am. You seem to be the one confused here.” The smirk on the ghost’s face grew larger as the blue blade approached its opponent. “I am strength. I walk in the light without fear. I fight the kinds of battles you only wish you were able to. You are but a daydream you sad little boy.”

“It can’t be true,” Bentre growled, trying to force his weapon sideways. “That’s impossible.”

“You are fighting a dark facsimile of the man you believe to be. Aren’t we past such semantics? Bentre Stahoes is nothing more than the lingering remains of a dream.” Not-Bentre pushed his sapphire weapon closer to the Shadow, vicious intent flashing in its eyes.

“I am not some child. I am not some brainless soldier. I am not some tool to be used!” With each statement, Bentre’s voice became a little louder, and he was visibly shaking. “I am Bentre *kriffing* Stahoes! I am a Sith! I am **real!**”

The supposed-apparition deactivated his lightsaber, and raised his hands so his palms faced Bentre. Its weapon hit the ground with a clatter, vanishing from sight amongst the rocks on the cavern floor. "You can't strike me even when I am disarmed, boy. You cannot harm me despite your **most** strenuous efforts. As a poet we are both familiar with once said, '*the dream cannot bring harm to the dreamer.*' So it is between you and I."

"If I can't harm you, then why are you stalling?" The Sith smiled a little as a thought occurred to him.

"Perhaps it isn't this one who is stalling?" Not-Bentre shrugged without breaking its stance. "You are the one with the lightsaber after all." It tilted its head in a mocking manner. "You are fearful and you know it in your heart of hearts. Because you know when a dreamer awakes, the dream surely dies. You clench onto this flash of an existence like a child to a stuffed animal. You boast of strength, but project weakness in your every step. You allow Atra, Locke, Marcus and the rest to step on you. Even your Master Daedric recognizes you for what you are even as you serve in his vacated position. Aspire as you might to greater things, who knows a man better than himself?"

A low growl rose in Stahoes's throat as he charged forward. He was a wolf, not a sheep nor a pup. He was a hunter, and a warrior first and foremost. He would not allow this thing to dissuade him from his mission and his path. He would not be denied power and he would not be denied prestige.

I will cut this thing and all who stand against me down with a steadied hand.

The Sith brought his crimson weapon down hard. The weapon was destined to miss its mark. Not-Bentre was as quick on its feet as its counterpart, and evaded the haphazard attack with a skip and a quaint chuckle. Its eyes flashed with humor and derision.

How many opponents have seen this gaze? Bentre found himself wondering. *You would almost think he was a little crazed. He keeps going on about battles and who is real and-* Stahoes stopped mid-thought and smiled. Meeting gazes with the apparition, the Shadow deactivated his own weapon, and clipped it to his belt.

"On second thought, I think that I am quite alright. I don't need to cut you down with a lightsaber to prove anything to you. I *am* Bentre Stahoes. Be I dream, apparition, conscience of figment of the imagination doesn't matter." With a practiced hand, the Sith plunged his mechanized hand into his jacket and withdrew a worn blaster and fired.

Each bolt hit Not-Bentre squarely and the figure collapsed to the ground almost silently.

Ignore me as you like, boy. The gravely voice cooed in his ear, though much weaker than normally. *In time I will show you the error of your ways. One day the dreamer will awaken.*

“It doesn’t matter in the end.” Bentre spoke aloud, as though to reassure himself. He watched as the form of the doppelganger began to fade away into wisps of smoke. “If I am a dream, I will still fight to the bitter end.”

Bentre Stahoes, Pin # 14185