

Atra Ventus #11708
Polarity Shift Entry

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A Taste Of What Could Be



The rosy light of dawn broke through the dark pallor of the bed chamber, casting its rays through the ornate windows and directly onto the sleeping occupants. The unfortunate Umbaran — who happened to have turned to face the opening during his slumber — groaned somewhat through the fog of unconsciousness as his sensitive eyes reacted to the sudden illumination. There was something to be said about the cruelty of the light, and that something was most certainly looping through the Praetor's thoughts as he stirred.

The man, Atra Ventus, slowly forced his right eye to open only to wince and shield his face with his left arm. It had been, admittedly, not one of his smarter ideas. Maybe if he had turned over first he would have spared himself the sudden agony. He couldn't be blamed for it though, as was the case with any and all actions that took place during the process of waking — save for the damnable 'morning people', which Atra was very much not counted among.

A heavy sigh escaped him as he shifted onto his back. His arm fell to rest against his forehead while the Umbaran stared at the ceiling with blurred vision. Atra blinked several more times as he willed his eyes to focus, reaching up with his right hand to rub the sleep out of his eyes. He yawned quietly as he went through his mental preparation for the day. Pushing back at his own inner darkness and replacing it with a facsimile of the light had become almost second nature to him. Like he had done so many times before, Atra called to the power that lay dormant within him and... nothing happened.

Confusion fluttered across his mind and chased away the remaining fatigue from his thoughts. Again, Atra flexed the often used muscle that was his connection to the Force and found it utterly absent. His sheet slipped down to his waist as his torso raised, exposing the mangled tapestry of scars that was his flesh. The muscles of his abs clenched just beneath his skin as he shifted upright and glanced quickly around the room. Atra's grey, gold-flecked eyes took in his surroundings and found absolutely nothing changed at all from the night before.

He remained propped up with his elbows sinking into the mattress beneath him, still unsure what to make of what he was feeling — or rather, what he wasn't. A soft breath flowed from between his barely parted lips as the wheels continued to turn over the possibilities. Atra turned to gaze at the sleeping form beside him, lost within the shroud of the covers and her own silken hair. He shifted onto his side, carefully, and began to reach out to wake her before stopping himself. It would be more prudent to explore it on his own first, he decided, than to ask questions that could not yet be answered.

Turning himself around once more, Atra planted his feet firmly on the cold ground. The cuffs of his pants nearly hid his bare feet from sight as the thin fabric hung loose around his legs. The black garment provided a harsh contrast against the near porcelain quality of his pale flesh. He felt... heavy. His hands gripped the edge of the mattress on either side of his legs, steadying him as he acclimated to the different sensation. Beyond that, even more startling, was

the complete silence within his thoughts. The Praetor had always been partially aware of his powers at all times. They were a constant buzz at the back of his mind as he used the Force as a crutch to maintain control over his emotions. That awareness, that dependence, was now utterly absent.

The very emotions he so readily controlled in the past clawed away at his insides, as if only just becoming aware of their newfound freedom. His dominant right hand pressed against his chest protectively in response to the sudden surge of pain. Atra's pulse beat wildly through his veins as his breathing quickened and sweat began to drip from his brow. A veritable maelstrom of sensations struck him simultaneously. Fear, grief, anger, resentment, and regret exchanged blow after blow upon him in an unrelenting torrent. The Umbaran slid off the bed and collapsed to his knees, dropping his forehead to press against the ground as he fought to keep from curling into a ball.

"I can't," Atra managed through gasps. It was like countless wounds opened anew all at once and the shock of it threatened to drive him mad. The sound of the sheets shifting behind him caught his attention, sending a sudden wave of panic through him. Clarity followed in its wake with the certainty that he just couldn't let her see him in that state. Grinding his teeth together, Atra pushed off the ground and made for his escape... only to crash face first into the still closed door. He groaned audibly from a mixture of pain and frustration. He had realized all too late that he had tried to open the door with a tendril of power that he no longer had access to. The door hissed open as his fingers worked across the access panel and triggered the temporary release. Atra slipped through the opening as soon as it was wide enough to allow his passage, knowing it would close immediately behind him.

The hallway was near empty save for the distant footsteps of the morning patrols. That fact alone brought a small measure of relief to the Praetor, but it wasn't enough. He needed complete solitude far away from anyone who could stumble upon him. He turned down the hall and broke into a sprint, his bare feet slapping against the ground as he focused on his breathing. Even without the Force he was able to maintain a measure of athleticism; the Obelisk philosophy for perfection of body and mind benefitted him with physical competency. Still, each breath brought a renewed burning to his muscles that made him all too aware of his body's limitations.

The feeling was completely unsettling compared to what he was accustomed to.

Shadows gave way to light as the Umbaran broke out into the main hall of the Temple of Sorrow. He practically jumped from step to step as he made his descent from the entrance to the ground below, making a path towards the nearby forest. Atra winced more than once as stone and debris cut through the flesh of his feet and left specks of crimson in his wake.

Flashes of light stung his sensitive eyes as his muscles began to burn, locking up and making his movements difficult. Exhaustion overtook him suddenly and sent him falling to the ground without warning. Atra didn't know exactly how long he had been running but it hadn't been nearly long enough. The images and feelings still cut deep through his mind, leaving the Umbaran with no recourse other than to curl into a ball among the foliage and ride it out.

At some point, his anxiety and panic had given way to exhaustion and caused the Praetor to slip in and out of consciousness. There was no means of gauging the passage of

time within the imposed darkness of the forest. Only Atra's internal cycle could give him even a clue towards how long he had lain there, if it hadn't been thrown off by the ordeal. Tears, unknowingly staining his cheeks, turned the dirt to mud as it stuck to his skin. His breathing was finally growing more even as the fog lifted from his thoughts and allowing a semblance of clarity.

"Why," Atra murmured quietly to the empty the space. His throat was hoarse despite its lack of use, causing his voice to take on a rasping quality. "Why now... and not back then?"

Memories followed the words, painting a picture he had ignored for so many years. He was no longer on Sepros, but rather another world, another system. The moss covered ground gave way to the soft yet firm quality of a mattress and a light touch landed on his cheek. The touch sent a warmth surging through him that was as undeniable as the scent reaching his nose. "It's your turn, love," a soft, feminine voice intoned from behind him. The sound was like silk running up his spine, despite the notable grogginess associated with it.

"You have no proof," Atra muttered in response, refusing to stir from the bed.

The hand on his cheek slid down his neck and over his shoulder, leaving a trail of goosebumps. "Have you forgotten so quickly, Mr. Ventus?" the woman chuckled as she pressed her face into his back. "The mother doesn't require proof."

Atra groaned and began to sit up, turning to face the woman with impossibly blue eyes as she tried to bury her face deeper into her pillow. "You're lucky I love you, Renora," the Umbaran responded with a bright smile.

"I think you're going to have to prove that when you get back, love," Renora Viru responded. She wiggled her eyebrows playfully before pulling the thin sheet over her head.

He stood and walked towards the door, a voice inside him screaming to stay but within the confines of the memory he could only retrace his steps. The door to the conjoining room hissed open to reveal its contents. The space was relatively tiny, but comfortable. There was a row of stuffed animals of various types lining either side of the tiny bed, and a small lamp in the corner if needed. There was no one to be seen, though the sheets on the bed had a notably curious bump in the middle that appeared to be sniffing. The door shut behind him and Atra's Umbaran eyes had no issues discerning the shapes as he approached the bed and kneeled down. He tugged the sheet back slowly, revealing the tiny, raven-haired girl that had been hiding beneath. She sniffled again, fighting back tears as she wiped her forearm across her eyes.

"Hey there, Special K," Atra said softly. He leaned against her bed and reached out to softly stroke her hair back. "You're okay, I got you."

The little girl clung to his forearm as he touched her. She looked at him with blue, gold-flaked eyes that seemed to shimmer as her tears accumulated. The large Umbaran climbed into the small bed and pulled the toddler into his arms. "Another bad dream, Keira?"

"Bad... man," she managed with small shudders, pressing in closer.

"It was just a dream, you're safe," Atra whispered. He spoke the words, and in the scene of the memory he meant them, but inside he was screaming with rage. He remained with his daughter until her breathing evened out and he was certain sleep had claimed her, yet his mental voice was still in turmoil.

That internal scream was then answered by the very loud, very real sound of Renora crying out in pain from the other room. The memory turned into a nightmare in a flash, his body completely locked as she called for help, for anything, and he couldn't give it to her. Fear and agony rang in chorus from beyond the closed door, reaching a crescendo before giving way to a painful silence. The pounding of his blood in his ears sounded like the drums of war, looming over him for what felt like eternity before a small sound came from the girl in his arms.

"Daddy," the weak voice hit him like a punch to the face as she slipped from his grasp. The toddler stared at him with wide eyes as a wash of crimson began to spread from an impossibly small wound in her chest. Her skin paled quickly, Keira's limbs falling limp at her sides. Again he was screaming inside, completely powerless against his own inner torment without the Force to aid him. Her lips opened again, an unnatural act set within her dead features. "Fath—"

"—er!" Keira shouted as gripped his shoulders, worry written across her features. "What are you doing out here?!"

Atra blinked several times, his gaze taking in the canopy above him once more. He was back on Sepros... back in reality. The thin, blue fabric draped around Keira's arms rested lightly on his exposed chest as her fingers gripped his shoulders. He turned his focus to her and found her staring at him with her blue, gold-flaked eyes. "I sensed... something. I thought it might be you but it didn't feel right. Not like normal—"

"I've lost my connection to the Force," Atra interrupted bluntly, coughing as his throat burned at the sudden use. It was the only explanation for the reality he was currently facing. It fit too well to be coincidence.

"But, how?"

The woman, cloned from his daughter's cells by the very man who had killed her, kept staring at him with those unmistakable eyes filled with worry. "I don't know," Atra replied with a growl. He didn't need the Force to know how Keira was feeling as she helped him into a sitting position, as her emotions were written all over her face. He had to avoid her gaze, the old wounds far too fresh and opened anew.

"We need to get you back to the temple, father. I'm sure they can help you—"

Anger and perhaps something more seized control within the confines of Atra's mind, causing him to lash out. "I am **not** your father," he suddenly bellowed. The young woman shrank back suddenly, curling inward and hanging her head as if she had been slapped. Her hands remained somewhat raised, wanting to reach out to him. "My daughter is dead," Atra continued as he refused to look at her, "you're just a wraith wearing her face."

Though he may have been staring daggers into the ground, the Praetor couldn't stop himself from hearing the wet sound of a falling tear. "You're right," Keira spoke softly, "I'm sorry |—"

"Go! Just go," he roared.

A flurry of gray and blue fabric crossed his vision momentarily as the woman rushed off back towards the temple. Atra remained motionless where he was, regret and pain mixing together as the rage faded. Why had he done that? It was beyond harsh, though partially true. The fact remained, however, that the clone existed. She was merely searching for her place in the galaxy and had hoped that he could fit into that. How had he answered those wishes?

With malice.

The Praetor shifted, finally, as he crossed his legs and placed his hands on either knee. His connection may have been gone but the tenants of meditation remained, and even non-Force Sensitive individuals were known to practice it. Perhaps he could manage to find some clarity, or at least a reprieve from his emotions. Atra focused on his breathing and the steady rise and fall of his chest. He shut out the sounds of the forest around him and listened only to the constant beat of his heart. With his eyes closed he felt the world fade away into nothingness until only he remained.

He replayed the events in his mind, looking for the cause of his fiery response. His brow furrowed as he pushed back at the flames of anger, fighting to keep his mind at ease. It hadn't been the fact she had called him 'father', that much he could tell, but then what was it? As he chewed it over, realization came to him like a puzzle clicking into place.

"I don't want help," Atra muttered as he opened his eyes. The shock of having to face the full brunt of his emotions after so long had blinded him from the truth of things, and it was the suggestion of being 'fixed' and having his connection restored that had caused his anger. The Praetor felt like a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. Without the Force, Atra no longer held power. It was that power that carried with it so much responsibility, and the need to fight a war that had consumed his life. Emotion swelled within him again as he thought back to his lost family, those fleeting years of happiness.

"Why couldn't I have been freed earlier?" he murmured with regret. The urge to let his sadness flow was strong, but Atra managed to push it back. The past could not be changed, but perhaps his future could.

Atra rose shakily to his feet and tried to control his breathing as his muscles still ached from his previous efforts. He began the slow walk back to the Temple of Sorrow, plagued with further uncertainty. He still didn't know what had caused the sudden change, the undeniable loss of his Force powers. So long as that remained an unknown, there was the chance that his abilities could be restored.

The thought terrified him more than anything he had ever experienced before.

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