

As the swirling blues of hyperspace gave way to the streaming white lines of regular space, Bentre straightened up. As the lines became a canvas of stars, the old smuggler gave a momentary glance at the Corellian before turning back to his instruments. "You seem awfully ansy for a man who is coming home, boyo."

"Haven't you dealt with Clan Naga Sadow long enough to know what I face back there?" Bentre's eyes narrowed as familiar globe of Sepros grew larger in view. "There are some that I can trust such as the Consul, the Jedi, my apprentice, the Twi'lek, the Zeltron, the Snow Dragon," Stahoes rattled off descriptors, daring not to drop any names, "and even the Betrayer and the Apostate. However, there are those whom have not earned my trust. Those such as—"

"-Trayas," a voice crackled out, interrupting the Shadow mid-sentence before disappearing into a thick cloud of static.

"Speak of the devil," a bit of nostalgia hit the Corellian as he had spoken the words so many times before as a BTL, "and he shall appear."

"Repeat—" the voice came across the comm with a snap. "-is DARTH Tray—" more static broke up the words. "-eet you on la - ng." Dread coiled in Bentre's stomach like a serpent preparing to strike.

"Can you try that again, Trayas?" Waving aside the protest of the freighter's captain, the Warrior compressed the transmit button on the archaic comm. "Repeat your transmission, Trayas. We are getting some interference out here." Silence followed his request for several moments. Then, pain etched across Stahoes' forehead like lightning.

"Do not give me that trite tone, child." The wretched witch's voice filled his thoughts, though muffled as though spoken through a thick fog. "Do not forget that you are as disposable as any of the rabble in the Warhost. Bring the artifacts you found onto the landing pad. Don't think that you can hide any secrets from me, boy."

Bentre closed his eyes before he spoke again. "Land the ship at the landing pad. Give me just enough time to disembark and then depart. I will ensure your credits are transferred into the specified account as agreed. Thanks for your service, guys." The Corellian opened his eyes and looked at the elderly pilot shifting uncomfortably in his seat. "I will contact you in the future if I have some other work you can assist with. Give Tokk my best."

"Aye, lad. Best of luck to you." The old man grunted as he led the ship down toward its destination.

Trayas looked up at the sky as the roar of the engines filled her ears. Keeping her hood low enough to barely cover her eyes, she nodded to herself. The dog has come as he was bidden. The ship did not land as expected however. Instead, it hovered over the landing pad for several moments. The hatch opened, and like a cat pouncing, a dark form shot out from the interior. The Sith watched as the body hit the ground with a roll before laughing. Holding his side, Bentre swept hair back from his face to reveal a face full of mirth.

"I guess the landing was a little harder than I had expected," he let out a chuckle followed by a hiss of pain.

"Charming," Trayas muttered. "You brought the artifacts as promised?"

"Well, sort of." Stahoes shook his head. "I found a Jedi holocron while I was there. Nothing too interesting. I am not even sure if it still works." The man extended his metallic hand, showing off the golden cube.

"Was there nothing else?" the older woman's voice came out akin to a growl. "For all your efforts this is all that you brought back? What about the Marconikk Holocron?"

"Nothing quite like that, unfortunately. I mean they found a nice Sith piece but a lot of the stuff they had was nothing more than junk." Bentre smiled sheepishly. The foolish crone seemed to be taking his word for matters hook, line and sinker. As the Corellian began to walk past the angrily sputtering woman, he felt cold talons creeping along the sides of his head.

"You really expected to hide things from me?" The angry voice of Trayas filled his thoughts. "Are you trying to be funny, you mangy little mutt?"

The glowing red holocron floated from within Bentre's clothing. The Warrior reached up with his flesh and blood hand. The sound of crackling electricity caused his ears to perk up as his fingers brushed its warm surface. A white bolt of energy struck the Corellian hard in the chest, knocking him down and causing him to convulse painfully. When the white fingers stopped tracing along his body, Bentre could only hear the sound of his own breathing for several moments. The smell of singed hair and burnt flesh filled his nostrils. As the fog cleared, the pain was only punctuated by the slow footsteps of the decrepit Sith Lord. Stahoes could feel her warm breath just behind his ear as she leaned close to him.

"You try to be an alpha again like that, and I will put you down like the flea-bitten animal that you are, Bentre. If I have to discipline you again, expect to get neutered. I won't have a disobedient pet in my employ." There was cruelty in the words that caused a shiver to descend down the Shadow's back. "Do you understand, pup?"

"Fully," Bentre gasped for air as he forced the word out. The woman let out a coo of pleasure at the word.

“With the Marconikk Holocron, I will unlock knowledge that will allow me to rival perhaps even Muz Ashen himself!” The Sith Lord cackled. “I will take over the Clan, and in time I will topple even the Dark Council itself and lead the Dark Brotherhood into a new golden age of darkness! With a dark legion at my fingertips, I will crusade against the Republic, the remnants of the Empire, the First Order, and the alien scum who dwell across the galaxy. All will be re-shaped into an image of *my glory*. All by *my will*.” The laughter died down, and Bentre could feel the cold presence of Trayas in his mind. “You will have to live knowing what you brought upon your fellows. Maybe I will have to start with that *wife* of yours first.”

A fresh wave of pain rippled over Stahoes upon the last words. Some time passed, but he could not tell how much before the pain stopped. By the time that the Corellian had regained his senses, Trayas was gone.

It was all for naught, though. Bentre had been sure to cover his tracks before he had descended. All it had taken was a quick message to Locke, Kiriya, and yes even Muz. Trayas would meet strong resistance long before she had a chance to unlock any secrets from the holocron. Once the holocron was secured, he would have a chance to recover it again. It was a good thing the egotistical old hag had not probed his mind any further. The Force was with him that day. Maybe he was starting to get a hold on this whole treachery and deceit thing. Just a little bit at least.