He turned the saber over in his hand, carefully inspecting the Raaltiiri eel-skin encased in lacquer. That one scrap, the only portion of the skin to have survived years of packing and unpacking, war, intrigue, the ascent and collapse of Grand Masters—it was all that remained of Aran Tonor.

Eiko’s quarters were quiet as he rested on the cushion, meditating.

*You’re known best by the absences you leave*, Eiko thought, flexing his left hand and its mechanical fingers. The old man had taken three fingers with his lightsaber—cut into the night air on Ione, trying to stop Eiko from stealing what Tonor refused to give. A student and a master, one hungry and the other saddened to watch so much potential *rot* into darkness.

He furrowed his brow at the thought. Tonor taught his student as much as he dared, and then he feared he’d given too much. In the old Jedi’s eyes, Eiko was a tangle of the possible—bright, caring, an heir apparent to his studio. And then, in the same breath, Eiko seethed with loss. The death of his godfather, the escape from his home, the drifting lilt of his journey across the galaxy, and the tension of leaving the familiar behind one more time all swirled around in his eyes—and Tonor knew. He knew that this student would either be his heir or his demise, the highest and lowest of what his life had become since he’d gone into hiding.

Eiko had seen that realization, through the blur of his own fury, when he’d hunted Tonor down to snap the invisible collar around his own throat. It was in the pitying eyes of Tonor, one hand outstretched to plead for his wizened life, the other stretched across the stained carpet to find his saber’s hilt. If there was nothing else that he could remember about Tonor, it would be the faded blue of Tonor’s eyes staring up from the corner of the apartment’s living room, reflecting the hot red armory saber and his own glare of hate and fear.

Because when the final blow fell, and Tonor’s body slumped against the wall, that fear had already grown a new shape.

*You never died*, Eiko spoke to the ghost of Tonor, the construct of the man that floated around in his mind. *No, you never died and released me*. *I killed you because I thought I’d be free of you—and because of it, you never left.*

The eel-skin underlay on his saber was supposed to release him, too. The smell of the market by the sea, the last stop that he’d made before stalking down to Tonor’s newest hiding place, finishing the journey that he’d set for himself—everything was still so familiar, even years into the trials of the Brotherhood.

He’d learned, in the end. His meditations always ended with the same feeling of being held in place, supported and restrained by each individual thread. Now, the eel-skin reminded him of the value of each strand, whoever it led to and whatever had brought it into existence.

Eiko opened his eyes and imagined the tendrils stretching out, through the Anchorage, around the thrones of the Brotherhood and the networks of cultivated contacts he’d prepared. What once choked him, tight and restrictive, was a tool in his hands now. He wrapped his finger around one thread and pulled it taut, feeling the tension and the shifting across the line and at its other anchor.

Now, it was responsive.