

Breaking the Ties That Bind

A Submission to the Competition:
Sacrifices



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During the first half of the year 27 ABY, Reiden had learned that his master Kadain Thorne was dying. The older man had tried to hide it, likely for some time. But lately he had been coughing more and more. One day Reiden found a cloth spotted with blood and realized the truth. Reiden had learned much during their months together. He had grown much stronger than before they had met, more so than he had ever thought possible. He was grateful to his master for showing him how to make use of his gifts in the Force. Having lost his family at a young age, Reiden had actually come to view Kadain as a sort of surrogate family member, filling the void left by the death of his parents.

Like any child and a father or grandfather figure, Reiden sought to prove himself to Kadain, to make him proud. Reiden felt like he had been making great progress in his studies and power, but he wanted to experience more of it all. With the realization that Kadain may soon be leaving this world, the young man was unsure of what to do next. The older man was his source of knowledge. But once that source was gone, where would he turn to next? After much contemplation, the answer loomed in Reiden's mind all of a sudden, like a switch had been flipped: the Dark Brotherhood. Aside from Kadain confirming its existence when they first met, Reiden still hadn't learned much about then network of Force-wielders. He needed more answers if he were to seek them out at some point. And that point seemed to be arriving a bit sooner than he had expected.

While Kadain had largely been rendered bedridden for the time being, his body tired and fighting off bouts of fever and fits of violent coughing, Reiden took the opportunity to question his master about the community. The answers came slowly and reluctantly at first. But Reiden impressed upon the old man the importance of continuing his training and his desire to one day join them. Kadain finally relented and informed his apprentice that the Dark Brotherhood made its home within the Antei system. Reiden learned about the various Clans within its ranks and how they all were based in different systems. He heard about the rank structure for its members and how the most power was held by those at the top, and that getting there took time and patience. Or a well calculated strategy, as was typical of many Sith throughout history.

With rapt attention, Reiden took in all of this new information. The more he learned, the greater his desire to seek out the Brotherhood grew. He had always been curious as a child, and that fact had not changed much with age, although it could, at times, get him into trouble by getting involved in things better left alone. But he would not be deterred. He felt rather strongly that this was something that he needed to be a part of. To be around others like him, more than just his master. But at the same time, he knew that a small part of him, deep down, was angered at the fact that his master had held this information back for so long. How could Kadain have kept this from him? Had he not proven himself capable many times by now? Reiden tried to quell the smoldering embers of rage, but a spark always remained, glowing stronger. He did his best to ignore it for the time being.

Reiden continued to go about his days as usual, earning credits any way he could. Most of the time, he would fall back onto the ways of his past and collect debts, or even the occasional bounties. He had no idea what he would need once he decided to seek out and try to join the Brotherhood, but he wanted to be prepared. Reiden would even make some meals for Kadain from time to time, the older man unable to move from bed on bad days. But even so, Reiden still had work to do; training to continue.

However, those embers of anger still seethed within him. Now, the more he ignored it, the more it grew. Once again, Reiden started questioning why Kadain had kept something so important from him. He felt like he had more than earned the right to learn of its secrets, yet his master had held back all along. When they had first met, Kadain had told the younger man that he had been watching him for some time, and that Reiden showed promise. That was why their training had begun. But if there was such promise, why had he felt the need to utilize the deception? Why hadn't he told Reiden more about the Dark Brotherhood sooner? Reiden tried to shake off these questions, but they always lingered in his mind.

After a short time, Kadain showed signs of improvement, although small. His fever had begun to let up a bit. Reiden took hope in this. He would try to learn more from his master. But such was not to be. But yet whenever Reiden would press the old man for more information, he remained tight-lipped. Not wanting to receive such treatment any longer, Reiden stormed out of their safe house and into the night. He quickly walked to the nearest bar and ordered a drink. And then he had another. And then another. As he drank, his anger grew greater. Some local drunk had accidentally bumped into him, and even apologized for it. But Reiden didn't care. He dragged the man outside and began beating him. It took several concerned people from inside the bar to pry the two apart. Reiden's hands ached, but he welcomed the feeling. It had given him strength before, as had anger. He made his way to another bar and ordered one final drink.

He took his drink to a dark corner booth took a seat. As he sat there, a plan slowly began to take form in his mind. What he truly desired now was revenge. He didn't like admitting that to himself, but there it was. Kadain had become like family to him. But family, in Reiden's mind, shouldn't act as Kadain had. They don't keep such important matters to themselves. They don't hold other members back from achieving their full potential. Reiden decided that the only way for him to really gain more power, to grow even stronger still, was to leave Kadain. But simply leaving him behind would not be enough. No, Kadain had to be punished for what he had done. And Reiden would take full advantage of the old man's weakened condition. In truth, it could even be considered showing mercy. The man was old and beginning to grow frail and weak. He knew his master could still put up a fight, but he had seen the sharp decline in wellness, and he had been noticing it for some time now. Reiden even suspected it was why Kadain would so often claim to be attending to other matters and leave him to his own devices while saying that it was the best way to train him. That he would learn better on his own without someone there to coddle him.

As the days went on, Reiden carefully considered his options on how best to exact his revenge. He tried to mask his true feelings and intentions when he was around Kadain, lest his master sense that something may be amiss. But Reiden wouldn't fool himself into believing that he was completely successful. He knew full well that his master was powerful, much more than he was for sure. Reiden hoped that, in his weakened condition, Kadain would not be as perceptive as he may have been otherwise.

It turned out that Kadain's improvement had been a sign of false hope. His condition worsened after about a week longer. It seemed to take more of a toll on him than ever before, and he was coughing up blood more now. Reiden felt that the old man was not long for this world. Despite a strong desire for revenge, he became uncertain as to what he should do. After all, Kadain was like family to him. He had trained him in the ways of the Force and confirmed that the rumors he had heard of the Brotherhood were, indeed, true.

Reiden was torn between those two opposing sides. Each one fighting against the other to take a firm hold of Reiden's will in a horrible tug of war. He hated the feeling of indecisiveness that had welled up inside him. But he could do nothing but continue to think on it. He spent hours mulling over his options, weighing the pros and cons of it all. In the end, he knew he had to make the sacrifice. Kadain had trained him well, and he would have to trust that as he moved forward with his life, as he moved forward on the path towards the Dark Brotherhood.

One night, Reiden lay awake in bed, listening to the soft, steady breathing of his master as he slept. As quietly as he could, Reiden sat up, glancing over at the old man. He steeled his resolve and got out of bed, his feet very softly padding over the floor as he went to his gear and silently drew his blaster, walking over to the bed that Kadain was resting upon. He gazed down at the weakened form that had once been so full of life when they first met a little over a year prior. He felt sickened by what he was about to do, but he knew it must be done. In truth, it would be a mercy. He would be ending his master's suffering, and they would both finally be free. Kadain would be free of this mortal existence, and Reiden would be free of the chains that presently bound him to the older man. He held the blaster out. The cold metal barrel glinted slightly in the moonlight that came in through a crack in the blinds covering the window nearby. Reiden gave his head a slight shake and steeled his resolve. Once again, he felt that anger rise up within him at how Kadain had withheld such vital information from him. He gave a small sneer of disgust. Then his finger tightened and pulled the trigger, a yellow blaster bolt searing into his master's head, killing him instantly. Reiden sank to the ground, filled with both relief and faint sense of sadness at once again being alone in the world.

But he was not truly alone, he realized. There was an entire community waiting for him. The Dark Jedi Brotherhood; that is where he would make his new home. He would find new purpose there, and grow even stronger than before. He put his blaster in its holster and got dressed, gathering his belongings. He paused for a moment and went to Kadain's side.

"Goodbye, master. May the Force guide you on your next journey," he whispered.

Reiden then took what credits he could find among Kadain's belongings and, finally, the man's lightsaber. He looked at the weapon with reverence. He would have his own one day, but this he would keep as a memento of his time training. A symbol of what he will one day become. He clipped it onto his belt and left for the space port to board his ship. He had the astromech droid set the course to the Antei system and the ship took off, beginning the next step of Reiden's journey. He would find the Brotherhood. This sacrifice will not have been made in vain.