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| **Legendary Encounter -May the 4th Event - Vodo Biask Taldrya 3729-** |

The cabin aboard the *Karufr Knight* was ideal, just cooler than comfortable. That was the way he preferred it when he slept. The bed was just as comfortable as it had proven to be these last months in-train with the remnants of Taldrayn’s Navy. The air was cool, his bed was comfortable, but Vodo still found no sleep.

Sleep was rare any more. Clan Taldryan was homeless still as they wandered the stars seeking a new, worthy home away from the Iron Throne and its Justicar, Jac Cotelin. The Consul was driving them into dishonor and oblivion and Vodo could only buck and obstruct so much before Rhylance forced his hand. There would be a coup, but only once all the pieces were in place. He needed trusted men and women in command of the Fleet’s vessels, he needed section heads and midshipman ready to act, and most of all—he needed to be sure the Clan would follow him. The worry, the doubt, and the stress kept him awake.

He lay, staring at the ceiling of his sleeping cabin. The hum of the *Karufr Knight’s* system was all but inaudible but that wasn’t terribly surprising. It was an Upsilon-class shuttle that had been custom fitted for comfort and safety and the sound deadening ensured that the interior was always quiet. It might have as well been as loud as the *Dark Prophet II*’s flight deck for all it mattered. The silence was deafening and he was not going to get any shut eye.

Vodo rolled up into a sitting position and carefully maneuvered his cybernetic legs, reverse-articulated at the knee joint, over the side of the bed. He sat there, shirtless, staring at the mirrored panel occupying the wall in front of his closet. The Warlord was approaching 40 and it was more than showing. Delving for dark secrets, living in anger and simmering passions, and seeking the true power of the Dark Side had taken its toll on him. His once ruddy red-brown skin was now a pale green and tallow. His eyes were beginning to sink back into his skull where they burned an angry yellow, flecked with red. They called those Sith Eyes and he wore them like a badge.

The Brotherhood may have accepted Jedi, and Taldryan along with them, but Vodo remained a disciple of the Sith’s teachings. His anger and his fury were his oldest companions, predating even his induction to the Dark Brotherhood those many years ago. They dwelt deep in his heart and leant him strength in his struggles. Vodo craved power—the power to be free of the Galaxy’s rules, the power to be his own Master. At the moment Commander Rhylance, the Consul of Taldryan, held that power and that made him Vodo’s enemy.

He heard movement beyond his cabin’s door, in the lounge. Vodo rose to his metal feet and padded to the door, opening it. Light from the galley’s refrigeration light spilled out into the lounge occupying the center of the shuttle’s rather generous interior. A small figure stood in front of the open device, silhouetted by the light, determining what to take.

“You ate your ration for the day already,” Vodo said coolly.

The figure tensed for an instant before attempting to dive to the floor. It instead rose into the air and hovered there, rotating until it faced Vodo. It was his son, Zakai. The boy, only eleven, floated there with wide eyes and a mouth stuffed with something out of the refrigeration unit. Vodo waited for the child to chew through the food and swallow it before setting the boy down roughly.

“I was hungry.” The boy said it as a matter of fact.

The insolence inflamed him, “And you’ll continue to be until you’re not this soft—thing. Your mother was soft and I will not have a soft son. I have plans for you; plans that require a strong, capable, hard man at my side.”

Zakai had heard this speech before but he had also been on his father’s bad side much in these last few weeks since meeting him for the first time. The boy’s Mother, Zasati Tryezsch, had secreted him away before Vodo had ever learned of her pregnancy. The tepid reconciliation of the two Dark Jedi had brought about the revelation that Vodo was a father, something he’d always assumed was not his destiny since the accident. Zakai now had the unfortunate roll of son and Apprentice. Vodo was not a patient teacher, or a forgiving Master, even to his adult apprentices.

The boy lowered his defiant chin and addressed Vodo’s feet, “Yes Master”.

Vodo allowed Zakai to wallow under his glare for a few moments before dismissing him with a wave of his hand. Vodo watched the boy scurry into the guest cabin which had been taken over by him on his arrival. The cabin door slid closed but still Vodo followed his Son’s progress getting back into bed through the Force as he himself slid into the plush chair behind a wrap-around desk in the corner. Vodo sat there in silence, the lounge once again dark, and he drummed his fingers on the polished wood of the desk.

Taldryan. Zakai. Zasati.

Vodo grabbed a glass from the shelf across the lounge with the Force and levitated it to his outstretch hand. A decanter of expensive, rare, whiskey followed shortly after. Vodo poured himself a few finger’s measure and swirled the amber liquid in the glass allowing it to breath. He brought it to his lips and sipped. Its warmth filled his mouth and he savored it but it did nothing to wash the sour taste in his mouth that seemed permanent anymore. Jac Cotelin had smashed Taldryan and taken them from their home, his Apprentice, Zasati, had returned to him and revealed a secret love-child, and now-- in the midst of a fleet in exodus preparing for a coup d’etat Vodo now had a small boy to teach and raise.

Nothing was going according to plan! His rise to the Dark Council years ago had heralded great things. He’d been on a trajectory to become the most powerful Dark Jedi in the service of the Grand Master, he had studied and trained to defeat Darth Ashen when the time came, but when the time came—he’d failed. He’d retreated to Kr’Tal and hid behind Taldryan’s formidable fleets. He’d secluded himself upon his generous estate and wallowed. It all infuriated him! Despite all his strength he was still so weak!

The glass sailed across the room, hurled angrily, and shattered against the wall. Vodo stood suddenly and hurled the decanter and everything on his desk at the same wall. His hands searched for something in the dark to throw until they landed on an object set to the side. It was large enough to fill a hand and had quite a heft to it for how delicate it felt. Vodo immediately paused; a small but rational voice warned him not to throw this thing. It was a Holocron.

The steam left him and he collapsed back into his chair, his hand still on the Holocron. He lifted it and brought it before jis face. A Twi’lek, Vodo could see well in the dark, and he studied the cuboid. It was plain aside from delicate and precise bronzium metal pieces that followed the Holocron’s edges. They met at the verticies in fan of small gear teeth. The face of each side was a cloudy white and it was easy when seen in the light, to imagine the interior of the device was hollow. It wasn’t, Vodo knew, from years of experience with the objects. This one was unique, in his experience, though. This was a Jedi Holocron.

It had been one of the last items he’d acquired before Kr’Tal’s fall and it had been put aside and forgotten in the ensuing chaos. He’d only noticed it sitting on a low shelf earlier that day. Vodo was wary to activate the device. It wasn’t unknown for Sith Holocrons to demand a demonstration of commitment to the Dark Side from the one who activated it, often with lethal consequences for those who failed. It wasn’t the Jedi way, he knew, but it was wary caution that had kept him alive surrounded by Sith.

Even if there was no life or death consequence for activating it, most Holocrons had a gate Keeper, an imprint of the Master who had constructed the device, and if the Gate Keeper did not find you worthy it was all but impossible to pry any information from the thing at all. What would the imprint of a long dead Jedi say when presented with Vodo: a half-man, half Cyborg clearly marked and claimed by the Dark Side of the Force. Almost as though he were seeking a laugh Vodo reached out with his senses and activated the Holocron.

A blue-white beam appeared atop the cube and resolved into the standing figure of a humble man wearing a Jedi robe with the hood down, “Hello, I am Master Belth Allusis and you are… Sith.”

A corner of Vodo’s thin mouth curled into a sneering smile, “Hello Master Allusis.”

The projection moved into a stance of rejection, arms folded across its chest, “I have little to say to one such as you.”

“Ah, but you do have *something* you could say to me?” Vodo decided this was a welcome distraction to his sleeplessness.

“I could tell you of the peace and serenity of becoming one with the Force, but I have my doubts whether you would listen”, the small Jedi Master was quite forward with its dislike of him, not unlike the Gate Keepers of the Sith Holocrons he’d accessed.

“Peace? The Force requires no peace” Vodo put the Holocron down on the desk before him and folded his hands contemplatively over his stomach, “but it responds powerfully to emotion.”

“You used the word ‘powerfully’. The Force is a living presence; it flows through us and surrounds us. It is not a tool—there is no consideration of whether the Force should be used powerfully or timidly”, Belth paced back and forth across the top of the cube as he spoke.

Vodo leaned in, “It is certainly a tool. A Bantha is a living creature but its use is in its labor and its produce and the Force is no different.”

The small Jedi ceased pacing and looked up at the face of the one who had activated it, “You think you’re a hard man but I can sense your disquiet. You think your hurt and your pain make you strong? What has hurt and pain ever brought you?”

He was stunned. This Holocron was psychoanalyzing him, “The sacrifices I’ve made have made have made me respected, they have made me feared, and those things have made me powerful. People jump at my command. Ships have moved and fired at my whim.”

“Sacrifice can be a force for good and it can net great benefits, I will not argue that, but to say that all sacrifices are good—or necessary—is naive and foolish”, Belth stood motionless staring at Vodo to make its point.

Vodo’s anger flashed at the long dead Jedi Master, “What do you know of sacrifice!?”

The small Jedi looked somber for a moment while considering its response, “I have no recollection of it, for it happened after the Holocron before you was constructed, but I gave my life so that the Imperial Army of Grand Moff Zallos would be stopped on Bothawui. I sacrificed everything for the cause I believed in. I would venture that you feel strongly that you too would do the same.”

Vodo did feel that way, “I would die to see Taldryan avenged. I would die to see that traitor, Jac Cotelin, meet his just end but that moment does not come without considerable energy and sacrifice.”

“Exactly, and worthy sacrifice should be pursued at just about any cost”, the projection began to pace once more, “but what if the costs are not worth the sacrifice?”

“Specify”, Vodo’s eyes narrowed as he followed the hologram of Master Allusis.

“The Dark Side of the Force is replete with mysteries and secrets that require the sacrifice of your being, your character, and your beliefs. There is no part of you worth sacrificing to gain the powers of the Dark Side, that path only leads to more pain, more hurting, and more suffering”, Belth stopped pacing again and faced away from Vodo, “Can you not see the cycle repeating itself in your own life?”

Vodo was speechless and he sat back in his chair, heavily, as he drew a long slow breath. The Holocron wasn’t saying anything he hadn’t thought himself once or twice. It wasn’t even making a point that hadn’t been demonstrated elsewhere before. No one had ever directed those thoughts at him though and that seemed to make a difference: just hearing it. He saw that he treated his own son like the lowliest, the meanest of Apprentices. He saw that the only woman he’d ever loved now only had a single hand, the result of a harsh lesson he’d inflicted upon her at the death of his other Apprentice. He saw a fleet of ships running through space, pursued by the forces of powerful men, a fleet that he wanted to inflict a schism upon.

His sacrifices were not his burden alone. They rippled out and affected the people he sought most to protect and lead.

Belth Allusis stood quietly until Vodo spoke whereupon he turned around and again looked in the Warlord’s face, “It is too late for me. I am this creature I have created already.”

With warmth and empathy the Jedi replied, “It is never too late.”