

# IMMORTALITY'S PRICE

By Aura Ta'var  
10,000 ABY

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The lost traveler hummed happily to himself as he sat in a large public square surrounded by the almighty Protectors, who were comprised of a variety of different species but a good number of them were Zeltron or part-Zeltron. They sat in a circle around him as they talked amongst themselves, lightsabers on their belts. The man simply took it all in: the sights, the sounds, and the contentment of a long journey finally over. He was an archeologist on the search for the fabled homeland of the Protectors and had finally found it. Years it had taken him and now he was finally here. Words could not express his wonder, awe, and joy.

*The Almighty Protectors at last! I did it.*

The children frolicked around the square, pretending to save the day. Older children sat off to the side, meditating as best they could in the crowded square in a test of concentration. Young men and women trained behind him, impatiently waiting to protect the galaxy. Adults discussed current events as if they could watch them from afar. The older Protectors patiently watched over their students, young and old. Moreover, everything felt peaceful, almost as if all was right in the world. They even wore the Jedi robes as the fables suggested. The man couldn't help but smile, the feeling rather infectious. The lead Protector, a grown man with a dusty-brown beard, finally broke his reverie.

"Welcome to our home, stranger. What do you call yourself?"

"Tiberius, Lord Protector. Simply Tiberius."

The lead Protector raised a brow but continued anyways. "I am no lord. Protector will do."

"Of course, Protector. Sorry. I am just so glad to be here."

"You should not have come. This is not where you belong," replied the Protector patiently.

"But, but I want to be here. I want to learn more about you, our great Protectors, so that I can share your wisdom with the galaxy."

"You already know our story and we come when we are needed. What more is there to learn?"

"Everything is different in person. I wanted to see how great everything was for myself. I want to study you if I can. After all, I'm an archaeologist and I've dedicated my life to learning more about you all, all the way from Aura Tav'ar's founding of the Protectors till now."

The Jedi looked at each other intently, not speaking, but their facial expressions gave their opinions away. Some seemed wary, while others were open to the idea. Finally, a consensus was determined.

“Very well, we will show you around, but you are to stick with us.”

“Promise.” Tiberius loyally followed after them like a dog after its master, absorbing as much as he could.

The Protectors showed the archaeologist around over the next week, patiently answering his questions. It was a glorious planet. Everything was good to Tiberius. The stories were all true and the Protectors could do no wrong. Tiberius even got to chat with the younger Protectors, who all impressed them with their energy and zeal for justice. One, in particular, gave him a shock. On the third day, he came across a young Zeltron who looked strikingly like the sparse images of Aura Ta’var he had seen previously. It was enough to fool him at least.

“Grand Protector, it is so glad to see you. Your campaign on Florum was legendary.”

“Uhh, I’m not the Grand Protector. My name is Zia.” The young woman responded awkwardly. “Can I help you?” she asked, looking up towards an elder Protector for guidance.

The elder Protectors whispered among themselves, fighting over the next course of action.

“We should—”

“No, she should not be bothered. He would think poorly of her.”

“But that is the point. He worships us as if we are gods—”

“I don’t see why that is bad. It helps enforce the peace.”

“Farrah, that is enough! That is not our way. Anyways, she wishes to see him herself.”

“But—”

“Do you wish to contradict her? Maybe you should be a Caregiver again. You obviously did not learn your lesson.”

The heated argument was swiftly shut down as the lead Protector had pulled out his ace. Few had fond memories of their days as a Caregiver. Some of the others merely were left to grumble in silence.

“Tiberius, that is not our esteemed founder. Come, there is something you should see.” The Lead Protector led the archaeologist by the arm to one of the nicer buildings in town. As the party slowly descended further and further underground, the mood of the Protectors similarly soured. The archaeologist noticed.

“What’s wrong? We get to meet Aura Ta’var. The immortal, the Grand Protector, the savior.”

“Immortality comes at a price. You’ll see, just like all our young do.” The Lead Protector instructed Tiberius solemnly.

As the group reached the final door to the Grand Protector several of the Protectors peeled off, though some were told to stay.

“Farrah, stay behind. You obviously need a reminder.”

“Toran, that’s not fair. I understand the lessons. I just—”

“No Farrah, what happened topside must not happen again. You will be the one to escort Tiberius as he helps the Caretakers over the next few days. No arguments.” Toran’s decision was final and Farrah knew it. She hung her head and took the keys from him.

“It would be my honor,” she replied sarcastically.

“Why are you two so pessimistic?” asked Tiberius incredulously. “Zia was absolutely ecstatic that she would get to be a Caretaker.”

“Well, you’ll find out soon just as Zia will one day. I imagine the Grand Protector will be most interested in both of you.” Tiberius perked up. “That usually isn’t a good thing. But don’t worry. She is won’t hurt you. She just...yeah. You’ll see,” replied Toran.

The pair entered a large moderately decorated room with mostly empty walls filled with names and faded pictures of loved ones. Several Caretakers lined the walls, ready to assist the Grand Protector when needed. A Zeltron woman that looked much like Zia was laying back on a couch in the center of the room and looking up at the ceiling, talking aloud to no one in particular. She looked towards them as they entered the room but otherwise ignored them.

"Javi Feron, I'm sorry.  
Hera Feron, I'm sorry. "

Over and over again she listed off names and apologized. The Caretakers standing or sitting around the edge of the room looked uncomfortable, almost as if they were trying to forget the names they heard. Aura Ta'var paid them no mind and continued to call out the names. Tiberius watched the spectacle curiously.

*How could the room feel so...sad? This is the Grand Protector and savior. This doesn't make sense.*

Aura looked at the newcomer once more, her interest peaked by his thoughts. The female Zeltron sat up and reached out to the Force to examine the man further. She was wearing traditional Jedi robes in blue, gold, and brown colors, much like her holonet likenesses.

"My Caregivers tell me that you are an off-world guest, Tiberius. I can see why they brought you to me. You are just like the young ones, head full of glory." Aura turned to Farrah. "And Farrah, back again? What did you do this time?"

"The same as last time," admitted Farrah guiltily, head hung low.

"I see. You will join Tiberius as I retell the story. Both of you can take the place of one of the primary Caretakers for a few days." Aura offered the pair to sit across from her and went to get a holorecording.

"Yes, Grand Protector," sighed Farrah as she sat down, mood already depressed.

"It would be my greatest honor," replied Tiberius with a bow. "Farrah, don't be so glum. We get to listen to the great Aura Ta'var."

Tiberius took a seat next to Farrah and took out a notebook, eagerly waiting for more knowledge. Aura arched a brow at his enthusiasm and played a holorecording while she spoke.

*Another fanboy, eh? This should be fun.*

"Tiberius, we are the Protectors of the galaxy, defending it from harm for thousands of years. You know this fact already and have fallen in love with it, but this power comes at a cost. The cost is innocent lives. No matter what I've done I have never been able to avoid this truth. Innocents are always hurt. Every Protector must be aware that they are not morally superior to those they protect. In fact, they are often worse because of the difficult choices we have to make.

The list of names I was reading off and the ones that you see now is to remind myself of who I have killed to ensure that peace. It has gotten rather large. At this point, it takes me 200 years to list them all off and the Caretakers get to witness it. It is their primary duty to give witness to the confession of my crimes and to remind them of the dangers of the Dark Side."

"But you got rid of it. There is no Dark Side. The loss of innocents is indeed sad but you saved many in the process," interjected Tiberius.

Farrah rolled her eyes, already knowing the answer.

"That is how the Sith think. Some of our younger Protectors think so as well but you will find it is not worth the cost. Be quiet and I will explain from the beginning."

Tiberius went silent, pen at the ready.

"Long ago, I was mortal and naive. I thought I could save everyone. I thought I could destroy the Sith from within. I thought wrong. So many died by my hand or by my words. I thought I was bringing peace but I was just becoming what I sought to defeat. Before I knew it, I was a Sith hurting a Jedi and innocents. It was all necessary for the peace. It had to be done. My motives were pure and but the path to the Dark Side is paved with good intentions."

The pair listened to her long story from the beginning as Aura Ta'var recounted every death she was responsible for over the years and what she got out of it. In almost all cases it was not worth the price. The gruesome tale even made Tiberius a bit depressed as his heroine freely admitted her darker side and undid most of his childhood fantasies about her. He was sad for the first time during his stay here.

*Being a Caretaker must suck.*

"And when I became immortal I sought a better path by creating the Protectors. I brought together Jedi from around the galaxy and brought them here. I had countless children myself, raising them as Jedi. I worked tirelessly year after year to build what you see today. As we speak, Protectors are being sent out to quell a rebellion, hopefully through nonviolent means. But we are never perfect. We messed up so many campaigns and unknowingly ignited more of them.

When I look back, I realize that though I am immortal I still don't know everything. Taken on a whole, did I help anyone? A few, but I mostly failed. My children are only marginally better. They too hold darkness within, just like all of us do, but at least their lives are short. They don't have the time to kill too many. They get to make peace and become one with the Force.

I, on the other hand, can only make peace with my past, but I can never be one with the Force. All I can do is guide the Protectors and watch them die." Aura sighed and hunched over. "I wish I could die..."

Aura cried for the first time today and put her head in her hands. Tears fell down Farrah's cheeks as the woman put aside her pride for her grieving founder. Tiberius didn't know what to say and thus stayed silent as the impact of her last statement washed over him. His heroine wanted to die because living hurt too much, yet she couldn't because there was work to be done. He found himself hating the darkness within each and every one of them. Aura sat back up and wiped the tears off her face.

"You know what it means to be a Jedi and a Protector in principle. Immortality is the ultimate punishment. I will never be allowed to join with the Force. Farrah, though she has stumbled, will find her peace and become one with the Force but I am destined to kill over and over again to protect this peace. No reprieve for the wicked. It is a penance I will pay forever. Even if I pleaded with you or my Caretakers, I would not die.

There is no escaping reality. This is what I want you to understand most of all. See the Protectors for what they are, well-meaning defenders, but do not forget they are fallible just as much as everyone else. See the galaxy for what it is, a mess we try to hold together. The Sith are gone but they can always return. They are within each and every Force user. I fight it every day. Each Caretaker eventually overcomes this struggle and eventually realizes the truth. I hope you keep this in mind as well next time you see me take the battlefield against a foe."

Tiberius opened his mouth to speak but Aura cut him off early.

"That is all for now. I urge you to read the books and datacrons in this room. Learn all you can before you go home. Share the wisdom with others."

Tiberius looked up uncertainly, plucking up the courage to speak his mind and trying to stay positive.

"I don't know what to think anymore but I still believe in the Protectors. Thank you for the lesson, Grand Protector. I will read as much as I can and share the wisdom. Though, can I ask you a question?"

"Just one?" asked Aura with a rare smile.

"Well, for now. Anyways, you've done so much for everyone. How can I help you? This isn't about galactic peace but you. "

Aura stared at the man for a moment before answering. This was not a question she got often.

"Could I have a hug?" replied Aura.