

It was once said, there was a time for all things and for all things a time. She was not sure about that, but the last few weeks had been strange. This morning proved no different. She awoke under a strange sky, in a strange land with strange people. A cult, a family or a clan, they were tight-knit, but it still left her ill at ease.

Lav'anre walked down the hallway, looking at each of the doors in turn. She was still getting used to the soldiers stationed around the temple and the new surroundings. The climate of the planet was far from uncomfortable, and she found some of the sights idyllic. After all the time she had spent in space, her sense of direction was still not what she had wished it could be. Though, anybody might have felt out of sorts if they had been through everything that she had in the last month or so.

The young Twi'lek had been discovered by chance, or by the will of the Force, as the Corellian had said with a shrug, floating in space. Or at least, her ship had been floating in space. The power grid- and by extension, the heating unit- had failed, leaving her nearly frozen and thin on oxygen. Something was different about her, the scarred man had said thoughtfully. When he fingered the cylinder at his side thoughtfully, she had felt a pang of fear and uncertainty. At first she feared he was a smuggler, the sort who might have sold a young girl like her to a slaver. Instead, he had offered her a new kind of freedom.

"The Force is in all of us, in one form or another," the Corellian had assured her. He went on to explain how some people have a stronger connection to the Force than others. He explained that this great energy field permeated all things, living and otherwise. He gave her some ham-fisted biology lesson about bloodlines and how some could tap it more easily. Finally, he promised her an opportunity for greater things, if she only trusted him.

If only trust had anything to do with it. The alternatives were quite obvious to the young girl. She could go with this man into the unknown, at his mercy, or she would risk death. The chances of encountering two ships in a short period were practically insignificant. She had boarded the Corellian man's freighter with apprehension, praying to the old gods for safety. The man had brought her to what she now knew as the Orian system, to the planet they called Sepros and had been fed and given new clothes.

The man, whom she now learned was called Bentre, spoke with the serene human they called Sanguinius for several minutes before she was called before him. She learned that Sanguinius was the leader of a group, a sort of family really, that called themselves Naga Sadow. The Consul, as she learned was his title, offered her some time to stay in the Orian system, but Bentre had argued that she could become a security risk.

A short argument had followed, but in the end, Lav'anre had been brought into the fold within Clan Naga Sadow. She was assigned to Bentre, who quickly explained that he would train her, or break her. "You will not escape this system to tell others of us, kiddo," he had explained to

her in deadpan, "the risk is just too great. If you work hard though, you could reach greater heights than you could ever imagine."

This day was supposed to be the first in what Bentre had promised would be an arduous training regimen. As she watched the doors, she saw what appeared to be the door she was looking for. The placard bore two other names, but the girl reached out, quickly striking the door three times timidly with her knuckle. The door swooshed open to reveal tight quarters, with a desk visible from the light of a blue-white glowlamp on its surface.

"Step inside, kid. We don't have all day."

The girl did as she was bidden, though her steps were still slow and cautious. As she got halfway to the desk, the door closed behind her. An overhead light flashed to life, bathing the room in a blinding light. As she rubbed at her eyes, she heard a cough. When the spots disappeared from her sight, she saw the Bentre was sitting in a folding chair against one wall. The human pointed to his right indicating a cot that had been pushed up against the corner farthest from the door.

"So, is this where I am to stay now?" Lav'anre's gaze flitted between the cot and the Sith.

"This will serve as your quarters. I mean, I figure that a girl like you would prefer to stay somewhere besides the barracks? Or I at least figured you might like a bit of privacy. I understand that kids your age prefer that stuff more nowadays."

The young girl could not help but giggle a little at his last statement. "Don't you think that you are still a bit young to be talking about 'kids these days'? You sound like my dad."

"Yeah, well days as a Proconsul certainly age you. Trust me, as you start your training you will probably find that it ages you a bit, even when that maturation is just in your mind. Some of us he motioned to left eyeball, which slowly turned from hazel to a softly-glowing red, "just carry marks and wounds more visible than others."

"W-what?" Lav'anre's voice became hushed as she studied the scarring on his face again. "So you lost your eye to whatever did that to your face?"

"Oh no, this one was actually caused by an ally," he raised an eyebrow when he saw the girl's face twist in surprise and slight disgust, "but there is a lot more to the tale of how that went down. For that matter, there are lots of stories to tell, kiddo. But some of them are worse than others. Hopefully you will keep your pretty little face a bit more intact than I did. Some Novitiates and Journeyman have it worse than I had it, but we will endeavor to keep your looks intact if that worries you too greatly. In time, you might care less for such things, but I do not want you any more distracted than you need to be."

"I do, or I do not, understand what you mean. You brought me here, you tell me I cannot leave and now you are acting like you are my protector?" Her tone was almost a whine.

"Ho, okay, so let's give you the short version. There will be plenty of time for you to learn the ropes on the *Arcanum* later. The *Arcanum* is this nice ship where new folks like yourself get to learn more about the history of the galaxy, the history of our Brotherhood, and the secrets of the Force."

"Brotherhood?"

"Well, yeah. Clan Naga Sadow is one of seven clans, which are beneath the Dark Council. The Consul and Proconsul lead the Clan, with two houses beneath a Quaestor and Aedile serving in tandem. Sanguinius and I lead the Clan, and you won't have to worry about the Houses' leadership, for now."

"I- you- what?" Lav'anre seemed more confused at these words.

Bentre chuckled a bit, lifting a hand to stroke his clean-shaven face. "I guess so much has happened in the last few years, and so much has been streamlined with the Academy that I forget how much you folks do not know. Alright, so for starters, you are a Novitiate, a branch of ranks where our newbies start out at. At the moment, you are both in the system and in reality, an apprentice. With any luck you will fly through the early grades before you know it, and then you can begin your progress through the Journeyman ranks."

"So, I am an Apprentice Novitiate?" The girl spoke the words as though they were a proper title.

"Well, yes and no. More importantly, you have begun the first steps towards greater learning. Where you stand, Muz once stood. Muz eventually became the Grand Master over the whole Brotherhood."

"Grand Master?"

"The Grand Master is the de facto leader of the Brotherhood. Muz led the Brotherhood through a period of Crusade and conquest, though that was before my time. He stepped down a bit before I joined, and he continues in Marka Ragnos to this day since."

"So Marka Ragnos is another of the Clans?"

"Well, no Marka Ragnos is one of the Houses alongside Shar Dakhan under the banner of Clan Naga Sadow. When he left the Iron Throne, the Grand Master's seat of power, he tried to sort of retire."

"So, this Muz retires, and what then?"

Bentre sighed, looking slightly forlorn. "So this guy Pravus, Darth Pravus to be exact steps in to lead our Brotherhood into a prosperous period. We all thought things were more or less good. We worked alongside Scholae Palatinae during some engagements, but for the most part things were fairly peaceful between us. It wasn't ideal but it was," Bentre paused, looking for the right word before simply stating, "home. I mean, yeah I did a lot of studying, and my master helped me to ascend ranks through trials and tests, but things were relatively peaceful for a long time.

Lav'anre looked about the room for a moment as she considered all the things she was being told. Her eyebrows furrowed as she focused on the Corellian Sith before her once again. "So, if you are my master, what things do I need to do to prove myself to you?"

"Well, that really depends. After a Sadowan brought me into the fold myself from Nar Shadda- a long, messy story I will have to tell you later- I threw myself into my studies. The Shadow Academy archives taught me about the various Orders and their roles, and I tried to focus myself towards a path of my own."

"So, wait," the girl's voice was both confused and pleading, "I am supposed to be a part of a House, a Clan, and Order and this Brotherhood? How does that all work? What makes any Order greater than another, and how do I find my own path?"

Bentre's face darkened at her questions. The Apprentice feared she had spoken too candidly, or too quickly, or perhaps had asked too much. She looked down apologetically before glancing up again from below her eyebrows. The Sith nodded as he gazed off to somewhere behind her, releasing a huff of breath in a soft snort. "There were once some six Orders in the Brotherhood, three if you did not include those affiliated with Odan-Urr or the light. The Grand Master, Pravus, changed that some time ago. He marched we loyal soldiers, in some cases, against our fellows. Once, the Obelisk and the Krath were counted among the Sith. That was before the Purge, before the culling of Undesirables, and the rise of the Lotus."

"Purge," the Twi'lek's eyes widened as she softly spoke the word, "of your own people?"

Stahoes voice became bitter with a pained chuckle, "Not strictly just our own, but those who were inside of our space. Later, the Iron Fleet, under Pravus' flag, visited all the bad Clans who did not support him, and laid waste to worlds and fleets." Lav'anre gasped as realization of what she was being told truly started to sink in. "It didn't matter that my Obelisk brothers and sisters, that the Krath sorcerers and scholars had served the Iron Throne in our own ways. Before that time, I had no issue with serving if I had been called, but then this poodoo started as though he were looking to emulate the Galactic Empire."

"Who w-would want to do that?" Her tone and gaze sharpened, as she recalled the travesties her family had suffered at the hands of the Empire, told in old stories, and the hardships that some had suffered at the hands of the First Order.

"Oh, it wasn't an original idea, I assure you," the Battlelord shook his head, "for Empires and the like have been the dreams of Sith for ages. I could bore you with lots of details, but I am sure you will learn plenty as you go about your studies."

"But-" The Twi'lek Apprentice struggled with her words, "why would he go unchecked? The Rebellion fought the Empire, there is a resistance that fights the New Order in spite of the New Republic's-"

"Oh there is," Bentre shook his head sadly, "within the Brotherhood, there is a group called the Lotus. Mostly Jedi-leaning, from what little I have gathered. The only problem is, when you operate in secret, it is hard to draw others into the fold. They have to remain isolated in layers, for to do otherwise risk destruction akin to what Pravus did in the Cocytus system. As such, there is a detachment. Trust me," Bentre's voice became distant as emotion clouded his facial expression somewhere between sorrow and anger, "it is far easier to join the Grand Master's dogs than those who oppose him."

Lav'anre looked down as she took stock of all the things she had been told. What could she do about conflicts like this? She was only a young woman, a mere child when put up against events like genocides, rebellions, and the destruction of systems. Several minutes passed in silence as Bentre watched the girl for some sign of reaction, either revulsion or indifference. A dull ache began to bother the Apprentice as she stood in contemplation.

"By the way," Bentre's voice was softer now, almost fatherly, "there is a chair on the other side of the table if you would like to sit down."

Looking down, the new Sadowan noticed that a folding chair similar to that of her new master had been tucked beneath the table. Walking around, she pulled the chair out and turned it around so she could sit and look at Bentre without craning her neck. Settling herself down into the seat, she bit her lip softly before she found her voice again. "So what happens now then, Master? She spoke the last word with a soft determination.

"First off, let's not use the word 'master' as though you are a slave. It is not a title, so do not worry about tacking it onto the end of every sentence like you are going to get a beating or something. If you need to call me something, there are a few titles you may use: Sir, Proconsul, Battlelord and Kairn'tel are all acceptable forms of address. You may even just call me Bentre if you wish. I want to keep you here for two reasons. Firstly I cannot have you getting captured by the Inquisitorius and putting the rest of the Clan at risk. I was brought into the Clan by another Sadowan when I arrived, and I hope you will integrate yourself into our family. The other reason, the second one, while less important to our well-being is admittedly a little more selfish."

"More selfish than keeping a girl hidden away from the galaxy at large and putting her at risk of death?"

"Well," Bentre smiled sadly in spite of himself, "that is a way to put it I suppose." Matters were beginning to make sense to the girl. There was a larger fight here, and running away was not going to allow her to unlearn what she had here. Her family had tried to resist the Empire and had failed. She was of the age and the circumstances to help resist another dictator. This realization caused her to sit forward as Stahoes tried to find his next words. "I want to help you to realize your potential."

"Oh? The question was more softly spoken than even Lav'anre had expected. All this information, dumped upon her, had riled up her emotions and she was happy that her voice had not cracked upon the utterance.

"I want to train you. I can feel power and potential inside of you, Apprentice. I want to free you from shackles you never realized held you down." He motioned toward the ceiling dramatically. "I want to free you from the bindings of normal life, to achieve power you once thought the territory of dreams and myths." His voice rose with each word until it was almost a shout. The man stood to his feet, pointing upward as his finger jabbed to emphasize certain words. "I want you to be able to fight, whether you stay after the fighting calms, ultimately join the fray, or hide away from the fighting. I want to loose the chains which bind you to the mundane, and show you the spectacular. With the Dominion being beat back again by Clan Naga Sadow, I want you to join in the glorious task of preserving Naga Sadow. I want you to achieve immortality, your deeds preserved in song and tale long after your remains have returned to dust." His eyes were widened, manic, and the red-glow of Bentre's left eye and excited features made him appear as a madman. He huffed as he watched his apprentice, awaiting her response.

"Alright," she smiled at the man, extending a hand as though offering something, "so go ahead and tell me what you need me to do, where you need me to start."

For the first time since she had entered, a truly warm smile melted Bentre's features into a soft grin. "I have a datapad with a number of tasks that are expected of students. Many people refer to the archives to get an idea of how they want to achieve the markers necessary to ascend the ranks. Over time, if you prove yourself you may achieve Knighthood."

"Ah."

"But before that, I will need some time to complete a few errands and then I shall return. The Lotus are hidden, but surely cannot be unreachable. With the will of the Force, one of the lines I am putting out will be picked by a member of their lot. Dependent on what comes of it, I may call you for some odd tasks. I cannot allow Pravus to trample over my home, over *our* home. He will be stopped."

"As you will it, *Bentre*." She spoke the last word with unease, but nodded as the man lifted himself from his chair and strode toward the doorway. It was all a lot to take in.

"Oh," Bentre paused in the doorway. pointing to the desk, "I have an old datapad from my Academy days there preloaded with some courses I helped to refine when I was a Professor. Feel free to peruse those while I am gone. I am sure you will want to hit the ground running."

Lav'anre was not sure she understood everything, but the comparison between the tyranny of old and this new, previously unknown tyranny was clear. Unlike on her homeworld, she was not just wanting but able to do something about it. Picking up the datapad, she began to read. The path to power was there for the taking, the power to change the world, the power to topple kings, the power to free minds. Perhaps, through one means or another, there could be peace or order.