

Arx Shadow Academy

The sun had risen above the horizon, yet Gaius felt the cold deep in his chest. The Commander had been woken by the sound of intense wind gusts all night, and fought valiantly to return to sleep, only to fail time after time. He was awake, much to his annoyance. His stay on Arx was out of necessity, as Gaius much preferred to spend his time practicing his craft back on Aliso, the home of Clan Plagueis. He had spent the past week staying at the Shadow Academy, finalizing his latest degree. No matter, Gaius stepped out of his room, out into the bitterness of the full fledged winter.

An amazing sight on most days, Gaius sighed at the sight of the snow covered ground. He had studied Arx upon his return to the Dark Brotherhood. He had assumed that since the Shadow Academy was close to the equator of the planet that it would be spared the harsh winter weather that Gaius had ran from his entire life. The wet winters reminded him of his childhood, and the tasks associated with snow were dreadful.

The Commander made his way down to the ground and stood at the door to the Academy, and noticed that most of entire area had been uncleared of the nearly two meters worth of snow that had accumulated overnight. He managed to struggle through manually opening the door, as the mechanics might have seen themselves become frozen. The main corridor was a ghost town, not a creature was stirring, not even a Porg. Something was not right, the apprentices were usually clogging the hallway, conversing about their upcoming trials of knighthood. Gaius slowly made his way down the corridor, noticing empty room after empty room. Study rooms were empty with books on the desks, lecture halls had chairs that were not pushed in, something that all Professors required students to do before leaving for the day. Gaius made his way to the lift, and immediately struck the button to the top floor, where the Headmaster's office was located. The lift rose directly to the top floor without any interruptions, an unusual occurrence.

A soft snore filled the air as Gaius stepped out of the lift and into the Headmaster's office. Scattered on the floor were a few members of the Headmaster's staff, particularly his Praetor and a few others. The old man carefully stepped over the semi-conscious bodies of those on the floor, careful not to misstep and wind up crushing someone's throat. Across the room, one could make out Headmaster Farrin Xies laid back in his chair with his feet up on the desk, fast asleep. Gaius stopped at the front of the desk, clicked his heels and cleared his throat.

The Headmaster shook awake in a confused fury. "*Commander Caesar,*" he slurred, "*Can I help you with something?*". In mere seconds, the state of confusion vanished, and anger set in.

"Headmaster, I believe my final course meeting for my degree was to occur this morning. No one is in the halls of the Academy, not even the Apprentices." Gaius was desperate to finish his degree and leave.

“Caesar, take a look outside you fool. There are no courses today. Had you checked your datapad, you would have received the message last night that we had cancelled all courses today and for the foreseeable future.” the Headmaster blared out. Still, none of the bodies on the floor moved. *“But instead, you chose to walk into my office this morning, not giving a damn about the recovery of me or my staff.”* It became apparent to Gaius that the bodies were not moving because they were hungover from the party held the night before, to celebrate the snow phenomenon. Gaius had not checked his messages before he left his bed.

“My apologies, Headmaster. I thou-” replied the old man.

“You didn’t think at all, Commander!” boomed the Headmaster. This shout was loud enough to invoke a slight movement among those on the ground. *“Follow me, now!”* he instructed. The Warlord proceeded back towards the lift, with Gaius a few steps behind him. Both men limped their way into the lift, with Xies reaching immediately for the ground button. Neither man spoke as they rode down together.

The lift reached the ground level, desolate as it had been prior to Gaius arriving a few minutes earlier. The two men exited, and continued to stagger down the hallway. The echoes of their hobbled footsteps would confuse any who were not watching the scene unfold, as there was no rhythm to the steps at all. The Headmaster stopped abruptly by a closet next to the front door and began to chuckle slightly. He punched in a set of keys on the pad and the door opened, *“Commander, in addition to your courses, I am adding an additional requirement for your Savant degree.”* He reached in and pulled out a large shovel, designed exactly for the snow. He turned to face Gaius, and snapped off a portion of the bottom of the shovel, leaving an odd shaped base. He extended the handle out towards Gaius, who stood in shock. *“I want all of the pathways cleared. Under no circumstances are you to return inside any Academy structure until the task is complete.”*

The Headmaster opened the front door and guided the old man outside, only to slam the door behind him. Gaius stood in the cold, holding a broken shovel staring out at the vast amount of snow that had accumulated overnight. A tear formed in the corner of the old man’s eye, as the thoughts of his childhood returned.