

A sharp pain arched across the front of my head, drawing a long, low moan from my lips. I rubbed at my aching head with the back of my flesh-and-blood right hand. The air seemed to buzz as I slowly opened my eyes. The pupils began to focus, bringing the worn brick wall beside me into an uneasy focus. My gaze slid sideways and my mind slowly began to put together the parts.

I had been working in my office on Sepros, late into the evening. Security reports had been coming in from House Marka Ragnos about some local trouble. By comparison, House Shar Dakhan had gone pretty much silent. The Consul had gone off duty hours before and I wanted all the time I could spare to get things into order.

Tasha'Vel had left several messages on my commlink line. I was exhausted, kept awake only by the caf sitting beside me. The bitter drink had gone long cold but it served its purpose. It seemed as though fatigue won out against all forces in the universe at some point. I still could not recall having passed out. Yet here I was.

“Wha-” the word caught in the back of my throat, turning into a cough. “What is going on here?” I focused on the form of the armored soldier standing watch just outside of a set of bars.

“Be quiet.” The response was clipped, with no room for compromise.

“Come off it.” I released a low growl of frustration as I pulled myself up into a sitting position. “I have spent enough time around the planet to recognize a soldier. I can't have been out that long so you are probably Warhost?”

“I wouldn't worry about things like that.” The man shifted the grip he held on his blaster rifle so that it was in clearer view. “I would suggest settling in until your Consul calls for you. He has designated a 26 hour period for you to consider your defense. I have been directed to inform you that you will be tried for crimes against the Brotherhood at that time. You may represent yourself, or you may ask for a member of your Clan to represent you.”

“I will represent myself.” The words came out unbidden from my lips, answered by little more than a cocked eye.

“Very well.” The soldier shrugged,.

I tried to focus more, to reach out in the Force, but I felt a fresh wave of pain. Wincing, I withdrew and focused in upon myself. I was familiar enough with these bars given the last few months. I would need the Force if I was going to escape. For now, I could only bide my time.

Hours seemed to pass in silence. I slipped several times between sleep and waking, but it did little to break the monotony. During the quiet, I pondered my service on Nancora, I thought upon my more clandestine activities and wondered which of them had brought me to this point. I went down the list I had compiled in my head, and began to construct defenses for each. This activity really achieved nothing.

Eventually, a soldier came down and banged the butt of his blaster three times on the metal bars. “Open up the door. The time has come.” Still, I kept thinking, kept focusing. Even as the guard pulled me from the cell, I did not resist. My mind whirred as I was dragged through countless hallways. I did not stop considering the situation even as I was brought into the large room. I was shoved into a hard chair, still

looking at my feet in thought.

“By the Authority vested by Clan Naga Sadow, you are brought forward.” A familiar voice barked out, its tone more angry than I could recall over the last year. I hadn't even heard that tone as we considered the actions of the Grand Master, or the attack by the Collective, or the then-upcoming attack on Collective's factory world. Steeling myself, I stared defiantly up into the eyes of Sanguinius Entar. “In the sight of the Sons and Daughters of Sadow and the Summits of the Clan, charges are brought forth.” Sanguinius sat behind a tall desk, with his hands clasped together in front of him in a contemplative position.

This was surreal. I had seen enough bad criminal court holos to have a threadbare familiarity with the legal system. I never imagined I would end up on this end of the system. I had figured the last time would be the last time. There was near-silence in the room, save for some unintelligible whispering.

“I object.” I spit the words out, feeling my face grow flush. “What charges have been brought forth? What supposed crimes have I committed?”

“You,” Sang spoke the words with great emphasis, “have been charged with what amounts to high treason.” Lifting up a sheet of flimsiplast, he read out its contents. “To start there are no less than nine counts of Dereliction of Duty, seven counts of fraud, five counts of treason against the Brotherhood, and another three counts of treason against the Clan. How do you please, Stahoes?”

I bared my teeth at the Consul. I had respected the man for his stands. I had also worked around him as was necessary. Still, I was no more a traitor than he was. “I plead not-guilty to all charges.”

This prompted the raising of an eyebrow by the Gray Jedi. He seemed to think for a moment before nodding. “Very well. Let's address the first item on the agenda. Over the last few months, you have committed acts of torture on no less than two civilians, have filed numerous falsified reports and orders to countermand, undermine and replace those decided by the Clan and House summits. You have broken into computer systems, broken into security files, altered records, bypassed safeguards and staged attacks against the Iron Throne **against** the interests of Clan Naga Sadow. All of these things account for the before-mentioned charges.”

I shook my head. “I tortured two traitors. They may not have been traitors to the Clan but a traitor, is a traitor, is a traitor. These people knew of our system. They saw our planet, and could report of it to other people closer to the Core. Words have come back to us of the First Order and the Republic. Do you really believe some word of our strongholds here would not travel back with them?”

“Yet you decided to keep them off the record. It was not until orders for medical supplies were discovered that their detention came to light. You had beaten, burnt, shocked and tormented these two individuals to within an inch of their lives. What threat were they, that you went to these measures? Why did no report of their impact reach my desk?” There was a growing irritation in the Entar's voice as the questions rattled on. “Why did you remove records of their landing, or their arrest from computers? What do you have to hide?”

Anger bubbled in my chest. I could feel my face growing red as studied the Conul's face as each question tumbled forward. “You do not need to ask such things.” My tone became low and menacing. “These things are between family. They are still a threat to the Clan.”

“Were they really?” Sanguinius seemed to laugh. “So what purpose did you have to redirect Warhost forces between Nancora, Aeotheran, and Tarthos in the time period between 34 ABY and 36 ABY?”

“The dispensation of Clan-loyal forces was not sufficient to meet our needs. The original proposal called for a larger force to guard our planet, while the Collective remained a greater threat than the back-stabbing ways of the Brotherhood's other Clans. The movements between Sepros as the Clan hub and the satellite planets respective to the Clans was quite simple. They were used as peacekeeping forces.”

“You needed to break into systems in order to execute commands?”

“I had to work around our Consul, who seemed afraid to act when he was most needed. It wasn't until the attack on the *Suffering* that our oh-so-esteemed Consul chose to act. Before that he seemed quite content to continue to watch from the sidelines while our Brotherhood tore itself apart!”

“So the decision arose to abandon your station and take part in terrorist activities against Iron Throne assets?” The questions were coming more quickly. Any facade of a courtroom hearing was quickly falling away. “Or did you just believe that you knew better?”

I could not suppress a scoff at this. “Are you serious, Sang? I mean, are you really giving me the choice between action and inaction alone? Did you really expect me to stand aside? Did you think that I would wait for you to decide to do the right or the prudent thing?” I was picking up speed with each question. “Do you really t-”

“Order!” Sanguinius barked out the single word, pressing a button atop the desk which emitted the short blast of a klaxon. “What truth is there in the word of a traitor?” He waved a hand dismissively in the air. “Throw this man from this court. The Sons, the Daughters and the Summits will convene to decide his sentence.”

I couldn't believe it. Just like that, I had been branded a traitor. Motive did not matter. Intent did not matter. All that I had worked to create and build had been dashed in a moment. I looked up at Sanguinius, keeping my angered stare defiant. My doom had been sealed. Only the Force knew how complete my destruction would be now. Had Clan Naga Sadow really been diminished to this mockery of any sense of justice?

Force help us all.