

Return: Impressions of a New Home

Anshar Kahn Tarentae, #308

Had anyone bothered to follow the Deputy Grand Master's shuttle into Kessel's asteroid field, they might have noticed it altering its course away from the safer path. A short jaunt at full speed brought the shuttle to its intended destination, and its intended target. A solid black YT-2000, barely visible to the naked eye waited patiently for the shuttle, and the two vessels performed a seamless docking maneuver. Inside the YT-2000 *Gambol Shroud*, two combatants dueled with lightsabers, nearly oblivious to all that went on around them.

"Not bad," commented Dranik Tarentae as he blocked the blue blade of his opponent with his nearly white dueling saber. "You did not get distracted by the noises of us docking, though you are trying to hard." For her part, Triela Blake took in the comment, but did not reply. She attacked again, only to have Dranik parry the strike. If only she had the space to truly move about, her gymnastics training would have lent itself well to the duel. Or perhaps not; Dranik was Master Anshar's right hand man and chief student. Dranik had been Triela's combat trainer since she had accepted Anshar's invitation to join him, to become his apprentice, and to leave her old life behind. And she had left her life behind: her father humiliated, her best friend thinking she was dead, and even changing her name.

"Your mind is wandering," chided Dranik as he darted in. Triela could not block his attack in time and she stumbled backwards, falling against the wall. Dranik was on top of her instantaneously. Holding her right arm by the wrist against the wall so she could not use her own blade, he held his lightsaber perilously close to her neck. "You will get yourself killed one day."

"I'm-I'm sorry," replied Triela as sweat rolled down her brow and dripped on to her left eye.

"Don't be sorry, be better," he said, disengaging his lightsaber and releasing Triela, but still staying where he was, preventing her from moving. Triela felt her throat begin to tighten and her heart began to beat faster as images from her past flashed through her mind. She did not know if Dranik knew, but Triela knew that he would not care one way or the other.

"Or be dead," added Dranik before finally stepping away and giving Triela room to breath.

"She's getting better," said Dranik, causing Triela to lift her eyes from the floor. They settled onto Anshar he stood at the entrance to the cargo bay.

"I'll be back shortly," Anshar said, hearing Dranik's comment, but not acknowledging it. Triela sheepishly looked down. Undoubtedly, Anshar would lecture her later during one of their training sessions. Without another word, the master proceeded to the docking door.

"Go get washed up," instructed Dranik as he sat down at the computer and began to pull up the recording of their mock fight. Triela left in a hurry to her cabin and its limited facilities. As she scrubbed her face, she wondered why Dranik had not gone to clean himself up. Then it dawned on her; he had not even broken a sweat.

"Maybe I am trying to hard," she said aloud to herself.

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To say that the meeting was tense would not have been entirely inaccurate, but the two participants knew how to keep their cool, and to tolerate each other. Master Anshar Kahn Tarentae, a gray Krath adherent with his infamous blue within blue eyes, stared down the gaze of the reputedly deceptive Deputy Grand Master of the Brotherhood, Morgan Sorenn. Still, it was the orders of the Grand Master that brought the two together for this short meeting, and both knew better than to cross him. The fact that this meeting was being conducted in person alone testified to the potential importance.

“So, to be clear,” said Anshar, “Mav wants me to spy on Odan-Urr for him.”

“I would hardly call it spying,” countered Morgan. “More like observing, and helping to ensure stability of the political structure around them. From what I've been told, that is your specialty.”

“Specialty? If so, only out of necessity,” replied Anshar. “Controlling the Yridians and then setting up Messina were necessary tasks, to make my leadership of Tarentum successful. I won't be in that position with Odan-Urr, and I don't honestly have intentions on such positions.”

“Oh, we know,” replied the Deputy Grand Master with a smug smile. “Mav has told me all about how you were quite content as Headmaster, and that you only returned to Tarentum because Sarin asked you to do so. That was quite a bargain you struck, might I add. A complete copy of the Dark Vault, all to yourself.”

“That is only a rumor,” said Anshar, side stepping the truth of the matter.

“Whether it is or not, let us not forget that unregistered apprentice you have as well,” said Morgan. “You have been given much leeway by the Dark Council, and it is time you return the favor.”

“We could go back and forth on what I have given, and what I have received, from the Dark Council,” stated Anshar flatly. “I believe the scales are rather balanced. Let's keep them that way. I'll observe for Mav, but I won't betray anyone.”

“So, if it came to it, you would take up arms against the Iron Throne?” asked Morgan with a wicked smile.

“It wouldn't be the first time,” replied Anshar.

“No, I suppose not,” said Morgan, reclining in her chair. Reaching into the small armrest compartment in the chair, Morgan produced a datastick. She tossed it to Anshar. “You might want to start here.”

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When Anshar returned to the *Gambol Shroud*, he immediately went to the cockpit of the vessel. Triela was in the galley preparing something for the three of them to eat. When at home, Chloe would normally take care of this particular task, and she was exceptionally good at it. However, Chloe did not go on missions, and as the apprentice, Triela found herself performing the task of cooking meals. Not that Anshar had ever ordered her, or even asked her, to do it; she just assumed that it was one of her tasks. Neither Anshar nor Dranik had ever corrected her, either.

She brought the three dishes out to the dining hall, finding Anshar and Dranik already

there. It was a strange combination of foods compiled from the few ingredients available. Triela had made a shopping list and fully intended to keep the ship stocked. Unfortunately, the day of her planned trip to the local market had coincided with their departure, and so all they had was what had been on the ship. Dranik made a face at the food presented, but being the soldier that he was, he would eat it anyway.

“So, what's the plan?” asked Dranik as he took his first bite. “I don't suppose we can just show up at the door and say 'hi, we're the new neighbors.’”

“Considering that you are still officially rogue, and Triela is unregistered, I'm really the only one that needs to make any sort of appearance. That said, I have been reading up on the territory controlled by the clan, and I think we can remake our fortress much in the way it was on Yridia four.” Triela picked at her plate, her appetite not quite as big as she thought it was. Perhaps it was the idea of living in an isolated manor again that ate at her, even while she did not eat much of the food.

“Something wrong?” asked Anshar pointedly.

“I, just, well, I don't want to be stuck hiding away in the mountains,” said Triela. “I was never allowed to venture far from Messina.”

“Because you needed to be missing, to start a new life,” replied Anshar, flatly. “Things will be different here, assuming I have no trouble obtaining property. You will be able to move about more freely since no one here knows you. Assuming, of course, it is safe to do so.”

“What do you mean?” asked Triela.

“There is a good deal of civil unrest amongst the native populations,” said Anshar. “It seems to be a grab bag at best. Different political factions trying to exert control, and the age old nobility versus the common people. I am not eager to have to navigate all of this, but it seems that brute force is not a preferred tool, or perhaps even a real option, of the Odanites or the Empress.” Triela recalled her own reading on the political and cultural norms of their new home.

“Not that it was ever your favorite tool,” commented Dranik.

“But one that I used,” replied Anshar. “There is plenty of merit in not resorting to it, but we must use it when necessary.” He paused to drink his plain water. “Now, that said, we are about to reach our destination. Let us see what Morgan has set before us.” Anshar stood up, his food gone, though Triela did not recall noticing him ever actually eat. Dranik followed while Triela quickly cleaned up the table. She then followed them to the cockpit. As was customary, Dranik took the pilot's chair, but Triela found Anshar standing just outside the bridge.

“Take the co-pilot's chair,” he instructed. Triela did not argue, instead sliding into the chair that sat behind and above the pilot's chair. Moments later, Dranik brought the YT-2000 out of hyperspace. Directly in front of them sat a large gas planet, complete with rings, and yet no moons.

“Welcome to Sorilis,” commented Dranik, an underlying tone of sarcasm in his voice.

“I'm detecting four vessels, about fifty clicks at fifteen degrees,” reported Triela. “Looks like they're just outside the outermost ring. Two Y-wings and two Lambda shuttles; one shuttle is reading as disable.”

“Dranik, take us in,” said Anshar. “And use the ion cannon if it becomes necessary. I want to talk to some of them.”

“Understood,” said Dranik, firing up the thrusters and pushing the *Gambol Shroud*

forward. It did not take long for the Y-wings to take notice and they approached in a lazy attack formation. "Amateurs," muttered Dranik. When the vessels were about ten kilometers apart, the Y-wings began to hail them.

"Should I open the channel?" asked Triela. Anshar only nodded, and Triela dutifully switched it on.

"Unidentified vessel, halt your approach and identify yourself," came a shakily voiced order. "You have entered a restricted area." Triela turned to Anshar, expecting him to say something, but she instead saw his eyes closed and she could sense him concentrating and drawing on the Force.

"Restricted?" asked Dranik back over the comm system. "On whose authority? And why should I care when all you have are two Y-wings? I mean, is there someone else out there? Perhaps a real threat?"

"Shut your mouth," came back the reply. Triela sighed. They really were amateurs, even she could see that now. "Who we work for is not any concern of yours. Why don't you take your little ship and leave this system to the rightful owners."

"Rightful owners? You mean the Odanites? Or the Empress?" Dranik replied back. Triela could see the simple verbal trap laid out for the pilots.

"The Quohari are the rightful owners! We do not bow to anyone, not anymore! Now you will be destroyed for trespassing!" With that, the comm cut off and the Y-wings attempted to move forward, but their ships stayed still. Triela looked back at Anshar again and saw his eyes still closed. On the other hand, while the Y-wings found themselves not moving, Dranik pushed the *Gambol Shroud* into high speed, quickly closing the gap. A few blasts from the ship's ion cannon and both Y-wings were disabled. Dranik then pushed the *Shroud* towards the two shuttles, at which time one of them detached from the boarding procedure and began to move away, not that they could outrun the *Shroud*.

"What did you do?" asked Triela to Anshar. "Were you able to hold the Y-wings in place?"

"I could," said Anshar. "But, I took the far easier approach and simply held the throttle controls in the down position. Those two pilots could not move the levers. Remember, simple solutions."

"Yes, Master," she replied. It was a lesson Anshar had taught her before. For all the grandiose displays of power that could be shown, there were often easier ways to achieve the same result.

"Should we stop the shuttle?" asked Dranik, his finger resting on the trigger.

"That won't be necessary," said Anshar. "We have the two Y-wing pilots already. I would rather talk to those on the disabled shuttle." As they approached the shuttle to dock, Triela reviewed camera footage of the departing shuttle, noting some type of triangular logo on the dorsal wing, but not able to make it out.

The docking went smoothly and Anshar had Triela accompany him as they crossed into the shuttle. There they found two young Sephi, perhaps no more than teenagers, and the male had some bruises and some crusted blood from a minor head wound. Still, both were alive. The young woman was grateful and thanked them. Gratitude, however, was obviously not a concept the young man knew much about.

“Hurry! We must report this attack right away,” said the male Sephi. “Those Quohari pirates will be made to pay.”

“I’m sure,” replied Anshar, unamused. “Not my concern. Who were they?”

“I don’t know,” replied the boy exasperated. “Some Quohari curs.”

“I didn’t think the Quohari were a unified group,” said Anshar to Triela. “Do correct me if I’m wrong.”

“I am not sure, sir,” she said. “To be sure, they do have their assorted pirates and criminals, just like most other species. Of course, what pirates would be sitting out here, above an uninhabited world, well, they must be some pretty bad pirates.”

“So, you’re saying they’re not pirates?” asked Anshar, mockingly.

“No, sir,” replied Triela continuing with the mocking tone. “I do recall reading a travel warning. It said to watch out for escorted tours of the Sorilis’ rings. For an extra fee, you get the protection from any pirates. Of course, the escorts are con-men. You’d think someone would read about that.”

“Don’t mock me! I am nobility!” practically shouted the teen boy, with his female companion not saying anything, but instead rolling her eyes.

“Unfortunately for you,” said Anshar, “nobility does not guarantee intelligence. I was going to be nice and offer you a ride back to Kiast. However, you have changed my mind. You will have to wait for an official rescue. On the other hand, you, young lady, are free to come with us.”

“Thank you, sir,” she said. “I am sure my father will be most grateful.”

“Of course,” replied Anshar. “Triela, please escort the young lady back to our ship and have Dranik plot a course so that we can take her home. Oh, and do make sure we broadcast the position of these hapless fools.”

“Yes, sir,” Triela replied, motioning for the young lady to follow her. After they left, Anshar followed, having to force the young man to stay on the shuttle as he tried to run past him.

Triela could only smile.

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Triela watched from the back of the small meeting room. The blue haired Consul stared down the blue eyed Tarentum Master. Their discussion had been short thus far as the two seemed, for some reason, wary of each other. Perhaps, Triela noted, it was just the way things went when someone as skilled and as powerful as her master entered a new place. Finally, the Consul of Odan Urr spoke.

“Well, it seems that everything is in order, regarding the transfer,” she said. “You sure took your time in arriving.”

“You’ll find I’m quite used to coming and going as I please,” replied Anshar.

“So I have heard, and your little interference with that scam tour? Have you told anyone else?”

“No, should I have?” asked Anshar, his tone indicating that he did not particularly care about the answer. “It was a regular law enforcement issue, not some grand conspiracy against the nobles or the Empress.”

“Perhaps,” said Aura. “Of course, one can never be too careful. The politics of this system are a headache more often than not, but we have little choice but to be involved.”

“You are more than welcome to that headache,” replied Anshar. “But, I understand it comes with the territory. You join a clan, you have to take it all: good, bad, and annoying. But, let me make this clear: I have a rather direct method of dealing with situations like this, so if you want my involvement, don't get angry with the results.”

“I understand,” said Aura. “Now, before we end this meeting, any other questions?”

“As a matter of fact, I am looking for a place to build a nice little personal estate, much like I had back in Tarentum,” said Anshar. “I prefer seclusion.”

“We'll see what can be arranged,” replied Aura. “I think, though, you should join House Hoth. They are based on Solyait, and I think you can find what you're looking for there.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Anshar, reclining back in his chair. Triela sighed to herself. It looked like she was going to be stuck in the middle of no where again.