

SINS OF THE FATHER

WRITTEN BY AURA TA'VAR
37 ABY



Meeting room
Caracalla, Imperial I-class Star Destroyer
Lyra-3K-a system

Aura Ta'var sat surrounded by members of the Triumvirate and some of their support staff, each of which stared her down. They wore the signature emblem of the Severian Principate, laid in golden thread, and doubt was displayed clearly across their faces. The Zeltron subconsciously smoothed out her Jedi robes before continuing her presentation.

"Thank you for joining me today. You probably assume that I'm here to persuade you to give the Brotherhood another chance. But you'd be wrong. I'm not here to make up your mind. I'm here to show you what they are capable of so you can choose for yourself. That is if you'll let me."

Her audience gasped in mild shock and looked at each other in disbelief. Kamlin Xarel, a female Falleen with jade green skin, was the first to reply.

"But aren't you part of them? Why would you hurt your interests?"

Aura smiled bitterly. "You don't know what they've done. Let me show you."

"Show us? You think that just because you're a Jedi that we'll trust you? You serve a Sith Lord after all."

"If you think I serve a Sith Lord then you're sorely mistaken. I'll never serve one again," seethed the Zeltron, letting her emotions come through.

General Xarel narrowed her dark purple eyes in silent judgment, making note of the Zeltron's choice of words and the display that went with them. Aura tossed a data rod across the table toward them, only increasing Kamlin's view of the Zeltron as an immature child. *Blunt but straightforward*, she thought as she picked up the data rod and handed it to her intelligence chief.

"All the data you want is on there but you won't believe me until I show you. Let. Me. Show. You. If not for me then for the well-being of your citizens," begged Aura.

"One moment while we discuss this in private," said an elderly Twi'lek with teal skin as she put a reassuring hand on the Falleen's arm.

"Of course," said the High Councillor as she watched the trio and their entourage go into a back room, their security detail left behind to guard her.

Kamlin, the Triumvir of Steel, was the first to respond once the door was closed and they were finally alone.

"She's just like every other Zeltron I've met. Emotional children, the lot of them."

"I felt the truth in her plea, Kamlin," replied General Vairya Muktiba, Triumvir of Oaths. "You said yourself you don't trust the Dark Brotherhood. Are you going to pass up an opportunity to prove yourself right?"

The intel chief standing behind the Falleen held back a sarcastic remark, settling for a faint smirk as he went and busied himself with a holoprojector. Inserting the data rod into it, he took a quick look at what the Jedi had to offer them.

"This isn't a friend-making mission, Vairya. We're here to find out what they're up to and why," shot back Xarel.

"We are here to gather intelligence on an unknown entity called the Dark Brotherhood so that we can make sure they aren't a threat. We're making a better world for ourselves and I want to know if this Dark Brotherhood thinks and acts like our old imperial schuttas. So get over here and look at what the Jedi has offered us," ordered Adlez Freewoman, Triumvir of Words. It was barely a whisper but it appeared as if she had a gift of commanding others' attention.

The others turned around and went to join her by the holoprojector, drawn to the faint blue glow. A few minutes passed in silence until the intel chief finally passed on a particular piece of data and spoke, this time very serious.

"Comrades, if this is true we need to investigate this as soon as possible. These numbers, it can't be."

The Zeltron waited patiently for the Principate leaders to return, the shifting of armed guards the only sounds in an otherwise empty room. She felt her heart flutter with unease, each beat of her heart louder than the last. Aura passed the time by recounting to herself the rest of her presentation, ignoring the sentries around her. Finally, the back door opened and they returned, each with a very serious face that gave the Jedi hope.

"Okay. Where do we have to go to see it?" asked General Freewoman.

"Far away. I only know of one location myself, but we'll need one of your Imperial looking ships and we'll have to be quick."

General Xarel walked over and motioned for two armed guards to stand next to her.

"We can do that but you'll have to give up your lightsaber for now. I'm not going to let armed Jedi on one of my ships."

"No. This is part of me, part of my life. I have no reason to use it against you," the Jedi replied reflexively.

Guns activated and tracked towards her head.

"That wasn't a request. If you want to trap us on a ship with you, then we get your lightsaber until we **all** return safely," the Triumvir of Steel demanded.

"Hun, it's best if you comply. We don't like saber-wielding strangers or strangers at all for that matter," said the Triumvir of Words, trying to keep the peace.

"I see." Aura let the words linger for a breath or two and then said, "Well then, please be careful with it. Jedi make strong bonds with their saber and it would hurt if you damaged it."

The Jedi handed it over to General Muktiba, who despite her lack of conversation seemed the most trustworthy. General Xarel was not amused.

"I said to me, Jedi. Not—"

"Kamlin, this will do. Vairya will protect it just fine. Now, shall we move to the ship? It's ready."

Everyone got up in agreement and followed the Triumvir of Words out to the hangar. Aura took a deep breath and voluntarily walked in between the trio of women, already reaching out to the crystal inside her saber one more time as if to say *I'll be back, don't worry*. Before she could think much about it, they had already walked to an imperial shuttle that was prepped and ready for departure. The Triumvirate, their entourage and security detail, and Aura Ta'var boarded it immediately. The Zeltron took a seat in the back of the cramped shuttle, the pilot already querying her for coordinates. Almost as if it was *deja vu*, she inputted them into the man's datapad, the black-clad pilot already prepping the jump to lightspeed. Her new companions looked at her curiously.

"So, where are we going, Jedi," asked the intel chief with intelligent-looking brows as he held up his datapad with the data rod stuck in it. "There are multiple locations in your files but many don't have coordinates."

"I only know of one," the Zeltron lied, "and that's where we are going. You'll see. It will get the point across. Trust me, just remember we have to be quick."

"You keep saying be quick about it. Why?"

"Because they aren't my friends and they aren't nice people. While we travel, let me know if you have any questions for me about the data. I'll be meditating."

"I'll let you know."

The intel chief read on in silence, occasionally handing around the datapad to the Triumvirate to read. Aura Ta'var shifted in her seat to see out of the shuttle view, the swirling light of hyperspace almost hypnotic. She could almost feel her dread inching closer and closer to her as if gravity pulled her towards it rather than the engines of the ship humming beneath her.

"Where did you get these numbers from?" asked General Xarel.

"They're impossible," remarked General Muktiba.

"If you're lying, you'll regret it," threatened General Freewoman with a smile that spoke of daggers.

The Zeltron pulled her eyes away from the viewports and looked over her inquisitive company. "I wish I was. I really wish I was."

Unknown system

Outer-rim Territories

The Imperial shuttle fell out of lightspeed, the slight but familiar jerk bringing their destination finally in sight. The Triumvirate crowded around the pilot, trying to get a good look at whatever they had come so far to see. It was empty space for the most part, some large planets in the distance dotting the landscape infrequently. They were alone with only the celestial bodies to keep them company.

"A rather unimpressive sight," remarked the Triumvir of Steel.

Aura Ta'var got up and pointed to a distance planet first, the largest of the bunch. "Land there first. Then we'll visit the others."

"Do it," ordered General Freewoman. "Let's see if this Jedi is telling the truth."

The Zeltron ignored them and stood stoically in the back cabin, reaching out to the Force to keep her steady as strong emotions from old memories came back to her. She could feel the air thick with turbolasers as if it were yesterday. Her chest felt as if it had a knot in it as she remembered how it felt in the Force.

She remained silent as the shuttle descended onto a barren rock of various hues of brown and black, odd blobs of color conglomerating together. Aura Ta'var led the convoy of Principate diplomats towards the hatch, yelling for the pilot to land closer to the largest mass of gray. Jets of steam puffed out as they walked down the hatchway and the Zeltron couldn't help but feel imperial. It was nothing to smile about but it held a certain degree of humor given her company.

The Jedi marched relentlessly toward the scorched-marked shapes. *It wouldn't take long*, she told herself. The sound of unpleasant cracks went off under her feet whenever she walked on harder ground and she dared not look down when ominous shades of ivory poked through softer silt. For several meters they walked into the heart of the massed shapes, smaller dwellings turning into larger buildings with a large castle in the center.

The Jedi stopped. "I'd like to show you using the Force what happened here. I can only do this one at a time. I encourage the rest of you to look around in the meanwhile."

The Triumvir of Oaths sat down first, the Triumvir of Words waiting in line behind her.

"It helps me focus if we hold hands," Aura asked as she put offered one of her own, the other grabbing the ground beneath her.

"What nonsense," said General Xarel as she walked off to search the area.

General Muktiba took the Zeltron's hand and waited patiently. The Jedi took a deep breath and reached out to the Force within the soil itself, asking it to let loose the memories of how it came to be dead soil. Imagery filled her mind easily but then came the hard part. Aura concentrated hard on communicating it to the Human across from her, focusing her energy on fully expressing what she was experiencing through the Force.

For several seconds all was quiet but then Muktiba let out a gasp as the Human's head was suddenly full of images they had never possessed. Streaks of red fell from the sky like rain as frightened screams of faceless people echoed off each other in the tight confines of fleeing civilians. *Boom! Boom! Crack!* Buildings fell into piles of rubble while some obstinately stood tall, the castle the pre-dominate example.

A child's voice screamed out *Papa!* as their father fell to the ground with a dull thud, the weight of a stone wall had fallen on top of him. Her mother dragged her away to safety only to be incinerated by a jet of red light. The child cried as they shook off her dead mother's hand, the sole remains of their mother. Families were splitting up everywhere you looked as children were left to fight for the darkest of corners to hide in. Hours compressed into minutes as the red lasers from the sky fell with no intermission, all the way until the only building still standing was the castle itself. A lone child's hand reached out from a crack in fallen rubble but no one was there to grab it. Everyone else was dead and all one could hear was crying. The vision skipped forward to the child's last breath and then disappeared.

General Muktiba was visibly shaken, a look of terror upon her face. Aura Ta'var was already crying and didn't try to stop it. The Triumvirs of Oaths took her hand away and backed off, speechless. General Freewoman went to her but the Human only gestured her toward the Jedi. Adlez cautiously sat in front of Aura and took her hand.

"Show me what you showed her," the general ordered.

The Jedi repeated the process with similar results except for this time her concentration was broken near the end by a bone tossed between the three of them. Aura and the other Triumvirs jumped instinctively. General Xarel's face was red with anger.

"What is this? What happened here?! This whole area is full of bones, a lot of them."

Aura stared determinedly at the Falleen and said, "The Brotherhood paid them a visit. This is what they do to people they have a problem with."

"I don't believe it. You would need—"

"Lots of ships? Someone willing to pull the trigger? Well, they had it. What else did you expect from a Sith Lord? I trust you haven't forgotten what Palpatine did to your precious empire," the High Councillor scathingly replied.

The Falleen walked over and slapped her across the face but held back on her second blow. Aura didn't reach out for her saber nor lifted a hand to defend herself.

"Kamlin, it might be true. She showed us destruction. Utter destruction. There was no mercy. It was horrifying... Leave her be and let's check it out more thoroughly. I doubt the Jedi understands what she just implied," said General Freewoman in as soothing a tone she could muster given the circumstances.

"Fine, but the Jedi isn't going anywhere near me. You two look horrible. I'll show you what I've found."

The Falleen walked off, the other two following behind her as they further explored what was now a worldwide tomb. Aura caught her breath and solemnly made her way to a large open circle several meters away, what used to be a popular fountain to visit on hot days. On top of its spout was a small projector with a data rod inserted. As she walked in its vicinity, a simple stream of names reappeared, still on names that started with A. The Jedi sat forlornly next to a pile of bones and hung her head, the soil's tale was heavy on her soul after two retellings.

Aura wasn't sure how much was understood but the two women seemed sufficiently horrified to give her hope they had understood the magnitude of the situation. The Zeltron wrapped her

arms around her legs and watched the names scroll by while she waited for her companions. She didn't move nor did she speak. All she did was stare at the names. Finally, her party returned and interrupted her reverie.

"What's this?" asked one of the Triumvirs, Aura didn't care who at the moment.

"The names of the dead, as best as could be found from records. It started playing at the beginning a while ago," she replied despondently.

"That's, that's horrible," said General Muktiba, aghast at the size of it all.

There was a moment of silence until General Xarel spoke out. "Respectfully, we need to leave. The Jedi said to hurry and we have other planets to see."

"I almost don't want to see them but I feel like we should," replied General Freewoman.

"We need more data," replied General Xarel.

Aura let them bicker for a moment and then snapped. "Will you schuttas shut it?"

All three went quiet in shock. Kamlin looked as if she wanted to slap the Jedi again but resisted.

"We're here to honor the dead and learn from their mistakes, not run away from it. The General is right. We need to go. Now let's move," the Zeltron ordered as she marched back towards the ship.

Her bewildered guests followed behind her, quietly talking amongst themselves. Aura reached the shuttle first and paced around it, her boots digging a circular path around the craft. On her third pass, a flash of color caught her eye. The tip of a green blade cut through the dark loose soil around the ship, a slight breeze barely moving it. The Jedi's heart raced as she dived towards it and dug around it, frantically tossing the topsoil aside. After a few moments, the top layer gave way and revealed a small bed of scattered blades, most were still infantile.

She pressed a hand to the ground and felt them through the Force. She started to laugh, the irony of the situation too much. *Life finds a way, doesn't it*, she thought.

"You okay, Jedi? We're leaving," said the Twi'lek, a concerned look on her face.

"I told you she's weird," huffed the Falleen as he reboarded the shuttle.

Aura got back inside the ship and took her seat, quiet but oddly hopeful. She had found life, simple life but still new life. The Force had not abandoned it. Perhaps it would once again regain

its lush forests, in time. Maybe, just maybe, the Force could restore its balance. It was the best hope she had at the moment.

“What do you call this world?” asked General Muktiba.

The Zeltron simply said “Judecca” and kept her silence afterward.

The four of them visited each of the remaining planets, in turn, each a similar sight. For each one, Aura showed them again through the Force. Each time they recoiled and wanted to leave sooner. Finally, they turned back and headed home. No one spoke until they landed back in the Lyra-3K-a System. As they filed out of the shuttle, Vairya handed back her lightsaber, not a dent on it.

“Thanks, Jedi. We appreciate the history lesson and we’ll look into it further.”

“Thank you for listening. Now all you have to do is decide for yourself what you want to do with it but never forget what they’re capable of. The Brotherhood may have a new leader but many of his staff helped ensure that mission was a success. Their victims don’t get apologies or war reparations. Odan-Urr has felt the sting of that as well and you better believe we haven’t forgotten that lesson. We won’t let it happen again. Oh and the Collective isn’t any better. Just ask the Dark Brotherhood about them and they’ll have plenty of dirt worth checking into. Be vigilant and don’t let them trick you.”

“Thank you, Jedi. You have given us much to think about. But you should leave us now before you are spotted,” replied General Freewoman.

“Very well. May the Force be with you,” replied Aura as she slightly bowed and left for her ship.

The Triumvirate waited for the High Councillor to leave before speaking.

“Good intel today. Much to consider. I even got some good samples,” offered the intelligence chief, who was rather adept at not being noticed.

“Helpful, yes, but I doubt her innocence. I know the look she gave us when she was on Judecca. I heard her words and how she chose them. She has a guilty face.”

“You think she—”

“No. I don’t think she killed them but I bet she helped.”

“Makes no difference. Knowledge is knowledge,” chimed in the intel chief.

“Knowledge can be dangerous. We’ve only heard one side but imagine if the Dark Brotherhood did all that. Even if we verify it was them, we will have to handle this very delicately,” replied the Triumvirs of Words. “At least we can sleep soundly knowing what our enemy is capable of. We won’t let another Palpatine push us around.”