

The first days had been the hardest. The fall of the Brotherhood from power had preceded the collapse of Clan Naga Sadow. The Collective had met Clan Naga Sadow in our home system after the fact. Ships had gone down. The *Damnation* had been lost. With that defeat, the spirits of the Clan had hit a greater low than he had ever seen. Little by little, the Clan had splintered off. The Keibatsu continued to work in the background as the Sadowan fleet wandered from place to place.

Eventually, Sanguinius had turned from the head of Naga Sadow. I had my own brief time in the seat of power. After that, my second took over, and Sadow was lead with the overt hand of a Keibatsu on the throne. It was not enough. Our structure deteriorated. Where we should have found strength, we found strife. Old feelings surfaced, and people started to strike at each other. It started in little, passive-aggressive things. In time though, words exchanged became blows traded.

Instead of being unified, the Clan members started to draw lines in the sand. The Sons and Daughters of Sadow became fractured from the common Clan members. The Conclave became increasingly secretive. Power struggles began between increasingly disparate groups. Where once there had been some semblance of unity, there was derision and mockery. At the time, I had figured it was just the way that the Dark Side worked. After all, the strong would rise up, with those too weak being burned away or consumed.

I could not have realized how wrong I really was. The squabbling is understandable with a bunch of Dark Jedi, Sith, and fence sitting gray cloaks. Even between Sith there are differences of ideology. A certain amount of cooperation for the common good was logical. I guess the old saying about plans and first contact with the enemy can prove frighteningly true. The injection of the Collective into Orian, the intrusion at what had once been our secure home, having it torn away a second time, was too much. Where I had once had a tenuous grasp on how to keep our Clan afloat, I found doubt gripping my heart. When we had a home, we had somewhere to retreat to in the darkest time. With a convoy of ships, it was a lot hard. We wandered from system to system and in time the stress of living on our mobile fleet proved to be too great to bear.

Over time, we began to lose ships. Sometimes, it was not quite so noticeable. We would see a snub fighter here or a freighter there that might come up missing. Then, a few transports would disappear. It wasn't until we lost a cruiser that I realized how badly things had degraded though. That wasn't even the worst. More painful was the occasion upon which I elected that we send our admiral as an envoy of peace to meet with some locals. They had claimed to have common interests with our forsaken Clan. I had been foolishly hopeful. That optimism collapsed though when a Collective bigwig showed up at the same meeting.

Accusations were made, an arrest occurred and with one misstep Clan Naga Sadow lost our greatest military mind. We still had the likes of former Consuls and officers in the chain of command, so we wouldn't collapse overnight. It didn't matter though. The loss of Simonetti

served as a death knell. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that was the moment that my own nerves failed me. I had lost enough over the course of my life. The fall of the Orian system to the Collective marked the last time I saw my daughter. Her mother, my beloved Tasha'Vel, refused to leave the system without the young lass. I wish I could have been so brave.

I kept telling myself that I was working for the good of the Clan. I kept saying that I was a symbol of stability, or whatever other pathetic prattle that comforted me in those melancholy days. It was all a lie though. I was scared. There really is no excuse for what happened. Nothing I can think of would begin to hold water.

No, I ran from the Clan back to my old haunts on Corellia. It was not a lack of care that drove me. For that matter, I still hope to hear one day from Tasha'Vel. Honestly, I have little doubt that I would be an unwelcome face on the Versea Estate, let alone back in the Orian system. Family ties can be rough like that when you abandon one of your own. Trust me, I have spent a lot of time at the bottom of a bottle because of my own cowardice at the moment. Though my wife's wellbeing is constantly in the back of my mind, I have little doubt that my wee Lyna'Vel was destroyed. That is all the Collective has done to me- destroy the things I cherish.

The machinations of the Collective were far from the end of my hardships. Once back on Corellia, I was faced with even greater troubles. The death of my parents had been a moment of catharsis for a younger Bentre, but destroying your progenitor is less than helpful when you are at your lowest point. The authorities already had suspicion of foul play, but that wasn't even the worst of it. You see, my parents had declared me legally dead about a year and a half before I rung the life out of my mother by the neck, or caved my father's head in with his own phrenbi stick.

If only I had entertained some of my family's protestations, or sought some peace with them I might have had a leg to stand upon. The funny thing about the distance that is an intrinsic part of being a member of a cult of Force users is that even living family members are put off when you show up on their doorstep. I started to look up extended family, and found only strangers. I hadn't realized how much of a black sheep that my father had been in his own family, and I never knew a lot about my mother's family.

I was relegated to the streets for quite some time. It wasn't a matter of lacking skills or opportunities- those kinds of things came with time- but a distinct lack of direction. I wanted to be fulfilled, and working as a banker or doing some entry-level coding for datapad applications was not doing anything for me. Once a Rollmaster, I had found purpose in keeping power, in the pursuit of power, but could not find any comparable parallel in the poultry civilian life I had once lead.

I needed something to fill the gap in my heart that my wife and daughter had once filled, and despair kept an iron grip upon my heart. Sullen, dejected and listless I took to the bottle harder than ever before. If I had my hands upon a Bottle of Sadow, I do not think that I could conjure

enough alcohol to drown my despair. I became less than a shadow of my former self. I tried not to think back to my past affiliations or actions. There was always the creeping feeling that Takagari KogaRyu or another vengeful member of my former Clan would come back to haunt me. When nothing occurred, I launched into greater paranoia, to the point that I expected my former Anzati Quaestor to appear. Doubtless, he would consume my 'soup' and leave me a dried husk. Better, I think, that I deserve.

Eventually, I managed to snag a job despite my homeless state. I would work several hours each night in a warehouse, moving boxes between pallets and trucks. It was incredibly dull work, but over time I managed to scrounge together some credits. I had to resist the siren's cry of Corellian Whiskey and emotional self-flagellation.

It was months before I had a comfortable cushion of credits to work from. I did not give up my warehouse job, but used my off hours to start researching. I did not have the resources I had possessed as a member of the Shadow Academy Society, so the work was slow and taxing. Perhaps, I should have been looking for a better job to move up into, rather than wallowing in the menial nature of my occupation. Instead, I focused upon trying to track down what had happened to the Orian system.

More and more often I found myself thinking back to the system I had come to regard for several years as home. I wondered about what happened to my wife. I wondered about what happened to my daughter. I yearned to hold them both in my arms. I knew that it was a pointless fantasy to obsess over, but I just couldn't help myself. So I would spend endless hours poring through any public resource hoping to find something. It was pointless tedium, but it gave me a focal point to keep my attention. It was therapeutic in its own way.

It wasn't until I received an anonymous message that I took serious stock of my life now. To be fair, anonymous does not even begin to describe the message though. Once you know what it is, it is really hard to mistake the symbol of Clan Naga Sadow from anything else. There was the image of a knife at the top of the holonet message. This made me stop, not due to shock or confusion, but rather I found it a bit humorous. I had heard of sending 'a knife in the mail' but I doubted this was the intended meaning of the phrase.

"Naga Sadow does not forget." The message was blunt and to the point, and frighteningly so. Corellia had been supposed a safe haven, yet in that moment all pretense of safety was lost. I had thought myself amongst the greatest slicers the Brotherhood had to offer, yet I had been revealed. "The Clan calls all its wandering members back to the roost. The time has not yet come for the strength of Sadow to be crushed."

The image carried on in those kinds of terms, with that kind of bravado, for several more lines. I started to compose a return message immediately. I asked about the Brotherhood, I asked about our fleet, who served as Consul, and many other minute details about my old Clan. I typed many more questions than these, but they were chiefest among the myriad of details I lacked. I did not get the answers I had expected.

No, I got about the last answer that I had expected. "You left me for dead, Kairn'tel. You left me to perish Bentre. We swore loyalty to each other, and you abandoned that. You shattered our family, even more than the death of our child did. Your cowardice means little when the chance to redeem ourselves has come." My heart shattered anew realizing who had tracked me down.

"Tasha," I wrote, practically ready to gush out my heart in my return message, "I had no idea what happened. I don't understand how you survived, given the destruction wrought by the Collective in our own system. Where did the Clan resupply and rebuild our own Navy? Before I even think about returning, there is another question that I have to ask: What about us? Is there any possibility you won't want to kill me, or that we could ever have any semblance of peace between us?" I felt desperation in that moment.

"Remnants of the Emperor's Hammer, exiles themselves allied with us. We pulled a Palpatine, building a fleet in secret. Words comes on occasion of the other Clans running amok in the galaxy. Meet in Kuat. We can discuss the details there. As for the two of us- are you serious?"

That was the last message that I ever received from you. The thing is, I couldn't ever bring myself to return to the fold. That is why I am sending you this message, Tasha'Vel. Perhaps you can carry my story back to the Clan. I wish I had the heart to rally back to the Clan. The news of our daughter's demise is a greater pain than I can bear. Perhaps I will manage to finally drown myself at the bottom of a bottle. Perhaps you will send another after me, or even come to end my life yourself.

Perhaps you will find a sad shell of a man. Perhaps I won't even stop your blade as it passes through my throat. Perhaps I will not raise a lightsaber in retaliation. Perhaps I am tired of the fight. Perhaps the pursuit of power became a hollow goal with no end in sight. Perhaps I realized that the path of an Elder or the machinations of a Dark Council member were not in my future. Perhaps, you would find my standing strong and defiant to the very last.

I can say this: I will not come quietly. A Brotherhood so easily shattered by hardships, as ours was, is not worthy of service or support. I have my own regrets to deal with. If you come after me or leave me alone, that will be your own choice. Though, knowing you perhaps you would just find these words as more of a challenge than dissuasion. Time will tell about that, I suppose.