**[Caperion System](https://wiki.darkjedibrotherhood.com/view/Caperion_System),** [**Seraph**](https://wiki.darkjedibrotherhood.com/view/Seraph)**,** [**Moon of Ragnath**](https://wiki.darkjedibrotherhood.com/view/Ragnath)**,** [**Caelestis City**](https://wiki.darkjedibrotherhood.com/view/Caelestis_City)

**Adroniam Tower 10th Floor, Quaestor’s Quarters**

**39 ABY**

Lighting split the dim afternoon sky above the megalopolis that was Caelestis City. Constant flashes of electrical discharge crackled amidst broiling, dark grey and black clouds that seemed to eject an unending supply of autumn rain. It was a dark and brooding storm that was in its infancy, and unlikely to wane for many hours.

Raleien Sonavarret looked out through thick, steel-framed windows upon the city and the storm before him. Eyes the colour of lush summer grass brightened like polished emeralds with every discharge of electricity. A face pockmarked with decades of scars from battles forgotten amidst the legacy of the fallen Empire was fixed in a perpetual frown. The Quaestor might have been looking upon the storm, but in his mind’s eye all he could see were nightmares that glowed red, crystalline forms that howled for blood and tore though bodies like thin paper –

*Stop*, he told himself. *Breathe*.

He closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath in, his diaphragm filling with sweet air. And then he blew out from his mouth, focused on expending nearly every particle of air from his body. In, and out. *In… and out*.

*BOOM!*

Raleien’s eyes snapped open with the thunder. The breathing exercise wasn’t working. He could still see the slow, plodding form of the Restoration Troopers in the corner of his eye. They were coming for him.

Perhaps the music might work after all if he focused hard enough. Yes, focus on the orchestra. It’s damn good work.

The cacophony of the tempest was accompanied by the soft melody of an orchestra in Raleien’s opulent room. It emanated from a speaker which sat on a gilded wooden table to one side of the open-concept space. It was a collection of contemporary Pantoran symphonies, a gift from his new “master”, Kamjin. The clap and rumble of distant thunder that followed in the wake of lighting was a primal harmony that intertwined with the sorrowful piece of mortal-made music and the torrential downpour outside. Together, they created a depressing euphony of sound that was a perfect match for the Pantoran captain’s grim mood.

A soft chime sounded through his quarters. The doorbell. Someone was at the door. Perhaps if he just ignored it they would assume he was absent.

Moments later, another toll sounded. And another. And then another, and the frequency of the call increased as the seconds became minutes.

Raleien felt anger surging within him. Was someone toying with him? Were one of those acolytes playing a game, sensing his despair? They would not have the chance –

Something pierced the door! The Loyalist spun and watched in enraged shock as a green lightsaber carved a small rectangular hole through his reinforced durasteel door. Within a few seconds, the piece fell to the floor of his room and spewed molten metal from its edges. Through the hole he saw the pale human face of one of his subordinates, plump cheeks flush with drink.

“Listen here you fat toad, let me in,” she barked as Raleien began to move closer. She had certainly drunk a lot this night, for her speech was slurred.

Xathia Edraven. A human woman who was equally dangerous with blade, Force, or a computer. He and Xathia had struck up something of a friendship during his months with the Clan, and he valued her frank counsel and often humorous drunken antics. She was a wealth of knowledge on a variety of topics, and one of the few people who he could have a more civilized conversation with using the most backwards of language.

Yet he had never expected her to try and destroy his door, or to come upon him at this of all moments.

“Why won’t you let me into my room?” She asked.

Raleien paused, a confused look plastered on his face.

“Well, because this is my room,” the Pantoran responded.

“Don’t you dare lie to me, blue skin,” Xathia said, brandishing her green lightsaber. “I’ll come in and cut you if you don’t let me into my room. Wait, why are *you* in *my* room?”

“This isn’t your room. This is *my* room. And you’re drunk.”

“Well, why the hell didn’t you say so!”

“I did but –“

“And thank you, captain obvious. I am drunk. Pleasantly so. Now how do I get in here…”

“You’re not coming into my –“

Xathia cut him off, “Shut up. Let me in and let’s have a drink and a game, eh?”

Without waiting for Raleien’s permission, the woman fiddled with the control panel that included his doorbell and other controls. In a few moments and amidst a few sparks, the door opened, and she strode in. Though she smelled faintly of cleaning alcohol, she was steady on her feet as she took stock of his room. She looked from side to side, noting the dining area, the large bed, the small armour locker, the bathroom, and the massive windows.

“Certainly, pays to be a Quaestor,” she remarked. “Fine room here.”

“A bit too open for my tastes,” Raleien said.

“Might be open, but there’s some fine protections around this room. Programmed some of ‘em myself.”

She reached into her equite robes and pulled out a fairly large flask. She removed the clasp and stopper and took a swig as she strode further into the room. With her left hand she wiped her face and leaned on a finely carved wooden chair, one of eight that were part of this room’s overly elaborate dining set. Her scarred face lit up in a smile as she saw the sabacc deck on his dining room table.

Her braid swung as she turned to look at Raleien, eyes alight.

“You’re staying?” Raleien asked dejectedly. He had some talents, but forcing a seasoned Sith warrior from his apartments was not one of them.

“Aye, and we’re playing a few rounds. Please, sit.”

Xathia’s speech was no longer slurred. Though the flush of a deep buzz remained, she spoke with a gruff yet very sober voice that made Raleien a little unnerved. No one suddenly becomes sober just like that, not even these Sith types.

The Pantoran sat across from Xathia, who was busy shuffling the sabacc deck. The flask – no, two flasks also sat on the table between them. Where had the second come from?

He said nothing, unsure of what to do. Should he call security? Not that they could do much.

“I’ll have you know I did not give you permission to be here, let alone to ruin my door.”

She snorted.

“Leave. Now.”

“How about we play for a hand pot, fifty credit buy-in, Jhabacc style.”

Raleien’s temper got the better of him and he slammed his right fist, hard, into the table. The flasks jolted and there was a slight indentation on the thick wooden surface.

“I am not in the mood for your games, woman. Get out and leave me be.”

Xathia looked up, her own viridescent eyes locked with his.

“Should you really be alone right now?” She asked, her tone soft and percipient.

The Sith set the now shuffled sabacc deck down to one side and took another swig from one of the flasks, waiting for his answer.

Raleien sat motionless, stupefied at her conspicuous question. Those with their precious Force could sense the emotions of others, especially strong emotions. But how much did she know of his feelings? Was he laid bare to her, entirely? The thought made him shiver.

“No,” he finally replied. “Perhaps not. But –“

Xathia raised her hand, forestalling his question.

“But how did I know?” She began to deal the cards. “You’ve been around a little while, blue man. Ever since Dandoran. And it doesn’t take a shrink to know that something troubles you. We Sith – well, something troubles us all, truth be told. So, when we see it, that pain and suffering in some else? We know. I know.”

The Loyalist nodded, expression blank but his mind reeling with flashes of blood red terror and an immense, almost crushing vulnerability he had never felt in his life. Memories and emotions boiled inside him, a mental tempest that rivalled even the most powerful of storms. Lightning flashed once, twice, perhaps five times outside the window, illuminating his features and playing shadows across his drawn, trembling brow. He was taken ever deeper into his past, playing through battles and slaughters he had buried deep within himself, never to be remembered and -

“Raleien.”

He returned. The Pantoran sucked in a slow, deep breath and held it for a long moment before finally releasing the air. He opened his eyes – he hadn’t realized they had closed – and looked at his cards, ignoring her concerned expression.

After a long moment he used to collect himself, Raleien said, “Well you broke into my apartments so we might as well play.”

“Get ready to lose your credits, then,” Xathia replied. The slight slur to her words had returned and she seemed to have dropped the matter of his mental health, for which he was extremely thankful.

“And no cheating! No Force, no slight of hand, just fair play.”

“Now where’s the fun in that?”

They began their game. The storm outside continued to pound the city, and winds howled fierce enough to be heard through the reinforced glass. But inside, at that large table, Xathia and Raleien played hand after hand and took swig after swig of the undeniably vile liquid the human woman had on hand. They had paused their game briefly for Raleien to open a nearby cupboard, within which was a bottle of some fine offworld whisky that was much more palatable – and twice as strong – as the previous concoction they had stomached. After hours of credits flowing back and forth across the table and a nearly empty bottle among the finished flasks, the two outrageously inebriated players finally called the match to its conclusion.

Yet like the persistent storm outside which had yet to let up, so too had a distant part of Raleien’s mind harboured the trauma he so desperately wanted to avoid throughout the evening. Or was it morning, now? If so, it was the early hours

“Well,” Xathia said as she sat back in her chair and puffed her cheeks. “That whole no cheating thing wasn’t fun, as I had suspected.”

“Why, because you didn’t steal every damn credit from me?” the Loyalist replied, his own speech now slurred slightly.

She shrugged. “Just most of them.”

“Aye, you did at that. Took probably a month’s pay and some old bonuses off my person. Best spend that cash on some better booze next time. That poison you brought was awful.”

“Decided to try something new tonight. I regret it immensely.”

The duo laughed, both pleasantly intoxicated and slightly slumped in their chairs. Numb. Almost numb enough to forget entirely.

Almost.

“Raleien,” Xathia said. She sounded serious again, but she was much more drunk now in actual fact. “I’ll say it plain, old man. You’ve got some demons.”

“That I do,” he replied with blunt honesty.

A silence hung in the air for what felt like an eternity. They both sat in their chairs, eyes gazing outwards into nothingness, their minds eye focused inwards.

Eventually, the Sith said, “What are you going to do about it?”

“Is this therapy, now?” the old soldier responded, suddenly truculent. He was stuck in his ways, and he didn’t want to open up about – well, about *that.* Or did he?

Xathia sat forwards and stared at one of the flasks, one hand slightly out in front of her. After a few seconds one of the flask’s levitated a few finger-widths above the table before flying at Raleien’s face. He managed to bat the flask aside, though barely. He felt his rage beginning to rise again.

“What the hell was that for?” He demanded, sitting up.

“For being stubborn.”

“I’ve been stubborn for some sixty odd years, and I can remain stubborn as long as I damn well please.”

“Then it’s for being a threat to this Clan. Raleien, you’re sick. Up here.” Xathia pointed at her head. “It’s nothing to be ashamed of. Most of us are. But the difference between, say, you and I? I recognize my pain, my anger. It’s real, and I let it be so. And I channel it into raw power that could let me cut you in half right here if I wanted to.”

“I don’t know if I could stand up, so tonight’s as good as any,” Raleien said, using the poor joke as a deflection.

“This isn’t a damn joke.” The human woman leaned forward, hands resting on the table, her expression one of untamed rage. “I’m a researcher and a tinkerer. But you! You’re in a position of command. I might not care for a good majority of the scum in this Clan, but the one’s I do care about are in serious danger under your command unless you start getting yourself together.” She was shouting now. “Even now I can sense your pain. This suffering inside you is raw and roiling. It is what we Sith can identify a mile away, and what we feed on for our power. You don’t have these abilities. You’ve got to find another path.”

“I’m fine. It only happens once in awhile.”

“More like once a day.”

“Every few days, then.”

“Captain. Get help. Please.” Her last word sounded almost pleading. How odd for a Sith to show so much compassion.

He sat silent for a time and stared at his thick, scarred hands. Part of him screamed that she was right. He should talk to someone – a doctor, maybe. And get help. But another part of him wanted to fight on and forget. To ball those emotions and experiences and stuff them into the deepest and crowded crevasse of his conscious. He knew that path would lead to his undoing, but he hesitated. Because the former would lead to the deepest vulnerability he would ever experience in his life. The type of vulnerability he feared more than death and defeat.

Xathia sat silent and motionless while Raleien pondered. She watched him through heavy-lidded and keen eyes, waiting on his next response.

“Fine.”

“You’ll do it?”

“Yes.”

Some of the weight he felt in his soul lifted at this decision. One in which he had not expected so much conviction.

But now he had to figure out what exactly he could do. Perhaps see a doctor.

He would figure it all out, he knew. One step at a time.

His eyelids fluttered closed, and the world – and his mind – went blank with the slumber of deep drink.