

Bentre ran fingers along the crystalline drinking vessel that he had been given when he first entered the hall. When he had entered, it had held but common water, but since that time it had been filled up time and again with a variety of liquors and beers from more worlds than he could name. He had a nice buzz going.

“It’s really kind of crazy.” He looked to the haggard form of the Quaestor beside him. “You know what I mean?”

“Yes, sir.” The younger man looked into the rum the Overlord had brought him.

“Hey, hey, hey,” Bentre raised a finger, “hey, hey, hey now. This is the Shadow Feast. There is no sir here. We are both of the Society. Rank means little here. We all have our claim to fame.”

The words were not reflective of his feelings on any normal day, but the Sadow was not here to lord his position or accomplishments over others, for once. The idea of the Shadow Feast, and the successes of the Clan, had offered him a respite from the stress and chaos. He worked as the Keeper of Holocrons, as the Overlord of Clan Naga Sadow, and as the leader of his house. He had been a curator of many secrets, and kept a lot even from those nearest and dearest to him. This evening, he wanted to enjoy the camaraderie he had missed since his days leading up to his Knighthood.

“Yes,” Takagari paused in a moment of uncertainty, “sir.”

“I mean it.” Bentre motioned with his glass, sloshing some of his rum on the table as he did so. “Tonight I am not anybody’s sir. I am just another operative of the Society. Even my days as Magistrate are behind me.” He sipped at the glass tenderly, choosing to ignore his spill. “Well,” he shrugged, “at least for now. I have only had a few interesting encounters outside of the Clan, since that time.”

The Battlelord looked to the Warlord, expectantly. As much as the Sadow wanted for his subordinate, dare he say his friend, to relax, it did not appear to be in the cards for this evening. “Sir.”

Bentre sighed. “I guess you will want to hear about one of my expeditions or something, won’t you?” The Warlord shook his head, and swirled the fluid in his glass. “The actual digs and hunts are not very interesting in and of themselves. The more interesting things out there are things like the artifacts.”

“Like the find on Yavin IV?” Takagari Darkhawk watched his Consul with a slight smile.

Bentre laughed at the question. “I would have expected that you would prefer to hear about a trip that you weren’t directly involved in, my friend.”

“Yes, sir.”

The Sadow winced at the title. “There are quite a few. The most interesting had to be about a dagger I came across. I had been looking through the files we had aboard the *Perdition*. Some are the bits of the data we were able to recover from the archives on Orian and Tarthos before we left. Some of it had also been from backups I had made from the likes of the archives of the Shadow Academy or the Holocron Library. There is, as you can imagine, a lot to go through. The most interesting, however, was a note held in our own archives, encrypted by our own Rollmaster.”

Takagari KogaRyu nodded attentively. “I can only imagine how wild it must be, sir.”

Bentre Sadow briefly considered correcting the respectful address again, but finally decided to ignore it. Instead, he made a mental note to talk with the Quaestor about it later. He did not want the Sith weakened by a blind adherence to the chain of command. There was a place for that, but he did not want to engender such thoughts so easily in his ranks.

“It all started with a dagger. See, Xolarin had been tasked with the keeping of this particular artifact. It all started with simple curiosity, but once my eyes settled on the weapon, I felt something grip my heart. It was not a desire, exactly, but it was a compulsion. In that moment I just knew I *needed* to lay my hands upon it.” Bentre slowly sipped his rum.

“When I laid my fingers upon it, I felt frozen. I have heard voices for ages since the happenings on Dentaavi. I don’t believe that you were there during the Awakening, were you?”

“No, sir. I came back to the Clan again around the end of the year in 33 ABY.”

“The end of the year? Ah, well this was at least a few weeks before that, when Marcus Kiriya lead the rebellion, Vexatus operated under his own vision and Locke tried to keep the Clan together.”

“Locke is a good man, sir.” These words drew the Sadow’s attention from his story to Takagari himself. The fellow Shadow seemed perfectly genuine, but there seemed to be a glint of something in the man’s eyes. It was as though the Battlelord were hiding something behind his polite words. Which made him a more interesting dinner companion during the feast.

“He was, and is, still a good *Sadow*.” Bentre chose his words carefully. “He serves the interests of himself and his Clan in proper measure. He is certainly effective when he needs to be. I think in that moment, he did the best that he could. He saw the unity of the Clan more important than the pursuits of our then-Rollmaster. I always wondered in the back of my mind if he held our rebellion against us. Might be why I always felt he was keeping a closer eye on me, even after Sanguinius took over.”

“So the dagger came from your rebellion?” Darkhawk tilted his head curiously.

“No, I am getting a bit off the subject, my friend. This dagger was something that Tasha’Vel had found a while back. The entry talked something about a doll, but given there was none in evidence I imagine it was some kind of code. While such code made little sense giving the encryption she gave the file referring to this dagger of hers, perhaps she was just being particularly careful. In any case, as I said, she had given it to Xolarin for safe keeping. He didn’t seem to be too bothered at the idea of giving me a look at the dagger. I told him that I was following a lead to empower Naga Sadow.”

“Power is the highest of callings, sir.”

The Sadow peered at the Battlelord. “Indeed.” He looked back into his glass, feigning the gathering of his thoughts as he considered the situation. There was little to be lost in telling this story, he reasoned. “After I placed fingers upon the dagger, I felt the whispers and pull of something very dark. The world around me faded away, save for a ring of pale light illuminating a large, flat surface upon which I stood. A very large man, carrying a wicked looking sword strode forward, calling my name.”

“It almost sounds like one of the old rituals of combat.” Takagari remarked.

Bentre Kairn’tel was silent as he reflected on the words. He considered telling his friend that the name had called the Sith not been *Bentre* or *Kairn’tel*. Instead, it had called him by his birth name, a moniker he had not been aware of until a year or so ago. “It was something like that.”

The reality was a lot more complicated than that. “I was engaged in a duel. The two of us were on even footing as we traded blows, parries, and fierce strikes. Then, I felt a pain like fire across the back of my head. My eyes were filled with horrid images. I had to watch many horrible visions. I saw the fall of many, of my house-”

“House Shar Dakhan would not fall so easily.”

Bentre wished the dream had depicted something as minor as the destruction of one of the Clan’s houses. It had been his own home, both that on Corellia and that on Ryloth. His family home and his familial estate had been left in ruins by unseen forces. The whisperings had increased in volume.

“I saw the fall of the Clan itself to this great force. It was unstoppable. This mysterious human laughed as I felt the weight of these visions of failure. They were far from the end of these visions. More and more assaulted me, each drawing me deeper into a depression. When my vision cleared, the man seemed to be waiting. He gave a mocking smile as he twirled his large sword in the air.”

“The man laughed, before asking me ‘How can you overcome the likes of Ferros'otah when you cannot face your own weakness?’ He engaged in a fresh set of attacks, and with each blow I felt my strength began to wane. With each block or counter attack, a pain wracked my hands and my joints.”

“And then you came back?” Darkhawk watched his Overlord intently. He seemed to be enjoying some part of this story.

“You might have expected that.” Bentre found himself smiling. “I thought i even had a chance of turning the combat about. At the final moment, Ferros'otah threw out a hand and did the unthinkable. He grabbed the lightsaber blade with his bare hand.”

“Crazy.”

“The next part was even crazier. The blade did not sunder or singe his flesh. Instead, it was as effective as if I had attacked with a wooden stick. More than that, I was surprised to see the blade, normally an icy blue turned into a bloody red. I did not get the opportunity to react, before the handle became hot to the touch. Then, it burnt my hands, forcing me to drop my weapon. The spirit boasted about its strength. It boasted about its access to greater power than I had ever known. It made all sorts of claims about himself, or maybe itself, and the ancient Sith. It spoke about how even death had not been enough to bury its power.”

“So if it was all that powerful,” Takagari’s eyes shimmered as he grinned, “what did it need with you?”

“That is where it got a bit odd,” Bentre confessed, “it assured me it only needed an avatar, or a vessel. It wanted a conduit to operate through. It made all sorts of promises as well. It would grant me everything I could wish for. It promised with its help, that I would rule the Sadowan Empire as a proper Sith. It called me all sorts of things, including a child. And like that, I was a child. I can’t explain it, but I was small, and powerless again. My lightsaber was gone. My armor was gone. My sithspawned eye, my cybernetic arms, my scars were gone. Instead, my flesh was restored. Above all, however, I was weak. I was a child, clothed in mere cloth, with my equipment laid in piles to either side of me.”

“It claimed it required my body to continue its reign of power. It assured me that I would be a well-kept tool if I agreed. If not, I would be used and thrown away. I began hearing even more voices though. First, was the voice of Garan, an old associate calling out to me. From there, the voice calling to me became that of the traitorous Atra Ventus.”

“Wait, the Regent is a traitor?” Darkhawk’s voice became concerned.

“We have a history of sorts.” The Sadow growled. “I will tell you that a story another time. Tonight is supposed to be a more joyous event.”

“This doesn’t seem the most joyful story.” Darkhawk let the words hang when he saw his Consul’s gaze was locked to a far wall.

“This false-Atra began to beat my small form with fists, crying out all sorts of abuse. Talking about how weak I had been. When the pain became too great, the not-Atra became the spitting image of the Grandmaster Sarin before the assault continued. The not-Sarin took the form of Rath Oligard. This form of the spirit gave a wicked smile before lifting me off my feet by my throat. It asked me what I was going to do when faced by so great an enemy as he.”

Bentre felt something catch in the back of his throat. The experience had been recent, but he had not quite had the chance to come to terms with what all he had seen. It had left him shaken. “I called out to the Force in a way more primal than I had ever done so before. I called my lightsaber, so large in my small hands, to be grasped in shockingly small fingers. I pivoted the large lightsaber, and pointing the emitter into the eye of the large man thing, I ignited the crimson blade. I felt a snarl escape my throat, and I felt the body spasm as the weapon struck true.”

“And that is how you defeated the spirit, huh?”

Bentre looked off into the distance, without responding for several moments. Suddenly, he seemed to remember where he was. “I am sorry, what was that?” His forehead wrinkled as he looked at the Sith sitting across from him.

“Well, weren’t you saying that was the crowning moment? I mean, obviously, you cast out the spirit, and took the artifact for yourself?”

Bentre looked down for a moment, the memory of the encounter still fresh in his mind. Drawing a breath, Stahoes smiled. “Well, what do you think would happen, right? I mean, it isn’t like the spirit won in the end, is it? After all, I am sitting here, and we are having this conversation.” He gave a chuckle, picking up the bottle of rum he had brought with him to the table.

The Battlelord took several moments to take quiet sips from his own drink. The moment had been left awkward, and for that the Sadow cursed himself. He made an awkward story teller. He wanted to share something out of the ordinary, but just left an uncomfortable silence in the wake of the tale. After several moments of unease, Bentre pushed himself up to his feet. “Tell you what, Takagari. I have been poor company this evening. How about I get us both a bit of rum to enjoy and then you can tell me a story of your own. Doesn’t even have to be about your work in the society, either. It could be anything.”

“That might be nice,” the Battlelord paused, “sir.”

"I will be right back, then." Picking up the glasses of both Sadowans, the Overlord took slow strides toward the open bar.

*"Don't go saying this like that.* The cool voice was back in the back of his mind, warning him as he approached the bar. It was far less harsh than it had been in his dream state. Or was it a hallucination? Or did it matter? No one else could seem to hear it.

"It isn't like people will think I am any more crazy than I already am." Bentre muttered softly to himself, cursing all the luck he had since joining the Brotherhood. He had lost an eye, an arm, and then the other arm to pursuits of power and acts of warfare. He had brought madness upon himself, and in seeking power, he had awakened horrible things.

*"If you don't watch it,* the spirit's voice became more stern, *somebody might believe you. You have been too brash in the past. The work must continue, while we can do so quietly. The greater war will take a turn.*"