

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Asajj and Talzin check out the Holocron together.

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Its not that Asajj doesn't trust the Nightsister Matriarch... alright, so actually its precisely that she doesn't trust the Nightsister Matriarch. Mother Talzin has been relatively reasonable so far, but Asajj isn't going to forget the fact that the other woman had sold her into slavery as a 'back up plan' any time soon.

At the same time though, she was sent here to make an alliance... and refusing a request like this so soon after getting a tentative agreement from the Nightsister Matriarch risked torpedoing everything, didn't it? She needed to find a middle ground... and fortunately, after a few more seconds of awkward silence and growing tension, Asajj comes up with one.

"Let's study it together then."

Mother Talzin's eyes narrow at the compromise, but Asajj just continues on unabated.

"I would be a poor Apprentice if I let my Master's Holocron out of my sight. However, I would also be a poor ally if I did not allow you to at least study its contents. More than that, my Master assured me once I unlocked the remainder of the Holocron that I would have complete authority over how its contents were used... including allowing you and your Nightsisters to learn from it, I assume."

Smiling thinly, Asajj holds up the Holocron.

"So... shall we?"

There's a single moment more of tension... before finally Talzin relaxes and slowly nods.

“Indeed, let us see what sort of secrets your Master has left you then, child.”

She’s not a child and every time the Nightsister Matriarch calls her one, Asajj burns with the urge to correct her. But, like all of the other times, she holds her tongue. Instead, she steps forward and places Lord Vader’s Holocron on the table between them. Talzin moves in from the other side and leans forward as the Holocron activates and the cloaked form of Asajj’s Master appears as a hologram over the top of it.

Slowly, the cloaked figure does a full circle, first looking to Asajj and then on to Mother Talzin. Finally, he turns back to Asajj.

“I see you have made contact with Mother Talzin and the Nightsisters and secured a nominal alliance with them. Congratulations are in order, Darth Shar.”

Asajj flushes even as she straightens up and puffs her chest out in pride. Belatedly, she ducks her head in a bow.

“Thank you milord.”

Its not really Darth Vader, of course. Asajj understands that now, even if she’d made the mistake of thinking the Holocron was some sort of long distance communication device early on. To be fair, she’d never used a Holocron before, Sith or otherwise! How was she supposed to know the damn things were nearly sentient, having an imprint of their creator’s Force Signature embedded within them to give them the ability to teach in a limited capacity?

Well, she knew now of course... it was one of the many lessons that her Master’s Holocron had taught her, after all.

Turning to Mother Talzin, the hooded hologram inclines his head.

“And greetings to you, Mother Talzin. I am the Holocron of Darth Vader, True Lord of the Sith.”

The Nightsister Matriarch seems fascinated as she studies him in silence for a long moment before inclining her head back.

“Well met. I look forward to meeting you in the flesh one day soon, Darth Vader. For now... this will have to do. I find myself curious why you differentiate yourself from the likes of Sidious, however. Referring to him and his as the ‘Banite Sith’...”

The hologram shrugs.

“Because it is the truth. Darth Sidious and his apprentice Dooku follow the Rule of Two set down by a Sith Lord named Darth Bane. The Rule of Two is as simple as it is destructive and disastrous... there shall never be more than two Sith at a time. One to embody the power of the Dark Side and one to crave it.”

Mother Talzin frowns, even as Asajj watches on raptly.

“But that... the possibility of knowledge being lost is horrendously likely in such a system.”

“Indeed. And therein lies the flaw. That the Banite Order managed to make it this far and reach this point is truly a matter of luck as much as it was the personal talent of some of its members. However, the sheer amount of Sith Knowledge lost over the course of its existence is... staggering. Indeed, even in more recent history, it is said that Sidious’ own Master discovered the secret to immortality through the Dark Side... and Sidious killed him before he could pass on the knowledge, leaving the Apprentice to become the Master but remain scrabbling around in the Dark for answers.”

That brings a smirk to Mother Talzin’s face, and even a derisive snort from her nostrils.

“... Yes, that sort of short-sightedness sounds like Sidious. I am already beginning to see why our alliance will be beneficial... ending such a perverse and corrupted Order can only serve our purposes.”

The hologram of Darth Vader nods.

“Yours even more than that of my creator, I imagine. After all, without the intervention of Darth Vader, your entire people would have been wiped out within the year.”

Silence falls over the chamber as Talzin tenses up at that confidently spoken statement. Asajj’s eyes widen as well, shocked by her Master’s words. After a long moment, the Nightsister Matriarch hisses.

“Bold words... do you truly see us as so weak then?”

“It is not a matter of how I or my creator see you. Though it is a matter of *seeing*. Darth Sidious is not the only one with the gift of foresight. And while I am a mere shadow of my true self, I am not without power here.”

The hologram waves his hand at that and the entire chamber suddenly shifts and morphs around them, until suddenly they’re outside... or so it seems. Asajj can sort of tell that its an illusion and judging by the way Talzin merely peers around curiously, she can too.

Then, the fighting starts. It’s abrupt and violent and Asajj’s eyes widen alongside Mother Talzin’s as they take in the view of battalions of battle droids facing off again dozens if not hundreds of Nightsisters.

“If not for the intervention of Darth Vader, Asajj Ventress’ journey would have eventually led her here anyways, after she survived an assassination attempt by Count Dooku once she was deemed... used up. However, she would not have faked her death ahead of time... and her coming here seeking asylum would have led Dooku and his droids to your doorstep.”

The Nightsisters in the vision comport themselves well at first, fighting with all their might and all their hearts. However, therein lies the problem... because their enemies have no heart. They have no emotions at all. Droids are blasted apart, cut to ribbons, and destroyed again and again... only to be replaced by another row.

Slowly but surely, the Nightsisters begin to lose ground. More importantly, they begin to lose people. Just one at first, but her fall causes her sisters to falter and from there the cascade begins. The battle slowly and steadily pushes backwards, off of the ground and into the fortress. Inch by inch, foot by foot, the droids advance and slaughter every Nightsister in their wake, no matter the age or the experience.

“Of course, you and I both know that Dooku’s hunt for Asajj Ventress would only have been a cover at best. It was never about her, in the end... it was always about you and yours.”

A shudder runs through Mother Talzin’s body as she watches her people be annihilated in this vision of the future that would never come to pass.

“... Sidious wouldn’t even come do the deed himself then? He’d send his decrepit, aged Apprentice... and droids. He would wipe out the Nightsisters and all of our history, all of our techniques... with battle droids.”

Her voice is faint... and yet, Asajj can hear the fury all the same. Meanwhile, the hologram simply nods.

“Yes. You, of course, would have survived. And so would Asajj Ventress, by the skin of her teeth. And perhaps one or two more Nightsisters would have lived elsewhere in the galaxy as well. However... the Nightsisters as a culture would have been wiped off the galactic map. And Darth Sidious would go on to form his Galactic Empire, secure in the knowledge that you were a broken thing who could no longer hope to threaten him.”

Mother Talzin shakes at that... the fury growing. Finally, she explodes. Asajj tenses up, but her rage is thankfully directed away from her or the Holocron. Massive jets of green energy slam against the walls of the chamber, making the room shake as Talzin howls.

For a long moment, Asajj wonders if she might collapse the whole place on their heads and readies herself to grab the Holocron and flee before that can

happen... but no, in the end the older woman has more self-control than that. She reigns herself in rather swiftly, pulling back and letting out a single panting, shuddering breath before forcibly and visibly calming herself down.

To Asajj's surprise, nobody comes running despite the outburst... either this chamber is far more secluded than she thought, or such outbursts are... common place. Either way, she stands still as Talzin looks from the Holocron to her, eyes still a little wild with rage.

"... You were correct. This alliance will benefit me and my people greatly. And when your Master comes here to Dathomir to finalize our partnership, I will ensure that he knows just how much it will benefit him as well. The Nightsisters will stand with Lord Vader against the Banite Order... all I desire is Sidious' death above all else."

The cloaked hologram atop the Holocron inclines his head again.

"Very well. Let us then discuss what I am now capable of teaching to Darth Shar with the final restrictions removed."

Asajj perks up at that, unable to hide her excitement. After witnessing the genocide of an entire people... she was more than ready to learn some new things. Especially if it would help her stop that terrible vision of the future from ever coming to pass in ANY form.

Talzin also looks interested as she leans in again, the both of them listening intently as the Holocron begins to lecture on the nature of the Dark Side.

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Vader smiles for two reasons as he and Aayla ride the turbolift up to the top of the Grand Temple on Coruscant. The first is that it's good to be back for real this time. No more subterfuge... they'd ultimately been recalled to Coruscant at long last after news of Admiral Trench's death had finally trickled back to the Republic after the remnants of his fleet reached Confederate Space.

Malastare was still defended of course, its position on the Hydian Way was too important not to have some sort of defense force there as long as the war was still going on. However, it was no longer deemed mission critical, meaning that Vader and Aayla had been recalled to Coruscant for debriefing and to be given their next assignments.

The other reason Vader is smiling... is because he can feel through his Apprentice Bond with Ventress that she's making excellent progress over on Dathomir. No doubt his Holocron has unlocked at this point and gone on to show her the fate that her people would have suffered if not for his intervention. And hopefully she would then go on to show that to Mother Talzin as well, to cement the importance of their alliance in the Nightsister Matriarch's eyes.

From what he can tell from their bond, Ventress is doing quite well... so he can only assume everything is going as planned over there.

Now all he has to do is make sure everything goes as planned here too. Certainly, there's always a risk associated with coming face to face with the Jedi High Council, all things considered. If they were to detect his true nature, then Vader would have quite the fight on his hands.

However, given Depa Billaba sits among them and they haven't even detected HER true nature... he's not exactly worried. This should be a relatively simple debriefing, all things considered. Really, the only worry is if they question his use of Battle Meditation from the planet's surface, but that is what it is.

The turbolift comes to a stop at the top of the highest point in the Jedi Temple and Vader steps off of it at the same time Aayla does. They're quickly ushered into the Council Chambers themselves, chambers that hold a great deal of memories for him... many of them bad.

But he lets none of that show on his face, practicing perfect stoicism and humility as he makes sure to stand just a step behind and to the left of Aayla, allowing her to give their report as the Jedi Master on mission. She speaks clearly and concisely, detailing everything that happened and leaving out the

parts she needs to leave out, such as the fact that he'd taken her as his Sith Apprentice and also gone AWOL for over a week.

Truth be told, Vader isn't really as present as he maybe should be as Aayla talks and the members of the Council ask a question here or there. He senses no hostility and no danger in the Force and it's not like they're grilling her or anything so he sees no reason to interject. Until finally...

"Knight Skywalker."

Vader turns his attention towards Master Mace Windu, bowing his head in acknowledgment.

"Master Windu."

The no-nonsense Jedi Master has never had the best opinion of Vader, even when he was still Anakin Skywalker. Vader knew that if Windu had his way, he would never have been trained in the first place. And yet, in this moment... he doesn't see an ounce of suspicion or dislike in the other man's eyes.

Leaning forward, hands steepled in front of him, the dark-skinned Jedi flares his nostril as he sighs.

"Your actions during the space battle over Malastare are beyond reproach."

Wait, what?

"Your ability to use Battle Meditation from a planet's surface shows something I've always been hesitant to admit... you are indeed the Chosen One."

... What's going on here?

"Furthermore, you've shown all of us how a Jedi Knight can remain in the Light while prosecuting this war against the Separative Movement."

Suddenly, Windu does something that horrifies Vader to his core. The man... *smiles*.

“I’m sure you never thought you’d hear me say these words, but it is my pleasure to offer you both a promotion to the rank of Jedi Master... and a seat upon this very Council.”

Is he dreaming? Did he trip and hit his head in the turbolift and this is all just a concussion induced hallucination?

Vader finds it hard to accept that this is really happening, that this is actual reality. He pushes out with the Dark Side as carefully but also quickly as possible, needing assurances that he’s not in some kind of illusion or trap made by Sidious.

Instead of finding evidence that this isn’t actually happening, Vader finds evidence of something else... something he probably should have been able to guess a while ago, all things considered.

After all, in what universe would the Jedi High Council EVER promote Anakin Skywalker to Master and grant him a place among them without being coerced first?

Simple... the universe where they’d all already fallen to the Dark Side. Not just Depa, not just Aayla at his side looking as surprised as he feels. Each and every member of the Jedi High Council currently present in the flesh... is Fallen. And frankly at this point, Vader isn’t convinced that the ones currently hologramming in aren’t also Fallen to boot.

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!