

Ikarri Itinen
Aeotheran
Aurora Collegium Research Facility

Ikarri gazed out of the window of the mobile research facility. The pouring rain, so constant on the world of Aeotheran, pounded against the durasteel in a thunderous tempo. This marked the end of the second month since he had arrived on the Collegium's orders to conduct a review of their findings.

In the days since his arrival, he had become familiar with many of the other researchers whom the Collegium had tasked with studying the ancient complex uncovered during a mining operation on the interior of Send Karash island. The underground facility had proven to contain archives full of texts seemingly dating as far back as the reign of Marka Ragnos. The complex was in surprisingly good condition considering its age, having been hermetically sealed at some point in its history.

"Elder," a voice spoke from behind him. He turned, taking a sip of the cafe in his hand and looked over at Kaela Nureth, the young woman tasked with overseeing the Collegium students at the facility. Her long auburn hair cascaded down her back, complementing her fair complexion.

Ikarri smiled to himself. Despite his advanced years, he still couldn't help but chuckle inwardly at the prospect of being considered an "Elder."

"Nureth, what have you brought me today?" Setting down the mug, Ikarri extended his hand, and the woman produced a dataslate and handed it to him. The data contained titles and summaries of various tomes, letters, and texts they had found within the complex.

"Another wing of the archives has been opened, and my students have begun reviewing the texts within. We hope to have materials ready for transport off the planet by the end of the week."

Ikarri returned the dataslate to the head researcher and nodded his head, dismissing her.

He would be responsible for the transportation back to the Collegium archives on Arx. His detachment would provide an escort to the transport vessels. His smile widened at the idea of only having a few days left before he would be back in the emptiness of space rather than the humid downpour of Aeotheran.

A few hours later, Ikarri walked through the corridors of the complex. All around him, there were sounds of shuffling feet and murmurs of conversation as the research teams continued their work. He spoke briefly with those he passed, spreading encouragement among the gloomy confines of the darkened archive.

Entering an enclosed chamber ringed with shelves, parchments, and scrolls, he marveled at the extensive collection of knowledge they had uncovered. He gently removed a heavy leather-bound tome, marveling at its condition. Even after so long, the complex had protected the valuables within. He was only glad they had arrived quickly enough to ensure the world's natural humidity didn't have time to ruin the collection.

He opened the tome and began scanning through the text. Despite his frustration at being unable to immediately translate the words within, he found joy in the tactile experience. He focused on the texture even as he allowed the Force to flow through his palms and into his fingertips, picking up impressions of those who had held the tome millennia before.

Even as he stood in the place of the last reader of this tome, he suddenly felt a shift in the environment around him. A growing sense of dread filled his mind. He slipped the book back onto the shelf and extended his senses to their limits. Deeper within the complex, he felt a toxic, powerful surge of power. An almost palpable sense of corruption as the power of the Dark side seemed to pour out in waves.

Without any hesitation, he exited the room and began moving towards the disturbance. He mentally signaled the security droid to awaken at the entrance of the complex. He picked up his pace as he saw others beginning to flee the facility, even those among them who were not sensitive to the Force, sensing something alien in the air.

Turn after turn, he wove deeper into the complex, taking several stairways down, passing researchers, students, and staff as he went.

When he exited the last staircase, coming to the bottom floor of the complex, he found a large circular chamber with a high ceiling covered with foreign but ancient symbols. The smooth gray steel of the ceiling above reflected the shimmering crimson light emanating from the center, ringed by short benches. There were a dozen or more of Kaela's students, as well as the researcher, their heads bowed to the floor.

In the hands of a young student, the holocron within his hands was the source of the unnatural light. Each of the students seemed to be chanting in a trance, even as the disciple completed the incantation echoing from the holocron. With a burst of power, Ikarri watched as those closest to the man withered, their flesh becoming thin and pale as they bled from their eyes, mouth, and even their ears with shuddering cries of pain.

Ikarri watched, fascinated, even as he felt the power expanding. He felt the dark influence, and only through force of will was he able to protect himself from the effects that had killed those within the chamber. To his horror and surprise, the bodies began to rise, their eyes liquefying, pouring across the paper-thin visages of the now desiccated bodies.

Each began reaching out for him, their steps shuffling at first but quickening as the power of the ancient Sith magic began to empower them. The outer chambers surrounding the ritual room

began to fill with movement as the ancient dead, long buried after the facility had been sealed, began coming back to life to join their freshly risen brethren.

The Elder began backing away as the dead approached. He lost count of the shadows flickering throughout the room as more bodies flooded in. He took the stairs as quickly as he could, hoping they would slow his pursuers. On the floor above, he found complete chaos. Those who hadn't already fled were beginning to encounter the undead rising throughout the complex, long since buried.

He flicked the lightsaber at his waist into his hand. The brilliant yellow light filled the hallway as he began moving forward. Anywhere the dead reached for him, he severed arms, hands, legs, and heads when possible. He ensured he kept a steady but careful pace to avoid tiring too quickly, knowing he had floors left to go.

He knew there was no saving those on the lower levels. He watched as the recently dead began to rise. For each he cut down, dozens more would be rising from their casualties. Above him, he heard the sounds of blaster fire, the occasional hum of lightsabers, as the Collegium's more experienced staff began mounting a defensive retreat to the surface.

Seconds felt like hours as at every turn, he could feel the deaths of those around him. His senses weakened, assaulted by the powerful presence of the Force echoing throughout the Complex. Even still, he could sense every loss, the presence seeming to grow with each soul snuffed out.

Ikarri continued to strike swiftly and efficiently. The creatures seemed to attack mindlessly, allowing even his limited training to overcome them with relative ease. As their numbers continued to grow, he found he had to circle back to avoid a large gathering of the dead.

He reached out through the Force, pushing the dark mists surrounding his senses away. He deactivated his lightsaber to draw less attention as he worked. He found the path he was on choked with the dead. Above him on the next floor, the Collegium members had formed a barricade, attempting to contain the outpouring of undeath. Unfortunately, that meant his route was blocked as well.

On the opposite end of the hallway, he sensed a depression within, leading both above and below. *"A ventilation duct? Some way to transport air throughout the facility,"* he mused to himself. He eased his way to the corner of the hallway, glancing further in where the sounds of the living and undead's battle raged. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of corpses now choked the hallways leading up, the dead crawling over one another to drag the defenders above down to them.

He slowly crept to the opposite corner, holding his breath to avoid drawing attention to himself. Whether by ill-luck or some senses provided to them by the magic imbuing them with life, the dead turned, their eyeless sockets affixed to him. With a curse, he ran. Though he wished he

could provide aid to the defenders above, he knew he was of little use to them alone. He found the entryway to the ventilation shaft, drew and activated his saber in a quick motion, cutting the lock from the maintenance entrance, and with a flick of his hand, he pulled the doorway open with the Force.

He could hear the movement behind him. No longer were the dead slow-shuffling things. Instead, their feet pounded against the flooring as they ran. Their flesh cracked and split with each stride, only to be mended and held back together by the foul magic preserving them. It took only a moment for him to climb inside and begin ascending handhold by handhold higher and higher.

Ikarri found himself near exhaustion as he reached what he believed to be the first floor of the facility, as high as he could go. He braced himself, holding his weight against the rear wall, even as he used one hand to draw the saber and begin carving his way out. The brilliant blade melted through the wall to create an opening.

As he waited, allowing the metal to cool before climbing through, he knelt to catch his breath, exhaustion threatening to overwhelm him. He admonished himself for allowing the years to weigh on his capability. When he felt his racing heart slow, he stood and began taking the more familiar paths at the top of the complex toward the exit.

When he arrived, he found his War Droid awaiting him, surrounded by piles of the dead. His command to hold the entryway proved successful. He smiled in appreciation at the ease the Droid had in dispatching the undead compared to the futile efforts of the living below. He rushed past. Without a word, he felt his connection to the Droid and ordered it to follow him. The two rushed upward and out of the complex.

Above ground, he found nothing but further chaos. The more recent dead from conflicts with the Children of Mortis flooded out of the jungles surrounding the encampment. The security left above ground was struggling to hold them back as those who had fled the Complex rushed to any and every transport they could find.

He regretted the loss of the findings below but suspected they had discovered the cause of the facility being sealed in the first place. He found the control panel of the facility and began working quickly to activate the shutdown protocol to seal the complex. He felt more than heard the thunder of his droid's dual blasters beginning to fire at the encroaching undead. He entered the last command and watched as the doors to the facility closed, sealing the living and the dead within.

The remaining retreat to the Siren remained harrowed as more and more bodies poured from the woods, threatening to sweep over the retreating forces. Ikarri boarded his vessel, cursing for a moment as he stopped and ordered the Droid to remain behind and protect the remaining survivors as they boarded his ship and nearby transports. He fled through the familiar confines to the cockpit, quickly bringing the ship to life.

He waited as long as he could, allowing as many as possible to board before the undead drew too close. The engines fired as he lifted up and away, leaving the dangers of pursuing the unknown behind. He began to activate their comm systems and report the events to the Collegium.