

The Visitor

The air that hit Selika's face carried with it the unexpected tinge of smoke, causing the woman's eyes to water at the caustic sting. This was not what she had expected to see when she had stepped through the cabin door aboard her yacht *Princess Royal*, and the shock to her system was enough to stagger her nearly down to a knee. Her head swam as the sounds of battle struck her ears, her vision finally clearing enough to see what was before her. She stood along one of the causeways leading to Eos City, the Dark Ascent looming over the city, silhouetted against the a red, angry sky.

"No," she whispered. "It's gone, this cannot be real."

Selika's mind raced as she tried to reconcile what was before her with the last memories of Arx she had, the Dark Ascent blasted and broken as Eos City had burned to ashes. Armies had scourged the once-proud throneworld of the Brotherhood beneath their heel and left those who had survived to flee before them. In the decades since, Selika had spent most of her time outside known space, on the move and one step ahead of the Force hounds that had hunted her across the stars. This vista must be a specter of the past conjured up before her, a vision of what was. Before she could try to push it away and regain her center a humanoid figure ran up to her out of the darkened smoke that seemed to cover much of the ground around her.

"Roh," the towering woman with a glowing blue eye patch said as she stopped before Selika. "The Children have so far held us in the city."

"Ronovi," Selika's voice caught in her throat at the woman's name. The last time Selika had seen the Epicanthix had been during the Fall of Aliso, as the two had fought one another and the other had fallen against Selika's blade. The open wound in her soul still lingered, especially now in the years since as allies, even tenuous ones, had fallen by the wayside.

"Just don't," Ronovi said, cutting off the tongue lashing she assumed would come from the Consul of Plagueis. "The Children are a threat to the Phantom Assembly, same as you. We can go back to clawing one another's eyes out after they're dealt with."

"I've been here before," she said under her breath, finally realizing where, or, more importantly, *when* she was.

"What was that?" Ronovi asked.

"Nothing," Selika replied as the pieces fit together. She remembered this time, this place. This was a vision before her eyes in some ways, the reflection of the seat of the Brotherhood that existed within the Ethereal Realm. She remembered this battle, this place. This was no Force-conjured apparition, everything was too real. Selika had heard myths passed down through the centuries of the gateways between space and time that existed within the Force, never believing them before now.

It's time to believe the myths, Selika mused, you're in one.

"All right," Ronovi said with a shake of her head, "this way to the command point."

Selika followed Ronovi through the blasted duracrete canyon that the causeway had become and down a ramp to the ground. A series of holodisplays had been hastily erected to coordinate forces and display the enemy, and sentients milled about between them in visible unease. Selika saw several Plagueian defectors interspersed with unknown soldiers, each of

them exchanging looks with Plagueis regulars. The distrust in the air could have been cut with a lightsaber.

"Dread Lord!" an officer barked, saluting Selika with fist over heart. The Plagueis officers followed suit while the former Plagueis members reacted with less enthusiasm, some fixing Selika with glares that would almost have killed a lesser being.

Selika acknowledged the soldiers salutes in passing, moving to stand at her place before the tactical displays. She mostly ignored the officers outlining their plans, looking for holes in the Children's lines that the combined forces of Plagueis and the Assembly could exploit. None of this held all that much interest for Selika. This battle was won, lingering in the past would do nothing for her present. All she could do would be to change her course, and likely not for the better. It was more important for her to return to her own place in time. The Brotherhood was gone, but Selika had done what she had always done: survive.

Looking over the display as the other officer spoke, her eye caught on an indicator on the map display.

"There," Selika pointed, interrupting the major who was speaking, "What is that?"

"Uh," a lieutenant fumbled with his datapad before he could answer. "It reads as one of the portals from Arx, but with some additional readings. We assumed it was something that the Council was cooking up and have been giving it a wide berth as a result."

"Indeed," Selika mused and hesitated, before she waved the officer giving the briefing to continue.

It wasn't something that Evant was toying with, of that Selika was certain. She wasn't sure why, but she somehow knew with certainty that this portal was the path back to where she belonged. As the briefing finished up, Selika acknowledged the proffered plan from the soldiers at her command with a perfunctory nod, disinterested in it as she was. As the soldiers moved out towards their targets, Selika was able to take advantage of the general disorder to use her talents to cloak herself as she slipped away.

The journey to the portal she needed was only a few kilometers, and it was in the direction away from the bulk of the fighting. There were a few soldiers, friend and foe alike, between her and her goal. None of them saw her or noted her passage, as even the strange and augmented abilities in the Force that this realm conveyed were enough to pierce the veil that hid her from their perceptions. In less than an hour she was standing before her destination, the white ringed portal pulsing with both light and Force energy.

Without warning, Selika was lashed across her back with a torrent of Force lightning that took her from her feet and drove her forwards into the ground. The blast drove the wind from her lungs as fire danced across her nerves, but her reflexive defenses protected her from the worst of it.

"I knew you were arrogant," Ronovi called out to be heard over the roar of the spinning portal. "But I would have thought that even three years on the Council wouldn't have made you *stupid*."

"No," Selika said, gulping in air to fill her lungs once more. "Just a bit forgetful. You get so focused on a goal that you sometimes forget what's lurking behind you."

Ronovi moved to pull her saber from its place at her belt, but Selika reached out and enveloped the taller woman with the Force and halted her motion.

"What?" Ronovi demanded, realizing that not only was her arm held fast but that she was incapable of any movement from the neck down.

"Can't have you waving that around now can I," Selika explained with a smile. "You might put an eye out."

"How are you doing this?" Ronovi demanded. "Even here, in this place, you shouldn't be this strong!"

"You learn some tricks over the years," Selika explained with a smile.

Ronovi struggled against the iron grip that held her as Selika crossed the distance that separated the two former Councilors, the past and present Consuls. Selika raised her right hand and placed it, palm open, on Ronovi's left temple.

"Sleep," she intoned, her words carrying with them Force-augmented power.

Ronovi went limp in Selika's force grip, her good eye falling closed as consciousness left her. Selika lowered her opponent to the ground gingerly with the Force, making sure she did not fall. Then, Selika realized that there was a reason she was here. There *was* something she could change. Once again she put the Force behind her words, using all of the power that was at her command.

"I'm sorry no one came for you," she said.

Rising to her feet, Selika turned on her heel and strode purposefully into the portal. Instead of emerging into her ship, her own time, Selika saw that she seemed to be in some strange in-between. The dark void was lit by the portal that she had stepped through, still showing the broken landscape of the Ethereal Realm. It was also lit, however, by the light ringing another portal. This portal framed another person standing within the void: Selika Roh di Plagia, Dread Lord of Clan Plagueis.

"Who? What?" the other Selika demanded.

"Just another you," Selika explained. "Sense me, you can see it is true for yourself."

Selika opened herself up to the other, younger version of herself. She felt the other version of her mind touching her own, a strange experience to say the least.

"Satisfied?" she asked her counterpart.

"Yes," the other said with hesitation. "But I ask again, what are you? It's like looking in a mirror, but I know you are not me."

"Ah, you spend so many years pretending," Selika mused, "that you forget you've been lying to yourself."

The older Selika let the illusion that she had projected for so long that it had become reflexive, a fiction created without thought, finally slip away. Her younger counterpart gasped as the lines appeared on her face, the color faded from her hair to be replaced with a platinum gray. The fullness vanished from her cheeks, her fingers, leaving the truth behind.

"Age comes for us all," she reflected. "Even those of us that were the most vain."

The other Selika nodded, the vision of seeing herself with so many additional years sobering her. "At least," she observed, "we survived."

"That we did," the elder Selika accepted. "Now, go through so we can both end up where we belong."

The two nodded to one another, walking past the other as they headed towards the portal that was their proper destination.

Just as she was about to step through her portal, the gray haired Selika Roh stopped as if she had been hit with another lightning bolt. Spinning on her heel, she called after her counterpart as she stepped through the opposite portal.

"Do not go to Kapsina!" Selika screamed. "He is waiting for you at the Dark Tower! DO NOT GO!"

Selika Roh di Plagia, sitting Consul of Clan Plagueis, stepped through the portal onto the solid ground of the Ethereal Realm remembering nothing of the interlude within the portal, nothing of her time-displaced self. She had thought, just for a moment, that she had heard a voice as she emerged from the portal. But no, there was nothing.

Looking around at her surroundings, she saw the wasteland that surrounded the echo of Eos City, the floating islands just above the horizon. Her eyes drifted downward and finally saw the collapsed form that lay on the ground before her.

"Tavisaen," she hissed with contempt. "I knew the Assembly was here, but I didn't think you'd show your traitorous face."

Pulling the commlink she had at her belt, Selika clicked it open to the Plagueis military channel.

"Major Trax," she commanded, "mark my coordinates and dispatch a speeder to my position for retrieval."

"Dread Lord?" came the bewildered answer from the commlink grill. "I had thought that area was designated off..."

"Don't argue, Major," Selika interrupted. "Just get them out here. I'm not going to be kept waiting any longer than I have to, not with nothing but an unconscious deserter for conversation. Get it done."

Selika snapped the comm channel close before the officer could say anything else. There was a battle to be won here, and Selika had no time to spare on mildly competent subordinates.