

Xen'Mordin Vismorsus (#3783)
Scholae Palatinae

Broken Chains

Prologue

Brovon Fathu

Nathema
Nathema system
4999 BBY

Lord Brovon Fathu, like thousands of his Sith brethren, had come to Nathema due to a promise. The Sith Empire had fallen. The bitter rivalry between Naga Sadow and Ludo Kressh had fractured the Empire, so much so that the Republic had won. Now, Supreme Chancellor Pultimo was systematically ordering both the Jedi and the Republic forces, to kill every Sith they could find. The homeworld of Korriban was no longer a safe refuge for the Sith. Exiled and facing genocide, the Sith Lords had few options.

But then came a beacon of hope for the Sith. Lord Vitiate had sent word. His last century of secure rule of Nathema had given Lord Vitiate plenty of time to study the subtleties of the Force. His word of a ritual that would destroy the Jedi Order, would surely mean the Sith's survival. So Brovon Fathu answered the call to Nathema. The combined power of eight thousand Sith Lords would charge this ritual and save the Sith. Or so Lord Vitiate promised.

But Brovon Fathu, and his fellow Sith Lords, had been deceived.

Eight thousand Sith, including surviving members of the Sith Council, had come in good faith that their ways would continue- that the Sith Empire would survive; that the Sith as a species would survive. But as each Sith landed, each found themselves dominated by the will of Lord Vitiate. Not one of the eight thousand had known, or even suspected, that Lord Vitiate was a strong practitioner of Qâzoi Kyantuska and would dare to control their actions.

Somewhere deep inside Brovon Fathu's mind was a spark of independent thought, questioning the ritual that was now ten days in the making. Whatever persuasions this spark sent out into Fathu's mind was out shouted by the pressing need to successfully accomplish the ritual. Fear was the greatest ally Lord Vitiate had in accomplishing his goals, for it was fear that drowned out whatever thought to question the ritual appeared in the minds of those eight thousand.

Marka Ragnos had named Lord Vitiate at the young age of thirteen. If the Sith had been more wary of each other, this fact might have halted their haste in arriving on Nathema. Treachery was part of the nature of being Sith, yet facing extinction, this fact went forgotten.

Lord Fathu like so many others, had lived on Korriban, and walked the halls of the Academy. Like so many others, he fought against the Republic and the Jedi during the war. He had been a fervent supporter of Lord Naga Sadow, who was now apparently just as dead as his enemy Ludo Kressh. Lord Fathu craved power with the same intensity that had destroyed so many Sith before. But more than power, Lord Fathu craved survival. All the power in the universe didn't mean a thing if he was dead.

This thought, as it happens, was the same line of thinking that prompted Lord Vitiate to call all the Sith he could to his homeworld. It was this line of thinking that had fueled his years of research. And it was this line of thinking that had driven him to this exact moment. The moment when his own ascension was guaranteed.

For ten long days he orchestrated this ritual. Every one of the eight thousand in their place. Not a single one out of place. And now it was finished. Lord Vitiate opened himself to the flow of power that was channeled by his fellow Sith Lords. For one brief moment, they were all basking in the full power of the dark side.

Then it ended. Eight thousand Sith Lords had a split second of awareness of what they had truly accomplished here. And then they were no more. Bodies fell where they stood. The whole planet, so full of life and energy, was silenced in an instant. The very color of the world drained out, just as quickly as the life it held had.

Lord Fathu, his eight thousand Sith brothers, and a whole planet sacrificed. The only living thing on the planet was Lord Vitiate, no longer a mere mortal, and so much closer to being a God.

Regk Laues

Antei
Antei system
2950 BBY

Regk Laues was the youngest son of Gerek Laues, honored overseer of the Zigara province. This position had been passed down father to son for over a thousand years. It was said that Gerek's grandfather had once earned a personal token from the most high, God-King Okemi, following his ending of a minor rebellion in the land. It had ended before the God-King had even arrived in the region.

The families of those who had rebelled had been captured and presented at the Temple for the God-King's pleasure, along with the corpses of those who had fought to the death. Rebellion was foolish, for all that the Anteians had, they owed to the God-King. Not a single person from Antei had ever known someone who had lived outside the rule of the God-King. His wrath could be strong, his will unbendable, and all the Anteians had they owed to him.

As the youngest son, Regk was free of the stress that fell on his oldest brother Hemial, whose days were spent in preparation to one day take up their father's mantle as honored overseer of the Zigara province. As one of the Laues, Regk was free from the harder lives so many of the people of Antei suffered. He was not expected to work in the fields. Nor was he expected to carve out the mountains. He was not even expected to help manage the construction of the great temples for the God-King.

However even as a small child, Regk showed an intense self-discipline. Now at the age of sixteen, he was preparing himself to leave home. His path was one of the devout. His days were to be spent in one of the many temples that had been constructed over the last millennia for the God-King. He would help keep the temple orderly, teach those who came of the greatness of the God-King, study the great history of the God-King. Only one in five hundred were able to give themselves to the temples. If Regk had known why so few were able to give themselves, and what that exactly required, he would not have been so eager to leave home.

But Regk was eager, and by the command of the God-King himself, he was to start the life of a priest. Every three moons, the God-King came. Every three moons, the citizens of the Zigara province held service to their God. When the God-King came and appointed Regk to become a devout, his life was given focus. Deep down he hoped someday to make his way to the great Temple Bellseph itself. The greatest testament to the God-King's power was the pinnacle of a devout's ambitions. Regk knew without a doubt this was his destiny.

Regk had packed and repacked his things a dozen times over on the morning of his departure. Anticipation ate at his insides like a vornskr on a carcass. He was not due to leave until midday. He paced the ground of his family's ancestral home. Only a few in the generations of his family had been able to become one of the devout. Each left this home never to return to it. His sixteen years of life here weighed heavily on his mind. His father had reminded him nearly daily about the great honor this was bringing to the family.

His heart ached for Serah, one of the girls from town. She was the daughter of a farmer, but sweet and beautiful. As much as Regk longed for her, the thrill of becoming one of the great devout kept him at home, instead of spending those last hours of freedom with her. The coupling never would have worked, as such a lower caste, her blood was inferior to Regk's.

When Ante loomed directly overhead, Regk knew his time had come. The life he had known for the last sixteen years was at an end. His new life began now. Only it was not how he had expected.

In an instant the whole of Antei shook. The air turned rancid, water turned to dust, the lush greenlands of Antei were gone. The sun itself ripped apart in the sky, plunging the world into a new level of darkness. Regk was thrown to the ground, and his family home, which had stood for centuries fell. The air in his lungs burned. In his soul he felt the great release of power from the sun. Regk knew the people must have done something truly terrible to receive such wrath from the God-King.

Years later, old and weak, Regk would regularly tell tales of life before the God-King became one with the dark star. His grandchildren would laugh at his tales, a dream like world compared to the harsh life that they had all been forced to live. Regk's stories would find themselves warped, forgotten, lost to legend among the surviving Anteians. Regk would find himself the last Anteian who had been alive while the God-King lived. On the day his life was to change forever, it did. He watch his world face near total destruction. And he lived the rest of his life knowing that even Gods die.

Xen'Mordin Vismorsus

Judecca Cocytus system Two Days Ago

Xen'Mordin Vismorsus was in a budget meeting when he felt it. As the highest profile individual in the great Cocytus Empire, his sudden slump forward, knocking his glass of water off the table, was met with a slight alarm from the system politicians. Xen made a few quick apologies, and excused himself from the meeting. Followed closely by the loyal and brave members of his Praetorian Guard, Xen raced through the palace to his private office.

The giant screen on the wall already showed the faces of his closest advisors, allies, and friends. The upper echelon of the Scholae Palatinae membership. The days following the attempted coup d'etat by the former Palpatine Guard Fias Zhan had left them all on edge. As they work to rebuild their home, the air still left them uneasy. Each of them had the same chill down their spine that always accompanied greater conflict between Brotherhood units. The tension had been building to a crescendo in the last months of the Crusade, and now it sat ready to snap.

"It was Antei," Evant dove in the instant Xen came into view. Xen's easily recognized mask still be adjusted on his face. Behind the darkened holes of the mask's eyes, Xens pupils went

wide. They had all felt it through the Force, something had happened, something bigger than just the start of war. The Force snapped back against a fierce violation. It was not something that could be hidden.

“Antei... The Star Chamber... What have the One Sith done? We had them on the run,” Xen exclaimed.

Antei was the seat of the Brotherhood, hidden deep in the Shroud far from the prying eyes of the Republic.

“Our sensors are showing there were several fleets there. There was a transmission from the surface,” Dante reported.

He hit a button on his terminal, playing the message for all on the conference call.

“Lord Cotelin seeks the throne of the Brotherhood for himself. He wishes to prevent the Final Way, to challenge our unity, and destroy our Brotherhood. But it is not too late to join m-”

“Is that it?” Xen asked.

Dante nodded affirmative.

“What fleets were there?”

“In addition to the Brotherhood’s Fleet, Taldryan’s flagship the *Justice*, and then shortly before the incident, before our sensors went dead, several unidentified ships jumped into near orbit.” Evant reported, reading off a datapad.

“There is no weapon the One Sith have capable of triggering this so quickly after jumping into the system. Was this a Taldryan weapon? They’ve been arrogant, and I know its been a long time since someone they liked sat on the Iron Throne, but to unleash such raw power...”

Xen trailed off, deep in thought of the possibilities. There was a beep on the terminal. Xen pressed a button to read the message. He read it twice silently, then took a seat before reading it again.

“Muz Ashen attempted the Rite of Immortality. The same rite Tiamat convinced Okemi to undertake,” Xen said slowly.

“Was that the birth of a second Dark Star we felt?” Archangel asked.

Xen shook his head slowly.

“That was the destruction of Antei itself. The home of the Brotherhood is dead.”

There was a moment of silence as the Palatinaeans stood processing the news. As much as they tolerated the rule of the Council, Antei was the apex of the Brotherhood. It was second only destroying the Cocytus system itself.

“Orders?” Evant asked after spending the time processing the news. Standing on the bridge of the *Warspite* he was ready to make the call for war the instant Xen said so.

“Everyone to the ships. I’m on my way. Get a hold of anyone from Taldryan who made it out. We need to coordinate our response to this. The Grandmaster has broken the oaths that bound us together. Until this is ended, the Brotherhood no longer holds us,” Xen commanded.

The time had come for Scholae Palatinae to secure its future. Xen was going to see the Empire’s continued life. No matter the cost.

Chapter One

Xen’Mordin Vismorsus

Forward Rebel Landing Site

Korriban

Horuset system

Now

Xen was grateful for his mask. The wind was picking up the great red sands that made up Korriban’s terrain, leading to several of the soldiers to using scrap pieces of cloth just to breath. But behind the safety of his mask Xen was able to breath just fine. It wasn’t the most comfortable thing in the world to wear, but it was certainly useful in his dual life of Quaestor and Emperor. So while his men stood choking, Xen stood absolute amid the whirling and swarming dust.

Xen reflected back on an old myth, one that never had any grounds in reality but stuck with people because it seemed so feasible. Legend was that millennia ago, when the Sith were first crawling out of the mud and learning to walk, that Korriban was a lush garden world. No horrific sand. No fierce strong winds. No dry grounds. Pleasant and cool, a garden world that would leave anyone envious of those who lived there.

But then the Sith learned to use tools, and educate themselves. The Killik establish a colony there forcing the Sith to learned to fight. The Infinite Empire arrived and the Sith learned how to truly use the force to win. And from there the dark side’s hold on the planet grew to never let go. The trees withered. The water evaporated. And the Sith became a hardened people powered by the dark side. As they fought among themselves, and those they enslaved, the bodies piled up. As the bodies sat on the homeworld to the Sith and the dark side teachings,

the corpses rotted and decayed. The bones withered into the great red sands, choking the planet into the stark grim world it now was.

A story, that standing there, Xen could almost believe. What else than the continued betrayals, murders, and death could have made this planet what it was. Every breath filled Xen with greater connection to the Force. This world was so much more than any other Sith World he had set foot on. His skin crawled, not out of distress, but just by the sheer power pulsing through the planet.

Xen had never gotten to visit Korriban before this. So many of the Dark Jedi had been forced to avoid it, lest any wandering eyes discover them. The Sith Academy and Valley of the Dark Lords were out of the question anyway, having been secured by the One Sith years earlier. This was not the visit he had always dreamed of making to the planet. He had dreamed of coming to the planet to find ancient knowledge, lost from the great Sith Lords. Inspiration from the successes and failures of those long dead.

What he had come to was the same thing that befell so many who had found themselves on Korriban.

Death and violence.

The drop to the planet had been fast. The skies above Korriban continued to be filled by the great warships of the Brotherhood and One Sith. Everyone trying to kill each other. So few making it to the surface. The power hungry Arconans, Tarenti, and Sadowans followed Muz to the Horuset system, still searching for the final pieces to the puzzle that would give Muz that which he so desperately wanted. Xen had commanded his Palatinaean forces to work along side the Taldryanites and Disciples of Odan-Urr to stop Grand Master Ashen. Xen's long standing hatred for both Taldryan and Odan-Urr shelved until this war was resolved. Xen's life, and those of his fellow Palatinaean's hung in the balance.

Xen snapped his mind back to attention to the situation at hand. They had laid out a path of objectives to end conflict with the One Sith, and prevent Muz from completing the Rite of Immortality. While many still fought in orbit to secure safe passage to and from the planet, that victory would mean nothing if passage into the Valley of the Dark Lords was not found. The most obvious route in remained through the great pyramid of the ancient Sith Academy. It also happened to be one of the most defensible positions, a fact that helped the One Sith, who had been on the planet for quite some time now.

The Palatinaean's that arrived on the surface along with Xen had been joined by forces from Taldryan, and even some from Odan-Urr. The Jedi looked uneasy amid the blowing red sands. Korriban was the closest you could come to truly bathing in the power of the dark side. Behind their weary eyes, the Jedi were silently focusing on self mastery and discipline.

Xen turned back to the small planning table that was propped up. Crudely drawn schematics and maps filled its surface. Different colored lines streaked across it to show movement of the different forces. The green-haired and former Deputy Grand Master, Halcyon Rokir Taldrya was the leading man from Taldryan on the ground. He had been dispatched with other Taldryan members and soldiers to secure passage for Former Grandmaster Jac Cotelin, into the field to lead the strikes against Muz's Loyalist and Sith Lord Esoteric's One Sith Factions. The aging great hermit of New Tython, Liam Torun, had also found himself planet side to lead his fellow Jedi.

It was a dangerous mix of long standing enemies, forced to work together. Xen half expected the three units to go their separate ways by midday and write off the assault on the Academy as a loss. But for once, luck was on Xen's side, and the next few bloody, terrifying, and uncommonly violent hours would see him emerge from the Sith Academy, stepping into the fading day's light cast into the Valley of the Dark Lords.

Colyn "Tusken" Skybender

Hills, overlooking the Sith Academy Korriban

While many of the men he was leading squirmed behind him, Colyn "Tusken" Skybender felt unusually relaxed in the sunlight. This place certainly had the constant feeling of leaving the hair on your neck on end, but for Tusken, the sands, winds, and sun reminded him all too much of his home on Tatooine. A familiar foundation to stand-on gave his will and attention a stronger reach than normal.

"Stop squirming. Too much noise," Tusken punctuated each word with the firmness of his command.

This team was tasked with one goal. See the enemy forces engage each other, then come in to clear those who survived. He, and the men he commanded, would have preferred a straight fight, but orders were orders. He pulled his binoculars to his eyes again, scanning the high ridges that framed the Valley of the Dark Lords. His men fell perfect silent behind him.

They knew it was going to soon be time to move, and their survival was dependant on having each others' backs.

"Movement. Valley side," one of the officers said quietly.

Tusken brought his gaze down to watch the stream of men and women moving from the Academy to one of the ancient tombs.

“One Sith. Seem to be fortifying the tomb as well as the Academy. Which tomb is that one again?” Tusken whispered.

“Ummm... Lord Far-from-being-a-successful-Sith?” another of the officers joked.

There was a wave a very controlled quiet laughter among the men. Tusken turned and gave them a stern look. Even being quiet, it was all too easy for those sounds to echo their way into the ears of those who would see them dead. The first officer gave a quick refresher look at a tiny map of the valley.

“Tomb of Ajunta Pall. Right there smack in the middle of the routes to the rest of the Valley,” the officer said to in a serious response to Tusken’s question.

Ajunta Pall. Was that the one that faked his death, or the one that founded the Sith Empire... Tusken thought to himself. There had been so many Sith Lords, remembering who did what was never high on his priority list. His time was better spent on the battlefield, his true home. Covered in dirt and stinking of sweat, fighting the enemy. His brains were for tactics and warfare. The specific details of those long dead mattered not to him. The only history he cared about was that of war tactics.

“More movement,” came another voice, further behind the weathered career soldier.

Tusken spun, not needing to use his binoculars to see where the movement was. The dust kicked up by the incoming forces was clearly visible.

“The action is about to start boys. Let’s feed the fire,” he commanded.

Synin Torin

Valley Floor Level
Sith Academy
Korriban

The Sith Academy of Korriban, with all its history, violent successes, and shattering defeats, had undergone multiple change of hands over the millennia. Countless souls had found their way through these halls. Synin Torin didn’t care one bit about the long history the building held. Nor did he care about the massive tomb for Darth Bane, that now took up a sizeable chunk of the Academy.

What Synin Torin did care about was a malfunctioning leg motor in his YVH-1's left knee. The dust and sand of the planet had been causing all kinds of issues for his beloved droids. If YVH-1 couldn't walk, how could Synin possibly hope to fully manage the army of droids and One Sith that had collected in the Academy. There were thousands of them, filling the spare rooms and hallways of the Academy. They augmented the soldiers who had been commanded to hold the Academy at all costs. Synin could only lead this force with YVH-1 at his side.

"I fail to see what those ancient droids can accomplish that I cannot, master," YVH-1 said in protest as Synin adjusted a screw.

"Nothing, but they are expendable pieces of scrap. They will provide quite the annoying distraction for our enemies. Yes, quite the distraction," Synin replied still adjusting the knee some more.

YVH-1 looked around the small chamber Synin had taken residence in. It was out of the way of all the major routes through the Academy to the valley floor.

"They aren't going to distract anyone as well as I can, master," YVH-1 said unusually flat even for him. Synin's head popped up and looked around.

"Yes, yes. This is a good point. I will have them moved to the more, active corridors. I will ensure that not a single soul simply walks into the Valley of the Dark Lords. Lord Esoteric has commanded as much. And this task, is quite perfectly suited for my talents, and your capabilities," Synin said looking off into the air.

There was an urgency in his voice. The time was ticking down. He had been informed that those horrendous Brotherhood thugs would be enroute to the valley, searching for the final pieces of knowledge they needed. Luckily Esoteric had led Synin and his fellow One Sith to the planet long in advance. While the Brotherhood had been chasing fragments of their organization across the stars. Synin himself, alongside his beloved Droids had been on some of those planets, as parts of those fragments. It had all been terrifyingly exciting, and YVH-1 even to this day, continued to talk about it.

There was a knock on the door. After a moment, it slid open, sticking slightly to its frame. It had taken the Bpfasshi only 3 hours to have the power functionally flow through the Academy again. But those years of disuse meant the mechanics of the palace needed to wake up and stretch their motors and circuits. In stepped a messenger.

"Lord Torin. The first of the Brotherhood's dogs are nearly here," the messenger reported, bowing slightly.

YVH-1 gave his equivalent of a smile. For a droid he had been very much looking forward to the fun beginning. Synin turned back to make a final adjustment on the droid's knee, while nodding his head.

"Good," he said with a final click.

He stood and pressed a few commands into a nearby terminal. Ancient droids throughout the Academy buzzed with life. YVH-1 stood and did a few droid squats, testing his repaired knee.

"Thank you master, time for games?" the modified droid asked.

Synin nodded his head enthusiastically.

"The dry sands of Korriban will drink their fill of blood today," Synin cackled. He focused back on the terminal, typing in further commands for the droids of the Academy. He was not about to let this enjoyable day pass him by.

Rhiaen and Nalia Ust'essi

Outer Balcony Sith Academy Korriban

The twin Twi'lek Jedi had climbed quietly to one of the upper balconies of the Sith Academy. The door that had once protected the office from the harsh winds and sands of the planet had long since been left open. In the One Sith's sweeps of the Academy, not once had any looked at this opening as a way in.

It had only taken Rhiaen and Nalia three hours of searching to find it and make their way in when they first arrived to probe into the Academy. Now, days later, they sat in the sand that had blown into the office of some Sith Lord long dead and gone, reviewing the intelligence they had managed to gather.

"They will force the main entrance. While sturdy, it is the most easily breached entrance for the troops," Nalia said as she stared at the building plans they had put together.

"But we've reported the cave route through the mountain. It runs into the lowest level of the basements. There is far less resistance to face on that route," Rhiaen countered.

Nalia shook her head and pointed at one of the datapads on the floor.

“Liam sent us word, that is what the Dark Jedi of Taldryan and Scholae Palatinae decided,” she replied.

It was a gamble, but time was critical. If the Rebels failed in securing the Academy, then the Loyalists would wipe through them like a wave. If they got caught in the middle with One Sith ahead of them, Loyalists behind them, they would have no way out. The twins, while remaining officially impartial to the continuing conflict wanted to see the war end, and hopefully with their friends in the Jedi House of Odan-Urr still breathing.

“Can Liam seriously be considering this? I know Odan-Urr owes loyalty to the Brotherhood, but this involves truly aligning his Jedi with the actions of many Dark Jedi,” Rhiaen said.

“It is necessary. An Immortal Sith Lord would change the universe. The last time this ritual was successfully done, a Sith Lord nearly succeeded in taking over the entire galaxy,” Nalia stated.

They both knew this to be the case, but over the last few days, they had continued to give each other strong reasons to ensure their commitment to seeing this done. Neither the twins, or the Jedi of Odan-Urr were going to walk away from this unaffected. The best the twins, and the Jedi of Odan-Urr could hope for was the quickest resolution to this conflict. From the viewpoint of the twins that meant making sure the Rebels had good and accurate intelligence to work off of.

Though they knew they were hidden away enough in an upper out of the way office, the twins both kept one ear to the sound of coming enemies. Deep in thought, it was not the sound of marching soldiers patrolling the Academy that made them jump. It was the sound of a massive explosion at the main entrance to the academy.

The Brotherhood had arrived knocking. The question the twins needed to know the answer to was, which side had arrived first.

Chapter 2

Colyn “Tusken” Skybender

Main Entrance Sith Academy

Tusken, and his men, practically fell down the side of the hills they had been hiding on. As soon as they had a positive identification on the fools who thought they could waltz in and take the academy, they were off.

Of course it was an advanced group of fellow Loyalists, and not the Rebels that were running toward the Academy.

This was not the plan. These sithspit-brained Dark Jedi. Always needing to have the glory for themselves. Tusken thought this multiple times as he ran toward the advancing Arconan, Sadowan, and Tarenti forces. There was enough of them that they could have cleared out the Academy of One Sith, only because they arrived before the Rebels, they would then be boxed in.

“This is frakking insane! You said there was a plan!” One of the officers yelled in frustration as he managed to steady himself from nearly falling. Tusken while in full agreement, could never voice it.

“Plans change! We need to be in position for when the Rebels arrive. If we aren’t ready this will be a short war. We do not fail!” Tusken barked though his labored breaths.

Of course he and his men both knew if they failed and somehow made it away from the Academy, the Lion of Tarthos would find them. Of course Tusken himself would have kicked the brains out of any one of his men who gave any less than their life for the cause.

The Loyalists were moving fast, faster than Tusken and his men could on foot. Line of sight was broken as the safest route down took them around an outcropping of red rocks. The sounds of blaster fire echoed in the air. Followed by a shockingly loud explosion. The ground beneath Tusken’s feet shook, but he remained firmly upright as he ran.

A pillar of black smoke made its way into yellow-orange sky. He rounded the outcropping, finally able to see the main entrance to the Academy. While heavily fortified by the One Sith, the Loyalists had wasted no time. The bulk of the Loyalist forces advancing on the Academy were still a sizeable distance from the entrance. They had rigged several speeders to race ahead of them and ram into the fortifications of the Academy.

While it had barely made a dent in the thick blast doors of the Academy, the billowing smoke was making it difficult for any of the One Sith in the Academy to get clear shots at the advancing army. They either had to shoot blind, or venture out into the courtyard. As he quickly assessed the changes to the battlefield he shot his fist into the air and gave some quick hand signals to his men.

Together they changed course avoiding the main courtyard, and into a flanking position to the side of the entrance. The One Sith were too preoccupied with the Loyalists storming them, at the very least, Tusken would see the Rebels held up before they advance into the Academy.

Xen’Mordin Vismorsus

Tunnels Korriban

“Did you feel that?” Evant asked.

There was a tremor, slight enough that you would have easily missed it, save for the dust it disturbed in the tunnel.

“We left before the others, could they already be at the academy?” Dante asked. Xen shook his head and checked the time.

“No, we have at least another thirty minutes before they make it,” he replied.

Thirty minutes to get into position. Both Xen and Halcyon stood firm on the idea that all forces attack the main entrance to the Academy. Liam countered with information about the tunnels, information Halcyon and Xen had both already looked over and agreed upon hours earlier.

The Jedi might be allies in stopping Muz, but that trust could only go so far. And so they lied, and Liam eventually reluctantly agreed to the plan they were presenting. When the aging Jedi left the planning meeting, Xen knew there would be messages, messages that would without a doubt end up being seen by less than friendly eyes.

“Could be Loyalists, beating us to the punch,” Archangel said. They nodded knowing it was the most likely situation.

“Though it could be something else,” Xen said as they stepped up their pace.

His companions shot him a confused look. He shrugged before continuing.

“Not all of these tunnels were dug out by sentient people. Look at the walls. This is a k’lor’slug tunnel.”

Eether stopped dead in his tracks.

“You didn’t say anything about k’lor’slugs. Those things have way too many legs and stabby bits for it to be okay,” Eether said as the others stopped as well. Behind his mask Xen smiled and continued.

“Yes k’lor’slugs. There are a great many here beneath the surface. I would imagine the centuries of exposure to the power of the force here has left them more fearsome than ever.”

Archangel picked up on where Xen was going.

“Yeah. I’ve heard some of the scouts talk about tunnels wide enough to fly three TIEs wide down it. Rumbling of a slug that has burrowed deep into the surface, living for centuries, growing, feeding, waiting,” Arch added.

Xen nodded enthusiastically. Eether stood rooted on the spot.

“I didn’t sign up for this,” He said firmly.

He had seen plenty of combat and battle in his time with the Brotherhood, but a giant poisonous k’lor’slug was more than he was willing to put up with.

“We are heading into a hive of enemies, hoping that we can stop one of the most powerful force users alive from achieving immortality. Yet, here you are refusing to go further because of a slug?” Dante teased.

“Fear is the mindkiller, Eether, maybe you should try anger and rage. Focused at your gullibility,” Xen laughed.

Eether looked around, realization sinking in.

“When this is done, I’m going to make a couch out of your skins,” The Zeltron said through gritted teeth.

Ahead of them came the sound of footsteps. The soldiers snapped into position, rifles raised. The Dark Jedi of Scholae Palatinae had their lightsabers in hand and on before anyone could blink. They focused their lights down the tunnel. Out of the darkness stepped a man with nearly white blond hair. The man took a heavy drag from his cigarette and blew smoke rings at the Palatinaeans.

“Nice day for tunnel crawling eh?” he asked. None of the Palatinaeans lowered their weapons.

“Connor. Of course you found your way here,” Xen said coldly, eyes never leaving the man before them. Connor took another drag and nodded.

“Where else would I be?”

Rhiaen and Nalia Ust'essi

**Upper Levels
Sith Academy**

The twins had made their way quietly around to the other side of Academy. All they could see was black smoke, billowing from the ground stories below them. They could quite easily hear the action however.

“This is too early. Liam told us-” Nalia started.

“-when they would get here,” Rhiaen finished.

“Loyalists,” they said together, still peering through the thick smoke. They needed to send word to the Rebels. There was a sound of the metal butt of a rifle making secure contact with body armor. The twins spun on the spot and found themselves staring down the rifle of a surprised looking soldier.

“Hands where I can see them!” the soldier said voice shaking.

The sisters shot each other a single glance and their hands went up into the air. The soldier was sweating and the end of his rifle shook in place. Obviously he had been assigned to patrol this part of the Academy because he was less likely to have any trouble.

“What are you doing here?” the soldier stammered.

Both twins’ faces slipped into sly grins. They had talked their way out of trouble with men a hundred times more intimidating than this. A single young soldier, far from home. The twins felt almost like it was cheating. Almost.

“We were just-” Nalia said.

“-having a look around,” Rhiaen continued.

“There are so many interesting-”

“-things to see and find.”

“But we certainly didn’t expect-”

“-to find anyone here.”

“And most definitely-”

“-not one as attractive as yourself.”

The soldier stood there eyes darting back and forth from one sister to the other. He barely noticed that the two Twi’leks had been inching forward with every word. The his rifle dropped

slightly, as his brain raced. It was the opening they needed. Nalia's hand shot out, connecting with the soldier's nose. As the soldier's head rocked back, blood gushing, Rhiaen made the two quick steps behind him and locked her arm around his neck. She whispered softly telling the man to just relax. Within a few moments he was unconscious. Nalia retrieved some rope from their packs and together the twins tied the soldier up. He would not be pointing guns at one else this day.

Once the One Sith soldier was secure, the twins quickly sent word to the Rebel forces, hoping that it would reach them before they stumbled into the fray.

Synin Torin

Valley Floor Level Sith Academy

Synin Torin watch the feeds as his arsenal of ancient battle droids marched out into the light of the courtyard. The smoke could not blind a machine, nor could it choke it. They advanced with a singular purpose. Kill everyone who tried to get past them. Even as old and worn as they were, Synin's capable touch brought the droids a new life. For years he had been convinced if he had been leading the Trade Federation, the Clone Wars would have ended differently. With or without Palpatine's hand in orchestrating it. No droid he touched ever went down without putting up a proper fight.

And to Synin's delight, that fact appeared to be holding true. This Dark Jedi rabble might be advancing on the entrance to the Academy. But their soldiers were dying, littering the land with corpses. Should a droid suffer too much damage to fight on it would explode, sending metal shrapnel to kill any who neared it. Synin was able to manually control those explosions if he wished. He held several on the ground, appearing as duds only to go off when soldiers had gone past, shrapnel digging into the soldiers' backs and necks.

YVH-1 stood ready watching the feeds with as close to a hungry eye you could get from a droid. Both Synin, and his beloved droids knew it was just a matter of one side of the Brotherhood or the other to breach the walls of the Academy. And then the real games would begin.

"Master, might I direct your attention to camera Grek-Esk-Seven. It appears more soldiers are pooling to the side of the courtyard."

With a few quick taps camera GE-7 filled the screen. A shot of man with dark short cropped hair issuing several quick hand signals to the pool of soldiers behind him.

“Well, we can’t go having them ruining things, now can we?”

Synin was in his element. His already deadly skills had grown exponentially as he became attuned to the nexus of the force that filled the entire planet with energy. A few clicks and commands and a group of droids, augmented with One Sith soldiers were alerted and sent to deal with the new threat. Synin spun on his seat to face ASN-121. The courier droid hovered up to eye level with Synin, bobbing with seemingly anticipation.

“Go get better shots for us, this smoke is ruining all the good footage. Esoteric will want proper intelligence on what's happening.”

The droid gave a single affirmative beep and zipped off. It could handle itself should anyone come across it. Synin spun back around to focus on his work, his masterpiece of death.

Chapter 3

Xen'Mordin Vismorsus

Basement Sith Academy

The Palatinaean squad stepped from the dark tunnel and into a dark room. Soldiers rolled ball lights along the ground filling the room with sharp light. The first light this room had seen in many years. At the far end of the room, the light illuminated a giant colossal statue. While the soldiers looked for lights in the chamber to turn on, the eyes of the Dark Jedi were locked on the poorly lit statue. The understanding of where exactly in the Academy they were held firmly in mind.

Several torches were quickly found and lit, flames bringing a surprising amount of warmth and light to chamber. The Dark Jedi still hadn't moved from where they stood when they realize what chamber they were in. The soldiers lumbered about, ignorant of the significance. Connor Grey had moved straight to the base of the statue, looking at it with a hand light.

“Is- is this what I think it is?” Evant asked staring into the eyes of the statue.

None of the Palatinaeans were stranger to overpowering statues of Sith Lords. They regularly met in a room much like this one with Darth Sidious looming above them. This room did have one critical difference, one that Xen'Mordin was now very focused on. Mere yards from them sat the large sarcophagus that had been carefully crafted to hold Darth Bane's remains.

“Connor, back away from the Statue. If it *does* have anything in the base, I expect it would be rigged with some elaborate way to kill you,” Xen said, voice soft but easily traveling the length of the room.

“Like what? Is a Terentatek going to pop out of the statue and eat me?” Connor yelled back.

Even with his laid back attitude, Connor did take several rather large steps back away from the statue.

“You said you would help get me access to artifacts if I led you through the tunnels to here. You didn’t specify where you would let me scrounge around when we got here,” Connor mumbled mostly to himself while lighting another cigarette.

“You don’t think it’s actually... there do you?” Dante asked ignoring Connor and focusing on the sarcophagus.

Darth Bane was one of the few Sith Lords that every Dark Jedi in the Brotherhood knew the tales of. Creator of the Rule of Two. He was slain a millennia ago by his apprentice Darth Zannah, his body turned into ash. None of the Dark Jedi knew if the ash had ever been recovered to be laid here. But none of it needed to be for his spirit to have found its way here.

“Does it matter? His spirit doesn’t need his body to remain here. We need to get out of this room, and quickly,” Xen commanded, voice sharp but hushed. There was a genuine tone of anxiety in his voice. They knew much of the Academy had been repurposed as Darth Bane’s tomb, but popping up into it first thing was very unexpected.

“It’s just a big room Xen. Nothing is going to pop out saying ‘Boo!’,” Eether said, obviously pleased to have something to tease his former master about. “There is nothing here.”

Eether looked around expecting the others to pick up on the taunt. Only there were no smiles or happy expressions. Their faces were tense and pensive. There was a thunk and all of them jumped. One of the soldiers was waving across the room; they had gotten the main door open.

Barely able to breath, Xen was relieved to see proper lights illuminating the doorway. The flickering of the torches only added to their fears of a Dark Lord appearing in the shadows. They had enough enemies on the field without a vengeful spirit waking from the realm of the dead.

The Dark Jedi were nearly to the door when a clear voice rang out from the room. It reverberated from everywhere in the burial room. They could feel it ringing inside their heads, from the walls, from the floor, above, and below, and behind, it was everywhere.

“I believe this is where I say *BOO*.”

Rhiaen and Nalia Ust'essi

**Academy's Council Room
Top Story
Sith Academy**

Rhiaen and Nalia had encountered four droids in the highest story of the Academy. The peak of the pyramid was a sole room, used as the Academy's Council Room. When they climbed up through the broken lift to the room, they were sure no one had spent any real time there. What ever connections the terminals in the room once had, were surely frayed and damaged over the centuries. They didn't even think that the One Sith had bother restoring power to the area.

But the twins did know quite a few things the One Sith did not. Information was their lives, and they had become very good at getting it. With all the One Sith camped out in the Academy now focused on the battle outside against the incoming Loyalists, the two Twi'leks finally had a window to act on some particularly delightful information about the unused Council Room.

What they did not know, was that Synin's droid fanaticism had found its way into the circuits of even these droids. The tendrils of his obsession had pried their way into every corner of the Valley of the Dark Lords it seemed.

The sisters had a distinct disadvantage in that the droids were quite impervious to their traditional tactics of seduction and mind tricks. Metal also tended to handle hand to hand combat better than flesh. Both carried simple lightsabers, which despite being far more skilled in the methods of the martial form K'tara, they were forced to use as the droids lit up with life around them.

They wasted no time as the droids woke up from their sleep. Blue sabers humming, they ran to the different sides of the room, both taking down a droid before it could start moving. The two droids at the back of the room, mechanical joints creaking and moaning for the first time in years began to fire their blasters before the sisters could reach them. Both dove behind tables that lined the room, sending clouds of dust into the air.

Out of direct line of sight the two droids walked forward with several awkward lurching steps and into the middle of the room. The droids were focused on where the Twi'leks had jumped. Their processors, still trying to come online, would have normally figured out that their targets

had moved on. Searching for the women, the droids started to take opposite patrols around the room, endlessly looking to finish their sole purpose.

Both sisters had propped themselves up into the hard to see corner, where the top of the desk and the very front of it met. It wasn't the perfect hiding place to wait for murderous robots, but at least it wasn't out in the open.

The droid nearest Rhiaen was the first to find it's prize. But Rhiaen moved quicker than its rusting servos. She relaxed her muscles, which had been straining to keep her up as far in the shadows of the desk as possible. Her blue lightsaber springing back to life slashing at the droid. The blade cut the droids legs, causing it to fall. As this happened it began shooting, missing Rhiaen and it continued to fire first across the room and then up onto the ceiling as it fell. Rhiaen slashed again, this time out and down straight through the chest of the battle droid.

Across the room, the other remaining battle droid turned its attention to its falling compatriot. Taking advantage of its distraction, Nalia popped out from under the desk and stood face to face with the droid. As she stood she held her lightsaber, blade pointed up and slightly away from here. As she stood tall, the blade had pierced the chest of the droid, and found its way up into it's head.

With all four droids now neutralized, the sisters returned their lightsabers to their belts. Brushing the dust off themselves, they made their way to the back of the room. Several minutes of examining the wall, and they were able to get the secret panel to open. The terminal behind the panel blinked with life.

"Power is still going," Nalia said.

"Access to the Academy's system are still functioning too," Rhiaen said as she pressed several keys on the terminal. The One Sith either didn't know about the redundant control system, or didn't think anyone would be able to get to it, so high and out of the way. And now the twin Jedi had full access to the Academy.

Colyn "Tusken" Skybender

Main Entrance Sith Academy

"We're fraked hard sir!" one of the officers yelled, finger never moving from the trigger of his rifle.

Had the plan gone accordingly, Tusken and his men would have been comfortably hidden away, ready to flank and box in the Rebel Forces. The bulk of the Loyalist forces attempting to take the Academy had decided speed was the more important factor.

Regrettably that plan would have ended up putting Tusken in the same situation he was currently in. Being flanked by One Sith that had come from the side of the Academy. Tusken carefully fired off another 3 shots with his blaster. All three hit in rapid succession, taking down one of the advancing droids.

“We are going to have to get the attention of our comrades. They can turn some attention to relieve us.” Tusken shouted.

He took another couple careful shots. His men knew there was no way they would retreat to the relative safety of their Loyalist allies. They were just as likely to die there as they were here. They had to stop the flow of enemy soldiers and droids if there was any hope for the Loyalists to take the Academy.

One of Tusken’s men hit the ground, trying to communicate with the Loyalists without being killed by the oncoming army.

“This is advance team Aurek! At your nine. Need supp-!”

A grenade landed next to the soldier. His eyes went wide and before he could even react, it went off. Tusken flew forward with the blast, far away enough to not have been killed by it. He couldn’t say the same for three others though. Bits of bloody charred meat rained down, all that remained of the soldiers.

Tusken’s ears rang as his head pounded. Red sand clogged his eyes and nose. He tried to get to his feet to continue fighting. Blaster bolts flew overhead, flashes of intangible light seen through watering eyes.

Then came an array of bolts flying from the main battle. The message had gotten through and a small detachment of Loyalists had broken off to help recover their flank. They were advancing into the Academy itself now. The One Sith were being driven back. Tusken rolled and forced himself up as the detachment arrived.

“I thought you guys were suppose to be the best,” A soldier said offering a hand out to steady the recovering Tusken.

Tusken coughed trying to get the mouthful of sand out. His men were dying, and he didn’t appreciate the jab, especially from someone on the same side of the battle.

“They are streaming out down there,” Tusken said after a moment pointing down the side of the Academy.

“Then let’s go seal it off.”

Tusken bent over and grabbed a rifle from the ground, rage reaching its boiling point. He was going to see every One Sith here dead.

Synin Torin

Valley Floor Level Sith Academy

“How is this happening?” Synin screamed as he worked furiously at his terminal. Doors were opening and closing, managing to simultaneously let the Loyalist forces into the building and blocking off routes for the One Sith soldiers and droids. YVH-1 had plugged itself into the system and was searching for the source of this security intrusion.

“Council Room.” the battle droid said after a moment.

Synin froze. They had cleared the Council room shortly after arriving at the Academy. A handful of droids and dust was all that had been up there. And that was after having to climb up the lift shaft. And even then, how could someone have gotten up there amid the battle. Synin’s mind raced as he swiped through security footage hoping to find a functional camera in the council room.

No air drops, anti-air guns have forced everyone to land miles away. Were they cloaked? No the heat signatures would have registered on the entrances’ cameras.

There was no functioning camera. Synin slammed his fist into the terminal. Taking several deep breaths. He closed his eyes and focused.

ASN-121, get to the council room. I need to know what’s up there.

Somewhere amid the chaos of war, the courier droid flew off, looking for the sneaky rogues that had sabotaged Synin’s attempts to repel the enemy. Synin turned his attention back at trying to keep routes open through the Academy so the Loyalists could be delayed in marching into the Valley itself.

Then came an echoing rumble through the Academy. Sensors went off indicating a minor explosion in sector 24. Synin pulled up the camera.

“Oh look master, that human is quite resilient,” YVH-1 said, eyes locked on the image of Tusken. “May I go take care of him properly?”

Before Synin could reply another sensor went off. Rolling in past the bodies of the dead was the next wave of Brotherhood members. The Rebels had arrived.

Chapter 4

Xen'Mordin Vismorsus

Burial Room of Darth Bane Sith Academy

The sounds of blaster fire, running men, and death echoed through the open door to the burial room. While Connor Grey ran through the doorway, the Palatinaeans still stood on spot, frozen like statues.

“Come now, you entered my tomb, do you really think I would just let you *leave*?” The voice of Darth Bane echoed out again.

The Dark Jedi and their accompanying soldiers turned back toward the sarcophagus. The unlit torches on the wall sparked to life as they turned, bringing the tomb into greater light. Even now, the shadows still engulfed the very top of the great statue of the Dark Lord.

Swirling mists around the sarcophagus rose up to take form. The spirit of Darth Bane manifest itself visually. A millennia after death, it was still easy to feel the power of the dark side radiating from his spirit.

“Disciples of... Sidious. I see you. I hear you. I feel your emotions,” Bane’s spirit said.

Xen swallowed hard. He was glad the voice was out of his head, but less than thrilled to be standing in front of one of the great Sith Lords.

“Sidious was the one who accomplished what so many others had failed. And he was able to do so thanks to my will. The Rule of Two. Yet here you are. A group of *Dark* Jedi. And more of you fighting, killing, dying above us, and in the fields and valley around us.”

The soldiers didn’t know what to do. There was no training for spirits of Dark Lords. Some had their rifles up, ready to fire at a moments command. Others left their rifles slung across their back, not seeing how shooting a ghost could do any good. Dante held up a hand signalling for the soldiers to fall back to the door and into the hall.

The Darth Bane's face looked like a mix of annoyed and disapproving as he stared down the Palatinaeans. As the soldiers fell back, Xen'Mordin took a step forward, hand tightly gripping his lightsaber hilt. There was another shuttering echoing explosion from somewhere above them. Dust fell freely from the ceiling.

"Sidious died. The grand destiny of the Sith failed. We are better, stronger as a group than isolated waiting for an apprentice to kill us while we sleep," Xen said. His voice was firm despite being able to feel his pulse everywhere in his body.

"Better? You are killing each other right now. Three sides all showing how correct I was. The truth that no Sith wanted to face is still true today as it was then."

"I would rather live and die here in battle against my enemies that hide in the shadows."

Bane shook his head.

"The shadows and darkness are where you find power. Where better to dwell?"

"Leading the charge. I will not be passive in forging the new Empire."

"There will be others. Others who find the way of the Sith. You and your Brotherhood are an abomination. You must be purged."

"I will not be held slave to your ideals, my *lord*. Ashajontû kotswinot itsu nuyak. Wonoksh Qyâsik nun."

Xen activated his lightsaber, red blade pulsing with life. Behind him the others followed suit. Blades of purple, blue, red, green hummed, ready for whatever came next. Bane smiled.

"You have spirit. I will give you that. But spirit alone will not save you. The way of the Sith must be preserved. Your chains are far from broken."

Bane's spirit dispersed with a pulse of energy. The torches of the chamber went out as the pulse passed through and out into the rest of the Academy. It drove the air from the lungs of the Dark Jedi. The intense power of the dark side warped and bent the very air around them. It sunk deep into their bones. The sounds of the combat above them stopped. For the slightest moment the entire Academy was impossibly silent.

Then the silence was broken.

Chapter 5

Rhiaen and Nalia Ust'essi

Great Hall Sith Academy

Rhiaen and Nalia had successfully managed to lure the Loyalist forces into the Academy, giving the Rebels ground to advance on, leaving the Loyalists boxed in, along with the One Sith forces. They had been forced to abandon their sabotage of Synin's control of the Academy's defenses when Synin's ASN-121 popped out of the lift shaft and rushed them with a flame thrower.

While the twins had avoided the flames, it did fry the entire console. With no reason to stay, and wanting to avoid being roasted the twins flung themselves down the shaft with ASN-121 right on their heels.

They now found themselves amid the chaos of the Academy's Great Hall. One Sith, Loyalists and the newly arrived Rebels had come to douse the Academy in blood. Across the hall Rhiaen spotted Liam and a group of his Jedi defending themselves against the Loyalists. Knowing the Jedi were the least likely of the combatants to kill them, the twins twirled and danced their way around the clashing forces. When Liam saw the twi'leks coming he flash a quick appreciative smile knowing the Rebels never would have made it into the hall so quickly without them.

As the twins came up to the Jedi a wave of energy pulsed through the room, and everyone froze. The rifles and blasters being used sparked. Each of the droids in the room shuttered and fell still. And deep from the bowels of the Academy came a terrific roar of power. The droids snapped back into awareness, now firing indiscriminately at every life form they could in the Academy, their targeting software overridden. The very walls of the Academy creaked and moans. Segments of the ancient building giving way, floor and ceiling falling on the warring factions.

The sisters locked eyes as the ground beneath their feet bounced and gave way. And then they fell into the darkness below.

Colyn "Tusken" Skybender

Lower Levels Sith Academy

Tusken and his surviving men had managed to collapse the supports around the side access to the Academy. It had taken all of the explosives they had, but no more One Sith would be flooding to the outside by that route. He and his men dove deep into the Academy before setting off the explosion.

They were stumbling in the darkness, trying to find their fellow Loyalists when the energy passed through the passage they were walking down. Some of the wounded fell to their knees. Tusken himself had to slap his chest praying the air would return to his lungs.

“What was that?” one of the men asked.

Echoing through the halls came a deafening roar.

“Something bad it would seem,” Tusken said wide eyed.

The wave of energy was unlike anything the career soldier had ever experienced before. His days of life on Tatooine however had taught him very well than when something let loose a roar like that, you best be no where near it. The sound of crashing durasteel, stone, and bodies followed. A wall of dust swept up behind them, the passage behind them blocked even further.

“No choice but to go forward then,” Tusken added.

He let out a sigh and adjusted his grip on his rifle. He knew whatever lay ahead of them, he would definitely need to shoot it, and more than likely, stab it.

Synin Torin

Lower Levels Sith Academy

Synin was working frantically on a mobile datapad trying to restore proper control to his beloved droids. He was quickly realizing how difficult it was to key in commands while also running. Behind him lumbered YVH-1 not missing a step in chasing after the Sith Adept. Behind YVH-1, hovered Synin’s IT-O interrogation droid. Where ASN-121 was, Synin didn’t know. He was glad that it wasn’t behind him shooting fire. That would have made it even harder to concentrate.

He hit a set of stairs. So focused on his datapad, he missed the first step. There was brief moment where Synin’s stomach flew into his throat. Then it was in his feet. He fell head first down the stairs. His head hit a step hard, blood began streaming from his face.

“Why is this *happening?*” Synin screamed as he came back to his senses at the base of the stairs.

Nothing was going as it was suppose to. And now his droid, his beloved droids were chasing him trying to kill him. He half wished he hadn't fixed YVH-1's knee just hours earlier.

He looked up to the top of the stairs just as YVH-1 reached them. The droid aimed its rifle. Synin hit one last button on his datapad. YVH-1 slumped forward, inactive. Behind him IT-O dropped to the ground with a thunk. Synin took a few deep breaths and tried to pick himself off the ground. Light headed Synin quickly fell back down.

YVH-1 stood back up right. It looked around processing where it was. It looked down the stairs.

"Master! Why are you down there?" YVH-1 quickly made its way down the stairs to help the Bpfasshi to his feet.

"We are going to find the ones that caused this. Anyone who can strip you from me must die."

Chapter 6

All

Lower Levels Sith Academy

The ceiling above the burial room gave way in patches. The Palatinaeans couldn't move fast enough out of there. Outside the burial room wasn't much better. They came face to face with what true nightmare Bane had called.

"You've got to be joking," Xen said coming to a halt.

Out of the darkness loomed an ancient evil. The terentatek roared, saliva spewing. Several of the Dark Jedi and soldiers covered their ears. It was hulking and massive, even for its species. Its long strong arms and sharp claws stretched out, waking from hibernation after who knows how long of a slumber. The sithspawn had obviously been further twisted by the dark side energy pouring from the tomb of Darth Bane. Its beady black eyes came down and fixed on the Palatinaeans.

"Move!" Xen commanded.

They darted down a side hall. The terentatek roared again and gave chase. They turned another corner, and blasted their way through a semi-open doorway. The large conference room they found themselves in was in shambles. Nearly the entire ceiling had fallen in, as well as the ceiling for the floor above it. Those who had survive the fall, and the homicidal droids, were trying to pull themselves from the rubble.

“Where have you been?” a rather disheveled Liam called from across the room.

The elderly Jedi was helping the twin Twi’leks to their feet. Several other Jedi loomed close, ready to defend against surviving Loyalists and One Sith. On the floor above, several of the higher ranking Taldryan peered down while their soldiers cleanedhouse around them.

“Blowing the floor out from beneath us wasn’t part of the plan,” Halcyon yelled down to Xen.

Before Xen could respond, the terentatek blasted its way into the room.

At the same time, Connor Grey ran into the room from the south, tailed closely by Tusken and his surviving men. From the north, YVH-1 with IT-O and Synin Torin right behind him, blasted open a hole in the wall and stepped into the room.

“I will kill you all!” Synin was screaming, an aura of dark side energy channeling from him to YVH-1 who was firing his rifle at every lifeform he could see.

It took these new comers only seconds to realize there was a monstrous sithspawn charging forward into the room.

Tusken stopped in his tracks, turning his rifle away from Connor Grey’s back and on the massive beast. From above Halcyon jumped down to help subdue the beast. Xen’Mordin jumped out of the way, barely missing one of the terentatek’s poisonous claws.

YVH-1 noticing he was not being given the full attention of the warriors in the room gave off a sound that might have been interpretable as a sigh and continued to fire at all of the pesky organics he could. Synin nodded enthusiastically, and sent IT-O out to distract the Dark Jedi so that the terentatek might have an easier time mutilating everyone.

The terentatek continued its running charge, directly toward Liam. It seemed to sense that the Jedi were not like the other force users in the area, something new to taste. Nalia shoved Liam with all of her strength, sending him falling down the pile of rubble. The terentatek’s right hand slashing out in the air where Liam had been only seconds earlier. Its razor sharp claws did make contact with Nalia. They clenched tight around her abdomen, shredding her intestines.

Nalia let out a scream to rival the bellow that came from the beast. Rhiaen, desperate to save her sister lunged, lightsaber screaming to life. The terentatek’s left arm lashed out, back handing the Twi’lek Jedi, barbs injecting their lethal poison into her bloodstream. Rhiaen flew in to the back wall of the room with a tremendous force. There was an audible snap, as Rhiaen’s back broke upon impact. The terentatek threw Nalia at the wall as well, freeing its arm to attack those around it. As it released the Twi’lek the shredded remains of her intestines streamed out of her abdomen. She landed with a dull thud near her sister.

Halcyon and Xen both rushed forward, blades up, ready to draw the beast's attention.

IT-O zoomed toward Archangel, who was advancing from behind the beast, hoping to sink his lightsaber deep into its back. Arch swat at it with his enormous hands and then shoulder checked it across the room. It let out a surprised beep as it shattered and fell from the air.

From the other side of the room, Synin let out a scream even worse than the one Nalia had let out. He unclipped his lightsaber from his belt and held it high, purple blade glowing, and his rage pumping. In his eyes the terentatek was no real threat, that was all of these non-One Sith who continued to destroy his precious work. YVH-1 pulling from Synin's energy amplified his fire, focusing on the Dark Jedi directly around the sithspawn.

The terentatek lunged, and Halc and Xen both dove and rolled to the best of their ability. The rubble made a clean move and strong footholds nearly impossible. As Halcyon stood back up he turned and unleashed the arcane knowledge of the dark side. A torrent of lightning filled the air between the Taldryan and the Battle Droid. In a matter of seconds Halc had overloaded every processor and servo in the proud droid, then came the power cell.

Overloaded by the torrent of electricity pumping through it, the power cell exploded. The explosion sent YVH-1 into a thousand pieces of deadly shrapnel. Luckily it wasn't enough to send the shrapnel across the room.

Standing just behind the droid, Synin Torin got the brunt of the damage. He wasn't ripped to pieces, but dozens of shards of metal stuck out of his body. His lightsaber fell deactivated to the ground as he stared straight ahead, a look of surprise on his face. He tried to speak, but a piece of metal was stuck deeply in his throat. It moved up and down as he failed to get the words out, blood now pouring out of his mouth in addition to his other injuries. He fell, left bleeding out on the ground.

The array of blaster fire toward the terentatek was finally getting through its thick skin. It let out a new kind of roar, one a mix of panic and intimidation. It reached out toward Xen again. Xen jumped as far back as he could to avoid the deadly claws of the monster. As he landed, the rubble beneath him slipped and he fell, landing hard on his back.

Across the room Tusker tried throwing a grenade at the monster. It bounced off its head and off the rubble before exploding several yards away. The sound drew the attention of the beast, now advancing toward the Palatinaean group again.

"I did not sign up for this," Tusken muttered under his breath as he brought his rifle back up.

He prayed one of these shots would finally bring the beast down.

They knew that if they didn't kill the terentatek soon, it would methodically make its way through each of them. Xen's head rang from his slip. He stared up through the wreckage of the Academy, he knew what he had to do.

The other Palatinaeans were moving back to wall, hoping to lead the terentatek on a little chase. The sithspawn moved slower now, more cautiously as the blaster shots continued to strike it. Xen pulled his mask off his head and looked up, inspecting the openings in the several levels of ceilings above him. He took his lightsaber and threw it as hard as he could.

It flew up through the air, past the floor directly above them and up to the broken ceiling above. It spiraled through the air, ready to slice through anything it touched. It found its mark, slicing its way through a large section of broken durasteel support beams. They had been cracked and broken, ready to collapse the bottom of the floor above them.

The durasteel beam fell, Xen reached out with his mind to help the falling metal meet its mark. He pushed its tip forward toward the terentatek, and pulled it with all his willpower toward the ground. It sped like a makeshift bullet toward the terentatek with an unnaturally fast speed.

As the terentatek began another roar it made contact. It drove itself through the terentatek and embedded itself inches deep in the stone floor. Skewered, the sithspawn let out death cry. Its dark blood poured from the wound soaking the floor. It gave one last shutter, attempting to pull itself off the beam, and then died.

The fighting upstairs had ended. Only Rebel forces now remained, save for Tusken and his small group of men. They all stood in silence, too shocked to address the frantic last several minutes.

Chapter 7

Xen'Mordin Vismorsus

Lower Levels Sith Academy

Tusken sat, hands bound, captive of the Rebel forces. They had held their cards just long enough to let the One Sith and Loyalists do the bulk of the damage. The distraction team had gone above and beyond with disrupting the battlefield. He shook his head and stared at the corpse of the terentatek across the room.

Dante walked over and pulled the soldier to his feet. Dante looked over to Halcyon, Liam, and Xen.

"I'm going to take our friend here to have a chat, one soldier to another," he yelled.

Xen waved his hand telling Dante to go ahead. Any intel they could gather on the Loyalists plan could save a lot of lives by the end of the war.

“What of my men?” Tusken yelled.

He nodded with his head toward the pitifully small group of survivors that had followed him this far.

“They are in fact your men? Your team?” Xen yelled back, an expression of exasperation on his face.

His metal mask was still lying where he dropped it. Tusken nodded vigorously.

“Yes. they are mine!”

Halcyon and Xen exchanged a glance before Xen responded.

“Kill them, we don’t need them.”

Tusken screamed and fought against Dante’s secure grip on his arm. Before his men could even process what was just ordered, several soldiers fired off their rifles. It was over in the blink of an eye. Liam stepped back appalled.

“They were no threat to us!” He exclaimed.

“Nor were they of use. Welcome to the realities of war, *Jedi*,” Xen sneered.

Dante, with the help of Evant, dragged Tusken from the room for questioning. Up above one of the soldiers called down.

“We found your lightsaber, m’lord.”

Xen looked up and pulled the thrown saber hilt to his hand.

“Thanks,” he said, turning around to grab his mask and secured it to his face.

He didn’t want anyone to see the anxious expression still on his face. This was only a single step in a series of many they had to make before this war could end. Next to the corpse of the terentatek Connor Grey was smoking another cigarette, looking no worse for the wear of the afternoon’s events.

“I was joking when I mentioned this thing you know.” He said loudly enough for everyone to hear him, but not so loud that it looked like he was actually talking to anyone but himself.

There came a weak scream of pain from beyond the rubble. Everyone in the room turned toward the noise. Liam moved with a careful grace toward it. Rhiaen was still alive. Back broken, and blood pumping with poison she was using her arms to drag her body toward her motionless twin. Nalia's entrails trailed nearly 10 feet from the rubble to where they ended in her body.

Liam knelt down next to Rhiaen and placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. He closed his eyes and tried to focus. The energies of this planet made it exceedingly difficult to keep a calm clear mind. He was doing everything he could to draw the poison from her body. She could survive the broken back, but if the terentatek venom wasn't extracted from her body, she would spend several agonizing days dying. He had failed to save so many this day, he was not about to add Rhiaen to that growing list.

Liam was so deep in his focus that he failed to notice Xen walking up behind him. It was the clear ring of an activating lightsaber that broke his trance. Xen spun his saber around in his hand, gripping it so the blade went down. He half knelt, half fell to the ground, driving his lightsaber straight through the upper torso of the Twi'lek. She let out a weak dying gasp and then was still.

Xen turned off his lightsaber and stood up, peering through his mask at the absolutely revolted expression on Liam's face.

"Why? Why not let me try to save her? She was on our side!" Liam shouted.

"Careful now, I might be mistaken but that does sound like a tone of rage," Xen teased.

Liam stood up silently, aghast.

"It was a mercy Jedi. She was going to have a long and painful death. There was no reason to keep her needlessly separated from her sister. Let their spirits rest now." Xen said.

"You Dark Jedi are heartless," Liam said softly.

"On the contrary, how could we fuel ourselves if not for our passions? The sooner you realize there is no Light and Dark the better off you will be, Jedi. There is just the Force. You embrace it fully or you don't. Save your lectures for your dimwitted followers. Here they fall on deaf ears. If you really wish to see Lord Ashen stopped, you are going to have to make the hard choices," Xen replied.

He turned away from Liam to return to planning out how they were going to hold the Academy. Many lives were still going to be needed to keep their prize.