***Silenced Betrayal***

**Corellian-Gunship *Dagger***

**Nicht Ka Orbit**

Planet fall on Nicht Ka was imminent; the hostile and dying world bristled with decay and decadent energy as if tearing fresh wounds onto the surface, permeable through every rock, outcropping, mountain, hill or valley. The flight crew checked the schematics and followed the carefully arranged beacons. The cargo hold, now crammed with racks to accommodate the remnant of the Kraken Regiment, was alive with soldiers donning armor and cleaning weapons. Gunners alert at their posts plied the skies for any signs of a hostile host. Yet, the Knights of Acclivis Draco were silent.

Begeren has taken a costly toll on the unit. Of the three thousand soldiers that had left Antenora as raw recruits loyal to the Emperor, nearly half that score had either fallen victim to the Sith fanatics of Esoteric or their fellow brethren. What forces that could not be fully mustered remained behind; all that remained of the once prideful and beautiful regiment were five hundred battered and bloodied warriors. They were needed. It was known Begeren was not right, the trap was plain to see for all those who wished to see the truth unblended by malice and vainglory.

Two Dark Knights eyed each other casually and with an unspoken consolation. Lucyeth, as the leader, required a calm head and a steady hand above all other things. His second in command had long ago forgotten these traits of leadership and espoused a different coarse. Yet, it mattered not for the Sergeant. The carefully planned mission was about to unfold. The final stages of the assault on Esoteric had begun. Oddly, both men smiled in the horrific humor that came from knowing they once again were heading into a trap not of their making that would cost so much hard earned ground and be priced heavily in blood of irreplaceable men.

The announcement was made exactly on time. Dagger was to be offloaded immediately before taking up station in orbit. Providing air superiority, it was claimed. Few knew the truth, few dared whisper the answer. “If you are wrong about this Zagro…it will be the end of our careers and the disgrace of Acclivis Draco. How you ever convinced me of your heresy is beyond my grasp old friend.” The Hapan Knight grabbed his leader’s hand and pulled him hard into the bulkhead squaring him dead in the eye, “If you are wrong about this, it will be the end of the Brotherhood entirely and the disgrace of Scholae Palatinae.”

**One Sith Citadel Ruins**

**Nicht Ka Surface**

Blood and viscera were strewn about the cavernous halls and crypts of the once formidable fortress. What the One Sith had taken ages to build and maintain, and ages more yet to let fall into disrepair and dereliction, fell to the Kraken Regiment during a two day siege. Many a Knight was battered and hobbled by wounds most grievous. The acrid smell of burnt flesh and death was all encompassing and filled the breathless, airless catacombs.

It was not fair to call the engagement a siege as much as it was a series of raids, sabotage, sniper attacks, and assassinations. The Force sensitive amongst Acclivis Draco had been in the vanguard of the battle, what initial skirmishes could be encountered. What followed was a prolonged march of agony and terrors unknown on even the hostile clime of Antenora.

Sergeant and Battle Team Leader alike paced the megalithic ramparts flanked by a squadron of Kraken guardsmen. The feeling that the carnage was not justified was palpable as it was all-inclusive. Even the guardsmen, perhaps especially the guardsmen, were susceptible to showing fatigue and disdain for their Force sensitive masters.

“Care to inform me what it is you deemed worthy of spending our entire reserve for, not to mention us loosing a good deal of Dark Jedi for the remainder of the campaign? Esoteric will require each of our blades to confront, and we threw away many on a ruin of no strategic value. We are hundreds of miles away from the Hexagonal Fortress and are faced with assassinations from unknown forces daily here.” Lucyeth was visibly shaken and angry, yet an underlying sadness and remorse compelled him.

“My lord…I believe the evidence that we need is hidden here. Why else would this neglected outpost be guarded so secretly and so dearly given? The engineering is ancient and very temperamental but I was able to gain some information. I just need to find the source.” The Hapan Sergeant’s eyes glistened as he saw something in the distance.

In the hollow eyes of a marble statue of a long dead and forgotten Sith, was a tiny glowing orb. The size of a signet ring, it was all that Zagro Fenn had needed. He grabbed the object lustfully and turned to his friend and superior. “We must away, now, how many of our men remain?” Stated Fenn in anguish.

“Only one-twenty or so, diminishing as the day transpires. Why?”

“We cannot permit them to leave this place.”

“Are you out of your mind?”

“Possibly, but we will not have minds remaining to us if word of what we find leaves this place.”

“Fenn, these are Palatinae forces, our forces!”

“Exactly. This is exactly why they cannot leave this place. I am returning to Judecca, you must prepare Acclivis Draco for the final assault. If I fail, I dare not guess if the mission will occur or not.”

Lucyeth ignited his saber, while Fenn trickled Force lightning from his fingertips. In an instant the personal guardsmen were reduced and the two men rushed to escape their tomb.

**Imperial Winter Palace**

**Judecca**

**Aedile’s Quarters**

Evant Taelyn sat at his desk, his eyes transfixed on the data before him. He regarded the Hapan Knight before him with a mix of surprise and pride.

“Very well…very well…it is so. Indeed, the Master at Arms appears to have dealings with the One Sith fanatics and Esoteric. And it appears you have proof that I amongst him.”

Fenn eyed his Aedile with a restrained fear and apprehension. An outsider still, Zagro knew not truly where his allegiances lay. His deepest regret was not if his actions had doomed his fellow Force sensitive brothers, but of carelessly sacrificing the life of his Antenoran soldiers.

“Sir, what is to be done?” Asked Fenn.

“Clearly you know too much to be allowed to spin this tale. However, you know too little as to be clearly dangerous seeing as the truth escapes you. You were wise to see the military leadership’s blunders were caused by some evil hand. But you don’t realize the facts, Hapan. This war is not against Esoteric or the One Sith. This war is against us for the simple purpose of war. Who is the traitor? Who isn’t the traitor is the better question. There are elements tearing the Brotherhood apart and there are others working in the shadows to strengthen it.”

Fenn was aghast. “How can this be?”

“Come young one. I will take you to my master. But first, assemble what forces Acclivis Draco has remaining. We will need them.”