

The Sundering #8893

His lips were cracked. Bleeding. The air was filled with the acrid scent of burnt metal. With each uncertain breath, the smoke seared his lungs. He tried to roll, but his legs were unresponsive. He glanced down through a cracked visor and saw an armored figure draped across his knees. He recognized the Arconan sigil on the man's shoulder. Hissing through his teeth, he tried to push the corpse away. His hands, slick with blood, slipped over the man's dusty armor.

"Fall back, get to the Academy!" A voice called out across the battlefield. Was it the voice of a comrade, or the voice of an enemy? He could not know. Straining harder, he managed to push the body away, and gagged. The reflex brought his attention to the taste of vomit already in his mouth, masked by the coppery tang of blood. His legs were a mess; shards of metal had ripped through his shin guards, and his right ankle was twisted unnaturally. He swore, and his eyes began to water.

"Let me give you a hand, Jedi," a voice called from behind him, more gently than the brusque command issued earlier. Alarmed, he tried to turn, and fumbled for a lightsaber he'd already lost. *Who am I kidding? As if I'm in any state to defend myself.* Swallowing his pride, he nodded, squinting up at the figure. To his surprise, the man bent and picked him up, carrying him away from the wreckage. He was an enormous figure, and seemed untroubled by the weight.

"What happened to you, friend?" The tone was conversational, almost jovial. Had he not been so overwhelmed, perhaps he would have found the contrast with the macabre scene comical. Instead, his lips quivered for a moment before he found his voice. It came out as a rasp, foreign to his own ears. He didn't know his own voice, or even his own name.

"I don't...I don't know. I was—" He was cut off by a cough that originated deep in his lungs, spraying blood and spittle into his savior's pristine tunic. Sheepish, he wiped his mouth with a hand. "Sorry, I'm...that wasn't..."

The man chuckled, his broad chest rumbling. "You don't have to talk, friend. I'll do enough for the both of us. As I'm sure you're wondering, but are perhaps too polite to ask, I have no side in this conflict. I work for a man named Grey, Connor Grey. Perhaps you've heard of him?"

Grey. Of course he'd heard of him. He had been part of every briefing. He was a renegade, unpredictable. The man was still talking, rambling as he walked. "You're probably not thrilled to hear that, as his reputation precedes him, but at least I'm not an enemy, um...what do you call your units?"

He cleared his throat, wincing at the blood and phlegm. "Clans?" Even his voice was weak. The giant carrying him seemed not to notice, nodding and continuing his monologue.

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"Lord Consul, we've located the—"

Legorii whirled, his crimson eyes flashing. "Don't call me that. He's still out there somewhere."

The Arcona Armed Forces officer gulped and nodded his head. "Yes sir. Our scouts have located Bravo team, and we are currently—"

"How many survivors?" Legorii demanded, his gaze fixated on the smoldering horizon.

The officer hesitated. He took a deep breath. "None, sir. Our scouts report a 100% casualty rate."

Legorii swore. "I've had enough of your reports, officer. Go help the wounded. I need to meet with the remaining Shadeborn." The officer saluted and scurried off, relieved to no longer be the bearer of bad news. There was no shortage of bad news. Death had overtaken Korriban. Esoteric and his forces had been a lot to handle on their own, but with the Brotherhood's newest division, the supporters of the Iron Throne were on the brink of defeat.

Arcona's Proconsul surveyed his surroundings. The Clan's forces were decimated. There was hardly a man left standing. The ground was literally with the injured, the air filled with a litany of moans and suppressed sobs. Legorii was disgusted. His remaining Summit members flanked him. Cethgus, his brother Entar, loomed at his right shoulder, and Turel, a relative newcomer, stood a bit further away.

"Bring me our Elders," Legorii commanded them, his tone warding off any hesitation on their part. Within moments, Timeros and Strategos had appeared, and soon after them, Nadrin. Legorii looked them over. Timeros looked as though he'd just come from the spa, his combat robes unmuddied and untornd. Strategos looked as if he was at the spa, nursing a drink and chatting casually to Timeros. Nadrin, for his part, glowered at his Proconsul. *He doesn't think I'm the one to lead us through this.*

Legorii sighed. *So this is Arcona.*

"Gentlemen," he began, cutting off Strategos and Timeros' private conversation, "thank you for surviving to this point. Many of our brothers were not so kind."

"Where's Marick?" Nadrin asked, moving straight to the point.

Legorii blinked away a flicker of annoyance. "He's missing. By all means, find him. I've already tried." He paused before continuing. "I won't mince words. This has been Taldryan's doing all along. We have attempted to thwart them for years, but without the support of the Clans – save Tarentum, and we all know how useful they've been – we have been unable to prevent this war."

Timeros sneered. "Prevent this war? Since when was it Arcona's job to safeguard the Brotherhood from their machinations? That responsibility lies with the Iron Throne, and Muz stopped listening to us years ago."

Legorii raised a hand. "Go no further, Timeros. Do not even suggest what I know is on your mind. We will not turn away from the Iron Throne. Down that path lies only ruin." Timeros' mouth twisted into a leering grin, but he said no more.

"This is only the beginning. We've taken some heavy losses, but victory is still within our grasp. The Tusken and his ragtag forces remain holed up on the other side of these ruins. We cannot hold this position much longer, and we doubt he can hold his. By most accounts, Esoteric's forces have swept most of Taldryan and their allies from the surrounding area, but our intelligence is...sporadic."

With the final word, Legorii looked directly at Timeros, Arcona's intelligence director. The Adept merely shrugged, while Strategos snickered.

"I'm glad you both find this so amusing," Cethgus interrupted. The barrel-chested Zabrak was a no-nonsense warrior, clearly itching to get back out on the field and avenge his House's significant losses. "What's the plan of attack, Lord Consul?"

Nadrin rolled his eyes and muttered, "Lord Consul..." Legorii ignored him. "We're going to rendezvous with the Tusken. We've lost communication with Naga Sadow and Malik, but we're working on re-establishing contact. Scion is rallying his troops now, and will join us in our effort."

"What of the Twins?" Turel asked.

Legorii turned to him, brow furrowing. "The Twins? What of them?"

"They're out there, somewhere. We'll kill Torin on sight, but do we have a protocol in place for dealing with the Twins? Or Grey, for that matter?"

Legorii waved a hand dismissively. "Kill them. Kill everyone that doesn't support the Throne." He eyed his senior leaders once more. "Let's go to war."

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Grey's right-hand man was called Raw, apparently. Just Raw. He had asked one of the other men in the camp why the behemoth was so named. "It's because he'll talk your ear raw," he said amid laughter from those within earshot.

They were a pathetic group. Injured, aged, and crippled. Grey had been collecting them for a long time, according to the rumors flying around the camp. Most of the newcomers, like himself, had been scooped up by Raw from the battlefield, left for dead by allies and enemies alike.

"Why is he saving us? What are we doing here?" he had asked.

More laughter. "Saving us? Death would be a kinder fate, though death is coming for all of us whether Grey and his minions scoop us up from the dust of Korriban or not. He's after artifacts, boy. Items of untold power. Weapons that could alter the course of this war."

War. Was this really a war? He had nodded numbly, huddled in the shadow of the Academy ruins with the others. Grey had a plan for them. Just as he thought he could drift off to sleep, Raw appeared before him, blotting out the fading light with his mountainous bulk.

"Time to get up, my friends. Our plans have changed. Mr. Grey has made a deal with a delightful little fellow named Synin Torin, who will be helping us in our treasure hunting. Mr. Grey needs our help!"

Synin Torin. The name echoed in his mind, returning him to the briefing room. *The One Sith. Esoteric. The enemy.* He glanced around him and saw that the others were struggling to their feet, leaning on one another. Grunts of pain and exertion filled his ears. He had no choice. He had to follow. He moved slowly, dragging his broken ankle behind him and hopping along like a wounded rabbit.

They moved as a group, picking their way slowly through the ruins. Raw led them, his silhouette unmistakable amongst the Academy's shadows. Grey was nowhere to be found. The air was still. There was no blaster fire, no battle cry, no command breaking the silence. Occasionally, they came across corpses or discarded weaponry, but the

battle looked to have long passed this point. Still, he could not shake the feeling of helplessness that had settled over him.

The journey seemed to take an eternity. With each passing moment, he expected to be ambushed, slaughtered in seconds. And then they arrived. Through a broken doorway, Synin Torin looked on. He appeared to be alone, but any trained soldier would know better. Raw moved forward and knelt before him.

“Lord Torin, your lambs.”

Lambs? What did he mean, lambs? Where was Grey?

Torin chuckled. “Send Grey my regards. These will be most...useful.” Torin handed Raw a datapad. “This contains all of the information that Grey will need to deploy his, uh...new toy.”

Raw bowed again and turned back toward the two dozen men who had followed him. He spread his hands apologetically. “Sorry, my friends. There is no kindness in war.”

Chaos erupted. One Sith operative emerged from the shadows, and he felt himself behind dragged to the ground and bludgeoned once, twice. He tried to fight back, but his attackers were too strong. Just when all appeared to be lost, the air was split by shrieking blasters and the *snap-hiss* of lightsabers igniting.

He found himself in the middle of a battle once again. The men who had seized him released their grip. He dropped to the floor, dashing his head against a stone. All went dark.

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“That’s all of them, Lord Consul.”

Legorii nodded. “Any sign of Torin?”

The officer shook his head. “No, my lord. The giant escaped as well. Our agents believe that Torin was delivering essential intelligence to Grey, information he needs to use this mysterious new weapon of his.”

“That’s bad for all of us, then. Thank you, officer.” The man saluted and turned away.

Turel approached him, clipping his lightsaber back to his belt as he walked. “One survivor, Legorii. Would you like to speak with him?”

The Anzat shook his head. “No, we need to press on. We don’t know how much longer Tusken can hold out.”

“I understand, Lord Consul, but I think that you should take a look at this one.”

Sighing, Legorii nodded. He followed the Qel-Droman Quaestor toward the edge of the broken passageway. The injured man beneath them had been beaten half to death. He was clearly concussed, and his face was so battered as to be nearly recognizable. Upon seeing him, Legorii gasped, and his heart skipped a beat.

He turned to Turel. “Who else has seen this?” he demanded.

"No one, *Lord Consul*." The title had an edge to it, an emphasis previously absent. Legorii nodded, and crouched down beside the man.

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He opened his eyes, as much as he could. His vision was swimming. It took a few seconds, but the figure above him came into focus. His bulbous nose and crimson eyes were familiar, as was the dark hair that framed his face. His mind raced as he tried to pair the face with a name...

Legorii. "Legorii!" The name came out as little more than a whisper.

The Anzat smiled. "Go to sleep, Marick. Arcona thanks you for your service." His thumb flicked the activation knob on *Soulflayer*, his emerald lightsaber, and the blade ripped through the Hapan's chest. He was dead in seconds. Legorii retracted the blade and stood up, turning to face Turel.

"Thank you, Proconsul Sorenn. Go rally our forces. It's time to press onward."

Turel bowed, smirking. "Yes, Lord Consul."