

Awakenings - Fiction 1: Divided Loyalties
Atra Ventus - 11708

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Echoes of the Past



Warhost Barracks, Officer's Quarters
Temple of Sorrow, Sepros
Orian System

The war was over, or so *they* had told them.

And yet, the Warhost was in motion once more. Not an organized march towards a known target, no this was a far less organized mess than such as that. Gone was the elegance of structure that accompanied their order of battle, left with only the silence of torn allegiances. No one openly voiced what they all knew, as those loyal remained steadfast in their quarters whilst those who had succumbed to disillusion were already packing their things, preparing for the struggle to come.

It was such a quiet thing; the battle lines were drawn with nary a word. Yet drawn those lines had been, and there was no going back. After all, how could things ever go back to normal once friend turned to foe? Something was always lost in the transformation, and seldom did it ever return.

In the dim light of his quarters, the officer worked over what few possessions he still had. His pale fingers traced the edges of his insignia with an utter lack of grace, his hands shaking noticeably in tandem with his resolve. His blue eyes forged a glare as he dropped the object and clasped his hands together, willing them to be still. The man had no time to waver, no other choice he could make. So focused was he that he didn't even notice the slight hiss as the door to his quarter's slid open, an unwelcome shadow interrupting the light from outside as it cast a pallor across the quarters.

The door slid shut once more as the tall figure slid over the threshold. The newcomer's body was half lost within the confines of a heavy, black cloak which fell from his right shoulder all the way around to a clasp upon the left of his chest. The result left the fabric open on his right side, where moon kissed flesh stood out against the dark attire while the entirety of his left side was hidden from view. Feeling the weight of eyes upon his back, the officer half-turned to face his intruder while craning his neck as he brought the other man into his line of sight.

"Quaestor Ventus," the man spoke as a mixture of rage and disappointment marbled over his features.

"Planning a trip, Tristan?" the Umbaran spoke in his usual calm manner, each word sliding like ice down the officer's spine. He punctuated the question by making a gesture with his right hand towards the supply pack laid out upon the bed.

"After all that—" Tristan's voice caught in his throat as his face turned a striking shade of red. "I don't want to hear that name from your lips ever again, got it?"

For the officer's sake, he was quite lucky that they were confined to his quarters. Not for threat of violence from the Quaestor, who seemed to be taking the man's disrespect with a surprising amount of grace – or apathy. The luck in this situation was that no one was around to witness it.

"Very well, Sergeant," came Atra's all too calm response, not so much as a glimmer of emotion upon his face.

Tristan turned his gaze back to his work, neatly folding a couple tunics before cramming them into his pack, alongside his equipment. At his back, the Quaestor remained motionless save for above the neck, his head swivelling about the room as his gaze travelled. "You seek to follow the Prophet, don't you?"

Again, like icy fingers the words played their way up the Sergeant's spine.

"Not just me, others have made the same choice," Tristan stated as he worked the straps closed on his pack. "Anywhere is better than here," he muttered quietly.

A soft sigh came from the Battlemaster, little more than a long exhale rushing past his barely parted lips. "That is a choice you don't have to make," a strange weight seemed to come over Atra as he spoke, his shoulders and stance lowering ever so slightly. "I can protect you."

"Like you protected her?" Tristan's response was venom, spat with a striking intensity as rage burned bright in his blue eyes. He didn't bother to look at the Quaestor, to see his reaction. The Sergeant didn't care at all, because it would never give back to him what had been lost. His eyes stayed firmly on the durasteel wall at the back of his quarters, even as emotion sought to steal away his focus.

Atra's shoulders instantly stiffened, emotion seething through the cracks of his façade. True regret twisted his features for a moment before he allowed wrath to wash over him, tempering his metaphorical mask once more.

"I stood where you are," the Sergeant continued as he looked down and to the left, lining up Atra in the corner of his sight, "and spoke much the same words. She still chose you. She still died."

"I didn't—"

"You didn't **stop** it!" Tristan shouted as he interrupted Atra. Heat burned in the Sergeant's palms, his knuckles turning white as he continued to tighten his fists, even as drops of crimson fell to the floor.

Ventus took a careful step forward, his hidden arm pushing against the fabric of his cloak for but a moment before disappearing once more. "We both lost something important," he spoke softly as he was forced to turn away, to focus on anything but the man preparing to depart. Atra found his way to Tristan's desk, his right hand rose to the dragon medallion that adorned the simple strap around his neck. His pale finger softly traced the edges, as if contemplating revealing the secrets it held. With a subtle grace his talon fingered hand shifted from beneath the folds of his cloak, gesturing toward a turned over picture frame. The unseen fingers of the Force wrapped around the object, lifting it slowly into the air and turning the image towards him. A regretful smile tugged at the corners of his lips, a sudden wave of emotion forcing the Quaestor to blink rapidly as he worked to remain in control.

“She was my sister,” Tristan almost whispered, turning so that he could sit upon the stiff mattress while pressing his forehead heavily into his hands. “My **sister** you good for nothing sack of...” he didn’t bother finishing the sentence, it wasn’t worth it anymore.

I know, the Quaestor thought to himself as the inescapable weight of the past pressed in upon him. “That doesn’t mean you have to throw your lot in with the Apostle and his ilk.”

“We were loyalists to the core, Ventus... Serving Sadow is all either of us had ever known.” Tristan shook his head violently, trying to regain his calm.

Atra reached out, grasping the picture frame with both hands almost reverently. He placed it down gently before glancing around the room once more. “You’re packing awful light.” The Quaestor didn’t have to say anything else; they both knew the unspoken question.

You have no intention of surviving... Do you?

Tristan let out a long breath, one he had not been aware he had been holding. With a deep inhale he drew his hand back from his hands, wiping the light smear of blood from his cheeks with a sleeve. He slid the straps of his supply pack over his shoulders and rose to his full height, shifting the weight upon his back.

“Sergeant, I won’t stop you; we both know I don’t have the right... However you have my word that none under my command shall kill those who depart with you.” Atra kept his back to Tristan as he spoke, lacking the confidence to look his lover’s twin brother in the eyes.

The man stopped at the entry, glancing at the floor even as his hand hovered over the activation switch. “I don’t want your word, *my Lord*,” Tristan all but spat the moniker, “I want my sister back.”

And with that, he was gone. The door hissed open and the Sergeant marched into the light of the hallway, leaving Atra alone in the shadows of his quarters. The Quaestor stood as still as the darkness that sought to claim him, his breathing so slow, so quiet, that it became almost non-existent. He rolled his shoulders as he brought his arms tight across his chest, wrapping himself deeper in the shroud of his cloak even as his eyes turned to the image of a striking woman with bright, blue eyes. She wore the uniform of Dlarit, at least in the image, with her dark hair hidden beneath her cap and a smile that spread from ear to ear.

“I should have known better... That a life of peace was not one men like me could have,” Atra’s words hung heavy upon the air. Reaching up, he pulled his necklace from around his neck and looked at the red dragon. His brow furrowed ever so slightly as he forced a tendril of power into the small object, triggering the activation switch he knew to be there despite the absence of seams.

The Umbaran was forced to squint as light cut through the darkness of the quarters, the holo projection shining out from the medallion. The torso of a woman was the first clearly defined feature as his eyes adjusted, her face lost outside the scope of the projection, a more than regrettable fact. Within her ghostly arms, however, was the focus of the holo. A small shape squirmed within the woman’s grasp, popping its head out of the blanket that wrapped it and smiling with such infectious glee that even the Snow Dragon smiled as he looked upon it, even though that smile was warped with sorrow.

"I am so very sorry..."

Another sliver of the Force deactivated the device, plunging the room into darkness and the harshest of realities. After so much time, Atra was still too weak. He didn't have the strength to protect that which he cherished, and he lacked the charisma to keep them out of harm's way. All he could do was keep trying, keep fighting, and protect everything that was **his**. No more strife, no more conflict.

Ventus had known it was a mistake to come to Tristan, to try to stop him, and yet he had to try because of the past that had connected them. Funny how decisions made always had a way of coming back around. It left the Umbaran curious, and cautious... because just how many of his decisions were waiting to strike when he least expected it?

Life begets life, death warrants death...