

RALLY TO ME: TYRANT SWORD

Knight Nashiro Kakos, PIN #14194

Nashiro Kakos sat lazily in the co-pilot's chair of the *Broken Blade*, absentmindedly thumbing through a news feed on his datapad. He wasn't sure where Dash went, but when his apprentice and the pilot of the starship had asked him to mind the comms panel for "just a minute", Nashiro had assumed the mercenary meant a standard minute. Now he wasn't so sure.

"Message coming through, my lord," said one of the nameless, faceless crew members Nashiro hadn't bothered to meet. They were all interchangeable, expendable and replaceable to him. "Shall I patch it through?"

Nashiro didn't look up from a riveting article about riots in Coronet City. "Knock yourself out," he said.

The comms system activated with a burst of static that caused Nashiro to lose his place in the article. "Sithspit!" he exclaimed, turning towards the crew member with bloodlust in his eye. "If you can't..." he began, before the garbled message organized itself into discernable words.

"... has fallen. I say again, SCEPTER has fallen."

"That's Uji," said Nashiro recognizing the Aedile of House Galares. He placed his datapad next to the speaker and leaned in to hear more clearly. The message continued.

"Adept Keath is currently missing in action, and I have assumed command of House Galeres forces and the remnants of SCEPTER. I request all available Arconan force to respond immediately and move to assist our defense."

There was another burst of static, and the message began again. Nashiro looked towards the crew member. "You should probably patch that through to the captain," he said as he picked up his datapad. "And then issue an 'all hands'. Something tells me we're going to get dragged into this mess..."

Mirus' held his hasty council of war in his private galley outside of his quarters. The Captain's Mess was normally a place of celebration, but on this day, it was the site of fierce debate amongst the Force-sensitive members of the Tyrant Sword.

On one hand, his wife Rhiann was firmly in favor of assisting SCEPTER forces. After all, she had said, we all pledge fealty to Clan Arcona, and Galeres is an allied force. Joining her was Adem, his apprentice Dorn and Erin.

On the other side was Kakos and the newest addition to their crew, Knight Condar Sovar. Condar's reasoning was sound, as the Tyrant Sword was still a relatively new battle team in the Brotherhood, and engaging in a tough fight against an unknown enemy risked ending the

Tyrant Sword before it ever really began. Nashiro's reasoning, however, was pure Kakos.

"Frak 'em," he said, in his characteristic, caustic tone. "Let SCEPTER die and Galares with it."

Rhiann's light skin reddened with anger. "And what," she asked, raising her voice, "we do nothing and just allow loyal Arconan's to die just to satisfy your little vendetta?"

"It has nothing to do with my vendetta," said Nashiro, narrowing his eyes at the Sephi. "And I never said do nothing. I vote we side with whoever is attacking Galares."

The table grew quiet. Mirus arched an eyebrow. "That seems... unwise," he said, breaking the silence with his deep voice.

"We're *fraking* pirates," said Nashiro, leaning forward in his seat and poking the table with his finger for emphasis. "We're not a rescue team. We're not charity workers. We're pirates. We take from the weak, and right now, Galares looks weak to me."

"But further weakening Galares could open Arcona up to attacks from other Clans," said Adem thoughtfully. "What with the purges across the Brotherhood, we can't afford to make ourselves anymore vulnerable."

Nashiro considered the Umbaran's words, as did Mirus. Rumors had begun to circulate that the Dark Council's inquisitors and loyalist militias had begun systematically culling the Brotherhood of those termed "undesirables". He did not foresee any threat to his crew, but if the hand behind these purges was the Grand Master, Mirus wouldn't recognize Pravus' machinations until it was too late anyway.

Nashiro sighed. "I hate the idea of helping Arcona, but Umbrella Man has a point."

"It's pronounced..."

"I know how it's pronounced," hissed Nashiro.

"Enough," said Mirus. "Infighting can wait." He looked at his wife and second-in-command. "Ultimately, the decision is mine," he said, "but it is important to me that we agree, as a team, on what course of action we take."

He stood and walked behind Adem. Placing a large hand on the Gray Jedi's shoulder, he continued. "Adem, I agree that we cannot allow Arcona to become so weak that rival clans may threaten her. Our ability to operate in the Dajorra System is contingent upon top cover provided by our Consul, and if Galares falls, so may Arcona."

He moved to stand behind Nashiro. "Kakos, your rage continues to define your recommendations, but you make a good point. Galares is a rival house, and we must be careful not to upset the balance of power between Qel-Droma and them. Our intervention must be tempered with the understanding that, some day soon, those we help today will become our foes of tomorrow."

Finally, Mirus moved to stand behind Condar. “So, our assistance will be quick, covert and minimal. Because as Condar stated, we cannot afford to lose all that we have built here on the *Broken Blade*. Our journey is just beginning, and it will not end fighting someone else’s war. Therefore, I propose we execute a raid with the purpose of gathering intelligence on the enemy attacking SCEPTER. Once we know who they’re dealing with, we can ensure this information gets into the right hands.”

Mirus returned to his seat and looked around the table at the gathered crew. “Do we have an accord?” he asked. Nods of silent assent answered his query. “Good. Time is of the essence, so let’s talk strategy...”

Rhiann’s delicate fingers flew across the keypad of her console on the bridge of the *Broken Blade*. From their vantage point in the Dajorra asteroid belt, she knew that she wouldn’t be able to access many of the tactical networks that connected SCEPTER forces on the surface of Eldar to any orbital platforms, but she was certain there were some HoloNet-based network pathways she could access. The Sephi narrowed her eyes in deep concentration, but her bionic purple eye glowed brightly as she delved into the binary world of the SCEPTER network.

Behind her Mirus stood with Kakos at his right hand. The Dathomiri warrior had little clue as to what his beloved was doing, but he was certain that the slender Sith technomancer would be the decisive effort behind Tyrant Sword’s mission.

“Should we...”

“Shh,” whispered Mirus. Kakos glared at his captain but did as he was told. Even though Mirus wasn’t involved in this part of the operation, he still felt as if he needed to concentrate on it. All around him, the normally busy bridge crew was silent as the *Broken Blade* hung in blackout mode at the edge of the Dajorra System.

“... network appears down...” whispered Rhiann, mostly to herself. Mirus leaned closer to hear. “... can’t be... blocked... someone is talking...”

“What’s she mummering about?” asked Condar to Kakos.

The Sith marauder shrugged. “Nerd babble,” he said.

“What did I just say?” growled Mirus. “One more word out of either of you and I’ll dump you out of the airlock.”

Rhiann’s furious typing abruptly stopped. “That’s it,” she said definitively. “This is as far as I can go from here.” She adjusted a monitor to allow Mirus to look over her shoulder. “See this?” she said, pointing at a string of characters and symbols. “This code is an Arconan executive-level code, and it’s giving the impression that the SCEPTER network is down. But, when I do this,” she said as she keyed a command, “you can see that the network is passing a massive amount of data through every second.”

Mirus struggled to follow his wife's logic. "In Basic, Love. Explain it to me in Basic."

Rhiann allowed a small smile. "It means that someone has put a very high-level lock on the SCEPTER network, but someone is still using it."

"And?" asked Kakos. Both Mirus and Rhiann ignored him.

"I might be able to locate a backdoor through the tactical network," continued Rhiann, "but that would require..."

"Us to be in orbit around Eldar," finished Mirus.

Rhiann nodded. "Exactly."

Mirus didn't waste a second. "Dash, you drunken piece of *poodoo*, plot a micro-jump to Eldar!"

"Aye, Captain," came the gruff response from the pilot of the *Broken Bridge*.

Mirus turned back to Rhiann. "Any idea what's in orbit around Eldar?"

She shook her head. "None. Sensors are showing negative as well."

"We can expect some company, though," injected Kakos. "And if we hit 'em fast, we might be able to snag a prisoner or two to figure out what's going on."

Adem nodded in agreement. "If we can take one of the adversaries alive, I should be able to pry whatever secrets he holds from him."

Nashrio grinned. "And if his weird alien mind powers don't work, I'll just take a hydrospanner and a blowtorch to him and get the intelligence we need."

"Course plotted, Captain," shouted Dash from the pilot's seat.

Mirus nodded to the Knights. "You three prepare to board. We'll try to use the tractor beams to pull in a smaller ship, but in the event we need to, I want my boarding party ready to go."

The three Knights nodded and moved off the bridge. Mirus sat in the command chair and took a deep breath. The micro-jump would only take a few seconds, and then he and his crew would be in their first fight as Tyrant Sword.

"Mr. Rowsdower," he said with a wolfish grin, "engage the hyperdrive."

The battle had been fierce, but it was over quickly. As Nashiro stood in front of the battered escape pod in the small landing bay of the *Broken Blade*, he reflected on the last few minutes that had brought them all here.

When the *Broken Blade* exited hyperspace over the planet Eldar, the open space around the world was scattered with debris and remnants of SCEPTER starships. Initial sensor scans proved negative for orbital ships, but Rhiann's warnings provided only a few seconds before the formidable orbital defense system on Eldar's surface opened up on their ship. As Dash struggled to avoid turbolaser blasts from the planet's surface, a light corvette launched from SCEPTER's compound in the central basin region. It made no attempt to hail the *Broken Blade* and moved along an attack heading.

Mirus, always the warrior, had stayed calm and directed his green crew through their first battle. Rhiann had once again proven her technical prowess by rapidly slicing into the tactical network of Eldar and downloading enough data to partially fill the data banks of the *Broken Blade*. The gunners of the crew demonstrated their skill and prowess as they engaged the corvette at maximum range with a deluge of missiles and turbolaser blasts. And finally, Dash Rowsdower, sometimes pilot, all-time drunk, kept all of them alive with his deft maneuvering of a capital ship that would put many snubfighter pilots to shame.

And during all that time, Nashiro had waited for the call to board. A call that never came.

Escape pods had sprouted from the corvette as it rolled in flames. The *Broken Blade* plotted an escape route from the orbit of Eldar as tractor beam gunners struggled to target the small metal cylinders that rapidly plummeted towards the surface of the planet. Fortunately, they got one.

Unfortunately, it didn't matter.

Nashiro peered back into the open door of the escape pod. Inside, five human males lay sprawled on the floor on top of one another. Their skin was pale and their heads were cocked at unnatural angles. They looked as if every muscle in their body had seized up at once.

Now that the *Broken Blade* was safely in hyperspace, Mirus joined Nashiro at the opening of the escape pod. Peering inside, he confirmed what the young Sith had said.

"Poison?" he asked.

Nashiro nodded. "Looks like they took it once they knew they wouldn't make it back down to Eldar." He toed one of the bodies with his boot. "Don't suppose you know any Sith necromancy, do you?"

Mirus shook his head. Nashiro shrugged. "Worth a shot."

Mirus knelt down to get a closer look at the men. They were all nondescript, almost identical with only slight variance in their faces. If there was a definition of an average human, these men would be it.

"Check inside their mouth," said Nashiro, breaking the silence.

"What?"

"Open one of their mouths. I have a theory."

Shrugging his massive shoulders, Mirus reached into the escape pod and grasped the head of one of the bodies. Though the chemicals in their bloodstream had constricted all of their muscles and ligaments, Mirus was able to forcibly pry open the lower jaw. "Okay," he said sarcastically, "do you want me to fill it or just pull it?"

Nashiro ignored him. "Check the back left, bottom molar."

Mirus bent his head to look. "Not there. Broken tooth."

"Okay," said Nashiro. "Check another one."

Mirus grabbed another body and checked. "Same thing."

Nashiro stood. "Because those were fake teeth with a capsule of whatever chemical was used to kill these men. They were under orders to bite down and commit suicide rather than be caught."

"A lot of commitment and discipline for a bunch of mercs," said Mirus.

Nashiro shook his head. "These aren't mercs, Mirus. These guys are either true believers, which I doubt, or they're more afraid of their leader than they are of us. Think about it. Rhiann said there was an executive-level lock on the SCEPTER network, which means that someone very powerful in Arcona may be involved in what's going on down on Eldar."

Mirus considered Nashiro's words. "But if that's true, then we have a traitor among us," he said.

Nashiro nodded. "And this thing with the teeth, that's straight out of the Imperial Intelligence handbook." He grimaced. "Mirus, I know you don't want to hear this, but I think I know who's behind all of this. We need to talk to Rhiann to try to confirm. And then, we need to contact Uji. If I'm right, he doesn't have long to live."