

## Restoration: Ascendant Fiction II

### Prompt I



### FROM VOID TO HORIZON

*Continued from Week I Fiction*

*He had been dead for two years already. A few extra days wouldn't hurt...*

Eiko rose from the pile of clothes he'd used as a makeshift bed. In the darkness, he dug around in the folds for the rifle he'd pulled from one of the numerous dead bodies strewn throughout the hallways of the Anchorage. The chilled air and cavernous spaces within the station ate time. The dark wanted to tear at Eiko's sanity, feeding his hopes and fears with imaginary lights in the distance, voices that weren't there, and ghosts of the past that tried to speak with him in the stillness.

Lingering was nearly as dangerous as moving. With a strip of torn fabric, Eiko wrapped all the cloth into a bundle and slung it over his shoulder. He started moving gingerly, picking his way over the mounds of debris in some direction. It didn't matter much where he went, as long as it was clearly away from the fighting he'd escaped from, and it kept him marginally safer for the short term.

From the direction he'd come from, Eiko heard the clatter of rubble being moved. His throat clenched. Every breath seemed louder with the knowledge that he wasn't alone in the underworld of the Anchorage. If he could count on an ally turning the corner, he could be free from the dark, true, but with only a stolen rifle to defend himself, he swallowed hard. He'd drawn himself closer to the Force in the past days than he had in years, and it strained his body to channel the energy and shape its will to match his. Now, it seemed pliable—almost like it anticipated his thoughts and wanted to shroud him from sight, sound, and sense as desperately as he did. Eiko pulled his body up against the wall and did his best to calm his breathing.

Within moments, the white searchlight spilled out of the corridor and into the room, revealing the twisted and deteriorating remains of machines. It bobbed with its owner's footsteps, swaying back and forth methodically, drawing closer.

Seeping in around the edges of his mind was cackling pandemonium—voices without bodies, panic, delusions. He heard Tra'an's voice call out clearly, "Come, stand beside the Ascendant—traitor, traitor, rat, betrayer." Death had a voice, too, and it felt like oil trapped between his clothes and his skin. He felt the weight of his mask on his face, and saw the hovering information overlays in front of him for a second before they dissolved into impossible runes and then to dust.

Eiko blinked. He had no mask. It was back in the ship, the one that he'd flown to the Anchorage just in time to be captured by Drax's forces. Everything he owned was back on that ship. But even with the realization that he was shuffling about in the dark with nothing but scraps and salvage, it didn't shake the illusion completely. And if the illusion lingered into the next few moments, it would kill him. Death told him so, growling deeply in Huttese.

The glowrod was brighter than Eiko had expected.

"Position mark, end corridor. Position mark, next room."

The response from the figure's comm was immediate. "Marked, corridor end. Marked, room 43-Usk. Opening communication to central."

"Cancel," the man barked firmly. "Close all communications, and leave them closed."

Eiko shifted slightly so he could put the intruder's body between him and the glowrod. Above him, duracrete shuddered with the dull thud of an explosion several floors away—a breaching charge, perhaps, running through the bones of the Anchorage.

The glowrod aimed up at the ceiling first, illuminating the rainfall of dust and following it down towards the ground.

"Can't even be sure this is the right way out," the man grumbled, stepping further into the room. He scanned the space idly, glancing past Eiko without noticing him.

Eiko felt the rising pull of the Force, and the exhaustion setting in from holding tightly to the power that was now intent on ebbing.

"It's not," Eiko exhaled, dropping his concealment. His rifle was aimed at the man, and Eiko tried to steady his stance. "This is the Anchorage—the only way out is a hangar."

The man's eyes widened in surprise. "You..." Then the sight of Eiko's ragged clothes and the familiar sight of that particular rifle caused him to smirk. "You're the one who stirred up the commotion up there, right? Ran off, broke your fellow prisoners out at the first chance. Like a real hero."

"And you," Eiko straightened his back. "Deserter, I suppose. Not much hope going back for you." He fought back the urge to laugh, stifling it into a loud breath before the thought blindsided him and he found himself grinning oddly. His teeth felt grimy, like the oil between his shirt and his skin, like the pain that sailed along the side of his face as his smile disturbed the scars on his cheek. "You didn't think you'd get out of this alone *and* alive, did you?"

"It's better than dying."

"Well, we'll both find out soon, won't we? So you are a deserter. Didn't see the point of Drax's war? Or just reminded of your mortality at an inopportune time?"

A saber ignited in front of Eiko. "There's no reason why I shouldn't kill you now."

“Correct,” Eiko nodded, still enraptured by his smile. “But I’ve been dead for two whole years—and you, you aren’t dead yet. You might need lessons.”

The pain crept up his scalp and rolled down his spine, sobering him suddenly. The bolt of plasma was launched without warning, marring the face of the deserter in one brilliant stroke. The scent of burnt skin filled the air immediately, but Eiko couldn’t see why—to his eyes, the scorch marks crossed over a silvery mask with a sole red stripe.

The deserter’s red-bladed saber clattered to the ground next to the glowrod, both released from their owner’s hands. The body collapsed crudely, but Eiko stared ahead. In the place of the deserter stood all of his confidence and pride. The edges of the new figure’s robe warped and faded like mist. It was unmistakably himself, though, a fact firmly reinforced as the ice blue saber was produced from a ghostly belt.

Eiko sidestepped the first strike, dropping the rifle to tuck his body down and grasp for the fallen saber. He couldn’t see that the deserter’s focus was aimed at him, digging into Eiko’s already cracked mind and unearthing the impossible. The man grimaced in pain, clutching one hand to his face with the other outstretched at Eiko.

“Child, child, child,” the specter shook its head and spoke in the metallic monotone that had protected Eiko for so many years. “You should have stayed dead. It was safer there.”

Eiko felt his mouth close just in time for him to reply, but all he could muster was a shout as he swung wildly at the ghost. The gyroscopic tugging of the saber was foreign. Eiko tightened his grip and turned to face the form.

“Do you even know why you were dead?” The haze taunted. “Do you remember dying?”

Another swing from Eiko came up short as the ghost shifted away in the last second.

“You wanted something impossible—like every other soul before you. Even your precious Revan wasn’t immortal, but you thought you could escape that fate. You thought you were better.” The words seemed to rise and fall with Eiko’s own breath as he missed the ghost again, scoring the ground beneath him with an orange trail. “You thought immortality could be found in your martyrdom.”

The glowrod gave off a final burst of light as Eiko overshot his target and cut it in two. In the fading light of the molten scars of duracrete left by Eiko’s struggle, the ghost seemed larger. It infuriated Eiko, the way his opponent lingered just on the edge of his reach, always a step ahead of his strikes.

“I know why I was dead,” Eiko growled. “I chose it.”

The ghost threw its head back in amusement, still out of striking distance. “If that’s what you choose to believe, child, then that will be your truth. But even if you’re right, it doesn’t change the facts. You have always been a puppet. Of every master you’ve ever had. Of every leader who has held your leash.”

“I chose it!”

“You chose poorly,” it sneered.

Eiko’s cut found its home this time, separating the mist into two and cleaving the deserter’s crawling body at the waist. All at once, he let the saber disappear back into its housing as he clawed at the fading design of his mask hanging in the air. It was gone, and everything was soaked in darkness.

By the light of the saber, Eiko severed the head of the deserter and shoved it roughly into the man’s own hood, preparing to haul it back the way the man had come. Crossing back into the hallway, he coughed as another cloud of dust shook free from the ceiling.



Doku’s expression widened as he stared into the cockpit of the battle-scarred scout ship sprawling sideways in the hangar. Ahead, the remainder of his detachment pushed forward toward the front lines of retaking the Anchorage.

Lying in the pilot’s seat was a mask, robe, and saber—the mask, in itself, seemed strange.

“No dawdling, Rivendare,” Callus remarked blandly as he stepped behind the Knight.

“Doesn’t that seem a little odd to you?” Doku pointed into the cockpit. “It’s all in order—like someone meant to come back to it, but they parked in a rush.”

Callus saw the handle of a DC-15s pistol tucked underneath the console. He nodded slowly. “Just keep up with the team.”

As soon as he was out of earshot, Callus let his swearing loose in angry, muffled tones. He opened a connection to the Transcendent, skipping the chain to leave a message firmly in the hands of those who needed to know.

“News, Bo’ Amar?” Tra’an responded after a moment.

“He’s not dead,” Callus muttered.

“Who?”

“I found a mask and a saber in a scout craft in the hangar. I’ll secure it for now, but pass the word. The nek’s come home.”

The sound of a pensive breath came through the link. “Understood.”