

The Paladin Massacre

There is a figure, a figure with many faces. They sing a wordless song, before one by one they are snuffed out. The figure sits upon a throne, a throne made of metal and ancient malice, twisting and breaking and remaking with the sound of a passing shadow. There is a pillar beneath the throne, a pillar made of bones. Skulls scream out silently from the pillar, their features turning from pale ivory to ashen steel. There are figures at the base of the pillar. Some of them gaze up in wonderment of the figure on the throne. Some brandish their fists and shout their challenges to him. Some do not see the figure at all, their gaze cast down or behind, barely aware of the monument of bone in plain sight. Blood begins to pour from the hands of the figure on the throne. It starts with thin rivulets beading away from the fingers, snaking their way down the throne and the pillar. The blood begins to pool within the crowd, lapping at the feet of those closest to the pillar. They draw it in, elated by its touch as it works its way through their bodies until they are swollen and bloated by it. Now the blood is flowing in a torrent from the hands upon the throne, the pool spreading further and further into those below. Some are dragged down, disappearing beneath its surface in a single dreadful moment. Some thrash against it, flailing and drowning in the roiling crimson tide as it thrashes around them. The dreamer stares enthralled as the blood rushes to meet him. It envelops his feet, the cool sting of its touch heralding such intoxicating corruption. The blood rises higher, but the dreamer does not thrash against it. He welcomes it, spreading his arms wide and allowing himself to be buoyed upon it. He sees others like himself, their hands raised in jubilation, and from their lips comes a dreadful song of wondrous and joyful torment. The pillar raises higher now, bones erupting from beneath it, taking the throne up to the darkest depths of the heavens. The figure has but one face now, and a smile like the cracking of dawn over a broken world shines down from him. The blood that stemmed from him touches all there. Whether they fight against the tide, are pulled beneath it or raised up by it, none can escape the ocean of blood.

A sharp metallic beeping roused Kor suddenly from his meditation. He sat cross-legged on the floor, the flame of a single candle dancing gently with the constant breath of the ships circulated air. The candles light played over the spartan furnishings of the small room; a desk and a chair pushed against one wall, and an empty bookcase against another, all made of the same lustreless grey metal. There were many rooms like this on the *Paladin*, repurposed from sleeping quarters or small offices into private chambers where those making use of the Shadow academy could privately study texts and artefacts. Kor looked down at the book he had brought with him from one of the library halls, a lengthy text on modern interpretations of the works of Sorzus Syn, his vision still tinged with red as his consciousness reasserted itself. He had been meditating on the words when the vision had come to him. There was nothing new about that, visions often sprang to him when he was deeply immersed in the old lore, and these often brought insights or revelations into his studies. But this vision, the throne, the blood, this was something else entirely. Visions and hallucinations were not uncommon in the Shadow Academy; many of the items it held still carried impressions of their previous owners, and it took only a moment for an over eager initiate to draw these memories out through the Force. But this hadn't felt like the meanderings of ancient thoughts cast out into the stream of consciousness, caressing passing minds with a glimpse of what was. What Kor saw had pressed onto his thoughts like a storm cloud roiling in from the

horizon. He had picked up on something nascent in his surroundings, some potential that had bubbled up through the Force. But where it had come from, he had no idea. The beeping sound came again, and by now his faculties had returned enough to help him identify the sound. He reached a clawed hand into his robes and took out the small comlink he had been given when he had been approached to join this *inquisition*. The whole affair had been secretive and not a little theatrical, with unknown persons in black cowls talking to him of oaths and order and the duty to the Brotherhood. He had quite enjoyed it all. Clandestine meetings and secret societies were always an intriguing subject for him. Since then he been given minor assignments through the comlink; leaving certain information in a certain place, a murder of a dissident civilian or two, but nothing beyond the stretch of his capabilities. A small red light flicked on and off on the device now, indicating an incoming message. He thumbed the activation switch and quiet static began to spill from the small speaker, as it usually did. Then the voice came. It had never been the same voice when a message had come through, and it was almost impossible to identify the speaker, but Kor had a private suspicion or two on that matter.

“To all agents currently aboard the *Paladin*,” it said in a flat tone. “An operation is currently in progress, and to ensure your safety it is advised you remain in a secure location until receiving further orders. Should you be approached by a member of the Royal Guard, say the words ‘I am desired’. Failure to provide this passcode will result in immediate termination. Hesitation will result in immediate termination. Disclosing the pass code or any other information pertaining to the operation now or in the future will result in immediate termination. Await further instruction.”

The link ended. Cryptic as ever, but the content of the message was unusual. The fact that the *Paladin* was subject to an Inquisitorius investigation was concerning enough, but the involvement of the Grand Masters Royal Guard was particularly troubling. This was a place of knowledge and learning which held priceless treasures of the Dark Side, and for all intents and purposes it now appeared to be under attack. He could not sit by and allow such a travesty to unfold. He closed the book in front of him. He was finished with it now, and it was only proper to return it to its correct place.

It was a short walk through the empty corridors to the library on this level of the ship, his fingers twitching every time his hand swung past the lightsaber at his belt. Most of the newer members were not permitted to carry weapons in the Shadow Academy, but Kor Vaal was a full Knight and a returned frequently to study after his initial time here, and so certain privileges were afforded to him. It was quieter than usual though, the sense of desolation adding to the uncomfortable feeling pricking the back of his neck. He let the Force stretch out from him as he walked, sinking his perception into his surroundings till the echoing sound of his footfalls and the gentle whisper of his long robes against the deck seemed distant on the edge of his hearing. He had felt the touch of panic and could almost taste the discharge of power from unknown sources. The panic had begun to fade now, and it was not difficult to determine why. His suspicions were confirmed when he entered the library, a large room with a high ceiling and plain walls against which had been placed tall bookshelves, with simple unadorned tables and chairs scattered haphazardly over the floor. But all was not the way it

been when he had left several hours before. Bodies were scattered here now, five in total from a variety of different species. They lay crumpled on the floor or lay hunched over tables, their bodies rent from saber burns or the slashes of long blades. But Kor's gaze did not linger long on the dead, instead scanning the bookshelves for signs of damage to the precious materials which he thought he was sure to find. But there was none. Every shelf was pristine and ordered, every volume in its place and untouched by blood or blade or lightsaber. Whatever this 'operation' was the utmost care was apparently being taken to preserve the wealth of tomes and artefacts on the ship.

As it should be, Kor mused. People can be replaced. But knowledge, that is not so easily replaceable.

His reverie was broken by the sound of footsteps behind him, and he turned to see an Elomin in the ragged clothing of an apprentice running in, terror writ plain across his features.

"Force save me, I thought no-one else had survived!" He shouted, his words rushing out in a wheezing panic.

"Survived what?" The Kel Dor flatly.

"You don't...you don't know? They're killing everyone!"

"Who is killing everyone?"

"The Royal Guard!" The Elomin blurted out in exasperation. "Them and some other Jedi, they're moving through the ship and...I don't know why they're doing it! They called us 'undesirables' and then they just...we ran, we ran as fast we could. We split up at a junction further back, and I think I managed to get away from them for now. But the others...Ryssa..." He put his head in his hands, heavy sobs racking his body. Kor stood unmoving, weighing up the situation. The Royal Guard and the Inquisitorius, as much as he knew about them, answered to the Grand Master alone, and it was unlikely they had gone into open rebellion against him. But the Grand Master was one of, if not the most powerful Sith in the galaxy, and he had not taken that position without cunning. Murdering the students, these 'undesirables' had to be part of some greater plan for the Brotherhood at large, but what that could be Kor Vaal couldn't even begin to fathom. But the items contained within the academy seemed protected, and assuming the pass code from his masters in the Inquisitorius was genuine, Kor seemed to be exempt from whatever purge was taking place. For now, that was enough to the Kel Dor. Scenes from his vision began sprang unbidden to his mind; the figure on the throne. The blood.

"Why are you just standing there?" The Elomin shrieked. "We need to get out of here, if they find us..."

He trailed off and pushed past the Knight, his head darting from side to side like a terrified animal that knows a predator is close by.

"Tell me," Kor said as he turned towards the quivering Elomin. "Do the words 'I am desired' mean anything to you?"

"What? No. What the hell are you talking about? We need to get-"

The words died in his throat at the sound of Kor's lightsaber igniting. Before the apprentice could react the Knight's blade burst through his chest, his face contorting into a look of utter horror and confusion.

"Undesirable," The Kel Dor whispered sinisterly through his face mask. He tore his saber upwards through the Elomin, a brief shower of blood spraying out as the body crumpled to the floor. Kor watched it for a moment as it twitched, before his eyes drifted to his clawed hands, covered in the Elomin's blood. The vision began to play through his mind again.

None can escape the ocean of blood.

The End

Knight Kor Vaal (Sith)/ Battleteam Tacitus Athanasius of House Excidium of House Scholae Palatinae

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