Resolution

351.

It had been 351 days since he had been to his home world. Now, pincer like landing gears clutched the barren surface of Utapau, the *Sheathipede* class shuttle reposed upon the peak of some colossal xiphoid process. The network of bones which composed a literal *skeleton* of the landing zone emerged from the planet’s parched skin, gusts of wind and grit beating upon the hull of Thanadd Mawgath’s personal transport.

With an irreverent hiss, the shuttle groaned to life, yawning wide to allow its master to emerge. The juggernaut’s dark figure cut a striking silhouette against the torrid horizon. Granules of ancient terra firma crunched beneath his boots, themselves dusted by the swaying caress of a tremendous great-cloak. He lurched towards the chasmal gloaming of a nearby sinkhole, stomping into the depths of its mighty maw.

The Dark Jedi was eager to escape the arid kiss of Utapau’s troposphere, grateful for the nearly imperceptible cooling of his own sweat in the shade of the cavern. He had little recourse but to suffer the misfortunes of such temperatures, entombed in the fearsome carapace which sustained his life. The armor’s mitigation systems were meant to protect sensitive components, hardly adequate for comfort in such conditions. *“No matter,” he thought, “My reprieve will yet come.”*Sauntering to the epicenter of his secret grotto, Thanadd unclasped the gigantic cape which swayed at his back, splaying it out upon the floor beneath him. Like a column supporting the burden of a primeval temple, a powerful arm lowered his massive frame, his gauntlet squeezing a bended knee. The other retrieved the lightsaber from his hip with alien grace, softly surrendering it to the fabric of his grand mantle.

Closing his eyes, the Sith clenched his hand into a fist, finger by finger. He squeezed, as if crushing the space trapped within, and then flung his palm open. With effortless precision, Thanadd telekinetically reduced his sacred weapon to its constituent components. An intricate pattern took shape, seemingly the design of a skilled artisan. The arrangement created a marvelous symmetry, revealing the ultimate crux of the ritual:

A *kyber crystal*.

The lucent gem was a jewel of the Force, coursing with power – and bent to the will of a tenebrous master. It teemed and pulsed, yearning to burst forth from the domination which immured its potency. It was *life*.

*Thanadd’s* life.

A sinister wheezing broke the silence of the cairn, the prosthesis which enabled the Pau’an to speak now cradled by his thigh. Shadows did not soothe such a grotesque visage, one which the vassals of Tarentum were loath to be subject to. Here, alone on his homeworld, nobody trembled but Thanadd, struggling to inhale.

Concentrating on the crystal , Thanadd rued the sorrow of his existence. The rage of his death. The pain of his second chance. He lamented the scourging of Antei, the weakness which levied too high a cost. Gasping and reeling as adrenaline shocked his consciousness, Thanadd could only hate himself.

Embracing impending asphyxiation, he resolved to seize the hegemony which glory required. Which Tarentum deserved. The coming year would be a portrait of his prophesied rise, or distilled into an effigy.

His eyelids began to flutter, pupils dilating from lack of oxygen. Seconds from death, in a moment of isolation and darkness, Thanadd mastered his suffering. He achieved the impossible:

He breathed.

The dark miracle was a reflection of his obstinacy. Every year, it became more and more trying. The dark side tithed its devotees, brokering a price for true power. Only those who were worthy could withstand the heavy toll and survive. He had to be sure.

 One day, Thanadd knew, he would finally die…

…but not this day.