



SUBMITTED IN ENTRY TO CSP COMPETITION, THE
JOURNEY HOME:

Bloodlines

Authors:

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Clan Scholae Palatinae

NOTE: This fiction follows directly from the events of Starfall. The prologue is from the closing fiction.

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Prologue

“My lord, she is here,” One of the disciples said taking a knee. Darth Fallax smiled. There was only one Palatinaean left to deal with, but she was of use to him still.

“Doctor so nice of you to join us,” He said. Elinicia strained and fought against the restraints that had been so suddenly thrown on her.

“Xen... What did you do?” She screamed at Fallax.

“I’m afraid Xen is gone. And anyone who would have been of aid to you is going to be dying slowly in a cave on the far side of the Galaxy. You are the last of your clan, but I have need of you still. To study and understand this,” Fallax said, gesturing to his corrupted face.

“I do plan on having this body for a long, long time. And you are going to help with that, Doctor.”

1 Darth Fallax

The face of Fallax is one that Elinicia would never forget. Nothing remained of the man she once knew, the one she planned with for years to get him in this position. Restraints dug sharply into her wrists as she took a deep breath, calming herself, suppressing her emotions, a mix of fear, anger, and denial as she tried desperately to maintain her disguise. In her struggle, her Inquisitorius Scanner, the only item in her possession, had been knocked from her hand and collected by one of Darth Fallax’s disciples.

The Throne Room was full of strangers, dressed head to toe in cloaks black as night. Mysterious figures in black cloaks on Judecca was not a sight that had unsettled her since Scholae Palatinae’s first arrival twenty long years before. Even in her prime, fighting would not have been an option for the ‘Lost Daughter of Palpatine’. Her Scanner was turned to the Sith Lord himself for safekeeping.

Elinicia subconsciously took a nervous step backwards as Darth Fallax approached her. She could see every detail of his corruption, his face as pale as the labcoat she wore. ‘Xen’Mordin was useful,’ Fallax croaked. ‘A strong empire he built, but his body... is dying. You will help me fix it.’ *That explains the unusual electroencephalogram* Elinicia

thought to herself briefly, recalling her conversations with G14-DOS and Evant Taelyan.

‘Something on your mind, doctor?’ the hollow voice of Fallax snapped her back to reality.

‘Having things on my mind is what I tend to do best, *my lord*’, Elincia laboured over those last two words, finding her bravery, standing up straight as she stared Fallax down. He needed her mind clear and focused and she knew it.

‘Do not mistake yourself for being in some position of power,’ Fallax threatened venomously. ‘Your clan is dead, and you are *easily* replaceable.’ The Sith Lord’s insistence that Elincia’s only source of support were the Palatinaeans was encouraging. He knew little of her history as founder of both The Cause and Imperial Scholae Intelligence. Among the military and among the citizens, she had far more allies than Fallax realised.

‘This will be a complex operation,’ Elincia said plainly, tilting her head as she took in the level of corruption inflicted on Xen’s body. ‘I will require the computational power of G14-DOS. G14 has been monitoring Xen’s brain and heart activity for some time.’

‘Your AI friend will not help you esc-’

‘The doctor is not my friend.’

‘G14, now’s *really* not the time to interrupt!’

‘You will have access to only what you need,’ Fallax strained, as if the conversation was exhausting. ‘Do not even *think* about trying to use G14 to escape.’ He gestured to his disciple, and a strong grip clenched Elincia’s wrist. Behind the thick black cloak Elincia could barely make out any features of what she guessed was a woman.

2 Whispers

Her grip on Elincia’s wrist was as firm and unyielding as the restraints as she led the scientist through the halls of the Imperial Palace. The disciple was silent. Elincia assumed she had been forbidden to speak with her.

Scholae Palatinae emblems had been ripped from every wall of the palace, replaced

with the logo of The Order of the New Dawn. The guards carried Scholae-purchased equipment, but wore armour emblazoned with the rising sun. Elincia recognised a few faces of the high ranking military officials, as long as they were paid, they didn't care which freaks in black cloaks were on the throne.

After a short walk from the Throne Room, Elincia's restraints were released as she was pushed forcefully into a small cell, barely retaining her balance in time to avoid dropping to her knees. Fallax had clearly prepared this for her in advance. The cell was completely empty other than a small bed and a computer terminal in the corner. The disciple stood guard outside the durasteel bar door, lightsaber in hand, barely moving.

Escape would be difficult. Darth Fallax had chosen to keep her captive very close by and would be at hand personally within a minute should he detect any bid for freedom from the scientist, and the security camera in the far wall would accomplish just that.

Elincia approached the terminal. Her username still worked, but she had no doubt that everything she typed in to this terminal would be monitored by Fallax. Regardless, she had genuine interest in helping the Sith Lord, for she did not want Xen's body to die.

Elincia: G14?

G14-DOS: Doctor Rei. This is not optimal.

Elincia had never spoken to G14 by text before, but the fewer people hearing their conversation the better. She did not want the guard to interfere. It took Elincia a long time to compose her next message. G14 needed to understand. Fallax must not. She took a deep breath and began typing, putting her life in the hands of the AI's ability to read a hint.

Elincia: I need to find out what's happening to Xen's body. Will you help?

G14-DOS: Unable to define parameters with available information. I assume you have plans to acquire additional data.

Elincia: I don't know. He took my scanner.

G14-DOS: I understand.

Elincia: Good.

Satisfied that Darth Fallax and G14 would draw different conclusions from the exchange, Elincia cut the conversation there. It served little purpose to risk sharing any more information. It had been a long day.

Three hours ago, Scholae Palatinae under the leadership of Emperor Xen'Mordin Vismorsus had conquered the Aesirus system, and yet now every living member was trapped. Her home had moved from the Forgotten Temple to a cell within the reaches of the Throne Room of Darth Fallax, with Xen's fate unknown. Tired from the stress of the day, and confident there was little she could do that wouldn't make matters worse, Elincia chose the only logical option and went to sleep. G14 would take it from here.

3 Expression

She was awoken mere hours later by the rattling of fist on metal. 'Get to work, Doctor,' a female voice said firmly and strongly. It was the first time she had heard her guard speak. Elincia rose from her bed and went straight to the terminal to speak to G14-DOS.

Elincia: Call up the latest electroencephalogram and electrocardiogram recordings.

G14-DOS: Bringing them up on your screen now.

Her monitor was suddenly covered in electrical readings from Xen's body. Magnetic resonance imagery of the brain, 20 time traces showing detailed activity on specific brain regions, and a heart rate monitor. Elincia smiled as they moved across the screen, knowing instantly what she was looking at. Fallax had kept hold of her Inquisitorius Scanner and G14 had hacked into its MRI recorder. These signals were being recorded in real time. She took some time to watch for a little while.

Brain activity fluctuating at unusual levels Elincia thought to herself, watching the wild oscillations on the brain scan. *Heart rate twice what it should be, otherwise normal, strange...*

Elincia: Calculate a functional network of the brain. I want to see how everything is connected.

G14-DOS: Specify a method.

Elincia: We need to get this right. Include time delays.

The result surprised her in that the graph G14 displayed on her screen was absolutely typical of a functional brain network in a healthy, Force-sensitive elderly adult.

Elincia: Half the time scale on that ECG.

And suddenly everything looked like the normal heart rhythm of an eighty plus human male. *The body is working normally, it's just working twice as fast. The strain must be tremendous, and the body is ageing at an accelerated rate...* That was all she needed to know. She typed a message in to the terminal in large font, leaving it on the screen.

Elincia composed herself, walking towards the door of the cell. She took a deep breath before slamming her foot through the durasteel bar with all her might, sending it crashing into the wall opposite. The disciple standing guard was sent into a state of panic, as Elincia drew her dual ultraviolet lightsabers. The guard slashed wildly in an attempt to defend herself, black cloak swinging enough for Elincia to make out the figure of a Neimoidian.

When help finally came, four soldiers armed with blaster rifles found a deranged disciple, slashing and shouting in a frenzy at no-one as her crimson blade sliced the door of the cell into tiny pieces, . She was unable to deflect the blaster fire concentrated in her direction.

Elincia finally actually got off her chair and walked towards the commotion. 'You will go back to your duties, and leave this place at once.'

The commander inclined his head towards the doctor respectfully. 'We will go back to our duties and leave this place at once.' Her illusion and mind control powers had become exceptionally powerful since she relied on them every day to maintain her disguise. Wasting no time at all, she picked up the lightsaber from the dead guard, and allowed The Force to cloak her from plain sight.

She knew the Imperial Palace like the back of her hand. Judecca was her home, she was raised on the streets of Ohmen, a voluntary orphan from a useless father. Other the stark difference in décor the Imperial Palace remained unchanged. She knew of a secret passage that would lead her to a hidden hangar. Gripping the lightsaber of the dead disciple in her right hand while praying she wouldn't need to use it, Elincia crept silently, invisibly through the halls of the palace while trying to mask her presence in the Force as she tried to look for a hiding place.

The ear-piercing shriek of the security alarm rang through every corridor. It was not unexpected that the security camera would have picked up her escape and now every being in the complex would be looking for her, Darth Fallax included. Holding her breath,

she pressed her back against the wall of the corridor as three soldiers charged past, narrowly avoiding contact which would have disrupted her Force Cloak.

A hollow voice sounded from everywhere and yet nowhere. Elinicia struggled to push the voice of Fallax from her head, but it had been amplified a thousand times through the Force. ‘You cannot escape, doctor.’

4 The Courtyard

Elinicia continued her path through the palace, on a straight line away from the throne room, trying to maximise the distance between her and Fallax at all times. The guards in the throne room wore heavier armour than they used to, and their heavy, clunking strides masked the soft pitter-patter of Elinicia’s footsteps. Maintaining her cloak, she dropped in behind a guard on patrol, timing her footsteps with his own to mask the noise as he headed out into the courtyard.

She had set foot here many times before. An expansive area in the middle of the palace, bordered on all sides by the palace walls, surfaced with a decorative pattern of CSP’s royal purple shade that reflected brilliantly in the sunlight that shone from overhead or bathed in the darkness under the lush decorative trees and ornamental pillars. The openness of the area allowed Elinicia to take a breath of fresh air, and made it easier to stay far from the five guards on patrol and remain undetected in the shadows.

A crash stunned the courtyard as a pair of doors exploded open with impossible force. Flanked on both sides by a New Dawn Disciple, Darth Fallax strode into the courtyard. The patrolling guards knelt down to face their new Emperor, whose heavily corrupted burning red eyes were fixed on Elinicia’s position. She tried to hide herself behind a thick stone pillar. ‘I know where you are, Doctor!’ Fallax hissed with palpable hatred.

An electrical crackle filled the air. The full force of Fallax’s lightning came crashing into the pillar, filling the air with a static charge, and sending it crashing towards the ground. Astonished by the raw power of Darth Fallax’s Force Lightning, Elinicia rolled to the ground, dropping her illusory disguise and revealing her true form, the pristine yellow skinned twi’lek form of Impetus M’Nar, in Elinicia’s labcoat.

Her heart beat like a drum, her grip tightened around the disciple’s lightsaber. She simply could not best Fallax for raw power but the reveal had confused the Sith Lord

for a brief moment. Fallax's guards suddenly felt compelled to turn their rifles on their Emperor as Impetus capitalised on the moment of confusion then ran to find new cover. Darth Fallax ignited two lightsabers, one purple one silver, that Impetus recognised as Xen's. All five guards opened fire on the Sith Lord, a torrent of crimson light converging onto him.

The silver and purple blades of Xen danced into life. The Sith Lord deflected every bolt with ease, bathing the courtyard in a red glow. Parts of the palace walls came crashing down as Fallax's defence scattered blaster bolts in every direction, killing two of the guards in the process. As the remaining three began to regain their senses, Fallax smoothly swung both lightsabers around his head, building momentum before releasing both weapons spinning through the air in a smooth arc. The skill with which Fallax guided both lightsabers through the air to decapitate the remaining members of his own guard was unlike anything Impetus had seen first hand.

'Xen!' she shouted at Fallax, trying to stir her old friend back to the surface.

'Xen is dead!' Fallax sneered in response from the centre of the courtyard, sending a blast of telekinetic energy at the twi'lek. Glass windows shattered, stone walls began to collapse. The planet itself seemed to tremble under the power as Impetus ran from the devastation as she plunged the courtyard into a field of perfect blackness.

There was a dull thud as one of the disciples threw Fallax to the floor with an unexpected telekinetic strike to the back, dropping Xen's lightsabers to the floor. Darth Fallax rose to his feet, enraged. In the commotion, Impetus had disappeared, and Xen's lightsabers had been thrown to the corner of the courtyard. Fallax dismissed his remaining allies with an aggressive command, such that they might not be used against him any more, before seeking Impetus out through the Force.

The twi'lek was barely a metre away from the Sith Lord and barely had time to raise her lightsaber in time to block the strike of lightning that came her way. Impetus gripped the blade with two hands, fighting the overwhelming torrent of lightning that now arced from both of Fallax's hands, just as she felt she couldn't hold on any longer, a telekinetic blast from the Sith Lord sent her weapon flying from her hands.

Her breath was drawn out in rags. She was exhausted. Behind the sound of her own breath she could hear the heavy, rasping wheezing of Fallax. Xen's body still suffered

from the strain of the possession. Impetus' eyes burned with malice as strong as the Sith Lord's. Their eyes locked in pure mutual hatred.

‘XEN!!!’ Impetus screamed with all the power in her voice and more.

Time seemed to stand still. Fallax's eyes shimmered emerald.

‘Im... Imp... RUN!’

5 The Passage

Impetus ran for the nearest entrance back in to the palace as Fallax's eyes ignited with a fiery glow once more. The twi'lek barely made more than a few footsteps before an invisible hand lifted her from the floor, forcing her to turn and face the Sith Lord, freezing her in place.

Slowly, Fallax walked towards her, a hand outstretched to her throat. Impetus felt her windpipe close. ‘Xen. Is. Dead.’ Fallax reiterated as Impetus gasped for air. ‘It is a pity,’ he said terrifyingly slowly. ‘You have such cunning. You would have made a fine Disciple.’ Impetus tried to swear at the Sith Lord's idea of her being his Disciple but couldn't find the air to make a sound. ‘But you're too dangerous to be left alive.’ He closed his grip tighter around Impetus' throat. ‘And so now... you will die.’

Despite her best attempts to control her body through the Force, she was running out of air. Her limbs began to twitch from asphyxiation as her senses began to dull.

Impetus had begun to give up when an explosion rocked the courtyard. Fallax's concentration disrupted, Impetus was dropped to the ground, gasping for breath. She looked to the right and saw a yellow-skinned twi'lek man, 6 foot tall, strongly built, wearing the heavy armour of a high ranking military official, bearing the rising sun, with a repeating blaster at his hip and a micro-grenade launcher in his hands.

‘Tonal'la!’ the middle aged man roared her birth name at her, snapping her back to her senses. ‘With me!’ he shouted as engulfed the courtyard with a scattering of smoke grenades to keep Fallax distracted. It took all of Impetus' strength to get back to her feet and run to the mysterious twi'lek soldier. He ushered her inside the palace, smoothly drawing his repeating blaster and shooting two guards dead with impeccable

accuracy, then turned to the courtyard entrance firing a torrent of blaster bolts above the door. The collapse of the palace wall covered the entrance, blocking Fallax off from them.

‘Who are you?’ Impetus asked as soon as she found her breath, getting close enough to guess his age at between fifty and sixty. ‘Why are you helping me?’ She hadn’t gone by the name Tonal’la since she was leading The Cause to destabilise the System ten years before.

‘There’s no time,’ the soldier responded hastily. ‘Do you have a weapon?’ Impetus shook her head, having lost the disciple’s lightsaber. Without hesitation, he hoisted the grenade launcher from his back, passing it to her. ‘Can you use this?’

A few years ago the answer would have been no, but Dr. Elinia Rei had forged a reputation on explosive knowledge and recognised the weapon through its custom chromium plating. ‘No problem,’ she said confidently, despite feeling a bit strange about entrusting her life to a grenade launcher.

‘It’s been customised. Second trigger for smoke ‘nades. Let’s move, Tonal’la.’

Grenade launcher and blaster rifle in hand, Impetus and the twi’lek warrior ran through the palace. The first unsuspecting guard they ran into was flattened to the floor by the butt of the defector’s rifle with a loud and dull thud, putting a large dent in his helmet. Impetus towered over the downed guard. ‘Send Fallax a message’, Impetus shouted as her ally forced his rifle into the man’s face. ‘Tell Fallax he let the Lost Daughter of Palpatine escape! Tell Fallax that I will be the last thing he ever sees! And tell Fallax that his grip on Xen will be as fleeting as his grip on the Cocytus System.’ Impetus hoped he would be able to remember the content of the message as he was shortly afterwards knocked unconscious by the large man beside her.

‘This way!’ Impetus said as she pulled the arm of her new protector down a corridor that seemingly led to nowhere.

‘Tonal’la that’s just the service room, it’s a dead end.’

‘Trust me!’ she said hastily, running down the corridor, spraying smoke grenades back the way they came to obscure their path. With absolute conviction, Impetus ran straight into the wall, and as if by magic, emerged in a dimly lit passageway on the other side.

Seconds after, the heavily armoured twi'lek man appeared with her, bewildered.

‘That section of wall is a hologram when the alarm sounds,’ Impetus explained in a hushed tone. ‘It was put here so the Emperor can escape in a siege. It will have turned to wall again now we’ve passed through it. It leads to the streets of Ohmen. This way.’

With the passage closed behind them, the sense of urgency was passed, and they progressed through the hidden tunnel slowly, speaking quietly.

‘Tonal’la...’ he said thoughtfully, and in the darkness of the passageway Impetus just about made out his head examining her whole body. ‘How have you survived all this time?’

Impetus assumed he was one of her allies from when she led The Cause, or another Ohmen native that had become a high ranking imperial official, but something still seemed off. ‘My questions first,’ she said assertively. ‘Who are you, how do you know my name and why are you helping me?’

‘I was a commander in the Imperial Royal Guard, under Xen and Fallax.’

‘Yes I can see that,’ Impetus snapped, irritated at being told the obvious when she had bigger questions. ‘You risked your life to save mine. You defied a Dark Lord of the Sith. Why?’

‘You’re going to hate me for this...’ he said cryptically, as if trying to decide the best wording. Impetus said nothing, her silence speaking more than any words could. ‘But I’ve been watching you for a long time, *Impetus*.’ She sensed a smile as he used that name. ‘I didn’t believe the stories about your death. I saved your life to atone for the mistakes I’ve made.’

‘Explain,’ Impetus responded, losing patience.

‘Tonal’la... I’m your father.’

Epilogue

It was some time after that Elinicia's old cell was finally investigated, and her message still displayed on screen.

Dear Darth Fallax,

If you're reading this, then I've escaped from your cell. Whether I survived the attempt is irrelevant.

I don't want Xen to die. In that, our interests are aligned. I have discovered that your health concerns result from the strain your body is under, keeping two souls alive. If you recruit another scientist, instruct them to perform an RNA sequence. It should reveal an over-expression of genes responsible for ageing. If you hire a geneticist, they will know what to do to suppress this gene. I recommend Professor Isark Avenast of the University of Corellia.

Kind Regards,

Dr. Elinicia Rei

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