

*“Comrades, brothers
Our empire’s days are over
Our realm is bleeding
Her colors set aflame”*
- Ruina Imperii; V6:L1-2

“Get to your ships!”

The call was almost swallowed by the cacophony of warfare as Iron Legion forces bombarded the hangar. Dust from cracking duracrete wafted down from above as the vaulted ceiling of the hardened bunker shook and groaned under the weight of fire from countless artillery turbolasers. The situation was dire, but as long as there was life, there was still hope.

Somewhere beyond, on the beaches, in the streets of the Senchi Ring, in the skies above Selen and in the void of space the remnants of the Dajorran Defence Forces were putting up a bitter fight. A bitter, but fruitless fight.

After the cream of her forces had been decimated in a massive encirclement upon Nancora, the Arconan Expeditionary Forces obliterated almost to a man in the most crippling defeat in the venerable Clan’s history, the buzzards had descended to feast on the carrion. Iron Legion warships, fresh and ready to fight, had surged in to break the weakened Clan and brushed aside all resistance.

The surviving members of her armed forces had fought back valiantly, denying the enemy any advantage or advance and fighting with grim determination to the bitter end, but against such overwhelming force and firepower there could be no other outcome. What ships had been left after the fiasco of the Nancoran assault had been brushed aside or wiped out, packs of Iron Navy hunter-killers on the prowl to track down and execute any remaining warships that posed a threat. With the space lanes under their control, coordination of efforts became impossible and each of the Dajorran planets was cut off from the others.

One by one, they began to fall beneath the durasteel boot heel of the Grand Master’s armies.

Selen had resisted the longest, but crippled by shortage in food and medicine, left alone without allies or a fleet to protect her, it was only a matter of time before the capital would crumble and join the burning ruins of what had once been Arcona.

Tali Sroka pushed aside the fear that kept rearing its ugly head inside her mind, the falling chips of duracrete reminding her of the peril she faced each moment she lingered. The bunker would not last forever.

Around her, men and women rushed towards the waiting transports, their weathered hulls emblazoned with the faded insignia of the Arconan Logistics and Shipping Company. What had once been proud merchant barges had since then been pressed into service as

auxiliaries and the blackened scorch marks told a bitter tale of the battles they had fought against a superior foe. Not many were left to tell that tale.

"Mistress Sroka, we are almost ready for departure," an androgynous, yet faintly female voice sounded behind her. "However, I would suggest we expedite the process and leave at once. While the Iron Navy still has something else to distract themselves with."

Tali turned to face the pale Kaminoan who ran the operation, her tall and slender features showing no signs of distress though she could sense her apprehension through the Force. Another volley shook the roof above them, sharp screams of fear sounding around them as the refugees pressed on inside the waiting shuttles.

"Vhat do you mean? If they bring the bunker down, ve'll be deadt," the Twi'lek inquired.

"This hangar is not their target, they do not even know of its existence. The fire we are experiencing is merely bad gunnery or opportunistic misses. I was referring to the remaining Dajorran Defence Forces," the Kaminoan replied, her voice as emotionless as before.

Tali's heart sank upon the revelation, her senses instinctively picking up the gestalt fear and anger of the men and women around her. Their homes, their families, their lives were all being put to the torch. A campaign of extermination had begun and they were but roaches, unable to prevent their own demise.

Out, beyond, she could sense the desperation of what few units defended the steps of the Selenian Citadel against overwhelming odds, the choked field hospitals overflowing with the maimed and wounded, the bitter panic of platoons throwing themselves into desperate counter-attacks and being mowed down by the dozen while brave heroes and heroines met a martyr's end with saber in hand. The sheer scale and intensity of the conflict overwhelmed her and the pain and fear made her curl up inside.

"Mistress Sroka?" the Kaminoan inquired.

There was no response. Tali stared at nothing, hands wrapped around herself as she choked back the tears. She just hoped Koliss would have been here beside her.

A soft hand descended upon her shoulder and she looked up into the radiant blue eyes of the pale Kaminoan. There was no smile on her features, but in her mind, Tali chose to see one anyway.

"It is time for us to leave, Tali," the logistician spoke softly, gesturing towards the ships.

Tali wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and let out a steadying sigh, nodding as she forced herself to calmness. There would be time for tears later. "Yes, of course, Yumni. Thank you," she managed with a grateful tone, offering a weary smile at the Kaminoan before jogging off to join the evacuation fleet.

Yumni Ha watched the purple Twi'lek board the transport and signalled her crews to take off. The jammers she used to avoid detection during shipments of 'volatile' cargoes would keep them safe until they could make a jump into lightspeed. Though the half a dozen ships only carried perhaps a few hundred souls aboard, saving them would be preferable to total annihilation.

The war may have been lost, but the Kaminoan knew that as long as there was life, there was potential for anything. Boarding her own light freighter, stocked to the brim with essentials needed for starting a new colony somewhere in the dark expanses of the Outer Rim, Yumni took a moment to reflect. She did not pretend to know why placing one's hand upon another's shoulder had such a reaction as it did, but the gesture seemed to be universally useful. If they all survived this, she might have to consider using it more often.

Engines charged and cloak activated, she guided the battered ship out from the hangar and towards the burning skies, leaving behind the burning remains of Arcona and its realm of shadows and secrets.

*"Never, Never, ever to return
Arcona's might lost forever"*
- Ruina Imperii; V6:L3-4 mod.