

*Infinities*  
*Horizons*  
30 ABY

Someone once said, long ago, that space was the loneliest place to die in - especially since no one could hear you take that last breath.

Who that someone is remains unclear. And how long ago he or she said it, also uncertain. Or perhaps, in the grand scheme of things, no one in particular really said it at all. It almost felt obvious. Where else would be a quieter place of solitude to die in but an endless vacuum?

It didn't matter how many were whisked away at the same time. The result was the same. Even with fire from the viewing portal, any explosion or destruction could be seen, yet not heard.

Whoever saw the Shadow Academy light up in an imaginable inferno did not live long enough to explain how it sounded.

And in the end, all that remained of Lyspair was dust.

Dust and debris and new artificial stars built from microscopic shrapnel. Specks of metal and glass and perhaps even paper. Rock and stone shredded into grainy strings and sheets. Perhaps it had not been zapped like Alderaan, but all the same, the damage was down. The absolute core of the Brotherhood - where it kept its initiates - was reduced to nearly nothing.

Muz Ashen witnessed this from the deck of the *Fallen Spear*. He had just received his inoculation from Macron, as had the affected Equites and Journeymen. The Kapsina system was all but destroyed, but many would survive the Horizon Plague entirely. But the Shadow Academy hadn't. All because they had not been quick enough to alert them.

They had tried. Oh, how they had tried. Muz ran his hand across his groomed black beard. Nothing from Tavisae. The damn Epicanthix was impossible to reach through the Force; her genes barred the attempt. Ashen could have, with all his power, tried to connect to someone, *anyone*. But he had been distracted, and reasonably so. Zoraan's body still languished where he had left it.

He gestured for Shikyo, his brother and former student, to join him on the bridge. The Herald stared out into the abyss silently, lips pursed in a perfectly straight line. The two did not speak for a while, simply gazing out at what was once the Academy. All of that recruitment effort for nothing.

"This will hurt us," Shikyo finally intoned, though carefully, so as not to upset his master.

Muz nodded. He placed his hands behind his back, long hair bristling in the slight oily breeze coming from the wall vents. "A bit. In the short term."

"Dozens of initiates." Shikyo's nostrils flared. "No. *Hundreds*, perhaps. Slaughtered. We will have to start over, recruitment wise."

"Not necessarily."

"Did *she* do it?" the Herald suddenly spat, his temper betraying him. "I never liked her. Half-mad, that woman. Too indulgent. I bet you anything she did this. Like she was doing us a favor."

"Maybe she truly thought she was."

Shikyo whirled on Muz, eyes blazing. "Why the Hell are you so calm about this?"

"Because it is a hiccup," replied the Grand Master, whose eyes never left the viewing portal. "A mere snag in the grand scheme. We've lost the Academy before. Rebuilt it. Now we've lost it again. Tavisae is no real tragedy to us. Powerful. But so are many others."

"You can't be sure we'll recover so easily."

"Maybe not. But I'm confident. Aren't you?"

Shikyo said nothing to this. From what he could tell, they had lost many other prominent Brotherhood members to this decimation as well. Tarentum had reported that Anshar Kahn Tarentae had traveled to Lyspair. Alaris Jinn, of the Chamber of Justice, also at the Academy. All wiped off the face of the galaxy with most likely the single press of a button. What Shikyo had not heard, of course, was the discourse. The debate. The futility of convincing a plagued woman of stepping away from her rash decision.

*I have been where you are. I was forced to leave the Academy behind when Lyspair was invaded. But I tried to save it. I didn't blow it up, and I certainly didn't 'go down with the ship.'*

*Then perhaps you should have. You had a choice. You could escape. You could live. We don't have that luxury. We have to die.*

The *Paladin*. They could have connected to the kriffig *Paladin*.

Shikyo now realized that Muz was looking at him expectantly. Around them, ships floated seemingly aimlessly around the void that Lyspair had left behind. Officers who manned the control panels of the *Spear* were already volleying transmissions and calls. All were asking the same questions, demanding the same answers.

“Alert the Dark Council of all of this,” the Grand Master ordered, “as well as the Star Chamber. We have work to do. Our fallen numbers will need to be replaced, and quickly. I don’t want my plans to fall through.”

“The Crusade, my lord?”

Muz exhaled. “The conquest of the Sith Worlds,” he replied, “may have to wait. And the One Sith, though pitiful for now, are growing stronger. I remain certain that we can make up for the deficit. But this does upset the trajectory we were on.”

“Yeah. A rampant plague will do that.”

“Just carry out my orders,” barked Muz, finally growing slightly impatient. “As for the Academy, we will do what we did after the Incursion. The *Paladin* shall be a temporary replacement until we find a new planet. As for its steward, I will select a new Headmaster personally.”

“Anyone you have in mind?”

“Not yet.” The stars seemed dimmer now, as he looked at them. As if in mourning. “But I’ll think on it.”

The new hole in the galaxy practically glowed despite the absence of light. Muz’s black eyes closed and opened slowly in a deliberate blink. Like a fragment of a second, this, too, would pass.