

Symphony  
A Rite of Supremacy: Meridian Story  
Alaris Jinn  
9426

“...too many outcomes...”

*Patience.*

Ky Terrak di Plagia had not been a patient man nor a prudent one, but he had known his strengths and limitations, making him a wise man. He was harsh in his training. He combined classic Sith methods with Mandalorian and as a result his students always learned how to survive in the most hostile and isolated environments.

Terrak's most successful student had benefited from this training throughout his life. He had jumped from hostile world to hostile world: surviving torture by the Arconae, beatings by Jac Cotelin, streams of dark side energy from Braecen Kaeth, several prison cells, and even the unforgiving political world of the Galactic Senate. Alaris Jinn had possessed many things across his years, including the same title as his former master, and had let them all go, all except his training.

Thus his current predicament was nothing he hadn't dealt with before, it just wore a different facade. The Collective, for all of their misguided philosophies, were not particularly brutish. Their hatred of the Force was not one of malice so much as it was ignorance. Alaris regarded Oligard as a demagogue more than a true leader. Despite this, he recognized manipulative skill in others and held the man in some level of respect: strength of conviction if not strength of logic.

The cell wasn't luxurious by any means, but the Collective clearly intended for their prisoners to not be uncomfortable. *Not right away, anyway.* Alaris understood how to interrogate and torture, but as many had found before, Alaris's mind was near impenetrable by all but the most powerful Force users.

*Which doesn't mean it doesn't still hurt.* Alaris cringed, grabbing at his ribs. He had been able to give some time of meditation to repair them, but he knew he would need bacta, and relatively soon, lest he have permanent damage. The pain pulled him out of his concentration and he swore audibly. He looked down at the ration tray that lay by the massive durasteel door. It still had lunch sitting on it from two hours before. It didn't look nearly as appetizing as it once had, but Alaris was still famished.

The Twi'lek didn't mind solitary. It gave him time to focus on every possible future event. *Too many outcomes.* War was always a sticky thing. Searching for the result of *one* specific action gave a handful of possible conclusions. In battle, however, there were so many small split second decisions that there was a near infinite amount of outcomes. Determining a winner or

loser was easy, but the number of losses combined with specific objectives being secured meant that it was nearly impossible to determine war. Even Darth Sidious, whose mind and foresight was legendary, was unable to predict his own apprentice throwing him to his demise deep in the Death Star's core.

To that end, Alaris always focused on specific objectives. After his somewhat successful syphoning of Collective stock into his own portfolio it didn't take long before the Collective had caught up with his shuttle and brought him back here: Meridian. In the several days since he focused on only one objective: escape. The dark side had given him several different suggestions, but the one he settled on would drive both his former master and his current student absolutely insane. He settled on patience.

The dark side had shown him Kahlora in her cell, bursts of violet electricity, fog in a ventilation shaft, a Collective shuttle, and a series of sparks appearing across a control board. One could never be sure about what it meant, but the dark side told him that the required strategy that would result in his escape, with his life in tact, was patience.

The food was passable, although completely unseasoned. It was meant to sustain, not please. Now, Alaris sat cross legged on his bed. He placed his hands on his knees and expanded his mind. Tendrils of the dark side shot from him and started scouring the prison level for familiar souls. He brushed against dozens of minds, mostly weak and beaten, until he found the one he was looking for. Kahlora Teka was frightened and alone, but was putting on a brave front.

The first explosion brought Alaris back to his senses. It was distant, but he recognized the sensation of shockwaves through durasteel. The second explosion brought a smile to his face. By the time the fourth was sent coursing through the ground, the doors were open and the Twi'lek knew his patience had paid off. The fact that he wasn't dead told him that the gas system had been shut off.

The Brotherhood was here.

He reached out his mind again and found Mira Dantavi acting quickly, scurrying into the riots and doing her best to exacerbate them. When he found Kahlora again, he found her worse than terrified. She was panicking. He pulled his mind back to the present and he was quickly to his feet and to the now open door.

He glanced outside to see most of the crowd pushing toward the only exit. There was a single Imperial Sentry droid that was trying to block the path, to little avail. It was slowly torn apart by the prisoners, many of whom didn't care if they took a couple blaster shots. Alaris winced, reminded of the Horizon plague. He cowered back behind a durasteel pillar and again let his patience win out, again. Within a few moments, the crowd had pushed its way into the outer corridor and Alaris was free to follow in relative silence.

Alaris didn't know the path, but someone watching him would never have known. It was like an old familiar friend guided him through the madness toward his apprentice whose fear he could feel rising through the dark side. He reached the corridor that her fear and anger bled from and raced down the hallway to find her standing alone in her cell among three male corpses. He opened his mouth to speak, but suddenly, she was on him, ready to wring his neck.

Kahlora's strong hands enclosed around her master's throat. Her hands were red hot and her deep grey eyes were filled with violence. Alaris tried to breathe, but his apprentice's strength was too much for him. It was a bizarre feeling, the combination of annoyance and pride that he felt. Regardless of it, he would not let her choke him to death.

He grabbed hard on her wrists and his eyes burned amber. His apprentice's grip faltered the instant Alaris sent bolts of dark side energy coursing through her body and his air passage opened enough for him to send a scream into the echoing corridor. At the proximity of the current, the blast sent her back into her cell. She slammed against the ground and gasped desperately for air.

The Twi'lek grabbed at his ribs, pain wracking them again. He opened his mouth to scold her but the dark side flashed him a warning. He spun his head and he muttered a curse. No amount of warning would have prepared him for the massive beast of a man who came barrelling toward him. Foam and spit soaked his jaw and blood was caked on his hands.

Alaris took the brunt of the hit to the abdomen, which screamed in pain again. Alaris could feel the crack as his bones broke. They hadn't pierced his lungs, but he knew he wasn't about to survive many more hits like that. He gasped for air and tried to pull himself away from this monster of a man. The beast caught Alaris's tunic and pulled, ripping it clear away from the Twi'lek's body revealing the scars that covered his torso, the deep blue skin, and the tattoo that identified his Inquisitorius rank.

Alaris pulled himself as well as he could away from the monstrosity of a man. He flipped himself onto his back, wincing in pain, and pushed away desperately with his feet. The massive man took two quick steps closer to the Inquisitor until a flash of red shot out of a cell and onto the beast. Kahlora had planted herself on the man's shoulders. She reached over the boulder that was his head and dug her nails, and indeed some of her fingertips, directly into the beast's eyes. He barely had time to scream before her ashen eyes blazed with amber and she sent a wave of electricity directly into his brain, through his giant frame, and down into the floor below.

The monstrous man collapsed to his knees and then fell forward onto the durasteel floor. He was still breathing, but the blast had sent him into unconsciousness. Kahlora rolled off her prey onto the ground beside him, panting heavily. Eventually, she too fell from consciousness leaving only Alaris with his wits about him.

*Barely.*

He pulled himself upright and, with more effort than he would have liked, pulled Kahlora back into her cell. He couldn't muster the strength through the pain to lift her onto the bed, so he let her lay on the floor. Instead, Alaris laid down on the thin mattress and slowed his breathing.

It was a labored process, but the dark side scarcely failed him. It was as if his muscles were holding his broken rib and pulling it laterally until it was reset. Alaris bit his lip to muffle a scream. He could taste the iron in his blood. He pushed that from his mind, trying to avoid the distraction. Through the Force, he found the individual cells in his rib and demanded that they fuse themselves together again. Once the Twi'lek was satisfied that it wouldn't break without some outside force, he opened his eyes and brought himself up to a sitting position.

He wasn't sure how much time had passed, but it was enough that his apprentice was awake. She had deep bags under her eyes like she hadn't slept in three days. The amount she must have taxed the dark side, Alaris wasn't completely convinced she wouldn't have them forever.

"You're still with us?" she asked, cheekily.

Alaris could see she hadn't lost her sense of humor. "You're not rid of me yet, child," he cautioned, with a sly smile.

"Looks like *you* owe *me* one this time," she said with effort. As the young Togruta pulled herself upright she stumbled a little and caught herself on the corner of the door's opening. She quickly shot a gaze back over at Alaris.

"You expected my help?" he chuckled.

Another explosion rocked them, closer this time. The lights flickered overhead, and although they were quickly restored, emergency lighting filled the cell and adjacent corridor. It gave everything a slightly red hue.

"We have to go. Now." He got to his feet, wincing slightly. He had healed the break, but he was still heavily bruised. The two battered Inquisitors scurried as quickly as their broken bodies would carry them down the prison corridor toward less secure area. There were bodies strewn about the entire chamber, but it was otherwise quiet. The riots had moved onward into civilian areas and panic was wracking the entire station.

"Back to ventilation?" his apprentice queried.

*Clever girl.*

---

The ventilation shafts nearer the prison section were not the luxurious passage ways they were near hangar bays or civilian areas. Instead of finding themselves in easily climbable twists and turns, Master and Apprentice were barely able to squeeze themselves through it. By the time they reached the more open areas the amount of explosions had died down. This led the Twi'lek to believe that the Brotherhood had made significant inroads into the station.

*Perhaps they intend to take the station instead of blowing it to hell.*

There was a general haze coming down through the shafts and Alaris could hear hustle and bustle in the hangar bay above them. There was some general yelling that the Twi'lek couldn't quite make out, but without any blaster fire he made the assumption that it was under the control of the Brotherhood. He pushed a vent upward and it made an unceremonious clanging sound on the durasteel floor of the hangar. He put effort into pulling himself up into the large bay then offered a hand down to his apprentice, helping her up.

Alaris looked up, ready to scan the room to find the ranking Inquisitor, and immediately realized his error. It was almost comical: the sheer amount of guns pointed directly at him. About a dozen uniformed soldiers, who all looked eerily similar, stared down the Twi'lek and Togruta.

There was a brief moment of silence before the Twi'lek broke it. "Can anyone tell me where I can find the bathroom?"

The last two hours had featured a symphony of explosions, but the one that followed gave Alaris the most satisfaction. Smoke started to fill the chamber and fire suppression fell quickly from the ceiling. Blaster fire and the sound of swinging lightsabers came from the new hole in the wall and Alaris, after a brief second of panic, was thrilled to discover that he didn't have any new holes in his body.

The Twi'lek scurried over to the nearest shuttle for cover, right next to a technocrat. He touched the man on the shoulder and yelled over the mayhem, "Quickly! Give me your gun!" The dark side dripped heavily from his request.

Without much hesitation, the soldier handed his E-11 to Alaris and pulled out his side arm out to keep firing on the attackers. It was his last action as a bolt burned through his side and he slumped over next to the Twi'lek. Alaris looked at the murder weapon with disgust and dropped it next to its previous owner.

The rest of the hangar was cleared fairly quickly. A large man who Alaris recognized as a Sadowan, though his name escaped him, extinguished his violet lightsaber and upon identifying the tattoo on Alaris's chest bowed his head slightly. "Sir, I'm unsure how you've ended up here, but might I suggest taking one of these shuttles and departing. The rest of the fleet will be arriving shortly."

"I couldn't agree more," Alaris responded ardently. He ducked his head instinctively as blaster fire invaded the hangar once more. He recovered quickly and beckoned his apprentice toward the nearest shuttle craft. Her strength was returning slowly and she was able to stumble toward him fairly quickly.

Alaris swore upon arriving in the cockpit to see no pilot droid. He slipped into the pilot's chair and muttered under his breath something about flying being a droid's work. He fumbled around with the ignition process until finally the shuttle came to life. Blaster fire in front of the viewport shocked him, and the Twi'lek immediately rushed to get clear of the hangar. He pulled up on the yoke and the shuttle shot upward, smashing against the top of the hangar. He swore quietly and angrily, and pushed the shuttle toward the force field that kept air in the hangar and the vacuum outside.

Under Alaris's less than experienced hands, the vessel scraped against the ceiling and walls, and finally met its match with another shuttle. The two ships sideswiped and Alaris's commandeered vessel spun laterally. It skidded across the floor of the hangar, sending the equilibrium of its occupants into wild disarray and then suddenly, and with zero warning, the inertial dampeners kicked in.

The sudden change meant that his previous unsavory meal almost became intimate with the control panel before him. Alaris paused, letting his stomach settle, and then looked out the viewport. The shuttle hadn't stopped spinning, but now the view was from the outside of the station. The vacuum had immediately activated the dampeners.

"Next time, I fly!" The young Togruta was shaking and clinging tightly to her seat. "What ever happened to 'patience?'"

Alaris sneered. "I hate flying."

He activated the autopilot and the ship stopped spinning. It began to slowly move away from the station. Alaris sighed audibly, letting his relief take over. He keyed in the coordinates to Arx and pushed forward the hyperdrive.

Instead of the blue streaks he was expecting, the control panel started to smoke and a series of sparks overtook the cockpit. The string of profanity Alaris blurted out kept going even after Kahlora had pulled the hyperdrive toggle back to zero. He slammed his hands on the control panel and then threw his hands up in disbelief.

"At least things can't get worse from here," Kahlora muttered, tempting fate.

A sudden shadow overtook the viewport and a massive deep grey vessel suddenly appeared from hyperspace. Alaris would have sworn again if he had anything new to add. Instead, he

closed his eyes, shook his head, and wondered how the dark side could have betrayed him like this.

"It's a Brotherhood vessel!" Kahlora said excitedly.

Alaris's eyes shot open again and then recognized the Resurgent-class vessel he had served on under Jac Cotelin. He could barely speak. All he could muster before he let relief finally fall into his body was, "Raise them. Get us home." Then he closed his eyes and waited.

The dark side hadn't betrayed him, but sometimes the Force doesn't provide the most direct path.