

"A choir full of longing
Will call our ships to port
The countless lonely voices
Like whispers in the dark."
--Covenant, Call the Ships to Port

A Billion Words Ago

Sepros

He watched them, their hollow eyes, blank except for what he put there. There wasn't much left of what they once were, generations of his work tailoring them into something far more suitable for his needs. He stepped toward the center of the room, the altar lit by clusters of crystals, burning from within as much as he felt he was. He closed his eyes, hearing the chant begin.

Before him lay the amulet, forged in the old style, a gauntlet of silver fire and wine-dark gems that beckoned him forward. Beyond that, his blade, connecting the lines of this world to this place, his nexus. He smiled at her, and his love smiled back, standing tall and proud beside the sword.

"Daritha."

The word came through her lips as he reached out, his hand touching the amulet as she wrenched the blade from the node. The chains were broken, and as the world burned, Urias Orian was set free, screaming.

Six Months Ago

Master Suite

ADS Fallen Spear

Tingel Arm

He sat up, sweat drenching his brow, the echoes of screams still fresh in his mind. It took a moment, black eyes drifting across the room, his mind focusing his heart. He turned, feet finding the floor as he rose from his bed, a simple black robe pulled on over him. The door slid open in front of him, the dim light of the hallway spilling into the room for a moment before he stepped through.

He paused for a second, letting the door slide closed behind him before continuing on, another room opening up before him. He walked down the couple of steps into the recessed area, turning and taking a seat on the soft edge. He took it all in for a moment, the cases that lined the walls. A lifetime of collecting, of hunting. A few hundred artifacts, a thousand stories, millions of lives. He reached out his hand, and one of the cases moved from the shelf to him.

He stared at it for a moment, the etched crystal lattices the result of a decade of trial and error, trying to contain, to mitigate, to calm. With a thought, the case twisted, the top pivoting away to show the fragment within, wine-dark and crystalline.

The Consul is trying to reach you. Her words crept into his mind from the bridge of the ship. He closed the case, standing up.

I know.

Did you have the same... Ashia never finished the thought. She already knew the answer. *Bentre did.* There was more than concern there.

Good.

Now
Bay
Fallen Spear
Sepros Atmosphere

The ship darted, gyroscopic stabilizers and artificial gravity compensators working overtime as they met in the broad space of the bay. He moved deliberately, sliding the dark helmet on, the mane cascading down his back. Doc turned to the others, putting his own helmet on as he nodded at them.

"This is more like it." Doc chuckled, the sound filtering through his helmet. "No more creeping around, sneaking through tunnels."

"Sneaking around through tunnels got us Tarthos back without hardly any incidents." Leena sneered at him, one of her lekku twitching before jabbing into her back. "I don't know about you, but I prefer any plan where I don't get blastered in the face."

"That is considerably less of a problem when you wear a helmet." Doc laughed, pulling his blasters from their holsters. "But straight-forward, direct action? My favorite."

"I must confess that I feel much the same way." Hekate spoke, the droid lifting its blaster rifle and turning toward the opening, watching as the black of the void shifted to pale blue, then to green as the Spear made its final approach.

"Feel..." Doc laughed again and Leena threw him a withering glare, cutting him off. He shook his head, addressing the Nihilgenia fireteams. "All right, you all know the drill. Secure channels only, encrypt comms, we go in hot. Anything without the dragon or the bulls-eye on it gets the old Q and P."

A chorus of "Sir Yes Sir!" erupted from the clones, the clacking of boots on the bulkhead punctuating the words.

"Bullseye?" Leena's brow arched, the dark ink rising with her skin. "Q and P?"

"That's right, you were Nephilim, not Nihilgenia.' Her voice twisted in the air around her, sinking into her head and her ears. Leena turned, seeing the dark hair and Sephish ears. "They call the Sadow seal the bullseye. So 'anything not wearing the Keibatsu dragon or the Sadow logo is a target'."

Leena nodded at the woman. "I didn't know you were coming along on this one."

She smiled. "And miss out on all of this glorious carnage? I should think not." She flexed her shoulders back and reached with her arms, stretching them out before filling her hands with lightsaber hilts, the filigree work a comfort under her fingertips. She watched the ground grow closer as she moved next to Muz, her voice lowering as her eyes did. "I can still hear the screams."

His head tilted down for a moment. He knew. There were many reasons for them to return, more than most could possibly understand. The site was a convergence, a nexus of latent energies. There was a chorus of pain and destruction that rode the waves just below their consciousness, echoes of ancient Sith. Even she didn't understand fully, but if nothing else, Tiamat was patient. The plans of the Lion were inscrutable to most, contingencies built upon contingencies, nothing left to mere chance. Yet she knew from personal experience, it was far better to stand next to him than against. The bindings drawn across her back, caging her ribs were proof enough of that.

Hands rested on the hilts at his waist, his weight shifting slightly as the ship touched down. The Nihilgenia poured forth, black armor flowing out into the clearing, blasters panning across the treeline. Muz stepped off, moving in a straight line, his gait measured and steady. Purpose drove him to the palace now, his mind reaching out, feeling his wife as the summit made their own landfall on the far side of the Palace. To the south, he could feel Koji, moving along with the rest of the Ragnosian force. They would meet in the middle, forcing the collective's hand. The space battle had been all but won, and what remained was cornered and cut off. Which meant dangerous.

The golden hilts dropped from his belt, floating down the edges of his warcoat, then flitting up to whirl around him like birds. The universe sang to him, a dirge of captured fire and the pain sent his way. Four blades illuminated at once, golden fire snaring against the sniper's blaster bolt as sunset tones erupted from his hands. Beneath the helmet, Muz smiled.

"Contact!"

