

Objective 1

For the Dread Throne

Warrior Khryso Mallus sat calmly in a plush red chair, a civilized comfort that clashed harshly with the tunnel of rock and durasteel it was contained within. The lighting here was brighter than in most sections of the Valneikian Hive because it was one of the few places outsiders were expected to be on a regular basis. A small alcove containing a modest bar, serviced by a droid, a handful of soft chairs, and a holoprojector the size of a small table was not quite enough to make Khryso feel at home in the spire, but it was better than nothing.

If all went well, the Chiss wouldn't be here for more than a few hours anyway. He had arrived at the Valneikian spire less than an hour ago for a meeting with Archduke Krullok. The Sith normally left business deals in Administrator Sallo Wur's capable Skakoan hands, but Sallo had requested Khryso accompany him. Khryso's former dealings with the Geonosians could prove a boon in the negotiations; not to mention, forming a contract with the Valneikian hive could guarantee a certain degree of success moving forward. Khryso had no rebuttal for Sallo's logic, so here he was.

Sallo was not Khryso's only company, however. Shizu, the Sith's BD-3000 Luxury Droid assistant, stood nearby dutifully. The pair of Sallo and Shizu didn't make for exciting company, but Khryso didn't mind the silence. It gave him the opportunity to meditate in peace and prepare his mind for the upcoming conversation. That was the plan, at least, but a slight undercurrent of danger that was edging its way into his consciousness.

All at once, he could feel the hive explode into a frenzy of emotional states. Something was definitely going on. Concern furrowing his brow, Khryso stood up, his right hand hovering near the lightsaber hanging on his belt. "Stay here," he ordered, glancing at Shizu, "I'll be right back."

"What's going on?" asked Sallo, shifting in his seat slightly. The Skakoan's pressure suit made it hard to read his expression or body language, but through the Force, Khryso could sense a cloud of anxiety looming over the Administrator. Perhaps he suspected something was happening as well, Khryso couldn't say for sure.

"We'll see," Khryso responded flatly, "I'm just going to check in with our hosts." Without waiting for further questions from Sallo, Khryso turned and marched off down the tunnel, towards the dark durasteel doors that would lead him to the Hive's Command Center. Two picadors stood at attention on either side of the door. Normally, they might inquire about their guest's intentions in approaching the Command Center without permission, but a Plagueian Force User could get away with more than your average citizen.

The doors slid open at Khryso's approach, leading into a small antechamber that contained nothing but a second set of doors. As the second set of doors opened, a wave of anxiety and fear washed outward, confirming Khryso's suspicions that something was amiss. The Archduke

was still absent, the clear cause for the delay in their meeting, so the Sith addressed one of the nearby Geonosians working a console. "Situation report," he demanded simply.

"Under attack," the Geonosian replied in heavily accented Basic, "Killiks invade."

Khryso's lips pressed firmly together, the Chiss concerned if perhaps the Geonosians had become confused somehow. A Killik invasion seemed unlikely, especially on Aliso. Turning to the central holotable, Khryso ordered the Geonosian to contact the Archduke. He stood silently for several seconds as the tension slowly built, the hectic activity in the Command Center quickly becoming a chaotic chorus.

As soon as the shimmering blue form of the Archduke appeared on the table, Khryso spoke up. "Archduke, what's happening?"

After a moment of clicking, Krullok responded, his eyes constantly scanning around whatever room he was in. "The Hive is under attack by Killik invaders. Our meeting will have to-" an explosion from outside the spire caused the room to shake slightly and the hologram to briefly flicker.

Khryso lifted his lightsaber from his belt. "I can assist in the defense," he said, "have you contacted the Dread Lord?"

The Archduke's wings fluttered for a moment. "Yes. Reinforcements are on the way. If you are..." the Geonosian's voice trailed off as he glanced away, gesturing with an arm towards someone Khryso couldn't see. "If you are able, my lord, I would request you take up a position here, safeguarding the Queen."

Khryso nodded, briefly glancing back towards the tunnel where Sallo and Shizu were still waiting. "I must also place my companions under the Hive's care. Ensure their safety."

The Archduke hesitated before his wings fluttered and he gave the affirmative. He spoke several lines in Geonosian, addressing some of the Valneikians in the room with Khryso before the transmission cut off. A couple of the Geonosians ran out of the room, heading back to secure Sallo and Shizu. A third approached Khryso, indicating with a gesture that the Sith should follow him.

As Khryso followed the Geonosian through the hive, he could feel the battle looming outside of the structure. Lives were already being lost as a rainbow of emotions spread across the area. He still couldn't fathom why or how the Killiks were striking at Aliso like this, it seemed so sudden. He hadn't even heard any chatter about the aliens through the Inquisitorius network. There had to be more to this. Unfortunately, in his current situation, he didn't have the ability to do any investigation. He had to make sure the Valneikians held off the Killiks until the Plagueian forces arrived. The Geonosians had already proved themselves a valuable asset and, as the years went on, they had much potential to offer.

Nearly ten minutes had passed before Khryso began to encounter groups of Geonosians rushing through the halls, some armed with spears and blasters while some were wielding more makeshift weapons. The hive had even called the drones to arms. An honor guard of picador waved Khryso forward, his escort scurrying back towards the command center. The Archduke stood nearby, speaking in fervent Geonosian to any bug that approached him.

When the Archduke spotted Khryso he hurried over. Waving one of his arms towards a nearby doorway covered with many rugs and tapestries, he said, “the queen’s chambers are through there. I plan to coordinate our defense from the command center, so I will leave protecting her in your hands. Her life is more valuable than any of ours, so please protect her at all costs.”

Khryso nodded in understanding, moving quickly past the Archduke and entering the queen’s chambers. The large room had an air of apprehension in it, Queen Duzhannu’s massive presence laying motionless against the far wall. A dozen picadors were stationed around the room, guarding the four entrances. Khryso approached the queen, making sure to move with grace and poise before offering a slight incline of his head. “I am Warrior Khryso Mallus of Clan Plagueis, your highness. I offer my services in your protection.”

The queen spoke quietly in Geonosian, but her clicks and buzzed reverberated around the room nonetheless. Khryso couldn’t completely understand her, but he reached out into the Force to grasp her emotional state. She was nervous and scared, but also hopeful. This was the first major test of the hive’s strength since it had come under Plagueis’ rule, so it was likely that her fear was two-pronged. The Killiks were a threat, of course, but the Hive’s overlords demanded a certain level of competence.

Khryso allowed confidence to fill his aura, not willing to show any weakness or uncertainty in front of the queen. “You have nothing to worry about. Your people have adapted to your new lifestyle, ascended into loyal subjects, and that will avail you.” Khryso sat down on the rock floor, silently hoping his pants wouldn’t get dirty, and crossed his legs. Closing his eyes, he reached down inside of himself and began to meditate on the conflict.

The spire rose into the sky like a mighty tree, nurtured by the sun that is Plagueis. Energy surges through the tree, a rush of power that keeps it alive and growing. However, a cloud begins to cross over the sun, allowing winter to begin creeping its way in. Frost spreads across the ground and through the air. The ground turns white, the air turns cold, and the tree knows it is in danger.

Leaves and branches begin to frost over, growing cold and dead, falling away as they are overtaken by the winter. Surprisingly, some of the leaves began to turn into snow as they fall, falling upon their own tree and spreading the cold even further. The winter is vast and dangerous, but it is not endless. The tree has the power to weather the season and live through another year. It just needs some encouragement.

Khryso turns his will into a warm, summer breeze. The air caresses the tree and its leaves, the branches rustling and the wind whistling. You do not need to fight back the winter, you only need to survive it. As the tree accepts the warmth of the breeze, it is reminded to remain steadfast. The branches sway as one, the leaves shake off the frost, and the tree works in unison to steady itself for the coming cold and elude the frost. Spring will arrive soon, and in the face of that, the cold will stand no chance.

A sudden explosion uncomfortably close to the queen's chamber jolts Khryso from his meditation. In a breath, he has sprung back to his feet, his lightsaber in hand. The picadors are standing at the ready, prepared to die for their queen. Khryso reached out his hand, extending his presence outwards. The Killiks were getting closer. At least, some of them were. Khryso's violet blade sprang to life, adding a sinister hum to the deadly silence that pervaded the room.

The faint sounds of blasterfire and sonic cannons echoed into the room from one of the many passageways that connected to it. The picadors began to readjust their formation, preparing for a breach. However, after about two minutes, the sounds stopped. Another explosion broke the pregnant silence, this one much closer than the last.

Khryso slid his saber into his left hand, pulling out his LL-30 with his right. He expanded his senses, not wanting to be caught off-guard by an attack. He felt a sinister darkness on the edge of his awareness. It wasn't the same darkness that accompanied Sith; it was more like a void, filled with a multitude of voices. It was unsettling and uncomfortable. For the first time since this all started, Khryso began to sweat.

The pressure was suddenly lifted, however, as the attention he'd felt suddenly became scattered. Khryso drew in a sharp breath, closing his eyes for a moment to regain his composure. He felt as though he could relax, the danger having passed. One of the picadors suddenly turned and ran to him, offering a commlink. "Lord Mallus," the voice of the Archduke spoke over the commlink, "the Legion has arrived. They're beginning to turn the tables, but do not drop your guard."

"Understood," the Chiss responded simply, now understanding that the Legion had drawn the Killik's attention away. The battle was still far from over, but for now at least, the queen was safe. Khryso deactivated his lightsaber and holstered his pistol, once again taking a seat on the floor. He couldn't go out and fight at the moment, but he would do his best to continue supporting the hive's efforts. Closing his eyes, Khryso began to meditate, sending a warm summer breeze over the battlefield to welcome spring.