

## *ONE MORE TIME*



Every lie is composed of two parts: the lie we tell others, and the lie we tell ourselves.

It was an easy matter to tell the ones you loved that you have walked away from that lifestyle. It was facile to tell others that there were now more important things in your life that took priority. You repeated, over and over again, that you have left the path, your calling, as an Assassin. And maybe, just maybe, you have just started to believe it.

You think of her, Atyiru and her smile. Then you think of her, Kirra, and her small, bright laugh. You have promised both of them to be better, to do better. To value life before death, and the journey before destination.

Yet, when one threat ended, another took its place.

The Collective has been neutralized for months now. But now, inevitably, two new extremist sub-factions have gone and escalated tensions to their breaking points. Three, technically, if you counted the newcomer and her—alleged—ascension to power.

Restoration? Retribution? Ascension? The galaxy did not need them. Moderation was the key to peace. You know this. The galaxy knows this. Yet, moderation means slower progress. Less chance of changes or forward momentum. Patience is not a virtue shared by the many.

This, of course, encourages zealous calls to arms, to a promise or an ideal born of conviction. The cause becomes easier to accept. To rally behind. And someone needs to put an end to it.

Why that person is you, you're not entirely sure of. Yet something deep inside you still burns, unaffected by the lies you continue to tell yourself and those you love.

So here you are. Again. An insignificant yet critical chess piece gliding across a three dimensional board that has spiraled into a storm of pandemonium, bloodshed, death and destruction. Nothing new there. The only question, really, was why?

*Just one more kill. One more time, you lie to yourself.*

You make your way through the city of Tipool. A day earlier, the city had been your typical destination, but now, buildings crumbled amid the concussive blasts of demolitions from mutated soldiers, starfighter coverfire, mobile artillery, Force-wielders

and mercenaries. The path of the righteous, the path of the non-believers. There was no shepherd.

However, there was a way to cull chaos, to eventually allow it to spin off its axis until it crashed into pieces around its own unsustainable momentum. Find the head of the hydra, and eliminate it.

This is, after all, what you were made for, wasn't it? The only use, the only positive impact an assassin could provide to the galaxy was a swift blade to bedlam's neck.

Amara Cirrus of the Imperial Harmonist Party had given you the information you had needed. You had helped her take out one threat, but it had not been enough. (Of course it had not been enough. When, ever, was it?). Still, she had given you something that only you could use to put an end to some of this. (Never all of it).

While you had left behind the Shadows that had so effortlessly empowered your abilities as an assassin, you have gained new power and insight. You are an Elder Arcanist. So it is a trivial thing to reach out through the slipstreams of the Force, following the trail from the datapad that had once belonged to Rasha Hawee. Or, at the very least, the datapad she had entrusted to Dwipp Bruskar, who had now been removed from the line of command by your hand.

You find the thread, dowsing out the location of the Togruta at the center of all of...this. While she may have had her reasons for forming the Revenants, for guiding them down this path, her actions had led to ruin. Hypocritical coming from you? Perhaps. But it doesn't matter. In the end, nothing really mattered.

Except, of course, making her, making *them* smile. For that, any price is worth the weight of responsibility, the pain.

You skirt the edges of the conflict without much need for ghosting. You can still conceal yourself as needed, hug tight to the bleak landscape and pad silently through rubble and temporary smokescreens.

It is not long until you find Rasha Hawee. She is not behind some grand encampment with legions of guards protecting her. All personnel are deployed, and she is doing what she can with her single blaster pistol to bark orders, coordinate her forces, and find a way to pull victory out of the clutches of inevitable defeat. She is resolved and determined though.

This is easy to see on the furrowed brow against her light blue complexion. Ochre eyes dart left and right. Her voice is strained and raw and shrill. Her cybernetic left arm is moving more effectively than her organic one gripping the blaster. Her left montral is

scarred, just like her datafile suggested. The missing tip is more disturbing to look upon in person, certainly. Yet you are reminded, right then, that she is just...a person. Just like Rath Oligard. She was no mythical figure. Just a woman who had been wronged and chose to do something about it.

You respect that. You respect conviction. But there are larger troubles brewing. A crazed Seer has brought a new enemy to light. So, you resolve, without much strain, to do this one thing, to remove one element from the scales of conflict.

Stealth and subterfuge are like words at this point—wind. You walk towards the fringe perimeter that veils Rasha Hawee. Marick Tyris Arconae, the Brotherhood's Gray Fang, doesn't look all that threatening. Your ashen hair, bright blue eyes, and calm demeanor pair with your grayscale attire. Your stature is nothing to be intimidated by, lean and wiry and lacking any noticeable bulk.

Blaster barrels swivel and train on you as you stalk forward with no intent of slowing. Two guards shout and rebuke you, but your lightsaber is already springing to life, splitting the air with its black-cored blade shrouded in ghostly light. Your wrist turns, the blade hums, and the volley of blaster fire ricochettes away from you with effortless ease.

These two are quicker than most to realize what they are up against. One continues to concentrate fire while the other switches to a riot baton and snaps it into a defensive position. Your free hand goes to your belt and pulls out a set of throwing knives. You dexterously work them between your fingers with practiced ease, and then hurl them at the baton-wielding guard.

They manage to sidestep the first two throwing knives, but they are not accustomed to facing projectiles that fly with preternatural precision. (Force Users, am I right?) The third knife slashes a line in the guard's cheek while the fourth lodges itself neatly into their aorta. Blood gushes free from the body's primary artery, a momentary geyser that quickly sputters out and becomes a slow leak. The body slumps bonelessly to the floor.

The remaining guard screams, just as their blaster clip expires. They throw the weapon aside and charge you, bare-handed. You don't blame them, so you make it quick. Your free hand reaches out and you make a beckoning gesture. The Force reacts and reaches out to grab a hold of the charging guard. They close the distance towards you quicker than they would have expected and are met with the tip of your lightsaber. The dual-phase saber extends to its full length at the point of impact, piercing through the guard's chest cavity to protrude out back between their shoulder blades.

The guard grunts and in one smooth motion you pull your blade free and guide the dying body down to the ground. You don't let the motion slow you much, and keep moving forward towards your target.

Rasha Hawee sees this. She has lived long enough to know her end when it is in sight. There is no dramatic exchange of words. There is no plea of mercy. Rasha stares you down with a defiant look of decisive resilience rarely seen in the absence of the galaxy's denizens.

The scarred Togruta raises her blaster and takes aim. She fires. You perceive the bolt before it even leaves the barrel and side step. Two more shots, two more steps, and the distance is closed. You take one last step and make a single, clean cut with your lightsaber.

The leader of the Tenixir Revenants Retributionist sub-faction head falls and rolls across the cracked earth beside your feet with a meaty thump.

And just like that, one problem has been solved. Soon enough, another will arise. Patterns, lies. They are all the same. You will worry about this later, so you focus, now, on linking back up with your Clan.

One more time.

