

The Alter Ego

Honoghr

40 ABY

Battlelord Khryso Mallus sat with his arms crossed, a slight frown creasing his face. Despite the barren, rocky terrain stretched out beyond him, the Chiss rested comfortably in a plush silver chair. A parasol attached to the head of his seat kept the afternoon sun off of his blue skin while a circle of carpet protected his boots from the dusty ground. The relative stillness and quiet that surrounded him was contrasted by the dig site a dozen meters to his right, where a small variety of slaves and workers toiled away in a tunnel that had been carved into the ground.

While the Sith's eyes remained slowly listing across the horizon, his other senses were attuned to the worksite, waiting for some sign of progress. It had been quite a while since Khryso had found himself in the field like this. It was much more boring than he recalled. Perhaps he had just forgotten the feeling of humid, rancid air and dusty gusts of wind; more likely, he had developed a sense of being beyond this sort of trivial labor. That's why he left the hard work to his subordinates. That left him with little entertainment, however, but plenty of time to ruminate. Away from the busy Citadel and the work of a Quaestor, he might have been able to meditate had he not been so turned off by the desolate environment.

"My lord," Gwaro, the Weequay in charge of the dig, now approached Khryso, avoiding eye contact. "We believe we have found the chamber."

"Finally," Khryso muttered, rising to his feet without hesitation. He followed Gwaro over to the dig site, stepping lightly to avoid stirring up any unwanted filth. They descended into the tunnel, Khryso having to duck his head slightly to avoid accidentally brushing his carefully styled hair against the ceiling. It didn't take long for the Sith to begin sensing something within the Force. Even without his senses extended, he could tell they were close.

They soon reached a smooth, duracrete wall into which a smooth arch had been cut. Gwaro stepped aside to permit Khryso's entry. Before he stepped through, however, the Sith hesitated, reaching out with the Force to probe the inside of the chamber. He could sense power, but more than that, he could sense a familiar feeling. A feeling of disgust and unpleasantness that he was all too familiar with.

Reaching into his cape, Khryso pulled out his lightsaber and ignited it, casting a violet glow across the walls of the chamber. He stepped through the arch and paused a moment to allow his eyes to acclimate to the new lighting conditions. The chamber was mostly empty, save for a large, person-sized stone box in the middle. There appeared to be some kind of elaborate writing or drawing on the walls of the chamber. After pausing for a moment to study it, the Chiss realized any meaning it might have was currently meaningless to him. He would have to document it for study later. More importantly, however, was the contents of the box.

It was sealed shut, but simple stone provided no barrier to the lightsaber of a Sith. After carefully probing the box with the Force, Khryso began to trace around the top of it with his blade, cutting slowly but steadily until he had completely cut free the top of the box. Pausing for a moment to gather his mental strength, he brought the Force to bear on the heavy stone, drawing on his dissatisfaction and curiosity to throw away the makeshift lid.

With the box now open, he leaned over it, lifting his lightsaber to cast its glow over the container's contents. His eyes first fell upon the artifact, the target of this excursion. A stone ax-head, decorated with jewels and elaborate imagery that emulated the etchings on the walls of the chamber. However, it was clutched in the weathered hands of a corpse. That was when Khryso realized this was not just a box, but a coffin.

Surprisingly, however, there was no smell or clear sign of decay from the corpse. Khryso could sense no life in it, but it seemed somehow perfectly preserved. He was doubly shocked when his gaze panned up and beheld the face of the figure. It was his own. The Sith stepped back in surprise before leaning forward to ensure that his eyes had not deceived him. His second and third glance confirmed that the corpse indeed seemed to have his spitting image.

Khryso's lips pressed tightly together as he glanced around at the walls again, searching for some kind of clue as to what this meant. Surely, it must be some trick, a vision brought on by the Force. It was true, this chamber was alive with the energy field. This must be some last-ditch defense to confuse whoever might have come for the artifact.

Sucking in a steady breath of musty, dusty air, Khryso steeled his focus. He had no choice but to dismiss it as something of that nature. Rather than gaze upon the corpse again, he reached out with the Force, calling on its power to retrieve the axe-head from a distance. The artifact floated out of the coffin and into his outstretched hand. Without hesitation, Khryso tucked the artifact into his cape and turned towards the chamber's exit.

As he stepped out, however, something pulled him back. A pair of desperate hands clawed at his cape, catching Khryso off guard and causing him to stumble back. As he whirled around, the Chiss gritted his teeth. The corpse, despite still being just that, was now at his back, reaching for his throat. His lightsaber still in hand, Khryso quickly swung it upwards, severing both of his doppelganger's arms at the elbows.

The corpse didn't pause, however, surging forward and gnashing its teeth. This creature, this abomination, whatever it was, seemed intent on bringing Khryso down. The Sith suddenly felt himself overwhelmed with rage. This pretender, this shallow mimic, sought to destroy its original. Khryso would never allow such a shallow trick to be his undoing. Whatever this was, he had no intention to let it delay him any further.

Reaching out with his free hand, Khryso grasped the corpse by the throat and let his anger boil over, flooding out through his fingers in the form of violet arcs of lightning. The corpse was

flooded with the power of the dark side and began to convulse. Khryso took his blade and impaled the corpse through the chest, relishing in the creature's imagined suffering.

He made the mistake, however, of looking his doppelganger in the eye. That deep red, like a pool of blood, looking back to him. Khryso saw himself. He saw his own death. Is this what awaited him one day, being mutilated and humiliated and reduced into a convulsing mess of a corpse? The Sith didn't want to pay it any mind. Biting down hard on his lower lip, forcing as much power out as he could muster, Khryso hacked away at the body until there was little left.

The Chiss was left standing in the chamber, the smell of ozone and burnt flesh overpowering the stale scent of the underground. He was short on breath despite the briefness of the encounter, but he wanted nothing more than to put this behind him.

Stepping out of the chamber, Khryso glanced at Gwaro. "Document and take recordings of the chamber's walls. Then, destroy it, bury it, and slag the whole hillside."

"Y-yes, m'lord, of course," Gwaro responded, bowing. Khryso didn't wait to hear the Weequay's response, however, already moving briskly through the tunnel. His steps were now rushed and firm, betraying none of the care he had before. Now he remembered why he didn't like working in the field.