

# Blood and Shadow

## A Dark Times Saga - Part One Fiction

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### Prologue

*Chirping and nocturnal whistles filled the arborous domain of Seraph wilderness, birds and insectoids singing their nightly tunes as part of the forest symphony. A soft breeze blew through the pillaring trees, their branches dancing and leaves waving. Though it seemed like a normal night in the woods, nature unintentionally aided an unnatural predator stalking in the shadows.*

*Silently and carefully, a humanoid figure crept through the forest. A lone Nagai male it was, the hunter armed with a knife, a make-shift bow, and a quiver of arrows. Several nights, he had been out in the wilderness far from home to provide food for his family. Just like the previous ventures, he was once again on the trail of his next victim, his senses heightened by the Force.*

*A welcomed gobble caught his attention, and the Nagai quickly knelt down behind a tree. Peering around it, the hunter saw a Seraphian turkey strutting its stuff amongst a group of disinterested females. Its fluorescent tail feathers shone brilliant when kissed by the moon's light, but only the Nagai appreciated its beauty. The image of such feathers being made into a hair piece for his wife made him even more eager to bag his kill, prompting the Nagai to knock an arrow to his readied bow.*

*Just as his wife had taught him, he steadied his breathing and silenced his mind. Only the gobbling of the turkey and his heartbeat echoed in his mind, the Sith focused solely on his prey. Quietly, he pulled back the arrow and bowstring, aligning his shot with guidance from the Force. The world around him seemed to disappear, and only he and the turkey existed within the emptiness. The scene was set, the weapon ready, and instinct pulled away the hunter's fingers for release.*

*Shadow!*

*A single word and the prickling of the Force in the back of his mind was all it took, and the arrow soared through the air. Feathers and alarmed cries filled the air, the once unsuspecting*

*birds now fleeing for their lives. Yet, their escape was the least of the Nagai's concerns. Fear and worry drew the hunter's attention to the west, and the worried husband and father tarried not as both instinct and the Force drew him quickly homeward.*

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**Two days later...**

**Caelestis City, Maqor**

**Ragnath**

Rain poured down upon Caelestis City and the surrounding area, the gloomy weather matching the mood of the Palatinaean capital after chaos and destruction struck the Empire of Scholae Palatinae. Adoniram Tower, the bastion of the Empire's might and power since the defeat of Meraxis, now laid in ruins. To the Nagai roaming the streets, the tower and the Empire that claimed it had very little meaning to him. At least, that's how he felt currently and ever since his wife had abdicated the throne. Even before this, his loyalty had always been to her more than to the Empire itself.

*Shadow...*

That name had reverberated within Sanguis Caldiren's mind since he had discovered the wreckage of his home and the disappearance of his family. Fear, anger, and regret had tormented the Nagai's mind. His wife and step-sons were gone, and their home was just a smoldering ruin. Sanguis had sworn with his life that he would protect them, and instead he had been absent when they needed him most.

However, not all had been lost. Good news would come to Sanguis the following morning since the attack. Tears of anguish and sorrow turned to tears of hope after a courier of sorts from the nearest town brought a message to the Nagai. The twins were alive and well much to his relief, and he didn't hesitate setting out for the Empire's capital where they were being cared for.

The specified location soon came in sight as the Sith rounded a street corner and found himself before an apartment complex. He pulled out the piece of scribbled with the apartment number, only to shred it to pieces before he entered the establishment. He took the turbolift up to the seventh floor, his right hand hovering over the lightsaber hilt clipped to his belt beneath his cloak. Cautiously, he departed from the lift towards the apartment. He wanted to trust the source of this message, but trust was something he had very little of for others now days.

Reaching the door, he reached out into the Force, hoping to sense the familiar presence of his kids. To his relief, he confirmed their presence along with the presence of two others. There was something else that eased his heart, as well. However, he still kept his guard up.

*They're...not afraid?*

A bit puzzled, he still planned to proceed with caution as he knocked on the door. The door slid open, and a large Lasat appeared in the doorway. "Ah, the Nagai has finally arrived. About time, too."

Sanguis lightly tapped the saber hilt on his hip. "Are you Grex? Reiden's friend?"

"Something like that," the Lasat gruffly responded as he stepped to the side. Sanguis acknowledged the gesture and entered therein, coming upon a lightening scene in the parlor. "Artorias...Deus..."

The twins looked up at the speaker, their eyes alit with joy. Abandoning an ewok bound up by rope on the floor, they charged the already crouching Nagai. "Daddy!"

"My boys!" Sanguis proclaimed softly as he embraced them. "Oh, Artorias! Deus! I was so worried! I thought I had lost you both."

The twins clung to him tightly, the half-Sephi finding comfort in their step-father's presence after all they had been through. "We thought...we thought something happened to you too," Artorias admitted lowly. "We thought...they got you too like they got mom."

The Sith rubbed the younger boy's head comfortingly. "Lucky for us, I'm alright. As to your mother..."

"Reiden left ya a message," the Lasat quickly announced as he handed the Nagai a datapad. "He has a lead on the former Empress' possible location. He's already gone ahead and started on the hunt. Figured you would want to join him."

Sanguis stood up and graciously accepted the datapad, the Nagai reading the message that was already pulled up on the screen. "Ulr Uvi...that makes sense. Perfect place to hide out amongst the denizens of the underworld. How did he get this lead?"

The Lasat's gaze drifted towards the Ewok still tied on the floor. "This one was there, that night hiding in the shadows in case Reiden needed back up. He was spying on the ones who took your mate when he heard talk of the frozen ball. Something about interrogation and Lanis."

*Lanis...*

That name was very familiar to Sanguis, the Nagai recalling the events Shadow had shared with him shortly after she had begun to finally trust him. It didn't take a genius to guess why Lanis had come for the woman who had imprisoned him. What concerned Sanguis was how the man knew about where to find their secluded home, and what was happening to his wife? Just the thought of it all angered as well as worried the Sith.

“Daddy?”

Artorias' voice drew the pensive father away from his thoughts, his stone-cold expression melting away to a soft smile. “Yes, Art?”

“Will you find momma?” the boy inquired, his golden eyes filled with hope and a hint of fear he tried to hide. “Will you bring her back?”

Sanguis nodded and held his son to him reassuringly. “I will. I promise. I'll come back home with your mother, and we'll all be together again.”

“Dad can do it!” Deus declared, the gray-eyed twin pumping his fist into the air with triumph. “I know he can! He'll bring momma back! You'll see!”

A muffled mutter of sorts was heard from the ewok. Seemingly taking offense, Grex kicked the ewok warningly. “Rhun. Mind your words,” the Lasat growled. “Not in front of the kids.”

Rhun just rolled his eyes before averting his gaze from the children. Sanguis could only guess what the Ewok had said, but he chose not to dwell on it. Instead, he nodded to Deus and patted him on the head. “You two just behave for me. Don't have too much fun with the puffball, alright?”

A mischievous giggle escaped the boy's lips as the Ewok scowled. “We won't! We promise!”

“Wait, you're going now?” Artorias asked.

Sanguis nodded again. “The sooner I go looking for your mother, the better. You have to be brave for me though, and behave. Your mother would want you to be brave for her. Right?”

The young Sith smiled a bit this time as he nodded in return. “Mhm. We both be brave for momma.”

“Good good.” Sanguis pulled in both of the boys for a tight embrace one last time. “Stay strong. Everything will be okay.”

Sanguis then shifted his golden gaze to the Lasat. “Take care of them, for me. Shadow and I are in your debt.”

“Don’t you worry. The boys will be well looked after,” the Lasat assured him. “May your hunt prove fruitful.”

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**Three days later...**

**Ulr Uvi Underworld**

**Ulress**

Sewage steam and the chit chat of scum, degenerates, and business folks filled the air as the low and criminal of Ulr Uvi usuals went about their daily doings in the Underworld streets. Smart buyers interested in purchases of the illegal kind sent representatives in their stead, some in the forms of bullies and others who know how to smooth-talk a deal. Even for someone who had committed atrocities in his past, the criminal atmosphere was a bit distasteful for the cloaked Nagai traversing the rough streets. Thanks to his aura, however, many of the denizens dared not approach the Sith. Just one gaze from him was enough to keep a brutish-looking Zabrak away from him. After all, Sanguis had no time for foolish bargainings.

Ever since he had arrived in Ulr Uvi the previous morning, Sanguis had been going from cantina to cantina and club to club to get information. Any rumors of Lanis’ operations, or possible gossip alluding to Reiden’s presence would be good sources to start with. Much to the determined Nagai’s disappointment, no such info was discovered during the first day.

However, Sanguis still held onto hope as he continued his search. A gambling house had caught his attention, and though he wasn’t much of a gambler himself, he was willing to put his creds on the line to draw out possible information. Of course, if money didn’t get the tongue wagging, his Nagai charm or fangs would.

“Ah! Welcome to the *Ramblin’, Gamblin’ Wampa!*” exclaimed an amber-skinned, female Twi’lek greeter. “You’ve come to the right place to try your luck! Are you here to join a specific party, or are you just seeking to jump into any game, sweetheart?”

“I’d just like to watch a few parties first,” Sanguis answered as he removed the , the tone of his voice more soothing than usual as he offered a smile. “I might join a game a little later.”

“Of course! And if you want, you could get something to drink at the bar,” the Twi’lek offered as she began leading him further into the establishment. “Just make yourself at home and enjoy yourself! Promise me?”

A soft chuckle escaped his lips. “But of course, and thank you for your kindness...”

“Oh! Apologies!” She turned to face him again just as they reached the bar. “Tilli. That’s what everyone calls me.”

“Tilli. A cute name for a wonderful woman,” he complimented. “Well, thank you, Tilli. Truly. I’m sure I can come to you for anything should I need help.”

“But of course! Don’t hesitate to ask me anything, sweetie,” she chimed, her cheeks a deep red from the Nagai’s kind words.

With a bow of her head, the Twi’lek made her way back to her post while Sanguis ordered a drink to try and blend in. As the bartender poured him a glass of red wine, he surveyed the gambling floor. Carefully, he took all the details possible from the various players and their parties.

*Someone more local. Someone who might notice something unusual in this wretched place. Someone who might be in need of some creds.*

Scanning the floor some more, his eyes finally rested on a group of three: a male human, a female Rodian, and a male Devaronian. Unlike most of the other parties, the three looked less tense and casual, the Rodian and human drinking while the Devaronian was talking and laughing away. Others in the room were glancing at them a bit annoyed while others just shrugged off the disturbance.

A smirk formed on the Marauder’s face. Casually, he walked over to the table where the three with glass in hand. He leaned against the wall close to them, listening carefully as the Devaronian placed down a card at the end of a joke he was telling. The Rodian’s expression became a bit more concerned as she looked back to her cards.

“Bosba! You are distracting us with your jokes again!” she proclaimed with annoyance, the turquoise female finally placing down a card. “Josiah, stop drinking and focus!”

“Ah, hush yourself, Drima!” the human barked out before he let out a loud belch. “Ya crazy woman! I have this in the bag!”

“Hardly,” Sanguis muttered as he studied the human. Despite how he seemed cognitive, he was drunker than he let on. His hand was hovering over his cards, and before the Rodian could question him, he slapped his card on the table. A look of dread came across his companion’s face while the Devaronian just laughed and collected his earnings. He wished them a sarcastic goodnight, saying he was looking forward to another game before he took off.

“You idiot! Once again you lost!” she cried out. “I told ya to keep a facade of being drunk! Not actually get drunk!”

“Oh, shut your trap, woman! Not like you tried stopping me er’ anythin’!” he countered. “Your fault you also didn’t cheat right!”

“Josiah, shut your mouth! Don’t be telling the galaxy!” she hissed in her own Rodian way.

*Huh. A drunk and a bad cheater? Hmmm, this could be an opportunity.*

“Seems like the heart of the cards are not with you,” Sanguis casually spoke as he took a sip of his wine. “Gotta say, you two look to be an easy pair to beat.”

“And who asked you for your for your commentary?” the Rodian asked. “And how long have you been watching us?”

“Oh, not too long,” Sanguis answered. “And I only spoke because perhaps I could be of service to you. You see, I like listening to gossip and news about new things happening around here. Information is my desired wealth.”

“Are you some sort of bounty hunter...or somethin’?” Josiah asked a bit groggily.

“I wouldn’t say that, exactly.” The Marauder took another sip before he took a seat between the Rodian and the human. “But that’s not what matters. What matters is that I’m willing to make a trade. Information for creds. The more interesting the info, the more I’m willing to pay. Even more so if it’s information related to something important to me.”

“And...what would that be?” Drima asked with interest.

“I am trying to find someone whose cause I wish to join,” he answered, his voice taking on its hypnotic tone once again. “I think they’re sorta new here. Would probably have some hired muscle or soldiers operating somewhere to keep the locals away. Maybe to protect something? Who knows? And I am welcome to any out-of-the-ordinary news you might have in addition to that.”

Both gamblers looked at each other. The more cautious Drima didn't speak, but the more loose-tongued Josiah didn't hesitate. "Well, there have been some comin's and goin's of strange folks in the ol' Darrowdin's Coliseum."

"Josiaaaaah!"

"Hush you! I'll say wha I want! Espe'ally fer the credits!" he barked back before continuing. "Some folks been a'sayin' that in that ol' place people be gettin' escorted there recently. Was a huge armored transport of some kin' that I think Marger Tharn said he saw."

"Darrowdin's Coliseum, huh? Hmmm, interesting." The Nagai pulled out some credit chips. "Anything else?"

"I guess since the nexu's out of the bag." Drima sighed and shook her head. "You aren't the only one to ask around here. Someone else was wandering around here a couple days ago also asking about strange going ons and the like. Also offered us credits, but Josiah here had passed out and I wasn't too keen to answer his inquiries. Promised us creds too, but we were both cautious as well as sober then."

"I see. Did this fellow give his name?" The Sith pressed on, waving his hand slightly as he focused on her mind. "Did he give any details about himself at all?"

The Rodain became more lax, her resolve and cautious dissipating. "Told us his name was...was Fenorian Long."

"Fenorian Long...and did he by chance have long, purple strands of hair?"

Drima nodded. "Yes, he did. Why? Is he a friend of yours?"

"Sorta. We're...more like business partners," Sanguis remarked. "Anything else he told you?"

"Well, he told us that if we ever changed our minds, to go to his lodgings at the old Sunny Cinder Hotel," she answered.

"And where would that be?"

"Not too far from here," said a familiar voice as a man in traditional, purple, and silver Sephi clothing reached the table. Drima gasped in fear, but the half-Sephi himself raised his hand



assuringly. “Don’t worry, Drima. You’ve done nothing wrong. I know this man. We’re...acquaintances.”

The newcomer reached into his robes, withdrawing a credit chip pouch. With a smile, he paid an equal and generous amount to the two gamblers. “Now, run along. Just don’t tell anyone about this. We will know if you did or not.”

The Rodian and the human nodded and left, the latter being dragged by his compatriot. Sanguis sighed, but offered a smile of his own to the half-Sephi. “Fenorian Long, huh? Very original.”

The half-Sephi shrugged. “No one’s questioned it so far, so it works. Anyways, Rei Rei said you’d be tagging along. As surprising as it may sound, I’m glad you did. Especially, since you seem to have gotten the info we need.”

“Well, this is Rowan we’re trying to save,” Sanguis said, the Nagai playing it safe by using his wife’s real name. “No way would I entrust her rescue and safety to someone else without being involved.”

The half-Sephi nodded in understanding. “Well, come along then. Rei Rei will want to hear what you found out.”

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Both men had promptly left the establishment, with Sanguis leaving a generous tip for Tilli as thanks for her kindness. Fenorian, of whom was actually Fëanor Láng, led the Marauder to an abandoned hotel that he and Reiden were holding up in after they chased out a few amateur gangsters.

Sanguis and the sorcerer entered the hotel in silence, both not having spoken to each other after their encounter at the gambling house. Neither were very fond each other. Sanguis had stolen Shadow’s heart before Fëanor could finally win her over. The Nagai personally had no ill-feelings towards the half-Sephi, but he was very well aware of the the man’s anger and paranoia. Granted, anyone in their right mind would be concerned when a blood-drinking Sith is involved.

The Warlord could sense much tension from the Savant as they headed for the hotel basement. He could hear it now: *How could you let this happen? Why weren’t you there to protect her? What if Reiden hadn’t gotten there on time to save the twins?* He didn’t need to guess what Fëanor desired to say, nor would he hold such questions against him. After all, he still was being eaten by his own guilt.

“Here we are,” Fëanor announced as they reached and entered the dimly-lit basement. “Reiden. I’ve got the bloodsucker.”

*Bloodsucker? That’s a bit harsh.*

“Ah, finally.”

From what was once a basement office strode out Reiden, the human forcing a polite smile much to Sanguis’ hidden amusement. Not even Reiden liked him either, but his love for the twins who called him uncle was enough to keep Sanguis from disliking the man. He was Uncle Reiden, and Sanguis wasn’t about to ruin the relationship between said uncle and the boys.

“I had a feeling you’d join up with us soon,” Reiden commented as he offered a curt nod to the Nagai. “I hope you’ve had some sort of luck since you came to Ulr Uvi. We’ve got a lead, but nothing solid.”

“That pair at the gambling house I told you about ended up giving Sanguis some good information,” Fëanor remarked. “From what I overheard, the Darrowdin’s Coliseum is where she might be.”

“They told me that someone saw an armored transport around there and it’s thought people are being escorted there with no return,” Sanguis quickly added. “Unless it’s some kind of people’s prison, I think that might be a good place to check out.”

“Definitely, though we’re going to need to proceed with some caution,” Reiden stated. “If she is in there, that place is going to be heavily guarded to prevent escape and rescue.”