



## **Scholae Rising Part 1: Betrayal**

**By Shadow, Dek, and Ric**

### ***Caelestis City***

The planet Seraph's edge came into view of the night sky. A longer night would soon fall upon Clan Scholae Palatinae, with the main planet soon blocking the sun for a couple of days. The old HQ of Imperium stood on a distant hill overlooking the Clan's main complex.

Suddenly, a piercing shriek could be heard through the sky. The sound of glass shattering was followed by a sudden swoosh into the air. Bolts of electricity followed by cascades of swooping fire formed through the Imperium HQ, dismantling the internal pillars that held it together. The HQ tumbled into itself, falling into the newly minted mushroom cloud of dust, rising into the air.

Screams were heard ringing throughout the city. The Empress looked on from her office balcony, picking the datapads around her into action.

### ***Ulr Uvi***

The old villa stood in place. A masked figure loomed over the top of it's balcony, receiving a call on a communicator.

“Yes,” the robotic voice inquired.

“It is done,” the familiar voice on the other end of the line said.

The commlink was dropped on the floor and crushed under the figure’s boot.

***Calestis City***  
***Empress’ Throne Room***

The Empress stood at a desk filled with datapads, notes, and scribbles of plans. She was flanked by two Imperial Guards. On the rims of the room stood an older model guard; Praetorian Guards.

Dek entered the chamber giving out a huff, “I cannot believe it. My old stomping ground, up in flames.”

“It was bound to happen at some point,” the Empress said.

Darth Aeternus appeared from another room, entering into their foray, “Whatever it is, the sensation of deception is at its most greatest.”

Dek spoke, “So Meraxis, Elayan, Namarran, possibly the Iron Throne, possibly The Collective.”

Empress Shadow side-eyed both of them, “We need more details. I’m calling in some old contacts. But so far, it points to someone *internal*.”

Dek furled his brow, “I don’t believe it. Not until I see it personally.”

“Sullustans,” Aeternus whispered to Shadow.

Unphased, Dek spouted a few names, “Jorm? Ric? Reiden? We already had Elinia. Who else could be working with our enemies?”

“Unlikely any of them. They’re dedicated,” spat the Empress under her breath. She needed answers. Now.

“Call the members of the Clan. Tell them they are to investigate every possible lead they have as to who could have done this. I want possible leads within 18 hours.”

“What about the other attacks on Ulr Uvi, Seraph, and the rest of Ragnath?” Aeternus said.

“Information on them would be useful, but they weren’t as bad as the Imperium HQ,” the Empress responded. “Send someone to look into the old Excidium base.”

“Yes, Empress,” the Sullustan responded.

“Also,” he moved a bit closer, “Praetorian Guards? Weren’t they decommissioned by the Imperials?”

Aeternus smirked, but the Empress responded, “Were. We have Imperial Guards to defend the VIPs. We need the Praetorian Guards to defend the city. They’ve been my little secret until now.”

“Of course, Empress. For the Empire!” Shouted Dek.

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The Major had spent most of her adult life in Intelligence. She knew how to ferret out information better than anyone else in the service and was shocked that it took her this long to figure this one out. She had been assigned to duties in Meraxis Intel that had prepared her for this very mission, a mission given to her by her sponsor; a secretive man. She knew of his past in the Intel circles. He had been an operative in Imperial Intelligence during the Galactic Civil War thirty years ago and once he had come out of hiding after Endor he had found his way into the Intel service of one of the many Judeccan Warlords that had sprung up. It was there that he had learned the cloning techniques that always allowed him to return no matter the mission.

The Major again picked up the datapad, rereading the final conclusions of it over and over again. They were so obvious, how did she miss it, the entire time. She picked up the data pad and went to submit her report to her sponsor personally. She felt that it was better this way than in a public forum. As she made her way down the hall, she thought of the past year and a half and would never even have guessed who the mole had been. She had never even seen the sign that this person was anything but what they said they were. It was incredible, especially with how high they had made it until now.

She stopped outside his door and paused to straighten her uniform before she entered. As her hand reached for the door announcer, it slid open revealing the darkened interior. Seated behind his desk, he waved the Major inside.

The man, her sponsor, looked up from his datapad and watched as the Major approached his desk. He set his work aside and rose to meet her, knowing what she wanted to speak to him about. He was an old school intelligence officer and knew what she had found even before she decided to come to him.

“Good morning, Major,” he said.

“Good day to you as well, sir,” she replied. “Do you know why I am here?”

“I do. I wouldn’t be good at my job if I didn’t,” he sat on the edge of his desk.

“Is it true, sir?”

“You already know the answer to that but I sense that is not the question that you wish to ask,” the Major let her hand drop to her holstered blaster. She drew her weapon and pointed it at him.

“I want to know why, Sir.”

“That I can’t tell you,” the Major could feel all of her muscles start to lock as she tried to pull the trigger on her blaster. No matter how hard she pulled her finger refused to move that small distance. He stood up and pulled her blaster from her hand and tossed it aside.

“I wish that things could have been different and I wish that I had the answers that you were looking for. I also know that you planned for this very situation. If something was to happen to you then all the evidence that gathered would automatically be sent to the Empress. That was one of the reasons I recruited you in the first place. I will give you a choice though. Join me,” he could see that she would refuse.

“I won’t join you. I just don’t understand how you could do this,” she was fighting to move. He was impressed.

With a flash of purple, the man ignited his lightsaber and plunged it through her heart.

“Goodbye Major,” he said as he grabbed his go backpack from the side of the door. It was done and there would be no going back now. He headed towards the hanger.

### ***Six Hours Later***

Sitting alone in the cockpit of the stolen Lambda Shuttle, the man activated the small comlink that he carried.

“It is done,” he said. He looked at the screen and the text reply was a set of coordinates out towards the specific area. He set the navicomputer coordinates and pulled the levers on the hyperdrive. The stars turned to streaks and his small ship jumped away.

## **Scholar Rising Part 2:**

### **\*\*Retribution\*\***

“Sound the alarm!” the officer shouted to her underling, “The Major has been murdered!”

The whining alarm blurted out through the ship. The officer lit up her commlink, “Commander. Admiral. Someone has murdered Major Kristil.”

In a different part of the ship, Commander Fran and Admiral Jacaen were walking briskly towards the Major’s room. Suddenly, Jacaen put out a hand to stop them both. They looked one way and then the other, to make sure they weren’t being watched.

“Contact Imperial Intelligence. Let them know that Major Kristil is dead,” the Admiral stated.

“Imperial Intelligence?” questioned the Commander.

“And Head of Internal Security.”

“Who is that?”

“A new position to enforce the recent migration of traitors away from our Empire,” the Admiral responded.

“Finally,” the Commander sighed. “I’ll do so immediately.”

The Commander saluted and turned away, only to turn back for a second and say, “What was the nature of the Major’s mission here?”

“None of your business, firstly,” sneered the Admiral, “but, I am sure the murderer would most likely have something to do with it. Now, go!”

**\*\*Jakku\*\***

The Human Equite strode up to the bar, “A single shot of brandy.”

“How about starship mine-shine?” the bartender chuckled back.

“What is that?” inquired the Imperial.

“Brandy is for mid-rimmers. But you ain’t in the midrim. Plus, you couldn’t afford it,” the bartender let out a hearty laugh.

The Shadow took each saber he had and placed each one onto the bar.

“Oof,” the bartender winced, “Could fetch a mighty fine price for those.”

“I’ll be taking your alcoholic fuel. I’ll need it for my ship,” the Shadow rebuked.

The bartender lifted his fingers to others in the station area. Many beings of various races and sizes started walking over to the Imperial. The Equite joked, “You’ve got to be kidding. Sacrifice? This early?”

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Commander Fran, stepped off the ship, flanked by two Elite Praetorian Guards, and around 20 Imperial Guards flowing behind them.

He motioned to the left guard, “Scout ahead, take two Imps.” The Praetorian Guard followed the orders to the strictest degree, not budging from their duty.

He then spoke to the Imperial Guards, “Form a perimeter around the settlement and move inward, groups of two obviously.”

He turned to the last Praetorian, “You’re with me. Watch my back.”

The Commander whipped out two pistols from his pocket and grasped them in hand, strolling with them to the settlement.

Soon, the comms lit up, and the further Praetorian responded, “We see the target. He seems to be mid-battle at the local cantina, my coordinates.”

The Commander shouted to all Imperial Guards, "Surround the Cantina! Praetorian Scout, guard the back entrance! We're taking the front!"

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The Shadow decloaked behind the small Givin, igniting his saber into the back of the skeletal chassis that was its body. The remains slumped to the ground is a burnt husk. The bartender let out a growl, "Oooo!! No need for this anymore..." but as the bartender carried on the Equite saw out of the back windows at least seven Imperial Guards being lead by a stranger, more heavily armored and decorated guard.

\_Scholaeans\_, he muttered, disigniting his saber

He cloaked his body yet again and ducked out of the door. He saw ahead of what was about to happen and dodged a gust of sand thrown at the entrance way. He could see an Imperial Officer heavily armored point to the ground and shout, "The feet in the sand."

The Shadow decloaked and igniting both sabers, but had just fought off about 30 criminals and low-lives and hadn't slept for a couple of days. He was no match for the 20 more Imperial Guards, and two Elite Praetorian Guards. They held up their weapons, and shot a couple of stun rifles at him, bringing him down to the ground. He was chained and tied up and robbed of his valuables. His ship was impounded by the Clan and left for future pickup of evidence.

Commander Fran wheezed into his comm, "Chief, we got him."

**\*\*Caelestis City\*\***

The Imperial Judicator had entered the room, wood lined and pentagonal in shape. The Judge sat at the edge of the room on the highest throne. Below him were aides and above him a screen for holovids.

Everyone in the room filled benches, with a cage in the center for the guilty and the surrounding area for witnesses. It's thought that if witnesses could sit down, then they'd feel comfortable, and if the guilty could stand then they would be in a combat ready position. That simply wouldn't do. The opposite side of the room had space for the Head of Internal Security, the lead instigator of these proceedings.

When the Judicator entered the room, no one stood, as is customary. The Judge let out a call to order, "We'll begin these proceedings with the face of the accused, who has joined us via holo-vid on a transport commanded by Commander Fran Anchilis."

Up, above the Imperial Judicator's head appeared a lightly 3D holo-vid of Ric "Tater" Hunter's tired and defeated face.

### **\*\*The Villa\*\***

The hooded female walked up to a gigantic figure, at least 7 and a half feet tall, and whispered in a robotic voice "Master Kantrix, things have not gone according to plan. Our plant has been captured."

Kantrix turned to face her, also deeply hooded, and spoke with a voice deeper than a Hutt, "Join the others. We act soon. We cannot wait for the trial's end. We must enact the will of our Emperor."

### **Scholar Rising Part 3:**

**\*\*Caelestis City\*\***

**\*\*Imperial Judicator's Court Room\*\***

The Imperial Judicator continued speaking, "With the evidence provided by Xendar on the discovery of the Sith artifact, and the evidence provided by Xantros on the datapad in the Imperium HQ, this whole ordeal calls into question the validity of the accusation against Ric Hunter."

The crowd murmured in confusion. Certainly they thought that the conviction of guilt would be swift and the Head of Internal Security would be just and quick in his deliberation with the accused. Ric's face remained solemn on the holo-vid screen, careful not to celebrate an early victory.

The Head of Internal Security, Colonel Zlan Shrain, had his aide appear beside him from the side entrance, "Colonel, there has been a new develop in the case of the transmitter. With the help of Adept Kell Dante we've been able to ascertain the location of a rogue group of Force Sensitives on Ulr Uvi."

Colonel Shraine pierced his red, Chiss eyes into his subordinate's. He whispered, "Rogue Force Sensitives?"



“Yes,” she uttered.

The Head stood and took his leave from the chamber. The Imperial Judicator noticed this, but remained steadfast in allowing the crowd to slowly quiet down.

He started again, the age wearing on his voice, “With this evidence in mind, I can see no other solution other than to grant the accused a repr...” an explosion rocked the podium, sending pieces of the burnt Judicator flying into the faces of the crowd and those immediately around them.

Screams erupted from the chamber. Xendar, who was in attendance, leapt to cover one of his allies. Xantros, who sat on the opposite side of the room, closed his eyes with his hand raised, blocking much of the debris and flames licking the edge of the barrier he erected.

**\*\*The Throne Room\*\***

Empress Nighthunter stood over the table yet again, wishing she was able to visit the trial herself. Yet she knew that she would be better serve in this research role, and also safe from the attempts to destroy her rule from the outside world.

A low rumble was heard in the distance. A silent alarm light went off on a map. At least 20 Elite Praetorian Guards suddenly entered the room, with Darth Aeternus following them. The Dark Lord spat out, “Another explosion. In the judicial chamber. Seemingly before an announcement of potential innocence of Ric.”

The Empress sighed. “So someone wanted him to remain guilty.”

She turned back to the table. A hologram appeared with an Imperial Guard, “A message from Colonel Shrain.”

“Well, come on, then!” she scolded the guard.

The guard left and the Chiss stood in place of them.

“What news?” said the Empress.

“There is a rogue group of Force Sensitives on Ulr Uvi. Kell, convinced of his old friend’s innocence, found out where they were hiding.”

“What does this have to do with our case?”

Battlemaster Rayne, a long time member of the Clan, appeared in another hologram. The Empress sighed, “Yes! I accept.”

Rayne chuckled and started, "Through cracking a code, your highness. It turns out a group that calls themselves, The Insidious, has been slowly gathering on Ulr Uvi and has infiltrated parts of the Empire over time, using our discord against us."

Shrain continued, "We used Ric's commlink to find out where they were hiding. Xendar also found out that Ric was being controlled through a Sith amulet of sorts."

Darth Aeternus interrupted, "This doesn't explain his continued actions of escape."

The whole group was interrupted by another transmission. The Empress shouted, "Yes! Yes! I accept!"

Dek appeared in the hologram, "Xantros found a datapad in the ruins of the Imperium HQ. I followed where the data lead, and it referenced someone high up in CSP. This could have been Ric, but it possible mentioned someone higher. It might have been reference to any number of past high ranking traitors. Delak, Blade, Eli, even the former Grand Master. These members all had something to do with our destruction in some form."

Shrain spoke up, "We also conducted a scan of Ric. Customary health scan. He has a chip inside of his head."

Everyone looks at each other, puzzled. Aeternus let out a small laugh, "Palpatine did such a thing with his clone troopers. It's how he accomplished his Great Jedi Purge."

"And yet, we do not know who these Insidious are!" yelled the Empress, shutting down all points of excitement.

All the blue holograms remained silent. No one said a word. Suddenly a red hologram appeared in the center of the map table with a figure wearing a mask emblazed with the symbol of the Final Order.

"Greetings, usurper." The voice was a deep voice, almost robotic.

Everyone remained shocked at the surprise.

Aeternus was the first to speak, "The rogue Force Sensitives I assume?"

"We are not the rogues here," the voice continued. "You have decimated the will of our Emperor! You claim to be a legacy of our Lord, and yet here you remain in service to yourselves!"

"We are the legacy of Emperor Palpatine," spat the Empress.

"And yet, when we gave the call to join the Final Order, you denied it!"

Rayne spoke to the Empress, "We were asked to join the Final Order?"

Shadow looked down to the table, eyes shut. She huffed and looked back up at the man, "It was before my time. Messages were sent out to almost every Consul multiple times, and yet they were either delayed, denied, or ignored. And rightfully so."

She squinted at this seemingly weak man, "The Emperor died above Endor's moon. No façade could bring him back! The Final Order was a clone of a once great Empire!"

Shrain spoke up, "The military would never have approved of it. We may be a legacy of Palpatine. But ultimately we're better."

Aeternus responded, "It may have been out of the military's hands for approval. Palpatine was a Sith, and thus it would be with the approval of the dark side."

"Ric was a legacy member of this Clan," Rayne started, "It would have been up to us older members to decide what to do with him and the Palpatine message."

"Irrelevant of all of that, the Imperials would have the only authority..." but Dek was cut off.

"Enough!" shouted the shrouded man.

"We know you know where we are! We will enact our plan! Of course, in traditional form, I dare you to stop us! I have seven Sith with me, and plenty of loyal Imperial Guards! Ric was but a tool for an end to your Empire! We will succeed and sow discord among you! We will resuscitate our old Emperor with your addition of an Empire! Palpatine will rise once more! I am Lord Kantrix! You will either join us or die!"

The hologram turned off.

"Go to Ulr Uvi. End this charade once and for all." The Empress' words rang through the silent Throne Room.

#### **Scholae Rising Part 4: Silver Age of Imperialism**

The Empress looked over the fellows in the shuttle, proud of the small cluster of legends she had gathered. In their hour of need, not only were they joined by the Praetorian Guard, but so did five loyal Scholaeans. Xendar, Xantros, Aeternus, Wattrik, and Rayne allied with the Empress, joined their crusade against these new invaders and usurpers.

They soon dropped out of hyperspace, reaching the atmosphere of Ulr Uvi. The Insidious awaited below.

“Alright,” the Empress started, meaning that the others would gather around to join her.

“This Lord Kantrix awaits us below.” She looked up at Aeternus.

“Clearly I’m not the match I’m meant to be. So you’ll have to deal with him.”

“Clearly,” Aeternus retorted back.

The Empress continued, “We don’t know what kind of power awaits us other than that they are fueled by the dark side. We don’t know their numbers nor exactly where in the villa they are.”

Xendar spoke up, “I can deal with some alone.”

“No,” firmly responded the Empress, “You and Wattrik will be working together on this one. I know you’re used to being solo on these things, but I simply can’t risk your life on this one.”

Xendar huffed in disappointment and left the floor to Shadow.

“I’ll deal with the apprentice,” she continued. “Xantros, some of the Imperial Guards, and the newly minted Praetorian Guards will be taking on the rest of them. Rayne will join him in that avenue.”

Xantros piped up, “If I could ask, where is Kell? Dek? Kadrol? Reiden? Ras? It seems we’ve left a few of our stronger people back at base.”

“Kell,” sighed the Empress, “said he had an errand of mercy to run. Dek and Kadrol are holding down the fort. Reiden and Ras as well. We can’t expect everyone to abandon post and...”

The shuttle felt a rough shift in the atmosphere.

“No time for chit chat,” the Empress said, grasping onto a hand hold. The others followed.

“Gear up and ready to drop!”

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The Adept whistled his way down the hallway of the Retribution. He attempted to juggle a few objects while walking, but failed many times, always ready with a catch with his mind.

“What are you doing here?” Scolded a gruff low level soldier. “This is a restricted area!”

“I’m here for a friend,” he chided the guard.

The Adept looked at his fist, took one punch and knocked the soldier clean onto the floor, dazed.

The Palpatine took out a keycard and opened the locked door. The person on the other side shielded their eyes from the sudden light, and inquired, “The verdict? Guilty on all counts?”

The familiar voice of Kell Dante Palpatine chuckled, “Not for you, my friend.”

Kell took Ric’s hand and helped him off the ground. He drew out two shot glasses and a bottle of brandy, swiftly poured them, and took a shot each. Ric coughed, and Kell laughed, “You’ve been in prison for far too long!”

The Adept held his hand to Ric forehead and spoke in a robotic voice, “I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Sithari!” They both had a chuckle at the thought of that being true.

“Seriously,” Ric started, “This can’t really be the end for me.”

“It isn’t, friend,” Kell responded as they started walking out. The guard started getting up and Kell looked at him.

“When the people on top find out I’ve let you go, they’ll forgive you. Kell has forgiven you, and thus you are forgiven!” He joked. “Besides, you weren’t yourself. Sith happens and all that.”

“Thank you, Kell.” Ric sighed.

“One more thing,” the Adept said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a lightsaber, “You might need this.”

Ric smiled, shook hands with Kell, and they both parted ways.

The guard realized who had just confused him and spoke up, “I can’t wait to tell my daughter that I was knocked off by Kell Dante himself!”

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The Imperial situated themselves onto the landing pad just outside the extension of the villa.

"I'm surprised. No surface attack?" Wattrik spoke towards the others.

"No need," Xendar said, "They probably know that it's us or them. If we win, which we will, we will have the will of the Emperor. If they win, then many of our most valued leaders would die as well."

The Empress gave a nod of approval.

Aeternus spoke frankly, "This will be difficult."

"And yet I sense only victory," Rayne returned.

Xantros and Rayne took the Imperial and Praetorian guards down the landing pad first, sabers ready. They steered around the back of the compound, ready to give flank. Aeternus lead their slow march. Shadow followed his left side, while Xendar, and Wattrik followed the right.

They approached the front gate. Aeternus swiped a keycard at the entrance and the steel doors slowly opened onto a courtyard. There, upon the balcony, stood a giant hooded figure. He took off the robe and revealed himself to be a severely scarred male, with cuts across his face and blue eyes. He had a few tufts of hair strung about his head.

His voice boomed towards the Scholaeans, "Welcome to our new headquarters! When we survive this mess, we'll turn this place into a new hub of the Final Order!"

"We've dealt with how many reborn Emperor's so far?" Shadow quipped sarcastically.

"One from this time, and the other in...well...we don't discuss those events," responded the Dark Lord of the Sith loyal to the Brotherhood.

"I don't care what you think you've done. I have no time for this foolery," responded the giant man. "I am Lord Kantrix. I am surprised by the power emanating from you all. Too bad you will have to die."

The doors opened to the courtyard below. Across the crossing stone paths with a poisonous tree in the center, and broken beer bottles and moldy explosive shells stood a figure with a rancor face-painting on her mask. Two more shorter figures appeared in black robes. One had two cybernetic arms and a face-mask painted in a black and white web. The other wore a long

and flowing battle skirt and had what looked like a fully darkened mask over her face.

“My Hand with the rancor is Svedda, and both of her apprentices are Tijon, the cybernetic, and Chiron, the black masked one. If any of you wish to join, can do so. Minus the Sith Lord,” Kantrix slowly huffed.

Svedda activated his double sided saber, while the other two activated their single sabers. All red. Kantrix reached into his pocket and brought out two duel sabers, while a third one appeared from his head, hovering above him. They all activated to an intense red, cackling with the delight of the dark side.

An explosion could be heard behind them. Kantrix let out a laugh and said, “The flanking battle has begun!”

The Scholaeans activated their sabers and ran into the fight to hunt the rogue Sith.

Xantros and Rayne were on the other side of the mansion/villa. They had just breached the wall and they faced around 30 former Imperial Guards, traitors to the Scholaeon Empire.

Rayne sent her saber into one of them, guided with years of practice, and then pulled it back to her. Xantros jumped into the air, flicking two bolts into the air, and then falling down onto the ground behind the Imperials. A firefight ensued.

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Ric took the single saber and slowly crept through the halls, using his innate secrecy to get around. His skills got him through most of the ship to the hangar bay. But the bay was eerily quiet. Usually there were shifts moving and troopers to dodge. However, only a few could be seen doing work at different consoles. He pranced on the catwalk towards the flurry of TIE-interceptors that lay along the edge of the ship. Suddenly, Kadrol appeared at one end, saber activated in a bright purple.

He turned to run, but Dek had occupied the other end with his grass green saber.

“Kell let me go,” Ric proposed.

“Kell is not one to decide this,” Dek responded. “He may have a power that goes beyond us mere equites, but he is one that tends to simply do what he wants.”

Kadrol started running towards Ric. Defensively, Ric activated his saber and blocked a blow from Kadrol. They swept their sabers up and traded pounces into each other. Ric was used to holding another saber, and had to compensate with concentrating into a deeper fold of his mind.

Dek slowly stepped forward, "Imperium was our home. It was something that needed to be kept up in order to keep around."

Ric was able to land a kick to Kadrol's chest, knocking him back and creating more space for them to spar. Hunter stepped forward, while Hauen stood his ground.

Dek continued, "We don't see any reason why you would want the same. Even under the duress of a Sith Lord. Lesser people have come back from greater things."

Ric threw the saber clumsily at Kadrol and brute forced through the Mystic, nailing him in the head in the process.

Dek threw out his hand, and eyed down the back of Ric's head. The Sullustan Battlelord reached into the mind of "Tater" and stroked the abstract stem with the Force. He reached in for what he wanted to see.

Ric knelt in pain, feeling Dek grab thoughts from his mind. Kadrol started to get up slowly off the ground, "He kicked me!"

"Not yet!" Dek gritted through his teeth.

The Human Battlelord breathed and slowly stood up, still feeling the immense pain of his mind being ripped out.

"You don't want...this...Dek!"

Dek felt something, and decided to jump on it, but immediately felt a shock in his own mind, setting off a trap. Dek was thrown off a bit, stepping back and grasping the rail, putting his saber away.

"A chip?! You can be triggered at any moment!" yelled the Sullustan. Kadrol had stood at this point and faced Ric. But Ric closed his eyes and took a deep breath in. On the breath out, he fell into the cloak of the Force, mostly hiding from the sight of all.



“We have to go after him!” Kadrol yelled.

“No! Let him go! We will find him someday. He will return. He’ll be called to return by his mind machine!”

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Rayne and Xantros had kicked the last soldier to their knees, while Xantros beheaded them. Behind them slumped a slew of bodies, with about 4 Imperial Guard casualties, and one Praetorian casualty. They swiftly headed towards the innards of the villa to dispatch the others inside.

Out front, Tijon and Chiron faced off against Wattrik and Xendar. They fed off each other’s hatred and fueled both desires to continue fighting. Wattrik swung high as Xendar swung low. Chiron pressed some lightning, while Tijon crept in a punch with their iron fist.

Shadow faced off against Svedda, drilling each orange and white saber into her staff. Shadow swept across her face, knocking the rancor painting away. It revealed a distorted mess of features of which Shadow winced at.

Svedda growled, “I defeated a rancor on my own! Bare hands! These scars prove what I’ve accomplished. You’ll be no match!”

Aeternus swung his strong arms grasping the saber tightly. Kantrix dodged each attack, parrying the ones he wasn’t expecting. The flying saber came down and Aeternus split it in two.

Suddenly, a yelp was heard in the courtyard. Tijon had been stuck with Xendar’s saber, and Chiron had fallen to her knees in sadness, crying at her friend’s death.

Svedda took a split second, feeling the Force wound that had just been created. This was enough to allow Shadow to send Svedda off her feet, while Shadow held both sabers at her throat. Aeternus shot lightning at Kantrix, who blocked it with his dual sabers.

Shadow spoke through the cackling, “I offer you something! Join us or die!”

“Not on your...” Kantrix started, but was stuck with Aeternus’ step through his sabers, into his stomach. Kantrix slumped onto the ground.

Svedda screeched for a split second and crawled backwards.

“The offer still stands,” Shadow spoke to her mind.

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The Empress stood near the table, slowly clearing papers and pads away. Dek strolled in. Any sight of the old Imperial Guards were gone, and they all had been replaced fully by the now highly decorated Praetorian Guards. The Guards were assigned to different tasks. Less secure places, considering how many had joined the Insidious.

“Out with the old, in with the new,” Dek mumbled as he walked up to the desk.

The Empress didn’t look up. She was too busy packing things away.

Dek laughed, “You could have someone else do this?”

“You don’t think I thought of that,” she spoke bluntly, stopping to look at Dek directly.

The Sullustan raised his hands in surrender, “I get it. You want to have the control of where it ends up.”

“Hopefully in the archives,” she continued putting things into durasteel boxes.

Dek peered over at the empty throne. Dust had settled upon it. The crest of the Clan stood on the highest point of the throne, seemingly in perfect condition. To the right of the throne was Shadow’s warbanner, representing the power of the individual in office. The left of the throne had the tattered flag of the Clan, torn to shreds and appearing to have no shape.

Dek turned back to the Empress as she cleared the last box off and saw a clear strategy table with holoemitters. He piped up, “Now you can sit in the throne.”

“Highly unlikely, I have things to do.” She responded.

Dek smiled and continued, “The throne is a resting place for the powerful. You are that manifestation.”

“Traitors have sat on that throne. It ultimately means nothing.”

“That’s why you need to sit in it. It needs to be healed by your will. By our collective will.”

The Empress looked up at Dek, "I am the Empress. Not you. I will decide when I am ready."

"Of course, Empress," Dek confirmed he still understood where he stood in the pecking order.

The Empress pressed a button and some holograms came up. It showed the Imperial seal and three smaller seals on the bottom.

"What are those?" Dek said motioning to the smaller seals.

"Once powerful entities. It seems that in the absence of some forms of leadership, some people made a secretive play for power, utilizing the influence of the Clan members," the Empress grinned.

"I assume we won then?" Dek inquired.

"Of course," the Empress started around the table towards the center of the throne room, "With Ric receiving leniency, and of course a full pardon if and when he returns, as well as the utter annihilation of the Insidious terrorist group, minus a small child of an apprentice, we've received news that a small state has formed from Adoniram City. A loyal Governor to the cause of the Imperials. A new Protectorate."

"An Imperial Protectorate?" Dek smiled, happy at the news of Imperials maintaining the influence within the Empire.

"To be exact, the Xen Imperial Protectorate."

Dek choked a bit, "Xen? Emperor Xen?"

"Former Emperor, but yes. We named a part of land after him. And why not? The first Imperial Emperor and a retired leader? It would be foolish not to do this."

"Sounds good, what of the...other...elements?" Dek said.

"Seems like there are some people in the military who are gathering, as well as some older members allied to the royalists. There are of course some cult of pure darksiders that has always been rumored to exist. They had no influence at all. Make sense, considering they wanted us to join with the Insidious and no one else wanted us to."

The Empress walked to the edge of the throne. Dek followed her.

“I need someone,” the Empress started. “I need someone to lead the chosen people of the Empire to rebuild.”

“Jorm,” Dek pointed out.

“Missing.”

Dek looked confused, “Missing? Not good. Aeternus?”

“As far as I know, hunting Mandos.”

“Good luck, Mandalorians!” the Sullustan quipped sarcastically. “Me?”

“Yes, you, who else would I choose?!”

“Make sense.”

“I need someone to rally the Clan members around an advisory council.”

“What kind of council?”

“A conclave. This conclave will be led by you, the Procurator, and your Aedile, the Enforcer. The purpose of the Conclave is to allow the members to address the leaders of the Empire and give advice, as well as to vote on whatever I want them to vote on. It’s the voice I’ve chosen to give them.”

“And I’ll lead it?”

“Yes, and facilitate it.”

“I accept!” Dek bowed.

He continued, “Can I advise you on one thing?”

“Of course,” the Empress spoke.

“Sit on the fweccing throne.”

The Empress laughed, walked up the couple of steps and sat down on the throne, resting her laurels on the hand rests.

She closed her eyes and suddenly opened them in shock, "Oh! I just remember why I called you here!"

"I was wondering that myself!" Dek responded.

The Empress continued, "Some notable members have returned. I need you to welcome them."

"Yes, Empress."