

Ravens of Fate

RA Sylas Pitt

Chapter I

The dark void of wild space will be a sight that never gets old for Sylas; The vast unknown, stretched out in perpetual expansion, continuously creating something new to be explored. The viewport seemed like a black screen without a single star or satellite in sight, a rare sight even in this part of the Unknown Regions. Sylas relished in the moment, enjoying the uncommon stillness accompanied by the quiet hum of the ship. The hallway outside of the briefing room was unusually empty, a troubling detail.

The doors to the briefing room hissed open, calling his attention. Commander Dathka Graush emerged from the briefing room with his eyes glued to the datapad in his hands. He caught sight of Sylas out of the corner of his eye, pulling his attention away from his datapad and stopping in his tracks.

“Out for a stroll, Captain?” He asked as he made his way to the viewport.

“No, our dear Commander requested my presence.” Sylas responded, folding his arms behind his back. “I was simply admiring the view.”

Dathka looked out the viewport, seeing the black void, lacking any sort of bright decoration. He glanced back at Sylas. “Not much of a view, but to each his own, I guess...” He trailed off for a moment before changing the subject. “Did the Commander tell you why she requested your presence?”

“I was under the impression I was going to be briefed for a mission, but I was instructed to wait outside. She didn’t say anything to you about that?”

“Ah...” Dathka became visibly uncomfortable, “I’m sure she has her reasons.” Sylas raised an eyebrow in confusion, but Dathka continued before he

could inquire further. “In any case, she’s in there.” He then turned on his heels and sped down the hall, disappearing behind a corner.

Dathka’s odd behavior made the hair on the back of Syllas’ neck stand on end. In his mind, there was no reason for this briefing to require a private audience or any sort of special treatment. He shook his head and steeled himself the best that he could before making his way into the briefing room, feeling a bead of sweat beginning to form on his brow.

Commander Atashi Rain and Admiral Stryker stood by the holoprojector, quietly discussing in hushed tones. The crew stations in the room were minimally crewed, giving them a very slight and rare sense of pseudo-privacy. Stryker ended his quiet argument with Atashi when he noticed Syllas approaching.

“Thank you for joining us on such short notice, Professor.” Stryker began, turning to face the holoprojector, pressing a few buttons as the machine began to hum to life.

“Admiral, please, can we discuss this a little more before we come to a decision?” Atashi’s plea to the Chiss made Syllas nervous, watching them both with scrutiny. The holoprojector came to life with a display of a small planet. After a moment of studying its features, Syllas felt his heart sink to his stomach.

“I’m sorry, Commander, but the decision *has* been made, and it is *final*.” Stryker’s response to Atashi was curt, as he turned to face Syllas. He noticed the pilot had his eyes glued to the projection, a reaction he expected. He almost smirked. “Do you recognize this planet?” The question was almost entirely a formality.

“Brolsam.” Syllas’ response was tense, his eyes focused on the digital sphere that lazily spun in place. Atashi eyed him as Stryker continued.

“We have reports of a rebel cell operating in the Kathol sector. They’ve been known to bomb local government buildings, raid small and poorly-defended military outposts, and hijack supply caravans.” As Stryker continued to explain, the projected images changed to the news on the HoloNet depicting these rebel

activities; burning buildings, local witnesses being interviewed, and an elderly mother crying over her loss, her face twisted with agony. “Based on this activity, we have a reason to believe that these rebels are planning to overthrow their local government and install a new one outside of the jurisdiction of the New Republic.”

Sylas tore his eyes away from the projection to look at Stryker. “A rebel cell on a New Republic system?” He asked, bemused. Stryker finally smirked a little.

“Seems that a significant portion of the population is unhappy with how the New Republic has been managing their affairs.” He almost sounded amused. “They claim to have attempted to reason with their local government to argue against the New Republic’s overreach into their property and businesses, but none of that is really important.”

“Then why do we have an interest here?” He asked, stepping closer to the holoprojector. “Brolsam is nothing but farmland and villages, there’s hardly any minerals in the earth, nothing special about the flora or fauna...” He trailed off as he continued down the list.

“Your home planet will only be the catalyst.” Stryker responded, “The sector sits just outside of the Minos Cluster... I’m sure you can understand why it became of interest.”

“Then why are we not negotiating with the rebel cell and sending them supplies?” He asked as he turned back to face the Admiral. “Why are we sending pilots to a conflict zone instead of offering more practical help, like weapons, supplies, and intelligence reports?”

“They don’t want any official governments helping them.” Atashi answered the question for him. Sylas looked at her, watching her struggle a moment with the next words. “Turns out this rebel fraternity has been recruiting veterans that were involved in the sector’s uprising, two decades ago. They want to make their own government now.”

Sylas felt his blood run cold, having many of his questions answered in that instance. He leered back at Stryker.

“I am not negotiating with them.”

“Thankfully, that’s not the plan.” Stryker turned the holoprojector off. “With the sector so far out in the Outer Rim, the New Republic’s hold on it is already shaky, at best. Our goal is to give the rebels a little push in the right direction... Discreetly, of course.”

“The New Republic holds the entire Kathol sector. I don’t think one planet will make too much of a difference.” Sylas countered, folding his arms over his chest, eyeing the red-eyed Chiss.

“I disagree.” Atashi spoke up. “Brolsam is the agricultural hub; Most of its exports go to supplying the other systems in the sector... They don’t trust either faction, but this makes them useful in removing the New Republic’s presence from the planet, which can lead to the rest of the sector falling in line. The enemy of my enemy, or whatever it is they call it.”

Sylas mulled over her words for a moment. “If they succeed and we move in, they will fight us as well. They won’t just keel over.”

“Let the Fleet Commander worry about those things.” She calmly reasoned. “All we need to worry about is making sure we remove the New Republic’s influence over the sector. Once we clear a path, you get to come home and move on to the next task.”

“You, Commander Graush, and Lieutenant Mesh will travel to Brolsam.” He instructed. “You will infiltrate this rebel cell and aid them in sabotaging the New Republic’s hold on the planet. We know you have a vendetta with these rebels, but do try to restrain yourself from murdering our assets. At least until they are no longer deemed useful, anyways. If you have any other questions, I’m sure your Commander would be more than happy to answer them. Good luck, Professor.” Atashi saluted Stryker while he turned and left the briefing room, letting the doors hiss close behind him. Once he was sure they were alone, Sylas

allowed his shoulders to slouch, losing much of his gilded composure as he turned to look at Atashi again.

“Stryker ordered me to keep quiet,” She quickly explained before he could ask. “He knew your reaction would be unpredictable, given your connection to the planet. We couldn’t risk it until we were sure.”

Sylas clenched his jaw, trying to keep his emotions in check; he knew how dangerous it was to bear your emotions in the presence of a Sith, especially those of turmoil. He approached the holoprojector and reignited the image of his home planet, his expression pained with longing. The virtual sphere lazily spun in a quiet hum, illuminating his face and enhancing the hard lines. A heavy silence hung in the air for what felt like an eternity.

“Are you sure you’re up for this mission?” She broke the silence as she approached him, watching him study the projection. “I told Stryker that we have plenty of other capable pilots for this mission, I’m sure we can find someone else—”

“I’ll be fine.” He interrupted her, keeping his eyes on the image. His tone was low and hoarse.

“You’ll have to work with veterans that were involved in the uprising twenty-three years ago.” She reminded him. “And you can’t kill them unless we say otherwise. Are you sure you can handle that?”

Sylas sighed softly. He knew it was going to be a challenge to hold himself back, but he also knew this would be his only chance at revenge, if he was patient enough.

“I’ll be fine.” He repeated. As she prepared to argue, he continued, “Do we have aliases set up?”

She sighed, relenting to the change of subject. “Intelligence will have them ready within twenty-four standard hours. Until then, I suggest you meet with your team and discuss the mission.”

“Who is taking point?” He turned the holoprojector off.

“Dathka; Stryker believes he has the experience necessary, and wants to see him prove himself.” He nodded in agreement.

“What’s our transport?”

“The three of you will travel as refugees, separately, down the Rimma Trade Route. You will make different stops at separate ports, making your way through the Minos Cluster before reaching the Kal’Shebbol system. From there you will take a shuttle to the planet, separate seats, no eye contact.”

“I’m assuming we’ll be given credits to buy our passage at the ports.” He inquired as she nodded.

“Correct, can’t leave a trail that traces back to our accounts.”

“And who was that Lieutenant he mentioned?”

“Lieutenant Grant Mesh, fresh out of the academy. Stryker wants him to get some field experience.”

He stared at her in silent disbelief for a moment.

“This isn’t the type of mission to send someone fresh out of the academy.” He protested. “Stryker, of all people, should know that.”

“And I agree with you, but he also pointed out that with the Ishtari situation, we won’t get too many opportunities to send new agents out on the field to gain the experience they need.”

Sylas groaned softly, using his hand to rub his face in agitation. He knew Stryker had a point, however he was not looking forward to tutoring an inexperienced agent during a high-risk mission; One wrong move could disrupt the entire operation, and could even cost them their lives.

“I get it... But even *this* mission has too much at stake to risk.”

“As he said, the decision is final...” She looked at him mournfully, understanding the danger this assignment held for all agents on the field. “You and Dathka are resourceful, I have full confidence that you will see this mission completed successfully. You’re too stubborn to allow otherwise.” Her attempt at light humor was appreciated, as it got Sylas to smile a bit with a soft chuckle.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence.” His merriment lasted but a blink, as his expression returned to a determined focus. “In any case, I should go meet up with them, and make sure we’re all on the same page.” He turned to leave, but stopped when he felt her hand on his arm. It radiated a warmth he hadn’t felt since he began his service in the cold vacuum of space, catching his attention instantly. He looked at her, meeting her cerulean gaze.

“Promise me you’ll think with your head, not your heart.” Her whisper came soft, but her words were clear. He clenched his jaw and nodded once, trying to ignore the burning sensation he felt on his cheeks.

“I promise.”

She released him, watching him leave the briefing room, as the doors hissed shut behind him.

Raven Squadron’s hall was as quiet as usual. Commander LQC and Lieutenant Scottrick sat in the rec room, playing a game of Dejarik while discussing flight maneuvers and tactics. The resident Gungan, Lieutenant Garth Gottamash, had trapped a new pilot, Sub-Lieutenant Tequila Gringo, in a long and excited conversation. Sylas chuckled softly as he walked past them towards Dathka’s private quarters. He tapped the display by the door, requesting entry before hearing the doors hiss and open. As the doors closed behind him, he saw Dathka standing by his desk, with a young Lieutenant standing near him.

“Ah, the Professor finally arrives,” Dathka teased, gesturing Sylas to take a seat in one of the minimalist armchairs across from his desk, which he politely declined. “Grant, this is Captain Sylas Pitt, your Flight Leader. He’ll be joining us on our mission. Sy, this is Lieutenant Grant Mesh.”

The young Lieutenant turned to Sylas with a quick salute. “Pleasure to meet you, sir.”

“You don’t have to be so formal, kid.” Dathka teased again, grinning as he went to his liquor cabinet, pouring three glasses of a rainbow-filmed liquid. “We won’t need them where we’re going.”

“Right, sorry...” He mumbled as Dathka returned with the glasses, handing one to each of them. He lightly clinked each of them with a small smile.

“Relax, Lieutenant. We are about to embark on a long mission together, we might as well start getting comfortable with each other.”

“Yes, sir.”

“It would benefit you to really cut back on the formalities,” Sylas finally chimed in, sipping his glass of chalquila before continuing. “We’re going to be assuming different identities, and the more we act like those new aliases, the less likely we’ll be suspected. The tiniest mistake could cost us greatly in this mission.”

The Lieutenant simply nodded, looking down at the strange liquid in his glass. He quietly sloshed it around the glass, studying its swirling colors.

“If I may speak freely,” he began “I find it rather odd that I’d be assigned to a mission this quickly. I only just transferred here from the *Avenger*.”

Sylas and Dathka shared a knowing glance before they both took a sip of their drinks. Much to Sylas’ appreciation, Dathka spoke up first.

“Admiral Stryker has great faith in you after seeing your test results in the academy.” The Lieutenant looked up at Dathka, getting visibly flustered.

“I-I didn’t think my grades were that great.” Dathka shook his head in response before sitting in his chair behind his desk.

“Any sentient being can take and pass exams,” Sylas explained, “but that doesn’t make them special. We look at techniques, the ability to adapt to their environments, how they respond to certain scenarios and so on. The academy

tests far more than just your knowledge, and your results make you a promising candidate for our infiltration units.”

The Lieutenant seemed confused and prepared to ask a question, but was quickly interrupted by the notification chirp coming from Dathka’s datapad. He picked it up and opened the new message, skimming through the first few paragraphs.

“Ah, it seems Intelligence has sent us our aliases.” Dathka announced before downing the rest of his drink, audibly setting the glass down on his desk. Sylas tapped his pockets, realizing he left his datapad in his room, cursing under his breath.

“I... I have a question.” Grant spoke up, seeming to have regained his thoughts after the brief interruption. He looked at Dathka, as if waiting for permission. Dathka and Sylas shared a confused glance, looking back at the timid Lieutenant.

“... Yes?” Dathka prodded.

“In the case of one of us being compromised... What do we do?”

Dathka’s jaw visibly clenched, as he cast a side-eye to Sylas, as if begging for help. Sylas discreetly shook his head, looking away. Dejected, Dathka sighed and looked back at Grant.

“We will work as a team to reduce the chances of that happening,” He began slowly, standing from his seat and straightening his duty uniform. “However, in such a case, all of us need to understand that the mission takes priority above all else.” He looked at Sylas. “Sylas, from your experience in the field, what usually happens when an agent is compromised, but the rest of the team is not?”

Sylas sighed and finished his drink, setting the glass down on Dathka’s desk before responding. “Our first option is to attempt to find and solidify an alibi for the agent.” He looked at the young Lieutenant. “If the evidence presented against them is iron-clad...” He shrugged. “Like he said, the mission takes

priority, and sacrifices must be made.” Sylas could see beads of sweat beginning to form on Grant’s brow.

“Which is why you should study your alias thoroughly before we deploy.”

Grant nodded in understanding.

“Go study, Commander Atashi will let us know when we’re ready to go.”

Grant seemed a bit confused.

“Are we not going to study these things together, as a unit?” He asked, to which both Dathka and Sylas shook their heads in unison.

“We’re not supposed to know each other when we arrive on Broslam.” Dathka explained. “The less we know about each other, the better.” Grant nodded and quickly excused himself, setting his untouched glass of chalquila down on the desk. Once the door hissed shut behind him, Sylas took a seat in one of the armchairs across from Dathka’s desk.

“What’s your impression of him?” He asked the amused Commander, who picked up the full glass of chalquila, sipping at it.

“Between him and the Gungan, I’ll take the Gungan.”

“... Garth was our other choice?”

“I said the same thing.” Dathka sat behind his desk again, leaning back against it. He shrugged, looking at the glass in his hand. “Who knows? He might surprise us.”