

Galaxy Turned Asunder

By Shawn Carter

It all happened in an instant. There wasn't any giant shock wave, or a grand awakening, or anything spectacular. It was as subtle as could be. Like someone had orchestrated the event that way. The last thing the perpetrator desired was a grand spectacle that they had no control over.

No, Persephone wished to utilize the coming chaos to strengthen her foothold in the systems she controlled. Perhaps acquire a few others before the real fighting began. Her well-placed agents had already started to stir up trouble in multiple promising worlds. Soon her forces would splash across this unforgiving galaxy and reshape it. Most of all though, she relished the idea of purging the shadows and proving once for all that the Nightmare was humanity's greatest creation. The dark queen stood on her command bridge with a glass of red wine. "Life finds all," she hissed as she took a sip.

Entire fleets mobilized around the planet. Such a spectacle hadn't been seen for hundreds of years. It was both exhilarating and terrifying to witness. Giant ships that overtook the blue sky and blotted out the sun. It was unsettling to see tools of war and such an idyllic scene mingle together. The grim news from the front had forced the middle systems to start mobilizing. It had taken them a week to cobble together this expeditionary force. The logistics were a nightmare, and the problem would continue to grow by the minute. Sierra didn't know what the future held, but she knew one thing was sure, the game of numbers had just begun.

Veronica watched a young man hug his mother, father, and little sister for perhaps the final time. The father did an admirable job of holding back his tears. He wanted to appear brave for his terrified son and family. The mother, however, didn't bother being stoic. She had read and seen the news. Her baby boy was about to throw his life away to a cause that was well beyond all of their understanding. Tears streamed down her face as she held and gripped her son's shoulders. She pleaded for him to reconsider. He had nothing to prove to them or anyone. Veronica could see the boy taking his mother's words to heart. No one here would blame for bailing. In fact, he'd be smart to bail. The little sister who didn't look older than maybe 5 just stood there. Her bewildered expression broke Veronica's heart. She had little clue that her big brother wouldn't return. In her mind, her brother will be home for supper to tell her about his day. It took everything Veronica had not to walk up to the boy and ask him to leave and enjoy a peaceful life. She stopped herself because peace was all but a myth now. "All aboard," the ship quartermaster yelled. Veronica watched the boy pull away from his mother. She saw a hint of hesitation. He stepped away, turned his back, and made his way to his squad. The boy's father broke down at last as his mother hugged his shoulder. The little girl just stood there and watched as her brother soldiered on to his death. The boy did turn around and wave goodbye to

his baby sister as tears streamed down his face too. *War is hell* Veronica thought as she watched the boy leave his individuality and become just another number for her chart.

Cassandra watched the loading bay doors fly open. The metal walls of the transport muted the commotion outside to a dull ring. Though she had been one of the first to engage the Nightmares in combat, it had only been a handful of infected, and one giant creature with claws. Out there Cassandra didn't dare comprehend how many were waiting for. Standing next to her was Aryanna. She was decked in her purple power armor and had her shotgun cocked to fire at the first unfortunate target she saw. She had tilted head helmeted head towards Cassandra. "Are you ready?" Aryanna asked. Her usual brisk voice had been replaced by the monotone speaker in her helmet. The rest of the shadow marines stood up from their seats and cocked their guns. Cassandra pulled out her twin pistols and took off the safety.

"As I'll ever be," Cassandra offered a reply. Aryanna nodded in agreement.

"All right you dogs. So let's show these fuckers how to fight!" The shadow marines cheered and pressed forward. None of them knew what would greet them, but they sure planned to cause hell. Cassandra let that feeling take her over as she stepped out to greet her demons.

The Blue Saint stood behind her helmet. She rested her arms on it as she stared out into the darkness in front of her. "How did it come to this?" Teresa murmured. Her voice echoed off the barren metal walls. She had done everything in her power to prevent this war from happening. Instead, all of her actions only hastened the inevitable. Now, she stood here alone and angry. A terrible and unhealthy combination under normal circumstances. Lucky for Teresa these weren't normal times. No, this was a perfect time for them. She lifted her helmet and placed it on her head and walked to a mirror. Her blue hair glistened as usual, but her eyes were the big attention grabber. At one point they were subtle, but a bright blue. Now they glowed with righteous fury. The Blue Saint was no more. Now stood The Dark Saint and she did not desire peace amongst the stars. No, she only wished for annihilation. With a grimace on her face, she intended to burn the galaxy and all who stood in her way. For, in the end, death comes for all.