Chapter one: Introductions

The Tyrant Lord Geltzan was sat in his chair, going over generic Tyrant admin as a shadow flitted across the rafters. He looked up, but dismissed it as a symptom of tiredness. He stood from his chair, stretched then went limp as a crossbow bolt pierced his chest and spinal cord. I dropped from the rafters, landing softly on the balls of my feet in a crouched position and placed the crossbow on the desk whilst grabbing as much important looking paperwork as possible. The information gained from this mission would help The Triad in their efforts to stop the Tyrant Legions before they became a significant threat. After gathering the info, I stood by the window and waited for the spell I had placed on the crossbow to decay. After a few seconds, the crossbow exploded and threw me out the window. As I fell, I quickly went through a mental checklist to make sure I had done everything I had set out to accomplish. Number one: Take out Tyrant Lord; check, Number two: Gather intelligence on Tyrant funds and stuff; check, Number three: Satiate need to defenestrate self at any possible opportunity; will never be fulfilled but still having fun doing it. There was, however, one thing I had neglected to take into account.

“There’s always something,” I said to myself as I plunged into the raging seas below the Tyrant Lord’s private island home instead of the calm waters that had been there not ten hours previous. I bobbed to the surface and swam to shore, shivering with cold as I entered a nearby cave that reeked of sea salt and rotting seaweed. After drying off; which only took a couple of seconds thanks to the magic of Magic, I went through the papers I had ‘acquired’ from Geltzan’s office. They were mainly shipping manifests and invoices concerning the procurement and movement of weaponry and manpower, but vital information was still in there. About half an hour later, I had learned the location and flight paths of three separate Tyrant fleets, most of which were headed toward Inkorinkas Citadel; the Tyrant’s headquarters. I sensed movement inside the cave and quickly stuffed the papers in one of my coat’s many internal pockets. A group of bats flew out of the cave and into the starlit night. I then took the papers out again. Paper, made from trees. It wasn’t information stored on a data crystal, it was old fashioned paper. A bold move by anyone’s standards; paper was perishable and easily lost. I ran my hand over the rough, brown papers noting how it felt as if they’d crumble at the slightest breath. “What are you up to?” I asked. I started running through possible explanations to the paper conundrum, but that was interrupted by a slight vibration emanating from the deep recesses of my coat. I took out a small grey device and put it to my ear. “’Sup?”

“Shuttle is en route to your location,” Said a slightly crackly voice through the device. The reception in this cave was awful.

“Marker is green smoke, I repeat; marker is green smoke.” I then took the device out of my ear and crushed it, throwing the debris into the ocean. After carefully putting the papers back in my coat pocket, I left the cave and stood by the mouth, setting off a green smoke signal. There was a slight tremble in the atmosphere as a small, silver box with wings descended slowly out of the clouds. The shuttle made its way towards the cave, but the narrow cleft in the cliff where I was sat meant that it could only get about 100 metrae towards me before it had to stop. Grudgingly, I waded out into the planet’s highly saline ocean to a rope ladder that was my red carpet into the shuttle. I dragged myself into the craft and signalled to the pilot to go.

Three days later I was dropped off at Interchange 668, a sort of intergalactic services on the edges of the Aethrel Galaxy. This particular interchange was well known by traders, buskers and about 90 per cent of the Godfathers and gangs bosses in the local group. You couldn’t walk through without witnessing a shady deal going wrong because someone forgot the goods, or be assaulted by some has-been musician trying to get their old life back. It was a shit tip of the lowest order and perfect for someone like me, trying to stay off the Tyrant’s radar. Unfortunately, it’s also the kind of place where I frequently run into my own shady past. Sitting down at a bar, I noticed a familiar stench. A mixture of expensive booze and cheap cigars seasoned with some…unsavoury substances of a recreational nature. “Well looky what we have here, boys. Old Golden eyes himself.” I turned to face the putrid mass of fat and flesh that was Gen’hime Bosat, leader of a notorious drug smuggling ring. He was short, fat and dressed in more fur and gold than was entirely necessary. He held a glass of champagne in one fat, ring encrusted hand and a cigar in the other. Gen’hime was accompanied by two very large, black suited bodyguards that were meant to intimidate, but I ignored them.

“Still leading a feigned life of luxury I see, Gen’hime.”

“I wouldn’t really say ‘Luxury’. You see, after you killed all of my men and publicly humiliated me, I was forced into hiding to prevent any interested parties from tryin’ to steal what was left of my business.”

“Hiding? Here? You truly are a *ditz*, Bosat.”

“Oh really? I’m the idiot? Says the most wanted man on this station.”

“If you truly value what is left of your small, narcotics-riddled brain I suggest you keep your voice down.”

“And who are you to order me around, huh?” Gen’hime jabbed me in the chest with a pudgy finger.

“It was a suggestion, not an order,” I replied, unperturbed by the blatant invasion of my personal space. “Of course, you’re not here to get even; I scare you too much.”

“As it happens, no I am not here to cause any trouble. I would like to, how shall we put this, acquire your services as it were.” His response was intriguing.

“My services?” I asked, “What service would that be?” Gen’hime put his glass on the bar and pulled out a small grey square from his layers of fur coat, which he then handed to me.

“It appears we have been unwillingly workin’ for some two-bit Tyrant, goes by the name ‘Altardt’.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard of him.” I lied. I pressed the small button hidden on the edge of the holo-reader and a ghostly purple display appeared. Most of the information was written in Enlyan, Gen’hime’s native tongue, but I knew enough to get a general gist of what Altardt had been doing with Bosat and the remains of his gang. “Let me guess, you need him dead?”

“And we’ll pay handsomely for it, too.” I leaned back against the bar and thought about the proposal. I really needed to get the information I’d taken from Geltzan back to Triad HQ as soon as possible and this job would put me well off course, adding weeks that could be spent figuring out what Geltzan had been up to.

“What’s the time limit?” I asked.

“Time is no issue here, my friend. Take as long as you like.”

“Great, I’ll take it. But don’t expect to hear from me anytime soon; I have more important things to be doing right now.”

“I understand, but when you do finally rid the universe of that no good sack o’ shit permanently, just head straight to Mustar and we’ll sort out payment.”

“Agreed.” I grudgingly shook the Enly’s hand, sealing the deal. After Gen’hime had left a Torlan’Dahk joined me at the bar.

“Heading west, my friend?” He asked.

“We’re on the edges of deep space; there is no orientation out here.” I replied, pocketing the holo-reader.

“That is true. I must ask, what is a Mage of your standing doing in a place like this?”

“You claim to know me, insect?” The Torlan’Dahk shivered at the insult, but quickly regained his composure.

“Are you not…” He quickly referred to something scribbled on his arm, “Dazjtak Radon Temporum-Drakus, Apprentice of the great Aezjtak Haethrin and child of the Ancient Aerithris?” The Torlan’Dahk looked at me hopefully. I simply responded with a word and a shrug.

“Possibly.” I took a sip of the champagne Gen’hime had left behind. It was dry and tasteless, so I tapped the glass and changed it into something a bit more palatable. “And who are you, who so claims to know me?”

“I am Alaton, aide to the Sectinate.”

“The whole Sectinate?” The Sectinate were a group of people who governed The Triad and acted to maintain the virtues of Peace, Freedom and Equality.

“For now, yes.” There was a brief, but awkward silence that lasted a few seconds. “So, are you him?” Alaton asked, breaking the silence. I sighed and finished my drink.

“Yeah, I’m Radon, what of it?”

“The Sectinate have called you back into active service.” I gave Alaton a questioning look.

“Really? By the Six, they must be desperate.”

“Desperate enough to put together a team comprised entirely of the most powerful assets they have.”

“How many on the team?”

“Including you? Four, all of whom you have fought alongside before.” I drafted a quick list of who were most likely to be on the team. Ras would be there for sure, as would Aiden, if we could find him. Of course, The Triad weren’t going to try and recruit me without an incentive.

“So what are you luring me in with then? Good pay and a decent healthcare plan?” Alaton almost laughed.

“A Drakan, on a healthcare plan? Don’t be ridiculous. No, The Sectinate wishes to reinstate you at grade III-R with unrestricted access to any information you need. And of course you’ll get your own vessel; I imagine public transport is a nightmare these days.” Fortunately for The Triad, business had been slow this past year so I was already going to accept. The ship was just the icing on the cake.

“Ok, I’m sold, where do I sign?”

The man in the mirror stared back at me with mild distaste. His dark brown hair was scraggy and unkempt and in dire need of a good trim, the area around the mouth and cheeks was dark with stubble and his golden eyes gave away the sleep deprivation. I hadn’t seen my own reflection for about three months and it now came to light just how rough they’d been. Fortunately, my clothes had escaped pretty much unscathed. The boots were still black and not riddles with holes, the trousers were also black and had only minor fraying at the hems and the rust-coloured trenchcoat was still in the same condition it had been in when I had bought it about two years ago. The fingerless gloves had to go, though; they made me look too much like a hobo. A beep from the intercom broke me free of my reverie and I went over to the box on the wall.

“Yes?” I said, pressing down on the button labelled ‘SPREKNA’ (talk).

“The Sectin will see you in the meeting room, now.” Replied Alaton’s voice. Completely ignoring my own advice on the matter concerning the gloves, I left the room and headed towards the aft of the Sectin’s vessel.

It took more time than was entirely necessary to find the meeting room; the vessel was a new pattern that had been released only very recently so I wasn’t familiar with the layout. It was a simplistic and logical design: command and the front, amenities in the middle and engineering at the back. However, the designer had, for some strange reason, put the meeting room in the amenities section instead of the command section, hence the unnecessarily long journey. Eventually I located a door labelled *Konvírn G’ralthí* (Meeting Room) and knocked.

“Enter!” Came a familiar voice. I, rather grudgingly, opened the door and stepped in. The first thing that struck me was the contents of the room, or lack thereof. Bar me and the other occupant, the room was empty, possibly due to a hurried launch. Scarcity aside, the room was quite nice, just big enough for a small party to have a meeting. Warm, welcoming, a nice little room. That was until one considered the other occupant. He was tall, with long braided hair, gold eyes and tanned skin. He wore brown robes with gold, leaf-like patterning and had an air of…well, I couldn’t quite figure out what it was, but there was an air about him.

“Ah, Radon, welcome to my vessel. I have no doubt you know who I am.” He said, in a smooth voice, something that was undoubtedly synonymous with our race.

“Cyros Emanon-Invara, Gíth-Aezjtak and Sectin of Skarrapraech. Yes, I know who you are.”

“Good, now that we have introductions out of the way, we can get down to business. While you have been away, the Tyrant Legions have been more of a nuisance than usual; attacking colonies, hijacking trade convoys, they’ve even attempted to destabilise key Triad governments, something you’ve witnessed first-hand if I recall.”

“Yeah, the Tyrants have been doing that since their conception.”

“That is true, but is a large scale massacre on Mustar common Tyrant behaviour? No, not since Galon’s reign anyway. They’re becoming bolder, more violent; reports even say that they are looking for something; something so valuable to Shan-dor that he’ll commit genocide to prevent us from stopping it falling into his hands.”

“I don’t think the massacres have anything to do with whatever Shan-dor is hunting for. They’re more likely to be related, but not fully connected.”

“And what makes you think that?”

“For starters, there are no items of interest to Shan-dor that require the wielder to commit genocide in order to obtain them. The only one I can think of is Godreaver, and Shan-dor is not one of the few people who know of his existence. Secondly, I found some info from some Tyrant Lords that gives me the impression that these massacres were not Shan-dor’s doing. He’s too busy gathering his forces at Inkorinkas Citadel.” I pulled the papers I’d got from Geltzan and handed them to Cyros.

“Paper?” He said, taking the brown sheaf. “Why…” Cyros took a very close look at the papers. “Oh, that’s not good.”

“What is it?” I asked.

“This is ancient spell parchment, from the time of Godslayer.” Cyros waved his hand over the paper and the writing rearranged into an ancient pictographic script.

“That’s Coleopteran,” I said, recognising the script.

“Can you read it?” I shook my head.

“I never learned Arkan form, but fortunately this looks like a primal dialect so I’m sure Haethrin will be able to translate.” Cyros carefully rolled the papers into an empty scroll case. “So, was it your hare-brained idea to put this team together?” I asked, finally getting to the subject I wanted to talk about.

“No, surprisingly enough your Terran friend had this idea,”

“Aiden? There’s no surprise about it, we had a good run together,”

“Well, he did ask for you by name,”

“So he finally made the trip to HQ did he?”

“No, he sent us a video recording.” Cyros picked up a small pane of glass and handed it to me. As soon as I touched it, it sprang to life, showing the face of a man I knew well. After a brief pause, Aiden began speaking.

“I…am Aiden. I am a Lt. Commander in the 5th fleet of the Terran Empire. For 100 years, I have been in the shadows and I would spend another thousand, hunting and killing every Demon. This is a recruitment message. Your leaders, The Triad have ordered me and tasked me with this mission: To create a taskforce known as Project Alpha-Beta-Alpha. They…we are in dire need. You, Radon Temporum, we need you. You are one of the most powerful Mages in the universe and we need your expertise in all aspects of Astral Magic. I do not ask you to do this because you are a member of The Triad of some rank that I do not know. I ask you for the greater good of every life, because a war is coming; a war that will engulf us all. Please…heed my warning. If we do not combat this, we all die; everybody, no matter how strong. Thank you.” I handed the screen back to Cyros.

“That was…compelling,” Aiden’s words echoed in my head. ‘If we do not combat this, we all die.’ “Who else received this message?”

“Ras’lion Gond, Nagaon, Velgor Aneiris Stelleriath and…” Cyros sighed before upending my entire world. “…Alayna Kurinav.”

“WHAT?!” I roared. The lights dimmed and flickered in response to by outrage. “How long have you known?”

“Well, she really…”

“HOW LONG INVARA?” I yelled, cutting him off mid-sentence.

“Siddhartha returned her three weeks after the incident.”

“And is she on board?” Cyros nodded and told me where she was staying. I turned to leave but then swivelled and hit Cyros square in the jaw. “Don’t EVER keep something like that from me again.” Anger now spent, I left the room in search of Alayna.