

Citadel

The Citadel had stood for over a thousand years a monument to an empire that had slowly stripped itself of power, dignity and honor. Her golden age now behind her she had been reduced to defending the forgotten outpost on the edge of who cares where.



Rhombus could see her in the distance, trapped inside her sphere of light. A light that was slowly fading and as it faded he could see her crumbling walls and broken buildings the remnants of her once great houses of culture and magnificence. He adjusted his scope and he could see those terrible defenses that guarded the only approach across the desert plain. He retracted the scope from his bony head, he wanted to look upon her with his own eyes, but he had none and that infuriated him. He would take her but the question still burned in his mind. How do you take a great Citadel?

Brute force, well he could go that way but he was not an animal dog, like the Jackalion of the Shadowlands. The slow art of seduction, hmm he liked that but he did not have the time, the Kraynum had already landed and it would not suffer his failures a second time. Infiltration, no, no he had agents inside of her but they had proved too unreliable and untrustworthy. Starvation, the thought of watching her slowly shrivel and collapse from within, that was just too cruel even for his depraved mind. Deception and subterfuge, he had used these tactics before with great success when he had manipulated that idiot Qualcom into believing the empire had fallen at the battle of Pikus. He ran the simulator and it was orange, doable but the risk, a little too great for him at this time, the Kraynum would turn him off for sure if he did not succeed. Turn her against herself, yes that was a good option and the simulator had agreed, the green hue lit the halls of his dark mind and he slunk back into the cover of the shadows.

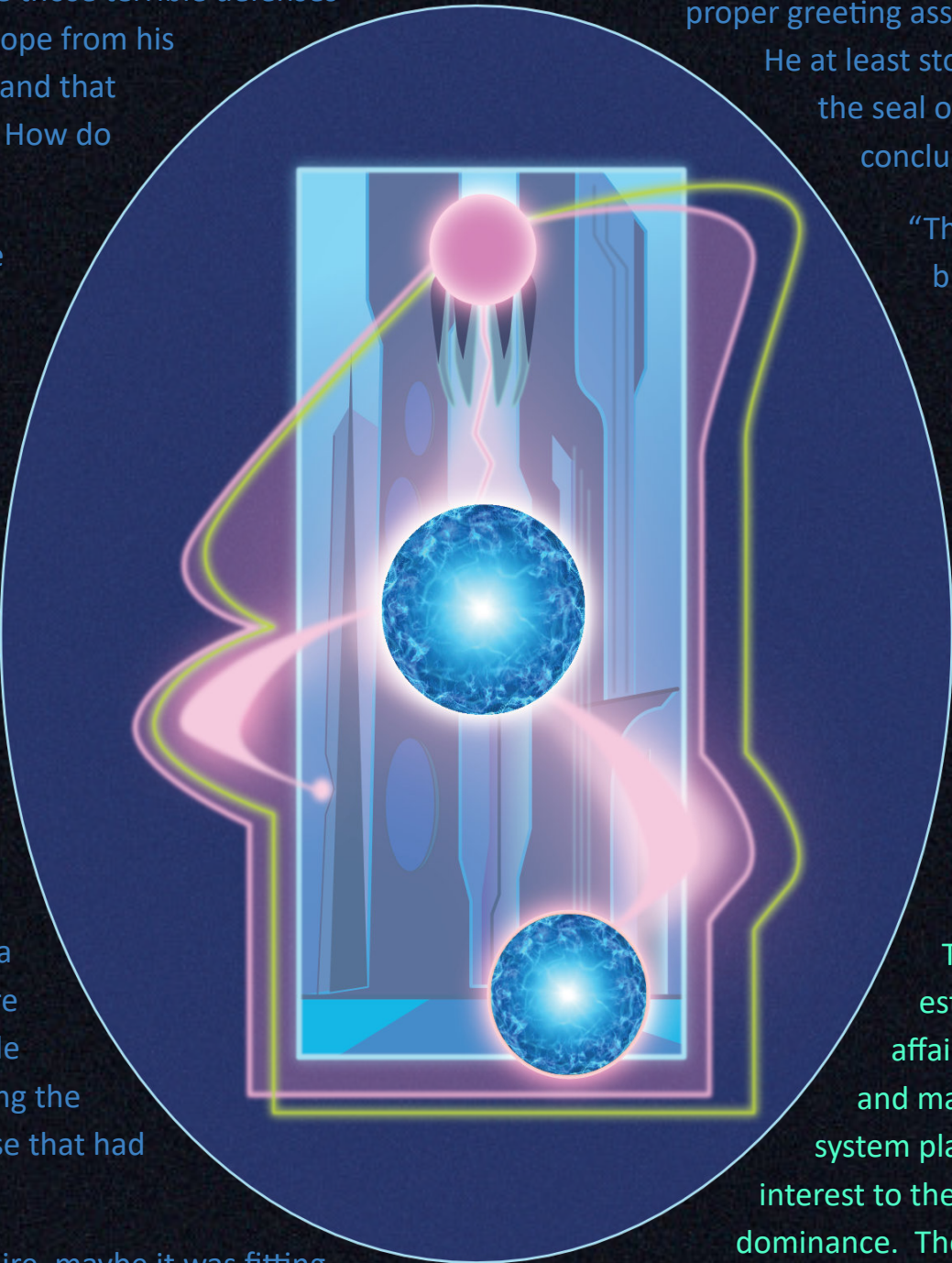
Grimor had been banished to this forsaken place at the edge of the empire, a crumbling excuse for an outpost if ever he had seen one. He was worth more than this but the CORE had sent him here to do who knows what. His shuttle had landed and he had stepped out upon the landing pad his marines wearing the empyreal colors of the house of Mektonon. A once great and powerful house that had fallen out of favor since the CORE had assumed control of the empire.

His House and family were all but gone, scattered throughout the dying empire, maybe it was fitting that he should end his days here at the edge, he looked up past the still shimmering moon and beyond

where the Nexus was waiting. Below the abyss surrounded the citadel the causeway the only bridge that connected her to the land of the scattered tribes. Was it really an edge he had thought, or maybe a Chasm to be crossed, a bridge too something greater? Grimor looked ahead at the man; they had not even sent a proper greeting assembly. A lone old man dressed in tattered and threadbare cloths of his clan. He at least stood upright and had some semblance of refinement. Grimor handed him the seal of protectorate as was the empire way and the formalities abruptly concluded.

“The Consort will receive you in his chambers when he has finished citadel business.” His first lie of the day he thought, the consort was still attending to the two ladies that he had summoned during the night.

“I will be your guide and interface to the citadel archives. I am Chandlor.”



CORE Virtual system administrator

The CORE had become the custodian of the dying empire, it was established as a fair and impartial co coordinator to oversee all colonial affairs. Outer empire planet systems have collapsed into factional infighting and many populations are seeking autonomy from the CORE worlds. The outer system planet Galsean has the last CORE elected Consort and has now become of interest to the Kraynum, a ruthless remnant authority seeking to re assert its ancient dominance. The CORE is attempting to consolidate the empire whilst dealing with internal political discord.

Helona slid her fingers over her pants and smoothed down the crease that had started to show, she wanted to look her best when the empires sigil arrived. She had tried unsuccessfully to access any information on this man that the CORE had insisted they receive. The CORE had given no reason for his presence other than that he was to assume command of the citadel upon arrival. He was illusive and a complete mystery to the inner core worlds, her friends at court knew nothing and she resigned herself to expectations.

“No No he is a pigeon man, a common kind of well I don’t know what, but he will not do at all.” She slid out of her best dress and entered her bath. The maids had soothed her but she scrubbed herself into a frenzy.

The Consort will have to intervene, send him back, and demand a replacement. Eventually the herbs had calmed her and she thrust her head back and allowed her maidens to tend to her needs.

The Consort sat at his desk, Helona had told him in no uncertain words that he would have to go. He had accessed the CORE and it had told him that Grimor was to stay, dammed odd the CORE countermanding a Consort like this. He wanted to press the issue but his gut had told him that something was up and that he had better find out first.

Klawtoss squeezed out from her draws and slid down the smooth legs of the table, master had sent him to find it but it was not here, the amber stone was nowhere to be found and that bothered him. He was so sure that it was here somewhere, the dream fragment had told him where to look,

where to search. It had never been wrong before but this time he had doubts and that was unfamiliar territory, very uncomfortable indeed. Klawtuss gave up the search and returned to his master empty handed. Master had put him back in the box and he knew that he would have to do better if he was to redeem himself.

Klawtoss could see the shapes as they formed in the darkness of his mind and he was relieved that they had come back to him. The story they told had disturbed him greatly yet the massage was not wasted for it had revealed a path that had led to a discovery of the kind seldom shown. The dream fragment had glimpsed his

master, the simulator as it processed the scenarios, the scenarios that the Kreynum wanted. Klawtuss could also see the citadel, his home; all was burning the defenses breached and the inner sanctum defiled. His master lay dead in the onyx chamber and he had the suspicion that he had caused all of this. Later master had removed him from his box and he once again scurried down the corridors seeking, watching, and learning all he could.

Grimor had met with the Consort and he had quite liked the man, he looked weak and unwell, but he had an inner strength that burned like a subdued fire. Oh and the other thing, he was nobody’s fool. They had talked and found common ground on how the empire had abandoned the old ways in favor of the merchants and accountants that had stripped the riches for themselves and had withdrew to the core worlds leaving the empire gutted and unable to defend the territories that were her life blood. Grimor had been questioned why the CORE had sent him, but that was also a mystery to him so they had accepted the situation for now.



Grimor slept and he drifted into the realms of the surrounding void.

Klawtoss had bypassed the matrix grid and had entered the chamber. The man was asleep and no one was around. He was not on a mission this time; no he was doing something that was for him unthinkable. A code had flashed across his mind and he had seen the end of his home, the end of all that he had held dear and it had motivated him onto a greater purpose. The strange looking man was still and his breathing steady. Klawtoss shot up onto the exposed flesh of his throat and shot out a single needle so fine that it would never be felt. The memory had been injected and he had slowly withdrew back into the shadows and left the chamber to continue his master's orders.

Grimor had felt something enter his consciousness and the dream had changed becoming more focused, the moon in the sky flooded his mind and he sensed why the CORE had sent him to this place. He awoke the sweat pouring down his face, his father had told him in the dream that they had returned. Grimor thought of his lost family, they had looked upon him as the runt; they had outcast him before he had been born, the bastard and the spawn of the forsaken mother, they had told him, again and again. They had hidden him away and denied him all that was his birthright yet he had usurped them all. He had taken the sigil and had established himself as a defender of the ancient order of the dammed. Now deep under the citadel he would have to commune with the entity that the Kraynum wanted dead.

Rhombus was glad that it had left, he was still alive and that was more than he had expected. He had told it what it had needed to know and that had satisfied it for now. The citadel would be his he had promised; already he had sent his minion Klawtoss to plant the virtual seed whose roots would push down into the foundations pushing deeper and deeper to the thing that was there under the earth, and far from the light.

The city was a mess and Grimor knew that she would have to be defended at all costs. If the Kraynum had returned then there was only one thing that it would want and that was the life form deep under the city vaults. A life form that few had ever seen or even knew about, the citadel had been built by the entity long ago after it had planted itself upon this world. The entity had touched Grimor in the dream and the memory that it had planted revealed that it was very frightened. Soon the population would become unstable and unmanageable and then the Kraynum would strike, taking the entity whilst at its most vulnerable and the citadel would be leveled returning to the dust. The dream had also touched upon another, out in the void of the desert far from the citadel, a watcher who waited and reported all that it could observe.

Helonor had watched the funny looking man as he inspected the city streets and spoke to the common folk. She was still miffed that the empire had not sent her a suitable strapping man whom she could have her way with; instead she had to make do with her usual stable of brutes. She knew she was spoilt she had always had her way in all things that really mattered. The Consort was pliable and the marriage had suited her needs, the weird thing was that she really did love him and actually hated herself for what she had become. She had also felt a deep stir within, something was not quite right; all she knew was that it had something to do with the man that the empire had sent.

The Consort slid open the stone floor and he ventured down under the citadel and into the chamber where he could feel her. She was tired and he wanted to leave her be but she had insisted that he commune with her. He felt her fear as she moved below and above he could hear the crash of stone and dust as a wall crumbled and fell. The citadel was dying and he knew that there was not much time.

Helonor watched as the wall crumbled and fell upon a group of peasants as they returned from the house of solitude. People had fled and then returned to dig out loved ones, the screams echoing through the streets. Grimor had ordered his marines to help with the recue but it was helpless they were all dead and the only thing they would be bringing out was the broken bodies of those that had been crushed. Helonor had watched as Grimor pulled the rocks off those poor souls and she was warmed by his compassion.

Out in the desert Rhombus had his scope on his head and the digital image told him that it had started. The seed had taken and the creature underneath had felt its fear, she would soon consume herself rather than let the seed take her. Then the Kraynum would come and he would take what was left for his own twisted purpose. He did not want this to happen but it was the only way to be rid of the thing that had returned to the planet after so long in the void.

Grimor had told the Consort that he had sensed her under the citadel and that he wanted to see her for himself. The Consort had objected fearing that she would become tainted by his presence but he had conceded and he was desperate for any help. So the Consort and Grimnor had descended into the bowls of the citadel where they entered the cavern where she had slept for over a thousand years and more. Grimor was horrified that this magnificent being had confined herself to the depths of the unseen; he wanted her free and able to take her place as a rightful guardian of the endless. Only then would the citadel become whole and glorious, a beacon of light amongst the stars. Grimor had felt her touch his soul and he was humbled by his own insignificance.

Klawtoss had also seen her; he had followed them down unseen and hidden from all. His cloak had shielded him as the master had told him it would, the master would be pleased as he had scurried back into the shadows and out of the citadel and into the desert where he would deliver his package.

Rhombus looked at the data stream that his little friend had brought him, this was just what he had wanted, something that would please the Kraynum when it returned.

Chandor had accessed the archives and Grimor had watched as the citadels history was revealed. A glorious story unfolded telling a tale of an ancient guardian and her exile to the outer quadrant of the endless. She had buried herself deep under the site that would later become the greatest city in the empire. Time had passed and the city had been forgotten and few ever ventured beyond the portal gate worlds to the forgotten planet at the edge of the Nexus. Grimor watched as the seasons sped by and the city shrank and crumbled, a slow demise into the realms of the lost and the dammed.

Chandlor had brought up the screen and he had revealed the hidden one, a watcher out in the desert that he had been tracking. The illusive shadow had evaded his probing but he had at last found it but he needed Grimor and his men to find and deal with the part man part machine.

Klawtoss did not like what he had done, the city and his home were falling to bits around him and he had started to blame his master. He felt used; he had become weak and unable to stop his spying. That was his job, what his master had built him for but he wanted more, wanted to be free and make his own way in the citadel. Klawtoss hated that he had become so weak, so dependent upon the master and his cravings. The master had created him, gave him purpose but the cost had become too high. He had friends, he had his own desires and he wanted his whole to be equal to the sum of his parts.

The desert heat distorted the horizon and Grimor had finally brought his men into the canyon, hidden and unseen from the thing that he had been sent to acquire. Chandor had come with them and he had told Grimor to halt is advance. The spire in the distance glimmered under the hot sun and it was there where they would find the simulator. Chandlor had known it many years ago when the citadel had been a mere settlement and she had been but a child. The memory of those good times had surfaced and he fought to hold back his emotions for they would reveal their location and that he could not let happen. Instead he formed a dark net around his mind, a shield that would prevent the simulator from discovering his true

intent. He had to be careful as the net could if not contained become a reversible trap, forever consigning him to an inner torment of the fragile delusional and paranoid mind.

The memory had faded and the desert heat now pummeled the senses. They were safe for now but they had to get to the spire unseen by his spies and Chandlor had no idea how to do that.

Klawtoss had watched the old man as he looked up at the master’s lair, he wanted to scurry on ahead and warn his master that the interlopers had arrived yet he stopped himself and had started to ask questions that he did not know the answers too. He had spied, he had sabotaged and he had aided in the plot to destroy his mistress and the citadel, a pawn doing the masters bidding. Now he had a choice to make and that was for him totally alien.

The needle shot into the neck of the old man as he slept and dreamed. Klawtoss had made his choice and it had made him feel different, more complete, and more whole and he had liked this.

Chandlor could see the spire in his dream as it rose up into the green sky and he could also see something else, a narrow corridor where the spies could not see, a path that would lead them into the spire and the simulator.



The Consort stood in the tower and watched as Helona was actually down in the street helping those poor souls that had lost their loved ones when the wall had crumbled. He had not seen this side of her before, she had always been too selfish only thinking of her own demands and desires. The mood in the citadel had changed he could feel it like a tangible unseen force that had slowly been building but had now started to assert itself. Another building had collapsed but no one had been killed, still it had started to feel that the citadel was about to collapse taking all with it. The guardian was resting and he was relieved by this, her slumber had slowed the panic in those that had assembled around the great atriums. The Consort returned to his chamber he had to find the seed that poisoned his mistress.

The walls of the cavern had rumbled and she had stirred, the tremor rose up to the streets and gently shook the surface sending her citizens running for cover. The cavern wall cracked open and the spiral seed had broken through into her space. It was growing feeding upon the fear of those above, her workers, her inhabitants, and her populace. Soon the seed would slither across the stone floor and enter her and then she would be truly lost.

Grimor had led his men into the valley and Chandlor had told them to keep a tight formation as they traversed the corridor that he had illuminated with his staff. Eventually they had made it to the spire and Grimor looked up at the night sky. Chandler’s dark net had held but he was starting to feel it constraining his mind, pushing inwards and flooding him with thoughts that he could not quickly transmute. If he could not control himself he knew that he would turn against them and they would all be dammed. He steadied himself for the final push and the spire portal had opened. Grimor led his marines through the portal and the sentry bots opened fire.

He lost two men securing the bridge that linked the portal to the hub and the gateway up into the spire. Chandlor had deactivated the sentry bots protecting the gravity platform. They were at the interior and Chandlor caught the first sight of the simulator as it relentlessly ran its computations.

“I see that you have successfully completed the simulation?” Chandlor looked at the slender man; he had a quality that had endured a harsh and unforgiving past. The marks were there deep in the mind of the man who had embraced the machine and had survived.

“Yes the Kraynum will not bother us now.”

“Good, take this and bathe in the light of the desert.”

Rhombas had gone into the desert and had bathed in the mirrored light of the moon. He had made his home out in the far reaches of the planets habitable biomes. The years had passed and his matrix had failed, the machine parts had asserted themselves and he had fought to control them. He had embraced the civil war within and his organic mind had prevailed, but the Kraynum had returned and he was too weak to repel it.

They were here inside of him and he had not the slightest idea of how they had breached his defenses. The bots could have dealt with them but he had sensed his old mentor Chandlor and he knew that he had lost. He shut down the sentry and stopped his computations, the seed almost inside of her. He wanted to live and maybe they would not turn him off. Rhombus had started a new simulation and it looked very favorable as the green light lit his mind, he would tell them everything for he feared the Kraynum far more than anything those of the citadel could do.

The virtual seed had collapsed shrinking back into its pod. The guardian had awoken. She felt stronger more alive than she had felt for as long as she could remember. The consort had opened the citadel portal and she rose up from the ground into her city and her people. She bathed in the light of the star that had brought her here and she stood for the first time since being banished to the underworld.

At the edge of the desert a lone figure stood and watched as she had risen from her slumber and had taken her place as the guardian. It could still take her as she was still weak but that would bring the others and it wanted this place for its own, the only thing the Kraynum feared were its own kind and so it had withdrawn back into the void to plot and scheme upon another less defensible citadel.

Part 2

The heavy frigate Halkin had left the last of the portals and was now in deep void space. The CORE had sent the final coded transmission and Rowling’s had looked at it utterly confused.

“Galsean. That’s the outer end of shitdom, what the …” He handed the codex to his commander.

“Must be some sort of a joke, maybe the CORE has had some kind of meltdown or it has developed a sense of humor at last.”

Gidion looked the codex over and ordered the system up on the halo sphere.

It was not even part of empire territory, so far of the chart that the halo sphere had to adjust and pan out before she finally centered upon the three planet system; in the backdrop the Nexus wove a gentle pattern, like a dancer upon a stage of purple mist.

“Leena, what do you make of this?” Leena stopped playing the computer and focused on the halo sphere.

She waved her hand around and the system spun upon her axis, zoomed in and settled upon the only moon.

“Interesting, no strategic value, no resource value or even relic significance, It’s not what we can see more that it’s what we cannot see.” She had said as she smoothed down her tunic and flicked her hair back over her shoulders. She adjusted the chart and cross checked it with the data stream.

“The moon, something is there hidden on the dark side.” Lines had been drawn upon the halo sphere and Rawlings could see what she was getting at.

“Gravity?” He said looking at her as she smiled in his direction.

“Yes Gravity, Commander the moon has shifted her orbit and she is hiding something very big.”

“OK what is the moon hiding and from whom?”

“I can’t tell you what but I can tell you whom.” Leena plotted the blind spot and the planet Galsean swung into view. The halo sphere dipped down and the hologram spread out over the command deck revealing the great Citadel .

Gidion had locked the codex away in his personal safe and sat pondering upon what the CORE had asked of him. He was to break all coms with any traffic, no contact with anyone, Imperative order. The codex would provide further instructions when he had reached the Galsean system. The codex was locked and programmed to deliver instructions only when his ship had reached the designated destination. Not uncommon but unusual, he had only ever known the CORE to issue instructions in this manner once in his career. They had left the last of the fringe outposts and were now heading towards the lawless pockets of void space simply known as the Dread.



The genocide was almost complete Plex had not heard from any of his kind for more than a thousand years and he feared that he was the last of his kind. They had wiped them out, all of them, his friends, and his family and now the galaxy needed them more than ever. He was old past it all and had lost interest in saving the tarnished souls, so he had come here, to the hidden outpost where the only way forward was into the Nexus. Vemus looked at him as he struggled with his meds.

“Here let me help you.” He had said knowing full well that he would suffer his rebuke.

“Leave me, why have you not finished your assignment?”

Ahh the assignment yes, Vemus thought, he need not concern himself with the petty task that he had been given. They would most likely all be dead by morning anyway. The first of the pirate clans Garius had already taken out the stations defenses and was preparing to board the outer segmentus. They had sent a distress call but this far out, it was useless to think anyone would care let alone intervene. Plex had unlocked the locker and took out his light staff. It had been so long he feared that he had forgotten how to use it. The master never forgets how to use his tools, he was a little clumsy, but Vemus knew that he would take those that came for him into the Nexus with him. His only regret was the innocent that had become the pawns, trapped and unable to flee the carnage.

“Sir, we have contact, distress beacon two sectors away and repeating?”

“Bring it up, but do not reply, understood?”

Horkus looked at Rawlings as if expecting him to interject. He had not. “Halo sphere active and acquired, no response sent.” The outpost station lit the bridge’s command deck.

“There pounding the hell out of her.” Rawlings said looking his commander in the eye. Gidion looked at the halo sphere, hoping for any other vessel that might render assistance, but there were none. His ordered were explicit, no contact, remain silent and get to Galsean undetected.

“Sir Incoming feed”. On screen...

The small void crafts had blasted the outer segmntus ring and the station was venting atmosphere, internal visuals displayed a hopeless firefight as station militia fought a desperate defense against a determined and outnumbered force. Pirates were killing all in their path, women children shot in their backs as they fled.

Gidion watched as his crew looked at him desperate for him to give the order, but he remained silent his face like stone.

“Plot an intercept course sounds the call to arms.”

He knew that the CORE would take his command, unable to follow a simple order it would say. Dammed machine, no sense of honor, just a singular frame of reference, he might as well take off his sigil and hand it to Rawlings but he was here and the CORE was, well not here and that was enough for him to be the commander that he had been taught to be.

Halkin entered the fray breaking cover as she thrust into the system, unannounced and all weapon pods hot. She took out all clan void crafts in her range and had sent her marines onto the station to save all they could. By the time they had fought there way to the inner hub they had found what was left of the stations population. The dead the dying and the wounded all behind a lone old Sarikin, they had to step over the bodies of those that he had slaughtered to get to him. Vemus had taken the survivors to the stations last secure refuge and was ready to join his master when the marines had intervened killing the pirates from the rear.

The station was lost and Gidion ordered all survivors to Halkin and he left the system resuming course for Galsean.

Plex watched as one of his hands trembled, he was carful that Vemus would see his weakness and he quickly put it back into his tunic and looked down the deck of the ship that the mortals had sent to save them. He wanted to be in the Nexus, free and done with this galaxy and it’s failing races. He was so sure that he was done with all of this but why had they come to save him, why had they bothered to keep him here. He sensed a purpose but that purpose could only mean one terrible thing and that was that the Kraynum had returned.

The dark side of the moon was the perfect place for him to watch and rest. The guardian had risen and she had once again bathed in the light of the stars, she was still weak but also too strong for him to take her as he had wanted. He had left the planet and returned to his lair, hidden safe and still undetected from his own kind. The code had flashed upon his mind, a red wave that caressed the darkness and it had revealed a ship that the humans had sent his way. Only a glimpse but enough for him to know that it existed and that it would be bringing the very thing that he had thought had long returned to the Nexus.

He had no name, such things where an attachment for the weak and the prey. He had come out of the Nexus to take what was his and he would not share her with the others of his kind. The guardian that they had banished so long ago would become his redemption and the inner realms of the Kraynum would be his domain again. That was how it was supposed to be yet the interfering mortals had denied him this by securing the simulator. The guardian had arisen and he was left to languish in this fringe space, already his density was dropping and they would soon see him. He had already drained the moon leaching all that he could without causing it to implode and possibly taking the planet Galsean with it.

Sanders thought he had seen something flicker across the bulkhead wall, a shadow but from what, there was nothing in the room just he and the torpedo he was working on. The lights had also flickered and he looked around but he could see nothing out of place. A shudder ran through him and he put down the tool he had used to re align the coil in the open torpedo.

“Who’s there?” He called out feeling a little foolish.

He could feel something push into his mind, so subtle yet he felt sick and he needed to get away, anywhere but here.

The explosion tore a hole through engineering and it was sheer luck that the rear armory did not go up, the shields had kicked in after the detonator had fired. Halkin had dropped out of hyperspace and her sub light engines had fired up. He had watched from his mind as the human ship had been pulled from hyperspace and the clan ships had descended upon her like the vultures they were. He had hoped that their ship had sustained more damage but it had contained his assault and he had respected that in some twisted way.

Gidion had pushed the sub light drives to max and he had created the distance that he so desperately needed. The rail guns had opened up and she had taken out the clan advance as they tried to swarm her. The shields were holding but he had to finish this quick. Leena had dropped the countermeasure and he

had followed it by unleashing a torpedo cluster. The surviving clan ships had dispersed and ran for the outer system.

“Pursuit course acquired, commander?” Rawlings called out.

Gidion looked at the halo sphere, “No set up point defense drones and bring us to a full stop.”

By the time Gidion had got to engineering his crews had contained the damage and brought the hyper drive back on line.

“Good work.” He told them as he inspected the virtual log that had told him how this had happened.

“This was no accident.” He turned to the master chief; he was covered in blood and oil. “How many did we lose?”

“Technician Sanders and O’Bannon of logistics.”

“See just there the virtual recorder phased out for a moment, what the hell is that thing.” Gidion looked closer; he had never seen anything quite like it.

“Some sort of shape a shadow maybe, but from what?”

“Not what commander, but whom.”

Gidion spun around and the Sarikin had stood where no one should have been.

Plex pushed into the space alongside the commander and slid his hand over the screen. The image zoomed in and the shape enhanced.

“The Kraynum commander, it has returned, from the Nexus.”

Halkin had re entered hyperspace and was once again en route to Galsean. Repairs had been completed and a ceremony held for the lost crew. The Sarikin Plex had been given quarters and he had briefed Gidion on his knowledge of the thing that had attacked them. Gidion was fascinated by the Sarikin, they were supposed to be all gone returned to the Nexus, he had heard the tales long ago from his farther but they were just old tales or so he had thought.

Plex had told him a story of how the Kraynum had ruthlessly purged his kind from the galaxy for their insolence and their inability to accept the Krynum’s natural dominion over all that was and will be. The Sarikin had left one parting gift as they were pushed into the far side of the Nexus and forever banished from this galaxy. They had created a barrier that separated the Nexus from the void space of the realms of mortals. Not even the Kraynum could traverse the barrier but the barrier had become weak and so a single Kraynum had emerged back into the galaxy. If not stopped then it would find a way to weaken the barrier further and more of its kind would come and claim this galaxy as their own. Plex had looked at the halo sphere and the readings that Leena had supplied. There was only one thing that the Kraynum could be after and that was a guardian for only they have the power to heal or open the barrier.

“So this Kraynum that attacked us is a shape shifter of sorts?” Gidion asked still not understanding what he was fully dealing with.

“Much more than that commander, they have the power to enter your fragile minds and manipulate your will, the power of limited possession and the ability to turn your selves against each other, an insidious infiltration that will crush any empire just as surely as any war machine. “

“How can we stop it then?” Gidion was starting to feel uncomfortable, he was a commander and he knew how to fight an enemy that he could see and understand, but this was so intangible, so unwinnable.

“We already have the advantage; we know that it is here and that it has not yet been able to access the guardian. That is our only focus now, protect the guardian for she has arisen and we must give her the time to heal and gain her strength. The citadel had formed in Plex’s mind and he had felt her calling to him, a sound that he had not heard since he was a child.

Helona had watched from her chambers as the citadel had slowly rebuilt herself, her crumbling walls now strong and able to withstand any onslaught. She had watched in awe as the guardian had arisen from her slumber and had stood encased in the comet dust that formed her outer core. The funny looking empire man had done the impossible; he had earned the trust of the citizens and had trained the local militia into a fighting force.

Later the empire ship had arrived and had taken to patrolling the system in search of the illusive Kraynum but it had fled into the void. A visitor to the city was admitted, he and his aid were granted entrance to the

citadel for he was a Sariken and he would train others that would come and seek the lessons of the ancient protectors.

“Yes it is that time again Padawans, gather around there is much to learn and so very little time to learn it all. The first battle is for the mind, only then will the body follow.”



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Colin Foster. 2018