

Prologue:

Even though the stage's wall stood twenty meters high and he couldn't see them, Anas Vidon heard the cheers and roars of the massive crowd. Over two hundred thousand citizens of the Vario United Systems had jam-packed into the Presidential State Park's stage area. In addition, hundreds of millions more watched the broadcast from their home viewscreens or giant holographic displays in the cities' town square. On the other side of the stage wall, banners saying "VIDON IS TRUE" hung from rafters and on hand-held flags. Anas's campaign slogan had been on everything for the past standard year and a half, from clothing to signs: many had supported him.

And all that support wasn't in vain. Anas Vidon was now the new President-elect of the Vario United Systems. In just over two standard months, he would be inaugurated as President of the Vario United Systems, one of the most powerful and influential positions in the entire galaxy. Ruling an entire star system, one of the largest in the galaxy, in fact, was nothing to be taken lightly. Anas knew he had a hard road ahead of him. Vario was on the brink of war with the Confederation of Judeui, which had once been several planets apart of the Vario United Systems, but they had succeeded last year, and now a civil war was looming dangerously close. Anas Vidon had not only won presidency, but the situation with the Judeui Confederation as well, unfortunately.

A staff director gave Anas a nod, and the President-elect stood from his chair, straightened his robes, and his way onto the stage. As soon as the crowd caught sight of him, the cheers' noise level tripled, and Anas's ears began to hurt from the booming, thunderous applause. It had been a long day, but he'd won the presidential election of 46 ABY. Anas approached the only thing on the long, large stage: a podium with several microphones on it. He took note of the two gigantic viewscreens on either side of the stage which showed him walking. Stopping at the podium, Anas raised a hand, and after a minute, the crowd respectfully fell silent.

"My friends and fellow citizens, we've accomplished a great deal here today. This election has stretched on with many promises, most of mine will be kept, but my opponent, whom my hat is off to, will now not be able to keep his promises. I assure you that he will receive a place in my administration board."

The crowd cheered for Anas and his well-known, good sportsmanship, then fell silent again.

"Today and tonight will go down in history as the closest election in this government's history.

Not only that, but for the first time ever, our nations are threatened by war from not another government, but what was once our own. Like both my former opponent and I promised, I will do everything to ensure we do not enter a civil war.”

Another short but loud outburst of cheers.

“We will last, we will triumph! Ladies, gentlemen, and children of the Vario United System, we will stand!”

Anas’s headache tingled at his temples. The lights on the police cruisers in the presidential speeder-motorcade which were flashing brightly didn’t help, either. He closed his eyes, and rubbed his fingers over his eyelids gently. The day had been long, but now he was free to return to what was now his home: the Hail Hatengton House, the official residence and office of the President of the Vario. The House’s gold and black walls were surrounded and sealed off by layers of security barricades. It would take a suicidal fool to even think about trying and breaching the Hatengton House. The Presidential Security Enforcement, or PSE, wouldn’t allow any visitors or guest whatsoever since The Slam. The Slam, which was a series of secessions from the Vario United Systems, made the entire Vario government uneasy, especially Anas himself. The Confederation of Judeui hadn’t made any offensive attacks, and the Vario United Military held their worlds in a planet-wide quarantine-blockade, but the Judeui undoubtedly had agents on Petir, the capital world of the Vario United Systems. Petir was an ecumenopolis world, with its entire surface covered in a single, gigantic city.

Anas, after receiving the wave from the bald, muscular, Crowl Ley, Anas’s chief security officer and well-trusted personal bodyguard, Anas exited his armored limo-speeder, and began the walk into the Hatengton House. The dew on the grass in the front lawn gave the night an eerie look. For a night Anas should be celebrating, he was rather depressed. After several minutes, Anas made his way to the Hatengton House’s main debriefing control room. Viewscreens lined the walls of the room, and Anas approached High General Teali, the highest ranking officer in the Vario United Military. The Bothan had a hint of sadness stained in his eyes, confirming the reports Anas had feared.

Anas’s only child - his son - was dead...

Chapter I

Private First Class Dane Biss of the Vario United Military sat with his back against a hard, rock with his right hand covering his eyes, shielding him from the scorching sun. Perspiration cooled the PFC in the slightest way, but the beating sun was wining the battle of internal temperatures within Biss' body. In his mind, he could see the little lines of heat coming up from the hard, rocky, desert ground. Opening his canteen, Biss finished off the little bit of water that was in there. It was barely enough to get a reasonable sip, but it was all he had. His tongue soaked up the little tad of water it'd been given, but his stomach growled when it learned that little bit was it.

Biss stood, and remained still for a moment while his mind adjusted to the sudden shift in position. He looked around, and found that the barren area hadn't changed the slightest since he started his guard shift four hours ago.

His partner and best friend, Private Ale Dunkin, sat in the only shade the two of them had: a small three-foot tall rock. The two were assigned a six hour watch, so they each switched who was in the shade every hour. By the looks of him, Dunkin was asleep. Biss nudged him with his boot.

"Your hour's up," he said as the private awoke with a start.

Dunkin smiled at him. "You're the one keeping time, right?"

Biss nodded and help up his chrono. "That's right. Why?"

Dunkin stood and began to pace around slowly, dusting sand off from his uniform.

"How do I know that you aren't cheating me by a couple minutes?" the private asked.

Biss chuckled. "If I *was* shortening you, I'd do it a lot longer than 'a couple minutes.'"

Laughing, Dunkin turned and started pacing around the little position they'd been assigned to.

"That's just wrong," he said. He began to whistle as he paced around slowly in large circles.

Biss slumped up against the small, hard, clay wall and sat down, leaning against it, and sitting on the side opposite of the sun. He covered his face using his hands.

"How much longer does out shift last?" he heard Dunkin ask.

"I'd say 'bout another hour or so," Biss answered.

Dunkin moaned. "I don't think I could put up with another hour of this shit. I'm dark-skinned, you know, so my skin attracts more sunlight. You're lucky."

Biss laughed, his eyes still closed, and tried to get his hour of rest. It wouldn't be long before his chrono's alarm went off. He only had sixty standard minutes. After a couple of minutes, he seemed to start to fade away, and the sun's warmth pushed him into a light, near-sleep.

Suddenly, he heard Dunkin's voice not yell from just a few meters away, but also through his radio headset.

"All units, enemy spotted at position T-12! Requesting immediate assistance! Private Dunkin with PFC Biss to HQ, requesting assistance, over!"

Immediately, Biss sprang up and ran over to his partner, who grabbed him and pulled him down. The two soldiers laid prone on the desert ground. Biss retrieved his blaster rifle that had been hanging over his shoulder from its strap. He switched-off its safety lock, and took aim at the approaching attackers. There were about three dozen of them, and they were holding what appeared to be primitive projectile weapons, the type that shot metal pieces called "bullets" or "slugs" from a barrel rather than a laser bolt. Biss fired two shots, both shots striking an attacker. Dunkin fired three times, and took out two attackers. But as the running attackers approached closer and closer, Biss and Dunkin realized that at this rate, they couldn't possibly succeed in taking them all down. There was just too many of them, and not enough of Biss and Dunkin. Staying behind and dying like this now would be foolish, and not brave in the slightest.

"I've signaled for help, but the nearest allied position is two kilometers away," Dunkin stated as he said each word in between shots he fired.

Biss turned and looked to the right: the south. About half a kilometer away, there was a forest-like area several kilometers in square area.

"If we can get into that vegetation," Biss said, "we can hideout until reinforcements arrive."

Dunkin fired a few more shots, and armed a thermal detonator.

"Worth a shot," he said before heaving the thermal detonator into the attackers.

The two soldiers stood, and began running to their right, side-stepping while still firing at their enemies. One of the attackers managed to kick the thermal detonator away, but its explosion still killed four or five of them. Running, the two men were able to slip into the forest.

"What type of weird world has a forest surrounded by a desert?" Dunkin exclaimed as he pushed the branches of plants aside so he could pass through. "This gully should make a nice little hideout spot for us."

Biss held the microphone button on his headset and spoke.

“Platoon leader, this is two-oh-three. Me and two-twelve are hiding out in a gully about half a kilometer south of our assigned position. Armed enemy troops, most likely Confederacy men, are swarming our post, over.”

“Copy that, two-oh-three,” their staff sergeant said after a moment. “Me and about six others are en route to you now. ETA: three minutes. Just hang tight, over.”

“Sure thing, Sarge. Out.”

Biss turned off his radio’s microphone, and slumped down next to a tree stump. He could make out the bugs in the foot-high mud, but he was already dirty, and didn’t care. Dunkin was not as eased as Biss was, and he paced around, blaster in hand, ready to fire at any enemies.

Biss wondered how Dunkin had become so paranoid of attack. He’d always been very strict, disciplined, and well-mannered in the six months of training the two had done together. In Biss’ opinion, Dunkin was a far better shooter, and way more agile than him. Still, the lieutenant had given the PFC position to him, and not to Dunkin. However, Biss couldn’t complain. Whenever they had a moment to relax, Biss spent his time with his fellow battalion members, while Dunkin had always preferred to go on patrol, train, or study, even when he was told not to.

In fact, one time the staff sergeant had caught Dunkin patrolling the base camp in the middle of the night, and Dunkin had a blaster pistol in his hand, which, at that point in their training, they weren’t allowed to carry weapons yet. Dunkin carried the weapon because a cadet had killed a sergeant later that night, and Dunkin killed the cadet before he could kill another soldier. Dunkin wasn’t punished, but rewarded. He’d received a Silver Star, and got a week’s latrine cleaning free-pass. For that, Biss had always thought that Dunkin would’ve received the PFC position, but he’d received it instead.

Biss made two silent, mental notes in his head: one to ask Dunkin why he was so paranoid, and another to ask Staff Sergeant Vedu why he’d been named PFC and not Dunkin.

Wiping his face off with a rag, Biss sat-up against the tree stump, wishing that he wasn’t stuck in some swampy mud-hole.

“You know, we don’t get paid enough for what we’ve gotta’ go through, Dunkin. This is Bantha fodder work,” Biss said to his friend.

Dunkin smiled, but Biss knew the smile was a false one, as his friend wouldn’t lighten-up in a situation

like this. So, realizing nothing he could say, no jokes, no puns, would make Dunkin relax, Biss stood and grabbed his blaster rifle, and allowed it to hang from its strap on his shoulder.

Anas lay in his large, four poster bed, his eyes closed and his body motionless, except for his breathing. Even still, he wasn't asleep. He couldn't sleep. The news of his son's death was unbearable. Pulling the silk bed sheets closer to him, he took a deep breath, then let it out. His wife, Jena, had died six years ago due to a disease she'd acquired from a patient at a medical clinic which she'd often had volunteered at. It pained Anas greatly that the first and only love in his life was killed by helping others, but Anas always told himself that's how she'd have wanted to go.

Seeing no sense in laying sleeplessly in bed, Anas went into his private bathroom, and slipped on his golden, silk robe and sandals. He exited his private chambers, and entered the main tactical command room. High General Teali was speaking to a young, Falleen officer - a lieutenant as Anas could tell by the insignia on his shoulders - regarding something about breaking security policies.

"It won't happen again, sir, I promise," the young lieutenant said.

"You're right, it won't, because the next time I find out you've gone against security regarding the arrest of a terrorist, I'll see to it personally that your title is removed and you're charged for treason."

Teali's words needed no time to sink into the young lieutenant's mind, as he saluted and quickly exited the tactical room. Anas approached the High General.

"What was that all about?" Anas asked.

Teali shrugged. "The fool tackled a injured a security officer who was arresting a known terrorist. Turns out, the terrorist was that lieutenant's cousin or something, so he didn't want him to get arrested."

"Isn't the high general supposed to focus on bigger things than a small-time arrest?"

"I like to do some small-time work," Teali said. "Gets me out of spending all day in here."

Anas chuckled. He turned and looked at the viewscreen Teali had been watching, which showed the map of a star system with red, yellow, and green dots and markings of various shapes and sizes on it.

"What's that?" Anas asked curiously. "It's obviously caught your concern."

Teali pointed the things out on the screen as he explained them.

“The red shows the Confederation of Judeui’s military ships, the yellow shows ships owned by the Ladin West Company, while the green shows our military ships. The map covers Dadde’s orbit and its surrounding space areas. So far, neither Judeui or the Company has attacked, but they refuse to let us into Dadde, saying we have no business there.”

“Dadde *is* in the Vario system last time I checked,” Anas said, irritation starting to grow within his words.

“But it also was one of the worlds that was apart of The Slam, so Judeui believes it and its inhabitants to be on their side, with the exception of Soni City,” Teali explained.

“Well, then, they technically *are* part of Judeui. If they left us, unlawfully I might add, then Dadde would now become a Judeui-controlled world,” Anas said.

“But the Vario United Systems’ jurisdiction is the *entire* Vario systems. Judeui, nor anybody else, has any right to go against us in our own star system,” Teali stated.

“Believe me, I know. That’s the whole issue I’ve been dealing with since I was elected weeks ago, but, Judeui won’t listen to us obviously, otherwise they wouldn’t be campaigning against us and getting ready to war us,” Anas said, his right hand rubbing his eyes. Teali noted how the president was showing symptoms of serious stress.

“The other generals and I are almost finished with the proposal for invasion of Dadde,” Teali stated.

“Give me a rundown on Dadde’s status,” Anas demanded, his eyes still viewing the map.

“Well, to start, it’s where Judeui’s presence is the strongest. We only hold Soni City. They have all the shores, spaceports, other cities, and other key locations on that world,” Teali answered, his tone full of knowledge and showing that he was worthy of being the high general. In general, Bothans usually were great commanders and skilled tacticians.

“Sounds like you’ve done your homework on this, huh, Teali? As long as you get the generals to unanimously vote on passing the invasion proposal, I’m confident I can persuade the rest of the executive branch to agree as well.”

“Well I hope we can do this quickly and quietly. I want to limit the amount of time Judeui’s forces will have to prepare.”

“Remember we’ll have to have no casualties if we do invade. We want to take over, not destroy,” Anas reminded Teali.

The high general squinted and let out a semi-annoyed sigh. “Anas, you can’t worry about that. They’ll fire at us, and we’ll have no choice but to fire back at them.”

“If it *does* come to that, I think the Jedi or Alliance would step-in,” Anas said.

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that. After all, they’ve both stayed neutral this long, and I personally think they’ll remain so until this is over.”

“You think they’re going to join the winning side?” Anas asked expectantly.

Teali nodded. “That’s exactly what I think. They hardly care about who wins, as long as it stays within the Vario system.”

“Those are some pretty heavy accusations, Teali,” Anas said, sternness covering his voice.

The high general merely shrugged. “A person can’t help how they feel. I’ve never been one to hide my emotions or thoughts, and you know that.”

Anas grinned. “Of course I do. It’s one of the reasons I appointed you to be my high general.”

Chapter II

Biss and Dunkin dropped down and laid prone. The rustling of the vegetation around them was quiet and almost unnoticeable. Biss raised his blaster rifle to his right shoulder, and closed his left eye, taking aim at the direction of the noise. As quiet as he possibly could, he whispered into his radio headset.

“Platoon leader, this is two-oh-three. Report position. Over.”

“Two-oh-three, we’ve just passed your given coordinates. Where the hell are you? Over.”

“We’ve got a suspicious sound ahead. Is that you?”

Biss heard a distinct whistle coming from the direction he was aiming at. He stood and, followed by Dunkin, approached the trees ahead. Biss jumped when he ran into his staff sergeant. Staff Sergeant Tibio Vedu sighed in relief.

“Thank god it’s you. We were just about to open fire in your direction,” Vedu said, slightly chuckling. Biss smiled uneasily.

“Same here, Sarge,” Dunkin replied.

The staff sergeant spoke into his headset. “Captain Bicco, this is Staff Sergeant Vedu. Come in. Over.”

After a moment, the lieutenant replied. “This is Biccó. Go ahead, Vedu.”

“Sir I’ve intercepted the two men that we were searching for. We’re on our way back to Soni City now.”

“Good. We’ve got a bit of a situation here. I’ll fill you in when you arrive. Out.”

Staff Sergeant Vedu looked around for a moment, then began to lead his squad back to Soni City, the only place the Vario United Systems still controlled on Dadde. Rather than taking the quicker, more direct route back to the city, Vedu led them through the forest part of Dadde. The sun was beating down on them, and the humidity was almost killer. Biss had so much mud and sand in his shoes and pants, that moving his legs was becoming very difficult, especially since they were treading in a swamp, which, at some points, the water got to be over a meter high.

The return to Soni City took them about two and a half standard hours, but Biss wouldn’t have known that if Dunkin wasn’t annoyingly counting off every five minutes. Biss, having taken point in the squad’s formation and led the way along with Vedu, was the first one to spot the city. It was very visible once they climbed out of the forest, and back into the desert. The city was nestled against and in between three sand-covered mountains. The city walls spread around its front and back, as the mountains provided enough protection by themselves for the city’s sides. The entire thing - both the city itself and the mountains - were surrounded by a treacherous trench that had a depth of over seven hundred meters. This would, for the most part, prevent any type of ground assault.

Even though he’d been there several times already, Biss had to admit that the city was an incredible sight. Unfortunately, its occupants were not. Soni City’s economy was...horrible, at the least. The city’s interior was compromised of thousands of little hovels, similar to those on Tatooine. The lower level of the city was a slum, with their occupants making next to no money, and crime rates soaring high. The middle level was composed of average, decent homes, with of working people and a fair income. The upper levels, though, were defiantly for the rich, the powerful, and the wealthy. Large, palace-like homes, mansions, beautiful vistas. It was a shame that the rich in Soni City were selfish, and ignored the poor completely, caring nothing about them.

The large, stone doors slid open at the city’s main entrance, and the squad stepped in, the doors closing behind them. Biss resisted covering his nose as the bridge crossed over the lower levels, and ended in the center of the middle level. Relieved of duty, he, Dunkin, and a couple other platoon members returned to the barracks for a nice, refreshing sonic shower, food and drinks, along with some

rest. After this, Biss laid in his bunk, with Dunkin asleep snoring loudly in bottom bunk, underneath Biss. Just as Biss began to drift asleep, Staff Sergeant Vedu walked in, demanding everyone's attention. Biss, wearing nothing but his undergarments, smacked Dunkin to wake him. The two hurried into the line along with the other platoon members. Vedu himself joined them at the end of the line, and Captain Biccio entered the barracks, standing in front of the line.

"Gents, listen up," he said, his voice loud but not yelling. "The lovely politicians on Petir just approved an invasion on here on Dadde." He was heavily sarcastic while mentioning the politicians. He, nor did Biss and most of the Vario United Military, cared for politics or those who worked in them.

"So what that means," he continued, "is that we're going to get some backup from our boys in orbit. They're going to land here in the city from transports, and we'll make sure no Judeui assholes try anything. Soon after, we'll see who's got control of this planet."

Several soldiers cheered at this, and Dunkin gave a loud, booming "woof-woof" as Biccio nodded at his enthused men.

"Well, then, I was going to discuss something about not fearing the enemy, but I can see it'd just be a bunch of Bantha poo-doo to you guys."

This drew a chuckle from the soldiers.

"So, with that said, good luck, men. You'll be expected to be up and ready by at least oh-seven hundred hours, galactic standard. Staff Sergeant Vedu will give you the details."

And with that, he quickly left the barracks, probably going to tell the next platoon the same thing. Biss sighed, and listened as Vedu filled them in on the details...

Anas walked through the darkness, his eyes adjusting having just woken up. He quickly put on his bed robe and matching slippers. After turning on the light, he pressed the OPEN button on the control panel, the main door to his living room slid open. Crowl Ley, Anas's chief bodyguard, bowed his head slightly.

"Sir, you've got a visitor."

Anas blinked, puzzled. "Crowl, I want you to head over to employee health, and ask to speak to the therapist."

“Sir, this visitor can’t wait.”

Anas sighed, slightly irritated. “Who is it?”

“Hei DiVon from the Ladin West Company.”

Anas nearly choked, and Crowl nodded. “He’d requesting a meeting with you immediately.”

“Have him arrested, restrained, and put him in my secondary office. I want you, Teali, and a couple security guards present,” Anas ordered.

Crowl went to carry out the command as Anas dressed himself quickly in a stylish suit and robes. Making sure he looked not just suitable, but good, he exited his living area and made his way through the Hatengton House’s decorated halls and corridors. Going from the thirteenth to the fourth floor, he quickly made his way to his secondary day office. There, two security guards, armed with blaster pistols, stood outside the doors. They saluted Anas as he entered the room.

The office itself was very plain compared to his primary and main office. This office had several artificial plants hanging from the roof and walls, and paintings adorning the walls. With red-and-gray-patterned carpet, and gray walls with two, large windows on the far side, the office was sufficient for those guest that Anas wasn’t trying to impress. He also often used it to conduct routine business with people he met every day.

What was more interesting than the office itself was the people who were in it. As requested, two security guards were present, along with High General Teali and Anas’ bodyguard, Crowl Ley. More importantly, a Human male, approximately thirty standard years of age with wavy, dirty blonde hair sat in a chair. He wore a fashionable business suit, with a Ladin West Company lapel pen on his coat’s front, and an orange tie.

Although Anas quite frankly hated Hei DiVon’s guts, he had to admit the founder and chairman of the Ladin West Company had style. And, according to the ladies, he was very attractive. Moving quickly yet not rushing, Anas moved into the room, and sat in his chair, which was on the opposite side of his desk from Hei. Teali and Crowl Ley both stood sat in chairs on the same side of the desk as Anas.

Anas leaned back in his chair, and motioned for the two guards to leave the room. They did so silently. Hei offered a slight smile.

“Mister Vidon, it’s so wonderful to see you again. It’s been awhile, hasn’t it?” Hei said, partly sincere but partly sarcastic and mocking.

“It’s *President* Vidon now, Mister DiVon.”

Hei simply shrugged. “You know, I’d actually hoped we’d be able to call each other by first names since our last names sound somewhat familiar. I don’t want our friendship to become un-obvious to the public.”

“We are not friends, Hei. We never will be.”

“May I ask why?” Hei asked politely.

Anas, irritated, answered. “Well, to start, you’ve no care for the public whatsoever, except for what they think and idolize of you. Secondly, you are a cold-hearted bastard that should be dead if this galaxy was perfect. And third, I simply don’t like you. Any more questions?”

“Several,” Hei replied angrily. His mood suddenly shifted to happy. “I’d like to compliment you on your lovely office. I’d still take mine over this one, but this is alright in some ways-”

“Cut the crap, DiVon! What do you want?” Anas interrupted.

Hei leaned back in his chair. “Right to the point, I like that. Very good for business. But what’s also good for business is knowing when to speak, and when to shut up.”

The last part he stretched out and emphasized.

“It’s such a shame, though,” Hei continued. “If only your boy had known when to shut up, his squad wouldn’t have been detected.”

Within a split second, Anas was on his feet, grabbing Hei by his suit, and dragging him onto the desk, holding him closely face-to-face.

“What did you just say to me?” Anas asked, his hands and face shaking with rage.

“What, you thought your son’s death could be kept a secret for a few weeks, didn’t you?” Hei continued mockingly. “You thought you could hide it long enough until you got the rest of the executive branch’s approval for Dadde’s invasion, that way they wouldn’t think your action wasn’t to avenge your son. There’s one thing you did wrong: you trusted valuable information with the wrong people.” He wagged his finger at Anas as if he was a house-pet that had “gone potty” on the carpet.

Anas landed a swift elbow to Hei’s nose, and heard a tiny *crack* sound. He then pushed the Ladin chairman back into his chair. Hei, his left hand clutched to his nose, groaned, but then laughed.

“You really just acted too soon. I won’t tell anybody anything, as long as you do something for me.”

Anas, his breathing still heavy from rage, said nothing. Looking at Teali, Crowl Ley, then back to Anas, Hei continued.

“Hold the attack on Dadde for a week or so: give me time to get my investments and many employees out. Then, go ahead and move in, and destroy whatever you and your... high general here see fit.”

Calming himself, Anas looked at Teali, who shrugged. Crowl Ley, however, shook his head in denial.

“How do we know you’ll keep you end of the deal?” Crowl asked.

Hei nodded. “Good question. Let me see... ah! Got it. You can keep me prisoner here, in the Hatengton House, until I get all my forces out and you start to invade. Deal?”

Anas considered for a moment. If the rest of the executive branch found out about his son’s death, then they’d think he only wanted to attack for revenge. While he didn’t trust Hei, he knew he wouldn’t be able to escape from the Hatengton House.

Anas heard Hei mumble something that sounded like “it’s good business.”

A pause of silence.

“Alright,” Anas decided. “But all of your possessions are to be taken away while you’re here, and your conversations via comlink will be pre-recorded so we know what you’re going to say.”

Hei nodded. “Of course.” He stood. “Now, if you could, I’d like to get some rest. Take me to whichever room you will have me stay in.”

Crowl stood, placed stun-cuff restraints on Hei, and escorted him out of the office. Realizing he was still standing, Anas sat and noticed the drinking glasses and liquid container on his desk. Pouring himself a drink of fine liquor, he turned his attention back to Teali.

“Do you think this deal is wise?” his high general asked him.

Anas signed. “To be honest, I don’t really know. What I do know, is that if Hei betrays us or not, Dadde *will* be invaded.”

“But sir, you saw the report map yourself. Judeui *and* the Company are keeping us blockaded from Dadde. I think an additional week might not even last. Judeui’s gathering more and more planets to their cause as we speak. We only have a certain amount of time before they snap and get sick of holding back their attack. We both know they’re going to attack, it’s just a matter of when.”

“Of course they’re going to attack!” Anas said, almost shouting. “Why do you keep telling me shit I’m already aware of? What, did you think I didn’t know they want to attack us? I spent the last nearly two years of my life talking and discussing this thousands of times with millions of people. So don’t go telling me a speech I’ve given thousands of times, because it gets damn old damn quick!”

Teali stood. "I think I'll take my leave for tonight, Mister President. Goodnight to you, sir."

With that said, the Bothan made his way out of the office, the door closing behind him. Taking another, large drink from his glass, Anas sighed and took a deep breath.

My own high general has doubts about my abilities, he thought to himself. I cannot allow Teali nor anybody else think I'm incapable of my position.

Anas pressed several buttons on his control panel at his desk and a hologram of Stoe Whi, Anas' personal assistant, appeared.

"Yes, sir? Something I can assist you with?"

"Stoe, I need to setup a holographic meeting with the Judeui Council. I want to speak with them tomorrow early afternoon. Understood?"

Stoe blinked in confusion. "Mister President, it's going to be rather hard contacting them. Are you sure-?"

"Can you just do it, Stoe?" Anas interrupted, growing irritated with his assistant.

"Yes, sir, I'll most certainly try."

Anas ended the transmission, and pressed several more buttons on the control panel.

A holorecording of the office he was in now appeared, but the recording was from three years ago. Anas' one and only child, his son, Next Vidon, was in the recording, along with Anas himself, having only been the senator for the Vario system in the Galactic Alliance back then. A third person, the then-President, Poe, a female Torine.

The real Anas focused on the transmission:

"Senator, I have no doubt in your ability to be my successor. However, ordering the immediate promotion of your son just because he your child is unacceptable. If my sources serve me correctly, talks of rebellion are growing here in the Vario system. I assure you that I, you, nor my successor can allow this," President Poe said.

Anas laughed. "Don't worry, ma'am, if I do win the next election, I assure you there will be no acts of rebellion."

"What do you think, Colonel Vidon?" Poe asked.

"Well," Colonel Next Vidon started, "I think that if there is a rebellion, they have backup of some kind. You don't go around rebelling against a powerhouse like the Vario Unites Systems without some assurance of another powerful group."

“Who? Who would help them?” Anas asked, laughing at his son. “You’re wrong there, my child.”

“Dad, is gotta be so. It’s no longer a question of ‘if’ but ‘when’. There is a rebellion, and you’ve got to believe me. I’ve gathered the Intel myself. I need you to convince the senate to help us. It’s our only chance to stop the-”

“Stop the what, son?” Anas snapped at him. “There is no kriffing rebellion, boy! Get your hormone-filled head out of the damn clouds and wake up! If I bring this to the senate, it’ll do nothing but create fear and chaos here in the Vario system. The Alliance won’t do a thing to help us as long as it stays within this star system. President Poe was right, I’m demoting you immediately. You’re a horrible leader, and a horrible son!”

Anas switched the holorecording off. Tears began to stream down his face, and he made no attempt to contain or stop them. He allowed himself to emotionally hurt. He realized he deserved it all. Slamming his fist on his desk, he started to sob...

Chapter III

TWENTY-FOUR STANDARD YEARS AGO

Anas and Jena Vidon embraced one another, holding each other. Tears of happiness poured out from each of them.

Their dreams had just come true.

For the two of them, it was the happiest moment in their lives. Nothing was bigger or better than this moment, and nothing would be for the next nine months.

Jena was pregnant, and the two soon-to-be parents were lost for words. For Jena, it was all she could’ve done to just tell Anas. She’d feared her politician husband would’ve considered a child this early in their lives to be a burden. But, contrary to her fears, Anas was happy... more than happy.

After several moments, Anas released his wife, and gazed into her eyes.

“How long have you know, my love?” he asked.

“I found out a month ago,” she answered.

“A month?” he said. “Why the wait to tell me?”

Jena looked down, but then back up at him.

“I was nervous as to how you were going to react,” she admitted.

Anas nodded. “I see,” he said. He swallowed an urge to complain. “It doesn’t matter. We’re going to be just fine. Don’t matter what. This baby is a blessing for both of us. Wither it’s a boy or a girl, we’re going to love it with every inch and beat of our hearts. I’ll not abandon you in the next eight months, or in the many years to follow. We’ll do this together, Jena.”

“Only I’m the one that’s going to have to push it out,” she joked.

Anas laughed. “Well, I got nowhere to do it, so yeah, it’s gotta be you.”

Chuckling, Jena kissed her husband, and went into their apartment’s kitchen to finish preparing dinner for the evening. Anas grabbed his comlink to begin spreading the wonderful news...

PRESENT DAY

PFC Biss, along with Dunkin, Staff Sergeant Vedu, and majority of their platoon, were pissed regarding the news of the invasion being held off. Captain Bico had delivered the news nearly two hours ago, but Biss was still fuming. Dunkin had gone as far as to go down to Captain Bico’s quarters and accuse him of being a coward, a move which earned Dunkin a week’s garbage duty. To mess with him, soldiers were already doubling their amount of trash, causing Dunkin to repeatedly run the garbage out to the trash compactor, which was a dozen blocks away. Even Biss found this entertaining.

The following day, Biss, along with Private Jinn Dandin, a young human, were assigned as sentries for one of Soni City’s many mountainside guard towers. Theirs was the tallest one, so high it was actually in the clouds. Earlier in the morning, Biss has conflicted wither to pack clothes for cold or hot, wondering if the high altitude would matter in the desert. It did, and he now regretted wearing his normal short-sleeved uniform. Dandin, however, had been assigned the post before, and wore a long-sleeved uniform shirt along with a uniform coat. The Vario United Military patches on either side of the shoulders of the coat were worn out, as was Dandin’s entire uniform and equipment. Biss had earlier assumed that this was because Dandin was one of the thousands of shoulder to be drafted, and not volunteer like Biss had done. For some unknown reason, those who’d been drafted received crappier

equipment than those who'd volunteered. Then again, it did make sense.

So far, no activities or threats had been detected. In fact, Biss even questioned the position of this guard tower. It was so high up one could hardly see the city. The only thing Biss *could* see was the peaks of the mountains around them. He swiftly changed his thoughts, as he was somewhat afraid of heights, but said nothing when Staff Sergeant Vedu had assigned him this position. If he had have said something, Dunkin and the rest of the platoon wouldn't have resisted to urge to humiliate him.

Therefore, Biss and Dangan just sat in the guard tower, occasionally grabbing the binoculars and looking around. The day, along with the next three, passed with relative ease. On the fifth day, and Biss' last to be stationed in the guard post, there was a hint of trouble: one of the squads from another platoon reported a suspicious shuttle which was loading and unloading cargo, which was permitted, but what wasn't permitted was that the cargo crates were designed to carry living things, such as slaves, criminals, or worse. Spotting the shuttle coming in for landing, Biss radioed to Staff Sergeant Vedu, alerting him of the shuttle's return. The ship's identification and port of registry could not be determined, and, under command of Captain Bicco, Biss sent a message to the shuttle.

"Pilot of this vessel, this is Private First Class Dane Biss of the Vario United Military. You are in violation of Code 312, Section 2-C. Requesting you land immediately at the specified pad." While he was saying this, Private Dangan prepared the automatic rocket launcher which was mounted on the guard post's roof.

"Pilot of this vessel, land now, or we'll open fire upon your vessel!"

Still no response.

"Shall I fire, sir?" Dangan asked.

Just as Biss was about to nod, he stopped. The shuttle, rather than keep making its way to Dadde's atmosphere, turned around, and looked like it was going to head back to the city. Biss heard Dangan report the movement to control, but they'd already known since they'd been tracking the ship as well. The vessel continued to decelerate, coming to almost a complete stop. It still flew several hundred meters above Soni City's peak.

There was a slight flash as a sliver object blinded Biss for a split second. At first, he thought it had just been the landing gear coming down, and the sun shining on them. However as the looked, the silver object continued to fall away from the shuttle, and there were two of them.

"Private," Biss said softly.

“Yes?”

“Open fire.”

“Sir?” Dunkin replied, slightly confused.

“Do it now, damn you! Fire!”

Dunkin squeezed the lock-on rocket launcher’s trigger just as the two bombs hit the city. Two explosions, combining into one, massive explosion, covered the city, a huge fireball burning across from city wall to city wall. Biss covered his eyes as the flames spread high up. The rocket Dangan had fired made contact with the shuttle, and it burst into a fiery explosion.

The impact from the two explosions combined was enough to damage the guard tower’s foundation. For a moment, it felt as if Biss were in open space, without any artificial gravity projectors. He then realized that he, along with Dangan and the entire guard post tower, were falling from the side of the mountain, and straight down towards Soni City’s ground. Biss struggled to pull the railing and climb back inside the tower, and braced himself for impact. He looked about quickly and was unable to find Dangan. He feared the young private was either killed in the explosion, or falling.

Suddenly, there was a strain in the tower’s fall. It seemed to slow, as if a giant bungee-rope was attached to it. Even with the slowed fall, the impact was enough to make Biss lose his grip, and send him flying through the tower’s window and onto the city floor, a ton of metal trapping him from above. He felt the heat and saw the flickering of fire, but he soon lost consciousness...

Anas, shaking with rage, pressed the OPEN button on the interrogation chamber rather hard. Inside, Crowl Ley was placing stun-cuff restraints on Hei DiVon’s wrists. Without warning or any indication, Anas leaned back and drove his fist straight into Hei’s left cheek. The blow sent the chairman to the floor, and caused him to groan in pain. Anas had punched him so hard even his own fist hurt, but he did nothing to show it.

“My lord, Anas. You know he’ll get us for assault, now,” Crowl said as he picked Hei up.

“Actually, his word saying he won’t hit me again will suffice,” Hei said half sarcastically.

“You’re a piece of shit!” Anas shouted at him.

“Care to elaborate?” Hei asked.

“You sent your troops to attack Soni City on Dadde, even after we made a deal. You stabbed me

in the back, you bastard.”

Hei seemed somewhat surprised, but was able to hide it well enough to where neither Anas nor Crawl noticed. Hei sat in the hard, metal chair, and leaned back in it.

“So, any casualties yet?” he asked insultingly.

Anas slapped him in the face, and Hei stopped himself from falling out of his seat.

“Here’s another one to match!”

Anas slapped him again, this time on the opposite side of Hei’s face.

“Oww-ie,” Hei groaned.

Crawl guided Anas to a seat on the opposite side of the table from Hei. Crawl himself then sat down next to his president.

“You know, I don’t think that one was necessary. You see, we had this pattern going to where every time I did something you didn’t like, you’d hit me. However the third one, well I hadn’t get a chance to do anything yet.”

“Call it an advance,” Anas replied.

“Well I’m not a businessman that likes the ‘in advance’ option. I prefer to see results first, however I really do think the slaps in the face is ‘result’ enough.”

“I *do* have the ability to slap you again,” Anas threatened.

“Beating me to a pulp won’t solve your problems.”

“Probably not,” Anas admitted, “but it’d relieve some stress.”

Hei frowned. “Most people relieve they stress by going to a therapist. It’s a lot healthier, for you *and* for me.”

“Would you call me a normal person?” Anas asked him.

“Probably not,” Hei answered, shaking his head.

The chairman leaned back in his chair, and pulled out something from his pocket. It was a memory chip for a datapad.

“What’s this?” Crawl asked, taking the chip.

Hei pointed at Anas. “For him.”

Hei then stood, and wiped the blood off of his face using his sleeve.

“Now if you’ll be so kind,” he began, “I’d like to go back to my room.”

“No.”

Hei looked at Anas. “There’s nothing more for us to discuss.”

Anas turned and spoke to Crowl. “Release him. Get him out of my house.” He turned his attention back to Hei. “You are banned from Petir, and I will see to it you are charged with treason against the Vario United Systems. I will stand as a prosecutor at your trial. Until then, leave me, and leave this world.”

Saying nothing, Hei allowed Crowl to remove the stun-cuff restraints and escort him out of the interrogation chamber. Anas picked up the datachip which Crowl had set down on the table, and inserted it into his personal datapad.

The screen’s display flashed, and the Ladin West Company’s symbol appeared. The screen began to darken, before a map appeared. Anas recognized it as the same map Teali had been viewing: the orbit of Dadde. The ships of the Ladin West Company and the Confederation of Judeui were firing upon those from the Vario United Military. Already, the Vario ships were flashing red, indicating that they were severely damaged. The battle was in Soni City, not in space.

Slamming his hand down on the table, Anas retrieved his comlink from his pocket while he exited the interrogation chamber, and hurried to the main tactical control room.

Anas spoke into his comlink. “Teali, order all ships orbiting Dadde to retreat immediately.” After a moment of silence, Teali replied, “Why would be do that, sir?” Anas blinked in confusion, but responded quickly. “Our ships are in hell right now. Get them out of it!”

“Sir, you *are* referring to the ships orbiting Dadde right?”

“Yes, Teali! They’re under attack, get them out!”

“Sir, we’ve received no word of an attack from any of them.”

Anas considered this as he entered an elevator, and pressed the button that would take him to the seventh floor.

“You mean to tell me that they’re *not* being attacked.”

“Sir, I’m watching the cams of the Second Fleet’s flagship right now. They’re still in routine formation, and the Ladin and Judeui ships are still on the far side of Dadde,” Teali reported.

“Rewind that feed three hours back, then watch it in double speed,” Anas requested. “I’ll be there in a minute.”

Anas switched his comlink’s channel over to Crowl Ley.

“Crowl, hold Hei DiVon. Repeat: do not allow him to exit Petir.”

After a moment, Crowl replied. “I’m sorry, Anas, he just entered a starship that was waiting for him.

They'll be entering hyperspace any second."

Anas swore under his breath, switched off his comlink, then exited the elevator. He lightly jogged to the main tactical command room, where Teali was closely studying a viewscreen. The screen showed the bow camera from the flagship of the Second Fleet. Sure enough, there was no fighting, no battle, no damage.

However, Teali still held a furious glance at the screen. As Anas drew closer, he knew, somehow, that Teali held embarrassed. Anas looked at him.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"It's on a loop," Teali replied. He wiped sweat from his brow using his forearm. "The cameras, the maps, everything: they've been hacked. The cameras are running on a loop, the same ships do the same thing, the audio repeats itself. How in the hell could Hei hack us like this?"

Anas sighed. "I don't think Hei himself did it. He must've got word out in one of our 'secure, monitored' calls that he made. He said something that someone on the other end knew: a hidden message of some sort. Do we have any communications at all with the Second Fleet?"

"No," Teali answered. "Usually, whenever they pass around the far side of Dadde, we lose communication due to the planets' moons which disrupt the signal. We get comm blackout for about four hours. But now that I look at it and see it, we're way overdue. We should've resumed communications by now."

"It's near impossible to hack the mainframe we're on now. It seems more probable that the Second Fleet itself was hacked, all of their ships, down to the last starfighter and shuttle."

"But sir," Teali protested, "it would be impossible to hack them all. It'd take a massive undercover infiltration team."

"It's the only logical explanation for the time being, so we're forced to accept it for now. What about Dadde itself?" Anas asked him. "Do we have contact with them?"

Teali shook his head. "No, we lost contact about ten minutes ago. The last word we received from them was they had a suspicious shuttle orbiting Soni City."

Trying to accept their current predicament, Anas remembered the datapad. He retrieved it from his pocket, and handed it to Teali.

"Hook it up to the main holographic display. I'll be back in about an hour."

Teali took the datapad. "Where are you going, Mister President?"

“To have my assistant set-up an emergency meeting with the rest of Vario’s executive branch, and our senate council. Teali, I can’t allow these actions to simply pass. We have to make a stand for ourselves. I’ve got no choice now: we’re declaring war on Judeui.”

Chapter IV

TWENTY-FOUR STANDARD YEARS AGO

Two people yelled in the birth delivery room of the medical center: Anas Vidon and his wife, Jena. Jena was screaming because she’d chosen a natural childbirth, a decision the pain was starting to make her regret. Anas, on the other hand, was screaming because his hand - his entire arm, rather - was being squeezed to death by his wife. The doctor, whose head was up Jena’s cloak, started to clap.

“Alright, Jena. He’s almost here.”

“I can *feel* it, you ass! Of course I know it’s here.”

Anas took the second to yank his arm away from his wife’s grasp. He groaned in pain.

“You aren’t the only one this baby’s hurting,” Anas commented.

“You weakling. That ain’t nothing. You’d be on the floor crying if you had to feel the hell I’m going through right now. You wouldn’t last one minute in this pain-”

Her sentence was cut short by her own screams and yells. Another nurse rushed in, then closed the door behind her once she entered.

“Doctor, it sounds like someone’s being murdered in here,” the new arrival said.

Anas moaned as his wife grabbed onto his hand once again. “I am.”

“Oh, yeah, he’s a big one,” the doctor said.

“Thanks for noticing!” Jena yelled.

Another burst of pain, then another push, was all covered up by the sound of Jena’s screaming and Anas’ painful groaning.

“God, he’s big!” Jena said. “Damn, damn, damn me for satisfying all those cravings. It’s my fault he’s so big-”

Another push, the biggest one yet.

“I can see his head!” the doctor exclaimed.

More pushes, more screams, and more of Anas’ groaning. After another few minutes, the baby that’d had rested inside of Jena for the past nine standard months was out, and bundled up cutely in a little, blue blanket. Anas held him in the hallway as the doctor finished up with Jena, then exited and allowed two nurses to clean the room. After Jena had taken a sanisteam shower, Jena was moved to a recovery room, and taken out of the childbirth wing of the hospital. Anas handed their newborn child gently over to his wife.

“He’s got your hair,” she noticed.

“And your eyes and face,” he said.

Anas came forward and kissed his wife on the cheek, then his infant son.

“You did it, honey, you did it.”

“*We* did it, you mean,” she corrected him, glancing at the medical tape that was now covering Anas’ right hand and wrist area.

Anas shrugged. “Don’t worry about it. Besides, we’ve still got one more important thing to do before we can say we did it.”

Jena, eyes still on the baby, asked “What would that be?”

“Name him,” Anas said simply.

Jena smiled. “What do you think it should be?”

“We’ve already discussed this.”

“And I’ve told you,” Jena answered forcefully, “I’m not naming my kid ‘Next’. It makes no sense. ‘Next’ what, what’s next?”

“It means he’s the next Vidon. The next generation.”

“I still think it’s stupid, Anas.”

“We’ll you were so hell-bent on having a girl, you didn’t even bother to think of a boys’ names,” he said, some sarcasm in his voice. “You’re jealous you’ve now got a boy.”

“We’re still young, we could have a girl,” Jena suggested.

“I don’t think so. One kid can be trouble enough, yet alone two of ‘em.”

“You’ll change your mind once I get into that old outfit that you like.”

Anas smiled and held back an urge. “The one with the sparkles and laces on it?”

Jena nodded. “You know it.”

“In that case, let’s have a dozen kids.”

Jena laughed. “Now whose the crazy one?”

PRESENT DAY

Biss couldn’t feel his head. In fact, he couldn’t really feel anything but numbness. Then, his senses started coming back to him. He could feel heat, pain, and the familiar warm, liquid on his forehead. He heard the crackling of flames, screams, and speeders, in addition to shouting voices. More importantly, he heard blaster fire, and lots of it.

As he opened his eyes, he witnesses horror. A young woman, presumably innocent, was gunned down by a trooper. The trooper wore orange and black body armor, with silver plates. Along with it was a black helmet, black boots, and black fingerless gloves. There were dozens like him, swarming across the street. Biss instantly recognized them as the fearful Divido troopers, elite troops from the Ladin West Company’s security division. Although they were officially labeled as “guards” most people, in fact just about everybody, considered them more to be like a “private army” for the Company. They were the new definition of “elite” and nobody wanted to cross them.

However, over the past year, the Divido were seen more and more commonly, and often acted unlawfully to resolve situations. Vario’s president, Anas Vidon, had petitioned to have the Divido banned from the Vario system back he was just a senator. The act failed, however, and what would be known as The Slam started. Now, the Company had occupied Dadde heavily within the past year. The Vario United Military had been trying to gather evidence that the Company was brewing an army on the world.

Still, it didn’t matter now. Soni City was being besieged, and they would be overrun by morning. Speaking of morning, Biss noticed that it was dark, and it hadn’t been when he was awake earlier. It was later afternoon then, meaning he’d been out for at least four to five hours.

Gathering all the strength he could muster, Biss tried to get up, only to find out that the debris from the collapsed guard tower was laying on top of his legs. Pulling the sandy, desert floor of the city, Biss tried to pull himself out from underneath the debris, but the weight was too much for him.

He looked up to see a soldier from his platoon, whose name he didn’t quite know, he gunned

down by a Divido trooper. Biss watched in horror as, even after the Vario soldier was dead, the Divido spit and kicked him. Biss closed his eyes when the Divido began to urinate on the dead soldier, the ultimate disrespect.

Grabbing his sidearm, he took aim at the Divido trooper. With four shots, Biss dropped the son of a bitch. He turned his eyes to the dead Vario soldier and smiled.

“Got ‘em for you, buddy,” he said, a tear streaming down his eye.

Suddenly, the guard tower’s debris was lifted up, and Biss was freed. Still unable to move his legs, Biss used his arms to turn himself around, and looked up towards the sky. The debris was...lifting itself. It was magical, unnatural. The entire bunch of debris flew into a destroyed building, crashing into it.

Biss, realizing one of the Divido was bound to investigate the incident, tried to stand and crawl away, only to fall back down hard on the city’s sandy ground. Then, an arm rapped around his neck, and hoisted him into the air, helping him stand. The person was a civilian, wearing a simple tunic over his robes. He was Human, and had black, silky hair that went down just past his shoulders, with a clean, shaven face. His eyes were also black, as was his tunic, with tan-ish brown robes underneath it. The man wiped his hand on Biss’ shaven head, wiping sand and dirt from it, along with blood.

Placing Biss’ arm around his neck, the man helped Biss limp away from the area, and into the upper city areas of Soni City. As they walked, Biss looked at their surroundings: there were Divido troopers everywhere, and Biss couldn’t spot a single Vario soldier. Seeing this made him question if he’d been out for more than just a few hours. The middle and lower sections of the divided city were in chaos, whereas the upper level seemed to be full of people that managed to escape. Gigantic, durasteel doors sealed off the upper level from the rest of the city, trapping those in the middle and lower levels.

The move was cowardly and heavily cruel, in Biss’ opinion.

“Why doesn’t the upper level allow them?” he asked his rescuer.

“The lower and upper levels have been gassed with a deadly poison. In just a couple hours, they’ll tear each other apart.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The gas causes panic and the urge to be violent in its victims. You were infected, so we’ll have to treat you as soon as we get into the governor’s building,” the man answered.

“Governor’s building?” Biss questioned. “It’s restricted.”

“Not to me.”

Biss was startled when the man suddenly went left, taking them into a small building which was once three stories high, but the top two stories' walls were just about blown away. They entered the building, and several men with blaster rifles sat around, inside, but didn't stop them. Biss wondered just exactly who his rescuer was, and where they were going. Another thing on his mind was his friends and squad members. He hadn't seen Dunkin, Staff Sergeant Vedu, or Captain Bicco. He did was he was trained, and assumed the worst.

The man pressed an panel on the wall, and the wall sectioned away, revealing a hidden passageway. It was large enough for the two of them to be able to pass without ducking or crouching down. It was cold, and very dark. Somehow, as though he had them memorized, the man managed to lead both himself and Biss through the darkness. After what seemed like forever, Biss, with some assistance, climbed up a ladder and pushed a trapdoor open. He climbed out, and allowed the man to once again help him stand. Exiting what appeared to be another house, they were outside again. It was the upper level, and far more organized. It looked like a fallout shelter, which, in some ways, that's what is was at the present time. Making their way up and up, they arrived at the outside of the governor's house, and Biss admitted he was looking forward to saying “I told you so” when the guards refused them.

Except the guards didn't refuse them, but rather permitted their entrance. Biss was bewildered, but said nothing. Eventually, the entered a room where several other Vario United Military soldiers were gathered. The room appeared to be a mini-medical center, and a nurse took Biss and aided him onto a bed, where she cut off his uniform and began to clean him.

Completely nude, Biss became somewhat embarrassed, but neither the nurse or his fellow soldiers made mention of his bareness. She quickly washed his body, and applied Bacta gel on his wounds before placing medical bandages on them. She then went on to take X-Rays of his legs, then wrapped them in casts. Next, she gave Biss several shots, and an I.V. which connected to his right arm.

Together, her and Biss' rescuer carried Biss onto another bed. Three other soldiers were on the same type of beds on his right side. Although there were now about a dozen Vario soldiers, Biss didn't see Dunkin, Staff Sarge Vedu, or Captain Bicco. The man that had rescued Biss turned to leave, but Biss' curiosity was killing him.

“Hold it!” he called.

The man stopped and turned around, then walked over and stood next to Biss' bed.

“Who are you, and how did you free me from the debris?”

The man pondered the question then answered.

“I am Vein Sho, member of the Order of Seta. I rescued you because that was my order from Seta's grandmaster.”

“Order of Seta?”

“I'm certain that you haven't heard of it. It's a secret society that dedicates to spreading peace and justice, in the best, most peaceful way,” Vein explained.

“Isn't that what everyone wants to do?”

“Well, yes, but we do it very differently,” Vein answered.

“How so?” Biss questioned.

“We'll discuss this later,” Vein said, changing the topic instantly. “For now, you need your rest.” Without another word, Vein turned and exited the medical room, and Biss had nothing to do but lay back and try to drift to sleep...

Anas stared at them. The people that he just didn't like: the senators of Vario. They didn't understand their situation like Anas and Teali did.

“Mister President, just because we've lost communications, doesn't mean we're under attack,” one of the senators protested.

“Senators, all of you, I've shown the map Hei DiVon gave me. It clearly shows our forces are under attack. Soni City is being besieged as we speak,” Anas explained.

“A simple map given by a suspicious character isn't enough for us to declare war on the Confederation of Judeui. The evidence is simply insufficient,” the senator said.

“You, all of you, are the only thing keeping us from war. If need be, I do have the powers to ask congress for emergency powers to override our decision. By the way, congress voted to support my decision,” Anas stated.

He looked at the seventeen senators.

“You're all going to have to vote on this. I'll be in the waiting room, come to me when you make your decision,” Anas continued.

And with that, he turned, and exited the senate chambers, with Teali, Crawl and his assistant, Stoe Whi, following him. As the doors slid shut behind them, Anas took a seat, as did Stoe and Teali. Crawl, however, remained standing.

“Sir, do you really think this is the best division? Pushing the senators into voting for war?” the bodyguard asked.

“We haven’t got any other choice, Crawl. It’s the only thing we can do at this time,” Anas replied.

“But it seems rather unorthodox,” Crawl protested. “I disagree, and think you should abort it.”

“Crawl, you’re my friend and trusted bodyguard, and I hold much respect for you. However, you are *not* my military adviser, Teali is. He and I both agree this is best.”

Teali nodded curtly in agreement. “Trust our decision, Crawl.”

Crawl took a seat next to Stoe, facing Anas.

“Do we even have enough forces to war Judeui?” he asked Anas.

“No,” Teali answered for Anas. “But we do have more political influence in the Galactic Senate. If Anas can get both our congress *and* our senate members to unanimously vote for war, the Galactic Senate might see that we had no choice, and are the ones that are innocent in this whole conflict.”

“And the Judeui Council has stated that they refuse to go against the Republic, so if we *do* get the Republic involved, Judeui will stop,” Anas finished.

After over half a standard hour, the doors to the senate chambers slid open, and Anas, Teali, Stoe, and Crawl reentered. Several of the senators had worried looks on their faces, some were angry, and some were, oddly enough, regretful. Anas could actually feel the tension and debating that had taken place in this chamber in the past.

“So?” Anas questioned.

“We’ve made an unanimous decision,” one of the senators said.

“To do what?” Anas pushed.

The senator sighed. “To declare war on the Confederation of Judeui.”

Chapter V

SIX STANDARD YEARS AGO

Anas most definitely was glad he had friends in law enforcement. He sat in the passenger's seat of the police interceptor cruiser as it sped through the skylanes of Petir. The police officer, whose name Anas didn't know, was doing this as a favor to Anas. Anas' close, personal friend, Colonel Teali, often helped him out every now and again.

Anas' mind raced with fear, worry, yet at the same time, he also thought about love. His dear wife, Jena, had been diagnose with a rare, deadly disease some months ago. The news had broken Anas' heart, but she took it well. In fact, for the past few months, she had been stronger than him. She'd shown true courage and hope whenever he'd show cowardice.

And for that he admired her, and his heart burned in love for her. His eyes gleamed at her beauty, like a thousand suns glistening over the deep, blue oceans. And as he exited the police speeder, entered the medical center, and walked into her hospital room, he loved in like he'd never loved anyone: with all of his heart. Breathing tubes, and I.V. and other medical equipment didn't make him think of her as any less beautiful.

However reality dragged him back down when he saw the heart monitor. It wasn't beating and going up and down like it should've been. Instead, it was a red, constant line stretching horizontally from one end of the monitor to the other. The little number, which showed her heartbeats per minute, was at zero, just like Anas' happiness was now at zero.

Lips trembling, with tears pouring down his cheeks, Anas touched his wife's face with shaking hands. Her eyes stared up at the ceiling lights that she couldn't see. Softly and gently, Anas touched his fingers over her eyelids, and slowly slid them shut. He crawled onto the bed next to her, and wrapped his right arm over her, his left hand streaming through her dark hair. He laid his head down on her chest, closed his eyes, and began to sob...

PRESENT DAY

Biss was bored...again. He'd spent the past two days in the room, forbidden to leave it. Despite his efforts to sneak out, Vein Sho was always there to stop him. In fact, Biss was now handcuffed to his

medical bed, which made him even more irritated.

He'd spent time talking to his fellow Vario soldiers, and found a lot of them were in the same situation. They received no word from the outside world, but judging by both Vein's and the multiple nurses' attitudes, things were not going well. In fact, Biss wouldn't be surprised if the Divido were close to breaching the governor's building. Sometimes, he could hear the faint shouting and blaster-fire. Once, he'd even seen a squad of Vario soldiers run by.

Today, it was worse than ever. He could hear distant explosions and battle, and sirens whined throughout the corridors. Suddenly, the power went out, and the dim emergency lights emitted a faint glow of light, barely enough for one to see around. Several nurses rushed in, along with Vein. As the nurses began evacuating other patients out, Biss was still restrained to his bed. Vein approached Biss, and removed Biss' restraints.

"It's about damn time I was set loose," Biss commented, then slowly and painfully climbed out of his bed, taking a Vario United Military uniform Vein had brought him, then dressing himself in it.

"You aren't free yet, PFC Biss. Come with me, we're going to the armory," Vein said as he turned and exited the medical center.

"So we're finally going to help my friends out, huh?"

"Negative, we're helping transports' crew load the weapons into the transports' cargo bays."

"Transports? We're leaving?" Biss questioned.

"The entire governor's building will be empty within the hour, and we're no exception," Vein answered. "All soldiers, building staff, and Order of Seta members are evacuating Dadde."

Biss continued to follow, but began to feel hesitant about doing so.

"How can we just retreat like this? Who's in charge?"

"Captain Biccó."

"Biccó? What about the governor?"

"He's dead," Vein said simply.

"Dead. The governor of Dadde is dead." Biss repeating, finding it hard to believe.

"I was under the impression that you'd never met him, and that you didn't like him."

"Well yeah, but that doesn't mean I wanted him dead. How'd it happen?"

"A Divido captain shot him in the face," Vein said, showing no interest or emotion.

"How's come you don't seem too upset about it. You better not be supporting the Divido!"

“Dane, if I was supporting the Divido, would I have saved you from that wreckage?”

“Your ‘Order of Seta’ is very unheard of and mysterious, Vein,” Biss said, a tone of accusation in his voice.

“I did say it was a ‘*secret*’ unless I’m mistaken.”

Biss came forth and grabbed Vein’s arm, pulling on it and turning him around to face him.

“What the hell is your deal?” Biss demanded.. “You talk like everyone else is below your damn Order. You ain’t no better than the rest of us!”

Vein pulled his arm free of Biss’ grasp. “If only you could have the patience to wait until we board the transport, because that’s when I’ll have the time to explain, *and* bring you and your best friend back together.”

Vein then continued walking, with Biss hesitantly following silently behind him. Other Vario soldiers rushed back and forth, along with building staff. Even though it appeared chaotic, it seemed as though they at least knew what was happening, and what their tasks were. Biss, however, was completely in the dark as far as knowing the situation was concerned.

Still, Vein indeed led him to the armory, where several other building staff members were loading crates full of weapons, explosives, armor, and treasures. Two *Wayfarer*-class medium transports were docked, with both people and cargo being loaded onto them.

“Biss, pack those blaster rifles into that crate. Hurry up, this transport departs in six minutes.”

Without questioning, Biss followed Vein’s command. He assisted the young, teenage-looking human girl in packing the rifles into the durasteel crate, placing them in racks, then placing the racks in the crate. Altogether, about fifty of the rifles managed to fit in the crate. After sealing it shut, a magnetic crane lifted it into the first transports cargo bay. Vein came over.

“Good work. They can handle the rest of the cargo, but the people that are suppose to be boarding are bringing too many personal items onboard the transports., which means we’re unable to pack as many people as we should be able to on them. I need you to monitor the items the people bring onto that first transport there,” Vein commanded.

“How many transports are there?” Biss asked.

“Two were loaded and launched already, there are these two, then two more. So there’s six total, with each carrying about one hundred fifty people,” Vein answered quickly. “Unfortunately, that’s all we can do at this time. Now go, and do as I asked.”

Biss rushed over to the transports loading ramp, and began the emotionally painful task of separating what valuables people could and could not bring aboard...

Anas straightened his suit's collar as he cleared his throat. Stoe Whi, his personal assistant, along with Crowl Ley and High General Teali, stood around him.

"Now remember, Mister President, stay focused and keep on topic. Don't answer any questions that you can't answer with one hundred percent accuracy," Stoe reminded him for what had to have been the tenth time.

"Stoe, you're just the presidential assistant, yet it seems you're more concerned than the president himself," Crowl said jokingly, drawing a chuckle from Teali.

"I just want to make sure President Vidon is successful, as my job requires," Stoe said, defending himself.

"Well I do appreciate it, Stoe. Now if you'd please let me, I don't want to keep the press waiting much longer."

"Of course, Mister President, good luck."

Stoe stepped away as Anas, Teali, and Crowl walked out from behind the stage's wall and up to the stage. Anas stepped up to the podium, while Crowl stood behind him on his right side, and Teali behind him on his left. Flashes from camera droids and photographers lit up the large, circular press conference room, which was located in the eastern wing on the first floor of the Vario United Capitol Tower. Reporters for the different HoloNet channels from across Galactic Alliance were already shouting out questions. Raising his hands, palms facing the crowd, the audience respectively fell silent.

"Ladies and gentlemen, reporters and interested citizens, children and adults, we're in a time of crisis. Currently, a mega-corporation and business giant has sided with the succeeded worlds and alliance known as the Confederation of Judeui. I'm here to inform you that the world of Dadde, which *is* indeed located within the Vario system, has been attacked and seized by Judeui military forces and the so-called "security division" of the Ladin West Company."

Anas paused to hear the gasps and murmurs of the crowd, before they fell silent once more to listen.

"I, nor the Vario Senate, nor the Vario Congress, will allow this to stand," he announced,

speaking powerfully.

The crowd knew what was coming before he could even say it.

“That is why, earlier this morning, the Vario United System’s executive branch, headed by myself, declared war on the Confederation of Judeui!”

Some in the audience cheered, some of the reporters asked questions, and some began to protest.

“In addition to this, the Ladin West Company’s security forces, weapons, and ships are banned from the Vario system,” Anas continued, his microphone and the room’s sound systems booming his voice over the crowd. “Hei DiVon is now a branded traitor to us of the Vario United Systems, and will be arrested and charged for treason and perjury on sight, as well as over three hundred counts of third-degree murder, and for a number of other unlawful crimes, such as felony fraud and attempted murder on an elected official.”

Anas held up piece of cloth, which had been cut from one of Anas’ coats.

“A device Hei DiVon planted on my coat would have sent radioactive-waves that would’ve caused my heart to cease beating over a several hour period of time.”

The crowd erupted into noise, with some people claiming Anas was lying, some shouting he was going mad, and some agreeing with him, saying that the declaration of war was long overdue.

“I will now accept some questions at this time,” Anas announced, and pointed at a Human woman.

“Mister President, why keep this issue in the dark until now?”

“Well *I* personally don’t see what you’re talking about. We decided and signed the declaration mere hours ago, I think this is still fairly new.”

The next reported asked, “Do you think Hei DiVon will make another attempt on your life?”

“I think he’d be foolish to try. High General Teali has ordered all military personal to capture him, but if he does resist, he will be shot dead. Next question.”

The next reporter spoke. “Do you have any solid, evidence that DiVon was behind the assassination attempt, or is this simply an action to extract revenge on him?”

“When we processed the device, there was a message on it to me from Hei DiVon. I think his face on a hologram is evidence enough. Next.”

The final reporter’s question made Anas’ stomach churn. “President Vidon, do you think your son, Corporal Next Vidon, will be deployed into combat, and face danger?”

His head started to feel like he was spinning. Noticing, Crowl Ley stepped up and assisted Anas down from the podium and off of the stage.

Teali stepped up to the podium. “That’s all the time we have. Thank you, and bless Vario.”

The High General stepped down and made his way off the stage, following Crowl Ley, Stoe Whi, and Anas out of the press room. The conference was over...