

Tiwir traces the lines with his finger, slowly, reverently, across the etched family tree carved into the stone of the west wall of the study. The names shimmer faintly with age, traced in silverleaf and deep Pantoran blue. Each one curls with flourished penmanship: Sujo Marn, Sujo Tallae, Sujo Veksin the Bold. The stone is cool beneath his touch; the air smells faintly of spice and woodsmoke.

“Careful,” his mother says, not unkindly. She kneels beside him, one gloved hand gently guiding his small fingers toward the correct branch. “You skipped the civil governor. Vexin ruled during the drought, remember?”

“He wasn’t a fighter,” Tiwir murmurs.

“No,” she says with a small smile. “But he saved more lives than most soldiers ever will. Not all battles are fought with fleets.” He nods, but his interest lies further down. Not the governors or diplomats, not the scholars or art funders. He’s searching for one name in particular. His mother waits. She knows where he’s headed.

*Sujo Tiwir. Supreme Commander of the Outer Defense Ring. Architect of the High Orbit Siege.*

It’s bold, inlaid with twin gold marks to denote military honor. He stares at it for a long time, chest swelling with something sharp and hot: possibility. The name feels heavier than the others, not just because it’s his own. It carries stories – real ones. He’s heard them in the grand hall over dinners, by the hearth when the lamps are low, whispered by tutors who think he’s not listening.

“He was my grandfather,” his mother says, quiet but full of warmth. “And your namesake. He once stood on the bridge of the city and stared down a Mandalorian war fleet with only half his battalion still breathing. Do you remember what he said?”

“Pantora holds,” Tiwir answers, almost whispering.

“Pantora holds,” she repeats. “Even when the Assembly bickered. Even when our defense lines buckled, he held. Because House Sujo does not kneel.” Her voice carries a rhythm Tiwir knows by heart, like a song meant to be passed down. She doesn’t look at the stone when she speaks; her eyes are on him. There’s no softness in her yellow gaze, but there is pride. Something akin to hope.

The storm outside the study window scratches at the glass. Thunder rumbles low across the sky. The hearth crackles behind them, throwing their shadows long against the wall of ancestors. Tiwir looks up at her, eyes wide.

“Will I be like him? When I grow up?” She leans in and kisses his forehead.

“You’ll be better,” she says. “You’ll help bring Pantora back to glory.” He nods, though he doesn’t quite know what she means. He pictures himself in his house’s black and gold, on the

deck of a starship, fleet arrayed behind him. Officers standing at attention. Pantora gleaming in the viewport. His name carved into the same stone, inlaid with something brighter than silverleaf.

His mother rises and walks to the window, arms crossed. Her silhouette is long against the firelight, regal in the dark purple robes of her station. Tiwir remains kneeling in front of the family tree, fingertips brushing the old name that will someday be his.

He dreams of starships. Of campaigns. Of the name Sujo whispered like awe on the lips of soldiers. One day they will call him General.

And Pantora will hold.

Three days later, the hall is full of voices. Tiwir isn't meant to be listening. His mother sent him to the sunroom with a tray of candied roots and a thick book on orbital warfare formations. But the conversation from the council chamber below carries through the stone. It rises and falls with clipped urgency, names, and dates tossed between sharp adult voices like blades. He crawls closer to the vent in the floor, silent on his elbows. From here, he can't see much, only the gold trim of the uniforms and the silver cords of Senators.

"It's not a minor infraction," one voice snaps. A man, nasal and insistent. "Unauthorized correspondence with Imperial agents is a violation. We have the logs."

"Our family has long-standing diplomatic ties," his mother says, voice steady and proud. "You'll find nothing treasonous."

"Your family's legacy doesn't exempt you from scrutiny. We are at war. And Pantora cannot afford shadows." There's a pause. A shift in the air. Even from this distance, Tiwir can feel it, the tightening.

"Be careful, Senator," Tiwir's father says, low and measured. "You speak of shadows while standing in a house that built this moon's defense lines."

"Exactly," comes the cold reply. "That is why we're here."

Tiwir doesn't understand it all, but he hears enough. He knows his mother's voice when it sharpens, the tone of her refusing to bend.

That night, the study is quiet again. The storm has passed, but a different heaviness fills the house. Tiwir doesn't trace the family tree. He sits by the fire, book open but unread in his lap. His mother stands by the window. She hasn't spoken since the Senators left.

When she finally turns, her expression is the same one she wore when telling him stories of the siege. Stern, proud, distant.

“They’re afraid,” she says simply. Tiwir blinks.

“Of what?” She comes to keel beside him again, this time her movements slower. Wearier.

“Of bloodlines that remember power,” she says. “And children who still believe in them.” She tucks a hand against his cheek and smiles, small and soft. He doesn’t understand what she means, but her comment still fills his chest with pride.

The next morning is quieter, brighter. The rain has stopped, the clouds have thinned to high wisps. Golden light pours through the dining room’s tall windows. The house feels cleaner, untroubled.

His sister throws a piece of soaked fruit at his head. It bounces off his shoulder, landing on the breakfast table with a wet slap.

“Tavira!” their father calls, more exasperated than angry. “Do not fling your food.” Tavira giggles behind her hands, a mischievous spark in her golden eyes. She swings her legs under the oversized chair, heels of her boots thudding rhythmically against the legs. She’s dressed in a velvet pinafore that already has syrup smeared across one cheek. Tiwir wipes his shoulder and forehead with a napkin, sighing like an old man.

“She did that on purpose!”

“Of course she did,” their father mutters, lifting his caf with the resigned grace of someone well outnumbered. “She is four. Everything she does is on purpose.” Tiwir narrows his eyes at his sister, who beams at him with too many teeth. Her smile is missing one in the front.

“You’re going to be a war criminal,” he informs her. She puffs up with pride.

“I’m going to be queen.”

“Yeah, right.”

Breakfast at this hour is always the same: sunlight catching on polished wood, the smells of warm spiced bread and puffy butterfruit, and the quiet hum of the house’s old heating system. Their mother has already gone to her morning meetings; she rises before either of them are up, robe a blur down the corridor.

Tiwir watches as Tavira stabs a cube of melon with her fork, entirely pleased with herself. There’s a smear of jam on her sleeve. Her hair is tied in two uneven loops with silver thread. Their father will try to fix it later. He always does.

“She’s going to get us both arrested one day,” Tiwir says under his breath.

“She’ll get herself crowned and make it our fault,” their father replies, pouring himself more caf. Tiwir’s not sure that’s a joke, but Tavira grins like she’s already halfway to coronation.

That night, long after dinner, Tiwir wakes to voices echoing down the corridor. The light under the door to his parents’ study glow faintly, flickering against the polished floor. He slips from bed without a sound and pads barefoot down the hall. Tavira is already crouched behind the hall column, hugging her stuffed tooka and watching through the crack in the door. She looks at him and raises a finger to her lips.

Inside, their mother’s voice is sharp.

“They’ll try to push us out at the next session. Not because we’ve done anything wrong, but because we haven’t bent. They don’t want houses with Imperial loyalties holding land this close to the Chairman’s seat.” Their father replies quieter.

“It’s not about legality, it’s about optics. The other houses see us as a threat. They’ll vote with their fear.”

“Let them,” their mother says. “We’ve made our position clear. The Empire respects strength. We’ve given Pantora more than loyalty. We’ve given it defense lines, doctrine, history. If they wish to repay us with exile, so be it.”

There’s a long silence. Tiwir’s breath catches. The Empire. The word coils in his stomach, unfamiliar but not frightening. He doesn’t know much, just that they are strong. That the Assembly hates them. That his mother doesn’t.

“We should tell the children,” his father says at last. “If this is the path we are on.”

“No,” she says. “Not until it is time to move.”

The next day, Tiwir walks beside his mother through the sculpture garden behind the estate. The wind cuts across the marble. He hesitates.

“You were talking to the Empire.” She stops walking. Turns. She doesn’t deny it.

“Yes,” she says. “Because they answered.”

“Are they bad?” he asks.

“They are powerful,” she replies. “They protect their own.” He looks up at her, brow furrowed.

“Will they protect us?” She kneels, takes both his hands.

“That depends,” she says softly. “On what kind of man you grow into.”

Tiwir turns ten under a sky thick with clouds. The estate is quieter than in years past. No parade of guests, no foreign nobles with gifts of glass or spice. Just his family.

He kneels in the ancestral hall beneath the great lantern of Sujo Tiwr, the Supreme Commander, while his father mixes the ink. It is no ordinary pigment. It's blended with dust taken from the vault, ground from the very stone of the house it was built upon. It smells of iron. The color is golden-yellow, radiant and sharp, the hue of heritage. When the light catches, it gleams like sunlight on metal. His mother stands beside him, robes formal, voice solemn.

"You are a Sujo. You carry our memory in your spine, and in your blood. Now, you will carry it on your skin."

Tiwir doesn't flinch when the first line is drawn. The stylus cuts diagonally, from the outer corner of his right eye to the top of his cheek. Then again on his left. A third stroke traces downward from the center of his bottom lip to the point of his chin. All three lines are straight. Clean. Deliberate. They sting, but he makes no sound.

Tavira watches from the side of the hall, sitting cross-legged with a cushion clutched to her chest, wide-eyed and silent for once.

When it is done, his father wipes the excess ink and sets the stylus aside. His mother leans down, touches a gloved hand to his shoulder.

"These are your first. More will come, when you earn them. Through action, through service." Tiwir lifts his chin. The ink burns, but he ignores it. His father clasps his arm, forearm to forearm.

"You wear them well, son." Tiwir doesn't smile. He nods, gaze fixed ahead. He is Sujo. And now the galaxy will see it.

It snows the next morning. Tiwir wakes to the sound of Tavira shrieking with delight in the courtyard. When he opens the shutters, the garden is dusted in pale frost, the fountains still half-flowing but rimmed in white. She's already running out into the snow, coat flapping behind her, boots too big for her feet, dragging a scarf that's far too long. She leaves a trail of chaos in her wake, overturned pots, trampled hedges, footprints like war plans through the snow.

He dresses quickly and joins her. Their father stands at the threshold with a cup of something steaming, watching the two of them with that look he wears on rare, quiet mornings: half pride, half warning, like he's memorizing the shape of this peace before it disappears.

Tiwir gives chase. Tavira shrieks, delighted, weaving around the pillars and ducking behind planters. She's too fast to catch right away and she knows it. She laughs every time he gets close, flinging a handful of snow into the air like confetti. When he finally corners her near the terrace wall, she throws up her arms in exaggerated surrender.

“Victory by escape!” she declares. He leans against the stone, breath puffing visibly.

“That’s not a real thing.”

“Sure it is,” she replies, triumphantly. They pause. She pokes at his cheek with a mittened finger. “Your face looks different now.” He touches the new tattoos. The skin is still tender beneath them.

“Good different?” She considers.

“You look like one of the statues. But alive.” He grins at her.

“You’ll get yours someday.”

“Mine will be better,” she says.

“Impossible.” She sticks out her tongue and dashes away again, arms stretched wide. He watches her run, snowflakes melting on her purple hair, gold light of morning turning everything soft and gilded.

Somewhere deep in the house, bells chime by the hour. Another meeting for their mother. Another letter draft. Another session to sway. But here, none of that matters. Tiwir lies back in the snow. The cold bites through his tunic, but he doesn’t care. He stares up at the sky and wonders how many fleets it would take to march onto Pantora right now. Probably a million.

His father watches them with worried eyes.

The next day, the air in the estate feels brittle. No one says anything directly. Not his father, not his mother, not even the steward who usually greets Tiwir with a tight smile and a daily schedule. The halls are quieter than they should be. Servants move briskly, eyes lowered, arms full of packed crates and folded tapestries.

Tiwir stands in the threshold of the main corridor, watching as two droids carry away a trunk he recognizes. It’s from the archives. Why are they packing up the archives?

He finds his mother in the solar, not at her desk but standing by the shelves, hands folded tight behind her back.

“What’s going on?” he asks her. She turns. Her expression is calm, too calm.

“We’re leaving.”

“To where?”

“Someplace colder.”

That's all she says. She tells him to pack his things. The essentials. "Nothing that would be missed." He tries to ask more, but her tone shifts, final and clipped. Not unkind, but finished.

Tiwir walks back into his room and opens his wardrobe. His hands hover over the uniforms he rarely wears, the old medals from study competitions, the carved wooden starship his father gave him when he turned six. He packs none of them, instead chooses the boots he can run in. The coat that fits his shoulders now. He moves through the room slowly, pausing at each drawer. His fingers run over the edge of his desk, the windowsill where Tavira once lined up sweets like soldiers. His bed is still unmade. The hearth glows warm from the night before. It doesn't feel any different.

Down the hall, he hears Tavira arguing with a maid about which of her books she's allowed to bring. She's crying, not loudly, but the kind of quiet sob that makes everything else sound too loud.

He walks to the window. Snow is still on the ground, but it's thinner now. The fountains are running again. Below, in the central courtyard, the garden statues have been shrouded in canvas, his ancestor's faces hidden. He presses a hand to the glass, as if he might stop time with it.

That night, the hearth in the library is lit early. The curtains drawn. Doors closed. Tiwir and Tavira are called in after supper, still in their day clothes, still not knowing why their bags are half-packed.

Their mother is seated in the long chair beneath the portrait of Sujo Veksin. Their father stands at the mantel, one hand wrapped loosely around a cup of lukewarm tea. Neither of them speaks right away. Tiwir sits upright on the velvet settee, Tavira curled beside him with her knees drawn up to her chest. Her eyes are still pink from crying earlier. She won't let go of her stuffed tooka.

"We are leaving Pantora," their mother says at last. Her voice is low, steady. "Not for a visit. Not for a season. Forever."

"Exiled," their father adds, not a correction, but a truth laid bare. Their mother shoots him a stern look. Tiwir's heart skips a beat.

"Why? What did we do?" Their mother doesn't blink.

"We do not hide our lineage. That is enough, for some."

"Our ties to the Empire are well-documented," his father says. "They always have been. But now the Assembly needs a scapegoat. A symbol to burn. We are...efficient." Tiwir stares at them. The words don't land all at once. He looks around the room, at the shelves full of his ancestor's journals and second-hand accounts, at the portrait of Veksin, at the faint gold light on the ceiling from the chandelier above.

“They can’t make us leave. This is our house.”

“Yes, they can,” his mother says. “And they have. The vote was taken this morning.” Tavira sniffles.

“But where will we go?” His father walks over and kneels in front of them.

“For now, Orto Plutonia. But soon, someplace safe. The Empire has offered us land, provisional land. We’ll be expected to earn our place.” Tiwir feels his stomach twist.

“Is it because of me? Because I got the tattoos?”

“No,” his mother says. There is steel in her tone. “It is because we are proud.” There is a long pause. “This is not the end of our family,” she says. “It is only a harder chapter. You will remember who you are. And one day, when the time is right, we will return home.”

He swallows hard. Nods, even though his throat burns. He doesn’t want to cry in front of her.

The transport is smaller than he imagined exile would be. Not a grand cruiser. Not even a shuttle with polished seats and a view. Just a weathered freighter, its markings scrubbed off, cargo bays reeking of coolant and silence. They’re given one crate for belongings. Tiwir watches as his father locks it shut with slow, methodical movements. Tavira huddles beside him, wrapped in three layers of coats, clutching her stuffed tooka like it’s the only thing keeping her upright. Her eyes are red and wide. She hasn’t spoken since they left the estate.

No one says goodbye. The sky is pale, clear. Pantora gleams overhead. White. Gold. Proud. The guards don’t look them in the eyes. Their orders have already been signed. Disgraced. Exiled. Not for treason, but for maintaining old friendships.

The shuttle lifts off without ceremony. Tiwir presses his forehead to the window and watches the city shrink. The silver spires. The courtyards. The snow misted rooftops. All of it pulls away like a page turning. Then, darkness. Cold.

Orto Plutonia does not welcome them. The winds scream before they even land. The sky is a flat, endless white. The ground beneath the outpost is crusted in ice, broken only by jagged ridges of rock and the bones of old survey stations. There’s no settlement waiting, no housing, just an emergency shelter dome, half-buried in snow. They step out into the cold in silence. The air bites instantly. Tiwir’s breath catches in his lungs. Tavira stumbles. Their father catches her.

“Move quickly,” his teeth are already chattering. “Inside, now.”

The dome seals behind them with a hollow clunk. Inside, it’s barely warmer. The lights flicker. A heating unit hums weakly in the corner. They have crates for chairs. Blankets in sealed



wrap. No staff. No supplies beyond what they brought. Tiwir sits beside Tavira on the cold floor. He doesn't ask what they did wrong. Instead, he speaks quietly.

"Is this where we live now?" His mother's eyes are distant.

"For now," she says.

The wind howls beyond the dome walls, endless and sharp. Tiwir closes his eyes and wraps his coat tighter. The frost creeps under the seams.

That night, the dome is still. The only sounds are the slow tick of the heater and the scratch of wind against metal. Tiwir can't sleep. Tavira curls next to him, fast asleep under a thin blanket, her breath fogging softly in the air. Their parents sit across the dome, speaking in low tones. Tiwir stirs. His mother sees it. She gestures for him to come closer. He crosses the space barefoot, sitting down against them. His father lays a hand on his shoulder. His mother doesn't waste his time with comforts.

"This isn't the end of anything," she says. "It's a beginning. A hard one. But ours." Tiwir doesn't speak. He waits with wide eyes.

"Sometimes," his father adds, "legacy must be reclaimed. Taken back, not inherited. That's what we'll do. Carefully. Intentionally."

"You are Sujo," his mother continues, voice low and even. "They think they can exile us. They're afraid of what we remember. And what you might become." Tiwir frowns faintly.

"What am I supposed to become?"

"A student," his father says. "Then a soldier. Then something more. We'll teach you the foundations. You'll learn the rest from the Empire, when the time is right." His mother smooths a hand through his hair. Her touch is gentler than the words that follow.

"One day, when we return to Pantora, it won't be to make peace. It will be to show them what happens when they think they can erase us." Tiwir's jaw tightens. He doesn't fully understand, but something inside him, cold and still, accepts his mother's words.

"We don't take revenge," his father says. "We restore. Brick by brick. Name by name. And you, son, you'll be the one they remember."

Outside, the wind howls. Inside, there is only the tick of the heater.

The weeks that follow teach Tiwir more than years of tutors ever did. Supplies dwindle fast. The emergency rations are bland, thin, and vanish too quickly. What little warmth the shelter provides is won through layered clothes and constant vigilance. His mother, who hated the cold on Pantora, takes the brunt of it. Her cough begins in the mornings, soft and rasping, and worsens each night. His father says it's only strain. But Tiwir knows the word for it now:

pneumonia. She hides it well. Wraps herself in heavy wool and drinks boiled herbs. Still, she shivers when they aren't looking.

They adapt. His father wakes him up early, before the dim light filters in through the dome's frost-dusted surface. Together, they brave the cold, wrapped in thick coats and silence. Across the wind-cut ice fields, past the buried edge of a forgotten comms tower, they search for anything. Lichen frozen flat against stone, roots hiding beneath layers of dirt, small game in the crevices of jagged rock. Tiwir learns to scan with his eyes, not just his hands. To watch the way the snow shifts underfoot, how wind uncovers old tracks. He learns to listen, to wait. His father teaches without raising his voice. Every motion is deliberate.

"Still your breath," he says once, crouched low beside a half-frozen burrow. "Control it. You lose nothing by waiting." Tiwir nods. The cold doesn't burn as sharply anymore.

Sometimes they find nothing, bring back only roots and snowmelt. But it is enough to keep moving. Enough to help. When they return, Tiwir takes his mother's coat from her shoulders, checks her pulse the way his father showed him. She lets him. She doesn't speak.

At night, by the weak heater, they study old holodiscs. Military history. Doctrine. Logistics. His mother quizzes him gently, voice cracked but clear. His father builds lessons from their failures in the field. Why they missed tracks, how they chose the wrong path. They don't call it training, but it is.

By the second month, his mother cannot stand for long. The cough comes in waves now, deeper, laced with something wet. Her hands shake when she tries to hold a mug. The boiled herbs no longer soothe her fever. Tiwir sees the shadows under her eyes, the way she pulls the blankets tighter even when the heater is on. She smiles when he enters the room, always, but her voice is thin.

One night, while his parents sleep, Tiwir wraps himself in a coat and slips outside. The wind slashes at his face. The comms relay near the ridge still flickers. Its range is poor, but it's still functional. He spends most of the night there, crouched against the wind, fingers numb, as he rewires the emergency link to reach beyond the local grid. His hand trembles as he types the code, one he isn't supposed to know, but has memorized from his mother and father's hushed conversations. He sends a single message.

*Requesting Imperial pickup. Medical help. Outpost three. Coordinates enclosed. Priority: House Sujo*

They arrive too late. A week later, a low altitude shuttle appears through the clouds. Black, sleek, unmarked. It hovers just above the ridge.

His mother died the day before. Quietly, in her sleep, wrapped in every blanket they had. Tiwir finds her just before dawn, hands folded, brow smooth. She looks peaceful. Like she'd simply chosen not to wake.

Tavira doesn't understand, not fully. She clings to Tiwir like a child half her age, refusing to let go of his sleeve. His father says nothing. Not to the medic who steps off the ship, not to the Imperial agent who arrives five minutes later in a pale gray coat, datapad already in hand. The man offers condolences. Tiwir doesn't hear them. They wrap her body with care.

Tiwir stands near the edge of the ice, wind tearing at his coat. He doesn't cry. He stares at the ship. The sharp angles of its hull, smooth gleam of its armor. It's the first time he's seen Sith colors up close.

*They came, he thinks. They saved us when no one else did.*

He doesn't turn when his father joins him.

"You contacted them." It's not a question. Tiwir nods. His father doesn't speak for a long time. Then, quietly, "Good."

Tiwir keeps his eyes on the ship. He does not move.

Dromund Kaas is a world of shadow and lightning. The shuttle cuts low through the thunderclouds. Tiwir watches through the viewport as black stone towers rise from the jungle. The rain starts before they land, relentless sheets of it. He doesn't blink.

They are met at the dock by an officer in crimson-trimmed armor, his movements crisp and impersonal. A medical team collects what remains of his mother. No one speaks a word.

The family is escorted not to a military outpost, but a tall building carved into the slope of Kaas City's upper ring. An apartment: sparse, high-walled, with polished black floors and flickering consoles. It feels like a holding pen, but it is safe. It is warm.

That night, as Tavira sleeps curled up beside a heating unit, Tiwir stands with his father on the balcony, watching stormlight crawl over the horizon.

"You brought us here," his father says. Tiwir doesn't respond. The rain slicks down his coat, thunder low and constant. "Now we make them remember," his father continues. "Your mother is gone. The House, wounded. But we are not finished. You will wear our name into their ranks, into their barracks, into their command halls. And when you rise, you will bring us home." Tiwir's breath is too slow.

"To Pantora?"

"Yes. You will march the Empire back to our doorstep. Not for vengeance. For restoration." Tiwir doesn't answer. Not aloud. But when he looks down at the city, at its sharp edges and flashing sky, he doesn't see a home, but a proving ground.

He begins training immediately. Each morning, he rises before the sun breaches the storm line. Runs the perimeter of the apartment complex. Studies tactics, Imperial structure, comparative doctrine. His father drills him on battlefield projections, makes him recite historical maneuvers, forces him to analyze failed campaigns, then improve them. No tutor. No allowance for fatigue. If he falters, the work doubles. If he masters something quickly, the bar is raised.

Tavira plays in the halls with her tooka doll and listens quietly from doorways. She watches Tiwir become something harder, sharper. He stops flinching at thunder, stops complaining about the cold. Starts speaking less, hearing more.

The day of his fourteenth birthday, he enlists. He doesn't ask his father's permission, but the patriarch of House Sujo nods when he receives the notice. Just once.

The academy is not built to comfort. That much is clear the moment Tiwir steps through its gates. Kaas City's outer military district is carved from black stone and lightning-fed steel. Storm shutters line the barracks like armor. The sky boils above them, thick, wet clouds lit from within. No one remarks about the rain, no one waits for instruction.

Tiwir is one of the youngest. His uniform sleeves are too long, his voice still changing. But he walks like he belongs. He stands straight in the registration line, arms behind his back, golden tattoos beneath his eyes like painting. He's given a bunk in the lowest cadet tier. Six to a room, no privacy, no furniture beyond lockers and bedrolls. The mattress is thin, the air recycled and sharp. His bedmate is a grizzled Rattataki boy two years older than him, who snorts when Tiwir introduces himself.

By mid-morning, Tiwir's been tested. Physically. Psychologically. His records mark him as a Pantoran noble. A risk. A boon. The instructors don't question him aloud, but they watch him closer than the others. He aces a logic simulation. Holds a plank until collapse. Endures a breath-holding drill in freezing water until his lips turn blue. No one's impressed. That's the point.

By nightfall, he's drilling alongside cadets with better gear and broader shoulders. He doesn't win most matches. But he doesn't break form. When he's thrown to the ground, he gets back up. When he's hit, he absorbs it. Silent. Stoic. They ask him no questions. He gives them no reason to.

The second day is harder. Instructors push them to failure, then measure the shape of their collapse. Some cry. Some lash out. Tiwir does neither. He breaks quietly, then pieces himself back together before the hour is over.

"You're young," one officer remarks, eyeing the gold tattoos beneath his eyes. "But you don't move like a child." Tiwir doesn't answer.

In the quiet hours between assignments, he studies. Logistics, chain of command, planetary mobilization theory. He takes notes even as the power flickers from the storms. At night, in his bunk, he stares at the ceiling and hears his father's voice.

He doesn't see them for two years. Rules forbid cadets from leaving the grounds before graduation. Even for mourning. Even for noble lineages. His father doesn't protest it. Instead, he holos in once every month or so, brief and severe. Tavira appears in the background sometimes, legs tucked beneath her on the couch, voice bright in the background but not childish anymore. His father speaks only of progress.

"You must learn the rifle, pistol, and knife. Never rely on one weapon, Tiwir. You should be lethal at any range, any posture."

Tiwir obeys. He learns the rifle first: fast reloads, shoulder control, close quarters improvisation. Then the pistol: quickdraws, offhand precision, firing under duress. He drills them until his hands blister.

In the quiet moments, he picks up the sniper. It starts during a free-range drill. Optional, unsupervised, meant to encourage initiative. Most cadets linger at the rifle stations or pair off for sparing. Tiwir finds himself alone at the edge of the range, where the long barrels are mounted and the optics extend like delicate spines. The sniper rifle is heavier than he expects. Slower. But the moment he peers through the scope, the chaos of the compound narrows into silence. It's the breath that draws him in. The pause before the shot. The stillness it demands. He misses the first few shots. Misjudges drop, lets his pulse ruin the aim. But he learns, steadies himself. The moment between inhale and exhale becomes a sanctuary.

The sniper doesn't reward instinct, it rewards discipline. It becomes meditation. He logs extra hours when no one else volunteers. Memorizes wind vectors and elevation curves. Charts his misses, then eliminates them. When he finally qualifies for advanced targeting drills, the instructors don't question his preference. But his father does.

"A sniper distances himself from the cost," he says once, voice edged with disdain. "It is a coward's weapon." Tiwir doesn't argue. He never argues.

Later that night, he requests permission to participate in urban sharpshooting simulations. He passes with a perfect record. The sniper steadies him. Focuses him. Turns the chaos of battle into clean geometry.

His father doesn't stop complaining. Every holocall, every report, every comment laced with hatred. His father makes it clear he believes the sniper keeps a soldier too far from honor. Too far from sacrifice. Tiwir never defends it. He nods along, then keeps practicing. Lets the distance protect him.

He graduates the Imperial Academy at sixteen. An early commission. Unusual, but not questioned. His instructors don't shake his hand, they simply stamp the seal and pass his orders on. One nods to him, faintly. Another mutters something about discipline. He boards the shuttle back to Kaas City in full uniform, freshly pressed, collar high. The rain starts before they land. It doesn't bother him.

Their apartment hasn't changed much. Tavira answers the door before the steward can. She's nine now, still short, still sharp, still all eyes. She stares at the uniform. At the stripes. Then at him.

"You look like the statues," she says.

"The good or bad ones?"

"Both."

Their father waits in the main room. No embrace. No warmth. Just the same nod, deeper now, edged with something heavier.

"You've made me proud, Tiwir." He sets a case on the table. A shallow one. Velvet lined. Inside, a tattoo gun. A vial of golden ink. Tiwir doesn't need to ask. He kneels without being told. His father looks at him for a long moment. Then says, almost softly, "You've grown into a far better man than I. Strong, disciplined, patient, obedient." The last words sit on his tongue a second. He picks up the vial of ink. Turns it once in his fingers. "You did not ask for this life, but you did not run from it, either. That is how I know you are ready to restore us. Pantora thinks us disease. You will be its cure." He tilts his head, eyes sharp. "Tavira watches you. She looks up to you because she knows your duty, your burden. We both do."

"I give you these marks not as reward, Tiwir. But as a promise. You are our return. You are our reckoning."

The first line is drawn slowly, carving from the bottom of his right eye to the edge of his jaw. Then the left. The ink burns faintly. Then the square above his brows. When his father finishes, he rests a hand briefly on Tiwir's shoulders.

"These are not honors, son. They are warnings. You will complete the set when we return to Pantora." Tiwir doesn't speak. He lets the silence talk for him. His father gives him a smile.

"Your sister and I are waiting. Everything we are rests on what you bring home." He rises. The ink glints under the lights. He turns to look at Tavira. She stands in the doorway, arms wrapped around herself, watching without a word. Her eyes shine with something quiet. He turns back to his father. Bows.

"I will bring us home."

Tiwir's first assignment comes in two weeks later. A frontline post in the Mid-Rim, where the fighting is constant and the victories bloody. He is sent as a lieutenant. Most cadets his age are still working their way through second-tier stations. He walks into command with his shoulders squared and record sharp.

His first days are smoke and sound and wind. Jungle mud clinging to his boots, air stinking of fuel and blood. He's given a squad. They don't question his age for long.

He proves himself in the field. Quiet orders. Clean shots. The rifle sits on his back, the pistol at his hip, the sniper in his hands. High ridgelines, collapsed towers, treelines thick with steam. He watches. Waits. Logs kills quickly. His squad calls him calm. The officers call him reliable. Command calls him promising.

Every two weeks, he receives a holo from his father. Tavira appears sometimes, now ten, sharper-eyed, watching the screen like a throne she hasn't claimed yet. One message, she's alone in the frame. Two fresh gold lines curve beneath her eyes.

"I got two," she says with a crooked grin. "Just the two, for now. Father says I earned them." Tiwir watches the recording twice. Saves the file. He missed it; the moment she joined the lineage not just by name, but by mark. She wears it well. Too well.

The next call, his father appears again.

"You're moving well. Keep your squad in check. Don't die for their mistakes. And remember: this is just the proving ground. You are not here for medals. You are practicing for Pantora." Tiwir nods. He reports numbers. Progress. His orders are clear. His aim, steady. In the quiet between missions, he touches the square inked on his forehead and imagines where the final lines will go.

Over the next four years, Tiwir rises. Lieutenant becomes Captain. Captain becomes Commander. And by twenty, he's made a General. The title isn't handed to him, it's earned, by blood and command. His adaptability in the field earns him elite command placements. When the rank is made official, he receives summons to Kaas City. There's little ceremony. A plaque, a nameplate with the old Sujo seal engraved into its corner. Once it's done, he returns to his father's apartment. The same walls, but they feel smaller now. The ceiling's lower. The air's tighter. Tavira is thirteen. She bursts through the inner hall like a shot from a cannon.

"Tiwir!" She throws her arms around him before he can speak. Wraps him tight, buries her face against his collar.

"You're so tall," she mumbles. "And you smell like carbon scoring." He huffs a quiet laugh and squeezes her back.

"You're also tall. And loud." She leans back and stares at him, eyes wide, bright gold and full of pride.

"You're different," she says, quiet at first. "Your voice is heavier." She takes a step back, circling him like an inspector. "You missed my new mark!" She points to the one under her chin. "And I've beaten Father at five out of seven puzzle boards. I've been reading your battle reports. And I've started correcting them." He raises a brow.

“How generous of you.”

“Someone has to keep your ego in check!”

Her smile falters only slightly when their father enters the room. He moves like a shadow behind the curtain, composed and silent. No stewards, no guards, just him. He studies Tiwir from the doorway, gaze unreadable, then steps forward.

“I see they gave you a general’s posture to match the title.” Tiwir straightens without thinking. His father offers no embrace, just a long look and a gesture toward the chairs by the window. They sit. The silence stretches, but not aimlessly. His father lets it breathe.

“You’ve done something rare,” he says finally, voice smooth, almost admiring. “You walked the path we laid for you and made it feel like your own. That takes discipline. And vision.” Tiwir doesn’t speak. He doesn’t need to.

“I won’t insult you by taking credit,” his father adds. “But I will say this: your return changes things. For Tavira. For me. For all of us.” He glances at Tavira, whose gaze hasn’t left Tiwir.

“She’s becoming sharper than either of us expected. You gave her something by coming through that door. Something I couldn’t. Hope.” He turns back to Tiwir.

“So now, General Sujo. The Empire believes in you. Make sure they follow. And, when the time is right, lead them home.” He stands, not to leave, but to retrieve a bottle from the cabinet. He pours two glasses of dark, resin-sweet liquor. Hands one to Tiwir, then clinks it softly against his own.

“To hope,” he says. Tiwir drinks. It’s stronger than he expected. His father studies him under the rim of his glass. “You’ve carried our name. Earned their loyalty. Now, earn their memory. Place the Sujo name in the heart of the Empire, and one day Pantora will open their doors to us.”

Tiwir finishes his drink. Sets the glass down with quiet finality.

“One day,” he says. His father nods, satisfied. And for the first time, Tiwir believes it.

His first gala comes just a week later. Dromund Kaas gleams under the stormlight that night, towers streaked with rain, glass facades reflecting crimson banners and the steady shimmer of overhead sky bridges. The hall is deep within the city’s Citadel, high-walled and angular, marble polished to a mirror’s shine. Red velvet lines the entry. Gold light flickers from suspended sconces. Tiwir arrives in full dress uniform. The hall is crowded, noise low but constant: clinks of glasses, murmurs, the occasional ripple of laughter that never quite reaches the eyes. He moves with purpose, observantly. His presence earns glances, nods, murmured



recognition. Some officers stop him to offer show congratulations. Others watch from the sidelines. But it's not the other generals that draw his attention. It's the Sith.

There are more of them than he expected. Lords and Inquisitors, their presence unmistakable. Robes tailored to a blades edge, posture coiled like a snake. Some mingle. Others linger near the periphery like they're bored by the performance of power. The air shifts subtly when they move. One general, older and red-eyed from a drink, leans toward Tiwir as they stand beside a refreshments table.

"Impressive, isn't it?" the man mutters, "Don't be fooled, kid. The real Empire doesn't wear uniform, it wears red and gold." He chuckles and drains his glass. "We serve. They own." Tiwir doesn't reply. He scans the room again, slower this time.

That's when he sees him.

A tall Togruta Lord stands near the central stair, flanked by two other Sith. One is an older Pureblood, broad-shouldered with scored red skin. He radiates the same cold authority as the Togruta. Commanding. Immovable. He leans close to murmur something into the Togruta's ear, and, whatever it is, it widens his cruel smile.

On the Lord's other side stands a younger Togruta woman, robes less battle-ready and more bedroom-ready. She laughs at whatever the Pureblood says, drawing the back of her hand to her mouth to hide her fangs. Her golden eyes survey the room with far too much eagerness.

It is the older Togruta who draws eyes, however, who commands the space without effort. His robes split at his side, deep crimson and black trim, his montrals curved like blades. His smile is too wide, too knowing. He doesn't speak, doesn't need to. Tiwir doesn't know his name, doesn't bother with Sith politics, but something in the way the others avoid his gaze says enough.

Their eyes meet across the floor, and his smile sharpens. Tiwir holds the gaze for three full seconds. Then moves on.

Three days later, Tiwir is summoned back to the Citadel, for his deployment. He expects the assignment to come with territory. A front to command, new troops and responsibilities. He arrives early, uniform perfect, datapad in hand. The Moff greets him with a tight smile and tired eyes.

"General Sujo," she says, extending a gloved hand. "Congratulation again. You've earned yourself quite the reputation." Tiwir nods curtly.

"I am prepared for deployment."

"Oh, you're being deployed," she replies, walking him toward the holoprojector table. "Just not quite the way you think." She flickers her fingers across the table and the assignment

manifest loads. Tiwir's name appears in bold, beneath the title: *Strategic Attaché to Dark Lord Palide*. His expression barely shifts.

"A Sith Lord."

"Yes," the Moff says, tone casual, eyes watching his reaction closely. "A powerful one at that. He sits on the Dark Council, Sphere of Production and Logistics. He's got a reputation for collecting generals the way some collect artifacts. You won't be his first, but you might be his youngest." Tiwir nods once. She glances at him sidelong.

"Between us, General, most of the high-performing commanders end up in a Lord's shadow eventually. Be grateful you've been selected by a powerful one." She leans in slightly.

"Perform to Lord Palide's satisfaction, and you'll be the one he remembers when he needs a blade." Tiwir looks down at the holoprojector. Nods again.

"When do I leave?"

"Deployment at 0600 tomorrow morning. He'll be waiting for you," she says, offering him a dry smile. "Welcome to the real Empire."

The estate lies just beyond the industrial skyline of Kaas City, hidden beneath high blackstone walls and security veils, where the jungle presses close and stormlight cuts through canopy in silver veins. Tiwir arrives on a speeder, gliding between towering cliffs, following a private route carved into the cliffs that overlook the outer capital. There's no escort, no insignia, just a protocol droid waiting at the landing platform to gesture him wordlessly inside.

Tiwir enters through an archway of obsidian tile and rain-polished stone. The hallway is lined with alcoves, each holding ancient weapons, Sith artifacts, and rotating holos of production schematics. Everything here is curated for effect. The droid guides him to a private receiving chamber lined with dark velvet. The lights dim as the door glides open.

Dark Lord Palide is waiting.

He's taller in person. Not imposing through size, but through precision. His robe is a tailored sheath of deep crimson and black, his montrals wrapped with silver. He stands with his back to the entry, one hand clasped behind his back, the other cradling a glass of dark liquid. He doesn't turn right away.

"General Tiwir of House Sujo," he says, voice smooth and precise. "You're early." Tiwir stands at attention.

"My Lord."

"Spare me the protocol. We'll be working closely, General. You'll find I value punctuality, clarity, and silence. Until I ask for the opposite, of course." Palide turns slowly. His smile is a razor's edge, beautiful and cold. "You've made quite the name for yourself. No

scandals. No failures. It's quite rare." Tiwir offers a tight nod. "Most officers of your caliber are trying to get away from Sith oversight. You, on the other hand, have been sent straight to it. How do you feel about that, General?" Palide tilts his head, red-gold eyes searching Tiwir for something. He holds his gaze.

"I will serve where I am most useful, my Lord." Palide chuckles.

"Good answer. Did your father teach you that, or did you learn it at the Academy?" He doesn't wait for a reply. He steps closer, studying Tiwir like a ledger. "You were born into expectation, same as I. You were given a path. But now you walk beside power, not under it." He turns away as he speaks, swishing the glass in his hands. Then, without warning, he hurls it against the wall beside Tiwir. The glass shatters. A shard slices just beneath Tiwir's left eye. A thin cut, bright and clean. He doesn't flinch. Palide smiles again, wider this time.

"You'll do."

Tiwir expects strategy. Maps. Orders. Instead, he's shown to a small office near the back of the estate, its walls lined with inventory manifests and resource tallies. For the next several days, he's not handed troop assignments or warfronts, he's handed ledgers. Supply routes. Production quotas. Manufacturing requests from distant foundries. He files reports. Oversees shipment routes. Drafts optimization briefings. Keeps his uniform immaculate, but the only battlefield he sees is the logistics grid.

Lord Palide appears intermittently, sometimes watching from the doorway, sometimes offering a line of feedback in passing.

"Efficiency is the war behind the war," he says once, not looking up from a datapad. "You want Pantora, General? Learn to manage power that doesn't shoot back." Tiwir says nothing, but he understands the game. There will be no glory here, not unless it serves Palide.

At night, when the estate quiets, he stares at the old front reports on his datapad. He reads them like scripture. The campaigns he studied, the skies he meant to command; he sees them now only as footnotes beneath someone else's name. He was meant to fly above Pantora with legions behind him, not sort fuel allocations for a Lord who could've hired any beggar off the streets to do his job. He's not a commander, not a general of the Imperial army. He's a sharpened piece of décor.

On weekends, he's permitted to return to his father's apartment. Palide grants him that without his asking.

His father is waiting the first time he comes back. Tavira runs to greet him, mock-saluting with a sharp grin.

“So,” she says, watching him pull off his gloves and strip his coat. “How’s your Sith Lord?”

“Busy,” Tiwir responds. “He thinks I look better next to a shipment log than a battle map.” Tavira snorts.

“I’m sure you do! Very terrifying.”

Their father appears in the doorway, still and unreadable as ever.

“A Sith Lord who keeps you close is better than one who ignores you. Stay useful, son, and you’ll lead an army of Sith to Pantora.” Tiwir nods, slowly. But anger tightens in his chest. He didn’t come this far to be polished and shelved.

He returns nearly every week. Not because he needs to, but because he’s allowed to. Each visit is the same, yet slightly worse. Tavira is always waiting, sharp, curious, full of dry remarks and quiet pride. She tells him about her studies, the debates she wins, the instructors she manipulates into giving her double credit. She’s the main reason he keeps returning. For the time they spend next to each other, reading. For the way she looks at him like he’s something worth admiring.

Their father never misses a visit. He always greets Tiwir with approval. A nod. A drink. A brief compliment, just enough to feel earned. Then the suggestions come.

“Has Palide spoken about Pantora yet? You could introduce it in context. Frame it as an economic opportunity. Logistics, perhaps.”

“He values initiative, doesn’t he? Remind him who you are. Whose legacy you carry.”

“Your presence at his side tells the Council you are trusted. Be patient.”

At first, Tiwir genuinely listens. Then he begins to notice the pattern. The way each praise circles back to an order. The way every sign of his restlessness is repackaged as strategy. He doesn’t argue. He never argues. But each visit leaves him a little more hollow. The first time he forgets to take off his gloves, Tavira notices. She doesn’t mention it. The third time, he sleeps through most of the afternoon on the divan while she reads beside him. By the sixth, he says fewer than fifty words to either of them.

He doesn’t stop coming, but he begins to dread it. Each visit feels heavier. The anger that started with ledgers and logistics doesn’t stay at the estate. It coils inside him during those visits, sharpening the space between his father’s carefully placed suggestions. With every raised glass, every order wrapped in praise, something inside him twists deeper.

His father speaks of strategy as if it justifies his hurting. As if molding a child into a weapon was noble work. As if a lifetime of precision-fed ambition was something natural. Tiwir doesn’t question him, but more and more the words sound like they were rehearsed long before

he ever heard them. The path he's walking feels less like a choice and more like a map someone laid down and folded into his hand.

And he starts to wonder: if Palide holds his leash, then who was it who handed it to him?

Almost a year into his deployment with Palide, he visits home again. It's rainy. Tavira waits in the hall for him. His father in the study, a drink already in his hand. Tiwir's already on edge. Palide had made a comment earlier that had stuck in his skin.

"Some generals are meant to hold the line. Others are meant to hold the tray. Which are you, Sujo?"

Tiwir hadn't responded. The words still buzz in his teeth. He greets Tavira, then enters the study alone. His father stands by the window.

"You look tired."

"I am."

"Still no orders from Palide?" Tiwir doesn't answer. His father takes a sip. "Perhaps now is the time to raise Pantora. You've proven your loyalty. He's comfortable. You could suggest an auxiliary campaign. It wouldn't take much."

"He's not interested," Tiwir says flatly.

"Then make him interested."

"And how do you propose I do that, Father? Polish his boots more often?" His father turns slowly.

"You're not angry at him, Tiwir. You're angry you haven't been put to work. Don't confuse stagnation with betrayal."

"I am confusing them." A pause. "I didn't come from the front line to manage another man's resource chain."

"You came with a title. A place. Respect."

"A place as decoration!"

"As investment," his father snaps. Tiwir's voice sharpens. His anger ruptures from his chest.

"Investment in what? Your legacy? Tavira's future? Or in the idea that if I work hard enough, someone might remember what the House was before you let it go to shit?" His father freezes.

“Watch your mouth, son.” Tiwir spreads his hands, anger boiling over past the point of restraint.

“Why? It’s the only honest thing either of us has said in years.”

“You think this was easy?” His father takes another sip of liquor. “You think I want to live like this, half a man behind half a name, waiting for you to grow into something to carry what we lost?”

“You didn’t wait,” Tiwir fires back. “You built a stage and shoved me onto it. You fed me to the machine!” His father steps closer, voice hard.

“I prepared you. I gave you purpose.”

“You gave me a debt. One I never agreed to.” The words hang there. Raw. Unrelenting. His father takes a deep breath.

“Palide didn’t come for me, he came for you. That means you have leverage.”

“No,” Tiwir says. “It means you’ve known from the beginning that this was built on me.” His father’s jaw tightens. Tiwir presses. “Why didn’t you call the Sith from Orto Plutonia? Why was it me who had to do it? I was eleven.” The old man’s jaw flexes.

“Because,” he says, more firmly now, “if you called them, then you’d remember who answered. And you did remember. You still do. That’s what makes you strong.”

Tiwir’s fists clench. His voice rises, finally cracking.

“No, no, no. It made me obedient! Made me feel like I owed them something. Like I owed you something! You killed my mother to force me into debt!” His father doesn’t move.

“It was never a debt, Tiwir. It was an honor.”

“You don’t get to decide that!” Tiwir shouts. There’s a pause. The silence of years collapses into the room. His father’s voice drops.

“Then decide what you are, son.” Tiwir’s throat burns.

“I’m tired. Tired of pretending any of this was ever my choice.” He walks out of the study, past Tavira, who watches without asking. He doesn’t take his gloves. He doesn’t look back.

He doesn’t sleep that night. He washes his face in silence. Strips off his coat. Sits cross-legged on the refresher room floor, the tile cold beneath him, the walls close, windowless, quiet. A lacquered case rests in front of him like an altar. Inside: ink, mirror, blade.

The mirror returns a stranger's gaze. The lines are already there, beneath the eyes, above the jaw, from the lip down. Marks given to him. A history worn in gold. The space between his brows is still untouched.

He picks up the blade. It glints, thin and sharp. A precise tool. He steadies his breath, cuts just enough to feel it and drags the ink into the wound with slow, deliberate care. A diamond. His final inheritance. As it bleeds, he watches the shape take form in the mirror. Watches it settle into his skin like it's always belonged there. He doesn't need someone else to give it to him.

It was never about the man who raised him. Not really. The House, the name, the exile, those were circumstance. Or tools. What mattered was what he became in the hands of something greater. The Sith didn't chain him, they opened the door. They came when he called. They answered when no one else would. And so he owes them. Because they saw what he could be, even if it serves their own ends. Even if it was never about him.

The blood beads along the ridge of the diamond and runs thin across the bridge of his nose. He lets it. When he finally looks at himself again, he doesn't see a son of House Sujo. He doesn't see a General. He sees a knife the galaxy picked from the drawer and sharpened on purpose.

Pantora won't remember him as an exile. It will remember the shape of his shadow. It has to. Because if it doesn't, then all of this, every scar, every held sentence, every body he dropped from a distance, was never his at all.

It may not have been his, he knows that deep down. But it will be his legacy all the same.