

-SHADOW OF WAR-

SINS OF THE DOMINION
NICO VIIKILÄ

Hey, reader!

Thank you first of all for buying my book. And secondly thank you for taking the time off your day to read it.

I've been writing small stories and making up fantasy worlds since I was little, but they never really amounted to anything. Just recently I've got the burn to write again and build a universe of my liking.

This is hopefully the beginning of something grand and something you're as passionate about as I am.

Thank you once again, and welcome to the galaxy.

Nico Viikilä

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Kannen suunnittelu: Nico Viikilä

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PROLOGUE

DEATH OF AN EMPEROR

For over two centuries, the Celestial Dominion ruled the galaxy, a vast empire held together by the iron grip of noble houses and their god-like war machines—the Iron Knights. Yet, all empires fall. When Emperor Hadrian V is assassinated without an heir, the galaxy fractures. The great houses, bound by loyalty and rivalry, now turn on each other in a war of succession.

Amid the chaos, Cipher Varos, a disgraced noble Iron Knight pilot, and Selene Vornheim, a former rebel leader betrayed by her own, find themselves drawn into a conflict far greater than mere politics. As factions clash for control, unseen forces move in the shadows, their motives unknown, their influence undeniable.

As Cipher and Selene form an uneasy alliance, they navigate a war of betrayals, shifting loyalties, and unexpected horrors. The fate of the galaxy hangs in the balance, and their choices will determine whether it survives the coming darkness—or is consumed by it.

The sky over Imperius Prime burned. Flames licked at the spires of the Imperial Citadel, once the heart of the Celestial Dominion. Smoke billowed into the void, choking the stars above. The great banners of House

Tiberion, golden suns against crimson fields, lay tattered and torn across the marble steps. The city—once a beacon of civilization—was now a battlefield.

Emperor Hadrian V was dead.

In the shadows of the throne room, Lord Regent Kael Ordos stood over the emperor's lifeless body, his armor stained with blood. The once-mighty ruler lay sprawled across the onyx floor, his eyes vacant, his chest still leaking the final warmth of his existence. Around him, the shattered remains of the royal guard bore silent witness to his murder.

Ordos sheathed his blade, his eyes reflecting the flames that danced across the shattered throne room. A slow, sinister smile curled at his lips, the weight of destiny settling on his shoulders. He turned to face the assembled nobles, their faces pale, eyes wide with shock and fear.

"It begins," he declared, his voice frigid, echoing off the ancient stone walls. "The age of weakness dies with him. A new Dominion will rise from the ashes."

But in the shadows beyond the light, unseen eyes watched with calculating intent. Whispers flickered through the darkness, ancient and faint, echoing through the void. And as Ordos turned his back on the corpse of the last emperor, the first pieces of a far greater game were set into motion.

CHAPTER ONE

EMBERS OF WAR

The world of Voss-Kael had always been a place of violence. Cipher Varos stood atop the wreckage of a fallen Iron Knight, his breath heavy in his ears. The frigid wind howled, carrying with it the faint cries of the dying and the mournful wails of ghosts unseen. It was as if the land itself wept for the dead, its soil stained with the blood of those who fought for causes long forgotten.

He closed his eyes, feeling the weight of the past pressing down on him, a crushing burden he could never escape. Images flashed before him—faces of comrades lost, friends turned enemies, the vacant eyes of those he could not save. Their voices echoed in his mind, accusing, pleading, haunting.

The shadows around him twisted, taking on distorted shapes at the edge of his vision, vanishing when he turned to face them. He shook his head, forcing the phantoms back, burying the ghosts in the depths of his mind. But they remained, lingering just beyond sight, waiting to reclaim him. Smoke coiled from the ruined machine beneath his feet, its once-proud form reduced to scrap and molten slag. Around him, the battlefield stretched into the horizon—hundreds of broken war machines, fallen soldiers, and the last echoes of gunfire fading into the winds.

The wreckage beneath him groaned as the ground shook from faint artillery. Cipher glanced down at Erebus, his Iron Knight, its obsidian plating scorched but intact. It stood proud amidst the wreckage, its armor pockmarked with battle scars, a testament to the brutal skirmish they had just survived.

He took a deep breath, the acrid smell of smoke stinging his nostrils, and prepared to descend when his comms crackled to life.

A voice spoke over his comms, faint but unmistakable. "Cipher Varos. If you're listening, I need your help."

Cipher's blood ran frigid. Selene Vornheim.

He should leave. He should let the past die. But even as his mind screamed to run, his heart betrayed him. Cipher hesitated only a moment before climbing into Erebus's cockpit, the neural link flaring to life as the machine recognized its pilot. With a deep exhale, he engaged the ignition sequence and launched into the night, following the coordinates Selene had sent.

The past was not done with him yet.

And as Erebus disappeared into the smoke-choked horizon, figures watched from the shadows, unseen and waiting. The war was far from over, and Cipher Varos had just stepped back onto the board.

The past had found him. And this time, there would be no running.

CHAPTER TWO

A DISTANT BEACON

Selene Vornheim stood alone on the windswept ridge, her cloak whipping around her in the frigid night air. Her eyes scanned the broken horizon, shadows dancing across the ruins below, the wind whispering through the shattered stone. The fortress lay silent, a graveyard of ambitions and dreams, forgotten by all but the ghosts who lingered.

The air was heavy, carrying with it the scent of decay and echoes of despair. She could almost hear them—the whispers of those who once walked these halls, their voices twisted by time and loss. They spoke of betrayal, of shattered oaths and lost causes, of hope turned to ash.

A shiver ran down her spine, a chill that seeped into her bones. She closed her eyes, exhaling slowly, steadying herself against the weight of the past. This was not her burden to carry. She was here for one reason only—to fight, to survive. To end what she had come here to do, expose the Dominion.

But even as she steeled her resolve, she could feel the eyes watching her from the darkness, their gaze heavy and frigid. The fortress was not void. And whatever remained within its walls was waiting.

The roar of thrusters shattered the silence. Selene turned, her heart pounding as she watched Erebus descend, its form emerging from the smoke-choked sky, landing with a thunderous crash on the plateau below.

Cipher's Iron Knight stood ominous, a dark shadow against the flickering sky. The cockpit opened with a hiss, and Cipher stepped out, his eyes locking onto hers.

For a long moment, neither spoke. The wind howled between them, carrying with it the ghosts of the past.

"You came," Selene said, her voice steady despite the knot in her chest.

Cipher's expression was unreadable. "I shouldn't have."

Selene's gaze hardened. "But you did."

He looked away, his shoulders tense. "What do you want, Selene?"

She hesitated, her defenses wavering. "I need your help."

Cipher's jaw clenched. "You've got a lot of nerve."

"I don't have a choice." Her eyes softened. "And neither do you."

Cipher's eyes narrowed, his fists clenching. "I walked away from this war. From you."

Selene stepped closer, her voice frigid. "Then walk away again. But know this—the Dominion won't let you escape. Not this time."

A bitter laugh escaped him. "They already took everything. There's nothing left to lose."

Selene's expression softened. "There's always something left to lose."

Cipher's gaze fell, the weight of her words settling on him. Silence hung between them, heavy and unspoken.

He looked at her, his eyes weary. "What's the mission?"

Selene allowed herself a small, relieved smile. "I'll explain inside."

They moved toward the fortress, their footsteps echoing against the stone. The wind howled as the shadows watched, whispering through the ruins, waiting for the past to repeat itself.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DESCENT

Selene knelt beside the hidden panel, tapping a sequence into the battered console. A faint hum reverberated through the chamber, accompanied by the flicker of half-broken lights sputtering to life. The console's holographic interface glowed a pale blue, illuminating her features with spectral light.

Cipher took a step closer, his gaze shifting warily around the darkened room. "Are you sure this place is secure?"

"As secure as anything can be on this planet," Selene murmured. The interface chirped in protest at her input, and she tried another sequence. "This fortress used to be a testing ground. They built these walls to withstand orbital bombardment. We'll have some privacy while we figure out our next move."

The hologram flickered, displaying a labyrinthine layout of the fortress, sprawling far deeper underground than Cipher expected. Corridors twisted into dead ends, chambers marked with Dominion insignias, and a massive sealed gate lay at the center of it all.

Selene's eyes narrowed, her fingers dancing over the controls. "This is what I needed you for."

Cipher's jaw tightened. "You want to go down there?"

"Not want to. Need to." Her eyes met his, cold and resolute. "The Dominion buried something here. Something they didn't want anyone to find. If we're going to survive what's coming, we need to know what it is."

Cipher hesitated, the weight of her words settling heavily on him. “And you think it’s worth risking our lives for?”

“I think we don’t have a choice.”

The room shuddered, dust raining from the ceiling as the fortress groaned. The ancient walls seemed to breathe, whispering through the stone.

Cipher’s voice was frigid. “Then let’s get this over with.”

CHAPTER FOUR
SHADOWS IN THE DEEP

They moved deeper into the fortress, their flashlights slicing through the dark. The walls were scarred, claw marks gouged into the stone, twisted symbols etched into the metal. The air was stale, heavy, carrying the faint scent of decay.

The shadows seemed to move, shifting at the edge of their vision, twisting along the walls before melting back into the darkness. An unnatural coldness seeped into their bones, and the silence was suffocating.

Selene's voice was a whisper. "Do you feel that?"

Cipher's eyes scanned the corridor, his senses straining. "Yeah... we're not alone."

A faint echo reverberated through the passage, faint and distorted. It sounded like a voice, but wrong, twisted, as if it were being dragged through the void.

Selene's grip tightened on her weapon. "It's coming from below."

They continued, the air growing colder, the shadows darker. The walls were covered in twisted writing, scrawled in a language Cipher didn't recognize. It looked ancient, primitive, desperate.

Selene's flashlight flickered, the beam sputtering before steadying. "The power down here is unstable and something is draining my battery. If the power fails, we'll be blind."

Cipher's jaw clenched. "Then we don't stop moving."

They pressed on, descending deeper into the abyss. The whispers grew louder, more distinct. Voices speaking in unison, chanting words that echoed through the stone. The air grew colder, heavy with malice.

Cipher's heart pounded, his pulse racing. "I don't like this."

Selene's eyes were bleak. "We're close. Whatever they were hiding... it's right below us."

They reached a massive door, its surface scarred, twisted, black veins crawling across the metal. The whispers were loud here, echoing through the corridor, resonating through their bones.

Selene's voice was unaffectionate, resolute. "This is it."

Cipher's eyes narrowed. "Then let's open it."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GATEWAY

The massive door loomed before them, its surface scarred and twisted, black veins crawling across the metal. The whispers grew louder, echoing through the corridor, resonating through their bones, filling the air with a bitter, void dread.

Selene approached the door, her fingers trembling as she touched the console. "This isn't just a gate. It's a seal."

Cipher's jaw tightened. "A seal for what?"

Her eyes darkened. "Something the Dominion was afraid of."

Cipher glanced at the twisted writing scrawled across the walls. "Then why are we opening it?"

Selene's gaze was resolute. "Because it's already awake."

She keyed in the code. The door shuddered, the metal groaning as ancient mechanisms ground to life. A freezing cold rushed through the corridor, carrying with it the scent of decay and the echoes of faint screams.

The seal cracked, darkness spilling through the widening gap. It was alive, writhing, twisting, coiling like smoke.

Cipher took a step back, his heart racing. "What is that?"

Selene's voice was void. "The reason no one left this place alive."

FOR CENTURIES, THE CELESTIAL DOMINION RULED THE GALAXY WITH AN IRON FIST, ITS POWER ANCHORED BY THE FEARSOME IRON KNIGHTS—COLOSSAL WAR MACHINES PILOTED BY NOBLE BLOOD. BUT WHEN EMPEROR HADRIAN V IS ASSASSINATED WITHOUT AN HEIR, THE GALAXY FRACTURES, PLUNGING INTO CHAOS AS RIVAL HOUSES VIE FOR THE THRONE.

AMID THE TURMOIL, CIPHER VAROS, A DISGRACED IRON KNIGHT PILOT HAUNTED BY BETRAYAL, AND SELENE VORNHEIM, A FORMER REBEL LEADER WITH NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE, FIND THEMSELVES DRAWN TOGETHER BY FATE. UNITED BY NECESSITY, THEY FORM AN UNEASY ALLIANCE, NAVIGATING A GALAXY SPIRALING INTO WAR, WHERE POLITICAL INTRIGUE AND SHIFTING LOYALTIES THREATEN TO CONSUME THEM.

YET, IN THE SHADOWS OF A COLLAPSING EMPIRE, A FAR GREATER THREAT STIRS. WHISPERS ECHO FROM THE VOID, SHADOWS TWIST AND WRITHE, AND ANCIENT DARKNESS AWAKENS. THE SHROUDED ONE—A PRIMORDIAL ENTITY OF UNIMAGINABLE POWER—IS SPREADING ITS INFLUENCE, CORRUPTING MINDS, TWISTING FLESH, AND CONSUMING ENTIRE WORLDS.

DESPERATE FOR ANSWERS, CIPHER AND SELENE JOURNEY TO FORBIDDEN BLACKSITES, CONFRONT THE HORRORS OF TWISTED DOMINION EXPERIMENTS, AND ENTER THE NIHILUS EXPANSE—A PLACE WHERE REALITY BENDS, SHADOWS LIVE, AND NIGHTMARES COME ALIVE. GUIDED BY CRYPTIC PROPHECIES FROM AN ANCIENT VEILBORN, THEY MUST PIECE TOGETHER THE MYSTERY OF THE SHROUDED ONE BEFORE ITS TENDRILS ENGULF THE GALAXY.

BUT EVEN AS THEY FIGHT TO SURVIVE, THEY FACE IMPOSSIBLE CHOICES—LOYALTY OR FREEDOM, VENGEANCE OR REDEMPTION, SACRIFICE OR SURVIVAL. AND IN THE DARKNESS, THE SHROUDED ONE WATCHES, EVER VIGILANT, ALWAYS WAITING.

WITH ALLIES AS BROKEN AS THE GALAXY THEY HOPE TO SAVE, AND ENEMIES LURKING IN EVERY SHADOW, CIPHER AND SELENE MUST CONFRONT THEIR PAST SINS TO PROTECT THE FUTURE. BECAUSE IF THEY FAIL... ALL LIGHT WILL FALL TO DARKNESS.

IN A GALAXY WHERE POWER IS EVERYTHING AND HOPE IS A FORGOTTEN WHISPER, HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO TO DEFY FATE.

SINS OF THE DOMINION—AN EPIC SAGA OF WAR, BETRAYAL, ANCIENT HORRORS, AND THE STRUGGLE TO RECLAIM HUMANITY.

**THE DARKNESS IS COMING
THE FIGHT FOR THE GALAXY BEGINS**

