



-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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PROLOGUE

DEATH OF AN EMPEROR

For over two hundred years, the Celestial Dominion held sway over the galaxy—a sprawling empire maintained by the unyielding strength of noble houses and their near-divine war machines, the Iron Knights. Yet every empire meets its demise. When Emperor Hadrian V is assassinated without leaving an heir, the galaxy shatters. The once-united great houses, intertwined by both loyalty and intense rivalry, now turn against one another in a bitter succession war.

Amid the ensuing chaos, Cipher Varos—a once-respected but now disgraced noble and Iron Knight pilot—and Selene Vornheim—a former rebel leader betrayed by her own people—find themselves irresistibly drawn into a conflict that surpasses simple political squabbles. As various factions battle for control, unseen forces stir in the background, their true motives hidden yet their impact unmistakable.

Together, Cipher and Selene form a reluctant alliance as they maneuver through a labyrinth of betrayal, ever-changing loyalties, and unforeseen terror. The galaxy's fate teeters on the brink, with their decisions poised to either salvage it from the looming darkness or see it swallowed whole.

Above Imperius Prime, the sky burned fiercely. Flames lapped at the spires of the Imperial Citadel—the former heart of the Celestial Dominion—while thick smoke choked the void, obscuring the stars. The majestic

banners of House Tiberion, emblazoned with golden suns set against crimson fields, hung shredded and ragged over the marble steps. The city, once a shining symbol of civilization, had been transformed into a battleground.

Emperor Hadrian V was dead.

In the gloom of the throne room, Lord Regent Kael Ordos loomed over the emperor's lifeless form, his armor stained with blood. The fallen ruler lay sprawled across the dark onyx floor, his eyes lost in emptiness and his chest still leaking the last vestiges of life. Surrounding him, the broken remnants of the royal guard stood as mute witnesses to his assassination.

Ordos lowered his blade, his eyes mirroring the flames flickering across the ruined chamber. A slow, ominous smile played on his lips as the weight of destiny settled upon him. He turned to face the gathered nobles, their faces drained of color, eyes wide with shock and terror.

"It begins," he announced, his voice cold and echoing off the ancient stone walls. "The era of weakness ends with him. From these ashes, a new Dominion will arise."

Yet, in the darkness beyond the light, unseen eyes observed with calculating precision. Faint, ancient whispers slithered through the shadows, resonating in the void. As Ordos turned away from the body of the last emperor, the first moves of a far grander game were already underway.

CHAPTER ONE

EMBERS OF WAR

The world of Voss-Kael had always thrived on violence. Cipher Varos stood amidst the wreckage of a fallen Iron Knight, his heavy breaths mingling with the howling, frigid wind that carried the faint cries of the dying and the sorrowful laments of unseen specters. It was as if the land itself mourned, its soil forever tainted by the blood of warriors who had fought for long-forgotten causes.

Closing his eyes, he felt the crushing weight of history bearing down on him—a relentless burden from which there was no escape. Faces of lost comrades, friends turned foes, and the vacant stares of those he couldn't save flashed through his mind. Their voices, accusatory and pleading, echoed relentlessly within him.

Around him, shadows twisted into distorted shapes at the edge of his vision, only to vanish when he tried to confront them. With a determined shake of his head, he forced the eerie visions back, attempting to bury these ghosts deep within his mind—yet still, they lingered on the periphery, waiting to reclaim him. Beneath his feet, smoke spiraled from the ruined machine, its once-proud form now nothing more than scrap and molten slag. The battlefield stretched endlessly on all sides—hundreds of broken war machines, fallen soldiers, and the last hints of gunfire dissolved into the wind.

The wreckage groaned as the ground trembled under the distant impact of artillery. Cipher glanced down at his Iron Knight, Erebus—its obsidian plating scorched yet intact. Standing resolute amid the devastation, its armor was pockmarked with the scars of battle, a silent testimony to the brutal skirmish they had just survived.

Taking a deep, steadying breath as the harsh, acrid smell of smoke burned his nostrils, he prepared to descend when his comms suddenly crackled to life. A faint but unmistakable voice spoke, “Cipher Varos. If you’re listening, I need your help.”

In that instant, his blood turned cold. Selene Vornheim.

He knew he should walk away, let the past lay dead. But as his mind screamed to run, his heart betrayed him. After a brief moment’s hesitation, he climbed into Erebus’s cockpit, where the neural link sparked to life, recognizing its pilot. With a deep exhalation, he activated the ignition sequence and soared into the night, following the coordinates Selene had sent.

The past was far from finished with him.

As Erebus dissolved into the smoke-choked horizon, unseen figures watched from the shadows, silently waiting. The war was not over, and Cipher Varos had just stepped back onto the board. The past had caught up with him—and this time, there would be no running.

Selene Vornheim stood alone on a windswept ridge, her cloak flapping wildly in the icy night air. Her eyes swept across the fractured horizon as shadows danced over the ruins below, and the wind whispered secrets through shattered stone. The fortress lay silent—a graveyard of shattered ambitions and forgotten dreams, remembered only by the lingering spirits.

The air was thick with the smell of decay and echoes of despair. She could almost hear the murmurs of those who once roamed these halls—their

voices distorted by time and loss, recounting betrayal, broken oaths, and hope reduced to ash.

A shiver raced down her spine, an icy chill seeping into her very bones. Closing her eyes, she exhaled slowly, steadying herself against the heaviness of the past. This was not a burden she was meant to carry. She had come for a single purpose—to fight, to survive, and to bring down the Dominion.

Yet as she steeled her resolve, she couldn't shake the sensation of unseen eyes watching her from the darkness, their cold gaze unyielding. The fortress was not empty; whatever lay within its walls was waiting.

The roar of thrusters shattered the silence as Selene turned to see Erebus descending from a smoke-laden sky, its landing marked by a thunderous crash on the plateau. Cipher's Iron Knight had arrived, a dark silhouette against the flickering sky. The cockpit hissed open, and Cipher emerged, his eyes immediately locking with hers.

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

"You came," Selene stated, her voice steady yet conflicted.

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

"But you did," Selene replied, her gaze hardening.

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

After a brief pause, her voice softened, "I need your help."

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

"I don't have a choice," she admitted, her eyes softening. "And neither do you."

His eyes narrowed, fists clenching as he said, "I walked away from this war. From you."

Stepping closer, Selene's tone turned cold. "Then walk away again. But know this—the Dominion isn't going to let you escape this time."

A bitter laugh escaped him. "They already took everything. I have nothing left to lose."

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

Silence enveloped them as her words sank in. Finally, with weariness in his eyes, he asked, "What's the mission?"

A small, relieved smile touched her lips. "I'll explain inside."

Together, they moved toward the fortress, their footsteps echoing against the ancient stone as the wind howled and unseen shadows whispered, hinting at a past that was doomed to repeat.

Inside the fortress, Selene knelt beside a concealed panel and tapped a sequence into the battered console. A soft hum filled the chamber while half-flickering lights sputtered to life. The holographic interface glowed pale blue, casting an eerie light over her determined features.

Cipher stepped closer, his eyes scanning the dim room warily. "Are you sure this place is secure?"

"As secure as anything on this planet can be," Selene replied quietly. The interface responded with a series of chirps as she input another sequence. "This fortress was once a testing ground. They built these walls to withstand orbital bombardments. We'll have some privacy while we plan our next move."

The hologram flickered, revealing a labyrinthine map of the fortress that stretched far underground—twisting corridors, dead-end chambers marked with Dominion insignias, and a massive sealed gate at its heart.

With her eyes narrowing and fingers flying over the controls, Selene continued, "This is why I needed you."

Cipher's jaw tightened as he asked, "You want to go down there?"

"Not want to—need to," she corrected, her gaze cold and resolute. "The Dominion buried something here. Something they never wanted anyone to find. If we're going to survive what's coming, we have to know what it is."

Cipher hesitated, the gravity of her words settling over him. "And you really think it's worth risking our lives for?"

"I think we have no choice," she asserted.

The room shuddered as dust tumbled from the ceiling, and the ancient walls groaned as if they were alive, whispering through the stone.

Cipher's voice turned icy, "Then let's get this over with."

They pressed deeper into the fortress, their flashlights carving narrow paths through the darkness. The walls bore the scars of past battles—claw marks gouged into stone, twisted symbols etched into metal—and the heavy scent of decay filled the stagnant air.

The shadows seemed to shift, contorting along the walls before melting back into darkness. An unnatural chill seeped into their bones, and the silence was almost oppressive.

In a barely audible whisper, Selene asked, "Do you feel that?"

Cipher's eyes darted around the corridor as he answered, "Yeah... we're not alone."

A faint, distorted echo reverberated down the passage, sounding like a voice dragged through some dark void, twisted beyond recognition.

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

They continued onward, the air growing colder and the darkness deeper. The walls were now covered in strange, twisted inscriptions in a language

Cipher did not recognize—a script that seemed both ancient and desperate.

Selene's flashlight flickered, sputtering before it steadied once more. "The power here is unstable, and it's draining my battery. If it fails, we'll be left in darkness."

Cipher's jaw set firmly. "Then we keep moving."

Deeper they ventured, the whispers growing louder and more distinct—a chorus of voices chanting in unison, their words echoing ominously through the stone. The air turned even colder, suffused with malice.

Cipher's heart pounded painfully. "I don't like this."

Selene's eyes were bleak as she replied, "We're close. Whatever they hid is right down here."

They finally reached a colossal door, its surface scarred and twisted with black veins crawling across the metal. Here, the whispers reached a fever pitch, reverberating through the corridor and filling their bones with a bitter dread.

"This is it," Selene stated with quiet determination.

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

Before them, the massive door loomed—a distorted, scarred barrier with black veins pulsing along its surface. The whispers grew louder, resounding through the passageway with a void-like dread.

Approaching the door, Selene's trembling fingers touched the console. "This isn't just a gate—it's a seal."

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

Her eyes darkened as she replied, "For something the Dominion was terrified of."

Cipher's gaze shifted to the twisted writing on the walls. "Then why are we opening it?"

Her resolve remained unshaken. "Because it's already awake."

With deliberate keystrokes, she entered the code. The door shuddered as ancient mechanisms groaned into life, and a blast of frigid air surged through the corridor—a gust laced with decay and the echo of anguished screams.

The seal cracked open, and darkness spilled through the widening crevice, coiling and twisting like living smoke.

Cipher stepped back, his heart hammering in his chest. "What is that?"

Selene's voice came out void and flat, "The reason no one ever made it out of here alive."

CHAPTER TWO

RUINS OF THE PAST

The darkness writhed like living smoke as it squeezed through the gap, sliding into the corridor with a sickly, pulsing glow. It felt alive—a tangible, coiling shadow that moved with intent while murmurs grew into a dissonant chorus echoing off stone walls, chanting in unison and vibrating the very air.

Cipher stepped back, heart pounding in his ears. “Seal it! Now!” he yelled.

Selene’s fingers flew over the console, her face drained of color. “I can’t—it’s bypassing our controls.”

The darkness surged ahead, twisting along the walls and creeping across the floor. The temperature dropped; the air grew heavy and suffocating. Shadows began to form into distorted faces, mouths agape in silent screams.

In a strained whisper, Selene admitted, “It’s... feeding.”

Cipher’s fists clenched. “Feeding on what?”

Selene’s eyes were empty. “Everything.”

The shadows moved like liquid, slithering along the walls and ceiling and curling ever closer to them. Those ghostly faces seemed intent on watching, their vacant eyes and silent screams an eerie invitation.

“We need to move. Now,” Cipher said, his tone as cold as the air around them.

They turned and ran, the darkness in pursuit, its whispers growing louder, echoing down the stone corridors. "Join us... become one... ascend..." the disembodied voices chanted.

Selene's pulse raced. "It's inside our heads... it's speaking to us," she gasped.

"Then don't listen," Cipher replied sharply.

They fled through twisting corridors, chased by shadows that slithered like living rivers, their clawed tendrils reaching out. The faces in the gloom watched with eerie malice, their silent screams a constant reminder of the terror behind them.

The fortress groaned as its walls trembled, stone cracking under the pressure of the darkness as it oozed through every gap. The structure itself seemed to suffocate beneath the heavy, cold air.

"Keep moving. Don't look back," Cipher commanded, though the darkness still lurked behind them with relentless whispers: "Join us... ascend... become one..."

Their footsteps echoed as they raced on, the shadowy figures twisting along every surface. Cipher's ragged breaths filled the air. "This place... it's alive."

Selene's response was steady despite her fear. "It's not the fortress—it's something inside of it, feeding on our terror."

The chanting voices grew louder, echoing down the corridors with mocking intensity. "Join us... ascend... become one..."

Cipher's jaw stiffened. "We have to find a way out before it consumes us."

Then Selene's flashlight flickered and sputtered out. Darkness swallowed them as she cursed and smacked the flashlight against her palm, but nothing spurred it back to life.

"Stay close. Don't lose me," Cipher said calmly but with an edge of urgency.

They moved forward, the darkness twisting around them as though alive—breathing, whispering, its contorted faces shifting hungrily.

"It's... changing the walls. The corridors are shifting," Selene noted in a strained whisper.

Cipher's eyes narrowed. "It's trying to trap us."

Rounding a corner, they came to a dead end. The shadows surged forward, coiling like serpents with clawed fingers outstretched.

"We're not dying here," Cipher vowed. He slammed his shoulder against the wall, cracking the stones. Selene joined him, pounding the wall until a narrow passage revealed itself.

"Move!" Cipher shouted, and they plunged into the passageway as the darkness screamed behind them, its whispers still chanting: "Join us... become one... ascend..."

The passage wound deeper into the fortress, walls scarred and crumbling as the temperature fell and malice filled the air. The darkness followed relentlessly while Selene's trembling voice broke through the oppressive silence, "It's never going to stop, is it?"

Cipher's gaze burned with fierce determination. "No—it won't stop until we're dead."

They dashed on, pursued by the relentless shadows and the chanting voices that seemed to emanate from the very walls. Cipher admitted between ragged breaths, "We can't keep running. It's toying with us."

Then Selene's eyes hardened with resolve, "Then we make a stand."

"How do you fight shadows?" Cipher asked bitterly.

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



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