

Book IV

SOLAR WARS

THE DAWN OF TWO SUNS

A long time ago, in unmeasurable eons of time... not in some distant galaxy, far, far away... but right here, in our own cosmic backyard... in our solar system... there was no earth!

Chapter 10

The Secret Reward



Kael'Ryn
MERCURY



Princess Lysara
VENUS



General
Vaelor Krynn
MARS



VX-17 (Vex)
Combat-Droid
JUPITER



The
Shallit'Biru



Xal'Zirath
MERCURY

DEE DOWNING

Chapter 10: The Secret Reward

Vaelor Krynn's battleship remained cloaked in the darkness of Mer'Kuri's orbit, unseen by the planet's defenses. On the ground, the estate of Alaric and Seraphina stood quiet under the pale light of the Ra.

That silence shattered when Krynn and his Martian soldiers arrived uninvited; their crimson armor gleaming like blood in the daylight.

Alaric, Seraphina, and their household stood tensely at the entrance of the estate, watching as the Martians advanced. The presence of so many armed warriors was too reminiscent of past violence.

Xal and Kael, newly returned from their mission, stepped forward to meet the unwelcome guests. Krynn led the way, his dark eyes scanning the estate as if expecting to find something... or someone... hidden in plain sight.

Beside him, the combat-droid **VX-17 (Vex)** moved with an unnatural grace; his humanoid form eerily lifelike. Though his face bore no expressions, his movements spoke volumes, betraying a silent but deliberate intent

"You're harboring Princess Lysara," Krynn declared without preamble. His voice was measured but sharp, his posture was one of absolute authority. *"I want her."*

Xal scoffed, stepping forward aggressively. *"She's not here! She's on her way back to Venus!"*

Krynn's gaze didn't waver. *"You're lying."* He tapped the side of his wrist, where a small holographic display flickered to life. *"My tracker says otherwise."*

Xal bristled at the accusation. *"Your tracker is wrong."* His fists clenched at his sides. *"We risked our lives to get her off Xyphos, and you have the audacity to accuse us of keeping her? If you want a fight, Martian, I'll be more than happy to give you one."*

Kael placed a steady hand on his twin's shoulder. *"Xal."* His voice was calm, but firm. Xal hesitated but didn't back down, his glare locked onto Krynn's.

Kael turned to Krynn and spoke evenly. *"The last time we saw the princess, we were leaving the Solari facility where she was waiting to return home. A Solari convoy was taking her back to Venus. That's the truth."*

Krynn didn't acknowledge Kael's words. He simply continued his scan of the estate, his eyes sharp with certainty.

Xal caught the movement of Krynn's lips as he whispered to himself, *"She's here. I know she's here."*

That was all Xal needed.

Without hesitation, he lunged at Krynn, his body twisting mid-air as he aimed a spinning roundhouse kick at the Martian general's head. Krynn didn't see it coming.

But Vex did.

Out of nowhere, the combat-droid caught Xal's foot in an iron grip. Xal's eyes widened in shock, but before he could react, Vex twisted and threw his leg aside, sending him spinning through the air. Xal landed on his feet, but now his focus had shifted.

Krynn turned, unfazed. His soldiers immediately raised their weapons, prepared to fire.

Krynn lifted a hand. *"Stand down."*

Kael moved as if to attack Vex, but Alaric stopped him with a firm grip. **Seraphina's** voice rang out sharply. *"Xal! Stop!"*

Her words fell on deaf ears.

Xal shot forward, his fists lashing out at Vex in a flurry of rapid strikes. Vex dodged them effortlessly, his movements economical and efficient, like a machine calculating the perfect counters. Xal shifted tactics, feinting left before launching a powerful knee strike toward Vex's midsection.

Vex caught the knee with his forearm, barely budging under the force. In an instant, he retaliated, striking Xal's ribs with an open-palm thrust that sent him skidding backward. Xal gritted his teeth and charged again, this time aiming for Vex's joints; seeking weaknesses, exploiting potential vulnerabilities.

He struck at Vex's elbow, attempting to hyperextend it, but the combat-droid twisted at the last second, deflecting the attack and countering with a precision strike to Xal's shoulder.

Xal staggered, rolling with the impact, but he refused to yield. He launched himself at Vex again, unleashing a series of acrobatic maneuvers meant to overwhelm his opponent.

Vex met him with calculated precision, parrying each attack with brutal efficiency. Every strike Xal threw was absorbed, redirected, or countered before it could fully land.

Then, without warning, Vex abruptly stopped fighting.

Xal, mid-strike, felt the shift but couldn't halt his momentum in time. He threw a final punch, only for Vex to catch his fist effortlessly. The combat-droid did not retaliate.

He simply held Xal's hand in place, his grip firm but not crushing. Vex released Xal's hand and walked over to General Krynn.

A silence fell over the estate as everyone watched, waiting for what would happen next.

Vex finally spoke. *"The estate family is telling the truth."*

Krynn frowned. *"What makes you think that?"*

Vex calmly walked up to Xal. *"May I?"*

Xal, still breathing hard from the fight, hesitated before nodding. Vex reached out and carefully removed a necklace from around Xal's neck.

Xal's eyes widened in realization. He looked dumbfounded.

Vex turned to Krynn and held up the necklace. *"The signal you're tracking is coming from this."*

Krynn took a closer look. His expression darkened.

Kael crossed his arms. *"And probably this bracelet, too."* He lifted his arm to show Krynn his wrist.

Krynn exhaled sharply. *"I gave them to her."* His voice was quieter now, thoughtful. *"She wasn't aware that they could be used to track her."*

The twins explained further.

“Princess Lysara wasn’t being disrespectful by giving us the gifts you gave her. She was simply showing her appreciation after we rescued her from Xyphos. These trinkets were all she had in her possession. So in gratitude, she gifted them to us after we got her safely to the Solari command center.”

Krynn understood. *“You may keep them.”* He disconnected the tracker. *“Now I have no idea where she is.”*

Seraphina stepped forward. *“None of your men ever question why you’re so hell-bent on finding Princess Lysara?”*

A bit surprised, **Krynn** looked at her. *“They suspect that I have some underlying sinister motive... like trying to steal the credit for rescuing her to put Venus in my debt.”*

Seraphina smiled knowingly.

“For the past three decades, I’ve had the same Martian diplomat... from an all-Martian male society... romantically pursuing me. I know that look. You’re in love with Princess Lysara.”

Krynn shrank in humility.

Seraphina tilted her head. *“Does she share your sentiment?”*

Krynn, with his head still half-bowed, replied, *“Yes... She does... and no one knows. After her kidnapping, I was so lost... so worried.”*

He turned away, ashamed that he had been outed.

Seraphina’s voice was gentle. *“Don’t worry... your secret will remain that way.”*

Krynn stopped, tilted his head slightly backward... then gestured ‘OK.’

Vex turned to Xal. *“Your fighting technique is impressive. As a battle-droid, I have never met your equal. But you can stand some improvements.”*

Xal smirked. *“Just wait ‘til you fight Kael.”*

Vex continued, *"If you like, I can train with the two of you to help improve your fighting skills. By the time we're done, even I might have trouble defeating you."*

The twins exchanged a glance, then nodded. *"We accept."*

"Time to go, Vex," **Krynn** said in passing.

Vex retorted, *"Permission to stay and train with the twins?"*

Krynn thought about it briefly, then nodded.

"OK... I have some business nearby at the space station, Gammaron. We'll be back to pick you up when you summon. Consider it my apology for this uninvited intrusion... and another gift... as well as my thanks for rescuing Princess Lysara."

Krynn and his men disappeared the same way they came.

Seraphina turned to Alaric, a smile playing on her lips. *"It looks like Kael and Xal found a new friend. Who knew?"*

Alaric raised an eyebrow, a knowing look on his face. *"The Ra told me things will work out... I think you found a new Martian friend too."*

Seraphina laughed softly. *"Well, he's nothing like 'Dain Varros'... You won't find yourself competing for my hand with **him**."*

Alaric snorted, his gaze lingering on Krynn as he walked away with his men. *"Yeah... He's got the serious **hots** for the princess."*

Seraphina looked at him in surprise. *"You know?"*

Alaric met her gaze, his voice laced with amusement. *"Of course I know. He looks at her the exact same way that Varros looks at you."*

Seraphina chuckled, shaking her head. *"I suppose that makes sense."*

Kael and Xal run over.

Xal: *Vex has offered to stay and help us train. Can he?... Oh please... please... Can he?"*

Alaric: *"Sure!... I'll let the Solari know that your visit is extended."*

Kael: *"Thanks dad!"*

They all head back into the mansion.