

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 12

The Final Mission, Part 2



Kael'Ryn
MERCURY



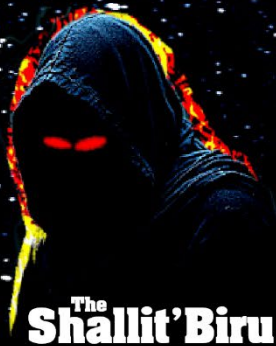
Princess Lysara
VENUS



General Vaelor Krynn
MARS



VX-17 (Vex)
Combat-Droid
JUPITER



The Shallit'Biru



Xal'Zirath
MERCURY

DEE DOWNING

Chapter 12: The Final Mission, Part 2

While scanning the moon's surface, Kael picks up a faint, looping distress signal. He adjusted the scanner's settings, narrowing the frequency range to isolate the distress signal. The faint transmission repeated in a slow, looping pattern... just enough to be noticed if you were looking for it.

Xal peered over his shoulder. *"That's a Solari signature. Old, but still active."* **Kael** nodded. *"It matches a missing patrol vessel. A small crew...last seen near this sector."*

They continued through the moon's dense forest, forcing their way through the tangled foliage. As they followed the signal's source, a clearing emerged; a wreckage site, charred and broken. The scattered remains of the Solari vessel lay half-buried in the undergrowth, twisted metal and scorched hull plating strewn about.

Xal leapt down first, boots crunching over blackened debris. *"This wasn't just a crash. There was a fight here."*

Kael followed, scanning the scene. *"Solari-Eclipse engagement. Look at the burn patterns... energy weapons, precise strikes. The Solari put up a fight, but..."* His voice trailed off as he spotted something among the wreckage. A body.

The fallen Solari warrior lay on his side, armor melted into his skin. His hand... what remained of it... clutched something tightly against his chest. Kael knelt beside him.

"Looks like he was hiding something," **Xal** observed, stepping closer.

Carefully, Kael pried open the soldier's charred fingers. The brittle remains crumbled away, turning to dust in his hands. And there, nestled in the warrior's grip, was a small, gleaming shard...

A crystal of Ra.

Kael's breath hitched. *"By the Light..."*

Xal took an uneasy step back. *"That's no ordinary crystal. This thing can channel Ra energy. In the right hands... it's a weapon."*

Kael studied the crystal, feeling the hum of its contained power even without activating it. *"A lethal one."*

Xal exhaled sharply. *"Question is... Why did he have it? And why was he hiding it?"*

Kael glanced around, his senses now on high alert. *"The battle had left no survivors. No bodies... except this one. The Eclipse wouldn't have left a crystal of Ra behind unless..."*

Kael turned sharply. *"We're not alone."*

Xal's grip tightened around his weapon. The trees beyond the wreckage rustled... something was out there, watching.

And waiting.

Kael and Xal shifted into defensive stances, eyes scanning the dense forest. The shadows twisted under the glow of a nearby star, but the underbrush beyond the wreckage remained still. Too still.

Kael's voice was low. *"Whoever's out there... they're waiting for us to make a move."*

Xal's grip on his weapon tightened. *"Or they're deciding if we're worth the trouble."*

A faint rustle. A shift in the darkness. Then... movement.

A figure darted between the trees, swift and silent. Then another. And another.

Kael's jaw clenched. *"Flanking positions."*

The Eclipse.

He caught only glimpses... dark armor, lean frames, the faint shimmer of Ra-energy woven into their weapons. Three, maybe four. Not a full squad, but enough to be dangerous. They hadn't attacked yet. That meant they wanted something.

Xal shifted beside him. *"We need to move, Kael. Yesterday!"*

Kael's mind raced. The crystal. That had to be it. The Eclipse wouldn't have left without it. Which meant...

"They don't know it's here," he murmured.

Xal's eyes flickered to the crystal in Kael's palm. *"Then we make sure they never do."*

A voice cut through the silence. Low, smooth, and edged with quiet menace. *"Drop your weapons."*

Kael turned his head slightly. A lone figure stepped forward, parting from the shadows. Unlike the others, he didn't wear the full Eclipse combat gear. His armor was lighter, fitted for speed rather than

brute force. His helmet remained in place, a dark visor concealing his face.

Kael didn't move. *"That's not going to happen."*

The **Eclipse soldier** tilted his head slightly. *"You have something that belongs to us."*

Xal scoffed. *"Funny. Looks like you left it behind."*

A pause. The soldier's posture remained relaxed, but Kael wasn't fooled. Every muscle in the man's frame was coiled, ready to strike.

"I'll ask one more time," the **Eclipse soldier** said. *"Drop your weapons... and hand over the crystal."*

Kael tightened his grip on the crystal of Ra. *"No!"* The Eclipse soldier sighed. *"Unfortunate."* Then the forest erupted into chaos.

The first shot came from the trees... a streak of red Ra-energy aimed straight for Kael's head. He ducked, rolling aside as the blast seared into the wreckage behind him. Xal was already moving, drawing his blades as another soldier lunged from the shadows. Their weapons clashed in a bright arc of energy, sparks flying in the dim light.

Kael didn't hesitate. He flipped the crystal into a pouch on his belt and activated his own weapon; a twin-bladed staff that hummed to life with crackling Ra-energy. He twisted just in time to deflect another incoming strike.

The lead Eclipse soldier pressed forward, his own energy blade flashing in a rapid series of precise strikes. Kael parried, his muscles straining under the force of each blow. This warrior was fast. But not fast enough..

Xal grunted as he drove a knee into his opponent's stomach, sending his opponent sprawling. *"I count four,"* he called over the clash of weapons.

Kael twisted around, catching another attack on his staff. *"That means there's at least one more waiting for an opening."*

A sharp whistle cut through the air. The Eclipse leader flicked his wrist, and the surrounding soldiers disengaged, retreating into the cover of the trees. Kael and Xal didn't lower their guard, their breaths heavy in the sudden silence.

*"Impressive," the **leader** mused. "You fight like Solari."*

Kael smirked, still holding his stance. *"That's because we are."*

A brief pause. Then the **Eclipse soldier** laughed... a low, unsettling sound. *"Then you should know how this ends."*

Xal wiped a smear of blood from his lip. *"Yeah? Enlighten us."*

The leader raised his arm. A sharp blue light blinked on his wrist gauntlet. A beacon.

Kael's stomach tightened. That wasn't a retreat signal. That was a summoning.

The air vibrated. A distant hum grew into a deep, resonating thrum. Kael turned his gaze skyward. A dark shape loomed beyond the tree line... a ship. Eclipse reinforcements.

Xal cursed under his breath. *"This just got worse. I guess we won't be in and out like the wind."*

Kael calculated their odds in an instant. They were skilled, but outnumbered. If that ship landed, they wouldn't last long. *"We need an exit," **Kael** muttered.*

Xal glanced at the wreckage, then in the direction of their shuttle. *"We're not making it back on foot."*

The **Eclipse leader** took a slow step forward. *"Last chance, Solari. The crystal. Or your lives."*

Kael's grip on his staff tightened. He glanced at Xal. His brother gave the smallest nod. No surrender. **Kael** smirked. *"Come take it."*

The Eclipse soldiers charged.

Kael and Xal met them head-on.

To everyone's surprise, the ground trembled beneath them. At first, it was subtle... a distant, rhythmic thumping that pulsed through the soil. Then it grew stronger. Louder. Each impact sent vibrations through Kael's boots.

The fighting stopped.

Both the Solari and the Eclipse hesitated, weapons still raised, but no one made a move. The tension shifted, no longer between them but toward something else. Something coming.

The **Eclipse leader** took a cautious step back. *“What in the Void...?”*

Kael and Xal instinctively moved closer to each other, their eyes locking onto the darkened forest beyond the wreckage. The trees trembled. The shadows deepened. The thumping grew deafening.

Then, a roar... deep, guttural, unlike anything else.

All heads turned to the treetops.

Branches cracked. Something massive stirred above the treetops. Whatever it was, it was big.

Before either side could react, three figures burst from the foliage, running at full speed.

General Krynn. Vex. And...

Kael blinked. *“Lysara?!”*

The Venusian princess, dressed in a fitted combat suit, sprinted ahead of Krynn, her expression tense with determination. Krynn was right beside her; his long coat whipping behind him. Vex’s metallic frame gleamed in the moonlight, his strides calculated, efficient.

They were running straight toward Kael and Xal.

Not stopping. Not slowing.

Kael barely had time to register what was happening before **Krynn** shouted as he passed, *“MOVE!”*

Kael and Xal exchanged bewildered glances... then ran.

Behind them, the roar came again, closer this time, shaking the ground with its sheer force. The Eclipse stood frozen for a fraction of a second too long.

Then the trees snapped apart.

A monstrous silhouette emerged, towering above the treetops; its massive form shrouded in darkness and shifting light.

The Eclipse now had their hands full.