

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 14

The Final Mission, Part 4



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 14: The Final Mission, Part 4

The quintet moved in silence, their figures barely discernible among the towering trunks and dense foliage of the forest. The Eclipse uniforms they had scavenged from the dead at the crash site were stiff with dried blood and the scent of burned fabric, but they served their purpose... keeping them hidden in enemy territory.

The forest was thick with shadows, moonlight barely cutting through the tangled canopy above. Every step was carefully placed, boots pressing into the damp earth, avoiding the brittle underbrush that could give them away.

Kael led the group, his senses heightened, every breath measured. The weight of the Eclipse rifle across his back felt foreign, but necessary. Xal walked beside him, his fingers twitching near his blade's hilt, his mind cycling through the stories they had heard.

The Rezzak. No one had ever seen more than one at a time, and even then, those who had lived through an encounter spoke of them in whispers, as if naming them would summon something from the void.

Behind them, Vex moved with calculated precision, his battle-droid frame making no more sound than the wind through the leaves. His optics flickered, filtering heat signatures, tracking movement beyond human perception. Two more warriors brought up the rear, gripping their stolen weapons with white-knuckled fists, their helmets obscuring all but the tension in their stance.

A heavy fog clung to the underbrush, curling like fingers around the roots of gnarled trees. It smelled of damp rot and something sharper; something wrong. The deeper they went, the more the silence pressed in, thick and unnatural. No insects hummed. No distant creatures rustled in the foliage. The forest was holding its breath.

Then, the sound.

A low, guttural rumble vibrated through the ground beneath them. It wasn't distant. It wasn't coming from the trees. It was close... scary close.

Xal's breath hitched as he turned his head ever so slightly. The sound wasn't a growl; it wasn't a warning. It was rhythmic. Steady. Deep.

Breathing.

His eyes adjusted to the darkness, tracing the outline of something massive, its form curled within the undergrowth. It took his mind a second too long to register what he was looking at. The ridged, armor-plated body, the faint rise and fall of its chest, the way its talons flexed unconsciously as it exhaled.

He was standing next to a sleeping Rezzak.

His every muscle locked into place. He could feel the heat radiating from its massive form. The raw power coiled within its limbs. A single movement... one misstep... and those claws would tear through him before he could even reach for his blade.

Don't move. Don't even breathe.

Xal clenched his jaw, eyes flicking upward to Kael. His brother had frozen mid-step, his expression unreadable beneath his Eclipse helmet, but Xal knew that look. The look of a man calculating a way out of a death trap.

A soft chime sounded in Xal's earpiece... **Vex**, speaking through the secure channel. *"Remain still. Readjusting scans."*

Xal didn't need a scan to tell him what his gut was already screaming.

The others had started noticing it, too. The heavy breathing wasn't coming from just one place.

It was all around them.

Kael's fingers twitched as he slowly tilted his head, his visor sweeping over the clearing. His pulse thundered in his ears as he counted.

"One..."

"Two..."

"Three..."

"Four..."

"Five..."

The trees weren't just casting deep shadows. The shapes between the roots, curled against fallen logs, weren't boulders.

They had wandered straight into a Rezzak den.

A shifting weight pressed the air... one of the creatures exhaled heavily in its sleep, a talon twitching. Xal's throat tightened as he caught the gleam of curved fangs beneath its curled lip. If one woke up, the others would follow.

Kael flicked his fingers in a barely perceptible signal: Retreat. Slow. Controlled.

No one moved.

Because something had changed.

The breathing pattern of one of the Rezzak shifted... no longer deep and steady. It had become shallow.

A pause.

A sniff.

Then...

A low, guttural growl rumbled in the chest of the beast beside Xal.

It was waking up.

A breath. A shift. The Rezzak stirred.

Before anyone could react, **Lysara's** voice cut through their earpieces, barely above a whisper. *"I have a plan."*

Xal's stomach twisted. Whatever it was, it had better work... because they had seconds before the Rezzak woke.

Kael and the others turned their heads slightly, just enough to see her. The faint glow of her visor reflected in the darkness, sharp with determination.

"The outpost is half a mile that way," she murmured, tilting her head toward the east. *"We move twenty paces, then we light this den up with grenades... and then we run like hell."*

Kael inhaled slowly. It was a risk. A massive one. But they had no better option.

Lysara's voice remained calm, steady. *"Leave some of the armor. Make sure they get Eclipse scent."*

Xal swallowed hard. Smart. The Rezzak would wake to an attack that smelled like Eclipse soldiers. If they were lucky, the creatures would redirect their rage toward the outpost.

They crept like hell.

Xal counted each step in his head. *“One... Two... Three...”* His boots barely made a sound against the damp terrain. A single misplaced step, one crunch of leaves, and this plan would turn into a massacre.

“Nine... Ten... Eleven...”

Behind him, Vex moved soundlessly, his processors adjusting to the shifting air currents, tracking every slight movement of the Rezzak behind them. Kael and Lysara matched his pace.

“Seventeen... Eighteen... Nineteen...”

“Twenty.”

They turned as one, dropping to a low crouch. Hands went to belts, fingers unclipped pins.

A heartbeat of stillness.

Then...

Click. Toss.

A series of dull metallic clinks as grenades rolled into the den. They landed among the sleeping beasts, settling into the dirt, nestled between limbs and tails.

Silence stretched thin.

Then...

Detonation.

The night shattered. A wave of fire and force erupted behind them, blasting the air with heat. Trees split, leaves ignited, and the ground trembled beneath the force of the explosion.

A screech... high, raw, and furious... ripped through the forest. The Rezzak were awake.

And they were angry.

Kael didn't wait to see the aftermath. *“RUN!”*

They ran.

Branches whipped past, the ground a blur beneath their feet. Behind them, guttural howls split the air, followed by the sound of massive bodies crashing through the trees. The Rezzak weren't just waking up... they were now very angry.

Lysara's plan had worked.

The only problem?

Now, the Rezzak were coming.

The Outpost on Pheldhor

The forest blurred around them, branches whipping at their faces, boots pounding against the damp terrain. The explosion still roared in their ears, but it was the sound behind them that sent ice through their veins.

A shriek tore through the night, followed by the deafening crash of trees splintering like matchsticks. Xal risked a glance over his shoulder... a mistake.

Dark shapes, massive and armored, wove through the underbrush with unnatural speed. Their long, taloned limbs tore through roots and debris as if they were nothing. Gleaming amber eyes locked onto their fleeing forms, pupils flaring wide in the darkness.

They were gaining.

"Faster!" **Kael** growled, pushing ahead.

Vex was already at full sprint, his movements impossibly precise, dodging trees with mechanical accuracy. Lysara was close behind; her breath steady despite the urgency. Xal's legs burned, but he didn't dare slow down.

A hundred meters to the clearing.

The trees were thinning. Just beyond the ridge, the enemy outpost waited.

Then... a snarl, too close.

A Rezzak leaped, its massive frame launching through the air, claws extended.

Xal didn't think. He dropped into a slide, mud spraying up as the creature's claws slashed just above his head. The Rezzak crashed into the trees beside him, obliterating bark and branches. It recovered fast.

“Xal!” Lysara twisted mid-run, drawing the Eclipse rifle from her back. Three quick bursts. The bullets slammed into the Rezzak’s thick plating, barely slowing it down.

Another scream ripped through the trees. More of them were coming.

Vex suddenly spoke through coms. *“Enemy proximity: two hundred meters. They have not detected us.”*

Kael didn’t break stride. *“They will in about five seconds.”*

They crested the ridge... and there it was.

The outpost.

A fortified structure sat nestled within a clearing, walls lined with guard towers and sentry drones. Eclipse soldiers patrolled the perimeter, their helmets glowing under searchlights.

They were running straight at the enemy.

And behind them?

A nightmare with fangs and claws.

Lysara’s voice was sharp. *“We take cover in the outpost. The Rezzak will do the rest.”*

Xal let out a breathless laugh. *“You’re insane.”*

Kael grinned. *“She’s brilliant.”*

No turning back now.

They charged forward... straight into the enemy’s line of sight.

And the Rezzak followed.

A cluster of armored buildings surrounded by fortified walls, patrolled by squads of Eclipse soldiers. The harsh white beams of searchlights cut through the dark, sweeping across the treetops. Automated turrets lined the perimeter, their barrels scanning for movement.

Xal's lungs burned, his legs screaming for rest, but they couldn't slow down.

The first Rezzak broke through the tree line with a sound that curdled the blood... a guttural, bone-rattling snarl that shattered the night. Its four massive limbs slammed into the terrain, crushing roots and stone beneath its weight.

The sentries on the outpost walls snapped their weapons up, helmets swiveling toward the disturbance.

A soldier's voice crackled over an intercom. *"Movement in the trees! Something's coming!"*

Another voice barked, *"Looks like our squad! They're being chased... open fire on those things! Cover them!"*

A warning siren blared.

Then the guns came to life.

Turrets locked. Rifles raised. The Eclipse unleashed hell.