

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 16

Shadows In The Void



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 16: Shadows In The Void

The void stretched endlessly in all directions, a silent abyss speckled with distant, dying stars. A lone battlecruiser, its blackened hull devouring what little light reached it, drifted through the cosmic expanse. **The Oblivion Wraith**; a name only whispered among those who had cause to fear it... had just emerged from a blind jump, its sub-light engines humming low as they cooled from the stress of interstellar travel.

On the bridge, **Captain Dren Malgrith** stood motionless, his gaunt features illuminated by the dim glow of the control panels. His gloved fingers twitched slightly behind his back as he peered through the massive viewport. Though no celestial body marked this stretch of space, he knew they were not alone.

One by one, they began to appear.

The armada of Draetheon... an overwhelming presence in the darkness... rose from the shadows like phantoms. Their ships bore no recognizable insignia, no conventional formations. These were war machines of unknown design, forged in the hidden depths of the universe, their surfaces shifting like liquid metal beneath the faint glow of distant stars. Some were vast, their silhouettes stretching longer than dreadnoughts, while others moved in unnatural silence, their engines making no discernible sound.

The flagship, a fortress-like leviathan known only as the **Abyssal Spire**, loomed ahead. It was larger than all the other vessels. A monstrosity of alien architecture, pulsing with an eerie, what seemed to be, bioluminescence. It was the heart of the Shallit'Biru's fleet... an enigma even to those who served it.

A voice crackled through the coms. *"Captain Malgrith, you are to board immediately. The High Admiral awaits."*

Malgrith inclined his head to his crew. *"Prepare the shuttle."*

Within minutes, his personal transport detached from the Oblivion Wraith and glided toward the Abyssal Spire. The closer they drew, the more its surface seemed to shift, as though it were alive, watching. The docking bay was vast but empty, devoid of crew, save for the silent figures standing at the far end. **Shallit'biru enforcers**... tall,

imposing beings clad in dark, fluid-like armor. Their faces were obscured behind sleek, featureless helmets, their presence exuding an unnatural stillness.

The moment he stepped onto the deck, Malgrith was escorted through the fortress, deeper into the unknown heart of the ship. The walls pulsed, whispering, as though the very vessel were breathing. At last, the enforcers stopped before a massive chamber, its entrance framed by shifting metallic tendrils that recoiled as he stepped through.

Inside, **High Admiral Kaylith Voss** stood before an immense projection... a grainy, distorted image of what should have been a fortified outpost. Instead, only a debris field remained.

"You were the last to leave this station, Captain," Voss said, his voice slow, deliberate. "Explain."

Malgrith narrowed his eyes at the flickering holo-feed. The outpost... once a secure stronghold... had been utterly annihilated. Not a single trace of structured wreckage remained, only a drifting field of twisted metal.

"This... was not us," Malgrith stated. "Nothing should have been able to do this."

Voss turned to him; his piercing gaze unreadable. *"And yet, something did."*

He gestured toward the projection, and a schematic of the outpost overlaid the image of its ruin. *"This station was the keystone of our Mer'Kuri invasion strategy. Its communications relays coordinated fleet movements. Its munitions stockpiles ensured our forces could sustain prolonged engagements."*

Voss turned fully to face Malgrith, his expression unreadable. *"Now, it is gone. Our supply lines are cut. We no longer have the luxury of a gradual approach."*

Malgrith stiffened. *"Meaning?"*

Voss stepped closer, his presence looming. *"Meaning we're forced to strike now."*

Malgrith's mind raced. The armada had been mobilizing for a precise and methodical campaign... crippling Mer'Kuri's defenses before overwhelming its forces. Now, that entire plan had been obliterated along with the outpost.

"A full-scale assault?" Malgrith asked. "Without preparation?"

Voss tilted his head slightly. *"This is our preparation."*

He gestured back to the projection, and the image shifted. No longer just a star map, but a series of fragmented surveillance feeds... distorted, incomplete, but unmistakably showing settlements, outposts, and lone vessels before their signals abruptly cut to black.

"The disappearances," Malgrith muttered.

Voss gave a slow nod. *"Every soul who stumbled upon our operations at Pheldhor was silenced. It was a necessary precaution. That station would have been an unseen hand directing our forces. Now it is gone."* His voice darkened. *"We do not have time to rebuild in the shadows."*

As Malgrith clenched his jaw, a voice broke the silence. *"Perhaps,"* a cold, calculating tone mused, *"someone found out."*

Malgrith turned as **Commander Typhon**, a veteran strategist and Voss's most trusted advisor, stepped forward from the shadows of the chamber. Her gaunt frame was draped in the dark, ceremonial robes of the fleet's high command, her unnerving gaze locked onto the fractured images of Pheldhor's remains.

"You believe we were discovered?" Voss asked.

Typhon gestured toward the flickering holo-feed. *"We ensured that every ship, every traveler, every soul who strayed too close to Pheldhor was erased without a trace. And yet, this happened. You do not call that a coincidence, do you?"* She turned her sharp eyes toward Malgrith. *"Something... or someone... knew exactly where to strike."*

Malgrith remained silent, but her words twisted in his mind. If they had been found out, if someone had learned the truth and retaliated... it meant they were being watched just as they had been watching others.

Voss turned fully to Malgrith. *"You find out who."*

Malgrith straightened. *"And if I do?"*

Voss' expression was cold, absolute. *"Then you eradicate them."*

Malgrith gave a slow nod. *"And you?"*

Voss turned back to the glowing red trajectory on the star map... the path leading straight to Mer'Kuri. His voice was steel.

"I will conduct the attack."

The chamber was silent. The weight of what was coming pressed down like an unseen force.

Malgrith exhaled. *"As you command."*

Voss turned away; his mind already consumed by the coming war. But before he could take another step, **Typhon** spoke again.

"And what of the Shallit'Biru?" Her voice carried no hesitation, only the cold efficiency of a strategist calculating every possible variable. *"Has he been informed?"*

Voss didn't turn, but there was the briefest pause before he answered.

"No."

Typhon's expression didn't shift, though her eyes darkened slightly. *"Should he?"*

Voss turned his head just enough to glance at her. *"Not yet."*

Malgrith tensed. Keeping anything from the Shallit'Biru was reckless... bordering on suicidal. He was not merely their benefactor; he was their master. It was by his will that the fleet had been raised; by his command that they had set this war in motion. And yet, Voss was choosing silence.

Typhon clasped her hands behind her back. *"If he discovers we have acted without informing him..."*

"He will know when the battle is won," Voss interrupted, his tone final. "Not before."

Malgrith and Typhon exchanged a glance. It was a dangerous gamble. The Shallit'Biru did not suffer insubordination. He was a being of singular, unrelenting power, and to act without his blessing was to invite consequences few could survive.

Malgrith: *"Then I will ensure he has no reason to question us."*

Voss gave a slow nod. *"Good."* Then, his voice dropped to something almost unreadable. *"Do not fail."*

But before Malgrith could so much as turn, the room exploded with blinding light.

A crackling, unnatural vortex tore into existence in the center of the chamber, sending violent waves of energy rippling outward. A force so fierce, it threatened to crush the very air in their lungs. Shadows warped, reality bent, and the very walls of the ship groaned as if bowing to the presence that now stepped through.

A towering silhouette emerged from the portal, its form shifting between solid and spectral, the very essence of darkness coiling around it like living tendrils. From within the shifting abyss, two burning eyes locked onto Voss, radiating fury beyond mortal comprehension.

The voice that followed was not spoken... it was felt, vibrating through every cell, every nerve, every inch of their being.

"WHAT HAPPENED TO MY OUTPOST!?!"

The force of the words alone sent Malgrith stumbling back, a sharp pain drilling into his skull. Typhon, to her credit, barely flinched, though her hands clenched at her sides. Voss, standing at the forefront, braced himself against the crushing weight of the dark presence.

Then the **Shallit'Biru** laughed.

A low, terrible sound, like the shifting of tectonic plates, the grinding of ancient bones beneath an unseen weight.

"I allow my children to play on their own," he mused, his voice slithering through the air, wrapping around their throats like unseen

chains. *"To make up their own rules as they go... To get the job done."* His gaze burned into Voss, then Malgrith. *"But never think that means I don't know what's going on... I might dwell in the dark... **but that does not mean that I'm in the dark.**"*

The light around them seemed to bend, darken, as his voice dropped to something even more insidious.

"Until now."

The **Shallit'Biru's** burning gaze snapped back to Voss.

"WHERE. IS. MY. OUTPOST?!?"

A crushing silence followed, broken only by the distant hum of the ship's systems.

*"The only **outpost** that was..."*

Voss, Malgrith, and Typhon say in unison: *"key to this operation."*

The **Shallit'Biru** continued; his voice no longer a bellow but a lethal whisper, all the more terrifying for its restraint. *"One that may very well have failed before it even began!"*

His fingers twitched, and for a fleeting moment, the space around him seemed to fracture. *"I admire your efforts to fix this before I found out."* He let that hang in the air before his voice sharpened into something cutting. *"But this... **this** is bigger than you."*

Malgrith, still kneeling, swallowed hard. *"My lord, we..."*

*"**Silence!**"*

The word alone was enough to paralyze him.

The **Shallit'Biru** straightened, his formless shape shifting, flickering between dimensions. *"The truth is, I don't even know what happened."* He let that revelation settle in, its weight a thousand times more crushing than his anger.

His gaze drifted toward Typhon. *"My only advice... is that **you**, Commander Typhon, go find out what happened to my outpost."*

Typhon's lips parted, but she did not dare to speak.

Then his burning eyes shifted back to Voss and Malgrith. *"And you two... **Go win me my war.**"* The darkness around him pulsed. *"Bring me Mer'Kuri to make up for this ridiculous failure."*

Typhon took a step forward, her chest rising sharply as she exploded.

"Is this because I am a woman?!?" she snapped, her composure finally breaking. *"Let **me** bring you Mer'Kuri!"*

The **Shallit'Biru** laughed again.

But this time, it was something different. A cruel, knowing amusement.

"No... no, my child," he said, his voice smooth, almost gentle. *"Not because you are a woman."* His burning eyes flicked toward the others before settling back on her. *"But because **you** are the brightest one in this room!"*

The air grew still, suffocating.

*"I believe **you** will find out what happened to my outpost,"* he said, his voice dropping to something even more ominous. *"or **die** trying!"*

And with that, the portal snapped shut.

The chamber was left in silence... except for the sound of Typhon's controlled breathing as she clenched her fists at her sides.

She did not turn to look at Voss or Malgrith. She simply walked away.

Malgrith: *"Do you think she bought that?"*

Voss shaking his head, *"I don't know."*