

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 17

Let's Go Ask Them!



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 17: Let's Go Ask Them!

Aboard Krynn's newly confiscated ship, the quintet settled in, still getting a feel for their unexpected prize. **Krynn** ran his hand along the control console, eyes gleaming with admiration.

*"Ah, she's a beauty. I think I'll call her... **The Black Talon**,"* he mused, almost to himself.

Lysara smirked, arms crossed. *"Should I be jealous?"*

Krynn cast her a sideways glance, a smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. *"You? Never. But if this baby ever makes me see stars better than you do, maybe."*

Meanwhile, **Vex** was busy combing through the ship's systems, his mechanical fingers flicking through holo-displays as he worked to uncover every hidden function and modification. *"It appears the Eclipse had quite a few... surprises installed. Some of them cleverly disguised."*

He paused, studying a particular file. *"This... is interesting. The encryption is buried beneath layers of coded obfuscation."*

Xal (to Kael): *"Obfuscation?"*

Kael (back to Xal): *"I don't know... Listen."*

A sudden crackle of audio interrupted him. The ship's speakers came to life with an urgent, automated voice:

"All ships of the Draetheon armada, rendezvous at designated coordinates immediately. Priority Alpha. Repeat: Priority Alpha. Stand by for further instructions."

Silence fell over the group. **Krynn** frowned, eyes narrowing as he checked the timestamp on the transmission. *"That message was sent several hours ago."*

Kael exhaled sharply. *"So **that's** who they are."*

Xal: *"That's who, **who** are?"*

Krynn: *"Hmmm... I wonder what that's all about."*

Xal: *"Has anyone ever heard of 'Draetheons'?"*

Lysara's expression darkened. *"I have."*

All eyes snapped to her, waiting for an explanation.

She hesitated before speaking. *"A while back, Venusian security uncovered operatives spying on our territory. We discovered them too late... they escaped with some very classified intel."*

Xal raised a brow. *"Whoa."*

Lysara nodded. *"I fought one of them. A woman. She had some impressive moves. She got away... **She** and I have some unfinished business..."*

Lysara paused. *"The thing is, we had no idea who they were. No known allegiance, no identifiable origins. But one of their dying operatives uttered two words before he bled out: '**Draetheon Forever.**'"*

The weight of her words settled over them.

"We've been trying to find out who they were and where they came from," she continued. "So far, they are nowhere in our solar system. Some even suspect they might be a covert Martian operation."

Krynn, who had been caught in his admiration of the ship, snapped his gaze to her. *"Covert Martian operation?... Were you ever planning to tell me this?"*

Lysara met his gaze, her expression steady. *"Actually... If it were true... I was hoping **you** would tell **me**."*

Krynn sighed, rubbing his chin. *"Well... To the best of my knowledge... it's **not** true... And if it were true... and I knew about it... I would tell you."*

She studied him for a moment before stepping forward, closing the distance between them. Without another word, they embraced.

Kael and Xal, never ones to miss an opportunity for mockery, exaggeratedly threw their arms around each other in an overly dramatic hug. *"Oh Krynn! I was so worried!" **Kael** teased.*

Xal played along, squeezing Kael tightly. *"I knew you'd never lie to me!"*

Vex, watching this bizarre display, tilted his head slightly, his mechanical optics scanning them. *"Mammalian behavior remains... in... consistent."*

The humor quickly faded as **Xal** straightened, his expression turning serious. *"You know what this means... don't you?"*

Krynn exhaled, slightly disappointed. *"Yeah... Let's go ask them."*

Lysara: *"Out of the frying pan..."*

Turning to the controls, Krynn took his seat. Vex, ever efficient, punched in the coordinates from the intercepted transmission. The Black Talon's engines roared to life, power surging through its systems.

With a final glance at the crew, **Krynn** gripped the controls. *"Hold on."*

Vex engaged the hyperdrive, and in an instant, the Black Talon streaked into the void, vanishing into the fabric of space.

The Pheldhor Mystery

Commander Typhon's ship arrived over the desolate Pheldhor moon; its hull gleaming against the dim light of a distant star. Holding position in high orbit, the vessel maintained a steady geosynchronous orbit as she led a squad of eight soldiers aboard a shuttle; descending toward the ruined outpost below.

The shuttle set down just outside what had once been their operational base. The boarding ramp lowered with a hiss, and Typhon led her squad into the eerie silence. The devastation was staggering... craters marred the landscape, structures lay in ruins, and the air carried the faint scent of... death.

Typhon's brow furrowed. *"What... did this?"*

After they examined the terrain for a minute, she motioned to two of her guards. *"Go check out the communication bunker."*

"It's done," one of them replied, and both sprinted off toward the bunker, their boots crunching over debris.

Typhon turned to the remaining six. They stooped down to form the next strategy. As the wind howled through skeletal remains of the buildings... suddenly, the ground began to **thump**; rattling loose metal sheets and sending clouds of dust spiraling into the air.

The squad froze. **Thump!**... They looked at one another. **Thump!**... They slowly stood to their feet... **Thump!**...

Typhon: "*Now what!?!*" Before anyone could muster a guess, a distant shout cut through the thumping.

"Commander!... Commander!" ... Thump!

One of the guards who had gone ahead was sprinting back; panic in his voice. **Thump!**...

His breath came in ragged gasps, his arms pumping as though death itself chased him. **Thump!**

He was still a hundred yards away when he suddenly just stopped running; his breath hitching. "*Command...*"

A dark blur exploded from behind a collapsed structure that obscured their view. A Rezzak emerged in an instant, grabbing the doomed guard. The creature's jagged teeth found flesh, and the unfortunate soldier barely had time to scream before being ripped apart in a gruesome display of predatory efficiency.

The squad stood frozen; eyes locked on the Rezzak. The beast loomed over damaged building... and the fresh corpse; saliva dripping from its fanged maw. Its muscular form flexed with unnatural precision, and its glowing, predatory eyes fixed on Typhon and her squad.

Typhon took a slow step forward, her voice measured but taut with tension. "*Don't panic... On the count of three, we're going to...*"

She turned her head slightly to check on her squad... only to find them already a hundred yards away, sprinting at full speed in the opposite direction. Their weapons clattered against their armor as they ran, adrenaline overriding any sense of duty.

She exhaled sharply, rolling her eyes. *"One. Two. Three."*

Typhon took off after them, her heart pounding. The Rezzak roared, its monstrous frame began its pursuit. The squad tore through the ruins, scrambling over debris and leaping across shattered structures in their desperate escape. They abandoned their shuttle.

Ahead, the twisted remains of the outpost gave way to the dense, overgrown expanse of the Pheldhor forest. Towering, gnarled trees stretched skyward, their thick canopy casting deep shadows over the terrain. Without hesitation, Typhon and what remained of her squad plunged into the forest, vanishing into the darkness as the Rezzak's enraged howls echoed behind them.

Payback is a...

Back aboard the Black Talon, Krynn and company arrive at the coordinates. The ship hums as it comes out of light speed; the stars snapping back into focus. The crew gathers around the control panel, watching as the navigation systems settle into place.

Krynn glances at Vex, who's already running a diagnostic on the ship's systems. *"Well, we're here. But... what now?"* **Krynn** mutters, his voice filled with both curiosity and caution.

Xal: *"Maybe it's a trap."*

Kael taps the edge of his blade, deep in thought. *"We'll find out soon enough."*

Lysara watches them all, her brow furrowing. *"Draetheons... You think they'll show?"*

Krynn pauses. *"I don't know... Although we're late to the party... we have to prepare for anything."*

The crew turns their attention back to the viewscreen. Ahead, emerging from the shadows of deep space, is a massive warship... a sleek, imposing vessel that dwarfs everything in its vicinity.

"That's... that's a flagship," **Kael** murmurs, his voice filled with awe and disbelief.

Xal's eyes widen. *"No way..."*

Krynn leans forward, his expression darkening as the ship comes into full view. *"According to these readings... that's the flagship of High Admiral Kaylith Voss."*

The Black Talon's sensors begin to hum as **Vex** analyzes the ship. *"High Admiral Voss commands one of the most powerful fleets in the Draetheon armada. If that's his ship, we're not just dealing with spies."*

Lysara's gaze hardens as she watches the flagship move slowly into position. *"So they were expecting us..."*

Krynn nods grimly. *"And they clearly don't want us here."*

Suddenly, a **voice crackles** over the coms, its tone cold and formal.

"Welcome... Prototype XK-07. We thought you were destroyed on Pheldhor. The High Admiral is looking forward to your report. You will be a welcome addition to the Mer'Kuri invasion."

The crew goes silent, the words hanging in the air like a threat. Krynn's expression shifts from confusion to alarm.

"Prototype XK-07?" **Kael** mutters, looking around at the others, his brow furrowed. *"Is that... us?"*

Krynn's eyes widen with realization. *"It's the ship. The Black Talon... They're referring to it. XK-07 was its designation before it was mine."*

Xal: *"Sounds to me they mean to take her back."*

Krynn: *"Well... I'm not going to let that happen."*

Lysara stiffens, her voice low. *"Wait a minute... you mean they're not Eclipse?"*

Krynn's face darkens. *"No. This isn't Eclipse. This is Draetheon. The Eclipse... they're aligned with them now... This explains their fight with the Kurai resistance."*

Xal glances at the viewscreen, where the towering Draetheon flagship looms in the distance. *"So they're controlling the Eclipse now? They've taken over?"*

*"Seems like it," Kryn*n responds, clenching his fists. *"The Eclipse probably worked for the Draetheons all along. But why keep it secret? Why the deception?"*

Vex turns toward the controls, his mechanical fingers moving swiftly across the panel. *"This changes everything. The Draetheons are far more organized than we anticipated. We've walked right into their proverbial trap."*

"Trap or not," Lysara says, her voice steady with determination, *"We can't back down now. We need to find out what they want with us... and why they're planning to invade Mer'Kuri."*

Krynn takes a deep breath, his fingers pressing into the armrests of his seat. *"We get in close, gather intel, and get the hell out before they realize who we really are."*

Suddenly, **Xal** jolts upright, his eyes wide as the words finally sink in. *"Wait a minute... Wait one minute..."*

Kael looks at him, raising an eyebrow. *"What is it, now?"*

Xal's fists clench. *"They're planning to invade **Mer'Kuri**... Kael, that's our home."* His voice hardens, filled with rage. *"Now I want to blow something up!"*

Kael grins, his eyes flashing with the same intensity. *"I'm with you on that. Let's make sure they regret this."*

But before they can act, the com crackles again. The voice, still responding as if the crew are expected guests, *"The High Admiral is preparing for your visit. He also wants to explain how that vital piece of technology you have recovered will play a key role."*

Kael: *"They think we're... survivors from Pheldhor?"*... a sudden realization dawning.

Lysara nods slowly. *"They believe we brought back something vital, some technology they need. And they want us on their side."*

Xal shakes his head, disbelief settling in. *"They've got the wrong people. We're not their allies. But if they think we are..."*

Krynn's expression darkens, a subtle smile curling at the corner of his mouth. *"We play along. For now."*

Lysara's voice is steady but firm. *"We need to keep them thinking we're a part of their plans. As soon as we know more, we strike."*

Krynn's jaw sets. *"OK... We stay under the radar, gather intel... Then... we make our escape... and warn Mer'Kuri."*

Vex, who has been scanning the flagship intently, finally speaks up, his voice steady and calculating. *"The way I see it... we have the opportunity to stop the invasion of Mer'Kuri right here. Right now."*

The crew turns toward him, surprised at his bold suggestion.

"We have the element of surprise," Vex continues, "All we really have to do is disable that"... pointing toward the massive flagship looming in front of them on the viewscreen. "If we take out their command ship, the whole invasion crumbles."

The crew exchanges looks, considering the possibility.

Kael nods slowly, the fire of determination returning to his eyes. *"That ship's the heart of their invasion force. Take it out, and their entire plan goes up in smoke."*

Lysara's voice is steady but sharp. *"We can't afford to waste this chance. But we need a plan. A precision strike."*

Krynn's jaw tightens as he turns toward Vex. *"You're right. It's a risk, but it could be our best shot. How do we take it down?"*

Vex's fingers fly over the console, quickly mapping out their options. *"There's a vulnerability in the flagship's lower hull. It's shielded, but I think I can bypass it long enough to disable their engines."*

Xal smirks. *"Then let's do it. We hit them hard and fast, before they even know what's happening."*

Krynn takes a deep breath, his expression resolute. *"Alright. We take their ship down, and we do it quickly. No second chances."*

The voice over the com crackles again. *"The command shuttle will arrive in five minutes."*

Krynn's gaze hardens. *"Our first move... we've got to take that shuttle."*

Xal mutters under his breath, his lips curling into a grim smile, *"Yeah... And we've got to do more than just disable their engines."*

Krynn turns toward the crew, ready to move.

"Then let's make sure they never see us coming."