

## Chapter 4: The Nightingale

Raven: "You know how it is, Eric. He left me no choice."

Talon: "I know. Send me the data, I will take it from here."

Raven: "Thanks, Tal. The Collective owes you for this."

The screen went dark then, showing only a reflection of the bags beneath Talon's eyes. It had been a long week and an even longer night. Even so, it seemed that his bed was still a while away. The metal table in his concrete office rattled a scraping hiss, as the tall one stepped away from his desk, closing the laptop behind his back with a soft thud.

A million lights beyond the window behind his desk. A million lights beyond the shadows of his bastion. Car horn after siren, a gunshot, then the silence. The silence, then the roaring of engines and the distant whirring of a helicopter. A crimson crest, a bleeding eye above a quiet valley, upon the tail of a soulless dragonfly. The beating heart, deep within an abyss.

Talon: "Aval's Tears."

Aquarius: "Sir?"

Talon: "The eye, the blood... Aval's Tears."

Aquarius: "A fable. Nothing more."

Talon: "Nothing less. We would do well not to underestimate the ones who invoke an ancient god."

Aquarius: "Superstition is expensive, Talon."

Talon: "It's not just superstition, you know this."

Aquarius: "That thing is only as powerful as we believe it is."

Talon: "I am not worried about our beliefs."

Aquarius: "Fuck me, you're not saying-"

Talon: "The Overseer. He's back in town."

Aquarius: "It's been months since the shooting, Talon. Are we sure they're not-"

Talon: "Ghost stories?"

The office was toxic with insinuation. The two exchanged a look, then another.

Aquarius: "Rumours, Tal. Nothing more."

Talon: "Raven has seen him."

Aquarius: "And lived to tell about it? The PKF top dog would have shredded a rat like them."

Talon: "The Overseer wanted something."

Aquarius: "Only one thing worth buying from the Collective. Well- Two things."

Aquarius' slender fingers sharply trailed over the back of his phone, scratching off the logo, bit by bit.

Talon: "And Raven sold it to him."

Aquarius: "Fucking rat."

Talon: "Business, Aquarius. Besides, the Overseer had their address."

Aquarius: "The Militia wouldn't have budged."

Talon: "The Militia have an army."

Aquarius: "So do we. Why not use it?"

Talon: "To kill the Overseer?"

Aquarius: "The Collective. We destroy their Eye, we blind the Overseer."

Talon briefly considered it, finally turning now to face the pale Aquarius. Eyes sharp as the Northstar itself, a brittle and tall body, but a strong will. Draped over a sofa by the eastern wall, he challenged his superior, but Talon would not budge.

Talon: "We still have friends in the Collective."

Aquarius: "So what do you suggest?"

Talon: "A more surgical approach. We will declaw the lion, before challenging his den. Send for a scalpel."

Aquarius: "The independent one or our lass?"

Talon: "Independent. If we can help it, we want to ghost."

Aquarius: "Yes, sirrrrrr-"

Aquarius slurred as he got up from his comfortable lounging. He stretched his arms above his head, before turning to face Talon a final time.

Aquarius: "And Leo?"

Talon: "Leo can handle himself. We will extract him if necessary."

Aquarius: "Understood, *Nightingale*."

With that, the operative left the room, leaving behind a void denser than before. Contemplative, Talon paced over to the display cases in the office's center, placing his calloused hand upon the glass as he whispered to himself.

*Virkor, do you look upon us now and scowl, or would you have slain the Eye?*

No answer would come. None from above and none from below. Talon lowered his hand again, to instead rub his temples, a headache ravaging his skull as he turned to the window once more.

He looked out over the city from his spire, wondering if either would ever fall. Much time to wonder, however, he would not

have; for the sky suddenly lit up with a cloud born from red powder.

Sirens wailed, before a horn bellowed.

A horn bellowed and it spoke: *Peace*.