

## **An Extract from Born of Shadows**

### Chapter 1

#### *Twenty-Two Years Later*

“Thank the gods you’re here. I’ve been running arou—”

Without flinching or breaking his stride as he walked down a filthy, dark alley, Caillen jerked his blaster out and fired straight into his sister’s shoulder, cutting her words off before she wasted his time.

Not to kill her or hurt her. Just to shut her up before she made things worse for both of them.

Right now, he didn’t have time to listen to her bullshit. He was here to save her life.

And hopefully his too.

Gasping, she crumpled toward the trash laden street. In one smooth move that caused his light-armored brown coat to flare out around his feet, he caught her against him and lifted her into his arms. He groaned under her weight. “Damn, Kase, quit working out so much and lay off the frigs. I’ve carried men who weighed less.” Not that he made a habit out of carrying men, but still . . .

Even though she was six inches shorter, she outweighed him by a good twenty pounds and he carried less than two per cent body fat on a lean six foot four frame. His muscles screamed out in protest of his heroics as he heard the Enforcers moving in.

This was getting bad.

He glared down at her unconscious body as her brown hair spilled over his sleeve. Her plain features were so peaceful in spite of the hell she’d unleashed that it really made him want to hurt her.

But he couldn’t do that.

Blood was blood.

Sighing, he moved fast to stash her behind a dumpster and to cover her with his coat. On top of that, he added enough trash to keep the Enforcers from seeing her. Yeah, she’d bitch-slap him later for the stench . . . and the headache his stun blast would leave her with but it would keep her safe and right now that was all that mattered to him.

Well, there was the urge he had to wring her neck until she turned blue- that mattered to him too, but that could wait.

A beep from his wrist alerted him that his hacked paperwork for her ship and cargo had gone through. Kasen's IDs were removed from everything and his were registered in her place.

I'm a fucking idiot. By doing all of this, he'd just put his neck in a noose and he knew it.

What the hell? Who wants to live forever?

For the record and in case any higher deity was listening and taking notes, he did. But he was definitely going to cut his life short if he kept rescuing his sisters. Or at the very least cut his freedom down to the size of a ten square foot cell.

Yeah well, at least then I'd get three meals a day instead of six a week.

Pushing that thought away, he pulled his blasters out and set them to stun to do what he did best.

Survive and escape.

"Drop your weapon!" an Enforcer shouted from his left.

Yeah, right. Like he'd ever followed orders. Caillen opened fire as he dodged into a vacant alley that was as rundown as the one he'd stashed Kasen in. Their return fire and the holes it left in the walls, street, and trash around him let him know fast their blasters weren't set for stun.

They were trying to kill him.

He considered resetting his to return the favor, but he didn't want to kill the drones out to make rent. They didn't deserve to die for supporting a corrupt system. Even the mindless needed to eat and it took more guts than most people had to stand and fight against the League and its sycophantic governments. He wouldn't hold their cowardice against them.

Much.

Jerking his head to the right, he felt the heat from a blast that narrowly missed his face. Strangely enough, he was completely calm as he fought. His sister Shahara called him Eritale – a Gondarion term that meant made of ice. And he was. Since the day he'd seen his father killed, he'd never panicked again in a confrontation.

No idea why. It was like the fear inside him had shattered that day and left something freakishly copasetic in its place, something that set in during a fight and left him totally rational.

He shot at three Enforcers before he holstered his right blaster and launched a grappling hook to the roof of a decaying building. The further he could get them from his sister the less likely they were to find her unconscious body and question her.

The hook caught and set.

Caillen pushed the recoil button on the hook's handle and fired at the Enforcers with his left hand as he sped toward the roof. Return blasts came close to

him, but none hit the mark as he quickly zigzagged up the chipped brick wall to the top. And thankfully none of the drones were bright enough to shoot his cord- that would have left an ugly stain on the street and ruined his already screwed up day.

At the top, he scrambled over the lip, dislodged the hook, recoiled it completely, and then took off running toward the river across the roofs, jumping from one to another with the grace and flexibility of a gymnast – something he trained hard to maintain every day.

The deep whirring of an engine overhead let him know air support was on its way and it was coming in low and fast. From his vantage point, he could see the number of Enforcers after him. And it was impressive. They ran on the streets below and across the rooftops, all trying to get a shot at him.

What? Was it a slow day? Didn't this place have any real criminals?

No, let's go after the smugglers because they were so much more dangerous than, say, a rapist or murderer.

"What the hell was in your ship, Kase?"

He should have checked the manifest because this was looking bad.

Real bad.

More shots rained down as the airlift spotted him and came in as fast as it could fly. Damn the bright daylight of a double sun. It left him totally exposed without a single dark shadow to crawl into.

Ducking the doorgunner's shots, he took off at a dead run as he dodged fire.

Caillen jumped to a roof and rolled to his feet an instant before the door opened and six Enforcers spilled through, aiming and firing at him. He turned to go back, but there were more coming in behind. The gunship was on his right and about to pin him into one seriously nasty situation. Dodging left, he sucked his breath in at the distance to the next rooftop. If he missed that, it was going to hurt.

Who wants to live forever?

Ignoring his favorite motto whenever a dose of extreme stupidity was called for, he pulled his javelin off his belt and extended it so that he could use it to pole vault over. He held his breath as he soared over the street so far below.

Thankfully years of dodging authority and living his life one half step this side of death had left him with enough skill to make it to the other side. As soon as he was safe on the rooftop, he collapsed the javelin and kept going as shots rained down and whizzed past him. Several grazed off his armored shirt and backpack, and would have brought him down but for its protection. Still, it stung like hell and a couple burned his arm.

You know, a sane man would be wetting his pants.

Good thing he was crazy as hell.

He ran to the ledge and in a well-practiced move, planted the hook into the wall. Without pausing, he jumped over the side and repelled down to the street where he'd have some cover. He jerked the hook free and let it recoil back into the case on his forearm.

At least the city was more crowded here.

Yeah, but it's hard to melt into them while your coat's laying on top of your sister.

True. Without its camouflage, his weapons were out and visible. Something that caused the people around him to cringe, scream and flee as they saw his short sleeved armored shirt that was covered with light bombs, ammunition clips, four blasters (in addition to the one in his hand), his repelling gear, and all the other "just in case" things he carried in addition to his backpack. Leather straps crisscrossed both of his arms from wrist to biceps.

Badass came at a price and today that price just might be his freedom.

Or his life.

He ran with the crowd which panicked the innocent people even more- no doubt because they were afraid he'd take one of them hostage.

As if. The only life he gambled with was his own.

The Enforcers flanked them, trying to get an aim on his head which he kept low. He could hear from the earwig he had tuned to their frequency that they were setting up blockades around the city.

But that wasn't what concerned him . . .

They had a Trisani tracker with them that they were about to drop in on the chase.

Damn.

Unless it was Nero, he was a dead man. Trisani had psychic powers that pretty much no one except another Trisani could fight. Nero could actually get into someone's head, shut down all brain activity and if he was really pissed, melt it and leave his vic a vegetable, sucking his thumb on the floor.

Luckily, Nero was one of Caillen's few friends and no matter what they might have paid him, Nero wouldn't bring him in.

He hoped.

Every life has a price . . .

And he knew that better than most.

Caillen felt the fissure of power as the Trisani stepped out of a transport and eyed the crowd, reading them as he sought Caillen's position.

Yeah it wasn't Nero . . . He'd never seen this tracker before.

Shit.

Caillen slowed as he saw the dark blond man with sharp features dressed all in black. Curling his lip as he locked gazes with Caillen, the tracker sent a plasma blast at him that barely missed his head. It ignited then exploded the transport behind him.

Hope no one was in that. Otherwise they were having a worse day than he was.

Caillen pulled out his other blaster and opened both up all over the tracker. But the bastard threw up a force field to block it.

“I hate the Trisani.” No wonder most of them had been hunted down to a small handful. At the moment, he’d like to add one more to their extinction list.

But that was all right – he still had tricks up his sleeves. Literally. He holstered his right blaster and jerked a light bomb off the chain. He lobbed it at the Trisani and then followed it with a pulse grenade.

The light temporarily blinded the Trisani and the pulse exploded against the force field. Even though it didn’t break through it, it was enough to send the Trisani reeling backward.

Yeah, don’t screw with someone whose closest friend was an explosive’s engineer renowned for making the best toys in the universe. Darling lived and breathed for one purpose only: making shit blow up.

Before the Trisani could recover, Caillen ducked into the next alley.

Which was crawling with Enforcers.

Damn. Damn.

Double damn.

Grinding his teeth in frustration, he turned to head back to the street.

He couldn’t. They’d closed in on him and the air transport was directly above with snipers taking positions on the building’s roof.

“Surrender!”

Ah now this was just galling.

“Lay down your weapons!”

That was easier said than done. He was covered in them. Took him two hours to get all this gear on . . .

Only thing that could induce him to take it off fast was a hot naked woman in his bed, clawing at his back. Definitely not one of those here and he had no interest in being defenseless with this much artillery pointed at him.

A warning blast shot over his head.

“The next one will be right between your eyes.” Targeting lasers let him know exactly what they were aiming for. Honestly it wasn’t the one at his forehead that gave him pause as much as the one at his crotch.

“Put your hands behind your head!”

Caillen frowned. “If I put my hands behind my head, I can’t drop my weapons, people. Someone needs to make up their mind here. What do you want me to do and in what order?”

“Drop the weapon in your hand then put your hands behind your head!”

He did as instructed.

They moved in closer.

Yeah, come to papa, baby. Closer . . . closer . . .

Don’t be shy.

When one of them went to cuff him, Caillen grabbed him and used him as a shield. Three sniper rounds went into the man’s chest. Caillen flung the body at the Enforcer coming in at his back. Twisting, he grabbed another man, disarmed him and knocked him flying. His morals on killing drones out the window under this assault, Caillen used his spring loader to pop his fighting knife into his palm and took out five more before the Trisani grabbed him by the neck without touching him and paralyzed him where he stood.

The Trisani tsked at him. “I almost hate to hand someone with your skills over to the drones.”

“Fuck you.”

The Trisani laughed. “Sorry. In this the only one getting screwed is you.”

Caillen locked gazes with the Trisani. The moment he did, he felt the surge of power that Nero had taught him. It was the only weapon anyone could really use against the Trisani species – unless this guy was as strong as Nero this would work.

Here’s hoping he’s not.

He focused it with everything he had. One second the Trisani had him, the next, Caillen was free and slamming the Enforcers into each other. He shot his cord up the wall and started to leave them in his wake... until he heard something in his ear that gave him pause.

“There’s an unconscious woman here in the street, under some garbage. Not sure if she’s with our perp or not. But she is covered up by what appears to be a man’s coat.”

Fu-fu-frick.

They'd found Kasen. If he escaped, they'd take her in and she'd never stand up to their questioning.

Of all the flying ass bad luck.

Caillen sighed as he flicked his wrist to miss the shot and allowed the hook fall back to the pavement. He let them think they'd done it when the truth burned deep inside him. But for Kasen's discovery, he'd have made it out.

They cuffed, then carefully disarmed him over the next twenty eight minutes.

"Damn, boy," one of the officer's said as they continued to find weapons hidden on him. "It's like disarming an assassin. You sure, you ain't in the League?"

He had to force himself not to lash out and escape again. Submission was not in his nature.

Think of Kasen...

Yeah, what he was really thinking about her was how badly he wanted to beat her.

The Enforcer jerked his cuffed hands. "Who's with you?"

Caillen met the Enforcer's gaze without flinching or hesitating. "No one. I fly alone. Check the logs." Thank the gods he was good at what he did. They wouldn't find a trace of anyone except him.

"What about the woman?"

"Nameless vic. I stole her wallet. You check my pocket, you'll find it." He always had a fake ID and wallet for his sisters with aliases.

Just in case.

The Enforcer pulled it out, then lifted his arm to speak into the mic in his cuff. "She's innocent. Get her to a hospital."

"You want me to take a report from her?" the voice asked.

"No. We have a confession and mugging is the least of what we're taking him in for. Just dump her and go."

Caillen met the Trisani's frown. The bastard either suspected he was lying or knew it for a fact, but for whatever reason, he kept it to himself.

End of the day, the Trisani was definitely right about one thing. He was royally screwed and they hadn't even fondled him yet.

That was bad enough.

Worse than bad came as they were hauling him toward the transport and they began reading him his charges.

". . . and for smuggling prillion."

He felt his stomach shrink. Shit.

His sister's contraband carried a death sentence . . .

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