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### **Deceived**

**A Vanguards Story**

**Chapter 1 - Seeds of Doubt**

*Download 57% complete…*

“C’mon, c’mon!”

*Download 65% complete…*

An armored fist pounds the desk repeatedly as the light blue bar on the computer screen slowly fills up. One painful centimeter at a time.

“Vox! We don’t have all day!” A second figure shouts from the doorway.

The muffled, but indistinguishable chorus of not-so-distant laser fire echoes through the thin, stale air of the abandoned tower command centre. Years of lunar dust and old tech clutter the once pristine floors of the archaic base. The center console, plugged into a small generator, hums softly as the computer’s dull glow illuminates the face of Corporal Aayden Vox, 2667th Hideo Reconnaissance Division.

*Download 78% complete…*

“It’s almost done! Just a little longer!”

Sergeant Shayne Paike, 361st Infantry Division, lets out a disapproving grunt as he scans the ground level below them, tracing their route back to the starship they arrived on.

“Not looking good out there Vox!” The impatience in his voice is palpable. “We’re being overrun. I spot at least two squads making their way through the main tunnel and another wrapping around past the back courtyard. I give us 30 seconds max before we’re trapped up here.”

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“C’mon!”

“Aayden!!” Shayne shouts as he charges the white modified cycler rifle in his hands.

*Download 100% complete.*

“YES!”

Aayden unplugs the disk drive from the console and stuffs it into a backpack, slinging it over his shoulders as he dashes to Shayne’s post. The sound of battle rings out much closer than before as the two soldiers steel themselves.

“Ready?” Shayne gives Aayden a one-over, “You didn’t forget anything?”

“We’re good. Go.” He draws a light plasma pistol from his hip and nods.

The two burst through the door in a dead run, racing down the hallway toward the staircase. The swift, but heavy, thumping cadence of their combat boots in sync as they round a corner.

Below them, a mosaic of blaster fire, explosions, and corpses once more smear the dark canvas of the forgotten Haiker outpost.

“Stairs, coming up on the left!” Shayne calls out, right before a series of violet laser bolts rocket through the tempered glass walls, barely missing the sergeant.

“Get down!”

Aayden and Shayne dive to the ground as the air rushes out of the hallway, sucked out through the newly made laser holes. The two reach back, struggling as they pull out oxygen masks and strap them over their faces, gasping for breath.

“Damn. These skunks don’t know when to quit!” Aayden’s remarks, his voice now slightly muffled by the mask.

“You’re the one who told General Callum that it was crucial we steal this information, Vox. This is on you.”

“I know, I know. You can get mad at me all you want once we’re out of this mess.”

“You know I will.”

His point made, Shayne turns and begins a slow, arduous crawl toward the stair entrance. Aayden follows close behind as more lasers penetrate the hallway.

The pair reach the doorway and Shayne manages to tag the scanner with a keycard. The door opens with a whoosh. Aayden crawls through first, with Shayne following closely, sealing the door behind him.

As the airtight door hisses shut, the two relax for a moment, pausing to take off their masks and catch their breaths.

“You still got it?”

Aayden pats his bag, making sure the rectangular lump that was the drive was still where he put it, “Right here.”

“Good.” Shayne stands, checking his gun again, “Then it’s time to move. Three flights down, two rights — ”

“ — Then a left and a straight shot to the ship.” Aayden interjects, a cheeky grin on his face, “You said it like four times on the way in.”

Shayne scoffs at Aayden, “Gun loaded?”

Aayden casually checks his pistol, making sure the little glowing bar was lit up all the way from red to green. “Yup.”

The sudden sound of a door opening below sends Aayden back into serious mode as Shayne cautiously peers over the railing. Below them, scanning the room, is a squad of Akukin troopers, clad in black armor with purple highlights, each holding a heavy beam rifle. He gestures back to Aayden, holding up 4 fingers. He points, indicating that the new intruders were moving up the stairs and to get ready to engage.

Aayden nods, taking a deep, but quiet, breath.

The staircase chamber is deathly silent, save the slow thud of the meticulous footsteps below as the Akukin squad sweep the bottom floor. Then the second. Then the third. Aayden moves up to Shayne’s position as the two prepare to engage their opponents.

Shayne looks to Aayden and mouths the words, “Three…two…one.”

Bright red laser erupt from their guns as they rain fire down into the Akukin squad. The enemy scatters as one of their ranks is gunned down in an instant.

“Take cover!” One of the Akukin yells before being subsequently shot by Shayne, dropping to the floor in a lifeless pile of flesh and blood.

The remaining two dip underneath the stairs, returning fire as they spray purple laser bolts randomly upward toward the two Hideo soldiers above. The blasts impact on the walls and stairs, leaving small black scorch marks on the greyish-white paint.

“Now what?” Aayden asks, backing off the railing and out of view of the Akukin.

Shayne smiles, “Race you to the ship.”

He produces a grappling hook from his belt and fires it upward. The hook catches and loops around the rafters as Shayne secures the carbon fiber rope to his waist.

A second later, he leaps over the railing, diving down toward the bottom floor.

He passes the two stunned Akukin soldiers on his way down and manages to pick off one in the process, his cycler rifle making short work of the man, the red bolts piercing his dark armor with ease. The second soldier, seeing his last squad mate fall, pulls back, retreating out the way he entered, calling for reinforcements as the door automatically shuts behind him.

The cable locks with a hard click and Shayne stops in midair, just before he hits the ground level. He disengages the grapple from his utility belt, just in time to see Aayden drop down beside him.

“You kill that last one?”

“Nah, he took off before I had the chance.”

“Tsk. They’ll be more coming then.”

“We just have to get to the ship.”

“Two rights — ”

“ — A left, then straight.”

Shayne chuckles, “Good man.”

The two replace the plasma batteries in their guns and open the bottom floor door.

No enemies. At least in this corridor. The windows and walls on the ground floor were much thicker and impervious to lasers, meaning anyone who wanted to kill them had to be in direct view. Aayden nods to Shayne and they burst out of the staircase room, sprinting down the hall a short distance before cutting their first right.

Down the hall, further ahead, a second squad of Akukin soldiers spots the pair and moves to intercept.

“Mark three-five, two targets crossing the northeast hallway. Approaching fast. Engage hostiles.” The squad leader calls out, his squad members raising their rifles.

Aayden and Shayne continue to run, straight toward the enemy.

“Shields!” Shayne shouts as he activates a small plasma deflector on his wrist. A circular blue disc appears and he holds his arm out in front, angling the disc to provide as much cover as possible. Aayden does the same, just in time as a barrage of lasers fly down the hallway. The shield absorbs the bolts, dispersing the energy evenly outward to the edge of the disc.

“Second right, dead ahead!” Shayne calls out.

“I see it!”

They continue to charge into the oncoming fire. As the shields absorb more and more shots, the soft blue starts to turn to an orange-red. The heat is palpable and Aayden feels a light burning sensation on his arm.

“Shield’s aren’t gonna last Shayne!”

“We can make it! Just run!”

“Keep firing! Keep firing!” The Akukin squad leader commands, as their targets’ deflectors wane dangerously close to overheating.

Aayden screams as he puts everything he’s got into getting to the corridor, his shield now a bright red color.

“Haaaaa!”

A last burst of effort and the pair round the corner, just in time as the shields pop.

Aayden yanks the drained and crackling deflector generator off his wrist, throwing it to the side as he continues sprinting. The two push ahead and take the last turn left as they hear the Akukin rushing into the corridor behind them.

At the end of the hallway, in the large hangar bay, rests a Hideo C-Class B2X Light Fighter Jet. Painted ice white, with red and blue highlights, the starship stands out like a sore thumb against the mottled dark grey interior of the hangar.

“There she is. We’re almost there!” Aayden shouts, still running.

Shayne looks back over his shoulder as he pulls a small cylindrical object from his belt.

“What are you doing?”

“You’ll see.”

He pulls the pin on the smoke grenade and lobs it behind him. It hits the ground and starts to spin. Smoke billows out and engulfs the passageway in a thick grey cloud, obscuring the vision of the pursing Akukin.

“Good thinking. Let’s hurry.”

The two continue on, reaching the hangar as Aayden unlocks the cockpit of the ship. The glass slides open and he starts to climb up.

“We should contact General Callum to let him know we — ack!”

Before he realizes what happened, Aayden finds himself splayed out on the floor of the hangar in a daze. Shayne stands over him, looking down, the disk drive in one hand, rifle in the other. Aayden looks up to see the barrel of the gun aimed directly between his eyes.

“S-Shayne? What are you doing?”

“Sorry Aayden. But this is where we part ways. I can’t let you take this back to Earth — back to Hideo.”

Aayden’s eyes go wide and his nostrils flare in anger.

“You’re with them? You’re Akukin?”

“Never said that. But I’m not Hideo either. Not anymore at least.”

Aayden tries to sit up, but Shayne forces him back down, jamming the gun against his chest. He resigns to his position and looks up at his now former partner.

“Why Shayne?”

“You wouldn’t understand. Or believe me.”

“Tell me anyway.” Aayden retorts, “It’s the least you could do for pointing a gun at a friend.”

For the briefest of moments, Shayne’s eyes soften. Their dangerous, challenging glare replaced by a wistful, longing gaze.

“I can’t tell you everything. But our great nation of Hideo isn’t what you think it is.”

“What do you mean?”

Shayne sighs, looking to make sure the smoke cloud is holding, “Do you remember your parents?”

“No. They died when I was baby. During the — ”

“ — First Lunar-Terrestrial War? Yeah, they told me the same thing.”

Aayden’s brow scrunches. “So? What are you getting at?”

“Do you remember who took care of you growing up? Who raised you?”

“Well, no. I — ” He pauses.

“I don’t remember either.” Shayne shakes his head ever so slightly, “Curious, isn’t it? That neither of us can remember life before the military.”

Shayne turns the gun away from Aayden and leaps into the cockpit of the ship. A moment later the engines roar to life.

“I’m sorry, Aayden. This was the only way.”

The B2X lifts off the ground, rising higher and higher until it passes up through the gravity field. Shayne hits the throttle and the fighter shoot off into the distance, leaving the base, Aayden, and the rest of the Akukin forces behind.

Aayden slows stands and realizes there’s something in his right hand. He opens his palm to see a crumpled note.

*If you want the truth, find Modukes. - Shayne*

As the smoke from the grenade finally clears, Aayden turns to face the squad of soldiers who have now posted up against the wall and behind crates, their rifles trained on him.

He reads the paper one more time before shoving it in his mouth and swallowing it. He makes no move to escape or show any sign of trouble as the Akukin soldiers approach, disarming and eventually cuffing him.

As Aayden is dragged away and out into a prisoner transport shuttle, he looks up toward the stars. The glimmer of something catches his eye, but he can’t tell if it’s a shooting comet, or a certain someone flying off into the distance…

*I’ll see you again, Shayne. Mark my words.*

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**Chapter 2 Preview**

Aayden Vox said not a word on the bumpy ride to Antares, or the City of Prisons as it was more commonly referred to as. Nor did he speak in the two-year long period he was put to work in the factories, building weapons and armaments for the government he swore his life to eradicate. Even when the Hideo arrived and liberated the city and the prisons, he said nothing.

Nothing was worth saying. Not until he heard what he needed to hear and found who he needed to find.

*Modukes.*

The name from the note and the only lead he had toward learning the truth about Hideo. About himself.

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