



# SUCCESSORS

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# SUCCESSORS

I remember the day he fell.

We stood in the ruin of a city block, surrounded by the shattered remains of would-be peacekeepers. Numbani, the “City of Harmony” . . . Ridiculous. The unity they preached was an illusion—a comforting lie that left everyone weaker for believing it.

Numbani was overdue for a challenge, I knew, but was this it? The wreckage wrought, the lives lost . . . all of it without thought. Without *purpose*.

Only one man gained from this.

“That’s all of them. Get an order to the vanguard . . . I want everything out of those bank vaults.”

The beleaguered wheezing of my mentor had become all too familiar to me. Numbani had dubbed Akinjide Adeyemi their Scourge, but I found that title far too generous. The years had been unkind to Adeyemi: he wasted his days indulging in the spoils of his trivial conquests, leaving him unfit for the head of Talon.

And yet, his rule persisted . . . for who would dare to face the bearer of the Doomfist?

The Doomfist. A tool so powerful that Adeyemi could ignore his every shortcoming. So long as he wielded that gauntlet, no challenger could stand



against him, no matter how weak he became. A superweapon reduced to a crutch.

But I was no mere challenger: I was Adeyemi's student. I knew his techniques, his weaknesses. In effect, I had replaced him in every way but in name.

"It's over, Adeyemi."

"What are you on about?"

"I cannot believe you've grown so complacent as to be blindsided by this."

"You would test my power while basking in *my* victory?"

"*Victory*? Look around. All this effort . . . *Pointless*. Talon has endured your greed long enough."

"You must be joking. Talon's power was built on my success alone."

"And what is Talon under your command? A bludgeon for petty raids on Numbani? You have squandered everything you fought for. You believe since power is yours now, so it will always be."

"You think I cannot hold this power, child? I have never lost a battle, and that will not change today."

"Can you truly claim those achievements, Adeyemi? Or do you owe them all to Ngumi?"

Adhabu Ngumi: the man who'd crafted the Doomfist and used it to beat back the worst ravages of the Crisis. The greatest thing Adeyemi had accomplished was stealing power from the corpse of a better man.

"So long as you remain in charge, Talon will stagnate. You have one choice: adapt or die."

"I will not have my reign challenged by some upstart. I honed you, I forged you. Without me, you are *nothing*."

"No. Without you, I will have nothing in my way."

He laughed then—a mirthless laugh. Any pretense of ego or contempt was gone from him. He understood that this fight would be his last.

"You think to be my successor? That you simply *deserve* what I have built?"

I was ready. *Hungry*.

But something wasn't right.





Weight pressed down on me, making each movement a struggle. I strained to focus on my mentor, but his image blurred and twisted before my eyes.

“It is as I taught you long ago. Power is not passed down . . .”

This time, it was not Adeyemi’s voice that spoke this lesson . . .

“It must be seized.”

The fight was over. But a new one raged as I woke.

A fight to move. To breathe. To survive.

How far had I fallen? Pain and numbness rendered me paralyzed. The storm overhead stung my open wounds with pelting sleet.

But when I reached out, tried to rise from the ground, I felt . . . nothing. Merely the phantom pain of a limb I could no longer claim.

I had lost the gauntlet.

I’d *lost*.

I had been beaten. When I had usurped Adeyemi all those years ago, I had believed myself far too capable to repeat his mistakes. But that faith had been vanity in itself. And now I had fallen, by the same path I had risen: found wanting by another, buried beneath my own failures.

There was only one choice left for me now: adapt . . . or die.

*No.*

*I will not meet Adeyemi’s fate. I will not bear the legacy of shortsighted failure, of one who has outgrown his own ambition.*

*I know which choice I must make.*

