End of the Road

As the molted swirl of hyperspace suddenly ended and the TIE Defender reverted to real space, it's pilot quickly scanned the sensors and the navacomputer to confirm his location. It was out of habit more than necessity. This particular pilot has more time behind the controls of a fighter than the newer Dark Jedi Knights had time in their own skin. But this was his routine, one drilled into him at the Imperial Academy and his early years fighting the Rebels during the Galactic Civil War, and one he will follow for the rest of his life. Taking a deep breath within his helmet he let the Force flow through him. He could sense the weariness of the crewmembers of the Tarentum Flagship that hung before him. His ship. Sure, it belonged to House Tarentum. But it was still *his*.

His comm unit crackled to life. "TIE Defender, please identify yourself." the pilot was about so smirk when he noticed not one of the ships point defense lasers or even the larger turbo lasers swung to target him, as was standard operating procedure. Anger began to dance behind his eyes as he pressed the transmit button on the control stick.

"Control, this is TIE Defender *Omega*. Captain Hades piloting." He could almost visualize the bored control officer, already aware that the Captain was scheduled to arrive at this exact time, look at his own fingernails to see if they needed a trim. At least that is what they did during the holodramas. The comm gave voice to the electronic reply, "*Omega*, you are cleared to approach and land in priority section one. Welcome home, sir."

He did not even bother with a reply. Pushing the engine control to full, the TIE Defender raced towards the ship's massive hangar. With the grace of a musician he glided the TIE into the correct landing pad and quickly shut down the systems. The pilot hatch shot open and Hades exited with a Force enhanced leap. With a slow forward flip he landed on his feet. His helmet was left inside the black TIE Defender. He quickly began to walk towards the nearest lift. Ignoring the salutes he usually returned. As he entered the lift he punched in the correct level for the bridge. His anger growing at the way his shipmates were behaving. He had spent 40 years in military service from the Galactic Empire, to the Emperor's Hammer, to the Dark Jedi Brotherhood. From flying a TIE Fighter fresh out of flight school to a Fleet Admiral and now to a Sith Battlemaster who is Captain of the lone Imperial Star Destroyer of his House. He knows the crew has spent the last year fighting for Tarentum in one battle after another. He knows they are tired. They are burned out. But this was still *his ship*.

By the time he reached the bridge he did not realize his unlit lightsaber was in his hand. He stormed from the lift, again ignoring the nod of respect from the stormtroopers stationed at the lift doors, as Hades had forbid saluting on the bridge to keep reaction times down. He screamed to the crew. "Weapons Officer! Control Officer! Front and center!" Hades could see the crew shrink within their own skin. Their Captain was not one to yell at the crew. Having come from their own ranks he was one of the Tarenti who treated his non-Force sensitive crew with the upmost respect. He knew all of this, but he did not care. Not this time.

From their stations the two officers he called out looked at him with their eyes wide, slowly standing and glancing at one another trying to make some sense from this outburst. This was too slow for Hades' taste. Letting out a roar from someplace deep within, where he held his darkest fears, he reached for both officers and propelled them with the Force together onto the viewports on the far upper walkway of the bridge. He held them there as he marched toward them, the ignited lightsaber unknowingly glowing violet in his hand. Their eyes darting now between his eyes and the lightsaber's blade.

"Why did you not train weapons on a sudden contact dropping out of hyperspace near the ship?!" He screamed at the Weapons Officer. The officer struggling for words as Hades switched to the Control Officer. "And you! I could feel how bored you were through the Force. Did you even look at your monitor to double check I was who I said I was?" The Control Officer's eyes showed nothing but panic as he shook his head.

"Is this the kind of bantha poodoo you want to be? You want to be the ones who let down your shipmates when an enemy drops in close and you do not even care to investigate? I bet it would just ruin your day if you were sucking space because you were not on top of your jobs, wouldn't it?" Hades raised his lightsaber when he heard a distinctive voice behind him.

"Hades!" Quaestor Scion yelled at him. His own arms down at his side. "Put them down, man." Hades let out a breath he seemed to be holding on to forever. His shoulders slumped forward as he deactivated his lightsaber. The two officers sliding to the floor, staying where they lay, afraid to move. Hades slowly looked around the bridge, at the faces of the horrified crew and closed his own eyes for just a moment. He then straightened up and walked directly to the Captain's ready room just aft of the bridge. He leaned down with his suddenly sweaty palms face down against the cool black glossy desk, his head hanging between his shoulders. Scion was quick to enter after him and closed the door.

"I can't find her." Hades said as his longtime friend stood next to him. No name was needed to identify the person in question. "She's.. she's just gone. I can't find a trace." Scion rested a hand on Hades' shoulder.

"I'm sorry, bud. I know you were desperate. That is why I gave you leave. You know how much I wanted you to find her." Hades nodded and turned around to lean against the desk. "I traced her back towards the DC's fleet. But it seemed she just vanished." He didn't add the 'not again' part but Scion could feel it was there. This was the second time Telona had vanished from Hades life. The entire war had been one crisis after another. It's toll was now showing on Hades' face as well as everyone else. It had been hard on Tarentum. Loosing many Tarenti to battle or injury. It had brought them closer together, at least that is what Scion had hoped. But seeing the always optimistic Hades in his current condition tempered that line of thought. He had no idea what will happen to his beloved Tarentum. His home for so many years might be in jeopardy. But for what? For whom? For the DC's lust for power? For the Grand Master's new playthings? Maybe it was just so the Grand Master's former clan reap the wealth and finally wage war on the rest of the smaller Houses of the Dar Jedi Brotherhood. Scion snorted to himself. The Brotherhood was no more a brotherhood than it was a confederation. Maybe it will be a dictatorship after all this is over. Who knows. But whatever happens, he knows he and his former Master, Hades, will face it shoulder to shoulder. Maybe they could buy a ship and go search for Telona together. Maybe they end of like Han Solo and Chewbacca, minus the being crushed by a moon part.

Hades stood up straight and looked at him. "Thanks. And I'm sorry about before." Scion nodded knowingly. Hades began to walk towards the door." You need to clamp down on your thoughts. You are like an open book." Hades gave a grin and strode through the doorway as it slid open, offering the following over his shoulder: "And you would be the Wookie, by the way."

SBM Hades of House Tarentum

#8596