**The Searching**

**38 ABY**

**Antenora Orbit**

**Cocytus System**

 The view from *T-4 Class* shuttle’s cockpit was a juxtaposition of serenity and abject carnage. In the distance, the beige planet of Antenora was visible, flecked with oasis of greens and whites at the poles and interspersed in a few diverse localities. The blight of urban development or a cluttered inner orbit did not plague this savage world. Closer at hand, debris of a defiled freighter slowly drifted in the vacuum of space, too far from the planet’s orbit to plummet yet close enough to be fixed immobile. “Now, we wait,” ordered the Krath Priest to the pilot.

 Zagro Fenn had known Grant Polle for some time now. The Correlian was a trusted friend and member of House Scholae Palatinae’s Imperial Navy. Disobeying orders for the sake of the ex Battle Team Sergeant would not go unpunished. “Sir, hiding in this debris field has put us at a tactical disadvantage. While we are shielded from being spotted we have zero visibility,” replied Grant.

 The Hapan sighed. It was a pity he could not tell his stalwart pilot all of the details of his stratagem. Key documents had gone missing, a horde of information that few were even aware of had been snatched from the Empire’s palm. More troubling yet, no one had seen the enemy enter the system or depart. Scholae warships had set up choke points throughout the system and had found nothing. Imperial Intelligence had come up lacking. As he eyed the few loyal soldiers remaining to him in the cabin, the shuttle’s communications display was hailed.

 “Zag…the Emperor is not happy that you left without permission, commandeered a Navy shuttle, and entered the quarantine zone in direct violation of his orders. The system is on lock down for fear of cloaked warships we cannot afford to send an escort to look after you,” came the friendly yet stern voice of Lucyeth. So, the Empire had good sense after all sending the Krath’s friend to reason with him.

 Wrapping his fist on the bulkhead he signaled for his men to be ready to disembark in fifteen minutes. He turned back to the display, “Lucyeth, Judecca does not become you. I was nostalgic for our old world. Truth be told I had a sense that the enemy that attacked this freighter and stole the tomes was not from without, but from within. The system is locked up tight yet an attack occurred. Simply put, whoever did this is still *here.*”

 Pollee acknowledged a signal on a different frequency and maneuvered the shuttle out of the debris field. Within seconds coordinates had been punched in for Antenora’s surface. Lucyeth’s voice came in with a harsh static from the capital. “Negative. Stand down. We have no jurisdiction anymore. We were reassigned and the team disbanded. I want a formal report immediately.”

 Fenn sighed yet again, not caring to continue the conversation, “The information we lost was betrayed to us from within. It matters not who, but to what aim? We are weakened by the unrest of Zhan. We have bleed heavily on Korriban. The tribes are restless on Antenora and with Acclivis Draco now a retirement posting and the Kraken Regiment demobilized how long until insurrection destroys all we have built? I have intercepted some signals from the southern hemisphere. The great clans of the south are preparing for war. This information will only agitate them and give a casus belli for war. I do not wish to see our warriors destroy themselves like this.”

 Lucyeth’s shock was palpable over the vast distance of space. “Stand down, if you continue on this course the Imperial Navy will have no choice but to bring you to Judecca. Ships are being mobilized now. Kell Dante himself is to lead this hunt.”

 “So, where the Navy and Intelligence should be finding the assailants they are coming after me? Look around you. We have a mole somewhere in the apparatus working against us. You know where I will be. I just hope my message has been received,” Fenn terminated the communications and sat down as the shuttle entered atmosphere.

**Southern Oasis**

**Antenora**

**3 Hours Later**

The compound was as massive as it was undetectable. Composed of adobe and sandstone it blended in with the gently rolling sand dunes and windswept plains of the desolate region. If it were not for the underground water source Fenn might not have known to monitor its location. The southern clans were wise to keep this staging area a secret, as no northern clans or moderates were aware of its existence. The location had its benefits, namely, the Imperials would not be able to easily discover it. This was what Zagro had hoped for.

 “Zag, I don’t know about this. We have zero intel on how many warriors are in here nor do we have any exfiltration plan,” came the cautious council of the normally determined and martial Ulfsark.

 “He is right, Master. Why not wait for backup and radio this in? We can have the fleet here in no time to blast it off the map,” Drake Starfire always seemed to like this approach.

 Fenn again sighed yet again and looked at his feet for several seconds. “Gentlemen, you have taken great risk to follow me. However, the men at our backs have not the luxury of standing down and going home. The Kraken Regiment has nominally been disbanded and disarmed. This is their planet. If we continue to do their battles for them how will Antenora become strong and self asserted member of the Empire? We have bled with these men and trained them for a while now. Have you no thought for them?”

 “Master, we simply do not understand the logic of sending three Dark Jedi against a fortified position, with no cover, against unknown odds, all for the sake of some natives,” Ulfsark came to his fellow apprentice’s aid.

 “Did I say *we* would be doing the assault?”

**Southern Oasis**

**Antenora**

**1 Hours Later**

The attack was as brief as it was brutal. The secessionist tribes had no indication that an assault was imminent. The sentries were posted haphazardly and were more concerned with the preparations inside the compound than with events outside. The first wave of Kraken Regiment commandos has reached the walls effortless and stormed the ramparts silently executing the watch. Devoid of their stormtrooper armor they moved swiftly and silently, and more importantly blending with the environment.

 The ramparts taken, the soldiers rapidly surged forward and concealed themselves against the walls of the compound, awaiting the massive gate to open. The commandos spread out across the perimeter of the walls and took their firing positions with crew served weapons. The few snipers that had answered the call taking key areas of coverage. When the gates opened, the slaughter was befitting of the carnal history of the planet.

 The Dark Jedi slipped in during the chaos and quickly made their way to the command center. It was not hard in the turmoil to dispatch all the remaining guards and retrieve the crates that they were looking for. Timing was fortunate as well, the Imperial Navy landed marines and sent air coverage shortly after the smoke began to rise over the horizon.

 Kell Dante imperiously strolled past the assembled Kraken Regiment warriors and eyed the wayward Dark Jedi callously. “Well then, your savages seem to have retrieved the artifacts after all. This is highly unorthodox. You have all disobeyed direct orders. Come with me, now. The Emperor will be speaking with you immediately.”

 The group followed, giving no resistance. Fenn acknowledged the officers of the Kraken Regiment and nodded a solemn praise in the Antenoran manner. “Yes, we disobeyed orders. But, we retrieved the documents. And more than that, we assured the Kraken Regiment’s survival. They, not the Imperials, have safeguarded their planet in the Emperor’s name. That is enough.”