Showdown

*"You have to keep your mental guard up at all times." Said the woman behind him. Hades took a deep breath and smirked a bit as he focused on the book in front of him. He began to read the old Krath book again, attempting to complete the final ritual he needed to obtain an elevation to Krath Archpriest. Telona placed her hands on his shoulders and leaned in to whisper just behind his ear. "I'm beginning to think you do not need me here." she said in a seductive voice. Keeping his mind focused on his task he was still able to smile at thought of his lover standing behind him. He was able to complete the ritual without an issue. He turned around and grinned at her.*

*"I think you are more evil than I am." she said with a smirk of her own. She glided the two steps between them and wrapped her arms around his neck. His arms slid around her waist as she kissed him with passion and intensity. Hades could taste her sweet lips on his and it was pure bliss. She pulled back slightly and smiled into his eyes.*

*"Get up you bum." She said. Hades tilted his head in confusion.*

"Get up!" Scion yelled at Hades as he kicked the cot the Tarentum AED had been sleeping on over to the far side of the tent. Hades was up with an ignited lightsaber within half a second, murder on his mind. Scion just laughed.

"Breakfast in five, briefing in ten. You slept four hours. Congratulations." Hades let out a string of curses at his old friend as the man left the tent laughing harder than he had in ages. Hades deactivated his lightsaber and hung it on his belt. He moved to the portable refresher station and made himself presentable. He stared at himself in the mirror for a few seconds, letting his mind drift off. He wondered where she was, what she was doing, if she was still alive. He gave himself two more seconds then shook the thought off, as well as the dream. Now was not the time or the place.

Breakfast was bland and the briefing was rife with holes in the intelligence section. At this point he was pretty sure Muz's Intel people were just making it up as they go along. But the gist was some scrolls to the Rite of Immortality were in this hellhole of a town controlled by the enemy. They have no idea if they are in the same spot or if one of a dozen people/factions might have it. Go there. Obtain the scrolls. Don't die. Have a nice day.

The team that was selected was the top half of its roster. Anyone who was above Dark Jedi Knight and above was going with the exception of Oberst, who was currently in charge of Tarentum's Naval Forces for this mission. Though since Scion and Hades would be on the team, Farrin was asked to remain in charge of the rest of Tarentum's forces and assist the Loyalists however they could. They would make regularly scheduled contacts with Farrin twice a day, but other than that, they were on their own.

Darth Aeternus (or Korras if you've known him for a long time) and Hades were usually on point. Korras had the powerful force abilities and Hades had the sniper rifle and scanning equipment. The Sith Battlemaster had almost fallen in love with the slugthrower carbine and sniper rifle that he had carried in his previous missions. The first mission had culminated in Hades dispatching 'Mav' Cantor from Tal at distance while the later was attacking Loyalist's positions at the mouth of the Sith Academy. That shot landing him the respect of Korras and others and many promises of drinks upon their victory. A victory that was far from certain, though the Loyalists do seem to have the upper hand.

Korras and Hades ascended the last rise before the city of Dreshdae lay before them, not even a hundred meters from the base of this very hill. The two Tarenti peered over the edge, Korras with the force, Hades with his sniper scope. The town looked half abandoned. They could make out some fighting by the spaceport on the far side of the city, a decent sized battle. Hades liked that. It would hopefully take some eyes off of their entry. The two could feel Scion, the QUA and Prince of Tarentum join them from behind.

"Report."

"Slim pickings so far. Only a few signs of life on this side." Hades began.

"And a battle by the spaceport." Korras added.

"We do not have any reports of Loyalist contact in the area, but that doesn't mean squat lately." Scion replied with a not so subtle hint of sarcasm. The other two nodded in agreement as they continued their scans. Korras tapped Hades' arm and pointed towards a building just to their left. "Second story." Korras added.

Hades aim the rifle at the house and zoomed in and slowly pulled up to get a better look at the window on the second story. Sure enough, a sentry was posted scanning the ridge line for activity. "Down." Was all Hades said as the sentry started scanning in their direction. All three kept down and out of sight for several seconds before Korras nodded that it was clear to resume. How he knew that, Hades did not know but longed for when he could do the same.

"Observe. See how long it takes for him to check in and time it. I'll have everyone ready." Scion moved down to start getting the other Tarenti ready to move. Korras grinned at Hades as both men knew exactly what Scion had wanted.

As they observed the sentry, the made note that he checked in every seven minutes via a small comm unit in his hand. The rest of the Tarenti were just below the crest of the hill as Hades set his sniper rifle's sights on the sentry's head. He had already checked to make sure the suppressor was properly fitted to the rifle, as they did not want to make a sound. He waited. Finally, the sentry appeared to speak into the comm unit then placed it back on his belt. Hades pulled the trigger gently and fired. The ballistic round was only halfway to its target when the Tarenti jumped over the crest of the hill with the assistance of the force. Hades and Korras were both up and running by the time slug found it's mark just left of the nose and right of the eye. The explosion of brain matter was quite a spectacle, Hades assumed. Too bad he would never know for sure. The first members of Tarentum were at the base of the building when the body had dropped. The two scouts met up with them two seconds later.

Hades had slung his sniper rifle over onto his back and slide his suppressed slugthrower carbine into a ready position. Some members of the team rolled their eyes at his choice of weaponry, then again, most of them have never been on the other end of one when the trigger was pulled. He still bore a few scars of where he had been struck. He knew a slugthrower with a high cyclic rate was almost impossible to defend against with a lightsaber. And, better yet, the slugs cannot be reflected back at you like a blaster bolt can.

Hades moved to the corner of the building and peered around. No one there. He then looked back at Scion and waited for orders. The QUA nodded to both him and Korras, who was leading half of the group from the other corner. Hades nodded and shouldered his rifle and peered down his sights. He then moved around the corner and carefully made his way close to the far corner, keeping in the shadows as he pointed to a door he passed so others behind him can keep an eye on it.

Once to the far corner, Hades and Korras both scanned the buildings on both sides of the first street, once it was determined clear they would run to the far side of the street and set up a watch position to cover the other Tarenti as they bolted across. This happened several times as they moved towards the center of town. They all knew this town was controlled by the One Sith so they had to be cautious. By the time the team had arrived at the main communications hut for the One Sith towards the middle of town they had avoided four One Sith patrols. This building would more than likely holds information that would aid the Tarenti in recovering the scrolls. Hopefully.

Scion was drawing up an entry plan as Korras held up his fist then quickly motioned everyone to get down. They all complied without a sound. Voices could be heard moving closer to the hut. Finally, the team could make them out.

"Listen you little Mynock munching dim wits. I don't have the damn scrolls. I sold them to one of your Masters earlier!" cried out the tall human male in binders.

"You're lying! You will give us the scrolls or face a very long and very painful death." Yelled a One Sith Dark Jedi, though Hades was not sure of the One Sith's skill level or abilities. Hades looked back at Scion who just nodded. Hades tapped Korras on the shoulder softly and received a nod in return. As the One Sith stopped in front of the communication hut and entered a code into the keypad by the door Korras and Hades stepped out of the shadows. While Hades was dispatching the three guards near the prisoner Korras quickly broke the neck of the One Sith. The two moved inside the communications hut as Master Anshar grabbed the prisoner and moved inside after them. Three of the four communication techs were permanently silenced by Hades while Korras took down the two One Sith in control. Hades pointed his carbine at the head of the remaining tech as he got into his role of the act.

"What should we do with this one?" Hades asked out loud.

"Kill him." Korras replied.

"NO! Oh please no!" screamed the tech.

"Why should we not?" Answered Scion as he stepped closer to the frightened man.

"I, uh. Can give you codes! Just please do not kill me!" Hades resisted the urge to roll his eyes. *Pathetic meat bag. He is not really a true believer, apparently.*

"I do not believe you!" Hades screamed as he lowered the carbine and shot a hole in the man's foot.

"AAAHH! STOP! Please!! I have the One Sith master code! Our unit leader just entered it to report the prisoner's arrival when you broke in. It's still activated!" pleaded the man.

"This code here?" Battlelord Merlance asked as he typed the code on the command console into a datapad.

"Yes!" Merlance looked over and plugged an earpiece into his ear and then to his comm unit and dialed up a just discovered One Sith frequency that was heavily encrypted. He smiled and nodded that the code worked.

"Is that all you have?" screamed Scion.

"That's all I have! Please, just let me go free!" begged the technician. Scion sighed and nodded. "Hades?"

Hades ignited his lightsaber and made a swift line through the man's neck, severing it clean.

"You are now free. Go in peace." Hades said to a few chuckles.

"Not so fast, you." Anshar said as he pulled the prisoner back in front of the group. "He was trying to leave without saying goodbye."

Scion stood in front of the prisoner and looked him in the eyes.

"Name." he asked.

"Who the hell are oooohhf!" spat the man as he doubled over thanks to a knee to the stomach from Anshar.

"What is your name?" Scion asked again.

"Grey." Said the man after he could breathe normally again.

"Grey what?" Asked Scion, but he was pretty sure everyone assembled knew exactly who this man was, and what this meant from this mission.

"That's all you get!" Before Grey could spit in Scion's face, Hades' carbine stock connected with the back of Mr. Grey's head, knocking him to the floor. Korras lifted the man up with the force by his neck. He began to struggle against the invisible hand restricting his air flow.

"Stop wasting our time, traitor." Korras said in a very flat, emotionless voice. Scion let the man hang there for several long moments before motioning to Korras to let him down. Korras did so and Mr. Grey dropped to the floor with a crack. He screamed and grabbed his ankle. He then bit his tongue looked up at Scion in a rage. The Tarenti QUA kneeled down a few feet away and smiled.

"Connor, your name is Conner right? Connor, you think we do not know who you are. That we have not been observing you for some time now. And you also think we do not know where the scrolls are." asked Scion with all seriousness. This reminded Hades never to play Sabacc against Scion, because the man was lying through his teeth and even Hades believed him while knowing otherwise.

"I don't know what you are talking about!" Conner screamed as he looked around at the other members of the team.

"You do!" Yelled Hades as he stomped on Conner's injured ankle. The scream that came from his mouth sent a chill down some member's spine. And everyone assembled enjoyed every second. Anshar smiled a bit then looked off to the side, thinking.

"What do you smell?" Anshar asked no one in particular. Several members tuned into their senses.

"A carbine discharge." Master Bloodfyre said, sneering at Hades.

"Smoke?" Battlemaster Archean responded. Anshar nodded.

"Cigarette smoke, to be more accurate." Anshar corrected.

"Check his pockets." Scion ordered.

"No! I'm all out! Stop!" Conner pleaded, but to no avail. Hades and Merlance searched the man's pockets until Merlance came upon a container of cigarettes about the size of three decks of Sabacc cards. He handed it over to Anshar. The elder Tarenti gazed upon the container intently before sliding his finger along the side edge.

"If you wanted a cigarette all you had to do was ask." Conner said, mockingly. Anshar ignored the man until he found the button he was looking for. A secret compartment inside the case opened. Inside, folded very tight and neat, was some old parchment. It's at this point Conner growled at Anshar and attempted to reach for his leg. Anshar calmly stepped to the side and approached Scion, who then gently pulled the paper from its hiding place. They were then carefully unfolded until Scion's eyes lit up.

"We have them." said the QUA, almost unbelieving what he was holding.

"That is nothing! Give them ba-" multiple shots from Merlance's blaster put Conner Grey out of his misery.

"So we do not have to fight through a few hundred One Sith zealots, slay some beast of lore and save a princess to get the scrolls?" Hades asked in disbelief.

"Nope." Bloodfyre responded.

"Roger that! Let's get this back to the Grand Master. Shall we?" Hades said with a smile.

"Lead the way." Scion said as he replaced the scrolls back into the case and handed it to Anshar. "Keep it safe until we get back to the Grand Master." Anshar nodded as he accepted his personal responsibility.

\*\*\*

**Near Orbit**

**Selen**

**Dajorra System**

**38 ABY**

*Nightfall* loomed very large in the viewport of the ISD-II *Magnus Kaerner.* The entirety of House Tarentum was onboard the *MK* for this meeting, save for Oberst who was on board the RSD *Orion* commanding the rest of Tarentum's fleet who were still engaged alongside the Arconan fleet.

A blip on a nearby monitor caught Hades' eye. A single shuttle along with two full squadrons of escort fighters left the hanger bay of the massive *Nightfall*.

"He's en route. Let's meet him in the hangar." Hades said. A communications office relayed the information to the other Tarenti onboard. By the time the shuttle landed House Tarentum was in perfect formation in front of the Grand Master as he descended. They bowed in unison before Muz lifted a hand up. "

"Rise, House Tarentum. You shall bow to no one else today." Grand Master Muz Ashen said as he drew near. The Tarenti pulled themselves up to their full height as Scion, Hades and Farrin stepped forward. Farrin and Hades on either side and half a step behind Scion.

"My Lord, the scrolls for which you seek." Scion said with pride as he extended the open cigarette case with the scrolls exposed to the Grand Master. Muz seized the container and carefully extracted the scrolls. He then discarded the container to the side.

"Magnificent!" Muz exclaimed as he carefully unfolded the scrolls. The older man's eyes filled with excitement for the future. He then tucked the scrolls deep inside his robes before looking upon House Tarentum once more.

"Members of House Tarentum, both Tarentae and Tarenti. Today you have delivered the deathblow to our enemies. Without these scrolls, the other factions will fall into line. From now on, The Dark Brotherhood will be-"

"LIES!" screamed a voice behind Muz, near the shuttle. The entirety of Tarentum and any other Dark Brotherhood Dark Jedi snapped their lightsabers on and into a ready position. A tall younger man appeared from under the shuttle, a golden lightsaber ignited in his hand. As he walked forward the pure anger on Muz's face turned into rage as he saw the man emerge from the shadows.

"PRAVUS!" Muz screamed as much as spat. "You would stand against me?!"

"You will bring this Brotherhood to its knees! You will rule with such distrust that it will tear us apart! I cannot let you use the Rite." Pravus leveled his lightsaber directly at Muz.

"Time to die." Pravus said as he engaged Muz while igniting his Darksaber. The elder Krath ignited both a red and violate lightsaber in the blink of an eye, meeting the attack with a quick counter attack before leaping back to open the distance between them. Muz scowled at his traitorous Deputy Grand Master. The members of Tarentum had withdrawn to the edges of the smaller VIP section of the shuttle bay. They had disgarded their robes but kept their lightsabers lit and ready.

"Why?" Muz growled.

"I asked you to reconsider. I told you to destroy the scrolls as soon as you held the in your hands. I felt the force as you finally obtained them. You were NEVER going to destroy them! This power will destroy the Brotherhood, not bring it together." Pravus did not hesitate after the last words slipped from his lips before attacking.

Hades could only watch and catch glimpses of the action. An attack, a block. A sidestep, a parry. Most of it was a blur. Holding his violet lightsaber in his left hand he un-holstered his Dissuader KD-30 slugthrower and held it at the ready. He could see a few of the Dark Jedi Masters within the ranks of Tarentum ready themselves. He knew he did not have a chance against a Grand Master, but he could possible distract one for a split second to aid in an eventual attack.

As the two battled intensely from one section of the shuttle bay to another, they could tell that Muz was starting to weaken. And if even Hades could tell, Pravus could surely do the same. Then, finally, it came. Muz extended a block a little too far and Pravus took advantage by slicing through the lightsaber in the right hand and taking two fingers and a thumb with it. Pravus then spun in an opposite direction striking Muz's remaining lightsaber and using his own second lightsaber to slice cleanly through GM's left arm just below the elbow. Muz fell to the floor with a short scream of pain before silencing himself and staring at his own demise. Pravus moved to strike down Muz but was startled by a cry from the ranks of Tarentum. Masters Darth Aeternus, Sith Bloodfyre and Anshar Kahn all jumping to Muz's defense. No one more passionately than Aeternus. His attacks brutal and intense.

As the three mastered dueled in a whirlwind of anger and death, Hades leveled his slugthrower pistol. Hades watched the four men battle for a few minutes before Hades could see a pattern developing in the attacks from the three Tarenti. They would switch attackers that were on opposite sides of Darth Pravus, keeping him off balance and just barely out of total control of his defenses. Waiting until Darth Aeternus again swung low as, opposite of him, Master Sith Bloodfyre swung high, Hades fired two shots in rapid succession at Pravus' heart. Darth Pravus moved to block Hades' shots as Anshar and Bloodfyre attacked again. The shots dissolved once met with Pravus' blade which was able to quickly block Anshar while the second blade blocked Bloodyre's, but as good as Pravus was, he could not also block Korras' blow that took the Deputy Grand Master and split him from stem to stern, as they say. The two halves of Darth Pravus crumbled into a smoldering heap on the deck.

"MEDIC!" Scion ordered as soon as the DGM had fallen. Several members of Tarenti moved to the Grand Master's side to aid the elder Krath. A medic quickly appeared at the GM's side and began to administer aid.

"*Nightfall.*" Muz said to Darth Aeternus who nodded.

"We need to EVAC the Grand Master to *Nightfall* NOW! Let's go!" ordered Aeternus.

"Thank you, Tarentum. I shall never be able to repay your loyalty." Muz smiled at Scion and Hades, the first smile Hades had ever seen the GM make in all the years he has been in the man's presence. The two Tarenti smiled at one another as they watched the leader of the Dark Brotherhood be loaded onboard the shuttle he had just arrived in. Hades reached the comm system on the wall of the bay and ordered the ship to General Quarters and to scramble all fighters to engage in security for the GM's Shuttle and to provide CAP in case Pravus had more up his sleeve.

Later on, the Tarenti received official word that Grand Master Muz was doing fine and being fitted for prosthetics at that time. As the rest of the Tarentum Navy was recalled back home to the Yridia system with all ships present and accounted for and fewer than one hundred deaths among crew and Tarenti, there was much to celebrate. As the house as a whole celebrated their victory, Hades and Scion sat in the Quaestor's office with their feet up on opposite sides of the desk.

"Well. Now what?" Hades mused into his glass of Corellian whiskey before taking a small sip.

"Vacation?" Scion asked.

"Ha! What is that? I think I am going to go back to the *Sword's Sheath*. There is something I need to do." Hades said as he finished his glass and stood. Scion just nodded.

"Telona?"

"Yeah. I know, Firebird. But..." Hades trailed off, searching for the right words. "I love her." he said finally.

"I know, brother. Have you ever thought of finding her?"

" I've tried. Every day." Hades smiled a bit at his old friend.

"Just let me know and say you are on a 'fact finding mission' for Tarentum. You'd be able to take the *Gladius*, or if you are going to be a few weeks, how about the *Cocytus*. The crew still considers themselves Hades' crew." The Tarentum AED appreciated the offer more than Scion would ever know.

"No. My TIE Defender should be just fine for now, if I feel the need to leave. But if I change my mind, I'll let you know." Hades extended his hand and Scion shook it like two old shipmates would.

"I'll see you next week." Scion smiled as his friend left his office. Once his AED was long gone, Scion depressed a hidden button on his desk.

"Did you hear all of that?"

"Yes." Said the woman on the other end.

"How long are you going to hide from him? He would go to the ends of the galaxy to find you." Scion sighed and rubbed his eyes.

"I know. But you must stall him. Keep him there, in system."

"How long, Telona? He is my oldest friend and Master." Scion was frustrated.

"Just.. Just long enough. Until I know how he will react." the former Krath High Priestess sighed.

"It's dinner time. I have to feed Jaden." The sadness in her voice was briefly tempered by the happiness when she mentioned Jaden's name.

"When will you tell him?" Scion could only imagine the thought of Hades not knowing.

"Soon. I promise."

"He would be an amazing father, Telona. You know that."

"I know. I've always known. But I left once I found out and... I just. One day. Soon. I have to go. Watch out for him, will you?" Telona quickly ended the transmission. Scion shook his head.

"Yeah. I always do.."

SBM Hades

AED of Tarentum

PIN #8596