**The Ordeal
by
Dante
#2407**

***Cocytus System
Ptolomea
Day 1
0932***

Heat.

Dampness.

Rain.

Trent.

Burning.

Pain.

Kell slowly opened his eyes as he realized that he wasn’t dead, and the scenery around him wasn’t very pleasant. The MAAT that he had been riding in was now strewn all around in a huge debris field, and it didn’t look like anyone else had survived the crash.

Stretching his limbs one by one, the Field Marshal was able to ascertain that nothing was broken, but he had severe bruising all over his body. “I’m gonna feel this one for awhile,” he muttered to himself as he rolled over and slowly picked himself off the jungle floor.

His helmet was gone, and it looked like an EMP weapon had been used to bring down the MAAT as none of his equipment that was powered was working other than his lightsaber as it was heavily shielded and not on at the time of the blast.

Around him, the lush vegetation was thick and would provide a brutal test to the battle hardened soldier if he was going to get out alive. As he stood up and looked up at the canopy shield, the rains began to start. One more obstacle added to an already dire situation.

Bringing up a mental map of the area, Dante remembered that there was a small outpost that the Imperial Scholae Guard had set up a few weeks ago in the sector, but it was going to be at least a two day march through the dense foliage in order to reach it.

A lightsaber, 2 DL-44’s, a E-17d sniper rifle, all the ammo he could carry, and enough rations for a week was what he was able to scavenge from what he had on him plus what he found in the wreckage of the MAAT. It was more than enough supplies compared to what he had to use back in the old SERE school that had been run by his father’s friend, Janson, two decades ago. That had been one of the roughest two weeks of his life.

Time to reminisce on the trail, he thought to himself as he shouldered the sniper rifle and began the long walk.

***Day 1
1755***

Every jungle was the same, but each was different. The oxymoron was enough to make Dante chuckle to himself as he walked along the animal worn trail. This one, in particular, reminded him of one of his first combat missions from his youth. He had decided to join the Hammer’s Fist Legion under the command of his father on the 2nd campaign to the jungle world of Trent. His father had regaled him with stories of the planet as that had also been his father’s first major action with the Fist in the service of the Emperor’s Hammer.

Darkness fell, and Kell managed to scrape together enough edible plants to make himself what amounted to a combat salad of greenery and wild berries. Luckily, he had packed additional water rations that would last the entire trip plus he had a large supply of potable tablets that would make most water on Ptolomea into potable drinking water. It might not taste good, but he wouldn’t get a parasite or infection from drinking the local water. Climbing a nearby tree, he managed to find a good comfortable spot and settle in for the night.

***Day 2
0630***

A new day had arrived, and more walking and thinking to do on the trail awaited him as he slid down the tree. As commander of the Imperial Scholae Guard and Quaestor of House Imperium, Dante had little time by himself, and even less time to meditated and ponder what was going on around him. Here in the forest, focus was key to survival, and Kell was intent on not dying out here in the boonies of Ptolomea.

That he was stuck on Ptolomea was fairly amusing since it was his father who had launched a massive strike on the planet and rendered some parts of it uninhabitable for years. Many had argued that it was his intense hatred of Caliburnus that had caused him to order the attack, but others had said it was simply a hard choice as the rebels had taken over much of the former headquarters of the former House. It was either destroy it completely or let out a bunch of very important and sensitive intelligence that was contained in the databanks and networks of Caliburnus.

***Day 3
0610***

After another night sleeping in the relative safety of a tree limb a few meters above the ground, Kell steeled himself for the final leg of the walk to the outpost. Heading up the last mountain, the trooper made a zig-zag pattern up the rough terrain. He hadn’t encountered any enemy forces yet in his two day adventure, but he wasn’t going to take any chances that he was being followed. As he approached the ridgeline, he began hearing voices.

Taking a knee, Dante brought his sniper scope up to his eye and scanned the terrain from left to right. To his right, he glimpsed a pair of enemy scouts dressed in green fatigues. As most irregulars were, their field craft was sloppy. Although they had set up their observation post in the correct spot to avoid detection from the other side of the ridgeline, they hadn’t anticipated the enemy coming from their rear.

With his sights settled on the first man, the Adept took a deep breath then exhaled halfway. A slight pull on the trigger, and the first blast from the E-17d went down range. The man’s helmet literally melted as the bolt impacted his skull. His companion barely had time to turn with a look of surprise before he too was taken out with a head shot.

Kell scanned the area for more observation posts and waited patiently to see if anyone would betray their position. After nearly an hour of waiting, the sniper slowly made his way towards the enemy position. Slipping over the makeshift barrier of the back wall of the keep, Dante slid over to the bodies of the two men. Both seemed to be lower enlisted men, and they had little on them besides the normal personal items which he left on their bodies. After grabbing their comm gear and putting it into his rucksack, he quietly slipped over the front of the small post and headed towards the downward slope and home.

***Day 3
1002***

After two days in the jungle, Kell looked down from the ridgeline and saw the wondrous sight of Outpost Bravo Kilo Three of the Imperial Scholae Guard. Never had a small comm station looked so good as it did now as the Field Marshal wiped the sweat from his brown and headed down the mountain to his destination.

Dante picked up the pace until he neared the outer perimeter of the comm station. He took out the comm gear that the rebels had had on them, and keyed up the emergency frequency for the Imperial Guard. “This is Nightstalker Lead calling Outpost Bravo Kilo Three… Again… this is Nightstalker Lead calling Outpost Bravo Kilo Three… come in… Over..”

A squawk came over the comms and said “Roger that… this is Outpost Bravo Kilo Three… require confirmation of identity over… Keyword is Indigo…. Awaiting response.”

Kell smiled and replied “Return keywords are Blue Tango Niner-Zero-Tango-Oscar. Over.”

“Confirmed…. They have been looking for you for two days, sir,” said the comms tech with much relief.

“Roger that… I’m on my way into your position, so please tell the turret gunners to not engage… popping blue smoke now,” replied Dante as he threw a smoke marker and headed towards the main gate of the compound.

Swinging open for him as he appeared, the gate quickly closed behind him, and the young lieutenant in command of the installation came out to greet him.

“Sir, we’re glad to see that you’re alive,” said Lieutenant Kravs as he reached the Field Marshal. The pair shook hands, and they headed into the compound’s main building.

“Get me a direct link to General Krennel… we need to launch a strike on the rest of the rebels…” said the Field Marshal as he walked into the comm room.

“Yes, sir… Coming right up,” replied the young private who was manning the communication system.