The Asylum. Headquarters of Mystics of the Black Arts. Occupied by the Krath Phyle of that name, it was a place that -even as Consul- Pel rarely visited. When he did visit, it was never without a good reason, and never without the company of the Krath Arch-Priestess Ciara Tearnan. She was no less insane than the rest of the Mystics, but at least she was able to keep them in line – mostly. This time Pel was making the journey for very good reasons - without her, but not alone by any means. The Asylum was under threat of attack, and Consul Farrin Xies had asked for volunteers to defend it. While the Asylum was part of Tarentum, and contributed to its power, it was not a military target. After the Mystics disbanded, the Asylum became used for other, even darker, purposes. Pel had not been back to the Asylum since before he left Yridia to wander alone. This visit was not one he was looking forward too.

Off-world mercenaries were seldom a match for a Dark Jedi Clan, but this one had already struck at the heart of Tarentum, cutting down SWL Rekio Corsair, and attacking SBL Raiju Kang – apparently converting him to their cause. Tarentum was not going to sit by and allow these invaders any more victories. Pel sat now in the passenger area of the *Tridens,* a Vanguard class heavy assault gunship, along with other members of the Order of the Trident. Recently co-opted by Pel to serve as a vessel for his own loyal faction of Tarentum. While formally a Battle-Team of the Clan headed by Pel’s former student, Ranarr, the Order of the Trident is actually a grouping of those loyal to Pel, and the ideals and glory of Tarentum before the Exodus. When Consul Farrin Xies decided a team should defend the Asylum, Pel made sure that Ranarr volunteered the Order’s services. Now Ranarr, Pel, Hades, Zekk, Dox, and Caesar were racing towards the Asylum to assist in the defense.

Captain Mikul Ledes intruded on Pel’s introspection, “M’lord, we will reach the Asylum in 4 minutes”

“Excellent, you can leave us at the Asylum proper, and then take up a patrol station. Knight Ranarr will keep in contact with your vessel, should we have further need of it.”

“Yes, M’Lord” was Vickes deferential reply, as he returned to his post.

Pel turned to his former student, “Ranarr, I’d suggest we deploy ourselves outside the Asylum. It would be good to stop the Mercs even getting inside if possible, and then if necessary we could fall back to the inside.”

“Sounds solid, I’ll make it happen. We’ll stop this crew from setting foot inside the Asylum.”

“That we will, Ranarr, that we will.”

Ranarr stepped away from Pel, and began issuing assignments to the Order. Pel fell back into a light meditative state, preparing himself for the coming battle.

Reaching a decision, Pel spoke again. “Ranarr, I have decided that I shall not accompany the team down to the surface. I will remain on board the *Tridens*. I am far more useful on a ship, than I am on the ground. If Captain Ledes can do his job well enough, there will not even be any troops on the ground for you to stop.”

“I wish that we had a few more ships,” Pel continued, “but at this stage I dare not over-extend my grasp, this one will have to suffice until we gain more power. This mission will help with that. I feel us landing, prepare yourselves.”

Pel settled back into the acceleration couch, as the other five Tarenti disembarked the *Tridens*.

“Leave at least a few for us.” Hades called back to Pel as he exited.

“We’ll see about that. “ Pel grinned back.

“Captain Ledes, put us in a spiral search pattern, centered on the Asylum, I don’t know if those mercs are coming by air or ground transport, but we should be able to find and stop them either way.”

“Yes, M’Lord.” The captain answered almost absent-mindedly.

Not for the first time- not for the last time either - Pel thought back to his former life as a Naval Officer. The excitement of fighter combat, the thrill of the first time he was met with pipes and salutes on boarding a ship as Commodore, the awe he generated as a full Admiral. While he held true power of life and death as a Sith BattleLord he was but a passenger now, an important passenger, but still just a passenger, and not even entitled to a salute. Oh, he was treated politely, but he knew he was seen as an intruder, and not someone who really belonged on a ship of war. His status as a Sith and a Tarenti ensured that proper courtesies were observed, *‘Yes My Lord - No My Lord - As you wish My Lord’* they were but meaningless pleasantries. He stood up.

“Captain Ledes, I shall personally man the Turbolaser cannons, should we find any suitable targets.”

“M’Lord?”

Summoning up both years of Naval discipline and the full power of a Sith into his voice, Pel repeated “The Turbolasers, I shall operate them during this mission, unless you have an objection?”

Captain Ledes swallowed loudly and stammered out “N-No My Lord, no objections.”

“Excellent, I hope we find some worthy targets.”

While Pel was getting things arranged to his liking aboard the *Tridens*, Ranarr was busy setting things to his liking on the ground.

“Hades, I’ll need your knowledge of the inside if we get forced back there, so your posting is closest to the entrance, say 50 meters. Dox, you and Zekk have the rear of the complex, Caesar and I will take the front. Stay out at least 200 meters, and keep visual on your partner.”

“Wouldn’t-“

“Shouldn’t-“

“How about-“

“I would-“

Ranarr cut all their objections off “No! I am in charge of this mission; we do it the way I said. The Consul has put his trust in me, you should as well. Get to your assigned positions and be ready.”

The members of the Order looked at the young Cathar Knight and realized that what he had said was right. He was the leader of the team, despite being alive less years than some of them had been members of Tarentum. Reluctantly they assumed the positions he had handed out, and began loose patrols.

Back in the air the *Tridens* was spiraling outward from the Asylum, counterclockwise at a height of 5000 meters – high enough to spot an air vehicle flying nap of the earth, low enough to spot/engage a ground transport. Pel was seated at the gunner’s console, watching the screen with half his attention. The remainder of his thoughts was on what he would do, if he were assaulting the Asylum. Aside from the obvious ‘I wouldn’t’ Pel was thinking of motivations and tactics that might help him anticipate when, where and how the mercenaries would strike.

*“A space vessel or airship would be too easily spotted by air control, “* Pel thought to himself*. “A ground transport might raise questions, there’s only so much habitable area on Yridia IX. Admittedly there is much corruption in the local government, but Tarentum still has contacts. The only way to actually get here mostly un-noticed is going to be in pairs or singly, with speeders or other small personal vehicles. That means there shouldn’t be any large crew-served weaponry, and no targets even worth trying to hit with the Turbolasers or other ship-mounted weapons. “*

Pel activated his com-link “Ranarr, I think you’ll end up encountering the mercs before we can see them. Just came to me that they probably won’t present a target worthy of even this vessel.”

“We’ll keep our eyes peeled. You coming down to join us?”

“Negative, I’m going to continue on the patrol, just in case I have over-thought things, once you engage let me know, perhaps we can provide assistance, or I can join you then.”

“Very well then. Ranarr Out.” Pel cut the com-link.

“Captain, take us lower down. Tell your men we’re probably not looking for a vehicle, ground or air, it will likely be individuals we seek – try to use thermal imaging and make sure they aren’t tunneling.”

“Yes M’Lord, consider it done.” There was no need for the captain to re-issue the orders, total crew of the vessel was six, and all were within earshot of Pel, on the command deck.

Hours passed, and both the Tridens and the *Tridens* continued patrolling. Suddenly one of the *Tridens*’s pilots called out “Sir, My Lord, could this be them?”

Both Pel and Captain Ledes looked up to see what the pilot was referring to. What they saw was a slowly moving heat signature that seemed to be under the ground, and quite close to the Asylum already.

“Captain, will our weapons reach down deep enough to hit that vehicle?” Pel asked.

“I don’t know M’Lord, we can try, isn’t the ground here full of minerals? It might be too dense.” Captain Ledes replied.

Pel thumbed his com-link again. “Ranarr, get inside, and get down to the sub-basements, it looks like the attack is coming from underground, and I don’t think we can stop it from up here. South-East side.”

“Moving now Pel, we’ll stop them!”

“Captain, get us to somewhere that I can take a shot!”

“Yes, Milud – come around to 164 in 3..2…1…Mark!”

“Range 2267 meters, I want to be under 500.”

“10 seconds”

Pel focused in on the targeting screen, and used the Force and his own skill to guide his aim, rather than the targeting computer. Just before the ship was forced to pull up, Pel fired the linked Turbolasers. A large cloud of vaporized and not-vaporized rock bits was his reward. Thermal was no help, thanks to the thermal bloom of the impact.

“Ranarr, took a shot, no verification possible- good luck.”

“Entering the sub-basements now, we felt that – let you know— - find -- Out”

Led by former Mystic Hades, Ranarr and his team descended rapidly to the lowest accessible levels of the Asylum, until all sense of direction was muddled, and the walls turned from brick to just worked stone with power conduits tacked to the wall.

“South-East corner is just ahead, to the right,” Hades said.

“Slow down, let’s see if we can hear or feel them.”

“You’d think breaking through the wall would make enough noise to hear, Ranarr.”

“Not if they broke through while Pel was firing.”

“Point.” Hades slowed down some, allowing Dox and Zekk to flank him as they cautiously approached the suspected ingress area.

Approaching a right-hand turn, Dox flanked far left, holding his un-ignited sabre low and across his body, ready to ignite it and catch any incoming fire should the need arise. Zekk was clinging tight to the right wall, sabre held in each hand – left low, right high- as he cautiously prepared to peer around the corner. Caesar stood behind Ranarr, scanning the rear, while Ranarr and Hades reached out with the Force seeking any sign of the enemy.

Dox and Zekk moved simultaneously to enter the junction, just as Ranarr and Hades found what they were seeking- a disturbance in the Force just 30 meters down the right hand tunnel. They called out a warning, just as a heavy blaster bolt reached out trying to hit Zekk and Dox. Zekk brought his dual blades to an “X” in front of him, using them together to absorb and deflect the bolt. It was too sudden and too powerful for him to redirect it, but he was able to protect both Dox and himself from injury. Dox meanwhile had brought his blade up and ignited it, charging towards the blaster cannon and its operator, Zekk right on his heels.

“Hades, is there a way around behind them?”

“No, dead end tunnel – for them, Ranarr”

“Then let’s get ‘em”

Ranarr drew forth his sabre and ran around the corner as well, just in time to see Zekk and Dox leap out of the way of another blaster bolt. A short stop and a lean back kept Ranarr from becoming a stain on the wall, and he was moving again.

“Stay with Caesar, make sure there are no more,“ he called back to Hades.

Hades and Caesar drew their own weapons, and slowly walked back down the way they had just come, searching for any sign – visual or Force- that others were in the complex.

That second bolt was the last one fired from the cannon, as Dox cleaved the barrel off as soon as he was in range. Two light blaster bolts came at him, but he effortlessly swung his sabre around to deflect them away. The tunnel was barely wide enough for three abreast, and the cannon took up almost half that room alone. There wasn’t enough room for the Dashade to pass easily through, but Zekk ran right past him, and cut down two invaders with minimal effort. Dox finished the destruction of the cannon and muscled his way behind as well, to find Zekk furiously fending off blaster bolts from the half-dozen humans still standing along the walls of the passageway. As Ranarr joined them the three began methodically moving down the hall, covering one another as necessary, and taking out the hopelessly out-matched mercenaries one by one.

The last attacker was still inside his boring machine, calling frantically for help on his comm panel. He threw down his blaster as Zekk approached. Zekk looked down at it, back up at him and backhanded the sorry bastard with the hilt of his sabre, knocking him out cold. Ranarr and DoX drug him back to where Hades and Caesar were coming back to join up with them again. No other invaders were found.

Once brought back to the surface, the surviving invader was quickly woken up and made to talk, while waiting for the *Tridens* to pick them all back up. It seems there had been more than one vehicle making the assault, the first vehicle did the wall breaching, and the second vehicle had stronger forces in it to actually take the Asylum. The second vehicle was never found, it must have been struck by Pel’s shot. While the captive did not know why the Asylum was being attacked, what is known is that the Order of the Trident was able to foil a plot on Tarentum, and begin to form into a cohesive unit – risen in Darkness, fed with blood, allowing none to escape their wrath.