"Very well. Send a scout to investigate. Do not engage if there is an enemy presence."

“My lord.. there are not many people left here. Mostly journeymen..” the lieutenant paused, not quite willing to mention the rest. “and.. the Sith Lord..”

Scion nodded. Darth Aeternus was not someone to give orders to, not even the Consul had the power to do so. He would ignore the lieutenant at best. At worst? Best not to contemplate. Hopefully, the thought of investigating this would amuse the Lord.

“Very well. I’ll talk to him myself.”

“Talk to who?”

Both the lieutenant and Scion were startled. Somehow, Aeternus had joined them unobserved. Unassuming, He was not even wearing full robes. If you didn’t know who he was, he would be mistaken for just another dark jedi. Unlike the other sith lords, the one with them now eschewed standing out. This was one of the things making him so deadly, as he was often underestimated. Those who knew, however, knew enough to not assume anything.

Gathering himself, Scion prepared to explain the situation.

“Lord Aeternus.. we are detecting signals on one of the islands. It’s not us, nor is it the council. No-one is supposed to be there, and right now, all I have to send there is you, and some journeymen. I was going to ask you to look into this, and perform recon before we decide what to do.”

Taking the datapad from the lieutenant, the former Master at Arms looked through it. “Correct. These don’t match any of the codes used by the council. Nor are they used by the other clans. Very well. Lieutenant, prepare a shuttle, and make sure there is proper diving equipment on board. I’ll find out what we are dealing with. I’ll depart in 15 minutes.”

\*\*

A couple of hours later, Aeternus was crawling through the bushes on the island, making good use of the nighttime. He had dropped out of the shuttle well outside sensor range, and had gone the last of the distance underwater, swimming, so as to keep as low a profile as possible. The journeymen would not have been able to swim the distance, as it required more stamina then he had seen from them.

He was controlling his body to emanate very little heat, and moving very slowly, so as to throw the sentry guns he had already spotted off. He knew he could easily handle them if they did track him, but his goal was to gather information, not to wreak havoc. He wanted to know who was on their planet, and what their objective was.

Finally, he was nearing the ring of walls that were set up. Making a small opening was not a hard task. The walls were apparently of the same quality as the ship he saw behind it: ramshackle. He listened, and could make out some voices.

“I tell you, there must be something on this planet. Other crews keep going missing, I tell you, something is responsible for it! and if we find that, we could make use of that ourselves! Rumour has it that it’s a group of jedi hiding out here! Imagine the artifacts they could have!”

“and I keep telling you, I don’t want to end up like those others! It’s probably wildlife, maybe there are Nexu or Rancor’s on this planet. Everyone knows the Jedi are gone. I don’t want to end up like Raunu’s crew: missing on this backwater planet.. boss.”

“fine! But there used to be a population here, and now there is not. There must be something left of them we can sell. Besides, we were paid good money to check if anyone is alive here.”

So, these were regular smugglers or pirates, with an extra agenda. It was not uncommon for them to visit by, even after Yridia’s native population was.. removed. And as these, those now visiting were mostly after a profit, and taken care of easily.

He counted about a dozen smugglers in total. He could fight them, and win, but he had a better idea. He would make them leave on their own regard, minus some of them. The men with them already looked spooked, and he would work with that. Focusing, he decided to use a form of battle meditation, focused on these smugglers, amplifying their paranoia.

The shift in their mood was almost instant. He added more to it by pulling one of the prefab walls down with a burst of telekinesis. One the men got near him, looking very frightened. Putting on his energy claws, not even bothering to ignite them, he used more telekinesis to pull him towards himself, and maimed him badly with the claws. Following that, he telekinetically threw his victim into the middle of the small clearing, still alive. The result was a gurgled scream, which scared them even more.

Their leader tried to rally them, and gave the example to fire from the walls. Excellent, just as he had hoped he would. A brief burst of telekinesis sent him over the wall, and screaming into the bushes, where the sentry guns started tracking him. This one, however, Aeternus wanted alive, and shielded with a force barrier, silencing him with a mind trick as the guns opened fire on their owner. No use in letting his companions know he was still alive.

The second in command wasn’t so brave. Seeing their leader getting, apparently, shot up by their own sentry guns broke his spirit, and he ordered the remaining into their ship, took off immediately, clipping several trees as he went.

As soon as they were gone, Aeternus stood up fully, and used his power to crush those sentries in range almost instantly. He walked over to the cowering smuggler leader.

“wh.. who are you?”

“your worst nightmare.” He tapped the commlink. “mission complete. Two for extraction.”

\*\*

Half an hour later, he walked into Scion’s office, tossing the now unconscious captive down. “they were smugglers, and I bring you a gift.. this one was their leader. He’ll wake up in an hour or so.”

Now, Scion was startled. “did you engage with them?”

“.. of a sort. They left, and several probably peed their pants out of fright. They have no idea what it was, however. Our secret is safe, and we have the chance to find out more from this one.”, he said, motioning to the smuggler on the floor. “enjoy.”

With that, the Sith Lord left the Qaestor’s office, grinning. He had enjoyed this little thryst.