Crandl Lorne has finally been outed as a spy, putting the entire Plagueis operation in doubt. He's trying to flee to the enemy's front line. The Dread Lord has personally tasked you with sneaking through the cross fire and giving chase. Write a fiction where your character pursues the traitor.

Karness Muur Forward Command Post

Surface of Capis

It had been two hours since Laren had been returned to the command post with the rest of the wounded. A few painkillers and a minor procedure later, and he was back on his feet against the silent suggestions of the Subjugates caring for him. His head was still heavy with pain, but his mind was seemingly clear, so he paid the former no mind. His torso was also still bruised, as only time in a bacta tank could heal such wounds so efficiently, but he had padding and bandages for those, as well. He was alive, and awake, and he had a job to do.

The forward command post of the Muurian assault was constantly on the move. Following a massive counterattack across their lines, they had regained the momentum and hadn’t had time to set up more elaborate lodgings. Even now, the command post was currently located in the back of Taranae’s personal AT-TE. Inside, only the crew, two Wraiths acting as guards for the Quaestor, a few Ascendant Legion officers and Laren starred at the cerulean hue of a holographic imaging device giving them a live feed of the ongoing battle.

“Lady Rhode,” Laren spoke as he took a seat amongst the crowded throng. “Have we determined the source of the counterattack?”

“Indeed, bounty hunter. Our good friend Mister Lorne is the source of all of our troubles,” she replied absent-mindedly, a hand cupping her chin as she focused her gaze on the holographic representation of the battle.

“Then why the hell are we still advancing? He could know most, if not all of our plans!” he shouted in alarm.

“We’re advancing, Laren, until this point,” he said, standing to manipulate the map. It responded to her hand movements, shifting the terrain forward, behind what was still currently enemy lines. “This is Hill Sixteen, and it is nearly the size of a bloody mountain, and twice as wide. On the left flank you have a river, wide enough that we would notice the enemy attempting to install a force field in order to cross with time to spare. Our forward arcs of fire would face directly into two of their suspected supply camps. And to our right in Hill Seventeen, not quite as tall but twice as wide. If the enemy wanted to hit us, they would have to go twenty kilometres or so around this hill, by which point our scouts would have seen them in the act and we could barrage their passage.” Taranae turned to look at the cerulean man, her face gleaming with confidence.

“Never doubt me, bounty hunter.”

“Doubt never besets me, Lady Rhode. But overconfidence is the mind-killer.”

As was classic in war, Laren’s holocommunicator began beeping on his wrist. He nodded to Taranae and she returned the gesture, bidding him farewell so he could take the communication in private. But the only privacy was outside of the vehicle, so he opened the rear hatch and gently fell to the ground, the slow speed of the moving AT-TE making it a relatively painless tumble.

He activated the communicator, and the cerulean figure of Teylas Ramar appeared in his palm, looking stoic, yet also beset with immense rage.

“You know why I am speaking to you?” the Dread Lord asked, his voice cold, almost distant, even over the communicator.

“My speciality is killing people, and I assume it’s our dear friend Lorne,” Laren replied back, his tone both sarcastic and frustrated.

“You must be weary. You may be a hunter, but this man is no scoundrel. He is well-trained, intelligent, and ruthless. He is easily your match, bounty hunter – alone.” Laren heard footsteps behind him, and what he saw made him groan. Arden Karn, followed by six Wraiths, one of which was carrying what was clearly Laren’s own set of temporary gear were waiting no less than one hundred metres away.

“I have to work with – with *him*?” Laren whispered, referring to Arden. He barely knew the man, and his trust for an individual like himself was nonexistent. He wouldn’t trust himself if he were Arden, either.

“You have no choice. Only the combination of your skill can bring him down. You and Arden will each be team leaders, and I will have direct control over the operation at all times.” *At least he isn’t my bloody boss*. “Your team has your orders, Laren. You haven’t failed me yet. Do not fail me this time.” The communication winked out of existence, and Laren turned to face the rival Quaestor, who motioned for the Wraith to hand the Pantoran his gear.

“I’ll have you know, Laren, I don’t want to work with you as much as you don’t want to work –“

“You’re a fierce warrior, an accomplished tactician, and a good shot, and I respect your skill, and perhaps your position. But beyond this assignment, let’s keep our distance,” Laren replied back as he slipped his pack over his shoulders and checked the status of his DC-17 hand blaster.

“Speaking of, he’s going to be a hard catch. He broke through our lines here,” Arden began, motioning for Laren to look at the datapad he was holding. Near the centre of the Plagueian front lines, a dotted line was showing the estimated path the Lorne must have taken upon his escape. “A platoon was sent after him, but they didn’t come back. He’s a good soldier in his own right, but he must have had help, my guess being some forward reconnaissance units similar to our Wraiths. Following so far?”

Laren nodded in response, but said nothing. This was an assignment with a lot of risk involved, and very littler information. Worst of all, the entire operation could be riding on the capture of this one man.

“Anyway, by the time we set foot on the ground, he should be about ten kilometres from enemy lines, though it is also the safest route for him to travel. Two LAATs are coming to pick us up. Laren, the Dread Lord has ordered your team to a cliff face with a good vantage point of the terrain. My team will be dropping in about a kilometre to the west. Our hope is that we can box him in, with you on the cliff providing over-watch while we move in for the kill.” Arden met the Pantoran’s golden eyes and frowned. “Problems?”

“Both you and the Dread Lord have much more experience in the way of tactics and operational command than I, but this –“ he looked at the datapad and back to Arde with a desperate look on his face. “There’s a lot of moving parts and a lot of risk involved. This man is dangerous, and we have little to no intelligence on who is helping him avoid our scouts.”

Arden grinned, his eyes shining mischievously in the light of the datapad. “It will work. Let’s go have some fun.”

Laren snorted before turning to the Wraiths. They were clad in dark grays, browns and greens, the colour of their suits matching their lush, forested surroundings. Two obviously female and a third, perhaps male Wraith stepped away toward Laren, and he grinned.

“Let me guess – it’s One, isn’t it?”

“That is how you referred to me during our last mission, sir,” came a voice emulated reply of the lead female.

“Perhaps we can do this, then.”

**Thirty Minutes Later…**

The LAAT came to hover a few feet above the cliff face. Laren and his three silent companions scurried off and landed on the ground, scanning their surroundings and making sure they weren’t compromised. The LAAT sped away into the distance, and Laren noticed that it joined up with its sister ship, as well. That meant Arden and his team were on the ground as well. The rumble of distant artillery fire and the thunder of its impact could be heard and seen in the distance, but all was quiet nearby. The afternoon light of the sun was beginning to wane, and so was their moment of opportunity. The teams had to act fast and efficiently if they wanted to catch this Lorne fellow. Lucky for Laren, though he so far disliked his co-team leader, Arden, the man was nothing short of efficient.

After five minutes Laren motioned the team to the edge of the cliff face. Two and Three set up their modified DC-15A rifle and began scanning the ground below. As Laren took a position beside Three, who was looking through a pair of macrobinoculars, Laren took out his own pair as well. One was behind them, having taken a kneeling position about ten metres from where they lay, well away from the cliff face. She was setting up a mobile transmitter in case they were going to be jammed, as well as an emergency forcefield if they were flanked. Neither would last long, but it would give them the warning they would need to stay alive, if it came to that.

The three observers quickly spotted Arden and his team. Arden was at the rear of their single file column, giving orders to his team and speaking with someone over the comm. Laren didn’t know who it was, so he assumed it was his Aedile, Malice, whom he was relaying orders to. Arden was with the three Wraiths in front of him, who were adeptly stepping over fallen foliage and through mucky terrain as they travelled toward their assumed objective. The human man below was counting on Laren and his team to spot targets from above, and if necessary, finding them a better path of escape. Laren took a datapad and placed it beside his left hand, taking notes and updating the version of the map he had in order to have a clearer picture of where exactly they were. But even as he looked back through his macrobinoculars, nothing but the trees met his eyes.

Blue blaster bolts streaked through the air toward the cliff, and the three had just enough time to roll away before a few holes were blasted where they had been laying not moments earlier. Cloudy smoke and debris from the thick rock fell on them as Laren moved to figure out what had fired at him. He took a position somewhere to the right of where they had been as Two and Three moved to set up their rifle opposite him. He saw Lorne in a small cosp of trees, peaking out at their position from behind the cover of a thick boulder. With him were Stormtroopers, about fifteen or so, though judging by the dirt and grime on their once-white armour, they were stragglers who had been cut off from the fight that Lorne had organized. But what struck him was their weaponry and poise. As Arden had guessed, they were no ordinary troops, armed with multiple thermal detonators, smallpacks filled with equipment, and helmets similar, but still distinctly unique from the typical Stormtrooper design.

“Arden, this is Laren. We have eyes on Lorne, though he fired on my position. He hasn’t returned fire yet, so we can’t confirm if he knows we’re here. I would recommend you hold your –“

Teylas interrupted the comms channel, saying, “Laren, Arden, though in an ideal situation I would agree with holding back and judging the enemy’s strengths, we do not have the time. Three transports punched through our anti-air screen and are headed for your position. They’re going to pick up Lorne unless you stop him, and stop them.”

“So now we’re killing him and blowing up those transports?”

“Just get it done.”

“Do we have any air support?” Arden asked.

“The LAATs have been dispatched elsewhere. If you must know, the man you’re hunting has put our operations in serious jeopardy. Kill his team and capture him alive, so we can break the man upon his return. Now, continue.”

As the communication winked out, more blaster fire met the cliff face. It missed Laren and his team, who had relocated about twenty metres farther south from their position, but it was still troubling Lorne had realized they were there. He nodded at Two and Three to begin to return fire, and Laren did the same. Though the plan wasn’t exactly being executed without a hitch, at least Arden was nearly ready to engage them on the ground. Arden’s men fanned out and began to fire on Lorne’s team, taking out two of the elite Stormtroopers before they began to return effective fire.

Suddenly, Lorne bolted from the scene and began running toward the cliff face. Though Laren was momentarily puzzled, he wasted no time. He ordered One to follow him down the cliff face, where they would be able to meet the man head on. Two and Three could provide them covering fire, and Arden could close the gap and trap him.

Using rappel cables, they lowered themselves fifty metres down the cliff face to the ground. They could see Lorne in the distance running toward them, and at the moment they turned around they knew it wasn’t in their best interest. Two of the same, elite Stormtroopers were nearby and they turned their blasters on Laren rather quickly, and Lorne joined the fray as well.

“I must say, bounty hunter, your curt response to my escape was almost unexpected,” Lorne drawled on in his mocking, fancy tones over the sound of blaster fire ripping through the forest. “But my team will deal with your friends, and I will quite easily dispatch you as well.”

*Over my dead body*. He looked at One, motioning for her to focus her fire on the Stormtroopers. With a nod they both fired their blasters, Laren aiming for the one on the right and One on the left. One missed her mark by an inch, while Laren dispatched his target. He got up and bounded over the fallen tree he had been using as cover, firing accurate shots on Lorne as the man tried to draw a bead against the Pantoran. In only seconds the gap was closed, and before Lorne knew he was trapped, Laren had come from Lorne’s left side and had the blaster pointed at his chest.

“Ah, so you do want me alive?” Lorne turned, slapping the blaster from Laren’s hands and sending it flying. The blaster fire nearby meant One was still engaged, and Two and Three were desperately trying to provide covering fire for Arden’s team. As the tall human man tackled the wiry Pantoran to the ground, he knew his own life, and the mission, was in his hands.

The two rolled over rock and root for a moment, soiling their clothes with the moist Capisian dirt from the forest floor. Though Laren’s expertise lay in the Echani arts, he was still adept enough in skill that he wasn’t letting Lorne get the better of him on the ground. When he tried to go for his neck, he used the larger man’s momentum twist his wrist or let it fall empty on the ground. When finally Lorne tried to choke him, the Pantoran utilized Lorne’s own downward motion to his advantage. Using his own legs, still left free, he pushed the human man over his head and away, before scurrying back up and taking a stance.

“Fighting like this is so barbaric,” Lorne said, dusting off his once crisp uniform and readying for another strike.

A blaster bolt streaked through the leaves and hit Lorne right in the left kneecap. He fell to the forest floor, screaming in agony, but very much alive. One came out of the forest a few moments later, her blaster in hand but lowered.

“I felt it best not to wait, sir. Let’s secure the prisoner and be on our way,” her mechanical voice spoke, emotionless as usual.

*Why can’t it always be this easy.*