

The Journey Home

By: Mune Cinteroph #3607

Darkness consumed the space, shadows bloated to swallow all within its cavernous maw. After the display of madness, it could be questioned what was deeper... the madness of their leader or the darkness they found themselves lost within. It consumed all things. The confused cries of the miners, the stumbling footsteps of frantic men and women. The panic was nearly palpable, as it steadily grew like some monstrous thing threatening to consume as easily as the blackness had. The panic could not stand. He could not allow it. They could not allow it.

"Lexiconus, Blade, to me." Mune whispered through their minds.

Within moments, he felt their presence to either side. He felt their presence within the Force, taken up their positions. Mune closed his eyes, they were no good to him here anyway. He reached out, picturing the Force as tendrils reaching outwards to touch the minds of those of his clan. Xen was being controlled, Elinia quite possibly a prisoner.... His mind sharpened and he felt it connect with those around him. His breathing came harder as he touched so many minds at once and spoke through that link.

"Stay your ground, clansmen. We have a new mission." He felt the panic recede some. Swallowing, he retained the link. *"This cave should have come down on us, as such, as many of you can ascertain, that means there are more explosives... find them!"*

Movement. He knew already that they endeavoured to regain control of the miners, even as others began the search in the dark. They had only the Force to rely on.

"Mune, you are going to overexert yourself." Lexiconus warned. He could feel the touch of the hybrid upon his mind. He tried to grasp Mune shoulder but it was quickly shrugged off by the hybrid. Lexiconus sighed and closed his own eyes to the void that engulfed them.

Shuffling of feet, the slow dripping of water. Drip... drip... drip... He needed them focussed. His ears twitching to each sound, Mune kept track of their movements. The miners had stopped their panicked struggles, and gave into their captures in hopes that they would prove their saviours. Pathetic how they whimpered and sobbed in the darkness... most likely terrified they would never see the surface again, some loved one.

"The ground seems clear of explosives." Blade reported.

"Have some of your Excidium men rally the miners into the center of the expanse."

"Shall I have them set some...?"

“No. Fires will exhaust our oxygen far quicker. I anticipate with this many people, it will but last maybe 24 hours... slightly more?” Mune spoke briskly. “Lexiconus, do we have any injured?”

The Quarran gave his head a shake, forgetting he could not be seen. “No... at least not that I know of. I believe everyone was clear of the tunnels.”

Small relief that... Mune thought.

The three stood in silence as their men worked diligently. Mune eased his concentration some, depending on his two companions to help rack the movements of their men. Mune calculated in the dark, going over scenarios slowly. He had plenty of time to go over the factors. His left ear perked his head swivelled to his left. He focussed on his link again, *who is closest...* He smirked. “*Kylex, four meters to your right, three meters up. It is drilled a meter into the rock.*” The flash had been a lucky glimpse. He sensed the Hunter going to the coordinates.

“Got it!” Came a merry call from Kylex, followed by a rather maniacal giggle of delight.

“Nice call Mune.” Lexiconus said at his back.

Blade could only roll her eyes at the two.

“*Kylex, you are good with explosives, yes? Jorm, help him. We’ll need more*” Mune broke the link, sitting himself upon the cold stone to regain his strength.

“Told you.” Lexiconus shot to the hybrid with an edge of teasing in his voice.

Blade snorted, not impressed with the show of weakness from their superior. “So your plan is to set off another explosion? Are you trying to bring the whole place down on us?”

“Blade. Are you questioning me?” Even in the darkness, the shadows seemed to exist, and they were rising around her. She frowned deeply, he was trying to intimidate her. Then laughter, the hybrid grinned up at where he sensed her presence, she could feel the mocking flame in his eyes. “You will follow my orders, Blade, whether you like them or not. You can stab me in the back once we are out of this mess; for the time being, you will shut down the attitude and do as I say.”

More explosives were found, already three hours had passed. Groping around in the dark, using what few flashlights any of them carried. Jorm and Kylex worked diligently, examining the carefully exhumed charges, carefully adjusting them for their new intended use. Mune had to assume they were certain of what they were doing, and so he put his trust in them. Three hours rolled into four, soon five. Blade grew agitated again beside him.

“Don’t you think we have enough already?”

“We need to dig up as many as we can so we do not set off the remaining charges. A chain reaction could ruin everything.” Mune explained distantly.

He moved the pieces around in his mind, gauging strengths, weaknesses. Most of these men, he knew next to nothing about. Near fifty lives. The vast majority, Force-users. He’d need them, he was depending on them as much as they depended on him to take charge. Calculation after calculation rolled around in his mind. The Novices and Apprentices, he decided would need to be spread out among the stronger clansmen. Those without attunement to the Force would need to take charge of the miners to help with removing rubble.

“What is the plan, Moff Cinteroph?” Lexiconus asked after six hours in darkness.

“We will blast through the rubble barricading us in. A bit at a time. Our Force-users will pull the blast rock free while also containing the explosions. Once the rubble is clear, the miners, led by our non-Force-users will clear it to the sides.” Mune explained, rising to his feet.

“If something goes wrong?” Blade asked skeptically.

“We die here.” Mune stated simply. “I estimate eighteen hours of oxygen remaining. Give or take.”

The clock ticked onwards, inexorably towards freedom, or death. Mune had his men position what flashlights they had remaining, focussed upon the caved in mouth of the mine. Mune had purposefully chosen one of the more narrow entryways. He had to minimize any further damage to the integrity of the tunnel walls. How much was loosed when the initial explosions occurred, he could not be certain. They would have to reinforce the tunnel as needed with whatever debris they had at their disposal.

“We have maybe five hours remaining us... let us make those hours... those minutes... those seconds count.” Mune spoke to the eerily lit men and woman he had charge of. “We will escape this trap. We will make our way back to our home. We will take that home back by force! We will take our Emperor back by force!” *Be safe Elincia*, he thought.

The first explosion rocked the cave, the charges carefully set by Jorm and Kylex to break away as much as they could, safely. The blast was further controlled by Force-users, keeping the rock from erupting outwards onto them all. Rather, they guides the rubble safely out and away to be carted further away by the non-Force-users. Mune had them cycle after every blast, making sure none of his men exhausted themselves in the effort of controlling the blasts. It was slow, grinding work.

Mune had put all his credits on his theory however. The detonations were meant to trap then bury them all alive. They second set of detonations had failed to bring down the cavern, so he believed strongly that they only need get through the destruction brought on by the first set. To close off the exits, only so much rubble was needed. No one was supposed to be alive to dig their way out. Mune watched the rubble cleared and before long they could see the opening beyond.

“Clear the rest of the debris before we proceed.”

Within another thirty minutes, a path was cleared and they moved out into the tunnels. The miners behind, they surged forth and to the surface. Mune led the way with the two Questors in step behind. The cool night air hit them, fresh in their lungs. "We need to secure our ships. We'll require the vessels if we are to return to the Cocytus system."

Blade stared at the back of the hybrid's head, sneering. "And if we make it back there?"

"We take out the monster that has taken our Emperor." Mune stated simply.

"You mean we kill him."

Mune turned on the taller woman abruptly. "We take him back," He corrects firmly.

Lexiconus watched the two for a moment before he spoke up, "How do we do that. No disrespect, my friend, but, none of us can really stand up to Xen let alone whomever it is that possesses his body now."

"I... I do not yet know. I just know it is what we must do."

"And the specifics...?" Blade pressed.

"Together. We will come up with a plan. You two are two of the most capable warriors I've ever had the pleasure to fight alongside..."

Blade almost snorted but Mune's expression stopped her from the snide reaction she intended. Mune offered her a slight smile, "No matter your qualms, we are all warriors in our own way, but we are on the same side. The Clan needs us to lead them, to get their Emperor back."

The miners were left to return to their homes while the invading Clan took back to space from whence they came. The plan was to make a stealthy return to the Cocytus system. Their enemy assumed them trapped. They had plenty of time to plan. It would be more hours until Mune excused himself to get rest, feeling the watchful eye of Lexiconus on him. He offered the Quaestor a smile, *Fine, I will sleep, stop worrying about me*; he spoke into his friend's mind.

Exhausted, he collapsed onto his bunk, eyes staring at the cold ceiling of the small room. He let it fade, and, allowed his mind to fall into the Force. He reached out, carefully, with one purpose. *Elincia*. He breathed softly, calming his mind. He hoped Elincia... rather Impetus would sense that they were okay, to ease the worry he was sure she would have at least for him. Before long, he was asleep, and they were on their way home.