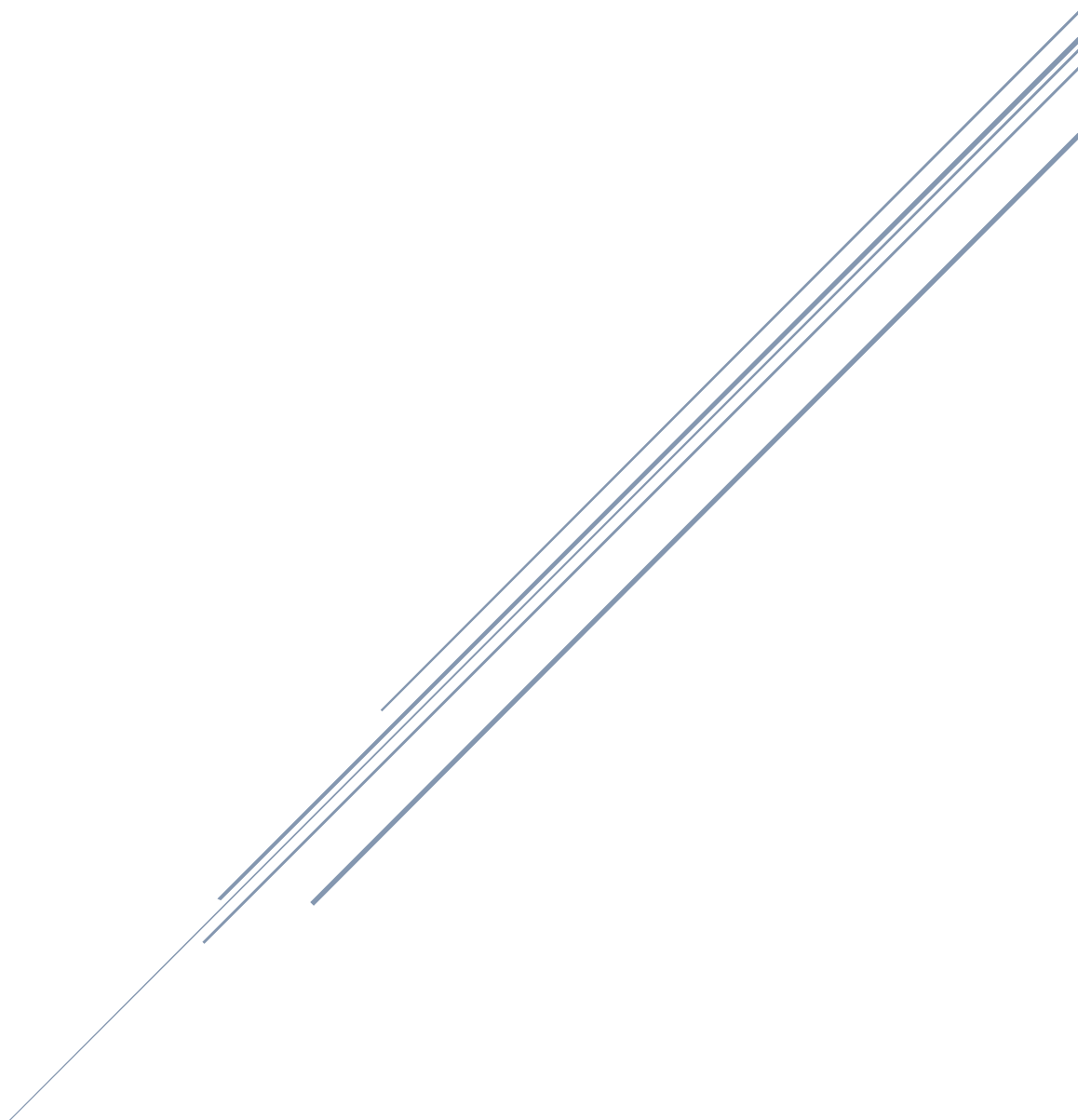


[TEB WEEK 2] FICTION

Prompt B



Pollus Paratus
#12436

Coastal Area, Outskirts of Aliso City, Aliso

Pollus and Linus were walking quietly with an anti-grav sled towards the sandy beach on the coastline. After a critical reactor crisis and a few hours of sleep, the two were summoned by Furios and given the task to find or breach an entry into the Geonosian base away from the beachhead that more and more B1s seemed to march out of.

After departing from Furios's makeshift command post, Linus had a flash of genius and excitedly shared it with Pollus while the tiny Aleena was studying his map, looking for possible locations. While Pollus was competent at mining and demolition, having spent a brief period interning for a mining corporation in between academy years, no amount of explosives would breach an opening that wasn't there. Linus pointed at the coast east of them, "Pollus, I went diving there. I remember seeing CIS symbols in some of those underground caverns, but I always thought that they were part of the remnants of the CIS presence on this planet. Do you think there could be an entry?"

Arriving at the shoreline, the two mercenaries started preparing for the shallow ingress into the underwater caverns. With dry suits on and eight hundred pounds of gear on an anti-grav sled, Pollus looked over the rest of the gear again, checking to make sure that everything was strapped tightly. He then activated the buoyancy compensator, which would be needed since the anti-grav sled would be powered down for the underwater journey.

Looking at Linus, who nodded at him, the two mercenaries moved the anti-grav sled into the surf until the water was so deep Pollus could no longer stand. Pollus then powered down the anti-grav sled. Instantly, the sled dropped to the water, sinking three feet before the compensator stabilized the load. "Well, this is it Linus. Lead the way."

Linus nodded and took ahold of the sled's front handle as he waded out further towards the entrance of the underwater caverns, morbidly responding, "I never thought we would be spending a day at the beach, searching for artifacts as Aliso City burns."

"The faster we can put these guys on the defensive, the less work we'll have to do to rebuild Aliso City. As much as I enjoy being paid, I dread the Dread Lord's ambition and fast schedule. She could break down a planet of workaholics with her rapid pace..."

The two mercenaries slipped under the waves and started kicking, providing forward movement towards the underwater opening.

The swim would require a descent of ten meters, which Pollus adjusted the buoyancy compensator for a slow descent towards as Linus propelled the sled towards the opening. As soon as they passed the opening, Linus slowed to a stop and Pollus adjusted the buoyancy compensator for an ascent up a vertical shaft. At the top of the shaft, Linus powered up the anti-grav sled, moving the sled up over the water's surface and the two pushed the sled to the subterranean rock floor.

Five Minutes Later

After climbing out of the water and finding his light, Pollus shone it on the walls, noticing the CIS decals and signs around them. "Wow, this is amazing. This must have been one of the air shafts before the tectonic plates shifted, raising the sea level at this location. It would explain the vertical shaft which would have housed a turbine and pump station."

"Yeah, and if it was an air shaft, we would find an entry point, right?" Linus pointed his light all the way down the corridor, revealing a tunnel that ended twenty yards away.

"Maybe. But I want to set up the underground acoustic detector. Hopefully there's enough machines clanking around down there to give up a passive picture of how big the compound is. Then we can blow this thing sky high and give Furios the backdoor he wants to crash."

Linus nodded and started unpacking the gear they brought with them.

Thirty Minutes Later

The acoustic equipment was set up with two dozen sensors drilled and buried in the hard cavern floor. Pollus and Linus were monitoring the data screen on a special vibration-dampening mat, waiting for the equipment to generate an image of what was below their feet.

"I wonder how they're doing out there." Linus gazed at the equipment, bored and tired.

"If there's something I know about the Dread Lord, it's that she'll make them pay bricks for every rock they take." Pollus chuckled. "She's a crafty one and the B1s and whoever are controlling them are in for the rest of their shorten lifespans."

The screen beeped and slowly a picture began to emerge. Pollus looked and then looked again. "Linus, there is definitely something approximately seven meters down and its bigger than a shock ball stadium."

Linus nodded, "It looks like its encased in a meter of impenetrable material, possibly some sort of durasteel alloy. Should we go active? It should penetrate the shielding."

"Nah, if we do that, they'll know we're here. We should set up the explosives and get out of here. Then we can let Furios know where to hit it and blow an entry right before he gets here."

"It could be more B1s or even B2s," Linus protested, "and whoever comes down here will be caught off guard. We need to let them know what they're dealing with."

"Fine then. So we modify the acoustic equipment to go active remotely and as soon as we get an image, we'll blow the hole. Either Furios breaches or we've created a giant distraction to relieve pressure off the rest of Plagueis." Pollus grumbled.

Linus gave Pollus an "are you out of your mind" look as he protested more forcefully, "Or the things on the other side are equipped with aerial assets and we've opened the gates of hell for an assault that Plagueis will not see coming! Pollus, whatever is on the other side of this wall could be really bad news."

"If they were fliers, don't you think they would have already opened it up?" Pollus inquired.

Linus shook his head, "They're droids, Pollus. Every droid I encountered in the fleet was incapable of imagination."

"What do we do then, Linus? Do we blow it or not? Furios wants a hole. He specifically said and I quote, 'Paratus, find me a hole.'"

Linus thought for a minute and pointed at the screen, "Here's what we do. I think it'll take five hundred pounds of explosives to open a gap in the ceiling that's large enough for two of our LAATs to land at a time. With the other hundred pounds of explosives, we can breach a hole at the bottom of the vertical shaft. The vertical shaft ends about twenty meters above the structure's floor according to the acoustics picture. If our active sensor reveals something bad, we blow the vertical shaft and flood the bottom twenty meters of the stadium so it can't hurt Plagueis."

“Hmm, so if its good, our troops breach. If it’s bad, we flood it. With the amount of water pouring in, it should take ten minutes to fill. That’s a great idea Linus! Let’s get to work.”

An Hour Later

The two mercenaries rigged up both piles of explosives and trudged over a mile from the underwater taverns. Pollus had already contacted Furios and informed his Quaestor of his progress as soon as the two reached the shore. Furios replied that troops were inbounded with an ETA of twenty minutes.

Pollus’s comm chirped, “Putable One, this is Reaper Six. We’re four minutes out, over.”

Linus snickered, “Furios sure loves you, doesn’t he...”

Pollus rolled his eyes, “Reaper Six, we’ll be waiting. Out.” Pollus then looked at Linus, “Let’s go active and see what’s under that shielding.”

Linus nodded and entered the command into the screen. Down in the cavern, the modern-day sensors emitted a series of waves of ground penetrating lasers, penetrating the vintage and ineffectual shielding and revealing the interiors of the stadium structure on the screen, which Linus promptly sent to Reaper Six and Furios.

Pollus’s comm chirped again with Furios’s familiar voice, “Paratus, breach it. Reaper Six will be descending into the interior. Over.”

“Roger roger, boss. Over.” Pollus smiled and looked at Linus who was just mortified.

After a second, Furios responded, “Paratus, you’re needed back here for a new assignment. Out.”

Pollus smirked and pulled the trigger on the detonator. Two seconds later, the ground shook as the five hundred pounds of explosives blasted up and down in the cavern, creating a large enough gap in the ground to allow Plagueis to drop troops into the subterranean structure. Pollus turned on his comm, “Reaper Six, you are a go. Over.”

Reaper Six chirped, “I can see the dust, Putable One. Thanks for the assist. Out.”

Linus gazed at the flowing dust, “I guess it means that we’ll have to walk back to the speeder now.”

Pollus shrugged, "It's gonna be fun watching the LAATs light up the cavern for their assault. Then we can go get paid."

Linus nodded, "I wonder what Furios has in store for us."

Pollus's eyes lit up as the LAATs came into view, firing guns towards the ground, "Hopefully as fun and impactful as this mission." Pollus looked at Linus, "Don't you see what's happening? We're finally getting the good assignments. Plagueis trusts us just enough to give us the assignments that other Plagueis forces rely and act upon. We just enabled an assault for Plagueis to capitalize and gain ground. We're becoming important, Linus!"

Linus chuckled, "I'm not sure if I should be thrilled or worried." The LAATs disappeared into the ground. Linus and Pollus stood up, looked at the breach location one last time and turned around, walking towards the direction that their speeder was located at.