**Demon in the Depths

Approaching Dlarit Base Bravo
Southern Continent
Tarthos**

*This must be what Chaos is like.* It was a dark thought that often came to mind as Erik Cato slowly made his way through the snow, wind and perpetual night. The environment offered no signs of the passage of time yet he knew it had been a long journey. The warhost group moving in from behind was quiet and observant. Their helmets constantly moved to the left and right, trying to identify any threats that could appear along the visible horizon. At the head of the group was Jurden Krennel, a sith battlemaster whom Erik had once fought alongside on the nearby planet of Aeotheran. At first the idea of departing the *Paladin* to join another assault mission was very exciting. He had been cooped up for weeks improving his piloting skills as part of a Shadow Academy program. This excitement faded the moment he learned of the southern continent’s harsh, cold environment. The constant shifts in weather, lack of any daylight and howling winds made it an unsettling landscape to any visitor.

“Erik! What do you see? We must be close by now.” The equite shouted over the howling winds, waving to the younger man.

Erik was at his side in less than a minute, adjusting his light amplification goggles to peer out into the snowy darkness. The sith knight looked like a grey ghost in his modified set of cold assault armor. The design was a relic from the clone wars but it had been repurposed for their mission with a heating modification and thermal vision. He blended in well with the eerie landscape using a combination of low light camouflage coloring and a heavy, grey cloak. On his back rested an old scatter gun loaded with armor piercing ammunition.

There was nothing to see but blinding snow and darkness. He grunted in frustration, detaching the goggles from his helmet so that he could adjust his visor’s settings. He switched to thermal vision and inhaled sharply in response to what he discovered. A faint, warm spot was just a few meters away where warm air escaped from a crevice in the snow. With the heavy snow fall they almost walked right by it. Without saying a word he turned off his thermals, reattached the goggles rushed forward until he found the crevice’s edge. The rest of the squad followed quickly in an effort to maintain formation.

Jurden followed Erik’s gaze to the many tethers that lined its jagged rim. Ropes descended down into the black depths of the base. *Nearly there*, the battlemaster thought invitingly. They needed shelter as soon as possible. He crouched down and tested each line to ensure they would be safe. Satisfied with the rigging, he opened a channel to the squad from his wrist com.

“This is Jurden Krennel. Cover the perimeter and prepare to descend. Maintain defensive formations inside and keep an eye out for the scout team. Regroup and call for reinforcements if you encounter heavy resistance. Good luck everyone. ” The communication was severed abruptly and the equite was first to lower himself into the base.

The squad had encircled the opening to cover their entry. Troops descended in groups of four. Each group would scatter as soon as they reached the bottom to form defensive positions. When another group arrived they would move silently further down the corridor to gain hold of a new area. This was done until everyone was inside. Erik snapped his goggles back into place and lowered the heat settings on his armor better acclimate to the inside temperature. The environmental systems seemed to be intact however the lights in this section didn’t function. They carefully moved deeper through the corridors with weapons ready in hand. It wasn’t long until they found the scout team.

The smell was an obvious sign. *Death up ahead*, Erik thought. He held his lightsaber tightly in his hands, ready to ignite at a moment’s notice. Jurden held a similar stance and they slowly advanced at the head of the group. The central corridor leading away from the crevice opened into a wider area with several other passages. Body parts and snow equipment lay scattered inside across the floor in a bloody mess.

“Humans couldn’t have torn up bodies in this fashion,” Erik stated coldly. The scene was reminiscent of the horrid dueling pits he grew up in. Many slaves would sometimes face a much stronger adversary in forced trials of combat. The casualties were often heavy.

As the majority of their assault force entered the larger area, Erik’s attention snapped toward one of the nearby passages. He sensed a very angry presence moving toward them very quickly. He ignited his lightsaber and assumed a defensive stance.

A large gorgodon surged quickly out of the passage and lashed out at him. The hairy lizard was very large for its kind and roared loudly as it raised its arm to bring down on its first target. Erik swung his lightsaber from a high guard to sever the offending limb however the weapon impacted solid mass with an unusual amount of resistance. Such a feat caught him by surprise and he was sent sprawling to the floor.

This was no ordinary gorgodon. The scales on the creature were much larger on the limbs and bore the markings of sith magic. Where it made contact with his weapon, its scales glowed from high levels of heat. It was larger and quicker than the normal kind, having been specially engineered as an experimental weapon. This was evident by the thick metal collar with a bar code bolted around its neck.

As soon as he fell all hell broke loose. The squad fired their blasters as soon as they had a clean shot. The gorgodon’s hide seemed to absorb or deflect blasters, only enraging it further. It reached out for Erik who had abandoned his lightsaber in favor of the scattergun. He drew it up just as the monster touched for him, unloading several shells directly into its face in a flurry of self-preservation. Three shots rang out noisily, there was a gurgling cry of pain and finally a loud thud. The room went silent for a few seconds in the darkness. The head proved to be vulnerable enough to score some major damage. The experiment was permanently ended and the body lay still on the frozen floor, pooling out blood from the entry wounds. One of its claws was embedded in Erik’s shoulder during the violent encounter.

With help from Jurden the claw was removed and medical aid was applied immediately. Everyone was on high guard from the level of noise yet no resistance came. Everything was eerily silent. When Erik was patched up enough to continue the squad swept through the base and found other scenes of similar violence. Remains and weaponry were spread out everywhere and only a handful of invaders had survived under barricaded conditions. It didn’t take long for the warhost to breach the doors and clear them out with a few grenades.

With everything under control at last they contacted base camp by long range communicator to fly in reinforcements. A more thorough search was made with greater numbers and engineering crews were dispatched to make repairs. The two sith warriors left the base in the hands of the auxiliary teams, taking one of the arriving ships back to base camp to make their report.