

Hades took a knee before quickly checking to make sure Betsy was primed and ready, he turned to his old comrade-in-arms Pel.

“Old Man, grab that pink saber of yours and let’s get moving. You’re a ground-pounder again – you really should just get used to it by now”

“I think you had at least five errors in that sentence, starting with which of us is the eldest, but I’m moving” was Pel’s response -- to empty air.

Hades hadn’t waited and was already moving before Pel had started speaking. Having Ciara back had energized Hades (and to a lesser extent Pel) even though Tarentum no longer existed in the Brotherhood, theirs was a bond that would last. He quickly exited the ship, and set off in the direction of the temple, knowing Pel would be right behind him in moments.

“We should be good once we get to the Temple, can’t be any worse than the Asylum was, eh?” he called back over his shoulder, as he heard Pel clumsily trying to catch up through the thick growth. “You just keep an eye on the rear, I’ll guide us there and deal with whatever didn’t like our probes. Probably just some native beast that found the noise of the repulsors irksome.” He continued talking without waiting for a response, knowing Pel would be listening, even if he was too out of breath to reply. Hades was no stranger to small group infiltrations, having conducted plenty of clandestine missions during his time with Intelligence, a lifetime ago in the Emperor’s Hammer.

The two had progressed a little over a klick before they found the remains of the first probe droid. It had clearly been caught in a crude net, before being impaled by numerous wooden spears. Certainly not the work of some wild beast. “It looks like we may be facing something more intelligent than I thought, but still not modern or technological. I don’t think we’ll have any trouble.” Hades kept up his rapid pace through the woods, checking his bearings every few hundred yards.

“Just another klick to the drones’ last reported position; c’mon Pel, we need to hurry up, don’t want to lose the light.” Putting actions to his words he upped his pace a bit, using the Force to both augment his muscles, and to reduce the feelings of fatigue that were starting to set in. His faster pace forced Pel to a near jog to be able to keep up.

Ten more minutes through the thick forest brought the pair to a decent-sized clearing. Littered throughout the clearing were bits and pieces of broken drone. It looked as if they had been smashed from below by heavy objects, but there was no indication as to what exactly might have been used.

“5-minute tactical pause?” Pel hopefully inquired. “We should see if we can figure out what took out our probes, before we stumble into it.

“Fine, fine, we can take a break, and examine the wreckage,” Hades reluctantly acquiesced.

Hades smirked as Pel went for his flask of water instead of any type of scanning equipment (tactical pause my ass). Hades took a slow look around the perimeter of the clearing, scanning the tree line both high and low. With no obvious threats present he eased his way out and grabbed the closest piece of droid parts he could find and withdrew back into the forest.

“Looks like scoring of some sort. Blaster?” Pel asked over his shoulder. The clearly older Sith wiped his mouth with his sleeve as he replaced the flask on his belt.

“Maybe. Near the scoring you can see the metal is bent inward due to the blaster bolt, but on the outside edges the metal is bent outward, like it exploded.” Hades pointed both sections out to Pel.

“Then the self destruct activated before it was captured.” Hades nodded in agreement. Hades took out a holoscanner and took a quick of this piece and those he could see in the clearing. He then uploaded them back to the Clan for analysis.

“OK. Let’s move. Quite this time. The enemy just got a bit more interesting.” Hades said as he replaced Betsy on his pack and pulled out his viroblade. The two began to move quietly around the clearing on the left side, staying well within the edge of the forest. The two men quickened the pace as they moved past the clearing. A thicket to the left forced Hades to detour to the right before he stopped. He turned back to the thicket and stared at it for a moment.

Pel looked at Hades, then back to the thicket. “What? Does it owe you money or something?”

Hades shook his head. “Do you feel that?” Pel looked back at the thicket. “No, sir. I do not. What do you sense?”

“Something... familiar yet not friendly. Like an old enemy. It’s dark. Very dark.” Hades began to move towards the thicket. Pel scanned the forest in all directions, making sure to have his friend’s back as they moved. As Hades reached the thicket he began to cut away at the vines and branches with his blade. He was careful as to not make a lot of noise, hence why his lightsaber remains on his belt.

The thicket was not exceptionally deep, maybe five meters, but at the center was a communications unit.

“Whoa. That’s not ancient.” Pel said after glancing at the object. It was painted green at it’s base, with it’s antenna reaching skyward towards the canopy also painted to blend in well with its surroundings. Hades began to brush away the fallen leaves and debris from it’s base. He opened up a panel and frowned.

“This is Imperial.” he said.

“What?” Pel took a longer look at the comm unit. “Well, well. Yes it is.” Pel kneels down next to the comm unit and looks it over. He points to an access panel.

“Let’s see who it belongs to.” Hades opened the panel and searched for a comm frequency. After a few moments, he found one. But when he did, he almost wished he hadn’t.

“Pel.. Pel. We need to leave nice and quiet-like. And right now.” Hades said as he pulled his lightsaber from his belt after replacing the vibroblade.

“Man, you’re kinda...” Hades silenced Pel with a finger to his lips before pointing towards the entrance they made into the thicket. They could both now hear footsteps moving towards them. Hades whispered to Pel to get into the side of the thicket enough to conceal him. Pel nodded and the two Sith quietly hid themselves in the thicket.

A few minutes later four armed soldiers found their opening. The lead held up a fist to halt the group. All four began to scan the trees around them. The leader pointed to another soldier and motioned them to follow. The two slowly moved into the thicket while the other two covered their fellow soldiers. Once inside, the leader kneeled next to the comm unit. It’s at this time that Hades slowly and oh so quietly pulled out his holorecorder. He began recording the two nearest the comm unit.

The leader put a finger on his left wrist, selecting a comm frequency.

“This is Patrol 5. Comm unit 3 Alpha has been discovered. Request instructions... No, sir. There are no signs of the enemy. The Clan touched down a few clicks away but no contact has been made. Yes, sir. We will extract now. We will not fail Grand Master Pravus. Patrol 5, out.”

Hades veins turned to ice upon hearing that name. The past several years of memories began to roll through his mind. The sudden attack on Tarentum’s forces by the Collective. The limited escape of his crew. His fleet torn asunder around him as he made his way into hyperspace in a TIE Defender. The secret communique by his former apprentice, Farrin Xies, informing him that Pravus himself would not let Farrin warn Tarentum of the impending attack. That the Grand Master wanted Tarentum to fall after so many years of the clan not falling to heel. His beloved Tarentum, gone. A rage built inside of him greater than he would have thought possible. It was time for a little vengeance.

A roar escaped his lungs as he darted out of his cover and directly into the two soldiers, knocking them into the ground. The two soldiers just outside the thicket raised their blasters but were too late. With a strong pull from the Force the two soldiers flew towards Hades. A quick snap-hiss of his violet lightsaber and a single swing left the two flying soldiers falling into four pieces. The junior soldier under him tried to crawl away from the mad Sith. He raised his blaster

with both hands and fired. Hades deflected the bolt, which was diverted into the leg of the leader. Hades sliced through the junior soldier's arms before sliding his lightsaber into his gut and slowly slicing upward, splitting the man virtually in two. Now he turned his full attention to the Patrol 5's leader.

A quick kick disarmed the soldier. He flipped off the soldier's helmet. It was a woman. Her green eyes were a mix of fire and fear. He pulled her hands above her head and held them there as he replaced his lightsaber on his belt and retrieved his viroblade. He did not turn it on.

"Where is Pravus?" Hades asked, his voice filled with hate on so many levels.

"Lick a Gundark!" she screamed. Hades kned her in her ribs. Hard. She cried out just slightly. He training starting to kick in. We'll see how long that would last.

"I'd tell the man what he wants to know, child." Pel said, as he kicks the woman's ribs. He hovered over the two of them.

"As much as I would love to play this game longer.... And I do. I simply do not have the time. I am a former member of Tarentum. We loved to play with the dead. I bet you heard the stories yourself. I know how to deliver pain. Please save yourself from this. I will give you a soldiers death. A quick death. Just tell me where Pravus is and what he is planning."

Pel takes another looks around before taking a swig from his *other* flask. It's hot, but he needed something other than water right now. His can barely keep his own flood of emotions in check.

"None of you were supposed to live, you death worshipping filth! Get on with it!" Hades began to squeeze her wrists with the Force until they began to strain and pop. She began to cry out as the bones broke entirely. He then slid the dagger into her side and twist. She cried out.

"Just tell me... where is Pravus!?" Hades asked again. He pulled the dagger from her side.

"Hades. We have new information. This is too much noise, besides, we have to get this back to the Clan. The summit needs to know immediately. Finish this scum and let's do our job." Pel placed a hand on his friend's shoulder and squeezed. Pel himself was there that day, on the other Venator Star Destroyer, as the Collective decimated their fleet. Their home. Their friends. He knows Hades' anger all too well. He feels it, too.

Hades nodded. He took his viroblade and turned it on and made a small incision in her throat. A cut straight through her vocal cords. He then sliced her stomach deep, up to the hilt of the blade. He took his hand and pulled out her insides and let them spill out onto the forest floor.

“That is for Tarentum.” He then stood up and spit on the expiring soldier. The woman began to writhe in pain as her worst fears come to pass. The great expanse of death reaches up to envelop her. She soon stops moving.

“Come on, let’s move.” Pel led the way. As he led the pair towards the landing zone of the Clan, Pel glanced back at his friend from time to time. He was worried about him. He had taken the destruction of his beloved Tarentum harder than even Pel had, believe it or not. The man seemed fine on the outside, but display back there was probably only just scratching the surface of his anger and hatred. Pel took another sip, of water this time, as the two of them made good time back towards where the Clan Summit would be.

An hour later they arrived back at the landing sight. The two found the Consul of Naga Sadow and delivered him the holorecording. Pravus has a plan for CNS. No one knows what or why. This entire revelation is...disturbing. Hades knew it was going to be a long, long night.

SBL Pel Tarentae #48

SBL Hades #8596