

"Pull yourselves back!" Cimozjen shook a fist in the air. "Draw together, and we will survive this!" The sting of noxious gas swept over the battlefield. Shambling crystalline forms approached. The gleam of the sunlight obscured the human and human-like forms of the monsters that approached the Temple of Darkness.

This was his home. The not-quite-Sadowan Elder held his lightsaber in one hand. He carried it like a symbol of defiance against the encroaching forces. The attack had been unexpected, but Naga Sadow was much like a cornered kath hound. Naga Sadow had teeth.

The former Grand Master and his ilk drew into a semi-circle to face the first wave of crystalline raptor combatants. Warhost and Clan alike moved forward, with the likes of Malisane Sadow joining with armored stormtrooper lines to push back the second wave.

For a moment, Cimozjen Kurios felt a light at the end of the tunnel.

The arrival of the first tanks prompted a temporary withdraw. Arcs of Force lightning issues from the hands of a number of Elders in the Clan, including Muz Ashen himself, but it seemed to do far less than expected. The shields rippled and glowed with the energy, but the expected explosions and destructions did not occur.

Suddenly, Cimozjen found himself fumbling for his pockets. The absence of a cigarette, which he might normally twirl between his fingers in a time of particular stress or danger, gave way to a sense of panic that he had kept at bay.

We need to fall back, Master Keibatsu. He projected his thoughts into the Force, locking the old Grand Master with a stare. Obviously, the Lion of Tarthos would not meet his gaze, but he had little doubt that the experienced Krath would lose focus over a small mental transmission. *The folly of the Overlord could be our undoing. We don't need to risk lives for mere secrets.*

He felt a ripple in the Force. It was as though a great growl rumbled from beneath one's feet. It buzzed in the mind and threatened to numb the senses to everything but dread. Lightsabers twirled with the barest of hand motions from Muz Ashen, but even so small raptors were starting to slip through their defensive line. Cimozjen whipped lightsaber and slughthrower in equal measure, giving no quarter. The fervor of the defense did not, however, prevent the bite of teeth.

We are being overrun! We must retreat! Cimozjen begged into the ether of the Force, entreating the former Grand Master.

Muz Ashen raised two hands, as though to embrace the sky itself. Raking inward at a sharp angle with his fingers, the Krath created a deep ripple in the Force.

Run. The single word echoed in the minds of all the Sadowans. Even in his hiding spot near the back of the enemy line, Bentre Stahoes could hear the thought echoing in the back of his mind. Instinct took over as Cimozjen pushed forward into the enemy line in a fury. It was not

until the small relent in the onslaught that the Adept turned tail, and ran. He heard the great crash as earth was upturned. Looking back briefly, Cimozen Kurios could see the clouds of dirt and dust that issued from the jungles and even from the Temple of Darkness itself.

Deny. Withdraw. Make chase. Outwit. Survive.

The simple words were all that the Arcanist needed to hear. At this moment, they did not need to fell the enemy. This fight would not be won by simply overpowering the enemy. If they were to be effective, they needed to stall. The field would be lost, but with time and wit the war would be won. As Cimozen ran through trees, he briefly caught sight of the Quaestor Sonjie before he lost sight of the last of the Clan members. As they disappeared into the jungle, it was clear.

The field was lost.

The field was lost.

For a time.

Survival was paramount.