

Nine Hells. Nine Hells. Nine Hells. Sweet mother of the Nine Hells.

Cimozjen was silently screaming the words in his mind as he ran. Every part of his body was silently screaming. He had heard the crystalline raptors on his heels, and that had nearly been enough. Nearly, but the blood on their razor sharp teeth spurred him on to greater speeds.

He had seen a young loyalist with the Clan fall to the little monsters. The poor bastard was picked clean before he probably even realized exactly what was happening. The Adept thought of a moment that perhaps that man was one of the lucky ones.

He realized that was terribly cliché, and found his hands itching for the familiar sensation of a lit cigarette clenched in his fingers. He ached for the smoky burn of a long tug, but the addiction would have to be fed later. Now, was the time for running.

As he was running, Cimozjen quickly realized he was losing his sense of direction. He had turned so many times, he wasn't even sure if he was still running towards the Temple of Fire, or if he was going off in some other random direction. He wanted to stop, but he knew that, if nothing else, death was going to await him back in that place. He had seen the machinations of the Ashen Keibatsu. He was incapable of such feats, even if he were given to being the sort of bloke that showed off like that. If only, he could stop.

Then, like an answer from the gods, Cimozjen Kurios felt a sharp, searing sensation along his right knee. His stride, was broken, and the not-quite-Sadowan Elder felt his footing falter. He found himself hitting the ground hard, and his senses were filled with a mixture of pain, and earth, and the snarling of little crystalline raptor monsters.

Pushing through his pain, the fallen Force user grasped blindly for the grip of his slugthrower. Wincing through tears and sweat, he tried to take aim, but was met with only the needle-sharp teeth effected by the bites of those little raptor bastards. This fresh pain seemed to bring matters into focus. Turning the weapon nearly perpendicular to his own arm, Cimozjen pulled the trigger hard. He was showered in a combination of crystalline pieces and flesh. While they may have been more resistant to weapons and blasters, they were not immune to sheer stopping power.

He checked his gun. He had probably five shots left with the machine. Hopefully, if the rest of the Forces were anything like the raptors he had been dealing with, then Muz and the other Elders would have all this sorted in time for tea and coffee back in the Temple of Darkness.

On the other hand, if the soldiers and ships were really as advanced as many had feared and speculated, then the Clan and even the Brotherhood itself were likely utterly and completely doomed. The urge to smoke a cigarette returned. Cimozjen Kurios had to push that sensation down completely. He started to look over his leg, to decide how bad the injury really was. He was many things, over many years, but Cimozjen was no doctor. He was not sure how far that he could get between fatigue and injury. Though, if he could make it to the Temple of Sorrow,

there might be something at the former site. Perhaps, there was something that they hadn't yet cleared out. Perhaps something had been forgotten.

"Well, hello." The thought process was abruptly aborted. A woman, a Mirilian by the look of her tattoos and skin tone, sneered down at the not-quite-Sadowan. "Thought you could get away from us, did you?" The brilliance of the crystalline plate armor was matched only by her cocksure grin.

Cimozjen lifted his slughthrower, prepared to kill. The Mirilian raised her blaster in return.

The report of both weapons could be heard, echoing through the trees.