

Support of the North

Prompt 2 - Hunting Caxxies

Arcona: The Godhunt

<https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/competitions/19001>

Mune Cinteroph (3607) [Mune][Caleb]

Doon Sulvir (16371) [Doon]

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Howling wind and driving snow whipped around them—a visual cacophony of white as far as the eye could see. And they were somewhere, hidden in ravenous sleet and cold, monsters of a god’s making lay waiting. So it was that the Arconans set foot upon the frozen plains, the DDF close to hand. A handful of native Tuncans guided them through the gnarled fangs of a blistering storm towards a recently discovered nest of Caxquettes. Everybody amongst them knew the risk their approach presented and what it was the abominations they came to exterminate had the potential to do.

Snow and ice crunched crisply underfoot, leaving tracks that would be gone within the hour. They shuffled through shifting drifts of white, pushing forward inexorably toward their target. They have faced the monsters repeatedly since the *gods* first made themselves known and the first battle fought.

They would not allow the nest to grow.

Two towering forms led at the fore. Captain Doon Sulvir and Operative Caleb Wild’en. A step behind and fanned out to either side, Adepts Eleceos Araave and Mune Cinteroph. The smaller

Shistavanen, Mune, conversed with one of the guides, the others close behind. The vanguard was made up of DDF, watching their flanks and backs (though Mune and Eleceos' Force powers were potentially aware of things well beyond their group as it was.) Mune's muzzle bobbed, nodding an affirmative to the guide before the man returned to the other Tuncans in the hunting party.

"According to our guide, we are about two kilometres out," Mune called over the wind.

"Thirty minutes' distance under normal circumstances," Caleb added. "Are they aware of our presence?"

The Miraluka hummed softly to himself and then gave their head a shake. "No, I do not believe so. I am weary of extending my senses too far; we risk them detecting us if I do."

Doon trusted Eleceos' judgment on the matter. He was still new to using the Force. He had to trust the two elders to make that call. His good eye scanned the horizon, greeted only by more of the all-encompassing white. It was nearly headache-inducing. The gnarled Shistavanen frowned. "We should proceed as though they are aware of our presence."

"You think they are waiting in ambush?" Caleb asked.

"Or actively hunting us," Doon growled out in Shista.

"I do not like being the hunted," The Togorian responded in Basic.

Sulvir slowed his gait and motioned for the others to close rank. "Mune, thoughts?"

"If we can actively conceal our presence in the Force, it is safe to surmise they could learn to do the same. Adapting seems to be a forte of theirs." Mune glanced toward their fellow seer, Eleceos seeming to be in thought. "If they are actively concealing their signatures...."

"We may not be aware of their movements until they are upon us," Eleceos finished.

There were nervous murmurs among the DDF troops, silenced by an annoyed growl from the Shistavanen Captain, giving the order to have weapons ready.

"Corralling us towards their nest, huh? Are they intelligent enough for such a tactic?" Caleb growled.

"I would not put it past them," Doon growled. "Mune? Eleceos?"

The white-furred Shistavanen glanced at the other Elder, and they both shrugged. "We cannot say for certain."

“What can you say?” Doon pressed with an exasperated huff.

Mune sighed and closed their eyes. The images were a jumble of violence, blood, and death. “I cannot say where the attack comes from.”

There were nervous mumblings from the Tuncans and DDF.

Doon took in a deep breath, icy air burning in his lungs. His golden eye slid closed while he focused on the pain in his chest. It centered him, grounding him to the snowy dune they were paused on. Nothing about this situation sat well with the black wolf, a feeling evident in the twitching, curled lip that snarled into the air. “The air. The snow. The ice. They could be anywhere, waiting.”

Another growl erupted from his lips, silencing more murmuring from the joint forces there to help. “We will be waiting, just as they are. They may decide when the fight happens, but make no mistake. *We* are the Hunters here. *They* are our prey.” His eye opens again, regarding those around him. “We push forward. Prepare for anything. I will lead. I want you in the rear, Caleb. Weapons ready, eyes open, Ears to the ground.”

With that, the large Shistavanen crested the White Dune they were on, and pushed forward down the otherside of it, leading the force into the icy headwind. Whatever doubts he may have had, he no longer showed. It was important to give the others a solid rock they could rely on, so he would be exactly that.

The following forces readjusted with the Torgorian bringing up the rear, ensuring everyone had a watchful eye on them. Meanwhile, Eleceos and Mune fell in just a few paces behind Doon.

As the group trekked across the snow, Ele had his bow in hand. While he didn't see in the conventional sense, the Miraluka saw what the Force allowed. The massive auras of Doon and Caleb protected the others, and Mune's gave a calming sensation as they kept their more primal instincts in check. Some members of the party, the Tuncans and the DDF soldiers, radiated fear. It seeped off of them and flowed across the frozen tundra. The perfect invitation for a predator.

"Please, keep your feelings in check." Ele spoke in a calm but firm manner. "I understand that the stories you may have heard have left you somewhat shaken, but you will be protected by us, and by each other. Fear will be your greatest weakness. The Caxqettes will sense your foreboding, and it will draw them to us. That makes it more of a danger than anything. For your own sake, stave off your worry. Put your faith in us."

The rest of the group stared at the young Miraluka. He hoped to maintain their focus. The trials ahead were dangerous. There was no sense in needlessly adding to it. From the corner of his *sight*, a shape skulked towards them. Ele informed the others in their thoughts and he waited for the creature to approach. Gently fingering the drawstring of his bow he bought his time. Doon, Mune, and Caleb were also ready for the creature. When it finally lunged, Ele pulled the string

back and released a bolt which pierced its soft belly. Letting out a shriek as black blood flowed from its new wound the Caxquette hissed and moaned as it struggled against the white snow until it moved no longer. The creature lay dead, but there was no time to relax.

"We are not alone any longer."

Red forms filled his *vision*. They were hunting the Caxquettes, but the Caxquettes were also hunting them.

Since they set foot in the snow and ice, it had been only a matter of time. Every passing second ticked down the moment when they would come face to face with the enemy. They were sent to slay monsters. Now the monsters were upon them.

Mune breathed out slowly, a single pebble in the ocean of the Force; it washed over them. Their eyes closed, and they centered themselves within it. Their mind expanded, stretched outwards, steeling the minds of their allies against the corrupting song of the creatures that sought to either take or destroy them. They would find no purchase amongst them. The DDF and Tuncan's seemed to calm, even as a score of the monstrosities met their lines.

Caleb dropped to a knee, his rifle coming around in his hands. He raised it to his shoulder and aimed. A sharp crack rang out, and an armour-piercing round ripped clean through a Caxquette's carapace. Its attention whipped around towards the Togorian. The sniper grinned behind his helmet and chambered the next round before pulling the trigger to obliterate the monster's skull in a mess of flesh, bone and other matter. Caleb kept his aim on it momentarily, making sure it was truly down before he picked out his next target, the next round chambered.

The siren song crept over the snowy plain to ensnare what minds it could. It brushed through the consciousnesses of the Arconans, DDF and Tuncans alike. It was met, however, with steely resolve like a barrier against their twisted manipulations.

Doon snarled against the flurry of snow that blew over their position, tossed into the air by the dozens of rising shapes, burrowing their way out of the valley of snow in front of them. There were more than the shistavanen was expecting. Many more. But it would be of no use dwelling on erroneous informants now. With the aid of Mune's meditation, Doon's mind focused on the task at hand. Outnumbered, in the open, weather conditions certainly not on their side. If they were to survive this, it would be by proper positioning and more than a little luck.

Doon spoke, shouting over the wind and snow into their team Comms. "Back! Up the hill. Fire if you can but don't drag behind. Hold at the top" He drew his Beskar blade, slowly stepping back from the rising horde while facing them. "Mune, Eleceos. I will hold a line below the crest and set explosives. Keep an eye on the others, assist me if you can." he finished, then, after a pause he drew the hilt of his saber in his left hand.

The Joint forces began their ascent, most men quickly gaining while some others covered their retreat, letting blaster fire tear through the closest wave of looming shapes that chittered and barked as they grew closer. Doon made a slow retreat, waiting until the sharp kraken beak and fatty flesh of the creatures drew within a few dozen feet before he lit his sputtering lightsaber. The red blade buffeted in the wind, the plasma edge more of a uniform flame than a traditional saber. Still, the black wolf raised it against his Beskar sword, letting the two rest gently against each other to cast sparks and light, hoping to attract the brunt of the coming mass.

Eleceos slowly backed up the hill, as Doon had instructed. His finger never left his bow string, and he waited patiently for the right shots. The Force guided his actions as the malevolent blobs of darkness infiltrated his “vision.”

THWIP
THWIP
THWIP

One after another, he pulled back his bows laser-like string and bolts released, sailing through the air dropping the beasts distracted by Doon’s stand. Ele knew that he needed to protect his captain and friend. He couldn’t lose anyone close to him today. Not today.

While he hated the idea of causing any living creature pain, the Miraluka continued shooting down the seemingly never-ending flood of corrupted creatures. Still, he did his best to maintain control of his breathing and posture, never letting up on his defense of the black-furred Shistavanen.

“Ele, watch out!”

His senses were so focused on Doon, that the Jedi failed to notice the creature sneaking up behind him. Mune’s voice rang out from a distance, alerting him to turn as the Caxquette crashed into him. The dark shape lashed out at his face his snapping jaws, Ele could feel the saliva splattering his cheeks, and the rancid breath assaulted his senses. Using his bow, the Miraluka pushed the beast at as far off distance as possible, but he failed to notice the tendril-like appendages where the beast's tail should have been. The barbed tentacle sliced through the air burying itself in Eleceos’s leg, the Miraluka yelling out in pain. The bard dug around inside of him, releasing toxins into his blood and muscles.

Ele pushed back as hard as he could, knocking the creature away, the barb releasing from the tendril and remaining in his leg. As the Caxquette righted itself, it charged again, this time being met by the ghostly green flamelike blade of Ele’s lightsaber. Piercing through the creature's skull, Eleceos killed the creature before reaching down and grasping the barb. He knew the pain would be intense, but it had to be removed, so he pulled hard, ripping the protrusion from his leg. He could feel the warm blood seeping into his clothes.

Placing his hand over the wound, he concentrated as energy gathered to his wound, and the Force closed the opening. The poison started to fight back, back slowly, it relented against the energy's power, dissipating and dissolving in Ele's blood.

He didn't have time to finish the process, though, as more Caxqette's broke through the snow. Knowing his duty, he pushed himself to his feet, rearming himself with his bow and assisting the others once more. They had to make it through this fight. No one was dying today.

Mune held out as long as they could, focusing on dispersing the mesmerizing song that echoed through the minds of the present fighters. It became apparent to Mune that they would have to move. They felt the looming form rise behind them. They needn't turn, knowing Caleb already had a bead on the creature. Their attention instead snapped to the one rushing from Doon's blindside while the larger Shistavanen fended off three from his good side. One shot rang out, and the creature at Mune's back stumbled. A second shot tore through its skull, then a third. The small Shistavanen twisted sideways to let its body drop where they had been standing. The Force swirled and surged around them, their Meditation broken; they refocused that power on their limbs and sprinted towards Doon.

For their part, Sulvir was a beast, beskar sword tearing through one small beast, shifting their weight and, in the same motion bringing the sword back up to catch a second from the side, rending it in twain. They did not see the one rising to take him from his unprotected, blind flank. He cut through the third with his lightsaber, feeling chitin, flesh, and sinew give way to the blazing plasma of his blade. Their good eye caught a glimpse of Mune flash past in a slide, a mere hair's breadth between them, prompting him to turn in time to see the smaller Shistavanen on their feet, catching a barb through the right shoulder. Hot and crimson blood splashed across the snow and Doon's armour, the large Shista realized with a start that the barb would have gone through his chest had Mune not put himself in the way of the monster. They heard the crackle of a lightsaber screaming to life and saw the purple plasma flash up and through the creature's arm, severing it at what he could imagine was its elbow.

Mune stumbled back and, against the pain, ripped the barb free.

"Mune!" To his surprise, Doon saw the wound rapidly closing, but still, he placed himself between the smaller Shistavanen and the rearing monster. It roared, so Doon naturally roared right back.

The Caxqette hesitated.

Doon tensed to attack until, behind the monster he faced, rose one still larger. Sniper shots rang out, armour piercing rounds ripping through chitin. He saw arrows of energy ripped through other parts of its great carapace, and the creature did not flinch. He felt Mune tense at his back and knew Mune was thinking the same thing. "Mune..."

“Do it.” Mune was already channeling the Force through themselves, building up their reserves to repurpose all that power for what they were about to do.

Doon killed the saber in his hand, clipping it back to his hip while the Beskar blade was stabbed into the snow next to him. Both hands went to his equipment belt. It took just a moment for him to grab what he needed, but in that time the towering creature had covered 15 yards in a mad sprint towards the intruders. Still, the black Shistavanen didn't waver. He clutched a beeping spherical denton charge, then with a roar he threw it as hard as he could towards the incoming threat.

The charge bounced off a few of the rabid creature's blubbery hides before disappearing underneath the horde. It didn't go quite as far as Doon had wanted, but it was far too late now. He drew the Beskar blade from the snow to quickly defend from the encroaching tide, thankful for the numerous blaster shots still slowly thinning their numbers. “Mune! Five seconds!” he shouted in warning, cleaving the beak off the closet Cax while holding a detonator behind him.

Mune's eyes were on the colossus, mentally counting its approach to the primed charge. The seeping wound barely a blip in their mind as they were sprayed with yet more blood from Doon's efforts. On the captain's mark they clutched a paw in front of them, sending all their energy into a barrier around them and Doon.

Doon's sharp claw found the detonator's button. The area under the gargantuan thing turned to hot plasma, exploding outwards in the blink of an eye. The shockwave ripped through the horde, and the snow and ice that made up the dune the fighters were positioned on. The ground quaked, and rippled as if a meteor had struck. Rings of ice collapsed inwards, drawing the Caxettes into an ever expanding hole that swallowed the dune of snow on top of them. Shouts of panic erupted from the DDF forces as they desperately clambered up the sinking mountain of snow. Doon straightened, surprised at the initial collapse, the brunt of the surface explosion lessened by Mune's barrier. Still, the wolf was far too slow to do anything much more than spin to bodily shield the injured Mune behind him as they too were swallowed by ice and snow.

A few minutes felt like hours as the panicked forces began digging those buried free. Doon and Mune could barely make out the voices of Caleb and Eleceos above them, the latter directing the former where to dig. Eventually, the lost Shistavanen were freed from their icy tomb. Miraculously the DDF forces suffered little more than bruises and minor frostbite from the collapse. Those that were buried were quickly huddled together, leaving the others on watchout as they recovered and addressed the situation.

“Captain!” Eleceos shouted, trudging through the snow towards the cluster of blanket packed warriors. “The valley, it all collapsed.”

“I can see that, Eleceos.” The grumpy wolf clenched his jaw to withhold from his teeth chattering.

“It’s not just a valley! The whole thing that collapsed, it was a tunnel system.”

“Tunnels? Like a nest?” Caleb questioned, positioned behind the two Shistavanen there.

Eleceos nodded, face turning back towards the captain. “That was the nest, the whole thing gave out when that charge went off. From what I can tell, it’s about twenty meters deep, all compressed now.”

Doon seemed to consider the young man for a few moments, before peering back towards the mess of churned snow and ice. If Eleceos was right, their original info was wrong. But Doon knew better than to distrust Eleceos, especially in front of the entire squad here. “If you’re right, we may be sipping warm tea in just a few hours... I need to make a call.”

Subsequent scans and scout ships confirmed no further Caxqette activity in the sector, mercifully granting the hunters peace.