

Chapter 1

The planet K-31 was just a tiny blip on the Republic's Galaxy maps. It was small and only sparsely populated by primitive inhabitants and a majority of the planet was covered by a large forest that provided habitat for an abundance of wildlife. Unfortunately, the forest provided no other valuable minerals or commodities that would make the planet useful to any commercial or government endeavours. The lack of resources allowed the little known planet to exist in the Galaxy without hardly being noticed by anyone. But not even this little known and useless planet could escape the clutches of the current Galactic War forever.

On this normally peaceful planet a low chirping sound emanated high in the trees of the thick forest. Barely visible to the naked eye lay four prone and heavily camouflaged soldiers on the forest floor. The four soldiers were a part of the elite Republic Scout Commando Unit (SCU) and were observing a clearing deep in the confines of the forest. All three of the Republic SCU units were constantly contending with the hot spots of resistance across the Galaxy and they now found themselves here. Because they were so busy in combat, these elite soldiers seldom took notice of the name of the planet where they were engaging the enemy, so K-31 was the only name that they called their current planet of operation. There were just too many battles-- and the planets became a blur as they sped from one skirmish to the next.

It was now late in the afternoon, nearly 22 hours into the 30 hour planet rotation and several hours of sunlight still remained in the day. The vegetation on K-31 was a mix of

low green fruit plants that grew to about a half a meter in height, along with large needled trees that varied between 10 and 50 meters in height. These needled trees and the lower fruit plants constituted the forest in this area of the planet that the Republic soldiers were operating in. Because the axis of K-31 was nearly perfectly vertical in relation to its multiple suns, there was very little changing of seasons. That was especially true near the equator where these soldiers were currently located.

The four soldiers were not regular Republic soldiers and nor were they ordinary special operations soldiers. These soldiers were a part of the elite Scout Commando Unit-11, SCU-11 for short. The ongoing Jedi-Seth war had taken a heavy toll on the fighting units of both sides, but it also produced accomplished combatants as well. The members of the SCU units were carefully selected from available veterans of the Republic combat units that had volunteered for service. There were only 16 operators in a SCU unit, with each unit broken down into four teams of four. A unit was led by a single Jedi Knight, most often a newly promoted Knight, fresh from the Jedi trials.

The typical use of young, inexperienced Jedi Knight's for the commanding officer was a point of contention with the SCU operators themselves. Most of them were not impressed with an inexperienced Jedi being in charge of an elite special operations unit, but they had little control over who was placed in command. Instead, they simply adapted and did the best they could.

There were currently only three active SCU units in the Republic army. SCU-1 and 2 had the responsibility of covering the core planets in the galaxy. SCU-11 was

responsible for all the outer rim planets. There was a recognized need for more than just the three units, but the members of the Jedi council had determined that it would not be a prudent use of the prized Jedi Knights to have them leading such a small team of soldiers. The council believed that a Jedi was capable of so much more, and their beliefs dictated most of the decisions that were made during this war.

Most of the fully qualified Jedi Knights, especially ones with combat experience, led at least a Battalion of Republic soldiers. It was also common knowledge that in order to be placed on the list of candidates for consideration as potential Jedi Council members, a Jedi had to show a high level of experience and competence while leading in combat. Leading a small SCU unit did not adequately show Jedi leadership qualities on a large scale and as such the assignment of leading one of the SCU's did not count as a positive mark of experience for council selection.

It is a fact that the Jedi code teaches that a Jedi does not seek glory or recognition. But a Jedi does seek to provide the most help, protection and justice to their fellow sentient beings; and this would dictate that they strive to eventually become a council member to maximize that effort. All of these factors lead to the conclusion that while the SCU units themselves were an Elite combat unit, it was not easy to find a Jedi Knight that had complete devotion to the SCU organization or mission. More often than not, the Jedi filled the position only because the Jedi Council gave them a direct order to do so.

The four camouflaged soldiers in the forest of K-31 consisted of two humans, a bothan and a Zabrak. They each

looked different and came from different home worlds and they each brought different skills to their team and to SCU-11. While they were all different with different backgrounds, there was one thing that all of SCU-11 was unified on, and that was that they each had expressed their reservations about their current Jedi leader. Their most recent Jedi commander that had been assigned to them was an old, feeble, Jedi Master named Fi'n Jarek. Master Jarek also had a human padawan named Mosok Ga'lliant. Mosok himself was older than the average Jedi Padawan, which drew further scrutiny from the members of SCU-11.

The Jedi and his Padawan had only been with SCU-11 for a little over three standard months and this was their first official deployment with SCU-11 in a combat zone. While this was a short amount of time to get to know their new commander, the team members accepted it as a part of SCU life. The devastation of the Galactic war had made such instances an accepted part of the job during this all-out war.

Master Jarek had transferred over from the Jedi academy where he had been instructing younglings for the past ten years. He had more recently taken on his current Jedi Padawan before transferring back into their current combat role as commander of SCU-11. Master Jarek was a new SCU commander and was considered 'Green' among the operators in terms of their primary capabilities and mission. At over 80 standard years old, Master Jarek was actually considerably older than all of the other SCU team members. The master's old age was just one of the nagging points that made the members of SCU-11 a bit more skeptical than normal of their new Jedi commander.

But the SCU operators were professionals, and when the time came to deploy to K-31 they were able to set all the skepticisms aside and get to work. They were all consummate professionals at what they did, which consisted of reconnaissance and direct small unit commando raids, usually deep inside enemy territory.

Vistom was one of the humans lying prone that made up the four person Green Team of SCU-11. He lightly tapped his team leader, the other human named Larun Bigstor, with his toe to grab his attention. After feeling the light tap, Larun glanced over at Vistom who used hand signals to convey his message. Vistom pointed first to both of his eyes which indicated that he saw something. He then pointed with his finger to the right most position of the clearing they were all observing.

Focusing on where Vistom was pointing, Larun looked and then he too saw the Sith soldier cautiously approach the clearing and then take a knee. The Soldier was clad in the traditional Sith infantry uniform for the outer rim planets. His torso was covered in a darker shade of green and grey camouflaged body armor and the trousers were a darker color with large cargo pouches. Larun knew that this body armor was synthetically engineered to absorb light to aid with concealment of the enemy.

As they watched they noticed that the enemy soldier was showing extreme caution as he approached the clearing. This was a clear indicator that he was no rookie pointman, but rather a seasoned combat veteran. The darker colors in the camouflage body armor he wore gave him away as part of the regular Sith army which meant there were more with him. The Republic intelligence reports from

the Brigade HQ had been right, the Sith were here doing something on K-31. Intel believed the Sith were in the process of, or had already completed, setting up this planet as a communications relay point. This relay point would lay between the inner core and outer rim planets of the Galaxy and provide a more secure and clear means of communication between the far reaching points of the Galaxy. This discovery of the Sith soldiers verified they were here, perhaps now SCU-11 would be able to determine just exactly what they were up to.

Larun, using similar hand signals that Vistom used, and in complete silence, passed the word of the sighting to the other two team members Harek and F'lark. Harek was a Zabrak with spikes protruding from his head, and F'lark, a furry Bothan. No command was needed to direct what they should do. With trained precision, Harek and F'lark directed their attention to areas outside of the clearing where they had just discovered the enemy soldiers. This was done to keep an eye out for other enemy soldiers that might threaten the safety of their team.

The Green Team had discovered signs of activity in the area near the clearing they were now observing soon after SCU-11 had inserted onto the planet. That insertion happened three 'local' days earlier. They had quickly set up a surveillance schedule on this particular clearing and a few others that were nearby. The three other remaining teams of SCU-11 had pushed their reconnaissance patrols further out from where they had set up their base of operations known as patrol base alpha. The temporary patrol base itself was approximately 12 kilometers north-west from the planet-side insertion point.

Within the Republic forces, the SCU teams are the acknowledged experts in reconnaissance and small unit Direct Action or 'commando' raids. This expertise was the reason why they had been selected and dispatched to K-31 for this particular operation. The SCU teams are a small part of the republic's special operations branch and 'technically' they did not exist. This was done to try and keep the knowledge of their capabilities and purpose hidden from Sith intelligence and their commanders.

But the fact that they did not exist on the records of the Republic datacrons did not prevent wide spread popularity of the SCU teams with the adolescents in the Galaxy. Their popularity was based off of the many Holocron stories being published about the SCU teams and heroic feats. There were also a great number of stories and rumors surrounding their unofficial exploits and adventures. A few of these stories even had some of the facts correct, much to the dismay of the digital security experts in the Republic military.

Because SCU-11 was responsible for the outer rim territories, they carried with them a bit more awe and prestige among the general public. This was a result of the reputation that the outer rim planets were 'unruly' and 'lawless'. This wildness created a perceived notion that things were more dangerous and exciting in the outer rim.

This perception is what caused the SCU-11 unit to be viewed, to the dismay of the other SCU units, as the team that got all of the action. There actually was some truth to this perception. Because of their higher deployment rate and more dangerous missions they typically received the better equipment and training to the envy of the other two

SCU units. The unfortunate reality was that with the long running Jedi-Sith war, all of the SCU units were seeing all of the combat that any of them really cared to. Each of the members in all of the teams had lost friends and teammates in combat over the years. It was a true testament to the quality and skill of the SCU units that they had not lost even more than they had.

Most SCU members were male, but there were a few females that made it through the Basic-Commando Unit Training (B-CUT) and then continued on to be full SCU qualified operators. Nearly 80 percent of the volunteers, all from active duty combat units, failed the grueling B-CUT.

For the females that did pass the initial training, a majority of them, for reasons unknown, tended to become Designated Marksmen/Snipers. The Female psyche tended to be more patient and capable of handling the Sniper role than the Male psyche, and this held true for most, but not all, species. Galactic scientists on Coruscant were still trying to figure that one out. The two current female members of SCU-11 were both Designated Marksmen/Snipers on their respective teams, Blue and Black.

Each four person SCU team consisted of a Team Leader, Automatic Blasterman, Heavy Weapons Specialist, and a Designated Marksman/Sniper (DM/S). All were experts in their specialty as well as cross trained in the other roles within the team as well. There was not a lot of room for rank advancement within the SCU teams, though that did not matter within the SCU itself since rank meant nothing. To them, their unit and the Republic, meant everything. The proper use of rank when addressing fellow SCU operators was non-existent and the use of nicknames or first names

was the most common means of addressing other SCU operators.

The four man Green Team consisted of Larun as the Team Leader, Vistom as the Automatic Blasterman, Harek as the Heavy Weapons Specialist and F'lark as the Designated Marksman/Sniper. They were now nearly invisible on the edge of the clearing lying prone. This extreme level of concealment was possible by the use of their visual stealth generators, SGs for short, combined with their natural surroundings.

The stealth generators used advanced optical technology to bend light waves around their concealed figures, but they were not fool proof. Many of the fantasy Holocrons tried to make the viewers think that the SGs made the operators invisible to the eye, they did not. When trying to remain concealed, movement was the biggest culprit to discovery followed by vegetation disruption. Vegetation disruption consisted of smashed down foliage where someone was lying or hiding. One of the favorite SCU sayings was that 'Nothing looks like a stealth generator in the field except a stealth generator in the field'.

SCU operators were trained extensively on how to properly utilize stealth generators to their full potential, as the green team members were doing now. This involved taking advantage of hide site construction to further enhance their concealment. Back in the early days of the stealth generators when the first generation generators were developed, they required a massive battery contained in a large backpack to provide power. The military leadership mistakenly gave them to select regular infantry units and had them test them in combat. Unfortunately it was a

complete failure.

The soldiers testing the units often felt that they were invisible and would charge toward the enemy with reckless abandon. Modern thermal sights on blaster rifles and motion detectors quickly became the downfall of the early stealth generators used by normal combat units and development of them ceased. But the technology was not completely lost. Top secret labs within the Republic had made significant progress on optimizing the capability of the stealth generators for use with specialized units such as the SCU teams. The cost was extremely prohibitive and the SG's themselves were susceptible to damage and not always reliable over prolonged operations. But they were now effectively being used by the various SCU teams on a limited scale. The latest generation of SGs were light and compact, adding only 2.4 Kg to the SCU's already lightweight and flexible body armor.

The Green Team leader, Larun, observed that after a minute of remaining motionless and scanning the clearing, the Sith point man made a hand signal toward the dark confines of the forest. A brief moment later another soldier, a female this time, came up beside him and took a knee. In well exercised precision the point man then stood and slowly entered the clearing, taking his time to scan from side to side. His movement was very deliberate and slow as he cautiously continued forward. The second soldier had her blaster rifle shouldered and aiming toward various parts of the clearing as she provided cover for the pointman as he made his way toward the center.

Vistom had his own rifle trained on the pointman, about 150 meters in front of the team and was following him

across the clearing as he moved. Vistom was not actually preparing to fire, but was rather recording the movement with the holographic recording device mounted to the left side of his blaster rifle on the universal mounting rail. Their Team's mission was purely recon and intelligence gathering at this stage of the operation. Of course the entire SCU-11 unit was hoping that the operation would eventually change to a direct action mission.

Larun had a wide-field-of-view holographic recorder up to his eyes and was recording a more wide angle view of the proceedings along with Vistom. His recording, combined with Vistom's magnified and more detailed recording of the point man, would be used later to try and determine what the Sith were up to here on K-31.

As the Sith point man reached about a third of the way across the 200 meter wide clearing, a third soldier emerged from the deeper confines of the forest. This soldier came from the same location where the first two soldiers had emerged and he also took a kneeling position next to the female soldier that was providing overwatch. That soldier then stood and proceeded into the clearing as well, following a similar path as the original point man. All of this was done with precision and without conversation. Larun logged this observed behavior and noted that it was another indicator of the experience and professionalism among this particular Sith unit.

As the point man reached an area near the center of the clearing he moved to a small rise in the ground and then went into the prone position. This small rise provided some protection and cover for the soldier in his new position. He kept his blaster rifle pointed to the opposite end of the

clearing looking for any threats he might find.

As the second soldier, still moving across the clearing, reached about a third of the way across, the third soldier proceeded forward as another replacement soldier reached him. This process continued as more soldiers moved into the clearing. When the second soldier reached the center of the clearing she too took up a prone defensive position about 10 meters to the left of the first Sith soldier.

Green Team continued to watch and record this process unfold in this same manner for fifteen minutes. When they finally finished, there was a full thirty-five Sith soldiers in the field in a circular defensive position about 150 meters in front of the members of Green Team. The Sith security element held their positions, scanning the treeline for any movement for an additional 20 minutes while the Republic commando's watched on. Finally one of the Sith soldiers, apparently the platoon leader with a larger antenna sticking up from his battlepack, made a quick call on his headset. Even with his audio amplification earpieces in place, Larun was unable to make out what was being said from this distance, but it did not take them long to figure it out.

About five minutes later Vistom was the first to notice the movement from the tree line where the Sith soldiers had first emerged. A group of four enemy Sith, each burdened with an oversized hard shelled load carrying sack on their back, made their way toward the defensive perimeter in the center of the clearing. As Larun recorded the events, two final entities appeared in the clearing that caused all four of the Green Team operators to stop breathing. One of the enemy was wearing the unmistakable robes and uniform of

a Sith Lord.

The robes were tighter fitting than those typically worn by the Republic Jedi. Of course, they were also dark, nearly black in this case. The Sith Lord also was wearing the hooded outer Sith robe as well, though the hood was not pulled up over the head at the moment and was just hanging loosely.

The tighter fitting robes were preferred by the Sith Lords because of their preference of the more acrobatic lightsaber fighting techniques. The robes were made of a synthetic material that allowed easy movement when burdened with combat gear and were well suited for combat operations. The tighter fitting style prevented the robes from getting in the way during their acrobatic moves. The tighter fitting robes on this Sith Lord also allowed Larun to notice that it was a Female Sith Lord. Of course, a Female was every bit as deadly as a Male would be, and sometimes even more so.

The presence of the Sith Lord was a key indicator that this Sith operation was more than just a simple probing force on the planet. The supreme Sith leaders Reven and Malak would never send one of their precious Force trained Lords out without a vital purpose behind their mission. Larun also knew they now had a new and potentially very dangerous threat that they would have to deal with.

With the appearance of the Sith Lord came a sudden uneasiness that settled over all of the Green Team members. They knew that while they had been trained in basic methods of thought shielding, a talented Force user could still detect their presence from a moderate distance away if they really tried. No Stealth Generator would be able

to help them against Force detection methods. As a team they had dealt with Force users previously, and they all knew that as long as they did not pose a current threat to the Sith Lord, there was a good chance that their thoughts would not betray their position and alert her.

Larun figured in his head that the Sith Lord was not expecting them to be there and there was also 100+ meters of distance between them and the Sith Lord, these things would help their chances of remaining undetected tremendously. He thought it might be worth taking the chance of hanging around a bit longer to try and determine what the Sith was up to. Larun made up his mind and they continued to watch and monitor the developments before them.

As the four heavily laden Sith soldiers and the Sith Lord reached the circular perimeter, they moved to the middle and began to talk and point among themselves. The four soldiers with packs appeared to be technicians as they were not carrying the standard Sith blaster rifle and they wore nicer, non-combat uniforms. They dropped their packs and began to open and unload their equipment in the field.

While the technicians were unloading, the Sith Lord slowly scanned the surrounding area around the clearing. Larun panicked for a moment as he watched her look directly at his team. Thankfully she noticed nothing and continued her deliberate scan all around her.

Larun double checked that Vistom had the holographic recorder zoomed in on the activity at the center of the Sith formation and was recording this important information. That important information included the Sith Lord. Larun knew that Master Jarek would be very interested

in the discovery of not only a Sith combat unit, but that a Sith Lord seemingly was in command of that unit.

Larun was not sure how an 80 year old Jedi Master, and a seemingly under achieving padawan, were going to handle a combat hardened Sith Lord and her combat ready troops, but that was his problem. How they planned to deal with this situation would be a mystery even greater than the mysteries of the Force itself!

After another fifteen minutes of observation, some of the pieces of the mystery concerning the Sith's mission began to fall into place as the four technicians began assembling what was unmistakably a solar amplification module. These amplification modules were utilized by large scale communication relay stations to provide the necessary power to run them where a power source was not available. Both the Sith and the Jedi armies had mobile communication relay units and they all required huge amounts of power to run. The communications relay units themselves were usually mounted on the chassis of hover tanks to make them mobile. In order to get enough power to both receive and then relay secure communications from distant planetary systems they required the use of multiple power amplifiers. It would usually take at least four, and up to six of them to power the communications units. These power amps normally were solar powered and were of vital importance to the relay station. Because of their importance, they were never left unguarded, as was the case here.

As the module began to take shape and everything was proceeding as planned within the Sith formation, Green Team observed the Sith security element change to fifty percent security. The other fifty percent of the soldiers

started to 'dig in' and improve their defensive positions around the perimeter of the amplifier.

The Sith Lord seemed pleased with the progress and she and her companion left the same way that they had come to the clearing. Larun did not even consider the thought of setting up a hasty ambush for the Sith Lord, dealing with a Sith Lord was something never to be hasty about. Her departure was an indicator to Larun that it was probably time to leave and consult with the rest of the teams of SCU-11 and their Jedi commander. Their discovery was something they would all want to review and discuss.

Larun had his team wait another fifteen minutes to insure that no tag behind security elements were out in the forest around them. Once it was clear that the Sith Lord had truly departed, Larun prepared his team to move out. They double checked to insure that they did not leave behind any "Target Identifiers" that might give their presence away. They knew the Sith platoon in the clearing would be out later to extend their security perimeter and would pass by their hide site. "LNT - Leave No Trace", pronounced 'LINT' by the operators, was a common SCU acronym to live by.

After ensuring everything was clear and that nothing was left behind that would be noticed, the team very slowly and deliberately moved back. They were then sure not to follow the same path out that they used coming in to the observation point. As they moved out away from the clearing that contained the Sith, their forms appeared as unfocused figures. Anyone that may have been around to notice, would have sworn they looked more like a shadow in the forest than a deadly commando unit.