

Chapter 11

The immediate series of powerful strikes performed by Darth Cloran were intended to completely overwhelm the older Jedi Master and as she attacked, she held nothing back. The first two strokes were traditional overhand downward strikes that were executed in rapid succession. The first strike originated from the upper right and the second followed from the upper left. With the second strike, Darth Cloran channeled the Force through her arms and into the strike for an additional measure of power that knocked the Jedi back.

Darth Cloran had predetermined that this older Jedi would not be capable of withstanding an extremely powerful and aggressive lightsaber duel with a younger and more powerful assailant. Even though the two attacks were deftly parried by the Jedi, the added strength from the Force that was channelled into the second strike appeared to catch the feeble Jedi unaware. It literally caused his feet to slide back as he absorbed the strike. This was the effect that Darth Cloran was hoping to achieve. The slight pause that was caused as the Jedi absorbed the blow allowed Darth Cloran to spin to build up both physical momentum and Force power to channel behind a crushing horizontal sweep. The intended power of the blow would be enough to knock the Jedi back off his feet if he did manage to block it. This was the advantage that Darth Cloran understood she would have by having the dark side as her ally.

The older Master Jarek did not survive to his old age in an unforgiving galaxy by sheer chance or good luck. Rather he was able to survive by listening to the will of the

Force, which guided his actions in situations like these. As the Dark Lord finished her spin and began executing the devastating horizontal slash that would have cleaved just about any foe on this planet, as well as most others in the galaxy, the hilt of Master Jarek's lightsaber caught her squarely in the jaw. Darth Cloran had been expecting the traditional parry from the Jedi, but Master Jarek had simply elected to step in toward the Sith Lord instead and took advantage of the opportunity that was offered to him by her slow developing attack.

This untraditional, yet clever, tactic unfortunately made it impossible for Master Jarek to use the blade of his own lightsaber to finish off his foe. But it had the advantage of negating the attack of Darth Cloran as well. The sharp strike from the hilt was enough to cut and draw blood from the cheek of the Sith Master. The stunned Darth Cloran stumbled back away from Master Jarek. This break in her attack allowed the venerable Jedi to go on the offensive.

Master Jarek had witnessed the full power of this Sith Lord and he realized he had to use every advantage he could devise in order to walk away from this confrontation alive. So without hesitation he executed a quick lunging stab that was not intended to be powerful, but instead was intended to be quick and difficult to parry. It would have just enough power and distance to penetrate the heart of his foe and end the conflict quickly.

As Master Jarek executed his elegant thrust he realized it was not quick enough. The shock of the hilt strike to her face had momentarily stunned Darth Cloran and thrown her off balance, but it was not enough. Darth Cloran was still in complete control of her emotions and fear and

she quickly recovered from the blow, and barely deflected the attack to the side.

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Isaul only watched the first exchange of blows between the Jedi and Sith combatants before he quickly obeyed his orders and sprinted toward the remaining SCU operators. Black Team, whom had been held in reserve, had now moved up and assumed a defensive position on the left flank where White Team had most recently been. As Isaul approached their positions, he yelled into his helmet which broadcast over the battlenet for all the SCU operators to hear.

“Master Jarek has issued the command to withdraw to the Rally Point. Lets move!”

The entirety of SCU-11, save for their new Jedi leaders, had served together through enough combat operations to trust the commands from the other team members without question. Without any hesitation the teams prepared to leapfrog their way back away from the combat zone. This tactical was used when they were engaged in a firefight and needed to break contact. The SCU units rarely would all just cease firing at once. Instead each team would cover for the other teams as they leapfrogged each other in a retreating maneuver to their pre selected rally point.

With the absence of Master Jarek, Larun from Green Team had assumed command.

“Okay Black, break contact and peel back 100 meters, Blue and Green will Cover. What is left of White, proceed with Black!”

“Roger that Green Leader” came the replies.

As soon as the Black team ceased firing and began moving back away from their positions, Vistom and Harek both shifted their fire to the left to cover where Black Team had been engaging the enemy. This was designed to mask the movement of the Black Team as they disengaged and peeled back. It typically would also momentarily fool the enemy into thinking that nothing had changed from a moment before.

At the same instant that Vistom and Harek had shifted their fire to mask Black team’s movement, Mosok also glanced left to check on the progress of the retreat of the Black and White Teams. It was then that he noticed the flashing blue and red illumination deeper within the forest. Mosok instantly recognized where his master had gone and what he was doing and concern enveloped him as he thought of his master confronting the Sith Lord on his own.

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Darth Cloran was still outraged at the fact that this old relic of a Jedi had landed a definitive blow so early in the fight. She understood the damage was superficial and would not decide the outcome of this duel, but it was a solid blow and it happened perhaps more quickly than in any other duel in her life! During the following attacks and parries, Darth Cloran had thought it through and ruled out the chance of it being a freak slip up in her attack, it had been a brilliant counter-attack. The pain in her cheek did drive her on and make her more determined to putting an end to this annoying Jedi quickly. Then she could hunt down his

companions one by one and put an end to their meager existence.

Master Jarek now found himself facing Darth Cloran, he assumed the traditional Seresu stance with his feet set shoulder width apart, torso bent slightly at the waist, and his weight up on the balls of his feet. Then he just stood there waiting, unmoving, concentrating on feeling the Force, and preparing for the attack that he knew would be coming.

This basic fighting stance actually was something that Darth Cloran had not encountered before when confronting other Jedi. The calm unmoving posture of Master Jarek was a bit odd compared to all other Jedi combatants she had faced with their flamboyant fighting style. As a test, she slid to the right and performed a series of slashing attacks to probe the defense of the Jedi. She made mental notes of his actions as he simply just pivoted and parried the attacks without performing any counterattacks.

The reserved and timid behavior of the Jedi with a lack of counter-attacks reaffirmed the assumption in Darth Cloran's mind that this Jedi was indeed feeble and beyond his prime fighting years.

Nearly all Jedi learn the tenets of the Seresu form, also known as Form 3, but it was typically only taught as a means of protection against blaster fire. It was for this purpose that Seresu was primarily developed many generations ago. Master Jarek was one of the few Jedi that mingled in the form as a standard means of lightsaber combat. There were even fewer that used it as a primary form of lightsaber combat while facing another lightsaber wielding opponent. Because it was considered the boring, or

non aggressive, lightsaber combat form, Seresu had never seriously been considered an effective form for dueling in lightsaber vs. lightsaber combat. In Master Jarek's opinion, that was a serious flaw in the current Jedi training curriculum. Over the years he had enjoyed the simpleness of Seresu which taught that one could essentially be in the middle of the storm, yet, calmly dictate the outcome of that same storm.

Darth Cloran again slid to the right and made the appearance that she was going to once again execute a traditional series of slashes as she had already previously done. At the last moment she switched to a very complex series of Djem So moves that were intended to confuse and bewilder the defender with their power and aggressiveness. The buildup to a diagonal overhead slash was altered at the last moment to curve around and become an upward slash. While it was a deceptive strike, it was still parried by Master Jarek. Darth Cloran then carried that momentum into a powerful side slash that was also parried, but this time it was a little bit later in the attack. Finally she executed a third attack, a deceptive thrust meant to slide past any traditional parries and deliver a killing stab. Again, Darth Cloran sensed that the end of the battle was approaching as the latter attacks were parried just in the nick of time.

Based off of his reaction times, she concluded that the old Jedi was just barely clinging to survival. He was also using a completely unsuitable combat form intended for deflecting laser blasts from rifles and not for dueling a lightsaber wielding opponent.

In an effort to again end the conflict, Darth Cloran aggressively entered into the next series of attacks. But

again, Master Jarek was able to just barely deflect and parry away each of the attacks. He allowed the Sith Lord to continue the onslaught with attack after attack without any interruption and without any additional counterattacks on his part. As the fight continued and the attacks from the Sith Lord became more exaggerated and powerful, Master Jarek simply became more at ease with the combat around him. He was countering the attacks with just barely enough speed to prevent the Sith's blade from penetrating his defenses. After several minutes of the relentless attacks, Master Jarek decided it was now time to apply a little frustration to the Sith with a surprise of his own.

Darth Cloran was amazed that the fight had lasted this long. Each time she thought she had found an opening in the Jedi's defense and a killing blow was coming, he was barely able to deflect or avoid the attack. Whether it was luck, or desperation on his part she could not tell. However, she was certain that the lack of counterattacks clearly showed he was outmatched and slowly wearing down. In an effort to penetrate his defenses, Darth Cloran figured it was now time to add some deception to her attacks. She focused and channeled the Force through herself and she stepped in as if to once again attack. Instead, she switched to an advanced Ataru attack and leapt up, flipping over her opponent with the intent to strike him from behind. She was midway through the flip and directly above the Jedi's head, when the Force once again began screaming an alarm through her mind. She did everything she could to obey the command of the Force and was just barely able to land on her feet and get her lightsaber up in time to deflect a deceptively simple series of attacks that nearly succeeded in

destroying her.

Darth Cloran was recognized that she did not have control over this battle and she was now reacting to what her opponent was doing. She knew it was imperative to regain control of the fight. In an effort to regain that control, she quickly executed her own counter attack. As she began a powerful sideways slash the Jedi unexpectedly lunged forward with another stabbing strike that forced her to abort her attack in order to deflect the stab. Before she could counter his stabbing thrust, the Jedi kicked out and landed a blow with the heel of his foot directly on her side. The blow caused some of the air to leave her lungs and also forced her to stammer back a few steps to maintain her balance.

Darth Cloran was stunned for the third time during this battle and was asking herself what had just happened. None of the Jedi's little hits were life threatening or even terribly painful, but they really were starting to annoy and irritate her. Without even a moment's hesitation, and with a grim look on her face, she began yet another torrent series of attacks.

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"Black is in position" came the call over their command net.

"Roger that. Green Team, break contact and peel."

As Larun issued the command, all of the Green Team members ceased firing and broke contact with the enemy. Just like the Black Team before them, they peeled off and fell back while Black, Blue and the remnants of White Team provided suppressive fire to help protect them as they

moved. As each of the teams progressively moved back, the amount of enemy fire was beginning to lessen. Larun did notice that there was movement within the Sith camp which he knew was a pretty good indicator that a counter attack was being prepared. As Green Team, which included Larun, sprinted back to a position past the other teams, Larun was preparing to issue the order to cease fire so they could all disappear into the depths of the dark forest when a transmission came over the secure channel.

“Sergeant Larun, this is Mosok requesting permission to seek out Master Jarek and see if he needs help.”

Larun contemplated the request for just a moment before he replied.

“Lieutenant Mosok, permission granted. I have been worried about the old man as well. See what you can find and report back. We’ll continue back to our RP and wait for you and Jarek”.

“Roger that.” came the excited reply.

Technically the Jedi could do as they pleased. They both outranked the SCU operators and all the members of SCU-11 knew they were Jedi and they could do whatever they wanted. But for a tight knit group like a SCU, a disciplined approach to the chain of command was required. Larun had been placed in charge and could deny the request, but he too was worried about the old man they had each had just begun to respect. Larun just hoped that Mosok would not create more problems than he resolved with his lone mission.

As Mosok broke away from the main formation he heard the command from Larun come over the net telling the

teams to cease fire and move back to the Rallye Point. As the noise of battle ceased and calm return again to the forest, the quiet allowed Mosok the calm he needed to sense where his master was. He quickly headed in that direction to try and provide any kind of help he could.

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Darth Cloran's anger had once again consumed her. She had had enough of the elegance and subtlety of a duel of like skilled combatants, she was going to end this fight now. She did not consider this foe a worthy opponent and while his antics were different and somewhat amusing, they were just that, antics and not a true challenge of her skills. It was this reasoning that persuaded her to bypass using just lightsaber skill but to combine it with her one true advantage over any Light Side force user, the ally of the Dark Side.

Master Jarek also noticed the change in her fighting style immediately. Each strike came with more force and ferocity, and even her countenance and demeanour had changed. Her brow was now constantly furrowed, and her face had the look of hate and disgust. Each of the attacks were accompanied with a yell of rage. Jarek knew the power of the Dark Side well as he had seen it many times over the years and this Sith Lord was emanating and pulsing with its power. Deflecting the incoming blows was becoming laborious and at times painful. The strain was beginning to take its toll on him and his aged body, but he did not see that the Sith Lord was being negatively affected by the exertion of power at all. If there was any change with her exertion of force, it was that the speed had increased and

the power only grown stronger.

But the light side of the Force had its advantages as well and it was in the peace and calm at the middle of the storm that he saw it. There was a vulnerability in the Sith lightsaber form. Master Jarek recognized it was a flaw found in Djem So users that had not yet mastered the complex form and in turn correct the opening he now discovered. He could notice that during the transition from left to right overhand strikes, she was not pivoting enough to the opposite side which left her side exposed to a counterattack. Additionally, as she continued to exert more energy with each attack of rage, she became more careless and the opening became larger and the exposed side was open for a longer period of time as she recovered from the strikes she just executed. Master Jarek knew it would have to be a precise and quick blow, but it was the only opening in the furious onslaught that he could find, and he knew his time was running out.

The brute force of her attacks actually inspired and motivated Darth Cloran even more as she could feel the Force surging inside of her. She continued the devastating attacks, propelled by the power of the Dark Side. She admitted to herself that the Jedi had fought well for an old man, but she knew the end was near as she could feel him wearing down from the attack. With her next series of attacks she brought the full force of her power in a downward blow from the right and then pivoted to her left for an equally devastating downward blow from her left side. At the moment she pivoted she saw the Jedi do something she was not expecting and she knew she had made a grave mistake. She sensed the blue blade arcing unsuspectably

toward her exposed flank in a quick darting motion and she instantly knew she would not be able to prevent it from striking home.

The realization that this would be the third time in this duel that this Jedi had landed a blow did more to anger and infuriate her than the coming burning pain she knew she would feel from the blade itself. It was this fury and determination combined with her lightning fast reflexes that saved her life. There was nothing she could do to prevent the blue lightsaber from hitting her, but at the last moment she spun away from the attack as quickly as her body and reflexes aided by the Force would allow. While the blade still made contact with her side, it did not allow it to penetrate deep enough to seriously damage her vital organs.

The sudden searing pain from the lightsaber blade as it pierced her side was a shock that sent alarms screaming through her entire body and she let out a loud scream from the pain. The pain was sharp, but it quickly subsided as her spinning body pulled away from the blade and the nerve endings were cauterized by the lightsaber itself.

Following through with the spin and in an effort to break momentary contact with her tormentor, she extended her left hand and channeled the Force into an extension of her arm and sent a powerful Force push into the chest of Master Jarek at point blank range.

Master Jarek, for his part, had thought he had won the battle as his blade struck the side of the Sith Lord. He did not expect the last second 360 degree spin toward him and he was ill prepared for the massive Force push that caught him in the chest. Jarek felt himself being lifted and

propelled through the air and he tried desperately to use the Force to cushion the coming impact. But without the aid of being able to see where he was heading, it was only of superficial benefit as his body struck a nearby tree. He felt the damage to his ribs, spleen, and other internal organs as they gave way to the immovable object. It was only with extreme effort that he maintained consciousness as he bounced off the tree and landed awkwardly onto the ground.

Throughout her career, the single thing that Darth Cloran craved most, was the thrill of victory over a Jedi. She considered it the most rewarding part, but this victory was especially sweet as she considered that the old relic had nearly been her downfall. It had been an unexpectedly hard fought duel and a lesson she would not soon forget. In the end, it had been as she predicted. She had succeeded again, and had come out the victor once more. She would be able to add another notch to her kill tally.

As the intensity of the battle left her, she let the rage within her subside and she slowly walked toward the body of the fallen Jedi that was now crumbled before her on the ground. She noticed some movement and she was surprised to see the broken man still alive and moving. Regardless, this fight was over and Darth Cloran would now bring an end to the life of this Jedi.

Master Jarek could hear the footsteps of the Sith Lord approaching him, but his eyesight was blurred and he had no idea where his lightsaber had fallen. Wincing from the pain, Master Jarek took a deep breath and tried to rise to his feet to honorably prepare to meet his destiny. He was still unable to see clearly and with the pain coursing through his broken body he began the process of preparing himself

to become one with the Force. Master Jarek was just able to stagger to his feet... but as he did so, he sensed another living being nearby, approaching from behind.

Somehow he knew he would come. His always loyal Padawan Mosok, had arrived, and it was not a moment too soon.