

Chapter 14

Larun Bigstor, the leader of Green Team, and the Non Commissioned Officer temporarily in command of the Elite SCU-11, continued to observe the rock outcroppings 200 meters to their front. These rock formations were not only an interesting shape and color, but they were also the agreed upon rally point where the SCU would regroup and plan the next phase of their operation..

Larun and the two other remaining team leaders, one from Blue and one from Black, had been watching and observing the area for the past twenty minutes. They were trying to detect any unusual activity that might signal that the area was not safe or secure. Fortunately for SCU-11, they had not observed anything that any of them would categorize as out of the ordinary.

The remaining members of SCU-11 were 400 meters further to their rear, up on the valley wall on the south side of the canyon. They were in a temporary defensive position that they had established among some shorter vegetation. They were all setup and scanning the surrounding area, doing their best to maintain security while the three team leaders performed their reconnaissance on the rally point.

It took a while, but the three team leaders eventually were satisfied that their visual inspection of the area was thorough enough and they agreed it was secure enough to proceed. Larun signaled to the other two team leaders it was now time to move out to conduct an in person recon of the Rally Point on foot.

Upon the signal from Larun, the three team leaders, who were also the three most experienced members of

SCU-11, moved out quietly and without any need for additional instructions or commands. They had each done this routine thousands of times over the years that they had worked together. Larun lead the other two, making sure that they remained in the cover of the small brush that was on the valley floor and they also made use of the periodic placement of the K-31 rocks. These tall and skinny rock formations looked a lot like vertical exhaust ports on subterranean dwelling units.

With the aid of their careful movement and stealth generating uniforms, they were able to make it undetected to the rock formation that was their destination and quickly performed their reconnaissance. They confirmed that the area was indeed secure and they could proceed to move the rest of the teams forward. Larun indicated for Systyun, the Blue team leader to remain with him and for Malulon, the Twilek leader of the Black team, to return and bring the remainder of SCU-11 forward to occupy their rally point.

Malulon nodded toward Larun indicating he received the order and would comply. As was the custom of all SCU operators, Malulon disappeared into the surrounding environment of K-31, fading from sight and making almost no sound at all.

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Mosok had spent the better part of the day making his way quietly and discreetly to the Rally Point, or RP as the SCU team members liked to call it. The movement was slow and laborious, but it was exactly what Mosok needed as he reviewed in his mind the events of the morning and

tried to figure out how to handle his emotions after the death of his Master.

The Jedi order teaches and trains their practitioners to eschew emotion because of times like this where those emotions may cloud judgement when sound judgement was sorely needed. But even for the most devote Jedi, losing one's master is a trying and difficult time.

Over the preceding hours, Mosok had gone over the melee combat a hundred times in his head. Reviewing the confrontation with the Sith, the direct command from his Master to abandon him and flee, and then the most troubling aspect of it all, the nagging thought that he could have somehow saved his Master if he would have stayed to help.

It was all disturbing and confusing to the young Jedi. Thankfully, the immediate and pressing task of locating the rally point and making contact with his unit helped to keep his mind focused and free from the emotional fog. This for or murkiness was natural and can permeate through the mind during such trying circumstances as he was now dealing with.

The sunlight was fading and night would be approaching soon which could pose some problems for the young Jedi. Mosok knew he was nearing the rock outcroppings that were marked as the RP for SCU-11 and he approached with even more caution. He had been working his way up the canyon, staying up on the side of the valley wall and off of the valley floor, just as his Special Operations training had taught him. He was slowly and deliberately placing each and every step, doing his best to minimize unwanted sounds created by his movement.

Mosok was holding his lightsaber hilt, unignited, in

his right hand, ready for immediate action should it be required. As he slowly came around a bend in the terrain he then saw the location of the RP, just as he expected. What he did not expect was the metallic feeling of a blaster barrel pressed to the back of his head.

“I thought Jedi were able to sense the presence of other beings and when they are in danger?”, a hardened military voice said from behind him.

Mosok was not alarmed and calmly answered.

“It is good to see you Vistom”.

Vistom removed the blaster from the back of Mosok’s head and disengaged his stealth generator, allowing his shadowy outline to become more fully visible to Mosok. Vistom commented dryly in reply.

“Glad to see you made it back... and remembered where the RP was. Where’s the old man?”

Mosok lowered his eyes and turned away for a brief moment before quietly answering the question.

“He didn’t.... he has become one with the Force.” was his strained reply.

If Vistom felt any emotion about the revelation of the death of their commander, Mosok could not detect it as Vistom replied.

“Lets go. Larun is expecting a report, I’ll guide us through the RP security point.”

Vistom turned and lead Mosok the remaining 400 meters to the perimeter of their formation. He then smoothly negotiated the password and challenge to get the pair of them inside the security of the SCU defensive position.

. . .

Sendu Farns found himself in the mindless state of “drone” work. It was amazing to Sendu how the mind could just wander when the body was just doing repetitive tasks for long periods of time like he was doing now. In the case of Sendu and the other sith soldiers, the task was cleaning up the remains of the destruction left behind by the Republic Strike on the MRU. The past day and a half had been the same, just cleaning up and helping when and where ordered. He was certain that he would be recalled shortly as there was clearly no longer a need for him on this operations, or his SIO companions. The Sith commanders no doubt, had better use for the specialized skills of the SIO operators that were located on K-31. He figured he just needed to go through the motions until the orders came down from his superiors that it was time to head somewhere else.

He reached down and picked up one of his sensor display panels from off the ground. He figured it must have been knocked to the ground either by an enemy explosion, or by himself when he was scrambling to get out of his shelter during the raid.

Flipping the reset button on the side of the display caused the screen to flicker back to life. On the screen was displayed the last set of sensor scans before the panel was so abruptly discarded and left on the ground.

Sendu was reaching to touch the panel and reset the sensor arrays when he found himself staring at the monitor. It wasn't what was on the screen that caused him to pause, but rather it was what was NOT on the screen that captured his attention. He stood staring at the monitor for what must

have been a full two minutes when finally one of the nearby privates called toward him

“Hey Corporal? Are you Okay?”

If Sendu heard him, he made no outward sign indicating that he had.

“Corporal?” the private called again.

Still there was no reply.

The private then walked up next to Sendu and lightly touched his arm, again asking.

“Corporal, are you al’right?”

The touch of the private’s hand on his arm brought Sendu out of his trance and he glanced at the private, and then ignoring him, turned to his right and quickly made a line directly toward the command shelter.

. . .

Larun was wondering to himself how in the galaxy they had gotten to this point? The chain of command was clear, and there was no arguing it. The clumsy and unproven Padawan, Mosok, was now technically in command of one of the most elite units in the vast Republic armed forces.

Larun had no real care for the Force one way or the other. But fate, or the Force, had dealt them a cruel and baffling hand. SCU-11 had just begun to take a liking to the wise old Jedi Master and that had just come to a very abrupt end with his death at the hands of the Sith Lord. The emotional struggle of the loss of their Jedi Commander was piled on top of the losses already suffered on White Team.

Combined with the realization that SCU-11 had not lost a Jedi commander in combat for as far back as Larun

could remember, the morale of this elite unit had suffered a major blow. The realization that the CIV was still not available for extraction added to the feeling of desperation within their ranks.

Larun was the highest ranking noncommissioned officer within the SCU and he knew it would be up to him to insure that morale and discipline remained up to the SCU standards that were expected of them. At that moment, realizing the seriousness of their predicament, Larun knew what his required course of action needed to be in order to maintain discipline and any hope of survival for them all.

Mosok was just completing his report to the team leaders of the death of Master Jarek and his own movement to the rally point. When Mosok completed his report, Larun responded before any of the others could.

“Thank you, Mosok, we are all saddened by your loss, we will all miss your Master. He was a wise and a capable leader” and then looking to the other two team leaders next to him, Larun issued the next command with authority.

“Alright men. We now find ourselves in a high risk scenario. Make sure your detection sensors are up and active then grab your teams and gather around in 5 mikes. I would like to address the troops.”

Each of the other team leaders responded with a “roger that” and headed out. Larun, without even so much as a glance toward Mosok headed off to do the same with his own Green Team members.

Suddenly, Mosok found himself standing alone in the middle of the perimeter without anything to do, and in a somewhat confused and bewildered state of mind. So he did

like he was always trained to do when confused, he kneeled down and meditated alone until the members of SCU-11 began to assemble in a half circle around him a few minutes later. Mosok stood back up and he too waited for Larun to come and assume command of the unit.

Larun was the last to come toward the group of assembled soldiers and confidently strode past the half circle of soldiers and faced Mosok directly with his back to the other members of SCU-11. He then stood at the position of attention, staring right at Mosok. He then executed a perfect salute that would have been more than suitable for the parade grounds back on Coruscant.

“Sir, Sergeant Larun Bigstor reporting for duty and awaiting your orders.”

A startled look of surprise crossed Mosok’s face as he was unprepared for the direct and sudden acknowledgement of command. Larun continued, with his arm still in the saluting position.

“Sir, just let us know what your orders are.”

Mosok looked around at all of the other faces that were staring at him and he was still not quite sure what to do as he had never assumed command of the SCU before. As his eyes made their way back toward Larun, he noticed Larun was mouthing some words and trying to catch his attention. Mosok quickly was able to make out the one word ‘Salute’ and caught on to what Larun was indicating that he should do. He quickly stood at attention and returned the salute.

Larun snapped his arm back to down to his side and further continued.

“Sir, the members of SCU-11 have gathered all of

their gear and are prepared to move out toward the alternate communication point as per our operational briefing. Shall we prepare to move out in 30 minutes time?"

Mosok's head was still not fully comprehending the entirety of the situation, but his thoughts were clear enough to stammer out a response.

"Uh, yes Sergeant."

Larun then spoke in an elevated tone so that all the other soldiers around him could hear him clearly.

"Alright operators, you heard the Jedi, lets prepared to move out to rendezvous at point alpha-niner. We demark in 30 mikes."

With the final command issued from Larun, the SCU operators all broke apart and moved to prepare for their departure.

Larun looked at the still bewildered Mosok. He insure he made eye contact and then gave a firm nod of support. Larun then turned around and headed toward his own gear to prepare to move out.

Mosok was still in such a state of shock that he just tried to remember where he had left all of his equipment!

. . .

Sendu approached the command shelter of the Sith Lord Darth Cloran and noticed the two guards outside of her tent stiffen as he approached.

"State your business Corporal" the heavier set one on the right asked.

Sendu replied, "I need to speak with with Darth Cloran immediately."

“Sorry, but she has asked not to be disturbed.”

Sendu was insistent that they let him in as he was confident that she would want to hear what he had to say.

“I understand, but this is of the most urgent importance and surely Lord -”

The Sith guard cut him off

“Her orders were clear, no one is to disturb her.”

Sendu had made up his mind, this was too important to put off to a later time and with a shrug of the shoulders he suddenly leapt for the door.

Unfortunately for Sendu, both of the guards were ready for just such an attempt to get by them. The larger of the two guards brought the butt of his rifle across in front of Sendu to block his way. The second guard was not so gentle. The butt of his rifle struck Sendu across the back of the head.

Sendu was not an unfit soldier, but he was not able to withstand the blow to his head and he collapsed to the ground with a grunt of pain. He was barely able to maintain consciousness and slowly began to get onto his hands and knees when the second guard raised the butt of his blaster rifle to strike him again.

Just before the guard could deliver the crushing blow on the skull of the young SIO specialist, a voice called from inside the shelter.

“Wait!”

The blaster rifle held its position while Darth Cloran came out of the entryway.

She addressed Sendu, who was still on his hands and knees.

“Corporal, what is so important that you would

interrupt a Sith Lord?”. Her voice was somewhat amused, but then turned cold. “But you better talk fast, I am lacking in patience at the moment.”

Sendu’s head was throbbing and he was having a hard time concentrating through the concussion induced fog. He was trying to form some sort of coherent thoughts in his head when Darth Cloran ran out of her limited supply of patience.

“Kill him”, and she turned around and walked through the entryway.

“WAIT!” Sendu cried out. “I can track them....”

Darth Cloran stopped and turned around.

“Who can you track?”

“The republic soldiers... the ghosts”

Darth Cloran raised an eyebrow, but remained skeptical. “Is that so? If you can, then why did your sensors fail the other night before the attack?”

Sendu was still having a hard time seeing everything clearly, but he was able to stammer out his thoughts.

“I will need to change their processing algorithms to do it, they were not setup for this new technology.”

Darth Cloran’s interest was piqued now. “Okay Corporal, why don’t you come on in and explain to me what you are talking about.”

Sendu slowly picked himself up from the ground while the two guards relaxed and assumed their normal places on either side of the doorway. Sendu made his way into the command tent where he found Darth Cloran waiting for him impatiently.

“So explain it to me.”

“Yes, My Lord. It came to me while I was looking at

the screens from my scanners just a few minutes ago. It caused me to think back to right before the attack was launched the other morning. I noticed at that point in time there were some blank spots on my sensor screens and I just assumed they were normal dead space on the forest floor. But when I saw the same outputs today, something just kept nagging at me until finally I saw it. The blank spots were in very specific patterns that looked an awful lot like military formations.”

Darth Cloran asked “Why have we not noticed blank spots on the sensor screens before?”

“I am not sure, but I suspect it was because I had increased the sensitivity levels of my sensors and had turned off the AI learning algorithms that normally filter out the ambient lifeforms. This in turn typically makes the entire screen blank”

“What prompted you to do that Corporal?”

“Well, with the trouble this Republic unit had been giving you guys over the past week, I figured I really didn’t want to be surprised and end up dead. So as a matter of self preservation, I wanted everything to be visible on my sensor screens... so naturally I adjusted the settings.”

Darth Cloran laughed at that. “Well, perhaps not very heroic or brave, but at least you are honest! So how do we find the ghosts, as you called them?”

Sendu continued his detailed response.

“Well, I will have to reprogram some of the sensor detection software and the learning code, but we just amplify the sensitivity of the sensors and make the software do the opposite of what it was designed to do and learn to track the blank spots instead of the bright spots..”

Darth Cloran had a scowl on her face that showed skepticism “Corporal, by the time we send the specifications back to the developers to make the changes and then get it back here in the field, the enemy will be two galaxies away.”

“No my Lord, we don’t send it to the developers. I will just make the changes here in the field. The alpha bytes are not difficult to change and my terminals can handle the recompile of the software.”

“You can do that?” Darth Cloran asked with raised eyebrows.

“Yeah, no problem.”

“How long?”

“I think I can have something working in the next few days.”

“Corporal, you are the first bit of good news I have had today. Bring your equipment to this command shelter and get to work immediately right here. You will be answering directly to me and working here in this tent where I can monitor progress.”

With a smile on his face, and a throbbing pain on the back of his head, Sendu Farns, SIO specialist, began work on perhaps the most important project of his life.