

## Chapter 15

The same intense look of concentration had been stuck on Emi-gon's face for the past three hours as she studied the digital map that was displayed on the large monitor in the crew common area on the Twilight Nova. The space freighter 'Nova, as Ocal liked to call it, had become Emi-gon's new temporary home.

It would have been easier for Emi-gon to get a better understanding of the lay of the land if the ship had been equipped with a three dimensional holoprojector that could display a high resolution terrain map. But alas, the 'Nova was not up to current Republic military standards in terms of planetary map display equipment, as well as many other things. But Emi-gon determined the two dimensional map display would have to suffice in her current circumstances.

Ocal and Quinto were both sitting in lounge chairs close to the food preparation area and were quietly laughing over some story they were reliving from their adventures in the past. Their voices rising and falling with the remembered excitement of the various moments during what Emi-gon guessed was most likely an exaggerated retelling of the actual story.

Emi-gon interrupted their story telling with her polite and reserved voice

"Captain, do you have any military experience?"

As he looked over, Ocal still had a smile on his face from the reminiscing caused by the storytelling.

"No, not really. I do understand basic military navigation and spacecraft marshalling, but I have no real experience with the internal workings of military

organizations. Why do you ask?”

Emi-gon continued to wear the scowl on her face as she looked back down at the datapad she was holding in her left hand

“Well... if you don't mind, maybe you could help me work through this.”

Ocal stood up, along with Quinto, and they both walked up to the map area the Jedi Master was so intently studying.

“- you see, we have the basic attack plan as it was transmitted to us by Master Jarek... but because the SCU units are so unconventional... you can see that there are major sections of the plan left blank.” Emi-gon pointed out the blank sections on the datapad.

“What I am trying to determine is what his plans were after they executed the attack on the MRU.”

Ocal moved in next to Emi-gon and looked over her left shoulder at the datapad and studied the information for a moment.

“What about communication frequencies, did he put those on there? We could at least try and contact them if we cannot determine where they are heading.”

Emi-gon continued studying the electronic pad but was quick to answer Ocal's question.

“Unfortunately, for security reasons the SCU units only synch their signal hopping codes with their transport units that are used to get into and out of an area of operations.”

“Aren't we their transport unit?”

Emi-gon nodded, her short dark hair bobbing with her head “Well, yes, we are, but unfortunately, SCU-11 is

not aware of that at the moment.”

“Well then just grab it from the guys that were suppose to pick them up.”

Emi-gon was courteous with her reply.

“I thought of that, but the CIV is in the middle of another operation and on complete communication blackout. Nothing coming in or out... that has been the problem with this raid from the get-go.”

Ocal shrugged his shoulders and stated “Well, did you look at the ship’s posted briefing from the initial insertion? Seems logical that they might have follow up plans already in place and they would have been posted at the central command center.”

Suddenly the smaller Master Jedi stopped scanning the data pad and looked back at Ocal, “Actually, as a matter of fact, that thought had not crossed my mind. I have the initial briefing right here in my records...” she swiped her finger across the datapad and typed a few other symbols and then the display filled with what appeared to Ocal as a detailed document not unlike the itineraries he was required to file with many of the planetary commerce agencies when delivering cargo.

Emi-gon smiled, “Well look at that, they have indicated here” she pointed at the screen “that the expected followup extraction was set to be at Bravo Three, which is set to these coordinates here...”

Emi-gon quickly typed in the coordinates onto the fixed map display and the point was highlighted on the separate map on the ship’s monitor.

“It looks like the scheduled pick up is in two days. That is plenty of time, but I still wish we had some way to

contact SCU-11.” Emi-gon paused for a few seconds as she thought the scenario through. “Well, unless anyone has a better idea, I suggest that we move closer to that pickup point and monitor emergency frequencies to hopefully make contact and pick them up. The pickup point is only about 30 kilometers from where we are now.”

Ocal nodded his head once and replied “Yeah, I don’t see any prob-”

A high pitched siren sounded from a panel on the wall to their left and by the time Ocal turned to see what it was, Quinto was already moving to look at the ship’s primary scanners. Quinto pressed a button to silence the sirens and was looking at the screen with a stern look on his face as sweat started to gather along his brow.

He didn’t look up as he provided a situational report. “Not good folks... our sensors are detecting an incoming ship... about a thousand meters above the surface. It appears to be small, and unless it deviates from its present course its gonna pass nearly directly overhead.”

A look of concern came over Ocal’s face as he shouted.

“Come on, follow me!”

Both Emi-gon and Quinto followed the sprinting Ocal as he ran toward, and then into the cockpit of the ship. He plopped down into the captain’s chair and quickly punched in some codes that brought the sensors alive. Once all the displays blinked to life they were able to track the incoming ship from there. Ocal was poised over the controls of the ship, ready to launch at a moment’s notice.

“Alright Q,” using Quinto’s nickname normally reserved for tense situations, “get the primary engines online

just in case we have to get moving quick.”

“Got it” was the reply.

Ocal continued “This clearing we’re sittin in isn’t gonna hide us if he gets anywhere near us... Q, charge the main guns and deflector shields as well”

Beads of sweat were beginning to form on Ocal’s forehead as he watched and prepared for action.

Quinto was intently watching the sensors that were tracking the progress of the unknown ship “He’s not deviating... he is moving fast, he might not see us. Master Jedi, are their any friendly forces on this planet?”

“No, the indigenous species are primitive and do not have any transportation craft capable of flight and there are no other Republic troops on the planet. It is us and SCU-11”

Ocal replied, “Well, guess that makes it easy... he’s a bad guy.”

“Yeah, and he is gonna pass right over us in about 20 seconds.” The strain in Quinto’s voice was obvious.

Emi-gon’s gentle and calm voice came out clear over the tense situation “Just hold tight boys, they might not see us.”

The three companions waited intently in the cockpit. They were each watching the blip on the sensor display as it moved closer and closer to the center of the display until it appeared to merge with the dot that represented their own ship in the middle.

They could hear the repulsorlift engines of the mysterious craft resonate through the cockpit of the ‘Nova and then the craft became visible through the cockpit windows as they all looked up. Emi-gon was able to immediately identify the craft.

“It is a Sith observation and close air support vehicle.”

And as if on queue, the craft began to descend lower and bank to the right.

“Captain, we have been spotted” was all that Emi-gon calmly said and was all that was needed to set Ocal into motion. His hands were a blur as various dials and controls were adjusted and in just a few brief seconds their craft was airborne and accelerating toward the enemy aircraft as it was banking.

Ocal’s voice was firm and in control “Sorry Jedi, but we have no choice, that ship is coming down.”

“No need to apologize to me, it is essential for our mission that we remain hidden.”

Ocal was banking the Twilight Nova toward the tail of the Sith scout ship when the pilot of the Sith craft appeared to notice it was being pursued and he tightened his turn even more. He was trying to bring its nose around to engage Ocal’s incoming ship.

Neither Ocal nor the Sith pilot were able to bring their ships around enough to get a shot off before they passed by each other. The Sith pilot was a properly trained combat pilot with skills developed over years of combat flying and he adjusted the thrusters and pulled the craft into a full 90 degree bank and coaxed his craft into an impressive high G short radius turn that would get inside of the larger crafts turning radius. The Sith pilot was expecting that this would allow him to get off a killing shot.

But Ocal had grown up on a farm and was flying aerial agricultural application craft long before he could properly identify which section of the galaxy map his home

planet was on. The Twilight Nova was more an integral part of Ocal than his cyborg eye was and it acted as an extension of his mind and body.

When the two craft passed closely by, instead of fleeing or continuing the turn to try and gain an advantage as the Sith pilot had, he used an old trick he learned when spraying crops back home. Ocal reversed his turn and pulled up into a climb while continuing the turn to the left. The steep climb bled off his excess energy and slowed the craft down and then while just barely hanging in the sky on the thrust from its engines, Ocal broke the bank hard left and dropped the nose down. The result of the maneuver was that the nose of the Nova was pointing directly at the sharp turning Sith recon craft.

With a slight adjustment of left yaw, the Nova was descending with its sites directly on the banking enemy craft. Pressing the fire buttons on the control yoke sent four high power plasma bolts streaming from the Nova toward the Sith aircraft. Three of the four bolts were direct hits. The first burned through the smaller crafts weaker shields, the second and third bolts finished the job, sending the enemy craft flaming and disintegrating into the forest below.

Emi-gon was impressed. “That was some fancy flying. Are you sure you do not have any military experience?”

“Yeah, I’m sure. Us ag boys just know how to handle a spacecraft.” Ocal responded with no expression.

“Oh, I believe you. But lets get this thing back on the ground and hidden before any other unwanted Sith craft arrive to see what happened to their friend.”

“Already on my way. Quinto, punch in those map

coordinates and lets see what we can find. I'll keep us low and away from any sensors.”

As Quinto set about with his tasks, the Twilight Nova skimmed away toward the Bravo Three pickup point just meters above the top of the trees.

. . .

“Recon One Three, say again....”

A slight pause

“Recon One Three, do you copy?”

The communications officer in the Sith command tent had not clearly understood the last transmission from the Recon craft that was overflying one of the remote quadrants west of their position.

An overweight human sensor operator with dark black hair and situated to the left of the communications officer spoke up next.

“Sir, Recon One Three is no longer on my scope.”

“What? where did he go?”

“Well Sir, he had made a hard circling maneuver and then I thought there was a second signature near Recon One Three and then everything disappeared.”

The communications officer was beginning to ask another question when Darth Cloran came over from the other side of the tent.

“What is it, officer?”

The communications officer, herself a newly commissioned officer in the Sith Army, turned and stood at attention as the Sith Lord addressed her and then replied.

“One of our recon vessels, call sign Recon One

Three, had reported that they thought they saw a craft on the ground around this sector here...” the young officer pointed to an area on the map that was 80 kilometers to the west of their current location

“...and then there was another broadcast that I couldn’t understand and then I lost communication with him. Corporal Jaasn was on the sensors and he was just reporting that Recon One Three no longer appears on his scopes.”

Darth Cloran continued the inquiry where the communications officer had left off. “Do we have any other vessels or units in that area?”

“No Sir, not in the immediate area. We have another Recon craft about 60 kilometers away that I can divert.”

“Yes, go ahead and get them over there, but tell them to be on their guard.”

The communications officer gave the quick order and then turned again to Darth Cloran.

“Sir, Recon One Seven will be on station in about 4 minutes.”

“Good, I’ll wait here”.

“Yessir” was the only reply as the communications officer turned back to her work.

Darth Cloran began to run through the different possible scenarios in her head. Was it a mechanical failure or was it indeed an enemy vessel here to extract the enemy commandos? She barely had time to contemplate the matter before a radio call broke her train of thought.

“HQ, this is Recon One Seven, yeah, we are coming up on the wreckage now.”

“Roger that Recon One Seven. Keep your eyes

peeled and your sensors active.” The communications officer replied.

“Yes sir. We are doing just that...” There was silence for about ten seconds before the pilot broadcast again. “it doesn’t look good down there, the wreckage is spread across several hundred meters.”

The voice was strained as the pilot of the recon vessel was pulling a tight high G turn around the wrecked craft.

“HQ, we are gonna sit down next to the main wreckage and check for survivors and clues. SlingShot was a good pilot, I’d like to check on him and his crew.”

Darth Cloran grabbed the earpiece and microphone from the younger communication officer and replied.

“Recon One Seven, this is Darth Cloran, we will monitor the sensors as best we can from here. Go ahead and sit her down and let me know if you can determine if the craft was shot down or if it may have been a mechanical failure.”

The pilot of Recon One Seven quickly replied “Oh, there is no need to check on that Sir. I can see the blaster scoring on the fuselage structure now. No doubt Recon One Three was shot down and it looks like plasma cannons. Probably shot down from a spacecraft. Plasma marks that big only come from large cannons typically found on spacecraft.”

The report did not surprise Darth Cloran as that had been her suspicion all along, but she wanted to be sure.

“How sure are you on that Recon One Seven?”

“No doubt... 100% sir.”

“Thanks Recon One Seven. Sit her down, do what

you can and let us know if you find out anything else.

“Roger that”.

Darth Cloran handed the earpiece back to the communications officer.

“Well, we have enemy craft in the area. Make sure our pilots are aware of this new development and be sure to tighten up our fighter sweeps in that area as well.”

“Yes my Lord.”

“Also, let’s concentrate our ground search around the location of the wreckage. Fan out about 50 kilometers. I think our invisible commandos have a friend out there and I bet they are trying to meet up.”

Darth Cloran quickly left the command tent and headed directly to where Sindu Farns had set up his shop on the other side of camp.

As she walked through the doorway he looked up from the computer display he was working on and only gave a short nod to acknowledge her arrival.

“How is it going Sindu? I hope you have some good news.”

Sindu looked back to the screen as he answered

“Well, as a matter of fact, I do. I am just finishing up on the detection algorithms now. Unfortunately it is not all good news, we do have one problem.”

Darth Cloran began to feel the rage creeping its way back up inside of her again and answered with venom in her voice..

“I said I wanted good news.”

“Well, my Lord, I do not exactly have a fully stocked laboratory here to work with. As I was beginning to say, the problem is that we do NOT have a fully integrated system

between sensors and processing CPU's with enough power to process the data on the fly. So we cannot fit everything on the Recon ships. What we have to do is mount the sensors in the crafts and then record the data from those sensors. That part of the puzzle is no problem, the recon craft are already capable of doing that. We then will have to bring the data back here and process it with my higher power CPU here in our make shift lab."

Darth Cloran thought about that for a moment before answering.

"Well, that will have to do. We just had one of our recon craft shot down which gave us a general idea of where our hidden enemy might be heading to. How long will it take you to get the sensors mounted and how many do you have?"

"We have three functioning sensor units after the raid. I should be able to have them mounted up and functioning tonight."

"Then get on it..."

"Yes My Lord".

Darth Cloran turned quickly and left the tent with a grin on her face.