

Chapter 16

Even an inexperienced Jedi that is not in tune with the living Force, could feel and sense the struggles of a mind tormented with loss. Isaul was the last remaining member of SCU-11's decimated White Team, and he had been temporarily assigned to Mosok. He was performing admirably while carrying on with their mission, but even trained and combat hardened soldiers such as the elite members of a SCU, struggled when they experienced the loss of a close team member and friend. Losing only one teammate was difficult, and losing two in one engagement would be considered tragic. But to lose the entire rest of the team as Isaul had, was nearly unbearable for just about anyone.

As SCU-11 continued to travel toward the designated communications point Alpha-9, the forest began to thin out. The spacing between the trees had grown to over 10 meters on average. As the teams continued to move toward their destination, Mosok watched Isaul from behind. He had noted a change in his demeanor and the way that he carried himself. Isaul was normally very confident in everything he did as a commando and he was willing to provide input on any tactical situation that they encountered. But ever since Mosok had rejoined the unit after the attack, Isaul had been quiet and had hardly said a word. It appeared to Mosok that Isaul was merely just going through the motions which was not not typical for Isaul, and this concerned Mosok.

Everyone knew that Isaul was a valuable member of the team and Mosok had a feeling he would be needed before they made it off of K-31. When Mosok contemplated

the thought, he felt there may have been more than just a feeling. Was it the Force speaking to him? Mosok was not yet sure.

Vistom was once again operating as the point man at the head of the SCU formation and he had brought the team to a halt. They were stopped under the cover of some rocks and larger sized vegetation that had large leaves with a light yellow color to them. He gave the hand signal to assume a defensive perimeter which would allow them to take a quick five minute break to rest their bodies from the grueling trek.

Mosok noticed Isaul a few meters away from him and in a prone position behind the trunk of a large tree. Mosok took this opportunity to approach him and start a conversation in a very hushed tone.

“Isaul”

Isaul looked up at him and responded in a like whisper

“Yessir”

“I heard about the loss of your teammates, they were all good men...” -Mosok began to run out of words to say at that point and wasn't sure how to proceed. He instantly recognized he needed more practice at this sort of thing.

Isaul turned away, looking down the sights of his MX-11 blaster rifle into the field beyond. His answer was strained and filled with emotion.

“Yessir... they were. All of them...”

“Isaul. Listen...” Mosok wasn't quite sure how to say what he needed to say and finally decided to throw caution to the wind and just continued “...there will be time for mourning when we get off this planet. But right now, I need you. No...” he caught himself, “let me rephrase that, WE, all

of SCU-11, your brothers... need you. You are a vital part of this unit. Your tactical knowledge and ability to discern enemy behavior is top notch and the Force tells me we will not survive this ordeal without you.”

What Mosok had just said was perhaps as much of a shock to himself as it was to Isaul. Mosok himself had to evaluate his own words and determine if he really believed what he felt and said.

Perhaps the least surprised person was the head of Green Team, Larun, who had been looking for Mosok to discuss another matter and had approached the pair while the conversation was ongoing. Larun had stopped a short distance away when he had overheard the conversation. He was thinking to himself, that perhaps there was hope after all for their newly minted leader. The young Jedi seemed to be fitting into the role as a leader quite nicely, and it seemed to be keeping Mosok’s mind off of the loss of his Master. Dealing with the loss of his master was another trial he would have to pass on his way to becoming a seasoned Jedi.

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It took another hour of slow and cautious movement for Vistom to get the unit within 400 meters of the base of the hill that was their destination, the communication point Alpha-9. Vistom brought them to a halt and they again assumed a hasty defensive position overlooking the small hill to the west.

Larun knew that the location for Alpha-9 had been chosen for its geographical advantages as it stood a

hundred meters taller than any other terrain feature within 10 kilometers. This elevation advantage would give their lower powered communications equipment a better chance of clearly reaching into the vastness of space where the CIV was scheduled to be in orbit, awaiting their contact.

It was a good strategic plan and would give them the best possibility of avoiding planetary interference with their communications. The problem that Larun saw was that the height of the hill made it an obvious point of interest to the enemy as well. It was for this reason that they had decided to pull up short of the hill and had begun to monitor it to try and ascertain if there was any enemy activity on or around the hill itself.

Mosok was laying prone next to Larun, as was Isaul. Since the brief discussion Mosok had with Isaul, he seemed to have found his confidence again and had resumed actively participating in discussions and planning.

Larun whispered to Mosok.

“That hill looks quiet, but with all the traffic from the sith recon vessels we have seen, I would prefer that we move up the hill under the cover of darkness.”

Mosok nodded in agreement. “Sergeant, I think it is obvious that I am not as well versed in combat operations as you are... I am going to defer that decision to you. If that is as you desire, then make it happen.”

“Yessir” was Larun’s reply.

Larun sent Isaul around the perimeter to inform the rest of SCU that they would be moving out shortly after dusk. The word was also spread that they would be moving in full concealment mode, utilizing their Stealth Generators as well as the utmost caution as they made their way toward

and up the hill.

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Darth Cloran was once again inside of the command shelter monitoring the communication and sensor traffic that was coming into and out of the structure. There had not been any new discoveries since the recon craft had been shot down, but the knowledge that there was a known enemy aircraft in the area had slowed their searches down. Proper air defense procedures had to now be adopted in order to insure the safety of the crews and aircraft.

But even with the delays and slowdowns, the recon sweeps were now adopting a more regular pattern and were focusing on the area near the crash site and fanning out from there. The patterns were designed as a cloverleaf to cause an overlap in their patrols which would insure full coverage of their search areas.

Darth Cloran had noticed that there was one prominent hill in that particular area which was but a few kilometers away from the main search pattern. She had given instructions to insure that that hill was scanned routinely and scrutinized more thoroughly than the others. She knew the hill would make an excellent off world communication point, but Darth Cloran had a feeling that the enemy unit they were trying to track had a local air or spacecraft already on the ground and were simply making their way to a meetup point to hitch their ride off the planet. Because of that uncertainty, she was not willing to commit any more resources to monitoring the hill than was absolutely necessary.

It seemed to the Dark Lord that a race to find the enemy before they linked up with the spacecraft was now underway and she was doing everything in her power to win that race.

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It had been dark for about an hour when Black Team lead the rest of SCU-11 out of their temporary location and began the slow march toward Alpha-9. Each of the members of SCU-11 were now fully concealed again with their Stealth Generators activated and were moving at a slow and arduous pace. They were doing everything they could to remain hidden from sight and to move without being heard.

Mosok himself was attempting to remember all of his training and reach out with what meager Force powers he could to try and sense the presence of any hostile life form that might be ahead of them. Isaul was again nearby Mosok, routinely spinning his head in all directions trying to detect any movement or shapes that were not natural. He was also doing his best to protect the new adopted leader of their SCU unit. The intensity of the situation had pushed any thoughts he had of his fallen comrades out of his mind, and he was now intently focused on keeping Mosok and the unit safe.

Fifteen minutes after they had left their position, the formation stopped for just a minute to allow each of the members to make any adjustments necessary to their equipment and to allow their senses to further acclimate to their new surroundings.

After the listening stop, the SCU began again to

move slowly toward the hill. The ground was gradually starting to rise as they approached to within 300 meters of the base of the hill. The labor of climbing the hill would provide a further distraction for the team members as they became short of breath from the exertion. This had been accounted for during their planning and the point man was instructed to take it very slow and careful as they knew they would be exposed and vulnerable to detection when moving toward the crest of the hill to try and make their communications connection to the CIV.

Loran had noticed that the hill, for whatever reason, was mostly bare of any vegetation until about two thirds of the way toward the top. He considered this exposure to be just another obstacle that needed to be conquered in order to achieve what needed to be done. Adapt, and overcome, the mantra of all soldiers, solidly applied to this scenario as well. So the men and women of SCU-11 proceeded on.

They slowly moved up the hill in a modified wedge formation, with each team member monitoring the overall progress of the others through the display on the interior of the visors of their helmets. The movement was slow, but it was extremely cautious and Mosok noticed and acknowledged in his own mind that they were doing well concealing their movement.

When they were about a third of the way up the hill the ground became more steep and they were now traversing the side of the hill at about a 45 degree angle instead of going straight up the steep part of the hill.

Larun was ahead of Mosok when Mosok sensed Larun suddenly raising his hand in a fist. The signal to immediately freeze. Mosok performed the same signal with

his hand and arm to pass the message back to those following him in the formation. He then remained absolutely motionless and began reaching out with his senses to determine if he could locate a hostile lifeform. He sensed nothing, but Mosok would be the first to admit that that was not unusual for him.

Larun gave the palm down signal indicating for the team to go to ground and seek nearby cover or concealment. Again, the signal was passed back and then Mosok eased his way forward toward Larun to find out what was going on.

It did not take the Force to sense the tension in the air as the SCU members strained through their night vision visors to see what might be out there. Their rifles were raised at the ready as they each slowly moved to a more concealed individual location.

Mosok was just coming up next to Larun when the signal to move out again came back from the front of the formation. It was a false alarm, and while everything remained all clear and safe, it did cause another delay in their progress. Though this delay was one that none of the unit members complained about, it was always better to be safe and over cautious than dead. They all knew It was just another day in the life of a SCU.

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Three hours and four emergency halts later, the weary members of SCU-11 assumed a hasty defensive position on the top of Alpha-9. Their nerves were still twitchy, but they were alert and prepared. Each member had

expertly selected a hasty fighting position in a 360 degree perimeter around the top of the hill and they were all facing out from the top.

There was more vegetation at the top of the hill than at the base and the light green bushes and tall yellow grasses helped provide cover, but Vistom and the others noticed that it also masked much of the area down away from the hill that they were trying to observe.

Malulon, the Twilek leader of black team, joined Larun and Mosok in the center of the circle and quickly unpacked the long range burst transmitter from his pack and began to set up the small collapsible antenna dish while the others looked on. It took about three minutes to get the antenna setup and properly arranged facing up toward the sky. Once it was setup, Malulon powered up the burst transmitter and began to adjust the frequencies and power spectrum to get the message to where the CIV was suppose to be located.

After the setup was completed he quickly began typing in the designated message that would be broadcast via a burst from the communication pad. Bursting the transmission in a compressed and encrypted manner would allow for a very brief transmission time and only a tiny bit of data to be sent. This would reduce the likelihood of enemy forces intercepting the communication and worse, triangulating their position from that interception.

The message that was inputted into the burst transmitter was short and only requested an immediate confirmation that the CIV was ready for the extraction of SCU-11 at the agreed upon extraction point.

Once the short sentences were inputted into the

burst transmitter, Malulon looked up to Larun for confirmation to send the message. Larun in turn looked to his left at Mosok who simply gave a nod to both Malulon and Larun, indicating it was time to send it.

The Twilek's finger pressed the send button on the screen which was quickly followed by a green message being displayed indicating the message had been successfully sent.

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Darth Cloran was again training alone with her lightsaber, working on the fine tuning of her melee combat to help counter the baffling Seresu fighting style that had nearly defeated her. She was intently going through a new set of velocities when a young private interrupted her mid swing.

“Lord Cloran, pardon my, my, my interruption...”

The look of fear was evident on his face as he stuttered the sentence out.

“What is it private?”

The private blurted the response more than he actually spoke it “My Lord, the communication officer says they have something.”

Darth Cloran did not even give the whimpering private the courtesy of acknowledging the statement as she just powered down her red lightsaber, grabbed her jacket from the ground, and quickly made her way to the communications shelter.

When she stormed through the doorway the young female communications officer looked up and stood at attention to address the Dark Lord.

“My Lord, our sensors have detected two separate electronic communication broadcasts originating from this hill here..” she pointed to the 3D holographic projection of the terrain “the amount of data was small, actually, tiny, but we had three recon craft close enough to pickup and confirm the broadcasts independently with their sensor arrays. I informed the craft to keep their distance away from the hill to prevent alerting the enemy that we knew they were there.”

Darth Cloran was pleased with the foresight of the young officer to keep the craft away and nodded her approval, and then asked a followup question.

“Are we certain the communication is Republic in origin?”

“Yes my Lord, I had our analyst compare it against known Republic encryption methods and it is an exact match. We cannot break the code to read what the message is, but they insure me that it is from Republic soldiers, or at least Republic equipment. It was good we had the recon craft in the area, the transmissions were so small that a single craft would not have been able to triangulate the location.”

A thin smile crossed Darth Cloran’s face as she became visibly excited about the news. “Excellent! Call over to Commander Dyonvar and have him assemble the quick reaction force at the landing pad immediately! I want to be airborne in 3 minutes!”

With the thin smirk turning to a smile, Darth Cloran ran out of the door and toward the landing pad.

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“Alright Malulon, three times is enough. I think it is safe to say the CIV is still not on station.” Larun turned to Mosok “Well sir, what do we do?”

Mosok closed his eyes for a moment, seeking guidance, if not from the Force, than he would take it from anywhere!

Larun pressed the question further “Sir, we do not have the means to fight a prolonged fight. Our best chance of survival is to stay on the run until we can link up with the CIV. If we become stationary, someone will find us, even if just by accident.”

Mosok opened his eyes and Larun saw a hint of courage and determination there.

“Yes Sergeant, I agree. We need to remain nimble and do what we do best. I would like to propose that we move toward the predetermined extraction point Bravo-3 and hope we can make contact with the CIV before we get there. If we cannot, we will try to make contact again once we arrive at the extraction point.”

Both Malulon and Larun nodded their agreement and it was Larun that responded.

“Roger that sir. I think that is as good a plan as any right now. We’ll stay alert and stay alive.”

“Okay, have the men ready to move in 5 minutes, I don’t like being up on this hill... I feel... exposed. Like we are being watched from every direction.”

Malulon looked off into the distance around the hill as he replied “I won’t argue with you there sir.”

In four minutes time the entire SCU-11 group was assembled and heading off the top of the mountain.

