

Chapter 17

Mosok was in the middle of the formation as SCU-11 was moving down off of the hill where they had attempted to make contact with the CIV. As the team moved down he was watching the progress of the lead elements in the formation by using the Force and occasionally catching the glimpses of their ghost like appearance from their Stealth Generators. The movement had deliberately been slow to aid in utilizing their concealment techniques and they were now traveling toward the Bravo-3 extraction point. They were now off the hill and were trying to get as much distance as possible between them and the Alpha-9 point on the top of the hill. They knew that there was a possibility that their transmission had been detected and triangulated, though the likelihood of that was fairly small.

Fortunately, it was still dark and Mosok figured they had at least two more hours of darkness before the suns began to rise again. With the slow pace of their movement, Mosok calculated that those two hours of remaining darkness would only allow them to move 5, or maybe 6 kilometers away from the hill. Hopefully, Mosok thought to himself, that would be enough.

Once the darkness was gone, Mosok and Larun had devised a plan to find a secure place and then hold up during the daylight hours to remain hidden from aerial observation. They knew the Stealth Generators helped, but they could only do so much to hide their location. Even with the Stealth Generators on, the members of SCU-11 would be much easier to detect in full daylight, and especially while moving. None of them wanted to risk taking that chance.

While Mosok was pondering the plan for the upcoming day he thought he heard the faint whine of multiple aircraft's thrust generators. He thought that perhaps they could have been spacecraft engines. At first it was barely audible and he was not sure that he was hearing anything at all. But then the noise became more distinct and he could hear the unmistakable sound of aircraft in the distance.. They had been hearing the distant sounds of various aircraft and spacecraft throughout the day and night so initially the sound did not alarm them and they continued on toward their destination. A minute later the sound of the aircraft was getting more loud and it was evident that it was indeed more than just a single aircraft and they were heading toward their location.

The hand signal to halt the formation came back from the point man and all the members of SCU-11 methodically sought for and found concealment from the air. It had not been uncommon to hide from enemy aircraft and there was no reason for any of them to be alarmed, at least not yet.

The sound was now clearly the sound of multiple Sith recon ships with their distinct twin engine howl. The fact that there was a Sith recon vessel heading over the top of them again did not alarm Mosok or Larun, but the fact that there was more than one did. The Sith had been sending out individual ships on routine search patterns for the past several days, but they typically never came out in multiples like this. All of the members of SCU-11 had their eyes glued to the sky looking to catch a glimpse of the aircraft in the dark pre-dawn sky.

There was enough ambient light in the sky from the

stars and orbiting moon to allow them to catch the dark silhouettes of the Sith recon vessels with their slab sides and distinctive side doors and weapons pods. Then the shock hit Mosok, there was not just two of the aircraft, but four of them in the formation passing directly over the top of their position and heading directly toward the the hill they had just left behind.

Instantly everyone in SCU-11 knew they had been busted.

As quickly as that thought had come to Mosok, it had come quicker to Larun and the rest of the SCU-11 team.

The yell came from Isaul, "Time to move!"

And with that call, all of the remaining members of SCU-11 stood up and began a quick march toward the thicker woodline 500 meters to their north-west. Their Stealth Generators would provide the safety they needed to stay hidden from visual sight and they also helped mask their heat from sensors in the Sith recon aircraft. But the denser cover of the trees would provide the cover they might require to make a defensive stand if need arose and it would mask them even further.

They had only just begun to move when the first of the illumination orbs were dropped from the Sith recon vessels. The half meter diameter organic orbs, grown on Kessel, were able to stay stationary in the sky and provide near daylight illumination for a half kilometer diameter or more, and they could do it continuously for fifteen minutes.

It took several microseconds for the night vision helmets worn by all of SCU-11, and the Jedi equivalent Night Vision Glasses worn by Mosok, to adjust to the extreme brightness by auto dimming. There was no doubt

that the Sith knew they were there in the vicinity, but Larun and the others knew there was a good chance that they did not know exactly where. The illumination orb was staying right over the top of the hill where Alpha-9 was located, and at the current moment they were all aware that their SG's would still provide the concealment they needed to make it to safety.

Their pace of movement remained deliberate and up tempo as they made their way toward the trees. Sprinting or other sudden movements would only increase the likelihood of detection, so they refrained from running to the safety of the treeline.

Mosok's fear grew to horror when a second wave of four Sith recon ships flew over the top of the hill, having approached from the south following a slightly different route from the first formation.

Mosok did the math, eight of the vessels searching for them, each holding a squad of eight Sith soldiers. That made Sixty-four sith troopers that had come looking for a fight.

SCU-11's best hope would come from their ability to keep them looking and not fighting.

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Darth Cloran knew the enemy was close, she could feel their presence. But with their blasted advanced technology suits that made seeing them extremely difficult, it was frustrating to not know exactly where they were.

Her quick reaction force had arrived at the hill only a few minutes after the last transmission was sent from the

hilltop which told her they could not be too far away, but trying to locate them in darkness would not be easy when those suits made them nearly invisible to the eye. The illumination orbs helped, but even that had limitations in range and they created additional shadows over the ground that could play tricks on their eyes, potentially helping the hiding enemy.

Darth Cloran knew that if there was just some way to disable their suits then the search would be much easier. At least until Sendu could analyze the data that they were even right now gathering from the lead Recon ship in the formation, callsign recon-one-zero.

The equipment used for the scans took up so much space in that lead craft that it could only carry two additional soldiers instead of the normal eight. But this was a sacrifice that hopefully would be worth it once the data was analyzed. Of course, even then it would only be able to discover where the enemy had been, not where they currently were or where they were heading.

Darth Cloran cursed the enemy stealth suits again for the hundredth time and wished to get her hands on one for their own use and evaluation. She was still imagining in her head the use of the electronic suits as the recon craft she was on board banked to the left to make another circular pattern past the mountain.

Then a thought dawned on her. Those suits were electrical which meant they were susceptible to ion pulses that could disrupt the electronics. The suits would more than likely have some basic insulation from ion disruption, but if they could hit them with a large enough blast it just might disable them, at least temporarily.

She clicked the broadcast button on the earpiece she had attached to her head that tied in directly to the aircrafts intercom.

“Pilot, what is your current loadout?”

There was a brief pause before the pilot answered after completing his tight banking maneuver.

“Standard recon load. In addition to the primary plasma cannon, we have two ion pulse bombs and two anti-radiation torpedos.”

Her reply was quick

“What is the radius of the ion bombs?”

“Effective range is about half of a kilometer at optimal detonation height. But there are no enemy sensor arrays nearby my Lord.”

Darth Cloran finished the basic calculations in her head and then broadcast her orders to all eight of the recon aircraft currently searching for the enemy troops.

Once her orders were received each of the eight aircraft separated, circled around and made individual approaches to different areas around the prominent hill.

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SCU-11 continued to move towards the treeline that was now 300 meters away. Each of the commandos noticed the change in formation of the Sith recon craft but they did not know what it signified.

Larun was watching the aircraft closely when he noticed one of them fly over the top of the hill about 500 meters above ground level, and to the east of their current position. As the recon craft extended about 1000 meters

past the peak of the hill he saw a small flash of light from the side of the vessel as something was ejected.

As soon as the parachute deployed, he realized what it was and that their predicament had just gotten worse. When the metallic object floating beneath the parachute reached 400 meters above ground level, it exploded into a white-blue flash of intense ion matter that spread out from the center of the explosion.

At that moment with all of SCU-11 staring at the explosion 2 kilometers away Larun noticed the next recon aircraft come over the top of the hill, heading almost directly toward them. The blast from the ion explosion was far enough away that they did not have to worry about it, but the approaching aircraft was of grave concern.

About the time Larun yelled the orders to run for the tree line, the second aircraft ejected its own ion bomb just a hundred meters away from them. By the time the team made it another 50 meters closer to the trees, the ion bomb detonated 400 meters above the ground and almost directly above their heads.

It was bad luck that the enemy craft dropped the ion bomb almost directly over the SCU-11 formation. But with eight aircraft each with 2 bombs, and with SCU-11 only a short distance from the hill, it was just a matter of time before it would have happened.

Luck or not, the effect of the ion pulse directly over the top of the soldiers was equally as effective.

The power of the ion bombs was enough to destroy many smaller unshielded electronic devices, but most military grade hardware was prepared for the battlefield with military grade ion shielding that typically prevented damage

in such cases. Unfortunately for Larun and the soldiers of SCU-11, the ion pulse was powerful enough to cause all but the most insulated equipment to enter a failsafe mode. It took less than a millisecond for the Stealth Generators to shut down which protected the valuable chips from frying from the sudden surge of ions.

This failsafe was able to protect all of the stealth generators on the members of SCU-11, including Mosok's Jedi cloak. The result was that immediately the entire unit became visible again to the naked eye and anyone in the area who was looking in their direction.

Mosok and Larun both knew that SCU-11 was in deep trouble. It would take about ten minutes before their SG's would cool down and reset enough to be operable again. That ten minutes was a lifetime in combat, and the odds had just turned against them.

The concussion from the blast had disoriented some of the team members and they were now just all regaining their bearings again and had once again began to move toward the treeline that was still 225 meters away.

Unfortunately, the the Sith recon craft that had dropped the fateful ion bomb was banking back around to get a better look at what his blast may have uncovered and it was then that he made the new discovery.

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Darth Cloran heard the report over the communications channel.

"Sir, this is Recon-one-one, we found them!
North-West of the main hill, 200 meters from the tree line"

Darth Cloran, with excitement in her voice, responded.

“All units, converge on the enemy location immediately. Off load the ground units and enter a pattern over the area to provide close air support.

“Recon-one-one, I see you. Put your craft down between the enemy and the treeline to block their escape route. DO NOT LET THEM GET TO THAT TREE LINE!”

“Roger my Lord! We'll block them.”

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Mosok knew immediately they were in trouble as they sprinted toward the trees, now about 200 meters to their front.

As soon as Larun noticed that they would not make it to the trees before the recon aircraft that discovered them would be able to engage, he ordered SCU to a halt. Fortunately for them there were some large rock outcroppings in the field and Larun instructed them to find cover and prepare to engage the aircraft that was rapidly approaching.

They were about 150 meters from the trees and were quickly scrambling behind any cover they could find. They arranged themselves in a small half moon formation that was directed toward the woodline where the Sith recon vessel was now situating itself in a blocking position. The aircraft flared with its nose up, and was slowing to a stop. It began hovering in the air and then prepared to settle down onto the ground between the members of SCU-11 and the safety of the trees. Larun had no intentions of just allowing

the recon aircraft to do that.

As it was lowering down toward the ground the legs of the Sith infantry soldiers could be seen dangling from the aircraft, ready to disembark as soon as it touched down. There were four of them on each side of the craft in the large open doors and all were armed with standard Sith blaster rifles. When they were about 20 meters above the ground the Sith soldiers began firing toward the SCU-11 formation that was now setup in the rock outcroppings. Because the craft was still moving forward and hovering, it was not a stable firing platform and a majority of the blaster shots were striking harmlessly into the terrain all around the SCU soldiers who in return, were actually not firing back.

The recon craft continued to lower itself toward the ground in a careful and methodical manner. When it was about 10 meters above the ground the pilot had halted all forward movement and was dropping the craft down to unload his squad of Sith soldiers. It was at this time when the vessel was most vulnerable that SCU-11 struck with a vengeance.

SCU-11 only had two remaining high explosive rockets from the MRU assault, and they were both used at this time. With the aircraft only 75 meters away from their firing point, the pilot had only a split second to react to the incoming rockets. The pilot was experienced and he reacted to the the best of his ability, applying full thrust to try and climb away, but it was not enough.

The first of the two rockets struck the cockpit and exploded, killing the pilot and sensor officer instantly. The second rocket impacted just to the rear of the crew compartment, damaging the control surfaces on the back of

the aircraft.

Immediately the recon craft sank to the earth and impacted ground hard. Modern Sith combat aircraft design was very advanced and the materials used were all chosen for their strength and their anti-flammable properties. The craft was destroyed, the pilot and cockpit area destroyed, but there were no fires and beyond a few broken bones, the Sith soldiers in the crew carrying compartment survived.

But only temporarily. The SCU teams were well versed with special operation direct action maneuvers. As soon as the rockets had struck the hovering aircraft, and before the craft had even settled to the earth, the entirety of SCU-11 was up and sprinting toward the aircraft as it crashed to the ground.

Vistom was leading the way with his blaster rifle raised to the shoulder as he moved forward. He was sighting down the barrel and through the optical sights at the crew compartment. At 50 meters distance he saw the first sith soldier in the wreckage raise his blaster rifle to engage the advancing SCU. That was a clear signal of hostile intent and Vistom discharge two blaster bolts to the chest of the soldier. The blaster bolts easily penetrated the Sith's armor and knocked him back and down, ending any further movement.

At 40 meters away from the wreckage, Vistom took out a second soldier with two more well placed shots. While Vistom dispatched the second enemy soldier another SCU member to his left began to place covering fire into the remaining Sith soldiers that were trying to recover and make their way out of the destroyed recon aircraft. Vistom continued to move forward at a trot, fully trusting the other

members of SCU-11 to know what to do and to place precise blaster fire into the enemy and not into his own back. SCU members never randomly placed shots, everything was deliberate and precise, which allowed for such precise maneuvering during combat and with friendly fire so close.

At 30 meters from the wreckage, Vistom took a knee and placed two more plasma bolts into another Sith soldier that had tried to obtain cover to the rear of the aircraft. Now Vistom was scanning for additional enemy movement and wasn't finding any.

Herek came up next to Vistom on his left, dropped his blaster cannon to his side, allowing it to dangle from its sling. He clicked the timer switch on a high explosive grenade to set it to three seconds, and then tossed it directly into the crew compartment of the wreckage. The explosion rocked the ground and as soon as it detonated, all of the SCU were back on their feet again and moving toward the remains of the wreckage. The assault maneuver on the downed aircraft was so well rehearsed and smooth that it was like watching a well oiled piece of techno-union manufacturing machinery.

All of the enemy movement from inside the downed aircraft had ceased. Vistom and Herek both entered in and insured the aircraft was clear of any enemy soldiers just as the rest of the team secured the perimeter around the destroyed aircraft. All of them then began making preparations for the next two recon transport vessels that were then making their approach to the landing zone.

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Darth Cloran had watched the destruction of recon-one-one which took all of only 30 seconds. Her own aircraft, as well as the other six, were now approaching the battlezone and after watching the combat below she could hardly believe what she saw. 'Unbelievable' was the only term she could use to describe the movement and action of the enemy unit. It was as if they operated as a single mind, each soldier knowing what the other was doing. She began to wonder if the Jedi leading this unit were trained in the ancient art of battle meditation and were themselves controlling the unit. She ruled that out as she had just seen the young Jedi sprinting with the other soldiers, which was impossible to do while attempting battle meditation. Not to mention she had fought this Jedi one-on-one and he had not impressed her with his command of the Force, which would rule out the possibility of him using Battle Meditation.

Regardless, caution had to be taken when confronting this enemy.

"All units," she began over the communications channel "proceed with caution. Recon-one-zero, provide some covering fire while we set the remaining landing craft down between them and the treeline. We must not let them escape!"

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In the cockpit of the hidden spaceship known as the 'Nova, Emi-gon was looking over the shoulder of Ocal at the various lights and screens. Ocal and Quinto were doing their best to locate the origin of the communication traffic that was flooding the communication net. A few minutes earlier they

had been awakened by Quinto who was on watch, as he noticed the spike in communications on their scanners. When they attempted to listen in, it immediately was apparent that the communications were scrambled and encrypted, almost certainly from Sith sources.

Quinto dryly commented "Well, it is a Sith encryption code, I saw a similar one a year ago."

Ocal answered "Something has gotten them all worked up. Those illumination orbs mean they are looking for something and with all of the fireworks going on, I would guess that they found our boys."

It was Emi-gon that spoke next

"We need to get over there and help them."

But Ocal was already shaking his head as he responded to her.

"Sorry Master Jedi, but that would be a suicide run. Not only do we have to worry about that squadron of recon aircraft that flew in there, but look here..."

Ocal pointed to a flat panel display in the middle of the cockpit.

"These four marks are aircraft that are orbiting the battlefield. I'm betting they are fighters. I'm certain our shooting down that recon aircraft earlier did not go unnoticed. I hate to say it, but there is nothing we can do right now. Though if you feel inspired, you can probably pray to your Jedi Gods,"

Emi-gon began to protest but Ocal cut her off.

"... or whatever else it is that you worship. You better hope your guys can pull out a miracle, break contact, and make it to the pickup point. Else we are done on this planet, and more so, they are done...permanently. We also need to

be thinking about our own escape off this planet if they can't get here.”

Emi-gon did indeed close her eyes for a moment to calm her senses and listen to what the Force told her.

“The future is clouded, but I know SCU-11... they'll make it.”

“Optimism is good... but can also be dangerous Master Jedi.” was Ocal's simple, but truthful, reply.