

Chapter 18

SCU-11 had finished clearing and securing the wreckage of the downed Sith recon aircraft and were preparing to make a run to the treeline. Suddenly a command from Larun rang out.

“take cover!”

Just then another approaching Sith reconnaissance aircraft began firing at the SCU operators as it performed a strafing run.

The Sith recon aircraft were not heavily armed, but the plasma cannon was powerful enough to kill any of the SCU operators with just a single hit. They each were scrambling to find cover anywhere within the scattered parts and pieces of the wreckage, but the strewn out wreckage was making it difficult to easily move around. The incoming plasma bolts were not accurately aimed and were impacting the ground randomly around the wreckage in various places. While it was not terribly accurate, there was enough incoming fire that it forced all of the Republic commandos to continue their search for some cover and protection. None of them were under any immediate threat, but it did slow them down and prevented them from moving to the safety of the trees for the time being. This was exactly what the Sith leader was trying to do.

As the attacking aircraft approached closer and then flew directly overhead of the republic soldiers, several of the members of SCU-11 began to return fire to the underside and rear of the passing aircraft. The lower power of their blaster rifles was not enough to do more than just superficial damage to the exterior armor of the aircraft.

Larun watched closely as the aircraft passed overhead. He figured they had just a brief moment to make their break toward the treeline while the enemy aircraft circled around to make another attack run.

Larun began to yell “Vistom! Grab Harek and get us moving to the ...”

Before he could finish his sentence the noise of two additional approaching aircraft drowned out his verbal command and Vistom instinctively turned his head toward the sound of the additional incoming aircraft. All of the members of SCU-11 watched as two more Sith reconnaissance aircraft descended rapidly and flared nose up just above the ground between them and the safety of the forest beyond.

Both of the Sith pilots, as well as the soldiers being carried in their aircraft, had seen what had happened to the first aircraft, Recon one-one. It had been obvious that the first pilot was over cautious and too slow which exposed his aircraft to the rocket fire that ultimately destroyed their aircraft. These pilots and their crew were not about to let the same fate happen to them. To avoid the same fate, the pilots brought their aircraft in very fast and approached the landing zone very aggressively with an exaggerated nose up flare to stop the forward progress of the airborne vehicle. While the aircraft started its flare, all of the soldiers from both of the Sith aircraft began firing their combat rifles at the entrenched SCU-11 team, once again pinning them down.

Vistom quickly return back to the safety of the area he had just left and all of SCU-11 began to return fire at the two new aircraft and their soldier occupants. Unfortunately for the SCU team, they no longer had heavy weapons that

could easily disable or destroy the landing aircraft.

The concentration of fire was intense in both directions as both of the aircraft touched down. All of the soldiers, eight on each aircraft, piled out and rapidly sought the safety and cover of the aircraft itself, using it as a shield. Their orders from Darth Cloran were clear and the pilots kept their aircraft on the ground to help create the requested blockade, preventing the escape of SCU-11 to the treeline.

As the Sith soldiers were trying to find some safety, two of the their number went down from well aimed shots. Just as the SCU commandos began to organize their fire toward the enemy in a coordinated fashion, the powerful plasma bolts began to come in again from the circling Sith aircraft that had previously provided suppressive fire. Again all of the SCU members had to duck and seek further refuge from the incoming plasma bolts.

Dirt and debris were flying up all around the wreckage that had become the SCU strong point. Systyun was yelling at members of his blue team, trying to coordinate return fire on the entrenched enemy near the woodline when a sudden cry of pain rang out behind him as a member of the black team took a direct hit through his chest. The powerful plasma bolt had killed him instantly. Systyun knew there was nothing he could do for him now and immediately went back to the task of trying to cut a hole through the blockade for them to go through.

On the other side of their formation, Larun was trying to look around the bulkhead of the destroyed aircraft that he had been using for cover. He was trying to come up with a plan to get out of their current predicament, but every time he looked around the duraplast metal a plasma bolt would

strike nearby.

“I’m not sure how we are going to get out of this one” he mumbled to himself.

From the corner of his eye he saw a flash of blue light pass by him and move into the open area between their wreckage and the two enemy aircraft that had created the blockade. The hum of Mosok’s lightsaber was loud enough for all of the SCU operators to hear and Larun looked toward Mosok with alarm as he sprinted into the barrage of incoming fire from both the airborne aircraft and the enemy soldiers on the other side of the field. There was a brief pause in the firing as the enemy tried to come to grips with what they were witnessing before them.

Mosok did not know exactly why he elected to run out from behind the safety of his cover, but he was certain at least a part of the reason came from watching the auto-blasterman from black team die not more than 10 meters away from him. The Force screamed at him as that soldier’s life instantly left him, and it was that shock and pain from feeling the life Force drained from the soldier that partly compelled him to action.

As he ran forward from behind his cover, his mind was filled with a cacophony of information being fed from the Force. Mosok recalled that when this same deluge of Force promptings happened the last time, he did not recognize it, but now it made sense to him. He did not know exactly what was being asked of him by the Force, but he listened as his Master had taught him and he WAS able to act on the given impulses. By doing so he was rewarded by continually having his lightsaber in just the right spot and in just barely enough time to deflect an incoming blaster bolt.

To those watching, his lightsaber appeared to be a blur as it moved all around him deflecting the incoming plasma bolts and blaster fire. In the chaos, Mosok was actually able to remember the teachings of Master Jarek as he taught him about the Old Masters of the Soresu form and how they mentioned being in the middle of the storm and being able to find their calm there, in the middle of the chaos. The more Mosok was engulfed within the mayhem of combat, the calmer he seemed to feel, at peace in the middle of the storm.

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The pilot of recon one-zero saw the Jedi run out from the wreckage and he did not hesitate to apply the corrections to the aircraft's controls to align the targeting pipper onto the exposed Jedi. He then continued to fire a non-stop stream of plasma bolts directly at him.

This was a unique opportunity for a pilot to take out a Jedi and he did not want to waste it. He slowed down his forward thrusters to give him more time to attack the exposed Jedi.

He noticed his first few bolts were deflected by the Jedi with his blue lightsaber but the Sith pilot was confident that his attacks would eventually penetrate the Jedi's defenses. He then noticed something odd. The last bolt actually reflected back toward his aircraft. At first he figured it was just luck, but then a second one flashed by his windscreen, and then a third and fourth. About the time the pilot realized it was no longer luck and the bolts were deliberately being direct at him, the fifth bolt was deflected

back and appeared to be heading directly toward his aircraft.

The bolt narrowly missed the cockpit and skimmed down the left side of the fuselage and struck the head of the soldier that was on board to run the new scanning equipment. Unfortunately for this soldier, he had his head exposed out of the side of the crew door watching the progress of the attack when the bolt came back and struck him, knocking him out of the door, falling to his death.

The pilot figured that was a close enough call and he took stock of the situation and quit firing the plasma cannon and then banked the aircraft quickly to the left and dove toward the earth for protection. He passed directly over the wreckage where the enemy soldiers were and then attempted to put that same wreckage between his own aircraft and what he now deemed to be a deadly threat, the Jedi.

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Larun was stunned for few seconds as his mind tried to register what he had just witnessed. Not only had Mosok rushed forward to try and protect their position, but he seemed to adapt to the incoming fire and began to purposely deflect the incoming plasma bolts back toward the enemy aircraft. They were not perfectly placed shots, but they were enough to cause the pilot to break off his attack, and that may have bought them the break they needed to finally make their escape to the woods.

Unfortunately, before Larun could formulate his plan or muster the troops to move out, the distinct whine of the thrusters from four additional enemy recon landing aircraft

could be made out over the commotion and blaster fire engulfing the battlefield all around him.

Larun turned to watch the first of the next wave of incoming aircraft flare, nose up, and set the craft down on the far right of their field of fire. The aircraft was only settled on the ground for a brief few seconds as the eight additional soldiers emptied from the open doors on each side of the aircraft and then it quickly lifted into the air again.

The remaining three Sith aircraft were all approaching the landing zone between SCU-11 and the treeline that represented their freedom and safety from the battle. The next aircraft in line was on the ground and depositing its load of troops when Larun noticed that one of the soldiers being dropped off was the black clad figure of the Sith Lord with her ignited red lightsaber in hand.

Without any sort of verbal command, a few blaster bolts were precisely fired toward the Sith Lord. This fire was undoubtedly the work of the trained snipers of SCU-11 that were always looking to cause havoc among enemy units by eliminating commanders. Unfortunately the Sith Lord effortlessly deflected those few precisely aimed shots.

The appearance of the Sith Lord caused Larun to remember that he had his own Jedi commander out in the middle of the battlefield, completely unprotected. Something needed to be done to get him back to safety, and it needed to happen quickly.

“Black team! Direct your fire toward the right flank to cover Commander Mosok!!”

He noticed the members of Black team on the far right of their defensive position shift their fire to try and provide cover for Mosok who was still out in the open. He

had now turned to face the enemy, drawing fire and was deftly deflecting it.

As this was happening, the third of the four aircraft had landed and was now lifting off again as the fourth and final aircraft was approaching the landing zone and was about 30 meters above the ground.

Mosok noticed the last aircraft coming in and saw the dangling feet of another eight Sith troopers. He slowly began walking toward the approximate area the aircraft would touch down at. The amount of incoming fire that he was drawing was enormous and Larun thought for sure one, or several, blaster bolts would break through his defenses and strike the young Jedi down. But Mosok's movements always seemed to be just enough to get the lightsaber where it needed to be in time to deflect the blaster bolt away harmlessly. The covering fire from the Black team was also having an effect of reducing the amount of fire directed at the young Jedi.

Mosok could feel the Force directing his movements and actions. Though he was discovering that it was so much more clear when he was calm and just allowed the chaos around him to do its own thing without reacting to that which was not of immediate concern. He was thinking to himself that he was finally understanding the meaning of becoming in tune with the Force while "in the storm". Perhaps more so than any other time in his young career, Mosok felt comfortable with the Force and that it was his ally and not merely an acquaintance.

For Mosok the Force was not the surging power that is so often heard about in Jedi lore. Rather it was a still, calm feeling that seemed to guide and prompt and for

Mosok the feeling diminished or was harder to understand the more frustrated, distracted or angry he became.

Suddenly, Mosok began to sprint toward the incoming aircraft, which made him a harder target for the Sith soldiers. This allowed him to not have to deflect the bolts away as often. As Mosok rapidly approached to within 25 meters of where the aircraft now was, only 10 meters or so above the surface, he leapt into the air with all his physical and Force induced might.

A typical Jedi master can easily channel the Force to allow them to leap to great heights, many as high as a hundred or more meters. While Mosok was in fact discovering his own unique gift when it came to his relationship with the Force, it did not necessarily empower him with great command of the physical Force. It took all of the ability he had to leap the ten meters into the air that he needed, but he was able to just barely do it. He was aiming to land in the large open doors where the soldiers were sitting, four on each side.

The Sith soldiers sitting in the open door that was facing the battle saw what they thought was a crazy Jedi flying up at them. Several of the soldiers even fired off a few bolts in the general direction of the incoming raider, but none of them came close to striking Mosok as he glided through through the air. Then it became mass hysteria and pandemonium as the Jedi landed within the aircraft, striking down two soldiers with a single swipe of his lightsaber and moving on to the others in the close confines of the aircraft.

Normally a group of soldiers at a distance with high powered blaster rifles and a coordinated attack plan can prove deadly to a Jedi. But in a small and confined area,

even the six remaining soldiers did not stand a chance as the quick moving Mosok made rapid work of the soldiers. It only took a few seconds using quick and deadly strikes from his lightsaber to finish the job. Finally, with a quick slash through the core computer housed in the forward bulkhead of the crew compartment, a large shower of sparks erupted and all of the stability controls of the aircraft were rendered inoperable.

The aircraft was only four meters above the ground when Mosok jumped out of the opposite side from where he entered. He tucked into a roll as he hit the ground and came up prepared and ready to defend himself against any incoming attacks from the enemy. To his surprise, there were no blaster bolts heading his way, but rather, all the Sith eyes were on the out of control Sith recon aircraft as it spun out of control to the right of his position.

The pilot and co-pilot ejected from the spinning death trap just before it collided with one of the parked aircraft that was still acting as a barrier between the forest treeline and SCU-11.

The resulting explosion and fireball were huge with massive parts and pieces flying in every direction. There was a massive heat wave that expanded out from the explosion. The warmth of the heat wave was felt by all the combatants within 100 meters. The sound and sight of the explosion caused a pause in the combat, but it also did more than that. The flying parts and deadly reactor core material spread along the Sith defensive line causing uncontrolled mayhem as soldiers ran for their lives, seeking to escape the deadly debris raining down on them.

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It only took Larun a split second to recognize their fortunate opportunity.

“MOVE! MOVE! MOVE!” he yelled.

Larun did not really need to issue the command as each of the SCU members had also recognized the diversion the exploding aircraft had caused. Larun did a quick head count as they all left their covered positions heading for the break in the blockade and the treeline beyond. Larun noticed that Malulon, the leader of Black team, was limping, being helped along by one of the other members of his team. There was also the other member of Black Team that had become a casualty earlier in the fray. The dead SCU operator already had his equipment self detonate, and as unfortunate as it was, there would be no way to bring the body home. After he performed his head count and he was sure everyone was accounted for, Larun followed right on the heels of the last operator. It was no surprise to Larun that it was the always trusty Vistom who was the last man out, leaving their temporary stronghold behind for good.

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Darth Cloran had watched the young Jedi bring down the landing aircraft and then watched him jump down from that same craft and land in the treeline off to her right. The trees were obscuring him from her view, but she knew the general area he had landed in. With her lightsaber in hand she sprinted toward the direction she figured he would be.

She used the Force to accelerate her speed while running, she was determined not to let the Jedi escape.

As she approached the area that she saw the Jedi jump to, she slowed to a walk and began to approach more cautiously. She reached out with her mind and used the Force to detect the presence of other lifeforms around her. Suddenly, from the corner of her eye she saw something quickly moving deeper in the darkness of the dimly lit forest. Glancing quickly in that direction she caught the glimpse of what she thought could have been a Jedi robe and she immediately took off again running after the fleeing Jedi.

Just as she began sprinting her mind erupted into a roar of warning as a blue flash came out from behind a large tree trunk. She instinctively raised her lightsaber in a panicked perry that narrowly deflected the sideways strike of Mosok's lightsaber.

Darth Cloran did her best to regain her composure and was able to work her way into a proper fighting stance as the young Jedi pressed his attack. His strikes were not precise and were easy to deflect, but they were rapid and purposeful and they prevented her from mounting a counterattack herself. She slowly gave way, backing up slowly while blocking the rapid attacks. She was biding her time to determine the opportune moment to deliver the killing blow she was confident she had... and then something landed on the ground next to her just as the Jedi broke off his attack and ran into the forest.

Darth Cloran had been focusing on the Jedi so intently that she did not notice the approaching members of the enemy forces. Nor did she notice one of them tossing a high explosive grenade at her feet. She immediately leapt to

her left just as her world erupted into a flash of pain and brightness. The explosion carried her further than she had intended and ended up slamming her down hard to the ground and knocking the air from her lungs.

She did her best to roll in an effort to try and absorb some of the impact but her mind was still clouded from the concussion of the explosion. She lay motionless on the ground for just a second as she did a self examination and determined that there were no broken bones or any other major damage. She quickly rose back to her feet, wobbling just a little as she did so. As the ringing subsided in her ears she started to hear the cries from her own Sith soldiers as they were racing to see what the new explosion was from.

She turned to face where her foe had been just a few seconds ago and noticed a shimmer, or blur, of several personages fade away into the depths of the night time forest. Apparently their cloaking devices had recovered and rebooted and had come back online after the ion bomb that triggered the attack disabled them.

As pain from several different areas of her body began to register in her mind, she told herself that she would call this confrontation with the enemy a draw and she began to acknowledge that this young Jedi may yet prove to be a worthy adversary after all.

It would have been nice to put an end to the Republic soldiers here, but she knew this was not her only chance. Now it was up to Sendu and his tracking equipment to lead them to the final confrontation, where she was still confident they would come out the victor.