

Chapter 19

SCU-11 had been moving in the dark at a brisk pace directly away from the battlefield and deeped into the safety of the forest. After 90 minutes Larun began to finally relax enough to feel they were away from the immediate threat of the Sith forces. They were now far removed from the artificial illumination provided by the illumination orbs dropped from the Sith aircraft, but dawn was also fast approaching and they were certainly not yet free from danger.

Mosok was officially in charge of the unit, and in Larun's mind he had just rightfully earned the mantle of commander of SCU-11 with the heroics he performed during the battle. As was normal procedure, the highest ranking noncommissioned officer, or noncom, was directing the movement. At the moment, that person happened to be Larun. He had directed the formation to move away from the battlefield in a sporadic and semi-random pattern, using a coin flip method every fifteen minutes to determining which direction to turn. While the unit was traveling in a random zig-zag pattern, they insured that overall they were heading in the general direction of the Bravo-Three extraction point, their last hope for safety and extraction. The casualties had continued to add up for their small unit, but they were still mission capable and continuing their mission.

Larun was still marveling at the speed at which the Sith were able to triangulate their position from just the short communication bursts. They were also able to then quickly assemble a reactionary force and organize an airborne ambush before the SCU had even left their broadcast area.

Both Mosok and Larun concluded that the option of using burst transmissions was more than likely off the table for the rest of their stay here on K-31. The most feasible plan that they could come up with was to expect that the CIV would detect their perilous situation and execute the emergency extraction procedure. This procedure involved a rendezvous with them at Bravo-Three, so that was where they were currently heading.

They fully recognized that there was still a chance that the CIV would still not be back in their sector, but that was an unknown factor they could not control. So they had to simply continue on without worrying about the things that were out of their control. The decision had been made that they would make their way to Bravo-Three and then determine what to do at that point. In an effort to preserve the batteries in their Stealth Generators, they were now traveling with them turned off.

The highly trusted Vistom was again operating as the point man and he again brought the formation to a stop. His equally trustworthy partner, Harek, made the coin flip to determine the direction of their course change. It would determine the Zig or Zag, right, or left. While the formation was stopped, Mosok made his way around to the other members of the unit and was performing a routine check on them. He was asking how they were holding up and other minor questions of minor importance. But as Mosok moved between them, Larun could see the way each of the commando's in the unit was now acknowledging him. They each were looking at him in the eye with admiration instead of forced acceptance as before. The events that happened

in the last battle had gone a long way to solidifying Mosok's command and respect among SCU-11 operators.

Mosok eventually made his way to Larun and in a hushed voice casually asked him.

"Sarg, how you holding up?"

Larun adopted the same casual demeanor that Mosok had addressed him with.

"Well boss, we were in a pinch back there and I must say, what you did-"

Mosok cut him off with a wave of his hand.

"That was nothing, what you and the rest of SCU-11 did was what was remarkable. You held them all together. You kept them from panicking. I'm just a Padawan trying to figure this stuff out and stay alive!" Mosok looked away, not wanting to make eye contact with the seasoned veteran.

Larun chuckled a bit at Mosok's humility and answered "Oh, I think you are a bit more than a simple Padawan."

Mosok turned his head back to Larun briefly and then his eyes drifted down to look at the ground.

"Well, thank you for your confidence. I just hope to someday be able to command the respect of SCU-11 like you do. Most of the time I feel like I'm just standing around watching what is going on, not knowing what I'm suppose to be doing next! They don't teach us this stuff at the academy"

Mosok was referring to the Jedi Academy where the Jedi instructors tended to teach a lot about being a Jedi, and only a little about leading others.

"Well Mosok, that part of it will come with time, just keep doing what you are doing. You are still young, just pay

attention to your troops and the rest will fall in place with time.”

Knowing how to lead was one thing that perhaps Larun did know better than most of the Jedi that were now in the field with the Republic forces. Mosok was listening carefully to what Larun was saying and sincerely answered.

“Thank you my friend, that is wise advice. Perhaps I will have the opportunity to develop these skills if I am ever made a commander.”

The signal came from the front of the formation that it was time to move out and all the soldiers began to stand and then began to move off silently.

As Larun watched his men and women move out, he kept his eye on Mosok as the young Jedi moved with them. While still watching Mosok he quietly muttered under his breath something that he honestly never thought he would say.

“Mosok, you just might turn out alright...”

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After he had to make his emergency maneuver to save his ship, equipment and himself from the wild Jedi that had taken him on in a duel between Jedi and Aircraft, the pilot of Recon-one-zero had watched the battle unfold from the air at a safer distance. Once the battle had abruptly ended with the escape of the enemy soldiers, the pilot had become aware that the information being gathered from the sensors in his aircraft became extremely vital. The information now being stored would be critical to the mission of the Sith searching for the enemy and being able to track

them. Hopefully the information would provide the link that they needed.

Realizing the increased importance of his data, the pilot began flying an ever widening circular racetrack pattern over the area that the enemy was last seen in. He hoped to gather as much information as possible from the area with the valuable sensors in his aircraft. He continued that route for another 30 minutes and then finally he began the return trip to where Darth Cloran had her base setup.

The cleanup work at the field where the main battle had taken place was just about completed when he called in to the communications officer back at the base ahead of his arrival. The communications officer had given him an immediate clearance to land on landing pad alpha.

As the pilot of recon-one-zero came in low over the trees and into the clearing to land on the designated landing pad, he noticed the group of technicians lined up near the landing pad. As soon as his aircraft touched down, and even before he shut down the internal power drives, the team ran up and began fiddling with the large sensors that were mounted in the cargo hold of his aircraft.

He had lost one of the operators with the reflected plasma bolt from the Jedi, but the second operator was able to handle running the equipment without a problem. All he really had to do was monitor the equipment since it was already up and running when they made it to the battlefield. Now it was just a matter of seeing if the computer geeks could figure it all out and make the loss of all those Sith soldiers during the battle worth it.

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Sendu was one of those geeks the pilot was hoping would be able to figure it out, and he had ran up to the aircraft that was carrying his equipment. A quick scan of the digital readouts let him know that everything was in good functioning order. He had been concerned after listening to the reports on the communications channel of the Jedi attacking the ship. He worried that perhaps somehow some of the equipment may have been damaged or destroyed, but everything appeared to be working as expected.

Sendu had one of the other technicians plug in his data pad to the input/output (I/O) jack on the equipment and transferred the required files on to his datapad. This process took about 5 minutes to move all of the data over to the datapad and then they took it to Sendu's workshop and began processing all of the information. This process required using the software program Sendu had written to apply the required algorithms to analyze the raw data from the sensors.

The computers required two painstakingly long hours before it finally reported that the analysis was complete. Once Sendu acknowledged the message a bunch of data began printing on the screen on Sendu's workbench. To the average sentient being who happened to look at the screen it looked about as meaningful as a Jawa junk pile. It appeared to be just random numbers that covered the screen. But just like a Jawa knows every square inch of his junk pile, Sendu knew everything that was being outputted on the screen.

Once application had completed outputting the data, Sendu typed a few commands to transfer that data to

another application on the main computer banks and then with a stroke of a key, a map came into view. On the map there was a yellow colored line drawn on it. A huge smile beamed on his face as he grabbed his datapad, unplugged it from the monitor, and ran over to the command shelter.

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“You can see here on the map”, Sendu was pointing to the screen, “-that they then made another turn to the right fifteen minutes after the last one.”

Darth Cloran was examining the map intently right where Sendu was pointing and she then commented.

“Well, I would bet a Corellian gold piece that their turns are completely random. I have heard of some specialized units actually flipping a coin to determine the direction of the turn as they travel in order to try and lose anyone trying to follow them. It looks like they are doing something similar here. But I’m not concerned about that, what does bother me are these breaks in the path, especially right here...”

Darth Cloran was pointing at a section of the drawn line on the map that actually broke apart and had several different little marks scattered over an area.

Sendu was also somewhat concerned about that, but had his own theory.

“I believe what has happened there is that the data became distorted by additional ground data, or, in this case you might say, the lack of data.”

Darth Cloran looked up at the technician and gave him the look that indicated she wanted him to continue.

“You see, the way that I have programmed the algorithm is to actually track the blank voids where there is no sign of life from the sensors. Typically our scanners attempt to track living things based off of a number of parameters, like body temperature, emitted carbon dioxide gases, movement, etc. But that also allows for a lot of false positives from insects and creatures, and even plants where chlorophyll is tracked. We are working in reverse here. We are looking for the void of everything the sensors are telling us might be living. I think the problem with this break in the line is that there may be a very limited amount of living cells in this area. So the dead spots created by their suits blends in with the surroundings, which are also dead spots.

“In fact, if we overlay some recent aerial reconnaissance photos over the top of our map here...”

Sendu pressed a few buttons on the control console that they were staring at and a photo realistic overlay appeared on the map.

“Yes... right here where the data goes blank, you can see they passed through a very rocky part of terrain with almost no fauna and apparently very little living organisms.”

The explanation seemed to satisfy the Sith Lord well enough and she turned her attention back to the tracking plot of the enemy forces.

“Well, if we ignore their zig-zag pattern, we still do not know where they are heading and the data is now already several hours old.”

A troubled look crossed over Sendu Farns face as he answered what he thought was a criticism.

“Yes my Lord, that is a limitation of the current system... but I just do not have the equipment I need to

make a more refined unit that could provide more up to date tracks!”

Darth Cloran nodded her head in understanding

“Yes, Corporal, I know. You have done more than I could have ever hoped, and for that, you are now Lieutenant Farns.”

Sendu was sure he had heard the last part of her sentence correctly, but he wasn’t sure he believed it and he just stared at Darth Cloran, who continued.

“Oh, you have earned it, and now I need you to prove to me the promotion was not an error. I want you to install additional sensor units on three other recon craft and set them to searching on regular patrols so we can try and track these galactic scum. If we can determine their general heading, we might be able to see where they are heading, and then we can strike!”

Sendu was still speechless as he left the command tent and headed back to his own shelter, with shiny new lieutenant's bars pinned to the collar of his uniform.

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Using every bit of the low altitude nap-of-the-earth piloting skills he had, Ocal was able to covertly move his space freighter from their previous hiding spot to a new one a good kilometer and a half away from the designated Bravo-Three rendezvous point. In the process of locating a new hiding spot, he took the time to find the right spot to obscure his spaceship from view as much as possible. This was accomplished by placing it in a deep recession in the side of a hill. All three of them, Ocal, Quinto and Emi-gon,

did not want a repeat of the episode a day prior when they were discovered by a lucky reconnaissance craft and they had to fight their way out.

With their spaceship securely hidden away, Ocal had shut the primary powersource down but had left the sensors active and powered up to hopefully detect any incoming enemy aircraft or vehicles. With their spaceship set deep in the crevice of the hill side and tall trees on either side, their sensors were blocked from being able to do a scan of the entire area, but the tradeoff between safety and restricted sensor views was determined by them all to be worth it.

Once everything was secure and the limited preparations they could make were completed, Jedi Master Emi-gon decided to explore the surrounding areas to get a better idea of the lay of the land and what was around the Bravo-Three rendezvous point. She had removed her traditional Jedi robes in favor of the more tightly fitting field uniform that was common among combat Jedi. It had been a while since she was in a combat zone, but she was no stranger to it, having fought on many of the early battlefronts in the war. A Jedi did not move up the ranks in the current Jedi order without having some leadership and command experience in combat, and she had plenty of the latter.

Emigon slowly made her way toward the designated Bravo-Three area which was located in a wide crater sized depression in the terrain. According to the maps, this crater was free of major vegetation down in middle depression of the crater. As she made her way there she did notice that while the interior of the crater may be sparsely vegetated, the surrounding areas certainly were not. The trees grew together tightly in some areas and they all but blotted out the

sunshine from reaching the forest floor. It took her an hour of walking and climbing to travel the 1.5 kilometers to the rim of the crater. As she approached it, she took care to be extra careful to remain concealed in the trees and bushes.

Once at the rim of the crater, Emi-gon was able to see across the depression which was about 500 meters in diameter. The size of the landing zone was plenty large enough for a CIV craft to land and make either an extraction or insertion. That amount of space was also more than enough room for Ocal to land his much smaller spacecraft there. Emi-gon also noticed that there was indeed limited ground vegetation growing within the crater which would be helpful for selecting a landing point.

After spending twenty minutes examining the pickup point from the confines of her hidden area on the ledge of the crater, Emi-gon decided she had seen enough and began heading back toward the 'Nova. She planned to make several more visits at a later time to insure everything was safe. She also wanted to move around the entirety of the crater rim to further explore what might be around the landing zone.

As she was heading down the craters elevated edge toward the ship, some movement caught her attention in the corner of her eye and she quickly came to a sudden stop. She slowly turned her head toward her left, avoiding any sudden movement. She was able to see that standing fifteen meters away from her was a large six legged cat-like creature. It was at least a meter tall at its shoulders with well defined muscles covered in short fur. Its ears were perched low on the sides of its wide head and the whiskers were half a meter long and framed a set of sharp teeth that were

exposed in its mouth. The dark eyes were narrowed, examining Emi-gon and the dark green fur was ruffled on its neck. The animal, whatever it was, was hunched down slightly, ready to spring on the attack, or to perhaps flee if needed.

Emi-gon reached out through the Force and touched the mind of the creature and she was able to sense a feeling of curiosity more than aggression. She slowly raised her right hand toward the animal and then channeled the Force toward the mind of the beautiful creature. With minimal effort Emi-gon was able to smooth over any concerns in the mind of the creature. After a few brief moments, the animal turned away and walked into the forest casually.

“If only the fears and evil desires of man could so easily be persuaded to seek peace instead... then this war would be over and we all could once again live in peace and harmony... but I dream...”

Slowly Emigon did the same as the creature and turned and disappeared into the forest.