

Chapter 2

The old worn face of Jedi Master Jarek was concentrating on the holographic recording being displayed in its typical blue hue in front of the gathered crowd.

“Hum, this is an interesting development...” His voice was strong and firm, betraying the many years of service the Jedi had provided through his career.

Larun was not just the leader of the Green Team, but he was also the highest ranking enlisted man in SCU-11 and the look on his face clearly showed that he was beside himself! Up to this point he had kept his composure throughout the debriefing. He had also remained calm during the initial showing of the holographic recordings, but to have an ancient Jedi Master make what surely must have been the biggest understatement this side of the galaxy, simply put the leader of Green Team over his self imposed limit.

“With all due respect, sir!” Larun began with a bit more force in his voice than he intended, “this is a *LITTLE* bit more significant than an ‘interesting development’! We have discovered what is clearly an experienced combat unit led by what appears to be a veteran Sith Lord! I am certain the council would agree that this is a bit more than ‘interesting’!”

Jedi Master F’in Jarek, born on Coruscant 82 standard years earlier, was indeed old. Perhaps he may even be too old for combat operations, but he had seen enough through his tenure as a Jedi Knight and Jedi Master to know when it was the right time to get excited and when it was the right time to remain calm. Right now, it was a time

to remain calm. He patiently listened to what Larun had to say before he carefully formulated his own reply.

“My good Sergeant, I appreciate the concern you have for these recent developments. But this does not change our mission or how we conduct our operation here. In fact, it provides us with a head start. It appears we have already discovered a significant piece to the puzzle as to why the Sith have had such an interest in this remote planet. By my reckoning, we are a full two weeks ahead of schedule, thanks to your excellent work.”

Somewhat reluctantly, Larun found himself immediately put at ease by the calm demeanor that Master Jarek was using. Though he was not entirely certain the Jedi had not used his Force powers to calm his mind... but Larun did not want to contemplate the thought of that possible reality.

Master Jarek noticed that Larun seemed to have calmed down and he continued expressing his thoughts to the gathered group of soldiers. With a slightly raised voice so all of them could clearly hear what his commands would be, he continued.

“Men, the presence of this Sith Lord adds some concern and will require all of us to be even more vigilant. But from what I have seen since I have been a part of SCU-11, that warning is probably not necessary.” He looked around at the faces staring back at him and noticed a few of them nodding up and down.

“Each of you has performed admirably and I have the utmost confidence that you will continue to do so. Do be aware that we do have a Sith Lord that will use every possible trick the Dark Side of the force is capable of to

protect their precious communications relay station.” Again, Master Jarek paused to allow his words time to sink in.

“Not only is that a concern, but if you look at the uniforms of the Sith soldiers” Master Jarek pointed to the arm of the point man in the frozen frame of the holographic image. “...you will notice that the patch has three triangles. This is the unit patch of the Sith’s 163rd Infantry. One of their most experienced and capable combat units in their military.”

A few murmurs rippled through the men and women of SCU-11. Though it was not a murmur of alarm or concern, it was more of acknowledgement. The old Jedi continued.

“We need to locate the main relay station, as I have a feeling our mission may change from just a recon mission to one of a bit more direct action.”

The smiles on the soldiers faces indicated they completely understood what Master Jarek was insinuating. They realized that the chances were in their favor that their mission would become a Direct Action Operation; and Direct Action was what all SCU members desired most. Though they were all aware of the increased danger it also brought.

The Jedi’s voice was just loud enough to be heard above the continued murmurs of conversation. “Team leaders, maintain 75% security. Get your men fed, and meet me at my shelter in one hour with ideas on how to conduct our patrols in order to locate the main relay station and any other amplifier units like the one Green Team discovered... Dismissed.”

With the final dismissal, the teams broke up and returned to their individual defensive positions. Each of the four teams had left one soldier on security while they had

reviewed the recording and conducted the briefing. Those operators that were on security would now be brought up to speed on the new developments while they were eating their military issued Combat Rations.

As the group broke apart and went their separate ways, one of them stayed and waited for the crowd to disperse before approaching Master Jarek. He was about the same age as the other SCU-11 operators but instead of wearing the standard SCU combat uniform, he wore the loose fitting robes of a Jedi. The Padawan Mosok was 26 standard years of age which allowed him to fit in at SCU-11, but he was considered to be very old for a Jedi Padawan.

Many in the Jedi Order had passed over Mosok as a Padawan when he was a youngling. It wasn't because they did not like the humble teenager, but rather it was because he consistently showed only the most basic capabilities with all of the force skills taught at the academy. It had gotten to the point that the Jedi council was preparing to assign Mosok to the Jedi Archival service after being passed over for padawan selection by the 20th Jedi Knight that had evaluated him. Many of these Knights were even personally encouraged to take the boy as a Padawan by Master Jarek himself.

Over two decades ago and with much discussion and pleading, Master Jarek had convinced the council to take the young child Mosok in as a Jedi youngling. This was done even though his force aptitude tests came in below the required standard for admission into the Jedi Order. The council did not understand why Master Jarek was so insistent on having Mosok trained as a Jedi, but Master Jarek had earned the respect of the council through his

many years of dedicated service. So as a return gesture of respect for the Master Jedi, they had allowed Mosok to be admitted to the academy and trained.

At the time, Master Jarek was approaching the end of his active service with the Jedi Order and a few years later had volunteered to return to his homeworld of Coruscant and the Jedi Temple to train younglings. It was here that he was able to watch the progress of Mosok at the academy. That progress was slow, and at times even painfully slow. There were even cases when Master Jarek had no choice but to provide some special one on one tutoring when the boy needed it. As would be expected, many in the Jedi Order doubted the wisdom of Jarek's desire for the boy to be trained. While everyone enjoyed the humble and kind personality of Mosok, they all feared he would fail the trials when the time finally came and that it would forever emotionally scar the child. Some naysayers even went so far as to suggest that such a failure could send Mosok down the path to the Dark Side.

Mosok did in fact struggle all through those early years as a youngling. Unfortunately, the struggles did not end after those early years and he struggled through every aspect of his training. It was common for him to have to be retested in just about every subject matter of his training. He had seldom passed the qualification tests on his first try.

The one exception was the standard lightsaber velocities and sequences that were a part of the Jedi Combat training with the lightsaber. For this part of his training he at least did not have to be retested at testing time and he was able to pass on his first attempts. But even then, he was still in the bottom one third of his class and was not

considered a standout.

Master Jarek had hoped that Mosok would be picked up as a Padawan by one of the Jedi Knights or other experienced Master in the Order. He hoped then that Mosok's Jedi training could be completed. This was the time that Master Jarek even tried to convince a few of his colleagues to take him on as a Padawan, but to no avail. After so many of them had passed over the boy, it became apparent to Master Jarek that Mosok would not become a Padawan unless something drastic took place.

Master Jarek considered himself too old and he had no intentions to become an actively assigned Jedi again, but it was the only way that he could see Mosok completing his training, and Master Jarek was convinced that that training had to be completed. Unfortunately the council thought that perhaps Mosok's skills lay elsewhere, such as in the intelligence analysis fields of the Jedi Order or in the Archiving Branch and they were preparing to assign Mosok to one of those branches. Master Jarek was so convinced that Mosok needed to be trained, that he went against his own will and desire and put himself back into the ranks of the active Jedi available for deployment and took Mosok on as his Padawan.

After several months of initial preparations and training, Master Jarek and Mosok were assigned to SCU-11. Master Jarek knew that this assignment was one that most Jedi did not want or desire, yet the position had to be filled and the council thought it fit to have Master Jarek and his new Padawan fill the role. This would allow the more qualified young Jedi Knights graduating from the academy to fill more prominent positions elsewhere. This made the

arrangement mutually beneficial. Now Master Jarek and Mosok were deployed on their first operational combat assignment and things had become very interesting for them and SCU-11.

Master Jarek noticed his Padawan approaching him and he spoke first in an almost fatherly tone.

“Mosok, I sense that you are troubled. Follow me and speak your mind.”

The look of concern only became deeper on Mosok’s face as he joined his master at his side as Master Jarek turned and walked toward his camouflaged shelter.

Mosok knew better than to prolong his thoughts, so he spoke without hesitation. “Master, this Sith Lord, does she pose a threat to the mission?”

A small chuckle emanated from Jarek’s throat, “Yes Padawan, she does pose a threat. Did you think this assignment would be as simple and easy as walking around the Jedi Academy looking for a misplaced datapad?”

Mosok answered seriously “Well, no Master, but I am not sure I am ready if we should have to confront this Sith Lord.”

Jarek tried to think of the right words to use to calm the apprentice. Finally he settled on the direct approach. He was too old, and times were too desperate in this war to gently approach a serious topic such as this one.

“Mosok, you do not have time for uncertainties or fear. These lead to the dark side. I am old, you are inexperienced. But I am wise, and you are full of energy. For every negative, there is a positive. We shall prevail, I have seen it. Now calm your mind and join an old Master for a peaceful meal and let us speak of matters we *can* control.”

The words had the desired effect and calmed the Padawan immediately. With a smile on his face, Master Jarek lead his Padawan to the opening of his shelter. There they sat down and the two Jedi settled and began preparing their combat rations to eat.

. . .

Darth Cloran, Lord of the Sith, Slayer of Jedi.

She preferred to be called by the last of her assumed titles. She truly hated the Jedi and reveled in the accomplishment of defeating them. She considered them weak and pitiful in comparison to the Dark Side and as such, she felt it her responsibility to rid the Galaxy of any of the Jedi that she came across.

In her mind, any force sensitive life-form that did not accept and embrace the full potential of their capability, did not deserve to live. If they did, it was an insult to the choice few who were privileged to wield the power of the Force. She did all she could to insure that the weak did not live. The Jedi did not welcome the power that comes from rage and anger, so she considered them weaker than their Sith counterparts and she had yet to confront a Jedi that caused her to change that opinion.

Darth Cloran had already begun to make a name for herself by rising through the ranks of the Sith Army quickly, much more quickly than most. Some outside of the ranks of the Sith wondered how someone goes about gaining notoriety and distinction in the Sith army. It did not happen simply by showing an aptitude to lead soldiers, there were many that could do that. But what really set Darth Cloran

apart was the very reason she earned her trailing title, she was good at killing Jedi.

She had twenty three confirmed Jedi kills and that ranked her above many of the Sith Lords who had twice as much combat experience as she did. It also had gained her notoriety among the upper echelon of Sith leaders. Her most recent Jedi kill had been the well known Jedi Master Fanlar and the memory of that kill still brought a smile to her face when she thought about it. The look of shock on Master Fanlar's face as her lightsaber struck the killing blow still remained vividly clear in her mind.

It had come after a long and well fought duel on the battlefield and it was a battle that would go down in the Sith archives to be studied in the years to come. At least that was how Darth Cloran thought that it should be remembered.

Master Fanlar's forces had quickly faltered after watching their leader die and without his leadership the battle became a rout and was easily won by the Sith. But it was the defeating of a worthy Jedi opponent that brought Darth Cloran the ultimate satisfaction. She hated the Jedi, but she also respected their prowess on the battlefield, and the greater the Jedi, the greater the satisfaction with his or her defeat at Darth Cloran's own hands.

She was not now combatting a Jedi, but instead was standing and watching over the installation and construction of the fourth of the six solar amplifiers required to run the massive relay station. As she stood there and watched her soldiers perform their duties she was pondering about the mission laid out before her.

Commanding the full battalion of the 163rd Galactic

Infantry (Light) was a worthy accomplishment in and of itself. It also often lead to her being able to pursue her ultimate goal of eliminating the Jedi one by one. Watching the engineering crew in front of her unfortunately reminded her that the chances were pretty slim that this particular mission would allow her to add to her kill total. It was a fairly routine mission that consisted of landing on the planet with her battalion of soldiers, securing the area, deploying and establishing the communications relay point, and then holding the area while a permanent garrison could be established and constructed.

Once the permanent garrison was established, they would then wait for the next set of orders to come in and be off to another part of the galaxy to fight. Her 163rd 'Striker' Battalion had done this same mission a few times before and those missions had on occasion even lead to some heated battles. Though typically that was not the case. Even so, Lord Cloran would not allow her troops to become lackadaisical or complacent. She knew it was when soldiers let down their guard that lead to people dieing and battles being lost. No, Lord Cloran had it set in her mind that her soldiers would maintain their vigilance and security. They would thank her for it later, of that she was sure.

She was recalled that none of the scanners had picked up any activity outside of the atmosphere of the planet. She also knew that none of their patrols down on the surface had discovered any sign of enemy activity either. There really wasn't much of any signs of anything other than some traces of native wildlife, which there seemed to be a lot of. It was the abundance of wildlife on the planet that lead to the choice of K-31 for the relay point. Normally searching

for and establishing a backup communications capability was deliberate and measured. But the destruction of the primary site by the Jedi forces a week earlier had accelerated the timeline for establishing this mobile relay station. Now the pressure was on to get the site up and going... and to do it quickly.

Darth Cloran noted that the progress was going well and she figured another two local days and the relay point should be up and operational. If they could accomplish that, it would be about two days ahead of schedule. Everything was going a bit better than planned and she was content with the situation. She thought to herself that the only thing that could make it better would be if there was a Jedi to hunt! That would really make it a successful and satisfying endeavour.

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“Okay men, gather around.”

The command voice of Master Jarek grabbed their attention and their own talking stopped as they listened to what the Jedi had to say. Jedi Master Jarek was leading the briefing at the center of the defensive parameter that SCU-11 had established.

“I contacted Commander Holt and received our orders straight from the top.” All the operators that were gathered around sat up straighter now, waiting to hear what the orders might bring.

“We have been ordered to take out the one amplifier that we are currently aware of and then to locate and destroy the main relay station as well as any other amplifiers

we come across. The commanders feel that by taking out the amplifier it will delay the relay station from coming online, which is a good thing.”

Master Jerek looked around at all of the soldiers faces as this bit of information brought smiles to them all. An excited chatter quickly spread through them.

“Okay men,” the term men being used universally as there were two women among their ranks as well “calm down. Unfortunately it is not all rosy and fun. There is a bit of bad news as well.” The talking ceased and all the eyes were focused intently on the Jedi as he continued, “We will have very limited support and it may be some time before any extraction can be executed to pull us off this world if things go bad.”

This bit of news caused several of the operators to silently look at each other as they considered what this meant.

“It appears our CIV has been tasked with a ‘higher priority’ mission and will not be back on station for another four planetary days at the earliest”.

The CIV, short for Covert Insertion Vessel and pronounced ‘siv’, was the SCUs primary means of galactic transport. The CIV was a specially designed space cruiser that specialized in covert operations. Getting forces onto planets without detection and getting them off planet just as covertly was what the CIVs were designed for and excelled at.

They were also armed and could provide off planet, as well as atmospheric, bombardment support. The firepower was nothing heavy like a battlecruiser, but it was still enough to support the SCU units quite effectively in

small intensity conflicts. The CIVs also had specialized communication and detection equipment built in as well. Most of what was on board a CIV was classified and as far as the Jedi force commanders knew, the Sith were unaware of the existence of these specialized craft.

The CIVs were small cruisers, not holding more than 100 soldiers and their equipment, and they were shaped in a way to help them avoid radar, ladar, and active ultrasonic detection. They had so many electronic counter measures on board that the crews joked they could fry any minnock with microwaves that flew within 100 meters of them. Much of the exterior design and electronics were engineered by the experts in covert technology on Bothan and all of this classified technology combined to create the most stealthy cruisers yet devised.

Unfortunately, the CIVs were not solely used by the SCU units and they were often tasked to other recon and forward scouting units as well as the SCU teams. This made the handful of expensive CIVs in high demand and sometimes hard to task. This occasionally lead to the CIVs having to be taken away from an operation and not being available when needed. Sometimes they were even dual tasked with multiple support missions at once, which was what the case was this time with SCU-11.

Master Jarek continued his briefing, “The absence of the CIV leaves us a bit vulnerable, but Commander Holt does NOT want that relay station to come online and taking out the amplifier will delay the Sith from powering it up. He understands the risk and has ultimately left the decision to proceed with the attack up to myself as the commander here on planet, and I do sense danger in this mission. I would like

the opinion of the Team Leaders before making my final decision.”

The team leader of Blue Team, Systyun Dunkyen, was never one to hold his tongue and he was the first to speak up.

“Sir, if the Sith are already placing their Solar Amplifiers, then they are preparing to power up the relay point at any time. For all we know, that relay point could be operational as we speak. Blue Team is prepared to strike and I would venture to guess that the rest of the teams feel the same.”

Several heads in the crowd nodded and each of the team leaders gave a confirming grunt as well.

Master Jarek nodded toward Systyun and continued “It appears the teams are unanimous and I agree. We will begin preparations for the strike on the one known amplifier. Are there any other thoughts or concerns from anyone else?”

It was Harek that spoke up this time. The heavy weapons specialist from Green Team was respected and well liked among all the team leaders and he was a sure bet to be on the short list of candidates for one of the next available Team Leader spots.

“Sir, we can handle the job of getting that amplifier, no problem. But once that job is done, we will have announced our presence and you can bet the Sith will not take lightly to us destroying one of their little toys. They’ll be searching for us like a hungry Rancor searches for a Bantha.”

Master Jarek nodded in agreement.

“Your point is well taken. Do you feel we should alter

our plan?”

Harek did not hesitate to answer “No sir, not one bit. We just need to make sure we plan to be mobile and unseen, and we’ll also need to deal with that Sith Lord.”

Master Jarek confidently replied “When the time comes Harek, my Padawan and I will deal with the Sith Lord.”

That statement caused a lot of nervous looks and unsettled movement to come over the SCU operators. While no one said it, everyone was clearly thinking the same thing “Good Luck old man”.