

Chapter 22

As soon as the young Jedi appeared on the battlefield from behind his cover, Darth Cloran all but forgot about the ongoing battle that was raging around her. The young Jedi had impulsively ran to the aide of his companion who had collapsed to the ground from well placed blaster shots in his back. The Jedi had a look of shock on his face and had paid no regard to his own safety. This did not matter to Darth Cloran. His mere appearance within striking distance was all that she needed to compel her to spring her attack from her own hiding place up on the ridge.

She had sprinted quickly down the side of the ravine and summoned the power she needed to deliver a powerful blow to the Jedi using the Force. The unaware Jedi was hit square on and she fully expected that the initial Force push would disorientate and catch him completely off guard. She did not expect the attack to do much else other than separate them both from the main battle so it was no surprise when she watched the Jedi nimbly recover from the attack with minimal damage.

She now eyed her opponent carefully as he stood before her. Years of experience had taught her to not underestimate her opponent, but she had already made that mistake twice with the Padawan and his Master. She was confident that she would not make that mistake again, though she did know that he was no match for her in terms of one-on-one Force combat skills. Her light colored lips were closed tight and pursed as she examined the Jedi. Her hand loosely held the hilt of her lightsaber, which remained unignited.

While examining him, Darth Cloran noticed that while the Jedi was younger than her, he looked older than the typical Jedi Padawan. It made her wonder what he had done to prevent him from progressing to the level of Jedi Knight at his current age. Was he being punished for something he had done?

The Sith were not so regimented in their structure like the Jedi where. When it came to progression within their own ranks, it was based on merit and potential. There were no fixed “trials” that had to be passed. Rather it was a matter of if you were powerful, ambitious, and showed enough skill to prove your worth, you could advance very quickly within the ranks of the Sith. This was exactly what Darth Cloran thrived at.

While staring at the Jedi and evaluating him, she began to pace from side to side. She was like a predator on the prowl, but it was not just a simple act of nervousness that made her move, she had her reasons. While she paced she continued to evaluate the foe before her. He was short, maybe only 1.7 meters tall, and of only medium build. A stunning physical specimen... he was not. In fact, Darth Cloran thought to herself that this particular Jedi would not have even survived the Sith training camp for Force users. But here he was, and he had already proved somewhat elusive in their first few encounters that they had already had up to this point. His Master had also been a worthy, if not aged, opponent. The ache in her side from the healing wound inflicted by that Master Jedi reminded her of that.

Darth Cloran decided to see what she could find out about the Jedi, his Master, and perhaps this combat unit that had handed her a rare defeat.

“What is your name, boy?” She asked in a quisitive but not unfriendly voice.

Mosok did not expect her to talk, and he was caught somewhat off guard and it showed in the bewildered look on his face.

“You do have a name don’t you?” She asked again.

Mosok realized that her voice was not filled with hate or malice and it was not demeaning. It was almost like they were having a conversation on the observation deck of a luxury space cruiser. As he stood there waiting for her to attack, he could come up with no reason to not answer her.

“Mosok Ga’liant, and I presume you are the Sith Lord Darth Cloran?”

Darth Cloran’s eyebrows raised “I see that my reputation has preceded me.”

Mosok only nodded his head in reply.

The fact that he knew who she was, was somewhat of a surprise and it did please Darth Cloran. It confirmed that her reputation was not only growing among the Sith but also among her enemy as well. She continued.

“Before I kill you, I wished to pay your Master his rightful respect...” Darth Cloran noticed the slight grimace on Mosok’s face as she mentioned his Master “he fought well and should rightfully be remembered as a great opponent. I will insure his name goes down in the Annals of Sith lore. What was his name?”

“Master F’in Jarek” Mosok said it quietly, almost in reverence.

“Well Mosok, he will be remembered, of that I can assure you. Let us now see if your name is worthy to be

recorded along side of his.” The smile on her face was a little sinister.

During this conversation, Darth Cloran had continued her side to side pacing, ever so slowly edging herself closer to Mosok. Mosok, had not moved, he had kept his feet shoulder width apart, with his blue ignited lightsaber held in his right hand, down at his side with the tip down. It was a very uncommitted and non aggressive posture and one Darth Cloran wished to take immediate advantage of.

As she had been prowling with her lightsaber hilt in her hand, but not ignited, she was setting up a rhythmic pattern. Moving to the right, then pausing as she changed direction, then again walking slowly to the left and pausing again after a few meters to change direction once more. Each time she stopped and changed direction in her side to side prowl, she moved a few centimeters closer toward the unsuspecting Mosok.

She moved to her right one final time and then paused as normal to change direction, but this time her lightsaber instantly ignited as she sprung forward, in a low lunging attack directed at Mosok’s heart.

The attack was a surprise to Mosok. But it was not a surprise to the Force as it screamed in his head to move anywhere but where he currently was standing. He desperately brought his lightsaber across his body with the tip down as he clumsily dodged to the right. His blue blade contacted the bright red blade just enough to carry the stabbing attack past him, missing by mere millimeters.

Darth Cloran was prepared for an unsuccessful attack and was already in motion with her followup series of strikes that were performed to keep the Padawan on the

defensive and unable to counterattack. This tactic had been very successful for Darth Cloran in defeating young and inexperienced combatants in previous engagements.

Mosok struggled to catch up to the series of quickly executed side strikes but he was just barely able to parry them effectively, remaining alive a few seconds longer. With each successful perry he began to become more in tune with the opponent in front of him as well as the rest of the combat that continued to go on around them. Mosok attempted to let himself fall into the grasp of the Force and listen to what it was telling him and at the same time rely on his own training in lightsaber combat.

The tenants of Soresu were different than the other lightsaber forms, and now he was understanding why Master Jarek was such a proponent of the unpopular lightsaber form. Master Jarek had insisted on it being the sole form taught to his struggling Padawan Mosok. Mosok fully realized he would never be a true master of the Force and would never be invited to join the council. But he was also beginning to realize that as he became more familiar with his limited talents, he was learning to utilize them effectively in his own sphere of influence.

Darth Cloran herself was also evaluating the style of the younger Padawan and she could see that he had improved his technique from the previous time they had met on the field of battle. He was controlling his fear and he seemed more focused, but he was still not as skilled or accomplished as his master was. What excited her even more was that she was more prepared herself to counter the odd and antiquated lightsaber style that he and his master used. Why the Soresu form had not been wiped from the

Galaxy by now was a mystery to her and the rest of the Sith, but here it was now, being utilized by two Jedi of unknown origin.

Darth Cloran noted that the padawan was showing promise as he was able to defend both her initial surprise attack and the follow up sequence. It was too bad that he would have to die here. He could have potentially made a fine apprentice, not that she had time for an apprentice, at least not at this stage in her career.

The Sith Lord continued with her continuous strikes, delivering multiple attacks from multiple positions but she was also holding back, allowing Mosok to once again get used to her rhythm. As he did so, she watched his movements, guessing in her mind and reaching out with the Force to determine how he would react to certain attacks. After doing that for several series of attacks, she then began predicting what he would do. Once she was able to reliably predict his given reaction, she then finally sprung her next scheme into action.

Darth Cloran performed an overhead strike, in the same pattern and rhythm as before and as predicted, Mosok brought his lightsaber up in a traditional Soresu cross parry. Immediately she brought her knee up in a powerful upward strike targeted for the exposed abdomen of the Jedi. She sensed that the blow would strike on target so she extended out with the Force to channel additional power into the blow for added power.

Mosok, though weak in most areas of Force knowledge and mastery, actually knew the blow was coming. In fact, he was well prepared for it and knew exactly what to do. How he knew what was coming, he did not know

and he did not dwell on it. He realized he had never encountered such an aggressive or brutal attack before and was quite surprised he had a plan to counter it. He simply just figured the warning and knowledge originated from the Force.

He quickly raised his own knee and used the shin of his leg to block and stop the Sith Lord's knee strike. The force of the collision was violent and knocked both of the combatants back away from each other, creating a pause in the combat. Mosok grimaced from the pain, but otherwise was unharmed from the attack.

It was the first respite from the continuous attack from Darth Cloran and the pause, and more specifically what caused the pause, had taken the Sith Lord by surprise. A thin smiled pursed her lips again.

"Well done Padawan. Your master has taught you well."

Again, her tone was not condescending and in fact there was genuine praise in her voice.

"My master taught me how to listen, the rest is the bidding of the Force." Mosok replied.

Darth Cloran emphatically replied.

"You Jedi are funny. There is no need to shy away from your accomplishments... take pride in your skill!"

She would never understand why the Jedi were so opposed to self accomplishment.

"Pride is the path to the Dark Side." was Mosok's simple reply, and one taught to all Jedi in their earliest days at the academy.

"Exactly!" was Darth Cloran's response, but it was yelled as she extended her arm and again channeled her

inner being toward propelling a hugely powerful Force push toward the Jedi.

Mosok again had a plan ready and leapt up and over the powerful blast that emanated from the Sith Lord. He gracefully flipped and as he came down toward the ground, he executed a powerful overhead strike of his own as he landed on his feet. Unfortunately for Mosok, Darth Cloran was too agile for such a blatant and obvious attack and had her lightsaber up to deflect the blow in plenty of time.

Then the defender, Darth Cloran, had the advantage as Mosok tried to recover from the momentum of his Force assisted jump. He was slightly off balance as the Sith spun a round-house kick straight to his ribs. Mosok was able to bring his elbow down so that his arm took the brunt of the attack, but it further put him in an awkward position. Darth Cloran quickly executed yet another blunt Force attack, extending both her arms forward with her lightsaber held in her right hand and the fingers extended from her left. The attack was delivered at point blank range where Mosok could not dodge it.

The push from the Force attack was immensely powerful, but again Mosok had been warned by the Force and was prepared for it. He lowered his shoulder to lean in toward the attack and did his best to maintain his balance. The push shoved him back nearly 20 meters, dragging Mosok's feet along the entire way. With his weight held forward and the good fortune of being on level and smooth ground, he was able to maintain his stance and stayed on his feet unharmed.

As Mosok recovered from the attack he stood upright and faced his opponent now 20 meters away, ready for

whatever might come next. Mosok thought to himself that such an aggressive attack on his part only made matters worse, and he vowed he would remember that valuable lesson in the future. The other thought that crossed his mind was the incredible power this Sith was able to yield in such short time spans. The leap he had done to jump over her previous Force attack had taken more effort than he could readily yield again any time soon, yet the Dark Lord was able to attack over and over again using the Force.

Darth Cloran had also recovered and again faced Mosok and spoke between her heavy breaths caused by exertion.

“Mosok, you shall indeed be mentioned alongside your Master. You are a worthy opponent.” and she bowed her head in a sign of respect toward the Jedi. “but you grow tired and you are becoming sloppy. I suspect this fight will soon end. I expect that you will die honorably.”

Mosok thought that if it wasn't for the fact that she was trying to kill him, and had successfully killed his Master, he might actually like the Sith Lord standing before him. He also bowed his head in an equal show of respect, and then raised his lightsaber and assumed the traditional Soresu ready stance, prepared to accept whatever his fate might be. He did not understand why he was so willing and ready to accept what the Force had in store for him, but he did not feel it would end here on this battlefield on this day.

Darth Cloran thought otherwise.

She elected to try something different that a younger, less experienced Force user would more than likely not be prepared for. Darth Cloran began to close the distance between herself and Mosok by walking in what one would

probably equate to a purposeful or fast march. The pace was just shy of trotting. As she did so she bounced lightly on her feet and brandished her lightsaber in a manner that showed her buildup and preparation for the next round of combat.

Mosok simply stood there awaiting his assailant, looking cautiously at her. He was preparing for the onslaught he knew was coming. He tensed his grip on his lightsaber, and then released it, flexing his fingers and remembering to hold the hilt lightly like he had been trained.

When she was about five meters away, Darth Cloran bounded toward the right and then bounded left, right back at Mosok with a one-handed side stroke attack aimed at his midsection. Mosok easily blocked the attack with a traditional defensive block using both hands on the hilt of his lightsaber. This was exactly how Darth Cloran envisioned he would block the strike. She then used her left hand to point at a 2 kilogram loose rock that was behind and to the side of Mosok and using the Force grabbed it and with a flick of her wrist propelled it at Mosok's back.

Mosok sensed the Force warning him of impending danger, but he did not see any incoming threat and hesitated for a moment. He had relied on his own physical training and thoughts to get him through so many of the early Jedi training tests that he was not yet adept at fully committing and listening to the promptings of the Force without hesitation. Mosok quickly ducked to avoid being struck by the unseen rock, but his slight hesitation prevented him from completely dodging the projectile and a sharp pain shot down through his right arm as the rock glanced off his right shoulder, spinning his body slightly to the left.

Darth Cloran was quick to pounce on the opportunity and spun around to her left a full three-hundred and sixty degree turn. She grasped her lightsaber with both hands now and brought it around with lightning quick speed in a waist level circular attack aimed again at Mosok's midsection. The full intent was to cleave him into two pieces.

The quick spinning and flashy attacks were Ataru style attacks meant to distract and confuse the defender. When combined with the aggression and power of the Djem So style, her other specialty, Darth Cloran had yet to find a foe that could counter it.

Mosok knew nothing of how to even begin to counter the different styles that the Sith was using against him. Instead, he only knew his basic Soresu defensive style and techniques, More than that, he was learning how to use that style to his advantage and how to become a part of the storm which lead to allowing the Force to direct his actions when needed. Mosok found himself in just such a need now.

Mosok was still reeling from the blow from the rock when again the Force began to prompt immediate action. This time, Mosok did not hesitate, instead, he acted immediately.

Mosok simply allowed his body to continue the momentum in the same direction it was already moving from the blow of the rock and then he tucked his right shoulder down and rolled along the ground, allowing the red blade of Darth Cloran's lightsaber to pass harmlessly over the top of him. Mosok continued his roll and immediately came to his feet, lightsaber at the ready and Darth Cloran now slightly out of position to properly defend herself. Mosok wasn't sure what to do having never been in a position of such

advantage in a combat situation before. So he performed the only thing he really knew how, he prepared to defend himself and again assumed his standard defensive position. The realization came immediately to him that he had missed an opportunity.

Darth Cloran knew she had overcommitted with the attack. She had expected either to slay the Jedi or have him block her blade and halt her momentum. When her blade found no resistance and passed over the rolling Jedi, she could not halt herself from over rotating which caused her to expose herself to his attack. It was then that she became very grateful for Mosok's inexperience in combat. Even a mediocre melee combatant would have jumped on the opportunity that her over aggressiveness exposed and ended the fight right then. Would not have taken more than a basic stabbing attack. While she was grateful for his reluctance, she also realized the greatness in his defensive move. Whether he did it intentionally or on accident, she was not yet sure, but it was a brilliant counter to her attack..

Again the two combatants squared off, but this time, Darth Cloran was not in a mood to talk. She was realizing that this fight needed to end sooner rather than later, and for the first time, she wasn't sure it would be a quick battle. The young Jedi showed true promise as a duelist and blademaster which would pose a bigger problem than she originally thought. She was still confident she could beat Mosok, but she was now resigning herself to the fact that it would take a determined effort. She could only hope that her soldiers were able to handle the rest of the battle without her in command. With 10 to 1 odds in their favor, Darth Cloran figured that should not be a problem.

Now resigned to the realization of a prolonged fight with her opponent, Darth Cloran began to set the tone of the next phase of the fight with a series of Ataru leaping and spinning attacks. The first leaping attack was easily blocked as Mosok gave ground slightly. When Darth Cloran continued the attack with left and right strikes and then moved into a spinning attack again, Mosok was able to defend them with just slight movements of his own lightsaber. Darth Cloran was beginning to breath hard with sweat beading on her forehead as she continued to force the attack on the Jedi. She was attempting to confuse him by leaping over and pressing the attack from multiple directions and at multiple speeds.

Mosok was calmly breathing and following the promptings of the Force, giving ground slightly as needed. He would fall back with each series of complex and bewildering attacks. Then Darth Cloran faked an attack to the left with her lightsaber and again spun to the right and attacked down low with a sweeping attack aimed at taking out his feet, or at worst, getting him off balance.

Mosok leapt into the air, flipping just barely over the circling arc of the lightsaber and as he prepared for the landing he extended out his lightsaber in front of him and brought it crashing down in an attack from above Darth Cloran. It was a beautifully fluid attack the flowed perfectly from the defensive maneuver he just performed.

Darth Cloran, following the Dark biddings of the Force, sensed the surprise attack coming and had little she could do to defend against it. She desperately tried to bring her lightsaber up and around in time to deflect the attack and realized that she was not going to make it and instead

opted for pain instead of death. She leaned in toward the attacking Mosok, allowing the hilt of his lightsaber to come down on her instead of the blade. At the same time she attempted to push through the body of the attacking Mosok with her shoulder and knock him from his feet.

Mosok saw her last second lunge forward and then felt the hilt of his lightsaber crack into the side of Darth Cloran's head. It was not a devastating blow, but it certainly would hurt and potentially stun her.

Darth Cloran saw a flash of light as the hilt struck her head and yet she still tried to channel her strength into the lunge at her opponent. But the blow had disoriented her and she was not able to effectively tackle the Jedi like she had planned. Instead, she felt another blow strike her in the ribs as Mosok dodge to the right and brought his right knee crashing up into her ribs. The powerful blow knocked the air from her lungs and sent her staggering past him several meters.

Mosok had performed the knee strike on instinct more than anything else. He was just trying to create separation between himself and the Sith master. He backed away several more meters while again resuming his Soresu stance, calm and steady. As Darth Cloran staggered forward she quickly regained her bearings and turned to face Mosok again. As she faced him there was a stream of blood dripping down the side of her face and her breath was now coming in staggered heaves as she felt the pain from at least one broken rib.

Darth Cloran formerly viewed herself as unconquerable in one-on-one combat. Now she realized for the first time in her life, she faced someone who had

outmatched her. She struggled with the emotions and the thoughts. She was not afraid to die, but she was afraid to lose. While pride was good for the Sith way of life, it was also the one failing attribute of the Dark Side. Pride had drove many of the truly gifted Sith warriors to death as they refused to let humility save them for another day and escape. Darth Cloran, destroyer of many Jedi Masters, had been soundly beaten by a Padawan. She was confused on how it was happening and as she contemplated it, she became even more bewildered by this mysterious Padawan.

Mosok was also confused. He had never been in a position of superiority in anything he had done to this point in his Jedi career. Sure, he had built a lightsaber with ease, but he was not the only one to easily accomplish that feat. But he had never been at the top of anything in the Jedi classes. He had won an occasional lightsaber sparring match, but never was he anywhere in the top half of the sparring charts for his class. But here he was, looking at a dangerous Sith Lord who was bleeding and struggling to breath.

“Darth Cloran, let us end this now. Call off your troops, let us go. Surrender to me, and we all live and walk out of here alive.”

She looked at him with the same look as an injured Wampa. Prideful and rebellious.

“Mosok,” she grunted with pain “you know I cannot do that. This fight is not over yet, and your soldiers are still drastically outnumbered.”

Mosok pleaded “I am offering to let you live! Please! With time you may even come to enjoy the benefits of the Light side.”

Darth Cloran could respect a warrior, but she knew she could not, and would not, ever accept the false ideals of the Jedi order. It was the mention of the light side that channeled her focus once more.

“No Mosok.” She stood up straight as she found her strength and resolve once more. “You will die here, as will your men.”

Without warning and again with surprising speed and agility that was beyond what injured body should have been capable of doing, she attacked. Darth Cloran let out a thunderous yell as she threw her lightsaber at Mosok, using the Force to propel and guide the spinning lightsaber across the 20 meters that now separated the two combatants. The spinning red blade was speeding toward Mosok at extreme velocity, but it was not fast enough.

Mosok was already in action as he quickly bent his body at the knees, leaning all the way back ducking under the lightsaber. He watched it spin over his face, missing just a few millimeters. Then in an instant, Mosok was back upright and running toward Darth Cloran who still had her hand extended toward Mosok from her throw.

Mosok approached rapidly and knew he had no choice but to strike her down where she stood. But Darth Cloran just stood there with her arm extended as he ran toward her preparing to strike. Then the alarms sounded again in his head from the Force and he realized she kept her hand extended for a reason. Her lightsaber was coming back toward her, and directly at him.

Mosok dove forward, tucking into a roll as the ignited red blade of Darth Cloran again whizzed over his head and landed in her outstretched hand. The spacing and timing of

Mosok's roll were perfectly timed and executed and when he finished the combat roll and ended up with himself in a crouched sitting position less than a meter in front of Darth Cloran. His arms were extended and his deep blue colored lightsaber blade was thrust through Darth Cloran's chest, extending a half meter out of her back.

Darth Cloran's lightsaber shut off and fell to the ground as her eyes looked into the eyes of Mosok. She came to the full realization that she had lost.

Mosok shut down his lightsaber, its blade retracting into his hilt as Darth Cloran fell to her knees. Her eyes were still locked onto Mosok's and a faint hint of a smile crossed her lips. She tilted her head down in one final show of respect for the honorable duel they just completed, and then she collapsed to the ground, dead.