

## Chapter 23

Emi-gon's eye's went wide with horror when she first heard the initial explosions from the ion pulse mines that had triggered the ambush on SCU-11. Her mind was going wild thinking about all the different possibilities of what was happening, the trepidation caused her to quickened her pace. A few moments later she heard blaster fire and additional explosions, at which point she threw all caution to the wind and began to run. She used the Force to steady her breathing and increase her pace. She also was reaching out with the Force to try and determine the fate of commandos. To her horror, she felt the dying cries of more than just one life form.

Due to the confined spaces of the crowded forest, she could not do an all out Force accelerated sprint. So she went as fast as she could given the conditions, and pushed even harder when the trees thinned.

As she approached what she estimated was about 100 meters from the ongoing battle, she slowed back down to a more cautious pace as she approached the battlefield. The closer she came to the sound of blaster fire, the more she reached out and concentrated with the Force, trying to determine where best to provide assistance.

Suddenly, she felt a distinct disturbance in the Force.

Something was happening off to the left of the main battle. She could sense a dramatic Duel between two Force users. She knew that it had to be Master Jarek's Padawan and the Sith Lord Darth Cloran! Given the new information she just discovered, she decided to change her plan. She figured that if she hurried she could save the Padawan and

with her new goal laid out before her, Emi-gon altered her course and ran toward the disturbance that she had felt.

As she approached the ledge of a valley she could hear the unmistakable sound of a lightsaber duel happening in front of her. She also could see some illumination from the blue and red lightsabers shining over the ledge in front of her and lighting up the darker parts of the forest where the battle was raging.

When Emi-gon crested the valley wall and looked down toward the duel, she was able to make out through the trees an intense Jedi melee combat. She could occasionally see two different beings through the trees wielding lightsabers and engaged in an intense battle weaving back and forth. She began to work her way down the valley wall and was able to see through an opening in the trees just as Mosok delivered a decisive series of strikes that knocked the Sith Lord back away from him and clearly caused injury to his opponent.

Emi-gon was awestruck by the swiftness and remarkable speed and cleverness of the attack the young Padawan displayed. She also knew it could likely be a ruse by the crafty Sith Lord. Emi-gon continued to make her way toward the makeshift arena in the forest where the two combatants dueled. She noticed that the combat between the two had momentarily ceased and she heard the sound of voices, but could not make out what was being said. She continued to move forward and entered the clearing just in time to see the Sith Lord throw her lightsaber at the unprepared Padawan.

Emi-gon knew first hand how deadly such an attack could be and she watched in horror as the red lightsaber

sped its way toward Mosok at a remarkable velocity and then watched in stunned disbelief as the Padawan deftly ducked below the attack. The humming blade scarcely missed him and passed harmlessly over the top of him. She watched again as the Padawan quickly recovered and sprinted toward the Sith Lord with his lightsaber raised and prepared to strike.

Emi-gon was at least 75 meters away, and she could do little more than watch the events transpire as the thrown crimson blade began to arch around and began its return journey toward its master's hand, and straight at the back of Mosok.

As Emi-gon watched the impending doom of the unaware Jedi Padawn, she herself moved into action. She sprinted toward the Sith in preparation to continue the combat where Mosok had left off. She was determined that someone had to put a stop to the Sith Lord and perhaps one decisive surprise attack from an unknown adversary would be enough to do it.

But Emi-gon came to an immediate halt just as soon as she had started running. Just as quickly as it all began, it was over. Emi-gon had watched Master Jarek's Padawan spar on a number of different occasions and he had never been graceful, or even adept at lightsaber combat. But something had changed in him. He executed a remarkably graceful and perfectly timed roll just as the Sith's blade was about to strike him from behind, but that wasn't the complete story. The elusive roll to dodge the Sith's flying lightsaber actually transitioned perfectly into an attack that the Sith could not defend in time, and Mosok delivered the killing stab through her heart.

The Jedi and Sith both referred to a stabbing blow as a Shiak and it was the most honorable way to defeat an opponent in one-on-one combat. It was typically a dangerous and difficult maneuver to accomplish, especially against a master lightsaber duelist. Remarkably, a Padawan just performed it against arguably one of the top Sith blademasters in the galaxy.

Emi-gon shook the surprise from her face and began to jog toward the younger Mosok.

“Mosok!” she called out after the Sith Lord had dropped to the ground dead and the Padawan had shut down his lightsaber.

Hearing his name called from behind startled Mosok and he quickly turned with his lightsaber raised, still unignited, and ready to defend himself. As he identified and recognized Master Emi-gon Vaus he lowered his lightsaber and replied.

“Master Vaus! How did you get here?” as a smiled spread across his face.

“I came with a...”

A loud explosion followed by heavy blaster fire interrupted her sentence.

“...I’ll explain later! Your men need us!”

Emi-gon cut off the conversation and ignited her lightsaber as she sprinted past the confused Mosok, who did likewise and joined her.

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The exploding grenade did not concern Vistom, it was still too far away and in front of their mound of earth to

cause any real damage. It was the increased amounts of incoming fire from the heavy blasters on both their left and right flanks that was a major cause of concern!

“We got to put an end to those heavy blasters if we are going to get out of here!” Vistom yelled it to no one really in particular, as he sighted in on and engaged another of the Sith soldiers that was trying to make his way toward their position undetected.

F'lark, the sniper from Green Team, heard Vistom yell the command, but he had already been plotting out his next move. F'lark had not engaged the enemy since they had all laid down covering fire when Mosok and others went and rescued Larun. Since then, F'lark had been taking in the commotion around them and trying to pinpoint the strong and weak points in the enemy forces. The increased barrage of incoming fire from the heavy blasters on their flanks had quickly grabbed his attention. He had already been planning his next move by the time Vistom yelled out the obvious.

F'lark went onto his hands and knees and cradled his rifle beneath him. He calmly tapped on the leg of Harek, who was standing next to him engaging various targets that he could see, and some he couldn't. When Harek looked down to where F'lark was, F'lark simply stated:

“I need a distraction.”

Harek was not known for his subtlety and providing a distraction was one of his specialties. He simply smiled, reached down to his belt and removed his last flash grenade. Then signaling his friend Vistom he pointed to F'lark and then moved his hand over his eyes to indicate he needed a distraction. Harek then held up the flash grenade and pointed at Vistom and then made a shooting signal with

his hand. Vistom instantly realized what Harek had in mind and brought his rifle up to his shoulder and nodded to Harek indicating he was ready.

Harek counted down using his fingers held up for Vistom to see... 3... 2... 1 and then threw the grenade as high as he could into the air toward the enemy. Just as the grenade reached the top of its arch, Vistom fired off three rapid shots at the grenade. He only needed one. The first shot was dead-on and struck the grenade center-mass causing it to explode with a thunderous explosion and a bright white flash.

The explosion from the grenade did absolutely no damage to the enemy, but it was not intended to. The loud and bright explosion caused everyone to either glance up, or wince and blink for just a second, and that was all that F'lark needed.

When Harek had thrown the grenade, F'lark started backing as far away as he safely could from their protective earth embankment and prepared himself for action. As soon as the grenade exploded in the air he quickly slid into the low bushes and shadows around their position, undetected by the enemy forces.

The long hair found on the heads of the Bothan race had always been a concealment advantage as it naturally would break up the outline of the head and shoulders and would blend in nicely to the camouflage suits the members of the SCU wear. As F'lark slid into the brush, he went completely prone and slowly and methodically moved from shadow to shadow along his pre selected route toward a fallen tree off to their left side.

F'lark's used all of his training to insure he remained calm and disciplined as he continued to use every bit of terrain that he could to his advantage. He slid along a small depression in the ground, then past the small fallen tree he had identified earlier. He then dropped down into a minor dry seasonal creek bed while using the large leaves of a low bush to conceal his prone movement. Finally he moved to the top of that same drainage to a natural V in the ground that provided him with just barely enough room to place his rifle between the rise on the right and the rise on the left. It took several painstaking minutes to move the 20 meters, but when he got there, he was rewarded with exactly the scenario he wanted.

F'lark slid his long sniper rifle through the bottom of the V in the ground and looked through the magnified optics mounted on top of his rifle. The rifle and optics were wrapped in a loose fibermesh fabric that did a good job camouflaging the rifle even without any stealth generator. As he peered through his optics, he was presented with a view of the enemy heavy blaster cannon off to their left which was only about 180 meters from his position. It would be a trivial shot for an accomplished sniper like F'lark, but the trick would be if he was presented with a good shot.

He could make out the shape of the gunner and his assistant sending continuous strains of blaster fire directly toward the SCU-11 position with their tripod mounted blaster cannon. He aligned his scope reticle directly on the right side temple of the Sith gunner and squeezed the trigger with about 1.2 kilograms of force while keeping the sights perfectly aligned on the soldiers head. He was rewarded with the sound and hum of his rifle as the perfectly placed

plasma bolt made its way home, killing the Sith gunner instantly.

The recoil on a plasma rifle is almost nil since the mass of the plasma bolt is very tiny. This lack of recoil allowed F'lark to quickly align his sights on the startled assistant gunner and squeeze of another perfectly placed shot giving F'lark his second confirmed kill in under 2 seconds. F'lark half expected to begin receiving incoming fire from the enemy, but luckily it never came. He determined that the enemies attention was focused intently on the earth berm where the rest of SCU-11 was located and they had not noticed his two well placed shots.

With the first heavy blaster team eliminated F'lark slowly began to traverse his rifle to the right scanning the ridgeline for the enemy. He was focused on moving his rifle slowly enough to not draw attention to his position. He located a Sith soldier firing but he passed over that target and continued his scan and then found another. It too was not his desired target, and he continued to search slowly toward the right. Then he finally found the other heavy blaster cannon on their right flank. As far as F'lark could tell, none of the enemy soldiers had discovered him in his well concealed firing position.

The second heavy weapons team was about 320 meters away, which was still an easy shot, and again he lined up the reticle on the barely exposed forehead of the gunner. F'lark calmly squeezed off another plasma bolt, watching the head of the Sith heavy gunner snap back and his limp body slump over to the side. Again it took just a bit more than one second to align his sights and eliminate the

assistant gunner who before he knew what happened, met the same fate as his gunner.

F'lark knew from experience, as well as from training, that a sniper who shot from the same position more than once was asking to die. But he did not have time to change positions to engage the second team and therefore accepted the risk. F'lark knew he had pushed his luck too far, but the only thought that mattered to him was that his brothers in SCU-11 were in trouble, and he was the one that could help them out. So when the red plasma bolts from the Sith soldiers started raining down on to his now discovered position, he was not surprised. Rather he was prepared to take out as many of the enemy as possible before they finally got him.

F'lark quickly scanned back to the left and found a soldier that was trying to hide behind a tree stump and he aligned his reticle on the soldiers exposed left shoulder and put a high powered plasma bolt into him and watched the soldier recoil back in pain from the wound. He then scanned again further to the left as more plasma bolts came his way. His position offered more concealment than it did protection and as such, he knew he would not last long. Just as he was lining up another target, a sharp burst of pain shot up his left leg as a plasma bolt singed his calf muscle. Then another bolt hit just centimeters away from his head kicking up earth and rock onto his face.

F'lark tried to lift his head to look through his scope at another target but the enemy blaster bolts were coming in too fast now and he knew his time was done and he closed his eyes and prepared to accept his warriors death!

Then he heard the unmistakable sound of a lightsaber, and it was right next to his ear. F'lark looked up to see the young Mosok leap in front of him and begin to deflect blaster bolts away, shielding him from the incoming fire. A split second later he felt a gentle touch on his shoulder as a female Jedi knelt down next to him and examined his wounded leg.

“Come on Bothan, now is not your time to die. Lets get you back to cover, grab my hand.”

Without hesitation, F'lark grabbed the stranger's outstretched hand that, with surprising strength, lifted him from his prone position and together they ran toward the rest of SCU-11 positioned behind their makeshift bunker. Mosok followed close behind, deflecting blaster bolts all the while. F'lark just then noticed that the female Jedi also had a lightsaber and was also deflecting the occasional blaster bolt that came from a direction that Mosok could not get to.

The few remaining SCU members that were still left standing and fighting welcomed the trio back with enthusiasm and it was Vistom who spoke first.

“Great job F'lark! Getting rid of those heavy blasters has quieted them up a bit, but I'm afraid we still are pinned down here.”

Then turning to the attractive Jedi Master, Vistom added:

“Sorry Jedi Master, I wish I could properly welcome you to SCU-11, but I trust you will forgive me for not having traditional Jedi food and drink for the occasion.”

Emi-gon could do nothing to suppress her smile.

“No worries Sergeant. But I thought you could use a little help.”

Vistom took another shot at a Sith trooper and called back over his shoulder.

“Who us? Nah, we have them right where we want them! We can shoot at them in every direction!”

Emi-gon had never directly deployed with a SCU team before, but she quickly determined that she rather liked them.

“Well, seeing as you have things firmly under control here, I suppose I could just hop in my space transport and leave you all to clean up the situation here?” Emi-gon was still smiling.

The mention of off world transportation caught the attention of all of the remaining republic troops that were around them. It was Mosok who asked the question that was on all of their minds.

“You have a ship here?”

A couple of blaster rounds impacted the earthen berm in front of them, drowning out some of his question.

“Yes young Mosok, I am here for all of you... lets see what I can do.”

Emi-gon pulled a short range transmitter from her belt and held it up to her mouth and began to speak.

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The sensors in Ocal’s ship had picked up the fighting once it began and he at once fired up the ship and was prepared for departure. Doing this was risking discovery from the enemy patrol aircraft flying around. But Ocal figured that this was the final battle and since he had not heard from

Emi-gon he determined she was in the thick of it and would be contacting them at any moment.

With the auxiliary systems fired up, the reactor online, and the main weapons charged, they were ready to blast off with just a second's notice. Then they began the wait. Ocal and Quinto continuously monitored the sensors and communications, waiting for any word, and then to their relief, the unmistakable voice of the Jedi Master came over the speakers.

“Ocal, we need you here now!! Be advised it is an extremely hot landing zone. Come in hot and low. stay below the peaks and do it now!”

“Roger that Emma, we have your position from your transmitter... we're on our way!”

Ocal broke the transmission and immediately kicked the planetary drives into high power and blasted out of their hidden landing zone.

“Get on those guns Quinto. We are going to have to fight our way in and out! Make sure you are buckled in as well, this ride is gonna be bumpy.”

Ocal kept his ship only a few meters above the treetops as he flew down the canyon that skirted around the upper rim of the mountain. Suddenly the proximity warning lights and sirens started blaring as two enemy aircraft appeared on his scopes heading right for them.

With a quick adjustment of the flight controls he had the one on the right lined up and began firing just as the enemy did the same. What Ocal's larger ship lacked in maneuverability, it made up for in shields and firepower. Several of the Sith fighters blasters struck their ship, but the shields absorbed the energy without any problem. The Sith

fighter could not say the same as it exploded into a fireball and careened to the earth after a few precisely placed shots hit the haul of the fighter.

The second fighter had altered its course to try and engage Ocal, but there was not enough time and the two craft passed by each other head on. Ocal did not alter his course but instead, he increased speed even more and headed directly toward Emi-gon's location as the other Sith fighter tried to maneuver around to their "six". Ocal banked around a rock outcropping and began heading directly up the ravine that SCU-11 had walked up hours before on foot.

Ocal raced up the canyon, dodging tall trees and doing his best to distance his ship from the Sith fighter that was now trying to locate and engage them. Directly in front of them, Ocal saw the blaster bolts from the firefight. To his eyes, it was a one sided battle with thousands of bolts flying toward the small huddled band of republic troopers. But there was only a token amount of blaster fire being returned back toward the Sith soldiers on the valley wall.

As they approached the battle Ocal pitched the 'Nova up just as Quinto began to fire their heavy blasters mounted on a rotating turret on top of their freighter.

The sudden appearance of the spacecraft caused a confused havok to spread among the Sith troopers and Quinto was doing a good job of laying down a heavy dose of suppressive fire. Ocal decided that the only way this was going to work was to be the shield for the troops on the ground. He quickly landed the craft between the small band of SCU soldiers and the Sith army.

Quinto, all the while, continued to lay down a continuous stream of blaster fire into anything that moved

along the ridge line. In return, the Sith were now starting to direct large amounts of fire toward the ship and into their shields. Ocal began to see the status gauges countdown slowly, indicating their remaining shield power was being depleted.

As the loading ramp dropped, Mosok and Emi-gon moved forward, working together to provide a protective curtain as Vistom, Harek and the others carried their wounded, and their dead, onto the ship.

Mosok and Emi-gon were moving together, feeding off of each other's movements. They knew what the other was doing without asking or signaling it in any way. The Force was providing the coordination, and they performed brilliantly together until all of the remaining members of the SCU-11 team were onboard. They then quickly ran up the ramp as Ocal lifted the spacecraft off the ground and engaged the suborbital engines and blasted as fast as he could out of the atmosphere of K-31, leaving the sith ground troops and the lone fighter trying to keep up, back behind them.

Mosok looked at his men. They were all wounded except for Vistom and Harek. He then walked over to where Larun lay on the ground near F'lark. F'lark looked up and simply shook his head. Larun, their trusted and beloved leader, had died sometime during the battle.

Jedi are trained not to feel emotion as it clouds their judgment, but Mosok made no effort to hide the tears as they flowed down his cheeks.