

## Chapter 25

Ocal was sitting in the pilot's chair of the Nova Twilight. His feet were kicked up on the console in the cockpit as he was staring out the windows at the men and women working intently with last minute preparations on the 'Nova. Since they had returned from the rescue mission it had been a whirlwind of activity with much of it revolving around what SCU-11 had accomplished. At first Ocal and Quinto had been widely ignored as the medics and others did what they could for the wounded.

But as the commotion finally settled down and the confusion erased from the Republic leaders, Emi-gon was quick to insure that Ocal received his promised credits. After he had seen what the men of SCU-11 had gone through on K-31, Ocal was nearly tempted to turn the credits down. Then Emi-gon informed him that the Galactic Senate had promised to pay the credits. Ocal was not a fan of politicians, so he gladly accepted the payment at that point.

There were a few repairs that needed to be done to the 'Nova and those were quickly handled by the republic mechanics at the spaceport within a few hours of landing. The real highlight of the events that happened after the mission was when all eight of the surviving members of SCU-11 stopped by their ship a day later. A majority of them still wore bandages and bacta patches to help them heal from the wounds they had sustained in combat.

They had welcomed them on board and had chatted and caught up for a while. Then Ocal and Quinto were stunned when they were presented with a pair of matching bronzium plated custom blaster pistols as a 'thank you' for

what they did and risked for SCU-11 on K-31. They said their goodbyes and exchanged contact information and then had left them to their preparations.

With his feet still kicked up and completely relaxed, Ocal glanced to his left and saw the bronze colored blaster pistol hanging in its holster on the wall. The weapon was priceless because of why it was given to him and he vowed to not only never get rid of the pistol, but also to never aid the Sith again.

The sound of the cockpit door sliding open behind him caused Ocal to turn and see Quinto walk in.

“The final preparations are complete. We are ready to leave when you are.” Quinto plopped himself down in the co-pilots seat.

“That is great news. I don’t know about you, but I say we find a remote paradise planet with an active Sabaac community and relax. I have plenty of credits burning a hole in my pocket and no desire to work for a while!” Ocal brought his feet down off the console and began to make preparations to fire up the main reactors so they could take off.

“Oh no....”

The phrase surprised Ocal when he heard Quinto say it and he looked up with wide eyes. Ocal saw Quinto staring out of the cockpit and he followed his gaze and immediately knew why he was concerned.

“Ahhh, come on. Really?!”

Ocal just shook his head and resigned himself to defeat as he watched the small Jedi Master Emi-gon approach his ship and head for the cargo ramp. Ocal knew

there was no escaping the feisty little Jedi and chances are his vacation just ended before it even started.

. . .

Mosok found himself standing at the entryway of the living quarters of his former master. It was the same living quarters where Emi-gon had found him a few days earlier to announce the news of his advancement to the position of Jedi Knight within the Order.

Now these same living quarters had been assigned to Mosok as the new commander of SCU-11. The living space had been completely cleaned out and all of Master Jarek's personal belongings had been packed away and sent to his closest remaining family. Master Jarek had an older brother still living on Corellia. Mosok knew there was not a lot that Master Jarek owned, which was the traditional way of living for a Jedi. Regardless, all of it was gone now with only the slight fruity smell of disinfectant from the cleaning droids left to greet him in his new home.

It had crossed Mosok's mind that it was somewhat cruel to have to live in the same dwelling as his former master, but he did not complain. He knew he would have to get over the sentimental attachment to his Master if he were to advance in his own development as a Jedi Knight. Even so, it was an odd feeling standing in a new living area without his Master to guide and tell him what he should be doing. Instead, he was standing and just staring, all alone.

It took Mosok a full three minutes after the sliding door had opened before he was able to finally determine what the obvious first step was in the next phase in his life.

Sometimes it was the first step that was the hardest, and in this case it was both a literal and figurative first step. It was simple and easy, but yet difficult and unnerving. It was time to make that step through the door of his own living quarters, and then make himself at home. From there, he would be able to take the first step into the next phase of his life.

When he finally walked through the entryway it was as if he had finally advanced beyond the ranks of an underwhelming Padawan learner. He left that cherished, though questionable, part of his life behind him.

Immediately Mosok began to go to work which helped take his mind off of the loss of his Master or the tasks and challenges that lie ahead with his new assignment. He had very little to unpack, a few sets of basic clothing, Jedi Robes, and some other items, but it needed to be done. So he did it.

As he was unpacking those items, he uncovered the hilt of a lightsaber. Mosok picked it up and examined it. He knew the lightsaber, and more importantly, he knew what it stood for. This was the lightsaber of the Sith Lord he had defeated on K-31, Darth Cloran.

As Mosok carefully examined the craftsmanship of the hilt, he thought back to his advancement ceremony. He had no idea how Master Emi-gon Vaus had managed to retrieve the lightsaber, but it was without a doubt the very blade that his opponent wielded. He remembered the markings and the details as clear as if it were his own. The shock of life threatening events had a tendency to embed certain images permanently in the mind.

Emi-gon had presented the lightsaber to Mosok as part of the advancement ceremony and spoke of how Mosok

should use it as a reminder of how he was able to persevere under relentless conditions and overcome obstacles, and then finally was able to master his fear. These steps of progression finally allowed him to defeat his enemy. The lightsaber itself was a symbol of him passing his personal Jedi Trial, which had forged him through combat into the Jedi he now was and more importantly, the Jedi he had the potential to become.

Mosok knew to not view the lightsaber as a trophy- no Jedi should celebrate the loss of life- but he did vow to himself to never forget the things in his past that would guide his life as a guardian of justice in the galaxy. It was his responsibility to be a defender of truth and liberty. For those reasons, Mosok took the lightsaber and walked over to the empty display shelves in his meditation room. There he set it prominently on top. Once the lightsaber was placed there, he looked at it and then took a moment to silently think of its former owner, Darth Cloran. As he did so he closed his eyes and bowed his head slightly to pay his honor to the Sith Lord.

Darth Cloran was evil, she had chosen the Dark side of the force and she had killed many Jedi in previous combat. But she fought honorably and treated Mosok and his Master with respect. For that, she deserved Mosok's respect in return.

When Mosok made his way back to his items that he was unpacking, he noticed his combat robes used on K-31 laying on his bed. The singe marks, holes, and worn parts caught his eye. He had never really noticed how worn and ragged the robes had become during the operation. The battle damage brought back memories of the combat on

K-31. It also caused his mind to start thinking about what happened there. After examining the robes for a minute longer, Mosok promptly turned on his heels, and walked out the door. He turned left down the corridor that would take him to the NCO quarters and ready room for SCU-11.

Mosok walked into the common room where most of the operators were assembled. Both the old veterans and the newer operators that were just now slowly filling in the ranks of their fallen brethren, were seated in various locations in the common area. Some were cleaning blaster rifles and pistols, others were taking inventory of required equipment, and others were just talking about various things with the new guys and gals of the unit.

Harek was the first to spot Mosok as he purposefully strode into the room. Before Harek could announce the presence of the Jedi, Mosok called out

“At ease! Remain seated, please. I’m looking for Vistom.”

Vistom was now one of the more senior NCOs and had been made the NCO in charge, or NCO-IC, of SCU-11. He was a logical choice to replace their fallen leader Larun and he had assumed the role naturally. Just then, Vistom walked out of the arms vault having just put away his personal blaster rifle after a thorough cleaning.

“I’m right here Sir”, Vistom called out as he activated the laser shield to lock the vault closed. Vistom continued.

“Sir, I just wanted to say on behalf of the men, that we are excited to have you on board as our new commander.”

Mosok just waved the comment aside with his hand.

“Vistom, enough of the ‘Sir’ garbage. Call me Mosok. Grab your datapad, I have some ideas and we have work to do! The Sith are not gonna just sit around because we beat them once, not to mention they now know about our SGs.”

Mosok quickly exited the common room, straight into their briefing area before Vistom could even grab his stuff. Mosok yelled back over his shoulder “... come on now, quit standing around!”

Hurrying to grab his datapad, Vistom looked over to Harek, now the leader of Green Team, with a huge smile on his face. Harek knew exactly what Vistom was thinking.

Finally, a commander to call our own!

. . .

The Sith planetary transport craft flew smoothly into the hangar bay of the large battle cruiser that was now orbiting K-31. As the transport descended and landed in the hangar bay of the larger battle cruiser, there was a loud thud as the landing gear made contact with the hangar floor. After a brief moment the passenger door on the transport opened with a hiss of escaping oxygen as the two dissimilar atmospheres equalized. A ramp descended down to the ground from the door and the passengers began to walk down. Sendu Farns unbuckled his safety harnesses and grabbed his gear from the overhead storage bin and quietly started down the ramp.

It had been a long deployment for the recently promoted Sendu Farns. He was now an officer in the Sith Army, though with the death of Darth Cloran, he was not even sure who his new commander was going to be. He

was also not exactly sure what his new job would entail. Sendu was an engineer at heart, he loved solving problems. Unfortunately, his current problem was one he really did not have much control over.

The cleanup on the planet had taken a week. The Sith generals and commanders had determined they were not going to try and replace the Mobile Relay Unit on the planet. Rather they were going to build a long range communications relay on a Sith controlled planet deeper in the safety of their own controlled zone. In the meantime they would use multiple spaceborn satellites to relay their current transmissions. It would require putting up a large network of those satellites to insure uptime and reliability in case if one or more of them were destroyed. It was not as clean or quick as the MRU, but the Sith had learned a hard lesson with the setback on K-31 and they were determined to adapt and overcome.

Sendu had his equipment and team packed up in a matter of hours after the evacuation order had been given a week ago. But he had to help others with their preparations for departure, which delayed his leaving the planet. The entire 163rd had a dour mood about it as they realized the failure of their mission. The 163rd was a proud unit and they had earned that pride through a very long and successful track record of victories. The failure to protect the MRU and their failure to capture or kill the entire enemy special operations unit was casting a dark shadow on the entire battalion. To add to the mood was the fact that their General, the charismatic and powerful Darth Cloran, was found dead in the forest with a single lightsaber puncture through her chest and heart.

Sendu had grown to admire and like the late Dark Lord, and he was certain her loss was also adding to the depression he was feeling.

All of the soldiers in the transport vessel were quiet as they filed out the door and down the ramp. There was none of the normal chit-chat and banter that is associated with combat soldiers after an operation.

As Sendu reached the bottom of the ramp and walked into the main hangar bay, he heard his name called from one of the Deck Officers off to the side.

“Lieutenant Farns!”

Sendu looked over and walked toward the officer.

“Yes officer, I am Lieutenant Farns”.

The older man barely acknowledge Sendu and simply said “Follow me” and turned on his heels and purposefully marched toward a door on the opposite side of the hangar than where everyone else was heading.

The deck officer lead Sendu through a maze of corridors and rooms filled with staff officers in the Sith Army until they were at a repulsor lift. Sendu knew better than to ask questions and instead just waited patiently for the door to the lift to open after the other man had pressed the call button.

Once the door opened the deck officer indicated with his hand for Sendu to enter but he himself did not follow as Sendu entered in.

“Lord Voraq wishes to see you.” was all the deck officer said.

With that, the repulsor lift door closed and it immediately started heading up. Sendu was searching his mind trying to remember where he had heard the name

Voraq before and just as the repulsor lift came to a halt at the command bridge, it hit him. Sendu's eyes bulged in surprise as he muttered to himself "Oh No!"

The door slid open to the side with a hiss and standing before him was one of the most sinister looking beings Sendu had ever seen, both on the holonet or in person.

The Sith Lord was not large, only of medium build, but he wore dark black robes from head to toe. These were not the large flowing robes that the Jedi Favored, but these were tighter fitting robes perfectly suited for combat and killing. Sendu noticed the legendary double bladed lightsaber hanging from Lord Voraq's belt. While the weapon was worrisome, it was not the robes or the lightsaber that made him look sinister, rather, it was the full face mask that he wore.

There were no defining facial features to the mask, rather it was a simple oval and was a metallic color that almost looked like a durasteel screen. You could not see his eyes, nose, or any facial features at all. Because of this, one could not read any feeling from the face behind the mask which was more unnerving than Sendu had imagined it would be. Then a voice came from the mask. It was a deep, dark, mechanical voice that instilled fear and demanded obedience.

"So this is the Sendu Farns I had heard so much about from Darth Cloran?"

"Yes's Sir..."

"Good, we have work to do."

**THE END**