

Chapter 5

A full day had passed since the attack on and destruction of the the solar amplifier. The passing of time did no less to dampen the anger within Darth Cloran. She was still fuming over the stunning defeat of her platoon guarding that amplifier. She was, however, smart enough to realize that this defeat could be used to motivate the soldiers under her command. The realization that you are not invincible can help a unit focus more intently on doing their jobs exceptionally well. This would usually involve more attention being paid to the small tasks that could otherwise be viewed as non essential.

Darth Cloran also recognized that defeat could also be used to help herself focus on using whatever means were necessary to locate, and ultimately, destroy this elusive Jedi force. The hatred had grown the previous day after she had to report to her Sith superiors the shame that this force of Republic soldiers had caused her to her.

The attack itself had left their relay station with a lack of power and it remained offline, but a replacement amplifier would arrive on the planet within the next two days. So the loss was not a catastrophic one. At least the physical loss of the amplifier wasn't. In Darth Cloran's mind, the tarnish on her reputation was of a far greater loss than the relay station being non operational for a few extra days.

There were precious few details discovered about the enemy when the time was taken to examine the battleground. Interviews of the survivors and other eyewitness testimony did little to shed more light on the mystery. About the only thing that was discovered was that

the enemy was ferocious and deadly and that the enemy soldiers were using some sort of visual concealment device to mask their movement.

There were a few other bits of information that Darth Cloran was able to piece together as well. One was that there were two separate forces, an overwatch force and an assault force. This was not an unusual tactic and there was nothing too alarming in that detail. The other bit of information was an estimation of the rough size of the attacking force. This piece of information was the hardest to believe. The conclusion was based off of the footprints left within the perimeter of the defending force and the eyewitness accounts of the amount of blaster fire. As far as anyone could estimate, the number of enemy soldiers was no more than 40, and many thought that number may very well be on the high side.

Any unit willing to attack a numerically superior, dug in force, and then to successfully pull it off, was not a military unit to be trifled with. Instead, it was a force that was required to be taken very seriously.

These bits of information were not much, but it was more than what she had before. And now that Darth Cloran had at least a few more bits of information about what type of unit they were up against, she was determined not to be caught off-guard again and she was already going about implementing some changes.

The request for an additional Company of heavy infantry to provide security had already been requested, and granted. That Company would be landing planetside in about four hours. Also, some additional detection equipment, that was ion shielded this time, was also

requested and approved. Those items would take another two weeks to arrive as the specialized equipment was difficult to requisition due to limited supplies and high demand in other regions of the Galaxy.

There were also several specialized sensor reading experts in the Battalion and they had been granted special duty assignments as well and would be arriving planetside in just a few days to assist with the security of the Mobile Relay Unit. These specialists would also be available to assist with any attempts to locate and detect the enemy force.

The additional equipment and Sith soldiers would help with eliminating the Jedi led republic force, but the really hard part that was currently facing Darth Cloran and her Sith unit, was trying to locate the enemy. Once they were able to locate them, closing with and destroying them would not be a problem. Since the attack, Darth Cloran had doubled the number of combat patrols that were being sent out. They were double in both size and in frequency, and she herself had been leading a sizable portion of those patrols. She was taking any opportunity that she thought might be the most likely to produce results. Unfortunately, up to this point, none of these patrols had produced any direct results. But those patrols had turned up what appeared to be signs of a potential patrol base used by the enemy, though it appeared to now be abandoned.

Darth Cloran was experienced and trained in all forms of infantry tactics and she had systematically began running the patrols in a manner that would flush the enemy toward a natural choke point in the terrain. It was at this choke point that she was already setting up a heavily armed base of operations that would then crush the Republic scum

once they were pushed toward them. Darth Cloran knew that the key to the success of this operation would be the ability to expose and track the enemy, and it was in this area that Darth Cloran figured taking control of the Force would be of the most benefit.

Darth Cloran was already familiar with the Force presence of the Jedi leaders and she was confident she would be able to quickly recognize that same presence and discover them once they were close enough and their thoughts were unshielded. She had also felt the faint impressions of the other Republic soldier's minds when she was near them. Recognizing this unique ability Darth Cloran figured it would be herself that would be the secret detection weapon she controlled, and she planned to use it as effectively as possible to locate the enemy.

Her plan of action was clearly laid out in her mind and she was once again filled with anticipation of the upcoming operations that would ultimately lead to a final confrontation with the enemy. She would not consider her current feeling to be joy, but she was filled with renewed energy as she went about supervising the preparations.

. . .

Two days later, the four members of Green Team were huddled in a very small clearing in the woods, each of them on one knee in a tight circle. There were numerous tall green trees that raised up around them and provided a sense of security for the team members. The trees were thick and overlapping each other which reduced the visibility to less than 100 meters. Each of the four commandos was

facing outward and they were so tight together that their backs were nearly touching each other. The team leader, Larun, was operating as the pointman and had called the team to a temporary halt in the small clearing.

It was standard operating procedure for the team to assume a tight 360 degree defensive position any time they stopped. When in full stealth and stalking mode, their operating procedures dictated that the defensive position remain very tight. The three other members were maintaining a vigilant watch outward from their position and they could not see the look of concentration on their leader's face while he continued to track the enemy they had been following for the past hour.

Jedi Master Jarek knew that the Sith had begun the hunt for SCU-11, but what Master Jarek was hoping the enemy Sith Lord did not know, was that this was a two-way hunt. Not only were the Sith hunting the Republic SCU, but the SCU was also hunting down their primary target, the relay station. Master Jarek was hoping that this Sith Lord had assumed they would be on the run and only concerned with self preservation. But the truth was that they were indeed on the run, but this was more like the popular youngling game of sense-and-see.

There had been a number of times over the past two days where various teams had made visual contact with the Sith patrols that were sent out searching for them. But up to this point the SCU teams had remained undetected. Unfortunately, during this time the teams had also been unsuccessful at locating the relay station. Master Jarek knew that time was running out before the relay station would be back online and function, which was what they

were trying to prevent. He also knew that even if they did find another solar amplifier that was providing power to the relay unit, the risk of performing another raid like the last one was not worth taking. Unless, of course, what they found was the relay station itself. This was considered the main prize and was their primary target. When the relay station was located, Master Jarek was hoping the CIV would be back on station and in orbit and they could just order an offworld bombardment. That would be the quickest and safest way to be rid of the relay station. But as of yet, no further communication with the CIV had been established and for the time being, they were still on their own.

It was this dangerous situation that SCU-11 found themselves in. It was also what prompted the decision to perform what the SCUs called TOH patrols, pronounced “toe patrols”. TOH was an acronym for Tracking Of Hunters. This technique called for the SCU teams to start tracking and following the actual enemy patrols that were sent out to “hunt” or locate the SCU. The logic seemed backwards and it did involve added risk, but they needed to catch a break. The idea of the TOH patrols was that a team of SCU operators would track one of the enemy patrols that was hunting them. By doing so it would lead the SCU team right back to the enemy patrol base. In this case, Master Jarek was hoping that patrol base would be the main relay station.

The TOH patrols increased the risk, but the rewards could more than payoff if they located their primary objective and were able to eliminate the relay station.

They had moved out before dawn with their Stealth Generators activated and had perched themselves on a small hill overlooking an area that had previously seen some

Sith activity. It was only a few hours after dawn before the enemy patrol they were currently following was spotted.

The patrol consisted of a full platoon of over thirty Sith soldiers and they were heavily armed and equipped with additional scanners. Those additional scanners were a good indicator that the Sith knew they were facing an opponent that was skilled, and equipped, for unseen movement.

All of the SCU-11 teams had direct orders from Master Jarek to not track any patrol that was accompanied by the Sith Lord, of which this one was not. The reasoning of the order was that Master Jarek did not want to run the risk of a Force User detecting the presence of any of the members of the SCU team tracking them. Master Jarek knew first hand the capabilities of an accomplished Sith Lord and he thought it wise to not take that risk.

The amount of noise that thirty-plus Sith soldiers made while moving through the thick forest allowed the Green Team to easily remain undetected for the previous hour as they followed the slow moving patrol. They followed from the rear of the patrol and kept themselves about 75 meters from the rearmost Sith soldier. The patrol had been on what appeared to Larun, a circular path and he figured that this path was probably part of a larger cloverleaf pattern that was commonly used by infantry units. The cloverleaf was an easy way to coordinate the overall search effort to insure every location was properly explored. Larun smiled to himself as he thought it ironic that they were hunting the hunters who were hunting them.

It appeared now that the Sith patrol had stopped for a routine break and Larun had kept Green Team a safe

distance away from the Sith patrol. He positioned his team to keep the Sith just barely visible through the trees. He was making sure that every precaution was taken to remain undetected, even with the SG's on and activated.

The break wasn't long and after a few minutes Larun noticed the Sith patrol was preparing to move out and he lightly patted Vistom on the shoulder. Vistom was to the immediate right of Larun in their small security circle, and this pat indicated they were moving out. Vistom did the same pat to F'lark, who was on his right, while Larun performed the same signal to Harek located on his left. As the Sith patrol began to move out, Larun started moving as well, keeping the same pace and distance away from the patrol and taking extreme caution to keep from making any noise as well as to keep as many natural obstacles between the Green Team and the Sith platoon.

It took years of training before a team could operate to the efficiency and effectiveness as Green Team was now doing, and this training allowed them to remain all but invisible. Even in the bright light of the midday sun they were nearly impossible to see by just the casual observer. The sky was a dark blue color and there were rarely clouds in the sky during this time of the year on K-31. If it wasn't for the Galactic War, it would be considered a beautiful fall day. Unfortunately, there was a war.

Green Team continued to track the enemy patrol for an additional hour when Larun noticed that the speed of the Sith patrol was increasing. This was usually a good indicator that they were approaching home base, where ever that was. It is the nature of sentient beings to have a tendency to move more carelessly as they approached the perceived

safety of home. In this case it also meant that Larun and his team would need to be extra vigilant as there was sure to be additional enemy soldiers and detection sensors near by.

Larun did not increase the pace of their own march to match the Sith patrol, but rather he watched the direction they were heading, noted it, and proceeded at a careful and deliberate pace in that direction. Larun decided this would now be their launching point for their own recon patrol to locate the enemy perimeter and relay station. He indicated with a hand and arm signal to the other team members that this would be their Rally Point. Rally Points were common in all military forces and were used to indicate where they would meet back at if they were separated or came under attack. He then lead the way forward, paying close attention to the sights and sounds of the forest, trying his best to notice anything that was out of the ordinary.

...

Sendu Farns did not have the most glorious job in the Sith Infantry. That distinction fell to the auto-plasma gunner, sniper, Special Operations Operator, or anything else that the youth in the galaxy dreamed of becoming. Of course, he also didn't need to remind himself that he did not seem to have any sensitivity to the Force either, which became evident during his enlistment screening for the Sith military.

Sendu grew up in the urban city spending time on the holonet and tinkering with electronics and robotics. It were these hobbies and interests that did not give Sendu much time in the outdoors and away from the inside of a

building. The outdoors would have certainly better prepared him for the life as an infantryman. He was physically fit with a medium build and he was slightly taller than average. His dark hair and pale skin color, which was a result of the distance of his home planet from its sun, had a somewhat exotic look to it and he never had problems gathering the attention of the other human, and some non-human, girls.

But he did not seek the adventure and rugged lifestyle of a Sith infantryman. Rather he joined the ranks of the Sith because they not only looked to be the sure bet to win this war, but they let him play with fancy electronic gadgets that were not available to civilians. Not to mention, they even paid him to do it. Sendu liked to consider himself the top Sensor and Imaging Operator (SIO) in the Sith forces. The thing was, many of his superiors agreed with him. He seemed to have a sixth sense for anything electronic and some even likened his aptitude to that of a force user. But his powers were with things electronic, not living.

These attributes and skills had served him well in the Sith military and he had moved into a non commissioned officer rank of Corporal rather quickly. Sendu was also smart enough to understand that his rapid advancement would soon come to a halt in a military that favored direct action such as the Sith did. It was typically the combat soldiers that moved up quickly and gained notoriety and power within the Sith. Sendu had actually come to grips with that reality early in his enlistment and he was fine with it, he actually enjoyed what he was doing and he was good at it. To him, that was all he needed and wanted.

He had just arrived planetside on K-31 earlier in the

day and he was quickly escorted from the landing zone under the watchful eye of a heavily armed security team. They promptly brought him to the mobile relay station along with three of his other Sensor and Imaging Operator (SIO) companions. He currently found himself safely inside of the defensive perimeter that surrounded the mobile relay station and he was checking the initial readings from the five remotely located enhanced detection sensors he placed in Sector 3. This sector was his assignment and his responsibility. The other three SIOs had responsibility for the other three sectors which made up a complete 360 degree perimeter around the relay station.

The initial readouts from the sensors looked very good. The default settings for lifeform sensitivity seemed to be working well and the sensors were picking up multiple smaller life forms that were in the area. These lifeforms consisted mainly of the various native birds that frequented the area. There were also a few ground dwelling rodents that had appeared as well, several with six legs and forked tails. There were not many living creatures above half a meter in size on K-31 which actually would make the job for the SIOs easier.

Sendu was working on adjusting the preliminary seed values for the Neural Network algorithms in the sensors so that the Artificial Intelligence (AI) could “learn” what the native species of lifeforms “looked” like and then filter them out. As he adjusted the values the screen on the handheld display platform began to filter out the various yellow splotches that represented living creatures which cleared the screen up, revealing a clear scope with no enemy activity present.

Sendu looked up and called to a nearby soldier
“Private, can you walk 100 meters to our front? I want to check these scopes.”

The private that was assigned to provide security for Sendu was located behind and to the right of him and was perilously close to falling asleep from boredom when the question startled him back to attention.

“Um, Yes, Corporal!”

A few minutes later a green splotch appeared on the scanner that Sendu was holding, right where the Sith private was located. The Friend or Foe (FoF) sensor located in the soldier’s uniform was correctly identifying him as a friendly, which showed up as green on the scope. Any similar sized living creature that did not have a properly synched FoF sensor would show up as red on the sensor screen and would be considered an enemy.

Sendu waved his hand high above his head to catch the private’s attention and then pointed with an exaggerated motion to his right. The private understood and began walking further to his right as Sendu watched his movement on the sensor screen. Over the next twenty minutes he continued to guide the private around sector 3 to insure that all the sensors were picking up the lifeform as well as correctly identifying it. Finally when the private had covered all of the desired area, Sendu signaled for him to come back and then made a few final adjustments to the values for the detection software and then set the alarms to ‘active’.

Once that was completed he then finally moved to set up his sleeping and defensive area. Sendu was confident that whatever enemy was out there would be detected if they came into his sector.

The reports Sendu had heard and read about from the attack a few mornings ago were interesting to say the least. Sendu knew that visual cloaking devices had been around for a long time on spaceships, but all of the man size optical cloaking devices used by the Sith had not been extremely effective and were too heavy to utilize in combat. There had been no indication that the Republic had perfected the technology either. The powerful and ultra sensitive sensors that Sendu was using should have no problem picking up the enemy soldiers as they did not rely on optical queues to detect the enemy but rather they relied on thermal and LADAR (Laser Radar) detection, both of which should quickly locate even optically masked soldiers.

Sendu was not one to rule out technological breakthroughs and discoveries. As he stood there and thought about those reports and what he had read, he decided to adjust the settings one last time in the sensor panel. The new values made the sensors just a bit more sensitive than normal. Yes, Sendu knew it will set off more false alarms, but he would rather chase false alarms than die by an enemy that slipped past his sensors and slit his throat.