

Chapter 6

A Republic General was once quoted as saying “Watching a trained SCU operator is like watching the deadly Hrosma Tiger while hunting on its home world of Baskarn.” SCU operatives are masters of their element and they use every available piece of terrain to their advantage. They are nearly impossible to see from 30 meters away when they were not using their Stealth Generators. Then when they moved in the same manner but with a Stealth Generator activated, not even the bright daylight with multiple suns would help an observer with enhanced eyesight have any more luck in detecting their movement.

The four members of the SCU-11 Green Team inched their way toward their destination. All the while they were using every movement technique they could devise to remain undetected. They were crouching, crawling, and even slithering from bush to branch or from stump to crevice. Their movement was not rushed or pressured in any way, everything they did was deliberate and planned. They each knew that every move was critical and it was far more valuable to be slow and patient than it was to rush their movement and risk detection.

The four team members moved forward in a single file line, being careful to maintain at least four meters of space between each of them. Furthermore, they were paying special attention to mask their movements by using available terrain features and overhanging foliage. They were also doing all that they could to leave each touched piece of terrain the same as it was when they found it. They would do this by carefully pushing branches slowly to the

side as they slid by, and moving displaced twigs back to their original location where possible. Not only was it important to remain undetected, but they also did not want to leave any sign that they had passed through the area.

It had taken over two hours to move only 500 meters from their Rally Point where their stalk began. And their movement had become even slower the further into the stalk they went. It took them an hour to travel the next 150 meters when suddenly Larun froze in place. Larun heard the unnatural sound of the enemy patrol before he even saw them. The nine man Sith squad was on a routine patrol and were head back toward the area that they had approached from. Green Team was all frozen in place, none of them willing to move a muscle and risk disrupting some item of foliage that might give away their presence. The Sith patrol passed within about 70 meters of the members of Green Team, but in reality, they were never a serious threat. They remained motionless for another thirty-five minutes to insure the threat had passed, and then they were able to set off moving again.

Two more laboriously slow hours passed and the first setting sun was nearing the horizon. Green Team had covered another 300 meters in that two hours. Finally Larun called the team to a halt with an arm gesture, and then took a knee. Another quick signal again brought the team up in line with him, each taking a knee. The team was operating in close enough proximity to each other that the helmets were able to show enough detail using the projected stick figures that each team member was able to distinguish hand and finger signals from their Team Leader. Larun pointed to his eyes indicating he saw something. He then held up his

fingers and thumb into an “O” shape to indicate he believed he located their objective and then pointed at it with his pointer finger and thumb extended, held upside down to indicate he believed it was the enemy.

Each of the three other team members gave a nod indicating they understood and agreed with his assessment. Continuing to avoid all verbal communication, Larun pointed to F'lark and then pointed to the left and held up two fingers and then a fist to instruct F'lark he wanted him to move over to the left 20 meters. Another small nod and the Bothan slithered into the prone position and began to crawl off to the left of their position.

Larun then pointed to Harek and Vistom with two fingers, then pointed to the right with his hand held upright in a chopping type motion, and then again held up two fingers followed by a fist. Vistom and Herek headed off ever so slowly to their assigned positions on the line twenty meters to the right.

Larun himself also moved into the prone position and picked his way carefully forward another ten meters to a slight rise in the terrain that he hoped would provide a slightly better viewing point to see their objective. It took him fifteen minutes to cover the ten meters but once there, he knew it was the right decision. As he scanned in front of the rise the trees thinned out and he found himself staring at the Sith Mobile Relay Unit 250 meters to his front. They had found the prize!

Checking the map overlay in the upper portion of his visor where the data display was located, Larun was able to see that each of his other team members were in place now and had signaled they were ready for further instructions.

This was indicated by their IFF location dot turning to a brighter green color on the map display.

Larun brought his holographic recorder up to his eyes and used the magnification controls to zoom in closer to the Mobile Relay Unit and began recording the details. While recording he examined the massive tracked vehicle with its huge antenna that was easily 100 meters in diameter and pointed up toward the sky. While modern versions of MRU's had repulsorlifts to provide hover capability, this older unit still relied on mechanical tracks to move from place to place.

Larun noticed some movement at the base of the MRU and he zoomed the holo recorder in further to focus on the two Sith soldiers located there. Once Larun determined that they were indeed soldiers, it became easier for Larun to locate and see several others around the base of the MRU as well. When he scanned back to the first two soldiers, he noticed the Sith trooper on the left was holding a datapad that was distinctly non infantry in nature. The rank on his uniform identified him as a Corporal and the uniform was clean and appeared recently smoothed and pressed. Additionally he was not wearing any camouflage face paint like the lower ranking private that was standing next to him.

Right then, the Sith Corporal looked up from the datapad he had been intently studying in the same general direction where the Green Team now lay concealed. To Larun it looked as if the Sith Corporal was in serious contemplation about some task, or that his mind was somewhere else beside the forest area around them. After a brief moment it appeared that the corporal had made up his mind about something and typed furiously onto the datapad.

Once he finished typing he then placed the datapad to the side on a small table and began digging into his storage module looking for something.

Larun was about to continue his scan of the area when something else caught his eye. Just to the side of the Corporal, was a small, mostly cube shaped device of some sort, not more than half a meter tall. As Larun looked at it and then zoomed in closer using his holographic recorder, the other pieces of the device started to become visible. Realization dawned on Larun at that moment. This was a sensor expert operating a larger fixed emplacement detection grid.

A fixed emplacement grid used a whole suite of sensors with very high lifeform detection capability, but it required an expert to set one up and to operate it. Larun grinned to himself when it became apparent that the SCU raid on the amplifier had had a profound enough effect on the Sith leaders to cause them to bring in extra security measures to insure the safety of their MRU. It was always pleasing to an operator to discover their handy work had indeed been disruptive to the enemy.

Larun stopped the holo recorder and lowered the device from his eyes. He then curled his left arm up, bringing the wrist closer to his face so he could use his right hand to fold down the flap in the camouflage SG suit to expose a keypad on his left wrist. Each of the four team leaders had one of these keypads that allowed for brief one way transmissions to be typed and silently sent to the members of their team. Larun began typing the short message on the soft touch keypad and then hit the send key. The message

“BIG SENSORS - XTRM CAUTION”

was projected onto the inside portion of the visor of each of the helmets worn by the Green Team members. With a quick click of their ‘ready’ indicator they acknowledged their leaders warning. The masking capability of their Stealth Generator suits went a long way to completely masking their presence from even the more powerful sensors that Larun guessed were in place around them, but Green Team would still exercise extreme caution in their movements and would remain vigilant in their scanning routine.

The very low power scrambled message that Larun sent to his team was purposely very weak and only had a range of about 50 meters, but the power was so low and the digital bits so compressed that it prevented detection by any nearby electronic detection or sniffing devices.

The added danger of the fixed sensors in the area combined with the level of patrol activity during their insertion, prompted Larun to reject the urge to send a burst transmission to Master Jarek notifying him of their discovery. Larun knew that sending that transmission would introduce a chance of detection and triangulation of the transmission which would not bode well for their team. Instead, Larun insured he had the location properly logged and tagged on the map of his individual positioning system. He then double checked that the recording of the MRU was saved on the holo recorder and stored it away in his patrol pouch. The information would have to be sent to Master Jarek later, after the team had made a safe exfiltration away from the MRU and the enemy encampment.

Larun also contemplated locating as many of the

sensors as he could, which he was pretty sure were fairly close by to where they were now. After considering the idea, he discounted it as being too dangerous and he did not want to tempt the fate of the Force. He also knew there was the chance that the sensors had anti-tampering mechanisms that would notify the operator that something was not right. After considering all of these options, Larun decided it was best to leave the area as soon as they could, using the approaching cover of darkness to aid them during the exfiltration.

Larun looked up to the sky and figured they had about 20 minutes of daylight remaining and now was as good of a time as any to leave. Larun quickly typed another message on his wrist transmitter and hit the send button.

“EXFIL NOW- SF 324 3M”

The message indicated they were exfiltrating now, single file, with the order of march being set to 3 (Vistom) 2 (Harek) 4 (F'lark). It was assumed by SOP that Larun would lead them. The last part of the command indicated the desired spacing between them would be, 3 meters. This spacing was a bit closer than normal but Larun wanted to keep the team tight with the growing darkness in order to maintain easier control. With the quick flashes of the dots on map in his visor indicating the team had acknowledged the command, Larun slowly backed away from his location, turned away from the MRU and began the slow exfiltration process.

The start of the exfiltration away from the MRU would be done completely in the prone position. Green Team

would literally be crawling their way out of the area. After about 30 meters of movement, the team had linked back up together and the single file train of four crawling SCU operators continued forward at a Verullian land slugs pace.

The first 50 meters took the team thirty minutes to complete and it was here that they located one of the new, more powerful, fixed place sensors that Larun figured was a part of the sensor grid. The sensor was about 20 meters to the right of their path and Larun marked the location on his map and made a wider berth around the sensor.

Shortly after the encounter with the sensor and while the team was still crawling in the prone position, F'lark noticed movement from the corner of his eye during a routine scan to the rear of the formation. F'lark immediately looked a few meters to the right of the location where he thought he saw the movement and held his gaze there. He simultaneously signaled the rest of the team to come to an immediate halt by changing his ready status to emergency. This changed his color to red in the visors of all the team members and they instantly froze.

With the team halted, F'lark continued to look just to the side of where he thought the movement was. Even Bothan eyes picked up movement in darkness better when using the more sensitive parts on the outside of the pupil. To do this F'lark did not focus his eyes directly on where the target area was but rather a few meters to the side of it allowing the outside part of the pupil to pick up the movement. It took a few seconds, but F'lark's patience and knowledge paid off as he once again picked up some sort of movement in the darkness.

The helmet visors the SCU team's used had night

vision capability but it was typically not used because of the reduced depth perception and restricted field of view that it provided. An even more important reason they did not use the night vision capability at times like this was the increased light and electronic signals that it emitted. These were easier to pick up by unfriendlies using their own light amplification night vision devices or electronic detection equipment. F'lark opted to leave the night vision deactivated in the visor and instead relied on his own keen eyesight to help locate whatever it was that was moving.

The rest of the team was also disciplined enough not to push for details but to wait until the threat passed before inquiring as to what it was, extreme patience was a required virtue of all SCU operators.

Another minute passed before F'lark was able to discern what the movement was that had caught his eye, and he flashed his status indicator to "emergency" again to let the rest of the team know it was a confirmed threat. As the threat moved closer to their location, F'lark could start to make out more details and he was able to see that it was an enemy patrol that consisted of a squad of nine Sith troopers, fully armed and spread out in a tight Vee formation. Unfortunately, they continued to move closer to the team in a somewhat oblique direction.

If the enemy patrol held on their current path, F'lark could tell that they would pass closely, perhaps within 30 meters of where they were laying motionless. It did not appear that they would intercept their position, but it was close. Because F'lark gave the halt command and had detected the threat, he now assumed command of the team and he held them right where they were. In the darkness of

night the senses other than sight of most species increased sensitivity, and they all knew that the enemy patrol would more easily pick up the sounds of any movement by Green Team. F'lark knew that holding where they were was the best option to remain undetected.

By this point, the rest of team was also able to pick up the location of the enemy patrol and they had all discreetly maneuvered their rifles to aim at them as they neared. If Green Team had to, and with the element of surprise on their side, they could easily handle the small patrol, but by doing so would notify the rest of the enemy where they were. This in turn would compromise the SCU and things would get really interesting really fast. For them, this had to be avoided at all costs. So with weapons trained on the enemy, they waited, each member fearing to make the slightest movement or noise that might give their position away.

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Earlier that evening after insuring the security details were assigned and the perimeter patrols set up, Darth Cloran was not able to settle down for reasons that she did not understand. At first she spent several minutes running through her Form 5 velocities, but that too was unable to settle her thoughts and uneasy feelings. The feeling was difficult for her to identify, it did not seem as though the Force was warning her, but almost as if it was just... unsettled. After wrestling with it for some time, she elected to counter the unsettling feeling with action and she grabbed her patrol gear and set off to find the security checkpoint on

the southern tip of the perimeter.

She located the Non-Commissioned Officer, or NCO, in charge of the checkpoint and walked directly up to him and in a subdued voice that would not raise alarm asked:

“Sergeant, has anything out of the ordinary been reported tonight?”

The Sergeant had noticed her approaching and briefly glanced over at her and then again directed his attention outward into the dark. Darth Cloran appreciated the discipline of the Sergeant. He replied.

“No Darth, everything has been normal. Something bothering you?”

His discipline and vigilance warranted respect so she replied more casually than she might normally.

“Yeah, it’s hard to explain, but things just seem unsettled. Please keep a vigil, I’m going to head outside the perimeter and see what I can find. I should not be longer than 30 minutes and I have the proper security identification codes for the IFF.” She looked over at him and smiled and added “just be sure you and your men don’t blast me when I return.”

The Sergeant replied with a chuckle “No ma'am, wouldn’t think of it, we need your Lightsaber to cut through some trees in the morning”.

Darth Cloran made a note to remember the Sergeant, he had a confident ease about him and he seemed to know what he was doing. That was not always common in the lower NCO ranks. The Sergeant made a few notes in his security log and signaled Darth Cloran to proceed.

Once outside the perimeter she drew her lightsaber

and casually held it at the ready in her right hand, but did not ignite it. She then made an effort to calm her mind and focus on what the Force was telling her. There was still no clear indication or direction, so she proceeded forward. It wasn't really a conscious decision, but instead she was attempting to move toward the source of the unsettled feeling. She was about ten minutes into her patrol when she sensed and saw the approaching Sith patrol in front of her. She knew their proposed patrol path, as she set it earlier in the evening, and she was half expecting them in that location. The Force provided the confirming notification of their presence and location. She veered off toward the patrol and made a noise that somewhat sounded like a Canakal bird. The Canakal was a flying avian found on the planet Kesh and it had a distinct call that Darth Cloran had adopted as her unique identifier, all of her soldiers quickly learned the call and knew it well.

The leader of the Sith Patrol was startled when he heard the call from Darth Cloran and he brought his patrol to a halt. They took up a defensive posture facing outward and he waited for his unexpected unit commander to approach, which she did in a fairly casual manner and without delay.

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F'lark and the other members of Green Team also heard the creature call and knew instantly it was not a call from a native species on K-31 and knew something was not right. They watched closely as the patrol came to a halt and appeared to just wait, a mere 25 meters away from Green Team's position. Vistom grimaced, thinking that if they

couldn't have the luck of a Corellian, they clearly had no luck at all! The entire team was holding their collective breath, waiting. Then they each saw her, the commander they recognized from before, a Dark Lord of the Sith, and she was very close... and coming closer.

All SCU operators were accustomed to the strains of combat, they all had seen more than their fair share of combat before ever making it to a SCU. They each had the battle scars to prove it, but situations like this were almost too much to bare even for the elite SCU operators. Each of the four members of the Green Team were concentrating as hard as they could on their Force evasion techniques they had been taught and routinely practiced. The technique they utilized consisted of blanking their minds as much as possible. This was done by finding their non threatening focus thought, staying focused on that, and then remaining calm.

Their training had taught them that it was not a matter of trying to fight a Force user with their mind. Rather it was a matter of trying to avoid presenting a Force user any perceived threat. It also involved trying not to have any emotions for a Force user to sense and pick up on. The Republic military had spent a lot of credits on researching materials that could mask the presence of a sentient being from a Force user, but nothing yet had been discovered or devised that could effectively achieve this goal. The research had not been able to prove that a material existed or could be fabricated that would completely mask the presence of a living being. Even so, the SG suits that the SCU operatives used were interlaced with certain synthetic materials that had shown positive results in at least making

the mind of the youngest Jedi Knights a little bit fuzzy or confused, but most all Jedi were minimally affected by the material.

Instead, the SCU operatives relied on the intense training they received in the ninety-day Force Detection Evasion (FDE) course that all SCU and other specialized operatives were required to pass. Continued practice was also a part of the routine training for all the SCU units. All of this was done in an effort to help stay current with the latest techniques of Force Detection Evasion.

While it took all of their concentration for the Green Team members to remain undetected by the suddenly appearing Dark Lord, they were still able to hear the conversation that ensued as the Sith Lord approached the small Sith security patrol.

“Corporal, report” the Sith Lord demanded.

The Corporal quickly replied, “Good evening Darth Cloran, we were just reaching our outer perimeter now and were circling back around. We have not seen or heard anything unusual and our sensors remain clear.”

After just a short pause Darth Cloran responded “Thank you. Make sure your men remain focused, something doesn’t feel right. I’ll remain here for a bit, you and your men head on back.”

“Yes Ma'am”

At the conclusion of the brief conversation the patrol roze from their knees and moved out, slowly heading back toward the MRU.

F'lark, and the other team members, each had hoped that this encounter was over and it would signal the departure of the Sith Lord as well. But she did not follow the

others, instead, she crouched down and intensely began looking out into the darkness away from the MRU. She remained perfectly still as she seemed to just absorb her surroundings. All of the Green Team members continued to maintain their anti-detection defenses as they watched the lone figure 25 meters away.

F'lark had to focus hard on his favorite speeder bike back home on Bothan in order to avoid thinking of the possibility of attempting to put a blaster bolt between the eyes of this Sith Lord. Such thoughts like these would betray their position. Instead, F'lark focused on the performance figures of the speeder, acceleration times, top speeds, anything that did not elicit emotion within him, just the boring facts and figures.

Finally after what seemed like eons, the solitary figure stood, performed a smart about face, and headed back the way she had come, clearly perturbed that she did not find something she was looking for.