

STAR WARS FORCESHADOW

THE PREQUEL TRILOGY TO THE FANFILM
DESCENDANTS OF ORDER 66



CHASING THE LIGHT

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STAR WARS

ForceShadow

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A LONG TIME AGO IN A GALAXY FAR,
FAR AWAY...

FORCESHADOW I
Chasing the Light

19 Years before Yavin

After three years of armed conflict across the galaxy the Clone Wars have reached their final days.

A failed attack on Coruscant has left the confederacy fleet badly weakened and forced them into retreat. Meanwhile on the far-away planet of Utapau Jedi Master Obi Wan Kenobi has successfully traced and killed the evil droid leader General Grievous.

With most of its commanding leaders now lost, the Separatist Council has been forced into hiding on the lava planet of Mustafar.

Poisoned by the Dark Side of the Force, the young Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker has obeyed the orders of his new Master Darth Sideous, launching an attack on the Jedi Temple.

All over the Galaxy the Jedi are suddenly facing betrayal by the giant clone armies...

ORBIT OF CORUSCANT

Thousands of battleships hovered in the skies above Coruscant, vigilant and threatening. The dark, shadowy silhouette of the city-planet was sprinkled with the glittering lights of the largest metropolis in the galaxy, which had only recently suffered a sudden attack at the hands of the separatists. A battle of incredible dimensions had ensued, culminating in several days of bitter conflict. Face to face with a giant armada of hostile Droidships, countless Republican Star Destroyers and Star Fighters had battled their way to victory in the Clone Wars – a triumph for the Republic.

Now only the grey hulls of the huge wedge-shaped Venator-Class ships remained, encrusted with cracks and scorch marks and leaving thin trails of fuel across Coruscant's upper atmosphere. Pieces of debris traversed the ocean of desolate ships, colliding with the already fragile shells of the Cruisers.

On the angular bridge of one of the smaller Corvettes stood Jedi Padawan Nilas Dhr'thu. From the dim shadows of the emergency lighting, Nilas gazed at the destruction. The battle against the Separatists had been over for days, but the wrecks and debris would keep the Jedi and their troops busy for some time to come. Damaged Star Destroyers threatened to leak toxic exhaust gases into the atmosphere of the most densely-populated city in the galaxy.

Scores of Clone troopers and regular soldiers and a number of Jedi remained on board their dead floating ships, still awaiting rescue.

Nilas pushed back his robe with a sigh and sat down on the command chair of the Republic Corvette. The control stations around him were manned by Clones checking the ship's systems and calculating a course between the ruins and past any Cruisers that had been spared from destruction.

The technical units buzzed and a low hum emanated from the powerplant situated 5 decks below and 400 metres further towards the bridge.

»Sir? There's an incoming message from the surface.« A saluting clone trooper appeared towards Nilas' right, his left pauldron and body armour

bearing burn-marks which Nilas assumed had been caused by a sudden relay discharge during battle.

With a single elegant move Nilas rose from the command chair and stepped over to a monitor set in the wall of the bridge. After two seconds, the image of an old, bearded man emerged from the static fuzz. It was Nilas' Master.

»Padawan,« he said in an unusually sombre voice. »I sense danger«.

Behind his master Nilas could see a bank of medical instruments – the master's lifeline since the terrible injuries he had sustained three years ago, left him barely able to walk.

»Danger? From where?« Nilas knew that his curtness was inappropriate, but after all he had been through his tone no longer seemed to matter. The old man's face remained unchanged. He clearly thought the same. »...From everywhere« he said.

Nilas closed his eyes for a moment and concentrated. His senses tried to reach out into the Force but he found himself unable to focus. He doubted that there would be any further threats now that the Separatists had been defeated. Dooku was dead. And so was Grievous.

»I will be vigilant, my Master,« Nilas assured him, forcing his lips into a confident smile. The old man on the screen nodded gratefully and bade him farewell.

Nilas felt uneasy. He stepped back from the screen wondering what could possibly be worrying his master so. Usually so calm and confident, the Master did indeed seem worried. But Nilas felt no anxiety at all. Listening to his inner self, he felt nothing. Nothing but a sense of pride. Pride in his achievements on the battlefield. Pride in having saved so many lives. Nilas had survived the past - he would survive the future, too.

After a few moments staring into space, Nilas returned to reality as an unobtrusive flashing diode caught his eye. Small warning signals like this were not uncommon on a war-torn Cruiser, but something in the Force told him that this one was important. Was this what his master had felt?

»This light here,« Nilas mumbled to a passing Clone trooper. »What does it mean?« The trooper stopped.

»Irregularities in the air supply, Sir,« replied the Clone, leaning over the console. »The scanners are registering increased concentrations of Xyphenin, Nezphone and Glucas 3 in our air supply,« he added before returning to his original position.

Nilas stared at the display below the diode but was unable to understand the information. He lacked the necessary military background. »You mean these concentrations are increasing? And they're getting into our air supply?«

The Clonetrooper nodded slowly, his gaze fixed on the console. »Sir, unfortunately I cannot identify these substances exactly. But I recognise their names from training on Kamino.« He turned to one of the other soldiers who was tightening a bolt on a damaged unit at the other end of the bridge. »Twelve?« he called. The Trooper stood to attention.

»Yes Sir!« He saluted Nilas. Nilas nodded back.

»You had special training in chemistry« said the first Trooper to Twelve. »Are Xyphenin, Nezphone and Glucas 3 dangerous substances?«

Twelve answered promptly. »Highly toxic gases, Sir. Parts of a poison to which a few of us were introduced to on Kamino: Malkite Themfar. It is used in its liquid form in kaminoanian *Saber* darts, like the ones that Jango Fett apparently ...« With a sudden, harsh sweep of his hand the first Trooper stopped Twelve in his tracks.

Nilas flinched, his eyes wide open. »An assassination!«

The first clone was quick and decisive. »I will send out all the search squads immediately,« he said. Behind his dark visor his eyes seemed to look for the corporals he needed. »Sir, we will get you a Trooper helmet from the armoury at once.«

Nilas paused for a moment. »These helmets – do they protect from poison gas?«

A sinister suspicion formed in the back of the Padawan's mind, slowly mutating into a terrible truth, a truth too real and too obvious to be denied any longer. Surely the Assassins of the Confederacy could not be hiding on the ship? Had they been there for several days?

Suddenly Nilas felt a sense of horror rising up from the planet below. Something was going on down there.

The energies of hundreds of Jedi were had been activated all at once, leaving no doubt as to what had happened: they had been betrayed.

»Is everything OK, Sir?« the first Trooper enquired. A third Clone approached Twelve. The three of them were unarmed. In his singed body armour, the first Clone stood between the other two, clearly uneasy. In his mind's eye Nilas could picture his questioning look.

»Sir, you look pale even though the poison should not have come as far as the bridge yet. Should I contact the medical unit?«

»No, « Nilas said quietly. »Too many dead.«

Suddenly he was dazzled by a brilliant blue light emanating from a bright strip. A blade of searing energy sprang to life. It darted across to the dazed Clone Trooper and decapitated him in one simple, smooth cut. Dazed, Nilas thrust the blue lightsaber into the second soldier's armour. He could feel the last of the three clone troopers right behind him and stabbed him without wanting or needing to look at his target.

Looking up, he saw the remaining Clone Troopers rushing to leave the bridge.

Death and chaos raged on the planet beneath him.

CORUSCANT, JEDI TEMPLE

Darth Vader turned, his blue blade clashing against that of the attacking Jedi Padawan and discharging its energy with a faint flash. Vader pulled back his sword and thrust it forward again swiftly and smoothly, killing the Jedi in a moment. As the dead body fell to the ground, he turned to the next two Padawans who launched a last, desperate attack on him. Their emotions were clear: the Force stirred stronger than ever before, but offered neither answers nor refuge to the inexperienced Jedi.

But Vader did.

A single stroke of his sword delivered a deadly blow to the chests of the two attackers. Their faces froze as they fell to the floor. Another Jedi rushed to their rescue, but Vader leaped up. Crossing the dead bodies, he launched a devastating assault on the approaching Jedi. His startled opponent readied his sword to block Vader and launched an immediate counter-attack. But within a fraction of a second, Vader lodged the blue blade of his weapon between the Jedi's ribs.

There was a smell of burning flesh. Vader withdrew his sword and the next wave of death drained the last breaths from the Jedi's body, the searing blade cauterizing blood vessels as it sliced through them.

It was an elegant weapon. A weapon from a more civilized era.

Vader made a move from the hip to attack another figure behind him. As his deadly blue beam penetrated the stomach of another Padawan, he suddenly found himself surrounded by Jedi. He turned to level another blow and inflicted lethal injuries on every one of his attackers.

Some of them lunged towards him. Dodging their assaults, he thrust his blade into their bodies. He reached deep into the force, once a blue sea, now a black ocean, and raised his free hand to unleash a tidal wave that was to whip up billions of air molecules and send the Jedi traitors hurtling into the walls.

More and more Jedi stormed in, but Vader staved them off, savouring eve-

ry moment of his defence. With every stroke he sent another enemy trooper into the jaws of death. He fought for his defence. He fought for Padmé' s defence. Vader could have gone on forever, as none of them was an equal adversary.

Vader knew that there was only one thing he could not afford to do: he must never look them in the eye.

KASHYYYK

The Force is life - and on the forest-covered planet of Kashyyyk life was flourishing. An essential part of the wealth of flora and fauna on Kashyyyk were the indigenous Wookies, whose exceptional technologies enabled them to live a life with nature.

With no seasons to punctuate the passage of time, the giant forests on the planet's four continents seemed almost atemporal. Landmass covered almost half of its surface and provided the habitat for the most impressive species of tree in the galaxy – the Wroshyr. It was the base of all life on the planet.

Wroshyrs could reach several miles in height and live for thousands of years. In the depths of the woods they grew so enormous that new biotopes had formed in their crowns. Elaborately decorated bridges connected the Wookies' beautiful tree-top cities and at night the abundant illuminations provided a visible display of energy.

But far away, on the outskirts of the forests stood Jedi Knight Nokas Mepur, waiting in the shadows of a very small Wroshyr like the ones found on the ocean shores. It was probably just over 300 metres high, its trunk twisting upwards toward the sun while its elephantine roots protruded from the sheer rock-face onto the beach below. The longest reached almost as far as the dark blue ocean. The wide sandy beaches were populated with dead creatures. Droids.

After several weeks of deployment on Kashyyyk, the rusting droids edged across the water towards the coast, their rumbling engines propelling their heavily armed vehicles through the shallow waters as their chain wheels tore at the fine sand on the beaches. As the battledroids, wiry skeleton versions of the Neimodians were unloaded, and simultaneously left their transport position, transmitter masts and gun emplacements etched into the sand to receive orders from distant bases.

Kneeling on a ledge, Master Nokas Mepur nodded to one of the five clone

troopers. The faceless soldier went by the name of Tioman - not Nokas' idea but still easier than from having to remember hundreds of digital IDs. »Good work, Tio« said Nokas as he continued observing the occupation of the beach »We found them«.

»The Separatist landing sites are exactly where Master Yoda thought they would be,« said Tioman, his voice distorted by his helmet speaker.

Removing his comlink from his white belt, the clone pushed a button to confirm to the republican headquarters. »But we are too late. The Separatists are already preparing to attack.«

»Yes, and there are far more of them than we thought,« Nokas said quietly. »Even so, we can finish the job this time.«

»What will happen to the Great Army after we have won?«

Nokas could give Tioman no more than a standard reply.

»You Clones will help us secure peace« he said laconically.

Tioman remained silent.

»We don't have much time. Have your men ready. We need to get back.«

ORBIT OF CORUSCANT

The hasty, frenzied steps of the young Jedi Padawan Nilas Dihr'thu echoed through the corridor of the Corvette. Ahead of him Clone Troopers still under his command were fleeing. But the giant Clone Army had betrayed the Jedi and not a second passed without Nilas feeling the death of countless Jedi down on Coruscant.

Confused and almost helpless, the Jedi faced betrayal. But here on the Corvette the opposite was happening: although Jedi were probably being betrayed and eliminated across the galaxy, in this microcosm of the Corvette Nilas Dihr'thu was everything - and the Clones were absolutely nothing. Up here Good prevailed.

Summoning his strength, Nilas threw his light saber at the fleeing soldiers. Activated by the force, it cut through their white body armour like a knife through mist as distorted screams from the helmet speakers resounded through the corridor:

»Master Jedi, why.....Aaargh!...Please Sir, don't do it! Sir, please, don't.....Aaargh! No !!«

Nilas whirled through their ranks, thrusting his sword in all directions and drawing on the Force to hold back any Clone that attempted to flee.

»Sir, I'm begging you, your order.....No, you can't do.....«

He wanted them to stop.

»Please! You're making a mistake....you.....Aaargh!«

STOP!

They had to be still. Had they continued, Nilas might have hesitated and caused the death of many Jedi in the longer term. Yes. At all costs they had to be still. And there was only one way to make that happen. Nilas moving at ever-increasing speed to slay one Clone after the other. His human mind and figure seemed to transform into the image of a demon engulfed by the

blue fire of his light-saber. When his scorching blade burned through the last bridge crew member the voices were silenced. Nilas' scream tore his soul from his body in a desperate attempt to drown out the echoes in his head. With his eyes wide open, Nilas pressed his hands against his head. He seemed to be using the Force to control his thoughts in the same way he might control a stone.

»This was never a decision,« he said, »because I never had a choice.« Nilas had only one option. There had never been any alternative – not even that of refusing. Images of dismembered Clone corpses forced their way into his consciousness. None of the Clones on the bridge had been armed. Not a single one of them. Nor had they understood Nilas Dühr-thu's actions. Their perfidious brothers had not informed the crew on the bridge about the assassination attempt. Nilas knew that a number of other Padawans would have hesitated to kill their former allies, most of all because they would not have known of any treachery. But Nilas was better than that. He knew that now. If the Jedi were to die, the galaxy would die with them. So he clearly had no choice. No mercy, no hesitation. Those were his last thoughts before he sank into a battle trance. Forging a deep bond with the Force, he stormed into the front line of heavily armed clone troopers awaiting him behind the next door.

KASHYYYYK

An army of dead droids moved through the green paradise, their servo-motors buzzing. Chain wheels carried their elongated armoured bodies forward quickly, while the battle droids struggled to cross the thicket and uneven ground. Although they had a fair number of movement algorithms, the droids still lacked the programs needed to check for holes in the ground or negotiate tree roots.

Behind an enormous tree close to the path of the robot army Jedi Master Nokas Mepur and five Clone Troopers lay in wait. By subjecting the droids to the Force, Nokas had managed to confuse some of them and hoped to cause some of them to fail.

He tried to conceal his squad's presence. Glancing at Tiomaan, who was hiding against the tree, he said, »We need to find another way.«

»Today is a good day to fight, Sir,« came Tiomaan's prompt reply.

»I knew you'd say that,« Nokas smiled. The Mandalorian heritage had combined with the drills of Jango Fett's training team to produce an army whose fearlessness he sometimes admired.

The Jedi had to control their feelings. For the Clones it was easier: they simply didn't have that many.

'Whose life is richer?' asked the voice of Nokas' master. Badly injured, the master lay on the floor of the Jedi Temple on Coruscant. He had only just survived his previous injuries, which he had sustained on Geonosis three years ago. Three years? Was that all? To Nokas it felt more like decades.

»We'll not attack this time, Tioman,« the Jedi Master said, tearing himself away from the thoughts that coursed through his mind. »This time there is a different battle waiting for us.«

The Clone nodded. »I suggest you advance to the assembly point. I'll walk behind to cover you from the rear.«

»Fine. See you at the beach then,« said Nokas, nodding back at the Clone. He stepped out to the forest trail. It was not far to the republican landing zone and Nokas could already feel the immense energy that emanated from Master Yoda . He set off followed by four of the Clones while the fifth, Tioman, stayed behind as the rearguard.

CORUSCANT, JEDI TEMPLE

Anakin Skywalker stood in the middle of the Jedi Council chamber looking for Darth Vader. But except for himself, the place was completely empty. Gone was the confident, mighty demon – the one who might have killed even his friends to save Anakin’s only love. Anakin stood there trembling. He called Vader’s name, desperate to hand control back to the invincible warrior. His soul screamed into the empty the Council chamber, imploring for the Sith Lord to have been more than just an illusion, pleading for it not to have been him who had just killed those children. At his feet lay the dead Younglings, none of them older than twelve. There were no signs of blood, but Anakin’s blue sword had left gashes in their robes. Their eyes and mouths were closed. They had been taken away into a world of sleep from which they would never return. Anakin fell to his knees staring at the closed eyes of a small girl. Slowly came the realization that those eyes would never open again. With tears in his eyes and bent over on his hands and knees he dragged himself into the middle of the chamber. Here, between the twelve seats of the Jedi Council, sat Anakin Skywalker, the most powerful Jedi of his time. He caught sight of another child – this time a single boy who had hidden behind one of the Council seats. Aged about ten, the boy had short blonde hair and was the only youngling to have his eyes open. Anakin stared at him and suddenly felt the pain of a million needles entering his body: the boy lay on the exact spot where he himself had stood thirteen years ago at the age of ten – probably the first and last time he had not lied to the Jedi Council.

»How do you feel?« Yoda had asked him. Anakin had replied with childlike honesty, »Cold, Sir.«

Back then he had felt something reaching for him – just as it was doing right now. In the emptiness of the Council Chamber the dark side of the Force came to life, plunging its dark claw deep into Anakin’s heart. It had been lurking here for countless generations causing the freezing cold that he had felt back then. It had given Darth Vader the power to kill Jedi, Padawans

and even children ... and all to save Padmé – and to save Anakin's child.

Padmé ... Haunted by memories of Padme, Anakin suddenly opened his eyes. He focused his mind on the strong, mighty figure that should be Anakin Skywalker and remembered what he was supposed to be – Padme's protector. Her only protector. The only guardian she had in the galaxy. He alone stood between her and the ubiquitous evil that had decided she must die. He and only he had the power to save her. That ubiquitous evil was Darth Vader. In his mind Anakin, the fallen Jedi, opened his arms wide in search of the fountain of this evil which seemed to be concealed in the heart of the Council Chamber. He finally understood why he was here. As top chancellor, Palpatine had not only sent him to kill the traitors. No, Palpatine had known about the dark presence in the Chamber which had been neutralized for centuries by the light of the Jedi. Could it have been Master Yoda himself who had realized that the only hide-out for the mask was the centre of the Council circle? The power that could save Padmé lay beneath Anakin. Still on his knees Anakin pulled the light saber from his belt. He ignited the blue blade and burned a second circle into the centre of the chamber floor. Sparks rained down as he broke the floor open and burned it up. A swathe of thick black smoke rose up, bringing tears to Anakin's eyes.

With a sudden flash the sword's blue beam was extinguished. Not until the smoke had cleared did Anakin realize what had happened. The blade of his light saber had hit Cortosis core.

With a dark smile Darth Vader warned him. »You underestimate my powers.«

Anakin put away his sword which had been rendered useless for a while, overloaded by the contact with the Cortosis layer. He rose, allowing the tingling darkness to run through his veins, then directing its flow to his hands. He spread his hands and directed them at the opening in the floor. Then, with a single upward move as though he might send a fight into space, he broke through the Cortosis layer. At his feet, concealed in the darkness of the

secret chamber, was a snow-white mask.

KASHYYYYK

Jedi Master Nokas Mepur was struck by a wave caused by an icy cold stone hitting the ocean of the Force and churning up its smooth surface. In the distance he could see the huge waves gathering as they made their way towards where he was standing. They seemed to be coming from.....Coruscant? Nokas stood still. He could no longer hear the distant battle, nor could he sense any of the flora and fauna that flourished in the jungle around him. He summoned his remaining powers of concentration – all the strength he had after three long years of war. The four Clones surrounded him in standard formation to protect their commander.

Alerted by a dull signal, Nokas reached into the inside pocket of his Jedi robe and pulled out a holo-comlink. A blue cast image of Jedi Master Yoda appeared on the small projector disc.

»Master Yoda«, Nokas said, making an effort to keep his voice calm. »We have located several Separatist landing points. Their reinforcements are more numerous than expected. They may launch a second attack even before we...« Yoda was suddenly interrupted.

»Master Nokas!« Yoda cried, sounding unusually troubled. A shiver went down Nokas' spine. »Not the only danger for you the seperatists are. Turned against the Jedi the Clonewarriors. Immediately leave this planet you must.«

»What...? Why...?«, Nokas' eyes widened as these nightmarish words penetrated his thoughts. Suddenly the connection interrupted and all that remained was a three-dimensional blue glint. »Master Yoda!«

Nokas quickly turned around. The four Clones were still in protective formation by now pointed their laser-guns at him.

By all Sith...

Hell broke loose and Nokas Mepur closed his eyes.

CORUSCANT, JEDI TEMPLE

Darth Vader examined the white mask, holding it before his face in both hands. He stopped short of putting it on to his face, probably for fear of it might stick to his skin like a Naji predator fish in the distant world of Sartinaynian. It was shaped like the even front of a skull without a jaw. Split down the middle, the mask was held together only by a black ruby on the forehead. A black hole took the place of the nose, gaping like the eye sockets from which came two reddish stripes. The vessel seemed fragile, and yet an enormous presence raged inside it. He felt an incredible urge – for power.

»Put the mask away before it's too late, boy.« The silence of the Council Chamber was broken by the voice of an old man. Vader instinctively pressed the snow-white artifact up against his chest. »It belongs to a Sith Lord named Darth Nihilus.«

Vader turned. He scowled at the man, now fearless in the face of his victim. »You mean he *owns* it? The only remaining Sith are myself and Lord Sideous,« he replied, seizing his lightsabre in his sweaty grip. »The rest of the old Sith are dead.«

»Do you not know that the Sith can conquer death?« warned the old man as he stepped through the door into the entry area of the council circle. His stooping figures seemed even more ailing than Yoda's. His old, worn-out Jedi robe looked as though he had thrown it on in haste. »The Sith are more powerful than anything else that of the galactic history.« He mocked him with an evil smile.

Vader realized that using his sword against the Cortosis layer had weakened it more severely than he had anticipated. Rage distorted his face. He withdrew his useless weapon and covered it with his robe, along with the mask of Darth Nihilus.

The old man smiled. »Just as they cheat us, the light and the whole of life, so the Sith cheat death.« He stepped closer. »But they are not prolonging

life, they are prolonging death.« Suddenly the old Jedi lifted his head and responded to Vader's look with a force that seemed to come from worlds far beyond dark and light.

Vader tried ignore words. He prepared to fight.

»Wouldn't that be the right thing for you, Sith-Child?« the old man stood just two meters away from him. »A slow death in the shadow of a mask?«

»I know you...« Vader hissed. He almost exchanged his invincibility for the ability to speak. »You spent the whole war in the infirmary...«

»Geonosis came at a price,« the old man replied, growing weaker with every word he spoke. »Your rescue came at a price. So did that of Senator Amidala. And so did that of your master.«

Vader let the murmur of dark force and the adrenalin in his blood grow stronger and stronger, desperately hoping it would drown out the old man's words.

Driven by anger and a hint of disbelief Vader slowly moved his lips »Old man, how can you laugh when hundreds of your perfidious friends are dying?«

Vader's aged adversary gave an almost toothless grin. »The Sith prolong their lives« he said quietly, » but the Jedi have several lives. You are just denying that you will have to face it some day. But when you reach my age, child, you will see death as a doorway into another world.«

Vader did not understand. »Do the other Jedi mean nothing to you?« he cried. »Your friends? Your Padawans?«

The old man's grin finally dropped. »My fifth Padawan, Nilas Dirthu, has been forced to spend the last three years in the temple while his friends headed off, never to return. Now he is up in space fighting for his life.« The old man lowered his head again slightly. »My fourth Padawan, Nokas Mepur, is on Kashyyyk at the moment. I am never going to see either of them again. Not in this world«

He whispered. »What do you think, son... is Nokas ok?«

Anakin said nothing.

»When my Padawans suffer«, I suffer with them. »But the force will unite us.«

Vader suddenly found himself in mid-air. He was in the middle of a leap – a thunderous attack, ready to fight the truth.

KASHIYYYYK

In the darkness of the galaxy conflagration of the force awoke in the midst of the jungle wilderness. Nokas Mepur span through the air at speeds so great they were imperceptible both to the human eye and to the human imagination. The blade of his sword danced and turned, blurring into a wall of colour and flowing around him like a harmonic masterpiece of light. It smashed the four clone soldiers' blastershots back into the darkness of the jungle. Nokas knew he wouldn't be able to fight like that for ever. He suddenly dropped to the ground, his robe trailing behind him riddled with holes from a series of deadly laser blasts. Below the clones' line of fire Nokas pushed forward his left hand. The pressure between the layers of air emitted a boom. A shockwave whipped up the sandy ground at lightning speed. Leaves fluttered through the air the soldiers standing some four metres away fell as though hit by a mighty fist. Half a second later the Clone dashed against one of the trees, leaving green and brown marks as his camouflage armour slipped down its massive trunk. Nokas had long been on his feet again and set off another wave of shots, but still the three remaining clones were not out of action. He could have returned their shots but that would have been deadly. These men had fought beside him for months, their brothers had fought beside him for three years. Nokas had seen hundreds of clones sent to their deaths on his command. Once an entire troop had sacrificed themselves for his escape. What was going on here? What would he have to do to make this stop?

Nokas banished his emotions and tried to sink into force, its turbulent currents guiding him. His eyes closed, Nokas lunged forward his lightsaber ... and speared the ground in front of him.

He let the power of the force run through him. He directed its energy through the handle into the blade and finally into the soil. Like all other Jedi, Nokas too had spent months working with the force in a concentrated effort to construct his lightsabre. Each of its countless constituents had been selected by Nokas himself, and from the billions of crystals in the ice world

of Illum he had chosen the only perfect one. He knew his sword like no one else. In battle it was almost part of himself. And in this moment he *was* the lightsaber.

Bonded with the totality of life and existence that surrounded him, the Jedi Knight Nokas Mepur sent a powerful surge of the Force through the blade of his lightsabre and into the ground. Its tidal wave swept across all three clones. In this heightened state Nokas could feel their agony in his own body. He sensed the air being drawn out of their lungs and felt their bodies fight the sudden power of the surge that hurled them through the air. Finally, they fell helplessly to the ground. One of the clones still held on to his weapon. He tried to raise himself to take another shot at Nokas. But Nokas suddenly appeared before him and ended the clone's life by pushing his blade into his back. Nokas pulled the sword back out in time to ward off a shot to his back half a moment later. Nokas took a giant leap. Spinning in the air, he discarded the burned remains of his robe and thrust the blade of his sword into the shoulder of his attacked as he landed. Gasping, he tried to free himself from the force as the physical anguish of the man rained down on him like a thousand red-hot needles. His eyes were moist. He closed them and blocked out everything that was going on around him. Maybe that was Nokas' mistake.

The third clone had survived the blast in better condition. He righted his upper body, picked up his gun from amongst the long grass and pulled the trigger. Nokas turned on his heels, only to feel a burning energy in his right shoulder. A shot whisked past his right ear and went into his tunic. As if time had slowed down he held up his lightsabre and mobilized all his remaining strength. But the laws of nature were not on his side. They hampered his every move, eventually foiling his attempt to achieve the impossible. When the Jedi would die was to be determined by the mind of the remaining soldier. Nervous signals began to move from the clone's brain and exit the skull... when suddenly an explosion of fire severed his head. Just a few metres away

from Nokas Mepur stood another clone soldier in camouflage, his smoking blaster raised and ready to fire. Number CT-0327 stood there in the wilderness. It was Tioman. He gazed at the Jedi for a moment through the black visor of his helmet before lowering his weapon, but did not approach. Nokas was still stunned by the clones' betrayal a moment ago.

»Are you still on my side?« he gasped.

»Yes General.«

A terrible thought crossed Nokas' mind. What if every clone in the galaxy had....No! That could not be.

»Why didn't you...« Nokas felt his voice shaking from anxiety, exhaustion and fear. What if all clones, all over the galaxy had.... No! That could not have happened.

»Why didn't you follow the order like your brothers...?« Nokas asked.

Tioman remained motionless amongst the shadows of the trees. »I don't know.«

»I should have sense their betrayal...« Nokas whispered, realizing suddenly what the force waves from Coruscant had meant. He could feel them coming from every direction, turning the ocean into a chaos of clashing waves.

»That was no betrayal,« said Tioman quietly. »Clone armies across the galaxy followed a single order. Order 66.«

Nokas folded his hands and pressed them against his lips, shaking. »Yes, a murder....we Jedi would have felt that.... murderous thoughts, evil intentions, anything.... but not this. Because to your brothers it was an order like any other. One of many...«

Tioman slowly approached the defeated Jedi. »I should have followed the order too.« For a moment he seemed to bend under a crushing weight that was upon him. »I want to follow the order,« he said quietly, »but I don't want to kill you.«

Nokas had a sudden realization. »They will execute you for insubordina-

tion,« he said. He sent his senses out into the harmonic jungle in search of clone patrols.

»Not if I report that you have been killed.«

»You mean you want to lie to your commanding officers?«

Tioman suddenly removed his helmet to let Nokas Mepur look directly into his brown eyes. »The republic trained us as an army of traitors. Maybe that was their mistake.«

CORUSCANT, JEDI TEMPLE

Darth Vader raised his arm to strike a blow and sent his right fist crashing into the old man. The latter had already prepared to strike with his left arm. Vader's assault met with a barrier of force energy and a blast surged through the air. It was as though he had detonated an invisible bomb. Vader's right arm was thrown back and his entire body was off balance. Outwardly enraged, inwardly speechless, the former Jedi stared at the old man whose aged face seemed more wrinkled than before. Vader realized that this hunched figure used the force with such intensity that it powered yet harmed his own body. He also came to realize how the old man had managed to leave the infirmary after three years of confinement. He moved his effete limbs without using any muscles – instead he used the force, as though moving a stone through the air. The short moment ended and the two opponents moved at the same time. Closing his eyes, the old man leapt into the air with a flash and spiraled in Vader's direction, his robe flapping behind him. Vader did not move. He stood still as a storm of wind suddenly blast through the chamber. Before he could turn to face the old man he heard the shattering of glass. In a blink of an eye Vader realised what had happened. The old Jedi master had jumped through the panorama window opposite the entrance to the chamber using the force to smash the glass. A shockwave hit the other four windows, destroying them simultaneously. Vader had cut to the chase. Nobody - but nobody - would get away with insulting him.

Beyond fear or reason Anakin threw himself through empty window frame.

For a brief moment he could see his opponent's new position: he was about half a dozen meters below him, already in free fall. Vader used the force to determine his own ballistic trajectory. Catching up with his victim, he fell into the depths like a steel plate. Only a lightsaber's blade-length away from the blue shimmering outer wall of the tower he followed the old man. The base of the temple awaited them some 250 meters down but was still nowhere near close enough to matter to Vader. No - Vader was busy savouring every

moment of the chase. His long hair billowed like fire and his dark robe enveloped his falling body. The night air punished him with spears of ice as he cut through it in a free fall. This chase was not his first: as a Padawan he had leapt into the canyons of Coruscant in pursuit of Zam Wessel, the bounty hunter; he had dueled with Asajj Ventress in treetops of Yavin IV; and only a short time ago he had dived down a turbolift shaft on Grievous' flagship the *Invisible Hand*. But suddenly ...for one moment.... Anakin Skywalker felt that this was different. It was terribly cold. He was in a faraway galaxy, a long, long way from the warmth and comfort of home. Suddenly Vader received a kick in the face. His descent slowed down and he lost control. He thrust his fist against the old man's forehead. A cracking sounded and the force howled. Summoning his strength Vader moved over to the wall of the tower and clung to it like an insect. The old man had fallen another two or three meters and drew on the force to cling to the icy facade. Vader could see clearly the man's old, worn body had paid a high price for his immense use of the force. It was too shattered to survive. Vader could have left him; he would have been dead in a few hours anyway. But Vader refused to do him the favor.

He dropped down and clung to the wall again beside the old man. Holding on with both hands he swung out his left leg and rammed it into the left side of his opponent's torso. The old man's bones broke and the air was expelled from his lungs. But still the old man hung on. Taking his left hand off the wall he prepared to strike back, but Vader thwarted his attack, catching the old man's fist with his wounded fingers. The two men hung on the outer wall just a meter apart, their backs to the night sky. 150 meters below fires were blazing. The old man's fist was clasped in Vader's hand, the only link between them, when suddenly Vader felt something plain and cold between the fingers of the old man. The blazing, bright, emerald green blade of a lightsaber came to life right in front of his face. With a gasp Vader closed his eyes to shield them from the bright light, pressing the old man's fist against the wall with all his might. The slightest turn of his hand would cut Vader's skull in two. The sheer heat of the blade brought beads of sweat to Vader's brow as

the smell of singed hair entered his nose. He withdrew his senses and became oblivious to his enemy. Closing his eyes, Vader even tried to blot out his vision. The universe consisted of nothing but his two hands - one clutching at the wall, the other clasping the old man's fist with the deadly stream of energy. Vader let himself fall. The force concentrated in his left hand, shattering the fist that was in it. The Jedi master screamed out and followed him on his long, sheer drop. With his remaining hand he pulled the handle of the sword towards him. Vader was directly beside him. Together they plunged into the depths. The old man's unceasing scream grew louder and louder, and less and less human, turning into the howl of two voices. Darth Vader let his anger run wild. The handle of his light saber slid out of one of the pockets in his robe. He seized it and stuck out with every fibre of his body. The old man parried, his sword in his left, unharmed hand. Their blades met with a piercing scream and released their deadly energies as the two fighters descended faster and faster towards certain doom. Vader back pulled his sword and lunged against his opponent's weapon, harder and harder, again and again.

Unable to see anything but flashes and sparks, Vader had to rely purely on the force.

»Do you know what this tower stands for?« the old man screamed, jabbing at the outer wall with his blade. Sparks sprayed out hitting Vader, who was above him, in the face. »Well? Do you know? Do you know what every tower of the temple stands for?«

Stunned by the old man's ingenuity, Vader took his sword and plunged it into the wall, leaving an immediate glowing line of melted minerals. His world seemed to consist of nothing but fire and the unrelenting wind beat him further into the depths.

»These towers stand for the way of a Jedi,« the old man shouted, slowing in his descent »They stand for the rise into the light.«

»DIE, I TELL YOU! DIE!!« hollered Vader with a harshness that caused him physical pain.

The galaxy exploded beneath them. The smooth wall of the tower burst open, sending infernal flames and burning bodies hurtling into the night. Hit by the shock wave, Vader and the old man lost their grip. The world tumbled and tossed in the chaos of its own heat and debris. Finally Vader's blade gashed the old man's throat. The hook on Vader's rope caught and Vader was able to heave himself into the gap in the outer wall. Somehow he had survived.

ORBIT OF CORUSCANT

Padawan Nilas Dibr'ru ran onto the bridge of the small corvette gasping for breath. Just minutes ago he had terminated the lives of the clones who had been trying to contaminate the air supply of the ship with toxic gas. Two other Padawans turned to him, one of them a young Mon Calamari who gazed only briefly on Nilas, the other an old friend, Sweitt Cheev, one green-skinned amphibious Vurk.

»I cannot find Jilé with these sensors,« the Mon Calamari called hastily. Nilas struggled to understand her accent. The Padawan stood at a computer console busily typing in commands.

Nilas stepped into the middle of the bridge. »Jilé is dead« he said quietly. »There's only us left now.«

The Mon Calamari slowly turned around. Her big, sad eyes seemed to convey a strength of emotion unlike anything Nilas had ever seen before in a non-human face.

»What about the clones?« she asked.

»Also dead. All of them,« Nilas responded as he sat on the commando chair of the small bridge.

»Hardly any Jedi have survived down on the surface...« Sweitt Cheev started hesitantly.

»I know,« said Nilas. »My master also died just a few moments ago.« Nilas had sensed the deaths of many Jedi and followed them in his mind. That was the only way he could ensure their deaths would be properly avenged.

Sweitt's voice roused Nilas from his thoughts. »Nilas,« he said, »one of the Venator ships has changed course and is heading right for us!« The Vurk Jedi crossed the navigational control panel with his six green fingers. Behind the bridge's panorama window Nilas could make out the silhouette of the approaching battleship. Big Venator-class spacecraft had been in action since the second year of the Clone Wars and were thought by many to be the

successors of the Acclamator ships. But in fact they were nothing but troopships and material carriers with solid firepower. They were based on a concept that dated from long before the war. The Venator-class ships, however, had been created especially for the gigantic duels in deep in outer space. Even though they still bore huge red marks as a sign of their diplomatic immunity, they were the first fully grown representatives of a new kind:the Star-Destroyers.

»Without a crew our Corvette will barely reach half its combat capacity,« said the Mon Calamari, her voice still trembling. »The three of us are hardly enough to man all the important consoles.«

The Venator behind the big screen was approaching at speed. Nilas thought he could see more of them moving towards the Corvette. Those many thousands of battleships were all under clone command now.

»Three Jedi against an entire Star-Destroyer«, Sweit commented.

Nilas got up and strode briskly to one of the weapon control stations. Thoughts racing through his mind as he desperately searched for a way out. They were in the upper layers of Coruscant's atmosphere with most of the republican fleet above them. One of the ships was already on course for attack.

»Nilas!« cried the Mon Calamari clinging to both of the grips on the console. »It's coming closer. We won't survive close combat with a Star Destroyer for long!«

»Longer than we would if we fought the air defense blasters below us,« Nilas replied. He pointed at the sensor image of the approaching battleship. »The Venator's bow is ripped open.«

If there was any such thing as luck, the force had given them at least a tiny piece of it. A whole quarter of the Venator's wedge-shaped fuselage was missing, which looked like spearhead, that had broken off in the short range sensor image. Outside the window the approaching Star Destroyer was now so close that Nilas could see the rows of torn open decks.

»We can forget about escaping into hyperspace,« said Nilas, summarizing his analysis of the situation. »They only sent a single damaged ship to get us, but if we get too close to the rest of the fleet they will blow us out of the atmosphere within seconds.«

He charged all of the Corvette's remaining weapons. Unfortunately the arsenal of their own Marauder-class ship was not too impressive: there were eight turbo-lasers, these were all directed forward and Nilas could only control only half of them. The other four were operated from stations directly at the cannons... Nilas had just killed their crews some minutes ago. In addition to the main turbo-lasers there were only two secondary rearward guns.

»Turning maneuver, we'll backdrop down to the planet.«, Nilas ordered not wasting any time on sorting an authority question. As Padawans they were equal, but the Jedi council had given him the commando over the ship.

A push went through the ship and the Star Destroyer outside the window seemed to move upwards, while Coruscant's surface filled most of the vision field.

»I set the impulse to maximum.« the Mon Calamari announced.

»Rear shields as well!« Sweitt added and pulled a few switches on his console. »Nilas, should I direct more energy to the rear lasers?« A sudden tremor hit the bridge and made the lights flicker for a second. At the same time Nilas felt strong forces starting to affect him. The Corvette was in the middle of a powerdive towards the surface.

»Shield grid 42 has failed.« was Sweitt's damage report, »another hit in that area and the hull will break.«

»They're gonna shoot us down even before we get to the cities air defense.« the Mon Calmari shouted.

»Head for sector 27«, Nilas commanded. »Sweitt, I don't need any more energy for the lasers.«

Over a keyboard he opened fire on the Star Destroyer. »We cannot harm

them anyway. We just don't want to raise their suspicion.«

The green skinned Jedi briefly turned around, »Raise their suspicion?«

Nilas nodded, »Yes, suspicion !!«

A sudden blast sounded in the distance and in the same moment the three Padawans were slammed against their consoles. The Mon Calamari could not break her fall and hit the console with her head. The navigational display burst and the broken parts cut her skin. In the temporary darkness Nilas thought he saw green blood.

»We're holed.«, Sweitt shouted against the noise. Obviously a chain reaction was sweeping through several aggregates. Nilas bit his lips. While the reddish light came back to life the Mon Calamari remained motionless.

»One more hit like that and that's it...!« Sweitt screamed into the commencing silence. At the same time they had passed the wall of clouds and the nightly city appeared before them.

SPACE NEAR KASHYYYK

Emotionless the Twi'Lek Bib Durka stared at the republican fleet that was circling the planet Kashyyyk in the far distance. He counted at least eight bigger ships of the Venator-class. In addition to them there were several smaller ships of which most could barely be seen. Durka leaned back. His auto-pilot steered the small ship to the left leading it to the other side of the planet, away from the fleet. Trouble with the republic was to be avoided when you only were a small-time criminal and even the weakest ships of the republican armada were an invincible opponent. The republic had to fight the biggest part of the war on many fronts, so that the illegal transport of food and weapons had flourished. Thousands of smugglers had supplied nervous rulers of planets with military equipment and desperate doctors with medicine and provisions. In the process they had not cared about affiliation of the planet or about price fairness. Bib Durka however went away empty handed. His employer, Jabba the Hut, had kept him on a short leash.

Durka had been charged with errands. Most of the already small profits he had been forced to hand over to the rising crime lord.

Therefore he was left with a borrowed ship and almost out of money. Obviously bored he was in the middle of a simple recon assignment. Now that the republic's victory was only a question of time, Jabba wanted him to find out which systems were still in a barely guarded grey area. Kashyyyk was not one of them. The republic was still continuing their battle against the separatists on the surface of the forest planet. Jabba's organization had supported the droids and the splinter group of the Trandoshans with thermal detonators and microchargers. Bib Durka's colleagues had earned many credits like that. Fiercely he clenched his blue-skinned fists at the thought of it. In his younger days he had tried to find his luck in an honest way. To no avail. He had went to Jabba and had planned to climb the ladder in the crime lords organization. The galaxy seemed to enjoy watching him suffer.

The angry look on his face turned into an interested smile when he spotted three hyperspace jump rings in the distance. He knew that these rings alone enabled the Jedi's starfighters to fly faster than lightspeed. For a moment he thought about shooting all three of them into pieces. But seconds later a sudden inspiration forced him to stop.

OK then, he thought, all or nothing.

CORUSCANT, JEDI TEMPLE

While cold wind was relentlessly blowing through the yawning hole behind him into the temple corridor, Darth Vader was blandly standing there catching his breath. His ears were numb, his face reddened.

And he felt unusually empty. He had killed Count Dooku to finally end the Clone Wars. He had killed Master Windu to use Palpatines knowledge to rescue Padme. But that old man had died only because Darth Vader wanted it. For himself. And the worst was that the desired effect failed to appear. Vaders pride still was not back. His opponent had only been a Jedi. Fatally ill for the last three years. And despite that he had been powerful enough to insult Vader, to challenge him and push him to his limits. He needed to do something. He needed to somehow cause more harm to him, more and more until everything was revenged. But how do you harm a dead man? Find his body and...? No. Not enough. Vader held his breath. He took the comlink from his belt.

»Appo?« he asked quietly, aware that he was talking directly to the helmet speaker of clone soldier number CC-119. »I want two of the Jedi traitors alive: a Padawan called Nilas Dibr' thu, he is in one of the ships over Coruscant; and a Jedi called Nokas Mepur, stationed on Kashyyyk. Bring both to me.«

After he had given the order he began to ask himself why the old man had given away where his former pupils could be found. Had the old man really expected that Vader would not survive the fight? Irrelevant.

Vader would slowly execute them both. And he would enjoy it.

KASHYYYK

Jedi-Master Yoda seemed evanescent compared to the Wookie Chewbacca, as he was not much taller than the grass stalks around them. And it stroke Nokas Mepur that the green-skinned being had aged a lot more in the last hours than it had in the 3 decades that had passed since Nokas' time as a youngling. Those days had faded into the distance, burned in the fires of a galaxy-wide Jedi-massacre that now even his former master had fallen victim to.

»Master«, he said almost whispering the words after he kneeled down to Yoda. »How could all this happen?«

Yoda slowly shook his head »Nokas, very lucky you were.« , he sounded as if every word he spoke was agony to him. »Many other Jedi die today they had. But split up for now we must, to remain undetected. Back to the temple I must travel. Fly to Polis Massa. To wait for me there I ask you to.«

Chewbacca gave a sad howl. Eventually he took Yoda on his shoulder. Nokas watched them leave, asking himself if he would ever see Yoda again. Slowly he turned around and cut his way through the high grass towards his jedi starfighter. After an assignment a few days ago the small ship had remained behind outside the base camp. Coincidence? Nokas climbed in and as the transparent cockpit-roof closed over him he took some comfort in the fact that at least the force itself still existed.

AIRSPACE OVER CORUSCANT

Behind the bridge's panorama screen the bow heat shield flared up. Like edged stalagmites the skyscrapers of Galactic City were sticking high up into the sky. Nilas barely took notice as he carefully moved the Mon Calamari's dead body from the chair and onto the floor. For a second he stared at the interactive display. It was broken and almost unreadable where the dead Padawan had hit it with her head. In the back of his head he condemned it.

»We need to redirect navigation controls to a different console.« he explained hastily. Sweitt, with his head above the energy controls gave him a tense look »I know. But I don't know how.«

Nilas closed his eyes »Me neither.«

Alright, no navigation controls, he thought BanthaPooDoo!!!

The sound of an electrical discharge indicated that the remains of the protective energy shield had just been hit by a graze shot of the pursuing Venator ship. In his desperation he briefly observed the whole bridge, with his eyes jumping from one burned out display to the next. The bow of the Venator was ripped open but that wouldn't help them anymore now. He had come up with a plan but without navigation controls they couldn't perform the maneuver.

»We won't get away from here.« Sweitt said. »Thanks to the blockade we're stuck on Coruscant. We might as well sacrifice the ship.« Nilas looked at him in disbelief. He held on to the backrest of his seat when the force warned him about the next impact of enemy fire.

Suddenly a thought formed at the edge of his mind; a thought that quickly turned into something useful: A last resort!!

»The course seems right«, he suddenly shouted out. His eyes were glued to the Panorama screen in front of him. »Head directly for one of the air defense cannons!«

»If we get out of the way on time,« Sweitt said slowly, » then the shot will

hit the Venator. But this ship wasn't able for a maneuver like that in her best days.«

Nilas shook his head, rushed over to Sweitt's console and started entering the last commands this Corvette would ever receive. With shining eyes he looked at Sweitt and said »Her best times start right now!!!«

SPACE NEAR KASHYYYK

Nokas Mepur accelerated his wedge-shaped starfighter into space. A look onto the sensor display of his narrow cockpit confirmed that there was enough space between him and the republican fleet so they might not detect him. He gritted his teeth and concentrated on heading towards the coordinates where he would find the hyperspace rings according to his board computer. When he approached the coordinates he hesitated. There was only one single ring there and around it a fast spreading cloud of debris. Obviously someone had wanted to destroy the rings and Nokas had scared him away before the attacker could finish his work. The Jedi Knight now noticed a small ship on his display, floating in space. He couldn't make out the exact classification but in this moment Nokas was just glad he had arrived on time.

He performed a precise docking maneuver by placing the fighter exactly in the middle of the ring. The docking clamps of the starfighter and the ring reacted and connected them with each other. Impulse and computer systems were finetuned and synchronized. All of a sudden a warning signal sounded: the fleet of the republic was approaching. The sensors showed at least three Venator ships on a direct course for Nokas starfighter. The Jedi held his breath. His fingers were flying across the control pad but without an astro-mech droid on board it was impossible for him to program a jump in such a short time. And a blind jump was suicide. Nokas whistled when he found the usable specifications of a jump vector in the ring's memory. The ring had only little energy left but it should be just about enough for this jump. He entered the command and half a second later he was long gone.

AIRSPACE OVER CORUSCANT

Above the skyscrapers of Coruscant a burning Corvette was racing towards the city like a comet. She was heading for an air-defense-tower who's relentless laser-fire narrowly missed the closing ship. Her fire-tail was still followed by the Venator-class Star Destroyer. Finally a command to brake was entered on board of the Corvette. The simple power up of the according machines was among the only flight functions that were still working. The Corvette slowed down abruptly and the half destroyed hull of the ship bent under the sudden deceleration. The two Padawans on the bridge now used the energy console to transfer the remaining energy to the right jet engine. The gigantic engine suddenly started to glow only to burst in a blazing explosion a split-second later. As the left engine was still working the ship immediately changed its course to the right. All this happened at a speed that a ship of this class had never been through before. Like this she opened the way. The huge air defense cannon was now targeting the Venator which was still on the same course. The ships navigators instantly reacted and tried to slow down the massive battleship. And in fact it did slow down considerably now in the middle of its descent, but...interestingly it's bow was ripped wide open..... and with it it's huge hangar bay. Far more than 200 fighterships, consisting of V-Wings, Eta-2 Interceptors and ARC-170 fighters were blown across the floor of the ripped open hangar bay. Affected by their inertia they resisted the Venator's slow down maneuver and left the big longish hall. The air defense tower's laser beams that were initially aimed at the Corvette now hit the Battleship directly in its open hangar. Inside the colossus a giant chain-reaction broke loose. A few of the shots hit the swarm of pilotless fighters. Most of the machines though turned into fireballs and headed for the defense tower and the surrounding buildings. The Venator exploded and for a few moments it created a new star at Coruscant's night-sky. Spread over half a square-mile hundreds of fighters hit the canyons between the buildings almost like meteorites. The air defense tower was hit the worst and finally its

dome burst with an enormous bang. A shockwave coming from the explosion smashed every window of the surrounding buildings. At the edge of this destruction the glowing remains of a small Corvette was dropping into the deep. It was the ship of Nilas and Sweitt. It hit the wall of a factory building, pushed it in and moved further down along its facade. It was surrounded by flames and some people of Coruscant's lower city thought they saw the sun for the first time.

SPACE NEAR KASHYYYK

An evil grin disfigured Bib Durkas pale face. Everything had happened the way he had planned it. For the Jedi it had looked like he had tried to destroy the hyperspace rings. But in fact he had only reduced their number to one... and like that the number of escape possibilities. He had carefully transferred the remaining rings energy reserves to his own ship so that only one more middle range jump would be possible. And the vector of this jump had been exactly calculated by him. Bib Durka had constructed a perfect Jedi trap. He had forced a Jedi to jump exactly to where he wanted him. With exhausted energy reserves the Jedi would be stuck there. And he would soon find out that he was in a area where giant nebulas prevented any interstellar communication and made a call for help impossible. Signs of civilization in that region were very unlikely.

»Wait for me.« Durka whispered excitedly. »Wait amidst the vulcans of Sleheyron, until I have sold the location of your prison to the Confederacy.«

KASHYYYK, REPUBLICAN BASE CAMP

Commander Faie was 1.83 meters tall and had been created thirteen years ago in the clone-tanks of the ocean-planet Kamino. The famous ARC-trooper Alpha-17 had trained him and had formed him into one of the most devoted servants the republic could wish for.

He did not know feelings, he only knew orders. He did not know faith, hope or childish dreams. The sad thing was that he would have been capable of all those things.

»General Nokas Mepur is dead, Sir.« Commander Faie turned around and looked at clone CT-0327 who had just entered the camp. »Are you sure soldier?« he replied with a monotone voice.

»For three years we have experienced how competent the Jedi are. Jedi Quinlan Vos escaped the attack of our HAV-A6 Juggernauts He fled into the jungle.« CT-0327 nodded »Mepur is dead.« He handed over a lightsaber to Faie. The commander knew that this was the best proof there was. According to the databanks Jedi were extremely attached to their lightsabers. This alliance was even stronger than that of the clones to their equipment. And nothing more but their daily survival depended on that. No Jedi left his lightsaber behind voluntarily and a Jedi without his lightsaber would not escape their troops.

»Good work, Lieutenant.« Faie said and turned towards the datapad. Thanks to the statistics of the secret service the exact specifications of all lightsaber handles were stored in the system, including their owners. »Go to the radar center and see if you can help with the search for Vos and Yoda.«

Satisfied he put the pad aside. »No traitor can hide forever Tioman.«

END OF PART ONE
TO BE CONTINUED