**Arc 2 Chapter 14**

It was dark, only one moon in the sky, and Jorel knew tonight he would kill again.

This was war, and in war people died, but that didn’t mean he had to like it. The way the Temple taught it, every death was a tragedy, every life ended a regrettable act, and, while it may be a necessity, it should always be the matter of last recourse.

Except, if you spent even an hour looking into the Archives, it was obvious that was full of kriffing *druk*.

Jedi killed. Jedi killed a *lot*. Jedi killed on *most* of their missions, often when, if they’d gotten good enough with a few techniques, like the ‘Mind Trick’ that was the primary use of Force Confusion, they could have avoided it *entirely*.

And that wasn’t even considering that Er’izma was a *general*, who was responsible for the deaths of hundreds regularly. Jorel had asked his Master, after he was sure the man wouldn’t take offense, how he settled being a military commander with being a Jedi.

The man had laughed, and shaken his head. “Because Jedi have always been ‘military’,” he’d responded. “It is only in the last few centuries that we have pretended not to be. And badly at that.”

That had started a crash-course in Jedi History, the parts that hadn’t been accessible by Initiates. Of the Army of Light, that had fought the Brotherhood of Darkness, in the thousand year long New Sith War, that had ended almost a millennia ago, and had led to the Ruusan Reformation. When Jedi fought as everything from individual actors, like the Jedi did now; to the leaders of strike teams, with a trusted team to support them, a minority of present day Jedi did, usually to great effect; to Jedi that controlled battalions, like Er’izma did; to the Jedi that controlled entire armies, the High Council of the time made up of members whom each controlled a different aspects of war, such as intelligence gathering, logistics, or entire fronts in the war against of the Sith.

“But why aren’t we taught this?” the Padawan had asked, confused. The more he learned, the more he realized just hos much of the Temple’s wisdom was based on *lies.* He had frowned, then, mentally amending, *No, not lies. They didn’t lie. They just only told a small bit of the truth, and acted like there was nothing else out there.*

“Because the Jedi wishes to forget their past,” Er’izma had answered easily. “You will find most groups seek to distance themselves from uncomfortable truths and actions which, justified in the time, they would prefer to ignore in the present. Many a government formed in bloody revolution, after the years pass, and those that were present can no longer contradict those in charge, pretend their hands were clean, and they were brought to power through the will of the people, instead of the will of the *surviving* people.”

The Jedi Knight had shook his head. “Death is as much part of the force, and choking weeds must be removed, for the forest to live. While a forest might burn, there are different varieties of fire. Some cleanse, burning away the detritus, clearing the way for new growth. Some destroy the forest itself, but even then life may still return in years. An orbital bombardment, such that turns the surface to glass, kills *all* life, possibly forever. Most can determine the difference between the second and third, but many, fearing the fire that burns within themselves, cannot tell the first from the second.”

“Then we’re the cleansing flame?” Jorel asked skeptically. It was a nice thought, but, when he’d fallen to the **Dark**, that was almost *exactly* what he’d thought of himself as being.

“We can be,” the centuries old Jedi replied. “Though we could also be the crown fire that burns the forest, and, if the wood is rotten, that is what is needed. But we must never become the scouring inferno. But, when we destroy, we must be careful of what we are, and how we do so, for our connection to the Force does not make us more righteous, only stronger, and more capable.”

The dark-skinned man had shaken his head. “Our connection to the Force can allow us greater insight, but the Force is an advisor, to be listened to, and considered, but not to be obeyed. Because, at the end of the day, your actions are your own, and you must live with what you have done. If we must kill, to achieve what we desire, then we do so. However, killing should never be the end, nor something to take pleasure in. When you kill, you may take pride of your skill, of the fact that you are making a bad situation better, but never in the act itself. That way lies the **Dark.**”

On the surface, it was the same as the Temple, saying ‘If you’ll do this you’ll fall’. Below that, though, his Master’s commandment couldn’t be more different. The Temple said, ‘Don’t do this’, as if the act itself was the issue. Er’izma, however, said ‘don’t *feel* this’, or, more specifically, ‘Don’t *indulge* in feeling this.’ The core of the Mind Shield technique, the way that Jorel had finally understood it, when he’d finally ignored what the Temple Masters said, was to allow feelings to pass by, without not letting yourself get caught up in them.

Trying to control his feelings completely, trying to stop himself from feeling them in the first place, was impossible, and every failure had driven him further down. It was by not allowing them to dominate his mind that he could find peace.

And he was going to need a good deal of peace for what he was about to do.

Jorel moved through the forest, carefully, allowing the Force to guide his steps as he crept forward. Hisku and the others following a good distance behind. When he had secured the back gate, he would click the comlink he had been provided, and they’d move up, allowing him to open the door long enough to smuggle them through.

He moved through the undergrowth, utterly silent, and approached the tree he’d use to leap into the base. The feeling in the Force made him freeze, a faint sensation telling him to move behind a tree, which he followed.

A moment later, a light shone down, slowly panning across the hidden road that led to the back entrance, covering the forest on either side, and the Padawan’s position. After a long few seconds, it shut off, and the Force gave him the go-ahead to continue moving, the young man making it to the tree, climbing up with ease.

Sitting up on the vital branch, he checked the chrono built into the comlink, seeing that he had several minutes until the main force reached the front entrance. He had asked Stelog why, if they were able to sneak in, they needed Jorel’s team.

The older man had chuckled, and told the young Jedi that, with how much they were taking, it didn’t matter if they had orders from the highest Pengalan general, the base commander wouldn’t let them leave, as they’d been leaving the base vulnerable to, ironically, the rebels.

So the Padawan closed his eyes, meditating, and reached out in the Force. First was to draw a weak Veil around himself, so that, if any looked his way, they’d see not a person in a mottled dark brown cloak, hiding his armor and letting him blend in, but just an oddly formed part of a tree. After that, he looked outward.

Behind himself, he could easily see Hisku, like a beacon in the Force. She was worried, and nervous, feeling alone and on edge, but all of that was smothered under a steely determination that wouldn’t be out of place in the Temple, though her other emotions would be unusual. The other three moved with her, all focused to various amount, the Devorian woman, Kiri, at a state of relaxed readiness that felt almost predatory.

In the other direction was the base, dozens upon dozens moving about, though most were asleep in these dark hours of the morning. The guard force stood out awake and aware, though to differing degrees. In the area that Jorel would land two people were waiting, talking, and would need to be dealt with.

Need to be *killed*.

While Jorel would have preferred to merely knock them unconscious, without the Force that would not be reliably possible. Even if he managed it, though, there was a good chance the other members of his team would kill them anyways, to keep them from waking up and attacking his team from the back. He couldn’t even blame them, as, without the Force to guide them, that would be a very real danger.

In the distance, he could feel Xatra’s Presence, the Lieutenant part of the team that would try and talk their way in.

Checking the chrono, he had five minutes.

Focusing on his landing point, both guards needed to be killed before they could raise an alarm. If he were better, he could distract them, cause them to leave, or even paralyze them completely. If he could somehow make himself invisible, like the Force Adepts of Geist Squadron, this would be doable, but, as it was now, he wasn’t sure he could take them both out without them making a sound.

Two minutes.

*But, it isn’t making the sound that’s the problem,* he thought, reaching out in the Force. *It’s being heard by the others.*

He’d been practicing with the complex Force technique, and it didn’t have to be *perfect,* just good enough. Creating it at a distance was a bit harder, like typing on a screen a dozen feet away using long metal rods, but it *was* possible.

When he was satisfied with it, he looked at the comlink and almost dropped the technique as he was a minute late. *Time to move,* he thought, keeping the construct with one mental hand, while pulling in the Force with his other, infusing his body with it, he stood, the Veil falling away.

Pulling the long knife from his belt, he flicked on the Vibroblade’s mechanism, the weapon’s lowest setting creating a buzzing so low it could not be easily heard. Weapon in hand, he dashed down the tree limb, which bent under his steps, creaking dangerously, but before it broke the Padawan *leapt*, flying over the top of the wall, far enough to hit the edge of a building overlooking it, bending his knees to lessen the impact as much as he could.

Thankfully, the room on the other side of the wall was empty, something he’d checked in the Force, as he wasn’t entirely successful, but the noise did not reach the two guard below him. Jorrel fell, descending towards one of the unsuspecting guards, and landed on him as he shoved the vibroknife down, cutting the gap between helmet and armored uniform, dragging the blade across the man’s throat as he broke the man’s bones with his impact.

Even as he landed in that pseudo alley between building and wall, the other Guard yelled in surprise, but the carrying sound was caught in the sound baffles that surrounded them, insubstantial enough to move through, but solid enough to capture noise. The man lifted his weapon, an E-5 blaster just like the ones the rebels had stolen, but Jorel was on him before the weapon fully cleared its holster, another blade across the throat silencing man, while the sliced arteries meant the man was unconscious in seconds, his death coming shortly thereafter, his suffering short.

The twin blooms of **Dark** spread out in the force, pulling at Jorel, but, oddly enough, less than we he had killed with his lightsaber. It was, however, much messier, blood everywhere, in ways that made the padawan uncomfortable.

*Good. This shouldn’t be comfortable. And the lack of backlash is something to ask Er’izma later,* Jorel thought, letting the sound baffles fall and re-drawing the Veil around him. It wouldn’t hold up that well, the Jedi’s appearance too odd to be easily overlooked, but it was dark, and if it should hold against a passing glance.

Jorel didn’t look back, moving as quickly as he could quietly, jogging down the length of the wall, feeling the area around him with the Force. As he closed on the back entrance, the padawan could sense that there were three guards up in the guard tower that overlooked the back entrance, but one was leaving, heading the Padawan’s way.

The teen leapt up, still below the wall, hanging off a pipe that ran up the building as the guard moved past him, trying to drop down silently behind the man, but not quietly enough, as the soldier turned around, a confused expression on his face.

The Padawan leapt forward, *into* the man, slicing his throat even as he grabbed the man with his free hand. The man’s yell was a sputtering wheeze as he was lowered to the ground, passing out, and Jorel moved forward once more.

Both guards were standing together, overlooking the back entrance, and, even if Jorel threw up another sound baffle, the big red ‘alarm’ button was *right there.* If he could grab and drag them away, *even* if they ‘made no noise’, a stray limb could still ruin everything.

If he was as good as Anaïs as making barriers, he might’ve put one over it, but he wasn’t sure if that would be enough. However, *misdirection* was in his wheelhouse. While he still couldn’t telekinetically move something he couldn’t see, from his vantage point he now had *options*.

Reaching out in the force, in the opposite direction as he stood, it only took a second and a careful *twist* of the force, and a door opened, with enough force to swing out and hit the opposite wall, the entrance into the building under a single light which left a pool of illumination all around it. He didn’t do it that hard, but it was hard enough to make a sound.

Both Guards turned to look at it, and, when no one came out, looked at each other. Jorel froze, unsure if that hadn’t been enough, or if that had been too much, but after a muttured conversation, too far away for him too hear, they both made odd hand gestures. The female guard laughed, while the male one growled, and started to make his way down the tower’s stairs for the open door.

As the leaving guard descended, Jorel ascended the other side, climbing the worn ferrocrete wall, and silently clambering over the right side of the tower’s top, while the remaining guard looked over the left. A grab and slice, and the woman died.

A glance out, and he couldn’t see his team, but clicked his commlink, telling them to move up. It only took a few steps to cross the guardhouse and Jorel leapt off the left side, landing on the last guard, the Padawan’s knees on the man’s back knocking the breath out of him as he fell halfway into the light surrounding the open doorway. A stab with the Vibroblade, turned up in intensity for just a moment, sliced through the man’s spine in an instant, beheading him.

Again, unlike with a lightsaber, it was just so more. . . *visceral*, but Jorel centered himself in the Force, letting the feelings created by what he had done, slide away, focused on his goal. There was still no combat from the other side of the base, but it was only a matter of when, not if. Hesitating, he closed the nearby door, so he didn’t have to explain how he’d opened it.

In retrospect, he should’ve just thrown a rock, or something.

Climbing the guard tower, four at a time, he made it to the top, seeing his team standing in front of the door. Toggling the commlink, he whispered, *“Opening. Be ready,”* his voice sounding loud in his own ears. Waiting a few seconds, the Jedi opened the doors, closing them two and a half seconds later, to avoid their opening being noticed.

Walking down the stairs, he found the rest of his team gathered around the last, headless guard. Sham and Cen were both staring at it with wide eyes, and Jorel dismissed his Veil, stepping into the shadows cast by the light, causing them both to jump, lifting their knives.

Hisku was bringing up the back, looking around, while Kiri just laughed quietly.

“Not bad, newbie,” the rebel commented. “This almost looks professional.”

Unable to resist himself, Jorel asked, whispering, “What should I do better?”

The Devorian woman gestured, “Beheading him like that? *Way* too showy. But you’re from the circus, so I shouldn’t be surprised.”

“I just wanted to kill him quickly. To stay quiet,” the Jedi argued, still focused, still feeling what was happening on the other side of the base. He could sense feelings shifting, and, before the woman could respond, the sound of blasterfire broke the silence of the night, and the distant blooms of **Dark** as more people died were, in their own way, even louder, full of pain, betrayal, and anger.

According to the maps, the armory was only a few dozen feet away, and needed to be taken before the soldiers could wake up, and arm themselves. “*Follow me,”* Jorel commanded, remembering to pull back on Force Control, now that he had watchers.

Even then, though, he turned up his Vibroblade until it thrummed in his hands with a low hum. In the quiet night, it would’ve been an alarm all its own, but with an active battle going on up front, it wouldn’t be noticed. Darting through one door, then another, he came across a few soldiers and didn’t stop, slicing one in the leg, his fully powered vibroblade cutting through the reinforced uniform the soldier wore, a second in the arm, and the third in the throat, not stopping, trusting the others to take care of the survivors.

Two more rooms, and he found the entrance, the guards that were supposed to be protecting it with their backs turned as soldiers started to pour in.

Jorel’s first instinct was to go forward with his blade, but not only was it *much* shorter than his saber, but he wouldn’t be able to block shots with it either. Instead, he stepped up to one of the guards and buried his vibroblade in the man’s back, taking his blaster rifle and flicking it to full auto, and opening fire.

The Jedi let the Force guide his shots, killing the soldiers in front of him, as the others came up behind him, adding their own fire even as the soldiers tried to bring their own weapons to bear, taking cover.

Jorel, reaching out in the Force, felt the position of the soldiers in the armory, and pulled a little more on Force Control, throwing his now-steaming blaster forward. Pulling the vibroknife from the dead guard’s back, he leapt forward, chasing the weapon, which struck a soldier that stepped into the doorway.

The man screamed in pain, falling to the ground as he was burned by the burning hot metal, and Jorel jumped over him, lashing out with his blade to catch the arm of the soldier that was already turning to shoot him.

Hisku was hot on his heels, and he turned right, throwing himself into the soldiers on one side of the room, while his partner took the left, the other three coming in while watching their backs. In seconds, their team were the only ones left alive, grabbing heavy ordinance.

The armory was built to be held during an enemy attack, which would normally make it a fallback point, but *also* meant it could be easily held against outside attack. It also shared a wall with the base’s main power generators, something they were taking advantage of.

Jorel, Hisku, and Kiri held the doorway while the two men cleared the wall in question, attaching the breeching charges. “Firing!” one of them yelled, the explosion sounding a moment later, loud enough to leave his ears ringing, and sending up a cloud of dust.

The soldiers outside tried to rush them, but Hisku and Kiri both hurled grenades into them, the feelings of their deaths stacking on top of each other, obscuring Jorel’s ability to sense things in the Force, as it was turned into a fetid swamp of suffering and **Darkness**.

The Jedi pushed through it, grabbing Hisku and pulling them both back as the other two men moved to take their place, turning on the lights they’d strapped to their helmets. Both Sergeant and Padawan ran through the hole in the wall, gunning down the few soldiers still surviving. He moved to the door, locking it and sealing it. If he used his saber, he could melt the door shut, but it wasn’t worth it, not for this.

At the same time, Hisku got to work on the power generators. Breaking a power generator was not as easy as shooting them. Yes, that might work, but it may just as easily set it off like a bomb, which could set off the *next* one, and so on. Civilian generators were built to not do that, but military grade technology was more powerful, but that was a double-edged sword.

However, the Sergeant was *good* at what she did, and was able to shut off power, the lights cutting off, only to replaced with red emergency lights. A moment later, those secondary lights exploded, a power surge overwhelming the circuits, and the emergency defences that were built into them.

Hisku and Jorel both turned on the lights strapped to their chests, to continue working, as she worked to turn the generators into so much fancy scrap, and Jorel prepared for soldiers to breach the doors, but no one came.

A few minutes later, and Jorel’s attaché finished her work and they both pulled back to the armory with the others. A mass of blaster-fire came from the area outside, their commlink’s opened up, Stelog’s voice commanding, “Don’t shoot!”

A moment later, the rebels came walking in to the armory, some looking shaken, others excited, several glancing back to the killing-ground Jorel’s team had created, having had to walk over dozens of bodies to get inside.

They spread out, and Stelog followed them in, looking around. “Not bad,” he commented to himself, before yelling, “Get the lead out of your shebs and load up, men! Let’s not give these nerf herders time to find their stones and try again!”

The Rebels stopped staring and started opening bags, throwing everything they could into them as fast as they could. The cell leader walked over to the Jedi and the Sergeant, shaking his head. “Good job, Jorrel. Thought we’d have to take this the hard way.”

“They’re right next to each other,” the teen shrugged. “Two Hutts, one detonator,” he remarked, getting a laugh from the older man. “There’s still soldiers?”

“Aye,” Waleye nodded. “But as long as they stay holed up, they aren’t our problem.”

The Jedi sighed, glad that *some* people would survive. “Okay. Good,” he replied, then winced, looking up at the man, who’d killed a rebel when he’d balked, but the Force had remained silent.

The man, indeed, was smiling. “Don’t worry boy. We’re here to take Pengalan back for the people, not kill every poor fool who was tricked into defending the dictators who’ve taken it over.”

“You don’t have to worry ‘bout him being soft,” Kiri added, walking up to the three, carrying a bag full of high explosives. “Kid’s hardcore. Took a Mili’s head off, and wanted to know how he could do it *better*.”

That got another laugh out of the man, who dropped a firm hand onto the Padawan’s soldier. “I knew I was right about you, Jorel. I’ve got an eye for potential, and I think you’re gonna go far, here with us. Keep showing this kind of initiative, and you’ll make some powerful friends indeed!”

The Jedi gave the rebel leader a hesitant smile, even as he thought of his Master, the Jedi General who was the one who would decide who was going to win this conflict, based on what his Padawan found.

*Oh, you have no idea.*