**Arc 2 Chapter 36**

Despite Jorel’s prompting, only Hisku moved, the rest of his team, minus their slicer, who’d slipped away, having almost surely set them up, still staring.

*“Kriff me,”* Hela swore, the demolitions expert’s eyes wide as she grinned broadly, “you really *are* one of those special ops types!”

“You could say that,” the Jedi replied, playing things cool, not showing how the **Dark** around them was wearing at his nerves, “and as such, we need to *move.* Their ambush failed, but that only buys us a minute or two. We’ve got a mission, and we need to *do it*.”

Irvgar, their heavy weapons specialist, glanced back to the lift as the squad entered the room, “But, if they’re waiting for us, can we even do this?”

*“We can,”* Jorel told him, the Force reassuring him that his plan *wasn’t* suicide, though it *would* be dangerous. “After all, who could possible survive that *double* ambush, especially in civilian clothing?”

“Uh, you?” Hela offered, shrugging at his dry look. “But yeah, I get ya.”

The alarm still sounded, though, from the way the noise of it reverberated, it wasn’t *just* coming from this building, which meant the *entire* military city was going on high alert early. *They know the attack’s happening,* the Padawan thought, glancing to Hisku, who was trying to override the rooftop’s door control, the job that Stuale was *supposed* to do, before he’d slipped away.

Thankfully, every member of Er’izma’s flock got a basic instruction on ‘combat engineering’, and while she couldn’t do it without setting off alarms like a trained slicer would, she knew enough to-

Growling in irritation, the woman strode over to the now opened crates, where everyone was quickly putting on their armor, and grabbed one of Hela’s charges, slapping it on the hatch with a call of, *“Going hot.”*

Jorel reached out in the Force, and pushed out a noise baffling field as his partner jogged back to them, taking a moment to center himself before the door *exploded* open, sound and shockwaves the same thing when one got down to it, meaning they just got their hair ruffled instead of hit by the backblast, though it would’ve been survivable anyways.

“Whatever happened to slicing?” he questioned, going back to securing his greaves.

*“Kriffing sculags cut the power,”* the woman spat, leaking **Dark** into the already saturated air, the residual energies caused by the deaths of their attackers hanging about them like foul mist. Pausing, Jorel laid a hand on her shoulder, and she tried to knock it away, but Force Control left him unmoved.

*“Hisku. Center yourself,”* he quietly commanded. She started to glare at him, then caught herself, confusion leaking into her eyes. “*This is not a good place, but we have to stay on task.”*

He was being circumspect, and for a moment she didn’t understand, before her eyes turned to the dead bodies, then she took a deep breath, her Presence in the Force settling a little. Nodding to the Force sensitive woman, he finished putting on his armor, feeling a sense of *Danger* slowly coming from the elevator.

“*This is such a pain,”* the blue-skinned woman muttered, angrily slapping together the pieces of her *own* armor.

*“But the benefits are worth it,”* he reminded her teasingly, smiling at her grunt of annoyance, as he moved to where Hela was loading up her ordinance, snagging a grenade from her.

The woman shot him an exasperated look, “You have your own!”

“You have more,” Jorel shot back, heading to the door into the space, everyone almost done preparing.

“But what do you-” the demolitionist started to ask, as the Padawan primed and tossed the explosive, right as the doors to the lift opened, full of soldiers, reaching out with Telekinesis to hit the ‘close door’ button.

The surprised shouts of the enemy were quickly muffled, as was the beginning of the explosion, while the screeching of metal torn apart from the grenade, which was *much* more powerful than he’d thought, came through loud and clear, bits of shrapnel flying down the hall, the padawan shifting slightly so it’d bounce off the breastplate of his armor instead of striking the more vulnerable shoulder joint.

Turning back to the others, who were staring once again, except for Hisku, who was used to it, Jorel remarked, “Lift’s out. Irvgar, you got the zipline gun?”

“I, uh, Doma’s got it,” he said. “Stuale was supposed to carry it, but, uh, he’s gone?”

“Don’t worry, ***I’ll deal with him later,***” the Jedi promised, glancing over to Hela. “That grenade had some serious kick.”

“Made it myself!” the energetic woman chirped, leaning over and hefting the modified missile tube. “Just like this beut!”

Striding over to the open hatch, the fold-down ladder was scrapped, but there were ruined shelves all around, and tipping a couple over made a pseudo-ramp, enough that the others could clamber up out of it even weighed down with their gear. “Then it’s time to keep going. General Telane isn’t going to kill *himself*,” he announced, jumping up, grabbing the jagged lip of the torn-apart ceiling hatch, glad he was wearing gloves, and leveraging himself up and out, then ducking as the ever-present feeling of *Danger* spiked, and a blaster bolt passed over him.

Standing back up, there was a chance it might’ve just hit his armor, but it was always better to dodge if one could, and, looking where it came from, there were guards posted on the roof of the command building, but only three.

Trusting in the Force, Jorel took a half-step to the side to a safer location, then focused, the way Hisku did *naturally*, lining up his shots, blaster bolts flying past him, calmly pulling the trigger one, twice, three times, and then the area was clear.

Letting out the breath he’d been holding, he was glad that the guards had gotten bargain-bin blasters, as, two hundred feet away, most of it upwards, the guards had only been able to do what Hisku would derogatorily call ‘spray and pray’. The rest of his squad scrabbled, up, looking around, the spire of the comms tower’s antenna stretching above them.

“Okay, let’s see if we can do this the easy way. Hela, hit the command level,” the Padawan commanded, the woman nodding, taking the already loaded missile tube and pointing it at the window. Firing, the explosive streaked down and hit the window of the command center, where Telane was certainly managing the battle, with a resounding *boom!*

But, while their view was obscured by the detonation, there was only a couple blooms of **Dark**, not nearly enough for a room full of people. And *what was his life* that Jorel was disappointed there *wasn’t* more **Dark** energy in the air, the oily feeling coating his own Presence, offering its tainted assistance. “Reload,” he commanded. “Hisku, set the array to blow. Irvgar, get the grapple gun.”

“That *might’ve* worked,” Doma offered, the older woman covering the other direction, as soldiers rushed about, starting to mobilize, though, thank the Force, none of them were looking *up*, though quite a few had turned to stare at the struck command center.

“We’re not that lucky,” his partner disagreed, accepting the charge Hela tossed her, exchanging it for the missile tube the explosive expert reloaded, setting it on the base of the array.

The smoke cleared, and, while the windows of the command center *were* intact, clearly transparisteel, every window of the two floors below had been blown out, having merely been glass, though likely reinforced. Motioning to Irvgar, the man aimed the grapple and fired, striking right above a window directly *below* the command center, on a bit of the metal wall that *hadn’t* been directly damaged by their attack, as, looking back, Hela nodded to him, their last missile ready to fire.

They’d had one extra missile, ‘just in case’, but they didn’t need it, as the Jedi looked over the base, trying to find the best place to use it. Reaching out in the Force, the Resistance forces were starting their attack early, to try and strike *before* the Congressional forces could get *completely* ready. The Force, however, was silent, no *good* options present, one that could help stop the fighting and bring this to a peaceful resolution, but a ***different suggestion*** rose to mind, one tainted, but undeniably effective.

Turning and looking, it was in the residential section of the military city, where the utilities like water and power were taken care of, the *latter* of which, if hit just so, could set off a detonation that would certainly disrupt things.

And kill everyone nearby, which, narrowing his eyes, seemed to be civilians, mostly children, who were hurrying to hide as the alarm still sounded.

He was tempted, *very* tempted, but he rejected the idea, demanding one that was more humane, which the **Dark** scoffed at, so he rephrased it as one that wouldn’t *ruin* the city they were planning on taking.

That corruption of the Force fought him, but, forcing it to *bend to his will*, it provided a *different* answer, highlighting a seemingly ordinary building in amongst others, deep in the *military* section, refusing to explain *why*, like a grumpy toddler made of pain and hate.

*Thank you,* he thought to it, only being polite, as he pointed, ordering, “Hela, give the tube to Hisku, she’s a better shot. Hisku, take out that building right there, two to the right of that mess hall, then follow us. The rest of you, after me,” he commanded, Irvgar having secured the line to the array, which might damage it, but that wasn’t really a concern for them.

Taking off at a run, Jorel leapt from the top of the tower, folding his arm up to catch the metal line and cup it in the reinforced crook of his elbow as he sped down, picking up speed, swinging his legs forward as he closed on the broken window. Armored boots hit the little bit of it that still remained, shattering the sharp edges, bleeding off a little of his momentum as he let go of the line, flying through and skidding into the room on bits of glass over metal floor, spraying the space with blasterfire with one hand, taking out three enemy soldiers, the other pulling his vibroblade out and flicking it on.

The Jedi only had a few moments before the others arrived, and he was going to use them to their *utmost*.

An unfocused blast of telekinesis hit half the room, causing the surprised soldiers to stumble, as Jorel ramped up his Force Control, darting forward to the largest group, still firing mostly randomly at the others, a single, fifteen foot leap closing in on them in an instant, his blade flashing out and taking throats, shoulders, and thighs, guaranteeing near instant death, as he tossed his blaster into the air, hand lashing out to grab a grenade from one of the dying soldiers, prime it, and toss it at the door, where two more men started to enter.

Turning, swaying to take the enemy fire he couldn’t dodge on his most armored sections, Jorel threw the vibroblade, which buried itself in another man’s head, the non-vibrating crossguard slamming into his helmet hard enough to knock the man backwards, while the Padawan grabbed the blaster he’d thrown, as well as the blaster rifle of one the dead men, still falling backwards, and filled the space with fire, hitting soldiers, walls, desks, *everything*.

Two still survived, the woman taking cover while the man charged him with a vibroblade of his own, and the Padawan met the man’s charge. Having practiced with the Resistance, the man wasn’t *terrible* with his weapon for a soldier, but he was *no* Jedi, and Jorel slammed a fist into the hand gripping the blade, breaking the officer’s uncovered fingers, while, with a pull, the Padawan retrieved his own blade, which came flying towards him at speed, point first, *far* faster than he’d meant it to, courtesy of the **Dark** trying to ‘help’.

But he was starting to get used to its ***helping***.

Moving aside, the blade slammed into the man’s chest, killing him, throwing the corpse backwards as Jorel grabbed the hilt and pulled it free, turning and throwing it as the woman jumped out of cover, weapon up and spewing bolts, only to be skewered by the blade and pinned to a terminal, screaming in pain, ***Dark*** spreading in great gouts into the air, like blood in water.

Hearing the rest of his squadron coming, feeling their faint Presences, while Hisku’s clarified for a moment, the sound of the missile tube firing barely audible, the Padawan almost had to fight himself to lift the blaster and fire one last time, putting the female Cong out of her misery.

Drawing down on **Force Control**, Jorel felt an odd tiredness, an unpleasant *ache* in his muscles and joints that made him swear, as he *recognized* that *kriffing feeling*. “*Okay. Not better yet,”* he reminded himself, as the ***Dark***bodily empowerment that’d mixed itself in with his normal technique was reeled back.

*No wonder that went so well*, he thought, having, momentarily, punched *way* above his normal skill level, and he was now paying for it when he could *barely* afford to, which was downright *standard* when it came to the **Dark**.

*Well, at least the room’s clear,* he thought, as Irvgar swung into the space, sliding hook in one hand, heavy blaster rifle in the other, connected to his armor with a rig that’d help him support it, as he took a few stumbling steps in, bringing his weapon up in a panic, only to see the room cleared, the Jedi slowly walking over to retrieve his blade.

“Cover the door, if you would,” Jorel requested politely, doing his best to center himself, screening out the **Dark** that hung heavy in the air, his own tainted Presence giving it an in he had to actively work against.

“I, uh, sure!” the small man agreed, moving over, leaning out, then swearing as blaster-fire hit the doorway, the gunner leaning back out, weapon-first, and letting loose a cavalcade of fire as Doma came in, moving smoother, checking the room as Jorel yanked his blade free, flicking the blood and viscera off, and sheathed it, pointing with his gun to Irvgar.

The older woman nodded, double-timing it to support the other man, Hela coming in after her, landing in a forward roll that *covered* her back with debris, popping up, and looking around, and letting out a whistle. “*Damn*, boss, leave some for the rest of us!” she chirped, moving aside as Loran arrived, the Duros taking in the destroyed room and nodding like that was normal, the alien knowing that Jorel was a Jedi, though he’d thankfully been silent about that fact.

Finally, Hisku arrived, dropping in and smoothly landing, weapon up, checking the space before looking to Jorel, lifting a single questioning eyebrow.

“The blast did a lot of incidental damage,” he offered, ignoring the near hundred blaster-marks on the walls.

“*Yeah, the blast,*” she told him, shaking her head and moving up to the others, who had taken cover around the doorway, leaning out to fire as soldiers tried to move to pen them in, the sense of *Danger* slowly increasing once more.

Jogging up to them, Jorel felt out in the Force, leaning into its suggestions, ordering, *“Hela, clear the way to the right, then drop a bomb left while we go right.”*

The young woman blinked, nodding, giving him a thumbs up and reaching into her pockets, preparing the explosives. A moment later, she nodded to Irvgar, who sent down a hail of fire, forcing the enemy soldiers to take cover, and give her time enough to throw both customized grenades. Leaning back, the girl held up three fingers, closing them one at a time, until, when all she held was a fist, a *boom* rocked the building in one direction, then the other, Jorel, trusting in the Force, taking point as he ran into the hallway, which was filled with smoke, and the miasma of the **Dark**.

The rest of his squad followed him, as he ran by the splattered remains of the enemy soldiers, their bodies far weaker than the durasteel that made up the structure, and put that out of his mind as he listened to the directions being fed him, lifting his blaster, as he streaked out of the dust cloud, coming right up against more resistance, and he fired, strafing across them and taking them down in a moment.

His squad following him, he reached the stairs, a grenade tossed down them into the group of enemies running up to his floor, as he charged *up* the next one, ducking at the Force’s direction, blaster bolts passing over him, as he climbed them three at a time, unsheathing his vibroblade once more, and got to bloody work.

Immersed in his focus, the enemy soldiers weren’t ready for him, and were cut down, Hisku right behind him, allowing him to open a path and trust *her* to take the others, the rest of the squad struggling to keep up, the resistance heavier than it was supposed to be. On the next floor up, the entrance to the command center was clear, the thick, starship-grade bulkhead door shut, a few soldiers rushing about but unprepared for their attack.

Cutting the nearest ones down, Stuale’s betrayal of them was *more* keenly felt, as the man was supposed to slice the lock, but Jorel, thankfully, had some experience in that field himself, and took out the mobile terminal from a pouch, the device clunky, looking for the interface port.

*“Gah!”* Irvgar yelled, distracting the Padawan, who saw the man was hit in the side, stumbling out of the stairway, a volley of blaster bolts flying up as they were pursued, Hela tossing another explosive down at them, screams cut short by the sound of the blast.

On the other end, more soldiers came running, Jorel leaning the way out of a blaster bolt as he sheathed his weapon, Hisku firing at them, wishing he could use his saber, as then he could *literally* slice the door open instead of desperately trying to remember half-forgotten lessons from the Temple.

“It’s *closed?*” Hela questioned, expression tight, joining the Jedi and his attaché. “But, we don’t have Typhe to do it! Should I try and blow it?”

Finally spotting the port, which was locked, but putting his hand over it let him hide the Telekinesis he uses to force open the lock, he shook his head, plugging in his code-slicing tool as he told her, “I can do it, just keep them off me.”

*“No cover,”* Doma stated, lifting her rifle to send fire at *more* soldiers, these ones carrying heavy shields they tried hide behind, but Hisku’s Force-aligned shots took them down regardless. “We can’t stay here.”

“If you’ve got a *better* idea,” the Chiss standing behind him replied angrily, “please provide it.”

The older woman frowned, and just kept firing, as another stray bolt struck his squad, Loran this time, the Duros biting back a grunt of pain as he tried to keep fighting.

The Padawan navigated security protocols, and then was confronted with a security layer he had *no* idea how to get around, trying to keep calm, with his people hurt, with *no idea what he was doing,* the fear of what failure would result in mounting, having to shift slightly to let a blaster bolt strike his chest plate, bracing himself to offset the force of the blast.

Letting out a centering breath, he released his fear, his anger at having to do this, *everything*, and he trusted in the Force, letting it guide him to input the password, despite not knowing it, and then *he was in.*

Toggling the door lock open, he started to say, “I’m in, get cl-”

But the door slammed open in its own, and a hail of gunfire erupted from it, Jorel and Hisku dodging out of the way.

*Doma Drangon was not so quick.*

The Jedi watched as the woman was blasted apart, her death shocking in a way he didn’t expect, her death yet one *more* bloom of **Dark** in the dozens upon dozens around them, as her blackened corpse was slammed against the far wall.

***No,*** he thought, as a member of his squad, someone he was *supposed to protect*, died in front of him.

He moved without thinking, leaping forward with supernatural speed, the fire from inside slackening the moment before, flying into the room, seeing three *dozen* officers inside, half of them taking cover behind consoles, blasters pointed at the doorway, while the others still worked desperately, and, sitting on a raised chair, in a fully enclosed and armored powersuit, sat what *must* be the General.

Who was a **dead man**, he just didn’t know it yet.

Strafing the room with his blaster rifle, Jorel used his last grenade on the largest group still trying to fire on the rest of his team, though this time one of them kicked the explosive away, the blast only taking down one enemy, but the fear of it had made the others pause firing as well, giving Hisku and the others an opportunity to come in, more soldiers still firing on them in the hallway.

Unsheathing his blade, Jorel kept moving, the Force warning him that staying still was *death*. The **Dark** whispered to him, telling him that, with it, he **wouldn’t lose anyone else**, that if he’d not been stubborn **Doma wouldn’t’ve died**, but he ignored it, trying to shoot Telane, but the General’s armor took the shots, barely budging him.

Irvgar staggered inside, his heavy rifle roaring as it spewed more blaster-bolts, trying to avoid Jorel, but the Padawan was moving too fast, and so had to try and dodge *those* shots as well, the room becoming even more deadly as *more* blaster-fire filled the space, the unarmored officers dying in droves, consoles exploding, while the General stood and pointed an arm towards the Jedi, a jet of flame stretching out for him.

Jorel leapt away, Er’izma’s training having covered *just* such attacks, but in the process he was tagged by a bolt in one of his armor’s joints, the pain in his shoulder distracting, though he kept his focus.

From out in the hall, Hela tossed grenades and came running in, Loran covering her, but the Duros caught another rogue bolt, this one in the chest, from one of the surviving officers, and, with a cry, went down, the area so full of ***death*** that Jorel could not tell if the wound had been instantly fatal.

*More* ***Dark*** pulled at the Jedi, who was splitting his attention between the combatants and the commander, who was slowly striding towards him, *still* spewing flame as the man intoned, voice distorted by his suit, *“You made a mistake in coming here, rebel scum!”*

Irvgar, *still* laying down fire, looked away from the staff still alive to hit the lock on the bulkhead, shutting it even as more soldiers started to come in through the door, the rapidly closing portal slicing one soldier in half, two more entering the room before him, Hisku turning to kill them, the one that tried to shoot *her* missing.

The one that tried to shoot Irvgar did not.

The gunner’s head came apart under the point-blank fire, the Resistance member twisting about, gun still spewing bolts, which ripped apart his killer, and the soldier Hiku just killed, the woman twisting to use the corpse as a meat shield as Irvgar went slack, hitting the ground, Jorel putting down the last officer still in the room, even as the **Dark** taunted the Jedi, telling him that these deaths were ***all his fault***.

But Jorel would *not* pull on that cursed power.

It was *not* an option.

Then, from the side, Hela came running in, near suicidally, slamming her hand into the General’s side, the hit negligible but leaving behind a breeching charge, before the armored man turned, a blade shooting out of his other gauntlet, as he stabbed her through the chest with it, the force of his armor’s servos sending the girl flying back, hitting a console and flipping over it, a moment before her explosive detonated, sending *him* flying as well, crashing against the transparisteel window, which cracked slightly but held.

His armor was torn and dented, but the General started to stand, *laughing*.

An inarticulate yell of **RAGE** tore through the space, filled with bloodlust, *dripping* with **Dark**, but it did not come from Jorel, the Jedi struggling with himself.

It came from *Hisku.*

The woman blurred forward, crossing the space, slamming a fist into the warped armor that made Telane grunt with pain, not as unhurt as he seemed, the woman grabbing the man’s bladed arm as he brought it in to stab her and, twisting, slammed him into the ground, hard enough to dent the durasteel floor, pulling another pained gasp from the man, before she followed him down, straddling his chest, and sunk **Dark** filled punch after punch into the man’s face, until the metal of his helmet cracked, then started to deform inwards, the General’s struggling, desperate at first as he spewed flame, weakening, until he went still, as the chiss woman kept slamming down with increasingly *wet* blows.

Reaching across the bond they shared, the woman was a roiling mass of **Dark *Rage***, which he reached into without hesitation, calling, *“****Hisku! Enough!****”*

The look she sent his way was *crazed*, red pupil-less eyes wide and unfocused, and she seemed on the verge of attacking *him*, before she shuddered, fighting herself.

*Knowing* what she was feeling, he gave her something to do, directing, *“****Go help Loran, if he’s still alive. I’ll heal Hela!****”*

His partner stared at him, confused, as he ran to the still form of the demolitionist, hoping *she* was still alive, at least, before the blue-skinned woman jerkily nodded, standing, stumbling as if she were drunk, her own gauntlets cracked, two of the fingers on her left hand twisted unnaturally, and she stumbled towards the Duros.

Reaching the girl, a pool of blood spreading out under her, legs twisted worryingly, and the Jedi centered himself, gently turning her over, seeing that not only was her armor broken, caved inwards, her bottom ribs snapped, but the stab wound in her gut had pierced her through, severing the spine, a fatal injury.

But she *wasn’t dead yet.*

Not even hesitating, he took out his personal bacta patch as he tore off her armor, lifting her up and placing it across her back, before laying her down face up on the ground, centering himself again to try and heal her, even as the ***Dark*** filled the air around him, tearing at his Presence with barbed tendrils, trying to rip into him through his connection with Hisku, but, as tired as he was, even after a mere ten, maybe fifteen minutes of combat, he pushed through it, with determination but *not* desperation, and reached out to the Force to *help save her life.*

The Force’s voice was faint, and the Padawan knew that, had he taken the **Dark** up on its offer, he would be deaf to it, but it was *there,* directing him not to the girl, but to a cabinet, that he ripped open with Telekinesis, finding a three Bacta kits stored.

*“****Hisku,***” he called, and mentally tossed one of them to his attaché, calling the other two to himself, swiftly ripping open the patches to pour the healing fluid directly inside Hela’s wound, filling it, before the Force directed him to *begin.*

Opening himself to the that energy, he laid his hands on the girl’s chest, as she twitched, opening bloodshot eyes.

*“Did I get ‘em?”* she asked wetly, coughing, shaking, blood leaking from her mouth, her lungs damaged, possibly cut by the blade.

“We did,” he told her, trying to focus without *focusing*, even as, hearing her hurt like this, a mix of anger and guilt welled up inside him, as he was their *leader* and thus this had all been *his* fault, interfering with his healing. “Now hang on. You’re going to make it.”

The peppy explosives expert laughed weakly, “Jorel, I can’t feel my legs. But, it’s okay. We did it. That’s good enough.”

Her Presence, faint as it was, started to fade, and a flare of anger shot through him, one that, oddly, did not carry any **Dark**, as he told her, the Force thick in his voice, “***No.*****I’ve got you. You *Will* Live.**”

Hela blinked, surprised, and replied helplessly, “*O-oh, okay.”*

Focusing on the wound she’d suffered, the Force with him, Jorel implored it to help him help *her,* to keep her alive, as she *didn’t deserve to die like this*.

But it wasn’t enough.

And then, faintly, he could feel his Master, despite the man being hundreds of kilometers away, and a sense of firm *purpose* filled him, his hands moving on their own, as they glowed a rich, bright blue, glowing fluid seeming to flow out from his palms and into her wound, and the Bacta filling it, which, itself, started to glow.

It was odd, as, while he knew its properties came from a mix of specific bacteria, he’d never really thought about it, but, know, under the guiding hand of his Master, faint as it was, like the overlay he’d experienced watching the *Dove* take out the pirate fleet, he did not just try to heal *Hela*, he empowered the Bacta as well, intensifying its restorative properties, using Telekinesis to subtly align her legs properly.

His focus was subsumed by it, going, and going, until, *finally*, he felt the Er’izma’s Presence start to recede, and, fearful, he reached out for it, but that *same* fear caused his healing to stutter and fail.

*“No!”* he shouted, opening his eyes, but, looking down at the girl, her eyes were closed, and for a moment his fear spiked, until he noticed her regular, unimpeded breathing.

Lifting his hands, while she was still injured, the cut was shallow, and while she was bruised, she no longer looked *broken.*

Shaking, he stood, and almost ran into Hisku, who was sitting on the console next to him, watching him, a bacta-patch wrapped around her broken hand.

“Loran?” he asked, bracing himself, glad that he’d saved at least *one* of their squad.

“He’ll live,” she stated curtly. “What now?”

For a long moment, the Padawan blanked, unable to think of it at first, before he nodded to himself, stumbling over to one of the undamaged consoles, which was keyed into the Cong’s comm network, the fighting still ongoing, and he plugged in the information for the Resistance’s chosen channel for this operation, toggling them *both* on as he stated, with purpose, “**General Telane is dead. The Resistance has won.**”

The second half wasn’t true, of course, but it’s what Lonlen, the Resistance’s leader, wanted him to say, to strike a blow against the remaining Congressional Forces’ morale. Sighing, leaning on the terminal, the Jedi took a deep breath, and found his armor constrictive, looking down at his shoulder to see a bacta patch had been applied to it.

*Hisku must’ve done it while I was healing Hela*, he thought absently, stumbling over to a mostly-intact chair, and dropped into it, *exhausted*. “Uh, can I see your hand? I think-”

*“No,*” his attaché disagreed firmly, taking a seat in another chair nearby, looking as wrung out as he felt. “I, I was stupid,” she explained, after a moment, staring at her broken gauntlets. “I, this, this was the lab again. I lost control. I thought I was better. I deserve this.”

*“****No, you don’t,***” Jorel disagreed, getting her attention. “I see why Jedi don’t do wars, now. This is. . .” he shook his head. “You’re already hurt, Hisku. So was I. This is, is too much. I shouldn’t’ve taken this mission. This is on *me*. *You’re* my attaché. I was over-confident. We won, but. . . *not like this,*” he sighed. “Our being hurt should help get Lonlen off our backs, at least, but when we’re back home, I’m patching us *both* up.”

The fighting still raged outside, the small war being waged echoing in the Force, a tide of **Dark** the likes of which he’d never seen, even working with Er’izma for over a year.

*It’s because of the way The Flock fights,* the Jedi realized, Er’izma’s troops covering each other, minimizing losses, while striking with overwhelming force, keeping *enemy* losses contained, as the members of the opposing side were either unharmed, or killed outright.

*Here* meanwhile, a pitched battle was being fought, large amounts of injured on either side, suffering abounding, and, while some part of himself felt bad for it, felt like he should be doing *more,* he was *very* glad his part of the battle was over.