**Arc 2 Chapter 18**

*The reward for a job well done is a harder job,* Jorel thought, riding in the back of the covered speedertruck, as they made their way to B’skonako. A town that had originally been founded by Twi’lek settlers, it’d grown into a small city with the profits from its mining and construction industries, which made it a valuable location for both the ‘Congs’, the Congressional forces, and the Resistance.

Before, the Resistance hadn’t had enough forces, in both equipment and manpower, to contest the government’s claim on the location, but that had changed. More people had arrived in the past weeks, getting trained up on the weapons their cell had gotten their hands on. So many, in fact, that many of the bedrooms were converted into barracks, sleeping eight instead of two, everyone pitching in to throw them up.

He'd worried that he’d have to discontinue his ‘bedroom activities’ with Hisku, unofficially training her use Force Control to enhance her physical capabilities, but for some reason they’d skipped right over his room, something that the Padawan wasn’t going to complain about. Lacking any direction, he’d started teaching the new recruits, how to shoot, how to fight hand to hand, and how to move through the obstacle course they’d set up. Hisku had followed his lead, doing the same thing, playing the stern taskmaster to his encouraging guide.

There’d been some pushback, especially from some of the older recruits, but the fact that both Jedi and his attaché could beat pretty much everyone else had lessened most of the resentment, the rest disappearing on its own a few days later. Before he realized it, most of the new recruits were looking to *him* for advice, which he was happy to give, but compared to how he’d been treated in the Temple, it was an odd, but nor unwelcome, feeling. Heck, even in the *Flock* he’d had ‘respect’ only because of the fact that he was General Er’izma’s Padawan, not because of anything *he* had done.

To be honest, it was a bit of a heady feeling, and one he rather enjoyed, but it was *not* the Jedi way. As such, he’d started to meditate before bed, centering himself in the same way as he had before. He found it much harder to let go of those feelings, used to the anger, the frustration, the fear of not being good enough he’d dealt with for years. It felt *good* to be valued, but he was *not* here to help the rebels, to help shape them from scared and angry civilians into fighters that had a sense of purpose, that had a sensation they could better control their lives.

*Is this how Er’izma feels all the time?* Jorel wondered, the man having gathered an entire legion. However, the man still seemed to have a Jedi’s unflappable calm, so obviously delt with the same feelings that Jorel had now. Trying to talk about it with Hisku didn’t help, as she didn’t really understand his problem.

“We are helping to train new recruits,” she’d stated, confused. “Of course we’d be proud of them when they succeed.”

His response of Pride being something that Jedi *weren’t supposed to have* had her just rolling her eyes and informing him that she ‘wasn’t a Jedi’, so she didn’t know what he was to do. Regardless, he did his best to keep himself centered, though it was a work in progress.

Several weeks passed, until Waleye called him into his office, along with Kiri and Harmet, the Devorian woman and the man both relaxed, as if they were expecting this. Jorel, however, felt a bit nervous, but centered himself in the Force as he waited for Waleye to come back. The man walked in, along with Dash Baize, one of the other ‘veterans’ of the Resistance, and Stelog took his seat, motioning for the four of them to do the same.

“You’ve all been working hard to get ready,” the Rebel cell leader stated, glancing at Jorel, “Some of you more than others.”

The Padawan winced, “Sorry, was I not supposed to? I was just-”

“Shab, kid,” Kiri swore, shaking her head. “Calm down. You’re doin’ just fine. If you were makin’ a mess of it, we’d’ve said something!”

Waleye nodded. “We normally let our recruits find their own feet first, but we’ve been short on time, and most of *us* learned on the job. Don’t really know all that much ‘bout trainin’ myself. No, you’ve been doin’ good, which is why you’re here.”

The man typed on his terminal bringing up a holographic image of the town of B’skonako, giving the four Resistance fighters a rundown of its history, its major locations, and the defences the Congressional forces had set up. It wasn’t until Kiri, with a sharp toothed smile asked, “So when are we taking it?”, that Jorel realized why he’d been called in.

“Tomorrow,” had been Waleye’s response. “And each of you will be leading a squad.”

“Even me?” Jorel asked, unsure.

“Even you,” the leader affirmed. “After what you did at the base, you’ve earned it.”

Kiri laughed, “Just make sure to leave some for the rest of your team, kid!”

And so the general plans had been made, anything to specific bound to fail in a large operation like this one. Harmet and Dash were to take the mining and fabricating centers, holding them and making sure the Congs didn’t destroy them on their way out, the destruction of Kernast showing they had no compunctions against wrecking their own infrastructure, any civilians still there ‘acceptable casualites’. Kiri was going to go after the small ad-hoc military base that had been set up, leaping into their metaphorical jaws to strike deep before they realized they were being attacked, while Stelog stormed the city hall, securing the mayor and other city officials, and in doing so added legitimacy to their freeing of the city from military hands.

Jerel’s job? He was to hit the patrols moving about the city, denying any of the other groups’ reinforcements, and then moving to reinforce anyone who was having trouble. “But how do I plan for that?” he’d asked.

“You don’t,” Waleye had informed him with a smile. “You just follow your gut.”

Dash had frowned, looking at their leader with concern. “That’s the worst position. You think the boy can hack it?”

Kiri had shaken her head, “You didn’t see the kid work. He can.”

And that was that, the groups left to go plan, the Padawan heading right for Hisku and dragging her back to their room for advice, as he had *no idea what he was doing.* Unfortunately, she didn’t have much to offer, her experience was almost entirely in hitting hardened targets like the base they’d raided last time, boarding actions, or guarding against the first two. The most she could offer was suggestions on general tactics, splitting up the twenty two people they’d been assigned into two teams. When he’d put forward splitting up, so that he would lead one and Hisku would lead the other, however, she’d shot that down *hard,* going so far as to say she’d outright ignore his orders if he even tried.

Lacking any other real plan, they’d decided to just ‘wing it’, one group taking one speedertruck each, and for Jorel to look to the Force for guidance, for what that was worth. All of that led to his current position, waiting in the speeder for the fighting to start, his attaché sitting across from him, cool as ice, red eyes closed as she waited, the other people they had with them so nervous that the Padawan could practically taste it in the Force. Thankfully,

When his commlink chimed, he nearly jumped, toggling it on. “Yes?”

“*The Congressional forces have been mobilized,”* Waleye informed the Padawan. *“They’re on high alert, and have captured ‘Rebels’. They plan to execute them to set an example.”*

Jorel blinked in confusion, looking at Hisku, who was staring at the commlink with a frown. “Did we have people there already?” the Jedi asked.

“*No, they’re grabbing random people,*” the cell leader replied. *“We’re still going ahead, but your team’s being sent to stop them. I’m sending you the coordinates now. Do your best to save them, ge’verd.”*

 The link was disconnected, and the small datapad buzzed in his belt. Taking it out, Jorel saw the location, and the route they were supposed to take, but if felt. . . *wrong.* The sensation didn’t make sense, at first, until the Padawan centered itself and tried to track its source, finding it coming not from his own fears, but from the world itself.

*The Force,* he thought, the feeling of danger stronger now, but it was an ephemeral thing, not a definite answer, just the vaguest of feelings. Looking at the map program, he changed the path, but that was wrong as well. *How about this?* he thought, changing the path again and again, until he found one that felt *right,* though he couldn’t say *why.*

*Both trucks?* He put forward, but the same feeling of wrongness, lesser this time, returned. A few more tweaks and he had a secondary route that, once again, felt *right,* a sense of calm confidence brushing up against his own mind.

*Okay, got it.* But the problem was how to tell the *drivers* that. “Hisku,” he stated, sending the first path to her datapad, the girl looking at him expectantly, “Show Olen to go this way, I’ll go tell Raddax.”

She nodded, and they both stood, Jorrel dashing out of the back of the truck, and, calling the Force to himself, leapt up, passing over the cab of the truck following behind them and landing on the stretched plastifiber that covered its bed. A few more steps and he leapt again, easily reaching the next truck down, then the next, landing on the hood of the fourth in a roll that took him off to the side, hand reaching out and grabbing hold of the door as he brought himself to a stop.

“Choy? U loca?” the Rodian driver asked in Huttese, doubting the Padawan’s sanity, looking between Jorel and the speedertruck ahead.

“Change of plans,” the Jedi told the member of his squad, hooking one foot under the ladder rung while the other pressed down, making a clamp that held him in place as he used both hands to work the datapad, highlighting the secondary route. “Congs are going to kill innocents because they think they’re *us.* You need to take *this* path,” he said, handing the driver the Datapad, while reaching in to hold the controls steady.

The green-skinned alien was reluctant to relinquish the controls, but did so at Jorel’s impatient stare, looking over the route. “Jeejee bolla tah heee wonkee?”

“We’re going this way because there’s trouble if we go in straight,” Jorel replied in Basic. “You’ll show up a minute or so after we do, so you’ll be our backup. Understand?”

“Tee koo bai dokoi? Joday che mi,” the Rodian shrugged, happy to not be the first group to enter combat, tentatively handing the Padawan his Datapad back and taking the speedertruck’s controls back.

“See you then,” Jorel smiled, putting the datapad away and climbing up the truck, running down from the cab, along the hood, and leaping high, tucking his feet in to clear the top of the next truck’s covered top, rolling to his feet and making his way back. On the speedertruck before his he modified his jump, coming in low enough to land on the bed, two quick steps bleeding off momentum, allowing him to drop back in his seat, Hisku already in hers, while everyone else seated there just stared. “What?” he asked, unsure.

Celnor, one of the men that’d joined the Resistance the same time Jorel had, just laughed, smacking the arm of the woman he was sitting next to, one of the new recruits. “Ya owe me ten credits. Told ya he was in the circus.”

<SWPP>

Their convoy split up right before reaching the city proper, speedertrucks speeding through city streets that would be suspiciously clear, were it not for the distant sounds of blasterfire coming from ahead of them. The one and two story buildings quickly gave way to taller structures, as they got closer and closer, more people seen as they fled the other way, parting to let them pass without slowing.

Following the vague feeling that it was time, even though they were still several streets away, Jorel stood, calling out, “Get ready! Hisku, join me topside!”

Running down the bed, Jorel gripped the outside edge as he leapt, pivoting up and around, landing in a roll atop the speeding truck and coming up on one knee with his rifle at the ready, his attaché following only a little less gracefully pulling herself up over the top smoothly. Both of them were perched with one hand holding the fabric top, aiming his rifle with the other. Listening to the Force, it warned him of the turn, and of danger, ducking as he gripped tight, the speedertruck swerving as it round the corner, blasterfire coming for them.

The red bolts passed over his head, Hisku behind him opening fire, and he looked back up to see a pair of uniformed guards trying to stop them. He could feel his partner focusing on the one to left, so Jorel copied her, using the same technique to focus in on the one on the right, trusting in the Force and staying still as bolts sped past him. Locking it in, he pulled the trigger once, the shot taking the guard in the throat, in the space between armor and helmet, and dropping him as Hisku hit her own target.

Both men fell as the truck went by, careening around another corner, coming up on a platform where several people were kneeling, arms bound, bags over their heads while a man in uniform, with several medals on his breast, leveled a blaster pistol at one of the innocents, two already dead.

Aiming, Jorel tried to hit the man in charge, but he only had a moment, and pulled the trigger.

And *missed.*

His shot went wide, going too far to the left, harmlessly splashing against a wall, but the second bolt, from Hisku, *hit,* taking the man in the chest and throwing him backwards.

The other guards turned and started firing on the truck, and Jorel followed the feeling he had, letting go of the speedertruck as it screeched to a halt, jumping as he was sent flying forward, twisting so the blasterbolts that hit him were glancing blows, his armor scorching but holding up as he closed on the guards.

Drawing with his vibroknife with one hand, he flicked it on as he landed in a run, dashing past one guard, blade whipping out and decapitating him, as he fired with the other, his shots wild, but half of them hitting the mark. However, they were wearing armor as well, and only one of the half a dozen people he hit went down.

The remaining guards turned on him, the feeling of *Danger* blaring in his ears as he bolted for parked speeders, shooting as he dove over them, taking cover. The enemy paid for doing so, as Hisku, along with the rest of his men in the truck that spilled out, opened fire, a hail of bolts heading towards the soldiers that were only now starting to take cover.

Feeling the sense of danger pass, Jorel stood, aiming over the top of a speeder and firing, as while the two dozen enemy soldiers had taken cover from Hisku and the others, many were wide open for Jorel. He fired upon them, his blaster starting to get dangerously hot, but that just meant he had another weapon in his arsenal.

A uniformed woman, not in armor, tried to rally the others, but a shot from Hisku once more threw them into disarray, as members of his squad spread out, continuing to outmaneuver the enemy. As they cut down their foes, more spilled in from the other side, a hovertank coming around the corner, gun tracking to the side, slowly pointing towards their speedertruck.

*“Hisku! Move!”* he yelled, hoping he could be heard over the din of battle, and to his relief she was already moving, yelling something herself as she leapt off the top, Olen diving out of the driver seat and scrambling away.

From the skirt of the tank came two missiles that shot across the battlefield, striking their ride and causing it to go up in an explosion that sent people sprawling. The enemy cheered, and started to advance, pressing the advantage, even as a few more were shot down.

Their side wasn’t looking that great, armed and armored with the same gear the equipment the government soldiers were, only painted green instead of blue, and Jorel could feel the deaths of three of his squad, familiar with their muted Presence in the Force, and recognizing it when it dispersed, a surge of **Dark** pouring out from where they previously stood.

The tank started firing more, two side-mounted rotary blaster cannons spinning up and laying down fire, the main gun firing where several of Jorel’s people had taken cover, and he felt another one of them die, the pain of the others from their injuries screaming in the Force.

Jorel hesitated for a moment, wondering if they should pull back, remembering the *last* time he’d been in combat like this, years ago, but pushed that thought from his head. *You’ve gotten better,* he reminded himself. *You won then, and you’ll win here too.*

But last time he’d called upon the **Dark**, and this time he *refused* to.

Sweeping a Veil around himself, to divert attention away from himself, the technique requiring a lot more to maintain with eyes already on him, he filled his body with the Force and charged forward with near supernatural speed, not the fastest he could go, but the landscape of the battlefield meant that was impossible anyways.

Resisting the urge to pull his saber, he charged the tank, dodging its fire by tracking the turrets, but it wasn’t the only thing shooting, and he only had a fraction of a second’s warning in the Force as he threw himself forward, a bolt passing through where his head would’ve been. Rolling through the dive, he came up, running, wishing now more than ever he had his lightsaber, and thankful for Er’izma’s training to dodge without it.

Closing on it, he passed a soldier, who had pulled a grenade and primed it, ready to throw. Sheathing the vibroblade, Jorel reached out and smacked the soldier’s hand, sending the grenade flying towards more enemies, and ripped a second from the soldier’s belt. Jumping and twirling around, he shot the surprised soldier at point-blank, finishing his spin as he landed, still closing on the tank, which had started to turn, tracking him.

Feeling the warning in the Force, he leapt to the side, the main gun’s bolt missing him, barely, but the blast still pushed him to the side, causing him to stumble as he landed. Fear and worry tried to sink its claws in him, as the other soldiers started to turn on him, but he let those emotions slide off him, calm in the Force, and continued his task.

Letting the feelings guide him, he took three steps forward, then one back, weapons fire passing where he would’ve been if he hadn’t stopped, before darting forward again, closing the distance and reaching the tank, easily climbing up it, and reaching the hatch on top.

Which was locked.

Flattening himself against the metal, a few bolts barely missing him, the closest soldier taken out by a bolt from his people, the Jedi reached out in the Force, looking for the feeling. . . *there*. A bit of Telekinesis and the hatch unlocked, swinging open as he tugged it, revealing the shocked face of the enemy. Not saying a word, Jorel primed the grenade dropping it and closing the lid.

Jumping away, taking a hit in the shoulder that he twisted with, turning it into a glancing blow, he could barely hear the muted detonation as he ran for cover, the tanks internals broken , causing it to crash to the ground. Jumping to the side, he landed and scrabbled backwards next to one of the rebels, only to look over and realize it was actually one of the enemy, who stared at him, before starting to raise his blaster. The Padawan lashed out, using Tutumenis to disperse the heat as he slapped away the burning hot barrel, lifting his own shimmering weapon to kill the other man.

*Where’s our backup?* he thought, and, as if in response, he heard shouting from the soldiers, followed by a flurry of blasterfire from the same direction the tank had come. Feeling out in the Force, and not getting a warning, he stood, blaster at the ready, seeing the second team had arrived and were laying down fire, the soldiers in the middle unable to take cover in both directions at once.

Adding his own fire from the right side of the plaza, the enemy was caught in the crossfire, and quickly cut down. Silence fell over the battlefield, thick with the **Dark** that reached out to him, silent, but he knew it was merely waiting. Walking over to Hisku, she turned his way, gun at the ready, anger and relief warring across her features.

*“What were you thinking!?”* she demanded, striding up to meet him, furious. “How can I protect you if you charge in like that!?”

“I was thinking I needed to divert their fire. How many have we lost?” he asked, keeping himself centered.

The Chiss woman looked like she wanted to say more, but she bit it back. “Five, maybe six. Three more injured.”

“Then we lost a fourth of our people,” he replied, wondering what he’d done wrong, to lose that many people.

***If you’d used the Dark Side from the beginning, you wouldn’t have lost anyone,*** the alien thought whispered in cloying tones. ***You could have destroyed them all before they dared fire a single shot at yours.***

*Except I’m not supposed to show I’m a Jedi,* he thought back, knowing it was a mistake to engage that feeling, but unable to stop himself.

***Says who? An old man that abandoned you to stumble in ignorance? You could get the answers you wanted without skulking like a coward,*** it argued, the way it always did, so that it made sense unless you *really* thought about it. ***How much time have you wasted already? Late as an initiate, late as a Padawan, if you do nothing but wait for those who call themselves your better, you’ll never be a Knight.***

“Jorel, are you hurt?” Hisku asked, looking over him. “Your armor seems intact, but-”

“No, it’s fine,” he reassured her, turning his mental back on the **Dark**, focusing on the moment, not vague ‘could’ve’s. Clicking his commlink, he reported, “*Jorel here, took out the enemy, they had a tank.”*

The response was immediate, *“A TANK! Pull back! I’ll send Kiri with our missile launcher!”* Waleye commanded.

“They *had* a tank,” the Jedi stated, Hisku glaring at him. “I blew it up with a grenade.”

“*. . . Good job,”* their leader replied after a moment, the sound of blasterfire in the background. “*In that case, go support Dash. If we lose the factories, it’ll cost us.”*

“Will do,” Jorel replied, the commlink disconnecting, as he looked around, everyone looking to *him*. It was an odd feeling, but one he was getting used to, and he tried to channel Er’izma’s unflappable calm as he ordered, “Alright everyone, we need to move out. Grab what you need from the dead Congs and we’ll get going!”

By his side, Hisku quietly prompted, “And our dead?”

The Padawan nodded minutely. They had passed on, become one with the Force, now only empty shells, but he knew that others didn’t approach death the same way others did. “Jelnar, Fela, Ulut, get the fallen. We’ll apply first aid to those that are injured on the way. We’re heading to the manufacturing center. Drivers, you know where that is?”

“Uba koee tee kacay, um tee koniakiheua doth duaia bimhee!” the Rodian objected, waving towards the flaming wreck of their speedertruck.

“I remember,” Jorel shot back, pointing to a similar looking speedertruck parked to the side, “But the Congs left one of theirs for us. I’m sure they won’t complain if we borrow it for a bit!” Jogging over to it, the Padawan leapt up onto the hood, then on the roof of the cabin. “Now let’s get going, men, we’re not done yet!”