

The Will to Win

Sleep had been a luxury over the past four days, but Evant Taelyan had managed twenty minutes of it, enough to pull him a few notches back from completely worthless. Slowly he began the process of waking up, against the protest of his body, having been called back awake by a Private he had given orders to earlier. He was currently in command of the 37th Infantry Legion and 502nd Special Forces Groups deep below the surface of Begeren, holding a strategic objective for the past five days waiting for reinforcements. There was no time for sleep.

He hadn't managed to make out the words that agitated him back awake, but the sounds of explosions and blaster fire that followed rang in clear. They came with a faint echo and sounded as though it was all right on top of him. The large cavern where he slept, in the makeshift command post at the base of a massive Sith statue, was the central relief point for eight different battle positions making up the entire forward boundary of the perimeter defense. As any individual position came under attack, the resulting sounds of the battle would quickly echo down to the main chamber. Due to the endless attacks, it was as if the main chamber was perpetually filled with the sounds of battle. At times the Sith Warrior even longed for the dull howling wind that numbed your sense of sound he had experienced earlier on the surface before his subterranean plunge.

Blinking, he quickly cleared his vision as he leaned up. His eyes familiarized themselves again with the bright glow of the artificial lighting coming from the different stations. The brightest was in the center, where bright light escaped from small gaps in the large tent setup as the medical relief point, kept well lit to tend to the injured from the front lines. Nearby a much smaller tent glowed a brilliant red color, inside maps, plans and strategy was laid out on the tables of the command post where he spent most of his time. Elsewhere around the massive chamber were clusters of light coming from engineering teams performing maintenance on their limited equipment, or squads of soldiers in relief resting and waiting to be called back to the front lines.

All of it came back as expected, routing over the past few days. The new sensation was the smell. The original musty dry smell of dust and filth was slowly replaced by the stench of death. Bodies of dead enemies killed on the different front lines, or the rodents that called these tunnels home, mixed with the smell of dead Scholae Palatinae soldiers who came to death despite medical attention. Even burying the bodies didn't help. As if all the human excrement generated by the battalion strength force that got worse every day wasn't enough. It was difficult to stay focused. Yet, he was growing used to the smell and could hardly notice save a particularly strong draft coming by.

It was worse when it came to taste, if there was even anything around worth tasting. The entire force was growing short on water and food and began rations. They hadn't set out to hold a position for five days, yet storms on the surface and the movement of other units demanded it.

The already stale and bland meals available were made worse when the smell of death coated every breath. With dry lips and early dehydration it took an uncomfortably long time to even manage to down the food. Reaching down Evant grabbed his canteen and took a small drink, savoring every drop as he got to his feet.

He hadn't showered in nearly a week, but he imagined his own smell was the least of their issues. The twelve kilometer hike across the desert to get to the entrance of the caves had already coated him in sweat, draining his body of its precious water, before the additional five miles deep into the earth down an old mining corridor dried him out and left his body aching. He knew he wasn't nearly as worn down as many of the troops under his command and wouldn't for a moment let on that he had any discomfort at all. Instead he adjusted his armor and cloak when he got to his feet, and walked with his head high towards the small command center.

Deep below the surface in the dark, where sounds echoed as if they were all around you, covered in the stench of death forgetting what it was like to taste food, the Sith Warrior still had a sense none under his command had. Yet, as he reached out with the Force to understand what was going on above on the surface, or even within the caves nearby, the entire thing was so clouded little sense could be made of it. With every unit of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood in the area, along with the One Sith, not to mention years of Dark Side energies crafted into the planet itself, it was like trying to speak in a crowded room. Internally he could sooth his body and call on the Force for inspiration, yet he felt isolated. He managed what he could in brief moments of battle meditation to boost morale and give the troops over his command the upper edge.

Stopping short of the command center, Evant stopped and looked around. Appreciating briefly, that moment in time and where he stood. A massive cavern carved several kilometers underground as a crossroads to rich surveyed pockets of valuable crystals. The shape of each tunnel was identically carved by the same equipment. The chamber itself they temporarily called home was large enough to turn around and properly maneuver several at a time, including facilities for shift changes and coordination.

Looking a bit closer, beyond the shape you could make out elaborate decorations in this main chamber. In some cases headstones still stood with ancient Sith markings on them, remembering some long since dead follower of the Dark Side. To his left casting shadows across the wall behind it, was a massive elaborately carved Sith statue, the supposed leader of the fallen who lay in the floor beyond. For a moment the Sith imagined the pride and meaning of this place at some point in the past when it was finally completed. Despite all the noise, being so close he could feel the power of the Dark Side all around them. This was a large part of how he had so successfully managed battle meditation.

Yet now this chamber found a third purpose. Trenches dug out of the ground. Parts of the tomb replaced or moved down the lines to use as cover for the heavy weapons teams. What was once erected in honor of a fallen Sith, now protected his men from harm on the front lines. Pieces of

this tomb protected those who meant to examine and search it. He was anxious to show off his find to the Emperor when he got the chance, to the Dark Council, yet for now he must hold strong and maintain his position and what was his. In this place, this new found purpose for the massive chamber unfolded.

“My Lord, we have fallen back from the main perimeter in the east tunnel. They have reduced line of sight on the enemy from their new positions at a bend in the tunnel but it will allow a large gathering for an offensive push by our enemy,” a Sergeant reported, not even announcing his presence at the urgency of the announcement.

“Thank you Sergeant Frohurst, establish final protective fire at the base of the tunnel to the main chamber. Get all units in relief in arms and ready to hold this main chamber if they break through. Send runners to other fronts to advise them of final stand orders,” Evant announced as he grabbed his lightsaber and began to walk towards the east tunnel. All senses numbed to the logic and strategic mission in his head.

Walking the short distance over to the medical tent, Evant noticed several other officers gathering near the command post and discussing orders. He poked his head inside the medical tent, nearly blinded by the brilliant light, “Sergeant Markyle, prepare all your medics for more injured and wounded from the lines.”

As activity around the base picked up, everyone following their orders that were well known after nearly a week together underground, nothing was out of place. Quickly making way to his command tent, the Field Marshal gave a short salute to the small group of officers near the entrance, “Major Tromans, the battle is yours.”

“Yes my Lord,” the Major announced as he looked out over the chamber towards the east tunnel as bright flashes of light were visible at the edges.

Tucked inside the small command tent, surrounded by the scribbling of maps and battle plans all around him that were being executed by the well trained soldiers of Scholae Palatinae beyond. The Sith Warrior closed his eyes and blocked out all his senses, feeling only the will and images imprinted on the minds of all living beings within the battle perimeter strategically setup for this one purpose.

Evant fell into a deep battle meditation, from his central point he cast an image of victory. All fear and despair built up over the past five days was cast away in the minds of every single one of the six hundred and fifty three men under his command. Tucked deep below the surface for days with limited resources and almost inhumane conditions, the 37th Infantry Legion and 502nd Special Forces Group fought with the power of war on their side.

It was more effective than his single blade on the front lines slashing down his enemy. With every second that an enemy kept their blaster rifle on the enemy, every right decision made when

performing surgery on a wounded soldier, every quick repair of a heavy weapon on the line by an engineer, every steady shot taken by a sniper to stop an enemy in their tracks, his influence was incrementally benefitting across the entire battle.

He would sustain it as long as he could, the Dark Side emanating in the chamber fueling his cause. In the end he only hoped it would be enough. That slight reservation the only one that existed in that moment for all his troops.