

Korroth
Jedi Peacekeeper
Disciples of Baas
House Satele Shan
Clan Odan-Urr
#8488

3289 words

Odan-Urr vs Plagueis Between Light and Dark

Holding the Line

Prompt II: Enemy Mine

The sun-scorched plains of Florrum opened up before the three scouts, perched as they were on their high ridge. They were lying down on their bellies, a grey-skinned Pau'an in the middle and two Mon Calamari from *Kota's Fist* handling datapads and comlinks to either side. The Jedi was holding a pair of macrobinoculars up to entirely black eyes, relaying his observations to the two soldiers. Below them, on a wide plateau, KUDF forces were pushing the enemy South and taking control of the last cliffs. The low-intensity fighting and the armored columns of the Ascendant Legion fleeing into the Southern hills confirmed the previous intelligence reports, that Plagueis was withdrawing from this particular battle. The three scouts had been sent to find a reason for the enemy's suspicious actions, but so far they had seen no additional Plagueis forces drawing to the battlefield.

Korroth's perception of the plateau below was not limited to sight. His awareness stretched out into the Force, capturing the disturbed ripples stirred up by the battle. The exuberance of the Odanite army was already subsiding, as its unexpected advance met with the need to entrench at the Southern end of the plateau. Apart from the last dregs of their rearguard, the Plagueis forces

exuded nothing but a disciplined confidence, certainly nothing to indicate an unplanned retreat. The Jedi Peacekeeper held his breath, trying to “hear” the faintest underlying echoes from the direction of the Legion’s withdrawal, but he could distinguish nothing. They were not splitting their forces, there were no battalions hidden in the shadows of the hills, no massed artillery moving up to raze the plateau.

The currents of the Force suddenly tugged the Pau’an’s attention in the opposite direction, behind him on the ridge. A blaster shot rang out, the Mon Calamari to Korroth’s right screamed out, then he heard the unmistakable snap-hiss of an igniting lightsaber. The Pau’an leapt up and spun around; his green blade came up and clashed with the crimson beam of his opponent. The Dark Jedi was a tall Duros, his rapid, powerful strikes battered at Korroth, who could barely keep his ground in the surprise of this abrupt attack. In-between the flashes of green-red light, the Jedi saw three Legion troopers advancing on the ridge. His surviving Mon Calamari companion rushed forward, a concussion grenade raised in his hand.

“No!” Korroth shouted, barely deflecting a saber thrust to his shoulder. The KUDF soldier leaped at the Ravagers. The heavily-armored troopers raised their weapons and gunned him down, but the grenade’s explosion threw everyone off their feet. Korroth felt an elbow shoved into his face as he fell to the ground, then a fierce pain in his left side. The Duros loomed over him, his lightsaber thrust into Korroth’s midriff, just above the crest of his hip bone. The pain cut off the Jedi’s breath, the muscles of his torso tensed, but he had the presence of mind to remain immobile, or he would only widen the wound.

The Duros’s teal-skinned face was twisted in a rictus of exhilaration. His facial muscles were pulled tight, his features distended so that his teeth showed white against his lips, his slit orange eyes bulged wide below the bunched-up folds of skin on his forehead. His whole body quivered in the act of inflicting physical agony, but Korroth did not reciprocate. The Pau’an took his gaze away from his opponent’s warped visage and sunk his consciousness into his abdomen, drawing down into the centre of the pain. He let the searing sensation envelop him - it became simultaneously his whole world and an infinitesimal pinpoint. His mind was thus stilled, and so was his body.

The Dark Jedi’s facial muscles slackened, his lips drew down into a disappointed scowl. He pulled his lightsaber out of his opponent’s flesh, drawing a grunt from the supine Jedi. He now held the tip of his crimson blade steadily under Korroth’s chin, while his left hand rose and shoved the Jedi’s lightsaber hilt through the Force, out beyond the rim of the ridge. Korroth heard it clatter down the steep cliff face, once...twice...three times, each time more faint than the previous one.

“My lord,” one of the Ravager troopers had approached the two Force-users. He was holding one arm pressed to his chest, and he drew shallow breaths. Behind him, his comrade knelt beside

the third trooper, who was lying on the ground and making moaning noises. Part of the KUDF scout's body lay some way off, Korroth could not see the rest. "My lord, shall I call for evac?"

"Come here." The Duros spoke. "Restrain the Jedi." He did not deactivate his lightsaber until Korroth was handcuffed and the trooper stood with his rifle pointed at the Pau'an.

"Lord Khufus," the soldier tried again. "We need evac to take our wounded away."

The Sith ignored him. He turned to pick up a black cloak from the ground and he walked over to the prostrate Ravager. The man was still moaning, and his heel scraped back and forth, grooving the soil. Khufus pushed the other soldier aside and went down on one knee. He placed his left hand on the whimpering trooper's shoulder and his right hand, with the saber hilt, on his chest, below his chin. Korroth heard a muffled snap-hiss, the trooper's leg twitched, then he lay still.

"No evac, First," said the Sith as he stood back up. "We will continue due South-East. Bring the prisoner."

"Yes, Warlord," replied the "First" Ravager after a moment's hesitation. He motioned to the uninjured trooper and pointed at Korroth. The Pau'an was grabbed by the arm and hauled to his feet; the pain in his side exploded again, he felt like he was going to pass out. He ground his teeth and tried to shift his weight to his right leg. He could not walk on like this, he moved his manacled hands to the wound and coiled the Force into the plasma-cauterised flesh. Muscle fibres began to rejoin through the gap, grey skin appeared over the charred flesh, but immediately the Duros's head snapped to Korroth. He strode over and struck a heavy backhand on the Pau'an's temple, almost knocking him over again.

"We march at once," Khufus commanded, his large eyes fixed on the Pau'an. Though the wound had not mended properly, Korroth did not dare to make another attempt with the Force. He saw the Duros contract his upper lip, exposing his teeth. There was no anger in the Sith at the moment, only a certain eager thrill. Korroth felt puzzled by this behaviour; he could understand a Sith striking out of simple choler, but this one appeared to gain some kind of pleasure from it, and to expect a certain reaction from his prisoner.

The bare light of Florum's sun bore down on the four trudging figures, casting brief shadows behind them on the yellow sand of the flatlands. They had descended the South-Eastern slope of the high ridge, and now they headed towards the midday sun, skirting the range of the Western hills. In their trek the party had encountered several of the acid geysers that dotted the desert, and

they were passing by one now. A herd of skalders grazed around its rim. There were about twenty of the burly tusked ruminants.

At the head of the party walked the Duros, with the hood of his cloak pulled up to shade his eyes. Occasionally he glanced over his shoulder at his prisoner, wearing a frown more of impatience than concern. The Pau'an walked with a decided slant to the left, a slight limp and his hands drawn to his waist. With each step a lateral muscle of his left thigh gave way; the wound above his hip must have severed some motor nerve or other. Sweat descended the furrows of his cheeks, and it had little to do with the heat of the plains.

Behind himself Korroth could hear the steady steps of one trooper and the somewhat more trailing steps of the First. The latter's breaths came in short rasped gulps. Khufus hadn't allowed him to stop or use his medkit (not that there was much to be done about a broken rib); Korroth had begun to wonder if the Sith was driven more by the journey than by the destination. They had been avoiding the hills to the West, where he knew the Plagueis Legions were retreating, and instead they traversed this empty wasteland. Maybe this Sith just enjoyed inflicting pain, but the way the Duros stared back at him belied another motive, as if he was waiting for another opportunity to...

There was movement amongst the skalders. One of them gave out a snorting call, then the whole herd started scattering away from the geyser. Two of them barreled down in the direction of the party, while behind them a great jet of caustic fumes and vapour spouted from the geyser's well. The Pau'an did not hesitate to seize his own opportunity. His awareness reached out to the two panicked animals. He latched on to their simple, impulsive fear and used it to alter their flight path just a tad.

Khufus leapt to one side, narrowly avoiding one of the charging beasts. The Ravager trooper was not so lucky; the second skalder plowed into him, dragging him several feet before trampling him under its feet. Korroth hobbled towards the geyser as fast as he could, hoping to disappear beyond the caustic fountain and make his escape. The Pau'an saw the jets of acid steam were starting to subside, when without warning he received a mallet-like blow to the back of the head.

His vision went black momentarily, then he became aware of the Sith dragging him by the collar, up towards the opening of the geyser. He tossed the stunned Jedi to the ground, grasped the lapels of his kaftan and hauled him head and shoulders over the lip of the crater. The geyser's eruption had ceased for the moment, but Korroth could feel the rocks shuddering beneath him.

"You are lost, Jedi," growled the Duros. "You will never see your Clan again."

"What..." Korroth was clutching the Dark Jedi's sleeve with both manacled hands. "What kind of game is this, Lord Khufus?"

“You think you are strong, because you defy pain and exhaustion, because you clutch to hope in your hopeless situation,” the Sith’s lips retracted over his teeth, his eyes became wide and staring. “But what do you become when you realise the certainty of your death? When you gaze into the abyss,” he shoved the panting Pau’an further over the edge. “And recognise that you are no more for this world, that you have left your allies to fight on their own, your saber forever spent?”

Korroth attempted to pull himself back in, but he wheezed in pain as soon as he contracted his abdominal muscles. It felt like a hook was wrenching at the wound in his side. The only thing holding him up was the Warlord’s arm; if he let go, the Jedi would fall, without even a push. He began to breathe more easily.

“Odan-Urr will prevail with or without the intervention of my lightsaber, lord Khufus.” He had to raise his voice to be heard above the rumbling and bubbling from below. “My life holds no special value beyond that granted to it by the will of the Force; I am but a mote of dust in the terrible light of its gaze.”

“What of your mission to the ridge, Jedi? Your death will bring your skulking and prowling to an end, and the Clan will be bereft of its surveillance screen.”

“The reconnaissance has already... failed,” replied Korroth. The subterranean thunder grew louder every second. “I have no useful intelligence to report to my Council.” Initially, the Duros’s face slackened, but then a thin-lipped grin played on the corner of his mouth.

“I think the Force has ‘plans’ for you yet, Jedi.” With that, the Pau’an was hauled to his feet and both men threw themselves off the geyser’s escarpment. The geological monstrosity erupted again, hissing and sputtering, but it quietened after only a few seconds.

Korroth lay face down on the hard pock-marked earth. For a while the tearing pain in his left side occupied the entirety of his perception. The only relief came from the Force; with his guidance it progressively mended the gaping laceration, although a twinge remained in the side of his leg.

When he managed to stand up, he saw the Sith walking towards the First, who was holding his comrade up in a sitting position. The trooper, gored previously by the skaldar, was trying to get up on his feet, but without success. His leg was bent in an odd manner; though his thigh armour was merely scratched, it could not have protected his knee against the concussive force of the charging beast.

The First saw Khufus’s unswerving stare, but he hesitated. The Warlord brought a hand to his belt, to his lightsaber hilt, but the First raised his rifle - and fired it into his fellow Ravager’s head. Though Korroth could not see his expression for the helmet he still wore, the First did not take his sight from the Duros as he rested the body of his comrade on the ground and then stood

himself at attention. Khufus reacted with neither reproach or approval, he simply gestured for the trooper and the prisoner to resume their march.

The canyon's shade was a welcome respite from the light and heat of the sun, though, as far as the Pau'an could tell, it wouldn't be very long before the chill of the evening set in. They were still marching in a southerly direction. This time the panting, rasping First set the pace in front and the Sith brought up the rear, keeping an eye on his captive. Korroth himself felt thirsty and tired, but at least the wound in his side didn't bother him much any longer.

During the long sustained march the Pau'an had had plenty of time to mull over the ways of his Sith captor. Whatever his mission might be, there had to be more efficient ways of accomplishing it than trekking through the desert on foot. Korroth suspected that the Duros was doing this partly for his own personal enjoyment. The adherents of the Dark Side find many different paths to power, and this particular one seemed to relish imposing his dominance personally on his opponents - and his allies.

Just then the Jedi became aware of a low reverberation in the distance. It couldn't be another geyser, it was too steady and continuous, and... it was getting closer. The First must have heard it too, because he stopped and turned around.

"Halt!" The Warlord ordered in a muted voice. He pushed his prisoner into a deep crevice in the side of the canyon wall, with the First following behind. It wasn't long before what must have been a squadron of speeder bikes zoomed past on the surface above the canyon. Over the lip of rock, Korroth caught glimpses of Weequays, bandanas and rifle muzzles. Khufus moved up beside Korroth and placed the hilt of his lightsaber beneath the Pau'an's chin. Having made his forewarning clear, he turned his attention to the First.

"Report to Commander Lorne," the Duros said in a firmer voice, to be heard over the noise. "Confirm that the miscreants are moving into position as expected."

"Yes my lord." The First extracted a comlink from his belt and rested his rifle against the rock wall. Speeder bikes were still racing past overhead, but there was no chance of the three in the canyon being heard over their high-pitched roar. "Legion Command, First eight-eight-wesk. Native assets moving North-North-East one-three point five, from six-dorn-peth-resh, niner-five-foer-seven..." The First continued to reel off a series of numbers. Meanwhile the Duros moved his face closer to Korroth.

"You see, Jedi," he growled, baring his teeth. "The Force had a plan for you all along, I only had to open your eyes to it. You see, now, how your friends fall unknowing into our trap. They are beset on all sides by their enemies, the unseen hammer set to smite them into the anvil, their

fate sealed as long as they remain ignorant.” His feral eyes were large, his face stretched taut; he looked like the depiction of a fierce god of war. “But how does it feel, little mote of dust, to be filled once again with righteous purpose, and yet to be in chains?” Korroth did not reply, he turned his head away. The noise overhead had turned into a rolling rumble of a lower register, like that of heavy repulsorcraft.

“Jedi, now you see,” the Sith continued undeterred. “How I have mastery of your very being. When all is stripped away, you are nothing but an instrument of the Force, and now I have divested you of even that.” His voice broke into a croak. “You are broken, severed from action and purpose!”

The Pau’an was no longer listening. His attention had been on the First’s rifle all along, leaning there on the ravine’s rock face. His awareness had journeyed down its skyward-pointed barrel, to the grip and trigger, and now, through the Force, he squeezed down hard. A salvo of blaster shots fired up into the sky, then the weapon fell over.

“Frak!” The First had just enough time to jump on his gun before Weequay heads appeared over the rim of the ravine, followed immediately by blaster shots.

“Move!” Shouted Khufus, throwing the Pau’an into the wider canyon and activating his lightsaber. “You will not deny me my prize!” He growled.

The First followed Korroth into the canyon as he fired back at the pirates, but two speeder bikes had already descended to their level and were bearing down upon them. Khufus extended both hands towards them, and Korroth brought his own manacled hands down on the Warlord’s arms. The Force impulse shot out from the Sith and hit the frontal outriggers of the bikes and sent them crashing into the canyon wall.

The twin explosions blasted Korroth and Khufus off their feet, but the Pau’an had twisted his arms into those of his captor, and his hand was latched onto the lightsaber hilt. They struck the opposite rock wall; Khufus crumpled to the ground, while Korroth rose with the crimson lightsaber ignited in his hand.

The wreckage of the bikes filled the canyon with thick smoke; one end of the passage was completely blocked-off by billowing fire, and the sky had disappeared behind the clouds of black fumes. The First lay unmoving some way off, his armor severely charred. Khufus sat against the canyon wall, facing Korroth. Half the Duros’s head was burned, the flesh blackened and rumped, but a lopsided grin still stretched his lips. His mouth opened and emitted a wheezing laugh.

“Do you feel it, Jedi?” He rasped, what remained of his features twisting in pain. “You hold perfect sway over my life or death. You will not kill me, it is not your purpose, but you feel it, don’t you? The exquisite surge of triumph, the elation that comes of knowing that you hold a creature in your hand, and you could crush it utterly at your will.”

“A mote of dust.” Korroth muttered, more to himself than the croaking Duros. He heard many footsteps scrambling down the ravine. The Sith was right, his purpose was not here; the Clan had to be warned, that was paramount above all else. He deactivated the red lightsaber and disappeared into the smoke.