#### **[CSP/CNS] Gone in 60 Seconds**

By Macron Sadow 4856 CNS

The cold wind whipped the snow around the assault transport as it landed. The Warhost ship dropped in gingerly, sensors seeking for the hard icy ground below. Corporal Tivash turned to his commanding officer. “I can’t see squat in this whiteout sir!” The human expertly worked two joystick controls and manipulated thrust slider-levers from the seat he was strapped into.

“Copy that corporal. We have our orders, straight from the top. From Admiral Simonetti himself. We are to land, make contact with the extraction team, and return them and the asset to the Harbinger with all haste.”

The Arkanian lieutenant studied the readouts and glanced at the windscreen ports. All he saw was a whirling argent mass, the lights of his ship reflected in a million angles of frozen ice crystals. White like his hair. “This is rough duty, to be sure.” The ship shimmied a bit as the landing struts thunked into the snow and ice.

“Well, they sent the best right?” Cocky though he was, Tivash was a hardcore veteran. He had signed on with the Warhost at the end of the Crusades. Mykel Tivash had begun as a lowly private second-class. Growing up poor on Aeotheran had made him long for more- long for the stars, for glory, and for a good paycheck. He had found it in the vicious battles fought by the Warhost in the past few years. “Well, her ass-end is sitting on a snowbank sir. We’re down but we shouldn't stay here long. The reentry and landing heat is sure to loosen the ice and we might be stuck.”

Arcex Zoshra had survived battles on Aeotheran, supply drops onto Korriban, and drops onto the frozen moons of Inos. A few of his rack-buddies had died. A few more had been crippled. But all of them had been paid well, and their families were taken care of by the Orian Assembly's programs. So what if they were supposedly evil Jedi? It was all rumor anyhow. Who cares as long as their coin was golden, as the Aeotherani saying went.

“Yes.” Lieutenant Arcex Zoshra was donning a cold breath mask and pulling up his parka hood over his pale features. “I suggest you kit up. We’re to be on patrol until they arrive. R-5 there can take care of the ship’s defenses.” The white haired officer gestured at a battered old astromech droid. “Plug in old boy.” The droid complied as it connected a probe to the input jack next to the cockpit area. It spat a stream of bleeps and chirps. “Keep us safe and the engines hot. Run the de-icing protocol.”

“Yessir.” The human junior officer stood, zippered down the front of his coat and grabbed a breath-mask. “Suggestions on armaments sir?”

“Long guns are useless. You can’t see anything in this mess, and even scanner frequencies are sporked. Take a scatter-blaster and affix a vibro bayonet.” The Arkanian was doing just that, snapping a vibro bayonet to the stubby blaster rifle he held. “Grab your cold weather survival kit too.”

“Do you think we will need it sir?” The young warrior looked concerned. “It’s extra weight right?” Mykel struggled into his rucksack straps.

“You have a lot to learn still. Did you even get out on the surface on Inos 18?” The Lieutenant looked annoyed. “Gods help me.” The veteran dropped several hot-therm packs into his own backpack.

“No Sir,” replied the young man with a gulp. “I just delivered supplies on a transport to the landing zone. I didn’t get my promotion until just after. We got shot at, but I did not debark. Sir.”

“It’s cold out there, or have you not noticed? Even the slightest fuck-up can get you killed. Me killed. The mission lost… not good. Always be prepared. Do you compute?” The near-human strode to the entry ramp. “Lower the ramp, R-5.”

“Yes, sir!” The corporal was not entirely stupid. Listening to those who had been before him had saved his ass so far. He grabbed a cold survival kit and crammed it into his hard-pack. “Sir, you mind telling me how you got involved in all this?”

“Not at all corporal. I traveled to the Sepros system some time back. Before the Warhost. I worked for the Dlarit Corporation as a junior grade statistician. That became very boring as you might imagine. Anyway, I was offered a commision and took it right before the Korriban invasion. What a mess that was…” His voice drifted off. The Arkanian’s pale eyes almost seemed to match the tint of the hoarfrost outside. “Goddamn. We lost a lot of comrades that day. I saw on your record you were there son.”

“Yes. I made ammo drops in transports as a pilot. We got our tail blown off by a pop-missile. I managed to land and deliver the munitions anyhow by the skin of my teeth. Then they got me out of there.” The younger man became quiet. “My girlfriend was a level five Specialist in the Engineer Corps, third battalion.”

“Third?” The Arkanian turned to the Corporal as the ramp lowered. “They got their butts handed to them by One Sith warriors.” The officer jacked a grenade into the launcher slung under his rifle. Grenades were perfect for such conditions. They blew the hell out of everything moving and unmoving in an area. Close enough actually counted with grenades.

“That was the last time I saw her, sir.” The younger man raised his blaster to cover the area as they stepped down the ramp. “Clear!”

Arcex nodded quietly. An unspoken bond passed between them. He had lost dear friends too in that debacle. Blips of echoed sound echoed within his earpiece. “R5 says we have company. Coming in from the north. 100 meters out.”

“Hostiles?” The Corporal raised his weapon. “Not getting much on the thermal glasses. Too cold at that distance.”

“I don’t think so. Only one, and moving fairly quickly.” The Arkanian pushed a metal supply crate down the ramp and knelt behind it. “Get another line of fire from up there. Grab a crate and use it for cover.”

About five minutes passed and the sounds of snow crunching under boots became audible. The odd squerk, squerk sound of cold and dry snow crystals grinding against one another was an unmistakeable sound. “Halt! Identify yourself!” Lieutenant Zoshra braced his weapon against the top of the frosty metal crate.

“Hold your fire,” came a weirdly modulated voice. A figure clad in red and black with highlights of frost clutching a black lock-case shambled into view. Black blaster scars crossed the armor and the face-plate hung open. “Marshall Commander Macron Sadow,” gasped the ghastly figure. Congealed blood dripped slowly from his chin.

“Are there others?” queried the Lieutenant as he gestured as the Corporal behind him. “Go get the engines hot Tavish. We’re getting off this snowball. You must be a Foxtrot Uniform.”

“Affirmative. None that lived otherwise.” The figure clunked up the ramp. One leg hitched and a blaster penetration burn could be seen on the thigh. Caked blood and frostbite marked the right side of the Sith’s face. No normal person with those sort of injuries would still be walking. “Launch immediately. Inform Consul Sonjie, code zeta alpha that I have recovered the artifact.”

“Yes sir,” echoed both of the crew as the transport blasted away from the surface. They bent their wills to a medkit and the Elder waved them away.

“I will live,” he coughed. “Just make all speed. Give me a comlink channel.” He reached for a link microphone. “Macron Sadow. Give us a fighter squadron as an escort. That is an order.” Around them the freezing atmosphere of Mygeeto disappeared to be replaced by the cold of space. The battle was much more urgent up here in the blackness of space. “Warhost command, I am inbound with the prize.” The Adept coughed hard and sprayed blood across the comlink. “For Sadow!” With that, the Juggernaut passed out as the transport moved closer to safety. Four TIE Defenders moved deftly into formation around the transport as the Harbinger neared.

“Goddamn crazy bastard,” commented corporal Tivash. “Unreal. He’s a F-U?” The young man looked back at their unconscious passenger. “Interesting. I heard all Sith were boogeymen. He seems to be a lot like us though, mission and all.”

“Yes he is a foxtrot. You would be wise to stay away from him, and see that he accomplishes his mission.” The Arkanian grimaced. “It is Death to stand between the Sith and their mission. It’s a good thing we are on the same side.” The docking bay of the Harbinger hove into view. “I will personally be glad to be done with this detail.” He keyed the comlink. “Transport seven, requesting docking clearance. We’re coming in hot.”