

Acolyte Justinios Drake finished zipping himself into the sensor suit that would allow him to use the combat simulator and found himself perplexed as to why his Quaestor thought he could learn about armed combat from virtual reality. "This is a glorified children's game," the Aleena said mockingly, "and you want me to run a simulation about an ambush I already expect?"

Vanguard Rajiu Kang could only chuckle at House Dinaari's newest member. "Well professor if you think it would be that easy to survive the Order 66 scenario just humor me and complete it."

"When I get out of the way will you finally work with me on my lightsaber skills?" The academic in Justinios approached the military sciences as he had physical sciences; learn the what that has already been discovered, find the frontier and use what you've learned to advance the discipline. The Acolyte knew Rajiu had years of experience and just wanted his Quaestor to play the role of instructor instead of subjecting him to simulations.

"Yes I promise that the moment you complete the scenario I will drop everything to spar with you."

Grinning, Justinios finished putting on the sensor suit and donned the VR visor. As the simulation booted up a pleasant robotic female voice began detailing the scenario, "The Order 66 scenario places you into combat at the end of the conflict known as The Clone Wars. Your objectives are to survive combat with Separatist forces your own Clone Troopers after the initiation of Order 66. To complete the scenario you must escape to orbit and engage your hyperdrive. Your death at any point in the simulation will be scored as a simulation failure as will any attack made against Republic forces before the initiation of Order 66. The simulation begins now, good luck!"

As the scenario loaded the visuals, Justinios surmised that his immediate surroundings were some sort of troop transport. The scene that could be seen out of the front viewport was of a barren, pockmarked planet. As the transport neared the atmosphere the darker spots revealed themselves to be sink holes. Acolyte Drake could not identify the planet but as if on cue one of the Clone Troopers spoke to him. "General," the Trooper said while saluting, "Captain Dozer reporting with your briefing. We are approaching the surface of Utapau. General Kenobi's forces have surrounded General Grievous and the main Separatist forces. Our team has been tasked with taking out the command and control center on level five of the capital city."

As the Trooper finished his programmed exposition, the transport touches down on what Justinios could only assume was a landing pad on level five. The Aleena didn't much care about taking the command center, to win the simulation he only needed to not die.

"Captin what is our location?"

Dozer began to speak but before more than a few words were transmitted over the comlink, the screen went blank. As Justinios wondered what had just occurred, the pleasant female

computer voice returned to announce "Simulation Failed" as a summary was loaded onto the view screen. The recap indicated to Justinios that he was killed by a Commando Droid using a sniper rifle.

*Simple enough, he thinks to himself, I'll find cover before ordering my troops to advance.*

The Aleena reset the scenario and sat through the intro and briefing again. "...begins now, good luck!"

The transport landed and instead of looking for the Captain, Justinios found cover and contacted the Clone over the comlink, "Dozer, we need to take the entire squad and advance towards the objective" Remembering his failure he added, "Oh and watch out for snipers."

"Sir shouldn't we leave some of our squad behind to guard the gunship?" Acolyte Drake was only concerned with being able to take the gunship for himself when Order 66 was initiated and couldn't care if the Captain's programming included assuring safe exfiltration once the objective was completed.

"Captain if we take that command center there won't be any working droids left to prevent our retreat, guards will not be needed."

Dozer sent a *click* over the comlink to signal his acknowledgement. The clone then switched over to the squad channel and gave the orders for a full advance. The simulated Clones cut a path through the Separatist forces like a lightsaber through butter and the entire squad arrived relatively unscathed to the control center.

As the squad first finished clearing the exterior of defenders, Captain Dozer's voice rang over the comlink again, "General, the bunker has two separate entrances and I suggest we breach both simultaneously and approach the control room from two separate vectors."

Justinios loved that idea when he thought it through. *What a wonderful idea, if we split the squad that means I have to only worry about half of you when you turn on me and with any luck the droid defenders will actually notch a few kills of their own before then.*

"Roger that Captain, you lead the team that will breach the front entrance and I'll lead the team that will enter through the side." Justinios stifled a laugh as he took his forces over to their objective. He couldn't believe Raiju thought this was an efficient use of his time.

As soon as the door charges went off, the Clones tore through the opening. What little resistance the Separatists offered was easily handled by the troopers and Justinios simply strolled through the breach completely untouched. With a lull in the fighting, the Aleena expected this to be when the simulation sprang Order 66. As if on cue, blaster fire rang out in the hallway but it wasn't from his troopers.

Blazing red bolts rained down on the Clone forces faster than they could find cover. "General," it was Dozer over the comlink "we have reached the command center but it will take us a few moments to get the door."

"Please hurry Captain, it seems that the Separatists decided to focus their defense on my team and we can't hold out much longer." As Justinios clumsily tried to bat as many of the blaster bolts he could aside, it became clear that the simulation had decided to mass defenders at one side of his spot forces. "Can I get an ETA on that..."

The screen went black. "Simulation failed." The summary didn't need to tell Justinios that he died from a B2 droid's wrist blaster.

*No big deal, the Acolyte told himself, I won't split my forces this time.*

Justinios reset the simulation. "...begins now, good luck!"

Acolyte Drake directed his forces identically as he had done during last attempt up until the moment his troops were about the breach the the command center building. This time Justinios overrode Captain Dozer. "Dozer we will all breach the main entrance and cut a path to the control room."

The Clones breached the entrance just as commanded and Justinios directed the squad into the building, but they were immediately met with a barrage of blaster fire. The troopers were cut down as soon as they entered the opening, one after another being blasted before they could make it through the breach. The droids started to advance on Justinios' position and he began to call for a retreat until the pleasant voice returned, "Simulation Failed."

Getting frustrated, Justinios reset without even considering what went wrong. "...beings now, good luck!"

This time he commanded the Clones to take the objective and he would guard the command ship. Captain Dozer protests, but complies. Before the Clones even reached the command center the screen goes black, "Don't you say it..."

"Simulation failed," said the still pleasant computer.

Justinios felt a tap on his shoulder. He whipped off his headset to see a smirking Raiju, "Having trouble?"

"No," Justinios responded tersely, "just a little trial and error. Nothing a scientist like me can't work through." He put the headset back on and reset the simulations.

"...begins now, good luck!"

Justinios' fourth attempt was to take a small team into the side entrance while the main forces occupied the defenders at the main doors. They made it into the control room but the annoyingly pleasant voice returned, "Simulation Failed." This time Justinios was killed in the control room by his own troopers.

The simulation is reset. "...beings now, good luck!"

On attempt five Justinios sent his troops into the control room while he made a preemptive escape to the gunship. You won't *Order 66 me while my back is turned*. In his haste he forgot to go back out the side entrance and Dozer is waiting for him. The voice again says, "Simulation Failed." A barrage of blue blaster bolts.

The simulation is reset. "...beings now, good luck!"

Attempt six, Justinios goes out the side entrance but as he takes a direct route to the gunship he runs into other Clones. Blue blaster bolts are followed by the aggravatingly pleasant voice, "Simulation Failed".

Unconsciously the Aleena let an "argh" slip out in frustration. No doubt Raiju was behind him grinning like an idiot. Taking a deep breath he convinces himself he has it this time.

The simulation is reset. "...beings now, good luck!"

Following all the same steps, he left no guard at the gunship, lead the small team in through the side entrance and escaped as the clones entered the control room. But this time, the Acolyte took a long winding path back to the gunship. A trip that should have taken ten minutes instead took thirty, but at the end of the excursion, Justinios laid his eyes upon the Clone gunship, waiting on the landing platform all by itself.

Thinking of all his previous failures he took inventory of the area surrounding the transport. Justinios looked high for snipers and saw none. Focusing back on the ship itself he couldn't see any clones within the vicinity either. In a full sprint, he closed the gap between the gunship and his hiding place and entered the cockpit in a flash. His tiny body notwithstanding, he plopped down into the pilot's seat and began his preflight checks. The engines roared to life but the screen goes black, "What?! This is a bunch of..."

"Simulation failed." The voice states in an obnoxiously pleasant manner. Justinios, seething, waits for the summary screen to load. It does in short order but it indicated that the gunship had been sabotaged while they were preoccupied with the mission and the engines exploded as soon as they had started up.

A string of words exited the Aleena's reptilian mouth that would have made a smuggler blush and, in frustration, he whipped the virtual reality visor across the room. The device's momentum

carried into one of the durasteel walls, hit fast enough to shatter it into at least a dozen pieces. Even after the commotion of Justinios' fit had died down, Raiju could be heard laughing deep from within his green belly.

The blue-skinned Acolyte was not amused, "What is the point of this garbage?" The Nautolan's laughing began to subside as Justinios continued, "I am going back to my lab, back to something that isn't just pointlessly difficult. Like orbital physics."

A more serious expression forms on the Quaestor's face. "That is exactly the point. You need to learn that not everything is simply a formula that can be solved. Combat is as much art as it is science, it isn't a checklist you can memorize and work out on paper."

Understanding the point of the lesson, Justinios' emotions began to calm. Still slightly frustrated he asks, "Can we start lightsaber practice now? I don't think I can continue the simulation anyways now that the headset, um, disabled."

"Yes we can go practice." Raiju walked out of the room but before Justinios could follow him yelled from the hallway, "But that headset is coming out of your next payment."