

Silence at the bottom of the hill. At the top, swarms. Faceless soldiers with faceless visors waiting to partake in faceless battle. Wraiths and Ravagers, all dressed in dark, intimidating armor, their blaster rifles tucked gingerly into the crooks of their arms. They waited with their weapons and their droids and their ground assault vehicles. They waited with a cannon. They waited for carnage.

At the top of the hill, Abadeer Taasii waited, his arms folded across his robes, his wrists damp beneath the black bandages that swathed his red skin. His lightsabers lay dormant at his hips. The Proconsul was always keen on battle; any chance for victory, be it simulated or not, was enticing to him. He knew that the person leading the troops below was capable of being an admiral opponent; he said *capable*, of course, because he was never sure what would happen. The former general he now squared off with was never one to avoid erratic decision making.

After a long, uncomfortable lull, the Togruta rubbed at a tender spot on the white patch around his left eye. From nearby, he could swear he could coughing, maybe sniffing. Slowly, he approached the crest of the hill and looked down, seeing the tall, stiff silhouette of Ronovi below.

"This is stupid!"

Abadeer exhaled. "I figured you'd say that."

Even from a distance, he could spot the Epicanthix's nostrils flaring. She gestured wildly at the fifteen soldiers at her beckoning. "It's a waste of time! Why try to attain the higher ground when we both know it's a practice in madness?"

"Because the Dread Lord told you to."

"I've got fifteen men! What am I supposed to do with fifteen men?"

"Take the hill. Simple."

"I've got better things to do!" snarled Ronovi. "I had plenty of those silly simulated campaigns to practice and undertake when I was still a Journeyman in Tarentum. Under the tutelage of Maximillian von Oberst, let me remind you."

Abadeer grinned. "What, the man who ultimately wished to see you removed from the Throne of Yridia?"

*"That's not relevant!"*

"Maybe not, but this is a training exercise. And considering you haven't been doing much military work for, I don't know, four years, we figured a refresher would be useful." The Togruta

sneered, raising a long index finger and pointing it at the irritated woman. “Unless you’d like to trade away the position of general to someone more willing to take on this challenge?”

Ronovi’s one organic eye blazed. “You wouldn’t.”

“Might even get a non-Force sensitive to do it, actually,” continued Abadeer, clearly meaning to goad the stubborn Ronovi on. “In fact, why don’t we pull the Taskmaster away from his chores at the Circle to do this exercise with me?”

Bringing up Laren, even if not specifically by name, was enough for Ronovi, and Abadeer knew it. He let out a short, curt laugh as Ronovi began bellowing orders, and soon, her troops were streaming toward the hill. Of course, none of her men would directly take on the slope, and the Proconsul knew that; to attempt to overtake the spot by sheer, direct force would be nothing short of suicide. Instead, he watched deliberately as the small group of tanks, soldiers, and lower ranked Dark Jedi began to circle the hill, some clusters even moving purposefully past where the foundation of the hill lay.

Abadeer knew the strategy well. If perhaps his forces were, say, protecting a viable base of location at the opposite side of the hill, then Ronovi’s strategy would work perfectly. Of course, this was not the case at all. The other potential move would be to completely surround the hill, cutting off supplies leading away from their encampment. All conventional ideas on the battlefields; too conventional. The Togruta knew that Ronovi was never one to act predictably. Therefore, he figured he may as well play her game.

He may have been technically lower rank than Ronovi in the Brotherhood hierarchy, but Abadeer was still a leader and a developing military mind. His ability to analyze both the situation and his opponent was a mixed blessing, as he could come up with brilliant strategies though not necessarily quickly enough in the heat of the moment. He turned to look at his assigned troops, who were all ready to fight.

“Down the slopes, men!” he ordered. “All sides! Gut anything that gets in your way!”

He knew their weapons were all set to stun, and that would do the trick. He watched as his squadrons coursed down all the available slopes of the hill like dark streams of ink. He heard the cannon blast nearby, and while it nearly knocked him off his feet, he was prepared. He waited for the inevitable incapacitation of the enemy. And from a distance, he saw it done.

One by one, the fifteen men of the squadron were taken down. Abadeer remained at his post, witnessing it all. The stun blasters did the trick, sending each wily soldier onto his back and leaving him there to writhe like a turtle stuck on the back of his shell. He heard the cannon go off - again - and watched as a group of his soldiers toppled over from the concussive force.

Wait. *His* men. That was impossible. His squadrons were the ones operating the cannon!

He whipped around to see a gleeful, ruddy-faced Ronovi fire off the weapon like it was a toy and she was a giddy schoolboy. Abadeer ducked as she aimed its barrel toward him, rolling to the side and getting ready to counterattack. He knew he couldn't use his lightsabers - no deadly weapons here - and he was certainly not able to match Ronovi in hand to hand combat. He was ready to ask how Ronovi - a six foot seven Epicanthix with an eyepatch - had managed to slip past his own men and take control of the enemy equipment with ease. Before he could speak, she was already answering him.

"Next time, remind your men that the stronger person ought to be taken out first!" she crowed. Then, as Abadeer attempted to regain his footing, he heard the cannon roar like thunder one last time.

*How does she do it?*