

The Shaded Thicket

By Erik Cato

50km south of Seng Karash
Aeotheran
Orian System

The jungle forests of Aeotheran were host to a diverse range of creatures. Interaction with sentient life was a rarity the further one traveled from the occupied settlements. Few groups dared to journey far along the dark, forest floor unless for a largely profitable venture. It was for this reason that Erik Cato regarded it as welcomed place of solitude. He had traversed the humid jungles for several hours after landing his newly acquired vessel with no real destination in mind. Having spent the majority of his life either in captivity or aboard a ship, he welcomed the natural heat despite its intensity.

The Sith warrior had checked over his Ghtroc 720 light freighter from bow to stern before trusting his co-pilot to manage things in his absence. The simple FA-5 valet droid was the perfect companion for the most part. It assisted with ship operations and remained mostly silent so that the battle leader could manage his affairs in peace. Instructions were left with the droid to standby at the controls and alert by comlink if there was any sign of danger. With precautions taken, Erik gathered up his gear and departed the ship to scout the planet's surface for the next several hours.

Erik finally stopped when the moment felt right and settled himself down on the mossy jungle floor to meditate. His trust in the force had brought him to a dark place nestled in a dense thicket. Although his eyes could catch no signs of movement he sensed could sense much of the local fauna scurrying nearby as they went about their daily task of surviving. The living force was strong here. His heart rate was increasing rapidly as a result of its powerful presence. The warrior unfastened his breastplate, cowl and weaponry to arrange them neatly before him. Satisfied with their positioning, he closed his eyes and began to relax his entire form.

After a few minutes of calming his heart rate, the battle leader opened himself up further to the force. His senses grew more attuned to the world around him. He could sense the nearby rocks and trees without the need for sight. Reaching out a hand, he gestured to a heavy boulder several meters away. It steadily rose under his telepathic influence. Erik felt the weight of it pressing on his will however it was less taxing than in past times. He had grown much stronger as of late. The war with the Collective had pressed him to become more deadly.

War.

Since joining Clan Naga Sadow he had seen plenty of skirmishes. Pirates. Abominations. Terrorists. The Collective was something different. Brutal and overzealous. Both sides had taken a heavy toll just engaging with the Technocratic Guild. He had left the mid rim for

Aeotheran many years ago in hopes of finding freedom but this enemy had threatened to take all that he had been working for. The thought of losing everything now made his blood boil.

The athletic human let out a ragged sigh and drew on his anger, letting his body fill with toxic malcontent. Violent memories of his recent battles came trickling to the surface of his thoughts, further disturbing his emotional balance. He concentrated on them, eliminating all other distractions within his mind. Under the guidance of House Shar Dakhan he had learned to draw upon his painful past, to temper it into a focused weapon of the Dark Side.

Gritting his teeth, Erik spread his arms outwards with palms facing upwards. The warrior called upon the force, testing its power further over his shaded surroundings. One by one, rocks and deadfall of various sizes rose from the earth to match the height of the floating boulder. Nearby trees began to groan and crack under protest. Some of their lower limbs suddenly moved downward as though being pulled by invisible hands.

Slowly opening his eyes, the Dakhani battle leader shifted his palms forward. His dark emotions surged forward in the form of a powerful telekinetic push. The floating objects rushed forward at high speed, smashing noisily against anything that stood in their way. The hold on the tree limbs ceased, creating a wave of movement through the jungle as branches settled back into their natural positions. An especially loud boom echoed as the heavy boulder crashed through a dead tree, sending pieces of rotting wood flying into the air. The trunk fell under its own weight and fell to the ground. Several pops and cracks accompanying the loud boom as the smaller items met with hard surfaces. When nature had finally settled again there was a dead silence.

Any sign of wildlife had vanished and only a lingering sense of fear remained. Erik Cato grinned deviously as he rose to his feet. He suddenly felt dizzy. Weak. The experience had taxed him greatly yet left behind a sense of catharsis. Slowly moving forward, he inspected the damage with a sense of awe. The landscape was littered with marks of violence and broken branches. It was as though a stampede of banthas had just passed through. Satisfied with his findings, Erik made efforts to gather his belongings and signaled his ship through his wrist link.

"Make preparations my return."

Without further instructions he shut off communications and began his slow return. Erik was gravely silent on his journey back to the ship, deeply mulling over everything all the painful parts of his past.