

Meditation

Orbit
Unknown Planet
Unknown System

The bridge of the *Retribution* was silent as Commander Mauro Wynter sat and waited. Silence within, silence without. The black, bleakness of space surrounded the VT-49 Decimator as it circled idly around the emerald green planet below. The distress call should have long ago been answered by Odanite listening posts or picked up by the Central Cloister within Sky Breach Base. But, alas, Wynter sat and waited.

He was supposed to be headed back to the Kiast System. The transitory mists and nebulae that surrounded the Odan-Urr protected territory was normally a beacon of hope and a safeguard for returning members of the Clan. Alas, this was not such a time. The human pondered where he could have gone wrong, how he could have wandered so far off course.

The navigational computer was faulty, of that he knew. Though he was trained in astrogation, Mauro could not set a light-speed jump blind. There was a strong chance a passing vessel may cross this path and could provide some bearings. Better still, his distress call may be picked up and coordinates could be sent to the *Retribution*. Commander Wynter sat and waited.

Nothing moves as slowly as time when it is the only constant companion to a lone pilot lost in the endlessness and openness of space. The VT-49 had only a faint link to the holo-net and could not stream in any data to help pass the time. Wynter cursed himself, wishing he had more of a taste for the creature comforts of other ship commanders; holo-operas and period dramas broadcast from Coruscant and other hubs of entertainment. He was truly alone.

The irony of how sudden casual thoughts of assistance turn to overt fears of being stranded and foraging for survival. Wynter took mental stock of his supplies. Minimal, at best. His trek was supposed to take only a few days at best, transiting from Odanite safe-houses near the Core via secret space lanes. Now, the duration of his odyssey could not be calculated. His fuel reserves were steady, but Wynter considered how long he may be out in space and the better utility of his power supply while in atmosphere.

The decision to land a vessel is never easy in uncharted territory. Scanning the topography and looking for electromagnetic pulses turned up nothing of value for Commander Wynter. He decided to put his craft down at the peak of a plateau in a hilly continent on the northern hemisphere. The planet looked to contain a breathable atmosphere and had some traces of water. Perhaps he could eek out survival for a time. He keyed in a few dials at the helm and manually began the descent.

Entering atmosphere the approaching sky took him by surprise. He was confronted with a vibrant gold and deep purple. As the *Retribution* slowly descended Wynter could detect no aerial fauna, and below only the outline of stubby flora were visible. He considered himself

content for a second to not maroon others with him and then cursed his isolation as the craft made landfall.

Planetside
Unknown Planet
Unknown System
Several Weeks Later

Daytime was easier for Wynter. The beautiful purple and golden sky cheered him in his solitude, and helped him forget that despite his wanderings and treks through the streams and fields of this unknown world, he was utterly alone. Nighttime was more problematic. Not even the low humming and guttural noises made by the native reptiles and small mammals put him at ease. He had found no apex predators, to be sure, but he had found no sentient life to help him find his way.

And so he slowly became accustomed to daily field navigation and marking off a grid perimeter to thoroughly search his new world. He cursed not having a speeder. He cursed his isolation. The silence and loneliness was not helped by the dull palatability of the reptiles and rodents he was able to catch and cook readily. He would not starve, and the *Retribution* made for a luxurious retreat from the elements. Mostly though, Commander Mauro Wynter sat and waited.

The distress signal was ever present, tapping a long low frequency barely audible within the bridge of the VT-49. A single red diode flashed ceaselessly, as if faintly beating away the resignation that Wynter was slowly finding himself in. He often sat in the commander's seat on the bridge and tried to remember faces of people he missed and the sights of the places he wished to see again.

After many, many weeks he devised a way to distract himself from the gloom and misery. While no Jedi himself, he had learned a few facts about battle meditation and the benefits it had on a person under immense duress. He learned to breathe slowly, to close off his mind to what little external stimuli that surrounded him. He learned to create an area that he could relax and draw mindfulness from.

At first it was a passing effort, one he dismissed as a way to make time move. Yet, the more he meditated and the longer he allowed himself to transcend himself the more he began to gain. Sitting in silence, letting his mind take him wherever it inherently wanted to go soothed him to the core. Memories of friends, partners, and long past battles flowed freely. The good and bad were both there, representing a lifetime of experiences and development. It reminded him that he had value, he was a person, he did indeed exist apart from the unnamed world he now felt as a prison. It gave him hope. It also gave him the ability to not truly care *where* he was or *when* he was, for that matter.

During his meditation many beautiful and wondrous things appeared in his mind's eye. Entire landscapes and storylines played out. He found himself at the center of plots, of romances, of reunions with family and friends long past. He saw glimpses of the past, of *other's* past, and of futures yet to come and which had already transpired. Creatures of outlandish size and scale, of abilities and mannerisms unknown to him. His mind raced and plodded as it saw fit, becoming something outside of Wynter's control. And yet, he could also make his mind do incredible things.

The weeks dragged on but with a new purpose for Wynter. He learned what his mind could do and what liberty meditation brought him. He was never, now, on the unknown world he had settled on. He was free to travel to all the worlds he had ever visited, read, or heard about. He conjured up what these places and people looked like and built entire memories of events that had never been. He was freer and more true to his own devices than ever before.

Like a spark, one day, Mauro felt a slight change. Imperceptible at first, but then it gradually began to take root. Something strange, surely, as he was never able to sense things in this way before. He had been around Jedi and Sith for many years and had never shared any of their gifts. True, he had studied a great many months at the Shadow Academy and had risen high within its ranks to the chagrin of many. Perhaps it was simply the isolation and delusions of grandeur taking their course within him. And yet, he could not push this aside. Was it possible the Force was reaching out to him, finally breaking through to the irresponsive soul of Commander Wynter now in his most open self?

He did not know, and could not know, truly. He increased his meditation regiment drastically, spending countless hours a day in trancelike harmony with his mind and body. He concentrated long and hard, reaching out to his fellow Odanites. Surely, with their Force abilities they may be seeking him out, searching for him feverishly. He had forged many strong friendships over the past few years and trusted that he would not be forgotten on this idyllic and unknown planet. He knew it was a dream at best, but a dream that allowed Wynter to be at peace.

And yet, as things often do, when Mauro found himself adjusting to his new life fate interceded as a cruel mistress. He did not hear the call at first, deep in meditation. He attributed it to his imagination and wishful thinking. Yet, the high pitched note refused to be ignored. He slowly moved to his communications array and flickered on the incoming message.

"Retribution, this is Sky Breach Central. We have found you. We have found you. Repeat. Repeat. You are coming home. Sending waypoint beacons now. Commander Wynter, you are coming home."

He did not reply, not yet. He did not look up, not yet. He simply sat and waited. Slowly, tears began to flow freely down his face as he repeated the words over and over in his head. He was going home.