

MOTHER NATURE IS A CRUEL MISTRESS

A STAR WARS FICTION BY
- VARUK KRU OF CLAN NAGA SADOW -
(#9056)

COCKPIT, JUMPMaster 5000 - *UGLY GIZKA*
IN HYPERSPACE TRANSIT
36 ABY

The Umbaran sat patiently in the cockpit as he usually did while in hyperspace transit. Never one to be caught off guard in case something happened, the former Sith remained attentive at all times while piloting the aging JumpMaster 5000. While the *Ugly Gizka* had some life left in her yet, the shuttle was starting to get rough around the edges.

Modulated breathing from the Sentinel's life support armor was the only noise in the cockpit until the battered gold TC-X1 entered through the rear of the cockpit. The droid rarely disturbed his master while flying, lest he be thrown into a bulkhead - or worse - during times of highly acrobatic flying. Things had seemed relatively stable for the moment, so he took the opportunity.

"What is it, TeeCee?" muttered the Ragnosian as the droid's metallic feet clapped against the floor. The dark chrome-armored man did not turn in his seat, eyes focused on the blue streaks of hyperspace from behind his onyx faceplate. The gears, servomotors and hydraulics moving the droid's chassis came to a halt.

"Sir, I had some modifications in mind for the shi-" began the droid, before he was interrupted by Kru. "*She* has a name, TeeCee. Use it," he stated coldly. The droid's purple photoreceptors flared for a moment as the fiery personality Varuk had provided him held back an insulting response. Instead, he continued with his previous statement.

"I believe there are some ways we can retrofit and modify existing systems to make *her* more likeable and appropriate for you, sir. I had some ideas in mind that I'd like to explore with you, and have established a final cost figure."

A pale eyebrow raised from beneath the helmet and the armored form swung around in his seat to face the droid. He raised a dark gauntlet covered in Ancient Sith text to point a finger at the dull golden TC-series droid.

"*You* are always coming up with ideas on how to spend *my* credits, droid. What is it going to cost me this time?" he queried.

"The appropriate upgrades should only run you - by my precise calculations of course - about ten thousand, five hun-" the monotone voice began, before being cut off once more by Varuk. This time, the Sentinel had raised both hands in complete frustration.

"Ten thousand! No. We are not spending *anything* further on modifying this aging rust bucket to suit your personal wants and needs, droid. The *Ugly Gizka* is my ship, and mine alone." he stated coldly as he folded his arms over another. The droid scoffed, raising his right arm.

"But sir, these modifications are not intended for me!" he called in a higher tone as he emulated frustration of his own.

"I said *no*, TeeCee," the stern words left the Sadowan's lips as his legs pushed him to his feet. He towered over the metal companion, another finger pointed at the droid. "I have told you for the last time."

When the final word escaped his lips, disaster struck. The entire vessel shuttered and reverted from hyperspace, being thrown into an intense spin as the console sparked and power to various systems fluctuated. Both the Sentinel and droid were thrown from their feet into the walls from the instant deceleration and forces from the spin. Varuk grabbed hold of the pilot's seat and looked out the viewport, the elegant view of a purple and green planet surrounded by a light asteroid field came in and out of view during the spin.

With each additional rotation of the damaged *Gizka* the unknown planet became closer and closer, taking up more of the cockpit's viewport. Kru instantaneously got to work once he adjusted to the spin of the craft, doing a systems check on the various engine systems. A readout of the various system statuses displayed on the screen before him.

::: CONTROL SURFACES: **60%**
::: MANEUVERING THRUSTERS: **5%**
::: ENGINE I: **UNDETECTABLE**
::: ENGINE II: **OFFLINE**
::: REPULSORLIFT DRIVE: **OFFLINE**
::: SUBLIGHT DRIVE: **OFFLINE**
::: HYPERDRIVE: **OFFLINE**

The engine situation looked bleak. After attempting a quick reboot and coming up empty handed, the pilot got to work checking any mechanical systems as the planet neared. TC-X1 had returned to his feet, moaning on about their recent experience.

"Not now," snapped Kru, working quickly to try and ascertain the problem. A moment later, the battered protocol droid had been the one to discover what the problem was to the complete horror of both parties.

"Sir, we're missing half the ship!" he called, pointing out the viewport to the left side of the vessel where much of the ship's mechanical components and first engine resided. The Umbaran's eyes went wide, gazing out the viewport. Nearly thirty percent of the left side had been ripped away by an outward explosion from inside the hull, most likely the fuel source. The former Sith cursed as he secured himself into the pilot's seat.

"That's something I can't fix," he said coolly as he finished securing the crash webbing, the planet fully encompassing the viewport now. Moments later, the vessel was nudged slightly as it impacted compressed gases in the planet's atmosphere. The spin of the vessel at this point completely stopped, allowing the Sadowan to moderately control their angled descent to the planet's surface with the remaining control surfaces on the exterior of the hull.

The once ice-cold metallic surface on the remaining exterior of the *Ugly Gizka* was now red hot during entry to the planet's atmosphere, the lack of a sealed hull causing a fire to break out on the edge of the craft.

"Sithspit!" The Sentinel had hoped the planetary entry would be easy on the *Gizka* to keep some form of system integrity, but they were proving dashed as internal components ignited. As they passed through the various layers of the atmosphere the controls of the JumpMaster 5000 - and indeed the whole craft itself - began to shudder more violently with each passing second. Once the craft broke through the thick clouds, a dark mountain range with bases of lush green forestry filled the viewport. "You better hold on, droid."

"Oh dear," muttered TC-X1 as his weak hydraulic digits grasped at the edge of the cockpit terminal. Kru analyzed the landscape for a suitable zone to crash land in, and following his instincts pulled the controls to the right. The vessel's remaining control surfaces on the exterior went to work, trying to force the shuttle in the requested path as smoke billowed out the left side. The controls fought hard against the Sadowan, who used the Force to amplify his strength and keep a firm hold on the controls.

The dense mountain range became higher as the craft slowly lower, before the burning JumpMaster 5000 hit a low-pressure pocket of air and plummeted an additional five hundred feet in it's violent cruise to the surface. Now just a thousand feet above the mountains, Varuk looked over at the droid momentarily. The *Ugly Gizka* collided first with the rocky surface of a mountain top on the underside, knocking the Umbaran unconscious as it careened and plummeted into another.



***UGLY GIZKA* CRASH SITE**
UNKNOWN WORLD, UNKNOWN SYSTEM
4 HOURS AFTER IMPACT

The Umbaran's eyes snapped open as pain enveloped his body, modulated breathing heavy and wheezy. The onyx faceplate in his helmet had cracked, rendering the heads up display near useless. Grumbling with discontent at the situation, the pilot unhooked released himself from the seat's crash webbing and his metal form smashed into the floor with a crash. Varuk allowed the Force to flow through his body as he worked to slowly mend the damage caused to it by the crash - and control any additional pain he was currently experiencing.

Once centred, the former Sith pushed himself to his feet and inspected the cockpit around him. Most of the terminal - save for the flight controls - was intact, but showed no power. The transparisteel glass viewport however had a large hole broken through the center, and battered gold foot dangling from between two broken edges.

"TeeCee-ExOne," called the Sentinel in surprise as he grabbed the foot and prepared to lift the droid back into the cockpit. To his sadness it was incredibly light, and lifted right out from the broken transparisteel - as it was only the droid's leg. The rest of him Kru ascertained, had been lost.

It did not take long or the Techweaver to determine what was and wasn't operational on the vessel given that a huge portion of it was absent, and nearly everything else damaged from the planetary entry and subsequent crash. He looked over the display frustratingly as a new plan started to formulate in head.

::: ENGINE SYSTEMS: **OFFLINE**
::: HULL INTEGRITY: **10%**
::: LIFE SUPPORT: **OFFLINE**
::: COMMUNICATIONS: **OFFLINE**
::: LONG RANGE SENSORS: **OFFLINE**
::: SHORT RANGE SENSORS: **80%**

While he needed to determine if any of the systems could be repaired, Kru also needed to be aware of any potential threats in the area. The dark chrome-armored man started a scan at the furthest distance capable on the mostly-intact short range sensors. After patiently waiting for the results of the scan, a new weight pushed down on the Equite's shoulders.

A heavy weather system was inbound for the mountain range the JumpMaster 5000 had crashed in, and would be arriving shortly. If he was in the starship when it hit, it might mean his end. The Savant had no choice but to abandon the *Gizka* for the time being, seek shelter, and hope it as here when he returned to fix it.

Making his way from the cockpit into the middle section of the vessel, Kru observed the remaining damage to his vessel. Most of the inner walls and floor had remained intact but there were several gouges and holes noticeable immediately upon exiting the cockpit. The Umbaran took a couple steps forward, forcing open the door to his cabin. Inside, the bedding had been flipped and transparisteel weapons display case shattered across the floor.

The former Sith reached down, pulling a midnight black T-7 Ion Distructor Rifle from the floor and securing it over his head via a tactical sling. He grabbed one of his Bryar Pistols, securing it into the right hip holster while the other remained in the shattered remains of the case for the time being. He returned to full height, reaching out two outstretched hands in search of the signature in the Force emitted by the Kyber crystals in his lightsabers.

As he latched onto the two separate signatures the Equite called both weapons from within the room's destruction to each of his hands. The lightsaber *Tenebris Ignis* arrived in his right, while *Tenebrae Duellum* the left. After clipping the obsidian *Ignis* to his D-ring in front of his right thigh and securing the perfectly machined *Duellum* to the maglock holster on the back of his waist, the Sadowan entered the middle of the ship.

"Eye-Dee-Nine, where are you?" called Kru, hoping that his personal ID9 Seeker Droid would answer the call. With no response, the armored man set off. Upon exiting the ship onto the side of the mountain he had crashed into, a hand reached down to rub the healing abdomen. The view of the mountain ranges from the exterior of the ship were magnificent. Stretching as far as his eyes could see through the atmospherics were dark mountains - some with frosted peaks - with a bright purple-red light illuminating the sky and lush green forestry surrounding the bases of each mammoth structure.

In the distance, a red sun that had started to set was partially obscured from the dark purple storm encroaching on the edge of the mountains in the distance. Thunder crackled as the setting sun and rolling clouds began to darken the terrain further, alerting the Equite that it was time to make haste in locating shelter for the night. He was offered two paths carved into mountainside - up, where he may find a cave to cover himself or down, where he could surely construct or find shelter as well. Thinking of the climb back up the next morning should he choose the path of least resistance tonight, Kru opted to go up the mountainside now. Pulling his torn cloak around his armored form, the Grey Jedi started the climb.

The first three hundred meters along the path were simple; the terrain almost smooth and unnatural as if it had been crafted by someone. By that point the rolling purple storm was just upon him, starting with a thin blanket of rain, and the journey beyond much more treacherous. The further the armored began to ascend up the mountainside, the harsher the rain became.

After another ten minutes on the trek, the path up the side of the mountain turned into a vertical rock face. Gone was the easy path, for it seemed fate had a different idea in mind for him today. Looking down into the chasm at the edge of the path, Varuk felt a wave of determination wash over him.

So be it.

Reaching up with one hand the former Sith latched onto a rock and began an ascension up the mountain face, his mind and concentration focused solely on the climb. While not perfectly vertical, the climb was steep and sharp and not without perils of its own. The modulated breathing expunged from the seals in dark helmet became heavy and thick as he exerted himself beyond the normal levels of his physique.

The rain was heavy now, thick droplets smashing against the rock face and pattering against the plating of the Umbaran's armor. The lightning, much closer, caused of thunder that vibrated the very mountain Varuk had been gripping. As the Sentinel approached what appeared to be a small ledge after climbing nearly one hundred meters, his vision became obscured by a blue flash of light. With a quick shake of his head the light was gone and sight restored back to the dark stormy scene of the mountain - a wave of exhaustion beginning to wash over him.

The armoured hand reached up once more with his left hand, found a rock to grip and attempted to haul himself up once more. As his weight was pulled upwards the grip on his left hand slipped, feet losing their grip as well. Dangling from the side of the mountain by one hand, his eyesight was once again blinded by a blue flash of light. This time it did not fade immediately, instead shifting to a blue light surrounding the dark silhouette of a woman for several seconds before cutting back to reality.

As his grip began to slip on his right hand, the former Sith channeled his emotion at the situation through his body in a burst of amplification, quickly steadying himself against the mountain face and continuing the climb with renewed strength to reach the ledge above. The rain continued to hammer against him, some of the droplets turning to hail prior to hitting the mountain range. The remainder of the climb while a short distance, took almost twenty minutes due to the horrific weather.

Once both of the Umbaran's hands grasped the edge of the ledge he tried to hoist himself up. As his head and shoulders came above the edge of the ledge through sheer momentum and strength mother nature struck again, throwing turmoil at the stranded Equite.

A powerful bolt of purple lightning came from the clouds with incredibly destructive power, lancing out and striking the ledge the Umbaran was holding onto. The blast of pure energy had hit several feet inward from the edge and shredded the mountainous rock at the point of impact, dislodging it from the rock face. With nothing to hold it both the ledge - as well as the man who had been holding it - went crashing down the side of the mountain.



**SOMEWHERE ON THE MOUNTAINSIDE
UNKNOWN WORLD, UNKNOWN SYSTEM
1 HOUR AFTER FALLING**

The Sadowan's eyes slowly crept open, the second time opening after a violent crash today. Several of his remaining flesh ribs had been damaged in the fall, and multiple contusions were sustained. Pain was all he could feel through his right arm, which was bent entirely backwards at the elbow. Groaning in agony, Kru was too disorientated to steady his pain using the Force and was forced to bear it. He awoke on another ledge further down the mountain, much closer to the forested floor than the *Ugly Gizka* had been.

He had fallen farther than he had climbed, and the storm was still raging on about him - the hail dinging against his armor as heavy rain continued to smash against it. Pushing himself to his feet using his good left arm, Varuk moved to a seated position and leaned up against the side of the mountain momentarily. Grasping his right forearm with his left, he winced as pain continued to shoot through it.

One... Two.... THREE!

With a firm grip, the Sentinel wrenched his right arm back around to the correct location with a horrifying crack and screams of pain. As the disorientation started to subside Kru deployed the Force to help ease his pain and speed the mending process - although it would still be quite a while before his arm would be of any use again. The lightning striking around him became more frequent, and more powerful as the storm edged slowly across the mountain range..

The Equite pushed himself back up, inspecting his surroundings. Just as before, there was another path winding up the side of the mountain. Proceeding forward up the path, the former Sith was greeted with a familiar scene just minutes later. Strwn about the mountain pass were pieces of circuitry, joints, and golden-plated appendages. Kru continued onward, aware the remains were likely those of his droid TC-X1.

While the droid had played a semi-vital role during his time with his master, he was not of the utmost importance or even a necessary companion to the Umbaran Sentinel.

Less than fifty meters up the path from the droid's remains were a small cave, seemingly uninhabited at first glance. With no other place to ride out the storm, the former Sith resigned himself to the shadowy nook for the night. When he took a seat against the stoney floor and attempted to relax he was hit with another vision. The same blue light obscured his view, with the same dark female silhouette filling it a moment later. After several seconds, it faded into clarity and the woman stepped forward.

Garbed in a flowing black cloak with a slim crimson trim lined with Ancient Sith text, the woman in the Equite's vision had shoulder length grey hair and wrinkled skin. She pointed a singular, crooked finger towards the Sadowan and uttered a single word, "Kill."

The vision snapped into nothingness as the roar of an insectoid creature filled the audio receptors in Varuk's helmet and alerted him to an incoming danger. Rolling quickly to the left, the Grey Jedi narrowly avoided being struck by a pointed appendage from the face of a creature unfamiliar to him. Throwing himself to his feet, Kru's good hand quickly summoned Tenebris Ignis with a burst of telekinetic energy. Once his thumb was firmly on the black and crimson two-piece activation switch, he ignited the fiery lava-red blade.

As the blade of pure energy roared to life from the emitter matrix at the end of the lightsaber hilt, the unknown creature attacked again. It managed to strike Kru on his right arm, sending an uncontrollable shock of pain and a small shriek from his lips. Luckily, it had failed to pierce his armor in the initial strike.

"Enough of this, creature!" scorned the former Sith as he duped the creature in its next attack by ducking and rolling his body to the right. After avoiding the incoming strike, the armoured man returned to his full height and with a tight grip brought the brilliant burning blade of Tenebris Ignis down through the forward appendage in a quick downward swing. As the blade finished separating flesh and bone the limb fell to the floor, wriggling due to the nerves. Due to the cauterization, there was no blood to speak of.

The creature screeched in the face of the Ragnosian, launching a final attack with one of it's remaining appendages. It too was quickly severed by the pure energy blade, causing the beast to begin a retreat back into the depths of the cave. Varuk stayed with it, preventing the retreat as he flourished the lava-red blade.

Cornered into the meeting point of two walls, the insectoid cried out. The Umbaran raised his left arm, lightsaber blade reflecting in the cracked surface of his emotionless onyx faceplate before it came down to silence the creature for good. As the beast ceased to move, the former Sith felt its life force depart the living and enter the after life. Tenebris Ignis was deactivated as Kru returned to the cave entrance, staring out into the edge of the raging storm outside the cave.

In the morning, he could return to the ship to try and ascertain the status of the communications systems - and whether he would be stuck on this world forever. With any luck, he would be able to return back to the Orian System and Clan Naga Sadow. For now though he would have to ride out the storm from the cave. As the Umbaran took a seat against the wall of the cave, his senses remained sharp and unhindered save for the pain he experienced from his previous fall.

Throughout the night, Varuk had been attacked several more times by the insectoid creatures that seemingly plagued the cave he took residence in. During each encounter, the Equite held his own and sustained minimal damage due to the small girth of the cave preventing the creatures from rushing him at once. While it had provided protection against the storm, the cave did not provide the same against the local fauna. Luckily, no other visions with the woman were experienced either.



Once the bright orange and red sunrise had struck and the large billowing storm passed by the mountain range, Varuk set back off; this time to return to the *Ugly Gizka* and attempt communication offworld. The trek back up the mountainous terrain was hard and demanding, but the Umbaran's determination proved he would see it through.

After a climb of nearly four hours, the armored Umbaran stumbled upon the soaked wreckage of his JumpMaster 5000; modulated breathing from the stressed life support system continuously heavy. The *Ugly Gizka's* black hull was dotted with droplets of water, while the open gashes on the upper side and internals had most certainly suffered damage from the storm. After entering the shuttle, Kru discovered ID9 - a piece of metal shrapnel shaped like a spear piercing his photoreceptor and rear of the dome head.

That made two droids the Grey Jedi had lost in this freak crash.

Varuk shook whatever feelings he held about the situation for the time being, certain that they would cloud his judgement and thought process otherwise. Grabbing a small set of tools from the cargo area, the Techweaver attempted to bring new life back to the communications system. He started first with the main wiring, severing power from any additional drawing sources to isolate power to the communications system.

The former Sith spent the rest of the daylight under the main console inside the cockpit, working tirelessly to re-hardwire power from the main system to the communications, modify the short wave sensor array with the remains of the communications disk, then exponentially boost the power sent to the dish to send the transmission out far enough.

As the red sun set once more and the sunlight faded into night, the Umbaran finished his modifications to the wreckage of the JumpMaster 5000 to restore communications. He recorded a short mayday transmission, before broadcasting it across Brotherhood frequencies that he deemed friendly in every direction from the unknown planet he was on - with hopes they could trace where the signal originated from.

The Sentinel spent the next night just outside the wreckage of his craft since no storms had been detected prior to his modifications, lest he be lost when help arrived. The next morning his calls for help were answered when a transport bearing Sadowan markings flew overhead. A fantastic response time, and the one saving grace of the entire situation. After establishing communications, a cargo transport arrived at the wreckage site with a small party of Warhost medical staff. Kru shrugged them off.

The battered hull of the *Ugly Gizka* was scuttled into the chasm below with the remains of TC-X1, with the former Sith having taken the remainder of his things from the wreckage and brought aboard the cargo shuttle. A short ride later, the shuttle arrived through the ventral hangar bay of Clan Naga Sadow's flagship, the Warhost Navy vessel *Damnation*. The *Venator*-class Star Destroyer would have to serve as the Equite's temporary home.

Yet he had faced the harshness of mother nature, and emerged victorious from his struggles. Varuk Kru had defeated this test by the Force, and proved to be stronger and more resilient by it.

