

**Ambria**  
**Stenness Node**  
**Inner Rim**

A great storm was brewing. Unlike the unusual dust maelstroms which plagued the planet, the events unfolding were not natural to the planet of Ambria. It was a storm of living beings. The Tiernvale Mountains were bustling with people, resources and equipment in such a manner as had not been heard of in ages. The assets had all been shipped in with part of the Shar Dakhan fleet to establish a mountain outpost. The discovery of a great meditative canyon had captivated the minds of the summit with its potential and many had answered the call to investigate.

Teams of engineers, excavators, scientists, military and civilians alike had been offloaded with their equipment as the first phase of operations to set up crowded base camps wherever there was space available. Offworld activities were strictly prohibited to maintain confidentiality and communications were kept to shortwave frequencies so as not to attract any unwanted attention. The landing crafts had been grouped closely together to shield their occupants, providing temporary shelter against the harsh environs of the wasteland while a nearby mountain was being hollowed out. Mesh netting, camouflage and debris had been piled atop each ship in order to mask their visibility from above. In record timing, a grand entrance had been deeply cut into the center of a mountainous rock formation and reinforced with duracrete to prevent any cave ins from occurring. From the center the mountain steps were carved downward into the darkness and branched out into separate hallways like the roots of a great tree. With each passing day the halls of what would be known as the Temple of Ambria were spread further outward and downward.

Erik Cato had fervently taken part in the operations; first as a pilot of special freight and passengers and then as reconnaissance. Although there wasn't much in terms of wildlife to worry about, the odd smuggler or pirate group had made an appearance which threatened to disrupt the work. Defensive forces had made short work of the vagrants, guarding the secrets of House Shar Dakhan. As a battle team leader Erik was offered a more administrative role overseeing various teams as he saw fit however he refused to be caught up in any red tape or obligations that didn't directly benefit him. Rumours had spread through the camps of hidden treasures and he wanted the chance to look out for them on his own.

With the passing of another week came more developments. A series of moisture collectors had been ingeniously disguised as tall rocks and spread out across the uneven terrain outside of the mountain. The outpost had been excavated enough to provide some storage and personnel quarters. A war room of sorts had been established on the lowest accessible sublevel. At its center was a large, circular stone table set in the middle of a room with holoprojectors embedded at various angles in the ceiling. The pale warrior now found himself in this particular room, examining the craftsmanship of the table. He ran a hand along its cool, smooth surface until he found what he was looking for. There was a small indent along its outer edge in which

he inserted a small data crystal. A blue glow was cast down from the ceiling as the holo projectors came to life.

Before Erik stood a holographic version of the House Summit. Each member stood ominously in a semi-circle at the other end of the table. The voice of Quaestor Etah Bloodfyre breached the silence of the war room.

“Battle team leader Erik Cato. Welcome to Ambria. I trust that you’ll guard this information with your life-” *My life?* The warrior understood this to be a subtle threat. “There is another force nexus. The dark side is very strong there. Darth Bane himself was said to have made camp along its shores. The coordinates have been marked within the crystal. You are to travel alone to Lake Natth and report back on what you have found.”

The images of the Summit had faded away, replaced by a floating map of the surrounding regions. A small flashing dot drew his attention at the centre what he perceived to be the lake. He studied the map silently, committing it to memory as best he could before pulling the crystal from its enclosure. The glow faded almost instantly, plunging the room into darkness.

### **The Next Evening**

Erik Cato departed the ever-expanding outpost under cover of night. He had requisitioned a RGC-18 Landspeeder and a viper probot from the available supply of equipment to take across the wasteland.

The journey was slow at first. Traversing uneven rocky ground made it difficult to navigate until he was out of the mountains. Once the landspeeder had cleared the rocky outcroppings he immediately punched it to maximum in order to make up some time. He only made it a few kilometers before a sudden dust storm had overtaken his position. In an environment such as Ambria it was easy to clog up the engine’s intake and so he immediately slowed to a halt and shut down the vehicle until the weather had subsided. During the chaotic ordeal he had crouched down against the side of the heavy speeder with his armorweave cloak firmly wrapped around the recon droid to protect its sensitive instruments. His cowl and hood were pulled up to keep the flesh of his face from being roughed up by the swirling sands. Now and again a terrible smell would affront his nostrils as the winds changed direction. The source of the foul smell was within the speeder’s storage compartment. Choosing to ignore it, he remained stationary and spent his time staring down at a portable scanner to check for nearby life signs.

After the bulk of an hour the skies began to clear. The pale warrior gave the speeder a few swift kicks to shake off the dust and then hopped back in to continue the journey.

It was still dark when Erik Cato reached the large body of water. He stopped the speeder about two hundred hundred meters from its edge. The lake looked calm, almost welcoming under the night sky. The battle team leader was highly suspicious of its nature based on the rumours that

had been spread back at the outpost. Checking his portable scanner again, there were multiple readings dotting along its edge however he could see no movement whatsoever. Reaching out with the force, he could sense it as well. It was difficult to pinpoint however as the area gave off a heavy dark side presence.

*Something isn't right here.* He thought to himself.

With a disapproving grunt he activated the recon droid and it propelled itself into the air with a series of small repulser lifts. The machine moved east of the lake and then disappeared over the horizon. Erik withdrew his slugthrower, left it on the dashboard where it was easily accessible and waited. He kept the engines running in case whatever was bothering his senses decided to make an appearance. It wasn't long before the viper probot had returned. It landed in the copilot's seat. It gave off a series of beeps and chirps, pointing in the direction it had come from.

Nodding in satisfaction, Erik drove off with the recon droid acting as navigator until they reached a herd of wild staga. The speeder swerved to the front of the pack and the vehicle's storage container popped open. The foul smell seemed to amplify tenfold as the contents of the trunk were exposed to the air. It drew the attention of the beasts and they began to follow.

Turning to the droid, the man grinned and adjusted the speed of the vehicle to keep the herd moving at a decent stride. He was leading them back to the lake.

"They must have thought I was crazy when I ordered this fodder from the hunting parties. If you want to draw something out, a little bait can work wonders." The droid didn't bother to respond. Social grace was not part of its programming.

When they were close to the lake again, Erik stopped and dumped the fodder onto the dry earth. He then drove down wind of the creatures and observed what would happen at a safe distance. As the herd began to feast upon the bait, several sets of dust clouds drifted up from the lake at an alarming speed. The ground was being disturbed yet he and the recon droid could see nothing until it was too late for the staga to react. As if by some arcane force, a group of large lizards materialized and sunk their teeth into the bulkier creatures. They cried out in agonizing pain and turned to flee but more of the attackers appeared out of nowhere and cut them off. It was a massacre. The reptiles were three meters in length with tough, green scales covering their exteriors. Now that they were some distance from the lake he could distinguish that they too were steeped in the dark side of the force. It was as if Lake Natth had made an imprint on them somehow. He didn't stick around very long after they started to feast.

Yanking the controls of the RGC-18, Erik circled around to the direct opposite side of the lake where he felt there wouldn't be any interference from the dark side dragons and leaped out of the landspeeder. With slugthrower pistol in hand he approached the water's edge and continued to assess the area. Water lazily lapped at the shoreline, bringing a sense of calm to an

otherwise disturbing place. Here and there, rocks jutted out from the lake's surface like tiny platforms. Upon one of the platforms was a nest littered with eggs.

*There we are. Living treasures. The summit will be pleased!*

There was a scratching sound behind him. With lightning reflexes he turned to see two of the green monstrosities approaching him. They were larger than the others, most likely elders. Erik extended an arm and aimed at one of them, firing his weapon.

*Click! Click!*

Jammed! The dust storm must of clogged up the moving parts of his weapon. He holstered the gun and withdrew a thermal detonator, tossing it at the creatures in an attempt to destroy both in a ball of fire. One of the creatures spun in a circle, whipping the grenade back at Erik's face with its tail. He ducked under it and the explosive fell into the water. There was a roar from the lake as it detonated and a geyser shot upwards. Hot water poured down from the skies, soaking the warrior in lake water. The two lizards hissed in a peculiar way. It was almost as if they were laughing. They showed their sharp teeth but it wasn't in hostility. To the human it appeared as though they were grinning in amusement.

"Fine, that's how you want to play it? Come and get me you oversized gizkas!" He shouted as he unclipped his lightsaber and activated it. His eyes burned with hatred.

The two rushed him immediately, intending to overpowering him with their superior weight and razor sharp teeth. They moved fast. If not for Erik's steely physique and reflexes he would have been killed in mere moments. Dodging to the side, the warrior brought his lightsaber up and separated one of the creatures' front half from the rear. It thrashed about uselessly in on the ground in the throes of its demise. The second monster roared and attempted another charge. It was pushed backward mid-leap with a strategically performed force push. As it fell on its back, the tall human was at its side. He speared its skull with the tip of his lightsaber, ending its life instantly.

Dawn was breaking. Despite his light armoured form the warming of the sun and the recent battle made him start to sweat profusely. Deactivating his weapon, he clipped it back onto his belt again.

Looking back at the lake there were several disturbances in the water. All of them were headed his way. He had no doubt that it was the larger host of dark side dragons that he had first encountered. Erik executed a force jump and landed on one of the watery platforms, rushing over to the nest. He removed his cloak and held the ends tightly into a makeshift sack in his left hand. He placed six of the largest eggs into the cloak. As sunlight started to pour over the lake, a reflected caught his attention. Buried in the nest was what appeared to be an ancient, rectangular trunk. It looked as though it hadn't been disturbed in eons and it was quite heavy

when he lifted it up under his right arm. Despite this he managed to leap back to the shoreline with both eggs and trunk in his possession.

Erik Cato sprinted back to the landspeeder and deposited his loot into the rear storage container, moving as quickly yet carefully as he could manage. After closing the contents, he jumped into the pilot's seat and took off back toward the distant mountains.

During the drive back something nagged at the warrior, calling him to the rusty box he had discovered. His curiosity eventually got the best of him and shortly before reaching the outpost he had stopped to inspect the trunk in further detail. What he had discovered was unlike anything he had seen before. Within the casing rested a complete set of ancient Sith armour. What mysteries had caused the box to be left behind in such a desolate place? It didn't matter. It called to him and gave off the unmistakable presence of the dark side, much like the lake and its scaled occupants. The same feeling that compelled him to look into the container was now urging him to put on the heavy garb. He obliged with a sense of hunger. It fit like a glove as though meant for him to find and he felt powerful within its hardened shell. This was a new beginning for Erik Cato. Without knowing it consciously, the armour part of a chain of events that lead him further down the path of the dark side.