

Prologue
Three Days into the Crisis
The Office of the Governor of Daleem
Daleem, Kiast System

“Your highness, please. The situation is well in hand, I assure you.” The Governor of Daleem Previt Golvrin, presented an air of confidence and normalcy that bothered Empress Kaltani Anasaye.

“You assure me?” She paused for effect. “Prevet, I am seeing the reports from Joint Task Force Satele Shan.”

The Governor was insulted by the mention of the one “Guild” he loathed the most. “Empress, the Odanites are not to be trusted! Look at the chaos they have caused on my world alone!”

“Your World,” The Empress was taken aback at the phrasing and became heated. “Would not be destroying itself if you had not neglected to tell them about the terraformer in the first place. And if the former leader of the Shipwright’s Guild had not chosen to become an agent of the Collective to take your job, the Odanites would not have gotten involved.”

“Apologies Empress, but even if you have been affected by them!”

Her voice grew cold. “Watch your tone, Governor.”

The Sephi man bowed. “Apologies.”

Kaltani calmed herself and put on a diplomatic face. “Regardless, I cannot ignore what I am hearing from the evacuees either. Not just your friends, the ones who made it off the world before you took control.”

“What have they said, your highness?”

“Certain members of certain guilds are being selected to take the space elevator first. Even ahead of those who have been waiting since the generator stopped working.”

The sly governor tried to redirect. “A simple misunderstanding, I assure you...”

“Interesting because that came from a leader in the Indag-Conclave, Aeryn Osstar.”

Stunned, the Governor tried to backtrack. “Empress, I...”

"I heard a similar story from the leader of the Pa'un Pharma guild." The Sephi leader's hologram leaned toward the Governor. "Tell me, do you have a plan to fix, as you said earlier, 'your world?'"

"Not beyond evacuation of the planet, your highness," he stammered.

"Which will not happen fast enough." The Empress' hologram turned her back to the politician. "Governor, for your lack of compassion, leadership, and common sense leading up to and during these events. I hereby strip you of your title and rank. I name your successor Director Tisto Kingang of the Clan Odan-Urr Joint Task Force until such time as the disaster is over. My decision is final and approved by the Conclave. End transmission."

Forward Base Echo Daleem, Kiast System

Smoke was rising from a plume off in the distance. Another volcano had emerged off the coast. The gravimetric shear stress was wreaking havoc on the planet. Unknown by the members of JTF Satele Shan until a few weeks ago, Daleem was a tomb world terraformed to make it habitable. Kalmak Groro, a Master Specialist in the Odanite Domestic Forces Fire Service, watched the plumes grow in size through his electrobinoculars.

The Mon Calamari had seen many disasters in his life, but none on this scale. Suppression teams were trying to cool lava at the source to protect the civilian population of the planet, but it was a losing battle. Kalmak knew it, hell the teams knew it, but overall they had to find some way to buy time. The Odanite Expeditionary Forces and the JTF Director, Tisto Kingang, had developed a scheme to try and repair an actively running terraforming device. The medic had been ordered to lead a small team of firefighters and medtechs to scout tunnels near the coast for refugees. The Mon Cal lowered his electrobinoculars thoughtfully.

"Lismick," Groro turned towards the human firefighter he was addressing, "This is the spot. The nearest volcanic activity is 40km in all directions."

"Right away Master Specialist," The human replied keying up the communications equipment.

Groro turned to the closest medic, a Sephi woman. "Nala, take the scanning crew with you and scout the tunnels. Give me an estimate of the space, removing space for our medical and suppression equipment. Oh and get me a reading on how thick the tunnel wall is between the tube and the ocean."

The other medic nodded, "Yes sir. May I ask a question sir?"

“If you do not call me sir again, yes.” The Mon Cal replied with an edge returning to his observation of the ocean.

“Sorry, Master Specialist. Why do you want to know the wall thickness?”

A rare smile flickered across the Mon Cal’s face. “A good question. Simply put, an escape. If worse comes to worse, we will blow the wall. Water flows faster than lava. It will buy us more time than a bunch of Firefighters wasting suppressant and dying before we get overrun.”

“What about us non-waterbreather’s?” Nala asked.

Kalmak looked back to the MedTech. “The tunnels are not too deep, those of us who can breathe water will ferry those who cannot out. Oh and also stage some breathing apparatus.”

The medic nodded in understanding. “Yes sir.”

The Mon Calamari returned his attention to the horizon, scanning for any other new plumes.

I am scared as well Nala, all of us are.

+3:00 Hours

Shelter Area Echo

Daleem, Kiast System

In the time that had elapsed, Master Specialist Groro and his team had identified the site as viable for approximately 10,000 people, including supplies for them for one week. The former lava tube had been sealed hundreds of years ago and from what the scanners told them, there was minimal to no activity beneath them.

As the transports arrived, Kalmak noticed that it was a mixed bag of classes. Gone were the early days of the survival protocols enacted by the Governor. The rich and poor crammed shoulder to shoulder in transports whisked away and shoved into the tunnels across the planet. In the tunnels, the Daleemites would wait for their evacuation, but even the prospects for that were bleak. A freak storm near five of the largest space elevators on Daleem had snapped during transit, the official count was 11,593 dead with another ten or twenty thousand injured from the resultant crash. Several craft had successfully evacuated some civilians skirting the storms in the upper atmosphere, but larger transports needed to fully evacuate the planet in time could not enter the upper atmosphere without crashing. The Odanite plan of fixing the generator was in motion, but no one would know if it worked until it happened.

Groro read the reports about the destruction in his 2.25 square meter makeshift office. He was still the de facto commander of the tunnel shelter. His superiors were waiting their turn on what

would probably be the last flight out several hours, if not a day or so, from now. Secretly, Kalmak wished he could have been at Sky Breach Base.

At least I could be helpful there, he thought, but I have helped here quite a bit.

So far he had treated ten broken bones, helped a woman deliver a baby, and identified someone with a strain of flu before it had spread. Before that, him and his team had set up the medical center, the sleeping area and seismic sensors throughout the 3km long tunnel. He was tired and so were his staff.

A low rumble shook the tunnel.

Kark. Kalmak bolted from his chair, the datapad clattering to the floor. He sprinted to the nearest sensor keying through its detection modes. Two of his team ran next to him to observe the small display in red characters.

magma activity detected... 5 km below detector... danger level... yellow... alert condition one

The three were absorbing the information. The three second briefing from the Indag-Conclave engineer had been “Green equals good. Yellow equals move now. Red equals dead by the time you’re done reading it.”

Groro turned to the FireServ and LawServ members behind him.

The Mon Calamari dropped his voice low. “Get everyone out and to the rally point. Tell the explosives boys to get ready, as soon as the air breathers are out we are flooding the tunnel.”

Both nodded and calmly set out, the key in this situation was to remain calm. No sooner had the two personnel began waking the nearest sleeping refugees, a loud shrieking emanated from the sensor.

condition red...condition red...

Kalmak did not even hesitate. “RUN!!! GET THE KARKING HELL OUT OF HERE!”

He ran towards the nearest bunk and shook the Quahari man sleeping awake. “You have to go.”

The man bolted up and started running away. Around him the chaos of the situation was unfolding. Beings close to the sealed end of the lava tube (the end where the magma would have entered from) stampeded towards the end where the sensors still indicated no danger. At the back of the chaos was the Master Specialist, before him people running over beds, through the aiseways, grabbing children. Behind him he could feel the temperature increasing steadily. He reached down and picked up a younger Sephi child about four or five years old.

“Hey how are you? Mind if I carry you?”

The child shook her head.

“Okay, do you know where your parents are?”

She shook her head again, tears welling up as the Mon Calamari kept a decent pace. “I was playing with friends.”

“That is okay. We will find them. What is your name?”

The ground rocked beneath them, Kalmak barely keeping his balance.

“Laara” She replied weakly.

“Laara, I am Kalmak. I need you to hold on tight to me Laara, whatever happens, until we find your parents.”

Laara nodded and gripped the Mon Calamari’s neck a little too tight. About 100 meters behind the duo, the cavern floor fell in. Red hot molten rock bubbled up. Instantly several hundred cots and pieces of abandoned equipment burst into flame, if they weren’t consumed by the cauldron of magma. The Sephi girl screamed, terror in her eyes as the first wave of magma began to track towards the Mon Calamari. The tunnel ceiling above the pit began to cave in under the heat stress. The ground shook more violently than previously and the medic lost his footing. His head hit the ground hard. His vision was hazy and he swore he saw the girl screaming as she floated away, as if picked up by an invisible crane claw. Kalmak reached towards her, but she was already too far away, heading towards one of the air holes along with many others. The heat was getting more intense that the seasoned firefighter was used to. He picked himself up, dizzy, but mobile enough. MedTech Nala grabbed the Mon Cal by his arm.

“Master Specialist, several Jedi are assisting with evac. They have about a quarter out.”

The senior NCO nodded, “Where is Senior Firefighter Graves? We draw the line here.”

“He’s gathering what suppression equipment we have.”

“Alright, get you and your staff out. If you see Graves, tell him to grab my kit. Oh and also look for a little girl named Laara. One of the Jedi got her after I, uh...ouch.”

“Here.” the MedTech applied a Bacta bandage, the soothing effect immediately took hold.

“Thanks. The concussion is clearing up.”

The younger medic nodded and took off as an older human male with red stripes of the fire service on his shoulder indicating him as a Senior Firefighter.

“Kalmak, I figured you’d wan’ this,” Graves held out a box with the flame protection suit and fluid suppression equipment the ODF Fire Service used for standard operations. For the time being the magma had stopped erupting and was pooling again.

“Thanks Percy,” the veteran pulled on the armor and body components over his field uniform. The suit was very similar to the flame trooper armor of the Clone Wars era, down to the helmet design. The firefighter sealed his suit, its internal live support taking over. The comms were clear now and the Mon Cal picked up his suppression pack doing a function check.

“’ll set sir?”

“Let us do it.”

The Mon Cal started spraying the white foam at the closest hot spot of magma. The red hot rock turned frothy white, coated in suppressant. His partner began working on the other half and soon were joined by six others. Each spraying a section in front of them. The alarms were still reading green behind them.

“Step up!” The commander of the team ordered and the whole line took one step forward. They continued to cool the rocks and even the opening pits which sizzled, popped and let off huge amounts of white steam. The heat, even with the resistance built into the suit and the cooling of the rocks, was getting unbearable.

“How many left?” Kalmak asked, his unsweating face pained from the heat.

“About 45%, sir.”

“Tell those Jedi to hurry the hell...”

Suddenly the ground shook once more. This time a fissure opened up right behind the team who were all knocked to the ground by the intensity of the shaking.

“Half hit behind, half hit in front. OEF One, detonate!”

A smaller explosion shook the tunnel as four team members including Kalmak began shooting at the pit behind them. However, more magma surged from below on both sides. The streams were ineffective, only generating steam when suddenly a wall of water surged from across the pit, dousing the magma freezing it as rock. The cool ocean water dropped Kalmak’s temperature to a much more comfortable level as the team was carried over the original pit. As the current died out, one of the team members signaled one of the openings was close and

latched on. One at a time, the firefighters hauled their sopping wet selves out of the makeshift exit. While the main body of the stampede had been diverted up the ladder, those close to the ocean were given aquabreathers and had been force pushed out into the bay before the water had been let loose.

The day had been a success with no lives lost, but once again the refugees were homeless and Kalmak and his team would have to search for a new one.

As the Mon Calamari pulled himself out, he saw a Sephi girl standing next to Aurora Ta'Var. Kalmak and his people came to attention.

"Madam High Councilor. We did not know you would be here." Laara ran to Kalmak holding onto his leg.

"At ease Master Specialist." Aura chuckled, "This youngling refused to go anywhere until you made it out."

"Mr. Kalmak you made it! We watched the whole thing!"

The Mon Calamari took a knee to match the girl's height, "Did you now?"