

Option 2: STOP THE DEPUTY GRAND MASTER

TuQ'uan had been wandering around the Shadow Academy checking in on prospective Plagueians studying the ways of the Brotherhood and the Dark Side, at least that's what he had told Ronovi in order to get leave to head to Arx. Truth be told he had a personal errand to run—one that he didn't want the rest of his summit to know about—but that had been pushed to the back of his mind when the alert came in.

The Collective was here and they weren't looking for a nice picnic by the sea. They were here to put an end to their prolonged, self-righteous war with the Brotherhood that had claimed so many lives on both sides. If TuQ'uan were being honest with himself—and he had been more so as of late—he didn't really care about this war. To him it just felt like two bullies pushing each other around on the school yard with no particular care about any of the other people they dragged along with them or how it affected their so called allies, as long as they came out on top at the end of the day.

Despite his conflicted feelings towards the Force users he had aligned himself, the di Plagia knew who he had to fight for. Plus, he had spent too long climbing the ranks of the Plagueian summit to just change teams, the Collective agents would recognize him immediately as a sympathizer with the Sith and if they didn't kill him on the spot they would likely torture him as long as he could hold out and then some.

It wasn't the emergency alert that had worried the Kel Dor, no, he thought the clans uniting in orbit above the planet had things under control and the Collective would be pushed back again. How could they think attacking the Brotherhood on their home territory would fare any better than it had in the past? They had attacked multiple clans, Plagueis included, on their home planets only to be driven back time and time again.

What had caused TuQ'uan to worry came some time later when he had been walking by a series of transparisteel windows on the ground floor of the academy. What started as a low rumbling outside grew louder and louder, shaking the transparisteel in its frame. He tilted his head back and shifted his wide brimmed hat back on his head in order to get a better look at what the fray was going on out there. To his utter shock the Plagueian watched as the admin section of the Nesolat made its final descent to the surface of the planet coming to a rest a short distance from the academy itself, dust billowing out all around obscuring his view.

That can't be good, he thought to himself before noticing the multitude of ships descending through the, until recently, shielded atmosphere. *Oh, that cannot be good.*

Turning his attention back to the newly erected structure in front of the already imposing Shadow Academy TuQ'uan squinted through the settling dust trying to make out if it were friend or foe who had ridden down to the planet's surface. The mercenary cursed inwardly as he

watched hundreds of Collective soldiers flood out of the Nesolat's admin sections viciously cutting through anything and everything that stood in the way. TuQ'uan was sure that his eyes were playing a trick on him because right in the middle of the swarm of soldiers stood a hooded figure wielding what appeared to be a red lightsaber, not fighting the collective but leading them. The figure drew back his hood and strode towards the main entrance of the Shadow Academy, slicing through confused Iron Legion soldiers with ease, his amber hair billowed in the wind, a disinterested look on the pale face and a determined look in his amber eyes. Every member of the Brotherhood knew that face well. Evant Taelyan, Deputy Grand Master of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood.

I didn't even know that was an option, TuQ'uan half joked to himself. I've got to warn someone!

The mercenary tried his comlink. Dead. In a fit of rage and frustration he threw his comlink against a nearby wall, the Collective must have taken the network down somehow. He had two options here, run and hide, or slow down the Collective until backup arrived. But what reason did they have for taking over the Shadow Academy? TuQ'uan remembered from his early days here hearing rumblings of a hidden passageway somewhere in the depths of the academy that the Dark Council used to travel between here and the Dark Ascent. Up until this point he had dismissed this as silly rumours created by bored students to downplay their fear of the councillors, but now he wasn't so sure. It made sense right? Why else would Event be leading the army of Collective soldiers this way? The Shadow Academy held no real strategic value, it was filled with untrained students and teachers well past their prime, the Dark Ascent should be their real target, that's where Mav and the rest of the Dark Summit would be. But with a passageway in, they could attack from within and avoid the excessive defenses set up to drive invaders away.

A third option presented itself. Maybe he could get away AND slow Evant down? But first he would need a few things, luckily TuQ'uan had spent quite a bit of time in the Shadow Academy when he first joined the Brotherhood and he knew his way around. With a plan set in his head, the Kel Dor took off running towards the central spire and the security offices.

It took the di Plagia little time to get to his destination though he had a few close calls as he nearly trampled over a few untrained students heading towards the chaos at the main entrance, eager to prove themselves against the invading army. He didn't have time to stop but he knew that this was the only time he would see any of them, the Evant playing for the enemy team their chances of survival were zero. When he arrived at the central security offices it looked like it had been ransacked already. A few warm, half eaten meals sat on a central table with steam still rising, the chairs around the table were in disarray with a few having been tipped over, laying on the ground an officer's jacket was draped over the back of one chair and the blaster racks were emptied. A few close range weapons sat mounted on their racks and a set of closed lockers sat against the wall next to the racks. When the security forces left the office they had done so in a hurry and only grabbed what they thought was necessary, their blasters.

TuQ'uan moved quickly, first up was a nearby terminal. His fingers flew across the terminal keyboard as he navigated his way through various menus until he found what he was looking for, blueprints. A window popped up on the terminal's screen prompting him for a password. After contemplating for a moment, he typed in two words. The Worst.

Ding.

He was in! No matter what your status or position in the Brotherhood everyone could agree on one thing, Mav is the worst. His eyes scanned the screen finding exactly what he was looking for. A few floors directly below him was a sub basement that showed a stairwell and nothing else, it just ended at the foot of the stairs. That had to be it!

The crimson fingers began their dance once more, tapping away at the keyboard until he heard a click from the lockers behind him. As the door swung open a smile spread across his face, or at least it would have if he could smile. Inside the weapons locker were two black spheres with red countdown timers on top, why there were denton charges in this locker he wasn't sure, but he wasn't about to question his luck. With no time to spare, TuQ'uan clipped the charges to his belt and took off once again at a full run down hallways, around corners, and eventually down the stairs often two at a time.

His face nearly collided with the duracrete wall built within feet of the base of the stairs, his momentum had carried him forward at a breakneck pace. Had he been wrong? It was bare down here and appeared to be a dead end. As he took a moment to collect his thoughts and figure out what options were left he heard the whistle of a breeze coming through the base of the wall and upon further inspection he could see scratch marks across the floor as if something had been moved repeatedly here.

TuQ'aun pulled his vibrodagger from its place on his hip and stuck it in what appeared to be a crack in the corner of the wall and began to pry. This would be much harder to do as a non-Force user, but he was determined. With a groan the duracrete wall began to slide, just enough for the Kel Dor to get his finger into the newly created space.

The thud of boots began to echo through the stairwell, they were catching up to him and quickly. Planting his foot on the wall TuQ'uan heaved with all of his might, widening the gap by a mere inch. He didn't need to open all the way but just enough to squeeze through. The weight of the wall fought back trying to slide back to its starting position but the determined Plagueian wouldn't get it. With another mighty attempt the gap grew, more this time. He now had six inches of space but it wasn't quite enough. Changing positions he braced his back against the wall and shoved on last time, pushing his muscles to the limit.

As TuQ'aun slid through the tight gap his hat caught on the hidden doorway and fell to the ground on the other side, his strength gave out and before he could retrieve his prized possession the wall slid firmly back into place. Exhausted, he had to continue on without

mourning the loss of his hat. The di Plagia took off at a run, pushing through the screaming pain rising through his claws, this was the most running he had done in a while and he was not happy about it. The duracrete tunnel he found himself in was long, cold and dimly lit, every footfall echoed off the walls and for what felt like forever, his were the only ones he could hear.

His pace was beginning to slow when he heard the familiar scraping sound of the hidden passage behind opening up and boots filled the tunnel. He figured that this was as good a place as any for his plan and unhooked the detonator charges from their place on his belt. It took him a moment to hook both charges to the same remote detonator and right now every second counted but he was able to do it. Setting the charges on either side of the wide tunnel he was done and now was his time to escape.

Having used up almost every ounce of energy in his body, the Kel Dor's sad attempt at a run now looked closer to a jog or a slightly quicker walk. Before he could get fifty meters from the blast site a red bolt of energy soared past his head.

"Varick," Evant's familiar voice boomed. "You forgot something back there and I just want to return it!"

TuQ'uan pushed on, certain that Evant would tear him apart given the chance.

"I think you should come back here and get it," Evant's voice took on a much more commanding tone stopping the di Plagia in his tracks.

"I should come back there and get it," TuQ'uan muttered to himself and turned to face his pursuers. His feet began moving awkwardly as if being controlled by someone else, first his left then his right, he tried to tell himself to fight it but he was exhausted. Realizing he still had the detonator gripped tightly in his hand, TuQ'uan thumbed the control switch praying that this would work.

A massive explosion erupted halfway between Evant and TuQ'uan, shaking the tunnel violently and sending a large portion of those inside it to the ground. Duracrete chunks flew out from the wall and water began pouring in, a trickle at first but the change in pressure ripped larger and larger chunks of the weakened walls apart causing a torrent of water to flood in. A tidal wave washed over TuQ'uan pulling his feet out from under him and smashing the back of his skull against the hard floor. As everything faded to black, the last thing the Plagueian saw of Evant was the Deputy Grand Master throwing his hand up in front of him in an attempt to stop the powerful flood of water. TuQ'uan lost consciousness as the water carried him away from the fray.