

## The Unchained Malady: Full Frontal Assault

By: Knight Jinius Lu'Kar Griffin, 10545

An explosion boomed nearby. Dirt and pulverized jungle rained down around the small platoon. They were crouched in a shallow trench. Overhead several transports and fighters flew by. A tall blue-gray-skinned Zaborak walked along the outside wall of the trench. He looked at the platoon of men and women. As he walked, he barked orders and offered reassurance to his crew. Further down the line, other sergeants did the same all of them preparing their men for the battle to come. All around screams echoed through the jungles as answers to valiant battle cries or deafening explosions. War was hell.

Corporal Landris didn't know much about war. Today would mark his first engagement – his first chance to put his training and skills to the test in real-life combat. You didn't make Corporal without having a little time under your belt, but in his case, he'd been lucky, or unlucky, enough to avoid being on the front lines. He'd mostly served on guard details, did some unique specialization training, or even less-interesting missions. It had been a shock to him when Dlarit Special Operations recruited him in from his old unit – sans the experience needed – and shoved a blaster in his hand and sent him to the middle of a god-forsaken warzone.

"... Everyone good and clear on the attack plan?" the sergeant demanded in his firm and unyielding voice. Like any good sergeant, Sergeant Milkos was a stern man. Landris suspected the aged soldier had a lot of unexpressed affection for his men – most sergeants did. Landris was confident the Sergeant would lead his men into the maw of a Rancor without question and die right by their side.

*Surely, the temple doesn't actually have a Rancor pit,* Landris pondered silently. He often caught himself daydreaming or pondering the unimportant details – it was part of the reason he'd not been selected for battle detail until now.

"LANDRIS!" the bellowing growl of Sergeant Milkos demanded. The sergeant strode over and stood far too close to the Corporal, "You had better pray or wish, or whatever strikes your dandy butt's fancy that someone is looking out for you. You haven't a bleeding clue as to what our plan is do you?"

Landris snapped out of his daydreaming. It was rather foolish, he thought, to be daydreaming and wandering while a battle plan was being laid out. He shook his head at the Sergeant, "No, Sergeant. I..."

"Exactly." The sergeant poked Landris in the chest and then looked out over his men again, "I will not repeat myself again. We move forward to Waypoint Alpha. We should rendezvous with another platoon there and then we are head due east until we find the enemy. At which point, we proceed to kill them with extreme prejudice. Do I make myself clear?" The sergeant glared down at Landris with the last question.

"Yes, Sergeant!" the squad shouted. Landris joined them.

The next thing he knew, Landris found himself along with his squad marching through the jungle. A pair of scouts led the group hacking and slicing through the undergrowth. The gleam of their old-fashioned machetes served as a constant beacon to the troops trailing behind. Occasionally the boom of a distant explosion or the crash of a no-so-distant one would shake the forest around them. Those explosions would often lead to a chorus of screams and yells that served as breaks from the jungle's unnatural silence. Silence was an alien sound in a dense forest. A deep part of Landris could sense the life around him. That life was afraid. It was truly, absolutely terrified.

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The thick of the jungle broke into a small clearing accented with brilliant golden light pouring down through the canopy. The ring of trees that created the boundary of the clearing were marred with scuffs and scraps on their bark and accompanying moss. Someone had passed through the clearing recently, and they had been in a hurry. No one commented on the scuffs and the scouts only seemed to account for it briefly as they moved ahead of the group. Landris hoped that he wasn't the only one concerned as to whether those scuffs were friendlies or hostiles.

The sergeant threw up a first. The soldiers began relaying the gesture down the line until everyone had come to a stop and had taken a knee on the soft jungle peat. Landris was firmly in the center of a group of eight or so soldiers. As they all knelt waiting for more instructions, one of the scouts hurried to the sergeant. The others had taken knees further along the tree line.

"The rendezvous is about two clicks north by northeast. Recon update suggests enemy forces have diverted and are attempting to cut off section 3-Bravo. We're likely to run into them directly, Sergeant." One of the scouts said quietly to the sergeant. He immediately shuffled over and relayed the same information to the platoon's lieutenant.

Sergeant Milkos returned and pulled out his datapad, "We divert west five degrees. Spread out scouting another 100 meters. That should gather us enough notice to stop and move again if we run into any patrols."

The scout nodded and started to move up. Suddenly crimson spears of plasma exploded from the forest line. In a second two of the scouts and several soldiers in the front of the group had fallen to blaster fire. The air grew thick with the smell of ozone and the sound of heavy repeating blaster fire in an instant.

"Take cover! Weapons hot!" the sergeant bellowed only a split second before being cut down by a salvo of blaster bolts. He felt back with his torso smoking. His eyes stared blankly towards heaven; he didn't even have the chance to blink before being shredded by the blaster fire.

The platoon began returning fire in short, controlled bursts. Plants and leaves jumped and danced as the return fire lit up the tree line. Several trees on both sides creaked and cracked before bursting apart to tumble. Soldiers on both sides found themselves dodging the falling behemoths or risk being crushed.

Only a few heartbeats had passed since the first blaster shot had lanced across the clearing. Landris, in his inexperience, had only fired maybe two or three shots as he searched desperately for cover. In that span of time, at least a half dozen of his fellow soldiers had fallen to the volley of fire. The jungle was chaos. No one could argue that the platoon has fought brilliantly. They formed ranks and took cover and returned fire in expert volleys. Despite their efforts, the enemy forces were better entrenched and had caught their prey in the open. Landris never once saw an enemy soldier. He would see a burst of light as one of the heavy repeating blasters opened fire and occasionally saw a darting shadow in the trees. It was like fighting ghosts.

Landris could only watch as the blinking lights of concussion grenades arced from the enemy line to fall among friendly soldiers. A few soldiers yelled warnings. Even fewer dove to throw themselves onto the grenades or at least tried to block the blast. They weren't very successful. The explosions ripped apart the land sending bodies and parts of bodies sailing. The grenades had been expertly cooked so to land only moments before exploding. Landris was covered in pieces of his comrades. His mind thought to return fire, but his body was frozen. He wasn't fighting – he was panicked and shocked and completely

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unable to respond. He watched as his platoonmates fell one-by-one leaving smoldering, mangled corpses. As each soldier fell panic and fear crept in deeper. Paralyzed with fear and unsure of what to do he stood among his fallen and dying platoon.

Finally, his lizard brain kicked in and his will to live overcame his fear and any sense of bravery. Landris dropped to the ground and waited. His acting would have won holonet awards – by any account he was dead. Frozen with fear and pretending for a fate that was soon to become reality. It wasn't long before the enemy stopped firing and the explosions quieted to distant rumbles. Silence found the forest again.

Nearby the radio cracked, "4<sup>th</sup> Platoon, break off and return to Hotel Charlie. Enemy has pushed past the eastern front. Command wants to consolidate. Repeat: break off to Hotel Charlie." The operator must have died and fallen in a way that it was on the loudspeaker setting. It was an unusual score to the scene.

Over the next few minutes, Landris heard footsteps move among the bodies. The Unchained were likely checking for survivors. More footsteps came in the following minutes – most hurried past towards the temple. Landris often heard the report of the automated defenses as the enemy forces drew in closer to the temple.

More and more footsteps passed by. Many of them moved quickly, uncaring about silence or stealth. Those men knew that they were uncontested – it wasn't long until the temple would be taken. The Unchained were committed to throwing every man at the temple in a siege of simple numbers. Landris stayed still. He only had to survive a little longer and he could run off and hide and pray that they count him as dead.

Silence again fell on the forest. Landris waited as patiently as he could. He finally chose to look up. The scene around him was carnage. Blood and body parts were scattered around coating the trees and grass in a hellish paint. A squad of troops moved from the tree line into view. They wore Dlarit colors. Landris started to move and call out to his allies. He watched as another friendly arm shot up. Fingers were bent at unnatural angles and blood dripped from the palm. One of the approaching squads leveled his blaster and fired a shot into the survivor. The arm fell limp and quiet. More shots rang out and more bodies went limp. These men weren't friendlies.

The squad wore the colors of friends and passed the initial glance of a friend. They would pass through and past the defenses and would soon be into the temple. Landris drew a breath. He was helpless. Even if he could move, and the fear was preventing that, what could he do? What could one worthless coward do against a squad or more of armed resistance? He was no Jedi.

More minutes passed. More footsteps. He couldn't tell which direction they had come. Landris held his breath for a moment praying they wouldn't notice the rise and fall of his chest.

Suddenly a hand grabbed him. He found himself wheeling around to face a man holding a blue lightsaber to his face.

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"Reinforce the eastern front with the reserves from Taldryan," DarkHawk ordered. He stood over an interactive battle map. The console let out a hum and a ripple of bright cyan light crossed along the

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display. The images and symbols moved. Enemy forces moved as little red figures across the map while green and yellow figures moved to meet them, Taldryan and Sadow forces respectively.

Jinius strode into the room flanked closely by his droid. He bowed slightly as he approached the Procounsel.

"Warlord, you summoned me," Jinius asked with his head lowered.

"Relay the status update to the Consul. Ask him to advise on the reinforcement ETA." The looming form of Warlord DarkHawk turned to face Jinius, "Yes. I'm sending you in to help with the eastern front. We're getting overwhelmed and the last few Dark Jedi we sent haven't reported back. I need someone to meet up with 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon and help them reinforce the 7<sup>th</sup>."

Jinius had been dreading this order. A part of him had expected it to come eventually. The larger expectation is he would be left to try and decrypt enemy communications or hack their computer systems. Cutting down enemy troops on the front lines was not exactly in Jinius's wheelhouse.

Jinius sucked in and lifted his head from his bow, "Warlord, with respect, I am not a fighter. My place is..."

Jinius was cut off by a dark glare from the Proconsul. "Your place is where the Brotherhood tells you to be. Beyond that, I am fully aware of what you can and cannot do. Our current predicament calls for something different. You're smart, Knight. Go outsmart them."

"Warlord, I don't think intelligence has much to do with it," Jinius protested. He was still adjusting. His absence from the order was still weighing on him. He had no idea where he'd been for the last year, but he knew he had been somewhere. It was hard to put that aside and remember his place in the machinations of the brotherhood.

"Of course, it does! I know you haven't buried your blade in the hearts of many enemies but trust me when I say intelligence has its place. We all have a part to play in this battle, Knight Griffin." DarkHawk moved away from the console to grab a datapad from a couple of runners. He started skimming it as he continued, "Today, your part is to go in there and lead 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon out of the muck and make them effective. You'd be surprised what having a lightsaber and someone who can sling around a little Force hoodoo can do to a bunch of broken soldiers."

"Warlord, again with respect..." Jinius started. Dread overcame him and he found himself struggling to fight it off.

"Those men don't have time for this. Get out there or I'll throw you out the window and see if you can fly, Knight!" the Warlord's said without looking up from his datapad.

Jinius waited for a moment. He was searching for a rebuttal, the one thing that would convince his command that something more was needed.

"Knight, isn't there a word for throwing something out of a window?"

"Yes, Warlord. It is defenestrate," Jinius's droid answered cheerfully.

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“Knight, get on with it before you experience defen... that personally.”

Jinius nodded and turned to leave. He was about to get some firsthand experience on the battlefield.

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Jinius rushed through the jungle. The hum of his lightsaber and heavy steps of his droid were welcome comforts. His blade cut through the dense undergrowth as if it were made of soft plastic. Distantly, the occasional boom of an explosion would shake the trees sending showers of leaves falling. The groaning crash of ancient trees falling amidst the battle shook the earth beneath Jinius feet. He pressed onward.

The jungle was quiet. Most of the fighting had moved further east despite this being the eastern front still. He would stop periodically and open his emotions to the Force trying to see a glimpse of the future or see any secrets the forest held. A dense jungle teeming with life shouldn't be so quiet. As he explored the sensations of the jungle, he sensed something not too far away. Jinius dove to the side.

The bushes next to Jinius exploded. Blaster shots darted around him. Jinius went prone as the bolts seared the air overhead. He could feel the hot, warped air rush by as the blasters tore into trees. A metallic ping followed closely with a dull thud echoed. Jinius dared a glance upward.

Jinius's droid stood next to the bush having not reacted as quickly. One of the attackers lay at the droid's feet with a pool of crimson oozing from the man's neck.

“You're embarrassing yourself,” the droid chastised as a blaster shot grazed its chest. The Droid charged forward impaling the next attacker in a shower of magenta sparks.

“Not likely. The trauma of the situation has caused my sense of self to collapse,” Jinius muttered absently in response. He was not that used to conflict.

“Jin!” the Droid bellowed as it took another blaster shot in the side. Sparks flowed from the wound as molten durasteel dropped down. The droid swung its staff in an upward swing which connected with the jaw of another enemy soldier. A hollow crack followed along with a miasmic red spray both serving as an endorsement of the attack's effect.

“Jin! You're embarrassing me! Now fight!” Another shot grazed the droid's arm. It moved with brilliant speed never staying in one spot for more than an instant. The attackers were now firing wildly hoping to catch the droid as it shot around.

Jinius pressed himself to the ground. He'd been in fights before. Battles even. But, never had he been in a full-blown warzone. His mind was fleeting and wandering as the chaos consumed him.

“Jinius, stop self-actualizing and fight!” the droid pressed its electro-staff into Jinius's thigh sending a jolt through the knight's body.

Dawning realization fell on Jinius and he looked up. He was a scholar and a researcher. And he was a Knight of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood. He had sworn himself to Clan Naga Sadow. With that vow came a duty to his brothers and sisters and a duty to his order. Jinius rose from the ground reigniting his blade.

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Blaster bolts zipped and danced around as a squad of enemy soldiers emerged from among briars a dozen or so strides away from Jinius and the droid. Several of the shots grazed and even struck the droid as it buffeted the attack. Jinius batted the bolts that came too close sending them veering into the bush.

"Please... do... something," the droid strained as the blaster fire began to concentrate on it. More pieces of its armor slugged off falling to the ground in smoldering clumps.

Jinius raised both arms taking a step towards the attackers. He spread his fingers and felt the Force flow freely through him. He imagined a half-sphere of energy spread out just beyond his fingertips. He drew upon the well of energy that throbbed around him. The vibrancy of the jungle, the malice, and rage of the attackers, his own fear – it all pooled into his fingertips and spread outward as he took another step.

Blaster shots cut through the invisible wall of energy causing ripples of dim green-white light to flow out from where the bolts cut through. None of the shots found their home. Instead of striking Jinius full-on, the shots veered coursing into the weeds and bush with dull pops and hisses. A few caught his armor weave cloak leaving black streaks on the material. Jinius continued forward straining against the energy he allowed to flow through him. Whenever you called upon the Force, it would call back. There was always a cost. He could feel heat building in his fingers – the energy he'd stolen from the shots as they crossed through. He couldn't use it, but it would certainly build and build until it broke him.

With another forced step, Jinius pressed outward sending a jolt of energy moving in front of him. A telekinetic burst. The burst caused the line of soldiers to stumble back. Jinius shouted, "Now!"

Immediately from the smoke and cinder caused by the calamity of blaster fire, SA-TRN93, Jinius's droid, exploded from the smoke with his electro staff held firmly overhead. He brought it down against the skull of an attacker. The man dropped like a sack of logs, sprawling out on the ground.

In the moment between breaths as the soldiers refocused their attacks on the droid that was now upon them. Jinius launched forward in a dash and thrust his fist outward. Again, a wave of energy condensed in front of his moving fist and shot outward. The burst hit the first soldier and sent him back. The cracking of bones in the man's chest left him doubled over and gasping. Jinius flicked his blade and sliced through the man's forehead. The man went limp as his scalp slid back.

Another soldier turned to face Jinius. Jinius ducked beneath the blaster fire and slashed horizontally searing the flesh of the man's gut in a slash. The guard gurgled once falling forward. Jinius plunged the blade in the man's back as he ran by.

Bodies littered the around Jinius. Some had smoke rising from their wounds while others were just heaps of dead flesh. No more enemies charged them or pressed them. Jinius looked back at his droid. The machine as mangled and marred by the shots he'd endured. Entire sections of its plating were gone leaving large pot marks and gouges in his chest. Even some of his circuitry was gone leaving only glowing wires.

"You okay?" Jinius asked.

The droid gave a glare. "Okay?" It asked sarcastically. "That is the question I should be asking you that, Beast. My design allows me to reroute from this kind of damage. I'm only a little more vulnerable than when we started. I'm still more useful than you."

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Jinius scowled at the droid and started further into the woods. Jinius's senses teemed again. He could sense something close by.

Jinius darted through the brush towards one of the bodies nearby. His blade hummed at his side. The body he ran to hadn't fallen in the battle. It still had life and Jinius could sense it as he moved closer. He turned the body over and plunged his blade into the man's face stopping only a few centimeters from the man's eye.

The blue beam of his lightsaber cast opalescent shadows on the man's face as Jinius held the blade pointed straight at the man's face. The man, for what it was worth, let out a yelp.

"Who are you?!" Jinius demanded in a snarl. His droid came to rest just behind him. It scanned the jungle silently.

"Corporal Landris, sir. I'm a member of the Dlarit Special Operations Group," the man answered with a shake. He tried to raise his hands to put them between him and the blade. Jinius pressed him down in the ground so the man couldn't move.

"Landris. C0227-B35-4714-44A0-96E1. Voice print matches what is on record," the droid said quickly.

"Where is your unit, boy?" Jinius asked. Boy may not have been appropriate. He couldn't tell how much younger than he the soldier was.

"Dead, sir. It's just me."

"And why were you laying in the grass?" Jinius asked. He hadn't moved his lightsaber from the Corporal's face.

"That is an excellent question, Knight Jinius. Why was *he* hiding in the grass? That is a question I've found myself asking today more than once today," the droid asked adding a flair of sarcasm to his tone.

"Answer!" Jinius demanded of the boy ignoring his droid's remarks.

"Sir, I... I.. I don't have a good answer for that," the Corporal answered sheepishly.

"A coward then," the droid said with an excited chime in its tone. "You're in good company, kid."

"Do a sweep you infernal machine," Jinius demanded. The droid started to retort and Jinius moved his blade to point at its head. It sauntered off to scan the forest. "I want to know if anything else is lurking."

The droid silently complied and walked towards the tree line.

"Sir, does your droid always talk to you like that?" the corporal asked.

"Yes," Jinius answered with a glower in the droid's direction.

"Can't you order him not to..., sir?" the corporal asked almost forgetting to use the required honorific.

"Negative. Unfortunately for us, Master Kiryu locked out his programming before assigning him to me. I am unable to alter the programming. The only redemption is it has to obey my commands despite him choosing to be an ass about it the whole time."

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Jinius helped the corporal off the ground and looked him over briefly. The young soldier was unharmed aside from a few scrapes and bruises. He nodded and pointed off in the distance, "I'm heading to the line. I've been ordered to help reinforce our forces here. You can join me and one of the commanders can reassign you then. Keep up. I've lost too much time already."

"Sir, we need to head back to base. I... "

"My orders were clear, Corporal," Jinius interrupted.

"Sir, you don't understand. We have a false flag situation. Not long ago I saw some men dressed in our colors moving towards the base."

"Allied soldiers moving to the allied base doesn't strike me as the kind of thing we should be concerned about," Jinius said incredulously.

"They shot one of the survivors. Execution-style. Not exactly something friendlies do, sir."

"It was likely euthanasia. They were easing their suffering. I can't say I wouldn't do the same in their boots based on some of the corpses I've seen around us."

SA-TRN93 walked by on his scan of the area. "Knight Jinius, only the most grievous of wounds would engender euthanasia. Bacta treatments are extremely effective and could correct any manner of injuries. Cybernetics can cover the rest, usually," the droid said as it passed by.

Jinius stood quietly for a moment mulling over the information. He looked over some of the corpses. A few had injuries that appeared to be treatable except for one or two execution-style injuries. In fact, some of the wounds showed signs of clotting and even inflammation from healing. Someone had killed them a fair amount of time after their initial injuries. There was some merit to the corporal's concerns. On the other hand, if the order lost the front line, they could lose the planet. Again.

"Look at me," Jinius demanded. "Mind probing and all that fanciness isn't my strong area. I'm more accustomed to research and discovery rather than brute-forcing my way into someone's mind. However, we don't have time to gather the facts."

The corporal stepped up and looked into Jinius's eyes. Jinius closed his eyes for a moment centering himself. Again, he felt the flow of the Force around him. He felt the corporal's fear and confusion. He dove deeper sensing all he could. Underneath every thought and emotion was a belief. Jinius could sense that Corporal Landris believed with certainty that he was correct.

"We return to base," Jinius said calmly.

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The journey back to base was mostly uneventful. The band of soldiers Jinius and his droid had run into weren't the only enemy unit making their way to the temple. However, Jinius and his team were smarter this time and able to move deliberately enough to avoid the enemy forces that had broken through the lines. As Jinius and his small cadre came closer to the temple, they could hear the automated defenses engage tearing down enemy soldiers that came too close.



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Breaking through to the clearing that made for a buffer zone between the forest and the actual temple complex, they came upon the structure. Aged cracks ran along its surface and sections were haphazardly held together with durasteel plating. Little of it was battle damage; a lot was the wear of the ages.

Outside the temple was quiet. As the group moved closer the automated defenses zeroed on Jinius and quickly relaxed, they recognized him. Drawing closer to the main temple structure Jinius noticed the bodies of the guards laying on either side of the door. Likely the automated defenses had ignored troops in Dlarit clothing, and the guards had been more thorough.

"Any idea who I'm looking for, Corporal?" Jinius asked as they entered the temple.

"Negative, sir. We're looking for Sadowian troops among Sadowian troops. Needle in a haystack, sir."

"Assume anyone we encounter from here out is hostile. Challenge everyone and if they fail your challenge, gun them down. We'll deal with the consequences of that later."

"What's our plan, sir?" the corporal asked.

"Frack if I know," Jinius answered. He ignited his blade.

The base was essentially empty. The guard rotation wasn't for another hour and with all the chaos of the battle, command was unlikely to question a guard unit checking in for a while still. As they moved through the building, Jinius's team encountered a patrol or two but never sensed any hostility from them. He again opened himself to the Force and didn't sense the presence of any Sadowian command or summit. It was likely they had moved off to reinforce other segments of the conflict. A Warlord or Battlelord would be a welcomed weapon of carnage on the front lines.

The best plan Jinius had was to move room-by-room and hope to sense anything concerning along the way. If they got lucky someone suspicious or overly malicious would cross their paths.

"Knight Griffin, I don't think this should be here," the droid said calmly as they passed under a large stairwell.

Jinius walked over and looked at where the droid was indicating. A large metallic disc was stuck to the wall just under the stairs. Several lights blinked on it.

"What is it?" Jinius asked.

"Well, it is not of brotherhood design," the droid answered. "I don't have a complete database on Unchained technology, but I believe that there is a good chance it is a bomb. A big bomb."

"How big?"

"I could pick any number of adjectives as my understanding of explosives is lacking. I'm going to go with very big. If I'm feeling cheeky 'bada big boom' is my best description," the droid said absently. It continued to scan the wall the device was attached to. "This wall is load-bearing and part of the central shaft the rest of the building is linked to. Take out this wall and the whole house comes down."

"Can you disarm it?" Jinius asked. He wasn't able to hide the concern in his voice.

"No. My programming isn't written to handle random Unchained explosives. I blame you. Mostly."

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"I didn't program you."

"No, thankfully. Nonetheless, this is still your fault because I want it to be."

"I can do it," the corporal said suddenly. He'd stepped closer to the disc and looked it over in detail. "I mean, I've been training EOD for a few months. The device isn't too sophisticated. They likely banked on their ruse buying them the time they needed."

"A few months? Can't we hire a professional? Perhaps someone who's done EOD once or twice. Not someone who did a few holos and read a textbook," the droid interjected.

"Textbooks?" Corporal Landris asked, "What century are you from?"

"I work with what I have, meat bag." The droid shot back gesturing towards Jinius.

"We don't have many options and there are likely many more of these. Once you know how to disarm it radio it into the droid." Jinius tossed a device to the Corporal. "He can handle any others we find. Once this one is safe, find other stairwells and do the same to the bombs you find there."

"What is your plan?" the Corporal asked.

"I hope to find the source and then I'm going to kill it." Jinius started up the stairs with the droid following close behind.

Working through the building Jinius and his team found explosives in every stairwell. It hadn't taken Landris long to figure out how to disarm the bombs and once he conveyed that information to the droid, they dealt with the bombs quickly. Jinius, along with his droid, continued through the temple methodically.

"How many have we found?" Jinius asked as the droid removed another bomb from a stairwell.

"Between the Corporal and myself, this makes for twelve," the droid answered. It crushed a circuit component causing the bomb to power down.

"There can't be more than a few left then. There aren't that many stairwells in this fossil of a building. Let's keep moving," Jinius ordered as he charged out of the room.

"Yes, please tag along, droid. I'm going to boss you around while being as useless as possible. I'm so glad we have you on these missions, Knight Jinius."

As they neared the next stairwell Jinius noticed a pair of soldiers standing outside the opening to the stairs. Jinius nodded towards his droid and they quickly made their way closer.

"Stairway is closed," one of the soldiers said as he put his palm out encouraging Jinius to stop.

Jinius couldn't help but notice the other guard had not-quite-so-secretly leveled his blaster.

"I completely understand. Nonetheless, I need to get upstairs," Jinius said forcefully. "Move aside, soldier."

"It's closed you pompous prick," the guard shot back. It was a subtle hit the guard didn't use an honorific that he wasn't exactly on the right side of the conflict.

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"Tisk, tisk," the droid said casually. "While I agree with your apt description of Knight Jinius, you are not allowed to speak to Dark Jedi that way."

"Since when do I care?" the guard asked. He raised his blaster to point at Jinius's face.

Jinius rammed his lightsaber into the guard's gut igniting the blade as he did so. The guard fired a shot that went past Jinius's ear and down the corridor. The guard fell limp. The droid quickly flung his electro-staff at the remaining guard impaling him with the metal blade. Violet discharge forked off the man's torso as he fell back.

A shout sounded from the stairs and one of the Unchained in the stairs fired a shot from the opening. It hit the droid squarely in the torso. The droid stumbled back and collapsed to the ground.

Jinius reacted. He dove sideways dodging another shot and rolled to the far corner. He could hear the men in the stairs stacking up against the wall. From the angle in which he stood; he could see the thickness of the wall. It wasn't terribly thick on this side, maybe 5 or 6 centimeters.

Jinius plunged his blade into the wall. Molten duracrete pooled around the blade as flowed around the blade as Jinius rushed forward. He dashed allowing himself to be carried by the force causing his strength and speed to respond accordingly. The momentum helped his lightsaber drag through the thick material.

The blade crossed through the other side and Jinius could hear the groans and shouts of the Unchained using the wall as cover. The groans of agony quickly faded and were followed by meaty plumps as the men fell limp inside the stairs. Blood began to creep around the stairwell's opening.

After several seconds of quiet, Jinius looked around the corner. Inside he saw two dead soldiers wearing Naga Sadow colors. Directly across from him, however, sat another soldier. The remaining soldier was panting heavily holding a small device in his left hand. His right arm was a messy stump cut off near his bicep, and it was pressed firmly against his chest. Gore pooled and dripped from both wounds as the man hyperventilated. Jinius had struck his lung. The man would soon suffocate on his own blood.

The man looked menacingly at Jinius and smiled, "Rot in hell, brotherhood scum!" He moved to press the button in his hand.

Time seemed to slow and Jinius pulled himself back out of the doorway. He fled as quickly as his legs and the Force would carry him. He had less than a second to get as far away as he could. Instinctively he threw up a barrier behind him at the last second.

Boom!

The building shook and the lights flickered. The stairs exploded into a wall of rubble followed by a deep groan from the building as it strained under its shifting weight.

Stone and debris slammed into Jinius's barrier. For a brief second, he held it off. He could feel the weight of the rubble pushing against his strength. He dug in for that final moment. His fingers burned. The weight of 10 tons of rock moving at 100s of kilometers per hour, if not more, slamming into his barrier generated immense amounts of energy. Jinius felt the weight of the building press against his barrier. The barrier shattered in a dazzling shower of light. Everything went dark.

## The Unchained Malady: Full Frontal Assault

By: Knight Jinius Lu'Kar Griffin, 10545

Silence filled the air around Jinius. Occasionally a creak or groan from the structure would echo through the walls, but never for long. The blast surely had done considerable damage, but Jinius knew they had removed most of the charges. Only the remaining few had detonated.

Jinius tried to move but found his limbs were pinned beneath rubble. He could feel heavy stones pressing against his chest but not so bad that he had trouble breathing. Most of the rubble's weight was sustained by the pile itself. Jinius still held his lightsaber. He ignited the blade and tried moving it around to clear a path to free his arm. As he did, the rubble shifted and pressed harder against his chest. He couldn't move or risk dying from suffocation. He relaxed. There wasn't much fighting it now. This is how his first real battle would end. He won, but only to die in the end. A fitting balance for a Grey Jedi.

The debris shifted suddenly with a lot of the weight freeing from Jinius's chest. A moment later the grumble of falling rock filled the air around him as a small prick of light exploded through the rubble. Jinius could just barely see a droid standing on the other side holding a large piece of wall over its head. The droid, an IG-100 series droid, had a hole the size of a fist burnt entirely through his chest.

The droid cocked its head at Jinius seeing him through the hole. It then looked down at its chest and back at Jinius. "That is most certainly your fault."