

Hunted:
A Great Jedi War Tale

Battlelord Ric Palpatater (Sith) / M:FIST / House Acclivis Draco of Clan Scholae Palatinae

After bearing the brunt of a brutal assault on the Caelestis City by the Children of Mortis, the members of the assault teams settled into a defensive position to get a little rest. Ric Hunter and his partner, Malodin, were among those that had gathered in the rear area to rearm and get a little food before heading off back into the battle. Ric was no stranger to war, he had fought for decades and had been killed many times. This time was different though as he knew it would be permanent now.

Malodin picked up a new bandoleer of blaster packs and slung them over his shoulder as Ric took a long drink from his canteen, when suddenly there was a whistle in the air of incoming artillery shells. Malodin dove for the trench that had been dug for just this event while Ric grabbed his helmet and put it on his head. He dropped and rolled towards a low wall and rubble pile near him. With a flash and a cloud of smoke, Ric became disoriented as the concussion of the hit knocked him senseless. As he struggled to rise, his vision turned black and he dropped into an open hole in the street.

“What do you mean you lost him?!?” Kiera yelled at Malodin a few hours later. It was unlike her to yell at the man she considered her uncle. Malodin understood why she was upset and wanted to make sure that she understood.

“Look Kiera, we had just gotten to the supply drop and started getting rearmed when they hit us with artillery. I rolled left and he rolled right, when the smoke cleared I didn’t see him. Before I could look any more, they were on us. It was a running firefight until we got back to the main lines,” Malodin put his hand on her shoulder and then pulled her in for an embrace. He could feel her sob before she pulled herself back together.

“I want to see exactly where you lost him,” she said finally.

“I can show you but we won’t make it there. There are too many of them between here and there,” Malodin opened his map.

Ric’s heads up display flickered and sputtered, the flashing lights bringing him from the darkness. He felt around and made sure all his limbs were still attached and he was able to move. Once he did that he rolled over into a sitting position and tried his comlink. It gave a burst of static and finally went dark. It seemed that the hit had destroyed it. He had been in worse spots before. He just really couldn’t remember when.

Quickly he took inventory of what he still had and was glad that his blaster and lightsaber were still attached to his belt. Ric got to his feet and checked his compass to figure out what

direction he needed to go. He knew that the main Scholae force should be to the south east and that he had to head that way on the chance that they were still there.

Ric took off his helmet to check the antenna for his comlink. If he could figure out why it wasn't transmitting he might be able to call for pickup. As he checked the device, he began to hear a strange sound in the distance. It wasn't quite a screeching sound, but more of a weird honking sound. There was something weird about the pitch and he could hear it getting closer. Ric put his helmet back on his head and set the audio sensors to track and triangulate the noises he heard to try and avoid direct contact with whatever it was. Checking the display he began to move away from the area.

Ric crossed the street to the other side and began to make his way to the south. He headed into a wrecked building and made his way to the second floor. With the higher vantage point, he hoped to be able to see his route back to friendly lines.

Caelestis City had really been pounded pretty hard lately with the civil war ending just before the Children of Mortis attack. Ric had been offworld for most of the fighting, having been caught up in it when the attack came insystem. He had not stepped foot on the planet for a few years and had only come back when he learned that Shadow had been taken. Most of the city was rubble, even before the crystal had impacted.

Seeing that most of the direct routes to the south were impassable, Ric needed to find a safe passage. Maybe the underground service systems would still be intact enough to make his way through. He caught movement in his visor and focused his built in binoculars on it. A small group of civilians were flushed out of a bombed out building by a pack of crystal looking raptors. As he watched, he saw them be chased down and attacked.

After it was over, the victims began to stir. Ric was hopeful that they had survived but to his horror, he saw that they were bloody and torn. They shambled forward into the darkness and disappeared, while the pack of raptors moved off to look for other prey.

Ric had felt the fear of those civilians, even at this distance. That fear stopped when they had died and then he felt nothing from them afterwards. He knew that somehow they were not alive any longer. The thought sent chills through him.

Pushing those thoughts down, he moved off looking for an access to the underground. There were several manhole covers on the streets but he needed to find one that wasn't covered with rubble. Luckily, he found one that was wide enough to accommodate his armored form and he dropped down into the darkness below. The green glow of his nightvision gave the underground an eerie feel.

As he moved, he felt something grab his shoulder. Ric spun to his left and shoved the person away. In his HUD, he could see a man dressed in regular Meraxian clothing. The man grabbed at Ric again and Ric shoved him away from himself. As he stumbled, the man made no sound of pain, no grunt of anger, he just shambled back to his feet and came at him again. Ric grabbed his lightsaber off his belt and ignited the blade. With a sweeping cut, he removed the man's head from his body and watched as even with no body, the head continued to move. In the glow of his purple blade, Ric could see that the man's face looked as if it had been decomposing and yet was still alive.

He slowly backed away and headed down the tunnel, deeper into the darkness. This was something he had to get away from.

Malodin and Kiera sat at the monitor looking over the city. Most of the satellites in orbit were gone but they were still getting some data. Kiera was hoping for at least a glance of her Master, even if it was only a body. She knew that if he was dead, she would have felt it. Mal patted her shoulder and then turned to check the other monitor.

“Still no sign, and no signal from his comlink. I am seeing some strange creatures running around though,” Kiera said. She closed her eyes and reached out to try and feel Rics' presence in the Force but couldn't. She knew that he had closed himself off after the incident with the One Sith but hoped that he would reach out to her at least. She felt a flash of her master and knew that he was still alive. She smiled and then turned to Mal to tell him that Ric was alive.

After his first run in with the dead man who wasn't quite dead, Ric had to turn to the west to go around a destroyed area. He hadn't run into any more of them at least. Given from what he saw on the surface, he knew there were many more around. Suddenly, he could hear the crystal raptors screeching in the darkness. Ric moved faster into the darkness, knowing that his time was going to get short here.

Ric could hear the beast running in the tunnels and could feel that they were getting closer. It was odd that he couldn't feel them through the Force, though since he had barely opened his connection to it, that was no surprise either. As he rounded a corner in the tunnel, he stopped in his tracks as the way was blocked by a large crystal raptor. His hand moved to his lightsaber out of habit and he grabbed it off his belt.

Ric stood still and waited for the beast to make its move. It bobbed its head as if searching the darkness for him. It could hear and maybe smell him but couldn't see him in the darkness. He knew that he needed to act quickly if he was going to survive this encounter.

Ric reached out and tried to reconnect with the Force. He had a plan and needed everything he could get to do what he planned. As he opened himself up, he could feel all the pain and suffering around him. There was a lot of death and fear in the darkness, he would try and use it as fuel. Ric was never any good with telekinesis but he felt that he was good enough. Ric grabbed the raptor and squeezed with all of his might. The crystal structure that made up the raptor flashed with an electrical discharge that lit up the tunnel. Ric dropped to his knee and gasped for air. He was spent.

As he took a deep breath, Ric shakily got back to his feet and scanned the area. He saw that the raptor had shattered under the pressure of his grip and was laying in a pile on the floor. He grabbed a piece of it and placed it in a secure box on his belt. Maybe there was a way to kill these things more efficiently and he would help find it.

He started down the tunnel again as the honking of crystal raptor picked up once more.

Malodin felt good to be back out on the line. There was only so much he could take of being in the command post. Kiera had been called away to lead a section of troopers to assault somewhere in Old Town so now he was on his own again. Mal had mapped out the areas that would make the most sense for Ric to be headed. He would make his way around and try to find him.

After looking over the area, he knew that the only way that would make sense would be underground. Mal headed to the entrance to the subsystems and began to make his way into the darkness.

Twenty Three hours later-

Ric stumbled once more in the darkness and slumped against the wall. As he slid down into a sitting position, he could feel sleep trying to take him. He had lost track of time in his march towards safety and didn't remember the last time he had actually slept. It felt as if he had traveled the entire planet underground, going back and forth avoiding collapsed tunnels and as many fights as he could while fighting when he had too.

He removed his helmet and took a sip of the water from his built-in water system. He fought the urge to close his eyes and placed his helmet back on his head. He pushed himself back to his feet and headed once more into the darkness that had become his home.

As he stumbled forward, he began to hear the sounds of blaster fire. He moved towards the sound of the firing as it picked up in intensity. Ric dug deep down into his center and tried to push down the fatigue that had almost overcome him in the last twenty three hours of constant fight. He pushed on towards the sound of battle and hoped to find someone, anyone, that could get in contact with his clan.

As he rounded the corner on the next block, he came face to face with one of the crystal raptors that had been dogging his footsteps. As it reared up on his hind legs, Ric drew his blaster and opened fire at point blank. The impacts of the blasts threw the raptor off balance and it landed in a heap in the street. As it scrambled to try and regain its feet, Ric sprinted past it staying out of the range of his razor sharp claws. As he passed, he shot a flare into its face to try and blind it, something that had worked on a few of the others he had come across. The beast clawed at its eyes in a vain attempt to relieve its blindness and forgot about its target for at least a moment.

Ric sprinted towards the line of fire that had been directed at the enemy pack and was relieved to see the familiar armor of the Scholae forces. He leapt the line and landed behind one of the assault speeders and he grabbed one of the troopers.

"What's the situation and where is the clan?" He yelled over the sound of blasters.

"We are holed up near the spaceport. I'm sure they are going to be glad to see you, sir," the trooper replied. He directed two of his men to give Ric a ride to the spaceport in one of the speeders. As Ric sank into the seat inside, he almost collapsed with relief. Exhaustion had taken him and now he was so close to being safe. He closed his eyes and let sleep take him, if even for a brief few moments. He would be back in the war soon enough.