

Conversation in Shadow

By August and Cynthia Hahn

In the dark of night when all is still, a shuttle arrives from distant Coruscant bearing a most distinguished visitor. He's come to Almas to tell Lanius Qel-Bertuk the truth about the academy's new Master of Battle, Darrus Jehl. But is Lanius prepared for the revelation? Learn more in our latest supplement to the **Living Force** campaign.



Watchful eyes on Almas have witnessed many peculiar events in recent months: the departure of several Masters, the reassignment of Padawans to larger classes, and the arrival of a new instructor dressed in black. But even watchful eyes cannot remain open forever. Even those sent to spy on the affairs of the Jedi must sleep, and it is during this time, in the dark of night when all is still, that a shuttle comes from distant Coruscant bearing a most distinguished visitor . . .

The door to Lanius's personal meeting room slid open, and E1-6RA walked quietly into the room. Behind her, a man clad in the traditional robes of a Jedi Master strode confidently in perfect unison to her steps. The droid gestured to a seat opposite her Master and then bowed out of the room.

The two Jedi stared at each other for a time, each one hesitant to be the first to speak. Then the visitor finally broke the silence in the small stone chamber. "Why am I here, Master Qel-Bertuk?" His voice was weary but not truly rude. It did border on irritation, however, and for that, his dark face looked almost apologetic.

Lanius chuckled softly in response. "It is good to see you too, Master Windu."

The visiting Jedi sighed and nodded. "Forgive the tone, Lanius, but time is fleeting these days and I am expected to join my troops again soon."

Lanius smiled again. "Ah, yes, I understand that congratulations are in order, General Windu. You have been most successful to date with your facet of the war. Your work on Dantooine was exceptional, I hear."

The Jedi Master shrugged dismissively. "No need for accolades. I am doing what we must, and I take no pride in it. This war is consuming the galaxy and if we don't fight . . ."

Lanius nodded. "I have heard the speech, Mace. I did not agree with it then, and I don't agree with it now." He sighed deeply. "But it is good to see that you are safe. So tell me, how are we doing? The Republic, I mean."

Master Windu leaned forward studied Lanius's expression. "Honestly? I cannot tell. There was a moment, back on Geonosis, when I saw the entire swing of the war and how to end it. Now . . ." He stared down at his hands. "Now I do not know if it can be stopped at all. We have to, of course, but the path is clouded."

Lanius poured a drink of water and sent it down the table to Mace with a gentle wave of the Force. "What isn't these days?" It was meant to be a joke, but neither of their faces looked amused. Still, Mace took the water and tilted the glass to him.

"I'll drink to that." He did so, then set the cup down and asked again with a little more patience in his tone. "Why am I here, Lanius? You could have asked me about the war over Secure HoloNet."

It was Lanius's turn to sigh. "Yes. I need to talk with you about one of your former Padawans. Master Jehl."

Mace shook his head. "Darrus was never officially a Padawan of mine. You know that."

Lanius sighed again and poured a glass for himself. "Of course. But he did train with you for a time and his records show that you brought him into the order personally. That is true, is it not?"

"Yes. I found him as a very young child after . . . after an incident involving his parents. I brought him back to the Order and had him tested. After determining that he was gifted with the Force, I made sure he was placed with a training class." He looked pointedly at Master Qel-Bertuk. "Has there been a problem with Darrus? I was under the impression that you approved his transfer here."

Lanius laughed again. "Only if you count bruising my pride on a number of occasions a problem. I am delighted with our new Master; do not concern yourself with that. I just want to know why he is here. We already have a Master for lightsaber combat

and several members of my staff are opposed to his faculty title of Master of Battle." With a sardonic mutter, he added, "Those of my staff that remain, that is."

Mace took another drink and looked at Lanius seriously. "This has not been easy on any of us. You are as aware as I am of this Academy's status with the Jedi Council. To be honest, you are fortunate to have any staff at all." His tone was not threatening or challenging; he was just stating a fact.

And Lanius knew it. "True. I am grateful the personnel changes did not take all of my instructors away." He tried not to let any bitterness into his voice, but Master Windu knew him far too well to be fooled.

"You inquired about Master Jeht. I will tell you what you want to know." Mace took a moment to sip at his water. "No. What you *need* to know. But I warn you; this may only leave you with more questions than you have now."

An hour later, they sat in the quiet shadows. This time, it was Lanius that spoke first. "I . . . see. Does he know any of this?"

Master Windu shook his head. "He knows what the Council decided he should know. He still believes what I told him. It is the truth, after all -- from a certain point of view."

Lanius shook his head slowly. "You know how I feel about 'subjective truth', Master Windu. This is certain to come out some day. You know that." He sighed deeply. "But you told me this in confidence. I will not betray that. I urge you to tell him everything before he learns it on his own." He gave Mace a concerned look. "If not for his sake, do it for ours. I would not like to think of what would happen if he takes the discovery . . . poorly. His heritage --"

"Is not an issue. We are at war. There is no time for this. Besides, he is a Jedi. We are above such things. We have to be." Master Windu stood up quietly. "If you will excuse me, I need to get back to my ship."

Lanius stood with him. "Of course. Take our thoughts and wishes with you. I do not agree with this war, but I support the Order always." He crossed the room and walked with Master Windu to the front steps of the building. In the distance, Mace's shuttle waited to pick him up. "May the Force be with you."

Mace nodded, obviously lost in thought. "And with you. Please keep an eye on him, will you?" It was the closest thing to a genuine emotion the Master had shown since he arrived. Jedi or not, he was obviously troubled by what he had told Lanius earlier.

"Of course, my friend. How could I not?"

Mace nodded a final time and strode away to rejoin his troops.

After he was gone, disappearing into the stars once more, Master Lanius stared into the reaches of space. This was all very troubling. Out there, terrible conflict was claiming the lives of billions. Back here, in the Cularin system, a different war was raging. If the two storm fronts should ever meet . . . He shuddered to think of the consequences.

He already knew his fate. He had accepted that years ago and knew that time was no longer on his side. Other destinies were not so clear to him. He had not expected to survive Kirlocca; that had been a terrible surprise. How many more would fall before his own death? How many could he save? When the Clone Wars ended, as he knew they must some day, would anything remain on his beloved Almas but shadows and unmarked graves?

Yes, he decided. If nothing else survived, the stones of Almas would always stand. In his last vision, the one of Cularin's distant future, these pillars still reached out to an empty sky. On these stones, he would leave a record for those who would come after. He might not be able to protect his children, but he could at least preserve their memory.

Living Force Game Notes

Effective immediately, all Jedi characters with certified mentors must make a d20 roll before each adventure they play. The first time they roll, a result of 1 indicates that the Clone Wars have tragically claimed the life of their friend and teacher. Each adventure thereafter, the number increases by one. Any roll of that number or less indicates the same fate. A violent time has befallen the Jedi, one that will claim many victims in the upcoming months.

Any Jedi that loses his or her mentor this way is welcome to record that Jedi's final moments and share them with the campaign through the Almas Wall of Remembrance. Post these memorials on the [Wall of Remembrance](#) thread of the **Living Force** message boards. These posts are the final testament for heroes that have served the Order and their fellow Jedi faithfully. Writing skill is not a factor, but respect for the setting and nature of the project is crucial.