

Marching Orders

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Eventually, all wars arrive at one terrible truth -- they need soldiers to fight and more soldiers to replace the fallen. Once this occurs, war becomes less an exercise in morality or righteousness and more a constantly churning grinder mashing the best of a generation into dust beneath its terrible gears. Across the known galaxy, the Clone Wars have become this beast; most now fight because the constant combat is all they know.

Tragically, inevitably, this beast slouches toward Cularin. Its blood-rimmed eye looks toward the Jedi that defend that system and the world's valuable resources. The inhabitants of this once-independent system must quickly realize that only two options remain: fight or die.



"This isn't right!" Even from her infirmary bed, still recovering from the surgical replacement of her ruined arm, Master Devan's fierce beliefs could not remain silent. "What you are doing here is wrong!"

Master Jeht gazed down at her from his vantage point in doorway to her room. Dressed completely in ashen grays and black, even his light Jedi combat armor was the color of a starless night sky. Pulling on battle gloves, he shook his head and stared impassively. "It isn't wrong. It is what the Council has ordered us to do."

"Poo doo!" And as her temper flared, the nearby tray of ignored food began to rattle on its rolling table.

Jeht made a gesture and it fell still. "You need to watch your emotions, Master Devan." His eyes grew even darker, quite a striking expression given their already total lack of color. "Trust me; you don't want to let your anger get the better of you."

She glared at him, only relenting because he was right. "Save it for your apprentices, Darrus. They don't know you like I do. They might not realize how much of a hypocrite you are." Her words were cold, but her eyes were still blazing.

A swell of rage rose up in his heart, but Jeht quickly drove it back down. Outwardly, he remained as calm as ever. "I suppose I deserved that, but attacking me won't change anything." His gloves buckled tight, Master Jeht checked his lightsaber and blaster before turning to face Devan completely. "And you are wrong to call anyone my apprentice. I don't have any business teaching anymore."

He gestured to the hall behind him, a passageway Master Devan knew well as it led to the Academy's hanger and spaceport. "The Jedi assembling down there are just Jedi now. No Padawans, no learners. Right now, the Clone Wars allows only two kinds -- knights and younglings." He stared into her eyes and felt a moment of cool satisfaction as she flinched. "Almas is fortunate the Council is leaving you the latter." And with that, he spun on a leather-booted heel and started to walk away.

It was everything she could do, and more effort than she could safely muster, but Devan managed to climb out of bed and reach the ebon-robed Jedi Master before he stepped completely out of her room. "Jeht . . . Darrus," her voice was still rough from the injuries she had suffered at the hands of the Jedi Killer, but it was still loud enough to convey her desperation. "Don't do this!"

He looks down at where her hands, one flesh and blood while the other was shining chrome and steel pistons, clutched at his arm. For a moment, his eyes betrayed a flicker of the compassion she was trying to appeal to, but then it vanished. "Master Devan, I am not doing anything. The Council has ordered that all Jedi report to strategic locations for reassignment and military commissions. High-ranking positions are set aside for Almas's Jedi. It is really quite an honor."

She almost slapped him for that, and he could see it in her eyes. In truth, he would have preferred she had done so. It could have matched the slap he actually had received an hour earlier when he told the Academy's other female Master the same news. For a moment, that Master had almost become the Black Queen she once was, but then her anger faded. Jeht knew that in time, Devan's would as well.

Instead, she tried something else. "Darrus, has Lanius been told about this . . . 'honor'?" He could see in her eyes the hope she was clinging to as tightly as she was his arm. If Lanius was not informed yet, perhaps the Academy's Headmaster could overrule or at least delay the Council's decision.

"I'm sorry, Master Devan. I delivered the order to him the moment I arrived on Almas. He has pledged whatever support the Academy can give." He could see the hope dying in her gaze, her entire expression falling even as her strength failed her. Though she probably hated him for it, Darrus gently carried her back to bed.

He started to walk off without a word, but as he reached the door he glanced back. "Your condition gives you a temporary reprieve from these marching orders, Master Devan, though I fully expect you are opting for the same choice Master Lanius and the rest of the Academy staff have made personally."

He paused at the doorframe, knowing that as soon as his words sank in, she would ask him what he meant. He did not have to wait long.

"What . . . what choice?"

"The Right of Denial, of course. I would beg you to reconsider, but I doubt you would hear me. I will be on my ship, awaiting the last of the Jedi here . . . or their lightsabers." He sighed deeply before continuing out into the hall. "Goodbye, Devan."

She was too stunned to respond. The Right of Denial was an almost unheard-of act, one that in these dark times could almost be seen as treason. It was a Jedi tradition, though, and if Lanius had invoked it for himself, could she actually bring herself not to do the same?

She buried her head in her hands, feeling the brush of cold metal on her left cheek, as Master Jeht's sharp footfalls vanished into the distance. She had so hoped things would get better in the Cularin system after the fall of the Jedi Killer, but now things seemed so much worse.

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Twenty-four hours later, Master Jeht's ship, the *Maelstrom*, passed a pair of Republic battle cruisers on their way into the system. The first cruiser hailed him and, though deeply concerned with the morale and concerns of his Jedi cargo, Darrus took the hail immediately.

The clone commander in charge of the cruiser snapped to attention on his viewscreen. "Sir, the cruisers *Reliant* and *Devout* await your command. Are we cleared to proceed?"

Darrus blinked for a moment, but tried not to let his surprise show. He was not expecting any other ships to enter this part of space, especially after the Senate's previous refusals to send support vessels to aid Cularin. Instead of communicating his confusion, he chose a more neutral tone and simply replied, "Your orders?"

"To move into the system and secure it under martial law as dictated by the Emergency Powers Act, general. Without an active Jedi Academy, this system cannot be allowed to remain unprotected. Sir."

Darrus nodded, though inwardly he was shocked. Martial law? How could that be? Surely it was not legal, even under the EPA, to place a star system with active Senate leadership under military control.

"And this system's Senator -- Lavina Wren?"

The clone soldier nodded sharply and didn't miss a breath before responding. "Senator Wren is currently under investigation concerning allegations of seditious behavior and collusion with the Separatists." After a moment's pause, he continued. "The Grand Chancellor has gone on record in support of the Senator and has expressed his assurance that such charges are utterly baseless, but while the investigation continues, this system needs military protection more than ever."

Darrus sank deeper into thought, wondering just what was going on here. What was he seeing? Was a pattern emerging from all this? And if so, what image did it form? Trying to focus his mind, Master Jeht recalled his mentor's teachings and tried desperately to find the shatterpoint here -- the point at which everything was breaking down.

His concentration was broken before he could finish. "Sir? Do we proceed?"

Darrus sighed and nodded. There was nothing else he could do. If the Senator was compromised, and many of the system's Jedi leaving Cularin with him, these worlds would need all the defense they could get. He hated the idea of martial law, but with so many planets already under military command, it was really only a matter of time before Cularin followed suit. Better now, with troops he knew and for a better reason than most. The Chancellor knew what he was doing; Jeht had to keep believing that.

"The order is given, commander. You may proceed. But Almas is to be left alone. It will be under my personal authority. No troops should land there, and its air space must be left alone to expedite my return."

The clone trooper did not hesitate. "As you command."

Once the transmission ended and his own troopers went back to their various tasks around the bridge, Jeht whispered under his breath, "It's the best I can do, Lanius. It's the best I can do."

Living Force Game Notes

Effective immediately, Cularin is under martial law. However, it has little effect on game play or the actions and freedoms of the heroes of Cularin. The clone soldiers involved seem more concerned with patrolling the outer edges of the star system and fending off any possible Separatist advances. Any possible impact on play will be noted in future **Living Force** adventures.

For Cularin's Jedi, the martial law edict is considerably more serious. The Jedi Council on Coruscant has commanded that all Jedi of Padawan status or greater report to forward staging bases along the contested zone of the galaxy for assignment to the military. This leaves Jedi heroes in the **Living Force** campaign with two options: compliance or the right of denial. Each Jedi hero must make a choice immediately.

Option 1: Compliance

The hero leaves Cularin aboard the *Maelstrom* and is taken to serve directly in the Clone Wars. This renders the Jedi hero a nonplayer character and removes him from player control. The Jedi hero becomes a campaign character under the control and discretion of the campaign coordinators.

In return for this heroic sacrifice, the player in question is allowed to make a new hero at the same level as the previous Jedi, using the campaign's character creation guidelines in all other respects. The new character may automatically be considered a member of the militia if desired with a joining date of the time the Jedi character was first created. The new hero gains funds equal to 5,000 credits per character level and may spend them on anything that could be legally purchased. Any starship(s) or droid(s) owned by the Jedi (with the exception of any free items obtained by other **Living Force** articles) that have any credits already paid on them are refunded immediately and added to this resource total.

Option 2: The Right of Denial

Jedi heroes can follow suit with Master Lanius and send their lightsabers back to Coruscant in protest of the new mandate. This effectively strips them of their legal authority and makes them Jedi in name only. This is not the same as denouncing the Jedi Order because it's an act of defiance against the Council only, not the Code itself.

While this does not cause the protesting Jedi heroes to be labeled as traitors, it does leave Cularin without an official Academy or right of representation on Coruscant, opening the door for martial law in the system. Jedi heroes taking this option retain their character but must play one full adventure *without* a lightsaber.

After this time, they receive a mastercrafted lightsaber courtesy of the Academy's resident (and fellow protesting) Jedi Artisan, Felanil Banks. This new lightsaber receives a +1 mastercrafted bonus to damage and is also a personalized work of art. Keeping in mind that the weapon must still conform to the statistics of a lightsaber, Jedi heroes are free to create a description for their new lightsabers including material, shape, and even blade color (which can be any color desired except red or black).

Jedi heroes choosing the Right of Denial should take care to conceal their new lightsaber. Possession of such a weapon while still protesting the Council's decision to mobilize for war is considered a crime. Possible searches and penalties for being caught with a lightsaber will be made clear in future **Living Force** adventures.

During this time of protest, Almas is left alone by Republic forces. While no one on the former Almas Council is sure why, no clone troopers have taken up positions on the Jedi world or formed any blockades in orbit. They seem to be turning a blind eye to the system's reticent Jedi -- for now.