

Sith Battlelords

By Morrie Mullins

Adventure Spoiler Warning!

If you haven't played the high-level adventure "A Mon Alone," please don't read any further. The Sith Battlelords are an element of the plot of the event, and reading this article might spoil small portions of the event for you.



The following is an excerpt from a personal log on one of Cularin's many holonet nodes. It is unclear who the original author was, or who the slicer might have been that obtained the logfile. The contents are disturbing enough that the mainstream media is refusing to even discuss it, lest it further fuel the delusions of the Believers. All the same, the file has been making the rounds of some of the conspiracy-focused nodes, drawing no small amount of concerned reaction from many who read it.

Everyone wonders about that Sith fortress on Almas. I mean, it's not the kind of thing you can ignore, with the big black spire rising out of the desert. It's older than almost anything in Cularin, I guess. And it's a scary place. I've been there a couple of times, helping the Jedi out. It's scary in a way nothing I've ever seen is scary. It's wrong in a way I never imagined anything could be wrong.

I always wondered why anybody would build that kind of place. I mean, it's way away from everything else, it's out in the desert, it had to be terraformed just to be livable -- and I read that thing that was supposedly written by Darth Rivan about why he came to Cularin. But that doesn't explain why he'd build a fortress that shoots huge lightning at passing starships. And I'm not the kind of person who believes in the whole "mad, evil genius" mentality. You don't get to be a Sith Lord, I bet, by just doing whatever you want. Everything you do has to have a purpose. There was a reason Darth Rivan came to Cularin, and there's a reason he built that fortress where and how he did.

I think I may have figured it out. I mean, I got hold of a file. I'm not going to post it here, since it was something I horked off a Jedi's datapad. I don't want anyone tracing it back to him (or her -- I'm not telling). It laid out this scary ritual thing that would explain a lot about why we got a place like this here, and why Rivan would have wanted it to start with.

He wanted to use it to make Sith battlelords.

If you never heard of them, you aren't the only one. From what I can tell, it's not like these guys ever made it into wide circulation. If they had . . . well, the battles the Sith lost? They might have won.

The basic idea of Sith battlelords goes back to the problem the Sith always had that made them adopt that "rule of two" thing. Namely, if you get too many evil guys in the same place, they're gonna kill each other. Evil doesn't work well together. Darksiders can't organize, because they're always afraid everyone else is going to stab them in the back -- literally. With a lightsaber. These kind of people aren't likely to work together, and nobody's sure gonna want to work for them.

So to take care of this problem, I guess Rivan designed these battlelords. The basic idea was to eliminate insubordination as an option for soldiers and make it difficult for someone who's in charge of soldiers to mistreat them. Kind of a forced morale thing. It was a pretty convoluted process, and he needed someplace special to do all the work -- like a fortress in the middle of nowhere that he could use to test things out and refine the technique.

A battlelord, as near as I can tell, is like a commanding officer with big ugly teeth and a leash that connects him to all his soldiers. Except nobody can see the leash and the teeth. They're partly metaphorical, depending on the species of the battlelord.

This isn't making sense. Let me outline the process for you.

There's a long, drawn-out ritual. All sorts of Sith "magic" is involved, and I don't want to know exactly what happens. But at the end, the person who's supposed to become a battlelord is laid down and cut open. Then he bleeds, and while he's bleeding, his troops pass by and track through his blood. (I guess there could have been female battlelords, too. I never thought about it.) Somehow, with everything that's gone on, this bonds them to the commander. Then some more dark side badness gets done, and if the commander survives, when he stands up again, he's a battlelord and is connected to his troops.

That means they can't leave him. They can't get more than five kilometers away from him (this part was kind of vague, but what

was being described made it sound like about five km), or they'll fall into this wracking pain and eventually just die. They can't take action against their battlelord, or they have the same problem. Wracking pain, followed by death. So what you've got is a bunch of troops who don't have any choice but to be loyal.

Here's the best part, though. You'd think that they'd just want to kill the battlelord, right?

They can't! If they try to kill the battlelord, and if they actually manage to hurt him -- if they manage to draw blood -- the damage doesn't affect him. Instead, it affects one of them, one of the troops who are bonded to him. As long as they're close enough for him to see them, any time he gets hurt, he can make it hurt any of his troops instead. So the troops sure aren't going to try to kill him, and they're going to do everything in their power to keep him safe. Because for him to die, they either all have to be dead first, or they have to be nowhere around him.

That's why Rivan built the fortress. He needed a lab. A place with enough dark side energy to create these monstrosities to lead his armies.

I guess he didn't succeed, which is a good thing. Because I really wouldn't want a bunch of these battlelords running around. We have enough trouble killing the things that die when you stick a lightsaber through them. We don't need to deal with things that might not --

For the Gamemaster

"Sith battlelord" is a template that can be added to any living creature. Such a creature has undergone a number of secret Sith rituals designed to bond the battlelord to his or her followers. Some small amount of information has leaked into public awareness about the battlelords, but the fact is that they were never created on any large scale. Darth Rivan did perfect the process but was betrayed by his apprentice before being able to create sufficient battlelords to build an army. The process is painful and involved, and there is no guarantee that an individual who seeks to become a battlelord will actually survive the ritual.

The creation of a battlelord requires a dark side site (see the [Dark Side Sourcebook](#) for details on such sites) in order to concentrate dark side energies sufficiently to create something which, in nature, should not exist. The Wounding Bond (described below) makes the battlelord very difficult to kill; the Painful Bond (also described below) enforces loyalty in his or her troops. It is unlikely that a 1st-level character could survive the process of becoming a battlelord, due to the harm inflicted on the prospective battlelord during the ritual. As such, it is not recommended that any character have this template applied prior to 5th level.

The details of the ritual are left up to the individual GM, but we recommend the following as a baseline:

- The prospective battlelord must voluntarily allow a significant wound to be made to his or her person. In game mechanic terms, this involves voluntarily lowering his or her defenses and allowing a critical hit to be made with a weapon that deals at least 2d8 points of damage.
- The prospective battlelord must continue allowing such wounding until he or she falls unconscious.
- There must be some interaction of the prospective battlelord's followers/troops with the unconscious battlelord. This is most often represented by having the troops parade past the body as it lies "in state" (but, obviously, not yet dead), but other mechanisms may suffice.
- The battlelord must stabilize without the use of any Force skills or medical intervention on his or her person. A battlelord who spends a Force point to call on the dark side can automatically succeed on the stabilization roll but gains three Dark Side Points immediately.

The Sith battlelord retains all abilities of the base creature except as noted below:

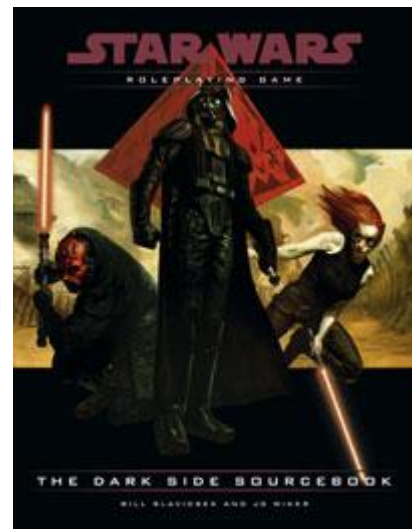
Defense: The Sith battlelord's skin toughens as a result of the ritual. The creature gains +1 natural armor, or a +1 bonus to its existing natural armor.

Vitality points/Wound points: As the base creature.

Attacks: As the base creature.

Saves: The Sith battlelord gains a +1 bonus to all Will saves.

Skills: +2 to Intimidate and Diplomacy checks.



Feats: A Sith battlelord gains the Frightful Presence and Infamy feats as bonus feats, even if he or she did not meet their prerequisites.

Ability Scores: +2 Charisma.

Special Qualities: A Sith battlelord retains all the special qualities of the base creature and also gains the following.

Wounding Bond. Any time a Sith battlelord would take wound damage, every bonded individual within 30 meters of the battlelord must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + the battlelord's character level + one-half the battlelord's Charisma modifier). If at least one bonded individual fails his or her save, the battlelord is unaffected by the attack. The individual who failed the save takes the wound damage that otherwise would have been inflicted on the battlelord. If more than one bonded individual fails the save, the wound damage is distributed evenly among those affected. Any bonded individual who knowingly attacks his or her battlelord is treated as having voluntarily failed the save to resist the wounding bond.

Painful Bond. Those bonded to a battlelord cannot stray far from their leader. Depending on the strength of the dark side site used for the battlelord ritual, the troops must stay within 5 kilometers (for the weakest site) to 15 kilometers (for a particularly strong site) of their battlelord. Exceeding that distance results in the bonded individual becoming sickened (with standard penalties, but manifesting as an intense, twisting abdominal pain and throbbing headache) for the first 12 hours. After that, the bonded individual loses 1 point of Constitution per hour (Fortitude save negates, DC 10 + the battlelord's character level + one-half the battlelord's Charisma modifier) until he or she either dies or comes back in proximity of the battlelord. A bonded individual who returns to the battlelord's sphere of influence immediately recovers all Constitution points lost as a result of the painful bond and is no longer sickened. (Note that it is quite likely that a battlelord interested in manipulating "heroic" captors will point out that as long as they keep him prisoner, they're killing soldiers who are doing nothing but following orders.)

In addition, when the battlelord template is first applied, the battlelord chooses to gain either the quickening bond or the ferocious bond. Once the choice is made, it can't be changed.

Quickening Bond. If the battlelord is within 30 meters of any bonded individuals, he or she can attempt to use the quickening bond. The battlelord indicates one of his or her followers, and that individual must immediately make a Will save (DC 10 + the battlelord's character level + one-half of the battlelord's Charisma modifier). If the bonded individual fails the save, he is dazed for 1 full round, and the battlelord gains an extra attack that round. If the bonded individual succeeds on the save, the battlelord gains no benefit from the quickening bond. This ability can be used once per round as a free action and can be attempted a number of times per day equal to the number of Dark Side Points the battlelord possesses.

Ferocious Bond. A battlelord within 30 meters of any bonded individual can elect to use the ferocious bond. The battlelord indicates one of his or her followers, and that individual must immediately make a Will save (DC 10 + the battlelord's character level + one-half of the battlelord's Charisma modifier). If the bonded individual fails the save, he is dazed for 1 full round, and the battlelord doubles his Strength bonus for purposes of damage (but not attacks) for the remainder of the round. If the bonded individual succeeds on the save, the battlelord gains no benefit from the ferocious bond. This ability can be used once per round as a free action and can be attempted a number of times per day equal to the number of Dark Side Points the battlelord possesses.

Creating a Bonded

"Bonded" is a template that can be added to any living creature. This creature has taken part in the latter stages of the rituals involved in creating a Sith battlelord and is permanently bonded to the battlelord in question. A bonded creature retains all of the abilities of the base creature except as noted below:

Defense: As the base creature.

Vitality points/Wound points: As the base creature.

Attacks: A bonded creature gains a +2 morale bonus on all attacks when within 1 kilometer of its battlelord.

Saves: As the base creature.

Skills: +2 to Survival and Sense Motive checks.

Feats: Iron Will (bonus feat).

Ability Scores: As the base creature.

Special Qualities: A bonded creature retains all the special qualities of the base creature, and also gains the following.

Wounding Bond. Any time a Sith battlelord would take wound damage, every bonded individual within 30 meters of the

battlelord must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + the battlelord's character level + one-half of the battlelord's Charisma modifier). If at least one bonded individual fails his or her save, the battlelord is unaffected by the attack. The bonded individual who failed the save takes the wound damage that otherwise would have been inflicted on the battlelord. If more than one bonded individual fails the save, the wound damage is distributed evenly among those affected. Any bonded individual who knowingly attacks his or her battlelord is treated as having voluntarily failed the save to resist the wounding bond. Particularly dedicated bonded creatures have been known to voluntarily fail their saves to keep the battlelord alive; this keeps the number of dedicated "bonded" relatively low.

Painful Bond. Those bonded to a battlelord cannot stray far from their leader. Depending on the strength of the dark side site used for the battlelord ritual, the troops must stay within 5 kilometers (for the weakest site) to 15 kilometers (for a particularly strong site) of their battlelord. Exceeding that distance results in the bonded individual becoming sickened (with standard penalties, but manifesting as an intense, twisting abdominal pain and throbbing headache) for the first 12 hours. After that, the bonded individual loses 1 point of Constitution per hour (Fortitude save negates, DC 10 + the battlelord's character level + one-half of the battlelord's Charisma modifier) until he or she either dies or comes back in proximity of the battlelord. A bonded individual who returns to the battlelord's sphere of influence immediately recovers all Constitution points lost as a result of the painful bond and is no longer sickened.

Breaking the Bond: The bond between a battlelord and his or her followers can be broken through the application of the Force Light skill. To determine the DC for breaking the bonds, treat each individual bond as a dark side site of the same power as that where the battlelord was created.