

Chapter 1 - Origins

Although the two thermal detonators themselves did not vibrate in any way, I could feel a trembling pulsation in my outstretched hands. Tiny embedded lights in the surfaces of the explosive devices winked on and off, pulsing in the dim light between the cloaked figure and me. I was fully prepared to detonate them both, ending the paths of two warriors, and departing this life here, now if that became necessary.

My lightsaber lay on a stone workbench on the second level. The blade I had used to hunt and execute countless numbers of his kind during The Purge would not help me this time. As I had been taught years before, my mind was clear and guarded, there would be no tricks played by the Jedi that stood between the cave opening and me.

My preoccupation with the jobs at hand must have been thoroughly distracting. By the time his approach was felt, it was too late.

In the seemingly endless space between the nanoseconds that now ticked away, my mind raced, crashing through a cascade of memories as I recalled the chain of events that had brought us both to this singular moment . . .

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In the last years of the Old Republic, leaders of industry and the head of the Mining Guild were assembled by Count Dooku to form a select sub-group of the Trade Federation. None were aware that Dooku was secretly Darth Tyranus, Sith apprentice to Darth Sidious, and that Sidious was masquerading as Senator Palpatine, the Sith Lord who would become Emperor. The veiled agenda motivating the group's formation lay in the need for pooled resources to bring a sickeningly monstrous undertaking to fruition.

It was in the early stages of battles that would later become known as the Clone Wars, Count Dooku and a team of Geonosian design experts successfully completed planning and launched the covert construction of a weapon that would carry the Trade Federation and Dooku's Sith master into a new era of galactic domination and unimaginable power.

The sheer scope of their plan, not only in physical size, but also in the scale of the deception, was staggering. Planets represented by the Guild were mined for the ores needed; stripped of their raw materials, each burning brightly in the flurry of activity and jobs that the project required as they were consumed.

As mining efforts were withdrawn and the jobs disappeared, they were left behind as mere shells of what they had once been; barren reminders of the Empire's blind ambition, all but dying out entirely.

In extreme cases, breathable gases had to be collected from the atmosphere and forced into contained cities. In the more fortunate locations, only moisture needed coaxing from the air using evaporative collection units.

The project was kept hidden from everyone except those responsible for its design. Once construction began, the design team was summoned to an emergency meeting. While en route to the meeting, their transport shuttle fell victim to a horrible navigational mishap. The ship's nav' computer was somehow set for a lightspeed jump on a course that directed it through a tight clustering of stars. The ship was vaporized, and unfortunately, the crew and passengers along with her.

It was rumored that one of the weapons designers, Moff Rebus, had missed the flight, and gone into hiding following the accident. He would factor into my life years later, during my missions on Anoat.

In the years that unfolded during the course of the ravaging Clone Wars, many things came to light. General Grievous was sought and ultimately destroyed by General Obi Wan Kenobi; Darth Sidious was entrenched deeper than ever in his plan to unravel the fabric of the Republic, and as the beginning of the end, Sidious' Sith apprentice, Count Dooku, was slain by Anakin Skywalker; beheaded by his own blade in combat.

Years before, in Skywalker's youth, subtle groundwork had been laid, guiding him along a crooked path. It lead him to a decision making crossroad where ultimately he would not only replace Dooku as Sidious' Sith apprentice of his own choosing as the newly born Sith lord, Darth Vader, he would be instrumental in the complete and utter eradication of the Jedi protectors of the Republic that stood directly in the way of his new master's power play.

By the time the Jedi Temple fell under Skywalker's hand, and the very letter of Executive Order 66 was being carried out by clone units across the galaxy, the skeletal framework of the project was nearing completion.

Raw materials were flooding in from the Mining Guild to a remote construction location to continue the work. The surreptitious project had been so expertly protected and hidden from even the Jedi by Dooku, that Emperor Palpatine commissioned a Garrison from among the handpicked members of Darth Vader's 501st Legion, the very troops that had stormed the Jedi Temple alongside him, and placed them in charge of security for the station's construction.

To honor his fallen apprentice, he anointed the newly formed group:
GARRISON TYRANUS.

At this time, I was growing up on Tenaab, which had thankfully avoided the gutting so many other planets had endured, mainly because of the Imperial shipyards located there. It had had very harsh cold seasons, so my family would spend that time with relatives on nearby Corellia. My father was an engineer, and my mother worked for an Imperial agency. She spoke little of it, and I never pushed to know more than she offered.

When I was a boy, I worked for my father at Industrial Automaton, building astromech droids. It was this work that revealed my love of engineering, design and construction. Industrial Automaton, at that time, before their merger with Soro-Suub, was a wholly owned subsidiary of BlasTech Industries. I spent my last few seasons on Tenaab working for BlasTech designing field cannons and orbital platform armaments.

After my shift, I would sometimes hang around to watch the Imperial Cargo ships arrive, with Stormtrooper guards picking up container after container of E-11's. I knew someday I wanted to be one of them, but still being slightly underage, that was as close as I could get to the action of the Empire.

Over the next two seasons, I learned how to install intelligent turbolifts, compactors and garbage chutes in my "life before the Empire", while interning in the Tenaab shipyards. I spent more time than I care to remember installing mile after mile of turbolifts and massive trash compactor systems in the bellies of starships. As one of my installation assignments came to a close, I was selected, along with a group of several hundred other workers for a new project that would last several seasons. At the new, clandestine location, we installed garbage chutes, trash compactors, waste-recycling economy systems and turbolifts on a massive project that dwarfed any I had previously worked.

On one occasion I asked a Stormtrooper standing guard what the huge skeletal framework was supposed to be for. I was quickly told it was better to know less and live longer. I had worked on many ships over the years, and it didn't look like any ship I had ever seen. It looked more like some kind of space station, but I kept my observations quietly to myself. My interest, however, was irretrievably piqued, and it was there that I signed up with the Empire. I was accepted into Stormtrooper training almost immediately and shipped off to Carida for nearly a year of intense training.

The construction project continued to move ahead as I trained. Its scale was enormous, never before equaled in all of recorded history; the final product would be roughly the size of a Class IV moon. By compartmentalizing their tasks, secrecy was maintained even from those troopers working on it.

With the birth of the Rebellion, supply lines became compromised in some sectors. The fledgling rebels had no idea what supplies they were diverting or destroying. They simply knew the cargo was stamped with an Imperial security code, and they attacked the defenseless federation convoys. The ambushes spooked many of the regular suppliers. They were transport pilots with families, just working for a paycheck. After the first wave of attacks, many walked away from the job. Those that remained were smugglers for the most part; less than reputable and suspect in and of themselves.

Shortly after the end of the final clone battles on Kashyyyk, many of the Wookiee survivors were enslaved and taken to work on the construction. In the years that followed, there were several instances of small, unorganized uprisings among the Wookiees, which were dealt with swiftly and brutally.

One of the smugglers, so troubled by what he saw, broke into the slave quarters, destroying records and freeing several hundred of the hairy Wookiee giants. He set off several dozen explosive charges, destroying a weapons stronghold, and made his escape with at least one of the Wooks aboard his ship. Most of the delivery manifests were destroyed in the raid, and the rogue pilot was never identified.

The only manifests recovered from the burned out wreckage showed inbound shipments from the remote desert planets Dantooine and Tatooine to the construction site, with continuing flight plans to the Endor system.

After my graduation from the Academy, I was assigned to Garrison Tyranus and sent for more training in a small unit on one of those very planets; Dantooine. The arid landscape there served as a perfect proving ground for practicing and honing desert survival techniques and skills I had learned in the classroom. Although the assignment was far more intense and challenging than I had ever expected, I enjoyed it, and asked to remain deployed there as a TD designated Sandtrooper.

I settled in with a small squad of troops in charge of monitoring several mining facilities, each of which fed a constant stream of ore transports to the project build site. In the several years that followed, I kept in contact with others from my garrison who were assigned as security for “the project”. They kept me up to date as I trained to become a sniper, mastering the DLT-19 before being reassigned to Mimban. Soon thereafter, shipments of ore ceased from Tatooine, but continued steadily from Dantooine until many years after my departure.

Somewhere along the line I lost touch with the troops working security, and my interests were pulled in other directions as my assignments called me to many new places across the galaxy.

While my friends at the project build site had been able to maintain security, they didn’t have the numbers needed to repel any serious external assaults or onboard insurrections should they have arisen. The project had also grown too large to keep concealed from long-range scanners.

Loyalists from Alderaan and many other inner systems were merging efforts to scan for possible remote building sites. They feared the very covert operations that were currently under way. They hoped to one day regain the peace they had known before the Empire, and acted to protect the remaining civilized pockets of their broken Republic.

Remote listening posts, comp scanners and orbital signal-jamming platforms were deployed to assist in keeping the draped veil securely in front of the project. Behind the shroud, armored ground assault vehicles, TIE squadrons, speeder bikes and a weapons stockpile including hand-to-hand weapons along with larger scale, sonic charges was amassed.

In all, the project progressed for nearly twenty standard years from its inception until all systems were finally brought online, and its existence was made known; its name revealed . . . Death Star.

With the battle station completed, the security team headed by Garrison Tyranus was reassigned to other duties close to the Sith Lord. Some were dispatched to temporary assignments on the new battle station, some to duty onboard Star Destroyers, with the remainder being assigned to various other posts, depending on their training and specialty.

Some of the members of Garrison Tyranus were assembled into a small patrol unit, assigned to re-establish an Imperial presence in the closed outpost on Tatooine.

It was with the formation of this new unit that my standing transfer request was finally answered. Late in the day, as I was returning from a 3 day mission in the caves beneath Anoat City, my CO confirmed the transfer.

“Deckard, I just got the holonet confirmation of your transfer approval. I don’t remember signing off on this, but I guess I must have if it’s going through.”

“Thank you, sir” I replied.

“So, how did things go this time?”

I shouldered my rifle and glanced back toward the entrance of the caves, “It went as well as could be expected. We found traces of old camp locations Rebus used, but no luck locating his . . .”

I turned my head back around to look at my CO, only to find that he had walked away from me as I was in the middle of my reply. This had become typical and was not completely without some level of anticipation, but it still pissed me off. He must have had a sudden, urgent need to *check in with headquarters*. I often wondered if he ever did any work at all. The rest of us in his unit were constantly pulling his weight and making the difficult, necessary decisions while he disappeared at critical moments.

I glanced skyward. Dark clouds were slowly gathering, and moisture hung heavy in the air as night came on, preparing to dump yet more water on us.

I entered my barracks, hurriedly gathered my gear together and slipped off my armor plates. I sat down, flipped open my field holonet pack and keyed a special request to the pilot of the shuttle that would be arriving in the morning. Confirmation of my sent message flashed 3 times on the small screen. I leaned back in the chair and switched it off. I was *finally* getting out of here.

That pleasant thought lingered in my mind as I stood up and crossed the small space to my bunk. I sat on its edge, and lifted my legs up and in as I lay my head back to the pillow. My empty stomach growled, begging to be fed, but after the day I had had, I was just too tired to eat. My eyes burned as thoughts and images from the past several days flooded through my head. My breathing slowed and steadied and I gave in to the seductive reprieve of sleep as the sound of the first droplets of falling rain became an elemental, hypnotic rhythm.

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I awoke with a heart-pounding start to the blare of the claxon mounted on the wall of the barracks. Other troopers began slipping on their gear and heading out for chow. It was almost light, and I knew my shuttle would be there soon. I gathered the few personal belongings I had and shoved them into my gear bag. As I was drawing the closure tight, I heard the whine of engines overhead. Standing anxiously, I crossed the room to the door and pushed it open.

The rain had stopped and through the haze of humidity I could see the morning shuttle arriving on the landing platform. I slipped through the door and jogged the short distance to the base of the platform and took the stairs 2 at a time. As I reached the top and stepped onto the landing pad, I noticed the ground crew already at work unloading supplies from the hold. The pilot was going over the manifest with them when I came running up. He shot me a look, shook his head and smiling, threw me a small, light pouch.

“I guess you got my message?” I said, snapping a quick, relaxed two-fingered salute his way as I turned away, racing off down the steps.

“We’re lifting off shortly! Hurry Up, Deckard!” he shouted after me.

I ripped open the pouch as I disappeared down the stairs. Out slid a new black thermal body glove. I held it to my face and breathed in deeply; it smelled new, nothing like the filthy sewers of Anoat, the way mine did. I had been on this rock for several years, and there had never been any point to getting a new one, knowing I would just be going back into the sludge and muck below in the caves and sewers. But now, well, now was a different story, I thought, as I walked to the barracks. Now I was getting out of here. No more lizard-ants. No more sewers.

I threw open the door to the empty barracks and disappeared into the shower, as I stripped off the disgusting old body suit. A short time later, I emerged again, clean and adjusting the fit of the new glove. I tossed the old one in the waste chute and slipped on my armor plates. Grabbing my gear bag, rifle, environmental backpack and helmet, I took one last look around, then walked out toward the shuttle.

This morning, I chewed on a high-energy ration bar for my breakfast as I walked up the boarding ramp into the ship. The last of the supplies had been offloaded and the pilot was bringing the engines online for our departure. I walked between the twin rows of jumpseats. I moved all the way forward, just behind the gunner’s seat and folded my metal seat down. Restraint harnesses hung from the bulkhead in a row behind the seats. I clipped my rifle into the mounted rack in the center of the aisle, and dropped my gear bag and pack to the deck, kicking them back under my seat.

I placed my bucket down in front of them and stepped one leg into the harness as I sat down. The thin metal was cold and hard, I thought, as I pulled the restraint up. In the grand scheme of things, it really didn’t matter as long as I was leaving this place! I put one arm through a hanging strap, then the other and clipped the two halves of the harness together with the crotch strap into the center clasp at my chest. I settled in for what was likely to be only the first leg of a long flight.

The ramp retracted and rose into the stowed position, airlocks sealing with a hiss. The pilot called back to me, “You in?”

I yelled back to be heard over the engines, “Let’s get out of here before somebody changes their mind!” I felt the ship lift under the force of its’ repulsor field, and heard the engines’ whine rising to a loud, dull roar as the shuttle rose further away from the deck and pivoted, climbing skyward.

The row of stowed jump seats rattled and the swinging restraint harnesses jangled noisily as the upward reaching wings lowered into their familiar triangular shape.

I leaned forward, peering out the port in front of the gunner’s seat, and watched Anoat slip into the archives of my *past* tours of duty as we accelerated away into the darkness toward my new post. I closed my eyes and rested my head back against the cold, vibrating bulkhead.

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