
PLO CRIIPT

A **STAR WARS** SURVIVAL

re.occurrence

(leo mara)

Light bleeds.

Threatened.
Rewritten.

Illuminated paths are unrefined.

I.I

Descent

In the final hours of the Clone Wars, the colonial planet Cato Neimoidia was captured by the Republic.

Through the storm-swept, clouded skies over the planet's third bridge city Aom, Jedi Master Plo Koon led a last patrol flight. In his Delta-7 Interceptor, he glided above evacuated high rises and commons, tracing fragmented B1 and B2 series droid joints and staining scorches scraped and spattered over tiled grounds. He watched small fires. Black smoke escape beaten allied ships and the adversary's machine-produced-machine-controlled tri-fighters.

Plo imagined restoration. Discussion of proposed strategy. How much of Aom's recovery would be aided by the Republic after their allied forces, the Jedi, law enforcers, insurgents, and clones were half the cause responsible for its damages. Their fighters and frigates tore off wings and corrupted engines and let all the physical fallout and salvageable weapons drop out of the occupied skies. Dead ships fell. A hail of shrapnel weathered and scarred the developed and well-visited streets, recking entrance gates and stools in fuel and jewellery markets. Piercing walls and windows. Plo acknowledged the victory of their fight, they'd saved the cities on Cato from Separatist rule. And this was what other commanders and even maybe other Masters on the council would argue was enough work to excuse necessity for efforts to support with the cities' reconstruction. If they, civilians of the cities, agreed and believed abolishing Separatists presence was the right course of action.

When Aom's population returned from the shelters that were nearer extraordinary seas and the planet's surface, would they be alone?

Without warning, a call over comms or a sign of attack, shots from a tailing ally ARC-170 zipped over Plo's interceptor. Acting on new orders, the clone pilot fired six times before Plo sensed sudden illness through the force. The clone fired another three times when Plo veered. His old heart clicked. A single shot pierced his interceptor's right wing. The shot caused the interceptor to immediately roll. It set alight reactive explosions across the navy and convergent white striped plating and underlying circuits. The interceptor deviated from steered course, going down towards the roof of an assembly hall flooded with abandoned blankets, tents and beds.

Plo heard an echo. A voice. A message, illusive and aged, but never forgotten. The words cast protection over his immediate reaction. They summoned an instinctual rush which overrode his flailing confusion and fear, reactively battling his acceptance of fate.

His interceptor hit a watchtower mounted to the corner of the hall's roof. It severed into parts as the cockpit caught ablaze. Plo coiled forward, covering his eyes, breathing mask and chest. Encompassing flames chased his wrinkled, coral skin and imminently caught up. Most of his body was seared. Devoured by extreme heat as he rolled with the violently stripped frame of his interceptor accelerating and barrelling across the hall's roof. Still conscious, Plo pleaded for enough power. He drew on a long-developed connection with the Force. Jaws of fire and pried metal snapped, puncturing his surface, but not able to bite down entirely. Strapped to his seat, he held off certain death. Cocooning himself inside fire and astounding force as he begged not to be ejected or thrown from the wreckage.

The coffin inferno tumbled off the roof.

It descended into ocean.

Steam cloaked all vision.

Flames hissed as they were extinguished by the salt water. Remnants of the interceptor's cockpit became a crushing sauna sinking underwater toward a shallow seabed. Plo's trusted astromech R7-D4 ceased to function any longer, stripped of shell and forcefully retired. Plo loosened his grip on the force, cautious to not let go of more as he thought of encompassing light and felt his life slow. His separately pieced goggles and the sealed gasses enabling his vision were intact. But the breathing apparatus equipped to much of the lower half of his face, was torn away and far from torn clean. The part of the rare, dark mask pressed to his left cheek was shredded, severed and ripped apart and the filter punctured. Skin, muscle and horn were eradicated. Half his jaw was a dripping disfigurement, bleeding stringed blood and saliva.

As the coffin acquainted the seabed, Plo croaked and flailed. He shoved at sharpened and shattered glass and the bowed cage and kicked hard with a tortured leg to escape.

Fog glazed the low ocean's surface. Balling smoke funnelled upwards from the crashed and sunken interceptor when Plo rose from the imposing deathbed, reaching shallower shore.

He stood himself up, slanted, struggling to keep his head held higher than his tested spine. Everything hurt. His autonomy pulsated like never before. More than any past slaughter, saber fight or crash he endured. He steadied his stance as iridescent oil and salt water fell from off his shoulders and dripped from creases and folds in his scorned, sacred robes. Only singed remnants remained of his boots. The short straps and hidden aurodium buckles washed away, abandoning patches of cured leather scolded to his shins.

Plo limped towards unveiled land. Settled rock above tide. A concoction of muscle, blood and drool still drooped from the crater in his jaw, staining his soaked and tattered fawn robes which cloaked worse condition. His suffocation was quiet. Few wheezes echoed inside the cracked shell of his mask. His lungs grasped at the malfunctioning life-support and decreasing pocket of air. One hand was lost. Not cut and cauterised by saber as he'd prophesied and was almost eventualised several times before. Rather, his four fingers were forcefully detached, and the roots to the base of his right hand to past wrist were patchily mangled.

With his remaining hand, Plo retracted a wet holoprojector from a pocket on his abdominal-ringed belt. He swabbed his thumb in a circular motion over the motion sense controls and waited, anxious, for the call to be answered.

As the hologram flickered, Plo watched forward and spotted faded movement some hundred metres ahead along the flat stone. Through light fog, he recognised the outlines of phase two trooper armour. A head-to-toe ensemble of white plastoid plates that appeared like a ghost. A faceless soldier more haunting given the recent count of friendly fire.

Turned from its own tightly postured body, the lone trooper locked sight in Plo's direction. As Plo held still, the clone moved. His body pivoted and realigned with his visor as Plo preyed it was one rotten pilot and not an entire infected platoon.

Four more clones appeared from fog, spaced metres from one another. As a squad, they drew nearer. They raised their rifles. Copies of copies turncoat, indoctrinated by inhibitor, hiding under black bodygloves and mass-moulded, colourless armour.

Stand down. "St- n- stn d- dn g-" Plo dribbled. He couldn't speak with his ruined mouth.

Unhearing or neglecting command, the clones continued their approach, tactfully sidestepping to cover all directions for the Jedi.

Plo slowly crouched, wary not to further startle his betrayers. He lowered to a position suggestive of surrender. *Please. "Pl- s- s-"*

Plo set the holoprojector down as the desperate call continued to attempt to connect.

The clones stopped their march, planting their feet and remained silent.

Plo ascended once again. He returned, upright and hunched as he put one hand on the belted hilt of his lightsaber, preparing to fight as long as he could.

Printless indexes slid to triggers.

"W- hy?" Plo managed to ask, through suffocation, pooling blood, and heavy sorrow.

The holoprojector connected, "Master?"

The instant Plo glanced at the thin projection, an attempt at merciless execution commenced. Red shots were fired and thrown from all sides as he stood, sole target of the assault. The first shot slashed an

arm, burning through his sleeve, bloodying his skin as he reactively drew the blade of his saber. He acted fast enough to deflect and evade the rest. The light of Kyber was cast, illuminating fabric, armour and stone with an incredible vibrance of blue. He lunged forward forcing a hole through unfed, imitated stomach then ripped the solid light out and attacked the next.

Knocking rifle askew with forearm, he caught throat with his blade and heard gurgles.

The squad was halved before Plo remembered he could hardly breathe. "h- h- cl- clones! Turnd!" he cried out mid-thrust, hoping to warn his fellow Master on the holoprojector. "Th- cls- cnes!" The warning was falling apart and away with more flesh.

"Argh!" he expelled with new rage as he batted away blaster shots and charged again. Each swing splattered stone and beaten trooper with strings of his own blood.

"Stop!" yelled the Jedi holoproject.

The last two infantry clones stepped back, taking turns to reload laser cartridges. As the squad leader fired, Plo reached out his partially handed limb and force pulled the clone in charge, sweeping him by the leg instead of drawing him nearer by torso. The imperceptible power dragged the squad leader across jagged surface, bending one arm until it dislocated, his head held flat and visor to the smoke and clouds. As he came within reach, Plo felt another incinerating sensation. A burning in his unruined palm. He restrained the squad leader against the surface, unarmed, an arm and a leg fractured as he looked toward the freshest and most sudden pain. Lava. Plo's saber was deteriorating. The crash had waned its integrity and usage since fried the rare and misaligned cylindrical parts. Melting alloys and shattering, sapphire kyber crystal bled through, spilled and stuck to his skin before he dropped the spoiled hilt.

As the squad leader's spine began to bow and they squealed, Plo dragged him nearer. *Not to me. Hurt overrode his unceasing harmony. With the force, he choked the clone.*

The other remaining trooper fired, nicking Plo's shoulder.

Plo let go of the squad leader's throat for a moment and turned his use of the force to instead lift the molten hilt of his lightsaber and launch it toward the firing trooper's visor. The trooper collapsed to the stone. He screamed as the melting meteor of colour-mutating light and the metal sunk through his helmet.

The holoprojector had disconnected, and the other Jedi Master was gone.

Plo choked the leader again. Through energy, he felt each vein inside the clone's throat. Clenching, he squeezed the blood-circulating strings. Taking life as life left him.

It was over.

Plo fell.

His limbs throbbed. His hearing rang and sight distorted. Blood ran still from his jaw and abdomen. Suffocation or fatal blood loss was imminent.

He closed his eyes. He waited.