"Locked and loaded, sir." 4728's blaster showed full charge and the extra packs weighed heavy on his ammo belt.

The commander made one last visual check of the troops, just as 4728 had seen him do before every drop. "This is a standard search. Keep an eye out for any hostiles, but our primary concern is to locate the missing unit. They were following up on an unlikely Mando lead, but it's looking more likely now that they've vanished. It's possible they've been eliminated and we're walking into an ambush, so be ready for anything. Regardless of what we find, lets find it and get out alive."

Hidden by his helmet, 4728 rolled his eyes. The unit that had gone missing was a bunch of fresh copies. Of course they went missing, a sleeping Hutt rolling over would be enough to wipe them out.

The roar of the ship entering atmosphere reverberated inside of his helm, bringing him back into the moment. The ship began to rock and shake, and in unison a dozen troops grabbed hold to steady themselves. The entire unit moved naturally, but identically. It was always a shock for enlisted troops to see a clone unit, an entire group designed to think the same way at the same time. Necessary for effective combat, but unsettling for those used to the normal variety of people. Most enlisted avoided the clones as a result.

The doors swung open above a moonlit jungle, the stark white armor of the unit appearing to glow. 4728 checked the readout on his visor and prepared to jump. The dropzone was reached in moments, and the ship began to drop. The instant it reached a safe height, the first batch of troops jumped. They hit the ground rolling, the second batch already following them. In moments the entire unit was on the ground.

The commander took a quick glance around. "Get scans started for the lost unit. We're not moving from here until we have a direction to head."

4728 started up his scanning gear, looking for even a hint of a signal. Just as he expected, there was nothing on the readout. No shred of evidence that the other unit was out there seemed to exist. He suppressed a shudder. He wasn't the least surprised that the fresh batch went missing, but who would have expected that every single member's tracker was also deactivated. It meant one of two terrible things: whatever got them so thoroughly destroyed them that not even a tracker survived, or whoever got them knew exactly where to strike to destroy all of the trackers. Either way, this was not likely to be a pleasant outing.

Just as he was giving up on finding anything, a flash showed up on the scanner's readout. "Something just showed two klicks ahead, sir."

The commander swung about to perform his own scan. "Can we get a confirmation on that?"

A long silence followed, as every trooper looked in the same direction, hoping to spot the same signal. A much better prospect than just wandering around in groups until all of them were lost or dead.

The silence was finally broken by the commander, with words that no one was expecting. "Where's 5630?"

They condensed, the entire unit facing outward, not eager to repeat the mistake of focusing to the point of ignorance. 4728 looked directly opposite to the direction of the flash he spotted before, and was rewarded with a heat signature on his readout. "Someone fleeing in the opposite direction. The initial signal was likely a distraction, sir."

"Confirmation," came the acknowledgement before the commander even had a chance to ask for it.

The commander stepped out of the group, addressing them face on. "Alright, form into alpha and delta groups. Alpha, you're on the hunt, and Delta, we're keeping this zone secure for pickup. Keep an eye out for the lost unit, but new priority is to find whoever did them in. Soon as we're ready I'll call for the transport, assuming signals aren't being jammed by our target. If they are, I can always shoot up-"

4728 followed the commander's gaze to above the group. The mystery of 5630's disappearance was simultaneously solved, and made that much more puzzling. 5630 was stretched out, arms and legs hanging limp over tree branches. More importantly, his armor was gone, and a burn mark on the neck showed where his tracker had been incinerated. This time, 4728 was unable to prevent the shudder.

Finally snapping out of it, the commander issued the order that all of them were now truly dreading. "As I said, Alpha and Delta, you know what to do."

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The jungle grew thick beyond the dropzone. Before long, the troops were moving at a crawl. 4728 found himself spending far more time hacking at vines than moving, and far less time check his surroundings than he'd like. Delta team was surely sitting on their laurels, just waiting for what was left of Alpha to return after being chewed up. Oh well. Survival may be unlikely, but at least things are interesting.

And that's the moment that things got for more interesting for Alpha group. 4728 heard the click and whine, even over the sounds of the group clearing away brush. Everything went white for a moment, then slowly faded to red, and finally started to come back into focus. He noticed that he was no longer standing up, he had instead wound up on his back. Once his vision had fully returned, a quick visual check showed that his limbs were intact and his

equipment still operational. Whoever had stepped on the mine was long gone, their lifeless form sitting a short distance from where it had started. The shockwave from the detonation had likely scrambled the insides of the poor trooper to find it, 4728 was happy he wasn't standing a couple feet closer.

He started to sit up and instead froze at the sound of blaster fire. He looked over just in time to see a fellow trooper take a shot right to the front of the helmet. White and black plastoid turned to slag in the blaster bolt heat, and the trooper went down with a solid thud.

4728 watched a few more shots come out from between the trees, tracking the origin, and finally sat up to fire back. He loosed a dozen blasts, and was rewarded by a single flash. He didn't know what exactly he had hit, but the unseen assailant stopped shooting. Before waiting to make sure that the shots had stopped for good 4728 sprung to his feet and raced for cover. Safely behind a tree, he took a slow breath and took stock of his surroundings.

No visual of his allies in the dense jungle available, he hoped that a verbal check would give him better results. "Alpha group, anyone out there?"

A minute passed, then another. The results were not very promising at all. This was definitely a trap, and 4728 wasn't likely to make it home. One last scan turning up nothing friendly or otherwise, he decided it was time to head for the dropzone and let the commander know that they'd need a lot more troops if this mission was going to be anything other than a spectacular failure. He took off at a full run, speeding up and slowing down at random, hoping that any incoming shots would be off as a result.

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He was getting close the the dropzone, with no incident to speak of. Maybe that lucky shot had really done the trick, and he could leave successful. Well, successful with a high casualty rate, but 4728 wasn't feeling terribly picky about that at the moment. So caught up in his thoughts of luck and success, he took a moment to register what he was seeing when he entered the clearing.

There was white everywhere, and shockingly little red. Delta team was lying on the ground, not a one of them left alive. 4728 recognized the damage to their armor instantly: lightsaber cuts. The heat of the blade cauterized as it cut, preventing most bleeding and causing the plastoid armor to melt from the intensity. He had seen those marks far too many times in the earlier days of the Clone Wars, and was certainly not expecting to see them here.

Distracted yet again, he noticed a startling pain in his stomach. Looking instinctively down, he noticed the red glow of a lightsaber blade, sticking about 6 inches out of his armor. The blade vanished, and he collapsed under the agony.

As he lay there, a figure moved into view. It was hard to make out, everything insisted on growing more and more blurry, but it appeared to be a Mandalorian. The figure gestured to him, and he could hear the static corrupted words playing from the helmet speaker. "Was that the last one?"

A voice came from behind him, its haunting resonance reminding him of the mind tricks used on him by sith in the past. "Finally. Have you finished the repairs?"

"The ship will be up and running in five minutes. We'll be gone long before any more stormtroopers arrive."

The lightsaber user stepped over him, but already 4728 was unable to make out any details. The saber user took a few steps and stopped. "Lose your blaster?"

"One of them hit it. An impressive shot, but not impressive enough."

The blur had engulfed his vision, and darkness started to take its place. He popped a stimpack, and the darkness disappeared, but the blur was too stubborn. He lifted his blaster, and fired straight into the air. With a little luck, the transport would see the backup signal and come get him. With a lot of luck, they'd do it without the Mando or the Jedi coming back. The stimpack wore off far too quickly, and 4728 lay there, hoping that some sort of luck was on his side.