

Conversations With Lanius

By Morrie Mullins

In the past, Master Lanius Qel-Bertuk of the Almas Academy has consented to a number of interviews with Cularin's media. These interviews have ranged from the bizarre to the pedagogical, with much of the tone set by the individual doing the interviewing. Master Lanius himself always remains the picture of composure, the serious-but-kind educator who takes the lives of his pupils, and the rest of the galaxy, very seriously indeed.



The individual sitting across his desk from him this time is the same one who's conducted the last two interviews with him -- Cularin's own Yara Grugara. Yara's coverage of the Thaereian conflict, as well as her ongoing editorials about the overall war effort, have begun to win her recognition throughout the galaxy. There are even rumors that a news syndicate on Coruscant recently made overtures to the former host of "Eye on Cularin," though thus far, no announcements have been made.

The situation in Cularin, and in the galaxy at large, is very different than the last time these two spoke. There is another important difference with this meeting, though. As the holorecorders begin to whirl, Yara checks her datapad, takes a deep breath, and speaks.

Yara: Friends, this is Yara Grugara. I'm in the office of Jedi Master Lanius Qel-Bertuk on Almas. Master Lanius, thank you for inviting me here today.

Lanius (nods): You're very welcome.

Yara: I must say, this came as something of a surprise. Usually, I have to contact Cularin's VIPs. But this time, you contacted my service directly. Would I be correct in concluding that you have some things you specifically want to talk about? And would you be willing to answer a few other questions when you're done with your own issues?

Lanius smiles. It's a tired smile, punctuated by the dark half-moons that hang beneath his eyes. He rests his chin on the tips of his fingers and nods.

Lanius: Yes. And yes. Although I suppose any prefatory remarks you'd like to make would be appropriate. It is your show, after all.

Yara: Prefatory? It's hard to know where to start, with everything that's gone on. It's been an eventful year. We could talk about Thaere, we could talk about Nirama, we could talk about local political maneuvering or the Believers or just about anything. But our viewers have kept up on all of these issues, so I suppose what I'd like to start with -- if it's all right with you -- is just this: What's on your mind?

Lanius nods once more, then leans back and weaves his fingers together before resting them on his chest.

Lanius: All of that. All of it and more. I suppose that what I really want to do is reassure the people of Cularin that the Jedi are not going to abandon them. And to say that we are truly sorry for any losses sustained as a result of the droid that was sent here to hunt us down. We dealt with the problem as expediently as we could, and we are grateful to the Cularin Militia for their vital role in resolving the situation. Without individuals like Major Starmine, it is unlikely that even the most capable of our Jedi could have succeeded.

Yara: We hear a lot about "heroes of Cularin." We've got a lot, don't we?

Lanius: We really do. It would have been very easy for the people of Cularin to fall into the trap that seems to have plagued so much of the galaxy. But they didn't.

Yara (clearly confused): Trap? What trap?

Lanius sighs.

Lanius: There may not be a diplomatic way to say this. In fact, there probably isn't. So I suppose just saying it will have to be enough. The trap is expecting too much of the Jedi. We love and protect the galaxy, but we are few, and the galaxy large. I've traveled -- in my youth, I traveled quite a bit -- and I've seen worlds where when anything went wrong, the citizens contacted Coruscant and requested a Jedi presence. I've never seen that in Cularin. People -- accountants, librarians, mechanics, pilots -- have been willing to step up when danger has arisen. They haven't waited for anyone else to take care of their problems. They've taken care of it themselves. Which is good. It gives me hope.

Yara: Could you elaborate? That makes it sound like you might lack hope, if people hadn't been willing to do what needed to be done. Would it be so bad, for us to count on the Jedi?

Lanius: Bad? It might be. People need to count on themselves. If someone else is fighting your battles for you, protecting you, what happens if one day you look around and they aren't there?

Now it's Yara's turn to frown. She checks her datapad.

Yara: Does this have something to do with the clone armies and that questionable bit of opinion that was posted to the holonet recently?

Lanius (confused): I'm sorry? I don't read most of the public areas that much. If it's not from one of the major news organizations, I may not have heard it. Busy, you know.

Yara: I'm just trying to understand what you mean. About protecting ourselves. Is this a Force thing? Do you know something the rest of us don't?

Lanius: Nothing relevant, I'm sure. I don't know what the future holds. I used to think I did, but for all of us, the future is clouded.

Yara: You sound so "Jedi" when you say that!

She then realizes what came out of her mouth and blushes a deep red. Lanius cocks an eyebrow.

Lanius: Well, there's a reason . . .

Yara (unnecessarily straightening her hair): So, back on task. You're proud of the people of Cularin.

Lanius: Not that it should matter to them, but yes. I am. There are star systems throughout the galaxy where this war has been fought, where the locals have done everything they could to stay out of the way. The people of Cularin have been just as willing to fight for what they believe as the Wookiees of Kashyyyk, and more willing than dozens of other systems I could name. This Academy has prospered because of the people of Cularin -- not the reverse.

Yara: But things should be calming down now, at least. It seems like our war -- what has locally become known as the "Thaereian Conflict" -- seems to be nearing resolution. There's only so long the rest of the galaxy can remain at war, right?

Lanius: That's not something I can answer. I know that it seems things may be settling back to something approaching "normal." But when was anything ever "normal" in Cularin? We're an exceptional location, in an exceptional time. A Sith fortress, a Jedi academy, wars among smugglers, at least two different groups venerating the dark side of the Force, and your standard array of criminals and malcontents, to say nothing of the economic threats posed by those who would exploit our natural resources. There is no time for complacency. Heroes don't retire, they . . .

He looks away.

Yara: Die?

He looks back at her.

Lanius: That isn't what I was going to say.

Yara: They do, though. That's what makes a hero -- the glorious sacrifice. Right?

Lanius leans forward. His eyes have the look of a man who's thought a lot about the question before him -- maybe too much.

Lanius (beginning lecture mode): Being a hero isn't about how you die. It's about how you live. We have a lot of heroes in Cularin -- most of them, thankfully, still living. Being alive doesn't make their actions any less heroic. And having an end in sight for our local conflict doesn't remove the onus of protecting our homes from any of us. Heroism doesn't end just because no one is trying to blow up your planet.

Yara: Who's trying to blow up a planet?

Lanius (a little shaken): I'm not sure where that came from. Nobody's trying to blow up a planet -- not that I'm aware of. It was just an example. Probably ill-chosen. Whether someone is trying to blow up a ship, a city, or a planet, it doesn't matter. There have always been threats. There will always be threats. Some will be more mundane than others, but in the end, every action

must be taken with the greater good in mind. Every action. The people of Cularin cannot grow complacent; there are too many threats still at large.

Yara (frowning): Are you sure you don't know something the rest of us need to know?

Lanius (with a sad smile): I wouldn't have chosen the path of an educator if I didn't believe that. But now is not the time for that particular lesson. I suppose we can continue to whatever questions you'd like to ask me. I've said what I needed to say.

From there, the interview continued; the full transcript is available at various locations around Cularin's holonet.

Lanius Qel-Bertuk, Jedi Master, Overseer of the Almas Academy: Male Human Jedi Consular 8/Jedi Master 4/Jedi Instructor 4; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Defense 24 (+2 Dex, +12 class); Spd 10 m; VP/WP 120/12; Atk +17/+12/+7 melee (5d8+3/18-20, lightsaber) or +15/+10/+5 ranged; SQ Deflect (defense +2, attack -3, extend defense and attack), Jedi Knight, Healing, Force Secret (Battlemind +1, Force Defense +1), Inspire Confidence +2; SV Fort +11, Ref +10, Will +16; SZ M; Rep +7; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 15.

Equipment: +3 mastercraft lightsaber (green blade)*, Jedi robes.

**Master Lanius has constructed his own lightsaber, then improved it with the assistance of Jedi artisan Felanil Baaks.*

Skills: Bluff +14, Craft (lightsaber) +5, Diplomacy +12, Gather Information +13, Knowledge (Jedi lore) +7, Knowledge (Sith lore) +6, Profession (educator) +6, Sense Motive +14; Read/Write Basic, Bothan, Dosh, Tarasinese; Speak Basic, Bothan, Dosh, Tarasinese; Understand Shyriiwook.

Force Skills: Affect Mind +13, Battlemind +20, Enhance Ability +14, Farseeing +27, Force Defense +16, Heal Another +17, Heal Self +13, Illusion +9, Move Object +11, See Force +14, Telepathy +17.

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (lightsaber), Force Sensitive, Heroic Surge (4/day), Improved Critical (lightsaber), Skill Emphasis (Farseeing), Trustworthy, Weapon Finesse (lightsaber), Weapon Focus (lightsaber), Weapon Group Proficiencies (simple weapons, blaster pistols).

Force Feats: Alter, Control, Dissipate Energy, Force Mind, Link, Master Mind, Sense.