

The Believers

By Morrie Mullins

The following is an excerpt from a holonet documentary produced by a group calling itself "Truth For Cularin" -- TFC, for short. TFC is producing a number of pieces detailing trouble within the Cularin system and offering speculation (often wild and unfounded) on why the trouble might have arisen and what could have been done about it. Their first subject, the group calling itself "The Believers," has been a problem in Cularin for some time but has been largely ignored throughout the remainder of the galaxy because of the ongoing war. While Believer activity has varied in intensity over recent years (with their training facility in the Sith fortress beneath Almas exposed, many Believers went into hiding), their continued presence in Cularin disturbs many citizens.



Other citizens are becoming increasingly concerned about TFC. Both their motives and their methods have been called into question on more than one occasion . . .

The man sits behind a plain-looking desk, its sides and face durasteel, its surface apparently clear, but so stacked with documents and datachips as to be nearly invisible. To call the man "ordinary" would be to overstate things, if only just. He has a weak chin, thinning black hair, and eyes that seem ready to disappear into their sockets at any moment. It's not that he looks ordinary, but that he's very much the kind of individual no one would look at twice on the street. This makes it all the more remarkable that he's on a prime-hour holonet broadcast looking as smug as a panthac in a nerf-pen.

"People of Cularin, my name is Jarik Vuintor. I represent a citizens' rights group known as Truth for Cularin. We in the TFC believe that it's long past time for someone to be telling the truth about what's gone on in recent years -- a truth, we suggest, that has been purposefully and maliciously hidden from the people of Cularin by our so-called government. They would have us believe that if such occurred, it would be in our best interests. The TFC would suggest otherwise. We would suggest that it is in everyone's best interests to have an informed constituency that understands the nature of the threats present in and around its home system. With that in mind, we must turn our watchful eye to the group calling itself 'The Believers' and ask two questions. Who are they, and what do they want?"

He pivots in his chair, turning to face another recording device. A window behind him shows the sprawling jungles of Cularin. For a moment, the window flickers, the jungle disappearing and then reappearing in the blink of an eye.

"The story we've been told about these Believers is that they are Sith worshippers. There is not a time since the ancient battles between the Jedi and the Sith that such individuals were as active as we've seen in Cularin in recent years. Are they Sith cultists, or are they something else?"

"If reports are to be believed, the Believers attempted to set up a base of operations in the Sith fortress on Almas, have made numerous attempts on the lives of citizens and dignitaries throughout Cularin, and have variously attempted to undermine major portions of Cularin's industrial centers. But to what end? What have the Believers been, other than a nuisance, beside the threat posed by Thaere? Do they even rate as a threat on the same scale as the Metatheran Cartel? At first blush, the answer seems to be no. For all their attempts at bringing people to their cause, they seem to have been thwarted at every turn, and of late, have been hunted down like the vermin they are.

"But things are rarely as simple as they seem."

He rotates in his chair again, resting his elbows on his desk. He looks very intense -- in an "I want to look very intense so I shall furrow my brows" kind of way.

"The fact of the matter is, the Believers are too numerous, and apparently too well-funded, to have been the loose collection of misfits and malcontents many seem content to dismiss them as being. How does one move a small army onto a planet occupied by a Jedi Academy, without the Jedi noticing? Into a Sith fortress that was, we are supposed to believe, guarded by Jedi at the time? How does a group of 'insane cultists' -- to borrow a phrase from a recent holonet report on Believer activity -- manage to gain access to some of the most secure platform cities of Genarius? There are too many questions that cannot be answered if we dismiss the Believers as lunatics, so we must consider them a real threat. We must further consider where, precisely, they may have gotten their funding.

"They are, as near as the TFC can tell, very intent in a narrow set of beliefs. They have long believed in the inevitable victory of the Sith over the Jedi, in the domination of the so-called 'light side' of the Force by the 'dark side.' Those of us who are part of the TFC certainly respect those who believe in the Force, but we recognize that the theological implications of this energy field are less important than the political ramifications of power shifts in the governance structure on Coruscant.

"What role might the Believers be playing in these power shifts? We've seen minimal evidence of interest in Cularin on the part of the Galactic Senate; could the Believers be part of the reason? We don't know. Nobody outside Coruscant does, we suspect.

"Let us assume, though, that the Believers actually do believe in -- worship, revere, whatever word you'd like to use -- the power of the Sith. Let us further assume that they are trying to access some of that power here in Cularin, first in the deserts of Almas and later throughout the system. We must ask ourselves to what end they have made these efforts. What is it that they are trying to accomplish? Why would they bother tormenting all of Cularin, if their enemy is only the Jedi?"

Again, he pivots. The window is behind him once more, but is curiously blank for a full two seconds before the image of Cularin's jungle appears. He steeples his fingers in front of his chin.

"The fundamental assumption, we believe, is wrong. What if, instead of being the enemy of the Jedi, the Believers are actually an arm of the Jedi? What if this is how those 'noble warriors,' those 'guardians of peace and justice' --"

He emphasizes these words with gestures indicating quotation marks.

"-- rid themselves of those who are simply not cut out for the life of a Jedi? What if this is the final evidence of the lack of ability of the Almas faculty to train Jedi in the ways of the Force? There has been *no* activity on this scale anywhere else. Only here, in Cularin. We think it's time for the truth. We think it's time for the Jedi to own up to what they've done.

"Think about it, Cularin. The truth of the Jedi's involvement explains a great deal. How the Believers came to be, why they were able to infiltrate Almas, why they were able to do so very many things. If you had the 'protectors of the galaxy' on your side, you could do all those things, and more.

"Or maybe the problem goes even higher. Who stands to benefit from Believer activity? Whose career path may be enhanced by recent Believer uprisings? This is where the Jedi theory starts to fall apart. With things as they currently stand in Cularin, it's difficult to believe -- no pun intended, of course -- that the Jedi are wholly responsible. If the Believers were, in fact, Jedi castoffs, they've long since outgrown the capacity of the Jedi to control.

"Who, then? And who could possibly be funding the Believers?

"Not the criminals. The Believers may have worked along similar lines as some of our criminal organizations, but the TFC cannot believe that a criminal group would fund a group composed of the mentally unstable castoffs from the Jedi Academy. Where's the motivation? Answer: There is none. Which means the funding comes from somewhere else -- from someone who stands to benefit from the attention the Believers bring to Cularin.

"Enter Lavina Wren. Senator. Social climber. Politician.

"It's pretty clear that politicians aren't to be trusted. Politicians from backwater worlds with no real power and minimal representation are to be trusted least of all. Look at the trouble small systems have caused! And now we have Senator Wren, whose system is besieged on all sides, looking for support from the Senate.

"We've seen this play before, people! Look around! Read the holonets! The fact of the matter is, when modern politicians want to rise in stature, to gain power, they put innocent lives at risk. That's nothing new; it's been done for generations!

"What we have, then, is a massive conspiracy. The Believers are a creation of the Jedi and Senator Wren, brought about to sow havoc in Cularin. That creation, we suggest, has gotten out of control. We must hold those responsible accountable for what they have done.

"And that, friends, is the truth for Cularin."

He smiles -- a plain, self-satisfied smirk -- and the scene fades.