

# **Malignant Metamorphosis**

By  
Forcechild

SMASHWORDS EDITION

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PUBLISHED BY:  
Star Wars Fanbase Publications on Smashwords

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First and foremost I would like to dedicate this novel, as well as express my sincere gratitude, to Mr. George Lucas for his vision. Star Wars opened the door to a completely new universe for me, as well as billions of others. Mr. Lucas, you have my deepest respect and admiration. Thank you for taking me on that incredible journey to that galaxy far, far away.

I would also like to dedicate this novel, as well as express my deepest appreciation, to Mr. Hayden Christensen. His brilliant performances in both "Attack of the Clones" and "Revenge of the Sith" is what inspired this story. He projected an exceptional depth of understanding of the emotional pain that Anakin Skywalker suffered during his transformation into Darth Vader. It made me empathize with the character. Without Hayden's incredible portrayal I would've never put pen to paper. He made me aware of a hidden talent I never knew existed. I'll always be

grateful to him and will remain a devoted fan.

I'd like to thank all the other actors who performed exceptionally in the film, especially Ewan McGregor who portrayed Sir Alec Guinness' role to perfection. In my opinion no one else could have honored him more.

I'd also like to thank everyone else who encouraged me and had faith in me, especially my family, Judi and Leslie. (NMRK) Your love and friendship will always be appreciated.

Forcechild

### Author's Note

There is no way I can possibly achieve the brilliance of George Lucas, but I've tried to stay as close to his ideals in my attempt to continue his extraordinary epic. I've included original content from the movies, especially in the first few chapters. It is essential to introduce Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader to those who aren't familiar with Star Wars by explaining who Anakin was and why he turned to the Dark Side of the Force. It is extremely important that readers understand Darth Vader's significance to the saga.

I was told that I caused some confusion when I skipped back and forth in time, especially in the beginning of my story. For that reason, I've extended the accepted lore and created a time line to follow. I hope it doesn't add to the confusion, but is instead helpful in following the tale. I've included a reference guide for new readers to Star Wars as an aid, which will enable them to understand the language of the saga. For those of you who are loyal fans, it will refresh your memory as to the main characters, as well as introduce you to new characters I've created.

I consider my novel to be more an alternate universe, not an addition to the extended universe already published. I hope all who read "Malignant Metamorphosis" will enjoy it. May the Force be with you all.

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Text by David West Reynolds, James Luceno, updates by Ryder Windham

Published by DK Books

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## Time Line and Reference Guide

ABE: After the battle of Endor.

BBE: Before the battle of Endor.

Example: 01/02/03-ABE (1 year, 2 months, 3 days)

Since Coruscant is located at the core of the galaxy, it's used as a standard measure of time. This is an established fact of the lore.

I created the following time line:

Coruscant's orbit around their sun equals 600 days/year, 10 months/year, 60 days/month, 4 weeks/month, 15 days/week. It takes approximately 14 hours for the planet to complete a full rotation. This equals a little more than twenty four hours earth time.

### Terms of the saga:

Chosen One: Anakin Skywalker. He was a very powerful being created by the midi-chlorians. (microscopic organisms that live within all life and give the Jedi the ability to use the Force) The Chosen One was prophesied in Jedi legend to destroy the Sith and restore balance to the Force.

Clones/Clone Wars: Millions of cloned soldiers created by the "Kaminoans." (a race that supplied clones for payment) They were supposedly ordered by the Jedi for the purpose of fighting the enemies of the Republic. Yoda brought these cloned soldiers to Geonosis to fight the Droid Army when Obi-Wan Kenobi was captured. Their continuing battle was later termed the Clone Wars. Having these clones created was a part of the Emperor's devious plot to later kill all the Jedi and overthrow the galaxy. These cloned soldiers were later called Stormtroopers.

Dark Side: The evil side of the Force.

Death Star: An enormous battlestation the size of a standard moon. Conceived by Grand Moff Tarkin, the Death Star was ordered constructed by Palpatine. The battlestation is powerful enough to destroy an entire planet.

Droid Army: Army of robots secretly constructed by the insectoid foundry on Geonosis. The robotic army was used by Palpatine in his quest to rule the galaxy.

Empire: An evil dictatorship controlled by Emperor Palpatine/aka Darth Sidious. Palpatine is the sadistic Sith Lord who ruled the galaxy by using the power of the Dark

Side of the Force.

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(the) Force: The universal power that is used by both the Jedi and the Sith. They use the Force in order to combat foes and gain insight. Powers used through the Force include ESP, telepathy, telekinesis, etc. - anything to do with extra ordinary powers.

Force Lightning: The electrical energy that issues from the hands of the Sith that can cause death. Only those who turn to the Dark Side of the Force (the Sith) have this ability.

Jedi Order/Council: A group of warriors who use the Force in order to combat evil.

Lightsaber: A lighted sword. It's empowered by jewels imbedded in a circular disk in the handle. The Jedi built their own weapons as a part of the "Trials." (advancement in the Jedi Order) I took the liberty of describing the purpose of the Jedi's use of the lightsaber. I stated that the more honorable the purpose, the brighter a lightsaber glows, enabling the weapon to exert more power.

Master: A teacher. There were tests a student had to pass in order to achieve this status. First you served as a "padawan learner." After years of training and testing, padawans achieved the status of Knight. If you passed all the "Trials" and matured enough to use the Force wisely, you were then granted the title of Master.

Netherworld: Where all good souls go after death. (heaven)

New Republic: The government who took over after the Empire fell.

Outer Rim: The furthestmost planets from the center of the galaxy.

Padawan: A student or apprentice.

Rebel Alliance: (the Resistance) Those who banded together and fought the Empire in order to gain independence.

Republic: (or Old Republic) The democratic government that ruled before Palpatine took control of the galaxy.

Separatists: Those who withdrew from and organized against the Republic.

Sith: The complete opposite of the Jedi who use the Dark Side of the Force.

Trade Federation: Led by Viceroy Nute Gunray it was comprised of industrialists, etc. within the galaxy who joined the Separatists.

(the) Trials: Tests the Jedi had to go through to advance in rank.

Youngling: A child, or teen.

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### Established characters of the lore:

Padme Amidala: Anakin Skywalker's wife. She served two terms as Queen of Naboo when she was fourteen years old. She met Anakin on Tatooine when her ship was forced to land there after being damaged while escaping the Separatists' blockade

of Naboo. After serving as queen, Padme became a senator representing her home planet. (Naboo)

(the) Antilles: (Raymus and Wedge) Raymus was the Captain on Bail Organa's starship, the Tantive IV. Wedge (Raymus' son) fought in the Rebellion against the Empire along with Luke, Han, and Leia.

Artoo Detoo: An astro-droid or astromech. They were robots who co-piloted X-Wings and other small crafts. They had numerous tasks such as piloting, plotting courses, repairing damage, etc.

Lando Calrissian: Smuggler, gambler and scoundrel. Han Solo's friend. Administrator from Cloud City. Han won the Millennium Falcon (Han's starship) from Calrissian in a game of chance. Lando later joined the Resistance and fought against the Empire. (Has rank of Admiral in my story.)

Chewbacca: A wookiee from Kashyyyk. (pronounced Ka-sheek) A ferocious looking creature covered entirely in fur. wookiees had violent tempers, but were extremely loyal to their friends. "Chewie" was Han's co-pilot on the Millennium Falcon.

Count Dooku: (aka: Lord Tyranus) Darth Sidious' apprentice who first appeared in "Attack of the Clones." Dooku was Sith Lord who was once a Jedi Knight trained by Yoda. He was Qui-Gon's Master before being turned to the Dark Side by Darth Sidious.

Emperor: (aka: Palpatine, The Dark Lord of the Sith, Darth Sidious) One of the main characters in "Star Wars." He went under the guise of different identities. Darth Sidious was the evil influence behind everything that transpired in the saga. He was extremely cunning and powerful.

Obi-Wan Kenobi: (aka: Ben Kenobi) Jedi Knight. Anakin's Master, later becoming Darth Vader's enemy after Palpatine turned Anakin to the Dark Side. He watched over Luke while he was growing up on Tatooine and was responsible for Luke's emergence into the Force.

Bail Organa: A senator from Alderaan. He was present at Luke and Leia's birth. Adopted Leia and hid her from Emperor Palpatine, as well as Darth Vader. (Luke was taken to Tatooine to be raised by his Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru.) Bail organized the resistance without Palpatine's knowledge. He was killed on Alderaan when the Death Star destroyed the planet.

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Leia Organa: Princess of Alderaan. She served as an ambassador, but was secretly a member of the resistance. Anakin/Vader's daughter. Luke's twin sister.

Owen and Beru Lars: Luke's aunt and uncle. They lived on Tatooine and raised Luke there.

Poggle the Lesser: Insectoid leader of Geonosis where the Clone War started. He manufactured the Droid Army for Darth Sidious.

Qui-Gon Jinn: A Jedi Knight. He was Obi-Wan Kenobi's Master. (teacher) He found Anakin on Tatooine and sensed that the boy was the Chosen One. He took Anakin to Coruscant to be trained as a Jedi.

Han Solo: A smuggler hired by Obi-Wan to take him to Alderaan after Leia sent Artoo Detoo to Tatooine. Fought by Luke's side during the Rebellion. He became a hero of the saga.

Anakin Skywalker: (aka: The Chosen One/Darth Vader) A Jedi Knight who was turned to the Dark Side by Palpatine.

Luke Skywalker: Anakin/Vader and Padme Amidala's son. (He was introduced in the original movie.)

See Threepio: Protocol droid built by Anakin for his mother when he was a child. He was Artoo's companion throughout the saga.

Darth Vader: (aka: Anakin Skywalker) Luke Skywalker's father. Villain of the saga. Darth Vader became one of the most popular characters of the Star Wars saga.

Mace Windu: One of the senior members on the Jedi Council.

Yoda: A central character of Star Wars. A Master Jedi Knight. He was a senior member of the Jedi Council. This small, green creature was known to be one of the wisest of all the Jedi. He trained Luke in the Jedi Arts after Obi-Wan Kenobi died.

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### **New characters I've created:**

Steffen Antilles: Wedge Antilles son. He is Ben Solo's classmate at the "Galactic Space Academy." They become very close friends.

Alec Brant: Ben's captain on the "Solaris," the Rebel Star cruiser Ben is assigned to after he graduates from flight school.

Ceris: Poggle the Lesser's son. Palpatine appoints him the new ruler of Geonosis after the death of his father Poggle.

Lucian Gris: Second Lieutenant on an Imperial Star Destroyer. His appearance is important to the story and is presented during different time lines.

\* Benjamin Bail Solo: One of the major characters in my story. Son of Han and Leia. Luke Skywalker's nephew. Named after Ben Kenobi (Obi-Wan) and Bail Organa.

\* Padmay Hanna Solo: Another major character in my story. Daughter of Han and Leia. Luke Skywalker's niece. Named after her grandmother Padme and Han Solo. (I changed the spelling so this character wouldn't be confused with Padme Amidala.)

\*\* Though the lore already has children born to Han and Leia in other books I took the liberty of creating "different" offspring which makes my novel more an altered universe, not an extended one. I did this because I feel Leia would name her children after those who were very important and meant a great deal to her. Thus, I gave them the names of Ben and Padmay.

\*\* There is another major character that I can't reveal at this time. He's the villain of my story, and his "creation" is essential to my tale.

\*

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Everything “Star Wars” and the known characters within belong solely to George Lucas with the exception of my new characters and plot.



# **Malignant Metamorphosis**

Part One

Prologue

- Endor -

~ 00/00/00+10 ABE: Ten minutes after the battle over Endor when Emperor Palpatine and Darth Vader died on board the Death Star. ~

The massive explosion lit up the heavens over Endor as the Emperor's second Death Star detonated into a million fragments of molten metal before vaporizing into space. What started out as an ambush by the Imperial Fleet ended up being an all-out assault by the Rebel Alliance once the Death Star was destroyed. Hundreds of assorted ships banded together targeting their weaponry on the Empire's Great Armada. Chaos erupted at the death of their monarch causing his mighty fleet to retreat.

Second Lieutenant Lucian Gris remained at his post as his Imperial Star Destroyer came under attack. This being the first major battle he'd taken part in, terror was churning up his innards like sulfuric acid, but Gris dared not show this weakness to his superiors as he carried out his orders.

The ship's deflector shields were down, enabling the craft to initiate the new cloaking system that was installed some months back. Gris' captain had just given the order to start the procedure. In the hurried process to activate the device, a Rebel Star cruiser went unnoticed as the vessel's sensors detected its swift approach. The small cruiser fired on the huge battleship without cessation. They saturated the destroyer's unprotected bridge with an unrelenting barrage from their turbolaser batteries. Their accurate blasts finally penetrated the vessel's armor-plated hull hitting command central. The violent explosion propelled the burning bodies of his superiors soaring in all directions. Bloodied body parts splattered Gris in his face. The man shrieked in uncontrolled fear and joined other crewmen in a frenzied flight from the control room.

Gris narrowly escaped the fireball that enveloped the bridge as he fled in terror to the main turbolifts. The inexperienced officer let panic control him as he tried in vain to open the jarred doors, but they were thrown out of line by the continuous explosions that rocked the ship. The inferno was abruptly extinguished as the vacuum created by the shattering of the viewport sucked both atmosphere and crewmen out of the breached gap. The blast doors automatically slammed

shut, and life support was instantly reestablished. Gris greedily sucked the sustenance into his deprived lungs as it flooded back onto the bridge.

Confusion intensified as the rebels continued to attack the armada relentlessly. Though outnumbered, the resistance fighters decimated the Imperial Fleet through the sheer fierceness of their defiant assault. As the battle raged on, the Star Destroyers scattered in every direction.

Lucian Gris finally regained his composure and scanned the destruction on the bridge. He noticed his captain lying under a pile of debris near the helm. The young officer ran over and pulled his superior from the wreckage. His captain was still alive, but appeared to be in critical condition. The man was badly burned and blood was gushing from an open wound in his forehead. Gris was consumed by fear, but refused to let his subordinates see this. He stood erect, showing false bravado, and shouted out to two crewmen, "You there. Take the captain to the infirmary. Now!" The men quickly scurried over and did as commanded.

While crewmen scoured through the wreckage for more survivors, the Second Lieutenant realized that he was the only officer to remain unharmed on the heavily, damaged bridge. His underlings looked to him for orders as the vessel continued to take on heavy fire. The young man understood that this was a rare opportunity for advancement and quickly took advantage of the situation. He puffed out his chest in exaggerated authority and gave the order to initiate the cloaking system.

Emperor Palpatine had discovered a different power source for cloaking shields. A few prototypes had been randomly installed on eight of the fleet's newest destroyers. Lucian was eternally grateful that he served on one of the vessels that incorporated this experimental device. Though often used on most crafts, cloaking devices never held enough power to conceal such large vessels before. They required stygium crystals for power. These rare crystals were only mined on Aeten II in the Outer Rim and the supply was depleted long ago. The cloaking device proved its worth in this day's battle. Gris' ship wasn't fired on again as the Imperial Star Destroyer disappeared among the stars.

Lucian knew the only way he'd survive this day was to run from the enemy. He decided to head to the gigantic asteroid field that orbited beyond the Outer Rim. It was uncharted territory and only a few had dared venture into it. Surely no rebel ships would follow. The young man planned to hide among the orbiting debris.

Gris told the helmsman to plot the course and gave the order to activate the hyperdrive. The Imperial Star Destroyer sped to the relative safety of the asteroid field and carefully made

their way to the interior. The destroyer remained hidden there for days. The young officer tried to contact his superiors numerous times, but it seemed all communications had been severed. Lucian Gris never received further orders.

## Chapter One

### - Geonosis -

Far from Endor, eons before this major battle between the Empire and the Rebel Alliance took place, life forms of a different kind struggled for survival in another system. Geonosis was a heavenly body ringed by billions of asteroids of varied shapes and sizes. Scattered among the lumbering satellites were smaller bits of frozen ice, rocks, and dust that gravity held together in an orbit around the sphere that bordered the edge of the galaxy.

This planet was once completely submerged under water and quaked with volcanic activity. Magma erupted from the core creating gigantic mountain ranges that slowly rose from its depths to the surface. Billions of volcanic vents covered the seabed allowing life giving matter to spew violently from them. Microscopic organisms formed and clung to the growing towers as they fed on the precious elements that billowed into the sea. These organisms slowly evolved and moved from the seas to enormous marshes that bordered them. Jungles rose from the bogs as the organisms evolved and eventually inhabited the entire surface.

Sea levels slowly diminished through the ages leaving nothing but vast expanses of arid, flat, rocky terrain that stretched out over most of the sphere. Other portions contained mountainous peaks that jutted sharply into the heavens. Geonosis seemed a desolate planet devoid of all life forms, but upon closer inspection, one would see caverns gouged into the craggy ridges. If these caverns were explored, it would be acknowledged that the orb was indeed inhabited. It was populated by several different species of air-breathing arthropods.

Centuries elapsed as the survivors of the insect's warring evolution merged into one intelligent species. Their mingling through the years produced insectoids that were dark green, while others were colored a reddish brown. They bore a resemblance to termites, though they stood approximately four feet in height, almost as tall as human beings who now populated systems throughout the galaxy. Some insectoids were wingless, and as such were classified low class among their kind. Their winged brothers soared among the clouds as these flightless creatures labored for the upper class.

As the new species spread throughout the planet their predecessors disappeared through extinction. The survivor's knowledge advanced at an incredible rate. The abundance of the planet's precious ores were detected and mined by the insectoid race. They used the metals to produce their foundries. Building their extensive city underground, the inhabitants were able to keep their existence hidden from the prying eyes of the galaxy.

Years passed before Geonosis' resources were discovered by other systems. Many grew wealthy because of the commerce now shared between the planets. Their leaders profited greatly from this alliance. The winged insectoids amassed a vast fortune and became very powerful as they ruled over their small domain. The excess of rich, vital ores Geonosis provided ranked it as one of the Trade Federation's most valuable members.

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Poggle the Lesser was the current monarch of Geonosis. His underground foundry had been employed to manufacture an army of droid soldiers for Count Dooku. The Count, also known as Lord Tyranus, was once a Jedi Knight. The Jedi were warriors endowed with what was known as "the Force." The Force was a universal power that granted them supernatural abilities. This gift allowed the Jedi to use their powers to police and protect the galaxy from evil. Dooku had become disillusioned by corruption in the Galactic Senate and believed that the Jedi had been corrupted as well. He left the Order and fell under the influence of Darth Sidious. Darth Sidious was a Dark Lord of the Sith. The Sith, like the Jedi, had knowledge of the Force and used their abilities to fulfill their greedy desires. The Jedi were Darth Sidious' hated enemy. He easily persuaded Dooku to join him in his endless quest to eliminate them.

The creation of the robotic army Poggle the Lesser manufactured was just one of the many steps taken in the plan developed by the Sith Lord in his unquenchable desire to rule the entire galaxy. Darth Sidious used whatever means possible for this endeavor. Part of his plot involved luring the Jedi into a number of traps that he hoped would eventually lead to their downfall.

When Obi-Wan Kenobi, a Jedi Knight, was captured and held prisoner on Geonosis, the Jedi went to rescue him. They were attacked by the Droid Army led by Count Dooku. Yoda, who was a senior member on the Jedi Council, brought a cloned army to the planet and a battle broke out. Due to the clones, the battle turned in the Jedi's favor. Because of this, Poggle ordered his warriors to hide in the catacombs. There was no need for his followers to die in this day's battle. This confrontation was the first conflict in what later became known as the Clone Wars.

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Years passed while the insectoid warriors hibernated inside the dark catacombs. When Poggle's son Ceris was finally awakened from his slumber, he learned that Darth Sidious' plot was already well in progress. The Sith Lord had hidden his true identity from everyone, including all his followers. Darth Sidious was known among the Republic as Senator Palpatine, the Ambassador from Naboo. He'd won over the hearts and minds of the population on Coruscant. The man was highly regarded throughout the galaxy, and was a well-respected member of the senate.

The Sith Lord had secretly instructed Viceroy Nute Gunray to use the Droid Army to invade the peaceful planet of Naboo. Gunray was the leader of the Trade Federation, and a member of the Separatist Movement. The Separatists were an ambitious group of beings in the system that withdrew from the Republic because their ever increasing demands were repeatedly rejected by the legislature. Darth Sidious used this invasion as a means to oust the current Supreme Chancellor, using his control over the senate to be elected to this extremely important position.

Ceris had learned that Darth Sidious' apprentice, Count Dooku, was killed by a Jedi Knight. This was part of the plot conceived by Darth Sidious to turn the young warrior to the Dark Side of the Force. The Sith Lord had foreseen that this powerful Jedi, who now fought against the Sith, could some day take Dooku's place by Darth Sidious' side. He'd been right. Due to the Sith Lord's manipulation, the young man soon pledged his alliance to him.

The Separatist leaders played a major role in Darth Sidious' plot to seize control of the Republic. For this reason, he ordered General Grievous, the new Commander of the Droid Army, to send the Separatist leaders to the volcanic planet of Mustafar in order to hide them from the Jedi. He sent Poggle the Lesser along with the group. The Sith Lord couldn't take the chance that he'd be captured. The insectoid had knowledge that must not be revealed under interrogation.

Darth Sidious told Ceris that, while under his protection, the Separatists had turned on Poggle and murdered him in order to gain control over Geonosis and its valuable resources. One of the most valuable ores mined on the planet contained the element vanadium which was fundamental in the construction of all space vehicles. When blended with durasteel it increased the tensile strength of spacecrafts enabling them to withstand the tremendous pressures exerted on a ship when entering hyperspace. Without vanadium, space travel would be seriously compromised. Hence, it was a sought after and brought fortune beyond belief to those who controlled this most valuable resource.

The Sith Lord also told Ceris that he'd been enraged by the Separatist's treachery. He'd sent his new apprentice to the planet to retaliate for Poggle's death. Lord Vader had exterminated all the assassins. After executing his orders, Darth Vader engaged in combat with his former Jedi Master. He didn't come out the victor. The young man was seriously wounded during their battle. He'd been burned beyond recognition and his lungs were severely damaged. This injury caused him to be placed in a life sustaining suit. The black, armored suit only enhanced his menacing demeanor. In seeking vengeance against the Jedi, Darth Vader ultimately proved to be invaluable to Darth Sidious in his quest to dominate humanity.

The Dark Lord had acquired an inordinate amount of authority while he presided over the Republic as its predominate official. Under his pseudonym, Supreme Chancellor Palpatine used his substantial influence to turn the minds of the population against the Jedi Order. He accused the Jedi Council of attempting a coup against the senate and trying to assassinate him. Sidious used this apparent Rebellion as an excuse to order the extermination of all the Jedi. They'd been tagged traitors to the Republic and had a high price on their heads. Sidious then appeared before the senate and appointed himself "Emperor of a new Galactic Empire." No one dared to openly oppose him.

Emperor Palpatine had since sent Ceris a special package. Instructions accompanied it which was to be carried out in stages. Everything was to be opened upon his authorization alone and the orders followed without deviation. He also informed Ceris that the contents were highly classified and must be kept from all eyes but his, friend and foe alike.

Ceris was completely astonished by being honored with such an important assignment. Ceris would do anything the Sith Lord asked of him. The insectoid was now secured as ruler of Geonosis and owed his Master a great debt. Darth Sidious had also sought revenge for his father's murder. It was an honor and obligation the creature would never forget.

Ceris was well aware that this exceedingly important parcel, as well as the mysterious orders within, needed to be kept in a secure place until his Master called for it. The insectoid vowed that he'd protect the package with his very life, keeping the contents safely concealed from the Sith Lord's adversaries. Holding the package protectively in his arms, he returned to the catacombs and entered into hibernation while awaiting the Emperor's summons to proceed.

The new Emperor was confident that this extremely important task would be carried out with the utmost secrecy. He was well aware that Ceris was terrified of his wrath and would never disclose this information, or alter his orders in any way. Like his father before him, Ceris was a

coward at heart. The simple-minded beast could never fully appreciate the importance of the parcel's contents as he carried out his instructions like an obedient pet. Besides, the creature was extremely pleased with himself now that he was installed as the new ruler over his tiny realm. Ceris hungered for power, lusting after his father's throne. Sidious had done what this coward dared not do. He'd given the creature Poggle the Lesser's crown.

This gesture on Palpatine's part would ensure Ceris' complete loyalty, even if he learned of the Emperor's true role in his father's death. The Separatists had not really tried to murder Poggle, nor had they tried to take control of Geonosis' resources. Darth Sidious had needed Poggle the Lesser's foundry in order to construct a new, deadly weapon. Since the battlestation's construction was well under way, Poggle was no longer needed. Darth Sidious ordered Vader to kill him.

It had also been necessary to eliminate all the Separatist leaders he'd sent to Mustafar in order to end the Clone Wars. The war was no longer been viable as it had secured his domination over all possible enemies. Sidious' careful plotting through the years had finally achieved his goal to eliminate all the Jedi. The Sith ruled the galaxy once more.

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Many standard years passed before the new leader of Geonosis was roused from his hibernation. Upon awakening, Ceris was notified that he'd received authorization from Emperor Palpatine to open his instructions. They read as follows: "In the event of my death..."

## Chapter Two

### - Orders Received -

~fn00/07/00 ABE: Seven standard months after the death of Emperor Palpatine.~

"We're entering the system now sir," the helmsman said.

"Good," Lucian Gris replied. He turned to the communications officer, "Tell them we'll be entering orbit shortly."

"Yes sir."

It had been many months since the Imperial Destroyer fled from the battle over Endor. Gris wondered why, after all this time, he'd finally received a coded message to report to Geonosis. It wasn't wise to venture near the Outer Rim. The Rebel Alliance patrolled the outermost systems and could easily pick up their vessel on sensors. He only entered this area of

space when absolutely necessary.

Gris hadn't been in contact with any ships from the Imperial Fleet since the Death Star's destruction. His only source of information came from the scattered outposts they raided. He learned that most of the Great Armada was destroyed or captured by the Rebel Alliance. Once knowledge of Emperor Palpatine's death was spread through the systems, the Resistance gained allies as they massed in their vendetta to rid the galaxy of the Empire's Forces. This "New Republic" soon declared victory.

Gris' captain had been seriously wounded in the attack and could no longer perform his duties. His vessel, badly scarred and damaged, had barely made it out of the system. The young officer was aware that it had been his duty to stand fast and destroy as many rebel ships as possible, but doing so would've been a suicidal attempt. His decision to flee had been his only option in order to save his life.

Except for the infrequent raids they made on the outer planets to keep the ship functioning and sustain the crew, Gris had stayed within the relative safety of the asteroid field. So far, he'd managed to evade the New Republic's patrols during their incursions inside the Outer Rim. Not having received orders, nor being able to communicate with the fleet, Gris had sometimes thought about surrendering to the Alliance, but feared the consequences of such an act. He was glad that he'd decided to hold out. After all this time, the Empire had surely regained control over the galaxy.

When his shuttle landed on Geonosis Gris was escorted to the main council chamber in the subterranean city. When seated at the huge, oblong table, he expected to see others from the fleet, but there were only a few officers he recognized among the various life forms that had assembled in the Grand Conference Room. Were their destroyers the only ones summoned? It was inconceivable that only eight Star Destroyers remained of the Empire's Armada. Of all the countless ships in the most powerful fleet in the galaxy, that couldn't be possible.

As Lucian Gris looked around the huge hall he was surprised to see members of the Trade Federation in attendance after hearing the rumors about the massacre on Mustafar. Many of their leaders had been a part of the Separatist Movement. It was whispered that Emperor Palpatine ordered their execution. He always sent Darth Vader to do his bidding. This one man alone, if you could call such a dark, menacing presence truly a man, slaughtered all who were there. Not one soul had been spared.

Thinking of the former Sith Lord sent chills up Gris' spine. Vader was the Emperor's most



loyal servant. He'd always followed Palpatine's orders to the letter. He'd forced his way into the Jedi Temple on Coruscant and eradicated all within. Most of the Jedi had been on assignment throughout the galaxy and had gone into hiding when they'd learned of the massacre. They'd escaped death, but Vader hunted each and every one of them down through the years. The Jedi were all dead now. The Sith Lord eliminated all of his Master's enemies.

Darth Vader's violent reputation was well known. He'd been greatly feared among all in the Empire. He had a quick temper and would not hesitate to destroy anyone who displeased him. His powers within the Force allowed him to reach out through space and crush them at will, without even laying a hand on them. Lucian Gris had seen this formidable figure kill on pure impulse. The Second Lieutenant was extremely grateful that he'd escaped assignment on Darth Vader's Super Star Destroyer, the "Executor." He was aware that the heir to the Emperor's throne died alongside his Master on the second Death Star, but with the incredible powers Vader possessed, Gris still held a deep fear of such a merciless assassin, dead or alive.

All eyes were upon him as the ruler of Geonosis took his place in the center of the room. The insectoid looked around at the varied assembly gathered before him and was pleased. Ceris stood as tall as his small frame allowed and banged his staff on the floor for attention. He adjusted his translator and said, "Please come to order. We have serious business to discuss. Serious business indeed."

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Back on board his vessel in the privacy of the captain's cabin he now occupied, Lucian pondered the unexpected turn of events. Ceris had instructed the fleet's superior officers to assemble in a row. The young officer rose and joined the men in the line. Gris was still wearing his insignia and was asked why he stood with them while only having the rank of Second Lieutenant. He explained that his superiors were wounded or killed in the battle over Endor and he'd assumed command. He was ordered to sit back down. Other officers were questioned and it was discovered that three more vessels were now under the command of subordinates. These men were also told to sit down.

The high ranking officers stood before Ceris wondering why they'd been asked to remain standing. Most of them were seriously injured, including Gris' captain. Hardly able to support himself without any assistance, Gris' superior stood proudly at attention. They were then escorted from the room by a squad of insectoid guards.

The rest of the assembly was instructed to proceed to the tall doors at each end of the

huge chamber. Gris passed through the nearest portal and walked the length of the curving corridor to the balcony that overlooked the outdoor arena. The ancient, fissured structure strained in protest under the profound weight as the crowd of onlookers watched their superiors being lined up below them along a towering wall. Gris assumed that they'd be given medals for their service to the Empire, but his assumption proved wrong.

The insectoid guards left the arena in a rush. The spectators murmured among themselves as enormous, metal gates screeched open. A great roar was heard from within. A gigantic beast slowly emerged from the shadows. Gris had never seen a creature that looked so ferocious. The officers scurried like terrified eopie as this monster chased them around the arena. The sandy bottom was soon filled with bloodied body parts that had once been proud officers of the Galactic Empire.

When the crowd was finally seated in the council chamber again, a numbing silence hung in the air. The insectoid leader broke the strained repose telling the assembly that their superiors were nothing more than unworthy cowards who shirked their duty and ran in the face of the enemy. Such desertion would not be tolerated and was punishable by death. The present company would not be held accountable for their superior's cowardice during the battle over Endor, but their deaths would serve as a valuable lesson. It was certainly a lesson for Lucian Gris. He thanked his lucky stars it wasn't learned that he'd given the order to retreat. The crew assumed their captain had issued the command.

All remaining crewmembers had been given a promotion in rank. To his complete amazement, Gris learned that he had the most experience of all the survivors. What this really meant was that he had served the longest. By sheer luck of a few standard months, Lucian was given a promotion to "Rear Admiral of the Imperial Fleet." His promotion wasn't expected. He did deserve it; there was no question in his mind. However, the young officer had been stunned that he'd been selected above all others to command of the entire fleet. The rank given Lucian was an honor, to say the least.

Lucian Gris was told that his assignment would be the most important undertaking since the fall of the Empire. He was well aware that the task placed before him would be significant to his career. He dared not fail with the enormous responsibility placed before him. He could never have imagined how many years would pass before this vital mission was finally accomplished.

- Tatooine -

~18/02/00 ABE: Eighteen years, two months after the death of Emperor Palpatine. ~

A parsec away from Geonosis there is a remote planet called Tatooine. This firmament has two suns that distribute their illumination and heat in tremendous amounts, making most of the surface a desolated wasteland. It would seem that these extreme conditions would make the planet uninhabitable, but many different life forms do exist on this intolerable world. The surface is nothing more than scorching, blowing sand. However, below the harsh surface Tatooine's depths are pocketed with caches of underground springs that provide precious water to the residents who are brave enough to make this their homeland.

The Old Republic had little influence over this planet that was far from the hub of democracy. Tatooine's sparse outposts were under the strict control of the Hutt's criminal organization. The vast, open spaces between the gangster's havens consisted mainly of moisture farmers. These hardy, steadfast homesteaders built their commonplace dwellings underground helping them to achieve a cool environment.

Luke Skywalker had finally returned to Tatooine to rebuild his uncle's farm now that the galaxy was under the control of the New Republic. The Empire's Imperial Stormtroopers, who'd been duplicated from the original Clone Army, had destroyed the farm and killed his Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru years ago. They'd been looking for data that was stolen by conspirators who'd plotted against the Empire. Suspected of being associated with the Rebel Alliance, Leia Organa's cruiser had been chased towards the Outer Rim by Darth Vader's destroyer.

Leia's role on board the vessel had been as an ambassador on a diplomatic mission, but she'd really been bringing this crucial information to her father on Alderaan. Leia and her father had been secretly active members of the resistance.

Under orders from Emperor Palpatine to retrieve this stolen data, Darth Vader had attacked Leia's ship while over Tatooine. The Sith Lord hadn't been able to find evidence on board of a coded transmission they'd received from rebel spies. The signal contained schematics of Palpatine's newest secret weapon.

Leia, who was the princess of Alderaan, hid the data in a compartment inside of Artoo Detoo and ordered him to flee in an escape pod. She sent the droid to the barren sphere in order to find General Obi-Wan Kenobi. It was known only by her father and herself that the former Jedi Knight was living in seclusion on the dismal planet. She'd instructed Artoo to seek the Jedi

warrior's help against the suppressive empire.

See Threepio followed Artoo into the emergency vehicle while the Stormtroopers fired at the crew, their blasts barely missing the droids. The pod detached from the cruiser and spiraled down to Tatooine. Darth Vader sent cloned soldiers down to the surface in order to search for the vehicle, assuming the schematics were on board. When finding the pod, the clones discovered it had been occupied by droids who'd escaped with the plans.

After the pod crashed in the midst of the desert wasteland, Threepio and Artoo tried to make their way to civilization, but they were captured by Jawa Traders. These strange, little scavengers roamed the badlands in search of junk and spare parts that they repaired and sold to the inhabitants of the planet. Luke's uncle dealt with the indigenous species from time to time. When they'd stopped at his farm, Owen Lars bargained with the creatures and brought the two, dust covered droids.

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As a lad Luke Skywalker couldn't wait to escape the confinement of living on this remote and forsaken sphere. The knowledge that each day would bring about the same mundane tasks as the previous days, months, and years depressed him greatly. Luke had an adventurous spirit and felt his uncle was holding him back. He thought that he'd never be free from his bondage. If Luke had known what the future held in store for him, he wouldn't have been in such a hurry to escape the farm and the constant boredom that plagued him.

Luke first saw the holo-image of Princess Leia that Artoo projected on the floor of the garage when he mistakenly hit a switch while wiping smudges of blaster fire from the droid. The young princess had begged for Obi-Wan Kenobi's help. The only one Luke had known by the name Kenobi was old Ben. He was an odd hermit who lived in the badlands and rarely ventured out to visit anyone. Luke was intrigued by this message, but his duty done for the day, he'd gone outside to watch the suns set and then went to bed.

The persistent, little droid escaped during the night and continued his search for General Kenobi. Luke would've been scolded by his uncle for losing the droid, so he went in search of him. In his pursuit of Artoo, Luke was attacked by the Tusken Raiders, or Sandpeople as the locals called them. Sandpeople were violent nomads who attacked unsuspecting travelers for any goods they could lay their hands on. Ben Kenobi rescued Luke from the murderous creatures when he was confronted by them.

Owen warned him to stay away from this crazy wizard, but when Luke told the hermit

why he traveled to such a dangerous area, the old man revealed that he was the Jedi warrior Leia Organa sought help from. He'd also revealed that Luke's father wasn't really a navigator on a freighter like his uncle claimed, but that Anakin Skywalker had really been a Jedi Knight who'd fought by Kenobi's side during the Clone Wars.

Luke decided to join the aged warrior on his important mission after the Stormtroopers murdered his family and left the farm a burning ruin. They hired Han Solo to take them to Alderaan where they'd discovered the Emperor's newest weapon against the resistance, the Death Star. The massive space station had vaporized the entire planet. Alderaan was now nothing more than scattered debris.

Luke paid for his impetuous decision to avenge his family's death. He'd witnessed Ben Kenobi die at the hands of Darth Vader on the first Death Star. To his complete shock, Luke later learned that the Sith Lord had really been his father, Anakin Skywalker. Luke was also surprised to learn that Leia, the beautiful princess he'd rescued from the Death Star, was his twin sister. The Jedi separated them at birth fearing Emperor Palpatine would sense their presence. He would've had them murdered because they'd inherited the power of the Force through their father.

In his quest for revenge, Luke later joined the Resistance and helped to destroy the first Death Star. He'd witnessed Emperor Palpatine's violent end at the hands of Darth Vader, whose death he also witnessed. Luke participated in the birth of the New Republic after the downfall of the Empire. He then helped reestablish order within the galaxy.

When Leia finally admitted her love for Han Solo, Luke stood happily by the couple's side when they were wed a year after Palpatine's death. Luke had been elated the following year when Leia discovered she was pregnant and carrying fraternal twins. He'd been overjoyed at the children's birth, which coincided with the anniversary of the Emperor's death three years prior. Leia insisted her son be named Benjamin Bail honoring Ben Kenobi and Bail Organa. Leia named her daughter Padmay Hanna honoring her mother and Han. She spelled her daughter's name differently than her mother's, hoping no one would make the connection to Padme Amidala. Everybody thought the Organa's were her real parents. Only Lando Calrissian knew of the secret adoption.

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The last surviving Jedi Knight now lived on his uncle's moisture farm on Tatooine. Luke was finally content to reside on his home planet and view the simple, yet beautiful sunsets provided each evening. Memories of past events flooded his mind as he watched the twin suns

setting above the desert with his young niece and nephew this evening.

It wasn't long before the blazing orbs sunk below the horizon and distant stars appeared in the heavens above. As deepening darkness took hold of the night, he bid the twins goodnight, once again warning them about the peril of staying out too late due to Tusken Raiders. The locals knew enough to stay indoors after dark.

Luke entered the humble abode and sought his bed. He soon fell into a deep, troubled sleep. He started to toss wildly as the recurring nightmare began. In his terrifying dream Emperor Palpatine held him within a deadly grasp. Force lightning issued from the Sith Lord's aged, crooked hands, entrapping Luke in sheer agony. He cried out loudly in his sleep, "Father, help me. Please!"

Young Padmay Solo rushed into her uncle's chambers when she heard him cry out. "Are you alright Uncle Luke? Can you hear me?" She turned as her fraternal twin hurried in behind her. "He's not answering me Ben."

Benjamin Solo looked down at Luke with deep concern. His uncle wasn't getting any better. He appeared to be having disturbing dreams lately that were seriously affecting his sleep. If Luke didn't get a decent night's rest soon, the youth feared his uncle would never regain his health. He asked, "Can you make out what he's saying?"

"No, he's just mumbling. Oh Ben. I'm so worried. Isn't there anything we can do to help Uncle Luke recover? I feel so useless."

"You're doing all you can Padmay. The best we can do is keep him as comfortable as possible. His last attack has taken a tremendous toll on him, but I am sure if we keep him calm he'll recuperate fully. He's always been a fighter Padmay. You know that. I'm sure he'll get better this time too. He needs lots of rest. He's quiet now. We better let Uncle Luke get some undisturbed sleep. I don't want to wake him. Come on. Let's go back outside."

The twins joined hands and quietly left the room.

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Luke's vivid nightmare continued. In reality, Darth Vader had turned on Darth Sidious in order to save his son's life. However, in Luke's terrifying dream, the Sith Lord joined his evil Master in his son's destruction. Vader's own Force lightning shot out at him leaving Luke completely helpless. He watched in frozen horror as his father's dark figure approached him. Vader reached down and lifted Luke's limp body high over his head. He carried his son to the railing that led out over the central core of the Death Star. Darth Vader then tossed Luke into the

deep abyss...

Luke bolted up from his nightmare. He was shaking badly. He felt chilled to the bone, yet was dripping in his own sweat. His heart was hammering violently inside his chest. When his eyes finally focused on his surroundings, he realized that he was in his own room. Luke reached out to the Force in order to calm himself and slowly gained control over his emotions.

Struggling to stay awake, it seemed to Luke that all he did lately was sleep. He didn't want to slip back into his nightmare. He knew that Emperor Palpatine would have killed him if his father hadn't intervened, so why was he dreaming of Anakin wanting to kill him as well? Darth Vader had been incapable of using Force lightning not having the use of his hands due to traumatic amputation. Luke couldn't understand why he'd envisioned Vader using the power in his dream, nor why was he having such disturbing dreams about him. Learning all he had, and knowing Anakin Skywalker was released from the Dark Side of the Force, Luke couldn't fathom the reason behind the terrifying images that plagued him. He could actually feel the rage emitting from the Vader of his nightmares. The intensity of wrath was extreme, aimed towards anyone who stood on the positive side of the Force. Luke felt tremendous hatred towards himself, towards Leia, and especially towards Obi-Wan Kenobi. He'd never felt such penetrating hatred from Darth Vader while alive, even being under Emperor Palpatine's influence. Luke had felt his father's indecision and regret at having to end his son's life when Sidious attacked him on the second Death Star. He knew what little remained of Anakin Skywalker's soul had resurfaced. Darth Vader had saved Luke by killing his Master.

The only other time Luke could recall feeling such deep hatred was when Darth Sidious tried to taunt him into giving in to his anger while watching his comrades die during the battle of Endor. The pure rage that flowed from the man when Luke subdued this temptation was immeasurable. The Sith Lord's anger couldn't compare to the rage Luke felt from the Vader of his nightmares. That Vader's hatred was more intense, almost as if it were a living force.

A chilling shudder of fear ran the length of Luke's spine. Could his nightmares be a vision of things to come? No. It wasn't possible. Both Darth Vader and Emperor Palpatine were dead. How could his dreams be a premonition? He shook the eerie feeling and tried to convince himself that these surreal images were due to his failing health. He thought about the obscurity of death everyone faces. Humanity fears the unknown, but Luke Skywalker was a Jedi. Death was not an end to life; it was a new beginning. Luke knew his soul would be entering the Netherworld after his body died, but being in a weakened state, he thought perhaps his subconscious was twisting

his experiences. It calmed him and sleep soon reclaimed Luke's weary body.

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Later that evening Ben slipped quietly back into his uncle's darkened room. Luke's health had deteriorated greatly through the years. Having endured Force lightning when attacked by Darth Sidious, he'd ended up with a weak heart. The lad feared his uncle might now have a fatal attack. The twins felt he needed to be watched over constantly. Both Ben and Padmay had shared this responsibility since bringing their uncle home to Tatooine.

Padmay had watched Uncle Luke most of the day. She'd insisted that Ben get some rest, but he thought she needed it more. She'd been fretting over Luke since they arrived. Padmay was nearing exhaustion herself. It would never do if she got ill on top of everything else. He demanded that she get some proper sleep. She told him that she was fine and didn't need to rest. Ben almost had to get physical in order to get her to leave Uncle Luke's side. Padmay reluctantly let him take her place.

The teen quietly approached his uncle's bedside and pulled the wooden chair closer in order to begin his vigil. Luke's emdee hadn't given a good prognosis. He seemed to be getting weaker by the day. Ben was very concerned about his uncle's worsening condition. As he sat silently watching over his beloved uncle, Luke's eyes fluttered open. He didn't seem to be aware of his surroundings. He wasn't asleep, but he didn't appear to be quite awake either. Luke was gazing towards the end of the bed and started muttering. The boy leaned in closer, but couldn't make out his words. The youth thought he heard Luke say Ben.

## Chapter Four

### - Turning of a Jedi -

"Hello Ben," Luke said to the phantom figure of Ben Kenobi standing at the foot of his bed. "It's been such a long time since we last spoke together. It was so long ago that I learned the truth about my father, so long ago that I faced him in battle. He was once your friend Ben. He was once a Jedi like you. He was your student as I was. He fought by your side against the evil that would some day claim him."

I've come full circle, thought Luke. I've come home. Tatooine is where it all began. This is where I first met Ben Kenobi and learned that he and my father were Jedi Knights. This is where my father first met him. It's fitting that it should end where it all started. It's fitting that I should



be laid to rest next to my father.

I honored Anakin Skywalker with a traditional Jedi cremation after escaping with his body just before the second Death Star exploded. When Anakin's soul was released, he stood in phantom form and bid me farewell. I buried his remains next to his mother on Tatooine. I believe my father would've approved of my decision. I know Anakin would've preferred his ashes to be interred next to his wife on Naboo, but that would've caused a scandal. No one knew of their marriage. Not even Obi-Wan Kenobi knew that Anakin Skywalker secretly wed Padme Amidala after they'd faced death on Geonosis.

Jedi were not allowed to fall in love. It was forbidden by the Council. It would be too useful a weapon for the Sith to use against them. Such attachment holds the fear of loss. Any fear we hold leads down the path to the Dark Side of the Force. My father proved that to be all too true. After losing his mother, he feared losing Padme too. His apprehension was well founded. Their love affair ended tragically.

These thoughts dominated Luke's mind when he said, "Soon now Ben. Soon I'll join you, my Master, my friend. I shall join you and Master Yoda in the Force. I'll be joining my father as well."

"Yes Luke. Soon we'll all be together in the Netherworld. It'll be a very joyous reunion," Obi-Wan assured him.

Luke gasped for air as pain stabbed inside his chest again. The Force had taught him how to control such pain, but in his weakened state, he was afraid he wouldn't be able to hold on much longer.

Obi-Wan Kenobi had come to Luke in phantom form many times after he'd entered the Netherworld. He'd explained how his Master, Qui-Gon Jinn, learned how to become immortal through the Force. Qui-Gon taught Obi-Wan this ability during his years of solitude on Tatooine while watching over Luke.

Obi-Wan had taught him this ability as well, but Luke wasn't prepared to surrender his body as yet. One had to be ready to release their soul into the Force, willingly giving up their outer shell in order to achieve immortality. That was something Luke could not do at this time. He hadn't finished training his nephew in the ways of the Jedi. There was so much more the boy had to learn. Luke hoped he had enough time left to train his padawan properly. If he had to give up immortality to accomplish this task, so be it.

As Luke thought about his own death, his mind wandered back to his father. Ben Kenobi

told him that Anakin Skywalker was a great warrior against the Sith. He was headstrong and hard to keep under control as Obi-Wan once was, but through the years, the subdued Jedi Master grew to trust Anakin implicitly. Luke wished he'd known the good man Obi-Wan loved like a brother. Luke only knew the Dark Side his father turned to through the treachery of Darth Sidious.

Luke remembered how he'd been able to sense the inner turmoil his father endured while watching his only son dying at the hands of Darth Sidious. The good hidden deep inside Anakin's soul finally flooded to the surface, allowing Darth Vader to overcome his hate. He'd killed Darth Sidious and sacrificed himself. By doing so, Anakin fulfilled the prophecy that said the "Chosen One" would destroy the Sith and bring balance back to the Force.

Luke sensed that his father's own death didn't matter as long as Luke survived. He'd failed to save Padme from her fate. Anakin was determined not to forfeit the only good thing that survived of their love, their children.

Luke couldn't help but shiver as he recalled the tremendous amount of pain inflicted upon his father as the energy from Force lightning issued from Darth Sidious' hands engulfed his body. He could still feel the incredible amount of heat from the electrical current that fused the mechanisms that controlled Vader's life sustaining suit. Luke struggled for air just as Anakin had when the suit failed to function. He felt his father's fear, and then his relief as Anakin realized death was imminent, his imprisonment finally over.

As Anakin Skywalker exhaled his last breaths, he'd used the Force to transfer every stage of his life to his son. He'd not only wanted, but needed Luke to understand all the events that transpired, leading him down the path to such evil. Anakin wanted his son to understand that he'd been manipulated by a master at deceit.

Luke Skywalker finally learned of the struggle Anakin and his mother suffered while slaves. The brutal beatings Anakin received from Watto for constantly defying his taskmaster. He'd learned of Anakin's pain and complete heartbreak when the Sandpeople killed his mother, Shmi. The all-consuming rage Anakin let take hold as he took revenge for her death. He'd slaughtered the whole tribe, including the women and children. The guilt he'd felt tearing at his soul when he confessed this horrendous deed to Padme Amidala. The oath Anakin made at his mother's graveside never to fail again. His shame of defeat when he'd lost his arm to Count Dooku when he was still a padawan learner. Anakin's feelings of mistrust from the Jedi Council, as well as distrust from Obi-Wan. His suppressed rage when the Council wouldn't promote his rank to Jedi Master. And most importantly to Luke, the main reason why his father turned to the

Dark Side.

Anakin Skywalker's extraordinary love for Padme Amidala was the main reason he'd turned to the Dark Side of the Force. Luke's father had been extremely happy about his marriage to Padme, but was weary of their deception. The Order had mandated that no Jedi was to allow themselves to fall in love. He was aware that the reasoning behind this mandate was a sound one, but Anakin loved Padme more than life itself. He could not live without her. He'd ignored this strict rule and secretly wed Padme after they'd escaped death on Geonosis.

Luke was keenly aware that Anakin's wedding day had been the happiest experience of his life. It was as if Luke stood in his father's shoes as the event took place. He could even recite his parent's wedding vows to each other, word for word.

Padme had said to Anakin, "You were but a boy when we first met, but you remained within my heart through the years. We were destined to be together. My love for you encompasses my entire soul. Life is too bleak without you. I take you as my husband for all of my days."

This had been Anakin's pledge to Padme, "When I first saw you I was completely stricken by your beauty. When you looked my way, my heart started pounding wildly within my chest. When you smiled at me, my heart leapt into my throat. I couldn't catch my breath. When you kissed me for the first time my soul soared above the heavens. You finally admitted your love for me when you thought death was near. I knew from that moment on that we'd never be parted. I take you as my wife Padme, in life, in death, and beyond the end of time. Our souls shall be united throughout eternity."

Having both been pure of body, when the newlyweds made love for the first time it was a unique experience for both of them. They explored each other's bodies like younglings opening sweets. When Padme caressed Anakin, his body quivered in uncontrolled desire. They joined together and their passion peaked as one. It had almost been too much for Anakin to endure. He'd never known such ecstasy could be achieved.

How arrogant the Jedi were to forbid such feelings, Anakin thought. Being in love with Padme Amidala made him feel so alive. It was said that one's eyes were the mirrors to one's soul, but when Padme smiled at him, it opened the doorway to his heart. The ability she had to crumble the wall he'd constructed around his emotions had strengthened Anakin in ways he'd never dreamed possible. Loving her had allowed him to forget all the torment he'd endured. She'd even filled the void left by his mother's death. Padme completed him.

Anakin's joy had been beyond all limits when Padme finally pledged herself to him. He'd wanted to share his happiness with his best friend, but knew Obi-Wan would feel duty bound to tell the Council. This thought disturbed Anakin greatly. He'd always imagined himself a fearless warrior as a child. His dream became a reality when Qui-Gon Jinn found him on Tatooine and brought him before the Council to be trained as a Jedi. After Qui-Gon was killed he became a padawan learner under Obi-Wan's tutelage, eventually achieving the rank of Jedi Knight. The Order provided Anakin with many opportunities to prove his worthiness to serve them.

Anakin had wondered if could he relinquish his childhood dream. How could he give up what was still so important to him? How could he forfeit becoming a Jedi Master? He'd sacrificed so much already to achieve this seemingly, unreachable goal. He wondered if he should reveal his secret and risk being expelled from the Order. No, that was something he dared not tell anyone. His marriage had to be kept a secret.

When Anakin returned to Coruscant from his short honeymoon on Naboo, he and Obi-Wan had been ordered to the fringes of the galaxy in order to lead the offensive in the ongoing Clone War. During this time, Sidious continued with his devious plot to turn Anakin to the Dark Side. He'd told Count Dooku to order General Grievous to Coruscant and attack the capital in order to "kidnap" him.

The Sith Lord hid the real reason for his abduction from Count Dooku. He'd foreseen one outcome. The Sith Lord knew that the Council would send for their best warriors, Obi-Wan Kenobi and his trainee, Anakin Skywalker. The young man's loyalty had to be tested while rescuing the Supreme Chancellor before any attempt could be made to sway him. If Anakin defeated Dooku, Sidious would then order him to kill Dooku. If Anakin did as commanded, Darth Sidious would know his foresight about turning the young Jedi Knight would indeed prove true. He'd soon have Anakin as an apprentice.

When abducted, the Jedi Council sent for Obi-Wan and Anakin just as Sidious had planned. When the pair confronted Dooku, he'd overcome Obi-Wan and he lay unconscious. Since Anakin's Master was incapacitated, the young man had to face Dooku alone. Anakin defeated his nemesis and Dooku went to his knees in submission. Though Anakin knew it wasn't befitting a Jedi warrior to slay an unarmed prisoner, he'd obeyed Palpatine's order to end Count Dooku's life. Sidious couldn't have been happier. Anakin had proven his loyalty. The Sith Lord knew he could proceed with his plot to turn Anakin to the Dark Side.

Anakin saw Padme standing alone on the sidelines when they landed on Coruscant. Being

separated for so long he took advantage of the opportunity and hurried over. Once reunited, he learned that she was pregnant. He was stunned and didn't know how to react. Though extremely happy about becoming a father, he was also upset. If word of her pregnancy got out he'd have to tell the Council. Having a bastard was intolerable in their society and he'd never let Padme be shunned. He wondered how he could tell his Masters that he'd gone against their strict rule not to fall in love. How could he explain that he had married and was going to sire a child? It was cause for expulsion from the Order.

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Time passed and Anakin's anxiety only increased over their deception, but being cast out from the Order meant little to him by then. His nights were filled with horrible nightmares. They were just like his premonitions about his mother's death. Anakin dreamed of Padme dying in childbirth. Anakin loved Padme beyond all reason and couldn't bear the thought of living without her. He'd felt torn in two, feeling extremely guilty about the thoughts that swirled inside his head. Though he'd already started to love his unborn child, Anakin unwillingly began to hate it at the same time, knowing his child would cause Padme's death. He had to find some way to save her.

Darth Sidious sensed Anakin's confusion and overwhelming fear. He used it to continue his efforts to seduce him. He told Anakin that he knew how to cheat death. He convinced the lovesick young man that he could save his wife, but without his help, Padme would surely die.

Once Palpatine revealed this, Anakin realized that his friend and mentor was really a Sith Lord. He'd gone to the Council, exposing Palpatine's true identity. Master Windu went to arrest the Chancellor, but wouldn't allow Anakin to assist. He'd ordered him to wait in the Council Chamber for his return. The young man knew any chance of saving Padme would be completely lost if Palpatine was tried as a traitor. He felt he had to intervene. Anakin disobeyed his orders to wait at the Temple and hurried after Windu.

When Master Windu accused Palpatine the Chancellor attacked him. They'd fought each other, seemingly equal in their fighting skills. The Sith Lord knew he could defeat this unworthy opponent easily, but it hadn't been quite the time for the Jedi Master's demise.

As soon as Palpatine sensed Anakin entering the Senate Building he let Windu corner him. He knew the lad's nerves were strained to their very limits and his judgment would be seriously affected. He needed Anakin to see him as a feeble, defenseless, old man pleading for his life, while Windu cast the image of a merciless, brutal assassin.

When Anakin rushed into the room, Sidious let Windu subdue him. The young man saw

the precarious position his mentor was in and knew he had to do something. When Windu placed his lightsaber to Palpatine's throat, Anakin allowed himself to fall into the Sith Lord's sinister trap. The man faked weakness and begged Anakin to save his life. The Supreme Chancellor reminded Anakin that only "he" could save Padme.

Each of them swore the other was the traitor and waited for the young Jedi Knight to come to their aid. Anakin knew he had to choose between his loyalty to the Order, or saving Palpatine. The answer was simple. He'd sacrifice anything for Padme. Windu was going to take away her only means of survival. Anakin couldn't allow that.

It all happened fast. Windu raised his lightsaber and slashed down to take Palpatine's life. Anakin drew his weapon by pure instinct, severing Mace's hand. Palpatine then used his unlimited power. Force lightning surged from the Sith Lord's twisted hands. He used the Force to fling Windu out the window, falling thousands of feet to his death.

Anakin was horrified. It was his fault Windu died. The realization of that, along with the awesome power he'd just witnessed, made Anakin believe that he had no choice but to join with this Dark Lord. Besides, it was the only way to save Padme. The young Jedi Knight knelt down before Darth Sidious and pledged his alliance to him. Sidious then dubbed the new Sith Lord, Darth Vader.

Palpatine gloated when the young man pledged himself to the Sith. With the tremendous powers Anakin Skywalker held within the Force, Darth Sidious would now be able to declare himself Emperor over the entire galaxy. Not one soul would dare interfere with his destiny.

Anakin had been filled with complete despair as he carried out his new Master's orders and led thousands of Clone Troopers to the Temple in order to kill all the Jedi, including the younglings. The newly named Darth Vader was surprised how easy it was for him to murder his friends. He knew deep inside what he was doing was terribly wrong, but at the same time, Anakin felt justified. He convinced himself that what he was doing was right for the Republic. Darth Sidious soothed his guilt by telling Anakin that the eradication of all the Jedi would prevent a civil war from occurring. By taking these traitorous lives, he'd be saving millions of innocent people. Anakin Sky..., No. Darth Vader would finally bring peace and order to the galaxy.

After the slaughter at the Temple Palpatine ordered Vader to the volcanic planet of Mustafar in order to kill Nute Gunray and the other Separatist leaders. Once their deaths were achieved there would be no more enemies to deal with. The Sith would rule the galaxy once again.

With each death he'd caused by the slash of his lightsaber, Anakin Skywalker's soul was being savagely ripped apart as it was devoured by the Dark Side. He allowed himself to disregard everything he'd once stood against as whispered to himself, "I'm doing this for you Padme."

As the Dark Side took complete possession of him, the absolute power Anakin felt amplifying throughout his body was completely intoxicating. He was now more powerful than any Jedi. He was even more powerful than the Emperor. None alive held such power. By the time Anakin's mission on Mustafar was accomplished, the young man's journey to the Dark Side was nearing its conclusion.

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One of the final steps in Anakin's turning was when Padme rejected him. Obi-Wan told Padme that her husband had turned to the Dark Side. Not wanting to believe him, she'd followed Anakin to Mustafar. When there, Anakin told her that he was powerful enough to overthrow Palpatine, telling her they could rule the galaxy together. When he asked Padme to join him in this act to free mankind from the Sith Lord's tyranny, she'd turned away from him in horror refusing to stand by his side. Anakin felt that his wife betrayed him. It tore his heart to shreds. After all, Padme was the main reason he'd surrendered his soul to Darth Sidious.

When Anakin saw his former Master standing on the threshold of Padme's cruiser he'd been consumed by fury. He'd assumed Padme had brought Obi-Wan along in order to kill him. Anakin blamed him for her devastating betrayal. His best friend had turned Padme against him. He believed Obi-Wan had stolen her heart.

Extreme jealousy raged within Anakin. He wanted to crush Kenobi with his bare hands. He'd be following his new Master's orders when he killed this traitor who'd taken away his only reason for living. He'd stolen Anakin's love, his life, his Padme. Darth Vader took revenge on his former Jedi Master.

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There was a great lightsaber duel fought between the warriors. Even though Vader's fighting style was more aggressive, Obi-Wan had trained Anakin. They knew each other's moves by heart. When Anakin advanced, Obi-Wan retreated. When Anakin lunged, Obi-Wan parried. On and on their battle went, neither one besting the other.

As the opponents advanced through the chambers of Mustafar's control center, Anakin used the Force to toss heavy equipment at Obi-Wan as if they were mere toys. Obi-Wan deflected them. As the adversaries continued to slash at each other, they destroyed the delicate equipment

that regulated the planet's volatile forces. The power plant failed to confine the volcanic might of Mustafar. The orb seemed to retaliate. Lava raged and boiled around the combatants.

The warriors proceeded through the plant's hallways to the exterior ramps and bridges that splintered out from the control center like a gigantic spider's web. The walkway they battled on was suddenly covered by an outburst of lava. The thick metal sagged and split away from its melting frame. It plunged into the magma that churned and seethed beneath it. The combatants plummeted down with the twisted alloy as it splashed into the molten river. The speeding, violent mass swirled towards a sheer drop that cascaded in front of them. They jumped from the searing metal onto production droids performing their routine tasks, not even noticing Mustafar's rage. As their make-shift life rafts carried them along the swift current that spewed lava furiously around them, the warriors continued their frenzied battle.

The intolerable heat and the length of their battle had begun to show on the elder warrior. Obi-Wan's strength started to ebb as he deflected Anakin's swift, vicious strokes. He knew that he couldn't keep up with the physical exertion much longer. There was no way for him to beat his tireless foe. Obi-Wan's expertise was no match against this much younger and stronger adversary.

The Jedi Master knew that he had to find a way to gain the advantage. His raft neared a steep bank jutting out from the raging flow of lava. He jumped across and climbed the searing sand, taking higher ground. When Anakin floated over Obi-Wan begged him to cease, but it was pointless. His plea fell on deaf ears. In his anger, Anakin had let the Dark Side take over completely. That was Obi-Wan's advantage. He could control his emotions while Anakin let his wrath control him. His rage seriously affected his ability to vanquish his former Master.

Anakin's extraordinary abilities within the Force had become much stronger through his use of the Dark Side, but in his blind fury, he'd forgotten one of his most important lessons while still a padawan learner. Obi-Wan told him time and time again, "When your adversary has the higher ground, make him come to you. Never try to get above him. You'll expose yourself to your enemy."

Anakin told Kenobi not to underestimate his new powers, but he was the one who'd misjudged Obi-Wan's ability to defeat him. The furious young man leapt above his hated foe leaving his limbs unprotected. The Jedi Master severed both of Anakin's legs above the knees, as well as his left arm. Anakin slammed to the ground and tumbled down the embankment. He tried to claw his way up the steep hill with his remaining robotic arm, but the gravel was loose and he kept sliding back down.



Obi-Wan deeply regretted what he'd done as he cried out, "You were my brother Anakin. I loved you. You were the Chosen One. You were supposed to destroy the Sith, not join them. Bring balance to the Force, not leave it in darkness."

Anakin's pride, as well as his body, had been seriously wounded. He shouted out his hate for Obi-Wan in an uncontrolled fury. His struggling caused him to slide to the very edge of the embankment. Lava leapt up from the flow and caught his tattered clothing on fire. He screamed out in pure agony as the unendurable heat and flames raced up his body.

Obi-Wan turned away. He couldn't bear to see his friend suffering so. No, this was no longer his trusted companion. Anakin Skywalker was already dead. That person had been completely absorbed by the Dark Side the minute he swore his allegiance to Darth Sidious. Anakin's glowing, yellow eyes were proof of that. Obi-Wan felt completely at fault for his failure to recognize what was happening to Anakin through Palpatine's treacherous influence. In his pride, he'd failed not only his best friend, but the Jedi Order as well. It was a guilt he'd have to carry within his soul for the rest of his life. It overwhelmed him.

Obi-Wan bent down in his exhaustion of body and spirit and retrieved Anakin's lightsaber lying close to his amputated limbs. This was the weapon of a Jedi Knight. Such a weapon belonged to the pure of heart. It was not to be misused by the evil of the Sith. He tried to hold back his tears as he turned and started up the hill, but paused to take one last look at the young man he'd once considered a good friend. His eyes opened wide in shock as Darth Vader's malevolence reached out to him, penetrating to the very core of his soul.

Even in Anakin's excruciating anguish he screamed out in an exorbitant amount of hatred, but what issued from his throat was a barely audible croak. He found that he could no longer speak due to his vocal cords being severely damaged. Completely consumed by hate, he thrust his rage at his former Master telepathically.

Anakin's thoughts echoed loudly inside Obi-Wan's mind. "Damn your soul to hell Kenobi! You and all the Jedi! How dare any of you judge me? You constantly reminded me that I was the Chosen One, a title I neither wanted, nor claimed. Each and every one of you saddled me with the responsibility of restoring balance to the Force. I hated the task you expected me to achieve, but I would've done anything the Council asked. All I've ever wanted was your respect, but you all ignored me as you would a flitnat. I've given my life..., nay, my very soul to the Jedi Order, but that was never enough. None of you trusted me. I knew deep inside that the Council was never going to accept me."

“Yoda is fully aware of what I’m capable of. He knows the chaos I can bring upon the galaxy. That’s why he fears me. So does the Council, though I suspect you’d no knowledge just how much my abilities frightened them. You all think I lack discipline, but you don’t know how wrong you’ve been. I’ve more restraint than you ever gave me credit for Kenobi. You don’t realize how hard it’s been for me to contain the insurmountable energy I’ve kept locked inside all these years. You’ve no idea of the destructive power I possess. I learned to control my urges, but I struggled with the temptation to unleash this energy daily. That’s why Yoda sent you to kill me. He knows that I’ll use my powers to destroy the Jedi now that I’ve turned. How dare he attempt such folly?”

“Palpatine was right all along. He told me that the Jedi would turn against me. I should’ve listened to him. He’s the only one who’s ever shown me trust. He’s given me what you and the Council denied me all my life, respect. Palpatine could sense my full powers and encouraged me to use them. He’s opened my eyes to the Jedi’s treachery. I owe him for my deepest gratitude. The Chancellor has granted me what the Jedi refused to do. He’s granted me the title of Master.”

Kenobi was considerably shaken by the intensity of contempt hurled at him, but he couldn’t deny what Anakin claimed. He’d never trusted his apprentice without some reservation. Neither had the Council. Anakin had always been too eager to move up in rank before he was ready. He’d put his life in jeopardy in order to gain the Council’s trust. The young man was arrogant beyond endurance. Still, he hadn’t exaggerated the facts. Obi-Wan knew the reason why the Council hadn’t granted Anakin the rank of Master. It was because he was too immature and hadn’t the temperament to be given the rank. He hadn’t learned self-control, nor patience. His midi-chlorian count was higher than any Jedi’s. For that reason, Anakin felt he should’ve been dubbed Master. He couldn’t comprehend why the privilege was held back.

Obi-Wan had been amazed that the young man had been able to block his true feelings for so long. He’d kept his anger at bay, just barely subdued below the surface. Like Mustafar’s violence had been released by their reckless destruction of the control center, Anakin’s rage had finally been released from its prison. Mustafar’s destructive power was nothing compared to the devastation Anakin’s fury could unleash upon mankind.

Palpatine had seen the boy’s unending struggle and used Anakin’s weakness to free this malicious beast in order to achieve his own wicked goals. Obi-Wan wondered how he could’ve been so blind all these years. How could he have not seen this coming? He’d known that Anakin craved his respect and desperately wanted to become a Jedi Master, but the lad’s true lust for

power had now become evident to Obi-Wan for the first time. When Anakin finally unsheathed his wrath, he'd been completely unhampered by restrictions of guilt. He'd willingly embraced the Dark Side and let damnation overtake his very soul the instant he became Darth Vader.

Obi-Wan was completely devastated. He'd always thought of Anakin as a brother. No, he'd been more like a son. He'd loved Anakin with all his heart. Now he was lost to the Dark Side. The man sighed deeply, full of regret. There was no real victor here. Neither Jedi or Sith.

Kenobi turned away from Anakin in shame and utter disgust, not only with Anakin, but with himself as well. He knew he should kill the abomination that lay helplessly below, but he couldn't bring himself to end Anakin's life. The Jedi Master thought it best to let the young man ponder his foul deeds before he died and his soul burned in hell forever.

"You may have ended my life on this level of existence Kenobi, but you cannot destroy my soul. I'll continue to exist within the Force. I'll never give in to defeat. I'll find some way to make you pay for forsaking me. I swear it!"

Obi-Wan didn't respond to the vow of revenge. He'd climbed the steep embankment without looking back. He let go of his feelings for Anakin Skywalker. Obi-Wan Kenobi left Darth Vader to die alone on that hellish planet.

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Anakin suffered excruciating agony as he lay on the searing embankment pleading for his torture to come to a swift end, but his death didn't come that night. Palpatine felt his danger and went to the forsaken planet to find him. Barely alive when found, the Sith Lord knelt down next to Vader's incinerated body and lightly touched his forehead as the awful stench of burned flesh rose up to him. Even so close to death, Anakin still held a tremendous amount of power within the Force. Darth Sidious felt Vader's uncontrolled fury flow through his veins as he said, "You are very powerful my friend. Very powerful indeed. Allied together our powers shall be greater than anyone has ever seen. Your hatred will serve me well Lord Vader. We'll destroy all the Jedi and rule not only the galaxy, but beyond its limited borders. The Sith shall rule the entire universe!"

Emperor Palpatine brought Anakin back to the medical center on Coruscant. His pain was beyond description. He screamed in torment as the med-droids peeled off the remnants of charred clothing and flesh that fused together, adhering to his body. His relentless torture continued as the surgical-droids affixed new robotic limbs to what was left of his mangled, writhing torso. The black, armored suit he was placed in enabled his severely, damaged organs to operate through tubes and wires connected to a control device that regulated all of his bodily functions.

Those first deep, resounding breaths Anakin took as the black helmet was lowered over his head reverberated loudly in his ears. This protective suit became Lord Vader's personal prison for the remainder of his life. His rage trapped there, along with a venomous hatred against all the Jedi.

Darth Sidious sucked in Vader's hate as one would a fine, exotic wine to be savored. When he asked his apprentice if he was alright, Anakin replied and heard his first words spoken through the voice-box that replaced his cauterized vocal cords. The sound that escaped from him was completely foreign to his ears. The deep voice asked what had become of Padme.

Sidious took extreme pleasure in revealing that, in his anger, Anakin had taken his wife's life. The Dark Lord feasted on the young man's complete misery as he screamed out in absolute grief and despair.

This was the final blow to a soul that was just barely holding on. This was when the Dark Side devoured Anakin's soul entirely. This was when Anakin ceased to exist and Darth Vader was truly born. Anakin Skywalker's journey to the Dark Side was now complete.

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Anakin had been right when he'd foreseen Padme's death in childbirth. He'd been the contributing factor in her death. In a sudden rage, he'd used the Force to grab his wife around the throat and squeezed the breath from her. He'd come to his senses and released his hold before any real damage was done. That is not what caused her death, but it may as well have been.

Padme hadn't known that Obi-Wan hid on her ship when she followed Anakin to Mustafar. He'd told her that Anakin had turned to the Dark Side, but she'd refused to believe it. All she wanted to do was find her love and run away from all the madness. But when Anakin revealed his plans to overthrow Palpatine, she knew that Obi-Wan spoke the truth.

Padme lost the will to live when she'd lost her love to such despicable evil. She couldn't follow her husband down that unholy path, yet she could not live without him either. The trauma of losing Anakin's trust and love brought on her labor. She lived long enough to give birth to twins.

The young woman felt great sorrow that Luke and Leia would grow up never knowing their mother. Her children would never be held in her loving arms. They'd never know of her gentleness, nor the warmth of her smile. The twins would never feel her tender kisses. Luke and Leia would never hear her sweet voice declaring her undying love for them.

Anakin Skywalker's children would grow up never knowing their father. They'd never

know the magnificent man Padme had fallen in love with. Luke and Leia would never know of Anakin's complete devotion to her, nor his unwavering loyalty to his friends. They'd never know of his kindness, nor his selflessness. His children would never know full extent of love their father possessed within his soul. They'd only know the monster that Anakin Skywalker had become.

These thoughts filled Padme with the greatest despair as she lay on the birthing table, weakened heart and soul. She wouldn't allow herself to believe that her husband turned to the Dark Side completely. Padme told Obi-Wan that there was still good in Anakin's soul before she finally yielded to death.

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His mother had been right, Luke thought. The good buried deep inside Darth Vader's soul finally emerged to save his son's life. Luke felt his father's love, as well as his pride. Anakin was extremely proud of Luke for doing what he was never able to do. Anakin had never been strong enough to turn away from Darth Sidious and the lure of the Dark Side, but Luke managed to resist the overwhelming temptation.

All of these thoughts passed between father and son as Luke held Anakin Skywalker in his arms in those final moments aboard the Death Star. He was grateful he'd learned this from Anakin before he died. Luke felt as if a deep wound had been miraculously healed. It left him feeling whole and complete at last.

Luke was no longer shamed by the vengeful monster who was known throughout the Empire as Darth Vader. He put aside all the horrendous acts his father committed while under Palpatine's control. Luke finally allowed himself to forgive this weak and forsaken soul who'd been just as much a victim as all who'd suffered under him.

Darth Vader was dead. Luke's father was a Jedi Knight. He'd been a defender of the Old Republic, a fearless hero. He'd been respected by all who knew him, and of him. Anakin Skywalker was a man who was capable of bravery, honor and great compassion. Luke thought of his father now with enormous pride and a deep, fulfilling love.

Luke wanted to pass all this information on to his niece and nephew. He wanted young Ben and Padmay to understand that the dreaded name of Vader was just that, a name. That name was just the title of a lost soul who could threaten, nor harm anyone ever again. Darth Vader was no longer to be feared or ashamed of. He'd redeemed himself. Anakin Skywalker was still the Chosen One, no matter what name was spoken. He did bring balance to the Force. That was something to be very, very proud of.

Chapter Five  
- Time To Let Go -

Young Benjamin Solo was asleep in the chair next to his uncle's bedside when his sister entered the room early the next morning. She silently walked up to the pair and looked down at Luke. She was very worried about him. Her brother woke when he felt her presence next to him. "How is he?" she whispered.

"He's been very restless and seemed to be dreaming most of the night. He was speaking with someone. At first I thought he was trying to talk to me. He said the name Ben, but I think he must have been dreaming of Ben Kenobi," Ben quietly answered.

"Your namesake?"

"Yes. He mentioned Anakin Skywalker and Darth Vader too."

"I wonder what he could be dreaming about. It's almost as if Uncle Luke's reliving his whole life."

"I know. I hope that's a good sign," Ben said, assuming it wasn't very likely.

"So do I." Padmay sighed before changing the subject. "You should go to bed. I wouldn't be able to move if I slept in that chair all night. I don't know how you do it. I'll look after Uncle Luke. I feel quite refreshed now that I've had some undisturbed sleep."

"I'm fine. I want to be here when he wakes up, but would you mind watching him while I clean up a bit? I imagine that I have a rather pungent odor by now."

"Whew! You can say that again." Padmay waved a hand under her nose in mock offense while giggling. "You know I'm just kidding, but you could use bath."

Benjamin frowned, but then laughed in spite of himself. He couldn't help but notice that his sister stood a healthy distance away as she continued.

"Though the indoor climate is controlled, we aren't used to this continuous heat. So yes, please do bathe. And get some proper rest afterwards. I don't think you've slept in your own bed since we arrived here."

"I'm okay. Really. I've gotten used to little sleep in all sorts of odd places and positions. It's all part of my training."

"Then I'd never want to be a starpilot. I'm used to working regular hours and getting a full night's sleep in a proper bed."

“Yeah. You’re a spoiled brat. Mom always did overindulge you. She loved you more than me,” Ben teased.

“You are such a liar Benjamin Bail Solo! You know that isn’t true.” Padmay playfully slapped her brother on the arm while scolding him.

Ben laughed, but his smile quickly faded as he left his uncle’s room and walked down the corridor towards his chambers. As he entered the fresher and disrobed, he thought of how nice it was to bathe in real water for a change, limited as it was on Tatooine. Back at the Academy the cadets were only allowed access to the sonic-showers. Trainees soon learned that water was a precious commodity in space.

On his way into the shower stall the youth glanced in the mirror and noticed how tired he looked. After his uncle’s last heart attack, Luke wanted to come home to Tatooine. His uncle’s rehabilitation had been quite a strain on the twins.

Padmay had taken a leave of absence from her post as Senator Hugo’s aide. He’d been quite sympathetic and agreed to her request. As far as anyone knew, Luke Skywalker had no living relatives. Senator Hugo was aware that the Solo’s were very close to him. If her friend was in such serious condition and needed looking after, Padmay had his permission to take all the time she needed to attend to his needs. After all, Luke Skywalker was a renowned hero of the New Republic. Senator Hugo had no idea that Luke was Padmay’s uncle, of course. There would be a blemish on the family name if their true history was known.

Ben’s leave had been a bit harder to obtain. After his parents died he decided to quit his position as an intern for Ambassador Yagus. Ben hated politics. He tried very hard to obey his mother’s wishes and stuck with it for quite a long time after their deaths, but he knew it wasn’t what he really wanted to do with his life.

Ben had joined the Academy and was now attending flight school. He’d asked for a compassionate leave when Luke became so ill, but because it wasn’t known that Luke was a blood relative, his request was denied. Soon afterwards Ben’s Commodore received a personal call from Admiral Calrissian. Ben was immediately granted an extended leave of absence. With all due respect and best wishes from the “Galactic Space Academy” for a speedy recovery for such a hero of the New Republic, the young trainee was sent on his way. He and Padmay had escorted their uncle to Tatooine and had been here ever since.

Ben finished with his shower. He didn’t go to bed as his sister requested. Instead, he returned to Luke’s chambers. He ushered Padmay out, under strong protests, and took her place

by his uncle's side once again. As Ben sat there, he wondered what his uncle had been dreaming about. Was he dreaming of when Han, Chewie and Obi-Wan helped him rescue Leia from the Death Star? Ben had heard the story often in his youth. His father had embellished his role at each retelling. It was quite amusing watching Han's animated reenactment of the rescue. Leia often teased him about it. Han had always feigned hurt feelings at her continuous taunting and everyone's laughter as he related the tale. It seemed as if every member of their family enjoyed teasing each other enormously. It became a part of their daily ritual.

Both Ben and Padmay had gone into politics at their mother's insistence, but Ben had really wanted to be trained to be a Jedi like his uncle. Luke had often told Ben that he and his sister had inherited the power of the Force through their grandfather. Leia had scolded him for revealing this fact. She didn't want her children to become Jedi Knights under any circumstances. Leia feared that, if schooled in the Jedi Arts, they might be called upon to fight for the New Republic some day. Naturally, Leia wanted to protect her children and keep them from all harm. She certainly didn't want them to go through what she'd experienced in her own struggle for independence.

Leia had tried to discourage Ben's desire to become a Jedi in every way possible. She'd told her son how difficult it would be to live as a Jedi. There would be many sacrifices he'd have to make. She'd said that in these peaceful times there was no longer a need for such warriors. The Empire had fallen years ago. Who was there left to fight? He did plan to marry and have a family, didn't he? The Jedi were not allowed to wed. Leia told Ben that's why she'd refused Luke's offer to train her. Leia had fallen deeply in love with Han Solo and knew long ago that they'd eventually marry.

Ben wondered what his mother would've have done if she'd learned that he'd gone behind her back and asked Luke to secretly train him. He'd declined, but soon gave in to the boy's requests and started training him in the Jedi Arts. They were both aware that Leia would've gone ballistic if she'd found out. Though his mother had given many excuses why she didn't want her son to become a Jedi, Ben felt he knew the real reason Leia had refused to give her consent. Darth Vader!

Leia's ship had been captured when she was a member of the resistance. Darth Vader had interrogated his mother and made her witness the destruction of Alderaan where she'd been raised by Bail Organa. Leia lost the only family she knew at the time. Vader's cruelty and the torture he'd put her through left her completely terrified of him. She'd held on to this excessive fear her



entire life.

Through the years Leia found out all she could about her real parents. She hadn't wanted to leave behind her anxieties, as well as tarnished memories for her children. She yearned to understand how and why such a good man turned to the Dark Side of the Force. Luke told her time and again that their father saved his life, but Leia hadn't been able to allow herself to believe it. She'd known that her brother hadn't been lying to her, but try as she might, Leia just couldn't envision anyone as evil as Darth Vader doing anything honorable.

Luke had often offered to transfer what he'd learned from their father before he died, but Leia's trepidation was just too great. She'd said that she'd never be able to enter into the mind of such a monster. Luke hadn't taken offense. He understood her timidity and reluctance, so he never pushed her. He had hoped that she would come around some day, but she never did.

Ben often brooded over his unanswered questions about Anakin Skywalker. His mother never revealed anything about her father after he'd turned to the Dark Side, nor did she allow her children to question Luke about him. It was very upsetting for Ben. Anakin was his grandfather, after all. Didn't he have the right to know what he was really like? Ben just couldn't understand his mother's stubbornness on the matter. The terror Vader instilled haunted Leia until the day she died.

Ben had asked Luke to share Anakin's life with him without his mother's knowledge, but he'd refused. His uncle told him that his abilities weren't strong enough, only being a youngling. Though endowed with the Force, Luke worried that the transfer would be too powerful for Ben to handle. This frustrated Ben to no end, but he'd supposed Luke had been right. He'd only been eight years old when he'd started asking Luke to transfer Anakin's thoughts. Knowing it was pointless argue, he'd given up.

Ben feared he'd never learn why his grandfather turned to the Dark Side. Luke was too weak to share the information now. Ben's abilities had increased. He was sure he could deal with the transfer now, but Luke had to focus all his attention on his health. He wanted to see Lando Calrissian and Chewbacca again. They'd both played a major role in his life and they meant a great deal to Luke. He'd asked them to come to Tatooine. Lando told him that they'd come as soon as he could break free from his duties on Coruscant. They were due to arrive sometime today.

Since his uncle wasn't in the position to answer Ben's queries about his grandfather while young, he'd figured he could ask Artoo about him. Luke told Ben that Artoo's mind was never

wiped clean like Threepio's was. The little droid had retained all his memories from that time period. The astromech was in service on Padme Amidala's "Royal Starship" when she served as Queen of Naboo. When she became a senator, Artoo was assigned to her cruiser before she'd given him to Anakin as a gift. He'd been Anakin's astro-droid during the Clone Wars. He was in his grandfather's service when Emperor Palpatine took control of the Old Republic, and when the Sith Lord turned Anakin to the Dark Side.

Besides Luke, Ben couldn't think of anyone who'd shared more experiences with his grandfather than Artoo. He'd been certain that he'd be able to learn about Anakin Skywalker through the little droid. Ben had never been able to understand Artoo's beeps and whistles like his uncle had, so that option was out of the question. He'd supposed he could've asked Threepio to translate, but his mother warned him about restoring the protocol droid's memory. Leia told him that it would confuse Threepio and might possibly be dangerous to his sensitive circuits. She once jokingly said, "Can you imagine if Threepio learned that Darth Vader was his creator? Why, it would cause him to have a meltdown!" Everyone had a good laugh at Threepio's expense.

Thinking about the good times shared with his family brought a sweet sadness to Ben. They'd all been very happy together and had loved each other deeply. His parents used to flirt outlandishly with each other like young lovers. Ben used to pretend to be embarrassed by such behavior, but he really thought it was amazing to see two people so much in love.

Ben wondered if he'd ever find that kind of affection. Even if he did, the teen knew he could never allow himself to return it. Though he'd never finished training, Ben still considered himself to be a Jedi. It was against the mandate the Jedi installed when the Order first organized. The Jedi were only allowed to love in a selfless, compassionate way. They weren't allowed to fall in love with any one person. Such love had been forbidden for a very good reason. Love was a weapon the Sith used to destroy the Jedi. Allowing themselves to care too much weakened them. Anakin's carelessly disregarded that strict mandate when he allowed himself to fall in love with Padme Amidala. It was a fatal error for the both of them. Ben would not let himself to make the same mistake.

It seemed a lifetime ago that Ben and Padmay lost their parents. In reality, it was only a few years ago. They died together. Ben knew that they wouldn't have survived long without each other. They loved that deeply. Their deaths weren't due to any spectacular fight with the remnants of the Imperial Forces, even if there were any left to fight. It wasn't a hero's death at all. It was just an unfortunate accident.

Han and Leia made a habit of sitting out on the balcony every night after dinner. They loved watching stars reflecting in the pool. Han said it reminded him of the old days when he used to fly the Millennium Falcon.

Two younglings had stolen an airspeeder and were being pursued when their vehicle crashed directly into the tier. The event happened so fast that his parents hadn't time to get out of the way. They were killed instantly. Ben often wondered why Leia hadn't sensed the danger. He'd asked his uncle why. Luke told him that it was their time to enter into the Netherworld.

It was quite apparent that Uncle Luke's time to enter the Netherworld was close at hand. It didn't seem fair to Ben that he and his sister would lose their entire family. It wasn't fair that Uncle Luke wouldn't have time to finish training him. He wasn't ready for the Trials that would elevate him to Knight status. Regardless, who would test him? Luke was the last of the Jedi Knights. He'd told Ben that was why it was so important that he be trained. It would be Ben's responsibility to carry on the Jedi Order.

Luke revealed that he'd traveled with Leia on missions. Being an ambassador for the New Republic, she was sent throughout the systems to ease the transition after the Empire fell. Her protection was just one of the reasons Luke had gone along. He'd wanted to search for others who were Force-sensitive. He'd intended to recruit them into the New Order. He'd told his nephew that he'd have to take on the responsibility and resume the search. Once his senses became more attuned, Ben would be able to recognize the Force within such individuals. It would then be up to him to train them.

The teen wondered how he was going to do that now. His abilities weren't strong enough to sense the Force in another being. He wasn't allowed to marry. There would be no children to inherit the Force through him. How was he going to keep the Order alive?

He supposed the only way to continue the Order was through Padmay. His sister also had the powers of the Force, but she'd never held any interest in becoming a Jedi. It didn't appear that she was in any particular hurry to marry either, let alone bear children that would inherit the Force. If she did sire children someday, Ben didn't know if she'd allow him train her children. They'd never discussed whether she shared the same anxieties as Leia did. Regardless of that, Ben hadn't finished his training yet. How was he supposed to train anyone? He didn't have the knowledge that was required to keep the Order alive. Maybe his mother had been right all along. Maybe there was no longer a need for the Jedi.

Luke had known deep in his heart that the Jedi Order had to survive. That was why he'd

told his sister that he was training Ben. Leia had fought him tooth and nail at first. She'd been terrified for her son. She'd told Luke that it was too dangerous for Ben to become a Jedi. They'd argued about it for quite a while before Luke finally convinced Leia with her own argument. Who was there left to fight? She'd begrudgingly yielded to Luke's will.

Leia made Luke promise to keep her consent a secret from Ben. She'd hoped to change his mind and used all of her influence to keep him in politics, but Leia knew her son too well. She'd known that Ben would eventually quit his position in the senate and train under Luke's tutelage. The boy was determined to become a Jedi.

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Luke stirred restlessly in bed. Though still asleep, he was sensing Ben's concerns. He had to let the boy know that the Jedi Order must survive. He had to let his nephew know that he was ready for this important task. Ben had to be ready. Though the Sith were defeated for the time being, they could reunite and gather in strength again. The Jedi had to keep their guard up against the Sith and be ready to fight the Dark Side..., always!

Luke Skywalker felt an urgency to make Ben aware how significant his role for the future was. He reached out using the Force and started transferring his thoughts to his nephew. As he did, he suddenly felt a terrible weight starting to bear down on his chest. It was an enormous strain on his already weakened heart.

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Ben was sitting close to Luke's bedside. He was tossing and muttering. He looked very pale and appeared extremely agitated. The teen was worried. They hadn't spoken to each other since Luke retired to his chambers last night.

Ben leaned over and whispered in Luke's ear. "Uncle Luke. Can you hear me? You've got to wake up and listen. You've can't go on like this. You've got to get better. Padmay needs you. I need you. We can't lose you too. You're all we have left of our family." Tears started to well up in the corners of Ben's eyes. "You can't leave us all alone Uncle Luke. You just can't."

All of a sudden, Ben felt an overwhelming need to touch his uncle. He reached out and took Luke's hand in his. As he did, the teen slowly started getting images flash in his mind. Just fragmented images at first. Then the images started coming faster and clearer.

Ben suddenly saw Luke cradling his father as he lay dying. It almost seemed as if he was holding Anakin Skywalker in his arms as he sensed Luke's tremendous grief. He envisioned his grandfather's whole life unfolding before him. Ben experienced all of Anakin's love, doubts, fears,

pain, anger, hate, and finally the absolute rage that his grandfather allowed to consume his soul.

Then the images changed and the teen started to envision Luke's life. Ben could sense the awe his uncle experienced when Ben Kenobi told Luke that his father was a Jedi Knight. Ben felt the exhilaration his uncle experienced as he held Anakin's lightsaber in his hands for the first time. The overwhelming guilt and heartbreak Luke suffered when he lost his aunt and uncle to the Stormtroopers. Luke's pride when he rescued Ben's mother from the first Death Star. His sorrow when Obi-Wan Kenobi sacrificed his life to enable them to escape the battlestation. Luke's error in judgment when he failed to complete his training with Yoda, instead of rushing off to rescue his friends when Vader held them captive on Cloud City. Ben felt his uncle's shock and abhorrence when he finally learned that Darth Vader was his father. Luke's anger at Obi-Wan Kenobi for not revealing this fact. Luke's joy when he learned that Leia was his twin sister. His sadness at Master Yoda's passing. His overwhelming fear when Darth Sidious tried to kill him while on the second Death Star. His astonishment when Darth Vader turned on his Master and killed him in order to save Luke's life. His uncle's elation when Luke realized that Anakin's soul had been redeemed. And most importantly to Ben, the absolute joy his uncle experienced when Leia delivered Luke's niece and nephew into this world.

Ben felt a sudden surge of pure love for himself, as well as his twin sister. He sensed his uncle's frustration at not being able to ease his sorrow over losing his family.

Ben also felt an urgency to keep the Jedi Order alive. It wasn't just that Luke wanted him to keep it alive. The Jedi must survive! It was imperative that Ben keep up with the skills, as well as find others to recruit. It was extremely important that the Jedi Order be reestablished and become as powerful as it once was. It was necessary in order to prevent the reemergence of the Sith.

As Ben was experiencing all this, his uncle suddenly clenched his hand very tightly. The teen felt as if his hand was being crushed in a vise. He simultaneously felt sharp pains starting to stab in his chest. It almost felt as if a dozen, burning daggers were being plunged into his heart. He'd never felt such excruciating pain. Ben knew beyond all doubt that his beloved uncle was dying. The physical, as well as the emotional pain of the transfer was too much for him to bear. He passed out and keeled over onto the floor.

Padmay was in the kitchen preparing their breakfast when she felt Ben's pain as her own. She staggered and fell to her knees. Ignoring the sensation, she got up and rushed to her uncle's room. She saw Ben lying on the floor next to the bed and ran to his side. She felt more than heard

her Uncle Luke's last, shuddering gasp for breath. The girl screamed, "Artoo! Threepio! Hurry! I need you!"

\*

"It's time for you to join us Luke," Ben Kenobi said.

"The children still need me. I can't leave them now," Luke replied.

"They'll be fine. You'll always be here for them through the Force."

"Always in a hurry this one was. Always impatient. Now hesitate he does."

"Yoda?"

"Yes young Skywalker. For you, time to join us it is. Let go now of your physical form and become one with the Force."

"But what about Ben's training?"

"Trained he will be."

"How? I'm the last Jedi. Who'll teach him?"

"See to it the Force will."

"But...,"

"Join us Luke," Obi-Wan said.

Luke sighed in defeat. "Yes Master."

As the intense pain conquered him, Luke knew that he should accept the fact that it was time to let go of this frail, human torso and join his Masters in the Netherworld, but he still resisted. There was something more he had to warn Ben about. It was something to do with his nightmares. He had such a bad feeling about them. Luke just couldn't seem to grasp their meaning. Nonetheless, Luke Skywalker's heart suddenly seized and failed to beat. As Luke's soul exited his outer shell, he prayed that young Ben understood just how urgent it was that the Jedi Order be restored.

## Chapter Six

- Farewell to a Hero -

~18/02/01 ABE: Eighteen years, two months, one day after the death of Palpatine.~

Artoo and Threepio rushed into the room just as Ben regained consciousness. He assisted the droids while trying to save his uncle's life, but they were too late. They'd failed to resuscitate Luke. Young Ben and Padmay were devastated.

Lando Calrissian and Chewbacca arrived on Tatooine not even a standard hour after Luke Skywalker's death. Lando was beside himself for not arriving in time. He grieved with the twins, trying to comfort them in their loss.

Tears matted Chewbacca's fur as he helped Lando and Ben set up the pyre to cremate Luke's body in the tradition of the Jedi. All stood quietly as the teen set the wood aflame and watched as the fire roared to life. Ben broke down as he watched Luke's body being consumed. He screamed out in intense pain and anger, "What good is this so called power we possess if we can't keep our loved ones from dying and leaving us all alone? I can understand why grandfather gave in to the Dark Side. At least he tried to do something."

"Don't you dare say another word Ben," Padmay whispered in warning. Only the family knew that Anakin Skywalker had turned to the Dark Side.

"I don't care Padmay. Why did Uncle Luke have to be taken from us? What good is the Force if it can't save someone's life?" Ben asked in grief.

"Death is a part of life Ben. We've got to believe that Uncle Luke is in the Netherworld now and he's not suffering anymore. We have to be thankful for that."

"I know I should be grateful, but I feel completely lost without Uncle Luke and I know you do too. I'm going to miss him so much," the teen sobbed.

Padmay went over to Ben and hugged him. Lando did the same. So did Chewbacca and Threepio. Artoo even attempted to embrace the twins with the appendages stored in his hidden compartments. They stood together silently watching the smoke curl up towards the heavens. Tears were shed by all.

After the pyre burned out Lando and Chewbacca assisted the brokenhearted boy gather his uncle's ashes. They mourned with Ben and Padmay as Luke's remains were interred into the ground next to his father. They quietly said their private farewells as they stood by his gravesite mourning their loss.

Neighbors who investigated the smoke billowing in the sky learned of Luke Skywalker's death. Word spread quickly and soon the small, common room was full as people came to pay their last respects.

Ben called Lando aside and told him that he needed to speak with him privately. They excused themselves and went into the renovated garage where Luke spent much of his time in his youth. The teen looked around the workbench and touched the tools his uncle often used. Somehow Ben felt closer to Luke here. After a few minutes of reflection, he said, "I want to

apologize for my behavior earlier Uncle Lando. I didn't mean to lose my temper like that."

"That's all right son. I know how upset you are."

"How can you understand how I feel? No one can comprehend the pain I'm going through. Not until they've lost their entire family," Ben spat out angrily. "Our family has always considered you one of us, but we both know we aren't really related. Padmay and I have lost our only surviving blood relative. How can you or anyone else understand that kind of loss?"

"I do know how you feel. So do a lot of other people. Especially the ones who lost family members during the Rebellion," Lando replied softly.

Ben hung his head in shame. "I'm sorry Uncle Lando. I didn't mean to say that."

"There's no need to feel ashamed for your outburst Ben. I can understand your anger. It will pass in time. So will the pain."

"Will it? When? How much time does one spend grieving? A standard month, one year, ten? How can misery be measured in time?"

"You've just lost your uncle today son. Give yourself time to mourn. The pain will lessen. Though it seems impossible to you now, your sorrow will be easier to deal with each and every day. Trust me."

Lando noticed tears falling down the Ben's cheeks once more. He was worried about both Ben and Padmay, but Ben concerned him more. He'd been extremely close with Luke. More so than Padmay. The boy's emotions were always closer to the surface than his sister's. Not that Padmay kept her feelings to herself when she got upset. It just took more to induce her anger. Ben had a harder time controlling himself as a child. He had been easily provoked. He had quite a few scrapes with his schoolmates until Luke took him under his wing and taught him how to control his anger. Lando hadn't seen him lose his temper like this in a very long time. He hoped it would soon dissipate.

Ben finally got his emotions under control and apologized to Lando once again. "That's not the reason I brought you out here Uncle Lando. Uncle Luke wanted to tell you something important before he..., he wanted me to tell you if..." Ben choked back sobs and took a few, deep breaths before continuing. "Uncle Luke wanted you to know the truth about our family history before he passed on into the Netherworld."

"What truth is that?"

"The truth about our heritage. I know Luke told you about his father. Anakin Skywalker was a Jedi Knight. He fought by Obi-Wan Kenobi's side during the Clone Wars."



“Yes he did, but what has that got to do with anything? What did you mean before when you said something about the Dark Side? Luke used to mention it quite often, but I never really understood what he was talking about.”

“I shouldn’t have said anything about the Dark Side. I let it slip out and I’m sorry I did. That’s not how Uncle Luke wanted you to find out about our history, but he felt it was important that you know the whole truth. Let me continue and you’ll understand everything.”

“I didn’t mean to interrupt you. I just don’t understand why you’re talking about your grandfather. Luke told me all about him.”

“He didn’t tell you everything!” Ben exclaimed. He took a deep breath. Letting it out slowly, he continued. “It was important to Uncle Luke that you know everything about his father. He told you that Darth Vader killed Anakin. In a twisted way, that’s the truth. But Vader didn’t kill my grandfather. Anakin Skywalker was Darth Vader.”

“What?” Lando yelled.

“Emperor Palpatine deceived my grandfather. He was really a Sith Lord by the name of Darth Sidious. He’d manipulated Anakin for years. He finally convinced him that the Jedi were evil. It was one of the reasons he turned to the Dark Side. When my grandfather pledged himself to Sidious, the Sith Lord gave Anakin the name Darth Vader.”

Creases wrinkled Lando’s brow as he asked, “Are you trying to tell me that Luke’s father was really Darth Vader?”

“Yes. Uncle Luke wanted to tell you himself, but you didn’t arrive in time.”

Lando shook his head in disbelief. “That’s absurd! There’s no way you can ever make me believe this.”

“It’s the truth. We’ve never revealed our true heritage to anyone. The only reason I told you was because Uncle Luke made me promise to if he couldn’t. Something about cleansing his soul.”

“It can’t be true!”

“It is true Uncle Lando.”

“It’s impossible. Vader was evil. How could someone as pure hearted as Luke be related to a being as malicious as Darth Vader?”

“He wasn’t always that way. Anakin was once a Jedi Knight.”

“I know. Luke told me that, but no matter what you say, you’ll never convince me that Luke Skywalker is Darth Vader’s son. I just can’t see it and I never will. Luke must’ve been

mistaken.”

“I wish you were right about that, but Uncle Luke said he heard it from Vader himself. When he asked Master Yoda and Ben Kenobi if it was true, they didn’t deny it. Why would the Jedi lie about such a thing?”

“Who knows? Maybe they were afraid to confront Vader themselves. Maybe they needed someone as naïve as Luke in order to con him into killing Palpatine’s “Ambassador of Death.”

“You don’t actually believe that do you?”

“I don’t know what I believe. I don’t know anything about the Jedi or this Force Luke always raved about. I only know what he told me. He could’ve been fooled. Who knows? I sure as blazes don’t know.”

“Luke told me the Jedi were honest to a fault. They had no reason to lie to Uncle Luke. They didn’t want him to learn about his heritage at all. They kept it from him as long as possible. If Vader hadn’t told Luke, they probably wouldn’t have either.”

“If the Jedi were so damned honest, why didn’t they tell Luke who his father was when he was old enough to understand?”

“Probably because they knew he’d confront Vader before he was ready. They knew he’d have to face him eventually. They just wanted to make sure he was prepared for it when the time came.”

“Apparently he wasn’t. Whatever Vader did to Luke on the first Death Star led to him having a weak heart.”

“Vader didn’t cause Uncle Luke’s heart condition. Darth Sidious used Force lightning on him. That’s what damaged his heart. I guess we’re lucky he survived this long.”

Lando sighed. “I just don’t understand why Luke did it. He never should’ve gone up against Vader, especially alone. I wish I could have done something to help.”

“Like what? Uncle Luke told me you were a little busy at the time. He said that you were leading the assault against the Imperial Fleet.”

“Yeah, but if I knew Luke was on board the Death Star maybe I could’ve stopped him.”

“There’s nothing you, nor anyone else, could do to prevent him from facing Vader. It was something he felt he had to do. If he hadn’t faced his father, the Emperor would probably still be alive. If Vader hadn’t killed Palpatine we’d still be under the Empire’s thumb.”

“Now wait just a darn minute! Are you telling me that Darth Vader killed Palpatine? Luke didn’t kill him?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. Darth Sidious was trying to kill Uncle Luke. Vader turned on Sidious to save him. By killing his master, as well as sacrificing himself, Anakin Skywalker destroyed the Sith and restored balance to the Force. Just like the prophecy predicted.”

“Darth Vader killed Palpatine! Now I’ve heard everything. Somebody shake me and wake me up. I’ve got to be dreaming!”

“I realize this is a lot to take in, but it’s all true. I wouldn’t lie to you about anything. Especially about something as serious as this.”

“I just don’t know what to believe any more Ben. I thought I did before we started this conversation, but now I’m totally lost.”

“I’m sorry Uncle Lando. I didn’t mean to upset you. I just told you because Uncle Luke made me promise.”

“I realize that son. Don’t worry about it. I’m sure I’ll get over it soon. It’s just that this is such a shock. It’s damned hard to believe.”

“I hope you understand why no one told you sooner. I hope you can forgive us.”

“Of course I forgive you. I can certainly understand why Luke never told me. I wouldn’t want anyone to know I was related to the galaxy’s most brutal assassin. Who else knows about this?”

“Only the immediate family. We didn’t tell anyone. Not until now. I hope you’ll keep it to yourself. I don’t think too many people would be as forgiving if they knew our true heritage.”

“Nobody would believe it. I didn’t. I’m still not so sure Luke was right. It’s got to be some kind of mistake. Who would ever believe that Darth Vader was Luke Skywalker’s father?”

“I would never have believed it myself if it hadn’t come directly from Uncle Luke. It is rather inconceivable.”

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“Luke Skywalker. Jedi Knight. The renowned hero of the New Republic recently passed away after a long illness from a heart condition,” the Holo-Net reporter stated as the holoscreen focused in on the Jedi Temple in the background. “This is the former Jedi Temple that once housed these great protectors of the peace. Now, it is a grand hotel hosting their clientele in luxurious surroundings..., ” the journalist continued, using this to go into a commercial.

Lando was standing in the living room of the Solo’s apartment on Coruscant watching the report. He sneered as he turned the holoscreen off. “As if any normal person could afford to stay there.” Shaking his head in disgust, he asked, “That’s it? That’s all they have to say about Luke?”

He started pacing back and forth ranting all the while. “They’re blind, ignorant fools. That half-witted reporter didn’t even bother to mention why Luke had a heart condition. He didn’t mention why Luke was a hero. He didn’t bother to say that Luke saved the entire Republic from Emperor Palpatine’s tyranny, nor Darth Vader’s wrath. That’s the only reason he died so young,” Lando snarled. “Whatever happened to Luke on that Death Star nearly killed him. He was never the same after that. Never!”

Chewbacca growled loudly in agreement with Lando.

“Calm down, the both of you,” Padmay told the disgruntled pair. Uncle Luke wouldn’t want you acting like this. He was always uncomfortable when people made a fuss over his role in the fall of the Empire. He didn’t like being called a hero. You’re aware that’s one of the reasons he went home to Tatooine.

“You’re right. I’m sorry. It’s just that Luke gave so much of himself. It seems as if no one appreciates all he did for them.”

“I know, but you must realize that people have short memories. They don’t know how much he suffered. Besides, the war is over and has been for quite a long time. People seem to have a way of forgetting things they don’t like to think about. They don’t remember how many people gave their lives for our independence. They forget the importance of events that transpired so long ago.”

“You make it sound like it’s ancient history. It wasn’t all that long ago that the Empire fell. People shouldn’t be allowed to forget. Too many lives were sacrificed in order to give these ungrateful louts the freedoms they take for granted every day. When I think about the hell Luke went through it makes me so angry. I can just imagine what Darth Vader did...,”

Padmay cut him off in mid-sentence. “You know Uncle Luke wouldn’t approve of you speaking of his father that way. Anakin saved his life. Luke did forgive him.”

“I still have a hard time believing that. Don’t forget. I knew Darth Vader. It just doesn’t seem possible that anyone so wicked could be Luke’s father. Let alone save his life. It’s not the kind of thing Vader would do. He hated the Jedi.”

“Darth Vader did not save a Jedi. Anakin Skywalker saved his son’s life.”

“Vader. Skywalker. What difference does it make? They were still the same evil person. For the life of me, I can’t see him saving anyone. It just wasn’t in his nature.”

“How do you know Anakin’s true nature? Are you privy to some information we weren’t? Are you saying that Uncle Luke lied about our heritage?”

“No. That’s not what I’m saying at all. It’s, I, err...,”

Padmay interrupted him again. “My mother said she knew it was the truth when Luke told her they were twins. Leia was certain that Darth Vader was her father. Luke felt it. So did she.”

“Luke must have been mistaken. That’s the only explanation. It’s just impossible that Vader was his father. Luke was such an honorable man and Vader was so vile. Even you have to admit that it sounds highly unlikely.”

“I’ll admit to no such thing. And please do not refer to my grandfather as Vader. His name was and still is Anakin Skywalker. A name that I am very proud of. A name Uncle Luke was proud to bear. You seem to forget that Anakin Skywalker was a hero of the Old Republic before he turned to the Dark Side!” Padmay was fuming.

“So I’ve been told by Luke many times,” Lando sighed. “Look. I’m not saying that I don’t believe Vader’s your grandfather. It’s just that I’ve seen him in action. He was short tempered and believe me, he couldn’t be trusted. He killed anyone who got in his way without a second thought. I know that for a fact. I just can’t see how Luke could be related to such a monster.”

Padmay gave Lando a menacing look as she said, “I guess that makes me a monster too. Darth Vader’s blood runs through my veins as well.”

“Okay, okay. I give up. You win again. As usual.” Lando huffed out, throwing his hands up in total surrender. “I guess you carry a lot of your mother inside you too. You’re just as stubborn as she was. Once Leia made up her mind she was like a rock. It was impossible to get her to change her mind.”

“On that point I have to concur.” Padmay knew Lando was right about her mother’s stubbornness, as well as her own. Even though he’d upset her, Padmay couldn’t stay mad at him. She cared for him too much. Lando and Chewbacca had been a part of the Solo’s lives since before she was born.

Lando and Chewbacca. They were always together now that her parents were gone. “Uncle” Chewie frighten had always frightened their friends because he looked so ferocious, but Padmay and Ben had always thought of him as an affectionate creature. They loved him dearly. Chewbacca was extremely loyal to those he loved and would protect them with his very life.

“I’m glad we finally agree on something. Even if it has to be a damned stubborn streak,” Lando teased.

Padmay couldn’t help but giggle.

“I knew I could get you to laugh. On that note I guess I’ll take my leave. You know what I

always say. Leave 'em laughing. Seriously. Duty calls and all that. You'll contact me if you or Ben need anything at all, won't you? Chewie and I will always be here for you. You do know that."

"Of course we know that Uncle Lando. You've always been a part of our family." Padmay reached out and hugged Lando tightly.

Though he claimed to be a big ladies' man, Lando always got embarrassed by outward shows of real affection. He returned the hug while looking sheepishly away.

"Thank you so much for taking time from your busy schedule to go to Tatooine. I know you wanted to be there for Uncle Luke. I know how much he wanted to see you before he died. I'm so sorry he passed before you arrived," Padmay sighed.

"Yeah. I wish I could have broken away sooner. I'm sorry we didn't have the chance to say goodbye. I'll miss Luke a great deal. I know Chewbacca will too. We'll always have memories of him to share with each other though. We can be grateful for that."

"Yes. He'll always be in our hearts and in our thoughts."

"Always," Lando agreed.

Padmay embraced them both as they bid her farewell. She thanked them once again for their trip to Tatooine and all they'd done to help. Padmay had tears in her eyes as she watched Lando and Chewbacca walk towards their speeder.

## Chapter Seven

- Lucian Gris -

~02/02/00 ABE: Two years, two months after the death of Emperor Palpatine.~

His most important command, bah! Command of boredom, Lucian Gris thought. He'd been told that this would be the most important mission since the fall of the Empire. He hadn't been told the specifics of course, but his superiors said that the Empire would certainly regain control over the galaxy, and more.

The Rear Admiral was told to order the remnants of the Imperial Fleet to patrol Geonosis' boundaries. If deemed necessary, they were to destroy rebel ships that came too close to the planet. Fortunately, the New Republic rarely surveyed the Outer Rim. Gris was thankful for that. He doubted what was left of the armada could defend a portion of Geonosis, let alone the entire system.

His primary order was to take two destroyers into the inner systems and continue raiding

outposts, but not to attract too much attention. His superior's assumed that even if these raids were reported, two antiquated destroyers would seem insignificant. Lucian didn't understand the importance of this mission, but dared not disobey his orders.

The raids Gris was ordered to undertake weren't just to scrounge for supplies. He was commanded to abduct women. Human women. He was told to take the outcasts; women whom wouldn't be missed. They were to be in good health and of sound mind. They were to be of child bearing years. His highest priority was to capture a few virgins. Gris was told that if he failed to find at least one virgin, the whole mission would be in vain.

Most of the outposts they raided were controlled by outlaws. The women Gris abducted hadn't caused any problems, as long as the leaders were paid enough to look the other way. In fact, the Rear Admiral employed some of the thieves to do the dirty work for him. It was much easier to pay criminals to snatch women than it was to send crewmen to procure them.

What the Empire wanted with all these women was beyond his comprehension. Lucian Gris had no use for the opposite sex. They were insignificant. Women were only good to carry on the blood line. Females did have their usefulness he supposed. Being ship bound most of the time, these abductees did come in handy to amuse the crew. The men who left their women behind on Coruscant and the other planets the rebels now controlled were the ones Gris had to placate. They often complained about losing their families. He kept these men busy with their duties and allowed them "recreation time" with a few of the captives. Protecting the few virgins he'd managed to find had been considerably hard, but allowing the men release with the harlots seemed to keep them satisfied. A few had even requested to purchase their favorites. Gris gladly accommodated them. A few females wouldn't be missed. As long as his superiors didn't learn of this exchange, he couldn't see the harm. Best to keep the crew happy. Besides, it didn't hurt his pocketbook either.

Lucian Gris had been given full command of the entire Imperial Fleet. What a joke that had turned out to be. The fleet now consisted of the eight Star Destroyers that employed the use of the cloaking device to flee the enemy over Endor. As far as Gris knew, these eight vessels were the only remaining crafts in the whole armada that had escaped annihilation or capture by the Rebel Alliance.

It was a total disgrace. All he truly was in command of was a bunch of derelict ships and deserters. But then, he was a deserter as well. He was keenly aware that he was lucky to be alive at all. If Darth Vader had survived the destruction of the Death Star he surely would have crushed

Gris for his cowardice.

Lucian often wondered when his superiors were going to make their move against his hated enemy. He wanted to exact revenge against the Alliance. Some of his family's friends had become renegades and fought against the Empire, but most had sided with Palpatine. Gris held no love for them either. Their children had bullied and teased him in his youth. His family had been very poor and Lucian hated being looked down upon like he had some kind of awful disease. He swore he'd be rich and powerful one day and get even with those who'd scorned him.

No one had dared make fun of an Imperial Soldier. That being so, Gris had run away from his impoverished family at a young age and joined the Imperial Navy.

The man was extremely impatient with the slow process of promotion. Through the years, he'd worked very hard to achieve a higher station in life and it seemed as if his move up the ranks was taking forever. In his long, hard climb up the social ladder, Lucian used whatever means necessary to attain his goals.

One of the most important steps Lucian Gris took was when he met a young heiress. Her family was rich and well established within the Empire. The female wasn't much to look at. In fact, she was downright homely. Her disposition was just as undesirable as her looks, but none of that mattered to Lucian. He didn't have to endure the ugly beast for long, just long enough to seduce her.

Gris never felt any affection for the girl, not being capable of loving an individual other than himself. Lucian held himself in too much esteem. When the heiress got pregnant with his child they were quickly and quietly engaged. He cared nothing at all about becoming a father, but a bastard was a bastard and still frowned upon. He was certain that the girl's parents would demand that he marry her. Getting her pregnant had been his objective all along. Lucian knew that such a marriage would secure him a position of prominence.

His assumption proved right when the pair were wed in a private ceremony. Her parents then used their connections to acquire Lucian's promotion to Second Lieutenant. The aristocrats couldn't have their daughter wed to a mere soldier. They were to have a big, fancy wedding when he returned from his first assignment as an officer. He would then be introduced to all the proper members of society. Gris knew that his social status would take a grand leap from that moment on. His ambitious goals would finally be realized once he returned from the expected annihilation of the Rebel Alliance.

Lucian had never expected that the Rebellion would cost him so much. He could have



been sitting pretty right now if those insurgents hadn't interfered with his plans. Who could've ever envisioned that such a small, unorganized group of misfits would overthrow the mighty Empire? They'd all pay dearly when the new Empire came into power. Lucian was certain of that fact.

The Rear Admiral was eagerly awaiting that most important event. The young man just could not understand why his superiors hesitated reestablishing their control over the galaxy. Patience, he thought. Only those above him knew what plans were intended for the Empire's future. Lucian Gris wished he knew what that future held in store for him.

## Chapter Eight

- Benjamin and Padmay Solo -

~18/02/30 ABE: Eighteen years, two months, two weeks after the death of Emperor Palpatine.~

Padmay Solo walked into the domed Senate Building. Her mind was full of reflection as she entered the massive, circular chamber that was filled to capacity. This was probably the same path her grandmother took when the Old Republic ruled the galaxy so many years ago, she mused. It was also the same hallway her Uncle Luke once walked after the New Republic restored democracy to the galaxy. It hadn't been long since his death. Padmay missed her uncle very much.

The teen headed to the repulsorlift station that Senator Hugo was assigned to. Every time Padmay entered the theater she cringed a little on the inside. She was never much for crowds and the din of all those argumentative voices reverberated through her head on a daily basis. She often left the sessions with a severe headache. She often wondered how Padme Amidala had done it day after day, figuring her grandmother must've had a great amount of stamina.

Padmay's mother had been elected to a seat here immediately after the Empire fell. Fortunately for Leia, she'd been lucky enough to escape the responsibility of attending these meetings. Confusion had spread throughout the galaxy once the New Republic gained control. Leia had been sent to help restore order as the new government established itself. She was gone from Coruscant most of the time. Restoring full democracy to the systems had taken a number of years.

Luke accompanied Leia on these important missions while his health still enabled him to.

He'd protected her from scuffles that sometimes arose due to dissidents that gathered among the crowds. They'd been swayed by Palpatine's lies and continued to hate the Jedi, but most people held onto their faith in the warriors. They hadn't believed the Emperor's accusations against them, but feared speaking up in the Jedi's behalf. Defending such "traitors" would've led to dire consequences.

Ben and Padmay had gone along with their parents on some of these missions when they were very young. Han had watched them while Luke and Leia were busy attending meetings. When the restless younglings grew to be too much for him to handle all alone he'd recruited Chewbacca to act as their babysitter. The beast had handled the mischievous tots with extreme patience while they constantly pestered him to play. They'd climbed all over his massive body, pulling his hair and screaming loudly in his ears. They'd teased and tormented Chewbacca tirelessly. Wookiees had violent reputations and were known to lose their tempers without much instigation, but his gentleness while watching over his impetuous charges still amazed Padmay to this day.

When the twins were a little older, they'd questioned their parents about how Chewbacca got to be their "uncle." Han explained that he'd rescued Chewie from a life of slavery. The creature felt he owed Han a life-debt. He'd released the wookiee from this obligation when he'd rescued him, but the obstinate beast wouldn't hear of it. He'd followed Han everywhere which frustrated him. Han tried to leave him behind on more than one occasion, but Chewbacca always tracked him down. He'd finally given up and taught the wookiee how to pilot the Millennium Falcon. They'd been together ever since.

Chewbacca had protected Padmay's family for as long as she could remember. He'd acted as a bodyguard for Leia, as well as protecting young Ben and Padmay while the family traveled throughout the galaxy.

Leia had been an excellent choice as an ambassador for the New Republic. She was very proficient at handling stressful situations and easing people's anxieties. Many had lost important positions after the Empire fell and worried about their futures under the new government. Most who'd served the Empire were forgiven their transgressions and given pardons to help relieve the tensions. They hadn't been given much of a choice under the circumstances. These leaders had to submit to the territorial governors that had taken control of their provinces without complaint. If anyone dared to voice their objections their entire families were placed in one of the numerous prison camps that had suddenly sprung up throughout the Empire during Palpatine's tyrannical

regime.

When Leia faced the citizens of these provinces more than a few spoke up against such traitorous acts by their leaders. They'd rejected the very idea of amnesty, especially those whose family members died in the Rebellion. Most of the officials had profited from their cooperation with the Emperor. Leia made the disgruntled citizens understand their leader's positions under such a sadistic ruler. She'd made them realize that these pardons, for those who'd deserved it, were crucial for a smooth transition to take place. She'd sworn each individual would be seriously scrutinized before exoneration was granted. Any leader who'd truly benefited would be dealt with accordingly. Leia eventually quieted all their fears.

Young Padmay didn't think she would have fared half as well as her mother. The girl had a quick temper and wasn't afraid to speak her mind. Padmay knew she wouldn't have been able to hold back her opinions of such cowardice and treachery. Senator Hugo reprimanded her many times about keeping her opinions to herself. He'd told her that she had no clue what it was like to live under such conditions. Who knows what she would've done in a similar situation?

Padmay was aware that she wasn't a good politician. A worthy representative had to have an ear open to all sides. They had to be fair and impartial. One had to keep their personal feelings to themselves. That was something Padmay couldn't do no matter how hard she tried. She was too opinionated. She couldn't hide her true feelings regarding cowardly actions. When Padmay felt something was wrong she voiced her opinion. It didn't matter who she offended. Senator Hugo told her that her outbursts would be her undoing.

Padmay had been Senator Hugo's aide for over three standard years now. It seemed a lifetime to her. Most of her classmates had gone on and achieved a much higher status. She often thought the only reason she was given this position was because of her family name. After all, if her parents hadn't been a big part of the Rebellion there probably wouldn't even be a New Republic. Not that the Alliance hadn't plagued Emperor Palpatine, but their assaults hadn't done much to harm the Empire. Without her family's assistance the entire galaxy would probably still be suffering under Palpatine's tyranny.

While waiting for the rotunda to come to order, Padmay thought about the changes the New Republic made since democracy was reestablished. Groups from each and every system were elected to represent their planet's issues before going before the Grand Committee to be voted on. Representatives all agreed not to have one Supreme Chancellor after Palpatine. He'd abused the position through bribery and corruption. He'd used his authority to establish himself as Emperor.

No one person should have such power. They'd never risk losing their liberty to such an oppressive ruler again. Education, medical research, technology, personal worship and other freedoms were taken from them while under his rule.

There were many atrocities committed while the systems suffered under Palpatine's reign of terror. Those who uttered resistance were murdered without a second thought. Thousands of innocents had been sent to prisons which were nothing more than death camps. They'd been put to work supplying the Imperial Forces with its needs in order to keep the dictatorial Empire in control. Rape and torture were every day occurrences. When these captives could no longer work due to starvation and disease, they were put to death in the most horrendous ways. Padmay wept at what these tormented souls had to endure during their imprisonment.

Her parents had escaped those horrors, thankfully. Her father had been a smuggler and avoided the Empire's notice before he took part in the Rebellion. Leia had been adopted by Bail Organa and hidden from Emperor Palpatine before her role in the resistance was discovered. Bail had helped to organize the rebel forces into the Alliance and undermined Palpatine at every possible opportunity. He'd managed to accomplish this while still holding his seat in the senate. He must've been a most resourceful man, Padmay thought. It was a shame she never had the chance to meet Bail. He'd been killed on Alderaan when the first Death Star destroyed the planet.

Padmay realized just how fortunate she was that she didn't have to suffer through such bleak times. She was aware how much her family sacrificed in order to restore democracy. Them, as well as many others. They'd willingly sacrificed themselves not only for her, but for the entire galaxy. Never again would such a suppressive dictatorship take their freedom from them. Not as long as she could help it. Padmay would do everything in her power to help keep the peace and freedom so many had given their lives for. She vowed that as long as she held breath in her body, a dictator would never rise to power again.

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The Senate meeting finally over for the day, Padmay went home and joined her brother for dinner. Though not really interested due to another headache, she asked him how his day had been.

"It was a great day," Ben answered as he grinned from ear to ear.

"I can see that by your lopsided smile. Why are you so happy?"

"Captain Rutger thinks I'll make a good starpilot. He says I have natural talent."

"I see. Now I understand that look of satisfaction on your face. I'm glad to hear it Ben.

I'm happy for you. I don't think I've ever seen you looking so fit and sure of yourself."

"I'd probably be a fat, lazy, miserable hypocrite by now if I hadn't quit politics."

"I guess it's a good thing you decided to quit then. I'd hate to see you so obese that you'd have to attend sessions in a repulsorchair," Padmay teased.

"Very funny dear sister, but you'd better start watching your own diet. You haven't given up your position yet. How many times have I come home and had to listen to your complaints? How many times have you told me you were going to quit? I know you don't enjoy being a part of that pretentious atmosphere any more than I did."

"Who doesn't complain about their job? Everyone has a bad day once in a while. I don't imagine I'll be quitting any time soon. What else could I do? Besides, maybe I can make a difference some day. Who knows?"

"Yeah. Who knows? Mother certainly made a difference. If it hadn't been for her a lot of systems probably would've remained alienated and never joined the New Republic."

"Mother did have a way about her, didn't she?"

"You mean she was as stubborn as hell and wouldn't take no for an answer."

Padmay laughed. "You're right about that."

"You have a lot of her tendencies too, you know."

Padmay feigned surprise, "You mean, I'm as stubborn as mother was?"

"You know you are. You've inherited her obstinacy, but don't sell yourself short Padmay. You're willing to stand up to people when you see an injustice. I don't think I've ever seen you back down from a fight. I know you've been told many times to mind your manners, but it's a rare thing to find someone who'll go against popular opinion for what they believe is right. If it weren't for people like you the Alliance probably would've never been founded."

"You should've never quit politics Ben. You've got a lot of mother qualities too. You would've made a wonderful diplomat."

"I've had my fill of politics, thank you very much."

"If you ever change your mind I'll put in a good word for you."

"I don't think I'd have to worry about getting back into political arena in that case. They'd never let me inside the door."

"And just what do you mean by that?"

"Let's just say you haven't inspired that many people, though I'm sure you've managed to insult quite a few."

“I’m working on that dear brother. I’ll change. You’ll see. I’m learning how to control my temper. I haven’t smacked you yet, have I?”

Ben laughed. “No. Not yet, but I’m keeping my eye on you.”

“Oh Ben. Stop your teasing.”

“Who’s teasing?”

“It’s time to shut your motor mouth Benjamin Bail Solo.”

“Okay, but if I shut my mouth how can I finish this delicious meal?”

Padmay shook her head in exasperation. She knew she’d never get the upper hand when her brother was in such a good mood. He’d tease her all night long. “Eat Ben. Just eat. Stuff your mouth so you can’t say another word.”

“Yes Padmay.” Ben crammed his mouth full of food and made funny faces at his sister while she pretended to stay mad at him.

After the meal the twins went out on the balcony and stared up at the stars. Ben thought of his uncle and recalled when Luke told him about his grandfather’s flying abilities. He’d said that he’d inherited his skill from his father. Though not as proficient as Anakin, Luke was still a good starpilot. Ben also loved to fly. He never felt so free when he was soaring among the stars. He hoped he’d inherited some of his grandfather’s flying talent as well.

Padmay knew that her brother inherited their grandfather’s mistrust of politicians. Ben had never liked the false smiles and pretense one needed to be a member of the senate. He’d stuck with it for over a year after their parent’s death in respect to his mother’s wishes, but he’d hated every second he’d been a part of it. It made Ben quite moody having to hide his true feelings. Padmay was glad when he was accepted by the G.S.A. She’d never seen her twin look so content.

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The Solo name was very important in gaining Ben’s admittance into the “Galactic Space Academy.” Wedge Antilles was a member of the Alliance and became good friends with Luke and Han during their campaign against the Empire. Wedge was now in command of the Academy. When the name Solo appeared on the list of new applicants, Ben was immediately accepted.

Steffen Antilles was in Ben’s class. Steffen was Wedge’s son. Due to their previous friendship when young, they sought each other out and soon became close allies again. They’d lost touch with each other because the Solo’s were gone from Coruscant most of the time.

Steffen often invited Ben home for dinner after class. Ben had met Steffen’s grandfather when young, but neither one had been allowed to hear his tales of war. Now that they were older,

Raymus Antilles entertained the young men after the meal this night with a few stories about the battles he'd fought in during the Clone Wars. His past experiences had made him quite valuable to the Rebel Alliance. He'd been one of the strategists who'd devised attack plans against both Death Stars. He'd achieved the rank of Vice Admiral before retiring from active service.

Raymus Antilles was quite a character. Ben took a liking to him right away. As the elder was recounting his tales, he told Ben that he looked quite familiar. He asked his surname.

"It's Solo sir. My father is Han Solo. He fought in the Rebellion along with your son." "Yes. I remember him. Wedge introduced us. Made quite a name for himself during the Rebellion. He helped to destroy the Death Star. Both Death Stars, in fact. He also helped round up the rest of the Clone Army after the Empire fell. Regardless, that's not who you remind me of. Who's your mother?"

"Leia Organa."

Raymus sat quietly for a minute, then leaned in close and whispered, "Are you referring to Bail Organa's adopted daughter?"

"Yes sir." Ben was quite surprised that Raymus knew Leia was adopted. He asked in a hushed tone, "How did you know my mother was adopted?"

"I think we'd better talk privately. Come into the study. We won't be disturbed in there."

They both rose and excused themselves. Ben was more than curious as he followed Raymus down the hall. They entered a room dominated by a huge bookcase, the shelves filled with dozens of ancient scrolls.

"A fine collection, isn't it?" Raymus asked after pouring them each a glass of brandy.

Ben accepted his glass and then replied. "Yes sir. How did you manage to acquire these scrolls? Where did they come from? They must be worth a fortune."

"These scrolls are much more valuable than a mere credits son. They came from the Jedi Temple. Cloned Troopers stormed the library with the intention of destroying all the records. Most of the scrolls were burned, but a senior member of the Archives hid as many as possible before being taken into custody. She was killed while under interrogation. Fortunately, a friend of mine discovered a message she'd left in the security tapes revealing their location. He sent them to me. He couldn't leave Coruscant because he was being watched. He knew I'd be able to hide them off world."

"It's a miracle they survived."

"Yes it is. Palpatine tried to destroy everything pertaining to the Jedi Order in an attempt

to erase their existence entirely. I probably should've returned these scrolls to the Archives once the New Republic was formed, but they're such a rare treasure I find it extremely difficult to part with them. I'm sure my son will return them once I'm gone."

"I'm certain he will. Future generations have a right to know who the Jedi were and what they stood for."

"I couldn't agree more, but that's not why I brought you in here. I assume you must have a million questions about how I know about your mother's adoption. Please be seated and I'll tell you all I can."

"Yes sir. I'm surprised you know about my mother." Ben sat down in an overstuffed chair. He was a little upset that Raymus kept these scrolls from the public, but who was he to vent his ire? Antilles only kept them because they meant a great deal to him. He must've known some of the Jedi whose names were written within.

"I know all about your heritage Ben. My wife and son know nothing about Leia's adoption, of course. It was important that her true identity be kept a secret."

"Why did you keep it from your family?"

"It would've been too dangerous. Emperor Palpatine might have interrogated them. My wife and son had to remain ignorant."

"Why would they have been interrogated?"

"Palpatine was already wary of my loyalty. I was assigned as the captain on Bail Organa's starship, the Tantive IV. Bail had many friends among the Jedi. Palpatine kept a keen eye on him, as well as everyone he associated with. He brought Master Yoda on board after Palpatine falsely accused the Jedi of attempting a coup. We'd managed to elude the Stormtroopers by escaping to a secret base far from Coruscant located in an asteroid field just outside the Outer Rim.

Thankfully, the bases' location was never known by anyone but the Jedi. Master Yoda knew Palpatine wouldn't be able to sense his presence that far from the capital."

"How does this relate to my mother's adoption?"

"I was getting to that. Where was I? Oh yes. Shortly after we landed at the base Obi-Wan Kenobi arrived in Padme Amidala's shuttle. They'd just come from Mustafar where Obi-Wan and Anakin faced Darth Vader. That's when I learned your grandfather had fallen victim to the Sith Lord."

"My uncle told me how his father died," Ben sighed.

Raymus continued. "No one knows for certain where Darth Vader came from. Bail told me



that he was responsible for leading the Cloned Troopers in the massacre at the Jedi Temple. Obi-Wan and Anakin followed Vader to Mustafar after they'd discovered their friends had been slaughtered. Obi-Wan defeated him after he'd killed your grandfather. He'd thought he left the bastard for dead, but Vader survived somehow. General Kenobi was very distraught over the whole matter. He'd lost many comrades that day. He considered Anakin his best friend and was heartbroken when he died. They were extremely close."

Ben knew now that the elder Antilles didn't know that Anakin Skywalker had turned to the Dark Side and was, in fact, Darth Vader.

"Nobody knows why Senator Amidala was on Mustafar, but Vader attacked her too. Maybe she was looking for Anakin at the Temple and he kidnapped her in an attempt to be paid a ransom. Regardless of why she was on the planet, Padme was in a bad state when Obi-Wan found her. The med-droids did all they could to save her, but Padme died in childbirth. She'd given birth to twins. She named them Luke and Leia."

Raymus paused. He still felt tremendous sorrow over what had taken place that day. He composed himself and continued. "Bail told me that Anakin was their father. I'd known that Anakin cared for Padme a great deal, and that she cared for him, but I was shocked to learn of their affair. Regardless of that, the children's existence was a serious threat to Palpatine. If he'd learned they'd been born he would've had them murdered. The Jedi separated the twins in order to keep them safe. Obi-Wan took the boy to Tatooine to be raised by his uncle. Bail adopted your mother."

"I understand why this had to be kept a secret back then, but why did you keep this information a secret for so long? My mother and uncle were no longer in danger after Palpatine died."

"It would have been a dreadful scandal for the Jedi, as well as Senator Amidala's family. Padme was a politician and Anakin was a Jedi. The Jedi aren't allowed to wed and illegitimacy still bears shame today. The disgrace would've been held over their children's heads their entire lives. It just wouldn't have been proper to disclose the truth and bring shame to all concerned. Best to let sleeping banthas lie as the saying goes."

"I appreciate your discretion sir."

"It's the least I could do. Such a terrible tragedy. Padme was adored by all who knew her. Your grandmother was such a gracious woman, and Anakin was a hero many times over. His heroics were well known throughout the galaxy. Pity the lad never had a proper funeral. Obi-Wan

told me that his body had fallen into the lava while on Mustafar and couldn't be recovered. All in all, a fitting end considering burning a Jedi's remains is their tradition."

Ben was tempted to tell the Raymus the whole truth, but it didn't seem important after so many years. He wondered how the old man would react if he learned Vader's true identity, but as Antilles had just said, best to let sleeping banthas lie.

"Now I know why you look so familiar. Are you aware how much you look like your grandfather?"

"I've never really thought about it."

"There's a strong family resemblance. Anakin was quite famous. I'm certain your uncle related this fact to you. He was admired by everyone. Especially by females of all ages. He was very handsome. Every woman dreamed of snaring him, even though they knew he could never marry. That didn't stop them from chasing after him relentlessly, but apparently Anakin only had eyes for Padme Amidala. I bet you have to fight the women off too, eh?"

"Tempting as that is, I've never allowed myself the pleasure. I've taken the same path as my uncle. He's trained me in the Jedi Arts."

"Really? I didn't think there were any Jedi left."

"There isn't now. Luke Skywalker was the last of the Jedi Knights after Yoda passed on. The last of my family after my parents died." Ben sighed. "I'm not really a true Jedi. I guess I never will be now that my uncle passed away."

"I heard about his death and was sorry to hear it. I was saddened when I heard about your parents' deaths too. It's so sad to be left alone."

"I'm not alone sir. I have a sister. We're very close."

"I know about your sister. My grandson mentions her quite often. I do believe he has a serious crush on her," the elder chuckled. "I'm glad to hear you're so close. Family is extremely important."

"I couldn't agree with you more sir."

"My grandson tells me that you are training to become a starpilot. Want to follow in your grandfather's footsteps I assume, just like your Uncle Luke did. I met him when he first joined the Alliance. He was a fine starpilot, even though he never trained formally. Your uncle inherited his skill from his father, you know. Anakin was the best starpilot I've ever seen. He could out-fly anyone in the Republic. He could out-fly anyone in the whole damned galaxy as a matter of fact. I've never seen anyone who could pilot a craft as well as he did."

“I’ve heard about his flying skills from my uncle.” Ben couldn’t help but smile. He liked the way the senior Antilles changed the subject with tact, knowing his interest in flying. He would have made a good diplomat.

“If you have half the natural talent Anakin Skywalker had you’re going to make an extraordinary starpilot.”

“Thank you sir. I plan on meeting your expectations.”

“Enthusiasm. That’s what I like to hear. To be young again and have such resilience.”

There was a knock on the door. Wedge came in and told his father that it was getting late and that he needed his rest.

“I guess it’s past my bedtime. My son is going to put this decrepit, old man in his crib now. He probably thinks I’ve had too much excitement for one day. If he only knew what this frail body was capable of in the old days,” the senior Antilles sighed while scowling at his son.

Wedge rolled his eyes. “I’ve heard many, many times how able bodied you used to be father, but you’re not a young man anymore. You need rest. It is quite late.”

“Bah! Sleep is just little glimpses of death. I’ll be in my grave soon enough. I’ll get plenty of rest then.”

“Let’s not go through this again. Especially in front of company. It’s rude.”

“Rude, smude. I’m just being honest.”

Ben cleared his throat in an attempt to lighten the situation. “I have to be going anyway sir. Your son is right. It is late. I have to get up early myself. I don’t want to be late for class.”

“At least somebody’s showing some sense around here,” Wedge sighed in frustration.

The elder Antilles scowled at Wedge again before saying, “You’ll have to forgive us son. We share a stubborn streak and often bicker this way. No harm done though, eh? It surely was a pleasure meeting you. I hope you’ll stop by again someday. I enjoyed our little chat. I get visitors so rarely these days. I miss sharing my adventures.”

“Thank you sir. If I get any free time I will visit again. I enjoyed your stories immensely. I’d love to hear more.”

“Stop by anytime. I’d like to tell you more about the Jedi, as well as Anakin. He was a great and fearless warrior.” The elder leaned in close to Ben and whispered, “You should be very proud of your heritage my boy.”

“Thank you sir. I am proud to be a part of the Skywalker line,” Ben responded quietly. He did not reveal the truth that, in fact, he was ashamed to be related to Anakin Skywalker.

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Benjamin Bail Solo graduated from flight school at the top of his class two weeks later. He'd lived up to Raymus' expectations. Thirty days allowed him sufficient time to become quite an exceptional starpilot. The teen had never felt so proud when Wedge pinned wings to his lapel.

Ben was excited to learn that Steffen was appointed to the same cruiser he'd been assigned to. The Solaris was a modified Nebulon-B vessel that had seen more than her fair share of action. Most of these old ships had been scrapped, but a few had been restored and were considered battle ready. Most were used as training vessels for the new recruits.

When the new starpilots saw the ancient, battle-scarred ship they were assigned to they were a little disappointed. They'd hoped to be appointed to one of the newer battleships, but it really didn't matter to them. The Solaris still had plenty of life left to her. Ben and Steffen expected to carry out quite a few missions on the grand, old lady together. They could hardly wait to be on their way.

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"Are you sure you don't want me to come and see you off Ben?" Padmay asked.

"I'm sure. It's hard enough for me to say goodbye without seeing you shedding tears."

"Oh Ben. I wish you didn't have to go. I'm going to miss you so much."

"I'll miss you too Padmay, but you realize that I do have to go. What was the purpose of me joining the G.S.A. if I don't? Besides, I'd be absent without leave. You wouldn't want to see me arrested for desertion, would you?"

"No. Of course I don't want that. I'm just being selfish and thinking of my loneliness without you around," Padmay sighed deeply.

"I'm sure you'll find someone to annoy while I'm gone."

"You see Ben. Who's going to tease me the way you do?"

"I could give Uncle Chewie a call."

"Don't you dare! He'd follow me around like he did when we were children. I'd never get a moments peace."

Ben laughed. "He always did keep close tabs on us, didn't he? He was afraid to leave us alone for a minute knowing how much mischief we'd get into. We never really minded him chasing after us though. He'd pick us up and carry us around on his huge shoulders. Nobody would dare pick on us when he was around."

"That's exactly my point Ben."

“What do you mean?”

“I do have a social life you know. Chewbacca will frighten away any male that comes near me.”

“Is there anyone in particular you don’t want chased away? Perhaps Steffen Antilles?” Ben grinned knowing just how much his friend crushed on his sister.

“No, but why take the chance? Besides, I don’t think Senator Hugo would be pleased by having a huge wookiee stomping around and getting in the way while we’re working.”

“You’re right about that. I’d better put that call on hold then.”

“You had better Benjamin Solo!” Padmay exclaimed, raising her fist in mock anger.

Ben snickered at Padmay’s pretense to punch him. “That’s settled then. I wouldn’t want to get your dander up.”

“You’d better not if you know what’s good for you.”

Ben laughed, but then his face grew serious again. “I guess I’d better get going. I don’t want to miss the shuttle.”

“Can’t you stay a little longer?”

“I’m afraid not. I’m already behind schedule.”

“I guess this is goodbye then,” Padmay pouted. Tears formed in her eyes.

Ben hated to see his sister upset. It tore at his heart. “Please don’t cry Padmay. I won’t be gone that long. Six months will pass by before you know it.”

“Maybe for you, but six months will seem like an eternity for me. I’ll be all alone.”

“You won’t be alone. You’ve got Artoo and Threepio. I’m sure Threepio will talk you to death. And talk, and talk, and talk. I swear he never shuts up.”

“He’ll shut up if I shut him down.”

They both laughed.

Padmay’s face became sullen once more. “Please take care of yourself Ben. I just don’t know what I’d do without you. I’d be absolutely lost.”

“What can possibly happen Padmay? We’re just going on a training mission. We’ll be lucky to get the chance to shoot at a couple of asteroids for target practice.”

“I do hope that’s all you’re going to shoot at!” Padmay exclaimed in fear.

Ben quickly changed the subject. He didn’t want his sister to worry needlessly. “We’ve never been separated before, have we sis? Not for this length of time anyway. I’m going to miss you a lot.”

“Don’t you dare change the subject on me Benjamin Bail Solo! I know what you’re trying to do. You can’t fool me. You can’t ease my fears that easily.”

“Would I do that?”

“You most certainly would.”

“There really isn’t anything to worry about sis. Nothing exciting ever happens to new recruits. All we do is the grunt work. Even if we did run into trouble they’d never send trainees out. They’d send experienced pilots.”

“I guess you’re right, but I’m still going to worry about you Ben. I just can’t help it.”

“I’ll worry about you too. Maybe I should give Uncle Chewie a call after all. Somebody has to be around in order to keep an eye on you.”

“If you don’t start moving soon neither of us will have to worry about anything.”

Ben realized how late he was. He had no choice but to leave immediately. “I wish we had more time Padmay, but I have to go right now. Otherwise I’ll miss the shuttle.”

Ben brushed Padmay’s cheek with a quick kiss as he rushed out to the landing platform. He jumped into his speeder and mouthed, “I love you sis,” before taking off.

“I love you too Ben,” Padmay shouted as he sped away. She sighed heavily, missing her twin already.

## Chapter Nine

### - Aboard the Solaris -

The Solaris had been patrolling the fringes of outer systems for the past six months. They’d been given the assignment of chasing down two Imperial Star Destroyers that had been spotted within the boundaries of the Outer Rim. These vessels didn’t pose any threat to the New Republic. They were more a nuisance to the planets they raided. No one had been killed during their attacks. Their sole intent was to acquire needed supplies. Command deemed this a fortunate circumstance. Confronting vessels left over from the old empire provided new starpilots the opportunity to learn from actual combat.

Ben and Steffen had only been on a few of these sorties. There wasn’t much to do on board other than occasionally chasing down the destroyers. Crewmen played cards and told tales of the Rebellion passed down from their parents. Their duties kept them busy most of the time, but on his down time Ben was restless and got bored easily. He missed Padmay a lot and thought

of her quite often.

The Solaris was to rendezvous with the Quasar tomorrow, the cruiser being their replacement. The crew's six month obligation was over and they'd finally be heading home. Ben was eager for the vessel to arrive knowing he'd be able to see his sister soon. Due to each being Force-sensitive, it gave them an extraordinary link with each other. It was even stronger than the bond they'd shared with their parents. They knew each other's moods without speaking. They felt each other's pain when one was hurt, felt gladness when the other was glad, felt sadness when the other was sad. Ben wondered if Padmay could feel how lonely he felt now.

Alarms blared throughout the Solaris as sensors picked up a target in the area. No time to dwell on loneliness now, Ben thought as he rushed down to the flight deck. He jumped into the cockpit of his T65A11 X-Wing and buckled in. The new starpilot punched the ignition and was headed out of the bay within minutes. He grouped up with his squadron and steered towards the TIE fighters that had exited the aged Imperial Star Destroyer.

"Out for another one of their raids," Ben said to his R4 astro-droid unit secured in its socket behind his cockpit.

"This is Rouge Leader. Cut the chatter. You all know what to do boys. Follow me and let's get at them. Let's show them what we're made of."

"This is where the fun begins," Ben said as a big grin spread across his face.

There wasn't much of a battle. The TIE's were just protecting their destroyer in order to give it time to flee. Ben sought out one enemy fighter and the dogfight began. A few barrel rolls and reverse thrusters and he came up on his foe's six o'clock position. Ben targeted the TIE in his crosshairs and fired a single burst with his KX410 laser cannon. It was a direct hit. Way too easy, he thought.

"Good shot Ben," Steffen shouted over his comlink.

"Nothing to it," Ben replied matter-of-factly.

"Got one coming up on your tail. I'm on him." Steffen soared up behind the TIE and fired.

Ben felt the shock wave from the exploding ship as it vibrated his ship. "Thanks brother, but next time don't shoot so close to my aft," Ben teased. "You almost shook out my R4."

"Don't worry. I know what I'm aiming at," Steffen retorted.

"You've got one on your tail now. I'm coming around for him." Ben flew up behind the TIE and took aim. Firing a single burst, the enemy ship blew to pieces. Ben piloted through the burning debris and pursued another TIE fighter. The pilot tried to evade him, but to no avail. Ben

targeted the TIE and fired. It was another direct hit. The young starpilot chased and destroyed two more.

Ben was in complete command of his X-Wing. He'd already learned how to channel the power of the Force in order to navigate his ship while at the Academy. He was using his abilities to guide him as he fought his sworn enemies. The TIE fighters couldn't lock on to his constantly changing position. Ben looped around in order to take out another craft. He targeted and fired.

It was another direct hit. That was six by his count.

The TIE's soon retreated and soared back to their destroyer. The battle was over for today. They'd be leaving the system, heading back to the protection of the asteroid field just outside the Outer Rim. There was no need for the Solaris to chase after them. The destroyer wouldn't try to enter the galaxy again for a least another month.

Ben hadn't understood his orders to stand down on his first sortie against a Star Destroyer. They were a part of the old empire and he considered them a threat to the New Republic. He thought the enemy should be completely annihilated. When he mentioned the point to one of his comrades an officer overheard his complaint.

The veteran had fought in some of the last stages of the Rebellion and he'd seen a lot of action. He tried to explain the situation. "Do you really expect us to hunt down every last man that fought against us Solo? We don't have the crafts or the manpower for that. Even if we did we couldn't possible find all their vessels. They'd play hide and seek with us and pick us off one at a time. We'd be putting our pilots at risk. These destroyers don't pose any real threat to us son. If you'd really seen action, maybe then you'd know what I mean. They're just trying to survive the same as we are. If we hunted them all down we'd be no better then Emperor Palpatine."

Ben never questioned his orders again.

"This is Rouge Leader. It's all over for today men. Excellent job. Let's head on home."

"Race you Ben," Steffen challenged.

"You've got to be kidding." Ben laughed as he leaned on the stick. He spiraled in a few victory rolls, then sped out in front of his best friend.

\*

Steffen stumbled for the third time as Ben helped him towards their quarters. They both bounced off the walls while making their way down the corridor getting stern looks from their seniors. They'd gotten a bit tipsy drinking Veronian wine that was supplied to all the starpilots after the confrontation. It wasn't a normal practice for their senior officers to provide spirits after



a sortie, but since they were being relieved in the morning, an exception had been made.

“You’re all fine pilots and I’m proud to serve with every one of you. Exceptional flying by one of our newbies,” Lieutenant Sagan said as he looked around the rec-room in order to spot Ben. “There he is, over at the sabacc table. That’s young Solo.” He walked over and slapped Ben on the back while filling his mug again.

Ben was feeling no pain by the time he fell into his bunk. He’d never been so proud when Lieutenant Sagan applauded his flying skills in front of the whole crew. Captain Brant was in the rec-room hailing his abilities as well. The wine flowed into his mug non-stop after such high praise, which earned more congratulations from the flight crew. Needless to say, the young man hadn’t needed wine to make him feel intoxicated. The praise alone gave him a high. He passed out even before his head hit the pillow.

It wasn’t long before Ben awoke with a start. He’d had a bad nightmare. His sheets were soaked with sweat, but he was shivering. The cool cabin wasn’t what caused him to shake so uncontrollably. It was caused by his nightmare.

Ben couldn’t recall too much about the dream, but it felt as if someone had tried to reach inside his soul and physically rip it from his body. A feeling of unlimited rage surrounded him. The teen would never forget the yellow eyes that glared fiercely at him. It left Ben feeling alone and unprotected. He couldn’t shake the ominous presence that seemed to permeate the whole cabin.

He rose from his cot and headed for the freshers. A sonic-shower was what the young man needed in order to cleanse himself from the repugnance the dream left behind. It made him feel quite nauseas. Ben shrugged his shoulders and sighed, hoping it was his drunken state that had caused him to have such a disturbing nightmare.

\*

Padmay bolted up in her bed trying to stifle a scream, but it did no good. She yelled out loudly, which brought Artoo to her chambers. Dismissing the droid, the girl couldn’t help but still shake in fear. She’d had a horrifying nightmare. Such an intense feeling of menace and hate had surrounded her. In fact, the feeling still lingered. Goosebumps raised on her arms, the hair standing straight on end. It felt as if something was trying to devour her very soul. It was almost like she was being sucked down into a deep, dark, bottomless pit with no chance of escape. It was those eyes, Padmay thought. They’d reflected total insanity.

The next morning Padmay got up and dressed for work. She hadn’t slept at all after her nightmare. She was afraid to go back to sleep. She kept thinking about those maniacal eyes. They

shook her to the core. She'd never in her life experienced such a disturbing dream and couldn't understand the feeling of utter disgust it left behind. She couldn't for the life of her comprehend its meaning. People say that daily anxieties come out in your dreams in odd ways. What could've possibly made her envision the malevolent being that sprang from her subconscious? She was worried about Ben, but Padmay didn't think that was the cause. He'd insisted that the voyage was a training mission, but what if her twin was in danger? What if this nightmare was really some sort of premonition?

Padmay missed her brother a lot. Since they'd lost Uncle Luke, Ben and she had grown even closer. He always cheered her when she needed it. Padmay needed his cheerful disposition now. She felt so alone and vulnerable. "Oh Ben. Why did you have to leave me all alone? I miss you so much," the girl moaned in sadness.

\*

Anakin Skywalker sensed a powerful disturbance in the Force that quickly spread throughout the entire galaxy. Something was very wrong. Balance between good and evil had been destabilized. He'd have to go to the Temple that stood on the rim of the Netherworld and find his Masters. He was certain they'd felt this disruption as well.

Most of the Jedi that entered the Netherworld could never travel beyond its borders, nor could they enter the in-between world that separated them from all humanity. There were exceptions to this rule, of course. A certain few had learned how to extend their life force through deep meditation, going beyond these boundaries in order to contact the living. Yoda, Qui-Gon, and Obi-Wan were among the limited number who'd learned this skill.

But Anakin Skywalker was no ordinary Jedi. His powers surpassed all of his brethren, even Yoda's. Anakin was the "Chosen One." He was born with the highest midi-chlorian count ever recorded. He was not born of man, but was sired by the midi-chlorians.

The Chosen One went beyond being a mere immortal. Anakin had the ability to breach the dimensions of space and time to visit parallel universes if he so desired. He could stay within this galaxy and see all the wondrous sights he yearned to see as a child. He could journey to the land of the living on a whim and watch over those he left behind. He could appear to them in spirit like Obi-Wan had with Luke. Anakin could speak to them and had the ability to influence one's decisions. He could be a significant part of someone's life, but he chose instead to stay with Padme. His lust for unlimited power in life had caused his wife's death. Their time together now was precious to him.

Before Anakin entered the Netherworld he'd stood in phantom form on Endor with Obi-Wan and Yoda in order to said goodbye to his son after being released from the Dark Side. That's all he was allowed to do. His soul had to be cleansed before he could enter the Netherworld, or have further contact with the living. All he'd harmed in life who'd passed into this spiritual dimension had to grant Anakin absolution in order for him to enter this plane of existence. Feeling the incredible amount of love the Chosen One felt for all life after destroying his Sith half, he was forgiven all past sins. Each and every soul knew that he'd been duped by Palpatine, just as many of them had been while alive.

Anakin felt Shmi Skywalker's presence the very second his spirit entered the Netherworld. His mother had been eagerly awaiting his arrival. He'd spent a great deal of time with her and they shared many happy memories before he went in search of Padme. Once he'd found his wife Anakin had fallen to his knees and pleaded for forgiveness for taking her life so many years ago.

The instant Padme saw him, she knew that her husband had finally been returned to her as he once was, before he'd turned to the Dark Side. The soul that stood before her was the man who'd fully captured her heart. He was the man she'd fallen so helplessly in love with. The spirit before her craved nothing of the material world. The lust for power that had consumed his soul while alive was gone, all his demons put to rest at last. She'd pulled her husband to his feet and embraced him. Padme told Anakin that he was forgiven as she'd plastered his face with kisses.

From that moment on the happy couple never left each other's side. Their love for each other shown with a brilliance that filled the Netherworld. Anakin thought that he and Padme had shared happiness on Naboo when they were first wed, but nothing on any earthly sphere could compare to the rapture they shared now. It was much more than sharing love as two separate individuals. They were a part of each other's souls. Nothing in all the heavens could separate them ever again. Their joy was complete.

When Anakin started on his trek to the Temple his heart literally ached. He felt as if his whole essence was being yanked from him. The Chosen One didn't want to leave his angel behind. He didn't want to leave Padme's side for a second, but this disturbance was compelling him to do just that. Something extremely dark and clouded was pulling at him. It was just out of his reach. It was almost a familiar feeling.

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The cloaked figure sensed their existence from even this distance. It was as if they stood by his side, his reach was so great. He would not fail to turn them to the Dark Side of the Force.

He would turn them. That, or he'd destroy them. Only with them as his allies could the brooding, young man fulfill his true destiny.

## Chapter Ten

### - Revelation -

~18/09/30 ABE: Eighteen years, nine months, thirty days (two weeks) after the death of Emperor Palpatine.~

Years had passed since Lucian Gris was given command of the eight destroyers that survived the Battle of Endor. He was no longer the same naïve young man who'd married in order to improve his status. A good portion of his life had been spent raiding the outer planets for the women his superiors ordered him to abduct. Every time a cruiser picked up these abductees, he'd hoped to hear word that the Empire had finally decided to strike back, but they'd remained passive. Lucian had just about given up all hope that he'd be able to seek retribution for all he'd lost. That is, until he received orders to report back to Geonosis.

Gris was escorted to the council chamber as soon as his destroyer landed on Geonosis. Officers from the other seven destroyers were assembled as well, along with members of the Trade Federation who'd remained loyal to the Empire. Something very important must be about to take place for so many to be summoned. The crowd gathered around conference tables that had been set up and chatted among themselves waiting for the meeting to begin.

Lucian found the seat he'd been assigned. Too nervous to sit, he turned to his right and joined the conversation. Rumors of impending invasion spread like wild fire. Not since Palpatine ruled had the man been so hopeful. He was filled with anticipation.

The main doors suddenly burst open interrupting murmurs of speculation. The insectoid leader of Geonosis walked through the grand entranceway and stood in front of the crowd, just as he'd done years earlier. Everyone was told to take their seats. Though too excited to sit still, Gris did as commanded.

Ceris banged his staff on the floor for complete attention. When the room finally came to order he began his speech. "Gentlemen. You must be full of wonder as to why you've all been gathered here after so many years. I have very exciting news for you. I've been given the honor of making this extremely important announcement. Today is going to be the most significant day of your lives." The insectoid paused for greater effect. "You're about to be greeted by our new

Emperor.” Ceris turned towards the opened doors and bowed.

Two rows of soldiers dressed in the garb of Palpatine’s Imperial Guard suddenly charged through the massive doorway. A tall figure shrouded in a billowing, ebony cape marched in between them and halted in the very center of the room. The hooded figure stood silently with a distinct air of authority as he nodded to Ceris, signaling him to continue.

Ceris rose to an upright position and resumed his speech. “My friends, as you are well aware we’ve remained practically invisible for many years. You’ve all had very important jobs to perform during this time. Your tasks may have seemed unimportant, or even trivial, but everything you’ve done so far has contributed to this remarkable day. I now ask you to all rise and show the deepest respect to our new monarch. I’m honored to present our new Master, Lord Vader.”

Gris’ jaw dropped open and he gasped loudly. He wasn’t the only one who’d been taken by surprise due to the unexpected revelation. He’d never heard such an intake of breaths. Everyone was in shock. He wondered how this was possible as he stared in amazement at the dark, robed figure. This man could not be Darth Vader. He’d died alongside Emperor Palpatine on the Death Star, hadn’t he? Everyone had thought so. Had the Sith Lord survived somehow and remained in hiding all these years? No. If Darth Vader survived the destruction of the Death Star he surely would’ve let his presence be known. Everyone in the hall quickly jumped up from their seats and bowed down before their new Emperor.

Lucian just couldn’t understand it. This man was Vader. He was certain of it. There was no doubt in his mind. You didn’t have to see the black suit of armor, nor the long, flowing, black cloak that was so much a part of Darth Vader’s impressive image to feel the familiar dark emotions emanating from this figure. Gris felt Vader’s brooding presence. They all did.

Yes. This surely was the Sith Lord back from the dead, but he was also much more than just the former Lord Vader. Such power had never emitted from him alone. Only when Darth Vader stood with Emperor Palpatine had such an overwhelming aura radiate.

“Rise,” the new ruler said as he took the hood from his head revealing his face to the crowd.

Lucian Gris had never seen Vader’s face before as it was always hidden under the black mask he’d worn. Only those with the highest of ranks had been allowed that privilege. Lucian never expected the feared being behind that mask to look normal.

The Rear Admiral knew the man who stood before them now was indeed Vader, but he appeared much younger than Palpatine’s apprentice should be. Though his true age was never

known, Darth Vader was in the Emperor's service for at least twenty standard years. How could the man truly be the Sith Lord?

The ten soldiers took their helmets off and stood proudly around their Master in a tight, protective circle. Lucian was stunned to notice that each shared the same face as their new Emperor. He puzzled over this strange occurrence, but then his eyes suddenly opened wide as realization dawned on him. Gris finally understood why he'd been commanded to abduct all those women. The Sith Lord had cloned himself! But why did he have to supply so many women if there were only eleven replicas of Darth Vader? If this young man was actually Vader's clone, where was the original? Had the Sith Lord died during the time span it took to clone these individuals?

A steady hum was heard as the crowd whispered between themselves. Lord Vader looked around the room at his audience and was pleased by their stunned reactions. The man literally thrived on such disorientation. He finally spoke, "Gentlemen. You've been waiting many years for the former Empire to be restored. You need not wait much longer. Your patience shall finally be rewarded. The time has come for our greatness to be revealed to the galaxy. Please bear witness to our infinite strength."

Their new Master lifted his hands towards the doors at each end of the chamber. The hinges almost pulled completely off the ancient wood as they slammed open against the walls. Lord Vader bade his audience to the outdoor balcony.

The assembly immediately rushed out to the weathered structure that overlooked the arena. They gazed upon a huge army gathered below them. Gris couldn't believe his eyes. No wonder he had to continually supply his superiors with women through the years, he thought as he stared unbelievably at the innumerable amount of bodies amassed below. There were hundreds, upon hundreds of soldiers standing at attention, as well as filling the stands. Even from this distance Lucian could tell that they were all exact replicas of Darth Vader. The man was completely dumbfounded. Overcome with emotion, tears of elation seeped from the corners of his eyes. The Rear Admiral would finally be able to seek his revenge. At last!

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Ceris slowly stepped into the background as Emperor Vader revealed his plans for glory. His role was no longer necessary to the "new empire" his Master was describing. It had taken many years to accomplish, but Ceris had done his duty. He'd repaid his debt to Darth Sidious. Very soon now, he'd be allowed to return to the catacombs and enter into a well-deserved

slumber once again.

As the new monarch continued his speech, the insectoid thought back to when his role in this miraculous event began. His top priority was to keep the package hidden at all costs. He was also instructed to keep the parcel in a suspended state. Ceris made arrangements to have a small cryogenic chamber constructed inside his cubical deep within the catacombs. The contents were under his constant surveillance while he awaited the cubicle's completion. When finally done, the insectoid entered his impenetrable cell and put himself into a dormant state. He knew the package would be safe while he awaited orders to proceed. Years passed before the leader of Geonosis was awakened again.

There were different paths the future could take, but the Sith Lord had been forewarned of one outcome. This premonition allowed Sidious to see the downfall of his vast Empire. He foresaw the cloaked destroyers as they fled the battle over Endor. He also saw his own death, as well as his successor's, Darth Vader. Because of this vision Sidious knew he'd have to take steps in order to secure his "new empire." If these tragic events did occur, he instructed the insectoid to contact the Imperial Navy and order the surviving destroyers to Geonosis. He was to make an example of such cowardice by executing the officers in front of underlings. Though it had taken a while to contact all the ships, Ceris did as ordered. The traitors had been terminated.

Following the completion of this act all promotions had been left to his discretion. The remnants of the armada were to protect the system from the Rebel Alliance. The insectoid was also instructed to order two destroyers to raid the outer planets for women. Ceris was to keep these "volunteers" under his protection and in the best physical condition. Many women would be needed for Sidious' plan to succeed. This had been the first stage of his mission.

After a number of women were transferred to Geonosis the insectoid was to commence the second phase of his mission. He was instructed to unseal the mysterious package. Ceris remembered how he'd hardly been able to contain his excitement when finally unwrapping it with trembling hands. He'd removed the sealed article inside. It contained several vials with a substantial amount of blood. The Emperor had explained that he'd taken it from Darth Vader when he was on the med-table after his near death on Mustafar. The insectoid was to carefully reanimate these cells, then inseminate a virgin. She was to be human and in perfect health. There were to be no imperfections in the surrogate as any defects might be passed on to the child. Once the "New Lord" was born Ceris was to terminate the female. Sidious had explained that it wouldn't be prudent to keep the surrogate alive fearing spies might learn of the extraordinary

event. That knowledge must be kept secured at the highest level.

When Sidious had Lord Tyranus place the order for soldiers from the Kaminoans, they'd acceleration the Stormtroopers growth rate while cloning them. They hadn't known how long it would take before the army was used. Unfortunately, aging them too quickly interfered with the clones intelligence. In order to prevent such a reoccurrence, Darth Sidious instructed Ceris to age Vader's clones normally, especially the New Lord.

After his young charge had grown a few years Ceris was to make certain the lad studied the holograms that were included in the package. They provided all the information the boy needed in order to learn about the Jedi. It was imperative that he know everything about this extremely dangerous and once powerful enemy.

Ceris was to see that his young Master trained to fight with a lightsaber. Though this exceptional skill was already implanted deep within the boy's memory, it was important to keep his skill honed. It would also keep the lad in the greatest physical condition. It took years of special training to best one's foe with a lightsaber. The Emperor had no use for blasters. Anyone could aim and shoot. Sidious considered the lightsaber civilized weaponry. In his opinion, wielding such a weapon was the only honorable way of defeating an enemy.

Ceris started on the third stage of his mission while his young charge grew to maturity. During this time the insectoid was to create another cloned army by using the blood cells provided. He was to dilute the cells with another donor so they'd be weakened. Sidious didn't want another being as Force-sensitive as their Master would be. The clones would be exceedingly more powerful than the soldiers the Kaminoans created, but this new army would have to follow their new Emperor's orders unequivocally.

Ceris was to inseminate as many women as possible in order to create these unique soldiers. When the original blood supply ran out he was to acquire more cells from his Master. The women Gris abducted would provide him with the necessary surrogates.

The insectoid had taken it upon himself to be the donor required to dilute the blood cells used. His race had evolved from insects. There was no stronger killer instinct than in an insect. They killed, they ate, and they reproduced. That was all his species did at one time. His kind had evolved to a certain attained knowledge of course, but their desire to kill was still exceedingly strong. What better army could he possibly provide? These soldiers would fight to the death for their Emperor.

The last stage of Ceris' mission was to use Geonosis' foundry in order to build a new and



more powerful Death Star. The third battlestation would be completed in segments as the first one had been. He was to construct the vessel under landing sites Federation Starships once used. This would allow easy access to the surface, enabling workers to assemble it in space at a later date. It was imperative that the ship's construction be kept a secret. As the city's foundry was beneath these sites, the battlestation's fabrication had been kept well hidden from prying eyes.

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After the revelation of Lord Vader's reemergence was made known to all on Geonosis, Lucian Gris was summoned to his private chambers. The officer was excited and full of wonder. He sat in the ante-chamber waiting impatiently for nearly an hour. An Imperial Guard finally announced that his Master was ready to receive him. Lucian nervously walked through the portal.

"Admiral Gris. Please come in. Sit. Relax yourself. You don't have to be so nervous. Would you like some refreshment?"

"That isn't necessary your Eminence," Lucian said as he bowed deeply before his new Master.

"Rise. Please make yourself comfortable." The Emperor gestured towards the overstuffed sofa.

Lucian walked over to the luxurious piece of furniture that took up much of the room and sat on the edge, afraid to mar its surface with his worn uniform.

"Well then. Down to business. I'll get right to the point. I won't keep you in suspense any longer. Are you pleased with your command Admiral?"

"Very pleased your Eminence."

"Then you'll be even more pleased at what I am about to offer you." A false grin spread across Vader's face. The amount of greed that this insignificant being emitted repulsed him greatly. He paused letting tension build before saying, "You'd make me extremely happy if you would consider taking the position as the commander of my new Death Star."

Lord Vader waited for Gris to eagerly accept his generous offer. He'd scanned the minds of everyone at the meeting as he proclaimed himself to all. The Admiral had quickly come to the conclusion that he was cloned from the original Vader. It was quite apparent that Gris was somewhat intelligent, to a certain degree at least. Intelligence was a requirement that was needed to command a Death Star. None of the others had been as quick minded, nor as greedy. This revolting, little man had performed many unscrupulous acts in order to achieve his grand goals. Lord Vader needed someone who held such a burning desire for position. Gris was a coward at

heart and could be easily manipulated. The new Emperor would allow no one to take exclusive control from him.

“A Death Star? You’ve constructed another Death Star?”

“Yes. A more powerful Death Star in fact. This battlestation will be the most powerful source of destruction ever created. There will be no possible way for anyone to break through its defenses. I’ve made certain of it. This Death Star will be impenetrable. Naturally, if you accept my offer, you’ll receive another promotion. How does the title of Grand Moff suit you?”

“Grand Moff? There isn’t any higher rank! You honor me too much your Grace. I’d be honored to accept the position, especially now that I’m aware of the need for all the secrecy. I have to admit that I’ve had doubts about the Empire’s future.”

“It was vital that this information remained classified. We had to grow this new body I now inhabit, as well as create our Grand Army. This all took time.”

“I understand that my Lord, but why the need to replicate soldiers from Darth Vader? I’m sure you could’ve found another suitable warrior to create your army.”

“Perhaps, but my needs warrant more than mere clones. The Clone Army served me well in the past, but they were all weak minded and easily fooled by those who are Force-sensitive. I can’t afford to make the same mistake this time.”

Gris was confused by Vader’s statement. He didn’t know why his new Emperor said that the Stormtroopers had served him before, but kept these thoughts to himself as he asked, “Why did you make so many duplicates of Vader? Aren’t you worried they may try to overthrow you?”

Lord Vader chuckled. “Do you think me a fool? My children have been altered, yet they are more powerful than any soldier could ever hope to be. Each clone is taken from my bloodline. They all possess the power of the Force, just as I do. But my children will never be as powerful as I am. Besides, they’d never risk my wrath by attempting to oust me. Don’t fret so much about the impossible Lucian. Never fear. I, and I alone shall rule.”

“Wouldn’t it have been wiser to reactivate the Droid Army my Lord?”

“Compared to my children? Don’t be ridiculous!” Vader spat out, not believing the man could be so naïve. “Machines can’t think on their own initiative. They have to be controlled by humans. People are weak and have failed me in the past. I will not risk failure again. It’s enough that I’m taking a chance on you. I can only be assured of success by having an army empowered by the Force.”

Gris didn’t expect such a harsh reaction and feared what Vader’s clone might do. “Please

forgive me my Lord. I didn't mean to question you. I hope you'll accept my sincere apologies."

This seemed to quell Vader's ire somewhat. He managed to calm himself before saying, "Of course I forgive you Lucian. I understand your doubt. Please ignore my outburst. It's just that I'm so excited finally being able to set my plan in motion. I've been waiting my whole life to rule the galaxy. My children number in the millions. I'm certain they'll secure my throne for me again."

Gris was utterly baffled. He sat silently afraid that he might anger his Master further if he uttered his thoughts.

"What bothers you Grand Moff?"

"Forgive me your Grace. I know this might seem a preposterous response, but you said that the army you created are your children. I don't understand why you said that. I can appreciate that they were cloned from your blood cells, but they aren't actually your children. Shouldn't they be considered your brothers? What did you mean by saying you'll rule again? You've never ruled the galaxy. Have you forgotten about Emperor Palpatine? Pardon my ignorance, but I haven't a clue what you're talking about."

"No. I don't suppose your feeble, little mind can grasp it at all," Vader replied as he reflected on how all this came about.

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When Darth Sidious went under the guise of Palpatine he'd sensed a being emerging within the Force that held an incredible amount of power. That being was Anakin Skywalker. He had more abilities than anyone, including himself. The Dark Lord was aware of Anakin's abilities from the moment he'd seen him. For this reason, he befriended Anakin and became his mentor. He'd nurtured the boy and calmed his fears, and treated him like a son.

Sidious caused the boy great confusion through the years. Anakin was a Jedi and trusted them beyond the norm. The Sith Lord misled him which gave Anakin reason to doubt the Jedi. Due to the Sith Lord's lies, Anakin placed more trust in him than he did the Jedi. This made the Sith Lord extremely happy. He was right to latch onto the boy when young. He'd foreseen that Anakin might one day pledge his soul to the Sith.

The tide turned in his favor when Anakin started having visions of his wife's death. Due to his fear of losing her, Darth Sidious managed to seduce his friend to the Dark Side of the Force. He'd sent the newly named Darth Vader to the Temple in order to kill all the Jedi, but Obi-Wan hadn't been there. He'd followed Anakin to Mustafar and confronted him. Sensing Vader's danger, Sidious went to the volcanic planet. He arrived too late. After severely wounding him,

Obi-Wan left believing Anakin would soon be dead .

The Sith Lord felt Anakin's excruciating torture as he knelt beside his incinerated body. The young man had to fight for each and every breath, but it was a good thing. The agony he suffered bound his loyalty to the Sith. Sidious could feel Vader's exorbitant hate flow like the lava around them. He had an overpowering need to exact revenge on the Jedi. This made his new apprentice a most valuable ally.

Darth Sidious then leaned over Anakin and touched his charred brow. He'd used the Force to reach inside the young man's mind. He'd captured every thought, every emotion, every experience the troubled soul had gone through.

Sidious then transferred his life experiences to his apprentice, as well as his complete knowledge of the Dark Side. He'd left an imprint of himself within every cell of the young man's mind and body. Their essences mixed and blended into one. No longer were there two separate intellects, but one intelligence merged together in two separate bodies. Darth Sidious was one with his young apprentice, and Darth Vader had become one with him.

The Sith Lord hadn't really lied when he'd told Anakin that together they'd learn the secret to cheat death. He'd just never explained that he already knew the technique to accomplish this miraculous deed. One could not actually save one's body from expiring. One could only achieve immortality by integrating oneself with another being. Due to his age, and meshing with a much younger man, Sidious had quadrupled his life expectancy. He'd mused with satisfaction that he might even live even six times that length.

The Emperor had been very pleased with himself for being able to trick Anakin into believing he had the ability to save Padme. It wasn't possible to bring the woman back as she once was, of course. He could have saved her essence from death, but not her body. Darth Vader would've killed him for that small misrepresentation of facts. The Sith Lord was surprised he'd been able to keep the information hidden from his apprentice all the years that he'd served him.

Darth Sidious had forced himself to withdraw from Vader's mind, lest he sap all of his power and his life force. He couldn't allow either one of them to be sucked down into death. His new apprentice had been extremely important to the Emperor's vision of the future. He'd needed this vessel to continue his conquest. Vader's powers were immense, even with all his injuries, while Sidious' powers were weakening. As he withdrew from Vader's mind, the Sith Lord locked this method of transference deep inside his subconscious. The young man was never aware that his Master had transferred his essence into him. This knowledge was meant to be awakened well

in the future when Sidious' frail body failed.

Emperor Palpatine had seen visions of the Empire's future though it was very clouded. Vader could have been a tremendous threat to him once his revenge against the Jedi was sated. With the extraordinary abilities Anakin held, and his continuing lust for power, the young man could've easily overthrown him. Since Sidious needed Vader to survive to a ripe old age, he needed to find a way to subdue him. The Sith Lord hadn't wanted to eliminate his apprentice. He had become quite fond on Anakin.

Darth Sidious soon realized that he'd already had the solution to this problem. He'd used Anakin's overwhelming love for Padme Amidala to secure his transition to the Dark Side. He used that weakness again. The Sith Lord made certain that Anakin knew he'd caused his own wife's death. Sidious continually tortured him by bringing the subject up at opportune moments, never letting the young man forget that he alone was responsible for Padme's demise. Anakin's love for Padme had been so intense that his guilt completely consumed him. His soul literally withered up and died. The Dark Side soon devoured what was left of his spirit. Sidious was assured of Anakin's loyalty after what little emotion left inside him was destroyed. His desire to overthrow his Master was substituted by an extraordinary need to seek revenge against the Jedi, especially Obi-Wan Kenobi. Darth Vader was easily controlled from that moment on.

Anakin's guilt slowly subsided after time as all traces of humanity were absorbed by the Dark Side, of course. That was when he truly became a Sith Lord. Sidious had been keenly aware that Vader craved his knowledge and would attempt to learn all he could before he tried to murder him. He didn't blame his apprentice. The temptation was just too strong. After all, he'd done the same. He'd killed his Master, Darth Plagueis. Being a cautious man, Sidious kept Vader at bay, only allowing him tidbits of information. Just enough to keep the young man yearning for more, but never quite enough to overthrow the Sith Lord.

Sidious had often seen visions of the great empire he'd one day rule, but the future wasn't carved into stone. He hadn't been certain that Darth Vader would survive any more than he would. His vision of events to come had been too obscure. Because they'd fused at the molecular level, taking Vader's blood had guaranteed Sidious' survival in a more suitable body. Regardless, he needed to find a way to insure that he'd be reborn without interference.

Coruscant was the center of the Empire and the Sith Lord was assured of his safety, but Geonosis was a more suitable place to maintain the secrecy needed to put his plot in motion. The planet provided the perfect setting to do what had to be done. He'd be able to maintain the

strictest security. Since he'd be reborn as an infant, he'd be extremely vulnerable. His protection was paramount. He would've preferred if Poggle the Lesser still ruled Geonosis. He was more intelligent than his son, but unfortunately, Poggle was long dead. That being the case, Ceris had to suffice. The Emperor had gained the insectoid's complete loyalty when he lied to him about the Separatists' attempt made on father's life. Appointing the ugly beast the ruler of Geonosis added to Sidious' security. He was well aware that the creature would never allow harm to come to his Master. The Sith Lord's safety was guaranteed.

The Emperor's plot worked out perfectly. Ceris had carried out his orders to the letter, and Darth Vader had been of great value to Sidious in his attempt to destroy the Rebels. It was a shame his apprentice had been so weak willed and easily manipulated, but it had been extremely advantageous for the Sith Lord. Through Anakin's vulnerability, he'd given Darth Sidious free reign to gain control of the galaxy. The Emperor had become exceedingly powerful with Vader's help, and through Darth Vader, Sidious had been reborn. With their combined abilities, the Emperor's powers would be limitless.

There was one enormous flaw that the vain man had overlooked. Sidious came up with a brilliant plot, but he hadn't perceived Vader's increased abilities since merging with him. The only thing that fully survived his rebirth was his complete knowledge of the Dark Side. The Sith Lord's essence was dominated by his apprentice, just as Sidious once dominated and controlled him. Vader had gotten what he'd continually yearned for and managed to keep hidden from his Master for so many years. He'd beaten Darth Sidious at his own game. Darth Vader had finally overthrown Emperor Palpatine.

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The new Lord Vader had almost forgotten that Gris was sitting patiently waiting for his response, so intense were his memories. "My apologies for making you wait while I reminisced Grand Moff. I'll answer your questions now. Unfortunately, I'm afraid you'll never comprehend the full extent of just who and what I'm now capable of. I'll do my best to explain it in terms you can understand."

"I won't bore you with the science that made this all possible, but I'm not merely Darth Vader's clone as you so cleverly deducted. I'm much more than that Lucian. Though I inhabit a new and younger body, I can assure you that I am Darth Vader reborn. His full essence resides within this shell, including all of his past experiences and knowledge. Palpatine's life force also dwells within me, as well as his vast knowledge of the Dark Side of the Force. Our powers have

been fused. I am more powerful than Emperor Palpatine ever hoped to be. I am definitely more powerful than either of us were separately. You could consider me a Force child. I was born with unlimited powers. That's why I refer to the army as my children. They were born from my blood and each one contains my abilities. They're invincible. Hence, my Grand Army will be the greatest and most feared fighting force the galaxy has ever seen. My children all have the ability to defeat our enemies through the powers of the Dark Side. Our success is assured."

Lucian was utterly speechless. Vader had been right when he said he wouldn't be able to understand his explanation. Though dumbstruck, he forced himself to reply, "Yes my Master. We'll know the glory of your Empire once again."

"We surely shall. Now then. The reason I called you in to speak with you privately..."

## Chapter Eleven

- Anniversary -

~19/00/00 ABE: Nineteen standard years after the death of Emperor Palpatine.~

Coruscant is an incorporated city that covers the entire surface of the planet. The sphere is located at the core of the galaxy. It's only fitting that the metropolis be dubbed the center of democracy. It is on this orb that the Galactic Senate creates the laws that govern the systems belonging to the New Republic.

The Solo family has resided on Coruscant ever since the downfall of the Empire. It was important that Leia Solo make this planet her permanent residence because of her position in the senate. This day was significant to the Solo household because Ben and Padme celebrated their birthdays.

It was also the anniversary of the death of Emperor Palpatine and the fall of his evil Empire. On this date, exactly nineteen years ago, the second Death Star exploded over Endor ending his sadistic control over the galaxy. Victory was declared as the Imperial Fleet fled. The Clone Army laid down their weapons in surrender allowing the Rebel Alliance to claim independence from the tyranny they'd endured for so long. The New Republic pronounced this date a day to celebrate. The festivities always lasted for days.

The annual "Independence Dinner" was to be held tonight at the "Freedom Palace," formerly known as Palpatine's "Imperial Palace." Dignitaries from every system would be attending the dinner, as well as attend other festivities that were planned for the following days.

Padmay was to go the banquet with Senator Hugo and his family. She would've preferred to go to local parties and celebrate with her friends like she always did, especially since it was her sixteenth birthday. Unfortunately, Senator Hugo requested that she attend the affair with him this year. She could hardly refuse. Besides, Ben would be there to celebrate with her.

There would be quite a few speeches made by politicians. They'd glorify the heroes, as well as honor the thousands of lives that were sacrificed during the war. Padmay knew her family name would be high on that list. Senator Hugo recognized a political opportunity when he saw it and took advantage of the situation. That was why he'd insisted Padmay attend the affair with him this year. He planned to introduce her as Han Solo's daughter, a renowned hero of the New Republic. Padmay was certain that Hugo wouldn't be flaunting her family name if he knew she was the granddaughter of the infamous Darth Vader.

A group of new recruits had been chosen to honor the Rebel Alliance and their role in the Empire's defeat. The Solaris was just one of the vessels who'd been granted the extreme honor of providing pilots to participate in reenactments of battles fought against the terrible dictatorship. Ben's squadron was selected to be among this group. He was home on leave and anxiously awaiting the event.

Padmay was sitting at her vanity trying to style her hair for the evening when she heard a knock on her door. Hoping it wasn't the seamstress she whispered under her breath, "If I have to go through another fitting I'll scream."

Ben cautiously opened the door and poked his head in. He could sense Padmay's mood and it wasn't a very happy one. He asked, "Are you decent?"

"Oh. It's just you. I was afraid I'd have to try that gown on again. How many times does one have to be fitted for just one dress?"

Ben entered the room stifling a laugh.

"Don't you dare laugh at me Ben Solo. You don't know how lucky you are. All you have to do is put on your dress uniform and you're ready. I must've tried on at least a dozen dresses for this grand affair. I'd just as soon go in my dressing gown."

"Calm down Padmay. It's just a dress."

"Just a dress, he says. I wish just for once men would have to go through this ridiculous ritual. You've no idea what it is to be a woman and what we have to endure in order to receive male approval. Men rule the galaxy, after all."

"I'm glad I was born a man then." Ben teased.



“I’m sorry Ben. No offense meant. I’m just in a foul mood.”

“I know.”

“You always aware of my moods. I sometimes forget how easily you sense my feelings.”

“I sense them very well. Too well in fact. That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. You look tired Padmay. How have you been sleeping?”

“Have you been having the nightmares too?” she asked, although Ben sharing the same dreams didn’t really surprise her.

“Yes. I’ve had a few.”

“Oh Ben. They’re so unsettling. Why would we be having such disturbing dreams?”

“I can’t imagine why. I’ve never experienced anything like them before. It’s those strange eyes that are so unnerving. Just thinking about them gives me the creeps.” Ben shivered despite the heat of the day.

“I’m worried Ben. I’ve felt so, so....”

“I’ve felt unsettled too. Something is happening within the Force. I can feel it. I know you can too. I wish I knew what’s going on. I wish I could understand our nightmares. More than anything, I wish Uncle Luke was here to talk to. He might be able to explain them.”

“I miss him too,” Padmay sighed.

Ben walked over to his sister and put his arm around her shoulder. They consoled each other while still wondering what their horrifying nightmares meant.

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The newly promoted Grand Moff was fidgeting and tugged at the collar of the vestment he wore. He was accompanied by four other officers. They were all dressed in rebel uniforms and were deep inside enemy territory. What if they were caught? Spies were executed.

“You’re sweating Lucian,” Lord Vader stated. “There’s no reason for you to be so nervous. These renegades can’t see through our disguises. You’re perfectly safe.”

“I’m sorry your Grace. It’s just that I’ve never worn one of these uniforms before. I feel so....”

“Traitorous? You needn’t worry over such minor matters Grand Moff. I shall protect our little entourage. You have my word that no harm shall befall you. I assure you of it.”

“I’m certain of that my Lord. It’s just that being here is extremely dangerous.” Lucian tried not to think about the foolhardiness of this mission, knowing Vader could easily sense his thoughts.

“I agree it is a little risky, but foolhardy, never. Only in this way can we learn the strength of our enemy. I have the power to probe these insignificant minds and see exactly what we’ll have to overcome in battle. We have to know exactly where to strike in order to make the most impact. We have to rattle this New Republic to its foundation. What better way to eliminate their alliance than to strike all their weak points? It’s easy for me to read their thoughts. I’ve already learned where their important bases are. Sending spies would’ve taken too long. I’ve waited long enough as it is.”

Lucian looked at his Master in amazement.

Vader looked back with knowing eyes. “I see you finally understand.”

Lucian Gris did understand. He was in awe of his Master. Never before had Lucian felt such confidence and determination in an individual. The man was the most powerful being he’d ever encountered. The old Vader had never expelled this amount of authority. He couldn’t read people’s minds like his clone could. Lucian had complete faith in this..., what was the term he was searching for? Supreme Ruler?

“Yes. Supreme Ruler. I rather like that title Grand Moff. I like that title very much. It’s very befitting.”

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Though espionage was the main purpose for this mission, it wasn’t the real reason the Sith Lord wanted to come to Coruscant. He could’ve gained this knowledge without making the trip. He had the ability to reach this far with his mind alone, but the man was compelled to come. He’d sensed his grandchildren’s life force from Geonosis. He’d already probed their minds, but wanted..., no, he needed to see his grandchildren with his own eyes. He felt a deep desire to penetrate to the very root of their souls.

The former Vader had become an empty shell after his wife’s death. Though Padme had betrayed him, the Sith Lord’s heart still belonged to her. Darth Sidious told Anakin that together they’d find the secret to cheat death, but he’d already gained this knowledge when he’d killed Darth Plagueis. Vader had been certain that Plagueis revealed all his dark secrets before Sidious murdered him. He would’ve never killed his Master otherwise. The Sith Lord would’ve never made such a serious mistake.

Darth Vader had been positive that Sidious could’ve taught him the method of bringing the dead back to life, but he’d been miserly with his wisdom. He’d only allowed his apprentice certain bits of information. He’d never let on that he already knew this miraculous secret, and Vader

never let on that he knew Sidious was lying to him. He'd repeatedly begged his Master to pursue his never-ending quest to bring Padme back, but the Sith Lord told him there were other matters to attend to first. Sidious had wanted complete control over the galaxy and that wouldn't be achieved until every Jedi was found and killed. If Vader hadn't held some fear of Sidious' powers, he would've killed his Master for such treachery. But such is the way of the Sith.

It seemed that Darth Sidious heartily enjoyed watching his apprentice suffer. Darth Vader tolerated the physical pain his Master bestowed upon him without flinching a muscle, but the mental anguish Sidious made him endure tore at his soul. He'd constantly reminded him that he was the only reason Padme died. Vader vowed that one day Darth Sidious would pay for all he'd had to endure at his hands.

Once reborn in this new body, the cloned Vader became aware of Sidious' memories. He realized just how much Darth Vader's Master manipulated him through the years. He now knew beyond any doubt that Sidious had arranged Padme Amidala's reunion with Anakin Skywalker. It had a part of his devious plot to turn the Jedi Knight to the Dark Side. It seemed Sidious knew just how much Anakin cared for Padme as a child and was certain that, once reunited, they'd fall in love.

Darth Sidious had been the one who'd orchestrated the assassination attempt made on Padme's life years ago. He'd known that the attempt would fail and suggested that Obi-Wan be her bodyguard. Anakin, being Obi-Wan's padawan learner, would certainly assist his Master. When the young couple reunited they did fall in love, just as Sidious had foreseen.

Things couldn't have worked out better for the devious schemer. Vader's unquenchable lust to overthrow Emperor Palpatine and rule the Empire died when he lost Padme. Without her nothing seemed to matter to the man, other than his extreme hatred for the Jedi. The only emotion that fully survived Anakin's transformation was his inconceivable need for revenge. Darth Vader devoted himself to learning all he could about the powers of the Dark Side. Only then could he retaliate against everyone who'd forsaken him, as well as freeing himself from Sidious' unending torture.

Vader's foresight had been clouded about his unborn child. He'd assumed the baby had died along with Padme. Once he learned that she'd birthed twins, it gave him hope again of overthrowing Palpatine. He was certain that if he could turn one of them to the Dark Side, their combined powers would be beyond Palpatine's allowing him to easily kill the man.

Darth Vader yearned to rule the galaxy with Luke by his side, but the boy had been swayed

by Obi-Wan Kenobi. He'd scorned him, just as Padme had. Vader's clone couldn't quite remember exactly how or why, but the imp had ruined all of Darth Vader's plans.

The Supreme Ruler vowed that he would not make the same mistake. He was certain that his grandchildren would surrender to him. He was determined not to fail in his unrelenting desire to turn his bloodline to his alliance.

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It seemed as if Padmay stood in the reception line for hours. Introductions appeared to be taking forever. The young woman sighed as she looked towards the end of the line. Only a few more dignitaries remained, thank the Force. Her responsibility of greeting high ranking officials would soon be at an end. She'd then be allowed to find Ben and take her seat.

\*

Grand Moff Gris started up the steps of the former Imperial Palace with renewed vigor. His faith in his Master gave him the strength to walk with an air of pride and dignity. His confidence was very high. Surely nobody would discover they were here to spy on them. Lord Vader would make certain their true identities weren't discovered as they mingled with the crowd.

Lucian Gris gingerly shook hands with his enemies while wearing a false smile. He was filled with contempt, but kept his feelings hidden. What pomp these rebels had, he mused. Thought quite a bit of themselves. They were extremely proud of their New Republic and positive they were in command of the entire galaxy. We'll soon change all that, Lucian thought with smug satisfaction.

\*

"Thank goodness only six more pairs of hands to shake," Padmay said quietly to Senator Hugo's wife. The elderly woman nodded her head in agreement. Padmay wondered how the woman kept a smile on her face knowing she had to be exhausted. Padmay's own back ached and she couldn't wait to get off her feet.

Five soldiers of according rank were moving slowly forward in the line. Padmay noticed a tall, distinguished figure standing behind them. He must be someone of high rank or royalty, she assumed. He walked with a regal air. He acted aloof, barely acknowledging those around him. It was as almost if he assumed he was above everyone in status. This person certainly thought of himself as someone of great importance. He barely touched hands with those he was introduced to. Perhaps he had a fetish about germs, Padmay snickered.

\*

At long last, Vader thought. Your destiny is approaching you my child. I shall reach into your mind and extract all of your deepest, darkest, secrets. The Sith Lord was full of expectation as he took a quick glance towards his granddaughter. He couldn't see her face clearly as she was turned the other way. He could hardly contain his excitement as he inched his way forward.

When the Supreme Ruler finally stood in front of his granddaughter he ignored Hugo's wife completely. He reached his hand out towards Padmay, seeing her clearly for the first time. The Sith Lord was taken aback and halted his hand.

\*

The tall stranger finally stood before Padmay. She couldn't see his face clearly because a hooded cloak shaded his features. She felt drawn to this person, but couldn't understand why. Padmay was certain they'd never met before. They reached out to shake hands at the same time and their fingers touched ever so slightly. As they did, an ominous foreboding engulfed her entire being. The whole room darkened abruptly. The mass of people seemed to crush against her. Padmay felt trapped. The claustrophobic space suddenly seemed as hot as an oven and she couldn't catch her breath. She became lightheaded and the room started to spin. She swooned. The girl felt herself starting to fall, but could do nothing to prevent it. She collapsed in a heap. Those who stood next to her gasped. Senator Hugo rushed to his aide's side.

\*

"Padmay. Can you hear me? Are you alright?" Padmay heard her twin's voice inside her mind and sensed his concern. Opening her eyes, they slowly began to focus on the surroundings. There were people standing over her while Senator Hugo waved a bottle of smelling salts under her nose which made her eyes water. Padmay pushed his hand away. Looking for Ben, she saw her brother and Steffen Antilles shoving their way through the crowd towards her.

Senator Hugo asked, "Are you alright my dear?"

"Yes. I'm fine now. Please don't make a fuss."

"Quite right. Too many people and far too many hands to shake. Not used to all the hubbub. You go and find a quiet place to rest for a while. Ah, here's your brother." Senator Hugo turned to Ben, "Take her out into the garden for some fresh air. I'm sure she'll be fine in no time at all."

The men helped Padmay to her feet, but she almost swooned again. Something or someone was trying to probe her thoughts. She shivered and sent a silent plea to Ben telling him that she had to get out of there, immediately!

Ben and Steffen held Padmay around her waist as they helped her from the crowded room. When in the garden, Padmay took a few deep breaths of the cool evening air and it seemed to clear her head a little. She was still trembling so Ben asked if she was alright. Padmay turned towards Steffen and asked if they could be alone. He looked a little dismayed, but honored her request.

As soon as they were alone Padmay almost shouted, “Alright? How can I be alright? Didn’t you feel it? Something vile was trying to reach into my mind. I feel as if I’ve been violated. It was terrifying.”

“Terrified?” Ben asked, puzzled by her statement.

“What are we going to do Ben?”

“Calm down Padmay. You’re not making any sense. What the hell are you so afraid of?”

“Didn’t you feel it?”

“Feel what? I didn’t feel anything but your sudden panic.”

“I don’t know how you couldn’t sense such a vile presence?”

“What could make you, of all people, fear anything? Why are you so afraid?”

“It’s our nightmares Ben. They were real. Whatever or whoever caused them is right here on Coruscant.”

“You must be mistaken. I didn’t sense anything. Are you sure you didn’t faint due to the excitement? Maybe you’re coming down with some ailment. You’re run down sis. It’s no wonder after waiting on Uncle Luke the way you did. You haven’t stopped racing around since we got back to Coruscant.”

“I’m not sick, nor did I pass out due to excitement. You know me better than that. I fainted because the evil I felt overwhelmed me.”

Ben knew his sister honestly believed she’d felt something ominous, but he hadn’t sensed anything out of the ordinary. There wasn’t any sinister presence that he’d detected. Regardless, he had to calm her down. She was extremely distraught. “I believe you Padmay, but there’s absolutely nothing for you to fear. You’re perfectly safe. Nothing is going to happen to you. There’s far too many people around for anyone to try and harm you. Besides, I’m here to protect you.”

Ben said this to reassure his sister, but he didn’t really believe she needed protection. Nonetheless, he kept a close watch over his twin. Something had happened to upset her, but he had no idea what it was. He didn’t leave Padmay’s side for the rest of the evening.

\*

When Padmay dropped to the floor in a faint a crowd of people had gathered around her. Vader and his men quickly drew far away and stood on the sidelines.

Was it really her? It was! He felt it! He knew it! His wife, his love, his Padme was reborn in his granddaughter. She was alive again, as was he. Could she feel his presence as he felt hers? Had she recognized him? Did she still love him as he much as he loved her? No. Padme had fallen in love with Kenobi. She'd betrayed him. Lord Vader couldn't take the chance that she'd betray him again. The man abruptly turned and stormed from the palace.

\*

It was easy for Lord Vader to concentrate on his wife and sense where she lived. He planned on taking her tonight. There wouldn't be any guards. She was a lowly aide, to a lowly senator. His men could easily gain access to her apartment and snatch her.

The only problem might be with her twin. Vader knew he could take Ben too, but the lad mattered little to him. He hadn't believed his sister when she'd told him she'd felt a presence, and wouldn't be expecting anything unusual. That would make it easier for the Sith Lord to put his grandson in a deep sleep, keeping him oblivious of the event entirely.

His granddaughter was entirely different. She could become a threat. Being shocked to discover his wife alive again, the Sith Lord had lost control of his emotions. He knew that Padmay hadn't seen through his disguise, but she had sensed who he was. He was certain of it. The Supreme Ruler knew he had no choice but to bring the girl back to Geonosis. It was more than just the threat she posed. His desire for her was very strong. He'd lost Padme once through her lack of faith and Kenobi's treachery. It would not happen this time. He would not lose his Padme again!

\*

"But Lord. We aren't equipped for passengers."

"She won't be a bother," Vader informed the complaining Gris.

"There's no room for her on board the shuttle."

"Then one of us will have to stay behind."

"Stay behind? But who?"

Vader just glared at him.

The Grand Moff turned towards the crew as an invisible force abruptly lifted one of the men off the deck. The man dangled in the air like a puppet on a string. He frantically grabbed at

his neck and gasped for air, but the constriction only tightened around his throat. The crewman struggled uselessly. He thrashed and kicked, his eyes bulged from their sockets. Lucian heard fragile bones snapping. The man gasped his last breath and shuddered violently. The body hung limply in the air before the force that held it finally loosened. It smashed down to the deck like a sack of wet mortar. The body hadn't even completed its fall when Vader stated matter-of-factly, "Now we have room."

Gris stared at the mangled form that was once a human being. Their new Emperor was definitely the clone of the infamous Darth Vader, he thought. He'd witnessed the former Sith Lord kill indiscriminately before. Perhaps if he'd worded it differently the poor man might still be alive. They could've retrieved him after they'd transported their "guest" to the destroyer.

The Grand Moff ordered the remaining crewmen to dispose of the lifeless form. They rushed over to the body and dragged it away. They knew enough to keep silent and not provoke their Emperor. Lucian Gris dared not either. He followed his orders without further complaint.

\*

They stole into her bedchamber like thieves in the night. It was easy. There wasn't even a droid standing guard. They were all in sleep mode elsewhere in the apartment. Lucian wrapped the young woman in a blanket and took her out to Lord Vader who was waiting impatiently in one of the speeders they'd acquired. The Grand Moff delivered the unconscious figure into his Master's arms.

Once their "passenger" was safely on board the shuttle, the Grand Moff ordered the pilot to head back to the cloaked destroyer. They'd be returning to Geonosis now, thank the stars. Finally on board the destroyer, Lucian left Vader alone in the compartment with the young woman. Why her abduction had been so important was a complete mystery to him, but after the Supreme Ruler "made room" for her, Gris wasn't about to question his orders again.

\*

Emperor Vader stood quietly over the cot and looked down at the still figure as she slept. Padme was so beautiful. He longed to reach out and caress her and run his fingers through her hair. He wanted to hear her voice. He needed to hear her sparkling laughter. How he yearned to taste her sweet lips upon his again. He'd forgotten just how much Padme meant to him. He hadn't realized that he missed her so much. It seemed like ages since he felt her body next to his. He literally ached for her embrace. It was so long ago that they held each other close in passion, but now was not the time.



The Supreme Ruler sighed very deeply and walked to the other side of the cabin. He paced restlessly back and forth, his eyes never leaving the sleeping form. Like a moth to a flame he was soon drawn back. He wanted Padme desperately. Lord Vader reached out to touch her, but restrained himself at the last second. He held his trembling hand inches above her chest just to feel the heat from her body. He wanted to lie down next to her and caress his wife. His need for her was enormous. He didn't want to wait to make love to her, but knew he had to be patient. He'd have to keep the young woman in a deep sleep until they were safely back on Geonosis. He knew he'd have all the time in the universe to be with Padme then. It took all of Lord Vader's will power to walk away from his love as he turned and left the compartment.

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The Emperor seemed unusually quiet, Gris thought as he gazed up him. The brooding figure turned and looked directly at the Grand Moff. Lucian quickly averted his eyes and hastened to the other side of the bridge, far from Lord Vader's harsh glare. The whole crew kept their distance from their monarch as he stood rigidly above them. It was clearly evident that he was very distressed.

The Supreme Ruler stood as still as a statue as he stared out the viewport looking deep into space. The stars streaked past in a blur, but he took no notice. The Sith Lord's thoughts remained on his beloved wife. His Padme.

## Chapter Twelve

- Missing -

~19/00/01 ABE: Nineteen years, one day after the death of Emperor Palpatine.~

The Chosen One walked into the Temple that stood in the center of the Netherworld. This half-world was separate from where normal human souls went upon their demise, but the Temple was considered the heart of the Netherworld. Anakin felt insignificant as he stood silently looking through the pillars regarding the beauty of this wondrous dimension. The sky was a deep mixture of azure, crimson and gold. No sunrise or sunset he'd ever seen could compete with its beauty. The grass was greener than any emerald. Flowers sang out vibrantly as tranquil breezes carried their voices through the trees, their leaves rustling gently. There was no comparison in the entire universe. But even this extraordinary beauty was muted by the ripples caused by the disturbance in the Force.

Anakin went to find Obi-Wan and Yoda after he'd left Padme. Reaching out within the Force, he asked them to meet him at the Temple. They were waiting for him when he arrived, and they weren't alone. There were quite a few Jedi gathered outside the Temple, all feeling disorder in the Force.

"How good it is to see you again Master," Anakin said to Obi-Wan as they embraced. He was extremely happy to see his former Master again. He hadn't seen him since they stood together on Endor in spirit form and bid Luke farewell. Anakin had begged for Obi-Wan's forgiveness. The Jedi Master eagerly accepted his apology, begging for Anakin's forgiveness as well. They'd both failed each other in life.

"Good for me also to see you again, but for such greetings, time there is none," Yoda said solemnly. "Great is the disturbance we have felt."

Obi-Wan asked, "What is causing this Master?"

"Very dark and clouded it is. Cannot see, but feel it I do. Such violent, dark tremors I have not felt since alive was Darth Sidious."

"I agree Master Yoda," Mace Windu said as he walked into the Temple.

"This disruption of balance is causing great anxiety among all the Jedi," Qui-Gon Jinn stated as he entered the Temple behind Master Windu.

Anakin spun all the way around when he heard the familiar voice. He exclaimed in excitement, "Master! I'm so glad you're here." He smiled broadly as he hurried over to Qui-Gon and hugged him. His smile suddenly disappeared and his face grew serious. "I wish our reunion was under different circumstances."

"So do I Anakin. I've waited a very long time to see you. I'm sorry that it took this disturbance to reunite us as well. I knew you'd been redeemed and was allowed entrance to the Netherworld, but I didn't want to interrupt your reunion with Padme. I assumed we'd see each other eventually," Qui-Gon replied.

"I was only a child when you died Master. I've missed you very much. I could've used your guidance. Obi-Wan did his best to teach me to be a good Jedi, but I failed him. I failed everyone. You expected great things from me, but I wasn't strong enough to resist the Dark Side. There are immeasurable crimes I've committed that I can never atone for. I beg you to forgive me." Anakin bowed deeply before Qui-Gon.

"Anakin. Please don't bow to me. I don't deserve such respect. It's I who should ask your forgiveness. I should've recognized your sorrow when you had to leave your mother behind on

Tatooine. You felt as if you'd deserted her. When she died it had an enormous impact on your life. You felt responsible, even though her death wasn't your fault. The Council was right. You were just nine standard years old. They thought you were too old to be trained to be a Jedi, but apparently young enough to be extremely upset believing you abandoned Shmi. You loved her very much and her death affected every decision you made from that point forward."

"No one forced me to leave my mother Qui-Gon. I knew what I was doing when I left her behind on that miserable planet. Shmi knew I was meant for something other than a life of slavery. How could she, or anyone else, foresee that I'd end up a slave to Darth Sidious? How could anyone predict how much power he'd wield over me? I was so weak willed that I let Palpatine control my every thought. I felt your presence while I was at my weakest, but I shut you out. I was aware that you were trying to warn me of the danger, but I refused to listen. I let my emotions rule me. You're not to blame for what happened. I alone am responsible for allowing myself to be swayed to the Dark Side of the Force."

The Jedi looked between each other and kept silent. No one disagreed with him.

Anakin turned towards Mace Windu and got on his knees before him. "Master. I'll never be able to fully explain my traitorous act against you. My callous and selfish decision caused your death. I can't expect absolution for that terrible deed, but I hope you can understand how and why I let this horrendous event occur. I was manipulated for years by an expert at deceit. I know that's no excuse. I have none. My despicable acts in life are indefensible."

"I agree Anakin. You had a part in my demise, but under the circumstances I should have expected you to save Palpatine's life. He was your mentor for a number of years and his friendship blinded you. You couldn't see behind the false mask he wore. You weren't aware of just how much he'd deceived you. You wanted to go with me when I went to arrest him, but I denied you that. Though I felt your inner turmoil, I should've shown you more trust. Perhaps things might've ended differently if I had. I accept your apology, but it certainly isn't required. I must take the responsibility for my own death. We were all deceived by this evil Sith Lord. He manipulated all of us."

"Later of this you will talk," Yoda said. "Concentrate on this disturbance we must. Felt by all the Jedi this has been."

Anakin turned towards Yoda and asked, "What can we do Master?"

"Meditate. On this matter think long and hard. Search your feelings young Skywalker. The answer, come to you it will."

“Yes Master.” Anakin did as Yoda commanded.

The Jedi Knight retreated into the forest. He found a quiet place near a brook and entered into a deep meditation. Before long, Anakin realized where he’d have to go in order to seek the answers. Returning to the Temple he told Yoda that he was leaving. When Anakin walked down the Temple steps alone, his face set with determination, Obi-Wan asked Yoda where he was going.

“The Chosen One knows.” That was all Yoda said. They all stood quietly and watched the young man walk briskly away.

\*

Ben awoke the morning after the Independence Dinner with a severe headache. The sixteen year old felt as if he’d been drugged. He’d celebrated with his friends and had a few drinks, but he shouldn’t be feeling this groggy. It took him quite a while to clear his head.

He was already late for roll call and didn’t have time to check on Padmay. Knowing he’d see her at dinner, Ben decided to wait until then. The lad dressed as quickly as he could, then ran out to his speeder. Threepio was chasing after him, but he was in too much of a hurry to stop. Ben yelled back and told the droid he’d talk later as he sped away.

The day was going to be a hectic one. It seemed as if his entire squadron was suffering from certain degrees of hangovers. Ben heard quite a few moans and groans as his comrades prepared the day’s activities. His squadron was to participate in the festivities by presenting an air show over the Freedom Palace. Thousands of landscaping droids had set up the center of the grounds to look like the surface of the first Death Star. Officials had planned mock attacks. Ben had been selected to reenact the maneuver Luke Skywalker performed when he took out the first moon-sized battlestation. He was extremely honored by the request. Little did anyone know that he had special knowledge of the event.

Ben thought of his sister as he headed for his X-Wing. He wondered if she’d be here to see his performance. He hoped she was over her fears of last night. Ben couldn’t understand why she’d collapsed. Padmay wasn’t one to give in to hysterics. He couldn’t understand her panic attack at all. She’d told him she felt an evil presence. He hadn’t sensed anything strange. Perhaps taking care of Luke had taken its toll on her health, no matter how much she denied it. He’d have to hurry home this evening, instead of staying to celebrate with his squadron.

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The day passed very quickly. Ben’s reenactment was performed without flaw. When trying to leave, he’d been sidetracked by those who wanted to applaud his performance. By the time Ben

got home he was ready to fall into his bed and sleep the night away. He barely touched down on the landing platform when Threepio rushed out to him.

“Master Ben! I’m so glad you’ve finally home,” Threepio shouted excitedly. “We can’t find her anywhere.”

“Hold on a minute Threepio. I just got here. At least let me get out of the speeder.” Ben released the seat belt and got out of the sleek two-seater. “Now then, what are you so excited about?”

“I tried to tell you this morning Master Ben, but you were in such a hurry I didn’t get the chance.”

“Tell me what Threepio?”

“Miss Padmay didn’t respond to my wake-up call this morning. I assumed she wanted extra time to rest after the night’s activities so I waited twenty minutes before I tried again. I thought that amount of time would be sufficient. When I returned to her chambers she still didn’t respond. It’s very unusual for Miss Padmay to ignore me so I let myself in, but she wasn’t there. I knocked on the fresher, but there was no response there either. I peeked in and the fresher was empty as well. She was in her bed last night when I checked on her before I went into sleep mode. I always check on the mistress before I shut down for the night. We’ve searched the entire area Master Ben. I even asked the neighbors if they’d seen her. They claimed they didn’t. I just don’t know where else to look. She’s nowhere to be found. Oh dear..., oh dear.”

“Calm down Threepio. Don’t get so excited. It’s not good for your circuitry. Padmay probably just woke up early and decided to leave for the festivities without telling you. We’ll find her. Don’t worry.”

As Ben tried to calm Threepio down he started to get anxious himself. This wasn’t like Padmay. If she’d given Threepio instructions to wake her, she must have had intentions to get up when he came to her door. Why would she leave without telling him? Ben closed his eyes and concentrated, but no matter where he searched with his senses, he couldn’t feel Padmay’s presence anywhere. Where could she be? After the odd way she acted last night, Ben started to get very concerned about his twin.

\*

They were back on Geonosis. As soon as their destroyer touched down on the planet’s surface, the Supreme Ruler nearly ran down the exit ramp almost knocking Gris over in his haste. He’d given instructions for their “passenger” to be taken to his master suite.

The Grand Moff wondered what was troubling Lord Vader. He'd been unusually quiet on their voyage back to Geonosis. He'd stood frozen at the viewport for hours on end. He'd refused all food and drink and hadn't uttered a single word to anyone the entire journey. It was quite unsettling. Lucian knew that whatever was upsetting him had to do with this woman they'd abducted. He wondered just who she was and why she affected him so. Why was this woman so important to him? Why did he seem so distraught? It was impossible for the man to have met her having never ventured off Geonosis.

Lucian halted the men as the young woman was being taken from the ship. He had to see this mysterious passenger. He hadn't bothered to look when they'd snatched her, but now he was most curious. He moved the blanket aside and noticed that this "woman" was just a teen, not much younger than Lord Vader himself. The Grand Moff was even more perplexed.

\*

The days passed swiftly. Lucian had been extremely busy overlooking the preparations for the Death Star's launch. Though no one had seen the Emperor since they returned from Coruscant, orders had been given to prepare the battlestation for departure.

The Sith Lord had assigned a large number of his children to positions on all eight Star Destroyers. Each vessel was ordered to continue guarding Geonosis and the surrounding systems. The children had taken over command from former captains. The men had been quite upset and grumbled among themselves. None of them dared utter their objections too loudly, especially after hearing about what happened to the crewman aboard the Grand Moff's shuttle.

The crew assigned to the Death Star was comprised of an assortment of the men from the surviving destroyers, along with Vader's children. Gris was very surprised that his command hadn't been taken from him. He was told not to worry. The children had important assignments to carry out that required their full attention. Besides, he'd proven himself to the Emperor.

All was in readiness. The Grand Moff was eager to be on his way. He'd soon get his chance to seek revenge. How Gris hated the rebels. Their Rebellion had cost him so much, but he didn't have to worry about his future now. Lord Vader had bestowed the grandest of honors on him when he promoted Lucian to Grand Moff. How he'd love to see the faces of all those who'd abused him in his youth. They'd all be trembling in fear.

The Grand Moff was filled with enormous pride as he stepped aboard "his" new battlestation and felt its tremendous power beneath his feet. He'd wandered the corridors and examined the bridge numerous times since its completion. He couldn't find a single flaw in the

craft's design. There were quite a few changes made from the first Death Stars. Ceris pointed out these changes as they toured the vessel one last time.

A number of cloaking systems were installed on the craft. The combined systems were more powerful than the smaller ones that had been installed on the eight, experimental Star Destroyers. Ceris assured the Grand Moff, though he hardly thought it necessary, that every battleship built from this date forward would include the updated technology. It was deemed invaluable to the new Empire.

The insectoid informed Gris that there was no need for this battlestation's defense shields to be operated from outside the vessel, as was needed on the second Death Star. Its deflector shields had been activated on Endor. The defense system installed on this vessel was operated internally. It held more than enough power to protect the vessel from all outside threats.

Ceris also proudly stated that this Death Star was built with several exhaust vents that led indirectly into the central core of the reactor. The rebels managed to breach the core on the first Death Star. A single rebel fighter shot two missiles into a vent that started a chain reaction in the reactor. It caused the craft's complete destruction. Ceris assured the Grand Moff that the enormous reactor on this Death Star was fully contained. Each exhaust tube had a number of twists and turns. Even if an attempt was made to fire missiles into them it was impossible for them to reach the reactor. The vents were screened with a triple layer of durasteel coverings. They were barely large enough for a flitnat to squeeze through, let alone a missile. The rebels would never be able to destroy this Death Star. Unlike the others, this vessel was impenetrable.

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While the Grand Moff was inspecting every inch of the new Death Star, the Supreme Ruler stepped out onto the balcony that overlooked the arena. The cheers that rose up from his Grand Army were deafening. He held up his hands and waited for the men to quiet down as they looked up at him with complete adulation.

Lord Vader began his speech when the arena finally grew silent. "The time has come at last my children. The time has come for us to reclaim what was once ours. We shall take back what was stolen from us and devastate our adversaries. We'll destroy the New Republic in a spectacular display of strength and superiority. I'm sending your brothers off on a mission to eliminate these renegades. The Sith shall be victorious."

The Emperor looked over his vast army and was filled with satisfaction as his children roared out their approval. As he waited for the cheers to die down he turned towards crewmen

who stood to his side. “Go now my children. You can be assured that the Force will be strong with you. I chose you because you were the first born. Your abilities make you exceptionally powerful. Though I won’t be with you bodily, I shall be with you through the Force. I’ll be aware of every move you make. I’ll celebrate as each planet is destroyed, and our foes along with them. You’ll bring order to the galaxy through your effort and shall make me very, very proud.”

The Emperor then turned back to the crowd below him and shouted, “We shall decimate our enemies my children. The Sith shall rule once again!” Lord Vader smiled broadly as cheers reverberated throughout the arena. The Supreme Ruler was filled with enormous pride as he watched his sons march off to reclaim his domain.

## Part Two

### Chapter Thirteen

- Search -

~19/00/15 ABE: Nineteen years, fifteen days after the death of Emperor Palpatine.~

Ben was in the brig. He’d been arrested because he’d been absent without leave. He’d been searching for Padmay for a number of days before finally being detained. Having failed to find her anywhere on Coruscant, the young man was at his wit’s end. There just wasn’t anywhere else to look. He was out of his mind with worry.

Hearing of Ben’s arrest, Lando Calrissian immediately went to the detention center. “I’ve seen your father behind cell doors lots of times, but I never expected to see you locked up,” Lando stated as he stepped up to the force field Ben was pacing behind.

“Uncle Lando. Thank the Force you’re here. You’ve got to help me.”

“You were A.W.O.L. Ben. That’s a serious offense. Can you explain why?”

“I was searching for Padmay. She’s missing. I’ve got to find her.”

“Padmay’s missing? Since when?”

“Since the night of the Independence Dinner. Padmay was acting very strange that night. The next morning she was gone. I was worried about her then, but now I’m afraid something might have happened to her. I’ve got to find her Uncle Lando. You’ve got to help me.”

“Hold on Ben. You’re not making any sense. What do you mean she’s gone? Calm down and tell me exactly what happened.”

Ben tried to control his anxiety as he explained what happened. He also told Lando about



Padmay's concerns over the nightmares they'd had, as well as how frightened she'd been that night.

"Have you asked Senator Hugo if he knows where she is?"

"Of course I did, but he hasn't seen or heard a word from Padmay since the banquet. I've asked everyone she works with too. No one has a clue where she is."

"Does Padmay have friends you aren't aware of? Maybe she's staying with one of them."

"I know every one of Padmay's friends Uncle Lando, and I have questioned them. They haven't seen my sister since that night either."

"Maybe Padmay met someone that night. Someone she didn't tell you about. Maybe she's on some kind of a fling. I know it doesn't sound like the kind of thing she'd normally do, but how else can you explain her disappearance?"

"I can't. I'm certain that Padmay didn't meet anyone there. Not in the way you're thinking anyway. She would've told me if she planned to leave without me, even if she had met someone who'd charmed her. She knows how worried I'd be."

"I suppose you're right."

"Padmay came home with me and went right to bed. I stayed with her until she finally fell asleep. She was extremely overwrought. The poor girl was so weary she literally passed out."

"Passed out?" Lando asked as he raised his eyebrows quizzically.

"If you're under the impression that my sister was intoxicated you're mistaken. You know her better than that. The most she drinks is a single glass of wine, and only on special occasions."

"I didn't mean to imply that Padmay was inebriated. Rather that she'd indulged a little more than she normally does."

"Padmay passed out from sheer exhaustion. She'd been standing in that reception line for over two hours. I assumed she was ill until she said something extremely odd. She told me that she'd felt something trying to invade..."

Ben suddenly recalled exactly what his sister said that night. He hadn't believed her when she'd told him that she felt an ominous presence, but what if she had? What if there really was some kind of evil force on Coruscant? Why had Padmay sensed it and not him? A shudder of fear raced down his back. "I've got to get out of here Uncle Lando. Padmay needs my help. I'm certain of it. I've got to find her."

"Being A.W.O.L. is a serious offense Ben, but I'll do everything I can to get the changes against you dropped. I'm owed a lot of favors. I'll have to tug on a few strings, but I'll do all I

can to get you released as soon as possible.”

“Thank you Uncle Lando, but please hurry. I fear Padmay is in danger.”

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The Supreme Ruler entered his darkened bedchamber. Lord Vader stood over his captive and silently gazed down at her. He'd kept his wife in a deep sleep ever since leaving Coruscant. There was much that had to be done before he could awaken her. He couldn't take the chance that he'd be distracted. Now that his plans were put into motion, the man was free to concentrate on less demanding matters.

It had taken all of his will power in order to stay away from his beloved on their journey back to Geonosis. Lord Vader had entered into a deep meditation, but even though concentrating as hard as he could, the Emperor found it nearly impossible to stop thinking of Padme, as well as his ever-increasing need to make love to her. As soon as they landed on Geonosis the Sith Lord practically ran to his medication chamber and locked himself in. Memories of the passion they'd shared taunted him, but after days of self-discipline, he gained control over his emotions, finally subduing them. He'd stayed in isolation until all was in readiness. He reemerged only this morning, fully aware that his cravings would soon be sated.

The Emperor had just sent his children off to retake his Empire. The former Darth Vader had wanted to rule with Padme by his side when Palpatine first seized control of the galaxy, but she'd rejected him. Padme had fallen in love with Obi-Wan Kenobi. His best friend had betrayed him and stolen his wife's heart. The Sith Lord tried to kill Obi-Wan then, but he'd let his rage consume him. He hadn't calculated on his former Master's final stroke that took the rest of his limbs. Kenobi always did scold Anakin for his rashness.

It seemed as if Darth Vader waited a millennium before he got a chance to retaliate for Kenobi's betrayal. He'd searched for his former Master throughout the galaxy for a number of years, but the man disappeared without a trace. The Sith Lord had just about given up all hope of exacting revenge. Then, seemingly out of the blue, he'd sensed the Jedi Master on board the first Death Star. The adversaries engaged each other in battle as if the years hadn't elapsed. This time, Darth Vader came out the victor. He'd vanquished his nemesis. Or had he? He'd sliced his lightsaber through Kenobi, but the weapon only passed through his robe, not his body. It was almost as if he'd vanished into thin air. Regardless, Obi-Wan Kenobi was dead. Darth Vader was certain of that.

The Supreme Ruler's thoughts returned to the present as he looked down at his captive

once more. "You'll pay for your betrayal as well my lovely wife," he whispered maliciously. "Wake up Padme. Hear me my love. Awaken."

Young Padmay Solo stirred in the huge bed. She tried to open her eyes, but could not. The girl felt as though she was trying to crawl out of a deep, dark hole. She was reaching for the rim, but couldn't quite grasp its edge....

"WAKE UP," Vader commanded in a loud voice.

Padmay's eyes suddenly snapped wide open. She was instantly awake. She looked around the room and realized that she wasn't in her bedchamber. She was disoriented by the unfamiliar surroundings. When her eyes finally adjusted to the darkness she noticed a tall, hooded figure standing in the shadows. Grabbing the covers she pulled them up to her chin she asked, "Where am I and who are you?"

"Quiet," the dark figure commanded, and she was.

The Sith Lord grinned knowing he had complete control over his wife for the first time. Padme had always been exceedingly strong willed. Though she'd never really opposed him, Padme never took his advice seriously. If she'd heeded his instructions to wait on Coruscant, instead of following him to Mustafar, she wouldn't have died.

He finally responded. "Everything shall be revealed in time Padme. Do you thirst? You must be hungry. I'll bring you a snack. Dinner won't be served for a while yet. When I return we'll speak of past experiences. Until then, enjoy your leisure my love." Lord Vader then turned and walked from the room leaving the young woman more confused than ever.

Padmay wondered what was going on. Where was she? How did she get here? How did this person know her name? Who was he, and why was she here? A dozen different questions popped into her head as she puzzled over her strange predicament.

The room spun as Padmay pushed herself into a sitting position. She tried to put her legs to the floor, but couldn't move them. There was something restraining her ankles to the bed. She threw back the covers and discovered that she was chained to the bedposts. The girl tried to control her fear as panic took hold. "NO! Why am I chained? This cannot be happening! Someone help me. Please," she yelled, but nobody came to her rescue. Padmay closed her eyes and concentrated. Using the Force she screamed out Ben's name telepathically.

The Sith Lord stood just outside the door and smiled broadly. He could hear his wife's repeated attempts to contact her brother telepathically. He couldn't help but laugh knowing her effort was in vain. He was filled with a deep satisfaction. Retribution was certainly sweet. "Yes my

love. Scream all you want,” he spoke under his breath. “It shall do you no good. Your cries to Ben won’t be heard. No one shall come to your aid.” Lord Vader could feel the young girl shiver in fear. Turning, he walked away from the bedchamber. Evil laughter filled the hallways as he slowly descended the staircase.

\*

Lando, Ben and Steffen Antilles were on board a shuttle headed to the Solaris. He’d called in quite a few favors to get the charges against Ben dropped. As soon as the young man was released, the trio searched for his sister without results. Lando was quite concerned about Padmay’s whereabouts and safety. They’d scoured the city to no avail, even going to the seamier parts of Coruscant. It was quite apparent that Padmay had been abducted, but by who and why? There was no ransom call made. Though she had insulted quite a few members of the senate, Padmay didn’t have any real enemies. She was well liked and respected by her peers. Lando couldn’t understand her disappearance at all. When Ben stated that Padmay was no longer on the planet, Lando went to his superiors and asked if he could search for her off world.

\*

Captain Alec Brant paced back and forth on the deck of the Solaris as the shuttle touched down in the landing bay. He’d received a transmission from headquarters informing him to cancel all leaves and to prepare for immediate departure as soon as Admiral Calrissian arrived. He hadn’t a clue why the Solaris had been ordered on an unscheduled mission.

The hatch slid open and Admiral Calrissian disembarked with Ben and Steffen exiting behind him. Brant was more than surprised that the young recruits accompanied someone of such high rank. Lando saluted the captain asking for permission to come aboard. The captain returned his salute and gave permission. The formalities over, Brant asked his superior why the mission was ordered. Lando told him that he’d explain everything in his quarters.

\*

The young officer tried to get Captain Nelan’s attention on board the Quasar.

“Excuse me sir.”

The captain ignored him.

“Sir?”

Captain Nelan was talking with the navigator. The crew was aware that their captain hated being interrupted.

“SIR!” the helmsman finally shouted ignoring the fact that he’d be scolded. He had to steal Nelan’s attention from the navigator!

The captain finally turned around. He was about to reprimand the young man when something caught his attention out the viewport. The elder could not believe his eyes.

Nelan hadn’t seen a Death Star since he’d been a member of the Resistance. He’d volunteered to join the group of Rebel soldiers that went to Endor led by General Han Solo and Princess Leia. They were sent to the planet to destroy the control center stationed there. The facility transmitted a continuous signal to the second Death Star. The signal regulated the battlestation’s deflector shield. Disruption of the signal enabled the Rebel Alliance to fire on the enormous space station and ultimately led to its destruction.

Now Nelan bore witness to a third Death Star. It couldn’t be possible, the man thought. Yet there it was, as big and bright as a moon. “All hands to battle stations,” the captain suddenly shouted as a shiver of fear raced down his back.

The alarm had barely gone off when the first hit came. There was no need for a second shot. There wasn’t a target left. The Quasar had vaporized into space.

## Chapter Fourteen

### - Imbalance -

A vast number of Jedi were camped at the Temple now; the feeling of unease growing stronger with each passing day. Tremendous ripples were building up pressure like a violent storm gathering strength before it released destructive winds. The Jedi were waiting for the Chosen One to return. They’d all sensed the deaths of those on the Quasar.

When Anakin left the Temple he knew he’d have to find the midi-chlorians. They held the answers he was seeking. The midi-chlorians were the Force. They were a part of every form of life that existed in the universe. They were the universe. These entities were immortal, symbiotic organisms that coexisted inside every animal, tree, blade of grass, as well as in every human being. This symbiosis was an extremely important part of the Jedi’s existence. They’d learned how to listen to these intelligent organisms and eventually gained the power of the Force through them. This allowed the Jedi to perform supernatural acts which they used to help maintain peace throughout the galaxy.

Qui-Gon told Anakin about these entities when he was just a boy. The Jedi Master had said

that once Anakin learned to listen, the midi-chlorians would speak to him, and they had. That was when Anakin gained true knowledge of the Force and how to use his ability accordingly.

The Chosen One wasn't sure where to look for these microscopic forms of life, but he'd sensed them calling to him while deep in meditation. He headed easterly, and walked for hours. The sun was soon to rise when he reached a misted area next to a stream. He sat on a boulder to rest while awaiting daybreak, and went into a meditative state.

The midi-chlorians never allowed a human being to see their true form, but they now joined into clusters large enough to be seen with the naked eye. Anakin opened his eyes when he felt their presence. Luminescent specks floated over to him and encircled his body. When these orbs of light landed on him, they caressed Anakin with a maternal embrace. A tingling sensation spread through him. As it did, a warm, wondrous, calming peace enveloped his soul. The midi-chlorians then spoke to him.

There had always been a Light Side and Dark Side to the Force. Each individual was given free will which side they chose to follow. The midi-chlorians did not interfere in one's chosen path.

Darth Sidious had chosen the Dark Side of the Force. Treachery is the way of the Sith and Palpatine used all of his cunning to turn Anakin when he'd told him the tale of Darth Plagueis the Wise. He'd explained that the old Sith Lord learned how to cheat death and influenced the midi-chlorians into creating life. Anakin thought that if he attained this knowledge he'd be able to save Padme. Of course, he failed to save her and suffered the consequences of that failure for the rest of his life.

Palpatine also told Anakin that Plagueis' apprentice learned all he could about the powers of the Dark Side from his Master. Once the student absorbed all he could from Plagueis, he'd killed the old man and took his place. Anakin hadn't realized that Sidious was Plagueis' apprentice until Palpatine confessed the fact. He'd never told Anakin that he, Darth Sidious, was the life the midi-chlorians created for Darth Plagueis.

Ages elapsed before the scales were tipped in favor of the Sith. Once the midi-chlorians realized balance had been disrupted, they had to intervene in order to stop the Sith before they controlled this delicate equilibrium. They created another being to counter the imbalance. Anakin was the life they created.

The midi-chlorians knew the only way they could completely restore balance was to use the Sith's own dark forces against them. For that reason, they'd reinforced all of Anakin's human

frailties giving him a strong desire for knowledge, as well as an unquenchable thirst for power. They made certain that Anakin craved what he could never obtain from the Jedi. They needed the young man to be irresistibly tempted by the Dark Side in order to seek its full powers. This was the only way they knew of combating the evil that would continue to grow until the Sith finally destroyed the Light. Anakin Skywalker was created for this purpose alone. The Chosen One was the only human endowed with enough power to confront the evil being the midi-chlorians created.

\*

Padmay screamed until her throat was completely raw. She'd tried to free herself from the chains, but try as she might, the girl could not release them. She'd tried to use the Force to break the chains, but something was preventing her from using her powers. She didn't know how long she'd struggled uselessly, but it seemed forever. It was hopeless. She hadn't been able to free herself and no one had come to her aid.

After quite some time the door to the chamber creaked open. The hooded figure walked in, but remained hidden in the shadows. Lord Vader spoke to his beloved wife in a soft tone. "Hello Padme."

"Who are you? How do you know my name? Why are you doing this? What do you want from me?" she demanded.

"Full of questions, aren't you my dear? It's to be expected I suppose. You don't recognize my voice, do you? It was so long ago that you heard me speak. You once loved me whispering in your ear pledging my everlasting devotion."

"I've no idea what you are talking about. I don't know you. I've never seen you before in my life."

"Forgotten me so soon? Maybe you'll recall I once did this for you." Lord Vader waved his hand towards the door. A small tray floated into the room. It moved over to a stool beside the bed and settled down on its surface. A piece of fruit rose into the air. A knife rose up to it, cutting it in half, then returned to the tray. One half of the fruit hovered in the air, while the other half floated over to Padmay. "Remember Padme? I did this for you on Naboo. I told you that Obi-Wan would scold me for using my powers to perform such meager tricks."

"Obi-Wan? Naboo? I'm sorry, but I don't know what you're talking about. I've never been to Naboo, and I never knew Obi-Wan Kenobi. He died long before I was born."

Both pieces of fruit slammed to the floor. "I didn't mention Obi-Wan's last name." Vader spat out angrily, "If you never knew him, how did you know his surname?" The Sith Lord's tone

softened again, “I don’t know why you ask who I am my love. Is it because you’re still angry with me?”

“How can I be angry at you if we’ve never met? For your information, the only reason I know Obi-Wan’s last name is because my mother and Uncle Luke told me about him.”

“Ah yes. Our children. Luke and Leia. But let’s not discuss them right now. I’d rather you concentrate on remembering me. Think my love. It will all come back to you.”

“Our children?” Padmay had no clue to who this man was, or who he thought he was. She was hoping that if she played along she’d find out. “Come into the light so I can see your face. Maybe then I’ll remember you.”

Vader laughed contemptuously “You can’t fool me by attempting to humor me. You do know me and you will remember me. I guarantee it.”

“I swear on my honor that I don’t know who you are.” Padmay could sense a tremendous rage building up inside her captor.

Lord Vader stood frozen as his temper flared to its peak. Padme was rejecting him again. He wouldn’t let her abandon him this time. He suddenly shouted at the top of his lungs, “DON’T LIE TO ME PADME! I WILL NOT STAND FOR IT! I WILL NOT LET YOU FORSAKE ME AGAIN! YOU PLEDGED TO OBEY ME WHEN YOU MARRIED ME!”

Padmay felt as if her head would split apart, he’d screamed so loud. “Are you out of your mind? I am not your wife!” she retorted angrily.

“Our love for each other is so strong that you’ve been returned to me. Can’t you sense it? Use your feelings Padme. You must remember me. You have to,” he pleaded

“You must be insane! I don’t know you. I don’t understand what you want from me.”

“YOU PADME! I WANT YOU!” Vader screamed in frustration before storming from the room.

Padmay started to weep. She was extremely frightened. Who was this crazy man? Why was he doing this to her? Why did he insist that she was his wife? “Oh Ben. Where the hell are you? Why can’t you hear me?” Padmay fell back on the bed sobbed into the pillow.

\*

The Solaris left orbit within the hour. Lando and Ben were in Captain Brant’s quarters. Lando had just explained their mission when he asked, “Where do you think we should start the search Ben?”

“I don’t know Uncle Lando. I can’t sense Padmay’s presence at all.”



Brant asked, "What do you mean, sense her?"

Ben told his superior that he and Padmay could sense each other's presence through the Force. He told Brant that he'd been trained in the Jedi Arts.

"You're a Jedi Knight? I thought they were just a myth."

"The Jedi were real sir. Luke Skywalker was the last of the Jedi. He was tutoring me when he died, but I never finished training. All I can really do is use the Force to sense things. It helped me when I confronted the TIE's."

"I don't know what you mean by some kind of force, but I knew there was something special about you. Anyone who can learn to fly combat that well in such a short period of time has got to have some kind of gift."

"I guess you could say it's inherited."

"Inherited?"

Ben sat silently. He didn't want to reveal anything about his heritage, but decided Brant should know the truth; at least a part of it. He finally replied, "Luke Skywalker was my uncle. My grandfather was Anakin Skywalker. He was also a Jedi Knight. Anakin fought in the Clone Wars against the Separatists and the Sith."

"I've never heard of the Sith, but I have heard about Anakin Skywalker. Raymus Antilles told quite a few tales about him. I thought the old man was exaggerating, of course."

"He wasn't exaggerating sir. My uncle inherited his flying skills from his father. I'm sure you've heard of Luke Skywalker. He was the starpilot who took out the first Death Star."

"I don't imagine anyone in the New Republic doesn't know who Luke Skywalker is. He was a hero and quite an extraordinary starpilot."

"My uncle said he wasn't half the pilot Anakin Skywalker was."

"I imagine you've inherited your skills from your grandfather as well, eh? Antilles said that Anakin Skywalker was the best starpilot he'd ever seen. That was quite a complement coming from him. Antilles wasn't such a bad pilot himself. He had an outstanding reputation during the war. Took out a lot of TIE's. Claimed he helped Bail Organa organize the resistance as well. I don't think too many people believed his tales."

"I've met him. Raymus Antilles is an honest man. I didn't sense any false statements or exaggerations on his part. His memory is sound. Most of our conversation centered around my grandfather. He seemed to be Antilles' hero."

"So I gathered. There were many heroes during the struggle for independence. My

generation owes them a lot. We probably would've never known freedom if it hadn't been for the likes of Luke Skywalker. He was a remarkable man. You must be proud to be related to such a hero."

Ben was glad someone finally acknowledged how much his uncle had done for the New Republic. "Yes sir. I am. Extremely proud."

Lando butted in. "Not to change the subject, but where do you think we should start the search Ben?"

Ben closed his eyes in order to let the Force guide him, trying to sense which direction to go, but it didn't help. He shrugged his shoulders and made a wild guess. "Head towards the Outer Rim."

\*

"We're orbiting Mustafar sir," the officer told Gris as he stepped onto the bridge.

Lucian couldn't get used to Vader's child calling him sir. Though hardly a child, the officer was quite young, as were all the children on board. They varied in age from teen to young adult, and they all looked exactly like their Emperor Vader. It was quite unnerving. "Good. Put your powers to use. Do you feel any resistance?" the Grand Moff asked.

"No sir. There are only twenty humans stationed on Mustafar. We've already brought them on board."

"Then fire at your discretion." Gris felt the massive engine hum at a higher pitch as the weapon drew power from the reactor. The vessel vibrated as the superlaser released its energy. It was over in a micro-second. Bits and pieces of debris that were once a planet spun furiously into space. Mustafar was gone.

Vader had ordered Mustafar to be the Death Star's first target. He explained that it was where he'd been wounded in his past life. When he told Lucian what happened on the volcanic planet, the Grand Moff finally understood why the former Vader never revealed his face. It was no wonder the man constantly wore the ebony suit of armor. Even if he'd wanted to, Darth Vader could never be free from it. His life depended on the mechanics the suit provided in order to support his existence. It was only natural that his clone would want this planet destroyed. Besides, it was an excellent test for the fire control crew. They'd destroyed the rebel cruiser, but there was a big difference between one ship and an entire planet. The Grand Moff had to be certain that his men would perform their duty without hesitation. After all, they'd be pushing the button that would incinerate not only planets, but trillions of life forms.

Everything had gone off smoothly. There didn't seem to be any problems with the system, nor the crew. Lucian was very pleased with the results. He turned to the navigator and asked, "Where's the next target?"

"The Malastare system sir."

"How long until we arrive?"

"We'll be entering the system in approximately twenty-six standard hours sir."

"Very good. That gives the weapon more than enough time to recharge. I'll be in my quarters. Notify me as soon as we're in orbit."

"Yes sir."

Gris returned to his cabin. He looked at the star charts projected over his desk and followed their projected course. They'd only encountered that one cruiser so far. The rebels hadn't time to send a message to alert anyone. Once the Death Star came into range of a target, the children were to take control and use the Force to block any communications being made. They were also to block all the defense systems. The enemy would be completely cut off and unprotected. Lord Vader's ultimate goal would be easily attained. It would be like taking sweets from a youngling.

The Grand Moff didn't want to get overconfident at this point. They were still very far from their final destination. The Death Star was only in the fringes of the Outer Rim. The New Republic only had a few scattered, undermanned bases this far out. Once the battlestation entered the inner systems, there'd be more for the children to handle. Lucian had his doubts about the children's abilities, but he did have total confidence in the Supreme Ruler. Lord Vader would make certain his children did not fail. If all went according to plan, he'd be dining with the new Emperor in Palpatine's former Imperial Palace very shortly.

## Chapter Fifteen

### - Unexpected Encounter -

The crew of the Solaris searched every inhabited planet as they made their way. They'd soon be reaching the outermost systems. So far, Ben hadn't sensed Padmay's presence anywhere. He was standing at the navigator's station with Lando going over the star charts when he suddenly sensed a huge tremor in the Force. The young man not only felt, but heard over a million souls scream out in terror at the same time. The sensation was gone in an instant, but Ben

couldn't help but wonder what happened. Was what he'd experienced a premonition of events to come, or had millions of beings just been killed?

"Captain on the bridge," the yeoman announced, yanking Ben from his thoughts.

"At ease," Brant said to the crew as he walked over to the navigator's station. "Have you any idea where we should look next Solo?"

"No sir," Ben responded.

"We're nearing the Outer Rim. There are only a few more systems left to check in this region."

"I'm aware of that sir."

"The men are getting restless and are starting to question this mission. If we don't find some sign of your sister soon, well..., I don't want you to think that we're giving up, but how much longer can we continue? We'll have to head back to Coruscant soon. We're running low on supplies. No one expected this to be an extended mission."

"I understand that sir, and I do appreciate all you've done, but please, don't give up yet," Ben pleaded.

"With the Admiral's permission, we'll check out the remaining systems, but if we don't find your sister by then I'll have to scrub the mission and return to Coruscant. Is that clear?"

"You have my permission, as well as my insistence that we continue the search Captain Brant." Lando stated strongly.

"But sir. You've got to be realistic. The girl could be anywhere. She could even be in another galaxy. How long do you expect to keep these men from their families? Their leaves were cut short as it is. We can't keep looking for her forever. It's out of the question. We might never find her. Even if we do, what if she left Coruscant on her own accord and refuses to return with us? This mission will be for naught."

"Padmay would've told someone if she'd left without being forced. I'm certain of it. That being the case, we'll continue searching for her as long as I deem it necessary. Is that clear to you?" Lando asked. It wasn't really a question. It was a command. He refused to give up the search.

"But...,"

The first lieutenant came over and saluted, interrupting his superiors.

Brant turned to him. "What is it Lieutenant Gregor?"

"We're coming up on an uncharted moon sir."

Brant climbed the steps to the upper deck and looked out the main viewport. He saw what appeared to be a moon, but it was traveling at an unnatural speed. Brant thought it quite odd.

Lando followed Brant up the staircase and joined him. His eyes opened wide as soon as he looked out. He gasped in shock. "It can't be possible," the man uttered in disbelief.

Brant looked at him and asked, "What is it sir? What's wrong?"

The navigator suddenly called out to his superior, "Captain Brant."

Brant turned towards him. "What now?"

"We're coming up on Malastare sir, but..."

"But what?"

The planet isn't there sir," the officer stated.

"What do you mean?"

"It's gone sir. There's no trace of Malastare on the scanning screen at all. We're just picking up bits of debris."

The helmsman suddenly shouted, "Captain Brant. The target just changed course. It's heading straight towards us."

Lando felt his blood turn to ice. He turned towards Brant and said as calmly as he could, "Raise your shields immediately Captain Brant."

The captain stood transfixed at the viewport. He hadn't heard him.

"RAISE YOUR SHIELDS IMMEDIATELY BRANT! THAT'S A DEATH STAR!" Lando couldn't help but yell.

The Death Star fired their lethal weapon. Brant hadn't ordered their deflector shields raised. Lando closed his eyes expecting his imminent death. The laser streaked towards them, but as the exorbitant amount of energy hit its target, the beam reflected harmlessly back into space.

\*

Lucian Gris had ordered the children to fire at will. The Grand Moff felt the vibration race through the battlestation as the laser released its energy. He hadn't bothered to look. Lucian was well aware what their weapon was capable of.

After a few seconds the lieutenant said, "Grand Moff, um..., sir. The cruiser's still there."

"What?" Lucian spun on his heels and looked out the viewport. "What do you mean it's still there? How?"

"I don't know sir."

"Why don't you know? Scan the ship or whatever it is you do. Find out at once!"

“Yes sir.”

\*

The alarms sounded on board the Solaris. Ben already reached the flight deck. Jumping into his X-Wing, he strapped in and waited for clearance to take off. The Death Star fired a second blast, but once again the powerful beam was reflected back out into space.

\*

“Sound the alarms. Get our fighters out there now!” the Grand Moff shouted.

Vader’s children scrambled to their fighters as the alarm resounded throughout the battlestation. Lucian watched the TIE fighters exit the Death Star. He then turned to the nearest child and demanded an explanation. “Why did we fail to destroy that vessel?”

“I don’t know sir. I can’t explain it. We can’t penetrate their shielding. Something is blocking us.”

“Blocking you? How?”

“I don’t know sir.”

“Well find out!”

“Yes sir.”

Lucian went back to the viewport and looked out. The TIE fighters were converging on the rebels.

\*

Ben had a TIE on his six o’clock position. He couldn’t shake it no matter what maneuver he pulled. He corkscrewed and broke right in a tight turning radius and got up behind the TIE. Being in the kill zone, the young man centered the fighter in his crosshairs. The TIE suddenly broke into a tight loop, soaring up behind Ben again. He closed the short distance between them and fired on the X-Wing. It was a direct hit. Ben’s craft should’ve been blown to pieces, but nothing happened.

Ben took advantage of the situation. He brought his ship around and came up on the enemy’s six once more. Catching the pilot off guard, Ben got him in his sights again and fired a single burst. It was a direct hit.

The starpilot didn’t have time to wonder why he’d escaped certain death as another TIE approached. As it did, Ben sensed the pilot trying to scan his mind by means of the Dark Side. “It can’t be!” the young man exclaimed. He knew beyond any doubt that the enemy he faced was Sith. He was certain of it.

Ben concentrated with all his might in an attempt to block the pilot from intruding upon his thoughts. It worked. He immediately reversed thrusters. Getting on the TIE's tail, he fired. The ship burst into fragments. Then he went after another one and took him out, then another, and another. TIE's continued targeting his X-Wing, but their blasts were repeatedly deflected. Ben continued to fire on his foe as he soared thorough the melee.

\*

The Grand Moff couldn't understand it. He'd felt the Death Star vibrate as soon as they'd activated the superlaser, but the powerful weapon failed to destroy the target. They had used a full charge to destroy Malastare. The weapon's system did need a full twenty-four hours to completely recharge, but Lucian was certain that it held more than enough energy for the short burst needed to destroy a cruiser. Regardless, why had Vader's children failed in their attempt to break through the cruiser's defense system? How had they been blocked? Gris was completely baffled.

Lucian continued to stare out the viewport as the battle continued. The enemy was being destroyed, thank the stars; all except for one X-Wing. Lucian had never seen such flying ability before. This ace was soaring through the TIE's, taking them out one at a time without suffering any damage to his own ship. This allowed his comrades to escape annihilation. How could this possible with the children's use of the Force? The Grand Moff had enough of this incompetence. He couldn't stand here and watch helplessly while his pilots allowed themselves to be destroyed. Vader's children or not. "Order our fighters back at once," he commanded.

"Back sir?"

"You heard me! Order them back immediately! Can't you see what's happening out there? Our ships are being destroyed. I cannot and will not allow this to continue. It's a complete disgrace. I want our fighters back on board this minute."

"Yes sir." Vader's child closed his eyes and silently communicated with his brothers. "The TIE's are heading back sir."

"Good. As soon as they're on board initiate the cloaking system. We're getting the hell out of here. Maybe then you'll be able to figure out why we failed to destroy that cruiser!"

"Yes sir."

\*

Captain Brant slowly came out of his stupor. The man was dumbfounded, not understanding why he hadn't heard Lando screaming. It was just that he'd been completely

shocked to see a Death Star. He thanked the stars that the Solaris hadn't been destroyed when the battlestation fired on them. Admiral Calrissian had immediately taken command of the vessel and given orders for the shields to be raised and the X-Wings deployed.

Brant stood transfixed at the viewport watching his fighters being destroyed. All of them, except for one X-Wing. It had to be Ben Solo. The captain assumed the young man was using the Jedi powers he claimed to have in order to defend his ship. He was engaging the enemy fearlessly, while not taking any hits at all. Brant had never seen such flying ability before.

Lieutenant Gregor suddenly shouted, "The TIE's are retreating sir."

"Retreating?" Brant asked, puzzled by this announcement.

"Yes sir."

Brant couldn't comprehend such an action. The enemy had the advantage. Why in the hell were they retreating? His brows wrinkled in a frown as he replied, "Order our fighters back. I'm going down to the flight deck. Lieutenant Gregor. You've got the con."

"Aye Captain."

Alec Brant needed to speak with Ben. Perhaps this strange young man did possess a special skill that enabled him to use this so-called Force. Brant had heard extraordinary tales of the Jedi's defeating foes of the Old Republic by using some sort of miraculous power. His brother had scoffed and told him that the Jedi had never existed. Alec idolized his older brother and naturally believed everything he said, but what if he'd been wrong? If Solo really had trained to be a Jedi, maybe he'd know why the TIE's were retreating.

Alec walked over to Admiral Calrissian and asked him to accompany him down to the flight deck. Lando stood as if frozen to the spot. He slowly turned and looked at Brant with a perplexed expression on his face. He couldn't understand the enemy's retreat any more than Brant could. They started towards the turbolift, but both men stopped short when they heard the first officer call to his captain again.

Brant turned and asked, "What's wrong Lieutenant Gregor?"

"Sir. The target. It's gone. It disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes sir."

"What do you mean, disappeared? Where is it?"

"I don't know sir. As soon as their fighters returned it vanished. Look for yourself."

Both men walked back to the viewport and looked out. The battlestation was nowhere in



sight. Brant shook his head in utter disbelief. Did this Death Star have some kind of cloaking device? It was very unlikely. No cloaking system he'd ever heard of held enough power to conceal a vessel an eighth that size. "Keep your eyes peeled Lieutenant. If you notice anything, and I mean anything out of the ordinary, sound the alarms immediately."

"Yes sir."

Brant and Calrissian entered the turbolift and hit the button for the flight deck. Having reached the level, they exited the elevator and waited for Ben to land. Both men suspected the youth had knowledge beyond their limited means of comprehension. While waiting, Brant asked Lando, "Do you have any idea what just happened out there sir? Why would they retreat?"

"I have no idea Alec, but Ben might. He's got some kind of abnormal ability. Claims he's connected to this supposed Force in some way."

Brant continued rambling about the attack, not hearing Lando's response at all. "Our pilots are better trained than that. I can understand a few losses, but the TIE's were taking all our fighters out. If it weren't for young Solo, who knows how many ships they would've destroyed."

Lando Calrissian wondered how any of them survived at all.

\*

Ben was in Brant's quarters. "I'm telling you those TIE pilots were Sith!" the young starpilot exclaimed for the third time.

"Calm down son. You're not making sense," Brant stated as he listened to the flustered youth rant. "Just who or what are these Sith you're talking about?"

"The Sith are the complete opposite of the Jedi. The Jedi were selfless and only used the Force in order to help mankind. Passion ruled the Sith. They were evil. They thought only of themselves. The Sith craved power then, and that's what they want now. They won't be satisfied until they control the entire galaxy."

Brant asked, "Are they using this force of yours too?"

"It's not my force. It's "The Force." It's hard for anyone who isn't endowed with the ability to understand exactly what the Force is, as well as what one can do while using it. The Force enables an individual to use supernatural powers. Luke Skywalker used the Force when he took out the first Death Star. It's what the Jedi used to protect the Solaris. Forgive me sir, but it would take too long to explain the Force fully."

"You're sure these Sith were on that Death Star?" Brant asked.

"Yes sir. I'm positive. Palpatine was really a Sith Lord by the name of Darth Sidious. He

used his powers to murder the Jedi and overthrow the Old Republic. When Anakin Skywalker killed the Emperor, he destroyed the Sith, or so it appeared at the time. Now they're back. I don't know how or why. There's only one thing I am certain of. The Sith were on those TIE fighters and they're also on board that Death Star."

Lando suddenly found his voice, "Darth Vader was a Sith Lord, wasn't he?"

"Yes he was," Ben replied solemnly.

"Then we're in big trouble," Lando responded as a frown creased his forehead.

Brant knew what a Death Star was. He'd just never seen one before this day. Everyone knew about the destruction of the Death Star, as well knowing that Emperor Palpatine died when it exploded. The armada had dispersed without their dictator to guide them, enabling the Alliance to win the war.

Brant couldn't help but question what Ben just told him about his grandfather. Raymus Antilles was certain Anakin Skywalker died on Mustafar when he fought Darth Vader. If dead, how could the man be responsible for Palpatine's death like Ben claimed? Skywalker supposedly died years before the Death Star was destroyed. Then again, Antilles was quite old. Maybe he'd misconstrued the facts.

"Raymus Antilles wasn't aware of the truth sir. He thought my grandfather died while on Mustafar, but he really died on the second Death Star. Anakin Skywalker killed Palpatine when the Emperor attacked his son. My grandfather sacrificed his life in order to save my uncle."

"How is that possible? Darth Vader would've killed Skywalker before he got anywhere near Palpatine." Brant stated, suddenly realizing he hadn't said anything about Antilles out loud.

Ben didn't reply. He sat quietly for the longest time.

"I don't know whether I like the idea of you reading my mind. Is that part of this force you keep talking about?"

"I suppose so sir, but I'm not really reading your mind. I'm sensing your thoughts. It's rather confusing for me too. I've never been able to sense anything this strongly before, not even with Padmay. I guess my abilities are increasing a bit."

"That's quite an understatement," Brant snorted. "Regardless, you still haven't answered my question. How could your grandfather get close enough to Palpatine in order to kill him?"

Ben looked over at Lando. Luke wanted him to know their true heritage, but when Ben told him, he knew Lando hadn't believed him. He'd completely rejected the idea that Darth Vader was Luke's father.

Lando asked, "What's wrong Ben?"

"Nothing Uncle Lando. I've just been trying to decide how much I should tell Captain Brant. I suppose I should reveal everything. This is no time for secrets." Ben sighed heavily and began.

As Alec Brant listened to Ben's revelation, he recalled all the terrifying tales he'd been told about Darth Vader when a child. He'd experienced nightmares as a result. Brant was shocked to think that Ben could be related to such a fiend. He tried to hide his revulsion when he finally asked, "Are you saying that your grandfather was Darth Vader?"

"I'm ashamed to have to admit it, but yes. My grandfather lived on to become the most feared terrorist this galaxy has ever seen. It was through Anakin Skywalker that Palpatine was able to achieve complete dominance over the systems. Yet, through my grandfather the Empire fell. It's rather ironic, wouldn't you say?"

"I don't know what to say," Brant stated flatly.

"There's really nothing to be said. I'm afraid we're going to come up against a formidable enemy. You have the right to know who you'll be fighting alongside of. I hope you can still trust me considering what I've just admitted."

"You have my complete trust son. Now more than ever. I realize how hard it must've been for you to divulge such a terrible family secret. Thank you for sharing it with me, but it certainly wasn't necessary."

"It was extremely important to me sir. I don't want any more secrets in my life. Omission of facts is the same as deceit. Deception leads down the path to the Dark Side of the Force."

"I appreciate your honesty Solo," Brant said, even though he didn't understand Ben's last remark at all.

## Chapter Sixteen

### - Fear -

The Chosen One walked through the enormous crowd that had gathered waiting for his return. Each Jedi bowed as he passed, showing him honor.

"Greetings my Masters," Anakin said as he bowed to Obi-Wan, Yoda, Qui-Gon and Mace Windu. They'd been sitting on the Temple steps, but rose and bowed back when he stood before them.

“Greetings to you as well my friend,” Obi-Wan replied. “We’ve all been awaiting your return.” He spread his arms gesturing towards the crowd.

Anakin looked out over his brothers with mixed feelings. He was well aware of what they’d soon face.

Yoda asked, “Find the answers, seek you did?”

“Yes Master.”

“Then come and discuss it we will.”

The Chosen One followed Yoda into the Temple. As he stood before the Jedi Council, which numbered over five hundred senior members, Anakin told them what he’d learned from the midi-chlorians. He explained what they’d have to do in order to restore balance to the Force. While discussing his plan, Anakin realized that this was what he’d craved while alive. He’d wanted the Council’s acceptance and respect. He’d wanted to share in their discussions and take part in their decisions. Every being on the Council was now listening to Anakin’s advice and showing him all due respect. He was truly amazed. He’d finally achieved the goal that he’d strived so hard for in life, to be a trusted member of the Jedi Council.

After his plan was agreed upon, the rest of the Jedi were told. Anakin was sitting on the Temple steps with Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon waiting for their decision. It was important that all the Jedi give their consent before proceeding. It was going to be a tremendous task to summon them all, but every Jedi that had passed into the Netherworld would have to be assembled here at the Temple. The entire brotherhood was needed in order for the plot to succeed.

\*

The Chosen One felt Luke Skywalker’s presence. He waited patiently, barely controlling his emotions while waiting for his only son to arrive. He hadn’t seen Luke since he bid him farewell on Endor. When he finally saw Luke approaching the Temple, Anakin ran to him. Embracing him, he was barely able speak due to his joy, but managed to say, “I’m so happy you’re here Luke. It seems like an eternity has passed since I saw you last. We didn’t have much time when my body was dying on the Death Star. When I saw you on Endor in phantom form I was only allowed to say goodbye. There’s so much I wanted to tell you.”

“I know everything about you already father. Your life experiences passed between us before you died. Don’t you remember transferring your thoughts to me?”

“Yes,” Anakin said solemnly. “There’s more for us to discuss concerning my fall from grace, but this isn’t the time. This is a happy moment. You’ll have to come with me and meet your

mother later. She'll be so happy to see you."

"Will there be a later father? The disturbance we've felt is the Sith, isn't it? I've never felt the Dark Side this strongly before. Is this why all the Jedi are gathering?"

"I'm afraid so. We all have a tremendous undertaking ahead of us. One which will determine our fate, as well as mankind's. Balance has to be restored before it's controlled by the Sith."

"I thought balance was restored to the Force when you killed Emperor Palpatine."

"So did I Luke. So did I."

"Discuss this later you will. Ready the Jedi are," Yoda interrupted them.

Anakin embraced his son again before going back to the Temple.

\*

The Supreme Ruler ranted loudly while pacing furiously back and forth. He'd felt his children's failure. "They" had interfered. The Jedi. Obi-Wan!

The Sith Lord didn't know how the Jedi managed to use their powers in this dimension, but they'd deflected the laser beam fired at the Solaris. The Death Star failed to destroy Ben's ship. He'd put his grandson completely out of his mind once he'd recognized his wife's essence inside his granddaughter. Lord Vader knew he'd have to gain control over Ben before the Jedi did, as well as his sister. He wouldn't have time to torture her soul as he'd intended. He'd have to turn her immediately. He would turn his love to the Dark Side, or he would kill her. It was as simple as that. Vader smiled cruelly before climbing the stairs towards Padmay's prison.

The chamber door burst open and slammed against the wall. The young girl couldn't help but scream. She felt her captor's rage as he stepped out of the shadows. Storming over to the bed, she finally saw his face. Padmay gasped and her mouth gapped open in shock. She knew who this man was now. She recognized him from the holo-portraits her mother had shown her as a child. The figure who stood before her was her grandfather. It was impossible of course. Anakin Skywalker was dead.

Staring into her captor's eyes she shook in fear. His eyes glowed bright yellow. These were the eyes of her nightmares. She knew if she looked into their depths for any length of time she'd lose her mind. Padmay turned her face from his.

"Don't turn away from me my love," Vader said with contempt. "You'll not forsake me as you did before Padme. I will not allow it!" He grabbed her face, forcing her to look at him.

Padmay screamed. She tried reaching out to Ben with all the power of the Force held

within her.

The Supreme Ruler laughed as he squeezed Padmay's cheeks in a viselike grip. "Scream my love. Yell as loud as you can. Bring your brother to me," the man commanded as he allowed Padmay's cry for help escape to her twin.

\*

The Solaris had come about and was heading to Coruscant. Ben was standing between Lando and Brant. The captain tried to explain why they had to cancel the search. "I'm sorry I had to scrub this mission Ben, but you must realize the importance of warning Coruscant of the impending threat. Our communications have been disrupted. I imagine it's due to the debris from Malastare."

"I understand why we have to return to Coruscant sir. I'm certain that's where the Death Star is headed. Trillions of lives are in jeopardy. Warning them is more important," the young man stated sadly, aware he had no say in the matter. All of a sudden Ben's hands flew to his ears as screams of sheer terror exploded inside his head.

Lando rushed to his side. "Are you alright Ben? Can you hear me? Answer me."

The world around Ben slowly dissipated to a haze. Lando's worried voice faded to a faint whisper, while Padmay's screams intensified. Panic seized control of Ben's heart. His sister was in terrible danger and needed his help. He had to convince Brant to turn around!

As Ben's fear started to overwhelm him, a great calm started to envelope his entire being. He heard a familiar voice calling out to him.

"Ben. Can you hear me?"

"Uncle Luke?"

"Yes Ben. It's me. He told me to contact you. He knew you'd recognize my voice."

"Who Uncle Luke?"

"The Chosen One Ben. It's extremely important that he speak with you."

\*

Lucian Gris vented his wrath on the nearest child. He raved like a madman in front of the whole crew. After having the system checked numerous times, he'd discovered that the weapon hadn't misfired at all. The laser had expelled an enormous amount of energy, but apparently the children were the ones responsible for missing the target.

Vader's child sat patiently and let his superior rant on and on. After the Grand Moff had exhausted himself, the young man turned to Lucian and said in a bored tone of voice, "You may

be in command of this battlestation, but your overemphasized, emotional outburst is uncalled for. It's extremely distracting. We'll warn you only once. We are Vader's children and have the power to eliminate you at our discretion. We're aware that we failed in our attempt to destroy the enemy vessel. We've discussed it and will remedy the situation. Now, if you are quite finished, we're coming up on the wookiee planet of Kashyyyk. What are your instructions?"

Fearing Vader's children, Lucian tried to control his rage. If they were as powerful as the Emperor, each one had the power to kill him by mere thought alone. He knew that he was lucky to be alive at all, let alone be given command of this Death Star. He was certain that Lord Vader was aware he'd been the one who'd given the order to retreat from Endor. The Supreme Ruler could've killed Lucian for his cowardice, but he chose to ignore his transgression.

The Grand Moff looked around the bridge. The children stared back with scorn in their eyes. "Take control of the battlestation and scan the planet for resistance," Lucian meekly ordered.

"The wookiees are powering up their deflector shields. We're blocking them."

Lucian waited impatiently, but didn't dare show his frustration. "Are you having any problems?"

"No sir. No problem at all."

"Then fire at will." Lucian walked over to the viewport and looked out. There was a bright flash of light from the superlaser. The planet was completely obliterated.

The Death Star accelerated through the debris of Kashyyyk as it headed towards their next target. Lucian continued to think about that one star cruiser and how it escaped destruction. He couldn't understand how the children missed the target. How had a single rebel pilot destroyed so many of their fighters? Vader's children were flying the TIE's. Weren't they using their so-called powers to defend themselves?

"It's not for you to know," Vader's children said in unison as they glared at their superior officer contemptuously.

Lucian's eyes seemed to bulge from their sockets. The children had read his mind! They really were as powerful as the Supreme Ruler!

"I'll be in my quarters," the Grand Moff replied as he hurried to the turbolift.

## Chapter Seventeen

- Doubt -

“I’m sorry to come to you under such circumstances Ben, but there’s much we need to discuss,” Anakin Skywalker told his grandson. “First of all, I want to tell you how proud I am that you revealed your heritage. I wouldn’t be able to assist you further if any secrets were held back. The whole truth has to be known, no matter how painful or embarrassing. Deceit leads down the path towards the Dark Side of the Force.”

“I know that sir. Uncle Luke drummed that fact into my head enough.”

“It was necessary that you learn that lesson in particular. I think you can understand why. With our abilities, it’s important to know how easily one can be swayed to the Dark Side.”

“Yes grandfather. I understand that.”

“It’s important that you keep that lesson foremost in your mind, especially now.

“It always is sir. Uncle Luke was a very good teacher.”

“Yes he was. I’m extremely proud of my son,” Anakin replied.

Ben could almost see the smile spreading across his grandfather’s face. “Was the Force guiding me so we’d find the Death Star sir?”

“Yes. The Jedi were there to protect you, as well as your comrades when the Sith attacked the Solaris.”

“How grandfather?”

“The Jedi all joined together as one and used the Force to create a shielding around the Solaris. We shielded you in your fighter as well.”

“Something like a deflector shield?”

“The result is the same.”

“Why couldn’t you protect the other X-Wings?”

“The Jedi haven’t gathered enough in strength yet. We had to choose whom to keep safe. We had to sacrifice a few in order to protect the rest of you. But you mustn’t mourn your comrades Ben. They’re spirits are a part of the Netherworld now.”

“I lost quite a few good friends today.”

“They aren’t lost as long as you keep their memory alive.”

“I know that, but it doesn’t ease my mind very much.”

“I’m extremely sorry we couldn’t protect them, but let’s hope your friends will be the only ones to sacrifice their lives to this cause.”

“To defeat the Sith?”



“Yes. There’s another serious matter that must be discussed. You have a very important decision to make Ben. You can continue to Coruscant in order to warn them, or you can go to Geonosis to rescue Padmay. I have the power to influence your captain into changing course. I’m afraid you’ll have to make this decision on your own. I cannot assist you.”

Ben was stunned and didn’t know how to reply. He knew they had to warn Coruscant about the Death Star, but Padmay was his sister. She mattered to Ben more than anyone. And what of the lives he’d be sacrificing if they went to rescue her? Ben thought about the seriousness of the decision he was being asked to make. He realized it was the same kind of dilemma Anakin faced when he tried to save his wife from death. Ben finally understood Anakin’s reasoning, choosing love over duty. He’d made the wrong choice. Ben wondered if he’d make the same mistake. Was he strong enough to sacrifice his sister in order to save others? The youth didn’t know what to do.

“I know how hard this decision is to make Ben. More than you can possibly realize. I loved your grandmother with such a passion that I couldn’t bear to lose her. I allowed myself to believe Palpatine when he told me he could save Padme’s life. I should’ve known he was lying, but I blinded myself to the truth. Millions suffered due to my error in judgment. Don’t make the same mistake I did. Use your mind to guide you. Not your heart. I know you love your sister very much, but lives have already been lost. Many more will die in the days ahead. Just how many depends on your decision. Search your feelings son. What would Padmay want you to do?”

Ben didn’t have to think twice. He knew his sister would gladly sacrifice her life in order to save others. “We have to proceed to Coruscant.”

“Is that your decision?”

Ben hesitated. Did he really want to sacrifice Padmay in order to save others? He knew it was the right thing to do, but was it really what he wanted? Did he have the right to decide anyone’s fate? He finally replied, “Yes sir. I know beyond any doubt that Padmay would want me to do this.” The young man was heartbroken. He knew going to Coruscant meant that he might never see his twin alive again.

“Are you sure Ben? You’re risking your sister’s life. She’s in great danger.”

“I know that grandfather, but I believe Padmay would want me to do everything in my power to prevent the slaughter of innocent lives.”

“Even though she is in great peril? You must be absolutely certain Ben. There can be no turning back once the course is set.”

“I realize that, but what else can I do? I know I panicked before, but should I sacrifice an entire planet and who knows how many more systems just to save one life? I don’t want to be responsible for so many deaths. I don’t have a choice. We have to go to Coruscant.”

“I am so very proud of you Ben. You’re selfless, a true Jedi at heart. We can only hope that your sister is just as strong. At the appropriate time I’ll return. Until then, have faith in us son.”

“I’ll try grandfather. I’ll try,” Ben responded.

\*

“Ben! Can you hear me?” Lando was beside himself. Ben was in some kind of a trance, speaking into thin air just like Luke used to do. Who in the hell was he talking to? “Ben!” Lando shouted once again.

Lando’s voice started to penetrate the fog that surrounded Ben as he slowly came out of his dazed state. His eyes focused on his surroundings. He wasn’t on the bridge anymore. He was lying on a cot in the infirmary. Lando was standing above him with concern etched deeply on his face. “I’m alright Uncle Lando,” Ben said as he rose to a sitting position.

“Are you sure you’re okay kid? You had me scared half to death. I didn’t think you were ever gonna come out of that trance.”

“I’m fine now.”

“Don’t ever do that to me again! You must have taken ten years off my life.”

“I’m sorry Uncle Lando. I didn’t freely enter into that state, but I’m glad I did. I know exactly what to we have do now. We have to go to Coruscant and stop the Death Star, but after that, we have to go to Geonosis. That’s where Padmay is being held captive. That’s where our true enemy is waiting for us.”

\*

Vader’s rage was out of control. The Jedi were keeping his grandson from him. He’d almost had him. He’d felt the boy’s panic as Ben heard his sister’s cries of terror. His fear for her overruled his thoughts of warning Coruscant. Then Ben’s mind suddenly slipped from the Sith Lord’s grasp. He’d been blocked by the Jedi. Vader tried in vain to recapture the lad’s mind, but it was useless.

“I’ve had enough of their interference!” he exclaimed to himself. “The Jedi will pay dearly for disrupting my plans.”

The Sith Lord swore that he’d find a way into the Netherworld and destroy all of the Jedi,

including everyone they cared about. He looked up the staircase. Yes. He would make Ben pay most of all. Vader's own son had rejected him years ago. Now he'd lost his grandson as well. The one Ben loved most of all would suffer for his resistance. Vader stormed up the steps to his chambers once more.

The chamber door burst open sending splinters of wood flying through the air. Padmay whimpered when the Supreme Ruler entered the room. "Please. Not again. I can't endure it. I'll do or say anything you want. I'm begging you. Please don't hurt me again," the terrified girl pleaded.

"Anything?"

"Yes. Anything," Padmay replied in fear.

"Would you finally admit that you're my wife?" Vader asked softly, hoping she'd finally accept the truth.

"But I'm not your wife," Padmay squeaked out, even though she knew exactly who this man was the instant he grabbed her jaw. She couldn't explain it. He was only a few years older than her. Regardless, Padmay knew this man was her grandfather. It had to be some kind of terrible mistake, of course. The whole concept was absolutely bizarre. There was no way he could be Anakin Skywalker.

Padmay knew she was related to this stranger by blood. She could sense the strong connection between them, but didn't understand why he looked exactly like her grandfather. Maybe Anakin had impregnated a woman while away on a mission during the Clone War, she mused. Surely he'd been terribly lonely and sought comfort in someone's arms, but Luke swore that Anakin stayed true to Padme. He'd told her that Anakin only had one love in his life. That love had been Padme Amidala. Luke claimed they'd both been pure of body when wed, that he and Leia were their only children. Padmay assumed that Anakin must've had another child after he turned to the Dark Side. That had to be the explanation. This man had to be Darth Vader's son.

Padmay knew deep in her heart that she was lying to herself. She knew who this man really was. She felt it to the very depths of her soul. He was Anakin Skywalker. No, not Anakin. This man was born from Anakin's dark side. He was Darth Vader reborn. Yet, there was more than just the presence of Darth Vader that dwelled within this being. Anakin Skywalker still had good inside his soul when he died. It's what enabled him to kill Darth Sidious. The life force who stood before Padmay now hadn't an ounce of good inside him. He couldn't have. Not after what he'd done. This man's essence was pure evil.

None of this explained why he claimed to be her husband, of course. Did he actually believe she was Padme Amidala brought back to life? He must believe it. Why else would he try so hard to convince her of it? Padmay knew she resembled Padme Amidala a great deal. She'd been told this fact as a child. Her mother had shown her holo-portraits of her grandmother. She had been a beautiful woman. Padmay used to pray she'd grow up to be half as lovely someday, but now she wished she didn't look like her grandmother at all.

This man had to be completely insane, of course. The situation was sad in a sick, twisted way. Anakin must've loved Padme very much in order to have been hurt so deeply. Padmay pitied this poor, lost soul.

"How dare you pity me!" the Emperor yelled in anger.

Padmay cringed at his wrath as her captor went off on a tirade, pacing back and forth in a fury.

"You have no idea how much I want revenge for all that was done to me," the man screamed at the top of his lungs. "You couldn't possibly understand the suffering I endured because you'd turned against me. Have you ever burned yourself my love? Can you imagine having your entire body consumed by flames? Fused skin and clothing had to be peeled away from me after being incinerated on Mustafar. Under that charred and blistered surface my body was an open sore. When the med-droids treated my wounds they had to scrape down to raw flesh in order to keep infection from setting in. The pain I suffered when I was first placed in that horrid suit was excruciating. The slightest movement shredded my open wounds. When my body started to heal my wounds itched beyond belief. Being trapped in that suit I couldn't relieve the discomfort it caused. Can you envision not being able to do something as simple as scratch an itch? It drove me absolutely mad."

"Can you imagine what it was like being left almost completely blind? The mask I had to wear had special lenses built into it. I was never able to see anyone through my own eyes again. Can you imagine your ears melted to mere stubs being left almost completely deaf. Do you know what it's like having your hair burned entirely from your scalp? Can you imagine being injured so badly you'd lost almost every inch of flesh on your body? I was left horribly scarred Padme."

"You could never comprehend what it was like never being able to take another breath without a device to control each and every gasp of oxygen pulled into your lungs. Nor can you imagine having your vocal cords seared, nor your lips and tongue burned so badly you couldn't speak coherently without a device that enunciated every word spoken with a strange voice not my

own. I wasn't even able to eat like a normal human anymore. Tubes were implanted in my stomach in order to sustain me. Need I mention what kind of dreadful device was installed to relieve myself before being able to use a fresher on my own? I was mortified having droids cleanse the filthy apparatus. It was like being a helpless newborn having my diapers changed."

"You couldn't possibly perceive the pain that I endured learning how to walk again after Kenobi took my legs. Each step I took caused such intense pain it's beyond all description. Just trying to keep my balance with the inferior parts those incompetent surgical-droids affixed was unbearable. It took months before I could walk with any semblance of a human being again; instead of the unsteady, mechanical lurching I demonstrated when I took my first steps."

"Even after I built my hermetically sealed chamber aboard the Executor where I could escape from that claustrophobic suit briefly, the total isolation I felt was beyond all limits of endurance. When the few humans I allowed to look at my mutilated form turned away from me in absolute disgust, I wanted to end my existence, but dared not because I served the Emperor. Can you imagine being so disfigured that no one could look at you without cringing? I can still see the shock of all those who gazed upon me. I was a handsome man once, as I am again. I was never prideful of my appearance Padme, but once your features are taken and you're left horribly marred, one tends to appreciate a familiar reflection. I dared not look at myself. I can still see the horror and revulsion in the eyes of those who looked upon my face. It haunts me to this day."

"Can you conceive what it was like never being able to touch or feel anything or anyone ever again with your own flesh? Can you imagine never being able to make love again?" the Sith Lord asked with malice in his voice. "Being imprisoned inside that suit was like being cast into the far reaches of space where no man has gone. I was completely cut off from humanity. I felt so alone and extraordinarily vulnerable, but I learned how to cope. I had no choice. I overcame my misery and became one with the pain. I devoured my torment before it devoured me. I used it to my advantage. I embraced the Dark Side with every ounce of my soul. That was the only thing that saved me. That, and my need for revenge."

"No Padme. You could never understand the absolute nightmare I've lived through day after day. You've no conception of what it was like having to endure the physical pain, let alone the heartbreak, as well as the mental anguish I suffered because of your betrayal. I was forsaken not only by you, but by the Jedi Council, as well as my so-called friend Kenobi. I'd lost faith in everyone. Everyone except for Palpatine. Yet, I couldn't even trust him. You don't know how many times he turned Force lightning on me in order to teach me a valuable lesson. And learn it I

did. Darth Sidious made me suffer horribly under his tutelage.”

“The Sith Lord promised me that we’d learn the secret to cheat death. That’s the reason I turned to the Dark Side; in order to save you. Little did I know at the time that Sidious would never return you to me. He could’ve restored your life force to me anytime he’d wished, but he always had a reason to postpone it. While my Master procrastinated, he never let me forget that I was responsible for your death. Not one day went by that he didn’t bring the subject up. How I hated him for that. I ran from his torture the only way I could. I sought the Jedi in order to exterminate them all. Exacting my revenge against them was never enough to ease the unrelenting guilt I carried within my soul. Others suffered because I couldn’t rid myself of the memory your death. After I killed them, I went after the rebels taking my wrath out on them. Darth Sidious finally paid as well. He suffered for all the anguish I endured at his hands, both physical and mental.”

“So you see my darling. I’ve learned how not to trust. I’ve learned all about treachery through Darth Sidious, and from you as well. I placed all my faith in hatred. But now my dear, you’ll know just how much I suffered. You’re going to pay dearly for betraying me.”

Padmay hadn’t expected such an uncontrolled outburst. This man was blaming her for all the suffering he’d experienced in his past life. Couldn’t he understand that she was not Padme Amidala? She wasn’t the one who’d rejected him all those years ago. She hadn’t betrayed him! The young woman knew deep in her heart that this hateful being would never show mercy. “How much more torment can I take?” she mewed.

Vader stormed back to the bed and grabbed Padmay by her shoulders. Squeezing her tightly, he leaned in close and stated maliciously “You’ll be surprised how much pain your body can endure.” His tone then changed abruptly. He spoke so softly Padmay could barely hear the man as he pleaded, “If you give yourself to me willingly I swear I won’t make you suffer as I did. I implore you Padme. Admit that you are my wife. Please tell me that you’re my angel.”

\*

The Death Star continued through the systems on their deadly voyage towards the core of the galaxy. Coruscant was their most important target. It was the center of democracy. The Grand Moff had been assured by Emperor Vader that once Coruscant fell, the rest of the galaxy would surrender without much of a fight. Any planet that did resist was to be annihilated.

The only planets he’d been given strict orders not to destroy were Tatooine and Naboo. The Supreme Ruler wanted the pleasure of destroying Tatooine by his own hand. Naboo was a

different matter entirely. He was not to destroy Naboo under any circumstances. Vader's children were ordered to control the minds of the population and destroy all who opposed them, but to leave the planet intact. When the galaxy was under the Emperor's complete control, he planned to make Naboo the center of his new Empire.

\*

The Grand Moff was in his cabin. It had become his sanctuary. While secluded, he could consider the situation without the children reading his mind. After they'd threatened him on the bridge, Lucian had to continually remind himself to keep his mind on the mission alone. Safe in his quarters, the man could analyze all the facts. He wondered what had gone wrong when they attacked the cruiser. Were Lord Vader's children fallible? They'd told him they'd been blocked. Blocked by who or what? If they were endowed with all of Vader's abilities, how could anything prevent them from using their powers?

Was Lord Vader aware of their failure? He'd told his children that he wouldn't be on board the Death Star physically, but would be with them through the Force. Could his powers reach this far? Could his Grand Army be defeated by the rebels? Was the new Supreme Ruler fallible? Emperor Palpatine had been certain of his control over the Empire, yet he'd been defeated by the Rebel Alliance. No, Gris suddenly thought. He'd better stop thinking along that line. If Vader's powers really were as immeasurable as he'd claimed, the man could easily reach out and kill him at will. Gris tried to erase all thoughts of doubt from his mind.

\*

Ben had returned to the bridge. He stood next to his captain and asked, "How much of a head start did they get on us sir?"

"About forty standard minutes to an hour. Things were a little hectic at the time if you recall. They must've installed some kind of cloaking device. It has to be extremely powerful in order to conceal a vessel that size. It was impossible to track their course. I'm assuming they're heading to Coruscant."

"I'm certain that's their destination sir," Ben replied.

Lando saw the look of concern on Ben's face. "Let's just hope they make a big show of it. Palpatine used to savor making a big impression when he held the upper hand. He loved seeing everyone bend to his will. I'm sure whoever is in charge on the Death Star will want to impress their strength before attacking Coruscant. Hopefully it'll buy us some time."

"I pray you're right Uncle Lando," Ben quietly replied.

“These old vessels are reputed to be a bit sluggish, but the Solaris has been upgraded quite a few times since the Old Republic used her. She’ll pull a maximum hyper-drive speed of 1500 KPH. We’ll shake her old hull to the limit, but she’ll do what’s required of her,” Brant stated proudly.

“Don’t worry son. We’ll make it there with plenty of time to spare,” Lando said trying to ease Ben’s fears, while his own dread started to enshroud him.

Wanting to be alone in order to think, Ben went to the observation deck. He stared out the viewport pondering the situation. He couldn’t understand why the Jedi needed his help in order to protect Coruscant. Maybe they weren’t strong enough to defeat the Sith without human assistance. Maybe it was against the Code. The reason why didn’t really matter to him. All Ben cared about was saving Padmay. But he’d given his word to his grandfather. He’d made the choice. If Padmay died it would be entirely his fault.

Ben was afraid. Not only for his twin, but for himself as well. He’d never been through a situation as serious as this. He’d fought in those few skirmishes when they chased the destroyers who’d raided the outposts in the Outer Rim, but those pilots hadn’t been Sith. The only real battle he fought in was when he flew against the TIE’s from the Death Star. He’d been shielded by the Jedi then. Would the Jedi be strong enough to protect him this time? Had they gathered enough in strength? Was he strong enough to face and defeat such a powerful foe? He had to stop thinking like this. Doubt is a tool of the Sith. Ben had to have faith that when the time came he’d be ready. He remembered his uncle’s warning. The Sith had to be guarded against at all times. How right Luke had been!

\*

Anakin Skywalker waited for his time of tribulation. The battle that lay ahead would determine the fate of both Jedi and humanity. He wondered if he’d be strong enough. Would the temptation to surrender to the Dark Side overwhelm him like it did when alive? Would he be able to destroy the Sith once and for all? Would he be able to save his grandchildren?

Flesh and blood were fragile, so easily destroyed. Anakin’s body had been destroyed long before his physical death. He’d had to survive inside that black suit after he’d been incinerated. It kept what was left of his shell alive. All that had remained of Anakin Skywalker’s former self had become evil.

Anakin held so much hate inside his soul then. Due to his anger, he’d allowed the Dark Side to take complete possession of him. He’d eased his guilt by continuously telling himself that



he was doing the right thing for the Republic, all the while knowing what he'd done was wrong. He'd murdered the Jedi due to his lust for ultimate power. He'd even killed his best friend, Obi-Wan. He knew deep in his heart that Padme hadn't really fallen in love with Kenobi, but he'd ignored what his heart told him due to his unfathomable needs. He'd pledged his soul to Darth Sidious in order to save Padme, but that wasn't the only reason he'd sworn his allegiance to the Sith Lord.

The Dark Side of the Force was all powerful in its seduction. Once Anakin witnessed the awesome might Palpatine held, it was impossible for him to turn away. The lure of ultimate power held an irresistible attraction. It consumed his soul with an overwhelming addiction. The Jedi, who only used the Force for good, never appreciated the full extent of evil the Sith possessed.

The one Anakin would engage in battle had full comprehension of that evil. The Dark One would have to destroy the Chosen One in order for the Sith to rule forever. Anakin could not allow that to happen. He'd been created for this purpose alone. He had to defeat the unholy creation born from his own blood. It was the only way to bring balance to the Force. Anakin prayed that he'd be strong enough to face the extraordinary event that lay ahead.

## Chapter Eighteen

### - Seduction -

The Chosen One was meditating, as were the rest of the Jedi. It was their way preparing for the upcoming battle. Luke couldn't spare the time to do the same. He had to find Leia. He had to convince her to come to the Temple in order to forgive their father. It was important that she do so; not only to help her children, but all mankind too. Without Leia's forgiveness Anakin wouldn't be able to proceed. His soul had to be cleansed completely of sin before confronting the new Sith Lord.

\*

"No. Absolutely not! I don't know how you can ask such a thing. You know what Vader did to me on the first Death Star. He's responsible for taking thousands of lives. He's a monster. I'll never forgive him."

"Not even to save your children? Can't you see that our father is trying to atone for all the wrong he did while under Palpatine's influence? Talk to him. You'll see what I mean. He's not the same person you dealt with on the Death Star. That was Darth Vader. This man is our father. He's

Anakin Skywalker.”

“I don’t care what name he goes under. He’s still evil.”

“The whole future of the galaxy is in jeopardy Leia. Thousands of innocents lives have been lost. More are slaughtered as we speak. We must destroy this new Sith Lord. Without your forgiveness Anakin won’t be able fight him.”

“Don’t use that as an excuse Luke. I’ll do whatever I can to help, but I refuse to absolve Darth Vader.” Leia hesitated before saying to herself, “I don’t have the courage to face him.”

“You won’t have to face him alone dear,” Padme Amidala said as she walked up to them.

“Mother?” Luke and Leia turned in surprise. This couldn’t be Padme Amidala they both thought, thinking the woman too young.

“Yes children. I’m your mother.”

“But you look so young,” they said in unison.

“Our souls enter the Netherworld as we are when death takes us.”

Leia couldn’t believe her mother looked so beautiful. She raised her brows in puzzlement and asked, “Is that why I look old enough to be “your” mother?”

Padme chuckled. “I’m afraid so my darling. Our spirits are seen as we were while alive in order to be recognized by family and friends.”

“If that’s the case, why does father’s spirit appear as it does?” Luke asked. “He wasn’t young when he died.”

“Your father is different from the rest of us Luke. Anakin Skywalker was not born of man. He’s the Chosen One. The midi-chlorians created him. When your father sacrificed himself he was redeemed. Because of that, Anakin’s spirit was allowed to enter the Netherworld as he was before he turned to the Dark Side.”

“I don’t understand mother. When father fought Ben Kenobi on Mustafar he’d cut off Anakin’s good arm and both of his legs. He was burned beyond recognition and had to wear that suit in order to sustain his life. He became more a robot than a man. Why isn’t he disfigured in the Netherworld?”

“You haven’t been listening Luke. Anakin isn’t like us. He’s the Chosen One. He wasn’t a mere mortal, nor was he a normal Jedi. He was, and still is, much more than that. His abilities transcend the universe.”

Luke shook his head in confusion, still not understanding.

Padme continued, trying to make her explanation more clear. “When Anakin surrendered himself to the Dark Side the good half of his soul died. That enabled his dark half to take possession of his body. In other words, Darth Vader’s body was disfigured Not your father’s. They became two separate entities.”

“I still don’t get it,” Luke stated in frustration.

“The reason your father appears young and unscarred in the Netherworld is because his soul died the instant he pledged himself to the Dark Side. I’m speaking figuratively, of course. Your father hadn’t really died, but the goodness that was a part him was trapped inside Darth Vader’s subconscious. You awoke Anakin’s virtue. That’s what allowed him to save your life. Due to his selfless act, Anakin’s soul was allowed entrance into the Netherworld as it was before he became a Sith Lord. He was cleansed of his wounds internally, as well as externally. Do you understand why your father looks as he does now?”

“I think so. You’re saying that Anakin was absolved of sin when he saved me. That’s why his spirit appears young and isn’t disfigured in the Netherworld. It’s almost as if Darth Vader never existed at all. Am I right?”

“Yes, but it’s mainly through your forgiveness that Anakin’s soul was purged. Since then, he’s held an immeasurable amount of love for all life forms. His affection radiates outwards and is clear for all to see.” Padme paused and looked at Leia. “Once one allows themselves to accept his affection, that is.” Turning back to Luke she said. “I’m sure you felt how much your father loves you. He proved that when he saved you.”

“I know that. I learned to love him too. But...”

“But what?”

“I can’t help but wonder what happened to his dark half? What happened to Vader?”

“I’m not certain. Perhaps his soul remained in some kind of limbo until...”

“Until now?”

“Yes. I believe that’s why your father is so upset. He feels responsible for the birth of the new Sith Lord. He can explain the situation much better than I can. That’s not the only reason I’m here through. I’ve wanted to see you both for such a long time. Won’t you give your mother a big hug?” Padme stretched her arms out to embrace her children.

Luke and Leia didn’t hesitate. They rushed into Padme’s arms. As they did, the questions flew from their mouths. “How did you find us? Where have you been all this time? Why didn’t you come to see us before this? Why did you wait so long?”

“Please children. One question at a time,” Padme laughed in delight. They finally ceased their seemingly unending query, allowing her to speak. “Now that I can get a word in edgewise, I’ll answer. It was important that your father and I renew our love for each other. Anakin didn’t know if I’d forgive him, let alone the two of you. I forgave him the second I saw him. I knew he was no longer evil. We planned on finding you sooner, but then he felt this disturbance in the Force. It took his mind from everything but righting the current situation. I felt an urgent need to find you as soon as possible.” She turned to Leia. “My precious daughter. You have to do as Luke asks. You must forgive your father. We wouldn’t ask it of you if we didn’t think it was absolutely necessary.”

“I can’t. He tortured me, as well as thousands of others. He brutally murdered those who resisted Emperor Palpatine without an iota of remorse. He forced me to watch as the Death Star destroyed Alderaan. Everyone I cared about died, including my family. No offense meant to you mother, but the Organa’s were the only family I ever knew. He took not only them from me, but he took your life as well. How can you expect me to forgive him for that?”

“Everyone he harmed while serving Emperor Palpatine has forgiven him Leia, even the Organa’s. Anakin wasn’t himself when he tortured you. He was Darth Vader.”

“But...”

“No buts about it. We’ll return with you Luke.”

“Mother. Please don’t make me to do this.”

“I won’t take no for an answer Leia. I won’t let you sacrifice my grandchildren when something can be done to prevent it.”

“Can I at least ask Han to come with us?”

“Of course you can. I can’t wait to meet him.”

Leia called to Han. When he saw Luke he was overjoyed. He ran to his friend and they embraced, spinning in a circle like children. They joked and slapped each other on the back before introductions were made to Leia’s mother. Padme explained where they were going. Han objected of course, but Padme had a way with words, finally convincing him of the need for their journey.

Very shortly, Leia would face Darth Vader. She hoped she’d be able to look upon his face and spit into it. She’d never forgive him. Even if it meant she’d be sacrificing her own children’s lives. Leia looked up into her husband’s eyes. She sighed nervously and said, “I guess I’m as ready as I’ll ever be.” She grabbed Han’s hand and held on to it tightly. The Solo’s headed to the Temple.

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Young Padmay Solo lay under her Master's weight. She was afraid to stir, lest she awaken her love. Lord Vader had been right. She was Padme Amidala reborn. Everything was so clear to her now. The Sith Lord had shown her in their past lives. They'd shared a brief, but passionate love as man and wife.

Padmay had been terrified of his wrath at first. Lord Vader invaded her mind, as well as her body. He'd touched her forehead and transferred all the pain he'd described in such detail. She suffered not only physical, but mentally as well. Padmay couldn't imagine how the poor man endured such pain. She'd never experienced such excruciating agony.

Her husband made her realize that he'd been abandoned by the Jedi; that they truly had been traitors to the Republic. He also made Padmay experience Darth Vader's loneliness and his feeling of sheer isolation while imprisoned inside that black, armored suit. She experienced his misery learning that everyone he'd loved had been taken from him. She'd felt his devastation when she'd turned from him, and just how much her betrayal ravaged his heart.

Yes. Padmay could well comprehend the Supreme Ruler's need to make her suffer. She could understand his rage and exorbitant need to exact revenge. She'd gladly join him in his retribution. The Jedi would pay for forsaking him. The Jedi, and anyone else who stands in her Master's way.

They'd made love countless times since Padmay learned the truth. How stupid of her to have wasted all that precious time. It was so exciting to be taken by him. He'd been brutal before she'd willingly surrendered herself to him, not a gentle touch was given. Once she told him she loved him, his touch softened, he'd been tender and loving. The Supreme Ruler whispered undying love in her ear. The ecstasy of her lover's embrace was more than she could've ever imagined. His slightest touch sent tremors of pleasure racing throughout her body. He took her breath away. She hadn't known what to expect from one minute to the next. He drove her to madness; then held back making her beg for more. Her Master introduced her to a world of sheer ecstasy. He opened her eyes to something wild and uncontrollable hidden deep within her core. The young woman never knew she was capable of such passion. Padmay couldn't sate her need for her Master.

Through the Supreme Ruler's tutelage Padmay was learning all about the Dark Side of the Force. Her Master allowed her to feel the incredible might he held. She'd never realized such unrestricted power existed. It was as if she had been in a deep sleep her entire life and was

suddenly reborn into a completely alien world. The unlimited power Vader radiated completely overwhelmed her. Once he taught her all he knew they'd rule the galaxy together. Padmay could hardly wait to fulfill her true destiny.

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Yes! He finally had her. She belonged to him now, body and soul. Lord Vader had shown the girl their past lives together. He made the girl understand that she was truly his wife returned from the dead.

He made Padmay suffer for her betrayal. He made her experience all the pain Darth Vader endured as flames raced up his body. How she'd screamed. She'd pleaded for mercy, but he showed her none. She was at the peak of endurance before he finally relented.

Padmay's screams aroused him. He forced himself on her with unrestrained fury. She'd bled proving her purity, which excited him all the more. Though the memory of their passion was retained from his past life, he'd never lain with a woman while in this body. The Sith Lord hadn't remembered the pleasure it could bring as he rutted atop her like a beast in the field. She fought him which only increased his need. His assaults became more violent as a result. His rage was vented somewhat during an attack, though he didn't cease having his way until his seed erupted unhindered by contraception.

When the girl finally admitted that she loved him, Lord Vader turned the tables and showed her tenderness, which truly surprised him. He wasn't aware that he possessed the quality. He'd caressed her and dried the tears from her face while kissing her softly. He brought his wife to her first climax while in possession of Padme's body. It hadn't been long before she begged him to take her a second, and even a third time. It had taken time before her body responded to his ravenous appetite, but once it did, the lust she felt for him was as unquenchable as his own.

The Sith Lord let the girl experience the tremendous power he held within the Force. He led her to believe that they'd rule his new Empire together, but nothing was further from his mind. Padme betrayed him in their past lives. She'd pay for her treachery fully. Once she fulfilled her usefulness he was going to kill her. Before doing so, he'd torture her mind and body, more than what he'd already made her experience. He'd hold a mirror up to Padme, allowing her to see the monster she'd become as the Dark Side took complete possession of her soul. The Supreme Ruler planned to keep his wife alive for his pleasure only. When he tired of her, and not until then, he'd dispose of her lifeless form. He'd keep his vassal alive for the time being knowing she'd provide him enjoyment, both physically and mental. Padme had a lot of years to make up for. Just thinking

of her retribution aroused him. She was sleeping soundly next to him, but it didn't matter. He pulled her to him waking her. She was soon as aroused as he. They joined together as one, their shared moans of bliss filled the hallways once more.

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Anakin felt his soul being ripped wide open the instant Padmay fell under the Supreme Ruler's spell. He'd used her empathy and awakened sexual cravings as his tool to turn her, just as Darth Sidious had used Anakin's needs to turn him. This evil being weakened the girl's spirit by vicious attacks made on her mind and body. This cloned version of Darth Vader made Padmay believe that she was Padme Amidala Skywalker.

There was never a love as pure, or quite as intense as Anakin's extraordinary passion for Padme. It was just as much a spiritual love as it was physical. The unlimited power of their affection bound their souls together even before death. This vile creature abused the purity of their love, tainting it.

His granddaughter was such a young girl, a child really. She'd never known love in her short life span. How could such an innocent understand that love had nothing to do with the lust she felt for this deceiver? How could Padmay comprehend that what she was yielding to was foul and disgusting?

This abomination tricked Padmay into believing that she was Padme Amidala returned from the dead. It wasn't just to turn her, but to sate his physical needs. He'd denied himself of sexual pleasure before abducting Padmay. His abstinence made him yearn for her with an unfathomable lust, but he did not love her. Darth Vader was incapable of love.

Anakin was keenly aware that this unnatural being was his dark half, but the man was also much more. He was cloned from Vader, but he'd also acquired Sidious' characteristics. The Supreme Ruler was controlling Padmay's mind, just as Darth Sidious tried to control Anakin's son. Sidious had exaggerated need to turn Luke to the Dark Side. He wanted him to kill Darth Vader and take his place by his side. Fortunately, Luke denied him. Rejection enraged Darth Sidious and he turned Force lightning on Luke. That's when Anakin was set free from Vader's core. He'd saved his son. Now, Darth Sidious was getting a second chance to turn the Skywalker line.

The Chosen One knew the battle to save Padmay from this malignancy would be incredibly difficult. The Dark Side held an irresistible attraction, akin a black hole, sucking in all light. Once drawn in, the temptation of acquiring ultimate power was too strong to resist. Padmay hadn't

been strong enough to fight it. Her loyalty was now bound to her Master.

Anakin was heartbroken. He wondered if Padmay would blindly obey the Supreme Ruler as he'd obeyed Darth Sidious. If so, her sins would quickly darken her soul. He hoped that his grandchild would have enough strength to overcome her addiction. Otherwise she'd end up a slave to the Sith as he once was; completely under its sinister influence for the rest of her life. Anakin vowed that he'd do all in his power to free Padmay from the corruption of her soul, as well as keep Ben from succumbing to the lure of the Dark Side.

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Ben Solo staggered as a sensation of perversion slowly enveloped his entire being. He started to hear Padmay's thoughts swirling inside his mind. She spoke of doing terrible things with the new Sith Lord, sexual things that thoroughly revolted him. He'd no idea she even knew what these words meant, much less willingly perform them. Indecent images began to appear in his mind's eye. He tried to block the vile images out, but failed to do so.

Ben then heard the Sith Lord's cruel laughter. When it finally ceased, he said, "Your sister has done all those things with me Ben. She's done that and much more. She's given herself to me completely, body and soul. She now cleaves to me as my wife." He laughed maliciously again before saying, "Need I mention that your twin has joined me on the Dark Side of the Force? She's sworn her allegiance to the Sith."

Ben felt the man's smug satisfaction as he happily relayed this information. It felt as if his heart was being ripped from his chest. Falling to his knees, Ben screamed out in pure anguish, "NO! Not my sister! Why Padmay? Why?"

## Chapter Nineteen

- Forgiveness -

Padme and Luke brought Leia back to the Temple quite a while ago, but she just couldn't bring herself to face her father. She was still terrified of Darth Vader. They both assured Leia that Anakin was no longer that vile individual, but they couldn't convince her. Padme went to her husband and told him their daughter still refused to see him.

"Did you tell her about her children? Does she realize the danger they both face if I can't persuade her to forgive me?"

"Yes, but I don't think Leia understands the situation fully. Her fear of you is blocking



everything else out.”

“Then I have no choice but to force the issue.”

“She’ll come around eventually Ani. She just needs more coaxing.”

“We don’t have the luxury of time. I’ll do what I must to convince her,” Anakin stated sadly. He turned and started towards the forest where Han had set up camp.

Padme called out to him, “Be gentle with her Ani.”

Anakin’s disappointment over Leia’s refusal to see him instantly dissolved at the sound of Padme’s voice. He halted and looked back. “Don’t fret my love. I’ll be as chivalrous as I can be.”

Padme smiled. “Then I’ll cast all my worries aside. You’ve a way with words Anakin Skywalker. You swept me completely off my feet.”

“No. It was you who swept me off mine. You stole my heart the instant I saw you.”

“We were meant for each other Ani. Now, and throughout eternity.”

A huge grin spread across the Chosen One’s face. “Yes Padme. No matter what happens in the near future, that thought eases my mind greatly.” He turned from her again and proceeded into the woods.

As soon as Anakin neared their encampment, Han Solo stepped in front of him blocking the path. “Who are you?” he asked.

“You don’t recognize me as I appear now Han, but I’m Leia’s father.”

“You’re Vader?” Han asked in shock, not believing the young man who stood before him was the same vicious person who’d caused so much misery.

“Yes. I’m sorry you still think of me that way. Darth Vader was a part of my past. I know you still regard me as that monster, but it has no bearing on the situation now. Please let me pass. I must speak with my daughter.”

“She doesn’t want to see you.”

“I realize that, but she has to.”

“You’ll have to go through me,” Han announced boldly, still not believing this person was who he claimed to be. It wasn’t possible. Vader died an old man, while this man was young.

“If there was any other way to remedy the situation, I wouldn’t ask, but I’ve no choice in the matter. Your children’s lives are at stake. Do you want to see them die? Do you want to see them both turned to the Dark Side as I was? It’s already happened. Padmay has been seduced by a new Sith Lord who’s extraordinarily powerful. He won’t use her just to achieve his goals. He’ll kill her when she’s no longer useful. He’ll destroy her soul as well. She’ll end up in hell, just as I

would have if not for Luke. So will Ben if he's turned. Do you understand why it's so important for me to speak to Leia? I have to see her. If not, I won't be able to save either one of your children."

"We've tried to get her to see you, but she refused, and still does."

"Have you really tried Han? Have you made a serious effort? You both have every right to hate me, with good cause. I don't blame you for being obstinate, but I'm certain she'll listen to you. If you care for your children at all, you must convince Leia to see me."

"Don't you dare insinuate that I don't care about my children! I'd do anything to protect them, but you don't know how stubborn Leia is. She's made up her mind. No matter what anyone says, it won't alter her decision. She won't budge an inch. I've never been able to get her to see things my way. Besides, I don't want to change her mind. I won't force my wife to see you. She despises you and so do I."

"Then it appears I'll have to force the issue."

"You'll still have to go through me."

"I know," Anakin sighed. "I'm sorry for having to resort to this. I hope you'll forgive me." The Chosen One raised his hand slightly. Han rose up in the air and dangled as if he were a marionette. Anakin then moved the startled man aside, gently lowering him to the ground. Han sat in stunned silence. He didn't try to stop Anakin as he passed.

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"Has he left yet?" Leia asked as she turned expecting to see her husband.

"No, 'he' hasn't."

"You! Stay away from me. I don't want to see you." Leia spun away from her father and cowered in fear.

"I can't Leia. We have to speak. I need your forgiveness. I can't and won't leave without it. Your children's lives depend on it."

Leia spat out, "How dare you intrude upon this encampment expecting forgiveness for all you've done!"

"I realize it's extremely presumptuous of me, but it's very important that we speak Leia. At least hear me out."

"I've no desire to listen to you."

"I realize that, but you don't have a choice if you want to save your children. I understand your reasons for not wanting to see me, much less find it in your heart to absolve me, but you've

got to understand that I had no control of myself while under the influence of the Dark Side. Yes, I tortured you on the Death Star, yet it wasn't me. It was Darth Vader, but that's not who I am now. It was the vengeful part of my soul that made you watch the people you loved die on Alderaan. I can never excuse the atrocities I've committed against you and so many others. I didn't know you were my daughter at the time. Even if I had known it wouldn't have made any difference. My existence revolved around serving my Master, as well as my uncontrollable desire to exact revenge against the Jedi. I was blinded by rage."

Anakin paused. He took a deep breath before continuing, knowing his explanation would be difficult for his daughter to accept. "I'm ashamed to have to admit it, but it was fairly easy for Palpatine to seduce me to the Dark Side. I was weak and allowed it to happen. I feared for your mother's life and he used my fear to turn me. Saving her was the main reason I turned, but I also hungered for power. You'd know this if you'd allowed Luke to transfer my life experiences to you when he offered."

"Allow your vile thoughts inside my head? Absolutely not! I would've rather been thrown into a sarlacc pit. I hated you then and I still do."

"I know," Anakin sighed. Ignoring the stab to his heart her hatred caused, he continued. "When I became a Sith Lord Anakin Skywalker ceased to exist. I did whatever Palpatine wanted. I'm no longer that vile beast Leia, but the evil inside Darth Vader survived. The dark half of my soul has been reincarnated into another vicious Sith Lord. He's already seduced Padmay. He's turned her to the Dark Side. He's attempting to turn your son as we speak. I need you to absolve me in order to save their lives. Nay, their very souls."

"Forgive you? How can you expect me to forgive an evil monster like you?"

"You'll have to if you want to save your children. My dark half will destroy them if you don't."

"What do you mean, your dark half?"

"The evil part of my soul, Dark Vader, has been reincarnated into a new Sith Lord."

"Reincarnation is a myth."

"I'm afraid it isn't. At least, not for a soul who was not born of man."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"The midi-chlorians created me. I'm the Chosen One. Unfortunately, I'm not the only life they created. They created Darth Sidious as well. Darth Sidious was Emperor Palpatine."

"I know. Luke told me that. But why would the midi-chlorians create a Sith Lord? They

aren't evil."

"An old Sith Lord by the name of Darth Plagueis fooled them into creating a life for him. He played on their emotions, claiming to be unable to impregnate a woman. He pretended to be a good person, blocking his true character by means of the Dark Arts. Not aware how evil Plagueis was they'd agreed. They created a child endowed with extraordinary abilities. When they realized Plagueis was a Sith Lord, the midi-chlorians had no choice but to correct their error. The only way they could was to create another life that contained abilities that would equal Palpatine's. That's the only reason I was born. In order to cancel out the midi-chlorians' mistake."

"Palpatine is dead. What harm can he do?"

"More than you realize Leia. His clone is more powerful than Palpatine or Darth Vader alone. He's a combination of the two."

"Palpatine's clone? I thought..., What do you mean? You're confusing me."

"You're well aware that we're all born with a good and bad side to our souls. My soul was divided when Palpatine turned me to the Dark Side. He merged his mind with mine when I was near death on Mustafar. I was never aware he'd done it. Maybe if I had known I might've been able to prevent this current abomination from being reincarnated."

"I told you before. I don't believe in reincarnation," Leia repeated.

"Some say that there's no such thing as the Netherworld. Does that mean it doesn't exist? We're here, aren't we? Granted, not everyone has the ability to reincarnate, but some souls have been reborn. A few Jedi are immortal and can breach the boundaries between the living and the dead."

"You really expect me to believe that?"

"I don't expect you to believe anything I've said up to now, but if you let me continue I'm certain you will."

"Alright. You've piqued my curiosity, but I hope you realize that a lengthy explanation won't convince me that reincarnation is possible, nor will it change my mind about forgiving you."

"Point taken. Now, please be quiet while I continue."

"How can I keep you from rambling on? You're the Chosen One, aren't you? Can't you force me shut up?" She asked snidely.

"Don't tempt me daughter. I may have resort to that in order to get you to listen."

Leia didn't respond. She sat down on a stool and looked up at him wide-eyed. She appeared as if a child waiting to hear an outlandish fairy tale.

“Now that I’ve got your full attention I’ll continue. Emperor Palpatine learned how to cheat death by transferring his essence into me. He planned on destroying my mind and then taking possession of my body when his grew to weak. Palpatine always had back-up plans. Not knowing for certain if either of us would survive, he took my blood with the intention creating a clone that contained his memories. The clone he created is the new Sith Lord, but he’s more than a mere clone. Every thought, every memory, every experience, as well as our powers has been passed on to the new Sith Lord. In that respect, Darth Vader has been reincarnated.”

Leia was more perplexed than ever. “Even if true, what has any of this to do with me?”

Anakin continued. “This malignancy wants to turn both of your children to the Dark Side. If he can turn both of them they’ll be no stopping him. He wants to restore Palpatine’s tyrannical empire. He’s already manufactured another Death Star that’s traveling through the galaxy leaving death in its wake. Billions of lives have been lost already. Billions more are at stake. I cannot allow this to continue. The only way I can stop this abomination is with your help.”

“What do you expect me to do about it?”

“Absolve me. That’s all you need do. Then I’ll be able to confront him.”

“Never!”

“Leia. You don’t understand how important this is. The entire galaxy’s fate depends on stopping this madman. He’s already turned Padmay to the Dark Side. That bastard has awakened her sexual appetite and used that as his tool to turn her. He’s made her believe that she’s my wife reborn. Your own mother. Padmay has fallen completely under his spell. She’ll do anything he asks of her. She’ll even kill Ben if he can’t be turned. Do you want Padmay to murder her own brother? She will you know. She’ll die for her Master just as I would have.”

“That’s a lie! Padmay would never kill Ben!”

“She will if her Master commands it. His hold over Padmay is that strong. You don’t know the true power of the Dark Side. All you ever knew was your fear of me. You still fear me, though there’s no reason for it. You have to overcome your fear. I need your forgiveness in order to help your children. Please Leia. Embrace me. You’ll see that the evil that once existed inside my soul is gone for good. Look into my eyes. See your father for the first time. See me for who I truly am. I am begging you. Please absolve me. Do it for Padmay.”

“I can’t,” Leia sobbed as she spun around on the stool. She couldn’t bear to look upon her father’s face a second longer, especially after he said his evil half had corrupted her daughter. Oh how she hated this vile creature!

“Please Leia. I implore you. Turn around and look at me.”

“No. I’ll never forgive you. You’re a monster. I hate you!”

“Please look at me,” Anakin quietly repeated.

Leia turned and looked up at her father. She couldn’t stop herself. He’d willed it. Her brows suddenly wrinkled as she wondered, is this really the man she’d hated and feared all her life? This being was Darth Vader, yet he appeared to be nothing like him. This man claimed that Vader was reborn in another evil being. Was it really possible for one’s soul to become divided into two separate entities? Her mother told her that Anakin’s soul split when he became Darth Vader. Of course, Padme was blinded by her love and would believe anything he told her. Leia was positive that reincarnation wasn’t possible, nor being able pass on one’s essence into another person.

Another thing that disturbed her was Luke’s belief that Darth Vader killed Emperor Palpatine. She hadn’t believed him. She thought Luke had twisted the truth for some unknown reason. On the other hand, if he hadn’t distorted the facts, perhaps Vader had saved his life. If so, Anakin could be telling her the truth. His good half could’ve survived inside Vader’s core, if only just a speck of decency remained.

Looking into her father’s eyes, she realized that the entity that stood before her couldn’t be Darth Vader. It wasn’t possible. This man was beautiful. She’d never thought of a man as being beautiful before, but the Chosen One was. There was an inner beauty that fully enveloped him. Everything about this figure radiated compassion and honesty. Leia couldn’t deny that she felt an unlimited amount of love flow from him. Love for her, and for every life form in the universe.

Anakin smiled, knowing what she was thinking. A glow of light started to surround his body. The whole encampment from the lowest blade of grass, to the tips of the tallest trees lit up. Leia felt an incredible amount of warmth radiate towards her. The Chosen One held out his arms. Leia felt compelled to be embraced by that warmth. She couldn’t prevent herself from running into her father’s outstretched arms. When they embraced, Leia’s heart leapt to her throat. She felt as if a deep wound was finally mended. She started to weep in joy.

“Don’t cry my darling. I’ve waited for this moment for what seems an eternity. You can’t imagine how happy you have made me. You’ve eased the guilt I’ve felt for making you suffer while Darth Vader.”

“How can you be that evil monster? You’re nothing like Darth Vader. I sense nothing but good inside you.”

“I’m not the same person I was then Leia. I was redeemed when I saved Luke. He forgave me. I only hope you have it in your heart to forgive me as well.”

“Yes father. I forgive you, but can you forgive me for being so blind and stubborn?” Leia held on to her father tightly. She never wanted to let him go. The love she felt penetrated deep into her soul.

“There’s nothing to forgive Leia. Although, I have to admit you’ve inherited a stubborn streak from your parents. We tend to share that trait.”

“It almost prevented me from seeing you as you really are father.”

“Nevertheless, you did open your heart. Your generosity of spirit has released me of my sin against you. I can’t thank you enough. I wish we could stay in each other’s arms. There’s nothing I’d like better. Unfortunately, I’ve no time to waste. There’s more that needs to be done before I confront the new Sith Lord.”

“I fear for your safety.”

Anakin chuckled. “I’m sorry my dear. I don’t mean to make light of your statement, but what can possibly happen? I’m already dead.” Then his face grew serious. “I won’t deny that there is some danger. I haven’t faced the Dark Side in quite a while. I could be tempted again. The abomination I’m about to face does possess the same abilities I have. It does present a slight problem. Regardless, I intend to do everything within my power to save your children. You have my word.”

“I can’t ask more than that. I’ll pray with all my heart that you defeat the vile beast who’s turned my child to him. You’re my only hope.”

\*

Han, Luke and Padme were waiting at the edge of the forest when Anakin and Leia emerged through the trees. Padme noticed that Anakin was holding Leia’s hand. Seeing the expression of joy on his face she said, “You don’t have to say it Ani. It’s quite apparent that you have our daughter’s absolution.”

“Yes my love. All is right with us now.” Anakin looked down at his daughter and smiled, but his smile slowly faded when he looked at Han. His forgiveness was also required before his soul could be purged entirely from past atrocities. He looked Han directly in his eyes and said, “I know I have no right to ask this of you, but your forgiveness is necessary also.”

Han looked at Anakin with shock on his face. “You’ve got to be kidding! You tortured my wife, murdered thousands of innocent people, and destroyed billions of lives. Now you’re asking

me to forget everything you've done. Go to hell you bastard!"

"I know it's a lot to ask Han, but you've got to forgive my father. It's the only way to save your children," Luke pleaded.

Han ignored Luke. He stared at Leia thinking she'd been hypnotized. The man claiming to be Anakin Skywalker had to be using the Force to control her. Well, he wouldn't be fooled. He'd never forgive Darth Vader, no matter what name he used. He finally turned towards Luke and answered. "No. I won't forgive him. I'd be betraying everything I've ever believed in."

Luke walked over and stood next to him. "Do you think I could've forgiven my father if he was still the same evil person we'd encountered in life? Do you think Leia could've forgiven him? He's not Darth Vader anymore. All he wants to do is make things right. He needs your forgiveness in order to save your children, my niece and nephew."

Han shook his head no. "I'm sorry Luke. I can't. It goes against my grain." Yet as Han said it, he glanced over at the being known as Palpatine's assassin. Maybe the kid was right. Leia had just forgiven him. Maybe there was some truth in what Luke said. If Leia could overcome her fear and forgive her father, perhaps he really did want to atone for all the atrocities he'd committed.

"I do want to make amends Han. I'm aware that you doubt I'm Anakin Skywalker, but I assure you that I'm no longer Darth Vader. The only reason I was born is to bring balance to the Force. Everyone thought I'd restored balance when I killed Palpatine. I believed so too, but I was wrong. A new pestilence has befallen us. He'll destroy the galaxy if not stopped. I have to destroy this cancerous growth before it spreads any further. I fear it may already be too late."

Han gasped. He couldn't believe that this man knew what he was thinking.

"I implore you my friend. Look into my father's eyes. You'll see that he isn't evil now. He's no longer Darth Vader. Please Han. You've got to forgive him," Luke begged.

Han looked at his closest friend. The kid hated his father all his life, at least until after the Battle of Endor. What had happened to cause such a drastic change? How could he come to love Darth Vader? Why was Luke so determined that he forgive him? And what of Leia? Han was completely baffled.

"You don't have to understand it Han," Leia said. "Just look into my father's eyes and you'll know why we forgave him."

Once again Han was shocked. Could Leia read his mind as well?

Leia chuckled. "No Han. I can't read your mind. It's just that we've known each other for



so long. I know exactly what you're thinking by the expression on your face."

"That's a relief."

"We'll discuss that remark later, but it isn't important now. What does matter is that you forgive my father. Please Han. You've got to forgive him. Do it for me," Leia pleaded. "Do it for our children. Look into his eyes. Everything will be crystal clear once you do."

Han couldn't help but give in to Leia's plea. He looked from her to Anakin. What he saw reflected back was pure love. This surely wasn't the being he knew as Darth Vader. Why hadn't he seen him this way before?

"Now do you understand?" Leia asked.

"Not really."

"You're wondering why you didn't feel my father's love," Luke said. "It's simple. You weren't ready to accept him as he truly is. You've overcome your hate, just as he has."

"My darling husband. You know how much I've feared my father all my life. I held onto my hatred too. If I can forgive him, I know you have it in your heart to forgive him as well. I'm begging you Han. You must do this for our children's sake. It is the only way to save them." Leia urged.

Han looked at Anakin again. Luke told him that this man saved his life. Leia and Luke both claimed that this being was no longer Darth Vader. Yes. Han couldn't ignore the truth any longer, finally realizing this person wanted to save his children. He finally said, "Who am I to go against my wife's wishes. If she can forgive you, I guess I have no choice but to do the same."

Anakin smiled at him. As he did a bright glow of light started to radiate outward.

Han felt a tremendous warmth spreading throughout his entire body. He tried to take his eyes from the incredible light that shown with an illumination that was almost blinding. Nothing he'd ever experienced made him feel so complete. Not even the birth of his own children. Han knew he was right to forgive this remarkable entity. Han Solo finally saw through the veiled darkness of Darth Vader. Instead he saw the brilliant, loving light of the Chosen One.

\*

Anakin stood at the edge of the forest with Luke by his side. He held his wife's hand in his. He looked down at her wanting to speak. Feeling his need, Luke stepped a few feet away giving them privacy.

"I'm afraid I have to leave you my darling," Anakin said as he gently stroked his wife's face. "I don't want to go, but I have no choice." He ran his fingers through her hair while looking

into her eyes. “It seems as if we’re always saying goodbye my angel. I can’t tolerate being away from you for more than a few seconds, but circumstances always seem to arise that separate us. I wish we never had to part.”

“Hold me Ani.”

Anakin pulled Padme to his chest, feeling her heart beat in sync with his own. He leaned down and kissed her passionately. When their lips finally parted Anakin whispered in her ear. “Why do I have to be the one to face this abomination Padme? I don’t know if I’m strong enough to face the Sith this time. What if I fail? What will happen to mankind? And what of us? Will I transcend this dimension into another? What if we’re parted forever?”

“Don’t fear my darling. There’s no need to concern yourself with such matters. I have no doubt you’ll be the victor.”

“I wish I had your confidence. Oh Padme. I’ll miss you so much.”

“I’ll miss you too Anakin. You have no idea how much, but now you have no choice. You must confront this new Sith Lord.”

Anakin sighed. “I know,” he said softly. He kissed Padme once more before reluctantly pulling away. “Wait for me my love,” he said before finally turning from her.

“I’ll wait forever Ani.” Padme held back her tears as she watched her husband walk towards the Temple. Luke went to his mother and kissed her cheek in farewell before following his father.

\*

The Supreme Ruler felt the moment of his wife’s conception. She wasn’t yet aware that she’d bear his child. Remarkably, she’d conceived the very first time he’d assaulted her. Lord Vader thought this a good thing. The baby would understand that he’d been created through a violent act, learning to hate even before his birth. Hate was a valuable asset. It made one more powerful.

It didn’t matter what gender was born to him, but Lord Vader was extremely happy that his seed would produce a male child. His wife’s pregnancy was never in his original plans, but it was a very fortunate outcome. Padmay Solo had inherited the powers of the Force through her Darth Vader, which would be passed on to their child. The Supreme Ruler’s powers would pass on to his son as well. He’d be the most powerful being the universe ever beheld. His child would be even more powerful than the Sith Lord was now.

As soon as the embryo developed into the fetal stage, Lord Vader used the Force to

become one with his child, just as Sidious had become one with him. The only difference with this transference was that the child was aware of their blending. There was no need to hide this information within his son's subconscious as was necessary with Darth Vader. When the time came for the Sith Lord to bequeath his vast domain to his offspring, he'd live on again through him. An uncontrollable laughter suddenly shook the man. Lord Vader was filled with absolute glee realizing the circumstance was a phenomenal paradox.

This then was his true destiny. He'd never truly die. The being known as Darth Vader would continue to reincarnate through future generations. The Supreme Ruler's reign would last forever!

## Chapter Twenty

### - Deadly Foes-

The Chosen One stood on the steps of the Temple gathering his thoughts. Never before had his opinion counted, but now, every Jedi that ever lived was gathered waiting to hear him speak. He was overwhelmed. What could he say to stress the importance of the situation? For over a thousand years the Jedi had fought the Sith in order to keep the peace. Now, even in death, they'd have to face the Sith again.

Anakin inhaled deeply. Letting it out slowly, he began his speech, "My Masters. Brothers and sisters. May I please have your attention?" The murmuring quickly subsided as they looked up at him. Anakin bowed to them showing respect, then rose and said, "You all know why we've gathered here today. We've all felt an extraordinary disturbance in the Force. I'm certain most of you are aware that this disruption is caused by a new Sith Lord. Some of us have already faced this inconceivable enemy. We won that skirmish, but now, we must all confront this malignancy together."

Anakin paused letting each one sense the urgency in his voice before beginning again. "Each and every one of you knows who I am and what I became in life. The beings whose lives I've destroyed while under the influence of the Dark Side have all forgiven me. I can't express how grateful I am. I have no excuse for the atrocities I've committed, but I've learned there was a specific reason why I turned. It was prophesied that I was born to restore balance to the Force. That is true, but balance has not been achieved." He paused again in order to sense their reaction. Though surprised, none said a word.

He continued. "The midi-chlorians created me knowing full well that I'd turn to the Dark Side. Having instilled an extraordinary craving for ultimate power inside me, they knew I wouldn't be able to resist when tempted. You may ask why they did this. It was important that I learn about the Sith and the powers they possess. It is said that we should know our enemies better than ourselves. Never a truer phrase was spoken. I was born in order to defeat the Sith, but I cannot do it alone. My friends. An insane creation has arisen from my blood. My evil half has been reincarnated. This Sith Lord holds Darth Sidious' knowledge of the Dark Arts, as well as Darth Vader's abilities. He wants to reinstate Palpatine's tyrannical empire. We cannot allow it to happen. I ask that you all join with me in order to defeat this powerful opponent. If any of you declines, I'll certainly understand, but I need each and every one of you in this crusade against the Sith. If one of us falters we all fail, but we'll not be the only ones who'll suffer the consequences. The ones we left behind shall bear this burden the most. I humbly beseech you. Will you join me in my cause to defeat this terrible Sith Lord?"

There was no shout of acceptance from the Jedi. There was no need to yell out. Anakin felt each and every one of them accept the challenge that lay before them. He wouldn't face this phenomenal enemy alone. The Jedi would confront this evil foe as one united entity.

\*

The Death Star was already orbiting Coruscant when the Solaris entered the system. Gris had just ordered Vader's children to scan the defense systems on the planet. They were in the process of doing so when one of the children said, "We're having a bit of a problem sir."

The Grand Moff turned to the officer, "What do you mean?"

"We are having trouble controlling the inhabitants on the planet sir."

Not again, Lucian thought. "I don't understand. Are you saying you can't block their defense systems?"

"Yes sir. Something is preventing it. We're having the same difficulty we had when we encountered that star cruiser while still in the Malastare system." The child paused and looked down at his monitor. "The planet's deflector shields are fully operational sir."

"Sir," the communications officer spoke up.

The Grand Moff's irritation started to surface as he asked, "Now what?"

"Three vessels are in the area. Assistance is on the way."

"How is that possible? Block their transmissions immediately," Gris ordered.

"We are trying sir." The children looked at each other with puzzled expressions on their

faces.

This can't be happening again, Lucian thought. He had a terrible sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. If Vader's children were so powerful, how were they being blocked? Had the rebels developed a new kind of technology they couldn't penetrate? The Grand Moff didn't have time to ponder the circumstance for long.

"Sir. There's one incoming cruiser approaching. They've contacted the other vessels and are preparing for an attack.

"Four battleships? Sound the alarms to battle stations. Order the pilots to their fighters," Gris commanded before hurrying to the viewport.

\*

An attack had been ordered by Captain Brant. Ship's company were already at their assigned stations. Ben was settled in his X-Wing awaiting orders to launch. Communications had been established with the three cruisers. Their fighters were already on the way. The battleships would be within range of the Death Star shortly.

Ben was eager to confront the enemy. He knew the Death Star destroyed planets on their way to Coruscant. He'd sensed the inhabitants fear as their homes were fired upon for no reason. He wondered why so many had to die. What was their crime? Who could be so hateful that they destroy so many innocent lives? Of course, Ben already knew the answer. It was this new Sith Lord. If this person could slaughter so many without hesitation, how easy would it be for him to kill Padmay?

Ben recalled how his shipmates the Solaris had been shielded when they first encountered the Death Star, yet he'd been the only fighter protected. Had the Jedi gathered enough in strength to protect his comrades this time? Were the Jedi strong enough to defend Coruscant? What if they failed? Coruscant was the center of all democracy. If destroyed, the New Republic would certainly fall and the Sith would rule again. Ben was determined not to let that happen. He put his thoughts on hold as permission to launch was given. He exited the Solaris and grouped up with his squadron.

"This is Rogue One," Lieutenant Sagan spoke into his comlink confidently. "This is for the big one men. I don't have to tell you what's at stake here. It's all or nothing. You're a fine group of pilots and I'm proud to be serving with you. Good luck my friends. Now, let's send those bastards to hell."

Ben's comlink was filled with cheers of upcoming victory. He felt a surge of pride to

belong to such a courageous group of men. As he looked out his canopy, Ben noted that the X-Wings that were sent from the other cruisers had arrived. They grouped up into units and headed towards the enemy.

\*

The battle began. Ben soared up behind a TIE. Getting the target in his crosshairs, he proceeded to fire a burst from his laser cannons. Before he could fire on the ship, the TIE broke left, then a hard right. Ben kept pace with him as the craft angled around to get on his six. He put his X-Wing in a tight loop and closed on the TIE again, but the fighter kept out of the kill zone. Ben looked out his canopy and noticed that his comrades were having the same difficulty locking onto their targets. The TIE's were keeping just out of firing range. It was almost as if they were playing games. This went on for a number of minutes. A TIE closed on an X-Wing and blasted his canons. Game time was over.

A TIE started to pursue Ben. He corkscrewed, and then pulled up trying to stay out of the pilot's range, but the TIE stuck to him like glue. Ben suddenly felt the pilot scanning his mind. Two can play that game, he thought. Ben blocked the pilot and turned the tables by scanning his enemy's thoughts. He felt the pilot's rage as he did. Ben was astounded when he discovered what they were doing. Each TIE pilot had the ability to read minds. They knew exactly what maneuver Ben's comrades were planning. The advantage made it impossible for the X-wings to defeat the TIE's.

Ben didn't have time to warn his comrades before two TIE fighters joined the TIE that pursued him. He soared out of the kill zone an instant before their spray of lasers flowed past his canopy. The starpilot instinctively used the Force to block his thoughts from them as well. Since they couldn't read his mind, the pilots couldn't keep up with his fast paced maneuvering. Ben went into a steep climb and they lost sight of him. Diving towards them, he simultaneously fired his laser cannons. The enemy fighters exploded into bits of burning debris. Ben flew through the firestorm seeking more enemy crafts.

The young man wondered why the Jedi weren't shielding him, nor the other X-Wings. Hadn't they gathered enough in strength yet? And what about his grandfather? Where was he? Ben didn't have time to ponder his situation as another TIE soared up behind him. He outmaneuvered the pilot and fired. The ship was destroyed.

Finally in the clear, he radioed the X-Wings to warn them what the enemy was doing, but the signal wouldn't go through. He used the Force to warn them instead. He heard Steffen's

stunned reply.

“I hear you Ben. I just don’t understand how I can hear your voice inside my head.”

“There’s no time to explain it now. Just listen to me. Don’t think of your next maneuver. Just do it. The enemy can read your mind. They know your next move before you even make it. Don’t think about anything but taking them out Steffen. Let your instincts take over.”

“I’ll do my best ole’ buddy, but you’ve got a lot to explain when we get back on board the Solaris,” Steffen said as a TIE attacked.

Ben quickly reversed thrusters as the pilot started firing on Steffen. Using the Force, he sent his thoughts to the pilot ordering him to stop the assault. It worked. Ben then targeted the TIE and fired. It erupted in flames.

“You got him!” Steffen exclaimed. “Nice move. Thanks my friend. You just saved my butt.”

“There’s more friendlies out there. Let’s give them some support.”

“You’ve got it pal. Let’s pound those TIE’s to hell and back,” Steffen responded.

Ben continued to use the Force as he sought more of the enemy. He took out every TIE he came up on. He felt an increasing strength building within him. The Force flowed through him like he’d never experienced it before. He could actually feel himself become a part of his fighter. His hand molded to the joystick as if it were an extension of his body. Ben no longer needed his eyes to see the TIE’s as he picked them off two and three at a time. The young starpilot banked, spiraled, pitched and rolled as his X-Wing plowed through the enemy fighters. His laser cannons became red hot as they spit out burst, after burst, after burst.

The other X-Wings were taking TIE’s out as well. Many of Ben’s comrades had fallen, but the rest were holding their own now that they knew what the enemy was doing. Yet, no matter how many TIE’s they took out, more kept taking their place.

Ben wondered how long they’d be able to hold out before all the X-Wings were destroyed. He knew exactly who and what they were fighting now. When he’d scanned the pilot’s mind who’d first pursued him, he’d also gained his knowledge as well. He’d learned that the TIE pilots were cloned from Darth Vader. He couldn’t understand how it was possible. Darth Vader was dead.

Ben was aware that the being awaiting him on Geonosis was a Sith Lord. His adversary had let that fact escape when he’d heard Padmay’s screams of terror. Was that man Vader’s clone too? If true, how was he going to defeat anyone who held that much power within the Force?

Would he survive against the TIE's? Was Anakin by his side to protect him? Ben knew his abilities weren't advanced enough to be flying as well as he was. He couldn't understand how he'd been able to enter the enemy's mind telepathically. Nor did he know how he'd been able to send his thoughts through space in order to warn his comrades.

Anakin Skywalker told him that he'd return when the time was right. Ben concentrated on his grandfather's presence, but didn't sense him at all.

\*

As the small fighters waged battle over Coruscant, the New Republic's cruisers came into firing range of the enormous Death Star. All the vessels banded together with a fleet sent up from the planet's surface. The Solaris came broadside of the massive space station and opened fire. Their turbolaser batteries blasted away without cessation. Every battleship deployed fired on the enemy, but even their combined firepower couldn't penetrate the Death Star's deflector shields.

\*

Lucian Gris had a smug look of self-satisfaction on his face as the battle raged on. The New Republic's starships were no more than flitnats buzzing around banthas, seeming no more than toys, the Grand Moff mused. Even if Coruscant sent their entire fleet into combat, the rebels meager attempt to destroy this battlestation was totally in vain.

Though the children failed in their attempt to block Coruscant's defense systems, the battle between the fighters was certainly going in their favor. The ability of the children to read the enemy's minds and attack them accordingly was working superbly. This is how a war is truly won. Lucian couldn't help but think with pride. It was an honorable way to fight. Destroying the enemy face to face was the only way to triumph with a true sense of victory.

Lucian wanted to savor every minute of the slaughter. The rebels had a lot to pay for. First the TIE's would destroy all of their fighters. Then they'd attack the battleships. While the cruisers concentrated on the TIE's, the Death Star would be able to lower its shielding and fire on them. Once the battleships were eliminated, they'd be free to fully power up their weapon and destroy Coruscant. All those who'd fought against the Empire would perish in a bright flash of hot, molten fire. The Grand Moff could hardly contain his joy.

Gris finally turned away from the viewport. He couldn't be happier as he strutted over to the communications station. His smile extended from ear to ear when he asked, "Have you made any progress breaking through the defense system on the surface?"

The officer didn't answer his superior.



Gris' smile faded and his brows creased. "I asked you a question. Is there any progress?"

Vader's child still didn't respond. He wasn't paying any attention to him at all. He was sitting in complete silence with a confused expression on his face.

Lucian scanned the bridge. All of Vader's children were staring straight ahead looking bewildered. He bent over and tapped the com officer on the shoulder. The child slowly came out of his dazed state and looked up.

"I asked you a question young man and would appreciate a response," the Grand Moff stated with authority.

"I..., um..., I'm sorry sir. I didn't hear you."

"That's quite apparent. I'll ask the question again." Lucian spoke each word distinctly as if the young man was an imbecile. "Have you breached the defense system on the planet's surface?"

"I don't know sir."

"You don't know? Then might I suggest that you find out as quickly as possible."

Vader's child hesitated.

"NOW!" Gris dared to shout in his face.

The officer tried to communicate with his brothers, but he couldn't get through. He looked up at the Grand Moff and shrugged his shoulders. He quietly said, "I don't understand it sir. They can't hear me."

"Well try again." Confident that the problem would soon be solved he walked back to the viewport in order to watch the massacre, but something was very wrong. The TIE's had stopped firing on the enemy. What the blazes was going on?

\*

"Do you see that Ben? The TIE's are flying in circles." Steffen said stunned by the sight. "Why have they stopped the attack?"

"I don't know. Keep sharp Steffen. It may be some kind of trick." Ben used the Force to enter into an enemy's mind once again, but there seemed to be a black void surrounding the pilot. He concentrated harder attempting to scan more pilots. He succeeded, but their thoughts were blank as well. He couldn't understand what was happening.

The minutes ticked by. Suddenly Ben began receiving the pilot's thoughts again. Their voices were loud and jumbled, making it impossible to understand what they were thinking. He concentrated on a single pilot. Ben sensed something not entirely human deep within the young man. He allowed his mind's eye to see what the pilot was envisioning. He saw a swam of insects

buzzing around their hive. Ben knew immediately that the pilot, or a part of him at least, had evolved from that particular species. Protection of the hive was foremost in an insect's mind, along with a strong need to kill enemies who attacked the hive. The instinct insured their survival.

Intrigued, Ben scanned more pilots. They were all seeing the same image. He learned that every pilot evolved from insects. They'd belonged to different species at one time, but evolution had blended them into one race.

Ben also sensed a sinister presence that was shared by the pilots. He concentrated with all his effort and what came through shocked him to his very core. The young man finally understood the enormity of whom and what he was facing. These pilots weren't just Vader's clones. They also contained Sidious' vast knowledge as well. Each one had the ability to use the full powers of the Dark Side. The pilots intended to use their powers to kill all who opposed them. Their mission was to eliminate democracy entirely.

As Ben sat in stunned silence, he sensed the pilot's ancient warring instinct surface to the forefront of his mind. An surge of pure, unrestrained fury dominating him. An irresistible urge to kill started to control his every thought. His wrath wasn't aimed against Ben. His rage was aimed towards his brothers. The pilot unexpectedly turned his fighter on his comrades and started firing on them. Then another TIE pilot did the same, then another one, and another. The X-Wings were no longer considered the enemy. They were completely forgotten in the enemies need to eliminate their new foes.

Ben quickly surmised what was going on. The Jedi were using their survival instinct to invoke an intense hatred against one another. They were making them think each one was an invading species trying to infiltrate their hive. The pilot's brothers became the "intruders" and the Death Star became their "hive." They'd continue fighting until only one species remained. It was in the insect's nature to kill rivals. These young men couldn't perceive that evolution had mixed their species into just one race. They'd annihilate each other.

Steffen soared up beside Ben. He was in awe of the spectacle. "What going on Ben? Why are they attacking each other? It's sheer insanity."

Ben suddenly felt an urgent need to flee. "We've go to get out of here Steffen," he shouted telepathically.

"Why?"

"There isn't enough time to explain. I just know we have to get out of here. Now!" Ben banked, and sped away at full throttle.

Steffen didn't hesitate. Leaning heavily on his stick, he followed.

Ben used the Force to contact the fleet, warning them that they had to get as far away from the Death Star as quickly as possible. He knew they had very little time to escape the cataclysm that was about to occur.

\*

Back on board the Death Star chaos erupted on each and every level of the battlestation. Vader's children were attacking everyone in sight. They'd grabbed blasters and fired on their brothers. The regular crew wasn't armed so they grabbed anything available in order to protect themselves from the children.

On the bridge Gris screamed amongst the mayhem, "What's going on here? Stop this at once. Get back to your posts immediately. I demand it!"

His orders were completely ignored.

One of the children suddenly turned towards him and shouted, "We've been invaded! They've breached the containment core. The hive will be destroyed." The young man laughed in absolute madness before turning to his brothers.

The Grand Moff didn't have time to wonder what was meant about "the hive." He was grabbed from behind and spun around. The last words Lucian Gris heard were, "He's an invader! Kill him!" The children leaped on their captain. They tore the flesh from his body with their teeth, ripping his throat wide open.

As Vader's children ran amok on the massive battlestation in a murderous rampage, they continued attacking all the "intruders" on board. The entire crew deserted their stations and hid wherever they could in order to evade the mayhem, but to no avail. The Death Star's decks turned red with blood.

Before long there wasn't a soul left on board to monitor a very serious problem that had arisen. The weapons system had been ignored while Vader's clones destroyed control panels in their attempt to slay their enemies. The superlaser had been activated by a damaged switch, but could not propel its enormous energy outward. The reactor built up a tremendous amount of pressure and quickly overloaded.

The most powerful space station built to date detonated into a spectacular, brilliant blaze that illuminated the surrounding heavens. The Supreme Ruler's hopes of destroying the New Republic disappeared along with his "indestructible" battlestation. It disintegrated into bits of molten debris. A few littered fragments of the third, moon-sized Death Star would revolve around

the hub of democracy forever. Smaller pieces would be drawn closer to the planet by gravitational pull until their orbit decays. The remaining particles would slowly descend into Coruscant's atmosphere and burn up, incinerating entirely.

Part Three  
Chapter Twenty One  
- Interference -

The Supreme Ruler had been connected to all his children when they entered Coruscant's orbit. He wanted to feed off the fear and confusion as his "ultimate weapon" destroyed all those worthless lives. The Death Star would leave nothing behind but burning cinders and ash. The pleasure of that moment was greatly anticipated. After these lengthy years of patiently waiting for retribution, his hunger would finally be sated.

While the Sith Lord waited anxiously for this long, awaited event to occur, he felt an incredible, swirling turbulence gathering strength within the Force. Though welcoming this violent tempest, he sensed an inordinately strong opposing energy trying to break through. He felt as if he was in the very center of an enormous maelstrom as good and evil opposed each other in an immovable impasse.

The Supreme Ruler suddenly sensed this enigma burst past the dam of battlements. This immense force was invading his children's minds, manipulating their thoughts. He felt a tremendous need arise inside each one of them to kill an imagined intruder. The Sith Lord was filled with absolute dread as he sensed his children stop their deadly assault. Instead of destroying his hated enemy, the pilots turned on each other, all shouting, "Protect the hive!"

It suddenly dawned on him that Darth Sidious made a terrible error when he employed Ceris to create this cloned army. The former Emperor had instructed the insectoid to dilute Darth Vader's blood cells before inseminating the women who birthed them. He hadn't foreseen that Ceris would use his own blood for this purpose. He should've been more specific with such a lowly, primitive mind. Darth Sidious should've specified that the insectoid use only human blood.

Even with such a horrid mistake, Vader couldn't understand why the pilots adopted their forebear's instinctive need to kill intruders. Ceris had been the only one who'd known how they were created. Darth Sidious had the creature's complete loyalty. Ceris would've never divulged this information to a soul fearing Sidious' wrath.

Lord Vader couldn't understand how this was happening. Who was powerful enough to be able to influence the pilots this way? It had to be the Jedi. Was it Ben? No. It couldn't be him. The lad's powers were just beginning to be awakened. Kenobi then. No. He wasn't powerful enough to disrupt his children's thoughts. Someone else had to be behind this. Perhaps it was Yoda. He might be strong enough to twist the pilot's thoughts, but how could the aged Jedi Master break through the defenses of the Dark Side? No. It couldn't be Yoda either. The only one strong enough to control his children's thoughts was Anakin Skywalker, but even he wasn't powerful enough to dominate so many minds. It really didn't matter. The Supreme Ruler was determined to put an end to the Jedi's interference once and for all.

As he reached out in an attempt to block the Jedi, the Sith Lord felt an incredible amount of energy flowing through his grandson with a strength he knew couldn't be the boy's alone. Someone had to be aiding him, making his abilities stronger. Most likely it was Kenobi. Obi-Wan had taken Padme from him, as well as his son. He'd not steal his grandson too!

Lord Vader reached out through space once more, doubling his effort to sever Kenobi's connection to Ben. As he did, he was suddenly propelled back into the air as if physically struck by an enormous release of energy. Flung to the floor, he instantly got back to his feet. He was filled with an uncontrolled rage. He'd felt the Death Star explode. He screamed out at the top of his lungs, "NO! THEY CANNOT DO THIS TO ME! NOT AGAIN! I WILL NOT ALLOW THEM TO DEFEAT ME THIS TIME!"

\*

Ben's small X-Wing barely escaped the shock wave when the Death Star was destroyed. The battlestation detonated in a display so bright that it rivaled a gamma burst. The lad's piloting skills were all that saved him from certain death as his ship spun out of control. Debris from the explosion smashed against the fighter, nearly tearing both wings off.

When finally managing to get his crippled ship under control Ben scanned the area for Steffen. He'd also survived the blast. Luckily, his fighter hadn't been damaged at all.

"Can you explain what happened now?" Steffen asked as he soared up next to Ben.

"Can it wait? I'm having a bit of a problem. My ship's been damaged and my R4 can't take over. I lost him in the shock wave."

"Sure buddy, but I hope you can explain what happened when we get back to the Solaris. It's got me completely baffled."

"I'll do my best to explain things when we land. I promise."

\*

Such a terrible waste of life, Ben thought when he landed on the cruiser. Over a million souls had cried out in panic trying to escape the bloody massacre on board the Death Star before it was destroyed. Ben sensed each and every one of their lives come to an end. He was filled with sorrow. No matter what side of the Force a person was on, they shouldn't die without being mourned.

Most of Ben's squadron had already landed. They were shouting out in victory. Sympathy was also shared over those who'd fallen. Many friends were lost in this day's battle. They would not be soon forgotten.

Steffen rushed up to his fighter as soon as he opened the canopy. Ben told him that their discussion would have to wait. He needed to find Captain Brant. He turned and hurried from the flight deck leaving Steffen more puzzled than ever.

As Ben entered the turbolift and punched the code for the bridge, he was well aware that their ordeal was far from over. The hardest part of the fight was yet to come. It would be even more dangerous than his battle against the TIE's. He was filled with trepidation knowing who he was about to face. Nothing in his short life had prepared him for it. He prayed that he'd have enough courage to face the Sith Lord.

The lift doors opened and Ben stepped out onto the bridge. He looked towards the viewport and saw Brant standing there staring out into space. Lando was standing next to him. He climbed the steps, but before he could say a word Brant stated, "I knew it wouldn't be long before you got here Solo."

"Can we go after my sister now sir? I know where she's being held. She's on Geonosis."

"I'm sorry, but we can't go anywhere without reporting to headquarters first."

"Captain Brant is right," Lando added. "I am sure our superiors will have a million questions about how and where another Death Star came from. Besides, I left Chewbacca without saying a word. I'm sure he's been going crazy wondering where I went without him. I can imagine what kind of damage I'll find for leaving him behind."

"I'll gladly welcome your input Admiral. It'll be easier to explain the situation better if we do it together. We shouldn't put it off any longer." Brant turned and gave the order to prepare his shuttle. He then turned back to Ben. "I want you to know that I'll not endanger the lives of this crew without their consent. I don't know how many more of these Sith are out there, but I won't take unnecessary risks with my men. I'll have to tell them exactly what this mission entails. I'll

only take volunteers. If we don't get enough men the mission will be scrubbed. Do you understand me pilot?"

"Yes sir, but how long do you think it will take at headquarters?"

"I don't know, but I'll make an announcement to the crew if and when we get approval to resume the search."

"May I have your permission to go down to the surface with you sir? There's something I need to get. It's very important."

"Of course, but don't take too long. I expect we'll be on our way shortly, but only if we get permission."

"You can go to the surface with us," Lando told Ben. "I have to get Chewie anyway. He'll never forgive me if I leave him behind again."

"What are we waiting for?" Ben asked as he rushed towards the turbolift.

\*

When their shuttle landed on Coruscant, Lando accompanied Brant to Central Command. Ben rented a speeder and raced home. Threepio hurried over to him as soon as he touched down. "I'm so glad you're finally home Master Ben. Did you find Miss Padmay? Is she with you?"

"No Threepio. Padmay's not with me, but I know where she is now. That's one reason I came home. I need Artoo. He's got stored data that may come in handy. I'm sorry, but you'll have to come with us. I know how much you hate flying, but I need you to translate for me."

"Of course Master Ben. I can translate approximately over six million..."

"Not now Threepio. Just get Artoo."

"Yes Master Ben." Threepio turned and went towards the kitchen, muttering to himself. "I wonder just where we're going. It's been such a long time since Artoo and I went on an adventure together. I wonder why he's so important. I have stored information that might be helpful too," Threepio continued talking to himself as he went after the little droid.

\*

Ben met Lando and Chewbacca at the shuttle. Threepio was still complaining to himself, while Artoo beeped and buzzed in reply. Ben was certain Artoo's retorts were rude comments. The droids always bickered.

Brant was already on board the shuttle. Chewbacca was pacing frantically back and forth in front of it. He was upset because he hadn't heard from his relatives on Kashyyyk. There were quite a few systems Coruscant had lost contact with. The general public didn't know yet that most

of their homes worlds had been vaporized by the Death Star. Ben hoped he'd be able to keep the wookiee's rage under control when he informed him of the sad news. When he did, Ben was surprised by his reaction. The gigantic beast just sat down on the ramp and wailed in great sorrow. Both he and Lando did all they could to comfort him.

After they got Chewbacca calmed down, the small group entered the shuttle. As soon as Ben walked through the hatch, Brant said, "We've received permission from headquarters to resume the mission, as well as getting more than enough volunteers. Every member of the crew is on board the Solaris. Not one man asked to be relieved from duty."

Ben wasn't surprised. He'd known that his comrades would stand by him in his time of need. Once again he was filled with enormous pride to serve among such courageous men.

"We'll depart as soon as we stock up on supplies," Brant continued. "You'd better get some rest as soon as we get back on board. You haven't had much sleep in the past few days. None of us have. I have a feeling we're going to need it."

"You have no idea how right you are sir," Ben replied.

\*

Steffen was lying on the top bunk when Ben entered their shared cabin. "Do you have time to explain what happened now?" Steffen asked as he hopped down.

"I'll do my best," Ben said as he sat down on the bottom cot. "I'm sorry I had to put you off before, but I had to find out if we were still going to search for Padmay. I'm so worried about her."

"I've been worried about her myself. Are the Sith a part of what's going on? Are they responsible for her disappearance?"

"I'm afraid so. The Sith are behind everything that's happened up to this point. I fear my sister's life is in jeopardy as we speak." Ben's shoulders sagged and he sighed. "You deserve a full explanation of why all this is happening, but I've no idea where to begin."

"I've always found the beginning a good place to start."

"Well, it all started the night of the Independence Dinner..."

\*

Ben reintroduced Steffen to Padmay while attending the Academy. Due to their parent's friendship, they'd been playmates as children. Through the years they'd lost contact with each other, as often happens when people are separated for any length of time. Ben felt Steffen's attraction to Padmay and was hoping they'd develop a relationship now that they were older. He



prayed there would still be a chance for it after he revealed his family history. He told Steffen everything, including their relationship to Darth Vader. "I hope this won't change your feelings towards me and my sister," Ben stated when finally finished.

Steffen appeared dumbfounded and didn't respond right away. It was apparent that he was trying to digest everything as he gnawed on his lower lip. It was a nervous habit he had while deep in thought.

Ben wondered if Steffen was revolted now that he knew Ben and Padmay were Vader's grandchildren. Would his friend avoid him from this point forward? Ben hated the thought of losing his friendship.

Steffen finally replied. "It certainly isn't the best news I've ever heard, but I imagine I can live with it. As long as you don't try to talk me into joining the Dark Side," he joked. He cocked his head and gave a wry smile trying to relieve the tension that had built up between them.

Ben breathed a sigh of relief. He couldn't help but laugh at Steffen's attempt at humor. "You don't have to worry about that my friend. Serving the Sith is definitely not what I envision for my future."

Steffen laughed as well, but his face quickly grew serious again. "Is Padmay really under this Sith Lord's influence?"

"I'm afraid so. I don't know how I'm going to save her."

Steffen was just as anxious as Ben, but didn't want to upset his friend any more than he already was. "Don't worry Ben. You know everyone on board will do all they can to help. You know you can rely on me."

"Thanks Steffen. You don't know how much it means to me."

Steffen sat on the cot next to Ben. Putting his arm around his shoulder, he tried to comfort Ben as best as he could while feeling his own heart breaking.

\*

Mess call had been announced. Attendance was required so Steffen and Ben went, but neither one ate very much. Not being on duty when the meal was over, both went back to their quarters. Steffen was now sleeping soundly in the upper bunk. Ben was lying atop his own cot with his eyes closed, but he couldn't sleep. He forced himself to relax and went into a meditative state. He knew he wouldn't get any rest until he considered every aspect of the situation he found himself in. That was why he brought Artoo. The little droid held data about his grandfather. Though Luke transferred the main portions of Anakin's life to him, Ben hoped he'd learn more.

He assumed such knowledge would enable him to find a weakness in the new Sith Lord.

The young man was determined more to learn all he could about Anakin Skywalker. Threepio would have to translate Artoo's data, no matter how dangerous the consequences might be. Maybe once he recalled that Anakin was his creator, Threepio might also have some useful information that hadn't been wiped from his memory entirely. Of course, that's if the droid survived the knowledge that Anakin was Darth Vader. Ben hoped Threepio was emotionally stronger than he appeared.

Ben's mind seemed to be in an utter state of chaos. His thoughts seemed to be spinning out of control. He felt as if he were on some kind of wild amusement ride that his mother used to take him on when a child. He didn't know which end was up. He feared for himself, as well as Padmay. His apprehension was hard to manage knowing the ordeal that lay ahead. He had to confront this version of Vader, just as Luke had faced the original. There was one major difference in Ben's confrontation though. His battle would be more dangerous than Luke's was. Ben was well aware that the entity that awaited him on Geonosis was cloned from both Darth Vader and Darth Sidious. The lad wondered how these separate individuals had become one mind. Why had the new Vader taken Padmay? Why hadn't Luke or Anakin told him who he'd be facing? These thoughts swirled in the forefront of his mind as he tried to get the rest his body needed so badly.

As Ben lay there trying to get his confused thoughts in order a great calm started to envelope him. He heard his grandfather's voice calling out to him.

"Can you hear me Ben?"

"Yes grandfather. I hear you."

"I'm sorry I didn't come to you before this, but I couldn't risk breaking free to come to your aid during the battle."

"Why not? I thought the Jedi would be protecting the X-Wing's when we went up against the TIE's this time, but they didn't help us at all. Most of my friends were killed."

"I deeply regret that so many died, but their deaths couldn't be avoided. Even using our combined powers it took quite a few Jedi to shield Coruscant and the Solaris, as well as the other battleships involved. The rest of us had to control TIE pilots' thoughts, as well as those on board the Death Star. The Jedi had to make a choice whom to keep from harm. Unfortunately your friends had to be sacrificed in order to win this battle."

"That isn't much consolation. I know, I know. Don't mourn for my friends. They're all in the Netherworld now, but it just doesn't seem fair that they had to die."

“Life isn’t fair Ben. Nevertheless, your friends gave their lives for a greater cause. Each one shall be remembered as a hero.”

“Again, that’s not much consolation.” Changing the subject he said, “There’s so much I need to know before I encounter this new Sith Lord grandfather. How was I able to fly so well? My piloting skill increased tenfold. How was I able to communicate telepathically? How could I reach inside the enemies’ mind and read their thoughts? I don’t understand where did these capabilities come from? I never had them before.” He paused before asking, “Why didn’t you tell me I’d be facing Vader’s clone?”

“As far as your flying abilities are concerned, you inherited them from me. The other skills you now possess come from deep within you. You gave yourself completely over to the Force. When you did, it allowed you to achieve a higher level of development. That’s the reason you were able to connect with your comrades telepathically, as well as read your enemy’s thoughts. I regret that I didn’t tell you who you’d be facing on Geonosis, but you weren’t ready. You had to learn who your foe was on your own. It strengthened you. Your mind has to be strong enough to resist him when he tempts you to the Dark Side.”

“I’m not so sure my willpower is strong enough to resist him grandfather.”

“I’ll help you all I can son, but the struggle to resist the temptation will rest heavily upon your shoulders. I can’t prevent you from falling victim to it. You’ll find it extremely hard to resist the lure of ultimate power. You haven’t realized your full potential as yet. Unfortunately, Luke died before completing your training, but I have complete faith in you Ben. I’m certain you won’t end up a slave to the Sith as I was. By the time your confrontation is over you’ll be able to call yourself a true Jedi Knight.”

“That’s only if I can resist the temptation to turn.” Ben sighed, doubting himself.

“You can’t let yourself think that way son. Doubt is a tool of the Sith.”

“I know. Doubt leads to fear. Fear leads down the path to the Dark Side. Uncle Luke taught me that.”

“You remember your lessons well,” Luke Skywalker said as his shimmering form suddenly appeared before his nephew.

“Uncle Luke. Is that really you?”

“Yes Ben. I’m here. Not in physical form. I can’t touch you, nor can you touch me. I’m more in your mind’s eye. Nonetheless, I am here with you.”

“I’m glad you’re here. I need your help, just as much as I need grandfather’s assistance.”

“There’s more for us to discuss concerning your confrontation. You’ll have to meditate in order to gain sufficient strength. You’ll have to seriously consider everything we’re about to tell you. You have to willingly accept your responsibility before giving consent. We won’t be able to proceed with our plan otherwise. Now, if you’re ready, we’ll explain exactly what has to be done.”

\*

Ben was on the observation deck staring out the viewport, but he didn’t see the stars streaking by. He was deep in thought. He was thinking about what was expected of him. His grandfather’s plan seemed impossible to pull off. In fact, it was suicidal. Nonetheless, he’d do his best to perform his duty, even though his chance of survival was slim to none.

The turbolift doors hissed open taking his attention from his thoughts. Lando walked out with Chewbacca, Threepio, and Artoo rolling behind them. He noticed the worried look on Ben’s face and asked him what was wrong. Ben knew they’d all face death very soon and tried to explain how dire their situation was. They listened quietly until the young man told them that rescuing Padmay would be extremely difficult. Lando asked him how he knew she was on Geonosis.

“The new Sith Lord informed me.”

“What? How? You haven’t been anywhere but on board the Solaris, except for when you went to get Artoo. How do you know it’s true?”

“The Sith Lord first came to me through the Force. Rather, he sent his thoughts to me when he was torturing Padmay. He came to me again when he turned her to the Dark Side. But there’s more I have to tell you that’s even more upsetting Uncle Lando. He knows we’re coming. He wants us to come. That bastard is waiting for me in order to turn me too.”

“Luke mentioned the Dark Side quite often. He tried to explain it to me, but I still don’t understand what he was talking about. What exactly is it?”

“The Dark side is the evil side of the Force. It can corrupt you completely. Once turned, you’ll even kill your best friend if they oppose you.”

“Padmay is a good person. She’d never harm anyone.”

“Under normal circumstances she wouldn’t, but the Sith Lord is controlling her mind. She’ll do anything he asks of her.”

“I don’t understand how anyone’s mind can be controlled fully. Not without a physically threat being held against them or someone they care about.”

“You’ve seen Uncle Luke use the Force on weak minded people making them do things they didn’t want to do. It’s kind of like that, but the Dark Side gains absolute control over your mind. You forsake everything you’ve ever believed in. Friendship, love, it makes no difference. You won’t let anyone stand in your way. You become another person entirely. Padmay has joined the Dark Side and is now evil. She’s under the influence of the Sith Lord. He wants to turn me in order to control me too. He wants to use our powers in order to overthrow the New Republic. It may already be too late to save my sister. Padmay now belongs to her Master body and soul.”

“Padmay belongs to no one. She isn’t a slave.”

“She is now. Lord Vader has twisted her mind.”

“Who?”

“Darth Vader’s clone. That’s who’s holding her captive.”

“That’s impossible. Vader died on board the Death Star.”

Ben sighed. He knew Lando would never accept the fact that Darth Vader lived again as a clone. “It’s kind of hard to explain, but Darth Vader found a way to reincarnate through a clone. This being isn’t the Vader you remember either. He’s more powerful. Palpatine transferred all his knowledge to my grandfather when he was injured on Mustafar. Vader’s clone contains both Vader and Palpatine’s personalities, as well as having their powers.

“You’re not making any sense Ben. Vader and Palpatine are both dead. They were on the second Death Star when it was destroyed. Reincarnation is a myth. Even if true, it’s impossible for two separate personalities to be reborn as a single individual.”

“I know it seems highly unlikely. It’s hard for me to believe myself, but it is true. Regardless, I’m certain Padmay is on Geonosis and under that bastard’s influence.”

“Why are you so sure Padmay turned?”

“The new Vader wanted me to know that he’s seduced Padmay to the Dark Side, just like Sidious seduced my grandfather. He’s twisted her mind and let her experience the power he possess. Palpatine tried to get Uncle Luke to join him on the Dark Side, but he refused. This enraged Darth Sidious. His clone still holds on to that rejection. It’s made his resolve even stronger to turn the Skywalker line. This new Sith Lord will use every resource to achieve his wicked goals. That includes using my sister, as well as me.”

“Sith Lord, Palpatine, Sidious, Darth Vader. Vader’s clone! You’ve got me completely baffled Ben. Just who in the hell are you talking about?”

“Emperor Palpatine was a Sith Lord by the name Darth Sidious. I already explained that to

you when we were on Tatooine. Palpatine transferred his essence into Darth Vader when he was wounded by Obi-Wan Kenobi. We'll be confronting both personas on Geonosis because they've been reborn into one single being, but Vader is the personality that dominates his clone. I know it's extremely hard to believe Uncle Lando, but it's the truth. I swear it."

"This is all very confusing Ben. You're saying that Vader's clone was created from both Darth Vader and Palpatine combined. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"That's who we'll be facing on Geonosis?"

"Yes, but it isn't just Vader's clone we'll be facing. We'll be confronting Padmay as well. She'll use everything she's learned from this new Sith Lord in order to protect him."

"Are you trying to tell me that Padmay is like Darth Vader was before he died? That she has his powers?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying. The knowledge Vader's clone has shared with her has given Padmay even more power than the original Darth Vader had."

"This is just too much to comprehend Ben."

I don't know how I can make it any clearer Uncle Lando. Padmay has turned to the Dark Side. She's more powerful than the original Darth Vader. The army the Sith Lord created is powerful enough to defeat the entire galaxy. You've seen the Death Star he constructed. The pilots and all the officers on board the battlestation possessed the full power of the Dark Side. It was born into them. They were Vader's clones too, although weaker versions. The Jedi got into their heads somehow and controlled them while over Coruscant. That's the only reason we won that battle, but there's thousands of Vader's clones on Geonosis. That's what we're up against."

"If what you're saying is true, we're going to need more than just a single star cruiser to fight them. We'll need a whole fleet. I'll have to tell Brant. We have to return to Coruscant and gather at least five dozen full battalions, then come up with a battle plan."

"We don't have time Uncle Lando. Padmay needs our help now. Vader's control over her gets stronger every minute we delay. We can't turn back. We have to destroy the Sith Lord, as well as his army right now. If we wait he'll gain control of the galaxy and too many others will die."

"How in the blazes do you propose we do that with one worn-out battleship?"

"We won't be fighting this battle alone."

"What do you mean by that?"

“We’ll have the Jedi and the power of the Force behind us.”

“The Force. Yeah. I almost forgot about that,” Lando sneered. “Kindly explain how that’s going to help us. Luke used to depend on this supposed Force too, but when it came right down to it we faced our enemies alone. There was never any Jedi or any Force to depend on. It was always us against the opposition.”

“You don’t really understand the Force Uncle Lando. You can’t see it. It isn’t anything that you can hold on to physically. The Force is an extraordinary power that is inside a person. Believe me. If Uncle Luke told you the Force was with you, it was.”

“I don’t tend to believe what I can’t see or feel in my grubby, little hands.”

“The Jedi used the Force to shield the Solaris when the Death Star fired on her. It should’ve been blown apart, yet it wasn’t. How else can you explain what happened?”

“I can’t.”

“We don’t need an army Uncle Lando. We already have one. Every Jedi that have ever existed will protect us on Geonosis.”

Lando shook his head in utter disbelief. How could the lad believe such nonsense? “No Ben. We have to go back to Coruscant and gather troops. Live human beings, not ghosts. The Jedi are all dead.”

As Ben was trying to convince Lando that the Jedi would protect them he suddenly reeled and covered his ears. Vader had invaded his mind and was scanning his thoughts. He yelled out in rage over his children’s deaths. His voice was so loud, Ben felt as if his head would burst wide open.

“So, you want to save your sister. Then come. You and whoever is aiding you. The Jedi, I assume. They’ll not defeat me this time. I’m invincible, and so is my army. I’ll heartily enjoy the entertainment you provide while attempting to defeat me.”

“Don’t be so sure of success Vader,” Ben spat out as he tried to block him.

Vader laughed sardonically. “You impetuous child. How dare you think you can come out victorious? Why, my apprentice could defeat every one of you without assistance from me. Her powers equal mine. Would you like to know who my apprentice is?”

“I already know Vader,” Ben said in his heartbreak.

“Yes. You’re well aware of who my apprentice is, aren’t you?” Vader asked with malice in his voice. That’s all that was said. The connection between them was instantly broken.

Lando noticed tears forming in Ben’s eyes. “What’s wrong son? Who were you talking

to?”

“Vader just came to me Uncle Lando. He’s assured me that Padmay will protect him with her very life. What are we going to do?”

“What do you mean? I don’t understand.”

“You’ve never understood any of this, have you? It’s not your fault. You’re not a Jedi. Even they don’t realize how strong this new Vader has become. His powers have grown tremendously and he’s shared them with Padmay. She’ll die before she lets us get near him. Padmay will try to kill all of us Uncle Lando. How can we possibly save her now?”

“You’re right Ben. I’ve never understood or believed in this Force Luke praised so highly. I guess I never will understand it, but that’s not important now. Are you saying that Padmay will try to kill us?”

“Yes. My sister will even die to protect her master if he asks it of her. That’s how much control this new Sith Lord has over Padmay.”

“Then how in the hell are we going to rescue her?”

“I don’t think we can,” Ben replied as tears started to stream down his face.

Lando looked at Ben with tears starting to form in his own eyes. Beautiful, gracious Padmay, who wouldn’t for the life of her harm a living soul, was now as evil as Darth Vader. This just couldn’t be real. It had to be some kind of terrible dream that he couldn’t wake up from. But as Lando looked into the depths of Ben’s eyes, he knew everything the lad claimed was true. An icy chill ran down Lando’s spine knowing this nightmare was very, very real.

## Chapter Twenty Two

### - Preparing for Battle -

“Yes my love. Advance. Thrust. Do not falter. Don’t let me gain the advantage. To hesitate is to fail. I won’t allow you to fail me Estrus. You’re my insurance that your brother will surrender. Ben shall join us. I assure you of that. He doesn’t have enough willpower to reject us, but just in case he does...,” Vader lunged at the newly named Padmay catching her off guard. “You’ll have to do better than that my angel. Don’t trust anyone, including me.” The Supreme Ruler laughed and continued the lesson.

Estrus was becoming quite proficient with the lightsaber. The Supreme Ruler was teaching her every tactic of swordsmanship he knew. Padmay told him that her brother trained with their



Uncle Luke. He remembered that his son had been a poor adversary when they'd encountered each other in his past life. He could've slain him easily if he'd wanted to. If that was the only training Ben received, his new apprentice could easily defeat the boy without much effort on her part. Besides, the obstinate fool was weak minded and loved his sister too much to harm her. Estrus would fight her brother to the death if need be.

Lord Vader was aware that his grandson was coming to rescue his sister from what he thought was her complete decent into hell. It was of course, but the lad would never be able to save Padmay from that fate. She'd continue to serve him as long as he allowed her to. Estrus was devoted to him. The Sith Lord vowed that he'd turn his grandson too. He knew the Jedi would be there to protect the boy, but though Ben was gathering inner strength through them, his resolve to save his sister would be his undoing.

There was much Darth Sidious had learned through his tutelage from Darth Plagueis. The old Sith Lord had taught his pupil all he knew about the Dark Side before Sidious murdered him and stole the title from the aged Master. The Jedi feared and could never comprehend the full extent of that talent. Darth Vader's own abilities increased tremendously since Darth Sidious joined minds with him.

Lord Vader was aware that this would be the ultimate battle between the Jedi and Sith. This confrontation would decide their fate, as well as his own. Anakin's midi-chlorian count had been the highest the Jedi ever recorded, but his knowledge of the Dark Side had been limited when first turned. The new Sith Lord assumed that the deceased Jedi Knights would assist Ben in some minor way, but he was certain they'd never defeat him. There was no way they could leave the Netherworld in order confront the army stationed on Geonosis. How the children on board the Death Star failed him was a mystery to the Sith Lord, but he was certain victory would be attained by the surviving clones.

"Have I exhausted you already my Master?" Padmay asked.

"No my love. I was just thinking of events to come. Shall we continue?"

"Of course, but I would much rather spend our time in a different way," Padmay teased.

"Later my beautiful wife. After today's lesson perhaps." Vader smiled as he slashed at Estrus with his scarlet lightsaber. She sidestepped his attack proving her skills were improving. "We will have plenty of time to share sensual pleasures when we rule the galaxy together. We must concentrate on other matters now." He swung on his apprentice again missing her completely.

“You’ll have to do better than that if you want pleasure tonight my love.”

“So I shall my dear. So I shall.” Lord Vader laughed in delight as the lesson continued.

\*

Ben was in his quarters. Threepio was interpreting for Artoo. The little droid had just finished relating Anakin’s life up to the point of his flight to the Senate Building, just before Palpatine turned him to the Dark Side. The next stage of Anakin’s life was about to be revealed. Ben would soon find out if his mother was right about Threepio’s possible meltdown.

“What was that you said Artoo?” Threepio asked.

The little droid beeped in reply.

“It isn’t possible. I don’t believe you.”

Here it comes, Ben thought. “What did Artoo say?”

“This old bucket of rusted nuts and bolts is trying to tell me that my creator was Darth Vader. It’s ridiculous. I don’t believe a word of it. He’s just trying to upset me. He’s jealous of the attention I’ve been receiving since he’s no longer used as an astromech. He’s aware that his usefulness has been fulfilled and that he’ll never navigate a ship again. It’s a boldfaced lie.”

“I’m sorry to have to tell you this Threepio, but Artoo isn’t trying to deceive you. Anakin Skywalker was turned to the Dark Side. He was Darth Vader.”

“It isn’t possible. It’s inconceivable. Oh my. Oh my!” Threepio started muttering to himself.

Ben had never heard the protocol droid say “oh my” so much in his life. If it was possible for him to turn white as a sheet, he would have, Ben thought. When he finally settled down a bit, Ben asked if he was alright. Threepio didn’t respond. He just kept mumbling and said, “oh my” once again. Ben then heard the distinctive beep that signaled he’d gone into shut down mode. He was afraid that his mother had been right about his circuits not being able to handle the information. He quickly asked, “Can you hear me Threepio? Are you alright? Respond Threepio.”

Once again, the golden droid didn’t respond. Artoo rolled over to him and extended one of the appendages stored in his barrel-like body. He hit the switch to reactivate his companion.

“What..., um..., Oh my!” Threepio sputtered again. “Where am I? Artoo buzzed a reply, but Threepio ignored it. What do you think you’re doing? Don’t touch me with your spidery appendages you pint-sized, trash can. You might harm my delicate circuitry.”

The flustered droid suddenly realized that they weren’t alone. “Oh. Master Ben. You’re back. Where have you been for so long? I thought you were searching for Miss Padmay. Did you

find her? Is she here with you? Wait a minute. We're not on Coruscant. I'm on board your ship, aren't I sir? You were speaking to me about something important, but I can't seem to recall what it was about. What were you saying? I think it was about the maker. What was it now? It's right on the tip of my..., OH MY! Now I remember. Darth Vader is my creator!"

"Don't go into shut down mode again. That's an order," Ben commanded.

"What? Oh. It's you Master Ben. What were you saying?"

"I asked if you were all right. You are, aren't you?"

"Why of course Master Ben. Thank you for asking."

"Threepio. Do you remember what we were talking about?"

"Yes Master Ben. We were talking about. Oh...,"

"Don't say "oh my" again. Please!"

Threepio sat quietly for the longest time. Ben wondered if the droid shut down again. "Can you hear me Threepio? If you can, please respond."

"I'm sorry Master Ben. I didn't mean to cause you alarm. Everything is in perfect working order now. All data that was wiped from my memory has been fully restored. You see, our vast store of knowledge is never eradicated from our system entirely. We have a built in recycle area that we can activate in order to retrieve information that has been erased from our conscious mind. It's a little complicated to retrieve the data. Unless there's a specific need to recall important documentation, it's suppressed deep in our memories. It was necessary to reroute my thought processors. That's why I appeared to be ignoring you."

"Considering what you just learned, I didn't know if your circuits could handle this information. I knew you'd be upset."

"Upset? Of course I'm upset! You would be too if you found out your maker was Darth Vader."

"Anakin Skywalker is my grandfather. It's kind of the same thing. Don't you think?"

"Yes sir. I suppose you're right. I didn't think of it in that respect. I am sorry Master Ben. This must be quite upsetting for you too."

"Don't worry about it. I've known about it for quite some time. I've gotten used to it."

"Used to it? I can't understand how humans adjust to bad news so easily. It's extremely difficult for us to process disruptive information."

"Believe me Threepio. Humans don't adjust so easily either. It takes us quite a while to get over a tragic event. We tend to keep these things buried deep inside us. Some humans never get

over a traumatic experience.”

“It takes a long time for us as well Master Ben.”

“I know. Well, are you alright now? I know this was a shock.”

“Of course it’s a shock. I had no idea that Master Anakin was Darth Vader. It’s extremely hard to believe that someone as kind as Master Anakin could be turned into such an evil monster. It’s unbelievable. I suppose I’ll get used to it as you did. Humans are so complex. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to understand you.”

“Some humans find it hard to understand droids too Threepio. Now, if you are quite sure you’re functioning properly, could you continue translating for Artoo?”

“Yes Master Ben.”

Ben was surprised that Threepio handled the news so well. Of course, he thought the droid was fusing circuits when he kept repeating “oh my.” Thankfully, he was working fine now.

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Ben kept the droids at it for quite a long time before Artoo was finished relating all he know of Anakin Skywalker. The young man didn’t know if the sketchy information would help in his upcoming battle, but it did give him more of an insight of how and why his grandfather turned to the Dark Side. Ben finally understood the full amount of inner turmoil his grandfather suffered when he’d foreseen Padme’s death. Anakin failed to save his mother’s life and it had broken his heart. He vowed that he wouldn’t lose the only other person that truly loved him. Unfortunately, his attempt to save her life failed too.

Anakin Skywalker’s love for Padme Amidala, and his inability to live without her, had been the main reason he’d turned to the Dark Side. There were other factors that aided Darth Sidious’ ability to turn him as well. Anakin’s lack of sleep due to the visions of his wife’s death kept him on the verge of a mental breakdown. His devotion to the Jedi suffered due to the Council’s failure to recognize his continual efforts to please them, which they ignored.

Obi-Wan’s indifference to their friendship caused Anakin a considerable amount of distress. He thought of him as a father, but Obi-Wan never returned his affection. Anakin never understood why the man he considered his best friend appeared to be so shallow. His Master’s lack of interest hurt Anakin deeply. The young man hid his true feelings while continuing his effort to receive Obi-Wan’s love. The man never praised him. He never showed Anakin the respect he felt he’d deserved. Neither did the Jedi. The Clone War added to his worries as well.

Anakin also felt mistrust from both Obi-Wan and the Jedi Council. He felt an exaggerated

amount of mistrust from Mace Windu. The lies Palpatine implanted in his mind through the years made him doubt the Jedi in return. They'd never trusted him fully. He'd felt that the Council betrayed him, and in a way they had. All of these things were a contributing factor to Anakin turning against what he'd always believed in, the Jedi Order, and his faith in mankind.

Learning that Palpatine was really a Sith Lord, Anakin reported him to the Council. He'd been extremely upset when Mace Windu went to arrest the Chancellor. The man claimed he could save Padme's life. Anakin believed him assuming, that if arrested, there'd be no way to prevent her death. He disobeyed Mace's orders to wait at the Temple, chasing after him instead. When he saw Palpatine use Forced lightning on Windu he'd been seduced by the power his mentor possessed.

That had been the moment Anakin turned from his duty to the Jedi Order. That had been his breaking point, but he'd sacrificed his soul in vain. Palpatine had lied when he told Anakin he could save Padme. No one person had the ability to recreate life. At least, that's what Ben once believed.

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When Artoo and Threepio finally left, Ben went to his locker and took out a small, wooden box he'd retrieved while on Coruscant. It contained his inheritance from his uncle. Carefully wrapped inside the box was Luke's lightsaber. This was the weapon of a true Jedi Knight. It was the weapon Luke used when he'd faced Darth Vader on the second Death Star. Ben couldn't think of a better weapon to use against the new Sith Lord.

Luke Skywalker had trained Ben in the art of swordsmanship to the best of his ability. The youth knew he had enough experience to handle a lightsaber, but wondered if he'd learned enough to defeat such a powerful opponent. The only experience he'd had wielding a lightsaber was during practice sessions. He'd never actually used one in a true battle. While Ben was in the process of making a practice orb to refresh his skill, he remembered the first time he'd constructed one. A padawan learner was required to make their own weaponry in order to pass the Trials. Ben had never been so proud when he'd completed his assigned tasks to his uncle's satisfaction.

When Ben had his first lessons with a lightsaber it was like playing an exciting game with a new toy. Luke scolded him for having thoughts of fame and glory. He'd said that it marred the weapon's true meaning.

The shame of that day came back to Ben full force as he recalled Luke's harsh lecture. His

uncle had said, "You must take your lessons seriously little man. You have to learn that a lightsaber is not only a weapon to guard and protect our freedoms; it's also a symbol of what the Jedi stand for. This is a weapon for the pure of heart. It's never to be used in anger or fear. It's not to be misused for personal gain. A lightsaber is not to be used in pride or self-fulfillment. It's not merely a weapon to defend yourself. It's to be used to protect the innocent, as well as keep the peace. It is never, I repeat, never to be used for anything but the purest of reasons. Anything less will dull its color. A lightsaber shines according to the purpose it's used for. The more honorable the purpose, the brighter it shines. The brighter a lightsaber shines, the more strength it exerts. You have to learn this if you want true control over a lightsaber young man. Treat it with disrespect and your weapon may fail you."

Ben hung his head in embarrassment as Luke continued the lecture. "The Sith's rage is what empowers their lightsabers. Their weapons glow bright red. Red is the color of hate and anger. Red is also the color of blood. There's nothing the Sith like better than spilling innocent blood. It sates their unholy appetites, but never completely quenches their thirst. The Sith are never satisfied."

The youth looked at Luke while he continued his speech, wearing a stern expression. "Always remember this, my young padawan. It is the way of the Sith to deceive. Be wary Ben. The Sith are well practiced in ways to entice you to the Dark Side. They'll use any method to gain your loyalty. Every individual they lure to the Dark Side makes them stronger."

Ben meekly replied, "Yes sir. I'm sorry. I'll never do it again. I promise. I really didn't mean to cheapen the honor of such a weapon. It's just that I feel so powerful while holding one."

"Granted, but you've got to be extremely careful Ben. The temptation to use a lightsaber for your own goals can mislead and ultimately destroy you. Don't forget what having this ability did to my father. That's only one reason why it takes special training to wield a lightsaber. We only use it when absolutely necessary. Your knowledge of the Force gives you the responsibility of dealing with people with intellect, instead of violence. Never use a lightsaber in anger. You're a Jedi. Use your abilities for good deeds, if not, it will lead to your downfall."

Ben had been very contrite when he replied, "I promise I'll remember everything you said Uncle Luke." And he did. Everything Ben learned that day came flooding back to him as he practiced with the orb. Not only the lecture from his uncle, but every move, every thrust, every feign came back to him. It was as if he'd never put his lightsaber down. How he wished his uncle could stand by his side when he faced this new Sith Lord.

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Lando was waiting for Ben to return to the observation deck. He'd left quite a while ago with the two droids, saying he'd be back later. Lando was glad for the time alone. He wanted to think about their situation. Could what Ben said be true? Was Padmay really turned into an evil monster like Vader once was? Was there really an army of Vader's clones awaiting them on Geonosis? Did Darth Vader really reincarnate, and if so, how? It wasn't possible for anyone to transfer physically into another being.

Lando told Ben that he didn't believe in the Force, nor that there were any Jedi left alive to protect them. He continued to think that way. After all, Vader had killed them all.

Ben certainly believed in the Jedi though, as well as believing in this so-called Force. Was the lad fooling himself like Luke used to? Luke often spoke of this Force, and relied on it heavily. He got involved in serious situations that he shouldn't have escaped from, but he'd always managed to somehow. Where was this great Force Luke constantly raved about when he lay dying? It hadn't helped him then!

As Lando stood at the viewport wondering if he should give the order to turn back, an overpowering need to sleep overcame him. He barely had time to sit before falling into a deep slumber. He instantly went into a dream state. While in this dreamlike trance, Luke Skywalker came to him. He told Lando to believe Ben and have faith in the Jedi. There really was a Force that empowered the boy.

While Luke was relating this, a tall figure, cloaked in a white robe joined him. "I'm glad to finally see you again Lando. I want to thank you for all you've done for my son. Your friendship meant a great deal to Luke."

"Who are you?" Lando asked. "I've never met you before."

"You don't recognize me as I appear now, but we have met before. Our meeting was under very different circumstances. We met on Bespin a long time ago. I'm Luke's father. I'm Anakin Skywalker. You know me as Darth Vader."

"You can't be Darth Vader. I don't feel anger or hate flow from you as it did from him. If anything, I feel a calming sensation emanate from you. You are not Darth Vader."

"You're right. I'm not Darth Vader anymore. The vengeful part of my soul is gone from me forever, but who and what I am is of no consequence right now. You doubt the Jedi. You don't believe we'll be able to protect you. You have to leave that doubt behind Lando. Your life, as well as the lives of many others depends on your belief in us. The Jedi will be there to protect

and defend the future of all mankind when you face this new Sith Lord. I know this is a lot to ask of you. You've led a life that relies on facts, but for just once, you must have faith in something other than what you can see with your eyes alone."

"How can I do that? I've been a skeptic my entire life. I've never been able to put my trust in anything or anyone. Every time I did I ended up a victim."

"I know all about your misgivings Lando. You used to be a carefree, happy lad who'd give the shirt off your back without a second thought. You were a trusting soul, but the one person you thought you could trust the most betrayed you. It changed your life completely. Your best friend overheard your father speak against Emperor Palpatine. He divulged this information to the territorial governor. Because of his traitorous act your entire family was arrested and placed in a work camp."

"You had a younger sister whom you felt protective of. You were devastated when you witnessed her being tortured. You were thoroughly disgusted with yourself, thinking yourself a coward for not trying to rescue her. She died at the hands of her captors, just as the rest of your family did. You've never been able to forgive yourself for their deaths, though it wasn't your fault."

"If it hadn't been for me being so trusting, my so-called friend wouldn't have overheard my father speak against Palpatine and reported it. My family would've never have been arrested."

"You can't blame yourself for the acts of others. You must find it in your heart to forgive yourself."

"That's something I'll never be able to do."

"You were a mere child when this happened, chained and guarded. You had no means to help your family and no means of escape. There was no way you could save them. If your family doesn't place blame for their deaths on your head, you shouldn't either."

"How do you know they don't blame me?"

"I can sense it through the Force."

"I don't believe in the Force."

"I see you need further convincing. After years of hard labor, you escaped from the death camp and eventually found this betrayer. Your need for revenge was sated when you killed him, but his death never really eased your conscious. Since then you led a reckless lifestyle. You joined a motley crew of smugglers and risked your life for meager profit. You had very little regard for yourself or anyone else until you managed Cloud City. You've convinced yourself the only reason



you took charge was for your own self-interests, but through your leadership you helped many people.”

“How could you possibly know all this? I’ve never told anyone about being in that prison camp, or about avenging my family. Not even Chewbacca.”

“I already told you. Through the Force. I know everything about you Lando. Do you think I’d risk putting my grandson’s life in your hands if I didn’t trust you fully?”

“You trust me? Why?”

“You’ve saved my children’s lives on more than one occasion. Would you do any less for my grandson?”

“No. I love that kid. I’d do anything for him.”

“Then believe what he tells you. Learn to trust your feelings again Lando. Learn to believe in the Force, and in the Jedi. We are here to help you.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“There’s nothing to say. It only matters that you believe in us.”

Lando didn’t know what to think. He hadn’t been able to trust in anything or anyone for so long. He shook his head in confusion, but finally replied, “I’ll try, but I still can’t completely accept what you’re telling me.”

“There you go again with the doubt,” Luke sighed.

“I’m sorry Luke. I just can’t help it. I find it hard believing in anything anymore.”

“You may say that you don’t believe in the Force, or the Jedi, but I know for certain that you finally do.”

“How can you possibly know that?” Lando scowled. “I didn’t say that I believed, just that I’d try.”

“But you do believe everything now. I can sense it.”

“The way you two bicker it’s a wonder you ever became friends at all,” Anakin chuckled.

Luke smiled and joined his father in his mirth. Their laughter slowly faded. The two figures slowly disappeared.

Lando awoke with a feeling of calming peace, wonder, and awe. Did he actually see and speak with Luke and his father? It was just a dream, wasn’t it? Yet deep in his soul Lando knew that he’d really spent time with his close friend. He knew he’d just spoken with Luke’s father. Anakin Skywalker, not Darth Vader. He couldn’t understand how it was possible, but he was positive that it actually happened. Lando Calrissian did fully believe in the Jedi and the Force.

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Shortly after Lando had his dream, Ben walked through the turbolift doors. The instant he saw Lando he knew something wonderful had taken place. He walked up to him and asked, “Luke and my grandfather came to you didn’t they Uncle Lando? You believe everything I told you now. Don’t you?”

“How do you know that?”

“I just do.”

“I guess you sensed it through the Force, just like Luke used to be able to do.” Lando shook his head in bewilderment. “Well, you’re right. Luke and your grandfather came to me in what I first thought was a dream, but the more I think about it, I’m positive that I actually talked to both of them. I know it sounds like I’ve completely gone off my rocker, but I swear by the stars that I just spoke with the dead.”

“And now, you finally believe in the Force, and in the Jedi.”

“Yeah. I guess I do. I don’t pretend to understand how or why, but the moment I spoke to your grandfather I knew the Force was something tangible. I can’t describe how it’s made me feel Ben. All doubt is completely gone from my mind. It’s totally blown me away.”

“It makes you feel kind of special knowing its real, doesn’t it? The Force is very powerful Uncle Lando. That energy can be very dangerous when used by the wrong hands, as you well know. Look at what having that ability did to my grandfather.”

“You can’t blame the Force for what happened to him Ben.”

“I don’t blame the Force, but if Anakin Skywalker didn’t have the ability to draw all that power, he wouldn’t have been able to do all the evil things he did.”

“You don’t still hold that against him, do you?” Lando asked before laughing loudly. “Listen to me, will ya? Can you believe that I’m actually taking Darth Vader’s side? Who would ever dream it possible that I, Lando Calrissian, would defend Darth Vader? But that isn’t who your grandfather is anymore. I’ve learned that much.”

“So have I Uncle Lando. I was just trying to warn you how strong the Force is, as well as how easily it can be misused.”

“I can see how having that much power can corrupt someone. It must be extremely hard to stay on the straight and narrow. I know I would’ve never been able to do it. I understand so much, thanks to your grandfather. I truly believe in him, in Luke, the Jedi, and in the Force. Anakin Skywalker convinced me it’s all real.”

“That means a lot to me Uncle Lando, but I think we better find Captain Brant and come up with some kind of plan. I sense the time is near.”

## Chapter Twenty Three

### - Entering Orbit -

Ben and Lando were in Captain Brant’s quarters when Ben asked, “When will we be entering the system sir?”

“Very shortly. I’ve given instructions to be notified when we do,” Brant replied.

“Are you certain about this Ben?” Lando asked with concern in his voice. “I don’t want you going to Geonosis by yourself without support.”

“I’m certain. It’s too dangerous for anyone to come with me, including you. Besides, you’re needed here.”

“What about Padmay? Will you be able to rescue her?”

“I don’t know. It all depends on her. She’s one of them now. She’s pledged herself to the Sith. She’ll do whatever he tells her to do. If she defends him, I’ll have no choice but to fight her.”

“Even if it means you might have to kill her?” Lando wasn’t sure the lad had it in his heart to take his sister’s life, or even if Ben could defeat her.

“I pray it won’t come to that,” Ben sighed. “Padmay is my sister and I’m certain she still loves me. I won’t allow myself to believe that she’ll kill me in order to protect him. I’ll find some way of breaking through to Padmay. I just have to!”

“There’s no way I’m going to allow you to face them alone,” Lando stated firmly.

“You don’t have a choice Uncle Lando. You’ve got take charge when the Solaris goes up against the Star Destroyers. You’re the only one that’s faced more than one destroyer. You led the attack over Endor. You not only had the Death Star to contend with, you had the Empire’s full fleet to deal with as well. Forgive me Captain Brant, but you don’t have enough experience to lead an assault against eight, enemy vessels.”

Brant asked, “How can you be so sure that there are just eight destroyers in this system? How do you know they don’t have a whole damned fleet of ships waiting to ambush us?”

“I’m positive that’s all that’s left of the Empire’s fleet.”

“How can you possibly know that for certain?”

“Believe it Brant. He knows,” Lando stated.

The comlink buzzed. “We’re coming up on the system now sir. Should we enter into an orbit around Geonosis?”

“I’ll get back to you,” Brant replied to the disembodied voice. “Well? Are we going ahead with Ben’s plan Admiral?”

Lando looked over at the youth who’d be facing death very shortly. He’d sent men into perilous situations before, but none whom he loved and thought of as his own son. Could he really send this boy into such danger? The Admiral saw the grim look of determination on Ben’s face and knew he had no choice. Ben’s mind was made up. He was going after Padmay no matter what anyone said. “Yes. It’s the best strategy we can come up with under the circumstances.”

“Very well.” Brant replied and notified the helmsman to enter into an orbit.

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“Ben’s here Estrus. Are you prepared to face your brother in battle?”

“Yes my Master.”

“Will you defeat him?”

“Yes my Lord.”

“Will you kill Ben if I ask it of you?”

“Yes Master.”

“Are you willing to sacrifice your life for me if the need arises?”

“Yes my love. Gladly.”

“Good.”

The Supreme Ruler couldn’t wait for Ben’s arrival. He was anticipating the expression of despair on his grandson’s face. He knew just how much the boy dreaded facing his sister and felt his anguish. I’ll drink deeply of his misery and enjoy it immensely, the man thought with glee.

How dare the boy think he could confront him! Ben actually believed he stood a chance of defeating him. It was absurd. Even with all the Jedi’s help, his grandson had neither the strength, nor the knowledge to vanquish him. The youngling was even too weak to defeat his sister. Lord Vader would never give Ben the chance to harm Estrus, of course. She must live on to give birth to their child. “Soon my foolish boy, I shall have you within my grasp too. You may think you’ll be able to resist me, but you have no idea how strong my resolve is to turn you to the Dark Side. If you refuse me you will surely die.”

“What did you say Master?”

“Just speaking aloud my love. Just speaking aloud.”

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“It’s time Ben. Are you ready? Have you truly forgiven me in your heart? If you haven’t we can’t proceed.”

Finally comprehending fully why his grandfather turned to the Dark Side, Ben was willing to forgive Anakin for all the atrocities he’d committed as Darth Vader. Luke learned to love his father deeply and had absolved him. If his uncle had it in his heart to pardon him, Ben knew he could forgive him too.

“Yes grandfather. I was ashamed my entire life due to your acts while alive, but now I understand exactly why you turned. You were duped into believing you could save your wife. You let your heart rule you.”

“It was a mistake I paid dearly for, as well as Padme. Thousands suffered due to my error in judgment. If it weren’t for Luke, I may have continued to serve Palpatine and destroyed even more innocent lives. I appreciate your forgiveness more than you can comprehend, but now I have to know if you’re ready. Are you prepared for the battle ahead?”

“I hope so grandfather, but are you sure your plan will work? I’ve never knew the Jedi could do such things.”

“Only the Chosen One has ability we discussed Ben. Whether our plan will succeed or not, I’ve no idea. The Dark Side clouds my vision of the future. We can only hope that our effort won’t be in vain.”

“What about Vader’s cloned army? Are you sure the Jedi can influence them like they did on the Death Star? We were far from Geonosis then. He might be able to block them now. His influence is bound to be much stronger here.” Ben was stalling. He wasn’t ready to see his sister standing beside this new Sith Lord willing to defend him with her life.

“Do not fear Ben. The Jedi are gathered enough in strength now to defeat all of Vader’s children.”

“But…”

“Ben. There can be no more hesitation on your part. You are either ready for this confrontation, or you’re not. It is entirely up to you whether you want to proceed. You have time to change your mind. No one will think the less of you if you decide not to participate. We’ll still do all in our power to stop the Sith from regaining control of the galaxy, but you have to make your decision right now.”

Ben wondered if he was truly ready to face what lay ahead. Did he have enough courage

to face such an overwhelming enemy? Did he have enough strength within himself to stand before the Sith Lord and confront him? And what about Padmay? Could he face his sister in battle? Ben knew deep in his heart that he might have to kill his sister if she defended her master. He'd have no choice. Too many innocent lives hung in the balance. He took a few deep breaths and exhaled slowly to overcome his anxiety. He let the Force engulf him and it calmed his nerves. The youth knew he had no option but to accept his responsibility fully. He finally replied, "I've made my choice grandfather. I'm ready to face our enemy."

"Are you certain?"

"Yes grandfather."

"Are there any doubts left in your mind?"

"No grandfather."

"Then I shall proceed."

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Threepio stood beside Lando's fighter as they lowered Artoo into the socket behind the cockpit. "Be careful my friend. I wouldn't want any harm to come to you. After all, it's been years since you last served in combat. I'm afraid you might have forgotten how to pilot an X-Wing. Oh my! How can they put you in such jeopardy? I just don't understand any of this. Why do humans have to fight? Why can't they be more like droids?" Threepio fretted.

Artoo beeped a response telling his friend not to worry.

"I can't help but worry Artoo. I'd miss you terribly if something happened to you. Remember what happened when you assisted Master Luke when he destroyed the first Death Star? I didn't think they'd ever be able to repair you."

Artoo razzed a snippy retort as he settled into the X-Wing.

"You don't have to be so defensive. I only stated the truth."

Artoo beeped a reply that was surely a curse.

"If that's the way you feel about it I won't bother you anymore," Threepio snapped. Feeling sorry for himself, he turned around and sulked.

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Ben stood next to Lando as he waited to climb on board the small fighter. "I hope I can fly one of these things. I've never piloted an X-Wing before."

"You'll do fine. I still say you're needed here. I don't know why you insist on leading the attack."

“You think I’m too old for this sortie.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“No, but that’s what you’re thinking.”

“How do you know what I’m thinking? Have you suddenly been granted the power of the Force?”

Lando chuckled. “No Ben. I don’t have that gift. I wish I did. It would sure help when we go up against the TIE’s. I know you don’t think I’m up to it. Anyone can see the concern on your face.”

Ben sighed and shook his head in exasperation. He knew there was no use in trying to talk Lando out of being a part of the battle. He was a very stubborn man. He thought he’d be more useful leading the attack, needing every available pilot. The youth shrugged his shoulders in defeat and said, “It’s easy to pilot an X-Wing Uncle Lando. I’m certain you won’t have any problems. She’ll withstand pretty much everything they fire at you. In case of serious damage, you’ve got the ejector capsule. It’ll supply you with about an hour of oxygen. That’s more than enough to sustain you until picked up.”

“Picked up by whom? We’re all going to have our hands full. Besides, I won’t be using it. It’s always been do or die in my book.”

Ben didn’t want to think about losing the last human link to his family. He ignored Lando’s remark and continued to explain the X-Wing’s capabilities “Her weaponry has been upgraded quite a bit, but the cockpit hasn’t changed much. You’ve got your laser cannons, proton torpedo launcher, deflector shield. All you have to do is nudge the stick and she’ll respond instantly. You also have Artoo to repair damage, if needed.”

“I wish I’d brought the Falcon along. I restored her after Han gave her back to me.”

“I thought you said that you’d won the Millennium Falcon back from my father in a game of sabacc.”

“Have you ever won a game of sabacc when playing against your father?”

“No.”

“Well, neither have I. Han let me win the Falcon back. He wanted to make sure she’d go to someone who’d take as good care of her as he used to when he finally settled down with Leia. He loved that old crate and he knew I did too. Han knew exactly what she’s capable of. She’d be able to handle herself in today’s battle. The Falcon is fast as hell and maneuvers on a dime. I’m used to flying her. I’m not so sure about my abilities piloting such a small fighter.”

Ben chuckled. "Don't worry Uncle Lando. I'm sure you'll be able handle an X-Wing without any problems. She's darn fast and easy to maneuverable too. Besides, the Jedi will be there to protect you."

"I hope you're right about that."

"You're doubting again Uncle Lando. You've got to trust the Jedi."

"This is all new to me Ben. It'll take some time getting used to believing in something again after all these years."

"Time is something we have very little of." Ben sighed as he looked past Lando. The deck chief was standing next to the X-Wing waiting to strap him into the cockpit.

Lando gripped Ben by the shoulders knowing it might be the last time he'd see him alive. "I wish I could go to Geonosis with you Ben. I have a feeling you're going to need my help."

"I told you before that it's too dangerous. You've no idea how powerful the Dark Side is. It's like a fog that no light can penetrate. The closer you get to Geonosis, the thicker the fog will be. It surrounds the entire planet. It's impossible for you to go up against such an incredible force. You're not a Jedi. That's why I have to go alone, but don't worry. I'll be okay. The Jedi will be there to protect me."

"Even so, please promise me that you'll be careful."

"I'll be as careful as I can be under the circumstances. I promise."

"You know that I love both you and your sister very much. You're the children I never had. I'd die of heartbreak if anything happens to either of you."

"You have my word that I won't take any unnecessary risks, and I promise that I'll do all in my power to bring Padmay back unharmed. I'm certain that I won't be forced to take her life. I'll know I'll find a way to save her from all this."

"I'm certain you'll do all you can to save Padmay. But if you have to take her life, will you be able to?"

"I don't know Uncle Lando. I'd rather die than harm a hair on her head. I love Padmay too much, but I'll do what must be done in order to save the galaxy. That has to take priority." The deck chief cleared his throat in order to get Lando's attention.

Before acknowledging the man, Lando said, "I know you'll do your duty Ben. I just wish it didn't involve fighting your sister. I know the thought of facing her in battle breaks your heart, and pray as much as you that she can be saved. I wish you the best of luck."

"Thank you Uncle Lando, and may the Force be with you."



Lando turned and boarded his X-Wing.

Ben walked the distance between the ships and climbed on board his own fighter. He looked towards Lando as he settled into the cockpit. Lando looked back. Ben waved a final farewell to his father's best friend. Lando saluted him back.

The canopy came down sealing Ben in his craft, protecting him from the vacuum of space. He closed his eyes lettering the Force surround him and felt his grandfather's presence beside him. The young man knew the Chosen One would be there protect him when he faced the Sith Lord. He prayed that he'd have enough courage to fight Padmay, if need be. Ben couldn't help but wonder if he'd be able to slice into her flesh, taking her life. Pushing the thought from his mind, the starpilot hit the ignition and waited for clearance to take off.

\*

The Solaris had the capacity to carry five times the amount of starfighters the old cruisers had. The hangar bay had been renovated, more than quadrupling in size. The old warships only allowed enough room for twenty four fighters. It was a tight fit, but the Solaris carried one hundred and twenty X-Wings. Alec Brant wondered just how many of those crafts would return today. How many men would survive? Would any of them?

Brant also thought about whether the Solaris would be able to hold off eight, fully equipped Imperial Star Destroyers. They carried thousands of weapons systems. The destroyers had everything from turbolasers, to ion cannons, to tractor beams. Not to mention all the TIE fighters, interceptors and bombers. Their gigantic hangar bays held over three hundred starships. They had over three garrisons of ground troops, adding up to approximately thirty eight thousand men. The list went on and on of men and equipment.

Alec was well aware that one battle-weary cruiser would never be able to go up against such incredible odds, even with improved weaponry. Most of the systems had been upgraded quite a bit, but the vessel didn't have the capacity to fight such an incredible force, even if all of the Star Destroyers were undermanned. The Solaris was equipped with fifteen turbolasers batteries, each one containing fifteen laser cannons with precision tracking servos. They had sophisticated sensors and long range communications systems. Her hull was reinforced with tough durasteel armor. The Solaris could hold her own against one destroyer, possible two, but eight? It was out of the question.

Brant nearly fainted when young Solo told him that they were going to confront so many enemy destroyers. He'd wanted to cancel the assault on the spot, but Ben told him that they had

to stand fast and defeat the Sith here and now. Admiral Calrissian had agreed. No matter what Brant thought of such a ridiculous assignment, he'd never go against the chain of command.

When he learned of Lando's intentions of leading the X-Wings, Brant was totally against the idea of their highest ranking officer flying a fighter into combat. Calrissian was needed on the bridge. As Ben had pointed out, Alec had never led an assault against so much firepower, but there was no way Lando could be talked out of his decision. Brant prayed that the man knew what he was doing.

The captain of the Solaris stood on the bridge and pondered their fate as he watched the small fighters soar into space. One hundred and nineteen heroic men flew towards the enemy. Only one X-Wing flew towards the surface of Geonosis.

## Chapter Twenty Four

### - Temptation -

There were many false paths leading to dead ends as Ben walked through the maze of tunnels excavated in the mountains on Geonosis, but the young man knew which direction to go. He was being drawn to his sister like a blind man seeking sight. Ben knew the tunnel he took would lead to the center of the underground city. He reached to his side and felt for his uncle's lightsaber. Just knowing it was the weapon that subdued Darth Vader once before comforted him. He prayed that this weapon would triumph again.

When Ben arrived at the archway that opened to the main concourse, he noted that the courtyard was deserted. Crossing the mall, he proceeded cautiously fearing an ambush. When on the other side, he passed under a similar arch and into another tunnel. Ben sensed that this passageway would lead to the main council chamber where Count Dooku once presided over the Separatist Leaders.

The air was dank with an ominous presence. The stench of the Dark Side filled Ben's nostrils as he continued through the dimly lit tunnel. His skin crawled with a sense of repugnance as he neared the chamber. When standing just outside the opened doorway, he saw a large chair at the end of a massive table. A figure stood next to the chair that resembled a throne. The seat was occupied, but the shape wasn't clearly visible as both figures were shrouded in darkness. The form that stood stiffly next to the chair was cloaked in a black robe, the face hidden by a hood. The familiar posture was easily recognizable to Ben. It was Padmay. She reached her hands up and

lowered her hood revealing herself to her brother. Her face showed not a trace of the sister he loved so much. Her eyes glowed bright yellow. Innocence gone, what stood before him now was pure evil. Padmay had truly given her soul to her Sith Master.

“Come in Ben. We’ve been waiting for you,” his twin said emotionlessly.

Ben slowly entered the chamber.

“Sit and make yourself comfortable brother. There is much for us to discuss.”

“I think not Padmay. I’d prefer to stand against my enemies.”

“I’m afraid I no longer answer to that name. I shall only respond to the name my Master has given me. My name is now Estrus.”

“I’ll not call you any name he’s bestowed upon you.”

“You hurt my feelings dear brother.” Padmay feigned a sigh before continuing, “I suppose I can’t convince you to join us. You don’t know what it is to gain this knowledge Ben. You have no concept of the powers I now possess. You can’t know. The Jedi have lied to you. They fear the Sith. They know they can never defeat us. They send you before us as a sacrificial eopie for the slaughter. Don’t give up your life needlessly my brother. Join us. Become a Sith. Know the full powers of the Dark Side.”

“You know I can’t and won’t do that Padmay.”

“Yes you can Ben. It isn’t necessary for us to fight one another over this issue. The Supreme Ruler has shown me the true nature of the Dark Side. Let him show you as well. The Jedi have no concept of the extraordinary powers we’re able to use. Don’t let the Jedi continue to deceive you. They claim the Sith are corrupt, but so are the Jedi.”

Padmay continued her speech trying to convince her brother to join them. “Yes Ben, the Jedi are corrupt. They lied to you about so many things. They told you that the Sith are wicked because we use the Force for selfish reasons. This is a fact. Why shouldn’t we enjoy the better things in life? The Jedi Temple is adorned with expensive tapestries, art, and sculptures that cost thousands of credits. The amount spent on their frivolities would’ve been better spent on those who really needed it. The Jedi claim to be selfless, yet how much of their wealth was shared among the people? They sat in their Temple with a blind eye to the anguish so many suffered. You’ve never been to the bowels of Coruscant Ben. You don’t know what those who live there had to do in order to survive each day. The poor starved due to the Jedi’s indifference. My Master bore witness to the hardships they were forced to bear. He wanted to help the needy Ben, but wasn’t permitted to under the Jedi’s mandates. Their strict code wouldn’t allow it.”

“That’s just one of the reasons why my Master turned to the Dark Side. He couldn’t

tolerate the false compassion the Jedi claimed to possess. The Sith desire power, yes. It's always been quite obvious what we seek. We don't hide behind false robes of pretense like the Jedi do. You don't realize how much you've been duped. Don't let the spirits of dead Jedi manipulate you. Don't let yourself be a pawn in their galactic chess game. Let us show you true power my brother. If you give yourself over to the Dark Side, I can show you powers that surpass your limited abilities."

"You're the one who has been duped Padmay. Your lust for this abomination has blinded you to the truth. He's using you to fulfill his goals, not yours. He doesn't care about the poor and he'll never help them. He has no compassion in his heart. The Jedi always did, and still do possess an unbounded compassion for humanity; unlike your Master who can't comprehend the concept of selflessness. Nor can he feel love. He's incapable of it. He doesn't love you sister. He's filled with greed, hate and the need for absolute control. After you give him what he wants, he'll toss you away like the ashes of a dead fire. Don't you see? You'll never sit by his side and share his throne. It's the way of the Sith to deceive Padmay. The Jedi do not lie. Search your feelings. You know what I'm saying is true."

Padmay let her robe slip off her shoulders and it fell to the floor. "There is only one truth dear brother. If you won't join us, you're our enemy." That said, Padmay leapt into the air and landed directly in front of him. Her lightsaber already ignited, she took Ben by complete surprise. She lunged at him with a jab that should have killed him, but at the last second Ben twisted out of the way. His uncle's lightsaber now in hand, Ben waited for Padmay to make her next move.

She attacked. Ben feigned to the left and then parried her strokes. Their swords locked together and sizzled as they stood face to face, Padmay's eyes glaring. For an instant Ben thought he saw recognition in her eyes. It was short lived as his sister broke the connection to strike at his chest. Ben leapt back from her onslaught in retreat.

Padmay advanced without hesitation as she slashed at him with unbelievable agility. "I can feel your weakness brother," Padmay huffed out as she continued her fierce offensive. "Your faith in the Jedi has weakened as well, but there is still time to join us. Lay down your weapon and surrender. You haven't the skill to defeat me."

"It's not you I came to defeat," Ben shouted as he leaped into the air and landed on top of the table. He ran the length of the highly, polished surface and jumped to the floor. As he gained his balance, Padmay threw her lightsaber with deadly accuracy. Ben leapt out of the way in time. He felt the heat from her weapon singe the corner of his cheek as it flew past and clattered to the

floor. Too close, Ben thought as he found himself standing next to the “throne.”

Undeniable evil reeked from the shadows. Evil so powerful it took Ben’s breath away. The voice that spoke made him cringe. Every hair on his body stood on end. The young man shivered in fear before the Sith Lord.

“Impressive. Most impressive. You’ve fight very well considering you’re a mere padawan learner, but you aren’t skilled enough yet. You’ve much more to learn my boy.”

\*

The Admiral spoke into the comlink that fit snugly around his head, “You all know what to do men. You were given your orders at the briefing. This is going to be the toughest battle of your lives. It’ll be nearly impossible to get all of them to follow us, but it’s our best and only shot. Good luck. Now, let’s get at them.”

Lando flew his X-Wing head on towards the TIE’s as the fighters closed on each other. It only took him a few seconds to get the feel of the small craft as he soared through space. He never felt more alive.

As the fighters converged, three TIE’s immediately flew up on his tail. He pushed the stick forward until it strained under the pressure. They gave chase. He looked out the canopy and noted that the rest of the X-Wings were leading the TIE’s in the same direction. Maybe this insane plan was going to work after all. Lando let his instincts take over and kept his thoughts on the task at hand, knowing that the enemy could read his mind. He piloted his X-Wing away from Geonosis.

\*

Luke, Yoda, Obi-Wan, Qui-Gon, Mace Windu, as well as the rest of the Jedi waited for the X-Wings to reach their destination. The tremendous disturbance felt by the Jedi was almost visible as the Dark and the Light Side of the Force embraced in a struggle between good and evil. The incredible amount of energy surged and swelled as if a great tidal wave were rushing towards a distant shore to engulf all in its path. The Jedi’s role in this battle was about to begin.

\*

Ben fought feelings of utter fear as he stood next to this evil being who sat on his right. He held out his lightsaber towards him. The man laughed. “Come now Ben. You really don’t expect me to fight you. The idea is totally absurd. I’d much rather watch as you and your sister compete against each other. It’s very amusing.”

“It’s not funny to me Vader,” Ben spat his name out as if it were poison upon his tongue.

“Why are you doing this? I know you want to control the galaxy, but why did you abduct Padmay and turn her to the Dark Side? Why are you forcing her to fight me? I know you want to turn me too. I’m aware you’ll gain more power if we both pledge ourselves to the Sith. What I don’t understand is why it’s so damned important for you to turn the Skywalker line? Is it because my uncle rejected you?”

“Ah yes. Luke. It’s such a pity my son was such a weakling. He couldn’t envision the immensity of power we could’ve achieved if he became a Sith Lord, but your sister has. Estrus has willingly embraced the Dark Side. She understands my true power and you can too Ben.”

“You’ll never get me to join you.”

Lord Vader chuckled and then smugly replied, “You do realize that you can never defeat me. You’re not strong enough and never will be, even with all the Jedi’s assistance. Don’t you understand why they fear the Dark Side of the Force? They know they’re not able to control such power with their meager knowledge. Nonetheless, they crave ultimate power, just as we do. That is why they want you on their side Ben. They know you’ve inherited my abilities.”

The Sith Lord continued, “Padmay wasn’t lying to you when she told you that the Jedi deceived you. They told you that we Sith are evil when all we really want is order. The Jedi say the Sith use the Force in an unnatural way. There is no unnatural way to use our powers Ben. The Force is what it is. Nothing more, nothing less. The midi-chlorians understood this. That’s why they’ve never intervened. They leave it up to each individual which path to follow.”

“Only we Sith hold true knowledge of the Dark Side. Only we know just how powerful the Force can be. The Jedi only hold a limited amount of power. They fear full knowledge. If you reconsider and willingly join us, the full knowledge of the Dark Side, as well as the gift of absolute power is within your reach. We can destroy all our enemies. We can live in complete peace and finally bring order to our Empire. We can rule not only this mere galaxy, but the entire universe. It is your destiny Ben. Pledge your alliance to the Sith. Pledge your soul to me. Know the absolute power I possess within me.” Vader suddenly reached out and grabbed Ben’s arm.

The young man instantaneously felt an incredible shock wave race through his body. Energy raged within him, building up a tremendous amount of pressure. Ben felt as if his blood were boiling. His nerve endings tingled and writhed. He was filled with a feeling of undeniable power. Ben felt as if he could destroy this weakling that sat beside him by mere thought alone. Yes. He could absorb all of Vader’s dark knowledge and kill him by a simple wave of his hand. He could rule the entire universe!

Ben suddenly heard a weak voice calling to him. It slowly grew louder with each passing second. He soon heard the voice clearly. "Listen to me Ben. Heed my warning. Don't let yourself to give in to temptation. If you do, your soul will be damned forever. Don't surrender yourself to this Dark Lord. Do not weaken. You have the strength to reject him. You didn't come here to seek ultimate power. You came here to save your sister. Resist him Ben. I beg you. Deny him."

"I can't grandfather. He's too strong."

"Yes you can. Pull away Ben. Do it now!"

Ben wrenched his arm free from Vader's grasp. He fell to his knees, struggling to catch his breath. He shook his head to free himself from the intoxicating fever that still lingered. He'd never felt anything so powerful in his life. The urge to give in to it was irresistible. How could he defeat such an overwhelming force? Did he really want to?"

"Yes Ben. Surrender yourself to the Dark Side," Lord Vader said still trying to tempt him. "Let yourself be absorbed fully as I was. Feel the tremendous power inside you again my boy. You can't deny that you still want to. Don't reject me as my son did. Join me Ben. Join me on the Dark Side of the Force. You'll only achieve ultimate power through me, and me alone."

Ben could feel Vader's evil tendrils reaching out trying to ensnare his entire soul, but strength was building inside him to resist the haunting urge to yield. He stayed on his knees and let the Force engulf him fully. He finally responded, "I'll give you the same answer my uncle gave Darth Sidious. I'll never join you. I wasn't born to serve the Dark Side." That said, Ben rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Then you will be destroyed," the Supreme Ruler spat out in disgust.

"Or I'll destroy you," Ben replied with false bravado.

Malicious laughter burst from the Sith Lord. When his laughter finally abated he said snidely, "You'll have to kill Estrus first. Can you do that Ben? Can you terminate your own sister?"

Ben looked across the table at Padmay. She was eagerly awaiting his reply. Her eyes glowed bright yellow. He knew he'd never be able to convince her that her Master was using her. Padmay looked at her Master with adoration and complete loyalty. And yes. Ben saw it now. Padmay loved this abomination. He knew with certainty that he would have to kill his sister in order to defeat the Sith Lord. His beloved twin would fight to the death in order to protect him.

"Please join us Ben," Padmay pleaded. "Learn the full powers of the Dark Side. You'll see why I surrendered my soul to it, and to my Supreme Ruler. You've no idea of the pleasures the

Dark Side can bring you. You've only sipped from the cup. If you join us, there's no limit to the power it will bring you."

"Are you speaking from your heart Padmay? You'll do anything he asks, won't you? You'll kill for him and even give your life for him. Please don't misinterpret my love for you as weakness Padmay. I'll do what I must to defeat this vile creation. You would've too at one time. You swore an oath to protect the innocent from the likes of him. Don't you remember what Darth Sidious did to Uncle Luke? Don't you remember all the lives that were lost, as well as the suffering Darth Vader caused while a puppet to Palpatine? Think Padmay! Think! I know you still remember. There's still good inside you, just like our grandfather had good inside him. Use that to fight his influence over you. I will fight you if you force it upon me. There's no question of that, but I implore you Padmay. Please don't make me kill you. Renounce the Sith."

"Enough," Vader roared. He's made his decision Estrus. Kill him."

Padmay hesitated. Ben thought he saw the yellow glow in her eyes dim for a second. Was that a tear escaping down her cheek?

"I said kill him Estrus. Kill him now!" Lord Vader demanded.

Ben could feel the Sith Lord's influence recapture his sister's full attention. He saw the glow in his twin's eyes turn a brighter yellow as she bowed before her Supreme Ruler.

"Yes my Master," she replied. Padmay then raised her hand and stretched her arm out. Her lightsaber flew from behind Ben and returned to her palm. She ignited her weapon once more.

## Chapter Twenty Five

- Shielded -

"I've got a bad feeling about this," Lando said to Artoo as his X-Wing entered the asteroid field outside the galaxy's perimeter. Artoo responded with a series of beeps and buzzes. The man didn't need to look at the translating screen to know that the droid shared his anxiety. Lando knew he was an accomplished pilot, but thought this sortie was sheer madness.

Artoo shrilled a warning whistle. Lando jerked the joystick a hard left in order to miss a massive boulder that loomed in front of his craft. The X-Wing shook from the near miss. Within a few seconds another asteroid headed straight towards him, bigger than the last. Lando pulled back on the stick in an attempt to avoid it, but it was suddenly yanked from his hands. He'd assumed Artoo had taken control, but the ship responded too quickly. His X-Wing was soaring through the



rocky debris with expert precision.

“You nearly collided back there my friend. You always said you were such a hot shot pilot. I didn’t see you using the masterful moves you always claimed to possess.”

“Luke! How the hell are you...? Never mind. I know. The Force.” Lando snorted as he looked out his canopy to see how his squadron was making out. He could see TIE’s slamming into asteroids, but not one X-Wing came close to destruction. Their ships were soaring through the maelstrom as if the asteroids weren’t even there. He asked, “Do the other X-Wings have Jedi controlling their fighters as well?”

“Yes they do. Ben told you that the Jedi would come through for you, and we have.”

“He’s also the one who recommended this plan. How did he know it was going to work? How did he come up with this absurd idea in the first place?”

“Han is the one who suggested it. He and Leia were fleeing from the rebel base on Hoth when the Imperial Forces attacked. They were forced into an asteroid field. When TIE’s pursued the Falcon they were destroyed.”

Lando thought of how irresponsible Han often was, but he always seemed to come out on top of things. He missed him a lot. They’d been through a lot in the old days. “Leave it to Han to try something that crazy.”

“Well, it worked then and it appears to be working now. You’re luring the enemy to their deaths. Now get out there and draw more TIE’s in.”

“How are we supposed to do that? They’ve got to be aware of what we’re doing now.”

“They’re obsessed by the thought of destroying you. The Jedi are encouraging their rage and it’s blinding them to the danger. They’ll keep chasing you Lando. You don’t have to worry about being hit by asteroids, or by the TIE’s. We’ll continue to protect you. Now, do what I said. Get out there and draw more of them in.”

“All right Luke. It’s against my better judgment, but I’ll do what you want. I’m coming about.” Lando was astonished that the Jedi had such abilities and thanked his lucky stars that they weren’t his foes.

Artoo whistled as if in relief as Lando soared away from imminent danger. Though he really wanted to head to Geonosis in order to help Ben, Lando continued on his present course. He’d told Ben that he believed in the Force, and in the Jedi. He dare not lose that faith now. After what he’d just witnessed, Lando knew there was definitely some kind of phenomenal force assisting the X-Wings. Something far greater than he could ever imagine.

\*

Alec Brant had his hands full. The Star Destroyers surrounded the Solaris and they were drawing fire from every angle. Brant knew that the deflector shields wouldn't take much more punishment. It was like being a helpless tauntaun in the clutches of a Wampa Ice Creature, being eaten alive. Reports of shielding failure were coming in from all over the ship. Brant didn't have a clue how they were going to escape total annihilation.

\*

Lando couldn't believe that they'd managing to continue the sortie without a single loss. Every X-Wing was still intact. "I don't see many more enemy fighters out there Luke."

"Most of them have been destroyed my friend. I'm sure you can handle the rest without our help. After you eliminate the remaining TIE's, you'll have to wait for word that it's safe before returning to the Solaris. The second phase of our battle is about to begin."

"Are you going after the destroyers?"

"Yes."

"Why do we have to stay here? Why can't we go after them too?"

"It would take too long for your ships to return to the Solaris. Besides, firepower isn't needed."

"How are you going to take out the destroyers then?"

"The same way we did over Coruscant."

"And exactly how did you do that?"

"All you need to know is that we are enough in number to accomplish our task without your assistance."

"What about Ben?"

"There's no need for you to worry about him Lando. You have my word that he's in good hands. Everything that can be done to protect him is being done."

"Can't I go to Geonosis and give him some support?"

"Not yet. You have to give the Jedi time to complete our current task."

"I don't know if I can wait Luke. I'm so worried about Ben and Padmay. I can't just sit here and do nothing."

"All that can be done is being done. The only way you can help Ben and Padmay is to wait."

"Alright Luke. I'll do as you ask, but every second will be torture for me."

“I know Lando, but it can’t be avoided. I’ll get back to you as soon as it’s safe to return to the Solaris. Remember. Keep your faith in the Force and the Jedi high. It will help us to achieve our goal.”

Lando sighed knowing there was no point in arguing. “I will. Good luck.”

“Luck has nothing to do with it Lando. Now get out there and take out the rest of those TIE’s.”

“Aye, aye General Skywalker.” Admiral Calrissian got on the comlink and ordered the X-Wings to follow him once again. There were only about five hundred or so enemy ships left. Lando’s comrades didn’t let that number faze them as they targeted the fighters. It wasn’t very long before all the TIE’S were eliminated.

\*

“Captain Brant. One of our fighters has made contact,” the communications officer shouted.

Brant rushed over to the station.

“Can you hear me on the Solaris? I repeat. Can you hear me?”

“We hear you. You’re coming in loud and clear. Go ahead,” Brant answered.

“Is that you Brant?”

“Admiral Calrissian?”

“You sound surprised to hear my voice, but no more than I am.”

“You could say it’s a little unexpected,” Brant replied bluntly, even though shocked to hear Lando’s voice.

“Have you started firing on the destroyers yet?”

“If we lower our shields in order to fire on them they’ll blow us apart.”

“You don’t have to worry about that. You’ll be protected just like we were.”

“How?”

“There’s no time to explain it even if I could. Just take my word for it. Lower your shields and fire on those destroyers. No harm will come to you.”

“You must be mad!”

“Trust me Brant. Would I be able to contact you if we hadn’t won the battle? We should’ve been destroyed, but every X-Wing is still in one piece. Lower your shields and you’ll be protected too. Now divert power to the weapons systems immediately. That’s a direct order.”

“Yes sir.” Brant knew it was nothing short of suicide, but there wasn’t much power left in

order to keep the shields functioning much longer anyway. Might as well go out fighting. “Lower shielding number one. Divert all power to the lasers.”

“Sir?”

“You heard me right Lieutenant Gregor. Lower our shields.”

“Yes sir.” Gregor nodded to the officer in charge. When the order had been carried out he reported back. “Shielding lowered captain. All unnecessary power has been diverted to the weapons system.”

Brant held his breath, anticipating the Solaris would be blown to bits, but the cruiser remained intact. What the hell was going on? What was keeping them from being destroyed? The Star Destroyers were still firing on them with shots coming in from every angle, but their lasers were being deflected somehow. Was this what Lando meant by being protected? “Keep firing on the destroyers. Drain all our batteries if need be. We have to do as much damage to those battleships as we can,” the captain shouted.

“Aye Captain Brant,” Gregor replied in awe. He was just as bewildered as his captain.

\*

Padmay jumped onto the table and ran towards Ben. He did the same. They met in the center, their lightsabers clashing. Ben didn’t retreat this time. He advanced on his twin with a vengeance. He wasn’t fighting his sister anymore. He was fighting the enemy. He was fighting the Sith.

Padmay wasn’t prepared for Ben’s ferocious offensive and retreated from his vicious blows. Ben didn’t let up, keeping his twin on the defensive. His lightsaber flashed bright blue against Padmay’s deep red. Electrical discharge filled the air around them. They reached the end of the massive table slashing wildly at each other. He forced Padmay back to the very lip of the slab. She lost her footing and fell backwards onto the floor. Hitting hard, the air rushed from her lungs. She couldn’t hold on to her lightsaber and it flew from her hand. Ben leapt from the table and held his weapon to her throat.

The Supreme Ruler instantly jumped up from his chair. Force lightning issued from his fingertips lifting Ben high into the air. He was thrown across the room and slammed against a wall. Dazed, the young man slid to the floor. Ben’s weapon fell from his grasp and rolled out of sight. Imperial Guards quickly ran over and seized him. They dragged Ben to the center of the room and held him tightly.

The Sith Lord rushed over to Padmay and helped her to her feet. He asked if she was

alright. Ben couldn't help but notice true concern etched on the man's face. Could this beast really care about his sister?

Padmay lowered her eyes in shame as she bowed to Lord Vader. "I am truly sorry Master. I wasn't prepared for such a vicious attack."

"Quite alright my love. You're not harmed, are you?"

"I'm fine my Master."

"Good. Now finish the job Estrus. Kill him."

"But he's being held."

"Kill him Estrus."

"Master. With all due respect, that's not how I want to destroy him. I must fight him to the death. I have to prove my worthiness to you."

"Prove your loyalty by killing him."

"But..."

"DO IT!"

"Yes Master." Padmay bowed deeply and then walked over to her brother. She ignited her lightsaber and held it high above his head.

Ben closed his eyes. He couldn't bear to see his beloved sister commit this vile act.

Padmay swung the glowing crimson weapon down.

"HOLD!" Vader commanded.

Padmay halted in mid-swing. "Master?"

"I sense something," the Supreme Ruler stated as a deep frown creased his forehead. He walked over to Ben and started pacing back and forth in front. "I feel something powerful stirring inside you boy. It's unusually strong. Is Obi-Wan strengthening your abilities in some way? No, it isn't him. This is something or someone else." The Sith Lord stopped pacing and stood in front of Ben. "Raise his head so I can look into his eyes Estrus," he commanded.

Padmay did as commanded. She grabbed Ben by the hair and forced his head up.

"Open your eyes and look at me boy. Let me see into their depths."

Ben opened his eyes and looked directly into the Sith Lord's eyes.

Lord Vader gazed into Ben's eyes, slowly recognizing the eyes that stared back. "It can't be! It's impossible! I..., I..."

Ben's facial features suddenly started to transform. Padmay gasped as the face of her lover appeared on her twin. No. It wasn't Vader's image she saw. Ben's eyes were different. They'd

changed from blue-green to sky-blue. They seemed extraordinarily kind. They weren't filled with malice like her Master's were. It had to be someone else. But who? Realization suddenly dawned on her. Padmay inhaled in shock, not believing it possible. Anakin Skywalker was staring back at her!

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"We've just about depleted all our batteries sir," Lieutenant Gregor reported.

"Keep firing till they're totally drained. We've made some progress. Three of their destroyers have been damaged. Concentrate all weaponry on those ships. Maybe we can take one of them out of commission."

"Yes sir."

Alec Brant looked out the viewport in complete astonishment. He just couldn't understand how the Solaris was protected against the enemy's blasts. He'd done all he could to damage as many of their vessels as possible, but their turbolasers were quickly draining all power. Without time to recharge their batteries they wouldn't be able to generate enough power to the ship's systems.

As the last of their laser's power supply was depleted, Brant watched the bright flash of their laser streak through space one final time. They were now left completely defenseless. The Star Destroyers kept firing on them, but somehow the Solaris was still shielded.

What of the vessels themselves, Brant wondered. If he were in their position he'd surely ram the Solaris. Sure enough, as the thought entered his head, Brant realized that's exactly what the enemy had in mind as one of their huge crafts headed directly towards them. "Brace for impact!" he yelled.

As the captain waited for the massive destroyer to crash into the bridge, it suddenly veered off course. It missed the Solaris by a hairsbreadth. He watched the destroyer's path as the immense shadow passed overhead. The vessel stopped on their port side. Brant looked at the other destroyers and they appeared to be stopped dead in space as well.

"Sir. I've lost helm control," the helmsman suddenly shouted.

The Solaris quickly gained speed and started to head out of the system. Brant ran to the navigation station and punched his code into the computer trying to override its commands, but it denied him access.

The cruiser continued on its course at a tremendous rate of speed. When the starship neared the edge of the system, it suddenly heaved and bucked from a massive shock wave. The

vessel slowed and changed course back towards Geonosis.

“Have you regained helm control?” Brant asked the helmsman.

“No sir. She’s flying on her own.”

The man was at a loss for words as the Solaris continued towards Geonosis. When near the planet, they flew through a full quadrant of burning debris. Alec Brant couldn’t believe his eyes knowing that the debris was all that was left of the Empire’s mighty Star Destroyers.

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“You can head back to the Solaris now Lando. She’s in orbit around Geonosis again,” Luke stated.

“What do you mean, in orbit again?”

“She headed out of the system while the destroyers were eliminated. It’s safe to return to your vessel now.”

“Is that what the huge concussion was from?”

“Yes Lando. They’ve all been destroyed.”

“Then that’s it. It’s all over. We’ve won.”

“Not yet. The Jedi still have to destroy the army on Geonosis.”

“Then I’m needed there. Why head back to the Solaris?”

“The Jedi’s part in this conflict isn’t over yet Lando, but yours is my friend.”

“What about Ben?”

“If you get captured you’ll be putting Ben’s life in danger. Go back to the Solaris and wait for word that it’s safe to go down to the surface.”

“I feel so useless Luke. I have to do something to help Ben and Padmay.”

“If you go to their aid you’ll endanger their lives further.”

“I don’t understand, but I guess I have no choice in the matter. I know. I know. Keep believing in the Jedi. You don’t know how much it’s taking for me to keep that faith when I can’t be a part of the battle.”

“It won’t be much longer my friend. Be strong.”

“I won’t bother saying good luck again. Just don’t keep me in suspense. Let me know the second I can go to them.”

“I will.”

“And Luke. May the Force be with you.”

“Thank you Lando. That’s the first time you ever said that. I appreciate it.”

“It won’t be the last time I say it either.”

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Lando Calrissian landed on the Solaris shortly after speaking with Luke. Brant rushed up to him as soon as his fighter came to a halt. “What the hell happened out there sir?” Brant asked as Lando climbed from the X-Wing. “Why didn’t we have any losses? How is it possible that the Solaris flew out of the system on its own accord? The enemy was completely destroyed. How did any of it happen? I don’t understand this at all.”

I don’t understand it either Alec, but I believe Ben was telling us the truth about everything he said. I’m positive there’s some kind of supernatural phenomenon out there that we have no concept of. The Jedi have played a major role in this battle by using that energy. Now hold on. I know you’re gonna say that the Jedi are all dead. I’m well aware of that fact, but I swear by the stars above that the Jedi are responsible for saving us, as well as annihilating the Star Destroyers. Don’t ask me to explain it because I can’t. All I know for certain is that I now truly believe in this Force when I never believed in it before. As far as the Jedi assisting us, I never thought the afterlife existed up until now, but I’m certain it does now. There isn’t a doubt in my mind. Life moves on to another level of existence in the Netherworld. That’s where the Jedi reside. They’re able to breach the gap and use the Force in order to protect the living.”

“After what I’ve just gone through I don’t doubt you at all sir. I’ll never doubt anything again!” Brant exclaimed.

Both men walked over to the bay’s entrance and stared out into space. They stood silently, awed by an experience neither one would ever forget.

## Chapter Twenty Six

- Brothers -

The Supreme Ruler felt his children’s deaths on board the remaining Star Destroyer’s just as he had over Coruscant. They’d tried to protect the “hive” from imagined intruders and went on a murderous rampage, failing to keep track of the reactors. The destroyers exploded just as the Death Star did. Not one of the eight vessels survived.

Vader’s depth of anger was beyond all control as he realized his defeat at the hands of the Jedi. “I don’t know how you did all this, but it ends now,” he spat out to Ben as he furiously paced back and forth in front of him.



“You cannot stop what you’ve put in motion my brother,” Anakin replied.

“Brother? You’re not my brother. You’re just a figment of my imagination. You’re trying to use a Jedi mind trick in an attempt to deceive me, but I am not a weak minded fool. You are not Anakin Skywalker. He’s dead.”

“As you once were. My spirit has entered into our grandson as Sidious transferred his essence into you so many years ago.”

“That’s impossible. Only I know this means of transference.”

“You seem to forget brother, we were once joined together in one mind. I was Darth Vader. I know all your dark secrets.”

“You cannot transfer into another being after your spirit leaves your body. You have to be alive to accomplish it. No one can enter into another soul after death. It can’t be done.”

“Your assumption is partially right brother. I don’t completely inhabit Ben’s body at this time, but we do share it. The boy is in a suspended state and not aware of what goes on around him. I had his permission to enter him of course, unlike Darth Sidious did when he transferred into us while alive.”

“Just because you deem yourself the Chosen One, it doesn’t mean you can transfer yourself into an individual after death. If it were possible, I’d know. The midi-chlorians created me too.”

“I’m very aware of that fact, but I assure that only I have the power to transfer after death. Not another soul can do this. Not a Jedi, nor even you.”

“Bah! Even if it were possible, what good does it do? I’m alive and you are nothing but spirit. You can’t defeat me.”

“I have powers that even you don’t possess brother. You think you know all about the powers of the Force, but you’re mistaken. Don’t you understand why the midi-chlorians created me? Once Darth Sidious learned to use his knowledge and grew powerful, they felt a shift in the Force that favored the Sith. They created me to counter their mistake. They allowed Darth Sidious to tempt me to the Dark Side in order to become his apprentice. That enabled me to learn the means of transference. It’s true that the midi-chlorians don’t normally intervene in such matters, but when they learned what Sidious had in mind, they had no choice. They foresaw events to come, which included your birth. I was created to learn all about the Sith’s dark powers in order to bring balance back to the Force. I became a Sith Lord to destroy the Sith. I was born to destroy you. The situation is rather ironic, isn’t it?” Anakin couldn’t help but snicker.

Lord Vader stopped dead in his tracks and turned towards his captive. “You were created to destroy me?”

“Yes. If you aren’t destroyed the Sith will rule. You’ll destroy the Light which will disrupt balance forever.”

“And what of it? The Jedi have ruled the galaxy for a thousand years. What good did they bring forth? Did they bring peace? Did they bring order? No, they did not. As a Sith, I understand the importance of symmetry. The one and only way to establish a lasting peace is to dominate these pathetic human lives. Humans are weak and haven’t the intellect to control their own destiny. They have to be led. The Jedi never understood that. They believed that individuals have to remain free. The Sith are well aware that mankind will always wage war with one another. It’s embedded in their genes. The Sith are the only ones who have the power to control humanity in order to establish complete peace, which will finally bring balance to the Force.”

“You seem to forget that I know all about the Dark Side and what one can do with the abilities it allows them. What do the Sith use their power for except to bring suffering and disparity to billions of life forms?”

“We use it to establish order.”

“The Sith use the Force to dominate. You don’t care about humanity or any other life form. You certainly don’t care about establishing peace. Ultimate power is what you crave. Your lust will never be satisfied. When will it end?”

“Enough of this useless prattle. We could discuss this subject until time stands still and never come to a conclusion. There’s only one way to settle this.” He turned towards Padmay and said, “Kill him.”

Padmay heard the Supreme Ruler’s command to end her brother’s life. It was still Ben who stood restrained before her, wasn’t it? Yet her twin’s facial features had changed and he looked exactly like her grandfather now. Who would she really be killing? Her brother, or Anakin Skywalker? She was so confused.

The Chosen One spoke to his granddaughter for the first time. “Padmay. Please listen to me. You cannot kill me for I am already dead. You’ll be killing your brother whom you love more than anyone. This Sith Lord has twisted your mind and made you hate everything you once held dear. He’s lied to you and made you believe that you’re his wife reborn, but you are not his wife Padmay. You are my beloved granddaughter.” Padmay stood silently considering what Anakin said.

“The abomination that stands before you has made you think you’re in love with him, but you don’t really love him. He’s made you lust after him. Lust is of the body. What you’re feeling doesn’t come from within your heart. It’s just sexually awakening. He’s made you believe that you’ll rule by his side, but you won’t. He’ll destroy you as he destroyed me. He’s not just my dark half Padmay. Your Master is Sith Lord and his unfathomable need to rule the galaxy has twisted his mind. He’s trying to twist yours as well. He’s proved that beyond all doubt by molesting his own flesh and blood. This man is no more than a tyrant who’ll rule without mercy. He’ll kill without a thought to anyone’s suffering. Look into your soul Padmay. Let your conscious guide you. You’ll realize everything I’m saying is true.”

“Don’t listen to him Estrus.” Vader replied angrily. “You know how much you’ve learned through me. We’ve shared so much together, and we’ll share even more. We’ll share my throne and rule the galaxy together. This I promise you.”

“Lies Padmay. It is the way of the Sith to deceive. You should know this through his teachings.”

Vader’s anger was uncontrolled now as he screamed out contemptuously, “Enough! I will not allow you to take her from me this time Jedi! Padme is mine and always will be. Her soul belongs to me. Kill him Estrus. Dispose of this heinous specter that stands before us and spouts out lies through your brother. I command it.”

Padmay looked from her Master to the image of her grandfather. She hesitated.

Lord Vader raged at her indecision. His features contorted into a mask of absolute fury as he vented his wrath. Force lightning erupted from his hands and engulfed Padmay. She flew across the room and smashed into a wall. Sinking to the floor, she lay unconscious.

“Who will do your bidding now Vader?” Anakin asked as he reached out with the Force to sense if his granddaughter was alright. She was out cold, but otherwise unharmed.

Lord Vader’s eyes opened wide when he’d realized what he’d done. Had the baby been hurt? He felt inside Estrus’ womb to see. He breathed a sigh of relief. Neither his wife nor his son were injured, thank the Force. He then looked back towards Anakin. He focused his anger on him once again. “I shall enjoy killing you myself,” the Sith Lord replied with a snarl curling his lip.

“Can you? Won’t it be just like taking your own life?”

Vader stretched out his hand for Padmay’s weapon and it flew from across the room into his palm. “We shall see “my brother,” he spat out with malice as he ignited the lightsaber.

The Supreme Ruler raised his arm and brought the weapon down to kill his foe, but

hesitated in mid-stroke. He couldn't do it. Why not? Why couldn't he slash into Ben's flesh and destroy Anakin's spirit? Why couldn't he eliminate what he hated most of all?

"You can't do it, can you? It's like looking into your own reflection." Anakin paused sensing something. "What is disturbing you brother? Is there another reason why you can't strike me down?" Anakin allowed himself reach a little further into the man's core.

"Ah yes. I see it now. You're remembering your past life. Do you recall when you overcame your overwhelming hate and saved Luke by killing Darth Sidious? There was good inside your soul to conquer that evil then and perhaps that's what is preventing you from ridding yourself of my spirit now. I can see inside your soul my brother. It's as easy as looking through glass. That spark of goodness still dwells within you."

"I..., err..., I...", Vader stammered.

"We are mirror images my brother. I reflect what is truly inside your soul. The only way you can rid yourself of me is to kill your grandson. You cannot allow yourself to terminate him because he comes from our own flesh. That is what is preventing you from killing Padmay as well. She also carries your blood within her veins. You cannot bring yourself to kill either one of them. Don't try to deny it. Goodness still exists deep within you. I can sense it."

"You're wrong! There is nothing inside me but hate," Lord Vader raged, but as he raised the lightsaber to slash into Anakin's form once more, he hesitated yet again. What Anakin said upset the Sith Lord greatly as he recalled his former life. This memory had been suppressed in his subconscious and hidden from him until this very second. Now it all came flooding back. A shiver ran through him at the memory of his death.

The Supreme Ruler laughed hysterically as he conceded the pure insanity of the situation, but his laughter soon abated. He realized that when the original Darth Vader killed Sidious, he'd also sacrificed himself, which in turn destroyed the Sith. Balance had been restored to the Force, allowing Anakin's soul to be set free. That is why his spirit could appear to him now.

But why did Anakin assume there was still good inside his soul? He was beyond redemption. He was a Sith Lord. The Sith didn't rely on goodness, nor mercy. No. There wasn't an iota of good left inside his soul. Anakin was sadly mistaken. Hate is all he felt! Vader raised the lightsaber again, but just could not bring his weapon down, not while his own face stared back at him.

"You see my brother. You still can't take Ben's life, even though my spirit is all you see. You'll not end his life no matter how angry you are."

Absolute rage engulfed the Sith Lord. "I may not be able to slash into my own mirror image, but I can surely kill one that is a part of us." Vader spat out as he looked over at Padmay's limp form. In a blind rage he stormed over to her. The thought of killing his unborn child didn't enter his mind as he raised his lightsaber and sliced down to take Padmay's life.

The Chosen One instantaneously used the unlimited powers the midi-chlorians bestowed upon him to hesitate time itself. He repelled the Imperial Guards who were restraining Ben. They propelled across the room in slow motion and bounced against the wall. Falling to the floor, they remained motionless.

Anakin then used his grandson's life force to become a physical being once again. The youth's body instantly changed physically in breadth and stature as the Chosen One took full possession. As he drew breath into this human form and tasted its sweetness upon his tongue, Anakin felt an incredible surge of power pulsating through him as the evil influence of the Dark Side tried to recapture his soul. He pushed the images from his mind as he halted Vader's fatal stroke a mere fraction of a second before the lightsaber reached its target. Anakin mentally tore the weapon from the Sith Lord's grasp and it flew across the room.

Time resumed its natural pace as the Supreme Ruler spun towards Anakin in an uncontrolled rage. Force lightning issued from his fingertips.

Anakin absorbed the tremendous surge of energy into his palm and cast it back. Blue, white lightning exploded from each of them as an unbounded electrical current whipped and cracked, filling the chamber with light.

The Supreme Ruler concentrated deeply, drawing more power from the Dark Side. He lifted his hand towards the oblong table. It rose into the air and he tossed it across the room towards his foe.

The Chosen One stopped the massive table in midair and pushed it back at his adversary. Vader shoved it towards Anakin again.

Anakin stood immobile and obliterated the broad slab as it flew towards him. Debris flew harmlessly past and littered the floor. He smiled as he said, "It seems our powers are equal in this struggle my brother. We could destroy this chamber and still not accomplish a thing."

"Then we'll have to resort to what we know best," Vader replied maliciously. He reached out and Padmay's lightsaber returned to his hand as if it were a trained pet, obediently obeying its Master.

"As you wish, but you still won't defeat me." Anakin lifted his hand and Ben's weapon

flew across the room into his outstretched palm. He ignited the lightsaber and the crystals that empowered it shone with a brilliant, blue light.

The Supreme Ruler smiled cruelly as he ignited his weapon, its hue blood red. “We shall now learn which is stronger. You’re incompetent Jedi abilities, or the infinite powers of the Sith.”

The pair leapt into the air simultaneously and landed next to one another. Their weapons seemed to latch together as one as they looked into each other’s eyes. The bright glow that arose from their crossed weapons was purple in color as they sizzled loudly in their hands.

Lord Vader broke their stalemated contact first and lunged forward to impale his enemy. Anakin pivoted, side-stepped, leaping out of his foe’s deadly range. Anakin jumped forward again and slashed down. The Sith Lord countered the stroke then feigned to the right, striking at Anakin again. Anakin blocked Vader’s thrust and predicted his next maneuver, parrying his true blow. The Sith Lord advanced affecting several slashes. Anakin easily avoided each stroke.

The Emperor suddenly lunged forward and grabbed his foe’s wrists. He forced Anakin’s arms down slicing in an upward motion in an attempt to sever his hands. Anakin instantly spun, pulling free from Vader’s grasp in time to prevent the amputation. He couldn’t help but laugh. “Don’t be so foolish. Did you think that maneuver would work on me? I used that little trick when I severed Dooku’s hands. Don’t you remember?”

The Sith Lord growled in absolute fury at his adversary’s laughter. Forced lightning discharged from his hands once again, catching Anakin off guard. He flew across the room and slammed into a wall. The breath was knocked from him and Anakin lay motionless on the floor. Vader quickly leapt up in the air, his lightsaber pointed downward in order to pierce through Anakin when he landed.

The Chosen One recovered and jumped to his feet. He lifted his hand and halted his opponent while in midair. He tossed Vader across the room, and through the doors at the end of the chamber. Anakin leapt to the portal and they came at each other again. They continued slashing ferociously at one another as they made their way through the curving corridor. The hallway was narrow and most of their violent strokes hit the walls which gouged them deeply. The pair reached the end of the corridor and burst through the doors onto the tier that overlooked the arena. They crossed the length constantly striking at each other. The electrical buzz from their weapons echoed loudly as the stench of pungent smoke rose in the air.

Vader backed Anakin towards the waist high wall cutting off his retreat. Anakin jumped onto the balustrade blocking the Sith Lord’s upward strokes. The Sith Lord lifted his hand

engulfing Anakin with Force lightning once more. He tossed his foe outwards.

Anakin fell to the arena far below. He recovered from the searing blast to his body. Landing safely, he saw the stands crowded with thousands of Vader's children all rising to their feet at once. The Chosen One switched his lightsaber off.

The Sith Lord laughed wildly from above. He yelled out loudly, "I seem to recall you found yourself in a similar situation here once before my brother. That time it was droid soldiers you faced. You managed to escape your fate that time, but unfortunately for you, the outcome shall not be in your favor this time. Bring him," he bellowed.

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Anakin stood restrained before the Supreme Ruler in the council chamber once again. "I hope you will finally concede that the Dark Side is much stronger. You've failed to defeat me as I knew you would." The Sith Lord smiled widely.

"Have I?" Anakin replied with a slight grin spreading across his face.

"Why do you grin? You must realize that this is the end. For you, as well as the Jedi."

"You cannot kill what is already dead my brother. Besides, you already tried that. You failed to take Ben's life."

"I no longer care that you inhabit his body. It's you that I want to destroy. You're flesh and blood now. I'll rid myself of you while at the same time disposing of this impudent child who's refused my generous gift of knowledge. He's shown his true colors and is completely useless to me now."

"Then I will become spirit again and you'll still fail to destroy me."

"Yet I shall kill our grandchild in the process. Will you allow that to happen?"

"You won't have time to harm him." Anakin's grin broadened as if he knew a great secret.

"What do you mean by that?" Vader asked with brows wrinkled. "What are you keeping from me? Tell me. I demand it!"

The Chosen One's grin turned into a wide smile. He didn't respond. The guards that were restraining him instantly released their grasp, hanging their hands loosely by their sides. Their eyes became a complete blank. All four stood immobile before him.

"What are you doing brother?" the Emperor asked nervously.

Anakin still didn't reply. It had been his purpose to stall for time. Time enough for the Jedi to control the TIE fighters, and then destroy the remaining Star Destroyers. He'd known that this battle had to be fought in stages, unlike their engagement over Coruscant. All the Jedi had been

needed at the same time in order to destroy the Death Star, but this conflict had to be fought differently. Anakin needed to keep Vader's clone occupied while the battle waged in space, but now all the Jedi were free to fight his Grand Army on the planet itself.

The Sith Lord felt a tremendous vibration starting to swirl around Anakin and extend outward. A great shift was occurring in the Force. He'd never experienced anything quite like it before. He started to hear whisperings of "death to the intruders" echo inside his children's minds. The disembodied voices rose sharply and exceedingly fast. The Supreme Ruler suddenly heard all of his children scream out loudly in absolute fury. They began to turn on one another.

In a matter of mere seconds chaos erupted throughout Geonosis. A new life started to form on the orb and hurriedly sought sustenance to gather in strength. As Lord Vader stood dumbfounded before Anakin, he started to smell smoke as this greedy animal hungrily consumed all in its vicious path. The Grand Army was torching the city in order to force the intruders out. The ancient site was quickly going up in flames.

"NO!" Vader screamed at the top of his lungs. "I WON'T ALLOW THE Jedi TO INFULENCE MY CHILDREN AGAIN!"

"You cannot stop it brother," Anakin said.

"Withdraw from my children! I command it!"

"I can't. I'm not controlling them. The Jedi are, and they won't obey your commands."

A mass of children suddenly burst into the chamber with lit torches clasped tightly in their hands. They screamed at the top of their lungs with murderous intent in their eyes. Vader lifted his hand and repelled them across the room. The torches flew from their grasps and rolled beneath the ancient, withered tapestries that hung limply from the walls. They quickly ignited. The new life force enthusiastically lapped at the dried material as the hangings curled and twisted from the heat. Charred pieces floated furiously up into the air as the fire quickly consumed the fuel source.

The Imperial Guards, who'd just a few minutes before been Vader's loyal servants, turned on each other. A few of them ran over to Padmay as she rose from her stupor. They roughly seized her and yelled, "Kill the intruder!" The children started pulling and tugging on her arms trying to tear them from their sockets. Padmay screamed out in pain as they continued their effort to rip her body apart.

Vader yelled at them to halt, but they were deaf to his commands. He used the Force to toss his children across the room, but his powers were being blocked. They continued to pull relentlessly on Padmay. The Supreme Ruler screamed at Anakin. "You're behind this. I order you



to stop at once!”

“I am doing nothing brother.”

“Then order the Jedi to stop! I command you to stop them!”

“I already told you that the Jedi will not listen to your commands.”

“Will you allow the Jedi to kill your own flesh and blood?”

“It is not the Jedi who’ll kill her. Your children are going to kill her.”

“Master! Help me! Please!” Padmay continued to scream as the children clawed at her. Flames were inches away by now, eagerly reaching their tendrils out, threatening to engulf her body.

The Supreme Ruler watched helplessly as his apprentice screamed out in pure terror. He wondered why her pleading tore at his soul. Isn’t this what he’d wanted all along? Vader wanted to see his wife pay for her betrayal. He’d wanted to see Padme’s pale body writhe in intense pain. The Sith Lord wanted to see her flesh sear and char as his flesh once did. He’d wanted to see her suffer just as much as he had in his past life. So why were her screams so agonizing to hear?

Thick, black smoke darkened the chamber in the fire’s lustful intent to consume everything in its uncontrolled path. As flames erupted all around Padmay, something broke deep within Vader’s clone. He turned to Anakin. “Stop this please. Don’t let her be burned as I was. Don’t let my children tear her apart. Don’t let my love be taken from me again. I’m begging you my brother. Save her life.”

Anakin was completely stunned. What did he mean by “again?” Was he referring to Padme? Did he actually believe that his granddaughter was Padme Amidala reborn? No. It wasn’t possible. The man had to know that Padmay wasn’t really his wife. He had to realize that she was his grandchild. But then, his mind was twisted. Anakin had assumed that the Sith Lord told their granddaughter that she was Padme in order to turn her. Did this maniacal being actually believe he was making love to his wife while ravishing his own flesh and blood? Was it really possible that this Vader couldn’t separate them in his mind? Didn’t the man realized that both were two, distinct individuals?

The Chosen One reached deep inside the Supreme Ruler to sense his true feelings. He didn’t just glimpse the outer layer of his core, but probed the inner depths of his soul. Yes. Anakin could see it now. The Sith Lord did truly believe that Padme Amidala was reborn in Padmay Solo. He could not, or would not, recognize the fact that Padme didn’t really inhabit the girl. This cloned version of Darth Vader had let love conquer the overwhelming hatred that consumed his

conscious mind.

Anakin felt a deep sorrow for this pitiful being. He said sadly, "I'm so sorry my brother. I was right. My virtue survived deep within Darth Vader's core while alive and somehow some of that goodness managed to pass on to you, although I didn't recognize it fully until now. You really do believe that our granddaughter is Padme. Because that spark of goodness left within Darth Vader was inherited, even though hidden, you were able to open your heart and allowed yourself to love." Anakin sighed. He was filled with such sorrow that it completely overwhelmed him. "You have my deepest sympathy. I wish there was something I could do to help you, but there is nothing I can do to save the one you love."

"You have to do something. You can't let my children rip her apart. You have the power to stop them. I'm certain of it. You can't let Padme die. You have to save her. I'm begging you!"

"I can't stop what you started. You alone have the ability to save her. Only you can stop our granddaughter's death."

"How can I save her? Tell me before it is too late!"

"You already know how. Hurry. There's no time to lose."

The Sith Lord instantly understood what he had to do. He ran over to Padmay and used the Force to enter his children's minds, getting through to them this time.

The children suddenly stopped tugging on Padmay and looked towards their Master. Their eyes opened wide with a renewed rage. They now saw the Sith Lord as the intruder.

Vader's children released their wrenching grasp on Padmay and jumped at him. They beat him down to the floor and kicked ferociously. The Supreme Ruler screamed out in pure agony as they ripped into his flesh with their teeth, viciously tearing it from his body.

Padmay ignored the pain that still coursed through her body due to the attack and ran to her Master. She grabbed at the children trying in vain to tear them away from him, but they easily pushed her aside. "Don't let them do this my love. Stop them before it's too late," She screamed. "Don't sacrifice yourself for me. I'm not worthy," Padmay sobbed.

Fire lapped at her feet as flames ignited the children's clothing. She started to choke as smoke rose up, engulfing them all. A gap between the attackers finally opened wide enough for Padmay to kneel next to him. Managing to pull one hand free, the Supreme Ruler ran it along her cheek. He smiled and said, "I'll gladly give my life for you. Now go my love. There's no time to waste. You must leave me. Save yourself."

"I won't leave you my darling. I'll die with you."

“No Padme. You must go. I will not to let you give up your life needlessly. You must survive. Leave me now. I command it!”

“But...,”

“GO!”

“Yes my Master.” Padmay rose to a standing position and hung her head sadly. Her shoulders slumped in defeat as she turned, but she still didn’t leave his side. “I shall always love you Lord Vader.”

“And I love you with all my heart. Never forget that,” the Sith Lord managed to respond. He allowed his children to continue to rip into his flesh in their lust to kill him. He couldn’t take the chance that their attention would return to his beloved. “Go my love. Flee! GO NOW!”

“Goodbye my darling,” Padmay said sadly, but still remained rooted to the spot.

“GO! I COMMAND YOU TO GO!”

Padmay stood her ground and refused to leave.

“Please my love. I’m begging you. You must leave me,” he pleaded. “There’s nothing to be gained by sacrificing yourself. You must live on. I demand it!”

“I can’t leave you. I’d rather die, right here by your side. I can’t bear the thought of living without you Master.”

Vader’s last words were to the Chosen One. “I implore you Anakin. Force her from my side. Save our Padme.”

“Do not fear my brother. I’ll save her,” Anakin promised.

As the fire embraced the tangled bodies writhing on the floor chaotically, the unbearable torture Lord Vader suffered at his children’s hands peaked to an unbearable level. He, as well as his attackers, were being consumed by flames which was ignored by the children. Absolute rage blinded them to all else but achieving their goal, ripping the “intruder’s” body to shreds.

The Sith Lord did not cry out in pain or fear. All that mattered to him was that his beloved escaped death. His angel would survive. Anakin had given his word. The Dark Lord of the Sith finally allowed himself to slip away into darkness.

\*

Ben awoke to Padmay’s frantic screaming as Anakin retreated within the young man’s core, giving Ben complete control of his body again. He immediately ran over to his twin. Using all his strength, Ben pulled his sister away from the burning mass of bodies as the fire engulfed the entire chamber. He forced Padmay down the twisted maze of dark hallways towards the tunnels

that would lead them to freedom.

Thick, acrid smoke followed the pair and billowed about their faces as they made their way out of the underground city. It choked and blurred their vision. Incinerating timbers crashed down all around them as the fire raged behind them. It coiled and licked at their heels as they ran blindly down the black corridors seeking escape. They gasped for air as smoke rapidly stole the precious substance from them.

Ben used his senses to find their way through the seething, swirling furnace of hell out into the daylight beyond. Finally reaching safety, Padmay frantically struggled with her twin in order to return to the inferno. It took all of Ben's might to hold her back. She finally fell to the ground and wailed in agonizing grief and misery. Padmay felt her true love slip away from her. The Supreme Ruler was dead.

## Chapter Twenty Seven

- Wrath -

Every X-Wing had returned to the Solaris without a single scratch on their durasteel frames. Brant had returned to the bridge awed by the events that had transpired. Lando was waiting impatiently on the observation deck for Luke to contact him. He'd been pacing nervously for what seemed like hours before he finally heard his friend's voice.

"Lando. Can you hear me?"

"Luke?"

"Yes Lando. It's me. Our battle against the Sith is over. You can go down to Geonosis now and assist Ben with Padmay. They're safe for the moment, but you'll have to bring an armed guard with you. Ben's had to restrain his sister."

"Restrain her. Why?"

"There isn't any danger from the insectoid population. You won't have to deal with them. Once chaos broke out they hid in the catacombs, but there are still a few of Vader's children left. We're using the Force to control them and they'll soon eliminate each other, but Ben is still in danger from his sister. Padmay is trying to use her powers against him. He's very weak from his confrontation and is barely able to control her. She's trying to kill him."

"Kill him?"

"Yes. She's still under the influence of the Dark Side."

Lando didn't like the sound of that. He'd hoped that once freed from the new Sith Lord's hold over her, Padmay would return to her normal self. It didn't appear that was the case. "There's no need to say any more Luke. I'm on my way. I'll bring Chewbacca with me. He won't have much trouble managing her."

Within moments, Lando was on board a shuttle headed for the planet's surface. Thick, black smoke billowed from the tunnels carved into the mountains making the planet itself look infuriated by the fracas that had taken place. Luke told him Ben's exact location so it didn't take him long to find the pair. He'd been right about Padmay. She was physically attacking Ben. As strong as Chewbacca was, he had a hard time pulling her from her brother. The wookiee was forced to manacle her. Once restrained, they all boarded the shuttle and headed back to the Solaris.

\*

Ben was on the observation deck with Lando, Brant, Chewbacca, Artoo and Threepio. He was doing his best to explain what happened on Geonosis.

"How in the hell did you defeat Vader's children?" Lando asked.

"I didn't. The Jedi made them attack each other, just like the TIE pilots and those on board the Death Star did."

"They attacked each other?" Lando asked, not understanding what Ben meant.

"Yes. It's kind of hard to explain. Darth Sidious took Darth Vader's blood after being wounded on Mustafar. He used it to inseminate a surrogate who gave birth to Vader's clone. His army was created the same way, but their blood had been diluted with insectoid cells. The Jedi brought the soldier's killer instinct to the surface making them see each other as predators attacking their hive. That's why they murdered each other. My grandfather devised the plan." "

"Now I get it. That's what Luke meant when he told me the insectoids were eliminating each other. Clever idea, but what about Vader's clone? How did you defeat him?"

"I had nothing to do with that. My grandfather confronted him. He took full possession of me, both body and mind. I was in some kind of suspended state so I don't really have any idea what happened after I fought Padmay."

"What happened with her?"

"We fought, but when I gained the advantage Vader zapped me with Force lightning and I was restrained. That's when my grandfather took over. Everything's a blank after that."

"How did you escape?" Brant asked.

“I came out of my trance and saw Vader on the floor surrounded by his soldiers. They were attacking him. I haven’t a clue why, but I didn’t stick around to find out. I just grabbed Padmay and got out of there. The whole place was burning down around us. It was almost like standing in the pit of hell.”

“Luke said that Padmay tried to kill you. Does she still want to?” Lando asked.

“I’m afraid so. I’ve been down to the brig several times. Padmay rams against the force field trying to get to me. I can still hear her voice inside my head trying to convince me to kill myself. I’ve got to stay away from her Uncle Lando. I’m afraid she’ll hurt herself. She flies into a rage every time I get near her cell. She’s still under Vader’s influence.”

“Is there anything I can do to help her?”

“I don’t think so. Padmay’s not acting like herself at all. I don’t think she’ll listen to anyone right now. I’m hoping by the time we get home some of Vader’s influence will wear off.”

\*

Unfortunately, that wasn’t the case. Padmay attacked Ben while being escorted from the Solaris when they landed on Coruscant. She’d jabbed her elbows into her guard and grabbed his blaster, then fired on her twin. If she hadn’t been running towards him, her aim would’ve been more accurate. Luckily, he only suffered a superficial wound. She’d been subdued and restrained. Padmay vowed that she’d get revenge while being led away. The young woman had been taken to the stockade and been kept under lock and key ever since.

Lando Calrissian went to see Padmay a number of times while confined. She’d spat in his face and swore vengeance against them all. He was at a loss at what to do. Her trial was due soon. He didn’t want to see her imprisoned on a penal colony on some distant planet, or worse, be executed as a traitor.

Lando visited Ben while he was on leave recuperating from his wound. He knew the young man was extremely upset about Padmay’s condition and wanted to know what was going to happen to her.

Ben paced nervously while they discussed the situation. “I just don’t know what to do Uncle Lando. I’m worried sick about Padmay.”

“I’m very concerned about her welfare too son. I fear what the Justice Department is planning.”

“Will she have to stand trial as a traitor?” Ben asked.

“Her trial has been scheduled, but I intend to do all I can to stall it. Her best defense is an

insanity plea, which I'm sure she'll deny. Regardless, she wasn't in her right mind at the time, and she still isn't. I've asked that your sister be examined by psychiatrists. A medical report from them will attest to the fact. That should postpone Padmay's trial and hopefully keep officials content for the time being."

"Will that be enough to satisfy them? Won't they insist that Padmay stand trial as soon as possible?"

"Not if I have anything to say about it. I still have a few favors owed me. I'll do everything in my power to prevent that from happening."

Threepio spoke up, "May I suggest she be committed to a psychiatric facility Master Ben? You both agree that Miss Padmay isn't in her right mind. That might prevent any legal action from being taken."

"That's a very good idea Threepio. Padmay's mental condition is important to her case. Placing her in a mental hospital before a trial begins might give the authorities cause to drop the charges."

"I'll do everything in my limited abilities to assist her Master Ben."

"Thank you Threepio. I'm certain you'll do all you can, but that's not where your expertise lies. It's best to leave things in the hands of experts."

"So that's the answer then? Having your sister committed to an insane asylum?"

"I'm afraid so Uncle Lando, unless you can come up with a better idea."

\*

Once Padmay was placed in a metal facility it kept the Justice Department at bay for a while. Lando did all he could to convince the court that she'd been under an evil influence, and that she was innocent of her role in the Sith Lord's plot. His diligence succeeded and all charges against her were dropped.

During this time Ben remained in service on board the Solaris. He went to see Padmay every chance he got. His duties kept him away from Coruscant most of the time, but when given leave he visited her.

Three standard months passed before Ben started seeing some improvement in his sister's condition, though her reaction to him hadn't changed very much. She did stop trying to escape, at least. By then it was quite obvious that Padmay was pregnant. Ben assumed her condition had a lot to do with her subdued attempts to seek revenge.

The young man had been shocked to discover that Padmay was carrying Vader's child.

He'd no idea just how much his sister had suffered under the Sith Lord. How she could still care so much for someone who's stolen her innocence was beyond him. He supposed that's what she meant when she told him that she'd given herself to her master completely.

Steffen accompanied Ben a few times when he visited Padmay at the hospital. Ben had tried to discourage him from tagging along, but it had been useless. Steffen cared for Padmay a great deal and would not be put off. When Steffen found out that Padmay was pregnant, he'd suggested that they tell everyone he was the father. Though very grateful for his attempt to save his sister's reputation, Ben wouldn't hear of it. He wouldn't allow Steffen to sacrifice his good name.

Steffen seemed truly disappointed when Ben rejected his idea. He'd gladly sacrifice his name and anything else for Padmay. It appeared that his feelings for her were more than just a mere physical attraction. When she'd disappeared, Steffen realized just how much he'd yearned for her affection. He didn't care if his reputation was ruined. He'd gladly let everyone think he'd impregnated Padmay before wedlock. He'd even say he'd molested her in order to protect her from the scandal that would mar her name. Steffen Antilles loved Padmay Solo with his whole heart and soul, and prayed that she would return his devotion one day.

\*

Time passed and Padmay finally ceased her attempts at revenge. Anakin had come from the Netherworld in spirit form and spent a great deal of time with her. After his visits she seemed to improve rapidly. Padmay was soon to be released on a weekend pass. Ben was granted a leave and was looking forward to her visit.

The weekend finally came. Padmay's attendant-droid escorted Ben's sister from the shuttle as it settled on the landing platform. Ben and Lando were on the threshold waiting to greet her. She smiled timidly as her twin rushed out to her.

"How good it is to see you again Ben," Padmay said.

"Welcome home Padmay," Ben said as he cautiously put his arms around her and hugged her gently.

"Mistress!" Threepio shouted as he rushed up to her as fast as his metallic frame allowed him to.

"Hello Threepio. How have you been?" Padmay asked the golden droid as a huge grin spread across her face.

"I've been keeping myself busy with the household duties Miss Padmay. I've missed you



very much.”

“I’ve missed you too Threepio.”

Artoo rolled out onto the platform and beeped excitedly.

“How have you been my little friend?” Padmay asked.

Artoo whistled a response.

“I assume that means you’re glad to see me too.”

The little droid buzzed a happy reply.

Lando greeted Padmay with a little restraint on his part.

“Hello Uncle Lando. It’s good to see you again.”

“It’s wonderful to see you looking so, umm..., healthy,” Lando replied.

“You mean fat, don’t you?” Padmay laughed as she put her hands to her stomach.

“That’s not what I meant.”

“I know that Uncle Lando. Have you forgotten how we used to tease each other? Well I haven’t. I know you still have your doubts about me. I’m aware that I still have a long way to go before I’m back to my true self, but I am much better now. I’ve improved tremendously these past few months; with Ben and grandfather’s help, of course.”

“You must be tired from your trip. I imagine you want to freshen up. Threepio. Go with Padmay and attend to her,” Ben commanded.

“Yes Master Ben.”

Padmay reached out for her brother’s hands. Taking them in hers she said, “Thank you so much for everything you’ve done to help me Ben. I won’t soon forget it, but you’re right. I am rather tired. I think I will rest for a while.”

Ben and Lando watched Padmay as she walked down the hallway towards her chambers with her guard following close behind.

“What do you think Uncle Lando? Padmay does seem a lot better now, doesn’t she?”

“It appears so, but what do you think? Do you sense any hostility from her?”

“She is a little out of sorts, but that’s to be expected after all she’s been through. I assume her pregnancy is affecting her mood as well. It’s no wonder she isn’t back to normal yet. Regardless, I don’t sense any of the rage that she felt before.”

“Are you sure Ben? She may be blocking her true feelings from you. Padmay still might attempt to take your life.”

“Don’t worry Uncle Lando. Padmay has the guard watching her, and Artoo will keep tabs

on her this weekend. Even if she wants to, which I'm sure she doesn't, Padmay won't get a chance to do anything to harm me."

"Just don't let her start preparing dinner with any sharp objects."

Ben laughed. "I won't."

"I better get going."

"Are you sure you don't want to stay for dinner? I'm certain Padmay would like to visit with you too."

"Some other time. You both have a lot to discuss. I'm sure you don't need an old geezer like me hanging around getting in the way. That is, unless you're still afraid to be left alone with her."

"I'm not afraid of my sister Uncle Lando. I'm just worried that she hasn't truly forgiven me yet."

"Time will tell Ben. Time will tell."

\*

Time did tell. Though Padmay was a little remote on her first trips home, the more she visited, the more she relaxed, especially knowing that no legal action would be taken against her. Tensions slowly eased between the siblings and they started teasing each other like they used to. Padmay was finally deemed sane after five months and was released from the mental facility. She was coming home today.

As soon as her shuttle landed, Ben welcomed her on the threshold. He smiled broadly when he embraced her. "Welcome home Padmay."

"Thank you Ben. I'm extremely happy to be released from that horrid place. You can't imagine how much I've missed you. I've even missed Threepio's constant complaining," she giggled. "I'm so relieved to be home Ben. I couldn't be happier."

"Couldn't you?"

"I do have to admit that I still have the nightmares. Let me apologize for them in advance. I'm afraid I might wake you during the night. I find myself bolting out of bed screaming on occasion."

"There's no need to apologize Padmay. None of this was your doing. I'm just glad that you've found it in your heart to forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive Ben. You saved my life. I'll never forget what you did. I'm the one who must ask for forgiveness for what I tried to do to you."

“It wasn’t your fault. Vader controlled your every thought, but I knew deep inside that he couldn’t force you to kill me.”

“You’re wrong Ben. I would have killed you. I would’ve done anything the Sith Lord asked of me. If it weren’t for grandfather he would’ve restored Palpatine’s Empire. Humanity would be suffering under his tyranny as we speak. Then again, we wouldn’t be speaking at all, would we? You’d be dead, or you would’ve killed me. Grandfather saved us both.”

“Your right. Anakin did save us. Us, as well as the entire galaxy.”

“I still can’t figure out how he took possession of your body. Do you know how he did it?”

“No. I haven’t a clue. Nearly everything that occurred on Geonosis is a complete blank.”

“I wish I couldn’t remember any of it.”

Ben grabbed his sister’s hand. “It’s all in the past now Padmay. We have to exorcise the experience from our minds completely. Otherwise we’ll never be able to go on from here.”

“You’re right Ben. Let’s not mention what happened ever again.”

“I promise.”

“Me too. Mums the word.” Padme put thumb and forefinger to her mouth. She twisted them as if locking a door, just like they’d done when children trying to keep a secret from their parents, without any success.

Ben smiled. The memory made him start to laugh. Knowing exactly what he was thinking, Padmay joined her brother in his mirth. The twins embraced each other, pledging to let go of the past.

## Chapter Twenty Eight

- Naboo -

Ben and Padmay were finally back on Coruscant after visiting Padme Amidala’s home planet of Naboo. The Supreme Ruler had shown Padmay the beauty of this sphere and she wanted to see it with her own eyes. She also wanted to see where her grandmother was born. The young woman was excited knowing she’d finally meet Padme’s family.

Ben had advised against it. He thought that it wouldn’t benefit anyone to learn that Leia had given birth to two children, but Padmay insisted on making the trip. Who was he to suppress her wishes? Besides, he wanted to meet his family as well. It was past time for the secret to be

revealed.

The Amidala's had no idea that twins were born to Padme before she'd died. They'd believed that her child had died with her. Though Padme's parents both died quite a while ago, her sister was overjoyed to learn about Luke and Leia's birth. The shock outweighed any embarrassment or scandal the family would go through. She'd been sad to hear of Luke and Leia's deaths, but elated to finally meet her great niece and nephew. She welcomed Ben and Padmay with open arms.

Padme's sister had two daughters. The younger of the two had given birth to two daughters as well. She'd named them Reese and Rowena. Rowena had a daughter named Celeste. She'd introduced her cousins to her friend Deynah Sefort who was vacationing with her while on a break from school.

Ben fell in love with Deynah Sefort the second he set eyes on her. The young woman was a vision beyond all description, at least to him. She had long, blonde hair and the bluest eyes he'd ever beheld. She had a fair complexion, and not only was she beautiful outwardly; she held an inner beauty as well. Deynah radiated an honesty and purity that fully captured Ben's heart.

The youth was terribly torn by this emotion knowing it was dangerous to allow himself to fall in love. His grandfather had fallen in love with Padme Amidala which ultimately led to his becoming a Sith. Anakin's overwhelming passion for Padme had destroyed both of their lives. Ben would not allow himself to make the same mistake.

Luke felt Ben's distress over the unexpected predicament and appeared to him. He'd told Ben that he'd gone to the Jedi Council and revealed his situation, stressing how strong his feelings for Deynah were. They discussed the matter at great length and decided to lift the mandate banning marriage. They'd concluded that the only way to reestablish the Jedi Order was for Ben to sire children who'd be Force sensitive.

As soon as Luke informed Ben of the Jedi's approval, he immediately sought Deynah out. When he asked if she returned his love, Deynah admitted that she'd felt the same way. He'd immediately gone down on bended knee and proposed marriage.

The young couple's courtship was short. Ben and Deynah were wed on Naboo within the month. It was long afterwards that Deynah discovered she was expecting their first child. Ben was filled with a great satisfaction knowing that the Jedi Order would be reestablished through his children.

\*

The months flew by. Ben paced the halls waiting for the birth of her child. Her delivery had been long and hard. She'd suffered a great deal of physical pain. More than what most women experience in childbirth. After thirty-two standard hours of brutal labor her child was finally born. She'd named him Eumenides.

Eumenides was a beautiful child. He was born with a full head of light, brown hair filled with streaks of blonde waves that seemed to be spun from the purest gold. His eyes were the brightest, sky-blue and appeared to emit a unique knowledge beyond a newborn's awareness. When the new mother looked into her child's eyes, she was assured that her lover hadn't left her forever. He was reborn in his child.

"How is she? How's the baby? Can I see my sister?" Ben asked the med-droid who assisted in his nephew's birth.

"The baby is in excellent health. Your sister is doing very well too, but she's exhausted. It was a very difficult delivery and she needs a lot of rest. You can see her, but don't stay too long," the med-droid warned.

Ben walked into his sister's room nervously. "Hello Padmay. How are you feeling? Are you well enough to see me?" Ben didn't know what to expect from her. He still felt Padmay's rejection at times. As her child's birth neared, Padmay had grown quiet and stayed in her room most of the time. Ben knew it would be quite a long time before Padmay emerged from her experience with the Sith Lord.

\*

Padmay Solo had turned to the Dark Side fully when she'd surrendered herself to her master's domination over her heart and mind. She'd fallen helplessly in love with the Supreme Ruler. When she'd discovered she was pregnant, it had strengthened her hatred towards Ben. She'd wanted to kill him for murdering her child's father. Anakin had discussed this with Padmay at great length, making her understand that it wasn't Ben's fault. Anakin explained that the Supreme Ruler was responsible for his own death. He'd sacrificed himself in order to save her. After Anakin reminded her of this fact, Padmay ceased blaming her brother.

Ben had been completely astonished when Anakin told him that the Sith Lord had given his life in order to save his sister. It didn't seem possible that such an evil being could perform such a noble act.

Time progressed and Padmay's condition eventually improved. Through Ben's patience, and Anakin's ability to come to her in spirit form, they helped her come to terms with the ordeal.

After some time Padmay finally conquered her addiction to the powers of the Dark Side.

\*

“Hello Ben,” Padmay said snapping Ben from his thoughts. “Have you seen my son yet?”

“No. I haven’t been to the nursery yet. I wanted to see how you were doing first. The med-droid told me you had a rough time. Are you sure you’re alright? You’re not too tired to see me, are you?”

“I’m fine, but I am quite tired. Regardless, I’m overjoyed at the birth of my child. You’ve got to see him Ben. You’re an uncle now. Go and see your nephew. Ask the nurse when I can suckle him. He must hunger for me as much as I do for him.”

“I will, but I insist that you rest in the meantime. I’ll come back later.” Ben paused before saying, “I love you Padmay. I’m happy for you, as well as being extremely proud of you. Most women in your situation wouldn’t have carried the child to term. I’m certain no one would’ve blamed you if you’d terminated this pregnancy.”

“I’d never do that under any circumstances Ben. But I do have to admit, regardless of the shame it’ll bring on our family name, I’m quite proud of myself too.” That said, Padmay closed her eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

Ben stayed with Padmay for a few minutes watching her while she slept. Though she looked ragged from the lengthy labor, he sensed a deep satisfaction radiate from her. He knew that his sister was content and he was grateful. Hopefully she wouldn’t be plagued with the nightmares any longer. She’d had quite a few of them. He’d sat with her trying to comfort her and after a while the nightmares finally subsided. Padmay hadn’t had one in months. She’d gone through so much these past months. Ben was surprised that she’d been able to gather enough strength to rebound. He thanked the stars that her experience while a captive to the Supreme Ruler hadn’t left her permanently scarred.

\*

Ben left Padmay’s side and headed for the nursery. It wasn’t hard to find. All the newborns were screaming at the top of their lungs. Ben informed the nurse-droid which infant he wanted to see. As soon as Padmay’s son was brought into the viewing room the nursery quickly quieted down.

He had to admit that Eumenides was a very handsome child, resembling Anakin greatly. Ben thought the boy looked at him accusingly, though it could’ve been due to the guilt he felt over the role he took in his father’s death. This child would grow up never knowing his father,

just as Anakin and Luke hadn't known theirs. Ben was aware just how much both felt that loss throughout their lives. The young man prayed that he'd be able to fill that void somewhat by being as good an uncle to the boy as Luke had been to him.

"That's certainly a sight to behold, isn't it?" Lando asked as he walked up to Ben with an armful of flowers.

"I didn't expect to see you here Uncle Lando. You brought me flowers. How kind of you," Ben teased.

"Where else would I be at such a time?" Lando asked as he plucked one of the flowers from the bouquet and put it behind Ben's ear. "How's Padmay?"

"She had a rough time bringing her son into this world. Between the hours of labor and the meds they've got her on for pain, she's completely out of it now. She was dead to the world when I left her room. Other than that she seems extremely happy. At least she isn't looking at me with those forlorn eyes anymore. I sense just how much she cared for Vader's clone."

Lando couldn't help but cringe inwardly in disgust at the thought of Padmay loving such a vile monster. "I can't understand how your sister could allow herself to fall under his spell. I guess it wasn't entirely her fault though. The man did have complete control over her mind. Padmay should get over him now that she's got a son. The baby will keep her busy and hopefully keep her mind off of him."

"Or make her think of that bastard all the more," Ben sighed.

Lando changed the subject knowing how guilty Ben felt. "Is Padmay feeling well enough for visitors? I'd like to congratulate her."

"You'll have to check with her emdee-droid. Padmay needs time to recuperate. I was just about to go home and check on Deynah."

"How is your wife? It won't be very long before we're celebrating the birth of your first child."

"She's doing great. They say being pregnant makes a woman appear even more beautiful. I never believed it before, but the old saying seems to hold true. I've never seen Deynah looking so radiant. She absolutely glows."

"You're a lucky lad Ben. I don't know how such a scruffy looking nerf-herder like you managed to capture such a gorgeous creature. I've never seen two people more in love. The only exception being your parents, of course."

"It's a shame they can't be here to see their grandchild," Ben sighed.

“I can imagine how happy Leia would be. Han would be so proud he’d run through the whole facility announcing the event at the top of his lungs.”

Ben chuckled. “That sounds like something my father would do. His antics would be quite amusing. I’m certain of that.”

The nurse-droid waited patiently while the humans ogled this miniature human, exalting its existence. They were strange that way. It seemed that they believed birth was an extraordinary event when it was just a normal human function.

When Lando and Ben finally left the viewing room the nurse-droid returned young Eumenides to his crib. The other newborns woke and started crying again. The droid was quite perplexed. She couldn’t understand why this tiny human appeared to be so upsetting to the others so much.

\*

Most of the Jedi that had gathered at the Temple returned to the depths of the Netherworld in order to be with their families. The battle had ended and there had been great joy shared among them. There was no longer a need to stay in this in-between land. The Sith had been defeated. Balance had been restored.

The Chosen One was sitting on the Temple steps with Obi-Wan reminiscing about their experiences together. Luke and Leia had joined them and all three listened intently as Anakin told them about his childhood on Tatooine. It wasn’t long before Anakin’s whole family had gathered to hear about his adventures while alive. Luke and Leia moved so Padme could sit next to her husband, while Shmi and Han sat at Anakin’s feet. The Chosen One was surrounded by those he loved and Anakin was filled with a satisfaction that he couldn’t describe. He started to rise when Yoda came up to them.

“Greetings Master Skywalker,” Yoda said as he bowed to Anakin. “Rise for me do not.”

Luke looked at his father and noticed a look of utter astonishment, as well as pride appear on Anakin’s face. Never before had Yoda called him Master.

“You honor me too much my Master,” Anakin said humbly.

“Honor yes. Too much, no. Truth I speak. Overdue the title is.”

“Thank you my Master,” Anakin replied humbly.

Anakin was content with the outcome of what they’d all gone through. Everything was finally as it should be in the universe. Balance had been restored to the Force. He’d been forgiven by every soul he’d ever harmed while under the influence of the Dark Side. And now, Yoda, the



wisest of all the Jedi, had just bestowed him with the rank he'd wanted so desperately while alive. Anakin Skywalker had finally been granted the title of Jedi Master.

The Chosen One should have been completely ecstatic, but he felt a slight ripple still lingering within the Force. It was so scant he wasn't certain he'd really felt it. He looked over at Yoda to see if he sensed it as well. The Jedi Master looked back with knowing eyes. Neither one said a word, but between them they acknowledged that they would have to be forever on their guard against the presence of the Sith.

## Epilogue

- Padawans -

~24/08/03-ABE: Twenty four years, eight months, three days after the death of Emperor Palpatine.~

The years seemed to soar by. Ben had become a father. He'd named his first born Lukas Owen to honor his Uncle Luke and Owen Lars. He was a rambunctious child full of curiosity, always asking questions while being taught the ways of the Jedi.

The young man became a father again at the birth of his daughter Celeste Shmi, named to honor Anakin's mother, as well as his cousin in appreciation for introducing him to Deynah.

Deynah was expecting again. Ben sensed this would be a male child. The happy couple decided to name him Han Anakin Solo. Ben was doing his very best to fulfill his duty in order to reestablish the Jedi Order. It didn't hurt any that it gave him great pleasure to perform this task as often as possible.

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There were three younglings listening attentively in the Solo's courtyard as Ben taught them the Jedi Arts. Two were his own children. The third child was his nephew Eumenides. Ben often wondered why Padmay had given the boy such an odd name. She'd told him the name meant "goddesses who avenge unpunished crimes." Ben assumed Padmay named the boy because of how he was conceived, in hatred, not love. He was certain that Menny, as the boy was nicknamed, would overcome the violence of his conception.

Ben was very proud of how quickly the youngling learned his lessons. Though Lukas and Celeste were fast learners and made their father proud, they didn't seem to advance as quickly as Menny. He'd already built his practice orb and asked numerous times about the fundamentals of

building his own lightsaber. It was a skill most padawan learners took much longer to achieve.

The Jedi Master continued with the lesson for today. “Repeat after me younglings. A true Jedi loves selflessly. A Jedi thinks outwardly, never of himself. We have the responsibility of using our intellect to defend ourselves. We cannot allow ourselves to succumb to anger, nor greed, nor anything else that sways our values. A Jedi warrior only fights to protect the peace and freedom of others. A true Jedi is pure of heart...”

Young Lukas, Celeste and Menny repeated after their Master word for word.

Padmay was bringing a tray of cool refreshment to everyone in the courtyard. She put the tray down on a small table by her sister-in-law, who was heavy with child. She poured Deynah a glass and sat down next to her. She listened to her brother’s lecture while teaching the children in the tradition of the Jedi, commenting to Deynah how proud their uncle would be.

As Padmay watched the scene before her, she reflected on everything that transpired since under the Supreme Ruler’s spell. How she missed her Master, but deep inside Padmay knew that he was still with her. Looking at Menny, she secretly communicated with her “son.” The boy glanced back. Both smiled as the yellow glow of the Sith lit in their eyes for the briefest of seconds.