

GEEKTASTIC

I awake tangled up in scratchy sheets with my head pounding and the taste of cheap alcohol and Tabasco still in my mouth. The spirit gum I used to attach my nose ridge and eyebrows sticks to the sheets as I roll over. Immediately, a wave of nausea makes me regret moving and I try to lie as still as I can until it passes.

The thing about advancing in the Klingon ranks is that you have to be badass. So when Kadi and D'ghor decided last night that we had to make blood wine with Everclear instead of tequila, and twice as much Tabasco as the recipe called for, I had to drink it or be a wimp.

I open my eyes and reason with myself that if I can crawl into the hotel bathroom, I can get some ibuprofen from my bag and stop my head from hurting quite so much. Also, water. Water would definitely help.

Pushing off the sheets, I realize that I'm still wearing my uniform and that my bra is still on. My pants and boots are missing.

"Arizhel?" someone says from the other side of the bed as I stagger toward a door I hope isn't a closet. The voice has an accent that might be Irish. I don't know anyone Irish.

I also don't know this room. It must be in the same hotel, but none of my stuff is here and there is only one single big bed instead of the two doubles that Kadi, D'ghor, and Noggra were sharing with me. The only thing that's familiar is my bat'leH leaning against the wall, the curved blade gleaming in the little bit of sun sneaking through the drawn shades. The glare hurts my eyes.

In the bathroom, I turn the lock and go over the night before. I think back on how we sang rousing battle songs in our hotel room, accompanied by swigs of that horrible blood wine. Then we rode the escalator, raising our weapons in

the air with a single shout, to the party that was happening on the main floor. A party seething with costumed people for us to growl at: Peacekeepers, Cobra Command, Stormtroopers, Browncoats.

I splash water on my face and chew up a couple of aspirins. Whoever is in the bedroom is really tidy; his toiletries are still in a little bag. There's even aftershave. I don't see any pots of makeup or prosthetics, so I figure he's not a Klingon.

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Maybe he's a member of Starfleet. There were a couple of cute guys with really proper costumes and phasers that glowed a little bit when they were fired. I remember arm-wrestling a cadet, but I can't believe I would have gone back to his room. For one thing, I won way too easily. For another, he had a Vulcan girlfriend who was watching us both like she wanted to have some kind of pon-farr excuse to kick my ass.

I remember hoping she was going to try.

Maybe it was that guy. I groan and rub my face.

I pull off the braided wig that's twisted around anyway, peel off my ridge and bald cap, and wash off as much of the makeup and adhesive as I can without cold cream or Bond-Off. Blinking at my own face in the mirror, I realize how different I look. Tame. Like I used to be.

"Are you okay?" comes a voice from beyond the door. He definitely has an accent.

"Yeah," I yell.

"I ordered coffees and some food," he says. "Grease will fix us right up."

I've never ordered room service. Only rich people order room service.

"Uh, thanks." I fill a water glass from the sink and guzzle it. I feel better, like the aspirin is kicking in, and I take a deep breath.

I wish I had my pants, but I pull down my pleather tunic as low as it can go and walk out of the bathroom.

There, sitting on the bed, is a thin guy with blond hair and a cute, lopsided smile. He's still wearing his uniform, too. His Jedi uniform.

I know I look completely stupid, but I just stand there in the doorway. The buzzer on the door rings, but I'm still staring. Tall riding boots, outer tunic, tabard, obi. Jedi.

No. I couldn't have. Not with an Ewok-cuddling, Force-feeling, Padawan-braid-wearing, lightsaber-rammed-up-his-ass Jedi.

He gets up and I fumble around in the covers until I discover my pants. Pulling them up and shoving my feet into my boots, I turn around as he opens the door. He signs something and comes back with the tray of dishes in metal domes.

"I feel totally thrashed," he says as though we haven't committed a terrible crime. As though we haven't totally betrayed the stupid uniforms we're standing around in. Everyone knows that trekkers and whatever starwarsians call themselves aren't supposed to have anything to do with one another.

He pours coffee into two cups and asks me how I take it.

"Black," I say.

He smirks. "I should have guessed that, shouldn't I?"

"And you take your raktajino with milk and sugar."

"Ouch," he says, but he's laughing. Maybe at what I said, maybe at the Klingon word. I want to know how we met, but I don't want him to know that I don't remember. I don't even know his name.

It turns out he does take his coffee with milk and sugar. "Makes it more like tea," he says.

I eat some toast with raspberry jelly and a sausage. After that and three cups of coffee, I start to feel a lot better. I feel good enough to realize that the room service receipt has his name on it. Leaning over, I take a quick glance. There it is. Thomas.

He sees me looking. "Thomas," I say.

"I told you it was my real name. Unlike Arizhel."

At least he didn't seem to realize that I don't remember him at all.

"So," I say, "are you here at the con with a lot of other..." I hesitate on the word, "...Jedi?"

"Yeah, yeah," he says, holding up his hands in a gesture of surrender. "I already know what you think about Star Wars."

"Oh, you mean that it's lame that Star Wars worships monarchical, secretive, and monastic systems and tries to tell you that anger is evil?"

“It’s pretty funny that a tough, angry girl like you is all about a goody-goody idealistic show like Star Trek.”

“It’s pretty funny that you find that kind of girl attractive.” I can’t help smiling. I take another sausage.

“Oh, come on!” he says. “Like your attraction to me is any less screwed up?”

“I’m a Klingon,” I say. “Of course I’m attracted to my enemy.”

II. Jedi

A Jedi is never supposed to give over to his passions; he is always supposed to be in control. But last night, at some point between Coke Pluses, Master Sven must have spiked mine with a little bit of rum. My being such a lightweight might be a contributing factor in the mess I find myself in this morning.

I know that most of my Order don’t go for anything outside of the Star Wars universe. It’s all Star Wars all the time with them. Which is cool. I get it.

There is something about the Jedi in Star Wars that feels more right to me than any other made-up alien life code. It’s the Force, really. I have this thing inside of me that is light and wants to do good, but I struggle with my own dark side. I try to keep it in balance, but it’s hard. I like the idea of there being something larger than yourself that guides you. The Jedi code.

I am not adverse to liking a bit of this and that from other universes, though. Heck, I like Star Trek. I even own all the original series on DVD. And this Klingon girl, Arizhel, whose real name I still don’t know, isn’t like any girl I’ve met before.

“Careful there, you might break something,” I say.

I'm watching her wolf down some breakfast and I'm trying to act all cool and all that in front of her, because she's witty.

"You are in more danger of being broken," she says. "I am a Klingon. I could break you with a roar."

And funny. God, she's funny. That's what I liked about her at the party last night, the way she made me laugh when she came over to my Master and me.

"So you're a Jedi Knight," she said, brandishing her scary sword. I lifted my lightsaber and parried with her.

"Apprentice," I said. "An honorable start, for a human," she said.

"I've mastered many levels since I've started my training," I said.

"Have you done battle?" she asked.

"Well, we do fight exhibitions," I said.

"So you are a dancer," she said. "No wonder you wear a skirt."

"It's a tunic," I said.

And then I blushed and felt embarrassed. I was worried that she wouldn't think much of a Jedi Apprentice.

Master Sven just handed me another Coke Plus with rum and left me alone with her. He told me he'd find another place to crash, and I took that as encouragement that I was doing well.

"Every dog has his day," Master Sven said.

I make sure my clip-on braid is in place while she pushes the button to call the elevator. I am wearing my Jedi uniform and she is wearing her Klingon costume, but not her ridges or wig piece, nor her makeup. She's very different from what I remember about last night.

I'm watching her out of the corner of my eye as we enter the hotel elevator.

First off, she's Asian. And not dark and orange. She's tried washing off most of her makeup but it's still a little streaky. Still, she's pretty. She also looks soft, almost shy for someone who seems so commanding. She's got a great body. Really curvy and she's an inch or two smaller than me, but I notice that she walks with a swagger that makes her seem taller. Her walk makes me want to get a little attitude in my step.

It makes the idea of turning to the dark side a little bit sexier.

I can't believe I just thought that. Annakin went to the dark side for love and look what happened to him. I don't care how cool this girl is. I'm not about to let that happen to me.

I'm a Jedi.

To become a Jedi requires a serious mind and a deep commitment, and here I am, feeling kind of giddy standing next to a Klingon.

She turns to face me.

“I didn’t hurt you or anything, right?” she asks. “Klingon mating rituals can be violent. It’s not unknown for there to be bruises, or broken bones.”