

Forceless



Version 1.5 : Dedicated to God

Chapter 1: Leo

"Good luck bros," I encouraged my friends as we walked down a long corridor to the training arena.

"Psssh, oh yeah; we'll need it," Joe stated, banging his fist into the palm of his left hand, "With so many trainees graduating, and so few available spots for Padawans, we all stand a slim chance of being picked."

"Actually, we stand a near one hundred percent chance!" Jake calculated, "Pod Seven and us are the only pods not to have finished our duels yet, and there are still two Jedi that have not picked Padawans yet."

"How do you know that?" Tay wanted to know, punching him in the arm.

Jake carefully glanced at our pod's director who was leading us down the hallway and whispered back to us, "I Force-read the mind of Srel."

"Bro!" I exclaimed, "You can really do that?!"

"SsssHHH!" Jake shushed me, "Not so loud, and yes, I've been practicing!"

"Dang," George said, "That's slick."

"Has anyone in Pod Seven gone yet?" I asked Jake.

"Everyone but the Fighting Twins," Jake replied, "I guess they got into another argument and had to be delayed."

"Figures," George chuckled, "They'll most definitely have to fight Jake and Tay."

"Awe man, I don't want to fight them," Tay mumbled.

"Why not?" Jake smirked, "You got the hots for one of them?"

"Do not!" Tay said too quickly.

"Well, I mean, if you like Ember, I won't say a thing," George teased.

"I don't like Ember! I like..." Tay trailed off as soon as the words came out of his mouth.

"Whoops," I laughed, "Looks like Amber's got an admirer!"

The rest of the boys slapped Tay on the back as we reached the end of the hallway and Srel opened the main doorway.

"Wait here guys," Srel told us, "I'll go inside and check to see if The Board is ready yet."

As soon as Srel disappeared into the main arena dome, Jake turned to me, "Don't think you're completely out of it either, buster."

"Huh?" I asked, confused.

"Ember likes you."

"Wait, really?" I said, dumbfounded.

"That's the rumor anyway."

I narrowed my eyes as George and Tay burst out laughing.

"Even if it is the case, I'm going to be a Jedi, so feelings can't go along," I stated firmly, "She'll have to go marry some Republic commander or something."

"Oouucch man," George spoke up, "Are you predicting her and Amber will fail to best Jake and Tay?"

"Hey, I'm just calling it like it is," I smirked, pointing finger guns at Jake and Tay, "Our pod has the better trainees, and Jake and Tay have been training for years."

"Bring it on!" Jake cried out, "We've got this in the bag!"

At this point, Srel popped his head out of the door and beckoned to us. I had been in the training arena countless times ever since I had started my Jedi training here at the Republic's state-of-the-art facility, but now, it was different. This time, there was a panel of four of the school's highest-regarded instructors as well as a large number of chairs where there were supposed to be Jedi and high-ranking generals in the Republic's army sitting. However, now there were only two Jedi and a handful of the Republic's army leaders left, as Jake had informed us. I recognized the older Jedi, his name was Bob, and he was infamous for his relentless pursuit of foes, but the second was a younger guy that I couldn't remember seeing before. "Welcome Pod members Two and Seven to the final rounds of Graduation Day," the head speaker of the panel announced to us through the speaker system, "As you may know, the best two-person team and the best single fighter will be chosen by these last, two remaining Jedi to be trained in the art of the Force. However, the losers will still be transferred to the Republic's army and be promoted depending on their prowess in the arena. We're looking for style, form, Force abilities, graciousness, and agility in these last two tournaments, and we all wish you the best."

"All right!" Tay cheered, fist bumping all of us.

"For our first competition, we will have trainees Tay and Jake facing off against twins Ember and Amber. Gentlemen and ladies please step up to the equipment area.

George and I slapped Tay and Jake on the back as they made their way along the short aisle and to the actual arena where they would be fighting. Across the room from us, Pod Two's leader high-fived Ember and Amber as they followed suit.

"Ember's looking at you," George teased me.

"Shut up," I said, "It's obvious she's looking at the Jedi."

"That's not what it looks like from here," George smirked.

"Why haven't I heard this rumor before?" I sighed, plopping into a nearby chair to watch the excitement.

Being trainees, and not even Padawans yet, none of us had a lightsaber. Instead, we trained with similarly sized and weighted metal lightsabers which were much safer and easier to train with. Both teams were handed their weapons by the coordinator; then they walked across a thin metal walkway to the large platform in the center of the arena.

The arena was a massive fifty square yard, circular, concrete, pit in the middle of the ground filled completely with ice cold water – except for a single solid pillar that rose out of the water and supported the twenty square yard platform that contestants would battle on top of.

The rules of the duel were simple; don't get thrown into the water.

Amber and Ember quickly chose the far left side of the platform, while Jake and Tay chose the right side. As the board of instructors shuffled around some papers, the contestants tensed, and so did I.

"Alright," boomed the all-too-familiar voice over the speakers, "Fight!"

Instantly, Jake and Tay Force blasted their opponents, except they both went for Amber first.

With quick thinking, Ember used the Force to grasp ahold of Amber and swing her around – using the strength of the Force blast from Jake and Tay as radial acceleration. Before Jake and Tay realized what was happening, Ember was hurled through the air using split-second timing and smashed right into them – sending Jake cartwheeling along the platform while Tay was

flattened underneath Ember. Much to my horror, Jake completely lost control and plummeted over the edge of the platform – splashing into the water below.

“Ugh!” groaned George next to me, “That hurts.”

Tay quickly crawled out from underneath Amber but was immediately attacked by Ember who wielded her metal lightsaber with impunity. Tay caught the initial attack and dueled back, managing to gain some ground by utilizing a Fluid Riposte, but just as he started to do this, Amber rejoined the fight. Tay may have been a skilled dueler, but he was not as good as both Ember and Amber combined, especially since they were skilled in Form IV. Despite George and I’s encouragement, Tay quickly succumbed to the relentless lightsaber attacks and was slung painfully backwards onto the platform.

“Time to finish you off!” Ember cried, Force grabbing Tay.

“Hey! That’s what I get to do!” Amber argued, attempting to Force grab Tay.

“No silly,” Ember argued, “I always get to finish our opponents off.”

“Says you,” Amber spat back, “This is my time to shine.”

“*Your time?!*” Ember exclaimed, relaxing her grip on Tay to punch Amber in the arm.

“You fool!” Amber replied, punching Ember back.

“WHOMP!” Tay dropped to the ground, but when he stood up; he had a grin on his face a mile long. Stretching his arms back, Tay released a surprisingly powerful Force blast for someone that wasn’t even a Padawan. The twins were so busy arguing that they were already flying off the platform and plunging into the ice water before they realized their fatal mistake.

George and I exploded out of our seats and pounded each other on the back.

“YAHHHOOO!!!” I cried out, “You go boys!”

“Nice return Tay!” George added.

The board of professors nodded their approval, and the retractable metal walkway emerged to allow Tay to safely cross the moat. Ember, Amber, and Jake crawled up a nearby rope ladder, and, shivering uncontrollably, trudged over to our instructors.

“Well done,” our head of piloting and aircraft accolated the trainees, “You all showed some quick thinking out there, but I’m sure you realize who will be chosen by our esteemed guests tonight.”

“It was Ember’s fault,” Amber mumbled.

“Not true,” Ember argued.

The younger Jedi quickly stood up and strode over to Jake and Tay, shaking their hands.

“I’d be excited to help train you two,” he said, “You’ll both make wonderful Jedi someday. Follow me!”

And, with an excited wave at George and I, Jake and Tay quickly followed the Jedi outside. Meanwhile, Ember and Amber were handed towels and instructed to go sit down in the chairs while George and I were called forward.

“And you two,” the head instructor informed us, “will be dueling for the last Padawan spot.”

I shook my head, “This totally sucks.”

George agreed, “Whatever happens, you’ll stay my friend.”

I nodded my head. Having never known my parents and only growing up with my uncle and aunt, I had never known a truly loving family member. George was my closest friend. I knew that whatever happened, George had a bright future because he was just that friendly guy that everyone knew and loved. I on the other hand was that quiet dude that you easily forgot was

nearby. This has its pluses, but the fact that I couldn't seem to draw out my inner Force powers put me at a large disadvantage.

We were handed our "lightsabers" and then directed to the platform.

"I wish you the best of luck in your new job in the Republic army," George smirked as we took our positions.

"I'll visit you every now and again when I get a break from my Jedi training," I teased back.

"You wish," George laughed.

"For the last fight of this graduating class," the head professor called out, "FIGHT!"

"Bam!" Our lightsabers collided, reverberating through their metal frames and across the large training room. I quickly followed my initial attack with a drop spin and back-hand slice, inevitably forcing George backwards. George desperately tried to block my blows, but I knew exactly what I was doing. I swirled my lightsaber in quick motions, undermining his weak blocks and allowing me to quickly gain ground.

George then performed a precise, fake parry and caused me to momentarily lose my balance, but I used this to my advantage and back flipped over him. George spun around quickly to meet me, but I obviously foresaw this, and locked my lightsaber around his, whipping him around.

Losing his grip as he was throttled backwards, George spun out and slid across the smooth marble platform, heading straight for the edge. Just before he fell off into the freezing cold water below, George released his grip on his lightsaber and dug his fingers into the platform, slowing his momentum for just long enough to roll back into a defensive stance. Unfortunately, his lightsaber, once being released in the critical moment, was dropped promptly into the water below with a satisfying "Plop!"

I swished my lightsaber over my head in short, intimidating movements – approaching him confidently, visions of a life of adventure swirling through my mind. Cutting off any chances of escape, I approached George, ready to throw him off the edge, but that's when George set his jaw and mouthed, "I'm sorry."

In the split second that he did this, I realized that getting the last Padawan spot was more important to George than letting me get it. Immediately, George shoved his hands out towards me in a quick movement, and I was immediately thrown through the air. This wasn't the first time that I had been force thrown, and neither would it be the last I imagined. Despite being hurled through the air, I kept my wits about me, retained a firm grip on my weapon, and somersaulted through the air, desperately trying to draw out my Force powers that I never seemed to have. George threw me so hard that I flew straight over the moat and onto some chairs on the other side. The fight was over, but I knew from last year that sometimes the instructors would overlook the ultimate loss if you displayed unusually skilled prowess. Without skipping a beat, I sprinted back up the hallway, vaulted over the three foot chain link fence and Jedi barrel-rolled through the air – a lot like a missile. I could see George on the platform, leaning over and catching his breath. Apparently, he didn't expect me to be hurtling towards him like a human torpedo.

"WHUMP!"

George looked up just in time to see my spinning head plunge straight into his stomach.

George was instantaneously jettisoned off the platform, collided with the chain link fence on the outside of the moat and dropped right into the water below. I pumped my fists in victory, but it

was short lived, because George came sputtering to the surface and Force yanked me into the water with him.

“AAaack!” I cried out after resurfacing, “This water is *freezing*!”

“You little back-stabber!” George accused me, although laughing at the same time.

“Hey, if I’m going to lose, I’ll lose in style!” I replied, swimming as quickly as possible for the rope ladder. We both crawled up it and collapsed onto the ground in a heap of wet clothes and dripping hair.

“You gave me a run for my money,” George breathed, flopping onto his back.

“That was some impressive work,” the last veteran Jedi informed us, walking over; “I have to say that you are both incredibly talented, BUT, I can only have one Padawan.”

I sat up and hung my head, “I know.”

“It’s not your fault that you don’t have Force powers,” the Jedi said, laying his hand on my shoulder, “But the Republic army needs skilled warriors like you – who can rival a Jedi without having any Force powers.”

I sniffed back some tears and nodded my head while George wrapped me in a bear hug.

“I’m so so sorry, Leo,” he said to me, “I wish this didn’t have to be so.”

“I know,” I told him, “I would have done the same if I was in your shoes. You go be the best Jedi there has ever been or ever will be!”

“I’ll do just that!” George replied confidently, slapping me on the back again, as he and Bob left. Still feeling cold and very wet, I sloshed over to the chairs nearby and plopped down while the instructors debated over their many sheets of paper. Presently, the school’s principal strode over.

“Well kids,” he addressed the twins and I, “You’ll be proud to know that you scored higher than all your other trainees that will be transferred to the Republic’s army. Leo, you will be promoted to Lieutenant, and you, Ember and Amber, will both be Lieutenant Assistants.”

“Great,” Amber replied sarcastically, summing up all of our feelings.

“Don’t be so gloomy! That’s a great accomplishment,” the principal insisted, “Go pack your bags now, the shuttle will be here shortly.”

This Republic’s academy used to be the galaxy’s best training center for young recruits wanting to get jobs with the republic, but with the addition of more numerous and specialized academies, this school was almost exclusively for those interested in being a member of the Republic’s army, air force, or a Jedi Padawan. I knew it was still a remarkable accomplishment to be promoted to a lieutenant at only fourteen years of age, but when you have your eyes set on becoming a Jedi’s Padawan, all other results are technically a failure.

We were almost at the door, when one of the other instructors shouted over to us, “Oh! And apparently you, Ember and Leo, will be stationed together at the base on Hoth! Amber, you’ll be stationed at Mearer.”

“Cool!” Ember said.

“Oh great,” I moaned.

The girls’ dorm was on the opposite side of the training center, so we quickly parted ways. I shortly found myself back at Pod 2’s room, where I threw what little possessions I had into my duffle bag in a matter of a few minutes. Jake, Tay, and George’s beds were already cleared out.

“Feeling depressed?” a voice from nearby broke the silence.

I jumped and quickly pin-pointed the voice which appeared to be coming from behind the large Republic Recruitment poster hanging on a pole slightly offset the wall. Sure enough, a hooded figure stepped out from behind it and offered me his hand.

"So you've been cut," he told me bluntly.

"Thanks for making me feel worse," I sighed, uncharacteristically unconcerned about a complete stranger being in my room.

"You accepted your position in the Republic army?" he asked me, keeping his face pointed at the ground.

"I mean, it's better than nothing I guess," I replied.

"Have you considered other options?" he quizzed me.

"I mean, a Jedi obviously," I countered.

"I may be able to help you," he told me, "How do you feel about joining the most elite group of warriors in this part of the galaxy?"

I narrowed my eyes, "What kind of elite group?"

With that, the man threw off his hood and stared me straight in the eyes. I instantly recognized the red eyes and battle-hardened face of the man – it was Jek-10 – the most infamous, Force enhanced, clone deserter in the history of the Republic. He had been strengthened using kyber crystal power, but after many years of faithful service, he switched to the Dark Side - disappearing all together shortly thereafter

I gasped, "But how...? I thought you disappeared without a trace."

"That's what I wanted everyone to think. Look at me," he said, "I'm as old as hell. The group I started is a non-partisan collection of mercenaries and warriors that only participate in the highest-profile missions."

"So not a Sith?" I asked, suspicious.

"I mean, we do work for them from time to time, but that's not our main goal anyway," Jek replied, "I mean; you know I became famous fighting for the Republic."

"So I've heard," I stated, "I'm going to need some time to think this over."

"There's no time," Jek quickly replied, "That shuttle will arrive shortly; then I won't be able to contact you. It's now or never."

"Um, uh...", I said slowly, "Why would you want me though? I have no force powers, and I was cut from this program."

"Because I sense a great power within you," Jek said slowly, "You have the ability to become a great tactician, regardless of the Force. Plus, we need *young* people in our group."

"I still don't know," I said, "A Jedi only sticks to the light side, and your group sounds a bit morally hazy."

"Have you ever considered that you aren't a Jedi?" Jek asked me.

"Well that's obvious," I said.

"Here, check this out," Jek said, pulling something out of his robe, "You know about lightsabers, right?"

"Yeah," I replied quickly, "What trainee doesn't?!"

"Check this out," Jek said, depositing an ornate, metal lightsaber hilt into my hands, "What do you notice about it?"

Actually being able to hold a weapon of this caliber was nothing short of thrilling, and I carefully turned it over in my hands.

“Woah, this is a custom dual-bladed lightsaber! Where did you get it?” I asked Jek.

“I know a guy who specializes in rare and valuable weapons... for a price,” Jek answered, “It’s brand new. You can have it.”

“What?!” I exclaimed.

“Yeah, but you know,” Jek continued, “That this isn’t your standard weapon. The first time you turn it on, it’s color will align to what side of the Force you are and what your abilities are.”

“Yeahhhh,” I said slowly, “But I don’t have any Force powers.”

“Turn it on anyway,” Jek commanded me, “You might be surprised

“But... but...,” I stammered, as I picked up on the sound of footsteps from far outside the doorway.

“Hurry!” Jek said, laying his hand on mine as I debated whether to turn it on, “Ignite it kid!”

Taking a deep breath, I pressed the trigger. Instantly, a long stream of kyber crystal energy flooded out of the hilt creating a double-bladed saber. It was so long that it almost burnt a hole through my bed’s posts. However, neither of those two observations caused me to gasp – it was the blade’s color that surprised me.

“C’mon,” Jek said, “We’ve got two more new members to pick up.”

Chapter 2: George

“VROOOOooooom!!” The nitroblitz engine of my hover bike roared to life as I jerked my handlebars forward for more acceleration. Trees, shrubs, and small hills whizzed by as I expertly sped through the dense forest and towards the secret compound.

“Be careful!” Bob said through my helmet’s intercom, “This forest is crawling with Sith and special-forces droids.

“Copy that,” I replied, “But I’m excited to get this mission done. No Jedi has ever successfully infiltrated this base!”

“Well that’s considering that few have tried or even know about this place,” Bob laughed, “But we have specific intelligence as to its whereabouts now.”

My GPS beeped loudly as I blasted off a small ridge, letting me know that I was only a few minutes away.

“Okay, let’s go in by foot. I’m not sure if there are any guards nearby, and these engines are loud,” Bob warned me.

“Hey, I’ve got this,” I reminded Bob, “I wasn’t promoted to a Jedi for no reason!”

“Cockiness will get you killed,” Bob reminded me.

“And being un-alert will also do that,” I added as a Droid crawler jumped out of the bushes and attacked me. Unfortunately for it, I had already sensed it through the Force, and I turned the tables on it – easily slicing it in half with a quick swing of my glowing blue lightsaber. We quickly weaved through the forest and soon reached a small clearing. While hiding behind a large oak, I surveyed the massive, camouflaged structure that stood in the middle of the clearing. It looked a lot like tar bubbles had emerged from the ground – giving the building a unique, spherical shape.

“According to the map of the building here,” Bob spoke softly into the helmet intercom, “The main door is right over there, but it’s locked by a keypad. We’ll have to cut it down.”

“Alright then, let’s go,” I replied, elegantly sprinting for the building. I slid to a stop in the smooth grass right outside of the impressive, iron door and jabbed my light saber into its hinges. Bob force jumped into the air and sliced right through the top of the door before gracefully falling and using the gravity to provide extra power as he cut downwards through the door.

“Crash!” The door finally broke loose and crumpled to the ground. Unfortunately, it also set off an alarm.

“Move it!” Bob yelled, racing through the entryway. We sprinted along the corridor with Bob leading the way; then turned and ran along another side hallway.

At the last second, Bob then kicked down a second door, and we emerged into a wide corridor that led to the main chamber where our object of interest was. Unfortunately, the entire hallway was crawling with droids who had quickly aimed their guns at us.

“Sayonara suckers!” I yelled out cheerfully, bearing down on them with ease. I had fought more than my fair share of the Separatists’ droids in my relatively short life-time, and I knew every single one of their weak points. Bob was even more experienced than I in Ataru Form, and in less than a minute, things were already shifting towards a Jedi victory.

“KRrrrzhak!” “Kaboom” “FZZZZHHHhhh”

I back flipped over a squad of heavy, elite droids; then utilized a Falling Avalanche to take them out from behind while simultaneously using the Barrier of Blades to deflect a few stray laser blasts.

“Bloosh!” The last droid fell to Bob’s steady light saber strike as I finished cutting through the locked, heavy door directly leading to the domed room where the special, kyber crystal was. The Republic had always heard of the existence of the galaxy’s largest kyber crystal, but its whereabouts had been kept a secret until a year ago when it was found to be possessed by the Sith. Now, Bob and I were on the verge of claiming this valuable crystal for the Republic. I couldn’t have been happier.

“Great!” I exclaimed, “The room’s empty.”

“Hmmm,” Bob said, slowly approaching the center of the room, “This feels too easy.”

With my senses on high alert, I followed Bob to a large hole. Square in the middle of this hole was an extremely tall tower; at the top of which was the kyber crystal – swathed in a massive array of lasers. I reluctantly peered into the pit and realized I couldn’t see the bottom of it.

“Trust me, that pit is *deep*,” a clear voice from nearby spoke out.

Bob and I were startled, and we quickly flashed our light sabers in the air, searching for the source of the voice. A body flashed above us and landed a few meters away, placing his arms behind his back like he owned the place. Unlike us, who were dressed in simple helmets and comfortable robes that allowed maximum ease of movement; this stranger was dressed in black combat gear – such as what soldiers of the Republic army would wear while in combat. It was form-fitting with several laser pistols hanging off the belt and two rounds of ammo slung around the torso. However, he wore no helmet, only a small earpiece in both ears.

“You looking to make off with the kyber crystal?” the stranger asked again, showing his face in the dim light of the massive chamber.

“Who...are...you,” Bob asked slowly, circling the stranger.

Momentarily taking his eyes off us, the stranger glanced at some technology on his right wrist,

“In three seconds your friends will arrive right over there. Three...two...one...”

“Boom!” The only other door leading to the chamber exploded open and two more Jedi entered the room, our backup.

“Who’s this?” Jake said, pointing to the stranger.

“Don’t know,” I said, “He hasn’t told us yet.”

“George?!” the stranger exclaimed upon hearing my voice, “Is that you?!”

“Uh, yeah?” I said, following Bob in a circular motion around the stranger. Jake and Tay quickly cut off the stranger’s exit on the other side; he was trapped.

“Recognize me now?” the stranger said, pointing finger guns at me.

“Leo!”

“I go by Leonard now,” Leo said, “But my nickname works too.”

“What are you doing here, Leo!” Bob said, obviously upset, “We thought you had defected.”

“I *had* defected, although actually I never joined in the first place,” Leo said, “Now there is the small matter of the kyber crystal. I can’t let you take it.”

“Says who?” Jake taunted.

“Says my boss,” Leo replied.

“Who’s he?”

"That's not for you to know," Leo spoke loudly, "He pays me well and that's all that matters. Now if you would be good boys and leave, that would be much appreciated."

"Fat chance," Tay chuckled, "Why don't you just hand us the crystal, Leo, and we *may* leave you alone."

"Oh, so you wanna go the hard way?" Leo laughed – except this time it sounded a lot more evil, "Sounds good to me."

In a flash, Leo spun around and assumed a defense stance.

"Vroosh, vroosh, vroosh, vroosh!" Leo then quickly produced a pair of lightsabers – revealing that he wielded not only two lightsabers, but two, double-bladed lightsabers. The dark red glow of the sabers contrasted the dim light of the room and created an eerie glow.

"What in the name of...?!!!" I exclaimed, surprised, "There's no way you can handle both of those at once!"

"You'd be surprised," Leo smirked, chuckling evilly again, "Attack me, and we'll see who the real loser is today!"

"Raurgh!" Jake and Tay simultaneously spun through the air, using Force jumps to give them an extra height advantage. Unfortunately for them and while still keeping his eyes on Bob and I, Leo whipped one of his lightsabers behind him and deftly blocked both Jake and Tay's attacks – causing Jake to spin out and Tay to be thrust backwards. Immediately, Bob followed up with a powerful Falling Avalanche attack, but Leo dodged, and utilized a Circle of Shelter to keep us at a distance. With a powerful slide, I came at Leo from the left, but Leo somersaulted over me, blocked another attack by Tay, and met my lightsaber thrust easily. Twirling his lightsabers around his head in an extremely fast motion, Leo then advanced upon Jake, relentlessly pressing him backwards towards the bottomless pit.

"Tay, come help me get the crystal!" Bob yelled to Tay, "And Jake, you and George hold off Leo!" I approached Leo swiftly and forced him to relinquish his attack on Jake to catch my Saber Swarm. Jake then followed up with some swift maneuvering, forcing Leo away from Bob and Tay as they ran towards the tower. That's when two more red light sabers appeared in the dark gloom of the chamber.

"Took you long enough!" Leo yelled over to the newcomers, "Can you stop those two?"

"Consider it done!" a familiar, feminine voice called out.

I may have had trouble placing Leo's voice, but I instantly recognized this voice. It was Ember – and Amber had to be the other. They both wielded only one double-bladed lightsaber a piece, but bore down upon Tay and Bob with skill that only the most intense and expert training could have allowed – forcing my colleagues to temporarily abort their mission to recover the kyber crystal.

Jake and I recouped to synchronize another series of attempts on Leo, but they were all instantly refuted, as Leo slid, jumped, dodged, and blocked with apparent ease.

"I'm getting tired of this," Leo growled, "Get OUT!"

"Not without that crystal!" Jake yelled back, swirling over head in a Jedi jump.

As I sliced at Leo and dodged his right light-saber's whirling motion, I saw Leo's eyes narrow; then he got truly serious. In a series of fast, insanely precise maneuvers that would have rivaled those of the greatest Jedi masters like Yoda or Mace Windu, Leo utilized Vornskr's Ferocity against Jake and I - forcing us backwards at an alarmingly fast pace. Before I even knew what was happening, Leo then turned all of his attention on me and attacked with all his

strength. It was impossible to dodge the double-bladed lightsabers that seemed to be everywhere at once, and in a matter of moments, Leo locked his weapon with mine and yanked it out of my grasp. It flew through the air and disappeared into the massive hole in the ground. To buy myself some time, I reached out in the Force to grab my lightsaber while simultaneously force throwing Leo. Leo jumped out of the way at the last possible moment, and managed to kick me hard in the stomach – causing me to lose my Force grip on my lightsaber. Jake then used the Draw Closer on Leo to help me out, but Leo effortlessly flipped Jake onto the ground as well with a perfect rendition of an Assured Strike.

“Ordinarily, I’d kill you both, but I’m no Sith lord, and you used to be my friends, so you can go, but I want you out of here RIGHT NOW!” Leo stated angrily. With that, Leo yanked Jake’s blue light-saber out of his grasp and plunged his double-bladed lightsaber into the hilt, effectively destroying it in a display of sparks and fire.

I couldn’t believe it. What had originally been a happy, determined smile on Leo’s face had now become one of a glorified grimace, and his eyes glared at me with hatred and anger.

“Leo,” I said softly, as Tay and Bob continued their duels on the other side of the room, “What happened to you?”

“Nothing,” He growled, “I’m just choosing my own path in life.”

“But remember when we used to daydream about being fellow Jedi and fighting alongside each other? What happened to that dream?” I asked.

“That dream was crushed underneath the wave of resentment over being rejected from that very Order,” Leo sneered, “Just because I can’t wield the Force doesn’t make me useless.”

With Leo’s attention on me, Jake made a quick dash back towards Bob and Tay, but Leo stuck out his lightsaber quickly – blocking his run.

“Uh uh,” Leo scolded him, “When I told you guys to scream, I meant for you to...”

A scream from the other side of the chamber distracted all of us. Even in the dim light, I sensed some large object was hurtling toward all three of us. Instinctively, I ducked just as Leo did as well, but Jake wasn’t fast enough and the thing hit him square in the head. It was only after Jake sunk to the ground that I noticed that the flying object had been Amber. Her red lightsaber embedded in the wall behind me.

“Ungh,” she groaned, trying to stand up.

As I debated on whether to steal Amber’s saber and fight back against Leo, Leo’s face went white, and he raced back across the chamber with lightning speed.

“Don’t you *dare* hurt Ember!” he cried out.

I noticed that across the expanse of the chamber, Ember was desperately trying to fend off both Tay and Bob but was no match for my trainer’s Form IV and VI abilities and was quickly shoved up against the wall – her lightsaber harmlessly falling to the ground and rolling away. Bob steadied his aim and advanced upon Ember quickly, who tried to squirm away but was pinned back to the wall by Tay. Leo, running as fast as a normal person could, raced to provide backup for her. At the last minute, he leapt into the air, preparing a powerful Swift Flank. That’s when a scene I will never forget was impressed upon my brain.

Bob could obviously hear Leo behind him, but instead of turning around and meeting Leo’s furious attack, he Force swung Ember into the massive pit surrounding the kyber crystal tower. As she plummeted out of sight (screaming the most horrific noise that I had probably ever

heard) Leo's blades fell upon Bob. In an instant, Bob was sliced into a dozen pieces – creating a mini eruption of blood.

Roaring in anger, Jake, who was next to me, suddenly sprang to life and raced after Leo, leaving me with Amber. Even after seeing her sister plunge to her death, Amber regained her composure and yanked her saber out of the wall. As I was not sure what Amber would do, I raced after Jake, forcefully grabbing Tay and boosting him up to the kyber crystal at the top of the tower. In an amazing display of agility and split second timing, Tay plunged his lightsaber into the dome of lasers, kicked the kyber crystal into the air and, as I continued to move Tay past the tower, gently kicked the crystal towards me.

From behind, I sensed Amber assault me, so I swung Tay around and bowled him into her – creating a confusing mess of arms, legs, and sabers. At the same time, the kyber crystal plunged through the air, and I leapt up and caught it.

"Run, hurry!" Tay yelled to me while trying to fend off Leo's attacks, "We'll catch up!"

Although I didn't want to leave my friends behind, I knew that completing this mission was critical for the Republic, so I ran straight for the door. Behind me, I heard Leo yell in exasperation, and a quick glance confirmed that he was now trailing me – leaving Amber to face off against Tay and Jake who quickly scooped up his fallen comrade's lightsaber.

The crystal was very heavy, and the floor was extremely slick – which made it hard to keep up a good sprint, but nonetheless, I managed to remember how to get out of the building. I had just emerged from the building into the extremely bright sunlight, when I whipped around and seized Leo with the Force – crushing him against the side of the building.

Leo attempted to squirm, but quickly found that it was no good.

"You traitor!" I screamed at him, trying to catch my breath.

"You killed Ember!" Leo replied, struggling to catch breaths as I flattened him against the metal wall of the compound.

"Well that seems fair, seeing as you killed Bob," I replied angrily, "You were supposed to be a Jedi, and now you've reduced yourself to doing the grunt work for the Sith?!"

"All I wanted was to become a Jedi," Leo wheezed, "I was tired of being belittled because I had no Force powers, and this gave me a chance to live an exciting life. But just know George that..."

The last part of what Leo was trying to say was cut off by the powerful plasma engines of Separatist droid carriers descending out of the sky. Likely, they were arriving in response to the still ringing sirens.

I whacked Leo against the building again and then let him fall to the ground in a heap.

"You let me go, so I'm just returning the favor," I yelled to him, "But tell your 'boss' to stay away from the Republic and our business!"

With that, I jumped into the forest, revved my speeder bike, and roared away before the area would be inundated with those stupid droids.

Chapter 3: Leo

I was still lying on the ground in a heap when the carrier ships alighted and offloaded droid squadrons and a few human commanders. Most of them promptly ran inside the compound, while others came over to check on me.

"Are you okay sir?" asked one of the commanders, bending down to me.

I painfully rolled onto my back and wheezed, "I'll be fine."

"Who did this to you?" the commander quizzed me.

"Jedi," I moaned.

"Leo!" Ember cried out from behind me, "You're okay!"

Ember quickly ran over to me and helped me to my feet.

"Thank goodness you really didn't plunge to your death," I sighed, "It's a good thing we got that extra platform down there. Where's Amber?"

"Amber? I thought she ran after Jake and Tay," Ember replied slowly.

"Oh goodness," I said, testing out my ligaments to see if they still worked.

"I'll get my men on high alert for her presence!" the nearby commander informed me, stepping aside to relay instructions to his droids.

"Did George get away with the crystal?" Ember quietly asked me, already knowing the answer.

I nodded my head while still trying to get my breath back, "But only after giving me an earful about how much of a disappointment I was."

"We've got to get that crystal back," Ember growled.

"Let me get the crystal back!" a familiar voice from nearby called out to us, "And you guys worry about getting Amber back."

I turned to see Jek-10 hobble towards us with his cane.

"Sir! Why are you out here?" I exclaimed, moving aside for him.

"I may be old," he told me in a cracked voice, "But I'm *not* slow."

Ember raised her eyebrows at this comment, and I caught her look.

"Okay, well, I am slow, but not when I have to be," Jek quickly replied, "Look, it's not your fault that they got away. I wasn't expecting the location of this place to be discovered. Nor was I expecting four Jedi to come here to retrieve it. The crystal is a loss, but it can be replaced."

"Eventually," I muttered, "But Darth Sidious won't be pleased with the loss."

"Using my enhanced Force powers, I sense that the two young Jedi are taking the captured Amber to Coruscant," Jek continued.

"So they did take her captive?!" I exploded.

"It would appear so," Jek replied flatly.

"And that's after I let them go," I grumbled.

"Jedi may be Jedi, but that doesn't mean they won't compromise their values to help the Republic," Jek informed Ember and I, "Even if it means not returning a favor or killing a past friend and ally."

"Tell me about it," Ember snarled, "Bob really tried to murder me."

"Come with me," Jek said, hobbling back to the nearest carrier, "And I'll take you straight there."

"But Coruscant is the Republic headquarters. It's crawling with Jedi!" I worried.

"Then you'll just have to be super careful," Jek smirked, "Don't worry. I've got you covered. We all specialize in these types of missions. Remember that time you guys invaded that crime ring on Forthy?"

After ensuring that I had no sprains or serious injuries, Ember allowed me to follow Jek to the carrier and board it. Inside, there was only the pilot, co-pilot and a guard – since all the droids had left to secure the premises.

"Take us to Coruscant!" Jek yelled to the pilot.

"Copy that," the pilot answered, turning on the carrier's thrust engines.

"Now," Jek said to us as we buckled in, "Let's see about your disguises. Jek clapped his hands twice, and the droid charging station immediately revolved underneath the floor – revealing an entire collection of clone armor.

"Where did you get this?" I asked, peering into boxes of clone armor and laser rifles.

"Well, when you annihilate as many of these pesky guys as I have," Jek said, "You tend to amass quite a collection. Here, put these on."

Jek handed me a clone officer's suit with matching pauldrons and TW-25 rifle.

"Ember, you're a little short for a trooper," Jek told her, choosing another clone trooper outfit,

"But I think we can make this suit work for ya."

As we flew off the planet and jumped into hyperspace, I quickly attempted to shove on my gear.

"Ugh, this is painful!" Ember groaned, "No wonder clones walk so funny."

"Welcome to my past life," Jek smirked as he typed on his hologram computer, "I'm right now scheduling you to be guards at the Jedi consulate and printing out your security cards."

I shook my head in disbelief. Even after training alongside Jek for six years, I was still scratching the surface of his experience and abilities – even when he was so old he was nearly bent over double.

"Put on the cloaking shield!" Jek told the pilot, "And take us down at the far loading dock to the West!"

"Aye aye sir," the pilot announced, punching a button on his control deck and navigating the ship into Coruscant's dusty atmosphere.

"I'm not sure that I'm ready for this," I announced, a little unsure of myself, "This is the first time that I've impersonated a clone trooper."

"Eh, it'll be just like that time you impersonated that one bounty hunter on Kamino. Just stand around and take orders," Jek announced, "Now go!"

The pilot landed behind a large space freighter and opened the bay doors which Ember and I jumped out of.

"Testing... testing," Jek spoke into our earpiece as we strode towards the impressive Jedi Temple.

"Reading you loud and clear," Ember replied.

"I built special cameras for your helmets, so I can see everything going on," Jek told us, "I can also give you extra instructions if you need."

"Affirmative," I answered.

"Alright, you see those double doors to your right?" Jek told me.

"Yeah," I said, veering to the right and walking by a troupe of clones.

"Swipe your card at those doors; then take your second left – that'll get you to the back entrance of the main chamber."

With Ember leading the way, we arrived at the double doors, and I swiped my card on the card reader. It beeped green and the doors opened – revealing the massive hallway of the Jedi temple. It truly was something to behold as I had never seen it before in my life.

“Stop gawking and start moving!” Ember admonished me as she sped-walked over to the back entrance. We both had to swipe our cards this time, but the door opened and we finally emerged into the massive chamber. It was surprisingly empty – only a few Jedi were actually there, but Jek told us to stand at the front where the main console was and keep still.

“You’re sure that Tay and Jake are taking Amber here?” Ember asked Jek.

“Almost positive,” Jek said, “I can sense her nearby.”

“Yes, we fully realize that there is a Sith spy in our midst!” the head consulate was addressing the gathering, “And our very own Mace Windu is already tracking this imposter down. It shouldn’t be long now.”

“How come this keeps happening!” one of the Jedi called out, “Why are Jedi defecting and spying!”

“Well, first of all, if they betray us, they truly aren’t Jedi,” the head consulate stated, “And second of all, the power of the Force is often too strong for the simple body of a being to contain. It tends to create a greed for power.”

“Boooop,” a buzzer on the consulate’s table buzzed, letting the members know that someone wanted to talk with them.

The head consulate sighed, and pressed a button nearby, “Yes?”

“We have the defector known as Amber,” the caller informed them, “Should we bring her in?”

“Yes, right away!” the consulate instructed them.

At the mention of Amber, Ember stiffened.

“Shhhhhht!” Jek whispered harshly into our ears, “Don’t act like anything unusual is happening!”

There was a long buzzer followed by the opening of a massive steel door. Emerging from under the door was Jake and Tay, leading a blind-folded and handcuffed Amber. They boarded a hover pod and flew over in front of the consulate – a mere ten yards from where Ember and I were standing.

“Well, well, well, I’ve heard a lot about you,” one of the consulate members addressed Amber,

“What do you have to say for yourself?”

“All I have to say is that I’m surprised by you lot,” Amber stated – her expression nothing short of a grimace.

“Why?” the head consulate asked.

“You say you’re all about morals and protecting the galaxy, and yet here you are going after me and killing my sister; and I don’t even know what happened to Leo!” Amber replied sharply.

“Were you not attacking our Jedi and did you not kill Bob?!” another member retorted.

“First of all, these guys, who used to be my friends, attacked us first. Second of all, I didn’t kill Bob, and third, that was *our* kyber crystal!”

“No, it’s ours,” the head consulate argued.

“It was ours first, you dummy,” Amber shouted at him – turning her head a bit too far to the right, since she couldn’t see.

“You’re calling *me* a dummy?!”

“I thought you Jedi don’t steal – that’s what I was taught anyway!”

“It’s not stealing if the enemies will use it for harm!”

"Really? Is that what you think? It's still stealing regardless, and I don't see what harm that crystal was doing by just sitting there."

"She's hopeless," a Jedi from the gathering called out, "She's been with the Sith for too long."

"I'M NOT A SITH," Amber called out, frustrated.

"Then why was your lightsaber red," Jake challenged.

"Because I work with the Sith, but that doesn't make me one," Amber reasoned.

"That's bologna!"

"Jake, Tay, can you please back me up?" Amber asked her captors.

"Ummm, no?" Jake replied.

Amber sighed.

"She obviously has no more manners than when she defected all those years ago," the head consulate stated, "Lock her up until we can come up with something to do with her."

"I warn you!" Amber said as Jake and Tay dragged her away, "There will be repercussions!"

"I'm sure," the head consulate member laughed; then addressed Ember and I, "You, Clones!" I had been so intrigued with the conversation, that I forgot that I was a clone and standing guard.

"Yes, sir?" Ember answered in a perfect clone voice.

"Accompany these two Jedi to ensure this young traitor doesn't escape!"

I couldn't believe the luck that we got!

"Affirmative," I answered, trailing after them.

Ember and I followed the group back into their hover pod and back outside the Jedi chamber. We then marched down a few hallways to an elevator that we took to the fourth floor. There, we strode down the main corridor until we reached a locked door with a keypad next to it. Tay typed a number into it and then led us all through. On the other side were a series of laser cells.

"Now!" Jek called to us, "Finish them!"

I turned my rifle to "full-stun" mode and pointed it at Tay, while removing my helmet with my other hand.

"This is for turning on your friends!" I angrily said to them. Tay gasped as I aimed my rifle and fired.

"ZHHHRRRack!" Tay was still so surprised at seeing me that he didn't even attempt to dodge and was caught by the taser pulse. Immediately, he sank to the floor unconscious.

Seeing his friend get taken out, Jake shoved Amber to the floor and pulled out his lightsaber – but he missed Ember's taser shot and quickly succumbed to its effects. He flopped onto the floor – his lightsaber harmlessly bouncing away.

"Guys!" Amber cried out excitedly, as I sliced through her handcuffs and Ember removed her blindfold, "You're both alive!"

"LEO!" Jek screamed into my ear, "What's your status?"

"We just picked up Amber," Ember said, "We'll be on our way down shortly."

"I got bad news," Jek informed us, "There's an entire ensemble of clone drop ships just now alighting outside the temple."

"Great," I groaned, "Are they after us?"

"Not sure," Jek said slowly, "But they're all heading for the main doors."

"Is there a back way out of here?" I asked Jek, "We're on the fourth floor!"

"I'm looking it up right now," Jek replied.

There was a brief pause on Jek's side of the conversation followed by an excited yell from someone near him, "Sir! They're searching all the nearby spacecraft!"

"Wonderful," Jek grumbled sarcastically, "Alright guys, you'll just have to take the stairwell that is located to the left on your floor; or possibly the elevator to the right, but I imagine that might be a bad idea."

"We came up that way," I said grimly, "and it's the most popular entrance, so we'll have to take our chance with the stairs."

Ember nodded her head and reached for the door, but it was promptly thrown open – slamming her against the wall. A squad of five clone troopers emerged from the hallway outside and aimed their laser rifles at Amber and I. Having just been passed her lightsaber, Amber quickly turned it on and jumped in front – ready to strike them down.

"Identify yourselves," the head squad leader demanded, noticing the color of Amber's lightsaber. I looked down at my body and saw that I was still wearing the outfit of a clone, and on the floor next to me was my helmet. The clone troopers would have to be stupid to not get a simple grasp as to what I was doing, so I snatched up my lightsabers and ignited them.

"You're Sith?!" one of the troopers exclaimed.

"No," Amber told them quickly, "We're just mercenaries."

"What are you doing in our suits?" the leader said suspiciously.

"Rescuing our friend," I informed him, "And you better not shoot your rifle, or you'll all be dead."

A groan from Tay interrupted our conversation, and he slowly sat up.

"Ughhh," he said, "What's going on..."

Before he could even finish, the head squad leader levelled his gun at Tay and shot him straight in the head. His men followed that up with assassinating Jake.

The very act of shooting his laser pistol set off an innate instinct in me, and I immediately struck the head commander down with a double slice. Amber was just about to follow this up with her own attack when the door slammed violently shut – smashing the rest of the troopers.

"They just killed Jake and Tay?!" Ember screamed as she caught sight of the dead bodies of our past friends, "They will *pay*!"

"Why in the world would they kill Jedi though?!" I exclaimed.

The troopers quickly recovered from being hit by the door, but Amber jumped on them and easily polished them off. Still hopelessly confused, I lunged out of the nearby door and raced into the hallway – coming to a quick halt as another few squads of clone troopers emerged from the stairwell about a hundred meters from my left.

"Jek! What's going on!" I yelled to him, as Ember and Amber jumped in front of me, prepared to fight.

There was a quick "bleep!" followed by Jek unmuting himself. Instantly, all of our ears were filled with the sound of warfare.

"A little busy!" Jek shouted over the noise, "These clones are literally killing everyone in sight!"

"They just killed Jake and Tay!" I announced.

"I know," Jek responded (*Take that you jerk!*), "They're killing *all* the Jedi!"

The troopers running down the hallway came to a quick stop about a dozen feet from us – their guns ready.

"Get out of there and don't come here," Jek told me, "Our ship is almost completely destroyed." Jek then muted himself again.

"Identify yourselves!" the new squad leader demanded.

"We're not Jedi?" I offered.

"Who are you? Sith?" the squad leader guessed.

"Not exactly, more like mercenaries," Ember growled, "Who happens to wield the Force."

The leader looked at us skeptically and said, "You know Darth Sidious or Vader?"

"Not personally," I stated, waving my lightsabers around, "But we have worked for them for the past few years."

The leader put his finger to his helmet and called up his general, "Vader? You know about a...a..."

"What are you guys' names?" the leader whispered to us.

"Leo," I told him.

"With Ember and Amber," Ember added.

"An Ember, Amber, and Leo?" the leader finished.

There was a brief silence then the leader said, "No, and they're carrying red lightsabers. Yes – well no, Amber's wearing a combat outfit, and the others are wearing clone armor. Yeah – I'm assuming-."

The leader was interrupted by the pounding of feet and yelling of troopers emanating from the stairwell. In a few seconds, a Jedi somersaulted through the doorway and plowed through the nearby clone troopers – slicing them in half from a myriad of angles. From behind me, more troopers ran into the corridor firing their blasters indiscriminately.

"QUIET!" roared the squad leader, indicating to his helmet where he was still talking to his general, "I'm trying to talk to Vader here!"

The clones quickly stopped firing and instead just surrounded the Jedi, who turned out to not be a Jedi. He was a young Besalisk with sea green skin and wielding two dual-bladed lightsabers – a blue one and a green one. The Padawan froze where he was and started slowly turning around – completely outnumbered.

"Yes, sorry, there's a young Besalisk taking out my troopers," the leader continued, pausing for a second to listen to the reply, "Yes, okay, I'll do that."

Finally, the leader turned to us and said, "Vader says he doesn't know you."

"That's because we're third-party contractors," Ember snarled, "If everyone knew about us, we wouldn't be very good mercenaries, now would we?"

The leader considered us briefly, then pointed at the Besalisk, "Vader says if you wanna prove who you are – then take out this kid here."

Amber and Ember didn't say anything at this. I knew they really didn't want to kill a kid – especially a Jedi Padawan.

"First of all," I told the leader, "I've never heard of any Darth Vader, and second, we're mercenaries – which means we only do stuff for *money*."

The leader nodded his head, "That's because he wasn't a Sith until like a few days ago. Darth Vader was formerly known as Anakin Skywalker."

At that, I gasped, "Seriously?!"

The leader laughed, "And he has something awful against the Jedi."

I grimaced, still unsure if I believed this story.

"And we'll pay you," the leader continued, "What about five hundred credits? That's a fair price for head hunting."

I knew it was a fair price, and I really didn't want to fight off an entire collection of clones. However, when I looked at the Padawan, I saw fear in his eyes. In the few seconds I had, I then noticed another emotion in his eyes – it was the pain of betrayal. I recognized *that* emotion. I had been overlooked and left for a boring career as a run-of-the-mill Republic lieutenant, and this kid, although having been chosen, was now about to pay the ultimate price for being aligned to an Order that I had wanted to be in for my entire life. Now, I realized that being a Jedi wasn't all that it was cracked up to be, and, now that I thought about it, being a backwards Jedi had placed me in the exact same spot. It was in that minute that I knew what I had to do.

"FFFFFZZZZzzzzhhhh," I back flipped over Ember and Amber and lashed outwards against the clones. Although perhaps still suspicious of me, the head clone leader did not see my attack coming, and he was instantly killed. With swift, sure motions I quickly brought down his troopers. Ember and Amber grasped what my "answer" was and followed behind – leaving no survivors on this side of the Besalisk, who then turned on those in between us and the stairwell. Another minute went by before we were able to take out the rest of the remaining clones, using a heavy amount of Form V.

"Who are you really?" he asked us, wiping sweat from his forehead. Although young, he was already as tall as Ember and Amber - as all Besalisks are very tall and the twins were fairly short.

"Just as we said," Amber stated, "We're mercenaries."

"But you said you worked for the Sith!"

"We *did*," I told him, "But I disown them if they're truly behind this weird switch of alliance among the clones."

"They are," the Besalisk informed me, "The Sith must have somehow turned them because now they're killing any and every Jedi in sight!"

I shook my head, "Even you Padawans?"

The young Besalisk hung his head, "As soon as I saw the pure hatred on Anakin's face as he and his clones burst into our chamber, I ran."

"So it's true?!" Ember exclaimed.

"It's true, and we're so dead."

"What's your name?" Ember wanted to know.

"I'm Ping," he told us, "Ping Krell."

I stiffened at the mention of the last name, "You mean like *Pong Krell*."

Ping hung his head in shame and whispered, "He was my father."

"Uh Leo," Amber said to me as she leaned out into the stairwell for the third time, "I think I can hear more clones coming up."

I quickly pressed my finger to my earpiece and spoke to Jek, "Jek, do you copy?"

There was some static, but no one answered. After trying a second and third time and getting no response, I grimaced.

"Jek's not answering," I told Amber.

"How many clones are down there?" Ember asked Ping.

"Hundreds," Ping grunted, "And *Anakin* is down there. We can't possibly fight him off."

"I guess we're taking the window," Ember announced, carving out the nearest window with her lightsaber.

"But it's like four stories down!" I exclaimed, "And I can't Force jump!"

"I can help with that!" Amber added, throwing me out the window.

I plummeted over the edge of the Jedi temple and bounced off the nearby roofing towards the ground below. Just before I hit the ground, I was slowed to a quick stop by Ember's Force grip and landed squarely on my two feet. Behind me, I heard the others jump after me.

Now on the outside of the temple, I saw the full carnage of what was going on. Clones were swarming everywhere – battling Jedi in every sort of capacity. A quick glance on where Jek had landed us confirmed that there was nothing left of our ship or the freight vessel in front.

"What's the plan for getting off the planet, genius?" I asked Amber as I performed the Barrier of Blades over and over again, "Since you seem so sure on what to do."

"I didn't really think that far ahead," Amber admitted as she used the Pushing Slash on nearby clones.

"There's a clone dropship over there," Ember informed me, "That a bunch of clones just left. It's probably empty now."

"I got to help my friends!" Ping yelled at us while utilizing a Shien Deflection on a nearby clone, "They need my help!"

"We can't help them," I grimaced, running for the drop ship, "We just need to get out of here and regroup."

Amber and Ember followed me, but when I arrived at the dropship that was idling on the landing platform, I realized that Ping hadn't followed.

"Look at us!" I yelled at Ping, "We're outnumbered twenty to one – we'll *all* die if we stay here!"

Ping, ignoring my warning, ran off back towards the temple.

I briefly wavered between leaving or chasing after him.

"We're already noticed," Ember warned me, ducking behind the open door of the dropship,

"Look at those clone troopers running for us!"

I nodded my head, "You know how to fly one of these?"

"I do," Amber said slowly, "But what are you-."

I didn't hear the last of what she said, because I leapt back out and ran after Ping – straight towards a certain doom.

This wasn't the first time that I had done something crazy like this. One time on Geonosis, I had had to penetrate a camp of clones to steal a valuable holocron. However, it had been more of a stealth mission – with a max of ten clones shooting at me at any one time. Now there were laser pulses literally flying everywhere, and I was in a completely wide open space.

Ahead of me, Ping was dispatching a good number of clones – swirling around his lightsabers with practiced skill. I could now see why he had been chosen for Padawan training. As we neared the front of the temple, I ran into an entire battalion of clones battling a dozen Jedi who had just arrived or maybe just left the temple. Sliding under the legs of a nearby clone, I slashed out my lightsabers to knock out the legs of any troopers nearby.

"Ping," I yelled at him when I reached him, "What are you thinking?! You're only going to kill us both."

Ping turned his back to me and shouted over his shoulder, "You didn't have to come. You're just a mercenary who only looks out for himself!"

"Not true," I snapped, "I look out for my friends! Why do you think I'm here?!"

As we talked, I noticed that just as fast as we dispatched one clone, three more arrived. Over to my left, I saw the group of Jedi having similar difficulty.

I had just deflected a series of laser pulses into a grouping of clones to my left when I heard a scream above me. I looked up just in time to see a Jedi jump into the air from on top of the Jedi Temple's overhang in order to avoid being annihilated by a squad of clones. However, the insane amount of laser shots proved to be too much, and he was promptly shot by a stray pulse. Jolting violently, his dead body flopped over the roof and plummeted to the ground. Behind him, his now unprotected Padawan (a female Togruta) was shoved off the overhanging after him by a large clone trooper. Unfortunately, this all happened next to Ping and I. The sight of a fellow Jedi dying in such a gruesome way right next to him scared Ping so badly that he stopped fighting for just a split second. Just as that happened, the Padawan plummeted on top of me. She managed to utilize a weak Force landing to cushion the fall, but her Force abilities were much less impressive than Ping's, and she smashed into me – flattening me onto the ground. The impact threw out my back and painfully scraped my face along the ground while the Padawan flew off and smashed into the Jedi temple.

It turns out that when you're directly in danger of being killed by treacherous clones; you tend to forget about severe physical pain. With surprising speed, I rolled around and forced my aching arms to respond. I performed the Barrier of Blades at the last possible second - just when Ping got hit in the arm and consequently dropped his blue lightsaber. The clones on the Jedi Temple roof quickly shot down on me as well while the clones around me continued their bombardment. Just when I thought all was lost, a clone drop-ship swooped in to my right, blocking half of the clones from shooting at me.

"Leo!" Ember shouted to me, "Get inside!"

"Get Ping!" I yelled back as blood started to stream down my face, "I need to get this Padawan!" While Ember simultaneously deflected the shots of clones and helped the injured Ping into the ship, I utilized Rising Whirlwind to thin out the clones to my left while making progress towards the downed, yet still alive Padawan. Just when I reached her, a massive explosion sounded behind me. Someone had launched a grenade charge. The thick smoke screen hid my whereabouts momentarily as I slapped one of my lightsabers back onto my belt and slung the Padawan onto my wrecked back – sprinting back to the dropship as fast as I could.

"GET THOSE FAKE SITH!" a clone leader bellowed, pointing at me as I swiftly approached the dropship. Lunging onto the ground of the ship, I slipped under the closing bay door just as Ember jammed the door completely down. A barrage of blasts ricocheted off the thick door a millisecond later.

"Can we help the other Jedi?" I yelled to Ember.

"I think we can try," Amber yelled from the cockpit, "But-."

She was cut off as another grenade charge sideswiped our ship and exploded on the temple, jerking the airship through the air. The sudden rocking of the ship threw me against the back of the ship and, weirdly enough, popped my back, back into place.

"VRRROOOOOOooooom!" the dropship's engines burned full-force, thrusting us out of the local warzone and into the air.

"Wait! I thought-," I trailed off. As our ship rocketed back into the air, I looked through the aft window, and saw a massive trail of smoke emanating from several places on the temple.

Worse, not one of the Jedi heroically defending the temple just a few moments before was left standing.

Chapter 4: Leo

I woke up from my pain-induced coma with the distinct feeling that someone was trying to suffocate me. It turned out that I was just wearing an extensive face bandage. It was pretty dark inside the dropship, and I was still fairly sleepy which was a bad combination. After stumbling around for a bit, I managed to find my way to the cramped storage compartment that was called the “on-ship-bathroom.” After carefully removing my facial bandage, I got a good look at my injuries in the smudged mirror. Unfortunately, it looked like a grenade had exploded on my face, but all the wounds had dried so at least I wasn’t dripping blood everywhere. My combat outfit had some scrapes in the belt and was rubbed thin in a few places on the arm, but other than that it looked okay. However, my back was *very* sore. I switched on my mini flashlight contained in my wristband technology and crept back into the cargo bay of the dropship. On the floor near the bathroom lay Ember – completely sprawled out and asleep. Near where I had been sleeping, I found Ping lying on a cot – his third arm completely bandaged up. Opposite him and lying on the only other cot was the Togruta Padawan sleeping on her face since the entire back of her head was bandaged; in addition to a few minor bandages on her arms and legs. Judging by the nasty burn marks on her clothing, I assumed that she and her deceased teacher had been through quite a bit. I continued on to the cockpit where I found Amber slumped in the pilot’s seat – her head resting on the control board. Being careful not to wake anyone, I unlocked the passengers’ door, and jumped out into the night air. I wasn’t sure where we were, but I was anxious to get some blood flowing through my body again.

Once outside, my ears quickly picked up on the sound of music – and my hungry body sniffed out some Colo Claw Fish. *Must be a bar and grill*, I thought to myself. Apparently, Amber had parked us in the parking lot of the bar, because all around our dropship were a myriad of other spaceships – mostly single or double seat vessels.

The outside of our dropship wasn’t in quite as bad condition as I had thought, but the red and white paint in several places had been either chipped off or just blackened.

I made my way to the bar and looked up at the large, neon sign that was screwed to the front of the old building. It read “Jong’s Club!” Shrugging my shoulders, I strode into the club. I had taken Ember on several dates to several glorified bars ever since joining Jek’s group, and this club was not that different from most. String lights were haphazardly strung across the wooden rafters, and ancient spotlights lit up a raised stage where some musicians were playing Quenk Jazz. Near the stage was a collection of old guys drinking and playing cards, with a few others hunkering down at booths and isolated tables scattered around the club.

“I’ll take a blue milk and a Colo Claw Fish,” I told the bartender, slapping down twenty credits, “I’ll be in the booths at the back.”

“Whoa!” the bartender said, catching sight of my injured face, “You look like you got involved in a serious tangle!”

“You should have seen the guy that lost,” I grunted.

The bartender was a fat Besalisk with an insane ability to multitask. As he talked with me, he had grabbed two cups and was simultaneously opening some taps to fill them.

“You’re not from around here,” he said, sliding a cup of blue milk across the counter to me.

"I drift around," I replied covertly.

"Hey, Jong! Pass my beer!" one of the old guys yelled over to the bartender.

Jong momentarily left the counter to deliver the drink; then came back before I could slink away.

"So you own this joint?" I asked him.

"Yeah, I'm Jong," he replied, "Been running this club for about twenty years now."

Nodding my head, I pointed to a vacant booth at the back of the club and said, "I'll be there when my dinner is ready."

"Dinner?" Jong chuckled, "Buddy, it's like four in the morning!"

Apparently, more time had passed than I had originally thought, but I ignored Jong and left to rest my tired body in the soft booth in the back.

"Did you hear?" the guy in the booth behind me was saying to his friend, "The Jedi Temple was attacked by the clones!"

"I heard," his partner acknowledged, "Apparently the Jedi had turned against the Republic."

"But that seems so crazy!" The first guy stated, "They've always protected the galaxy."

"There *has* been a rash of Jedi turning to the dark side though," the guy's partner argued.

The first man mumbled, "Well, as long as it doesn't affect my trade, I don't care who's in charge."

"You mean, as long as they don't bust your illegal firearms smuggling?"

"Oh shut it. You know I make a good deal of money at this. Why the other day I sold an automatic YR-99 for like four hundred credits!"

I had been planning on thinking about where I was going to lay low for a while, but the conversation in the other booth finally attracted my full attention.

I eased myself out of my comfortable position and turned to the guys behind me, "You said you work with weapons?"

Upon being interrupted in their conversation, both guys turned to me.

"Maybe?" the man closest to me said. He was an older, burly guy with a short crew cut and covered in tattoos.

His partner glared at me, "What's it to you?"

"I may need your services," I said to him, "What kinds of weapons do you work on?"

"Keep your voice low!" he snapped.

"Oh, shut it, Pgor," the burly guy said to him, "I'm always interested in potential customers."

"I'm Grunt," he continued, patting the seat next to him, "Let's have a talk."

After sliding in beside him and keeping my voice low I asked again, "Do you work with just guns, or perhaps with more...er...unconventional armaments?"

"I've worked on some other projects," Grunt whispered slowly, "What are you thinking of?"

"Have you ever messed with lightsabers?" I pressed.

At this, Pgor leaned across the table to study my face.

"Maybe," Pgor whispered, "You are interested in buying."

"Actually, I need some repair and custom work on some lightsabers I already got," I informed him, pulling one of my lightsabers off my belt.

"Holy Porg!" Pgor gasped, jumping back in fright, "You're a Jedi!"

"Shush," I whispered harshly, "I'm just a mercenary. Don't attract any undue attention!"

Grunt nodded his head and picked up my weapon, "I figured as much."

After studying it for a minute, he put it back on the table.

"It's a bit scuffed up, but nothing that requires any real repair," he told me, "What are you thinking?"

"Dual lightsabers are nice," I told him, "When trying to defend against multiple enemies, but hard to maneuver in close spaces."

"Ah," Grunt understood, "You need me to make them separable?"

"Exactly," I answered, "Can you do that?"

"CAN I DO THAT?!" Grunt guffawed loudly, "Can I best a Separatist battle droid? Of course I can!"

"Good then," I told him, "Where can I find you?"

"He works in the city of Varf in Lotho Minor," Pgor interrupted.

Grunt nodded his head, "When you come in just ask to see my selection of cupcakes."

As I reached for my lightsaber to go back to my booth, Pgor reached out and snatched it from my grasp. Quickly, he flipped the switch and it turned on. Two long, red blades extended in both directions – burning a hole through Grunt's glass cup.

"He's a Sith!" Pgor growled, "Look!"

Grunt turned to me quickly and looked me up and down again as I edged out of the booth.

"You're no Sith," he said, "I've seen Sith – and this guy ain't one of them."

"How come his saber is red?" Pgor challenged.

"I was given this by my boss," I informed Pgor, "And he practiced the dark side."

Grunt chuckled, "I made this saber. See this number here on the bottom? That's the number that I give all the lightsabers I make."

"You...made this?" I gasped quietly.

"Sure I did," Grunt continued, "This particular one I gave to a guy named Jek – who *was* a Sith clone I believe."

"How do you remember all that?" Pgor wanted to know.

"Because I've only sold like four lightsabers ever," Grunt stated, grabbing my lightsaber back from Pgor and handing it back to me, "I tend to remember people who order *these* types of weapons."

Pgor shook his head in disbelief.

"Look, guys," Grunt told Pgor and me, "It's been memorable, but I need to leave now. I gotta get back to my shop and finish my order of laser pistols before my client turns them on me. Break your legs!"

As Grunt got up to leave, Pgor glared at me again; then turned his attention back to his plate of Meiloorun Fruit.

I, in turn, sat back down and continued to think about what my next steps were.

However, I wasn't able to rest for long before my thoughts were interrupted by a young, male voice, "What're you doing here?"

I whipped around to see Ping talking to me.

"Mph – git!" I said, directing him to get into the booth with me, "What are you doing?!"

Ping leaned back and stared at me, "Following you."

I rolled my eyes, "Couldn't sleep?"

"I slept for like a while," he told me, "but you woke me up. What'd you order?"

"Eh, just some milk and a fish," I told him, "Wasn't planning on you showing up."

"You know this is my uncle's club, right?" Ping informed me.

"Wait, what?" I exclaimed.

"I'm sure you noticed he's a Besalisk," Ping stated, "He's my uncle."

"Good to know," I replied, leaning back.

"So, how did you come to be a mercenary yet so good with lightsabers?" Ping wanted to know,

"And where did you meet those twins?"

"You want to hear my story...now?" I asked.

"Yeah," Ping announced, "I feel like I should have heard about you before now – your skills are so legendary!"

I shook my head, "I was part of the young Republic training academy back when it was in the old building. I was the only Jedi Padawan-wannabe that didn't have any Force abilities."

"Why did they let you into the academy in the first place then?" Ping asked.

"Because the academy back then was for anyone who wanted a job in the Republic. While there, I showed so much promise in my lightsaber skills that they allowed me to try out for Padawan status anyway," I told Ping, "I had already partially mastered Forms III and IV by the time I came to the academy."

"Impressive," Ping declared.

"Let's just say, I still flunked and was sentenced to a life as a lieutenant in the Republic army," I continued, "And that's when Jek showed up."

"Whose Jek?" Ping wanted to know.

"A powerful, Force-enhanced clone," I told Ping, "His real name is Jek-10, and he was a legend for defecting from the clones and turning to the dark side. Anyway, he was getting old and wanted more people to join his mercenary group. All my training in future form masteries was through him."

Ping nodded his head, "And Ember and Amber?"

"Fellow flunked students," I finished.

"What's your plans for the future?" Ping continued.

"Not sure now," I told Ping, "The last few days have been...interesting? Previously, I just had to deal with your standard thugs and clone troopers, but recently I had to kill a Jedi I knew from school to protect Ember. I had thought that the Sith were just trying to improve the universe, but now I have the feeling their plans were a lot more sinister than I originally thought. I guess I'm just confused now."

"I know the feeling," Ping replied softly, "Same thing I dealt with ever since the death of my dad."

"So tell me about your dad," I prompted Ping, "Was he truly as bad of a traitor as everyone says?"

"In a way," Ping said, "He told me a few nights before he went to Umbra and was killed that he had seen the future of the Republic."

"And he told you that he was going to murder tons of clones?" I said.

"No, just that he was reconsidering options," Ping answered, "I guess he felt like embracing the new order was the wise option – but at the cost of becoming twisted himself."

"You think he became evil?"

"He endangered innocent clones," Ping sniffed, "What do you call that?"

I nodded my head gravely, "But he was right. The Republic has just fallen."

"The future happened regardless of Dad," Ping told me, "And everyone at the academy gave me a hard time because of Dad. These lightsabers are my only thing that I have to remember him by."

"They were his?!"

"Yep," Ping told me, "I just wish that I could make him proud."

As Ping was saying this, Jong thumped over to me with my meal.

"There ya go, Scars," he laughed heartily – but barely had he plopped my meal in front of me then he jerked back in surprise.

"Ping?!" he gasped.

"Jong," Ping said quietly.

The bartender quickly looked both ways to make sure that no one was watching than bent in close to us.

"What are you doing here, Ping?" Jong whispered harshly.

"Uh, well, you heard about the storm on the Jedi temple," Ping replied quietly, "So I kinda didn't want to die."

"But I heard that every, or at least almost every Jedi was killed," Jong said.

"I got saved by this guy," Ping told him, "But all my fellow Padawans were murdered."

Jong spat on the table, "Something's afoot here, and I don't like it."

"The Sith turned the clone troopers and Anakin to the dark side," I finally said, "A new order has arisen."

"Anakin?" Jong asked, "Him?"

"He's apparently 'Darth Vader' now," I answered.

Jong was about to say something in reply, but quickly stopped.

"Ping, you gotta get outta here," Jong told him, "Troopers came not more than an hour ago looking for escaped Jedi."

"No place is safe," I argued, "Better to be hidden among a lot of people than hiding by yourself."

"Who *are* you, Scars," Jong said, looking me in the face, "I still don't recognize you."

"I *was* a mercenary mostly working with the Sith before they attacked me," I told him, "Now, screw them."

"You *worked* for the Sith?!" Jong gasped too loudly, "Stay away from my nephew!"

"SSssh, Uncle," Ping told him, "Leo's cool. He risked his life to save me and his friends."

Jong glanced at me with narrowed eyes; then turned back to his nephew, "If you can, you really need to go visit your mom. She has been crying for hours over your supposed death."

Ping smacked his forehead, "Thanks for reminding me."

"You know where she lives I assume?" I asked Ping, with my mouth full of fish.

"Actually, she's here," Jong smiled, "I thought asking her to come over here and help with the food would keep her mind distracted, but all she's doing is making my food soggy."

"JONG!" a grumpy patron shouted over to him, "I'm *thirsty*. What's the hold up?!"

"Come," Jong waved to Ping, indicating for Ping to follow him.

Ping quickly got up to leave and motioned that he would be back shortly. I was nervous about letting the new, supposed Uncle go into the back of the pub with Ping, but I knew that Ping could handle himself. After slurping up the rest of my blue milk – much to the annoyance of Pgor in the booth behind me, I got up and walked back to the main counter where Jong was utilizing all four of his arms to serve the ever-thirsty and hungry patrons. Near the counter was an entire

shelf of maps and guides to several of the planets nearby. It was while I was studying the map of Endor that Ping and his mom came out of the back and up to me.

“Leo!” Ping said to me, “Meet my mom.”

Ping’s mom was also a native Besalisk but had a much darker green skin than Ping.

“Good to meet you,” I nodded, shaking one of her hands.

“Thank you so much,” she gushed, “for bringing Ping home in one piece. I thought training him to be a Jedi like his dad would keep him safe – but it just got him involved in more danger.”

I nodded my head, “I’m starting to learn that most jobs relating to warfare are dangerous. Who would guess?!”

Ping nodded his head rapidly, “Thanks again Leo, and I’m sorry for almost getting you killed man. I owe you my life.”

“Don’t sweat it, kid,” I told him, “Are you going to stay here?”

“I am,” he said confidently, “I won’t let anyone hurt my friends or family again!”

“You’re strong, Ping,” I told him, “And keep that desire to protect!”

Ping nodded his head, and I slapped him on the back, “Also, don’t kill yourself, okay?”

Jong thanked me again for my help; then I hurriedly left to go check on everyone else. When I entered the drop ship again, I found that everyone was still asleep. Wanting to search the ship’s logistics and check my galaxy mail, I quietly shook Amber awake so that she would get out of the pilot’s seat.

“Amber!” I said, patting her gently on the shoulder, “Can you move?”

Amber stirred momentarily and mumbled something but quickly fell asleep again.

After groaning, I grabbed her around the waist and physically moved her over to the co-pilot’s chair. Amber remained stubbornly asleep – apparently the past two days had worn her out.

“You have one new voice message,” the robotic voice of my galaxy account’s voicemail informed me, “Jek says, ‘Leo, if you’re hearing this, that’s probably bad news for me. You need to leave. I’m thinking that you should go to our base on Endor where you were stationed for the last year. Only two other people know about the base. The first was the Sith assistant who I heard was just recently killed on Geonosis. The second is the guy who contacted me. His name is Yugo, and I don’t know where he is. If you can get rid of him, then no one will know of the base and no one will ever come for you. Good luck.’”

That’s what I thought I heard anyway; it was rather hard to hear over the sound of yells and laser blasts as well as explosions. Afterwards, I worked on moving all my credits over to my anonymous bank account and closing any bank accounts that the Sith would have access to. I couldn’t risk anyone tracking me.

It was while I was surfing the latest news that Amber woke up. I had sat her down in the co-pilot’s chair rather awkwardly, so when she decided to roll over, she instead ran up against the arm-rest and her head flopped over the edge and knocked into the metal control-panel.

“Owe!” she cried, sitting up, “What the-?!”

“Sorry,” I told her, “But you were sitting in my chair!”

“Your chair,” Amber retorted, “It’s *mine*.”

I shrugged my shoulders, “You can have it back now if you want?”

“I will, thank you very much,” Amber said, getting up.

“But hey,” I continued, “Since you’re up now, would you mind flying us back to Endor?”

“Wait, why?”

"Because we need to go *somewhere*, and I'd rather spend my time in a place that is largely unknown to prying eyes!" I informed her.

"The Sith know about that base," Amber argued, "There the ones that had us stationed there for the last year!"

"According to Jek, there were actually only a select few that knew about it," I said, "Considering that it's a small base and that there was really only one purpose for it."

Amber sighed and started warming up the ship's engines, "Fine, you win."

"Good," I said smugly, "And doesn't it feel kinda nice to be making our own decisions now? You know, instead of Jek calling the shots?"

"I guess," Amber stated, "But I'm still lost as to the whole deal of Republic versus Jedi."

"I'm more or less sure that it's a result of the Sith finally taking over," I stated.

Amber carefully levitated our ship and gradually took to the sky – heading off the planet.

"By the way, why did you decide to stop on this planet?" I asked her.

"It was actually Ember's decision. She thought it would be a good place to lie low while also being only a short flight away from Coruscant," Amber informed me.

"And I didn't know you guys were so skilled in giving medical attention!" I commented, "That Togruta girl was really banged up!"

"Yeah, but at least her face didn't look like it was put into a blender!" Amber teased me, "Your face still looks pretty revolting."

"Well thank you for that," I groaned.

"Ember may even refuse to go on a date with you – since you look so bad," Amber continued.

"You're bringing this up now?"

"Well, now that I think about it though, Ember *insisted* that she be the one to bandage you up," Amber continued to tease.

"That's enough," I declared, "A guy can only take a certain amount of this every day."

"Well, you could go on a date with me instead!" Amber suggested.

"You?! I didn't even think you liked me!" I exclaimed.

"I don't all that much, but it *would* infuriate Ember," Amber laughed, "Can you imagine what she'd say if we went on a date one night?"

"I do *not* want to know," I stated.

"Okay, hold on," Amber interrupted, "We're going into hyperspace now."

Barely had I strapped on my seat belt, then Ember shoved the hyperdrive lever forwards – blasting us through space.

When we came to an abrupt halt outside Endor, I heard a yell from the back of the ship.

"Why in the WORLD did you guys put us into hyper drive with NO warning?!"

"Sorry!" I yelled back, "But we've got places to go."

There was some grumbling; then Ember strode into the cockpit.

"What are you guys doing here, *together*?" Ember asked us suspiciously.

Amber snickered but said nothing as we flew in towards the trees.

"We were talking about getting to our base," I told Ember, "Jek sent me a voicemail outlining that he thought this would be the best place to lie low."

"Annnndd, I asked Leo out," Amber added, her grin growing to an absurd size.

"Why you little -," Ember shouted, yanking Amber out of her seat and pinning her to the floor.

“GUYS!” I screamed as our ship shuttered violently and leaned dangerously to the right,
“Amber’s driving!”

“Not anymore, she ain’t!” Ember yelled as she and Amber scrambled around the floor – trying to hit each other.

I quickly leapt for the wheel just as our ship dove downwards. Yanking back on the joystick with all my might, I managed to get the ship to pull up, although it still clipped the tops of the trees. Unfortunately, one of the engines ran straight into a particularly bushy oak and choked. That in turn, put the spaceship into a nasty spin. The last thing I saw before we plummeted into the thick foliage below was our base just a mile ahead.

Chapter 5: Leo

"Do they normally fight like this?" Lhoka wanted to know as we stood outside the smoking wreckage of our spaceship and watched Ember and Amber battle it out with their lightsabers.

"Yeah," I said, "But they're evenly matched so they'll eventually wear each other out."

Lhoka sighed then said, "I just can't believe this happened! Why would those clones turn against us?! Why would Anakin turn?!"

"That's anyone's guess," I stated, "I don't know enough about the red-tape and confusing web of bureaucracy that is involved in the Republic and Separatists."

"Wait, did Ember just do a Hawk-Bat Swoop?!" Lhoka interrupted, completely changing topics again, "How did you guys get so good with lightsabers?"

"We literally just practice all the time," I told her, "So yeah, we've gotten fairly good. Anyway, let's go check out the base for any intruders."

With Lhoka following, we jogged away from the scene of our crash landing and over to the large field around our base.

"Hmmm," I said slowly, "The guard droids aren't here."

"There's a downed one there," Lhoka commented, pointing to some shrubbery to my left.

"What?!" I gasped, pulling away the shrubbery.

Sure enough, a full on super battle droid was lying perfectly still on the forest floor.

"That's weird. It doesn't appear to have seen any combat. It's in pristine shape!" I commented, running my hand over it.

"This isn't normal?" Lhoka asked me, "I've only fought a few battle droids in my entire life."

"No," I told her, "We always keep a bunch of fully-functioning droids in the forest to keep an eye on intruders. Let's keep going though."

A quarter of a mile later, we reached the field around the base, and we both quickly noticed the two large, clone drop ships resting in the grass.

"Ah," Lhoka said, "Those are our culprits."

I squinted my eyes, "Where did *they* come from?"

"Let's find out!" Lhoka said excitedly, sprinting off across the ground to the spaceships.

"Wait!" I whispered loudly, "Let's think about this first!"

"Oh, c'mon," she whispered back as we flattened ourselves against the back of the closest dropship, "There isn't much to even think about!"

"At least arm yourself!" I told her, handing her two blasters from my belt.

Lhoka counted to zero on her fingers; then led the charge into the ship. Unfortunately, it was empty – as well as the second.

"Oookkay," I said slowly, "That probably means they're already in the base."

We stealthily crept across the grass – keeping out of sight of the video cameras that I knew of.

If someone had truly infiltrated the base, they would probably be utilizing the video cameras.

The door still hadn't been fixed since George and his gang had sliced it open, so we just walked right through. Spaced periodically across the floor were more Separatist droids. Most of them were in perfect condition while the others showed only moderate signs of wear and tear.

"It's like someone pulled an 'off' switch on them," Lhoka commented.

"I wonder if their 'off' switch was pulled," I stated, keeping quiet, "As far as I know, Darth Sidious has the ability to shut them all down."

"But why would he shut them all down?" Lhoka argued, "He's used them for a long time!"

"Maybe because he's got an army of clones now," I finally realized, "And the droids are programmed to attack clones."

Lhoka thought about this as we checked out all the rooms on the first floor, but we didn't see anything.

"Do you feel anything through the force?" I asked Lhoka.

"Nothing unusual nearby, but I sense a general fear of dread and sadness," Lhoka said, "Many Jedi have been killed."

"Such needless slaughter," I said as we crept over to the stairwell.

Lhoka was just about to say something when she suddenly grabbed me by the arm and jerked me to a stop.

"Someone's up there!" she whispered fiercely.

"Who?"

"I dunno," she snapped, "I'm not *that* good with the Force yet!"

"Sorry," I defended myself, obviously having annoyed her.

With her pistols at the ready, Lhoka insisted on going first up the stairs and into the main second-floor corridor.

"This is the main living quarters," I whispered to her, "My room is the third from the left, with Ember's and Amber's being the fourth and fifth."

Lhoka nodded her head and slinked alongside the wall to the first room.

"THUD!" a box crashed to the floor in one of the rooms, and some excited voices and heavy feet were immediately audible.

"They're in my room," I scowled, noticing that the first two rooms still had their doors locked shut.

"Alright," Lhoka told me, taking the lead, "We'll rush your room on three. One...two...three."

Lhoka reached three before I could comment about her taking the lead, so we both sprinted down the corridor and into my room. We quickly found ourselves looking at a very surprised squad of clone troopers who were taking my room apart.

"Booom" "Bang!"

Lhoka shot down two clones right away, and I followed with a Twin Strike to the squad leader followed by a Spinning Attack on the other clones.

"Five down," Lhoka announced, flashing me a thumbs up, "Let's see who else is here."

"My room!" I whimpered, realizing what I had just done.

"Forget it," Lhoka said, ignoring the fact that my room now had numerous blast marks everywhere and most of the furniture was irreparably ruined.

Hearing the commotion, a bunch more clones emerged at the doorway, but Lhoka got the jump on them – literally. I polished off a third and fourth with a Saber Swarm; then advanced to Ember's room. However, before Lhoka or I could reach the doorway, two clones were launched through the doorway of her room and collided painfully with the wall – falling to the ground unconscious.

"You *stay* out of my room!" Ember shouted after them.

"Ember?" I gasped, "You were fast!"

"I don't like being left out of the fun," Ember informed me as she strode out of her room, swinging around her lightsaber.

"Well, well well," a loud voice boomed from down the aisle.

We quickly whirled around to see a tall, Separatist commander standing in the door of the stairwell – leveling his twin rifles at us, "Look what we found here!"

"Yugo?" I guessed.

"Good guess – you're right!" Yugo announced, "But it's time to make my es-."

"Thud."

Amber suddenly appeared behind him in the stairwell and smacked her lightsaber hilt onto his head – completely knocking him out.

"Hey!" I shouted, "I wanted to hear him finish!"

"Too bad," Amber chuckled, dragging his body out of the doorway, "I don't have time to listen to monologues anyway."

"Is this what you guys get to do everyday?" Lhoka asked me excitedly.

"Well, not every day, but quite frequently," I admitted.

"Cool!" Lhoka said, "Sign me up!"

"Wait," Ember told her, "You want to join our group? We're not Jedi."

"No, but you're also not Sith," Lhoka said, "Your red lightsabers are deceiving."

"I know," I stated, "Jek touched my lightsaber for too long – otherwise I dunno what color mine would be."

"It'd probably be white," Lhoka informed me, "Since you say you don't have any Force powers."

"But don't you have a family you want to go back to?" Amber asked Lhoka.

"No," Lhoka said, "My family was all killed in one of the many battles that have been waged on my planet."

"I'm so sorry!" I exclaimed.

"It's fine," Lhoka said, waving it off, "Ever since, I have vowed to participate in a higher order."

"We're hardly a higher order," Ember laughed.

"It's the best one I got," Lhoka said, "Plus, if there are any Jedi left out there. You guys seem like the best team to find them."

"Well, you'll probably find out sooner or later that we're not exactly the best mercenaries out there," I told her, "But for now, you can stay with us if you want."

"GREAT!" Lhoka exclaimed with excitement, "What do we do first?"

"Clean out my room," I grumbled, "This whole place needs to be redone if we want to establish it as our base."

"And we need to get our own spaceships," Amber added.

"And we need to weaponize our base more," Ember suggested.

"And I need a more epic outfit!" Lhoka added, looking down at her burnt, scraped, and bloodied clothes.

"Also," I informed the group, "I want to see if we can ransom Yugo!"

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"Knock, knock!" Ember said, lightly tapping on my door.

"Come in!" I told her, as I quickly surveyed my three monitors.

"What are you up to?" She asked me.

"Well, if you must know," I told her, "I bought a server indirection kit from a Mandalorian group and sent an email to Lieutenant Harph with a decently sized ransom for Yugo."

"Wow! Did you get a response yet?"

"I immediately got a nasty email; especially since it appears to them that the email originated from one of *their* servers!" I laughed, "I'm also searching various used spaceship markets for something that would suit our needs while also being affordable."

"We've saved up a decent amount of credits," Ember reminded me, "I can always lend some if you need."

"I think I'll be fine," I told her, "Although we'll need to start looking for jobs. By the way, thanks for cleaning out my room!"

"No problem," Ember laughed, "I just finished helping Amber as well."

"What did you do with all the droids?" I asked her.

"We piled them up in the main chamber," Ember informed me, "The clones I just piled inside one of the dropships."

"Good," I told her, "I still want to experiment with the droids. I feel like if I could get them back up and running, they could provide some valuable base security."

"Brrreeeepp!" My computer beeped, informing me that I had gotten another email.

"This should be good," Ember grinned, noticing that the sender was the Separatist Office.

After briefly scanning it, I got up from my computer and grabbed one of my cloaks out of my closet.

"Let's go then!" I told her, "I'll pick up Yugo from his holding cell, if you want to get Amber and Lhoka."

"Which dropship are we using?" Ember asked, as we left my room and walked down the hall to the stairs.

"Let's use that one full of dead clones," I told her, "We can further incriminate ourselves that way."

Ember laughed, "Okay then!"

After picking up a very annoyed Yugo from his holding cell and marching him back to the two clone ships, I boarded the nearest one and stepped over all the bodies to the front cockpit. Everyone else was already there.

"Amber already has the coordinates plotted for Lotho Minor," Ember informed me.

"Good, let's go then," I announced, pressing the button for the sides of the dropship to close.

As Amber took back off into space, I gave the group a run-down on what we were going to do.

"Okay, so, Amber, you're the fashion guru, so can you take Lhoka to some clothing stores and get her a new set?"

"HECK, YEAH!" Amber declared, "I am the *perfect* person for this."

"Really?" Lhoka exclaimed, "Thanks guys!"

"Ember and I will then turn in Yugo to the Separatist authorities and go searching for a spacecraft or two that we can use," I finished.

"Wait," Amber said, jumping us into hyper drive, "You're going with *Ember*."

"Yes," I stated, "It's always wise to have backup."

"I see what you're doing," Amber noted.

"Well, I can help Lhoka shop instead," Ember smirked.

"NO," Amber replied quickly, "You have no fashion sense."

Before Ember could argue back, I quickly added, "We'll meet at Modi's diner for some lunch; then I'm going to go with Lhoka to a friend of mine to get my lightsabers modified. Amber and Ember, I'm going to need you to shop around for some more jobs."

"A-okay," Amber replied, pulling us into the busy atmosphere of Lotho.

"Right on time," I said, looking at the time on my electronic wrist technology, "Let's pull in there."

Amber flew the ship into a busy spacecraft lot and turned off the ship.

"Let's go Lhoka!" We have a ton of shops to visit!

"I've only been here once," Lhoka said excitedly, "Let's go!"

"And we can visit the sketchy part of the city too for better deals and choices," Amber added, winking at me, "Now, I was thinking about an earthy feel to match the light green skin of yours, how about a little..."

I rolled my eyes.

As Amber and Lhoka left on the transport bus, Ember and I walked across the expansive lot to where a crowd of people were busy loading and unloading massive freighters.

"Here," I said to Ember, handing her a fabric mask, "Wear this."

Ten minutes later, a Separatist leader accompanied by a dozen clones shoved their way through the crowd and searched out my red flag that I was holding in the air.

"Von?" the leader said to me.

"That's me," I growled, "You looking for your cargo?"

"You know very well it's not *cargo*," the leader snapped, "I'm Muner."

"Transfer the money to my account; then I'll lead you to Yugo," I told him.

Muner grumbled, but pulled out his hologram device and showed me that he was wiring me the credits.

"Three thousand credits," I said out loud, ensuring the transaction finished, "Alright, let's go."

The pack of clones and Muner followed me as I led them through the busy space port and towards our clone drop ship. Ember followed from a distance to make sure they didn't try anything. As we approached the ship, I reached into my pocket and pulled out the electronic unlock device.

"Muner," I told him, "Yugo's in that dropship."

Without waiting for me to open the spaceship door, Muner pounced on the unlock device.

The door immediately flipped open - revealing the piles of dead clones and the gagged Yugo.

The yell of Muner's rage overpowered even the noisy forklift going by. I attempted to run off, but Muner pulled out a laser pistol on me.

"You'll pay for this Rebel scum!" he yelled, pulling the trigger.

Following his lead, the rest of Muner's clone squad followed suit, and I was forced to turn around and face the onslaught of laser pulses. Seeing this, Ember quickly came to my rescue by attacking the clones from behind. In a wave of brilliance, I maneuvered myself in front of the spaceship as Muner and the rest of his clones closed in on me. As soon as they were only a few feet away, I leapt onto the top of the spaceship and dove off the other side. The bombardment of gun shots continued as I disappeared among the rest of the spacecraft parked nearby but eventually grew noticeably quieter.

"You think he's a bit upset?" Ember whispered to me, coming up behind me as I caught my breath behind a nearby shipping crate.

"Almost assuredly," I snickered.

"Your plan worked," Ember commented, "They shot down Yugo when you jumped out of the way. Muner is so ticked."

I snickered some more, seeing as I had tricked him.

"C'mon, we can go now and do some spaceship shopping," I told Ember.

I had been to this city hundreds of times and knew it pretty well. It was the capital of shady and also above-board deals. You could get almost anything here.

"I'm thinking about trying the spacecraft plant on Pofgh street," I told Ember as we walked out of the spacecraft lot and removed our masks, "They had some good deals on epic ships on the Net."

Ember nodded her head, "But are we going for something with more speed and agility or something more heavily armed and larger?"

"Both," I smirked.

"Not every ship is like Jek's starfighter," Ember reminded me, "We were spoiled."

"I wonder where he kept that thing," I pondered.

"Yeah, it's really too bad he never told us where he kept all his money and stuff," Ember stated as we approached the spacecraft dealership, "Because now it'll only get lost with time."

"Assuming that no one else knows where it is," I added, opening the freshly polished door,

"Which I would say is unlikely."

"WELCOME TO MOSTLY NEW SPACE TRAVEL," a smartly dressed man addressed us, "What can I help you with today?"

"Well," Ember began, "We were thinking of-."

"We have new, used, new used, and used new spaceships," the salesman interrupted, "And we also have several small hovercraft for inner-planet travel."

"Well, I was actually thinking," I began.

"Excellent, well I have a little something that I think you'll like," the gentleman interrupted again, gently pushing us towards a large, blockier type vessel with massive wings, "This baby was just newly acquired by us and can hold up to twenty passengers!"

"I don't think we need that big of a spaceship," Ember noted.

"And it looks like it may go a bit too slow," I added.

"Well if *fast* is what you want, then I have that too!" the salesman continued, guiding us over to a sleek starfighter.

"Actually, that does look pretty sweet," I admitted, "And it has twin hyper drives."

"Not only that, but it has genuine leather seats to create maximum comfortability!" the salesman continued, trying to sell the craft to us.

However, as he gestured wildly at all the features of the spaceship, he briefly rested his arm on the hood of the craft. When he removed his arm, there was a large splotch of black paint on his white shirt and a very rusty spot of metal then showed on the star fighter.

"Um...", Ember told the salesman, pointing to his sleeve.

The salesman jumped nearly a foot when he saw the paint on his shirt and mumbled something about his shirt being new.

"Perhaps something else would interest us?" I offered.

"Of course, of course," the salesman said, trying to regain his composure, "Well...this way we have a practically brand new Galaxy rider."

"Hmmm," I mumbled, inspecting the outdated engine in the back.

"It *is* a rare version," the salesman informed me, "Would definitely get you a date or two if you came riding in on this one."

Ember growled at this remark, and I quickly told the salesman that I definitely didn't need any other dates.

"Let's go check out another lot," Ember announced, "I just don't see anything here."

I nodded my head and was just about to follow Ember out the door when the salesman jumped in my way.

"Wait!" he said hurriedly.

"What?" I replied.

The salesman quickly looked over his shoulder; then gestured for Ember and I to follow him. At the very end of the lot was a large garage where I assumed the used spaceships were repaired.

"In this garage," the salesman said quietly while punching a number into the keypad nearby, "Is a *very* special craft."

"Just like the other spaceships you showed us?" Ember said dryly.

"Better, if that's possible," the salesman continued, gesturing to a large spaceship sitting in the middle of the garage on jacks.

"What's so special about that?" I said.

"Watch," he told me, pulling a small device off the nearby table.

The back of the spaceship then lowered down, revealing a neat cargo hold which the salesman disappeared into.

"This ship has *three* hyper drives," Ember gasped, pointing to all the engines.

"Seems off," I murmured.

Suddenly, the top of the spaceship opened up and a massive laser cannon popped out, revolving in every direction.

"See?!" the salesman yelled out to us, "And it has side weapons too."

On cue, several small laser guns flipped out of the wings and body of the spaceship.

"Woah," Ember said while I carefully inspected the faded painting on the outside of the starcraft.

When the salesman left the pilot's seat, I accosted him, "This is a Mandalorian craft!"

"Well, uh, yes," the salesman stammered, "But it was acquired legally!"

"How?" I asked him, "And why all the secrecy?"

"Well, my boss didn't want this publicly displayed because it's sort of valuable, but you seem like someone that could use a beast like this," the salesman replied.

"How much are you asking?" I pressed.

"Twenty five hundred credits," the salesman informed me.

Ember gagged.

"Five thousand," I bartered.

"Are you crazy?!" the salesman exclaimed, "It's worth at least twenty two thousand!"

"I can part with ten thousand but no more," I continued.

"Well, I do like you," the salesman insisted, "But I just can't sell it for anything less than sixteen thousand."

"Thirteen thousand is my last offer," I told him, "Take it or leave it."

"Fifteen thousand," the salesman bargained again.

"Done," I told him, "But I need to try it out first. Plus, it'll take me some time to learn how to fly it."

"I'll let you borrow it for ten minutes," the salesman told me, handing me the techno key, "But no longer!"

"Be right back!" I declared, running into the back of the spaceship and plopping down into the pilot's seat.

"Hey!" Ember said to me, "How come you get to drive it?"

"Because you're the co-pilot," I told her.

"But I have to sit behind you then," Ember whined.

"Sorry, not sorry," I laughed, flipping the engines on, "Where's the controls to hover this thing?"

"This looks like a modified control board for a Republic cruiser 1B," Ember noted, "So maybe it's to your left there with all those red buttons."

"Hey," I exclaimed, after trying the buttons and carefully moving the craft out of the hangar,

"You're right! I bet this ship was custom made – I thought I recognized the paint patterns!"

"It's a combination of...Woah! Easy there!" Ember said, "Of different spacecraft."

"The controls are very sensitive," I informed Ember, gently pulling back up on the main stick to rise above the busy freeway of spaceships directly over the city.

"Are you going to try the hyperdrive?" Ember asked me as we blasted up into space.

"You bet," I said, "Just another few seconds."

When I reached a high enough altitude, I set the ship's destination coordinates for Hoth and jammed forward the hyper drive lever.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAaaah!"

In the ten seconds we were hyper jumping, I couldn't decide whether the engines were louder or Ember's scream.

"The hyper drives need to be oiled," I noted when we arrived over Hoth, "But otherwise they seemed to hold up fine."

"That...was...the fastest space jump ever," Ember gasped, "I had nearly a dozen heart attacks!"

"Let's take this back and finish signing over this bad boy," I said, "This will certainly cut down on our travel times!"

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"Have you noticed that Amber has been a bit off lately?" Ember asked me as we ate a small lunch at my favorite restaurant an hour later.

"No, and you have?" I replied.

"Yeah, she's been a lot more angry and annoyed," Ember said, "And I think I know why."

"Why?" I replied absent mindedly – as I watched the news on the nearby holographic projector.

"Well, you know she liked Tay a long time ago?" Ember said.

"Yeah."

"Well, he just got killed as we saw," Ember continued, "And I think that really upset her."

"That was very cruel," I admitted, "And mean and just...just disturbing."

"I think she hoped that in the future she'd meet back up and hit it off with him," Ember informed me.

I shrugged my shoulders, "I don't know about that. Jedi can't have *relationships*. Plus, we don't have exactly the best reputation among the Jedi – and they did try to actively kill us at our base."

Ember nodded her head, "I didn't say it made sense. It's just a theory."

"Relationships are tricky and busy," I said.

Ember chewed thoughtfully on her sandwich, "I wish we could find her a boyfriend."

"Psssh, I'm not doing that," I laughed, "That's a *bad* idea. She'll find one if she wants one."

"I guess," Ember mumbled.

At that point, the opening and closing of the restaurant's front door caused me to turn around and see Amber and Lhoka walk in – having apparently just finished their shopping.

"Whoaaa," I exclaimed, "Who's this hot chick, here?"

Ember glared at me, "She's fifteen!"

"Well, you still take first place in the cute category," I quickly added.

Amber breathed a sigh of relief, "I'm glad you like it – we spent like two hours shopping; and we asked like a ton of random strangers if it looked right."

"I'm rather partial to it myself," Lhoka told us, "We even got a utility belt, so I can fit my laser pistols and a few other stuff on it. It's also very breathable and comfortable."

"It does look pretty good on you," Ember admitted.

"Now that I'm dressed to impress," Lhoka announced, "Let's go visit your friend's shop now. It'll be dark in another two hours, and we don't want to be out on the streets when that happens. This city is sketchy as is."

"You're right," I replied, polishing off my late lunch and standing up. I then turned to Ember and Amber, "Where are you guys going?"

"I think we'll just hang around here for a bit," Ember said, "We might find someone needing something."

I nodded my head, "I'll call you guys on your wrist communicators when I'm done."

Lhoka and I high-fived Ember and Amber; then left to go to Grunt's weapon repair shop.

Luckily, it wasn't all that far away; only about three blocks.

"This...is it?" Lhoka asked, underwhelmed.

"That's what I think Grunt said," I replied, a bit unsure, "But this place looks like it's been here since the beginning of time!"

"I can't even read the sign anymore," Lhoka stated, pointing to the remnants of a fluorescent sign that had long since fallen into disrepair.

"But the door is new," I noted, wrenching on the heavy, iron handle and shoving the door open. Lhoka followed me into Grunt's shop and gasped, "Oh my?!"

"Look at all this stuff!" I exclaimed, gazing at the hundreds of weapons lining the walls, ceiling, and floor.

"I've never seen so many weapons all in one place!"

"This one is a genuine VH-192!" Lhoka breathed in delight, gently touching it with reverence,

"This gun can snipe a target from a half mile away!"

"And this is a portable laser *cannon*," I whispered, "Just look at it!"

"That's right!" Grunt said, leaving the counter to talk to us, "I found it after a violent street fight just a few blocks away from here!"

"Oh," I grimaced, quickly backing up.

"Good to see you again," Grunt said, extending his hand, "What's your name again?"

"Leo," I told him, "And this is Lhoka."

"Swell to meet you," Grunt said, "You said you wanted your lightsabers fixed?"

"Yeah," I said, pulling them out, "I want to be able to just ignite one end."

"Ah, an easy fix," Grunt said, "I'll only need to adjust the intensity and modify your switch a bit. Come over here to the counter."

Grunt jumped behind the counter while I placed my lightsabers in front of him. After carefully inspecting them, Grunt said, "Yeah, this shouldn't be too hard. However, you'll need to pay *before* I start working on them. I've had too many people try to rip me off."

"Understandable," I laughed, handing him my credit account's card.

Grunt completed the transaction; then took the lightsabers into the workspace in a back room.

"Move it, kid," a burly alien demanded, shoving me over to the left.

"Hey!" I exclaimed, "Wait your turn!"

"You already finished your stuff," he sneered, "Now move over."

Disgruntled, I backed out and joined Lhoka who was studying a case full of valuable weapons.

"That's a special lightsaber!" Lhoka told me, pointing to a handle with a disc-shaped rim, "I think it automatically turns around – creating a spinning blade!"

"Cool! I said, but wouldn't that create a weak point-," I began, interrupted by some angry yelling from my right.

"YOU SAID IT WAS ONLY GOING TO BE FIVE HUNDRED CREDITS, Grunt!" the burly man was shouting.

"No, I said it would be five hundred per box!" Grunt replied, indicating the two boxes of ammunition that the burly guy had set on the counter.

"You're cheating me!"

"No, you're cheating *me*!" Grunt exclaimed, "Either you pay, or you leave!"

In a fit of rage, the burly guy whipped a laser pistol out from underneath his cloak and levelled it at Grunt. However, at the last minute, his gun jerked upwards – which caused the laser pulse to harmlessly bounce off the ceiling instead of hitting its mark.

"Hey!" the burly guy screamed, turning around to see Lhoka quickly put her hands behind her back.

"Leave Grunt alone," I told the guy, "Or I'll return the favor."

"What favor?"

"This favor," I insisted, pulling out my own laser pistol while Lhoka pulled out hers.

When Grunt pulled out a rifle too, the man saw that he was totally beaten, so he grumbled and slapped down a sack of credits – making a hasty exit.

"Did he pay the right amount?" I asked Grunt.

"Yeah," Grunt replied, counting the coins, "Comes out right anyway."

"This happen often?" I asked.

"Yeah, but normally I'm quicker to defend myself," Grunt admitted, "I didn't see his pistol. Hey, which one of you used the Force on him?"

"Wasn't I!" I said, "I don't have that ability."

Grunt turned to Lhoka who promptly blushed.

"It was me," she said quietly.

"Hmph," Grunt said, "I need your help. You wanna help me work on something? I'll pay you handsomely."

"What is it?" I asked, suspicious.

"I'll show you," Grunt said, opening the door to his back room and letting us in.

Inside his back room, Grunt had even more weapons, but these were all in various stages of disrepair.

"See this?" Grunt showed Lhoka, "I think it's a lightsaber."

Grunt held what appeared to be the hilt of a lightsaber, except that it was shaped much differently from lightsabers that I had seen – regardless of the fact that the side of it had been removed, revealing its guts.

"What exactly do you need me to do?" Lhoka prodded.

"Well, I believe a kyber crystal goes right in here," Grunt continued, pointing to an empty space farther up the inside of the hilt, "But the problem is that as soon as it touches those two leads, it'll automatically create a loop of power that will destroy any of my special instruments, so I need someone who can do it without actually touching the crystal."

"Sounds easy enough," Lhoka said.

"Sweet, I'll pay you two hundred credits," Grunt bargained, reaching his hand in his pockets and placing a small kyber crystal in Lhoka's hands, "And I'll just be on the other side of the room working on Leo's lightsabers."

Grunt quickly raced to the other side of the room where he wouldn't get injured should something go wrong. I rolled my eyes at the obvious lack of courage.

"I've got this," Lhoka insisted, carefully levitating the crystal, "Just as long as I don't touch the conductive sides of this hilt."

I watched closely as she painstakingly maneuvered the crystal into the hilt and levitated it up the hilt and into a glass tube. A centimeter from the leads, she paused and carefully repositioned the crystal.

"I'm sweating," I told her, "And I'm not even doing this."

"Tell me about it," Lhoka breathed.

Very, very carefully Lhoka pushed the crystal into the leads; then leapt back. Instantly the hilt started vibrating violently as energy circulated around the inside of the hilt.

"Um, Grunt!" I yelled over to him, "Is there supposed to be energy arcing out of the hilt?"

"STICK THE COVER ON!" Grunt screamed from across the room.

Frantically, I searched the nearby piles of stuff on the desk for the siding of the hilt.

"I found it!" Lhoka told me, snatching up a small piece of metal and using the Force to snap it into place. As soon as the siding was put back on, Grunt ran over.

"Oh wow!" He exclaimed, "You actually did it and didn't kill yourself! I'm impressed!"

Grunt tossed Lhoka a few credits; then carefully soldered the hilt completely shut.

"Alright," Grunt said, "Now, I just need to figure out how to activate this."

"You don't know how to activate it?!" I exclaimed.

"No," Grunt laughed, "I've only worked with a select few lightsabers over my life, and this one is very different. Plus, most of the ones I get, I buy via underground markets; and they come in almost working condition. I just modified the outsides of the hilt."

After pressing on all sides of the hilt, Grunt gave up and went back to carefully adjusting my lightsabers.

"*These* Lightsabers don't have that tricky energy loop," Grunt told me, "So I can manually touch everything."

"You wanna try to turn this thing on?" I asked Lhoka, handing her the hilt of the special lightsaber, "I want to watch Grunt work on my lightsabers."

Lhoka, very much intrigued by the unusual nature of the hilt, carefully held it up towards the ceiling lights and inspected it.

"Well, Grunt informed me, 'I'm adding a few features to your lightsaber switch. Now, when you switch it to the left, the left blade turns on. When you switch it to the right, the right blade turns on, and when you just push it, both turn on.'"

Grunt showed me his handiwork by pressing the switch, "And, I added some rubber on the hilt for maximum grip."

"Alright! This is going to be entirely more helpful!" I announced, "Especially when fighting in close quarters."

Grunt finished welding my hilt back together; then said, "I was expecting this to take longer, but it came back to me how I had originally put this thing together. Anyway, if you want to-."

"PSSShhh!"

The distinctive noise of a lightsaber lighting up interrupted Grunt mid sentence, and we both instinctively turned around to see Lhoka holding a purple lightsaber.

"HOLY CATALONI!" Grunt shouted, "How did you do that?!"

"It's PURPLE!" I cried out, "You created a PURPLE lightsaber!"

"Gimme that!" Grunt insisted, racing across the room and snatching it out of her hands, "How did you turn it on?"

Grunt furious shook and twisted the hilt, but, of course, nothing happened.

"There's no switch on it!" Grunt continued, interrupting Lhoka before she could even start.

Lhoka quickly backed away from Grunt as he turned the lightsaber over in his hand to check the bottom of the hilt. In doing so, however, he neatly chopped a nearby lamp in half. Surprised, he then proceeded to jump out of the way (jerking the lightsaber in the process) as the broken glass exploded off the ground. No sooner had this happened then the kyber crystal energy exploded out of the hilt and looped around a nearby laser cannon - neatly slicing it apart.

Grunt yelped when this happened and dropped the lightsaber like it was made of lava.

"Gods help me!" he cried, jumping backwards, slipping, and promptly landing on all the broken glass.

Using her Force ability, Lhoka drew the lightsaber to her hand and switched it off.

"My HAND!" Grunt howled, quickly crawling away from the glass and rushing for the bathroom as a thin trail of blood drops followed behind.

Having been well out of reach of the commotion the entire time, I burst into laughter, although I simultaneously tried to stifle it in case Grunt was listening.

"It's not just a lightsaber," Lhoka said, coming up beside me, "It's a lightwhip!"

"I know!" I exclaimed, still laughing, "The long rope of kyber energy kind of gave that away!"

"This is legit the coolest weapon ever," Lhoka stated, "You can use it as a lightsaber, but if you jerk it like that...then it becomes a whip!"

Lhoka slashed the lightwhip through the air, creating an imposing "crack!"

"Maybe you can offer to buy it from him," I suggested.

Lhoka shook her head, "I'm not exactly rich..."

"Well, I can at least ask," I said, waiting for Grunt to come back.

However, he never did.

"Well this is just awkward," I said after a while, "When is he coming back?"

Lhoka shrugged her shoulders, "Judging by all the glass he got stuck in his hand, he'll be picking it out for a while."

I picked up my lightsabers, "Well maybe I'll check up on him?"

With me leading, Lhoka and I headed for the door to the front counter, and I opened it, intending to go see if Grunt had recovered. Instead, I found myself standing right in front of the barrel of a rifle.

"Put your lightsabers down and your hands up!" Pgor sneered.

"What is this?!" I cried out, "What's with the gun?"

"This is a hold up!" Grunt stated from my right, holding a pistol in both hands, "Put your weapons down and hand me your credit account card."

"You're *robbing* us?!" Lhoka exploded, "But we paid you!"

"Sure," Grunt smirked, "But I make my living on more than just payments."

"And we saved you from that last customer," I growled, dropping my lightsabers on the floor.

"Your loss," Pgor sneered again.

"NOW HAND YOUR CARD OVER," Grunt screamed.

Pgor and Grunt made their living off working with weapons, so I found it unlikely that I'd be able to escape, simply by dodging their shots. With no other solution, I slowly pulled out my card and handed it to Grunt.

"ZZzzaap!"

Immediately, Pgor turned his rifle into stun mode and knocked out Lhoka.

"What was that for?!" I screamed.

"Just to make sure you don't try anything stupid," Grunt laughed, swiping my card on his machine repeatedly, "You wouldn't want her getting hurt would you?"

"Ohohohoho," I growled, "You *will* pay for this!"

"No," Grunt said simply, "I'll get away with this. Like I have for the dozen other suckers."

I glared at both of them, but didn't move as Pgor had his rifle aimed at the unconscious Lhoka and Grunt was pointing his pistol at me, while still swiping my life savings away on his account.

"Pgor! I just remembered I got another credit account card!" I told him, reaching my hand into my right pocket.

"Gooood," Pgor gloated

Using my hand to shield the nonexistent card, I pretended to hand it over to Pgor who reached out for it. As our hands connected, I jerked him towards me and slammed him to the ground; his gun flipping through the air. Grunt immediately shot at me, but I dodged and swooped up my lightsabers that were still on the ground.

"Pgneer! Pgneer! Pgneer! Pgneer! Pgneer! Pgneer!"

Grunt sniped at me with perfect precision, but I carefully deflected every shot directing them towards a large crate of ammunition just behind Grunt who was so focused on getting his shots past my whirling blades that he never realized what I was doing.

"KABOOOOMMMM!"

The crate of ammunition exploded - throwing Grunt through the air and slamming him into the metal door of his backroom. Despite the intense blast, I managed to steady myself by gripping onto the counter.

"Ungh," Lhoka moaned, sitting up - the concussion of the explosion having awoken her.

"Time to run!" I called out, turning off my lightsabers, and slapping them onto my belt.

With a mighty leap, I cleared the counter and ran over to the damaged card machine, snatching it up.

"Hey! Pgor roared as he ran after me, "You can't have that!"

After clocking him in the head with the device, I sprinted for the remains of the outside door and fled into the evening light with Lhoka trailing behind. At the last minute, Grunt summoned his strength and made a flying leap to tackle Lhoka, but she whipped around and slashed at the door with...the lightwhip. Grunt was instantly buried in a pile of wood and metal as the doorway arch collapsed onto him.

"Hey!" I called to Lhoka as she hurried up to me, "That's not yours!"

"No," Lhoka admitted, "But I think it's fair reparations for them having stunned me."

"True," I added, "Plus, this card machine will be instrumental in me getting my money back."

"Should've known he was sketchy," Lhoka grimaced.

"Eh, that kind of thing happens a lot around here," I admitted, "But I've learned how to get myself out of these types of scrapes."

"This has happened multiple times in this city?" Lhoka gasped.

"Bahahaha, yeah," I laughed as we ran along, "One time I was picking up a flame bomb that I needed for one of Jek's missions, and the fellow customers all turned on me in a coordinated effort. They must've been members of some sort of gang. Anyway, I just ignited the bomb and threw it at the closest guy. In seconds, everyone was fleeing for their lives instead of attacking me."

Lhoka shook her head in amazement, "Now where are we meeting up with the twins again?"

"Just over there," I pointed out, "Next to that droid shop."

Lhoka quickly scoped out the area, "I feel nervous, now that I have this lightsaber."

"Eh, you'll get used to it," I told her, "Oftentimes people will leave you alone more often than not if they see you're carrying one."

"I have only seen a few hologram images of these lightwhips," Lhoka said, changing the subject again, "I'm going to learn how to effectively wield this!"

"Speaking of lightsabers," I said, "There's Ember and Amber, but they're escorting some guy..."

Chapter 6: Leo

"This is the last panel!" I yelled down to Ember.

"Sweet! Now don't forget to spread a generous amount of anti-fire solution on top there!" Ember yelled back up.

It was several months after what became known as Order 66 – the great Jedi purge. While keeping out of the way of the new Empire led by the evil Darth Sidious; Ember, Amber, Lhoka, and I had been busy fortifying our new base including resurrecting the numerous droids that had been decommissioned by the empire. After purchasing some special hardware from the underground market, I was able to access their software. What I found was glorified spaghetti code. Using my background in software development, thanks to my deceased uncle and aunt, I was able to enhance their processors and therefore better utilize the droids' abilities - making them smarter and more agile as well as loyal to protecting the base and us.

"That's the last of it!" I said, dumping the remnants of the container of anti-fire fluid onto the tiles.

"Good," Ember shouted as I shimmied down the ladder to the ground, "We have to meet with another one of our clients in an hour on Vorteph."

I sighed, "What's this about?"

"I dunno," Ember shrugged, "He wouldn't say when I met him."

"Hopefully he's not like that guy that we escorted back when Lhoka picked up her lightsaber," I said, "He was a headcase."

"I'll go check on Lhoka and Amber; then go pick up my things," I told Ember, "How many of us should go?"

"I think we'll only need you and I," Ember told me as we walked back into the base, "It sounded more like a stealth mission thing."

While Ember left to go upstairs and change out of her paint-splattered clothes, I made a quick stop by the main kyber dome (as we now called it) to see how Lhoka's training was coming along. Amber and Ember, having Force abilities, had taken personal responsibility to hone Lhoka's skills – drawing from their experience in the training academy and Jek's tutelage. I was by far the better lightsaber duelist, but my inability to utilize the Force made Amber and Ember more effective teachers.

When I entered the chamber, I immediately caught sight of Amber and Lhoka battling it out.

"Nice Makashi Riposte!" I encouraged Lhoka.

Lhoka quickly caught a double slash by Amber but was unable to catch a quick jab and had to dodge.

"Be more aggressive!" I shouted again, "Make Amber work for it!"

Amber laughed as Lhoka slid out of the way of Amber's Saber Swarm; then changed her lightsaber into a lightwhip and slashed outwards. Caught off guard, Amber had to dodge and spin her lightsaber around to defend against the unpredictable attack points of the lightwhip. Flashing her dual-bladed lightsaber around, Amber then quickly advanced upon Lhoka – using the lightwhip's weakness of close combat. At the last second, Lhoka struck her lightwhip right around the hilt of Amber's lightsaber and then transferred her lightwhip back into a lightsaber – swiftly performing a modified version of the Disarming Slash.

"FwoooooOOSSHH!"

Amber's lightsaber was ripped from her hands and flung through the air.

Lhoka pumped her left fist and went in for the fake kill, but Amber smirked and launched Lhoka right through the air. The intense Force blast sent Lhoka spinning through the air – right towards me

"I've gotcha," I chuckled, grabbing her before she slammed into the heavy, metal door behind me, "Next time hold onto your lightsaber!"

"Why?" Lhoka asked, standing up and dusting off her sleeve, "When I can just Force grab it." Lhoka's purple lightsaber, which had previously been lying on the ground, suddenly zoomed towards Lhoka's hand.

"FwwwooOOP!"

Unfortunately, Amber was already on it, and the lightsaber was quickly pulled to Amber's waiting hands.

"Awe man," Lhoka groaned, "That's not fair! My Force abilities aren't as good as yours yet!"

"Then keep hold of your lightsaber," I suggested.

Lhoka glared at me.

"Anyway, Ember and I are going on another stealth mission for a client, so keep an eye on the base here, will ya?" I asked Amber and Lhoka.

"Sure," Amber answered, tossing Lhoka her lightsaber, "But can you please stop making this droid follow me?"

Amber pointed to her heavy droid bodyguard.

"But it's good to have a bodyguard!" I argued.

"Sure, but this is just creepy," Amber said, "Lhoka is ten times the better body guard."

"But I won't always be next to you," Lhoka said, "For *obvious* reasons."

"HEY!" Amber said, "I don't smell!...Do I?"

"Not as good as Ember," I laughed.

"Speaking of bodyguards," Amber teased me back.

"Girlfriend – bodyguard – same thing," Lhoka added.

I waved them off, "Say what you want, but we'll be back in a few hours."

While Lhoka and Amber went outside to use the hover bikes, I quickly ran upstairs to change into more formal combat gear and hooded robe.

"I'll need these too," I said to myself, swiping a few laser pistols off my desk.

"Stop talking to yourself and get going!" Ember yelled through my door as she ran by.

"Says the person that took this long to get ready!" I retorted, racing after her.

"Well at least I look presentable!" Ember teased me.

"Hey! This is my standard outfit," I said, "My rough hewn robe is supposed to keep attention away from me. Your outfit looks like it was designed to *attract* attention."

"Hopefully only yours!" Ember laughed as she leapt into the cockpit of our spaceship, "And I'm flying!"

"Don't kill us," I mumbled, climbing into the co-pilot's seat.

"I'm pretending I didn't hear that," Ember stated as she maneuvered the spacecraft around and gently flew out of the spacecraft bay.

After a minute of intense hyperdrive, we reached Vorteph and landed at a massive living complex/shopping center where Ember said we were supposed to meet our client.

"That's him," Ember noted, pointing to a hooded figure bent over a large glass of water, "He's even in the same place that the picture here shows."

After confirming this via Ember's holophone, I stepped forward.

"Ecam," I addressed him, "You need some assistance acquiring something?"

The hooded figure didn't even look up, but extended his hand to shake mine.

"Yeah, I need to borrow a holocron from someone," he told me in a deep voice, "How do you feel about breaking and entering?"

"Not a huge fan," I admitted, "But I've done it plenty of times."

"What are your names?"

"I'm Leonard," I told him, "And you've already talked with Ember."

"So," the man said, leaning closer to Ember and I who sat across from him at the table, "You have Force powers."

"Just me," Embers said, "But that's why I applied for your job - you said the job required Force abilities."

The man, still with his head bent to his glass, turned to me and asked, "You have experience fighting people that can use the Force?"

"A few Jedi," Ember admitted quietly, "What exactly are we up against here?"

"Jedi?!" the hooded stranger exclaimed a little too loudly, "Seriously?"

"Well, that's not exactly something I like to talk about," I whispered, "But I do what I have to do to complete missions. Except, in the particular instance that I'm thinking of, we didn't win the fight."

"Oh," the stranger said, "How many were there?"

"There were four against three of us," I replied, "Ember, her sister, and I."

"Hmmm," the mysterious man said slowly, "Well, okay, here's what you'll be doing. You see this large living complex?"

The man pulled a small tablet out of his robe and placed it on the table. On the tablet was an aerial view of a large living complex with several massive suites – each with its own hangar.

"Yeah," Ember said.

"I need you to break in here," the stranger said, pointing a finger at one of the complexes, "And acquire a holocron that the owner has. I don't know where in the suite it is, but I'm fairly sure that it's there."

"And will the suite owner be there?" Ember asked.

"Not sure, but probably," the stranger replied.

"Then that'll raise the price significantly," I stated.

"I don't care the price, just get it done," the stranger growled.

"Fine, fine," I said, holding my hands up in the air, "But there's only one guy in there, and he's not a Jedi?"

"No, he's not a Jedi but does wield the Force," the stranger informed us, "So be careful."

"Consider it done," I said standing up, "How hard could this be?"

"Very," Ember whispered to me as we walked back to our spaceship, "This makes me nervous."

"Why?" I asked her, "We literally just took out three Mandalorians in our last mission."

"I know," Ember said, "But Mandalorians don't have Force abilities."

"Sure," I admitted.

"And what makes me even more suspicious is that that stranger has Force powers himself!" Ember told me as we jumped into our spaceship and headed back up into space.

"What?!"

"Yeah, I felt the Force aura around the guy," Ember insisted.

"Well, that is weird," I said, "If he has Force powers himself, then why wouldn't he go steal the holocron?"

"I wonder if we don't fully understand who we're up against," Ember said.

"I guess we'll find out," I replied.

Ember laughed nervously as we blasted into hyperspace

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"Alright," I said into my earpiece, "I'm right in front of the door. Are you in position?"

"Positive," Ember replied, "Ready to go on your command."

"Good," I said.

Taking a deep breath, I knocked lightly on the door. After waiting for a minute and hearing no response, I knocked again – this time a little harder. When there was still no response, I banged hard on the door.

"No one's home," I told Ember, "Either that or they refuse to answer."

"We go on three," Ember told me, "One, two, three!"

Jamming my lightsaber into the electronic keypad, I easily fried the circuit and the door clicked open. Carefully, I shoved open the door and stepped into a dimly lit entryway. Unfortunately, there was someone home.

"Well, well, well, who do we have here?" a tall, male Zabrak asked rhetorically.

"Maul?!" I exclaimed, "What in the world?!"

"Thought I was dead, huh," Darth Maul laughed, "But I don't know you."

"The name's Leonard," I said, pulling out my second lightsaber and only igniting one end.

"What do you want?" Maul asked, pulling out his lightsaber as well.

"I'm looking for a particular holocron," I told him, "You got it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Maul growled.

"My client says you do," I insisted, still standing in the doorway. Maul's reputation as a master of lightsaber duels preceded him, and I wasn't excited about fighting him.

"Well, he's wrong," Maul growled.

"C'mon now," I told Maul, "We both know you're lying. What could possibly be on that holocron that is worth fighting over?!"

"Something that you should keep your grubby little hands off!" Maul roared, leaping at me.

Side stepping out of his path, I locked light sabers and slammed the door in his face as he emerged out into the hallway. I then raced farther into his suite, finding that it was fairly normally furnished.

"Get back here little punk!" Maul roared as he jumped me from behind. I quickly dodged the blow and backtracked into the kitchen. As I knew, Maul had a significant disadvantage maneuvering his long light saber in the middle of his small kitchen – which gave me the upper hand since I could still fully use my two lightsabers – with only one blade lit apiece.

"Crraassh," Maul upended a nearby pot which smashed to the floor.

"Having troubles there?" I taunted him.

Maul growled and attacked ferociously, using numerous Saber swarms. However, it wasn't too hard to create a simple Circle of Shelter, holding my ground.

Eventually, Maul realized his disadvantage and stopped attacking me; instead opting to hurry back into the main living room where there was more space.

"I see you want more room," I noted.

Maul just glared at me, trying to figure me out.

"I don't mind coming to your ground, but that means I can do this," I replied, fully igniting my lightsabers.

"You have *two* dual-bladed lightsabers?" Maul exclaimed, "Can you even handle that?"

"Come see," I smirked, "Or just tell me where the holocron is."

"No," Maul said fiercely, "But you can fight me."

"I'm quite good just standing here," I told him, "Attack when you want."

"BOOOOMMM!" a small explosion emanated from the hangar outside.

"You're distracting me," Maul discovered.

"Worked pretty nice," I laughed.

Maul roared with anger and Force grabbed me. Unfortunately, I had not foreseen this, and I quickly choked.

"Let's see how many others are outside," Maul said as he strode to the back door and opened it. In the hangar outside, Ember was just removing a large holocron from a massive vault buried in the wall.

"Leave that there, or your buddy is dead," Maul growled as he choked me harder.

Flailing about in the air, I struggled to fight the invisible Force constricting my throat.

"Okay," Ember said.

"WUMP!" Ember blasted Maul with a powerful Force push – sending both of us flying.

"Catch!" Ember called out throwing me the holocron, "I've got this guy."

Maul roared and jumped at me, but Ember sped towards us and intercepted him.

"Move it, big guy," Ember told him – deflecting his Hawk-Bat Swoop.

While Ember held off Maul, I raced towards the end of the hangar – ducking under Maul's spaceship and escaping through a hole in the wall that was freshly cut – thanks to Ember's trusty lightsaber. As soon as I was outside, I sped across the nearby pavilion and boarded our spacecraft parked close by.

"Let's go!" I spoke into my ear piece as I sat down in the cockpit.

"Already coming!" Ember yelled back, breathing heavily into the mic.

In a few seconds, Ember emerged from the hole and booked it towards our spacecraft. I expected Maul to follow close behind, but instead, the hangar door started opening.

"He's going to fly after us!" Ember cried, jumping in behind me, "Punch it!"

"No need," I laughed, "He won't be getting far!"

"Huh?" Ember said, confused.

I quickly blasted the hyperdrive engines and sped into the atmosphere – leaving the planet behind. Behind us, a sleek spacecraft burst forth from Maul's hangar and turned in our direction. Fortunately for us, the wing promptly cracked off and the spaceship plummeted back down.

"I sliced off a good portion of the right wing," I laughed, "On my way out, of course."

Ember laughed too, "Nice going."

"So," I continued a minute later when I put the spaceship into hyper speed, "Did you expect it to be Darth Maul?"

"No way," Ember replied, "Never would have guessed that."

"His legs are robotic," I said, "He must have had to replace them."

"Apparently Obi-Wan only got the lower half of him," Ember stated, "Let's hope Ecam pays well for this holocron."

"You're sure it's the right one?"

"Yeah, I sent him a picture of it, and he confirmed it's the right one," Ember told me.

"Alright then," I said as we pulled into the Vorteph for the second time that day, "Let's get this to him."

After parking, we strode over to Ecam who was still sitting at the table sipping on his water.

When I plopped the holocron in front of him, Ecam jerked backwards – and his hood fell off.

"MACE WINDU?!" Ember gasped, "What in the WORLD?!"

Mace quickly threw his hood back on and whispered to us to keep it down. He then snatched up the holocron and turned it on. The holocron showed a detailed map of some sort of land and buildings.

"I can't believe you guys got this! Did Maul even put up a fight?!" Mace asked.

"Uh, yeah he did!" I said, "But we succeeded anyway. No thanks to you not telling us who we were up against."

"Looks like we were wrong not to have you guys join our Jedi Order," Mace said, looking back up at me, "We could've used you. Not that it matters now that we are almost all dead."

"Wait, how do you know that?" I asked, suspicious.

"I looked you up after you left," Mace said, "You made it easy on me since you never changed your names."

"How come you didn't get purged?" Ember whispered.

"I almost did," Mace admitted, rolling up his right sleeve and showing us that he was missing his arm, "But managed to escape alive."

"Now I understand why you wouldn't fight Maul yourself," I realized, "You don't have your fighting arm."

"Or my original lightsaber," Mace growled.

"Well..., are you going to pay us?" I asked him.

"Already did," Mace said, "Luckily I remembered all the codes to the Jedi accounts."

"Cool," Ember said, "Thanks for the business. Contact us if you need something else."

"I will," Mace said slowly, turning the holocron over in his hands, "You got a large spacecraft to transport people?"

"I mean, it's not *large*, but we could probably fit a dozen people," I said to Mace, "We have a clone transport ship – and one that can only fit about six or seven."

"I may be calling you soon," Mace said, standing back up, "And you did *not* just see me, okay?"

"Right," I said quickly, realizing what he meant, "We never did any business with you."

Mace nodded; then disappeared into the nearby crowds.

"Well, now I have seen it all!" Ember declared as we walked back to the spaceship, "I just met two people I thought were dead all in the course of a few hours!"

"Just a typical day in the life of a mercenary, I guess," I said.

When we reached our planet again and had parked in the hangar, Ember noticed that two of the hover bikes were still gone and suggested I contact Lhoka and Amber via our powerful wireless communication system.

"Sure," I replied, "But they're probably just having fun. I doubt anything is wrong."

"I know, but we've been gone for quite a while," Ember noted.

I shrugged my shoulders and hurried upstairs to the communication systems room. All the walls were covered with monitors displaying various information about the base and guard droids.

"Base to Amber," I said into the microphone, "Are you there?"

There was a crackle of static before Amber picked up, "Yeah? What's up Leo?"

"Ember wanted to make sure you guys are doing fine," I replied.

"Yeah, we're just enjoying ourselves," Amber told me, "We found some large tracks in the dirt about four miles from our base, and we're currently following them."

"You think someone was here?!"

"I guess, but I don't know why someone would have driven their vehicle here," Lhoka interrupted.

"Sure, sure," I said, "Let me know what you find out."

"Ten four," Amber replied.

Afterwards, I checked all the droid cameras to make sure that they were functioning and inspected the integrity of intruder alert systems which all checked out. I was just about to leave to go get something to eat when my holophone rang.

"Hello? This is Leonard," I spoke after pressing the answer key on my keyboard.

"Leonard, this is Ecam."

"Whoa! So soon," I chuckled, "What's up man?"

"You guys up for another run?"

"What's up this time?"

"I can't explain over this phone," Mace told me, "Can I meet at your base?"

"Why?" I asked, suspicious.

"Because I need a high profile place to talk. Plus, I need to bring my own team along," Mace insisted.

"Well, okay, but *only* if you promise to never reveal our location to *anyone* else," I told him.

"Sure, sure," Mace said, "What's your coordinates?"

After telling him the planet and coordinates, I informed him that he should land in the grass field outside the base. I also warned him of the roaming guard droids.

When Mace finally hung up, I hurried out of the room and attempted to find Ember.

"EEEMMMBBBEEERRR!" I yelled, "Where are you?!"

"Rec room!" Ember shouted as I raced down the stairwell.

I leapt out of the stairwell and skidded to a halt outside the large recreation room.

Ember was completely sprawled out on a large, leather chair – watching the news.

"Ember, Mace is coming over here," I told her.

Ember sighed deeply, "You invited him?"

"No, he invited himself. Something about a 'high-profile' mission and needed to keep this quiet,"

I replied, "So get off your chair and get moving."

Ember groaned, "Go talk with him yourself. I've been on the move since yesterday morning."

"That's fine," I teased her, "I'll just invite Amber to come along."

"WAIT! I'm coming," Ember yelled after me, scrambling out of her chair.

Meanwhile, I entered the hangar and grabbed a hoverbike myself; roaring off into the surrounding field. Behind me, I heard Ember putting her bike into gear.

I sped across the field and quickly reached the surrounding forest – then veered to the left and circled the base.

"What's your rush?" Ember whined into my helmet, "Where *are* you going?"

"Nowhere in particular," I replied, "Although I was thinking about briefly stopping to talk to DR-Commando."

"Oh, to warn him about the incoming spaceship?"

"Yeah," I said, just then spotting him talking to a few of his droids a good three hundred meters away.

Seeing me speed up on my hover bike, DR-Commando quickly turned to me.

"What...do...you...want...captain?" DR asked me as I skidded up and pulled off my helmet.

"We've got a spaceship landing around here soon," I told him, "So don't blast it to kingdom come."

"Right...oh...captain," DR replied, "I...will...still...alert...you...to...when...it...arrives."

I saluted him; then veered off again to where Ember was riding by.

"What's he doing talking with the other droids?" Ember asked me.

"Don't ask me!" I said, "I dunno!"

Ember rolled her eyes.

"Hey! You guys are within transmitting distance!" Lhoka called over the intercom, "We're probably only a mile away from base now."

"You found the source of the tracks?" I asked.

"Yeah, but it looks like the vehicle loaded onto a spacecraft and flew off, because the tracks stopped at some large imprints from what appeared to be a transport shuttle," Amber answered.

"Hmmm," Ember mumbled.

"Don't worry about it," I said, "It's probably nothing."

After a few more laps around the base, I picked up on the sound of quantum engines firing overhead. As expected, a medium-sized starfighter descended from the sky and rested in the field. Amber and Lhoka, just emerging from the forest, were the first to reach the spacecraft with some of the droids running up soon after.

I drifted to a stop by the spaceship just as Mace hopped out with two other guys.

"George?!" Ember gasped.

"Ping?!" I exclaimed.

"What *is* this about?!" Amber asked.

"You know these guys?" Mace said.

"Of course," I said, "George was my best friend – until he tried to kill me."

George glared at me

"Hey guys!" Ping said cheerfully, fist bumping me, "Mace stopped by my uncle's restaurant and recruited me to help out!"

"It'll be awesome to fight alongside you again!" I told him.

"Are we *sure* we can trust these guys?" Amber asked me, "They're Jedi after all."

"I don't know about George," Lhoka admitted, "But Mace is definitely a man of his word."

"I *will not* take this disrespect," George growled, "The only people here that are in the wrong are you guys!"

"To be fair," Ping said, "I thought so too, but they are really nice. I'd be dead if it wasn't for them. Plus, Leo put his life on the line for me."

Mace shrugged off the tense feelings and said, "It doesn't matter guys, we need to get this done."

"So what exactly is 'this'?" Ember asked.

"Can we talk outside of earshot of these droids?" Mace said, "They're making me nervous."

"Sure," Amber said, waving away the droids, "You can come inside our base."

Ember mumbled something about that being a bad idea but wisely kept silent. Once we entered the base, Amber led them to the recreation room, and I closed the door behind us.

"You did some serious coding on those droids," Mace said, impressed, "Normally they would have attacked us on sight."

"Yeah, it took a bit of time," I replied, "But they're actually very powerful. I just needed to modify their CPU usage and artificial intelligence circuits. Now they won't fire on humans unless those humans are actively attacking one of us, or we command them to."

"Seems like a good way to get yourselves assassinated in my opinion," George stated.

"I didn't ask for your opinion though," I told him.

"Shush," Mace said, placing his holocron on the table and turning it on, "These maps here represent a large Separatist base on Punthar."

"We're infiltrating the new Empire's base?!" Lhoka gasped.

"Sort of," Mace continued, "We're actually aiming for this section of the base."

Mace swiped his finger across the holocron's projection to another map that showed the floorplan of one of the buildings in the Empire's base.

"This is where a special station is that gives default instructions to clones," Mace said, "In other words this was the sort of station where Darth Sidious would have been when giving Order 66."

"How many of these are there?" I asked, intrigued.

"Only two," Mace said, "One was at Palpatine's office – but it's not there anymore – I checked. The other is here."

"I see where you're going with this though," George spoke up, "If we can reach that station – we can undo Order 66."

"I think so," Mace said, "Although there's a possibility that this station can only affect a certain amount of clones."

"But what kind of order would we give it?" I asked, "Like 'Kill the Sith'?"

"Unfortunately, we don't have the voice activation from Palpatine, but there is a special switch that automatically shuts down the clones' brains with so much information that they just seize up," Mace told me, "That's what we are aiming for."

"So, effectively, it'll just shut the clones down?"

"That's the hope," Mace said.

"The place is probably crawling with clones though," I noted.

"Which is why we need all the help we can get," Mace told me, "I don't know if there are other Jedi left. I suspect that Yoda and Obi-Wan survived, but it's only a feeling. Regardless, I can't find them."

"What's the plan, then?" Amber asked, "Do we split up?"

“Unfortunately, these plans aren’t as detailed as I would like, but I’ve gleaned some information from other dubious sources,” Mace replied, “We’ll need someone to access the control center to unlock the doors and traps leading to the station. We’ll also need someone to access the station and a special button, as well as someone to protect the wiring that plugs into the wall. If clones pull out that plug, then the station just won’t work.”

“This is getting complicated,” Ping groaned.

“Here’s what I’m thinking,” Mace continued, “I need only one person with good stealth to reach the station, two people with good laser pulse reflection skills to protect the main entrance, two people to protect the electrical room where all the plugs are, and two people to storm the security room.”

“Where’s the most heavily guarded place?” I asked Mace.

“The electrical room probably – it’s the center of the building and is hence the easiest to reach.”

“I’ll take the electrical room then,” I told Mace.

“I’ll go with Leo,” Ember quickly volunteered.

“I can probably handle the entrance,” Ping offered, “I’ve got two lightsabers.”

“I can go with him,” Amber said, “I’m fairly good at laser pulse reflection myself.”

“Good,” Mace said, “Then I’ll have you, George, push the button and this quiet girl and I can storm the security room.”

“My name is Lhoka,” she said.

“Oh, okay,” Mace replied, “You have Force powers or something?”

“I was a Jedi Padawan,” Lhoka told Mace, “And I have a lightsaber that also functions as a lightwhip.”

For effect, Lhoka ignited hers and swung her lightwhip across the room – creating a nice cracking sound.

“Purple?!” Mace gasped, “Very impressive!”

“Thank you,” Lhoka bowed.

“We better leave now,” Mace insisted, standing up, “I heard a rumor that Sidious may plan to shut it down soon for obvious reasons.”

“Sounds good with me,” I stated, “And we can take my clone drop ship as a disguise.”

“Let’s hope we can be successful,” George said, “Or otherwise this’ll be a suicide mission.”

Chapter 7: Leo

As Amber maneuvered our spaceship into the atmosphere, I quickly studied the landscape below.

"*That's* the Empire's command base," Mace pointed out to me.

"It's *huge*," I gasped, "However in the world will we find where we need to go?"

"Easy," Mace said, "I brought these."

Mace reached into his side satchel and pulled out a handful of small electronic devices.

"These are LPS – local positioning units," Mace continued, "I programmed each one with the coordinates and map of where you need to go."

"Wow," Lhoka said excitedly, "Which one is mine?"

After turning each one on, Mace was able to figure out which device went to which person and handed them all out as Amber landed in a particularly dense fog by a massive array of antennas and electrical transmission towers.

"You all know what you're doing, right?" George asked everyone as Amber jumped out of her pilot's seat and shut down the ship's engines.

I quickly checked to make sure that I had my weapons – my laser rifle on my back, my two pistols and lightsabers on my belt, and my loop of ammo around my torso.

"Yep," I announced, "I'm ready to go."

"Alright then," Mace said when everyone else nodded their heads, "Let's head out."

Ember opened the main door, and we quickly jumped out into the dusky air. Because of the dense mist, I had to ignite both of my lightsabers to get enough light to see where I was going. With Mace leading the way, all seven of us piled out of the spaceship and jogged towards the Separatist command center. We first crept across the roof of a massive warehouse; then climbed down a series of ladders and utilized a few small alleys to avoid clone patrols. Without incident, we then made our way to a run-down clothing shop that stood right by the main entrance to the command center. Outside the command center were about a dozen clones all standing guard.

"Alright, Amber and Ping, we'll leave you here while the rest of us go on," Mace reminded them. Ping nodded his head, "We've got this!"

"CHARGE!" Mace whispered.

Whisking my lightsaber blades around me, I sprinted forward, taking the nearest two clone troopers by surprise. The rest of our gang easily demolished the others. George shoved his lightsaber into the main doors' keypad; thus allowing our entrance.

"Break a leg," I told Amber, fist bumping her.

Amber smirked and nodded her head while my LPS reminded me to hurry forward and take my next right.

"C'mon Leo!" Ember yelled at me as Mace and Lhoka split off to the left, "We've got to hurry!"

I skidded around the corner and ran into two secretaries who Ember quickly slammed into the wall to knock them out.

"Rather violent," I noted as we sprinted forward and descended some stairs, "They're just doing their jobs."

"Can it," Ember told me.

We met some mild resistance as we ran for the main electrical room but managed to kill the clones that fired at us. In less than three minutes, I brought down the doors to the electrical room and stepped inside. The room was a confusing array of servers and electrical boxes.

Ember gasped, "How are we going to find the plug for that button switch thingy?"

"Mace said it's supposed to be a big, yellow striped box at the back of the room," I reminded Ember.

"But look! There's at least a dozen yellow striped boxes," Ember whined.

"Look for the box at the back of the room," I told her as some more clones came running down the outside hallway, "I'll guard the entrance."

The small squadron of clones immediately open-fired upon me, but I reflected the blasts and attacked ferociously – quickly stopping their initial attack.

"We've reached the security room," Lhoka told me through my earpiece, "I'll let you know when we open the doors for George."

"Sounds good," I said as I sliced apart the last clone, "How are you holding up Amber?"

"I'm glad we remembered to bring these earpieces," Amber yelled over the noise of warfare,

"We should have brought more for the whole group."

"You're hurting my ears," Ember yelled, "Stay muted!"

"That's what I've been doing!" Amber snapped.

"Let's keep the communication system clear," I reminded them.

A few seconds later, some more Empire-affiliated fighters emerged down the hallway and headed straight for the electrical room – but these guys were all carrying red lightsabers.

"Uh oh," I said, "There's Sith or something coming towards us!"

"What?!" Lhoka exclaimed over the noise of the commotion coming from the security room.

"Signing out for a bit," I responded, muting myself.

Three of the armed Sith approached, all dressed in black.

"Who are you?" the head Sith growled, pointing at me with his lightsaber.

"Leonard," I told him, "Who are you?!"

"We're part of the Inquisitor order," the leader said.

"So like, rip-off Sith?" I laughed, spinning my lightsabers around, "You will not pass."

"Fat chance," the second Inquisitor growled, charging me.

I quickly caught his attack and threw him against the wall – meeting the second and third Inquisitors simultaneously. All three of the Inquisitors turned out to be skilled, but they were uncoordinated in their attacks, and I managed to hold them off – while getting in a few attacks of my own.

"We've opened the doors for George!" Lhoka screamed into my earpiece, "Hold on for a little longer!"

As she said this, the head inquisitor cut through a nearby window – gaining access to the electrical room while I battled the other two.

"Keep him busy!" the head inquisitor told his comrades, "I'll put out the electrical plug!"

I smiled to myself as I knew he'd have to run into Ember first, but my smile quickly turned to a frown as several squads of clones ran down the hallway towards me. In an instant, I was overwhelmed with firepower.

Seeing no other option, I defaulted to a Circle of Shelter as clones swarmed me and the Inquisitors continued to beat upon me.

“LEO, EMBER!” George screamed down to me from the catwalk that he was racing along, “The end to the pesky clones is near!”

At the same time, Ember screamed into my earpiece that she needed me.

“Where’d all these clones come from?!” Ember yelled.

“I’ll be there in just a second!” I told her, jumping into the air and catching the top of a nearby server. Then, I raced along the server and jumped to the next – keeping out of range of the clones’ laser pulses.

Up on the catwalk, George reached the command room and broke down the door – thereby accessing the object of our mission – the switch. Somersaulting off my current server, I landed along the back wall and spotted Ember simultaneously fighting the head Inquisitor and a dozen clones. Slapping my left lightsaber onto my belt, I yanked out my laser rifle and sniped some of the clones as I closed onto Ember’s position. As Ember flashed her lightsaber around to slice in half three clones in one sweep, the inquisitor kicked her hard in the side and sent her flying against the back corner – right underneath George who had been distracted by a squadron of clones following him. The head Inquisitor quickly turned to the yellow striped box to pull out the plug for the switch while the two other clones leveled their pistols at Ember.

“Get those clones!” I yelled up to George, pointing to the ones about to shoot Ember.

In the split second moment that George had, he could choose to make a rush for the switch or use the Force to blast away the clones from Ember. Making up his mind, George kicked the nearest clone off the balcony and... rushed for the switch. With nothing preventing them from firing on Ember, the clones shot Ember down instantly. At the last moment, I launched myself at the head inquisitor but he dodged and ripped out the plug - just as I grabbed his leg and yanked him away. As we fell to the ground in a tangle of arms and legs, all the clones dropped to the ground.

“No!” the head inquisitor roared – seeing the clones go lifeless.

“No!” I cried out – seeing Ember fall to the ground.

The inquisitor desperately grabbed for his lightsaber, but I got to him first.

The head inquisitor screamed in pain as I took him out while the two other Inquisitors, who had just now reached the back wall, stared in shock. George, having completed the mission, Force jumped off the catwalk right in front of the other Inquisitors – locking them into battle as I bent down by Ember. She was clutching her stomach, but blood was still leaking out all over her hands, clothes, and the floor.

“Ember!” I told her, “We have to get you out of here!”

Ember looked up at me with pain in her eyes, and her face turning pale, “I won’t make it.”

“NO!” I cried out, “You must. I need you!”

Ember rested her head against mine and whispered, “Watch out for Amber, Leo.”

Then, her eyes rolled up, and she slid to the ground – her hands rolling off her chest and revealing a massive wound in her torso.

“We did it!” Lhoka declared excitedly into my earpiece, “The clones all just collapsed!”

Filled with rage, I scooped up Ember’s lightsaber and advanced on the Inquisitors. As I swung wildly at them, a sudden, loud explosion jolted the ground and threw all of us off of our feet.

"Guys!" Amber yelled into my earpiece, "There's a huge ship overhead firing nukes at the command center!"

"WHY?!" I screamed.

"I'm not sure, maybe they're trying to collapse the base on top of us!" Amber stated.

Leaping off the ground, I stabbed the nearest Inquisitor and sprinted out of the electrical room as several more explosions rocketed through the building – causing the ceiling and servers to start shaking violently.

"What's going on?" George exclaimed, not having heard the conversation over my earpiece.

"I'll tell you what," I growled as we ran down the hallway and leapt over inert clone troopers,

"You killed my girlfriend."

"Ember?" George said, "But I had to flip the switch before the dude cut the power!"

"At the expense of her?" I screamed at George, "What were you thinking? How would you feel if I put hitting that switch as more important than saving *your* girlfriend?!"

"I don't have a girlfriend," George stated.

"Well maybe next time you should get a girlfriend before needlessly sacrificing my girlfriends' life!" I spat.

George thought about this as we raced into the front entryway where the rest of the crew were. At this point, the ceiling was falling apart, and I had to constantly dodge falling debris. During the pandemonium, no one seemed to notice that Ember was missing, and they quickly fled outside where even more nukes were falling. Everywhere I looked were flames and smoke – adding to the already dense fog. Because of this, our group was quickly separated as everyone found their own way back to the spacecraft.

"Where are you?" Lhoka said through my earpiece.

"I don't know," I yelped as smoke filled my lungs and my eyes burned, "I can hardly see *anything*."

"I think Ping is in front of me, but it's kinda hard to tell," Amber said over our earpiece radios.

To my right, the side of a large, wooden warehouse blew out as an explosive charge fell nearby. Jumping out of the way, I kept on blundering through the smoke and ashes – using my LPS to guide me back to where the spaceship was.

After another minute of climbing ladders in the dark, Lhoka called out to me on my earpiece, "Leo! Are you there?"

"Mostly," I grunted, "Where are you?"

"At the dropship," Lhoka told me, "I sensed where Mace was and followed him."

"Well, I can't sense a single thing through the Force," I reminded her.

As I said this, something yanked me through the air and deposited me on the ground shortly thereafter. I quickly spun around to see Amber and Lhoka staring down at me.

"You were running by," Amber laughed, "C'mon, we've got to go! These nukes are getting way too close!"

Amber rushed to the controls, while I checked to make sure everyone was here.

"Hey! Where's George?" I said.

Mace shook his head, "I saw him fall down and not get back up."

"Where's Ember?!" Lhoka added.

"She didn't make it," I said quietly.

From the pilot's seat, I heard Amber scream, "WHAT?!"

“JUST GO!” Mace yelled to her, “If we don’t go now, the only place we’ll be going is to the afterlife!”

Amber started the engines and took a flying start off the ground – pulling up as hard as she could, but just as we reached the outer atmosphere, the spacecraft suddenly came to a quick stop and just hovered. Amber wrenched at the joystick, “I’ve lost control!”

“That’s because we’ve been caught by a tractor beam,” Mace groaned, pointing out a side window where a massive Empire warship was.

“We’re so dead,” I moaned.

“But there aren’t any more clones left operating,” Ping said, “So we should be able to fight our way out!”

“The empire has a whole lot of normal troopers though,” Mace grunted, “We could still be in for quite a fight.”

Slowly, the massively larger warship drew us to one of its loading bays until two massive claws extended from the ship and gripped our clone dropship firmly. Our ship was then pulled into a large hangar. Outside the aft window, I could see a lot of clone-like soldiers amassing around our spacecraft.

“Let’s just rush them,” Amber said, “I think that’s our only hope.”

Mace nodded, “Sounds good to me.”

Ping and Lhoka looked a lot more nervous about this plan, but I certainly didn’t want to get captured, and I had already lost a good deal. As soon as Amber yanked down on the lever to open the side door, all five of us rushed out and ran straight for the doors leading out of the hangar. All around us, the Empire goons fired upon us. Ping and I, both using the Barrier of Blades, had a much easier time than Lhoka and Mace who only had one lightsaber each (and Mace’s was just a standard lightsaber - not her purple one). Keeping low, I sprinted for the back doors – mercilessly slicing apart any soldier who got in my way. However, just as I reached the back door, Amber, who had been running alongside me, tripped on a fallen soldier and splayed out on the floor. I immediately turned to help her, but there were so many laser pulses flying everywhere that she was instantly filled with holes – becoming a bloody mess in mere seconds. Mace, following right behind me, plowed into me and we both flew out a back door as Lhoka and Ping ran behind and slammed the door shut.

“Amber!” I screamed. “That was Ember’s dying wish!”

“No time, Leo,” Mace shouted at me, “If you don’t help us get out, we’re all gonna die!”

Without waiting for an answer, Mace led Ping and Lhoka down a side hallway and into another. Shocked and blurry-eyed, I stumbled after them – not really sure what I was doing anymore. We were only halfway down a spacious corridor when the alarms on the warship started ringing. On cue, massive metal gates started closing off portions of the corridor. As the closet metal gate closed, I spied an unlocked door to my right. While the rest of my group slid under the gate and kept on running, I veered to my right and shoved my way through the door – hoping that I could hide in the room. Inside, all I found was a series of laser cells.

“Prison holding cells,” I groaned, “Just my luck.”

“Leo?” a withered old voice croaked to my right, “Is that you?”

Surprised, I whipped to my right and found the source of the voice. An ancient relic of a man in an orange jumpsuit laid on the ground in his cell – his head propped up to look at me.

“Who are you?” I asked.

"I'm Jek," he groaned.

"Jek?!" I exclaimed, "You've *aged*."

"Ever since I was captured, the stress has only accelerated my already ancient age," he whispered, "I don't expect to live for more than a day more."

"I thought you had died!" I told him.

"I thought I was going to be killed too, but since I'm only a defected clone, they spared me," Jek said, "What are you doing here?"

"I was on a mission to shut all the clones down," I told him, "But everything has gone wrong since – even though we did manage to shut the clones down."

"Apparently not all of them," Jek croaked, "Not me anyway."

I thought about this for a minute, "But we pulled the switch at the command center on the planet below!"

"There are two 'switches'," Jek told me, "One switch commands half of the clones – the other switch deals with the other half of the clones."

"Wonderful," I mumbled, "And I lost all my friends over this. Why am I so stupid?!"

"Stupid?" Jek asked, "You're *not* stupid."

"Amber, Ember, and George were all killed by this mission," I said angrily, "And why I'm alive I don't know."

Jek remained silent for a moment as the ringing of alarms continued on in the background,

"Sometimes life is cruel."

"Don't 'sometimes' me," I snapped, "Do you know what it's like to lose your closest friends?! Even if one of them betrayed you?!"

"Frankly, I do," Jek told me, "Every single one of my closest clone friends were killed in the clone wars."

"Doesn't make me feel much better about my situation," I sighed, "And I'm stuck in here – waiting for me to get picked off."

Jek took a great breath of air and laid his head back, "I may be able to help you Leo."

"How?" I groaned.

"I can give you something," he told me.

"What?" I stated, annoyed, "Do you possibly have something that could help me?"

"I can give you all my Force powers," Jek told me.

"Seriously?" I asked, confused.

"I have more powers than anyone has ever known. Some of which I have never been able to quite figure out," Jek said, "Most of it is too powerful, as I'm sure you know."

I gasped, "You're not kidding?"

Jek shook his head, "I was even able to revive people. Well, before I was this old."

I stared at Jek, open mouthed.

"I can give them to you," Jek told me, "But there's two problems. One, it will kill me, which frankly isn't that bad since I'll die soon anyway. Two, it's darkside power, so I'm not sure what that'll do to you."

"Could it also kill me?" I wanted to know, "Since I'm not Force sensitive?"

"I don't think so," Jek said slowly, "But I guess it could!"

Visions of the dead corpses of Ember and Amber flooded my brain, and, almost without thinking, I accepted Jek's offer.

Summoning his strength, Jek rolled off the floor and reached his hands through the laser bars of his cell, placing them on me.

"Alright, Leo," Jek said quietly, "But do me one favor."

"What?"

"Fight evil with everything you have," Jek told me as he began the process.

At first, all I felt was some dull pain in my right arm, but it soon grew to a painful sting all over my body.

"Owe!" I cried out, "It's painful."

"Hold on," Jek groaned as well, "It's about to get worse."

I would have pulled back because it hurt really bad, but Jek gripped me harder and let all his power loose. It enveloped me in red electricity – zapping all over my body like I was a lightning rod. The pain, so intense, eventually started to feel good, which also caused me to feel a bit sleepy.

After blacking out, I awoke with a start. I was lying on the floor with Jek's dead body sprawled out in the cell nearby. At the same time, I had the weirdest sensation. It was like I craved power now.

The Force coursed through my body like chills when you're sick and seemed to surround me in a weird aura. As I stumbled forwards, I realized that I had dropped one of my lightsabers when I had blacked out, and, without thinking, used the Force to pick it up. It was so natural; yet so foreign to me that I just stared at my lightsaber for a long while. That's when I felt the anger. It was dismissible at first, but as time progressed it started to really grow inside of me. Scared, I threw open the door and rushed out, confused about this new power I felt. I then promptly ran into a whole squadron of Empire soldiers – all with their laser pistols out. A few jumped back in surprise, but my new instinct quickly kicked into gear. I stretched my hands out and launched them clear down the hallway – causing them to collide painfully with the wall at the other end. Since the metal walls had been reopened by this time, I raced back the way I had originally run – towards my spaceship. Along the way, I met more troopers (although not clones) and sliced them apart with my lightsabers – feeling stronger than I had ever before in my life as I now had a sixth sense about where laser pulses were around me.

Rounding a corner, I saw an open door leading to the hangar, but just at that moment, a group emerged from it. It was the last inquisitor from the command center on the planet along with a whole group of troopers escorting a handcuffed Ping and Lhoka.

"YOU!" I roared, pointing my double bladed lightsaber at the inquisitor.

"YOU!" the inquisitor yelled back, "Get him and fill him with holes like that girl back in there!"

The thought of Amber arose something in me. That anger that had been starting to cloud my judgement ever since I had woken up from my blackout suddenly overflowed.

Without another thought, I Force sprinted down the corridor – easily annihilating my opponents as I did so. Jumping through the air, I somersaulted in between my friends and the inquisitor – placing my back against Lhoka and Ping.

"This ends now," I growled fiercely, slapping my lightsabers onto my belt, and extending my hands.

Scared and a bit taken aback, the inquisitor stumbled backwards. Closing my eyes, I connected with the dark side powers that Jek had given me and clenched my teeth. In an epic display of power, intense force lightning leapt from my fingertips – consuming everything in its path. It

turned the inquisitor and all the other troopers to mere ash, cracked the walls, blew out the lights, and reverberated down the nearby hallways.

Lhoka screamed.

As I grew more tired, I finally let up – letting the electricity fizzle away.

“What was that?” Ping whispered quietly.

“The new me,” I told him, “C’mon. Let’s get out of here.”

After striding into the hangar, I looked first to Amber’s corpse. She hadn’t been moved and was now enveloped in a small lake of blood. I was about to look away from the gorey sight, but then I remembered something that Jek had said. Ignoring the gasps from Lhoka and Ping, I leapt across to Amber – splashing across the blood to her pale body. Laying my hands on her, I summoned more of my Force power and concentrated it on her. At first, nothing changed, but then her numerous wounds started closing up, and her face began to resume a more natural shade. That’s when I realized that we weren’t the only ones in the room.

Across from me, a lot of troopers and fighter pilots noticed my arrival into the hangar, but seeing me touching the dead corpse of Amber, they came closer, curious.

“Huh!” Amber exclaimed, jerking, “Wha...what’s going on?!”

As the rest of the Empire’s troops looked on in astonishment, Amber stood up amid the guts and blood of herself and looked at her perfectly restored body.

“What...just...happened?” she screamed, “Looking down at her outfit.”

Although she had revived in perfect condition, her outfit hadn’t – which was ripped apart in a lot of places and completely soaked in blood – causing her to not be dressed appropriately anymore. Finally, the gravity of what had just happened dawned upon the other soldiers and most of them ran off while a few just stood and stared.

At that moment, Mace flew through the nearest doorway – pursued by a squad of soldiers.

Upon seeing Amber, Mace jumped.

“What in the name of the galaxy?!” he exclaimed.

While Amber whimpered from embarrassment, I stepped in front of her.

“I revived her,” I said slowly, checking out Mace’s reaction.

Mace stared at me for a while; then shook his head, “You’re not a normal person anymore.”

“You think?!” I exclaimed.

Mace quickly backed up towards the clone drop ship that we had arrived in and gestured to Ping and Lhoka.

“We’re leaving guys,” he said.

Ping and Lhoka froze, unsure of what to do, while the nearby soldiers looked on.

“He’s a Sith now,” Mace said, pointing to me, “He’s let anger cloud him. Do you think Force lightning can be harnessed by someone completely innocent?”

At this, Ping turned and left, but Lhoka stayed, unsure of what to do. Mace didn’t hesitate; he Force pulled her into the craft. Seconds later, he flew the craft out of the Empire warship as a few brave troopers shot after him.

Meanwhile, I commandeered a nearby transport shuttle and pulled Amber after me.

“C’mon!” I yelled to her, “Let’s leave before my anger rages again!”

Chapter 8: Amber

“AMBER!”

The voice interrupted my early morning dreams and caused me to thrash around in my bed. It sounded oddly like Ember.

“Uh, Whaaa?” I moaned.

There was a slight pause followed by what was definitely Ember’s voice, “AMBER! Listen to me!”

I quickly snapped awake and looked around, but didn’t see anything.

“What?!” I said aloud to my empty room.

“Amber, you *must* continue on the legacy,” Ember told me.

“But wait, where are you? And how do I do that? And what about Leo?” I asked.

“Too many questions,” Ember spoke, “And I can’t answer them all, but you must protect.”

“Protect *who*?,” I asked, “Were you absorbed into the Force or something.”

“I think I was absorbed partially, but I can’t figure out how to create a Force ghost, so... not sure how this all works,” Ember laughed.

“Okay, but what about Leo?” I asked her.

“Leo will find his own way,” Ember insisted, “Learning how to use the Force is a tricky business.”

“If you’re sure,” I said slowly.

“Oh, and one other thing,” Ember said, her voice starting to fade, “George didn’t die. I’ve met all sorts of Jedi legends here in this afterlife, but not George.”

As soon as Ember’s soothing voice faded out, I woke up with a start.

“It was just a dream,” I breathed to myself. And yet, I had the distinct feeling that it wasn’t.

I quickly threw on my robe and hustled outside of my room and to the right - where Leo’s room was. However, the door was standing wide open, and he was definitely not inside.

“Oh great,” I groaned, “Where *has* he gone now?!”

Hurrying down the stairwell, I rushed past the main chamber and coincidentally ran into a patrol droid.

“Ma’am,” it said, “Can...I...help...you?”

“Yeah, I’m looking for Leo? Have you seen him?” I asked quickly.

“Yes...ma’am...I...saw...him...outside...on...the...grass,” the droid said.

Without considering my hasty choice of wardrobe, I dashed outside of the base and quickly spotted Leo sitting cross legged out in the very middle of the grass field.

“Leo!” I shouted out to him, “What are you doing?!”

Leo turned to me quizzically, his arms resting quietly in his lap, “I’m uh...sitting here.”

“Whatever for?” I asked, walking up beside him.

“Well, uh, I had the strangest dream that Ember talked to me,” Leo said slowly, “And I got really upset for no reason this morning, so I came out here in the morning sun to ponder.”

“Ponder?” I said, “When have you ever *pondered*?”

“Since now,” Leo said calmly, “I feel a greater need to connect to the Force. I feel it calling me.”

“Calling you?” I gasped, “For what?”

“I don’t really know,” Leo said slowly, “Calling me to more power...”

"Power's a dangerous thing," I said.

"I know," Leo told me, "I'm trying to be logical, and yet, Jek's Darkside powers are just invading every part of me. I almost annihilated a poor droid that bumped into me this morning!"

I shook my head, "You must learn to control your anger."

"How do you do it?" Leo asked me, "You still utilize the Darkside, and yet, you seem so calm always."

"I've always been able to control my emotions normally," I told him, "Yet, as like you, there has always been a deep-seeded anger."

"Towards the Jedi?"

"Yes, and now towards the Sith too," I growled.

"Amber," Leo said quietly, "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure," I sighed, plopping down on the grass next to him, "What is it?"

"Did I make a bad choice?"

Leo didn't even have to inform me what that choice was; it was obvious.

"I don't know, Leo," I said, "I'm not sure we'll ever know. What do *you* plan on doing?"

Leo sighed again, "Welp, you're looking pretty cute this morning, so I guess the first thing I'm going to do is ask you out to breakfast."

Embarrassed, I looked down at my robe, "Oh, uhhhhh."

At this, Leo blushed, "Well, I don't want to embarrass you or something."

"No, no, no that's fine," I quickly said, "I just...well...no one has ever asked me out!"

"Seriously?" Leo exclaimed, "Not even at the academy?"

I shook my head, "No, and you were always more interested in Ember to notice me."

"To be fair," Leo said, "I did like Ember more, but she told me before she died that she did think you were lonely..."

I laughed, "I thought you already knew that!"

Leo stood up and was about to answer when the scream of nitro engines pierced the sky. Far above us a lone starfighter bucked violently through the sky and descended rapidly towards the base.

"What is *that*?!" Leo gasped.

"I have no idea," I said, "But I'm not sticking around to find out."

I raced for the base, but quickly discovered that Leo wasn't following. When I turned around, I saw him, his arms outstretched, pushing back on the spaceship and drawing it in slowly. The engines roared as the pilot tried desperately to pull away, but Leo's insane Force powers prevailed. Eventually, the pilot gave up and let Leo pull it down to the ground. The guard droids quickly surrounded it and aimed their laser rifles.

Intrigued, I went over to investigate. The top of the starfighter flipped up and Lhoka jumped out...followed by Ping.

"Guys?!" I exclaimed, "Whatever are you doing here? Is Mace with you?"

"Hey," Ping said, "Leo, you look a little better."

"I *feel* only a little better," Leo said, "My powers are too great for me."

"How do you know?" Lhoka exclaimed.

"It's kind of a long story," Leo said.

"The better question is why are you guys here?" I asked them.

"George came back to Mace's little apartment suite," Ping said, "And they started talking about some grand infiltration of the Empire's Star Destroyers."

"And we were like... 'We're outta here!'," Lhoka finished, "I'm done risking my life for a bit. I never signed up for this much fighting."

"What's with your outfit?" Ping wanted to know, looking at my bathrobe.

"Oh, uh, nothing," I quickly replied, "I need to go change."

"You plan on staying for a while?" Leo asked Ping and Lhoka.

"I never planned on leaving," Lhoka said confidently.

"Well, I may go back to my Mom. I don't want her to get worried," Ping admitted.

"You're welcome here as long as you like," Leo said graciously, "And I believe that I could learn a thing or two from you about how to control the Force."

While Leo, Ping, and Lhoka chatted, I hurried back into the base and ran up to my room. I had always prided myself on my fashion sense, and, with this being my first official date, I was determined not to screw it up. Although not as good looking as Tay, Leo had always been second on my list for potential boyfriends, although Ember had stolen him away. I hadn't really been that upset about it though because Ember had a lot of strong qualities. Jek had acquired new, special custom combat outfits for us a year ago, but whenever we weren't on a mission - as was fairly frequently the case, I got to go shopping. Hence, my massive walk-in closet in my room wasn't even close to big enough. A half hour later, I finally decided upon a black and gray, cut top that matched a light gray pair of form-fitting pants connected to a small dress attachment that flowed from the waist down the right pant leg. After braiding my mid-length hair into two braids that ran down the back of my head and wrapped into a ponytail, I stepped out of my room and walked downstairs.

I found Leo in the dining area, working on some more software for the droids on his laptop. Much to my surprise, Leo had also dressed up in a more formal outfit as opposed to his usual "action" clothes.

"Woah," I told Leo, "You're looking really good today!"

Leo took one look at me and stood up immediately, staring at me. Unfortunately, he stood up *too* quickly and ended up ramming his left knee on a table leg.

"OWE!" he grunted, "Owe, owe, owe!"

"Don't hurt yourself on my account," I laughed, heading towards the kitchen.

"WAIT!" Leo called out after me, "I already have the breakfast figured out!"

Barely had he said this, then one of his battle droids rushed out of the kitchen with a platter full of delectable breakfast treats.

"Hey!" I said, "I didn't know we had Naboo Break Knots here!"

"I smuggled them in a few days ago," Leo told me, "Because there was a really good deal on them."

Another droid rushed by and quickly removed Leo's laptop and pulled up another chair next to him.

"You...can...sit...here, ma'am," it told me.

"Why thank you," I said, sitting softly on the chair.

Leo piled a generous portion of soft cakes and Veron bacon onto his plate before asking me how I felt after yesterday's harrowing experience.

"I could be doing *a lot* better," I admitted, "I'm still mourning over Ember."

"Me too," Leo sighed, "I miss her so much already!"

"How *did* you revive me anyway?" I asked, "Was I really dead?"

Leo shifted about uncomfortably in his chair, "You were definitely dead."

"Like, how dead," I pressed.

Leo sighed, "Like, filled-so-full-of-holes-you-looked-like-butchered-meat-dead."

"That would explain why my outfit was so trashed," I stated, "I'll have to use my old combat outfit from three years ago."

"I would have gone for Ember too," Leo said, "But when she showed up in that weird dream I had...I couldn't bring myself to try to find and revive her."

"The Empire probably already burned her up anyway," I sniffed.

"It's really my fault," I sighed, "I should have never agreed for us to go on that suicide mission."

"Leo," I told him, placing my hand on his right shoulder, "We've been through so many battles, duels, and fights together. We all accepted the risks. It wasn't any more your fault than mine or hers!"

Leo didn't answer this comment; just continued to polish off the rest of the food on his plate.

"Soooooo," I finally said, "What did you and Ember do on dates?"

"Normally, we don't get any farther than this on our dates," Leo answered, "Something *a/ways* interrupts us."

This was followed by a violently loud beeping coming from Leo's laptop that the droid had placed on a small desk table a few meters away.

"Exhibit A," Leo said, getting up from the table to check his laptop.

As soon as Leo had flipped open the lid of his laptop, the beeping was suddenly replaced by the loud yelling of Lhoka.

"LEO!!!! AMBER!!!! ANYONE!!!! Do you copy?!"

In the background, I heard the sound of blaster fire.

"I'm here, it's Leo," Leo said into his computer's microphone, "What *are* you doing?!"

"Ping...and I discovered the source of those tracks in the ground yesterday!" Lhoka shouted over the sound of yelling, "There's a bunch of dudes trying to forest all the trees over here!"

"Why are they fighting you?" Leo asked.

"Because Ping said to stop cutting down the trees," Lhoka replied, "They could hurt the environmental ecosystem."

I sighed, "Did you let them take out the speeder bikes?"

"Uh, yeah," Leo replied sheepishly, "I didn't think they could get into this kind of trouble."

I groaned.

"I'll be right there," Leo told her, "Don't do *anything* stupid!"

With that, Leo rushed out of the room towards the hangar bay, "Thanks for the date, Amber! You stay here and keep talking to Lhoka!"

"But you're outfit!" I yelled after him.

"It'll be fine!" Leo shouted back, revving the engine of his own speeder bike.

As much as I felt guilt for not helping out, I knew that defeating a bunch of low-life loggers would be easier than pie for Leo to handle. Plus, I was starting to really like my outfit and didn't want to change out of it.

"Lhoka, is Ping by you?" I asked her, after sitting down at Leo's laptop.

"He was just here," Lhoka said, "I think he's on the other side of the spaceship."

This was followed by an angry yell and the sound of air hitting Lhoka's mic.

"Actually," Lhoka said a minute later, "I don't really need any help..."

"You defeated them all by yourself?" I gasped.

"With Ping's help," Lhoka told me, "But I will need Leo's help to decide what to do with all these guys."

"Who are you talking to?" a gruff voice spoke.

"None of your business," Lhoka snapped.

"But it is mine," a familiar voice answered - Leo.

"What's all this about?" the gruff voice continued, "What did I ever do to you?"

"This isn't free territory to log," Leo answered.

"Well excuse me. There wasn't exactly a sign telling us that we *couldn't*," the man replied.

"We'll talk later," Lhoka whispered to me, "I'll sign off now."

When Lhoka muted herself, I decided to go check on our spacecraft. It had taken a mighty beating yesterday, and I needed to make an inventory of what needed to be repaired.

"Could you get my holopad?" I requested of the nearby droids cleaning up the breakfast, "I need it."

"Yes, ma'am," the nearest droid told me, rushing off.

I left the dining room and walked over to the hangar where I had parked the ship yesterday.

"Oh bother," I sighed, "It needs to be almost completely replaced."

The windshield was nothing more than a glass spider web, two of the three hyperdrives were destroyed, and the wings were so full of dents that they looked like mini moons covered with craters.

It was while I was inspecting the tail fins, that Ping drove up on his speeder bike. Upon seeing me, he jumped.

"Oh! I didn't see you there!" he exclaimed.

"No problem," I told him, "How's it going over with those loggers?"

"Oh, uh, just fine," Ping said, "I forgot to retrieve my laser pistol from our starfighter out there."

"Okay then," I told him, distracted with the slivers of duranium that had been stripped clean off the apt fin.

As Ping left to retrieve his weapon, the droid finally arrived with my holopad.

"Thank you!" I exclaimed, hurriedly turning it on and starting to log the repairs that needed to be made. After jumping off the ship, I opened the side door to evaluate the inside of the craft.

"Ungh!" I cried out, "It *smells* in there!"

"Well, you did manage to track in a lot of blood," the droid reminded me.

"Ick," I said, "That's just so gross."

"Well, I'm sure it's..." the droid replied - cut off by the sound of nitro engines roaring to life.

"Ping?" I said, poking my head out of the main hangar doors.

Far to my left in the center of the field where Lhoka had parked the starfighter, Ping was now at the controls and slowly taking off.

"Hey, uh, where is he going?" I asked no one in particular.

"VrrroooOOOOMMMMM!"

Without even looking at me, Ping took to the sky and quickly disappeared into the atmosphere as a much larger spacecraft always arose from the forest and followed suit. I stared after them in shock; hopelessly confused as to what was going on.

"I...take...it...that...wasn't...supposed...to...happen?" the droid asked me.

I shrugged my shoulders, "Where would he be going? Home? Without telling us first?"

"He...may...have...asked....Leo," the droid said.

"I'll ask," I stated, hurrying back into the base and to Leo's laptop.

"Lhoka!" I spoke to her, "Did you know that Ping was leaving the planet?"

"What?!" Lhoka exclaimed, "You're serious?!"

"Yeah, he just left in your starfighter," I informed her.

"We just let the loggers go after they promised not to return," Lhoka told me, "Let me ask Leo if he knew about Ping."

There was some jumbled conversation; then Leo spoke into Lhoka's helmet microphone.

"Ping left, like...for good?" Leo asked me.

"I don't know," I told Leo, "He just told me that he wanted to retrieve his laser pistol from the craft, but then took off."

Lhoka sighed, "I have an idea what he's doing."

"What?" Leo insisted.

"He may...uh...be going back to George and Mace!"

"What for?" I asked.

"Beats me," Lhoka said, "But I did sort of think his coming along with me was suspicious. I was the one who suggested the idea anyway."

"Well, if he wants to go back, all the power to him I guess," Leo said, "Though I hope he wasn't spying on something."

"I really don't know," Lhoka commented, "But I'm sure he had no connection to the loggers."

"Probably just a coincidentally good distraction," Leo mumbled, "But let's Mace and George don't come back here. Mace didn't seem all too excited about me last time."

"No kidding," Lhoka said, "He gave Ping and I a long lecture on staying away from darkside users."

I grunted.

"Amber, would you check the radar?" Leo asked me, "Maybe we can get a bearing as to what direction he headed out in."

"Sure," I told him, "But just in case something weird is going on here...you are coming back right away?"

"Yeah, we'll be on our way in a second," Leo said, "I want to take a closer look at these trees first though."

I sighed again for affect and slowly made my way back upstairs to the security room. All over the room were beeps and buzzes and green lights that everything was checking out. I plopped down in a nearby chair and booted up the main radar station.

"Alright," I said to myself, "Let's see if we can figure out which direction he went in."

After pulling up the security footage, I found that the camera on the north side of the base had a really good view of him heading off in that direction, but when I looked up the spaceship on the long-distance radar, I saw that he veered to the right upon exiting the atmosphere.

I scrolled back another few hours to check what direction Ping and Lhoka's starfighter had flown in from; and...it was no surprise that it was the same direction.

"I can't believe that he would spy on us though," I mumbled, standing up to leave.

However, I was cut off by a buzzing alarm. This was followed by a large warning symbol on one of the monitors alerting me to another spaceship entering the atmosphere and approaching the base rapidly.

Chapter 9: Lhoka

The excited blabbering in Leo and I's earpieces started as Leo was inspecting the stumps of some downed trees.

"There's a large spaceship approaching!!" Amber screamed.

"Owe, OWE!" Leo yelled, "Wait a minute. What's going on?"

"There's a *large* spaceship approaching the base," Amber said, "It's on the radar, and the computer is beeping about it."

"Just one?" Leo asked.

"As far as I see," Amber said.

"Well, then it's probably not too dangerous. Just wait and see who it is," Leo suggested.

"But what if it's George and Mace?" Amber continued.

"There's no way that Ping could have gotten back to them in such a short amount of time," I informed Amber, "Unless they were literally waiting just outside of the planet's atmosphere."

"We'll be there shortly anyway," Leo said, "Just give me some time and keep me informed."

"Alright then," Amber said, worried.

"These loggers are just confusing," Leo commented once Amber had muted herself, "These cuts are so strange!"

"Why?" I asked.

"Because look, normally loggers would cut close to the base and remove the entire tree," Leo informed me, "But here we see they cut the trees halfway up. They're mostly just going to get leaves and branches!"

"Are the trees' canopies useful for something?" I questioned.

Leo shook his head, "Not that I know of, but I'm no flora and fauna expert."

To my left, the loggers had left a stack of the trees due to their hasty exit, so I sauntered over to them and took a closer look. Unfortunately there wasn't much to see.

"The canopies have been lopped off," I noted, pointing to the large pile of sticks and leaves positioned a few meters away.

"So they have," Leo acknowledged, coming over to me.

I sighed, "But what else would they have been here for? Surely they weren't here just to spy!"

"They *were* carrying guns," Leo noted.

"Doesn't everyone nowadays?" I countered.

Leo mumbled something; and then paused for a minute, running his hand along the chopped side of the trees, "What is this sap?"

"You mean this sticky, yellow stuff?" I asked, dipping my finger into the sap leaking out of the tree.

"Smells bad," Leo noticed, wrinkling his nose.

"How would we find out if any part of these trees are valuable?" I asked Leo.

"I'd have to reconnect with a contact of mine who specializes in rare, biological material," Leo said, "I'll just leave this stuff here, and I'll contact him when we get back to the base."

"Speaking of which," I said, "We should check on that spaceship - considering that Amber seemed super worried."

Leo laughed as he hopped back onto his speeder bike, "She's just cautious."

Quickly revving my engine, I zoomed after him, zooming through the trees with practiced ease. My absolute favorite thing to do was ride these special bikes through the forest, and I quickly covered the ground. After gaining air on the last small crest before reaching the base's surrounding meadow, I slalomed through the dense shrubbery and burst out into the open land. Leo, who had fallen behind me, was then able to catch up, as I slowed down - distracted by something I saw out of the corner of my eye. Just as I realized what it was, Leo slammed his bike into mine, and we went flying through the air... - just as a large laserbolt destroyed the remnants of our bikes.

"I hate it when Amber's right," Leo yelled, sprinting back towards the forest.

"What's she right about again?" I shouted back as more massive laser pulses flashed out of the cannon on the base's roof and attempted to annihilate us.

"That spaceship wasn't exactly a welcoming party," Leo yelled, diving into the bushes.

"They already captured the base?" I said, cowering in the bushes as we attempted to creep out of range of the laser cannon's pulses.

"I don't think Amber would be shooting at us," Leo whispered, "And..."

He trailed off as we ran into a large collection of the base's droids all hiding behind trees.

"Wait...What are *you* guys doing here?" Leo wanted to know.

"Um, we were being shot at, so we ran," Command-DR said.

"But you were *supposed* to *guard* the base," Leo exclaimed.

"How were we supposed to know that those Jedi were going to attack us?" Commando countered, "You told us to ignore them last time!"

"Wait, WHAT?!" I exclaimed, "They're *shooting* at us!"

"They were in the spacecraft," Commando said, "So logical thinking would lead to the fact that they are manning the cannon."

"I should have put more locks on that thing," Leo whined.

"But why would they shoot at us?! After all we did for them?!" I grumbled.

"Never mind that," Leo said, "I'm sure there's a very good reason."

"Good reason?!" I exclaimed, "There's rarely a good reason for trying to kill someone!"

Leo thought on this for a moment but was interrupted by frantic yelling in our earpieces again.

"GUYS!" Amber screamed over the noise of lightsabers clashing, "HELP ME!"

Suddenly and visibly shaken, Leo quickly responded, "We're trying, but someone's manning the base's laser cannon!"

"Well, hurry, because Mace is too...AAAAHHHH!" The ear-destroying scream ended the conversation and quickly dissolved into static.

If Leo hadn't been mad before, he certainly was now - lightning crackled between his fingertips as he barked at the droids.

"You guys provide the distraction - shoot back at the laser cannon. We'll run for the hangar,"

Leo snapped, racing back towards the base. The droids, without a second thought about the plan, spread out, charging ahead into battle.

"LEO!" I yelled after him as we emerged from the forest and sprinted towards the main hangar door, "Wait for me!"

"KAABOOM!" a massive laser bolt plunged into the dirt three meters away from me and sent me flying through the air. Luckily, I caught myself and kept on running while Leo cut open a hole in the locked hangar's door so we could get in. As soon as I flattened myself against the wall of

the base, I helped cut open the hole - allowing us entry into the base. Inside, the base was eerily quiet - devoid of the normal clanging of the patrolling droids.

Inside, Leo paused for a moment to connect with the Force.

"They're upstairs," he said, racing out of the hangar and into the main hallways. I quickly fell behind because Leo was using the Force to give him an extra speed boost. Huffing and puffing, when I finally climbed the stairwell, I immediately saw Mace and Leo battling it out. On the ground next to them was the inert form of Amber. With no one else in immediate sight, I quickly bent down to Amber and felt her pulse. Luckily, she was still alive.

"Lhoka?!"

I turned around to see Ping standing right behind me, his lightsabers at ready.

"Ping!" I said, "What is going on? Why is Leo fighting Mace!"

"Mace said we need to end Leo's and Amber's Darkside powers," Ping told me.

"But they saved our lives!" I yelled at Ping, "How could you possibly give up on them now?!"

"I haven't," Ping said slowly, "But...they're technically Sith!"

"SITH!" I roared, "What Sith do you know that saves lives?"

"None," Ping replied.

"Then get real!" I told him.

Behind me, there was a roar of anger from Mace as Leo undoubtedly gained a tactical advantage. I turned around to find Mace and Leo maliciously attacking each other - whirling around so fast, it was hard to keep track of what was going on. Leo may have been very angry, but he knew not to release his full power upon Mace, as Mace was an expert in dealing with Darkside wielders.

"Stop fighting!" I yelled at Mace, "We need to work this out!"

As my plea fell on deaf ears, George emerged from the main control room to my left - his lightsaber at the ready.

"Were you manning the cannon?" I demanded of George.

"Yeahhh," George said slowly.

"Why were you shooting at us?!"

"I was shooting at Leo," George defended himself.

This final statement set me off.

"I may be young," I told him, "But I know when to stand up for my friends! Step away, NOW!"

Taken aback, George stepped back into the control room, confused at my sudden outburst.

"Lhoka," Ping said to me, "Calm down."

"How can I calm down when you guys are harming us?!" I screamed.

"George!" Mace interrupted me, "Kill Amber while you can!"

"What are you saying?!" I yelled back.

"I decided we can't take any more risks with Darkside Force wielders," Mace yelled over the grunts of Leo and himself, "It's time we purge the galaxy of these people."

I set my jaw and placed a foot upon Amber's unconscious body.

"If you want to get to her," I told George fiercely, "You'll have to go through me first!"

George balked - not wanting to harm me, while I lit my lightsaber and resumed a defensive stance. However, instead of a dark purple blade, my blade had now turned red.

Ping gasped, and George's eyes grew wide.

"They've infected you!" George exclaimed, "It's too late."

This new revelation scared me, but I knew that I had to do something to save Amber's life. Quickly, George jumped at me, flashing his lightsaber towards my head, but I dodged and jerked my lightsaber in a quick motion - lashing out with my lightwhip. Ping got caught in the crossfire of my lightwhip and had to dive into the stairwell to avoid getting sliced in half. Meanwhile, George whirled around to get another "go" at me.

"CRACK!" I snapped my lightwhip in his direction - forcing him to keep his distance from me to avoid the unpredictable undulating of my lightwhip. Behind me, Leo and Mace continued to battle - unable to best each other. Ping, in the stairwell, was still frozen with indecision - unable to choose between the two sides.

Suddenly, George dove forward, aiming to puncture Amber's body with his lightsaber, but I caught the attack and repelled it using a special technique that Leo had taught me.

Simultaneously, Leo performed a swift defensive motion and locked blades with Mace; following that up by throwing Mace over his shoulder. Mace flipped through the air and collided with George and I - the momentum carrying us into the stairwell and over the edge of the stairs. It might have been possible to grab onto the railings had we not also run into Ping - our four bodies were hopelessly tangled as we plunged down the stairs towards the first floor.

When the constant motion of rolling down the stairs ended, I pulled myself up and came face to face with a clone trooper - or maybe it was a stormtrooper; I still had trouble telling them apart.

"Ungh," George groaned, just before noticing the hallway full of troopers, "What in the name of the galaxy?"

"Jedi, you are under arrest by the Empire," the head clone trooper informed us, levelling his laser rifle.

Mace, not being one to surrender, jumped on the troopers - attacking them. George and Ping followed, luckily forgetting about me. I, in turn, made a hasty exit back up the stairs ignoring the blood trickling down the side of my head from falling down an entire flight of stairs. Back up on the second floor, Leo had managed to awaken Amber, while also looking anxiously out the window of his room.

"There may be a problem," I informed him.

"I already know," Leo said.

"Wait, what's going on?" Amber asked.

"Stay here!" Leo insisted. Without a second thought, he blasted the window of his room open with the Force and leapt out. Amber and I quickly ran to the window to see what his plan could possibly be. Outside, several drop ships had already arrived and were quickly unloading storm troopers. Upon seeing Leo, all the closest troopers immediately fired on him. Unfortunately for them, Leo had been saving up the energy derived from his anger. Not even bothering to snatch his lightsabers off his belt, Leo cupped his hands in the air and summoned an intense wave of electricity - Darkside power that was so strong it consumed every living and non-living entity in its path. The entire air became a massive electrical cloud that incinerated every TIE fighter and spaceship in the air as well as scores of trees nearby and any storm trooper that had not managed to jump inside our base.

"Lhoka! Watch out!" Amber screamed, leaping out of Leo's room towards the door. I realized, just in time, that the electricity was arcing through the broken window; so I followed Amber out of the room and slammed the door shut as the cracking of thunder reverberated against the back of the steel door. Down below, I could hear the surprised yells of troopers.

Amber wasted no time in running into *her* room and quickly looking out the window as the smoke, fire, and flashes of light dissipated.

When we were finally able to see outside the window, I first noticed all the smoking carnage outside, but the next thing I saw were the two men still standing in the middle of the blackened meadow. One was Leo, but the other was in a dark, hooded robe.

"C'mon Lhoka!" Amber said to me, cutting a hole through the blast-proof window and leaping out. I didn't exactly want to jump out into the mess below, but I trusted Amber's instincts, so I followed. With intense focus, I managed to control my jump to land lightly by Leo who was kneeling on the ground, breathing heavily.

The hooded man began to say something, but was interrupted by a nearby door on the base being thrown open and three Jedi racing out. Mace, upon seeing us again, attacked immediately while George and even Ping followed up.

The hooded figure ripped off his hood, revealing his true identity - the previous Emperor Palpatine.

Mace growled in outrage, attacking ferociously while George singled out the exhausted Leo. Ping headed straight for me.

"You leave us alone!" Amber screamed at George, leaping in the way and blocking his blows.

"Me too!" I told Ping, as he bore down upon me.

Unfortunately, Ping was much too strong for me, and his whirling blades appeared to be everywhere at once. In a matter of seconds, he snapped my lightsaber out of my hands and thrust me against the ground with a powerful Force push.

"Ping!" I wheezed, "What are you doing?!"

"I'm -WWWAAAHHHH!" Ping began, before screaming.

Finally catching his breath, Leo had turned around and launched Ping far into the sky - right over the base. Completely surprised, Ping could do nothing as he flew through the air and disappeared on the North side of the base. Leo then proceeded to choke George, using both of his hands for maximum strangling power.

"Ungh! Argh," George groaned, trying to breathe.

"I told you to leave me alone," Leo growled.

"Don't hurt him, Leo!" Amber quickly interrupted, "He's already turning blue in the face!"

Despite his intense anger, Leo relaxed his grip on George, allowing him to crumple to the ground and breath again. While taking in great gulps of air, George suddenly went rigid and collapsed as Palpatine flashed by.

"Well now that was productive," Palpatine said, dusting his hands, "Three Jedi down in only a few minutes!"

"What did you *do*?!" Amber screamed as George's dead body slumped to the ground.

"I am finishing what I started," Palpatine grinned evilly, "And he is one of the Jedi I vowed to destroy."

"Oh, well then," Leo said, "If we're keeping our vows, I need to do this!"

With lightning speed, Leo stretched out his hands and started choking Palpatine. Angered, Palpatine attempted to shock Leo with his Force lightning, but Amber used her lightsaber to block the lightning and reflect it back on Palpatine who was immediately electrocuted. Leo, then, slung him far away over the forest.

"You...just killed the emperor?!" I gasped.

"No," Leo said, "He's just unconscious and will probably still live. I'm no cold-blooded killer."

Amber shook her head, "So much death, and where's Mace?"

"Sidious killed him over there," Leo told her, pointing to where some charred dropships were still smoking.

"What will we do now?" I asked as more TIE fighters descended from the sky.

"Somewhere we can make our *own* choices," Leo said defiantly.