



Chapter 1: The Signal

The planet had no name — not anymore.

It had been scrubbed from the archives, its atmospheric codes blacklisted, cartography data corrupted, and its Republic designation reassigned. What little history remained was buried in footnotes, sealed in fragmented Inquisitor records, and sealed behind access codes that hadn't been used since the Jedi still held seats in the Senate.

That's exactly why I came.

They call me many things — archivist, heretic, traitor, rogue. I've worn all those labels like cloaks and then discarded them when they got in the way. But one thing I am, always, is curious.

And curiosity's favorite food... is a mystery no one wants found.

I stood at the edge of the plateau, staring down into the basin below. What used to be an observatory — Republic issue, judging by the ferrocrete ring and scatter of long-range sensor dishes — now looked more like a cratered ruin. The bones of it jutted from the dust like a half-chewed carcass. Time, and war, had done their work.

But something inside was still moving. Still *transmitting*.

Four days ago, I intercepted the signal — a ghost frequency, pulsing like a dying heartbeat through an ancient band once used by the Jedi Outer Rim relay network. Long since decommissioned. Some would've dismissed it as cosmic interference, a digital hiccup. But the frequency was clean. Focused. Repeating.

"...Sky...walk...er..."

That name doesn't echo lightly.

I spent the next two days triangulating the signal's source — past collapsed hyperspace lanes and forgotten star charts — until it led me here. A dead world with no exports, no colonies, no orbital traffic for half a century.

Just a whisper. And a silence that felt... staged.

I brought *The Quiet Fang* down at dusk. She protested the landing — something in the ionosphere wasn't playing nice — but she held together. I left her cloaked against the cliff wall, triple-locked and rigged for discouragement.

Climbing down into the observatory basin, I passed the remains of defense turrets, their barrels melted like candle wax. Orbital precision strikes. Clone Wars era. Nothing scavenged, nothing looted. That told me something too:

Whoever hit this place wanted to make sure it stayed buried — not ransacked.

The main structure was half-collapsed, a jagged maw of fused stone and durasteel. I scanned it: the signal was coming from below. Of course it was.

I found a half-buried blast door along the western edge, scorched but sealed. Republic-era security stamp. Faint traces of energy in the emergency power couplings. Just enough.

I knelt, brushed dust from the control panel, and slid a charge spike from my belt. The lights flickered once, then the door groaned. With a hiss of stale air and decades-old dust, it unsealed — reluctantly — and slid aside.

The darkness inside wasn't just absence of light. It felt *layered*. Like time had congealed into shadow.

I stepped through anyway. Curiosity again.

My boots echoed through the corridor, muffled by a thick coat of undisturbed ash. Walls once lined with power conduits now flickered in dim, broken segments. Faint emergency glowstrips pulsed like a dying pulse. The silence was... attentive. Like the place was listening.

And beneath it all — the signal.

"...Skywalker..."

But this time, there was something else. A distortion behind the voice. Not static — *pain*. You can hear it, when you've heard enough dying messages in your life.

At the heart of the complex I found a central communications hub. Half the consoles were slagged or buried under rubble. But one terminal still had power — barely. A holo-interface hummed like a breath caught in a throat.

And then... it spoke again.

"Skywalker failed."

That wasn't a glitch.

I approached slowly. Fingers poised above the interface.

I've cracked Jedi encryption before — not because I'm better than them. Because they're predictable. Even their secrets follow structure. This one was buried under three layers of looping code, disguised as system errors.

But I found the key.

The hologram ignited, flickering blue and ghost-white.

It was a Jedi — or had been. Humanoid, hooded, face obscured by static. But the voice was clear now.

"If you've found this... the Archive failed. The Temple fell. Skywalker is compromised. The others — gone. Trust no Council. Trust no code."

The feed cut. And the signal looped again.

No name. No coordinates. Just a warning.

And a confession.

I stood in the dark a moment longer, listening to the signal fade back into its loop. My hand hovered over my holocomm, ready to ping the Fang.

Instead, I cut the signal recording, encoded it, and locked it behind my personal cipher.

This wasn't just some forgotten broadcast.

This was a survivor. Or a weapon.

Or both.

And the deeper I looked, the more I began to wonder...

What else had they buried down here?

Chapter 2: The Vault

The vault wasn't marked. No symbol. No sigil. Just a blank durasteel wall with stress fractures crawling up from the base — the kind orbital fire doesn't make unless it's trying to crack something *meant* to survive.

But someone had gone to great lengths to bury this room. And that always means it's worth opening.

I traced my hand across the wall, fingertips brushing a faint energy pulse — a repulsorlatch. Old Republic design, military-grade. Normally, you'd need a Jedi clearance imprint or a command override key.

I carry neither.

But the Republic had a flaw: too much faith in order, not enough imagination. The older the lock, the more predictable the blind spots.

I slotted my custom decryptor into a corroded port behind the wall panel and fed it a recursive logic trap — the kind that tells an old system, *Yes, of course I'm authorized... you just forgot to remember me.* After ten seconds, the wall *clicked*. The latch hissed. The vault unsealed with a slow hydraulic exhale.

Inside: dark.

But not empty.

The room pulsed with residual energy — faint, but charged, like the air before a storm. Dust curled upward as I stepped in, responding to currents that weren't there.

At the center of the room sat a pedestal. No console. No power conduit. Just a plinth of black stone — volcanic, maybe obsidian — and atop it, a holocron.

Unlike any I'd ever seen.

No geometric perfection. No Jedi crystal symmetry. This one was asymmetrical, angular, wrong in a deliberate way. Its surface bore Sith glyphs — etched deep, as if scorched by a blade. But underneath them, buried like bones under skin, I could see remnants of Jedi circuitry. Standard encryption mesh. Training core resonance frame.

A Frankenstein artifact.

Hybrid tech.

The kind both Orders would destroy on sight.

I didn't touch it. Not yet. I knelt. Closed my eyes. Listened.

No whispers. No pull of the Force. Just... pressure.

Like the air itself was waiting.

I reached out slowly, fingers hovering just above the artifact — and the holocron ignited.

Not violently. Not with malice. With *recognition*.

A soft hum. A red-gold light shimmered along the glyphs. And then... it *spoke*.

Not in Sith. Not in ancient Jedi tongue.

In a voice I knew from every corrupted record and battlefield echo.

"If you are not Jedi... then you may proceed."

Anakin Skywalker.

Not Darth Vader. *Skywalker*.

The voice was younger. Conflicted. Not yet consumed, but far from whole. Whoever recorded this had done so in the eye of the storm — not before it, and not after.

"You found this. That means you're off the path. That means... maybe you can still see."

The vault trembled — not physically, but psychically. A pulse behind my eyes. I gritted my teeth.

"They lied about what happened. They'll keep lying. The Temple didn't fall because we were betrayed. It fell because we became the betrayal."

The light from the holocron flared — and a vision hit me like a shockwave.

Not a memory. A *projection*.

I stood on the floor of the Jedi Temple — but broken, on fire. Blaster marks scarred the pillars. Younglings lay still. A shadow passed overhead, saber ignited, eyes lit with a fury the Force itself recoiled from.

And then — a flicker. The same figure... weeping. Kneeling in ashes. Whispering a name.

Padmé.

The vision shattered. I staggered.

The holocron dimmed.

"I tried to fix it. I tried to save them. But the rot was already in us. In me. If you're hearing this..."

A pause. Heavy. Human.

"...then maybe it's not too late for you."

The light collapsed inward. The holocron sealed.

But I wasn't alone anymore.

Something had been awoken — in me, or in this place. I couldn't tell which.

And somewhere behind the vault walls... I felt another pulse.

Deeper. Older. Still waiting.

Chapter 3: The Betrayer's Echo

The holocron pulsed again the moment I re-entered the chamber.

No contact. No command.

It *knew* I was there.

I watched it float an inch above the pedestal — suspended in its own judgment. The Sith glyphs glowed faintly, but the voice that spilled from the crystal lattice was still Jedi.

Still *his*.

"There was a moment..."

Skywalker's voice cracked — not with static, but with memory. Not performance. Confession.

"...when I stood before him. The Chancellor. My friend. My commander. And I knew what he was. What he had done. What he was becoming."

The air grew colder, though no systems were active. I stood motionless as Anakin spoke to someone who wasn't me — but could only ever be me.

"And I still listened."

He paused.

I didn't.

I circled the pedestal slowly. Studied the edges of the projection. Force-based compression... but layered with subquantum encryption. A data ghost built on top of emotion.

"I believed I could control it. The lies. The darkness. Him."

"I thought I could lie to everyone — including the Force — and walk away clean."

My throat tightened.

This wasn't a Jedi's message. It wasn't Sith gospel either.

It was... *something else*.

A record for the unwanted.

A mirror held up to those of us in-between.

"But control is the first illusion."

"The Council thought they had control of me."

"He thought he had control of the future."

"And I thought I had control of myself."

A high-pitched whine crept through the vault — not audible, but psychic. It buzzed behind my teeth. The holocron began to flicker. Not just visually — *foundationally*. As if its message was being unraveled mid-transmission.

"I made this... not for the Jedi. They'd destroy it. Not for the Sith. They'd corrupt it. But for someone else."

The projection stuttered. Anakin's face — half-formed in hard light — twisted. His eyes, once sad, now glowed a faint yellow.

But the voice that followed?

Not his.

"Enough."

Sharper. Colder. Authoritative in a way that didn't *ask* for obedience — it *assumed* it.

"If you are hearing this, you are trespassing on restricted Republic intelligence infrastructure. This archive has been repurposed under Executive Override Theta-Nine."

I flinched.

Palpatine.

Not his face. Not his presence. Just his *will* — woven into the very code of the message. A shadowprint of a man who thought ahead.

"You are not Jedi. You are not Imperial. You are nothing. Which makes you useful."

The lights dimmed. The holocron now flickered with two colors — blue and red. Jedi and Sith. Balanced. Or poisoned.

I looked away.

And realized I didn't believe either anymore.

"Listen closely, intruder."

"You were meant to find this. He was meant to break. And now you are meant to decide."

The room returned to silence.

But my mind didn't.

This wasn't a recording.

It was bait.

Laid by two dead men who still refused to stay buried.

And the worst part?

I wasn't sure which of them I agreed with more.

Chapter 4: The Siege

They didn't knock.

They landed hard — repulsorlifts screaming as their freighter scorched a trench into the dust plains outside the observatory ruins. No transponder. No IFF. Just violence inbound.

I sealed the vault door and activated the last security system that still hummed beneath the sand: a perimeter of forgotten Republic mines, their IFF sensors long since decayed. They wouldn't care who you were anymore.

Neither did I.

The holocron flickered again. Anakin's face — fractured, uncertain — mouthed a word I couldn't hear. Palpatine's echo hissed behind it like mold beneath tile.

And then silence.

The vault was no longer secure. And neither was the message.

Three entered. Two more stayed outside — sentinels, or snipers. They moved like former Jedi but stank of something else. Ash. Obsession.

The one in front wore a tattered robe marked with a burned-in symbol I didn't recognize — some bastardized version of the Jedi sigil, mirrored and split down the middle.

She smiled without warmth.

“Step back. That artifact doesn't belong to you.”

I didn't draw.

I didn't flinch.

I just spoke.

“You're half right.”

Her eyes narrowed. The others flanked left and right — but not too far. They were Force-users, but not clean ones. Broken kyber hung from one of their belts — still humming, still bleeding.

"We are the Wards of the Archive," she said. "We preserve what the Jedi defiled. What the Sith abused. We keep the truth safe."

"You mean you hoard it," I replied.

"Better than letting it spread."

Her blade ignited — a yellow-red fracture line. One of her comrades mirrored the move.

I didn't light my saber.

I threw a rusted hydrospanner at the emergency lighting panel above her head.

It exploded.

Flash, sparks, smoke — the oldest trick in the book. But it worked. I dropped low and kicked the pedestal, sending the holocron sliding across the durasteel floor. It sparked, hissed — the message stuttered into a scream and then fell silent.

And then came the real fight.

I didn't win because I was stronger.

I won because I *knew the floor plan*.

The second one slipped on a half-rotted power cable I'd pulled loose minutes earlier. The third didn't see the mine beacon I'd dragged inside the corridor and calibrated to trigger on sudden movement.

Only the leader was left — and she was bleeding. But smiling.

"You'll die here, Vox. And no one will even know what you tried to steal."

"Good," I said.

I finally ignited my saber.

No elegant spin. No Force leap.

Just a low guard. The kind that says: *I'm tired, I'm bleeding, and I'm willing to do this the ugly way.*

The duel was brief. Dirty.

She was better.

But I was meaner.

I pinned her hand to the vault wall with a grappling spike. She screamed. I grabbed the holocron before her other hand could reach it — just as it pulsed violently.

The casing cracked.

Anakin's voice shredded mid-sentence, merging with Palpatine's. Half-words. Code fragments. A phrase that sounded like "echo protocol" before collapsing into static.

I ran.

Not because I was scared.

Because I wasn't finished yet.

Chapter 5: The Choice

I found the nearest functioning relay tower fifty clicks east, buried in a petrified forest of scorched duracrete trees — relics of some long-forgotten orbital strike. It took a week to bring the uplink back online. Another to decrypt what remained of the holocron's core.

The casing was ruined. The interface, corrupted. But the memory lattice... still flickered. Barely.

I didn't rush.

Truth deserves caution.

On the twelfth day, it spoke again.

Not Anakin's full voice — not anymore. Just a fractured string of syllables, torn from multiple timelines, stitched together by desperation and code decay.

"—if you hear this..."

Static.

"You're... my last mistake."

Then silence. Then:

"Don't... follow. Don't... repeat. But don't forget."

The lattice buzzed violently. Its final lights began to dim.

There was no more message.

Only choice.

Upload to the Archive, and the galaxy learns that Anakin Skywalker saw his fall coming. That he tried to redirect the future in secret. That the Sith and Jedi both missed something — and I didn't.

Or delete it. Bury it. Let the Force scatter what's left into myth, where no one can twist it into another doctrine, another cult, another war.

I stared at the console for a long time.

Long enough for the relay's uplink light to stop blinking.

Then I picked up the holocron, now nothing more than a blackened shard with no pulse.

I walked out of the bunker.

No ceremony. No witness.

Just a gust of wind behind me... and silence.

The Archive never recorded what happened next. And I never corrected the record.

Sometimes, that's the most honest entry of all.

Epilogue

The chamber fell silent.

No humming core. No blinking glyphs. Just the cold whisper of dust settling after violence.

Taryn stood alone beneath the fractured dome, the stars above watching through the cracks. He held what remained of the holocron — black glass, scorched and silent.

He didn't speak. Didn't flinch. Just turned, cloak rustling, and walked into the dark.

Somewhere far behind him, the last echo of Skywalker's voice flickered once... Then vanished.

A new signal was already waiting.



Extras

Author's Note from Taryn Vox

This entry is restricted. Consult at your own peril.

Not everything I recover ends up in the Archive.
Some truths require discretion.

If you're reading this...

You either earned access — or you bypassed the locks.

Either way, you're complicit now.

Welcome to the shadows between the stars.



Next Transmission

Coming Soon: *Echoes of the Unseen War*

A classified protocol buried beneath the ruins of Malachor triggers an encrypted distress call — one that predates the Sith Empire.

Vox answers. But something... answers back.

"Not all wars leave bodies. Some leave echoes."