

Two souls in love torn asunder.

A commoner, caught in an ideological war between those who revered Luke Skywalker, and those who believed that his compassion sew weakness and insecurity into the galaxy, must choose her side.

A fallen Skywalker, running from those who hunt the blood flowing through his veins, must face his buried past, and uncover a truth far more tragic than he ever could have imagined...

Manipulated by a mysterious force that relentlessly pursues vengeance against the Skywalkers, the two lovers are bound in chains that can only be broken once one kills the other.

And now, Luke has returned from death to guide Rey towards the path he believes in, one that believes that all can live in harmony, rather than needing to sacrifice certain groups for the greater good. But Rey has discovered the consequences of this ideal, and is tempted by the voices of those who proclaim it to be not only unrealistic, but irrevocably dangerous...

The ideals she chooses to embrace will decide whether Kylo Ren lives- or dies.

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PROLOGUE

“What should I do?” she pleads to the Force.

But there is no reply. There is no breeze, no running streams, no echoes of creatures quivering through the night. Just her. A moment passes, and at last, she gives in. It is the only way.

“The Hooded Beast,” the girl whispers.

She is suddenly enveloped in sinking darkness. And now, she hears the stark, powerful voice of that raven haired man once again. It tells her: “I knew you would be back.”

“I need to see it,” she says, “What you wanted to show me.”

“It’s all true. There’s a world, nothing like this one.”

She speaks back to him: “Can we ever visit it again?”

“We have to try.”

...THE setting fades, and a new one comes to light...

...He finally looks at her. “I thought I could get you to stay in my world if I took something from you. But I was wrong. You shut me out instead.”

She replies, “And just after I did, I regretted it. I tried my hardest to get back. But something had sealed us off. No matter how hard I tried to get back, I just couldn’t.”

...THE setting fades, and a new one comes to light...

...Rey feels her heart pounding; right before her, she cannot tell if there is danger or calmness. But she finally understands who Ben truly is. She feels his desires, his dark longings to be powerful, to reign over others. She wants to push it all away. But there is something else. A kindness, a need to protect. Though she feels it, she knows that if she pushes the darkness away, so too will the kindness leave.

Rey puts her hand on Ben’s shoulder. “We can’t stay here forever. We have to forget about all that now. We have to remember what it was like before all this ever happened- and we will do it together.”

Ben turns and looks at Rey, and nods. He firmly places his black, gloved hand into hers, and they stand up together.

...THE setting fades, and a new one comes to light...

“...I just wanted to be somebody. I looked up to the Force and imagined I was someone important. I really, really wanted it to happen. It was the only thing that kept me going. But I was just playing pretend, like some stupid kid, all along.”

“Not anymore,” Ben tells her, and takes her by the hand. The two now gaze at each other, and just then, the sun begins the set, and it’s night time. A distant boom is heard; then, explosions light up the night sky. Fireworks parade across the stars.

A moment passes, and Rey and Ben are standing side by side. Rey grasps Ben's arm, and holds it tight. She softly says, "I didn't want this place to go away."

Ben looks at her and says, "I'll never leave."

Rey shakes her head. "But there's somewhere I need to be."

Ben begins to worry. He reassures her, "We'll break out of their world, where nobody cares for us, together. You don't need them."

Rey takes her arm away from him. Then she looks away from Ben, and starts to walk away. But he clutches her hand, and says, "Don't look that way. Ignore it all. This is the only thing that matters." Rey turns back and gazes into Ben's eyes, but then looks away again.

Rey tells him, "I don't want to leave, but I can't stay here. I'm sorry."

She hands him the broken lightsaber handle, and Ben grasps it. Just as he realizes what's about to happen, he shouts, "Wait, Rey!" He tries to reach for her arm, but she fades away. As her world begins collapsing back into darkness, Ben wakes up back in the physical world, surrounded by the harsh, metallic confines of the First Order base, and completely alone.

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REVIVAL

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Long ago, in a galaxy far, far away...

It has been over a year since Luke Skywalker became a martyr for the Resistance cause. Kylo Ren has taken control of the First Order and has marched through the galaxy, enforcing a scorched planet policy to weaken the Resistance as much as possible. In brave retaliation, the Resistance has been gathering allies by diplomatically meeting with communities hammered by the First Order's iron fist. However, several communities have been double crossing the Resistance. In order to ensure true loyalty, and knowing that even a few acts of betrayal will topple the already fragile movement, the Resistance has emboldened on its pledges of loyalty to accept only the most trusted of members in its ranks.

Several months ago, General Leia Organa tragically passed away, succumbing to an illness she fought long and hard against. With heavy hearts, the most senior leaders of the Resistance have taken the reigns and pressed on. They have been contacted by a small planet, Juri, which fears the First Order's power. The planet's inhabitants, the Jurials, have offered to host a grand welcoming ceremony for the Resistance, as a gesture of friendship. The Resistance has agreed to attend, but where the loyalties of the Jurials truly lie will be soon be seen...

Chapter 1- A Fearful Premonition

ON a distant planet, three suns loom high in the morning sky. Below is a bright, sandy desert. There are large marble structures forming what looks to be a city. It is not majestic, but it is just enough to host a kingdom. In a vast but shoddy market, human-like inhabitants with robes run around and chatter rapidly in hushed whispers. They are waiting for a ceremony to start- and they are nervous. It is the first time this kingdom has hosted such important guests.

Outside the city gates, stone vehicles crawl through the sand. Inside their dark interiors, where only a few rays of light shine in through the window holes, Resistance fighters wait; their faces are solemn, and some look apprehensive. In the front, Finn peers on through a window in the distance. Instead of being cheerful, his face is somber. He turns back to speak to face the other rebels, including Rose.

Indignant, Finn says to the others, "After dealing with all those traitors, we're just gonna step right in with our guns down. Everyone's cool with this?"

In a reassuring tone, Rose delivers a rebuttal. "You know the Jurials are isolated scavengers. They don't care about intergalactic politics or trade routes. Every other community desperately needs the First Order's trading routes to survive. But the Jurials don't. Not after they lost Artura."

Another rebel speaks up, "Rose is right. Our intel checks out; we can trust these guys. So let's get them to trust us."

Finn sighs, "I know it all checks out. But I've got a bad feeling about all this."

The conversation dies down. As Finn moves back, another resistance fighter, a rose-skinned alien woman with scarlet irides, puts her hand on his shoulder and says, "Well, if it's any reassurance, I get what you're saying. I guess we just gotta be careful... never let your guard down." Compromised, all Finn can do is nod back.

BACK inside the city, a robed figure is sauntering through the market as dust clouds blow past. Another hooded figure, whose ferret-like nose pops out of the hood, greets him and hands him a parchment. Disgruntled, the sauntering figure snatches it away and heads back into a stone building.

Inside the dimly lit clay house, a close up of the parchment is seen- it shows the famous Resistance fighter Poe Dameron, standing proud next to a fighter ship. Beneath the picture are the words "MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU." Suddenly, the picture is torn in half, and we see the hooded figure angrily ripping it apart. He takes off his hood to reveal a grumpy, human-like, middle aged alien with a ferret nose and ears. "More Resistance propaganda!" the Jurial shouts.

A Jurial woman enters the room. Nodding in agreement, she says, "It's sickening how the king and queen are hosting that damn parade for them. They've been leading our kingdom into ruin! Back in the days of the Empire, we didn't have such weak leaders. Ever since the New Republic took over, there's been corruption everywhere! The only hope we have left is the First Order."

On the kitchen table sits a teenage Jurial boy engrossed in some hologram device. He has a bruised eye, and a shroud of depression hangs over his face. He tries to pretend he's not listening, but his face is clearly annoyed, and finally he speaks up against his parents: "An Empire that oppressed its own citizens."

"What does a kid like you know about the world?" the father fumes. He snatches half of the ripped poster, stomps over to the teenager, and shoves the parchment near his face. "This limp looking idiot your hero? How is this guy gonna make our planet better? Got an answer to that, smartass?"

His face, though bruised with a black eye, remains diligent. "By getting rid of people like you."

The mother screams, "Oh, you're gonna pay for that!" She picks up a metal cooking rod and sternly walks towards the teenager. The teenager jumps up and runs out of the house, and his parents follow after him.

He runs as fast as he can, and looks back to check for his parents. Suddenly, he bumps into someone. He takes a step back, and to his disbelief, he sees Resistance fighter Poe Dameron. Next to him is a tall, well-dressed man with a black beard and mustache. Insignias cover his uniform. The teenager stammers.

His parents catch up behind him, and their face changes to surprise they when see the two Resistance fighters before them. Poe looks at the kid, notices his black eye, and stares back to the parents. "These people bothering you, kid?" Poe quips.

The father gains his composure and walks over. "That's my son. It's none of your business." Then, his voice curls into a threatening tone. "If you people really wanted to help us, you fly off and leave us alone."

Just as the father is about to grab the teenager, the well dressed man steps in between them. "I don't believe we've met," he says. "My name is Gnovian, Leader of the Resistance, as appointed by the grand senate of the Neo Republic. I presume you're one of the few Jurials who worked in Artura, building weapons for the First Order? Part of the program that sought to transition Jurials from scavengers into factory workers?"

The father snarls, "Yeah, yeah. It was a good job. Until your people came along."

Gnovian shakes his head. "I'm sorry. But the truth is, the First Order was planning to use the factory as a trap to lure the Resistance in. Just so they can blow up everyone inside- Jurial and soldier."

"What? Get outta here."

"The truth is not easy to accept, but I will help you understand." Gnovian pulls out a hologram. The two older Jurials' faces devolve into shock as they read reports of how the First Order planned to kill its own workers. Bombs had been secretly implanted inside of them during their medical checkup, and Resistance fighters were lured in under false pretenses of negotiating with the workers about better working conditions.

"Th- that's imposs..." the older female Jurial stammers. Her husband seethes and shakes his head, still not accepting what he saw. Seeing he still has further convincing to do, Gnovian takes out an explosives detector, and shines it on the Jurial's chest, revealing a bomb inside. With a warm, reassuring tone, Gnovian gently says, "Don't worry. It was deactivated after we destroyed the control center. Unfortunately, as many workers ran away before we could tell them, many did not know of this."

The father glares at the general. "This was all your fault. The First Order had no choice. The Resistance was breathing down their necks, threatening to shut down their factories!" He turns to his son and says, "You can stay and listen to their jabbering if you want. But they're liars. Don't say I didn't warn you, boy." As the older couple stomps away, the wife angrily remarks, "That boy was a lost cause, anyways. I knew this day would come."

The boy sighs and says to Poe, "I can't believe it. My crazy parents were just told off by the Resistance."

Poe replies, "You look like you're in bad shape. They give you a lot of trouble?"

"Yeah," the boy answers. It was all he could say.

"You must've said something that really rattled them."

"Just some stuff about how the Empire isn't what they think it is. I was tired of them badmouthing you guys."

Poe turns to Gnovian, and the two exchange a glance of agreement. "Hey," Poe says, "Standing up for what you believe in is what someone from Resistance would do. You know... we could always use more people. What's your name, by the way?"

The boy's eyes widen. "It's Yatu," he stammers. He pauses for a moment, and says, "You serious?"

Poe chuckles, "No lie. As long as you've good with that."

Yatu replies, "Yeah, I am." Then, he turns to look towards his house. "And I don't think those two would care too much if I was gone."

Gnovian smiles at Yatu, "Poe and I have been scouting the area before the parade, looking for any possible dangers. Do you think you can be of help in this regard?"

Yatu straightens up and answers, "I can."

"Great!" Poe exclaims, "C'mon kid, let's get going."

Yatu looks like he's about to pass out, but he quickly sobers up, trying his best to act like a soldier. This is it, he thinks. No more living in that damned, run down house. No more fighting against people who never cared for him one bit. This was the start of his journey as a Resistance fighter.

OUTSIDE of the city, the stone vehicles are getting close to the gates. Finn takes a deep breath. No one is speaking; only the hums of rotating stone are heard. Back inside, the chattering in the market begins to die

down. Before its stalls are giant stone doors. They creak open, and music plays. From the doors enter roughly carved stone creatures, blinking and moving in ritualistic greetings. There is a pause, and the Jurials fall silent. Then, the music plays again. Out comes a group of Resistance fighters sitting on top of stone vehicles, pulled by more stone animals, and the fighters are waving and smiling. The aliens start chattering again, and this soon converges into a harmonistic, unified hymn, resembling a patriotic stadium rally.

As more and more of the Resistance enters, the noise converges more and more into cheerful unity, until no chatter is heard. Finally, when everyone sings as one, the king and queen appear. The queen announces, "Fellow citizens of Juridom, we gather here today in honor of the brave fighters of the Resistance. I am greatly saddened by how the First Order has threatened not just our people, but our way of life. They are aware that as noble scavengers, we have collected centuries and centuries of precious artifacts whose values are not cherished by their original owners. And they want to take that from us. But on this very day, we shall worry no longer. We have guardians now- and they have sworn to protect us with their very hearts and souls. Let us welcome them with what little we have, with the best of what we have, in true and genuine gratitude!"

The stone vehicle doors below the royalty open, and Finn, Rose, and other Resistance fighters step out. Finn stumbles a bit, but regains his posture. Rose smirks. Finn whispers to Rose, "Precious artifacts? That's a fancy name for garbage collectors." Rose elbows him in jest. They smile and greet the population, who sings back to them with a strong and happy tune.

Ships start flying in. On a BTL-S3B Y-wing, Poe and Yatu are seen. They land and greet the people, too. The Resistance introduces them all. Poe, the daring pilot. Rose, the brave mechanic. Finn, the former First Order soldier who became a Resistance hero. And Merilia, the scarlet-eyed hero who, near the beginning of the war, had risked her life to save Gnovian, Leia and many other leaders from a First Order attack.

"And let us now welcome their leaders!"

Next, a tall statue is dragged in, and on the top are the leaders of the Resistance. Gnovian stands proud in the middle. Insignias cover his vest, and a cape droops behind him. In a powerful voice, he speaks: "I am Gnovian, Leader of the Resistance, succeeding the late Leia Organa. We are honored to be here today. As your Queen stated, we will protect you until our very last breaths. You may ask: How? The answer is clear: Because the Resistance follows the Way of the Force. As you all know, the Force has guided your people for centuries, guarding your crops and ensuring your safeties against larger, terrible foes. So, I say this with utter assurance: If you trust in the Force, you trust in the Resistance."

The Jurial respond with a new song, one even more joyous than the last. Gnovian continues, "We, the Resistance, would not be here today were it not for a very important person. Because of our trust in the

Force, we have been led to her. I would like to introduce you to the savior of the Resistance. Her name is Rey.”

The crowd falls silent, and small chatters are heard, but others hush them. Below the tall statue, something opens. In slow steps, Rey steps out. She sees the Jurials- some are surprised, others are curious, and others are fearful, imagining what great power could require such an introduction. Rey bites her lip, not knowing what to say. But she manages to softly speak, “Hello.”

The crowd’s chatter oscillates. But when Rey speaks again, they focus back onto her. Rey tells the crowd, “I know there’s a lot of emotion going through everyone right now. But there’s no need to be afraid. I... as was said before, I’m the savior of the Resistance.” Rey bites her lip again. She feels awkward praising herself like this, and though the admiration moving through the crowd pushes her forward, it also makes her nerves race. As the crowd mutters amongst itself, she quietly whispers to herself, “Was that the right thing to say?” Facing the Jurials again, she stutters, “B-but I am not too different from any one of you. You can trust me. Um-”

An old female Jurial strolls up to her, “Now, now,” she speaks to the crowd, “Let us not make it difficult for our humble savior.” She stares right at a young Jurial, “It’s not polite to stare like that.” Turning back to Rey, the Jurial speaks to her: “We are so thankful for all you have done. We have all heard tales of you; it must not be easy for such a young child to suddenly find herself at the heart of all... this. For our thanks, we have something to present to you.”

The old Jurial takes out of a box. When she opens it, a dark jade light shines into Rey’s face, calming her nerves and amazing her at the same time.

“This, young child, is part of a twin kyber crystal, different than all the rest. We have cherished it in our monasteries for centuries. Long ago, our kings used this crystal and its twin to power a grand stone guardian, one who was foretold to never let us fall into unreturnable devastation. But one day, to save us all, the guardian sacrificed itself. And in the process, it lost its twin. The guardian is no more; but this crystal remains. We Jurials thought we would never find a guardian ever again. But looking into your eyes, young savior, we can say for sure that we have found another.”

Rey gazes into the crystal. After a long while, the old Jurial coughs and speaks, “Ah- this is yours. A gift. You can take it.”

Rey slowly reaches for the crystal. She pauses, remembering what it was like when she first touched Anakin’s blue lightsaber. But eventually, she decides to touch it. When she does, nothing happens.

Suddenly, a loud roar is heard. The Jurials scream and scatter.

Finn turns to look at Rose, and exclaims, "It's the First Order!"

Chapter 2- Rey's Disturbance

First Order ships swarm into the battlefield and fire in a chaotic barrage, shattering the fragile temple buildings. Arches and pillars crumble and fall. The screams of the Jurials startle Rey, but she regains her composure, and calms herself down. Closing her eyes, she reaches both hands out; in an instant, the massive avalanche of stones stop falling, lying still in space.

A sleek First Order ship cuts through the sky, and a general with a black avian-like mask rides on its transport. "ATTACK HER!" she screams from above.

Finn activates a plasma shield, and rushes in to protect Rey from being shot at while other soldiers form a defense around her with their own shields. On the ground, another First Order general, wearing the mask of a raging deity, silently commands troops to surround Rey's guards. With their every breath, the Resistance tries to fend them off. As soldiers charge at the general, he calmly places his hand down on the ground, and a rumbling occurs. The Resistance fighters begin to lose their footing, and suddenly, are struck with intense vibrations, causing them to kneel down and scream.

The general with the avian-like mask flies by over a group of Resistance fighters, and with one swift strike of her hand, a swarm of rocky fragments above them coalesces into an avalanche, and floods down into the fighters.

Poe starts ordering his troops to go into defense formation. He tells Yatu to go hide. Rose joins Poe in fighting against the general on the ground, while Merilia heads into an aircraft with other soldiers to combat the aerial enemies.

The old Jurial speaks to Finn, "They're here for the artifacts!" She hides the dark jade crystal in her robes, and Finn, reluctantly leaving Rey, shields the old Jurial from the attacks. Faraway lies an old temple, with two paths leading to it: one through a treacherous rock formation, and others through foggy ruins. Jurials run towards the temple through the formation but are gunned down. Finn sees this and tries to take the other route, but the old Jurial stops him: "You mustn't go through there! Come, I know a pathway we can take." The old Jurial runs towards a hidden nook in the formation, and Finn tries to follow her into the passageway. But before he can reach it, he's knocked to the ground by a nearby blast, and in his blurred

vision, he sees the old Jurial is left without a guard as she continues running. As stormtroopers run towards her, Finn tries to get up, but is too disoriented. He reaches out towards the troops, murmuring “No...”

Just then, to his surprise, several large boulders behind the stormtroopers begin shaking. The stormtroopers briskly turn around, guns up, surprised by the enemy behind them. They see the shaking boulders, and then see Finn reaching out towards them. “There!” one of them shouts. Finn reaches out harder, but the boulders barely budge now. Just when the stormtroopers start to fire on him, they’re hit with red lasers that seem to follow their own trajectory, like homing missiles. Rose steps in with a gun and helps Finn up; he begins to orient himself again.

“Nice shot,” he compliments her, “A new kind of homing gun?”

Rose replies, “No... it’s just an ordinary blaster.”

“What? I’ve never seen an ordinary blaster do that.”

“Me neither...” Rose answers, in equal perplexion.

An explosion rattles the duo’s footing. Finn heads into the passageway while Rose joins a fight in the other direction. He catches up to the old Jurial, and they both enter the temple, which already has many Jurials inside. The old Jurial barricades the door. But as Finn is taking a long, deep breath to cool off, he senses that something’s not right. He looks up, and notices that the old Jurial appears to be speaking in tongues to someone else through a transmitter hidden in her robes. The old Jurial sees Finn look at her, and gasps, but quickly tries to brush it off, asking him to seal the door. He heads over to her and seals it, but then sternly tells her, “Those are First Order code words.” She closes her eyes and doesn’t respond. Finn doesn’t inquire any further.

The Jurials are all evacuated into their holy temples, and only the Resistance and First Order, along with some Jurial soldiers, are left in the open city. Rey finally drops the stones. She rushes back into battle, heading for the faraway temple that soldiers are trying to break into, but First Order ships have blocked all the paths ahead; Rey hurriedly looks around for another way through, and spots small cracks in mountains in the distance. ‘I’ve gotta be crazy to go through that,’ she thinks to herself. But with no other choice, she presses on towards them.

Once she gets just before the cracks, she hesitates. Her hands caress the outside, wanting to make sure it truly is safe. But she realizes there’s no time to worry. She puts a foot in, then squeezes the rest of her body through the petite passageway. The insides are pitch black. As she crawls her way through the rocks,

its tight walls becoming narrower and narrower as she progresses, with the darkness choking the light trying to make its way in from the outside, Rey's heart beats faster and faster.

But then, her hands reach into a solace: a vacuum of wind.

Rey pushes herself out of the rocks, and all she can see is fog. Walking past the grey veil wavering in the air, with misty drops coalescing on her skin, she begins to see faint outlines of large, looming structures. When she gets closer, she sees the ghostly expanse of jeweled, stone ruins. But there is something else lurking, waiting for her to step a few inches forward.

With the Force just trembling beneath her fingers, Rey turns her head to peer into the ruin alleyways, and glimpses flashes of shadows brushing past. She draws her lightsaber, its low hum cutting through the humid atmosphere. Rey jolts towards the alleyway, but all of a sudden, the Force begins to twist and tumble in a sickly dance beneath her fingers- a feeling she knew far too well.

She feels her spine begin to shiver. Someone is behind her. When she turns around, she sees Kylo Ren, donning his mask again, red cracks filling in what was once tarnished.

"It's been a while since we met each other face to face," Kylo calmly breaks the ice. "Every time I think we would, something would get in our way. But this time is different. Draw." Kylo orders.

Rey reaches for a hilt, but pauses. "DRAW!" Kylo shouts.

Rey draws a blue lightsaber. Its light is not as stable as it used to be.

"Still carrying around that broken stick, are we? Let's see how fine of a job you did at fixing it!"

Kylo swings at her, and Rey parries. His wild swings seem reckless and chaotic, as if he's acting on pure instinct and without a plan. But as Rey is focused on parrying, she suddenly feels a solid thud against her back- she's landed against a temple wall. Kylo smirks and tries to aim for her hand, but she kicks him away and he stumbles back. Now Rey realizes Kylo did have a plan all along- he was trying to use the tight corridors and walls around them to his advantage.

Just as she guessed, Kylo continues wildly swinging to force Rey into small corners and alleyways, but she manages to force push him away and elbow his chest to escape. But when she runs away with her

back turned towards him, Kylo kicks at her feet and she falls. Stumbling back as she gets back up, she loses her defensive stance, and Kylo thrusts his lightsaber towards her, but she parries it upwards. He pushes her forward and corners her between two temple walls. As the two are locked in a stalemate, Kylo grunts and forcefully turns his lightsaber hilt. Rey eyes it, and catches on that he's trying to use his hilt to burn her shoulder. She tries to fight it, but with her lightsaber thrusting against Kylo's at an upward angle, she's defenseless. The light pieces her shoulder and she screams; with her last remaining strength, she angrily slices Kylo's lightsaber away and rolls away from him, but drops her own due to the pain of the light. She clutches her shoulder and seethes with hatred at Kylo, feeling a scar forming as the heat and smoke sears through her fingers.

"It's over for you," Kylo tells her, with a serpentine glare. He begins walking towards her, then quickly picks up the pace and sprints.

But Rey is now more determined than ever before. With her free hand, she stealthily clenches her fist and feels the Force grasping the stones and fallen pillars around her. In one swift motion, she thrusts her hand outwards and the pillars fly up; Kylo dodges most of them, but one knocks him to the ground. When the pillars miss Kylo, their momentum drives them into the walls behind him, and they crash through the temple ruins. As the ruins begin to crumble, Rey quickly uses the Force to grab her lightsaber, and the massive ruins collapse, trapping the two in total darkness. From far away, the Resistance troops, noticing the gigantic collapse, heads towards them.

Rey finds herself cut away from the outside light. She treads carefully, and just then, begins to hear the pounding of footsteps just beneath her feet, growing louder and louder. She feels her way around to try to find the exit of this labyrinth of ruins, and reaches a thin wall. Suddenly, the footsteps stop, and Rey gasps as her arms are suddenly snapped back and strangled around her waist by a tight, whipping cord that slings into her; she loses her balance and her grip on her saber. Just before she's knocked down to the ground, she pushes her face an inch away from the cold, stone ground with the Force.

Struggling to break free, Rey sideeyes what just wrapped around her. A translucent, crystal-like rope constricts her wrists, forearms, and waist. She reaches towards her weapon in shaking desperation, but Kylo is pulling it away from her with the Force, and the hilt merely quivers in place. A presence is approaching her. Soon, she hears Kylo whisper, "Glica. I'm sure you've heard of it."

I have, Rey thinks to herself. It's a nearly unbreakable material that can only be locked and released by code words telepathically imprinted into it by its owner. Without knowing those special words, she could be trapped forever. But soon, a different lingering sense of unease creeps up thru her. Her eyes widen.

"Feeling lost, are we?" Kylo softly says, "Don't struggle. You'll only make it worse."

But it's not the endless captivity that stirs her fear- it's because there is something about it all that is oddly, terrifyingly familiar to her.

Those secret words. Did she know them?

In a gentle whisper, shutting her eyes to let the pure instinct flowing inside overtake her, her lips move on her own: "The Hooded Beast."

And in an instant, the cord is loose. Shocked, Kylo lunges forth to grab it, but Rey grasps the falling rope in her hands before him, and hurls it onto the Sith warrior.

Kylo is suddenly lashed with a whipping pain wrapping around his neck, managing to stick one hand through just before it constricts onto his windpipe. "Impossible," he mutters, his words barely choking through.

Rey, panting profusely, is taken back at what just happened. She's at a loss for words.

"How did you know?" Kylo asks again, his cracking voice barely able to be heard.

"It doesn't matter," Rey answers firmly and hurriedly. "You can't get out; I set a new passcode. You're finished."

Seconds pass. Rey can only stare at the raven haired man with an unquivering intensity, unwilling to let him go. 'This is it,' she thinks. After months of chasing, she finally has him.

But what transpires next is not what she expects.

Kylo, staring at the ground, whispers back through his mask, "The Smiling Shadow."

The cord is released.

Rey gasps, and steps back from him. "But how?" she mutters in shock.

With his posture still motionless, Kylo replies, “Because I knew him too.”

A moment, living on as if time was frozen, passes by, but quickly dies as the sounds of blasters fly through the air, demolishing bits of stone and rubble away- the ruins entrapping the two in darkness shatter, enshrouding the two in enormous dust clouds and debris. Rey covers her eyes and all at once, red lasers start pouring down where Kylo is. She hears an agonizing scream from where he used to be- but she cannot see him, as the dust obscures her vision. As they dissipate, she sees that she is surrounded by Resistance fighters firing nonstop into the clouds.

And then, just before her, she sees Kylo bruised, his mask broken, and with blood and burns all over his body. He gnaws his teeth, and screams again, but this time in defiance- lifting his hand up, he pushes the Resistance fighters away. He tries to stand up, but Rey uses the Force to throw debris at him. As the stones knock him down, he writhes in pain. He’s worn down by the barrage of broken ruins, and gasps for air. Rey clenches her fist and a broken pillar on the ground starts rumbling; but at that very moment, she feels like she has to stop. She looks at Kylo and sees his withered body sauntering back and forth; he is suffering, but is trying his hardest to keep himself alive. Rey loosens her fist, and the pillar lies still. Unsure of what to do now, she shouts the first thing that comes to her mind.

“Stop! Everyone, just stop!” The troops running back towards them are confused, but obey her orders with hesitation.

Suddenly, Rey feels a huge pang, as if her connection with the Force was rapidly being severed. Shocked and confused, she tries to move the pillar again, but feels weaker, and the pillar barely budes. Sensing the opportunity, Kylo uses the force to push every Resistance soldier out of the way, using a power far stronger than he had used before, until he and Rey are isolated, and attacks her. Rey fights back, but Kylo, even in his waning state, strikes her down to the ground with ease, knocking her lightsaber away. He saunters over, and towers above her.

But instead of finishing her off, he freezes. He senses something is unusual and yells out, “You think I’m stupid? Are you mocking me? I don’t sense it anymore. That raw power you had. And how did you know those words... what kind of trap are you laying out for me?”

Rey tries to speak, but nothing comes out.

In a fit of desperation, Kylo takes his helmet off. “Will you speak to me now? You thought I wouldn’t KNOW!?!” Rey is drawn into Kylo’s eyes; beneath his rage, she sees that Kylo is shivering. He is just as

lost as she is, and wants to force her to give him an answer. As Kylo grows more and more unstable, Rey prays to the Force, wanting to find the right thing to say, but she is alone.

Just then, an aircraft starts firing down at Kylo. He manages to dodge its attacks. Merilia is piloting the ship and holds off Kylo, forcing him to escape. Rey suddenly feels a slight re-connection with the Force, but not a full recovery. She's able to use her reinvigoration to force grab her lightsaber.

Soon after, the First Order is pushed back. Kylo and the two mysterious generals depart. But now intel has gathered something new about the Jurials.

Chapter 3- Finn's Rebellion

Gnovian angrily marches towards the hospital in the temple, where Finn, Poe, Rose, and the Jurials are hiding. Many soldiers march alongside him. Yatu, looking confused but desperate to take action, runs up and shouts at the troops, but no one answers him. Finally, he catches up to Gnovian.

"Sir!" Yatu shouts, "This is my home. I want to help it."

Gnovian looks at him, feeling remorse for the young kid. "You have been through a lot. Something terrible has happened with your people. If you are willing to know the truth, then come with me. But it will not be easy to hear." Yatu nods, still at unease, and follows Gnovian without question. He knows he has to remain as silent as possible, and simply observe.

In the temple, Merilia is carrying supplies towards wounded civilians in the hospital. There is a grave look upon her face, as she knows what is about to happen.

"Seize her!" He points to the old Jurial. Finn is afraid, but feels guilty, as he knows what is about to happen. Yatu is aghast, looks at the old Jurial, then back at Gnovian. Gnovian points to Merilia, "And her too. She's with them." The soldiers cuff Merilia.

Gnovian speaks to the old Jurial, "The First Order wasn't here for the temple's artifacts. You struck a deal with them to lead us into a trap."

The old Jurial, in true guilt, tells him, "We did not lead you into a trap. The ceremony was genuine. But-"

An older general, standing next to Gnovian, interrupts, “Lies! Then how did they know where to attack us?” Gnovian puts his hand up, and says, “Stand down, Vice Leader Citho. We shall hear what the Jurial has to say.”

The old Jurial confesses, “I did not finish. It was not our intention for them to find us. But... it was our fault that they did. For centuries, our people have prided themselves in surviving with our traditions and isolation. But recently, we have not been doing very well. Our planet is dying- and our resources are being drained. The only way we Elders knew of to survive was by joining the intergalactic trade federation, trading the artifacts that we had in exchange for food.”

She continued, “All our Elders did was speak with the trade federation. We did not contact the First Order at all. But after we signed an agreement... we later discovered the horrible truth that the trade federation had already allied itself with the First Order. Our people have no contact with the current events... so this news was not known until later. They must have planted spies in our midst, and used droids in the equipment we’ve obtained from them, to discover we were meeting with you.”

Gnovian sternly replies, “Your people had a vote to decide who to contact- the Resistance, or the Trade Federation. Instead of contacting the Resistance, your kingdom chose, by a large margin, to ally with the Trade Federation. If you went to us first, we would have informed your people about the alliance between the First Order and the Trade Federation.”

Breaking her silence, Merilia shouts at him, “The First Order was the only faction that could help them with trade!”

Yatu looks at Gnovian, expecting him to silence her. Instead, he sees that Gnovian is grounding himself in self-control, making himself focused on listening to what Merilia is saying.

Merilia continues, “Once the Jurials discovered the First Order had infiltrated their kingdom, they were trying their best to break off their trade federation treaty. The First Order was threatening them to keep it, so they needed protection. But if the Resistance knew about this risk, we would never protect them.”

Citho shouts back, “We? You think you’re still with the Resistance, backstabber? The Resistance trusted your intel! You hid the fact that you were adopted by a Jurial family! We lost many of our soldiers today. Don’t you dare say you are part of us again.”

Citho turns to the old Jurial and says, “You only believed in the Resistance when you needed it? Cowards. You traitors do not fight for the rest of the galaxy; you fight for yourselves. How do you expect to join an intergalactic alliance if you have such selfish views?” Now Gnovian speaks up: “Soldiers,”

Gnovian gestures to the Resistance, “Since the promise has been broken, retract aid away from the Jurial kingdom. Imprison everyone who did not vote for collaborating with the Resistance, or has been deemed a worthy suspect. Then, question them.”

At long last, Yatu can’t take it and blurts out, “List of traitors? Who’s on that list?” He runs after the soldiers ushering the Jurials through, and disappears into the crowd.

Resistance soldiers begin seizing many Jurials, including many parents from their children. Finn speaks up to object, “General! So you’re saying anyone who didn’t say they supported the Resistance is considered a ‘suspect’? They only wanted to save their people!” Rose and Poe, who are next to Finn, try to tell him to shut up. One soldier tells Finn to be quiet, but Gnovian tells him, “Let’s listen to his reason- I don’t just silence our soldiers. We have to try to reach an understanding.”

Gnovian stares at Finn, then moves towards him, not shifting his gaze one bit. “You do not know just how bad our situation is due to traitors. In many, previous battles, we turned a blind eye to those we suspected... and it cost us greatly. It is harsh, but there is no other way. We cannot just let these suspects go and risk having them harm our cause again. Who knows what else they may be up to? Who knows if these Jurials are even telling the truth?”

The old Jurial speaks up, “We have official documents proving this. Along with recorded testimonies of Jurials who were surprised and guilted at the revelations about First Order ties.”

Gnovian firmly replies, “Remorse is not enough. The First Order spies were able to hack into our Hararian ships and cause them to self-destruction, destroying our only supply of Littim crops. The Turbulisians can only eat Littim, and are in a food crisis. We promised them Littim- now, their deaths are on our hands.”

Finn retaliates, “That’s another issue. More than half of the Jurials wanted this trade plan. You’re taking parents away from their children, so how are the children going to live now? Who’s going to help them with food? The Resistance has no resources to do that. Their kingdom is destroyed- they don’t have anyone. What they need isn’t for us to imprison them, but for us to protect them.”

Gnovian counters, “Who knows how many of them are spies? Since many of them now know of Resistance plans, it’s too risky to let them run free. We can’t trust selfish societies who won’t risk their lives to help our cause. They may not have directly collaborated with the First Order. But their indifference to our cause will also hurt us. I know it is hard to accept, but the fact is, they are only using us.”

Finn grits his teeth. "I know that. Before we came in, I suspected the Jurials. But I'd rather be used than let all these people be threatened by the First Order in exchange for food they need. The First Order knows the Jurials will do whatever they want for them. They can force the Jurials to fight for them, even if they don't want to. It's a risk, but if the Resistance helps them, maybe the Jurials will change their mind about the trade pact. They deserve a second chance."

Gnovian glares at him. But then, he takes a deep breath and calms down. "Finn, you are a Hero of the Resistance. A soldier whose actions we are very thankful for. But you've never had to truly lead a cause, and make these hard decisions. It's because a leader has to be unquestionably loyal to the cause. Just because someone is a hero, does not mean we can trust them."

Citho interrupts him, "We trusted Merilia unquestionably, and that was our mistake. You're also a hero, but who's to say... you're completely loyal?"

Finn tenses up and gets angry. Some other soldiers look at him with suspicion. Gnovian sighs, "Citho, please tend to wing X-4. I will handle it from here." Citho nods, gives Finn a dirty look, and marches off. Gnovian continues, "We are all aware you used to be part of the First Order. And you can sympathize with these people. Put in a hard situation, with no way out. You have to give a little of yourself to the First Order to survive. But a Resistance fighter is a different. A Resistance fighter would rather be gunned down than lift even a finger to fire a shot for the First Order."

Finn glares at him. "You think I wouldn't do that?"

Gnovian replies, "If you are willing to do that, then trust in our cause. You know what happened when you disobeyed orders. It cost us as we landed at Crait." Rose bows her head down. Finn grits his teeth even more. Gnovian, with a stern yet grieving face, turns to Rose, "You know how destructive those actions were. I appreciate that you are trying your best to redeem yourself." He turns back to Finn, "It takes time to get rid of that First Order mindset. I encourage you to think about the bigger picture."

Finn was ready to attack Gnovian. But he calms down, and replies with quiet anger, "You didn't answer my question. What are we going to do with these families? Their economy is in shambles. Who's going to deal with all the orphans?"

Half of the other soldiers begin to speak up against Finn. One of them shouts, "After all that, you don't feel ashamed, you damn Hutt? Can't you make up your mind about what side your on?"

The other half of the soldiers speak up against them, defending Finn. Then another one shouts: "Are you with us... or do you feel more like a stormtrooper?"

The soldiers started shouting against each other, dividing into two groups: one, with Poe and Rose, trying to maintain order and defend Finn, the other attacking him. Poe restrains one soldier who lunges at Finn, "Hey, knock it off buddy!" Poe snaps.

The soldier stands down, but scowls at Poe, "You have no say in this! You're not a general anymore!" Just as the other soldiers are about to gear up and surround Poe, Rey enters the scene. She shouts, "Get off of him!" The soldiers all stop. Finn nods at Rey, and she nods back.

Gnovian says, "Soldiers, back to your positions. We have to evacuate this place. Rey, come with me. The leaders want to meet with you."

The soldiers do their duty. Poe lightly punches Finn on the arm, saying, "What was that about?" and then continues walking to where he's ordered to be. Rose tells Finn, "Finn, you're already on the ropes. I feel sympathy for the Jurials too, and so does the rest of the Resistance. But there's too much at stake; we can't risk it. At least Gnovian is a different kind of commander who lets soldiers speak their mind and question him. You could have been in a lot more trouble."

Finn shakes his head, "But what he did wasn't right. He was painting me as a First Order sympathizer just to get on the moral high ground." Finn stares into Rose's eyes, to see how she truly thinks, "I hate the First Order from the bottom of my heart. But there's something about the Resistance you should know..."

Rose whispers, "What?"

Finn continues, "Back when we were with DJ, he told me about who gave weapons to the First Order. Those rich weapon dealers. DJ... also revealed something to me about the Resistance. They bought weapons from those same weapon dealers too. Not everything that the Resistance does is the right thing to do."

Rose is startled, but replies, "The Resistance has to do some of these questionable things sometimes because of how bad the First Order is. That's just how war is. If we lose, and the First Order takes over, it'd just be like the Empire all over again. Haven't you heard stories of how terrifying that time was? The massacres, the torture chambers..."

Finn hangs his head down, remembering all the atrocities he witnessed during his time in the First Order.

Sensing his unease, Rose walks closer to him, and puts her hand on his face, “We’re going to get through this. Together.”

But Finn turns away, leaving Rose facing no one. He replies, “Thanks. You’re a helpful friend.” And then he walks into a different room. He goes about doing his duty again, now torn in his thoughts.

Chapter 4- Rey Questions

Back in the Resistance base ship, Rey meets with the leaders of the Resistance.

Citho speaks: “Soldiers are reporting that you told them to stand down. Why?”

Rey replies, “General Citho, I- I don’t know. I-” Rey wants to speak, but hesitates, not knowing if it’s the right thing to say.

The leaders chatter. Gnovian puts his hands in a thinking position, and asks, “It is reasonable to have mercy on an enemy leader, as taking them prisoner would prove valuable in extracting information. Let us move on to another matter: A wounded soldier on the ground reported that Kylo Ren abstained from attacking you, despite having clear openings. He heard him shouting that you were ‘mocking’ him. Rey, did you feel anything wrong at that moment? What were your thoughts at that time?”

Rey closes her eyes, then says, “I felt the Force being taken away from me. Like it was suddenly flowing away into a drain.”

The leaders chatter even louder, with fear being tossed around the room. General Citho shouts: “Order! We must address this issue. Rey is an important member of our cause. She has sacrificed much of herself to get us to where we are today. She bears tremendous pressure on her shoulders, and none of us can understand what it is like to be in her position.” He directs his attention to Rey again, and tells her, “But it seems to me that these two events- the stand down and this strange force drain- are related. Could it be that you see something in Kylo Ren? Perhaps... I think... sympathy? A fondness? You think there is still good in him!”

Rey glares at him. “I know what this drain felt like. It wasn’t because of any feelings I had for Kylo Ren. Why are you assuming this. Why are you speaking for me?”

Citho gets angry, but Gnovian shoots him down, “General Citho, it was not right of you to assert such wild speculations without any prior evidence. Rey, continue describing what you felt.”

Rey continues, “If I do feel sympathy for an enemy, I know that my connection to the Force does not go away. I do not need anyone to tell me how I feel. This time, something felt different. It felt like I was being shunned from the Force.”

The leaders are taken back. But Gnovian speaks up, “That is a cause for alarm. We will investigate this matter. As for now, we must consider all possibilities. General Citho’s proposal, while crude, is one of them. Rey, I am not saying it is true, but if you do have sympathies for Kylo Ren, you must set them aside. You have done so much for us, and we are grateful. Many of us depend on you. You are a savior of the Resistance and without you, we cannot prevail.”

Gnovian addresses the council, “And with that, the meeting is adjourned. We must regroup and re-strategize. May the Force be with you.”

Rey exits the meeting, and heads towards her chambers. She did not want others to pry into how she felt about Ben Solo, and she was absolutely positive that she was speaking the truth about the force drain- it was not because of whatever she felt for Ben. It was something else. But she ponders upon his words: “The Smiling Shadow.” She turns into a corridor, and for a moment, she senses a strong presence just before her. But there’s nothing there. She takes a deep sigh, and forcefully stops herself from thinking about it any further. She turns around and is now heading towards a new destination.

She hates the crowds, the judgmental eyes, and all the pressure. At first, it made her feel like she finally belonged somewhere and was wanted. But in exchange for that, she was pushed to live up to be the ‘savior’ everyone expected her to be. She heads off into a quiet engine room with many tall machinery. She leans on the balcony rails as she stares in the vast expanse below. The hums of the machines are like a lullaby to her. She remembers the aircraft she fixed several years ago on Jakku, when there was no one else but her and the engine for an entire week, and unwinds in her memories. Now that she is alone with her thoughts, she feels more calm. Solitude is an old, familiar friend.

Chapter 5- The Knights of Ren

Back in the First Order base, Kylo Ren speaks to his two generals.

“Serei,” he gestures to one of them in a black hood with a bird-like mask, “And Hailden,” he gestures to the other with heavy armor and a mask that looks like a god of rage, “you two are the last remaining Knights of Ren. As such, your duties were to lead the attack on the main ship. But you both failed. I am very disappoint-”

“In us? Reports say that YOU were the one who stopped attacking that girl when you had the chance to kill her!” Serei interrupts Kylo.

“How dare you!” Kylo tries to choke her, but Serei retaliates and the two are in a stalemate. She continues, “Kylo, stop with these stupid formalities. We both know what you did. Some of the troops did too, and they’re telling everyone. What the hell were you thinking?”

Hailden speaks up, “Both of you, stop! In-fighting will get us nowhere. Did you both forget how all the other Knights of Ren died because of in-fighting? Snoke was furious and never let us band together again. We had to hide in the Nissidha tunnels, where he couldn’t detect us. But now that he’s gone, the Knights are resurrected. And we cannot make the same mistakes.”

Kylo stops. He turns around, not speaking. Serei takes off her helmet, and so does Hailden. Serei is an alien with red-violet skin, while Hailden is an alien with indigo skin. Serei groans, “Kylo, just tell us what happened.” Kylo clutches his fist, but then takes off his helmet too. He faces them both.

Kylo says, “She was mocking me. I suddenly felt the Force flow away from her. The opening was too easy.”

Serei raises her eyebrows. “That is weird. Sounds like a trap.”

Kylo angrily replies, “And THAT’S why I hesitated. Did you hear what you want?”

Serei snaps back, “It would have been easier if you led our meeting off with that instead of your stupid roleplay.”

Kylo grips his helmet. “Snoke hated this mask. He didn’t believe I was good enough to lead. But now I’m the one standing on top of these stairs. And you two are right there beneath me. You heard what you wanted. Get out.”

Serei and Hailden exit the meeting.

Serei tells Hailden, “Who does he think he is now? We all know Snoke only declared him our leader because he’s a Skywalker kid. Now he thinks he’s the Supreme Leader and can order us around like that. Or- at least he tries. He never gets very far, does he?”

Hailden replies, “All I can say is that the First Order has not gone in a direction I thought it would.”

Serei says, “Yeah, with Whinelo Ren leading it?”

Hailden replies, “No. We joined Luke’s academy because he promised to save our home. We left because he broke his promise.”

Serei rolls her eyes and says, “No. You did that. I just felt the Jedi were too boring. I went there to learn how to do cool tricks, not meditate all day.”

Hailden ignores her, and continues, “Even if you do not want to admit it, I know that we both felt unrest spreading in the galaxy. Though the Empire fell, in-fighting within the New Republic continued. Each side had their own agenda and didn’t care about their allies. And war raged on. They took our lives away from us.” Serei looks away, not sympathizing, but deep down she knows it’s true. Hailden speaks again, “I thought... maybe the Empire was right. There needs to be central control. Without such an iron fist, the New Republic would implode. Hard decisions have to be made to ensure survival of some, at the cost of others. Or else, everyone would be destroyed. So when I heard of the First Order, I was given hope again. But Kylo... he doesn’t share that vision. All he wants is to rule, to be recognized as the most powerful.”

Serei sighs, “Yup, that’s Kylo. But hey, we got a pretty good deal as Knights of Ren. At least we’re on the winning side. You can shoot for all that galaxy peace and stuff. I just want my own castle.”

ELSEWHERE, with his helmet off now, Kylo is walking across a metallic bridge. Around him, there is only the hum of First Order machinery. He seethes, and shakes his head. The words ring inside of him: The Hooded Beast. How could she have known? Just then, he notices a strong presence standing before him. He stares ahead, but sees nothing. Yet it was so familiar- it was just like the raw energy he felt inside of her. He takes a step closer, but it starts to fade away. He walks faster, his face showing more and more desperation, but the faster he runs, the faster it fades. And then, it just disappears. Kylo clenches his fists, and relinquishes. He regains his composure and heads into the doors at the end of the bridge, entering an industrial complex. As soon as he enters, Hux walks alongside him.

Hux sternly says, “Supreme Leader, I have new updates about the proposed Superweapon, the Aquillian Starfighter.”

“The one proposed by General Hailden? The thing that we learned was useless without the twin crystals?”
Kylo mutters back.

Hux quickly replies, “Yes Supreme Leader, but we have excellent news. During the battle, our intel discovered that one of the crystals was held by the Jurials. Apparently, that was how they were able to power their guardian from their distant past.”

“Remarkable. And where is it now?”

“We... believe it is now in possession of that girl, Rey.”

Kylo stops walking. Hux looks apprehensive. Kylo speaks again: “Very well then. We must focus our efforts on taking this crystal from her. With both crystals, we will be able to power the Aquillian. Resume the project at once. I want to divert a large portion of our engineers to its construction.”

With their meeting adjourned, Kylo walks away, back through the doors where he came from, back onto the cold, metallic bridge. The soldiers, the weapons, the chain of command- they all fade away, and all that is left is a man in solitude, left to the devices of his own thoughts. There is no one for him now.

“Mother,” he whispers, unprovoked with no premeditation.

A deep sense of shame overtakes him, and he tries his best to push it away. But he can't. Ever since he heard of Leia's sudden death, he could not relinquish the damning sense of guilt that lay within. He wasn't there for her. Not for years. And she left the world believing that he hated her. Forever.

Kylo stops in his tracks, and begins to listen to the dark chants of the ship's gears and pistons. They are unable to drown out his raging demons, the ones which claw relentlessly at his very being. Forever; it has been done. Now, there is only one path he can follow.

Chapter 6- Rey, Finn and the Force

On the main base, Finn sees Rey in the isolated engine room, standing over a vast emptiness. He goes near her. "Is it okay if I join?" he asks.

"Yeah," Rey replies, still staring into the distance.

After a few moments, she breaks the silence, "I hate this place. Those leaders, this duty. All I wanted to do was help people. But not... this."

Finn replies, "I'm not the biggest fan of this place either. They're doing the right thing, but I just can't always agree with everything they do. I guess you saw what happened with me."

"I don't know all the details, but something about it didn't seem to be right to me, either. They can't imprison everyone they suspect. But I'm sure once they get it all sorted out, they'll figure out who the real traitors are and let everyone else go."

Finn looks unconvinced, and then asks, "What did Gnovian and the others talk to you about?"

Rey hesitates, and decides not to tell him about the force drain. "I hesitated when I faced Kylo. I told the other soldiers to stop firing at him. And it cost us. Who knows how many I could have saved if I were to end him right there?"

Finn responds, "Wait- why DID you stop?" Rey stops talking, and sighs. Seeing that Rey doesn't want to talk about it, Finn says, "Rey, all these people expect too much from you. They say you're the savior. Who cares? You don't have to live up to their expectations. Even if you can't save everyone, you're trying your best. You don't have to be perfect."

Rey finally turns to him, "But if I'm not, what am I to them? Will anyone even care for me if I'm not the savior? Everyone is so friendly- but only because of my powers! They'd just treat me like dirt- like how everyone else did on Jakku!"

Finn shakes his head, "Not everyone. I thought of you as a friend even before you discovered your abilities. You helped me get BB-8 to Poe even though you didn't have to. You were eager to help me escape the First Order, putting your own life at risk. You didn't use your fancy powers to do that. And

because of that, I knew I could trust you- not your powers, but just you. And I will do whatever I can to be a good friend to you too.”

Rey dips her head down away from Finn, and smiles. “Thank you,” she says. “Though I’m still not sure what these powers are. But ever since I learned more about the Force, about how it flows through all things, I think it’s been with me this whole time.”

Finn perks up, reminded of what happened in the battle. “Rey... there’s something that’s been bothering me.”

Rey turns to him and replies, “What is it?”

Finn continues, “Back in the battle, something strange happened. I reached my hand out, and these boulders started moving. At the time, I wasn’t sure if it was my imagination or not, but now, I’m sure it wasn’t. I don’t know what to make of it.”

Rey says, “You think it’s the Force, don’t you?”

Finn responds, “Wait- I never said that!”

Rey ignores this and continues, “Finn, that’s amazing! What did it feel like? Could you do it again? Was this the first time you felt the Force? How many stones did you move? How far?”

Finn stops her, “Whoa, okay, okay. First off, I don’t know if it was the Force. Second, I don’t know anything about the Force, so I can’t answer any of what you just said. Just- what IS it?”

Rey smiles, lighting up with passion. But when she speaks, she has a somber tone, “When I was a child on Jakku, I was alone. All the people there wanted with me was to use me to collect their scraps. I was hit, spit on, and tossed aside. The only hope I had was in those Rebel scraps I found. I heard stories about the rebels- and of the Force. I would always pray that one day, a Rebel ship would just swoop down and pick me up. And if Unkar tried to stop them, a Jedi would step out and push him out of the way.”

Then, Rey lowers her tone, and her eyes fixate onto the cold, metallic void before her. “One day, a group of bandits was arguing with Unkar. They left very unhappy. That night, after drinking heavily, I guess they wanted to take their anger out on anything. Unkar had ordered me to stay out at night in the city

alleyways and capture the Lifes, who would only appear at night and were selling for high prices. So I was the first thing they saw. I picked up a metal pole and tried to fight them, but they just grabbed it and tossed it aside. I was so scared and didn't know what to do. But just then, I closed my eyes and prayed for the Force. I prayed that if the Force helped me, I would do all I could to repay it. And when I opened my eyes, I couldn't believe what I saw. The bandits' arms were twisted up. They were frozen, and couldn't move. I ran out of there as fast as I could. I don't think I had done anything- but something, I think the Force, had saved me."

Stunned, Finn asks, "You're saying the Force is its own living thing?"

Rey replies, "Well... no one ever said it wasn't. Or was. I still don't know what the Force is. I just know that wasn't the only time. When I was alone, I would feel some invisible being next to me, curled up next to me while I was crying, or tricking Unkar into giving me more portions for the day than he wanted to. I was still on Jakku, but it was protecting me. The more I connect with the Force, the more I think it was there with me the whole time. I just couldn't truly connect to it until Kylo Ren had used it on me."

Finn tries to respond, but doesn't know what to say. "That... helps me a bit," he says, not meaning what he says.

Rey gathers herself up to speak again, "And there was... something else that I couldn't explain..."

"What was it?"

But just then, Rey stops herself, "Never mind. It's nothing." She pauses. "I'm glad that the Force is reaching out to you, Finn. I've never told this to anyone, because no one would understand. Now I know someone who does."

Finn replies, "Yeah! You can always tell me what's on your mind."

Chapter 7- The Force Calls to Rey

In the central Resistance ship, Finn and Rey are walking through a hallway, and Finn sees a pair of guys, who look just like him and Poe, pass by. The lookalike duo is wearing a set of prison guard uniforms. He does a double take. "Hey, did you just see that?" Rey answers, "No?" Finn says, "Those guys looked just like me and Poe!" Rey doesn't know what to say. "Huh..."

They continue walking, and an old man approaches them. "Excuse me, do you know where the cafeteria is?" Rey kindly says, "To the left, just up ahead."

"Thank you, young lady." The man strolls off. Slightly amused now, Rey asks Finn, "Who was that?"

Finn replies, "Old man Dunwick. Used to be a skilled console operator, now he just spends his day looking for the same cafeteria. The Resistance just keeps him around cause he's got nowhere else to go. As long as he just plays card games on his computer all day, he's not a bother."

"It's awfully nice of the Resistance to give him a place to stay. But I wonder if it's a good idea to keep him in a military base," Rey says.

"Well, if he went anywhere else, he'd be toast. I heard he pissed off the family of one of the First Order officers so much that he's one of its most wanted guys."

"That's... a bit hard to believe." But she didn't question it any further.

LATER in the day, operations begin to slow down. In her chambers, Rey lies in her bed, her thoughts drifting off, trying to push away any mentions of Kylo, the Resistance or Dunwick, and trying to remember the fine hum of machinery she heard just before. But before she can completely drift off, a scream rings through the ship.

Rey rushes out of her chambers, and bumps into Finn. "What was that?" she stammers.

"I don't know. But it's coming from there. Let's go!"

The two run into the infirmary, where droids, nurses and doctors are trying to subdue a patient whose arm is being twisted and compressed in all different directions. His face is overcome with sheer terror and unfathomable pain.

"What the hell is happening?" another patient angrily shouts, unable to grip onto what he's seeing.

"This looks like... the Force," a doctor whispers.

Rey darts her eyes towards the man's twisting arm. 'No, it couldn't be,' she thought to herself. But there was no denying it. What was happening to the man looked just like what happened when she, or Kylo, used to Force to bend an object, whether it be a metal pipe or a railing. But this was used on a person-with no mercy at all.

"Hey! You!" a patient runs up to Rey, shaking her, "You the one doing this? Just what the hell are you doing?"

"I'm not!" Rey responds in a panic, still completely frozen in place.

"Get off of her!" Finn shouts back as he pushes the man off.

Just then, just a few feet from her face, Rey notices a dark circle as small as her fingers, spiralling, growing larger. She motions to the doctors, "Do you see it?" Confused, the doctors shake their heads.

But Finn nods.

"You see it?" Rey hurriedly whispers. The spiral is growing, and there is something about it that draws her towards it. She's left now with a choice. Rey begins to reach her hand out towards the enigma.

Finn snaps back at Rey, "Rey... whatever that is, whatever you're thinking about doing... don't do it."

The rupture in space and time has grown into a portal as big as a hand. But now a voice, one that Rey seems to recognize, is calling out to her. Unable to resist, Rey ignores Finn's pleas, and touches the portal.

Immediately, she is shocked with a sudden yet incomprehensible force vision, accompanied by an agonizing, torturous scream. She pulls her hand out, shaken and terrified.

"Rey!" Finn grabs her, and shouts, "What were you thinking?"

However, Rey realizes this vision could have the answers to these anomalies. When she tries to touch it again, it's already gone before she can reach it.

Then, in an unexpected instant, the patient's arm stops seizing. He drops into a coma, and the droids rush to keep his vitals alive. A doctor roars into his transmitter, "We have an abnormality to report! Another Force induced anomaly, General!"

THE base convenes in an impromptu meeting. Rey meets with some of scientists.

One scientist asks her, "So... are you sure you didn't have anything to do with this?"

Rey tells her, "Yes, I'm very certain."

The scientist is not convinced. "We just read reports about how you were losing connection to the Force. This isn't the first anomaly we've recorded. In fact, there have been several, all throughout the galaxy. Could it be that you, and other Force sensitives, are losing control of it, and are causing these accidents?"

Another scientist chimes in, "Yes, that does seem to be the most likely cause."

Rey stomps down, "That was one time. I have perfect control of it now. You just have to believe me." She exits the room, annoyed that, for a second time, the Resistance officials are accusing her of something she did not do. However, she is not as irritated, as this time, they did not assert their accusations, but were merely hypothesizing.

She heads back into her chambers, and mutters to herself, "Time to give this another shot. Maybe this will have answers." She takes out a text of ancient Jedi teachings, which she obtained back when she tried to train with Luke, and throws them on the bed. BB-8 whirls up next to her, and she chats with him, "Time to put those reading and writing skills Unkar taught me to the test." BB-8 whirls in confusion. Rey answers, "Okay, so he didn't really teach me. He was always in debt and was threatening to sell me off, so I scrambled to find a way to make more money. I secretly took on additional work as a digital typist... they had a bunch of training videos. I managed to make enough, so I was useful enough to keep around. I stopped when Unkar wasn't in debt anymore because he sold enough of the other children."

She opens the books and tries reading a page she had bookmarked.

[Five zen-like poems are read, but each seems incomplete.]

“Huh. That’s just pure nonsense. Let’s just the next one,” Rey tells herself, and flips around to random pages, trying to decipher each page, but to no avail.

“What... does this even mean...?” Frustrated, Rey chucks the texts aside into a forgotten corner. “Just as I thought, I get nowhere with them again. Who wants to read these dusty old books anyways,” she remarks.

She feels tired now, and tries to fall asleep. As she drifts into her slumber, she can’t help but long for that familiarity. It was the first time, in a long time, that she had heard those words. “The Hooded Beast,” Rey whispers into the darkness.

A voice answers her: “The Smiling Shadow.”

Rey opens her eyes. The world around her is gone- she’s in total darkness. She shouts out, “How are we still connected? That was Snoke’s doing, wasn’t it? But he’s gone!”

She hears the voice again: “Perhaps there was something else connecting us. You know it, too.” Kylo emerges from the darkness, and is standing several feet away.

“I was wrong about you. You monster.”

“So we’re back to where we started.”

“Maybe it was always meant to be this way,” Rey snaps back.

Kylo begins to get irritated, “Enough of your games. Tell me how you know.”

Rey glares at him, “You first. Tell me how you know him. Anakin.”

Kylo scoffs, “My grandfather?”

Now Rey is the one who is annoyed, “No, the child. Anakin.”

Kylo pauses. He replies, “That wasn’t who I knew. You misunderstand.”

“All I know is that you did something to him.”

“I didn’t do anything! I…” Kylo stops. Rey walks up to him, “You what?”

Kylo shakes his head. “It can’t be. Can you tell me something?”

“Tell YOU something? You haven’t even answered me!”

Kylo continues, “The Red-Violet Sands. Its neverending rays of light.”

Rey freezes. There is something in Kylo’s words that she just doesn’t want to believe. She finally speaks, “The Laughing Carnival.”

“I know it, too.”

Rey steps back. “Why are you doing this to me? What kind of trick is this?” She masks her face with her hand. “Why would I trust you?” She pauses. “You still don’t know just how much you’ve hurt me.”

In a hushed tone, Kylo angrily asserts, “And what about me?”

“You did that to yourself. No one- no one in their right mind- would ever leave their loved ones to be with you and your insane, sick desires!”

“Fine. Lie to yourself. You will never know the truth.” Kylo disappears, and Rey stands still in place. She opens her eyes.

She’s back on her bed in the physical world, and most of the Resistance is asleep. She can barely keep her eyes open, but in the corner of her eyes, hovering before her bed, she notices something terrifying. The dark tear has appeared again. She closes her eyes and hopes it goes away, wishing it was just a hallucination, but when she opens her eyes again, it’s still there. It calls out to her. The voices are familiar- she suddenly remembers that they mimic those from the hole in the island. Unable to resist the

curiosity, she gets up from her bed, and touches it, trying her hardest resist the screams. She pushes her whole body into it, and is enveloped in a world of various ruins. All around her are gigantic glass stones, and wheat-like grass taller than any tree she's ever seen. But the sky is shrouded in darkness. As she steps through, she feels like the screams continue to call out to her. She senses something- numbers, as if they were coordinates to this mysterious place. Just then, ahead of her, is a dark figure. As it around, Rey gasps- it's General Citho. He appears 20 years younger.

But there is a more powerful presence just beneath him. Rey steps back, and is reminded back to when she was trapped in that alleyway as a child in Jakku, completely helpless. Unable to take it anymore, Rey screams, "I believe in you! Please come back!" She prays for the Force, but only a shrill shriek is heard. After collapsing, she pulls herself together and reaches her hand out to push the darkness away, and finds herself back on the ship.

Rey rushes to Finn's room. After hearing Rey knocking fervently, Finn finally opens the door, groggy eyed.

"Finn, do you remember those dark rips in space we saw?"

Finn replies, "Um, yeah. Rey- you didn't actually touch one again, did you?"

Rey responds, "I went inside. I heard the Force- it's calling out to me!"

"What? Oh no, what the hell."

"Finn, the Force is in trouble. Before I tell you, please promise me that you will not tell the commanders about this."

Finn raises his brow, but nods.

"Remember I said someone was taking power away from me? I think someone is disturbing the Force. And the Force is telling me where to look. I saw an island-"

"Another one?"

“It was covered in giant glass stones, and had wheat taller than trees. But it was dark. I stepped on its ground, and suddenly I knew where it was. I saw... Citho there. It was like the island had a memory of him stepping there. And I felt that it was afraid of him. Citho was up to something. And the strangest thing about this place is... I know how to get there.”

“Don’t you remember what happened the last time you followed these visions? You were led to Kylo, and right into Snoke’s trap.

“It’s different this time!”

“Why? Because the Force spoke to you? Rey, you can’t just rush into danger like this. It’s too risky. You just can’t go-”

“Why not?”

“Because you’ll get hurt!”

“I don’t need you holding my hand!”

“Oh, okay. You don’t need me. That’s right. Because you’re the savior, huh. You’re invincible. You can do anything.”

“You just don’t understand because you don’t see the Force the way I do.”

“And I don’t, but I have something else: common sense! Whatever crazy stuff you keep on witnessing, you can’t always say it’s the Force. It’s not always going to be a guardian spirit. You have to just... doubt yourself.”

Rey realizes what Finn means, and suddenly becomes disheartened. “So it was all a lie? When you said you understood what I meant- when I poured my heart out to you about how I felt the Force as a child- you didn’t believe a single word?”

“I never said-”

“I know what you mean. You’re no different than those old Resistance leaders.” Rey storms off. Finn calls out to her, “Rey, wait up! Hey! Stay right here! I’m not done talking to you!” Finn chases her, but Rey uses the Force to close the hallway doors behind so he can’t follow her. He whispers to himself, “No one ever listens to me...”

Rey marches towards her room. She gathers some survival supplies and a container holding the jade kyber crystal. She takes a look at the books, and after hesitating, she sarcastically remarks to herself, “You’re the only thing that could possibly understand me now,” then grabs the books too. As she heads towards an escape ship, BB-8 starts following her. Without looking at him, she curtly says, “Don’t follow me.” BB-8 whirls. Rey laughs, “You see ME as your owner now?” After some back and forth, BB-8 brings up an old memory using a hologram. Rey sighs and says, “So you’re resorting to dirty tricks? Fine. I guess you can come along if you have nothing better to do.”

She continues, “I was planning to do this the hard way, but with you tagging along, we can do it much more quietly.” Rey tells BB-8 to shut off security. Rey goes into the Millennium Falcon, but has trouble starting it up. BB-8 whirls.

“What do you mean it’s under repair? I’m not that familiar with the other ships here. Is there another one that’s similar?”

She searches around and sees a transport ship that eerily resembles the Millennium Falcon, but is sleeker and new. “Oh, the prototype that Chewbacca was working on. I’m sorry, Chewbacca...” She gets in and starts fidgeting with it to try to break in. “What did he call it again... the Myrioi Osprey?” Finally, she gets it to work. She tells BB-8 to disable its tracking systems, and takes off. When security is back up and notices she’s gone, they alert everyone. Chewbacca runs to the hangar and sees that the ship he was working on is gone, and roars in a bellowing rage.

Citho wakes up, greatly disgruntled, and asks a crowd of rebels, “Where did she go? Why? I want answers NOW.”

One rebel speaks up, “I saw her arguing with the First Order defector.”

Citho marches towards Finn’s room. He finds Finn outside, then yells at him, “What in the name of the Force has gotten into you? This is strike two. What were you two up to? Where has she gone?”

Finn retaliates, “That’s none of your business.”

“It is A MILITARY ISSUE. I am not Gnovian so this is not the time for philosophical meandering. DON’T QUESTION IT.”

Finn looks to the side, sighs, then replies, “She had a vision. And now she’s gone to where she thinks it’s telling her to go.”

Citho throws his hands up in frustration. “And you don’t know where?”

Finn hesitates, about to describe the place, but remembers what Rey said about Citho. He responds: “No.”

Chapter 8- Fortuna

On the Myrioi Osprey, Rey breathes in deeply, then meditates. She feels her fingers moving by themselves, and locates the coordinates of the planet. The screen says the planet’s name is Fortuna. Rey lands on the planet, and all around her is wheat-like grass taller than any tree she’s ever seen. Beyond that are giant glass stones. But unlike in her vision, in which the planet was shrouded in darkness, it seems to be in an eternal afternoon bliss. Just when Rey and BB-8 go off the ship, a droid in the darkness of the ship powers up. It sounds like R2-D2.

Rey journeys through the planet, seeing many ruins around her. There are dangerous creatures, and she’s able to fend them off with her lightsaber, but it keeps on malfunctioning, due to its previous break. After wandering around for hours, she’s lost. But then, she remembers a cryptic story in the Jedi books, and flips to it: she suddenly realizes that using it, she can find what she’s looking for.

This story is actually about events similar to the Force disruptions she’s seen, and hints that to stop them, one of the tasks she must complement is a crafting ritual. She tries to do it, but fails. Frustrated, she gives up immediately. She then remembers that there is another story in the book that is reminiscent of Fortuna, and starts to decipher it. She follows her guesses to find a red lake far away- the only source of water on the planet she’s seen so far.

She realizes to find the answers she seeks, she has to swim into the lake and dip her lightsaber in at a certain spot. She tells BB-8, “Time to test those swimming skills that Unkar taught me.” BB-8 whirls in confusion and question. Rey responds, “Well, he didn’t really teach me. He would throw me in one of the few pools in the city so I could steal some mechanical parts used to power the pool. I’m surprised I didn’t just drown.” BB-8 stays outside.

Rey swims into the red lake, and thrusts the lightsaber into a certain location (not at the bottom, as it's too deep). She hears a distorted collection of voices, all in unity, begin to speak to her. They are unraveling a sort of poem, and though bewildered, she listens to it very, very carefully:

[Three zen-like poems are heard, but they are incomplete, cut off before they end.]

As she is trying to take it all in, suddenly, everything becomes pitch black, and dark clouds surround her like a horde of sea monsters. Fearful, and hearing awful cries, she quickly tries to resurface, but forgets her lightsaber. When she does, she's not where she was before, even though she resurfaced in the same spot. All around her is darkness. She can't see anything. She looks around, confused, and suddenly something grabs her leg and pulls her back into the lake.

The lake begins to grow darker and darker. As Rey is dragged more inwards, she sees dark outlines of two tall humanoid figures. They are whispering to each other, as if in a panic. Rey calls out to them, and all the dark outlines abruptly stop talking and stare at her at once. She can't see any faces. She can hear, "Can she see us?"

Then, two much taller dark outlines walk in front of these two figures. They are sauntering, and are more confident, not panicking. She can hear the echoes, "Do not panic; trust us." Whatever is dragging Rey has now released her, and she is floating.

The voices appear to talk to her. They say: "We are only doing this to help you. There is a terrible danger nearby, and we cannot risk you falling in with the wrong side. Do not let your powers be taken away."

Fearing this prospect, Rey panics and tries to push these outlines with her hand using the Force, but nothing happens, and her body feels like it's moving in slow molasses, like in a nightmare. The two figures say in unison, "All you have to do was trust us...". Their words echo on and on.

From below, the ghostly monster restrains her again. Instead of pulling her down, it's grabbing onto her. The voices say, "The Force is leaving you. We are the only ones who can help you get it back..." Rey starts screaming "NO" but in the dark water, her screams are muffled.

Suddenly, Rey feels her restraints being loosened, and the monster cries in agony. Finally released, she quickly swims up to safety. She's back in darkness, but it's quickly being removed, and it reveals where she originally was. In front of her is a hooded figure that's using its powers to remove the darkness surrounding her.

“Who are you?” she asks.

The figure takes off its hood, and standing before her is Luke Skywalker.

Chapter 9- Finn Seeks the Truth

On the Resistance ship, many hours have passed since Rey left. Citho makes the announcements:

“As you all know, the savior of the Resistance, Rey, has left us. She was pushed into doing so after an argument with one of our own- Finn.”

The rebels’ eyes all dart onto Finn, who is trying to keep a stern face. Citho continues, “Since many soldiers saw that Rey was impulsively pushed to an emotional, irrational state by Finn, the council has decided that Finn shall be barred from participating in any upcoming missions, and will be put under strict surveillance. We also do not know the full story of their argument. He may be lying. Additionally, we have evidence that puts Finn in a suspicious light. Therefore, we have declared him to be a suspect in having a hand in her disappearance.”

The rebels chatter, and Finn’s mouth is agape. He looks at Gnovian, who is sitting next to Citho but has not said a word. Gnovian does not look at him. Rose and Poe are in disbelief.

Finn retaliates, “So this is what the Resistance has come to, huh? Some bozo making up the rules as he goes because he’s angry he can’t keep everything in control? What’s this so-called evidence you have? Is this what General Leia would have wanted?”

Citho, seething with fury, peers down at Finn. “You would dare sully her name for your own selfish purposes? Unlike us, not long ago, you were still part of the First Order. You know nothing about her!” One rebel shouts at Finn, “Yeah! She would have no problem scrubbing off scum like you!” Another rebel shouts, “They probably found evidence that he’s STILL with the First Order!”

Gnovian finally speaks up: “Let me interject.” The room calms down and listens. He continues, “The council is allowed to declare anyone suspicious as suspects, using evidence we are not allowed to share with anyone outside of the council. From our experience, it is too risky to let this evidence out. This is

why this rule, proposed by General Citho, has been implemented. It has proven effective in not only capturing many double agents, but in preventing important information from being leaked out to the spies. Even though none of you know the evidence we use, we promise the Resistance that we have good reasons to do so. Finn will not be imprisoned, but I advise you all to not speak to him. Until he tells us all the details of what went on, and until we decide we have enough evidence to declare him to be safe, we cannot trust him.”

Poe speaks up, “Generals, apologies in advance for doing this, but Finn is a trustworthy guy. He may not be always say things in the right way, but he wouldn’t lie. What he told you is all he knows.”

Citho glares at Poe, “So you’re helping the First Order defector? Not surprising for one who helped him disobey orders and endanger the entire fleet. Something about this just reminds me of when I captured those double agents during the Raid of Buruma.” Upon hearing Buruma, the soldiers begin to visibly side with Citho. “So the three of you,” Citho waves his hand before Rose, Poe and Finn, “Are you plotting something together again?”

Murmurs travel through the rebel crowd. Poe stops speaking. Citho continues, “Anyone else who sides with the First Order defector, and is against the Resistance, speak up.” He glares at Rose, who says nothing. Finn looks at her, feeling betrayed, and she stares at him with remorse. Finn notices that she is cradling her pendant, one of the last memories Rose has of her sister, who gave her life for the Resistance cause.

After the meeting, Rose is called away to other duties. A guard is assigned to Finn. Poe starts walking besides them, and whispers to her, “Hey, can you escort him to room 21X-V and give us a moment?” The guard nods and tells Poe, “Just between just you and me, I trust you guys.” They head to an isolated room, and then exits, leaving them alone. Poe goes up to Finn. “Hey buddy, you know I’m here to defend you and all, but there’s a line, and you’ve just crossed it.”

“What’s gotten into YOU? Weren’t you the first one to go against Holdo’s orders?”

“I did that- and I paid a terrible price for it. I’ve changed for the wiser. We can’t just rush head on into things and let our emotions take the better of us. How can you make these judgments if you don’t know the bigger picture?”

“We can’t voice our opinions just because we don’t know everything?”

Poe replied, “I put my FULL trust in these leaders. The Resistance has never failed me. I’ve believed in them until the very end. Now I don’t know what kind of evidence they have, but I’m sure it’s just a

misunderstanding, and once they investigate further and find it doesn't lead anywhere, they're gonna let you off the hook. Because when the New Republic failed to stop the First Order, I trusted the Resistance, and I've learned that they definitely know what they're doing, much more than I do. Maybe you should start trusting them too."

Finn responded, "Really- you trust these new guys? The New Republic- or the Neo Republic, whatever name it's calling itself now- has gotten back together and is allied with the Resistance. How did that even happen so fast? It was wiped out by Starkiller Base! Now the Neo Republic, these guys who have appeared out of nowhere and have made themselves the new leaders, is not only silencing anyone who questions its decisions, but is accusing them of being First Order spies! Doesn't something seem wrong to you?"

Poe gets in Finn's face, "Listen. So you say something is fishy. That's not our job to question. We're here to do our duties as soldiers. Not to make things worse."

Finn, not budging an inch, says, "You trusted the Resistance when Leia founded it. But things have changed."

Poe backs off. After a few seconds, he speaks up, less angry now. "Okay, so maybe you do have a point." He pauses. "There's something you should know. You're not the only one who's been wondering how the Neo Republic got around. When I heard that happened, it ticked off a few boxes in my head. Because just a few months before it happened, General Leia said something strange to me about that exact thing."

Finn replied, "What? About the Neo Republic?"

"Yeah. She was saying how some leaders in the Resistance were questioning her. It was just like when she was dealing with the New Republic senate. She told me that if something fishy about the new Resistance leaders ever sprung up again... that I was to listen to a message stashed in one of the HQ-7 droids."

"So why didn't you? Why didn't you speak up sooner?"

"You know what happened the last time we tried questioning the leaders. Leia said to only look inside the droid if I was VERY, very sure that something was wrong. Otherwise, without knowing all the gritty details, I might get the wrong idea. I didn't want to look because I didn't want to go down that path again. I wanted to trust the Resistance."

Finn bit his lip, and whispered to Poe, “But now you’ve seen how all these Resistance leaders are acting. So you’ve changed your mind.”

“No. No, not that. It’s when Citho talked about the Raid of Buruma. All the soldiers remembered it was a horrifying raid, and so obviously they’d become defensive to prevent something like that from happening again. Citho said there were double agents there. But just then, I remembered Leia- Leia had mentioned that when Citho was insistent that there were double agents, she disagreed because there was absolutely no evidence. She called him paranoid. If I remember correctly, this matter never got settled. But now we learned Citho proposed this crazy rule and was so sure there were double agents? Based on what evidence? I’m not saying Gnovian is lying. Maybe there were double agents. I didn’t want to think it, but deep down, it feels like this matter was just brushed under a mat without any of us knowing. Until now.”

Finn put his hand on Poe’s shoulder, “Poe, we need more information. If something really is wrong, we have to find it. Look inside you- you know it.”

Poe stared at Finn. Then putting his own hand on Finn’s shoulder, Poe responds, “I still trust in the Resistance. I just want to shake this uneasy feeling I have, and getting down to the truth will do that. Maybe this is all gonna lead us to something. Maybe not. ”

The scene cuts to Poe and Finn walking in a hallway, whispering to each other. Finn looks deep in thought. Poe asks, “Hey, you look like there’s something else you want to get off your chest.”

Finn is startled, “What? Ha, it’s nothing... just something Rey said. About Citho.”

“What? Hey wait a minute- so you DO know something more about why she took off, that you’re not telling anyone?”

Finn sighs, “Look. I kept a promise to her to not tell the commanders about it. It has something to do with the Force mumbo jumbo that’s way over both our heads. She can do what she wants, but I don’t want to jump to any conclusions just because of some weird vision.”

Poe replies, “That just makes me even more worried. But fair enough. It looks like it’s something that only Rey knows about. She seems like she’d be able to handle it, and with BB-8 she’d have no troubles.”

“I know she’s safe. It’s just that sometimes, I have no idea what’s going through her head. I don’t know whether she’s saying something important, or if she’s looking way too deep into this Force stuff and is overanalyzing it. Like what some people do with their dreams, you know?”

They stop talking for a while, and start to get serious. Poe, using his knowledge of the base, evades the cameras and the guards and leads Finn down to a hidden compartment of the ship. They reach a droid that looks like it’s been inactivate for ages. Poe kicks it and it beeps up again. “R’hlek”, Poe says, and lasers pop out of it. Using an eye scan, Poe unlocks the files. A distorted hologram and voice, implying Leia had to hide her identity, speaks to him.

“Poe, if you are hearing this, then something shady must have happened. If not, turn back now, because what you are about to hear will change how you see your commander, General Citho. He’s been claiming there are traitors within our ranks, but I have a feeling this may be an elaborate distraction. I have received reports that suggest that he may be secretly communicating with the First Order, and has plans to betray our cause.”

Finn looks at Poe, who is shocked. The hologram continues, “But if I am wrong, then this false accusation will have terrible consequences. I have spoken with a few others who are not undyingly loyal to Citho, and we have dispatched a covert team to investigate this matter further. My health is failing, so I do not know if I’ll be around to relay their findings to the Resistance. If I am gone, seek out the covert team: Jinstin. Kithto. Merilia. Find whoever is still alive. You’re-”

The message abruptly cuts off. Finn tells Poe, “Once we do this, there’s no turning back. Merilia is the only one who’s still here, but no one is allowed to talk to her. We’re about to piss off a lot of people.”

Poe, with a fierce but doubting look in his eyes, replies, “I feel the fire of indignation stirring in me again. If Citho is a traitor, then this isn’t Leia’s Resistance anymore. I will do this- for Leia.”

Chapter 10- Saving the Force

Beneath a white mountain lies a great expanse. Rey, still in disbelief, is sitting on a glass stone formation under an opal arch. Towering over her is Luke’s X-Wing- somewhat worn, but still in working condition. She has a blanket huddled over her to dry herself up. From the distance, Luke walks over and offers her some strange plant to eat. She eyes it hesitantly, but eventually decides to take it. As Rey is eating, Luke speaks:

“I never expected to see you here.”

Rey responds, “I was so sure you were gone. Leia did too.”

“I heard what happened to her.” Luke takes a deep breath, his expression turning to mourning, but finds the strength to continue, “This... is going to be hard to take in. It’s true that I left my physical self. The next thing I know, I was shrouded by a white light. Time didn’t feel like it existed anymore. I realized I had gone into the netherworld of the Force. I heard voices- familiar ones, too. But then, the light disappeared and I was covered in darkness. I saw these four tall figures standing before me; it was like I was nothing before them. I call them the Watchers.”

“I saw the same ones too! Just now, when I was in the lake!”

Suddenly, Rey notices that something is different. “The Force,” she says, “I can barely feel it!”

Luke takes a deep breath. “The Watchers must have taken much of it away.”

Rey shakes her head in a panic. “But why? Who are they?”

“I don’t know their motives. But I do know this: their end game is to take the Force away from people. In the netherworld, I couldn’t see who they were, but I saw what they were doing. I could tell they were trying to bend something, as if they were trying to restrain some sort of wild creature. Then I felt that light again. When I opened myself to it, I saw what these figures were doing. They were forcing these people to kneel before them. And when they knelt, they started screaming. Finally, I could hear those familiar voices again- they were showing me that these figures were disrupting the Force, and the voices asked me for my help to stop them. Without hesitation, I promised them that I would.”

Rey is shocked. She had never heard of such an excruciating power before.

Luke continues, “The voices told me so many things, but because they all came to me in a storm, I can only piece together a few of them. I realized they were trying to teach me both valuable information and techniques. Before I could make it all clear, I blacked out. When I woke up, I was back in my physical body, in the same place I had left. I remembered that they told me that I needed to help stop a disruption occurring in Fortuna. When I discovered where it was, that’s when I sensed that you had come to the same place, likely because you felt the same disruptions too, and I rushed to save you.”

Rey is staring at the ground. Without moving her gaze, she mutters, “So I was right. There really is something wrong with the Force.” She closes her eyes, trying to find the right thing to say. Exasperated, she tries to speak up again. “I’m sorry with how we parted ways.”

Luke sighs, then replies, “When you came to me, I had changed. I didn’t tell you this before, but decades of torment had left my mind in shambles. I could feel something reaching in and twisting me, yet I couldn’t discover why it was happening. I became paranoid... fearful... and angry. With every failed decision I made, I became less and less sure of myself. When I would try to reach for the Force, I felt like I was losing control of my mind. Eventually, the only way to stop me from slipping further into insanity was to cut myself off from it. Without the Force... I just couldn’t do anything; I lost hope, and felt like the only thing to do was to die on that island. By the time I met you, I was not the same person I was when I called myself a Jedi. If I was, things would have gone differently. It was only when I went into the netherworld that I began to regain much of my old self- the poisons polluting my mind must have been cured by the Force’s strong presence there.”

Rey sits in silence, and finishes the strange plant in her hands. Then Luke speaks up again:

Luke answers, “I felt a darkness watching over me as soon as I came back. I tried to feel for the presence of Force ghosts, but something was blocking me from contacting them. Just then, I remembered a technique the voices had taught me when I was in the netherworld. They called it a surrogate proxy. It was a way to hide my presence from the Watchers so they couldn’t find or reach into me. But when the surrogate is put up, one has to temporarily leave their connection with the Force.” Rey is startled for a bit, but Luke reassures her, “Don’t worry; when we leave the surrogate, the Force will be returned back to us.”

“But if these Watchers are always onto us, how can we ever leave this surrogate?”

“The Force voices told me about sacred expanses located in certain regions of the galaxy. The watchers’ powers cannot reach into them- at least, not yet. Some of these sacred expanses are located next to major Force disruptions that we have to patch up. I believe there is a good reason why these sacred expanses are so close to the disruptions. But when we leave these regions, we’re gonna have to use these surrogate proxies. I’ll have to teach you how to create your own around yourself.”

“Y- you’re going to actually teach me, this time?” Rey exclaims.

“There’s a lot you have to learn. Now that your connection to the Force is weaker, I’m afraid you’re going to have to go about a different way when using it.”

Rey finds a new strength inside herself and stands up. But suddenly, she remembers she has another duty.

“I have to go back to the Resistance. There was a general there whom I had a terrible vision of. But I can’t let him keep me away from helping my friends.”

Luke tells her, “That wouldn’t be a good idea.”

“What? But they need me!”

“You’d have to leave your surrogate. And with the Watchers tracking you, you’ll be putting them at risk. Right now, we don’t know what the Watchers want, or even who they are. And if this general has something to do with it, then we have to keep him away from you. The Resistance can’t know what you’re doing.”

Rey is frustrated, and looks like she has a hard time making the decision.

Luke continues, “Once we find out what’s causing these disturbances, then it’ll be safe to go back. We can’t fight the First Order using the Force if it’s growing more and more unstable.”

Rey relents, and walks over to Luke. “Then we can’t waste any more time.”

The X-wing seen is flying through the planet, over the tall wheat and glass stones, and arrives near the Myrioi Osprey. Luke and Rey head on board, and Luke is greeted by R2-D2.

“Hey there, old buddy!” Luke exclaims.

They get settled in, and Luke notices that one of the twin kyber crystals is on the ship. He tells her, “You have one? Amazing; I heard about the twin jades. With both of them combined, they can create a pretty strong weapon. In the hands of a skilled Force user, it has the power to change the tides of war.”

Rey replies, “I was only given one of them. I don’t know where the other one is; I hope to find it one day. But I don’t think we have time to search for it. Where do we go next?”

“I remember several places the Force voices told me to look into. But I don’t remember many of their names.” Luke begins to describe what he heard in the netherworld.

He finishes with, “...thin, silvery wisps in the sky. Winding, bottleneck passages in the sea. Rings of small, golden creatures joining together and wheeling through the winds, as they reflected off the rays of the giant, red sun...”

Rey thinks for a second, and then remembers, “I know that place. Etilma.”

Luke is surprised, “How did you know that?”

“When I was in the red lake, a collection of voices was speaking to me. I don’t think it was the Watchers; I felt like it was the Force. They were unraveling poems, talking about people. I realized they were the second half of these other three poems found in the sacred Jedi texts. One of the poems wasn’t about someone named Etilma- the poem was a personification of a planet. I think these stories are allegories; they’re like poetry.”

“You... you still have the texts?”

Rey tries to laugh it off, “Well, um, I took them before I left...”

Luke shakes his head, “Never mind that now. I could never read them anyways. Each time I tried to look inside of them for answers, I felt like I was being driven more and more insane.”

“That’s how I felt! Those crazy stories have been giving me a headache.”

“I was being literal. Remember how I said I felt like I was being twisted from within? I couldn’t even read a single word on its pages without feeling like my mind was losing more and more control. I can’t read them at all.”

“But... why?”

“I don’t know. What’s important now is that you’re the only one who can read them. And possibly, one of the few who’s smart enough to figure out what it means. From what Yoda told me, even the wisest of Jedi masters had trouble with them. I have a feeling that this isn’t the last time we’ll be needing these texts.”

Chapter 11- Etilma

Luke’s X-wing and the Myrioi Osprey are seen flying over clear, gleaming white and blue oceans, scattered with islands and sea life. The sky is turquoise, and there are no clouds, only vast, foggy wisps of silver.

Luke’s voiceover is heard: “Etilma was a place that the New Republic had assigned me to handle just after the Empire fell. It was a peaceful planet, and as such, was tyrannized by greedy warlords looking to enslave their people, the Wotuins, and sell their wildlife. I led a secretive group of soldiers into the warlords’ main base, which we destroyed, leaving them defenseless against New Republic fleets. We provided the Wotuins with a strong defense system afterwards, so that they could protect themselves in the future. Since then, Etilma has prospered, and its wildlife has been slowly returning.”

Rey and Luke land on a tropical island, next to a village. Inside, there is a giant barrack. Murmurs are heard throughout, and one by one, the entire village of humanoid, dinosaur-like beings with spikes on their bodies comes out of their huts. Some of them appear to be soldiers.

“He’s returned!” one of exclaims. They excitedly cheer, and rush out to greet Luke.

Rey smiles, uplifted by the positive energy circulating throughout the island. This is the Luke I had wanted to see, she thinks to herself.

One of the Wotuins speaks, “Luke, we cannot thank you enough for liberating our people. But we must ask, why is it that you have returned?”

Luke replies, “I saw visions that told me that there is a disturbance in the Force, and it has led us here. Has anyone witnessed anything unusual?”

The cheers fall silent. The Wotuin speaks again, “By the great Fortune... yes, there has been. For some reason we cannot explain... we have lost access to our defense system. The technology has not been tampered with, but something else- as if by magic- is hampering us from using it. And as such, our

wildlife has started disappearing again. Our people are being captured and enslaved too- so we are hiding out here. When your ship sent out a signal indicating that you were Luke Skywalker, hope returned to us, and we quickly contacted you.”

“What?” Luke softly replies, “When did this happen?”

“When the First Order rose again.”

Rey becomes sorrowful, now in sympathy. Luke remains steadfast. He continues, “I have a feeling that these two events are connected. We will help you and save this planet.”

The Wotuians begin to exhibit expressions of great hope again. One of the younger Wotuians points to Rey and asks, “Who is she?”

Luke tells him, “Her name’s Rey, and she’s my apprentice.”

Rey is taken back for a second time; she looks baffled, and cannot imagine what other surprises this new Luke has up his sleeve.

A Wotuin and the duo are walking towards a large carrier ship. The Wotuin tells them, “We do not know where these rogues are hiding. We will provide you with the last of our Grand Carriers, which can refuel your starfighters and traverse the seas, greatly aiding you in your investigation. But be careful; every one of us who tried to look for the cause has never returned. You will also be able to communicate with us using these transmitters. May the Force be with you.”

A montage of Rey, Luke and their droids, traveling on the Grand Carrier, is seen. They travel through the open sea to large lakes and swamps, stopping on land to find clues in the forests and mountains as to where the disruptions are coming from. They hunt, fish, and camp under the stars. One time, when they’re fishing, Luke is pushed back by a fish who looks up at him; Luke remarks to Rey, “That fish just used the Force!” They seem worried, knowing the Force disruptions are getting worse and worse, but soon laugh it off. Later, Rey and Luke are seen practicing swordplay. Luke also teaches her how to live like a hermit who lives off wild plants.

One day, as torrential rains assault the valleys around the duo, Luke teaches Rey how to create a long pole and how to use it to vault across cliffs. Though Rey stumbles at first, she quickly learns how to do it right,

and laughs when she succeeds. Luke nods, congratulating her for her accomplishment. Later, while camping at night, both of them laying down on blankets, Rey points to the sky.

“I’ve gone so far away from my home,” Rey softly says in a hushed tone.

Luke asks her, “Do you miss it?”

“No. Not at all. No plants, no ocean- not like this planet. Too much sand.”

Luke laughs, “Sounds just like my home of Tatooine. Let me guess what your home was like: moisture farms?”

Rey shakes her head and faintly smiles, “Not even. I was a scavenger.”

“A scavenger? Ha! Sounds like you had a tougher life than I did, kid.”

“I wished every day that I could find some way out. If it wasn’t for the Force, I would have perished.”

“I felt the same way, too.”

Rey suddenly pushes herself from the ground; no one else had ever told her that they saw the Force in the same way. She asks Luke, “You... you do? Sometimes I felt like... the Force has its own soul. Like it was watching over me. Everyone I talk to says it just sounds crazy, but I know they just don’t see it.”

Luke replies, “That’s right. Sometimes it does feel like the Force does have its own soul.” Rey perks up, and Luke continues, “When I was in danger, I would feel a voice call out to me. For a long time, I didn’t know who it was. But then I realized it was Ben- my old master. I realized it wasn’t the Force itself. But the Force had its ways of connecting people together. It wasn’t its own living being- it couldn’t decide to save people and move physical objects by itself. Ha, I mean, that would be nuts, right? If it could, so many problems in the galaxy would be solved.”

Upon hearing that, Rey becomes disheartened again, and realizes that Luke does not see the Force in the same way that she does. She knows that she was not imagining that the Force was, somehow, helping her

by physically moving things by itself. She can only reply, “Ah... that’s true...” while having a downtrodden look and biting her lip. But Luke is still looking up at the sky, and not at her.

Luke reassures her, “Not a lot of people see the Force the way we can. I couldn’t talk to a lot of people about this either. But I had old man Ben, and another teacher, Yoda. So don’t worry, kid; I got ya.”

Rey tries to smile, and says, “Thank you.”

Luke yawns, “Well, it’s getting late now, so we should be getting to bed.” He heads off into his own tent, leaving Rey outside to look up at the stars, wondering if anyone will ever understand her.

“The Hooded Beast,” Rey whispers into the night sky. But nothing speaks back to her.

THE next day, Rey and Luke are hiking through a tropical forest. Just then, Luke senses something, and stops Rey.

“Do you feel it?” Luke whispers.

Confused, Rey replies, “No... I can hardly even feel the Force.”

“It’s a sacred expanse. We can let down our surrogate here.” Luke points at a canopy of leaves.

Rey is relieved. She’s had her surrogate on for weeks now, and she was beginning to crave to be with the Force again. Luke walks through a canopy of leaves, and Rey follows him. When she emerges, she finds herself in a land of mysterious ruins. Luke closes his eyes and a faint, almost unperceivable light shimmers around them. Rey does the same thing.

“Looks like the perfect place to begin your training with the Force,” Luke says.

A determined look grows on Rey. Luke is training Rey, trying to teach her to how to use the Force to push herself off from the ground to jump, and also how to use it to land from high places. Rey quickly catches on, learning how to use it to hover above the ground when she falls. The two are running through an obstacle of ruins, and come across a wide chasm. Next to it is a bridge, and Luke crosses it. But instead of following him, Rey runs towards the chasm.

“You’re not ready!” Luke shouts at her, “Don’t try it!”

But Rey ignores him, and runs towards the chasm. She uses the Force to push herself off, but she does not get the timing right, and falls into the chasm. Luke uses the Force to catch her from falling to her death, right before she hits the ground. Then he abruptly lets her down and she lands on a loud thud with a face full of dirt.

“Patience! Rey, patience is the key to all this! You gotta cross the smaller chasms over and over before you to the big ones!”

Rey spits the dirt out, and pushes herself up from the ground. Defiantly, she bites back, “Maybe if you believed in me, then I could do it! How am I going to learn to cross the big ones if I don’t try? I don’t see the point of doing so many boring repetitions.”

“Are you kidding me? How many times would you practice a Force ability before you got the hang of it?”

“Usually... just one.”

“One? ONE?” Luke sighs. “You know, when I was younger, I was reckless like you. It took a while for me to learn that I needed to take a step back and stop focusing so narrowly on the goal in front of me, and to look at the bigger picture. Alright then, let’s end this here today.”

“What? You’re giving up on me so quickly?”

“I can’t teach you like this. You need to teach yourself before we can continue.”

Luke leaves. Rey smashes her fist into her palm, and angrily walks away.

THE afternoon passes, and Rey gazes upon the open ocean from a cliff as the wind breezes by, with her satchel, staff, and other supplies resting near her. As she’s thinking, something seems to spark up inside of her. She opens the satchel and takes out the old Jedi texts. She starts reading them again.

She closes her eyes, and follows the story she read on Fortuna, trying to visualize herself in a different state of being. But now, instead of giving up after one try, she tries and tries again. As she does, Luke is also meditating. He opens his eyes, and senses that Rey is learning. He smiles.

Hours pass by, and eventually, Rey finds herself in a different, more abstract world. Ruby surrounds her, but she can't make out what the shapes around her are.

When she awakens back to reality, her hands are cupped together, and above them floats an ethereal, ruby cube. Luke appears behind her, and says, "I felt a strong surge of the Force just now," he notices the cube in Rey's hands, and it suddenly disappears. "What was that?" Luke inquires.

Rey replies, "It was a soul artifact."

"A... what?"

"I read about them in the Jedi texts. At first I didn't understand, but now I do- there are Force powers held by ancient creatures throughout the galaxy, hidden away in secret locations. Some of them are destructive, others are controlling. The Jedi sought to take these powers, to stop them from falling into the wrong hands. To do this, they needed capsules- the soul artifacts- to hold these powers. The soul artifacts can hold either powers or information, and materialize them in the physical world. I found out how to craft one! I was able to manifest a physical representation of it, but it can't last long. It needs to be stored inside of its maker's soul."

"So, that thing is inside of you now?"

"I'd say so."

Luke ponders for a few seconds, then continues, "If these creatures held onto such tremendous powers, then we can guess that The Watchers must have taken their powers from them. These Force disruptions must be where these creatures live. If this is correct, then we have to find a way to heal these disruptions by helping them."

"The answers must be in the texts. I'll figure out where they are," Rey declares with resolve.

“Then let’s get on it. And one more thing, Rey,” Luke says to her just as she picks up the texts again, “This means that we have to be even more careful around The Watchers. Who knows what abilities they have. If we can store the Force powers in the soul artifacts to hide them from the Watchers, then we can’t let them steal those artifacts from you.”

Rey nods. She combs through the texts again, and now is smiling. Still engrossed in her reading, she tells Luke, “Those repetitions still seem drawn out and pointless to me.” Luke sighs and shakes his head as he walks away.

THE next day, Luke and Rey take the Grand Carrier towards a remote island. As they head there, Luke says to her, “How sure are you that the creature’s here?”

“I have a good feeling about it,” Rey quips back.

“If we find the creature here, there’s a good chance we’ll also find out what’s been messing with the defense systems on this planet.”

They reach the island and sneak around. They hear a commotion, and when they look into it, they see a group of Mandalorian soldiers patrolling the area.

Luke whispers, “Looks like Manalorians exiles. What could they possibly be doing here? The cave that the creature is in is heavily guarded; there’s tracking systems everywhere. They’re all controlled by some console nearby.”

“Don’t worry; I got this.” Rey gets up and leaves, and Luke calls after her, “Wait, what are you doing?”

She outruns Luke, and using a rope to climb down a cliff, she stealthily is able to sneak past the guards, and dismantles the console. The guards look around confused, and call an emergency- their security systems in that area have been disabled.

Rey rejoins with Luke. As they’re sneaking around to get to the next location, he whispers to her, “Good job, kid. Where’d you learn that?”

“Unkar taught me.”

Luke raises a brow. “The... ugly mean blob guy who you said always tried to sell you off?”

“Well, he didn’t really teach me, it was more like he would run away from the incoming Bullworms when they swarmed us, and would leave me alone on a cliff, so I’d have to figure out how to climb my way out...”

Just then, guards walk past, and the duo scrambles to hide again. Rey tells Luke, “I’ll go find and disable the other tracking systems.” Luke nods, “And I’ll distract the guards to lead them far away from you.”

After the systems are all disabled, Luke speaks to Rey through a transmitter. “Okay, we’re all done here. Now let’s go call in the Wotuians, and let their army handle the Mandalorians. After they’re gone, we’ll be able to get into the cave.”

Rey is in the middle of climbing just above the Mandalorian main base, and she responds, “But I’m right above the main base! I found a way to blow it up and escape. If I take it out right now, I can cause the base to self-destruct. We won’t need any Wotuians to risk their lives.”

“Rey!” Luke sternly says, “You know how many guards are there. It’s too much of a risk.”

“But isn’t that what you did on Etilma all those years ago?”

“Yes, but things are different now.”

“What’s different? Because you’re not the one who has the chance to save the planet now?”

“Rey, this isn’t about that!”

Rey shuts off her transmitter and climbs down. Though she’s able to evade several guards, suddenly, she’s discovered. She shoots at a guard and luckily hits him, but more guards approach. While running away, she loses her blaster. Now she ignites her lightsaber, and tries to fight off a guard, but has trouble doing so. Frustrated, she realizes it’s a lost cause, and scrambles to find a way to escape.

As more and more guards ambush her, it dawns on her that she has no other choice: if she's to have a fighting chance, she has to let down her surrogate. But just as she does, a guard from behind her knocks her out.

Chapter 12- The Watchers

Rey awakens in total darkness. Everything around her is a haze- she feels like she's left the physical world, and is now in some sort of mental projection. And then, there is a dim light. Her heart begins to pound faster. A sinking feeling falls over her- she knows what lies in front of her, and tries to run away. But there's nowhere to run in the darkness. The light grows brighter and brighter, revealing four faint apparitions- The Watchers. One of the shadowy figures waves away the dark clouds, and steps forwards. His face and body is now revealed.

He appears to be a tall, middle aged human male, royally dressed, with a sharp, pointed face and a rugged beard. "My name is Alstaire," he proclaims. Next, another one of the figures steps forwards, and the clouds are wiped away again to reveal a tall, middle aged human female with kind, caring eyes. "And I am Kiyla," she proclaims.

Rey swallows in trepidation, and asks them, "Who are you, and what do you want?"

Alstaire replies, "We have the same goal as you: we want to save this galaxy."

Rey replies, "By disrupting the Force?"

Alstaire continues, "We are keeping it away from the wrong hands."

"And whose hands are those?"

"The hands of many," Alstaire calmly replies.

Rey doesn't know what to say, and looks confused. Now Kiyla speaks: "The Force is a great energy, flowing through all living beings. But it is also a powerful weapon. With it, those who are greedy and wicked have used it to herald in war and death. It is not just the Jedi and the Sith who wield its powers; each living being has access to it, albeit in different ways."

Rey ponders for a few seconds, then realizes what Kiyla means: “The Force is what gives the cruel ones the willpower to overcome the current laws and systems holding them back.”

Kiyla kindly smiles, but with great sorrow. “You are a clever, clever child. It seems we think alike. But alas, that is the tragic nature of the Force. Due to its duality, only those who aim for justice and peace can wield it. And those who do not, such as Kylo Ren, must never have it.”

The name strikes something deep inside of Rey. Then she asks, “You want to stop the First Order?”

“We must. But as of now, we are not strong enough to do so. In time, we will find ways to get stronger. Then, only by working together with you can we find a way to bring peace to the galaxy.”

“If you need me, then why did you take the Force away from me when I faced Kylo Ren?” Rey questions defiantly.

Kiyla looks confused, and says, “We know nothing of that. When?”

“That... wasn’t your doing? Then what of the instability in the Force? How is General Citho connected to all this?”

Kiyla, answers, “We wish we knew. We are trying to heal the Force, too. The tears must be remnants of destruction caused by that misguided man...”

Her words send a shiver down Rey’s spine. There is something beneath them that Rey does not want to know. She tries to distance herself away, saying, “I still don’t understand. Why me?”

“Because you, young child, are not an ordinary one. You have a gift inside of you. One that we foresee to be the key to saving every being once and for all. You have been Chosen by the Force.”

Rey is skeptical, but is curious, as she is filled with many questions. “If I’m so important, you wouldn’t have taken the Force away from me back in the lake!”

Alstaire replies, "It was for your own good. Just nearby, we sensed a presence. It was faint, but as this presence began to shed its mask, we knew it was one who could not be trusted: Luke Skywalker."

Rey bites back, "What do you have against him?"

Alstaire responds, "We know it is hard to accept, but you must believe us, for the greater good of the galaxy. If Luke gets to you and your powers, he will misuse you, and surely lead your mind astray. He will usher in great chaos, just as he did many years ago."

"Luke is beloved by everyone on Etilma! He saved them!" Rey shouts back.

Kiyla shakes her head, "Oh... so she doesn't know. My poor child..."

Rey glares at her, "Don't know what?"

Kiyla continues, "Etilma is simply one planet out of many. You have not seen, first-hand, the destruction that Luke had wrought throughout the galaxy. By allowing the Force to be used by the cruel."

Rey refutes this, yelling back, "He would NEVER let the Force fall into the wrong hands."

Kiyla replies, "You have not seen it... the divisions and discords he had sewn in..."

Alstaire speaks up, "There is little time left. Leave Luke and believe in us, and we will give you back your powers. With them, you can save Etilma."

Rey shakes her head, "No. You're all wrong. I side with Luke." She turns her back to the Watchers.

Kiyla cries out to her, "Please don't go! Let us be with you! You'll be in grave danger!"

Rey begins to activate her surrogate again. As the four figures fade away, Rey feels herself falling down, faster and faster, through the darkness. Suddenly, she snaps back awake, and sees that she is inside of the Mandalorian base. She is kneeling down, with her arms extended and tightly bound by cords and ropes, held by Mandalorian soldiers on the other end.

In front of her, a bald, fierce-looking Mandalorian man with a goatee is squatting down and looking at her in the eyes, “Ah,” he says devilishly, “So she’s awake.”

Rey seethes at him, “Who are you people, and what are you doing here?”

The Mandalorian gets up, and chuckles. “What do you think? For ages, this planet has been protected by a pesky defense system. Most thought it was powered by just technology, but they were wrong- turns out some sort of rare, blue kyber crystal was behind it all. And then one day, what do you know, our trackers found its signals were madly going haywire! We landed near the source that we believed was causing interference with the kyber crystal. And our scientists found a way to manipulate some sort of creature to hamper the signal of the crystal. It just vanished! None of us could believe it, but we didn’t question it. So what better time to carve out our share of this planet and take advantage of its rich resources and wildlife.”

Rey looks around her. Surrounding her appear to be 12 highly capable Mandalorian soldiers. Unfazed, she asks the leader again, “You didn’t answer my question. Who are you people?”

The leader gets annoyed. “What are you, daft? Stupid? Look at the armor we’ve got on! We’re Mandalorian exiles! Thrown out of the planet because we were caught in the middle of corruption and a black market scheme! Seriously, kids these days need to catch on with the news...”

The leader then squats down again, his face right next to Rey’s. He continues, “And now that I’ve given you a little of what you want, shouldn’t it be fair that you give me some of what I want?” He grins, and Rey is disgusted. He tells her, “There’s a village housing a barrack full of Wotuin soldiers. The last line of defense for these buggers. We want to know where it is. Now, would you please kindly hold up your end of the bargain?”

Rey spits at him. “I never agreed to one to begin with.”

The leaders gets up, and wipes his face. “Rude. Guess you’ll have to pay some other way.” He motions to a guard, and makes a cutting gesture with his hand. Rey begins to panic as the guard walks over. He ignites a plasma blade.

“You will pay for this!” Rey shouts at him. The leader laughs.

Rey screams as a burning pain sears across her wrist, seizing her whole arm up in a convulsion. She yells and curses, closing her eyes to shut away the trauma. She takes rapid breathes, but the pain still won't leave. With her teeth clenched tight, she opens one eye, and in a blur, she sees that her right hand has been cut off. Right next to her, a Mandalorian soldier drenches it in some liquid and begins to burn it. Now consumed with utmost hatred, she glares at the Mandalorian leader.

"So, how'd that feel?" He grins, "Tell us where they are now, or you'll see that we've got a lot worse in stock for ya."

Though anguished, Rey gathers all the strength she can, and harshly whispers, "Never."

Suddenly, faraway screams of Mandalorian soldiers are heard. Blasters flare throughout the base, and bodies slam onto the ground. The soldiers all look around them, bewildered by the surprise attack. One soldier launches his jet pack and flies above to scout for danger, but as he's flying, a robed figure jumps out and pierces him through with its green lightsaber.

The soldier and the robed figure both land on the ground, and the robed figure unhoods itself to reveal that it's Luke Skywalker. The other Mandalorians attack him, but Luke slashes through them all. Finally, only the leader is left. He takes out a strange, twisted weapon, a mangled vibroblade. Luke duels him, and the leader quickly loses, falling to the ground. His saber hovers above the defeated Mandalorian.

"Your base has been captured by the Wotuians. You and your soldiers will be held prisoners on this planet, until the authority of the New Republic is restored and you can stand trial before the galactic courts."

Luke signals a message on his transmitter, and Wotuians barge in to capture the Mandalorian leader. Luke looks to Rey, and his expression falls when he sees her missing hand.

OUTSIDE of the base, Wotuin medics and technicians rush to attach a metallic hand onto Rey. She opens and closes the hand, but has trouble doing so, and grunts in frustration and despair.

"Unfortunately, with their limited resources, this clunky old model was all the Wotuians had," Luke solemnly tells her. "I made adjustments to it to try to get it to work better." Luke places his own metal hand on her shoulder, and continues, "After all, it took me a while to adjust to my own. So I know a few tricks on how to work it."

Rey covers her face with her left hand, and says, “So this is what I deserve? I guess the universe has its ways of punishing horrible people.”

Luke refutes her, saying, “You weren’t punished for being evil. You were reckless, and it cost you, but never say that you ‘deserved’ it. Things just happen. We can only learn from our mistakes.”

“Just reckless? I was captured... and if the Wotuians didn’t arrive in time, I could’ve revealed where they were, and let them be ambushed. I said I didn’t want them to risk their lives, but there was another reason! You know what I was thinking. I was...”

Luke finishes her sentence for her, “Trying to prove that you could do what no one else could? He sighs, “Every time I learn more about you, I realize that there’s a lot we have in common. I didn’t want to be a farmboy forever. So I wanted to make a name for myself. But at the same time, I was fighting the Empire because I had to stop it from hurting others. I was motivated by both selfishness and selflessness.”

Rey speaks up, “How will I ever be able to know if I made a selfish or a selfless decision?”

Luke replies, “Sometimes, you just can’t. Motivations are too complex. At the end of the day, it’s not about judging what drives us, but about what we accomplish. As long as we save others from being hurt, then we know we have done the right thing. And when we have to choose between our own wants and the needs of others, we must always choose others over ourselves.”

Rey pauses, and realizes that his words resonate deeply with her own experiences. She asks him, “The last time I saw Kylo Ren... I hesitated to kill him.”

Luke does not look at her, but shuts his eyes. “I sense that a part of you cares for him. There is something that he has that you do not want to lose.”

Rey tries to speak up again, but before she can, Luke continues, “When the time comes, for the greater good of the galaxy, you will have to put aside your own wants for the needs of others. And as you train, you will find the strength within you to do so.”

Rey does not know what to say, but believes Luke. Still, she is at a loss- what is selfishness to her? What is selflessness to her? Unable to find a dividing line between the two, she decides to stop thinking about it for the time being.

THE two approach a cave, and as soon as Luke steps inside, he feels a sharp pain on his head, and winches from it. A strange, yet familiar, distorted voice calls to him. Rey asks him, “What’s wrong?” Luke replies, “Don’t worry about it.”

Rey is now holding her staff with her left hand, using it to help her stay upright. They walk further in, and at the end lies a sickly creature. It has thick antlers and blue, bushy hair blankets it. Its formerly large chest and legs are wasted away as it lies in a dim light, the only one illuminating the cave. Its hooves are chiseled and fragile. Rey gasps, and Luke turns worrisome.

Then, the creature speaks: “I have failed as a soul guardian. They have taken it all away from me. ”

Luke asks it, “Who did?”

“I could not see who took my powers, but I am ill because of those Mandalorians... after my power was stolen, the kyber crystal of Ettilma’s defense system began firing erratically, and I tried to stop it. But I was weakened. The Mandalorians came and controlled me to do their bidding, using whatever power I had left to stop the kyber crystal from working.”

Luke replies, “You aren’t ill because of whoever took your powers away?”

“No... but without those powers, we are left defenseless, able to be attacked and subjected. They are taking it all from all of us.”

“Where are the other soul guardians?”

“Unfortunately, after my powers were stolen, I lost much of my memory too. I sense there are four others left, but do not know where. I do not remember much of my old self... or who I am...”

Rey and Luke look at each other in great distress. Then Rey tells it, “You have not failed. Whoever took your powers away hasn’t succeeded in disrupting all of the Force yet. We’re here to stop them.”

The beast replies, “Then, that is good to hear. All I remember is that I was to guard powerful soul objects. They managed to take many away from me, but I was able to hold onto one of the greatest of them all- and they do not know I still have it.”

Rey's eyes widen. She softly says, "We will do all we can to stop them."

The creature tells her, "I do not have much time left. I have spent the last of my life trying to protect it. But I cannot hold on much longer; I want to be free from this duress. Please... take it from me."

Rey approaches the beast and places her hand on it. The ruby cube apparates above her hands, and a glowing energy seizes into the cave. A silent flash erupts throughout, and when Rey can see again, the creature is no longer there.

Luke tries to hide his sorrow, and can only say, "We did the right thing. It's no longer suffering."

They exit the cave, and peer into the distance, taking in all the green tops of tropical trees beneath the cliffs of the cave. Rey breaks the silence, "The number of poems in that chapter match the number of soul guardians left- four. But I only know the second halves of three poems. Maybe the Jedi didn't want the wrong people to find these guardians."

"Then we'll have to use another way to find the rest. One of them could hold the key to reversing all of the damage."

Rey nods, and is about to say something else, but stops herself. She can't get the images of the Watchers out of her mind. After a moment, she gathers the courage to say, "Luke, back in the base. There's something I wanted to talk to you about."

"What was it?" Luke asks.

But just then, Rey remembers that she let her surrogate down. Not wanting Luke to discover that she went against his teachings, she quickly tries to think of different topic, and another thought strikes her. "When you fought off those soldiers, you had to let down your surrogate, didn't you?"

Luke tells her, "I had to do it to save you. I sensed that very soon, they were about to kill you. I was the only one who could get to you in time; I had no choice. But because the Watchers know where I am now, we'll have to leave this planet very soon. Its defense systems are back, so they will have their formidable protection restored."

Rey looks at Luke and replies, “I won’t put you in a place where you will have to do that ever again. You have my word.”

Rey leans on her staff with her left hand, and after adjusting her new metal hand, she succeeds in using it to grasp her staff, too.

Chapter 13- Finn and Poe Adventures

Finn and his guard are sitting in the isolated room, 21X-V. They hardly look at each other. Finn tries to make small talk. “So, it’s Hilda, right? How’d you get this job?” She doesn’t reply. Then, Poe enters the room, nods, and she exits.

Finn immediately begins talking. “Every security system in the base is heavily guarded. If we’re gonna talk to someone in jail, we’ll have to mess with the security cameras and figure out how to access the solitary confinement chambers. They’re guarded by droids, so we gotta disable them, too.”

“Don’t worry, I got a way in.” He speaks into his transmitter. “HQ-7!”

The doors of the room begin to open, and Finn and Poe snap up to look at it. Nothing’s there.

Poe gets irritated, “HQ-7, I told you to come with me, not just open the doors!”

Finn looks skeptical. “Uh, you sure this guy can do it?”

“Trust me on this one. HQ-7 is a reliable guy, doesn’t let you down.” They wait for a few seconds, and HQ-7, a clunky fat droid, is finally at the door, and slowly begins to wheel itself in.

It’s so slow that even though Poe and Finn are only a few feet away, the droid still hasn’t reached them yet. Finn says, “Right...”

“HQ-7 may be no BB-8, but he knows how to screw with every security cam on the base, and the good thing is, no one in the Resistance is keeping an eye on him. He’s not in their systems. Leia got him so that

whenever she wanted to skip out on a boring meeting, she'd tell him to set the sprinklers off, or something."

Finn sighs. "Okay. But we'll still need a way to access the solitary chambers."

"Just let HQ-7 do it."

"You sure he can get into them?"

"He's done a pretty good job with cams and sprinklers."

"But has he done high security prisons before?"

"I just said he's done cams and sprinklers."

Finn shakes his head and sighs, "Look, we need a better way."

"You saying HQ-7 isn't up to the task?"

"I'm saying the best thing we've seen it do so far is open a door!" He looks back to HQ-7, who is not even listening to their conversation. For whatever reason, it is trying to plug a square shaped rod into a hole in the wall.

Poe reluctantly agrees, and him and Finn think for a moment. Then, Finn lights up with a thought. "Hey, you ever see those two guys who look like us?"

"Um, Krait and Pinto?"

"No."

"Weasel and Gin?"

“No! Those guys look nothing like us at all!”

“Oh! You mean Jim and Riff.”

“No idea who those guys are. They got prison guard badges?”

“Yep. Hey, you’re not suggesting what I think you’re suggesting, are you?”

“All the consoles are heavily guarded. All except one.”

“Old man Dunwick’s.”

“He annoyed the senior officers so much, asking for a real console, that they just gave him the most defunct one. But it still works. They just always monitor him on the cams. Plus, they know that Dunwick isn’t gonna let anyone he doesn’t trust go anywhere near that console.”

“Everyone knows Dunwick is pals with all the prison guards because they let him eat the leftover prison food!”

“Exactly. We’ll just get Hilda to fetch us some prison guard uniforms and fix us up with fake IDs. We just gotta look the part and not bump into the real ones.”

Poe laughs. “This is crazy. You want me to pretend to be Jim? Or do you want to pretend to be Riff?”

“Dunwick is senile so he won’t remember a thing. We just gotta eavesdrop on Jim, Riff and Dunwick, and get the old guy to think we know all their inside jokes.”

“Whoa there,” Poe chuckles, “Hold up, that’s not gonna work.”

“Why not?”

“What if someone stops me in Jim’s uniform before I get to Dunwick? Jim’s got way too much swagger.”

“Er, how’s that a problem? You’re Poe, the Ace of Space, aren’t you?”

Poe shakes his head. “Not anymore.”

“Just loosen up and you’ll be back in no time.”

Poe throws his hands up in the air. “It’s not that easy! Ever since they demoted me, I’ve been trying to get more serious, to show them I won’t screw around. I’ve hung around Gnovian so long that I can barely cook up a joke anymore. Heck, now I just cringe every time I try to crack one.”

“Then let me handle it. I’ll be Riff.”

Poe sighs. “Riff’s got swagger, too.”

“Well, maybe I’ve got more than you now.”

“Ha, they teach you how to talk up a room in the First Order? What class was that for, the pep rallies?”

“Oh, you’ll see.”

The scene shifts. Finn is now walking in a prison guard uniform . HQ-7 has trouble plugging the right rod into the wall, and Poe yells at it trying to get it to work right. Finally, it succeeds and the cams leading up to Dunwick are hacked into. Poe speaks into a transmitter to Finn, who has an ear piece on, “You’re all clear. Jim and Riff are in another sector, and I’ve got you on a route with no patrols.”

Poe guides Finn along, but just then, he says, “Oh no.”

“What’s wrong?” Finn asks.

“HQ-7 messed up our tracking systems a little. Someone’s just ahead. You gotta turn back!”

But it's too late. A guard runs into Finn. The guard laughs. "Riff! How the hell have you been? Been a while, huh? Didn't know you patrolled this area at this time of the day!"

Finn nervously speaks up, "Well, don't tell anyone, but I'm supposed to be in G-6. The prisoners there are way too loud though. I told one of my interns to take over and I'm out here for a breather."

Poe chuckles, "Just like we rehearsed, buddy."

The guard squints at him, but then laughs again. "Haha, no worries. I do that from time to time too. Those interns sure are useful, aren't they?"

"Sure are."

The guard continues, "Say, did you watch the big game yesterday? I know you're a big fan of the Krumbos!"

Finn freezes. Poe mouths, "Oh, crap."

Finn tries to laugh it off, "Hell yeah, I sure did!" He tries to remember what he heard about the big game. While rambling on, he goes through a bunch of random hand motions, looking from side to side and mostly avoiding eye contact. "When the Gonzo hit the Crabbe, I was like 'Wha...?' and then they got to the rings and Elstein jumped all the way over, and I was just shouting 'No!'. Then the Baff just flew straight down, and I shook my head and just said 'Wow.' Just... uh... 'wow'," he ends in an unconvincing whisper.

He looks up, and the guard has a perplexed look on his face. He says, "Uh, Baffs can't fly."

Finn stiffens, and his mind starts racing. He starts stuttering, "Um, I know that! Just an expression, you know."

"And Baffs are on the bench this season."

"Huh..."

There is an awkward pause. But just then, Finn hears, “Well, well, well, if it isn’t Bill!”

The guard’s face lights up and he shouts, “Jim!” Poe is there with a prison guard uniform. The two bro hug it out.

Poe turns to Finn and says, “Riff! I was looking all over for ya! Had too many of those Entu berries, didn’t ya?”

Bill exclaims, “Wow. You managed to sneak a few onto the ship?”

Poe chuckles, “Yep, just as we got off Entuine, we brought a couple of those bad boys along for the ride.”

Bill shakes his head and chuckles too, “Well, I’m surprised Riff can still put on his uniform. Last time I had those, I found myself stumbling into Gnovian’s chambers, and started talking to him about my favorite blue milk recipes.”

“What’d he think about them?”

“He said he’d consider trying one some time.” They pause, and the two burst out laughing, while Finn is standing there in utter confusion.

Bill continues, “So what’d you think about the big game last night?”

“Well, when the Kratu hit the Mesmohoffs, I was like ‘Wha...?’ and then they got to the rings and Rickto jumped all the way over, and I was just shouting ‘No!’”. Then the Harlicker flew straight down, and I shook my head and just said ‘Wow.’ Just... ‘wow’,” he ends in a dashing tone, looking off into the distance.

“That was definitely the best part!” Bill exclaims. “Ha! Well, it was great bumping into you two. I’ve got a patrol to get to.”

Poe replies, “We’ll just be hanging out around here while our interns got our backs in G-6.”

“Huh,” Bill says, “Well I guess Riff wasn’t wrong about that part. Don’t worry; I won’t tell anyone you guys are here.” He waves his hand in front of Finn, who gets visibly annoyed. Bill tells him, “Just don’t go taking any more of that Entu stuff, and ESPECIALLY don’t mix it with blue milk.” Then Bill walks away.

Finn turns to Poe, bewildered. “How’d you do that? I said the exact same stuff!”

“Well, first off, you gotta brush up on your Nomballing knowledge,” Poe says.

“The First Order didn’t allow us to watch Nomballing, the channels it was on had too many New Republic ads. We only had Lom Racing.”

Poe is repulsed, “That’s the worst sport. And also, it’s not just what you say, but how you say it.” Finn sighs, and they continue walking up to Dunwick’s room.

When they get there, they see Dunwick fiddling with a busted up old console. Finn squints and tries to make out what the controls are, but has a hard time doing so. Poe whispers to him, “You think I should distract him, and you get on that console.”

“No way. Not only are those controls outdated, but Dunwick messed with them so much that I have no idea what they do. The officers must’ve known that no one but Dunwick can screw with it. We’ll just have to convince him to let us in.”

“Riff? Jim?” Dunwick says, peering at the two.

Poe coughs and says, “How’ve you been?”

Much to Poe’s surprise, Dunwick yells “Where the hell are my snacks!?!?”

“I’ve got them right here,” Finn tells Dunwick. He hands him a weird looking thing, and Dunwick snatches it and eats it. He sighs, “Ah, much better. I get cranky without my daily solid blue milk.”

Poe laughs and says, “Well, you can’t be crankier than Lartha!”

Dunwick guffaws. “Ah, you kids keep me young. What can I do for ya?”

“We’re looking to go into solitary confinement cell number 82,” Poe replies.

“You’ve got it,” Dunwick says and winks at him.

Chapter 14- Finn and Poe Adventures 2

Finn and Poe are walking through a gray corridor, and at its end is a white room. Poe motions to HQ-7 to disable the droids guards. Merilia is inside. She looks at them and says, “Last time I saw you two, you guys were a bit taller.”

Finn tells her, “We’re Finn and Poe, and we received a message from Leia that you have info about General Citho.”

Merilia looks at Finn, “I know who you are; I met you on Juri.” Merilia then looks at Poe, and says, “So you’re the one she entrusted the message to.”

“I thought you would’ve figured that out sooner,” Poe smirks.

“You’re not the first person I had in mind, but you were a close second,” Merilia replies. Poe looks slightly offended.

Finn says, “What did your team find about Citho?”

Merilia sighs. “I never got a chance to talk to them.”

Finn is confused. He asks again, “What happened?”

Merilia replies, “If just one of us was captured, the entire operation would’ve failed. So we split up. Three of us found info on Citho, but before we could get together to piece up what we found, the Raid of Buruma happened. My team members were accused of being traitors; they were imprisoned in different locations, and their intel was confiscated, stored in the main base. By then, Leia was gone, and no one could stick up for us. I’m the only one of us who’s still left.”

“Did they figure out you were all looking into Citho?” Finn asks.

“No. The security in our equipment is so unique, there’s only one person I know who can bypass it, and he doesn’t work for the Resistance. Also, we didn’t know if our combined evidence would accuse Citho either, so I couldn’t risk calling him out. But I know that if we gather all the pieces together, we can find out if Citho really was working with the First Order or not.”

“What do you want us to?” Finn asks.

Merilia twitches her nose. “Alright,” she declares, “Here’s the plan. Because I’m a Yintil, I can remember map layouts pretty well and figure out what’s happening in different places just by hearing faraway sounds. Echolocation through walls and stuff. So you see that screw over there?” She nudges her head in a place behind Finn and Poe. They turn around, walk over, and see a small metal screw lying on the ground. Suddenly, it vanishes.

“Whoa,” Poe exclaims, “What was that?”

Merilia answers, “I don’t know. But it’s one of those anomalies that’s been happening lately. At any moment now, the screw will be back.” Sure enough, the screw pops back into existence. Merilia continues, “I’ve been listening carefully to what’s been happening all around the ship. Focusing on certain sounds. Based on my calculations, the screw’s been teleporting through a sequence of rooms. It teleports to the engine room, and teleports back. Then to someone’s chambers, and back. When it gets to the end of this sequence, it repeats itself. It goes through a lot of rooms. It’s so small, I don’t think anyone else has noticed it yet.”

Finn is astonished. “So, what happens if we pick it up?”

“I don’t know,” Merilia answers. “Maybe you’ll be ripped apart. But if you don’t, and if I my calculations are right, then you can get to rooms where I believe the two pieces of intel are kept, and steal them.”

Finn gulps. Then, he says, "I'll take the risk."

Poe shakes his head, "Finn, I'll do it."

"No. You've got to lead the Resistance. I'm expendable."

Poe sighs, but agrees. Through his transmitter, he tells HQ-7 to be ready to mess with certain cameras and tracking systems when he tells him to. Before Finn heads to the screw, he reaches into a pocket and takes out a peculiar device. He snaps it and breaks it into 3.

Merilia looks at it with curiosity. "What's that?" she inquiries.

Finn replies, "It's a transmitter device, a prototype I took from the First Order base when Rose and I went there. I figured out that when we swallow it, we'll be able to hear each other speak. It flows through our bloodstream. However, it only lasts for a few hours." He gives a piece to Merilia and Poe, and they all swallow it. Now Finn walks towards the screw.

Just before he picks it up, Merilia tells him, "There's something else I need you to get: my transmitter."

Puzzled, Finn asks her, "Why?"

"I have an associate to follow up with."

Not questioning any further, Finn readies himself to touch the screw. "Alright," Merilia says, "You'll have to wait for 3 more teleportations before you touch it." The first one occurs. Then the second. "On my signal," Merilia continues, "Go." Finn touches the screw, and is transported to a dark, lab-like room. He breathes a sign of relief. No one is there. Merilia directs him to the equipment, and Finn grabs it. He heads towards the screw, and is able to grab onto it before it teleports back.

On the second try, Finn readies himself and almost touches the screw, but just then he hears: "Wait," Merilia cautions him, "Don't touch it just yet."

"What?"

“You were a second too late. It blinks into the right room, but just after, it blinks into Citho’s chamber. You would’ve been a goner if you went there. We’ll have to wait another cycle and try then.”

They wait, and the chance comes again. Now, Finn touches it, and braces himself. He lands in a hangar, grabs the piece, and heads back. Then he prepares for the final run: the transmitter. Merilia counts down, and Finn touches the screw, and ends up in a well kept chamber.

“Merilia, I’m here,” Finn says.

“Good. Do you see the storage boxes?”

“Boxes? No. I see a bed, and some fancy looking counter, and gold plates...”

Worry grows over Merilia’s face. “You’re not in the storage facility. You’re in Citho’s chamber.”

“What? Merilia, what the hell?”

Merilia is confused, “I don’t know; I know you timed it right. Some other anomaly must have changed the teleporting sequence!”

Finn tries to look for the screw again, but it’s disappeared. As he panics, he hears footsteps. “Who’s that?”

Merilia whispers, “Citho.”

Finn scrambles to find a way out, and suddenly, he hears a voice call out to him. He can’t make out who it is, but it sounds familiar. He approaches a golden box. The voice is telling him to touch it, and to visualize the storage facility. He answers the voice, “But I’ve never been there.” The voice tells him: “Use the Force.” He does, and he disappears with the box. A second later, Citho enters the chamber, and feels something suspicious.

He finds himself in the storage facility. “I’m there!” Finn says. Merilia and Poe are surprised. Merilia quickly tells him how to find the transmitter. He grabs it, and holds onto the golden box again, visualizing the prison chamber. He’s back with Merilia and Poe.

Poe shakes him. "How'd you get back?"

"There was a voice. It told me to grab onto a golden box. It's right-" He looks back, but nothing is there anymore.

Merilia tells him, "Let's not waste time on that. Pass me the intel and I'll assemble all the information from them together. I'll also need my transmitter."

Finn watches as Merilia places her hand over the intel, and suddenly, he feels a power emanating from her. He is taken back, surprised.

"Are you... using the Force?" he asks.

Merilia raises a brow at him. "No? This is just something called an Unravel that all Yintils can do. It's a way to hack into technology using ancient magic. As we crack it, we store the information we got within our minds."

Finn doesn't know what to say, but something in him is sure that he feels her using the Force. He and Poe wait for her to finish. Finn thinks back to the voice. He shuts his eyes in deep meditation, as if trying to contact someone. He whispers, "Rey." But no one speaks back to him. Poe asks him, "What are you up to?"

Finn sighs. "It sounds crazy, but I heard a voice back in Citho's room. I think I'm getting more and more connected to the Force. So I've been trying to reach Rey using this meditation thing she told me about."

Poe is surprised. "You. You can do those magic tricks, too?"

"Not like Rey. But I'm starting to do stranger and stranger things."

Poe laughs, "Wow. Is everyone getting Force powers?" Just then, Merilia succeeds in cracking open the devices, and a hologram of messages appears. They read through them, and she whispers, "It can't be..."

Finn clenches his teeth down, "What the hell is this?"

Merilia replies, “These communication logs... my teammates were planning to betray the Resistance to the First Order.”

Finn shakes his head. “They... met with Citho.”

Merilia solemnly says, “They thought he was on their side. They wanted to steal the Partul power cells from the Resistance. But it turns out, Citho was only pretending to help them; he knew there were traitors, and disguised himself to find them.”

“Citho was right all along?” Poe exclaims.

Merilia answers, “That’s what we know so far. Citho has a medical condition, and his device has to adjust his body to handle new environments. My team members stole data from his health tracker records, which logs his location and uses it to learn how to adjust his body better. These records match the events described by my team members.”

Finn angrily slams his fist into his palm. “You’re lying to us. These logs- they’re a forgery. This was a trap, wasn’t it? At any moment, Resistance fighters are gonna walk through those doors and arrest us. Maybe you’re working with Citho. He forced you tell us this.”

Merilia berates him, “Get out of here with your insane conspiracy theories. These logs are the truth. You can’t just ignore them because you don’t want to believe them. The evidence says that, at least in this case, Citho was right.”

“This doesn’t sound right to me.”

“If you want to do the right thing, you have a responsibility to accept the truth, even if it goes against what you want to believe,” Merilia says.

“A responsibility? To who? To you?”

“To everyone, including yourself! You can’t live in a bunch of lies. Do you want to be just like those you say are so brainwashed?”

Finn is still incredulous, but starts to calm down. Merilia continues, “We gotta stand up for what we believe in. But we’re not just responsible for supporting our beliefs; our job is to know the truth, too, even if it goes against what we want to be true.”

Suddenly, Poe gets a signal from HQ-7. “We can’t stay here. The guards are coming back to patrol this area.”

They hand Merilia a transmitter, which she hides. As they leave, Merilia tells them, “If you need me, you know where to find me.”

“Well, it’s not like you’re going anywhere,” Poe quips.

Back in the isolated room, Finn and Poe sit in silence. Then Finn asks, “I know the evidence points to Citho being right. But why was Rey suspicious of Citho?”

“You believe in that Force stuff too, now?”

“Rey’s not stupid. There has to be a reason she suspects him. I’ve been trying to contact her, but I just can’t do it.”

Poe sighs. “I’m going back to my post. Let me know if you get anywhere with this. Until then, let’s do what we’ve been assigned.” He leaves the room, leaving Finn alone. Finn shuts his eyes.

It has been over a month since Rey went missing. Another month passes. Without Rey, the Resistance begins to lose hope.

Chapter 15- Bridges

A clay-like, opaque sky looms over a rainbow landscape filled with a variety of peculiar plants. It is morning. In this meadow, Rey is reading through the Jedi texts again. She whispers to herself, “It’s starting to make sense now.”

But she hits a roadblock. So she closes her eyes, and tries to re-connect with the Force. As she tries to search for it, she starts speaking, “Tell me where you are hurting. Let me help you.”

A voice answers her: “You could never help me.”

Rey opens her eyes, and in front of her, a few feet away, is Kylo Ren.

“It’s been months. Why are you back?” she asks, exasperated.

“You think I want to be here?” he answers. Then, Kylo becomes alert, and stares at her. He notices she’s hiding something from him. A serious expression dawns upon his face. “I sense someone powerful near you. Luke is alive?”

“He’s the one who will stop the Force disruptions.”

Angrily, Kylo says, “He thinks he can stop them?”

Rey snaps at him, “So you’ve noticed. The anomalies ripping through the universe? The Force that’s spiraling out of control? There’s something more important at stake than this war. Once that is dealt with, we will go after you and the First Order.”

“A distraction. That’s what those anomalies are. Crushing the Resistance is far more important.”

Rey retaliates, saying, “You’ll never win.” She tries to walk away, but there’s nowhere she can go. Kylo asks her again, “So you weren’t talking to me. Who were you trying to talk to?”

“It’s none of your business.”

“It was the Force, wasn’t it?”

Rey stops, then asserts, “Don’t be ridiculous. The Force isn’t some living thing.” She lets out a short, faint laugh. “What, do you think I’m crazy?”

Kylo replies, “No, I think you’re bad at hiding things.”

Rey turns around and walks up to him, “Then tell me. What do you think the Force is?”

“Perhaps it has a soul.”

Rey walks back. No, she thinks to herself. It can’t be.

Kylo calls out, “I feel it deep within you. Somehow, you know that place, too.”

Rey remains silent.

Kylo continues, “I remember the games I played there. The languages made, the words I hid.” He pauses, and looks at Rey, who trembles at what he is implying. And he speaks again, “They never left my thoughts. I used them to encode my deepest secrets. There is only one other person who would know them, too.”

Rey finally shouts back, “And she wants nothing to do with you ever again!”

They are covered by silence. And then Kylo, in a hushed tone, speaks again: “So it is you.”

“You knew Anakin,” Rey yells, her heart pounding rapidly, her breath short. “What did you do with him?”

Kylo shouts back, “Why are you asking me? You know the answer already!”

Rey whispers, “No...” She tries to deny it as much as she can. “It couldn’t have been you.” She regains her composure, “Stop this. I don’t want to hear about it again. I’ve moved on, and the only thing I want to do is to help the Resistance defeat you.”

Just then, Rey feels herself fading away. Kylo feels it too. They are leaving this non-physical world.

In his parting words, Kylo tells her, "It's either Luke, or me."

Rey replies, "You were the one who wanted to leave."

"You don't understand; I just couldn't show you why!" A questioning look grows upon Rey. She asks, "Show me what?" She steps towards him. But before Kylo can answer, he sees her fade away.

He wakes up back in the First Order base, and suddenly feels a rush of water pour over him, as if he was drowning. He coughs and tries to breathe, and scrambles to sit up. As soon as he does, he sees Serei next to him, holding a dripping, near empty glass of water. He's in a meeting room, and was sitting in front of a large, circular table.

"Wh- what the hell are you doing?"

Serei, looking guilty, says, "Um, a bunch of us were in the middle of a presentation by Hux, and then you started dozing off. We couldn't get you to wake up and Hux got so angry that he just left. It's only been you and me in this room for the past 20 minutes. I tried everything I could to wake you up."

Kylo wipes the water from his face with his gloved hand. Though irritated, he says nothing, and struts out of the room.

LUKE is standing on a mountain cliff, overlooking the branches of blue, green, red and violet streaking through the plains. The sun is almost setting. Reddish clay covers the cliffs. Rey, bothered by something but trying to shrug it off, walks into the picture.

"How did your meditation in the sacred expanse go?" he asks her.

"I came across some roadblocks, but I've gotten past them. I've cracked a lot of the Jedi texts. I know what they're about."

Luke looks at her, with a steadfast look in his eye, "I'm ready to listen."

Rey tells him, "The texts aren't just manuals about how to craft things. It has stories too. And all the events that we've been going through... are similar to the ones that occurred in this chapter of the book."

"Visiting Etilma? Saving its people? Meeting with the guardian? Does it mention us?"

"No, not literally. All the stories seem like nonsense. But in them are patterns that I realize repeat themselves throughout history. One of the stories is about rebellion. Fighting against a greater power. There's a villain who turned to the dark side, a great weapon, and his son." Luke listens in with even greater intensity. Rey continues, "I believe it's an event that must have happened many times before, throughout these millions of years. Another is about two planets joining together for peace and unity. The stories themselves aren't important; the patterns are."

"If these stories were written long ago, how could they refer to events that are happening just now?" Luke asks.

Rey replies, "It's because this text is a collection of force visions. My guess is that Jedi masters would meditate and write down what they felt. The force visions they had were about patterns that would occur not just once, but many times, in a cycle over and over."

Luke follows up and says, "How do you know all this?"

"This isn't the first time these planets were visited, in this order, for the purpose of stopping the Force disruptions," Rey says, "Remember the poems about the five people- each of them being a personification of the planet we have to visit? We've already visited two of them. There are clues that one of them- the strongest one- is above the rest. It may even take the control out of whoever's doing all of this."

"Then we have to find that one. It's the most important." Luke pauses, thinks for a moment, and says, "All this goes with something I've been thinking about. If what..." Suddenly, Rey's vision gets blurry. She tries to fight it, but she feels herself fading away. She hears Luke continuing to talk: "...you're saying is true, and the very first planet we visited was Etilma, where I..." Her vision is getting darker and darker, and she feels like she's fading from the world. Luke's words begin to grow quieter and quieter: "...set foot on long ago, then some I must be connected to these..."

Rey feels herself fading away in blackness. It's happening again. Her connection to the other world. But just then, she hears "REY!" She wakes up to the sound of Luke shouting at her.

“Rey! You zoned out again. Just like-”

“Like Ben?” Rey says without thinking, then gasps and tries to take back her words.

Luke’s eyes widen, and asks, “How did you know?”

“Just... a lucky guess,” Rey sputters.

Luke sighs. “Before Ben turned to the dark side, sometimes I’d find him zoning out in the middle of my lessons. My other students would mock him for it, and I tried to get them to stop. When I asked him what he was doing, he just wouldn’t answer. He was a quiet, kind kid, but he didn’t get along with some other students, who thought he had an unfair edge over them for being the teacher’s nephew. Eventually, as he struggled to stay at my academy, he began to change.”

Rey pauses, in deep thought, and then asks Luke, “Were you close to him?”

Luke replies, “I tried to be. I wanted to help him. I told him that he had the potential to be a great, compassionate Jedi. That he had time to grow and learn from his mistakes. I could feel that he wanted to try his best, but there was something about him that I just could never reach. I sensed an innate darkness in him, so when he first asked to join my school, I told him I had to work with him on his issues before I could. But I could never find the time to do so. It wasn’t until his powers grew, and Leia and Han couldn’t control him anymore, that I realized I was his only hope left. But I couldn’t help him. No one could.”

Struck with too many painful memories, Luke leaves the grounds, leaving Rey alone.

THE sun sets. As Rey sits in the meadow at night, she continues to try to contact the Force. But no matter how hard she tries, it never calls back to her. She whispers to herself, “What should I do?” There is no breeze, no running streams, no echoes of creatures in the night. Just her. A moment passes, and at last, she gives in, whispering, “The Hooded Beast.”

A voice answers: “I knew you would be back.”

“I need to see it. What you wanted to show me.”

“It’s all true. There’s a world, nothing like this one.”

Rey speaks back to him: “Can we ever visit it again?”

“We have to try.”

Rey opens her eyes, and finds herself with Kylo in the darkness again. They don’t speak another word to each other. Immediately, Rey kneels down on the dark surface beneath her, and places her hand on the ground, then begins to draw a strange symbol. As she does, a neon flickering glimmers, tracing out her outlines. Right after she does, Kylo kneels down and join her. They start drawing faster and faster, as if it is all coming back to them with more and more familiarity as they relinquish themselves to it. As the two draft these strange symbols, they look each other in the eyes, and then, a flash of incredible light transports them into a different world.

Chapter 16- Rey and Ben

On a beach, covered by a faint, red-violet glow, two figures stand far apart: a young boy with scruffy, brown hair, and a young Togruta girl with orange skin. The landscape is dimly mellow, its sun encased in an eternal sunset. But no warmth lives in its crushingly black sky, and its overwhelming terror covers all save the sun that barely escapes it. Still, there are distractions. The ocean is clear yet faintly grey, and the sands are warm and still.

The girl walks towards the boy.

Close to him now, she hears the boy say, “We don’t need these avatars any longer.”

The girl pauses, and nods. She closes her eyes, and when she opens them again, she sees Ben Solo standing before her. Standing before Ben Solo is Rey. But she does not have a metal hand.

“I can’t believe I’m here again,” Rey whispers.

“But what was this place?” Ben remarks.

From the sand, Rey picks up a shell knotted in an intricate pattern. “Back when you were a padawan. Remember how you were trying to describe to me that Force ability you were practicing, but I just couldn’t get it? It wasn’t until you showed me this that I understood. This shell was a representation of that. This world is a manifestation of how each person sees the Force. This world-”

Ben finishes her sentence, “...this is how I see the Force.”

“And through it, I could see it through your eyes,” Rey says softly.

Ben replies, “But why were these worlds even manifested at all- whoever manifested them must have wanted to know how others saw the Force. Was it so... they could change how we think?”

Rey shakes her head, “Nothing points to that.”

“Why could only a few of us access it?”

“I... I don’t know. ”

Rey turns around, and from far away she sees a metal, igloo-like complex. Even farther away is a burning brightness. She points towards the building.

“There. That was your home, wasn’t it? You never let me inside.”

Ben scoffs, “It wasn’t my home. It was a resting stop that Han and I often stayed in when we traveled together.”

Rey starts walking towards it, and Ben exclaims, “Wait, Rey! That’s not what I want to show you!”

Rey is running now, and before Ben can stop her, she opens the door inside. She gasps. It’s a beautiful home, with a warm fireplace, stone walls, and a broad, magnificent ceiling. As she takes it all in, she experiences a rush of victory. Trophies surround her, and gold plates and emblems champion the surfaces of everything that she could see. But there is something else that stands out to her- as she approaches the fireplace, she notices holograms resting still just above the flames. A father, with a sly grin, and his proud

son are standing together, both with medals around their necks. She reaches out and tries to touch it, but suddenly, the hologram is wiped away. She turns around and Ben is standing behind her.

“It’s a fake,” he says.

Rey looks at him with sympathy, and says “No. Don’t you see? You and Han-”

“Those medals? That... happiness? They never existed. I just wished they did.”

Rey reluctantly looks away, unable to bear the cold regret she feels in Ben’s words. But then, she notices something hauntingly familiar. She walks towards it, and Ben’s eyes widen, but he does not move.

Rey whispers, “This...” She picks up the object. “This broken lightsaber handle... was mine.”

She turns around, now with a glaring intensity. “You stole this from my world.”

“You said you were going to leave.”

“Because I don’t know what had gotten into you that day. You insulted the Jedi! You said they would never come save me. You knew this was my favorite piece of the Jedi that I found in my world- and you took it from me!” Rey shouts back at him.

“Because you didn’t understand! And you still don’t!” Ben yells back.

“Then tell me why! What is it that you wanted to show me?”

Ben tries to speak, but doesn’t. He turns around. “I thought you were ready. To see what I see in the light. But now I’ve changed my mind.”

“Why? Are you afraid?”

Ben scoffs. Rey scoffs back, telling him, “You were trying to hide from the light. But the darkness is not who you are. And when I go there,” she grips the handle harder, “I’ll be taking back what’s mine.”

With the broken lightsaber handle in her hand, Rey starts walking out of the room, and out of the home.

Ben shouts, “Where are you going?”

“This place wasn’t always shrouded in darkness. You hid from the light- so I’m going to show you it’s nothing to be feared. And then, maybe you will understand.”

“Rey- Rey, don’t do this.” They are both outside now, and Ben runs up to her and grabs her wrist. She shakes him off, and starts running.

Ben runs after her, shouting, “You have no idea what lies there!”

As she approaches the brightness, her vision starts to blur. It hurts, but she doesn’t let it stop her, and as the brightness burns her harder and harder, she pushes on with stronger, more steadfast determination. And suddenly, she is completely blind- the only thing she can see is sheer light. But gradually, her sight begins to be restored. And now she is in a desert, but one far more scorching than Jakku. This is not a beach anymore. There are no oceans. It is an inferno.

Giant stalagmites pierce through the sands and valleys, twisting up farther into the sky with no end in sight. Rey clenches her teeth, seething- the heat is too much to bear. And then, she hears a screeching wail. In the distance, she witnesses a white, hooded figure. It seems still at first, but that is merely an illusion. It’s getting closer. And the closer it gets, the more she realizes just how gargantuan this creature is.

Rey starts running away, but she can’t find where she came from. The wails grow stronger, and now she sees the behemoth in all of its glory- an Absolute tower, a hooded being with light draping all around it, as tall as an Imperial Star Destroyer, outclassing everything around it.

Then she feels a cold, but human, grip around the palm of her hand. She looks up, and sees Ben. He’s in agony, but is trying his hardest to fight it. Neither of them says a word, but somehow, she knows that he can find the way out. The two run together, away from the behemoth, and into the edge of darkness. The world grows darker and darker to Rey, until she is left in an empty nothingness.

When she opens her eyes again, she is back on the faintly lit beach. She takes a few moments to catch her breath. Then she looks around for Ben- but he is nowhere to be seen.

Rey heads into the home, worried. She searches all around her, but can't find him. She rushes outside, and looks all around the beach. Nothing. And then she sees it- a realm of total darkness, one opposite of the blinding light.

As she approaches it, her nerves begin to race. Just before her in the distance, she notices a large, shadowy grin, almost like a mirage. Afraid, she looks away, and she can't see it anymore. But she knows it's still there. She shouts into the darkness, "You can't keep him there forever." There is no reply. But, she feels the entity begin to seep away. Though her nerves are still racing, with grim resolution, she walks inside.

Pitch black. Almost nothing to be seen. Then, she feels something nearby. Guided by her sense of the Force, she slowly walks forwards, and when she feels she reached it, she kneels down. Before her is Ben Solo, sitting down, his eyes closed, his hands over his head, elbows pointed inwards.

Rey tries speaking to him, "I didn't mean to hurt you. I just wanted to understand." However, Ben keeps quiet. For the next few moments, Rey doesn't speak a word to him, but now, she finally understands. She sits alongside him, and the two lie still in silence, lying still for however long Ben needed to.

A moment passes, and Ben finally speaks, "I tried to fight it. That thing took over the light and I wanted to take it back. But I wasn't strong enough."

"You tried your best. It wasn't your fault."

"No... it was. Because if I was strong enough, that thing wouldn't have existed. I couldn't be what Han wanted me to be. Every time he tried to take me on a mission, I would always mess something up. One day, I put him and his crew in so much danger, that Han didn't want anything to do with me anymore. And I couldn't be what Luke wanted either."

"B-" she stops herself, and says, "Kylo, it's not too late. You were strong enough to save me from that thing. I know you can be who you always wanted to be."

"You STILL don't get it, do you?" Ben shouts at Rey. But he soon calms down again. He continues, "Luke would always tell that to me. That I was a Skywalker, and inside of me, was a hero. But he was wrong. He didn't understand that I needed the darkness. I hated trying to save others, trying to give up

what I really wanted for the 'greater good'. I wanted to be a bounty hunter. But Luke said that Skywalkers have responsibilities- we can't just kill innocents, we have to protect them. Ridiculous."

"Killing... was what you really wanted?"

"If bounty hunters don't do it, who will? I told him just that, and Luke said I was different, because unlike everyone else, I had a danger inside of me- a Skywalker power that when unleashed, could slaughter the entire galaxy!"

"The light was my favorite part of your world. It was where all the Jedi were, and we all pretended we were a part of them. I was so lost when it was gone. But now, I wish I had just listened to you more."

Ben finally looks at her. "I thought I could get you to stay in my world if I took something from you. But I was wrong. You shut me out instead."

Rey replies, "And just after I did, I regretted it. I tried my hardest to get back. But something had sealed us off. No matter how hard I tried to get back, I just couldn't."

Ben looks away from her again. Then he continues, "The light was so painful. I had to find a way to escape it. I had no one left. And then someone came..."

Rey whispers, "It was Snoke."

"I had always looked up to my grandfather, Anakin Skywalker, because I had heard stories about how he was the Chosen One. He was so powerful, so heroic, so beloved by everyone. And I was nothing like that. But I started hearing a voice. I was able to enter this world again, and inside my home, I found him there. He was sitting in Han's chair, and he told me everything. The truth about Anakin. The truth about my grandfather, Darth Vader."

"I remember when the galaxy learned his real name. I... couldn't believe it, either."

"That was when I realized it- I didn't need to be good to be like Anakin. I realized I had a purpose in life, too. So I followed that con, that liar- but now that I look back, even though he was leading me on like a worthless guard animal, he taught me well. Taught me how to embrace my dark side. For the first time, I felt free."

Rey feels her heart pounding; right before her, she cannot tell if there is danger or calmness. But she finally understands who Ben truly is. She feels his desires, his dark longings to be powerful, to reign over others. She wants to push it all away. But there is something else. A kindness, a need to protect. Though she feels it, she knows that if she pushes the darkness away, so too will the kindness leave.

Rey puts her hand on Ben's shoulder. "We can't stay here forever. We have to forget about all that now. We have to remember what it was like before all this ever happened- and we will do it together."

Ben turns and looks at Rey, and nods. He firmly places his black, gloved hand into hers, and they stand up together. They walk out of the darkness.

When they walk out, they are not on the beach anymore. The world now resembles Jakku. But instead of the bleak roars of old engines and grated sneerings of traders, there is something else: a large carnival, a circus filled with food vendors, amusement rides, and animals from all different corners of the galaxy, all gathered on this lonely desert realm.

"It's still here," Ben whispers. "Your world."

"I can't believe it either," Rey whispers back.

"But... there's something missing."

"I know. It's only us two now. Everyone else is gone."

They head into the carnival, and walk through the booths, filled with games and laughter. Signs light up the stalls, filled with names of legendary Jedi. Toy lightsabers, along with other prizes, are hung all around. The vendors clamor and boast, drawing attention towards their games. But Rey and Ben are the only attendees.

Rey walks towards a game stall, one with grey, green alien blobs lining up the shelves. She says, "This was Quint's favorite game."

Ben replies, "Ava's, too."

Rey turns around, "What... do you think happened to them?"

Ben solemnly says, "The galaxy was being torn apart by wars. Each time one of them left, they must have..."

Rey starts tearing up, "No. No, that's just too horrible." She wipes away the tears she's shed.

Ben lets out an gruff sigh. "It wasn't supposed to be like this. The Jedi were supposed to end those wars. A Skywalker. But I, I just couldn't do it." He slams his fist against one of the booth stalls, startling the vendor. "Why was I so weak?"

Rey regains her composure, and tells him, "I believed in the Jedi too. That they would save our friends. But," she walks towards Ben, until she is right next to his ear, and whispers, "Let the past die."

Ben grows calmer, and the two begin to walk through the carnival again. The sun is now setting; it is almost evening.

Rey speaks up, "I never got to see any of their true faces. We were all roleplaying with our own avatars; we all wanted a way to escape and be someone different. One day, every year, the traveling carnival would come by Jakku and market what they had, looking for buyers to fund them. Unkar would never let me explore it, but he would assign me to carry around the vendors' equipment. That's when I saw the play- the one that told of the Jedi, before the dark times. It was such a wonderful play, and there was one girl there who I couldn't stop staring at- a Togruta, with white and blue head tails, who was said to be a legendary, powerful Jedi. That was when I knew I wanted to be just like her. I thought I would never get the chance to ever do so. And then I found this world..."

The pair walk up to a thin, tall booth, and stuffed inside is a hideous creature, draped with an oversized hood that masks his repulsive face, snarling at the two. Rey tells Ben, "The Hooded Beast. The caricature of Unkar. I tried to describe him the best I could."

Ben replies, "I don't need to see anymore of Unkar to get what he's like. This... tells me enough."

Rey smiles. "At least someone else gets it. Unkar made me feel so low all the time. I just wanted to be somebody. I looked up to the Force and imagined I was someone important. I really, really wanted it to

happen. It was the only thing that kept me going. But I was just playing pretend, like some stupid kid, all along.”

“Not anymore,” Ben tells her, and takes her by the hand. The two now gaze at each other, and just then, the sun begins the set, and it’s night time. A distant boom is heard; then, explosions light up the night sky. Fireworks parade across the stars.

A moment passes, and Rey and Ben are standing side by side. Rey grasps Ben’s arm, and holds it tight. She softly says, “I didn’t want this place to go away.”

Ben looks at her and says, “I’ll never leave.”

Rey shakes her head. “But there’s somewhere I need to be.”

Ben begins to worry. He reassures her, “We’ll break out of their world, where nobody cares for us, together. You don’t need them.”

Rey takes her arm away from him. Then she looks away from Ben, and starts to walk away. But he clutches her hand, and says, “Don’t look that way. Ignore it all. This is the only thing that matters.” Rey turns back and gazes into Ben’s eyes, but then looks away again.

Rey tells him, “I don’t want to leave, but I can’t stay here. I’m sorry.”

She hands him the broken lightsaber handle, and Ben grasps it. Just as he realizes what is about to happen, he shouts, “Wait, Rey!” He tries to reach for her arm, but she fades away. As her world begins collapsing back into darkness, Ben wakes up back in the physical world, surrounded by the harsh, metallic confines of the First Order base, and completely alone.

Chapter 17- Reunion with the Resistance

In the barracks of the Resistance main ship, a group of Resistance fighters sit around, resting. One of them whispers to another, “Where do you think Rey has gone? None of our scouts can locate her.”

The other replies, “I dunno. Maybe she ran away and gave up on the cause?”

Finn overhears this, and gives him a dirty look. The soldier sees him. “Hey,” the soldier barks at Finn, “This was your fault, wasn’t it? The least you can do is try to find her.”

Finn ignores him. He turns away from them, and closes his eyes. “Rey,” he whispers. He’s tried many times, every day for almost two months, but has never succeeded. He keeps on trying to meditate, trying to replicate what Rey told him. Reach out. Reach out and breathe. Those were the words she learned from Luke. Then, he sees something.

No longer does he feel as if he’s in the Resistance ship. He sees an aquatic world, and dives in. Though he is not actually there, his mind wanders through the sea, and deep down into a strange underwater world. He travels through many of its corridors and chambers. And then, in an isolated room, he sees someone. It’s Rey.

“Rey!” Finn calls out to her. She turns around.

“Finn?”

“Rey, I’ve been looking all over for you!”

Without saying a word, Rey runs up to hug him, but falls right past. Finn is startled. “What just happened?” he asks.

“I don’t know. There’s just so much going on. But you can really use the Force!” Then, Rey realizes what’s going on. “I’m not shrouded in darkness... I’m not in another world... you must have Force projected to where I am.”

“Force projected?”

“It’s a technique I heard about from Luke.”

“Luke is alive and with you?”

“Yes! But Finn, you can’t stay here! If you’re Force projecting yourself, you’re putting a strain on your body. You have to leave before you’re overwhelmed!”

“I... don’t feel any strain?”

Rey is confused. “That’s not possible. It’s even stranger that you can use the technique in the first place. How did you get so much stronger in the Force already?”

Finn thinks for a second, then asks, “Could it be because of the anomaly? Maybe it’s the thing that’s given me the ability to Force project in a different way? Maybe that’s why I’m getting Force powers?”

Rey shakes her head, “It can’t be.”

Finn sighs, “I don’t know what’s happening. But there’s more important things I want to know now. Look, I take back what I said. Something weird has been going on with the Force. What have you been doing? How is Luke still alive?”

Rey explains to Finn what’s been happening. She tells him that she and Luke have retrieved three of the five remaining soul objects, but have no lead on the last two, so she’s tried to find clues using one of the largest libraries in the galaxy. She tells him, “The Jedi texts have these stories that I couldn’t make heads or tails out of. I thought they were just nonsense. But first, I realized they were allegories. And then I was able to find my own ‘soul world’ - and I realized it had materialized in a way like those stories.”

“What do they mean?”

“Each one of us sees the Force in a way that others may not understand. That’s why all those stories were written as allegories- the only way the Jedi could describe their personal thoughts about the Force to others was by framing them in ways that were familiar. When I discovered my soul world, I realized it was the only way I could get others to truly understand how I see the Force.”

“How does anyone get to a soul world?”

“I’d figure they’d need the help of a teacher, who also helps them interpret the texts. I can help you find yours!”

“Nope. I’m good.” Finn says, not wanting to get involved in unnecessary meddlings with the unknown. Everything Rey has said is a lot for Finn to take in, and he places a hand over his face, and groans. Now it’s his turn to explain. “A month ago, Poe said he got a message from Leia that suspected General Citho was a traitor.”

“What? Was he?”

“Based on what we found, he wasn’t. But that was because the evidence I found was given to me by someone suspicious. I don’t think she’s telling the truth.”

“How come?” Rey asks.

“She just... something just doesn’t feel right about her. Plus, I’m not done with Citho just yet. You remember those force visions you had about him?”

“So now you believe me.”

“Yeah. I’ve been through some stuff. Is there any way I can see them too?”

Rey thinks for a moment, and replies, “During my meditation sessions, I’ve been seeing those dark rips in time. But I’ve learned to resist them. Maybe we’ll both find the answers we need if we approach them in a different way.”

“How?”

“The dark rips emit a sort of frequency, and I think what they do is allow us to see a certain perspective of the Force. But I found a way to tune this frequency, like on a radio dial, so that it can allow us to see a different perspective of the vision. Without the tuning, we’ll be thrown into that horrible nightmare from my first vision.”

“Then let’s do it.”

Finn watches Rey as she performs a peculiar ritual, and soon, a dark rift in space tears open. She waves her hands around it, and a blue streak withers through. “There,” she says, “Now all we have to do is to reach into it.” She begins to move her hand towards the abrasion.

Finn takes a deep breath. He watches as Rey is reaching out, but he hesitates and feels paralyzed. But he remembers his duty. His responsibility. He reaches his hand out, and in sync with Rey, they both touch the dark rift.

They are in Fortuna. The sky is still dark, but Rey notices it is not as terrifying as before. They pass by an ship, and look inside of it. The devices show the coordinates, date and time: two decades ago, back when Luke was still alive. Next to it is a red pendant inscribed with three fangs, drawn in a unique way that Finn has never seen before. They exit the ship, and see a hooded figure kneeling before an ominous entity. They can’t see who these figures are.

The hooded figure speaks to the entity in a distorted voice. “So, the only way this can work is if the Force is disrupted?”

“Yes,” the entity replies with a ghostly echo, “But we foresee that in the future, he will come investigate this place too, and reverse what we have done. We must be careful to not leave any traces of our ritual performed here.”

Suddenly, the two turn to Rey and Finn’s direction. The terrifying presence that Rey felt begins to loom over them again.

“Finn, we have to get out of here!” Rey shouts, “That thing is about to discover we’re here!” Using all of their combined might, Rey and Finn leave the vision. They are back in the isolated room of the aquatic dome.

“That hooded guy- that has to be Citho!” Finn asserts.

“But we don’t know that. We couldn’t see who he was.”

“You saw Citho in your first vision, right? Who else could it be?”

“It could be anyone!”

Finn scoffs. “Almost no one steps foot in Fortuna. Who else could it be? Luke?”

“I don’t know.”

“You’re... not seriously considering that guy to be Luke, right?”

“I... No! But Luke’s been teaching me to stop jumping to conclusions. We heard that they fear ‘someone’ is going to try to go to Fortuna to stop them. What if that’s Citho? What if he has the answers we need?”

Finn laughs. “There is no way in hell Citho is secretly working to stop the Force disruptions. If anything, he’d be using whatever ritual that was to ruin the Resistance.”

“I just don’t know. We don’t have any more evidence.”

“Then I’ll find it.” Finn thinks for a moment, and then says, “Wait. I’ve got something. Remember that date we saw? Citho’s locations are constantly tracked for his medical issues. If I can get into his medical records, or find out they were tampered with, then I get prove that he was on Fortuna on that date, in that very spot we saw.”

“Finn! You’re asking to break into confidential files! That’s class A treason!”

“Well, they already think I’m a criminal.”

“But the only thing this will do is prove to them that you are one!”

Finn sighs. Then he says, “Rey, you’re not gonna change my mind. Just like I couldn’t change yours. I’m going to do this.”

Rey sighs too, and deep down, she knows there’s nothing she can do. “Then promise me that if you ever need help, you’ll contact me. I’ll be here for you.”

Finn nods. "I'll keep you updated," he says. "I've gotta go now. I've been assigned to clean the barracks."

"Wait," Rey says, "Before you go, there's something I have to give to you. For a while now, I've been trying to tap into the links that allow Force users to communicate with one another from far away. Very few know they exist. The anomalies are destabilizing these links, and are causing them to randomly turn on and off. But I've been learning from the Jedi texts how to make these crafts called 'soul instruments'. And after tinkering with them, I think I found a way to stabilize the links."

"How?"

"By connecting with someone through the Force, I can pass along these soul instruments. The ones I'll send you act as communication devices. They can even work when someone has their surrogate up. Every one who is sufficiently Force sensitive enough emits a sort of aura, and the texts have taught me a way to calculate coordinates to these auras. I can ping to someone's coordinates, and if they let me in, I can speak with them. So, I've found my own coordinates. I've found Luke's, too. Give me a few seconds, and I can find yours."

"That means we can contact each other whenever we need to."

"Yes. There's three coordinates I want to give you. One is my own. But, in case anything happens to me, I want you to contact Luke."

"And what's the third one?"

"I'll... tell you when the time is right. In case Luke and I can't be contacted, use those third set of coordinates. But just not now."

"Uh, okay," Finn says, not questioning any further as he does with a lot of Force-related things Rey talks about, "Thanks."

"When you are free, I can teach you how to craft soul instruments." She keeps on trying to speak to him, not wanting him to leave. But she know she's only prolonging the inevitable. "Stay safe, Finn."

"I will."

Chapter 18- A Daring Endeavor

“AW, COME ON!”

Finn braces himself as Poe yells in the isolated chamber. Finn speaks up, “If we do it right, no one will ever know we were there.”

“We saw those files,” Poe shouts back, “That’s the best evidence we got right now.”

“And you trust Merilia?”

“Are you just gonna doubt everyone?”

“Look, you know something’s off. And I know what I saw in that vision. If Citho’s up to something, we’re the only ones who can stop him. The leaders will never believe us unless we get concrete evidence.”

“And you’re basing all this on what? Some magical hallucination?”

“It’s not just some magical hallucination! Here, watch this.” Finn reaches his hand out towards a device lying on a nearby table. Nothing happens. “Damn it,” he whispers under his breath.

“Right,” Poe says sarcastically, “I think you really do take too many Entu berries.”

“Just let me focus!” Finn insists. He tries again. Nothing happens. Then the doors open, and HQ-7 slowly wheels in. Suddenly, it whirls and short circuits. “HQ-7!” Poe shouts. He rushes over to it. “What did you do to him?”

“I- that was an accident!” Finn exclaims. As Poe inspects the droid, he notices something suspicious. “Huh,” Poe says, “I can’t figure out what’s wrong. You really can use the Force after all.”

“Well,” Finn tries to play it off cool, “Looks like I can.”

“But if you messed this up by accident, how do you know your force vision wasn’t wrong, too?”

“Rey was there with me. She wouldn’t get it wrong.”

Poe sighs. “Okay, pal. There’s no way I’m changing your mind. And since I’m not gonna let you do this alone, I’ve got your back.”

Finn is surprised. “Whoa, I didn’t think it’d be that easy.”

“My job is pretty bad now. They’re assigning me all these stupid things to do, and I’m never given anything important. The Resistance hasn’t been in the best mood; all the leaders ever whine about is how they need Rey to inspire people. I’ve been thinking to myself, maybe it wouldn’t be so bad if Citho really was a bad guy. I kinda want to get some new management around here.”

“Um, well, whatever works for you. Anyways, I’ve got a plan to get to the records. It’s not like the prison cells; Gunwick can’t get to them. No one is good enough to hack into them, either. But there’s a passageway I found that can lead to a physical, backup copy of the records. I’m just gonna have to go through some vile crap to get through it.”

“What, is it through the sewage system?”

“I’m gonna have to pass through some of the ship’s old machinery, and whatever crazy stuff lives there now. But to get to them, I’ll need some keys. There’s only one person I know who can lend me them. Rose.”

“We’re gonna involve her, too? Man, she’ll never be on board. And you’ll be putting her at risk!”

Finn sighs. “There just isn’t a better plan. I... I feel bad about this. But there’s something bigger at stake here. Poe, I’m gonna need you and HQ-7 to be on the lookout in case anyone notices I’m running through the machinery.”

“Huh, that’s the first time you said you needed HQ-7 to do anything. Don’t worry, we won’t let you down.” HQ-7 is not listening to them, and has been trying to fit a blaster into a wall socket for a solid minute. Finn groans.

IN a room filled with machines and engines, Rose is working. Finn sees her, and calls out, “Rose!” She turns around and sees him standing from afar.

“Finn?” she asks, surprised. “I haven’t seen you in months. I’m sorry... but I’m on orders to avoid speaking with you.”

“Rose, I need help.”

“You need MY help?”

“I’ve been given orders to do a routine inspection of sector NTF-86-b. But I lost the keys they lent me, and I need to get there.”

“All the regular keys I have to that sector are broken, and no one really cares about it anymore, so that issue hasn’t been addressed.”

“I know. I just don’t want to leave a bad impression of myself on the Resistance officers. I want to show them I can be trusted.”

“So you’ve really changed.” Rose pauses, and says with sincerity, “I trust you. I just wish I could help.”

“Rose, please,” Finn pleads to her. Rose looks him in the eyes, and steps closer to him until they are face to face. Inside, Finn is being eaten up by guilt. But he pushes on.

Rose takes Finn’s hand, and tells him, “There’s one key I have that can get there. The master key. It’s the most important one I have.” She reaches into a pocket, and takes out an electronic device. “I can lend it to you, but you have to return it to me.”

“I will,” Finn says. “Thank you.”

They stare at each other for a moment, then Rose looks to the side. “I’m not allowed to talk to you. But maybe once you show them that you can be trusted, we can hang out sometime. I know you can do it.”

Finn parts his hand away from Rose’s hand. “I won’t let the Resistance down,” he says. Rose smiles, and leaves. Finn hangs his head down, and inside, he curses at himself. He wish he didn’t do it. But it’s the only way.

FINN is in an old, dark corridor now, filled with roaring engines of the ship. He speaks through a transmitter, “Is the coast clear?”

Poe whispers back, “You’re good to go. The cams have been tweaked by HQ-7. It’s hard to get signals from the usual transmitters, so I’ll be talking to you through HQ-7. Also, it seems like the only place we can do this is in this open corridor... but don’t worry, everyone thinks HQ-7 is just malfunctioning.”

Poe navigates Finn through, and he narrowly avoids collisions with dangerous machinery and other ship parts. However, he’s distracted when he sees Jim and Riff approach him. Jim struts to him and says, “What kind of funny business are you pulling?”

“Funny business? I’m a pilot, not a comedian.”

“Knock if off. I ran into Bill the other day. Said I talked to him about sports. I don’t remember doing anything like that. You pulling a prank, Poe?”

Poe manages to get Jim and Riff off his trail, and they leave. He gets back to guiding Finn, who reaches an area with windows to the outside. He notices something strange, as if someone is stalking him. He turns to a shadow, and sees a figure with an emblem on it. He whispers, “Phasma?” The figure disappears, and Finn runs away from it.

Later, Finn encounters a wild creature that has found its home within the ship. The creature attacks him, and Finn shoots at the creature. He yells to Poe, “I need escape directions!” But before Poe can respond, Gnovian, walking by with Yatu, notices Poe and HQ-7 up to something.

Thinking quick, Poe kicks HQ-7 and he sputters, ending the transmission between him and Finn, though the cams are still temporarily tweaked.

“Poe!” Finn shouts into his transmitter. There’s no response. From now, he’ll have to use to the Force to guide him. He hears that voice again, and it tells him, “The Force will be with you.” The creature launches another blow, and with a new awareness of himself, Finn shoots him at the same time. But it happens so quick, it’s not known who got to the other one first.

“Good day, Poe,” Gnovian says.

“Hey, how’s it going, General?” Poe then nods to Yatu, who nods back.

Gnovian replies, “I have been hearing that you’ve been assigned some dreary duties. But no worries; I am working on getting you something better.”

“Really? Well, that’s good to hear.”

“I was also able to get Yatu a position on the ship. He’s training to be a pilot.”

“Aiming to get my own ship,” Yatu interjects.

Poe chuckles, “Well, what kind are you looking for?”

“A ship like yours. I want to fight the First Order. I can’t stand what they’ve done. I saw what happened to those families on my planet... none of that would’ve happened if the First Order didn’t come along. They manipulated them.”

“I know what you mean,” Poe replies. He thinks back to the destruction he’s witnessed: the fires, the massacres, the prisons. Still lost in his thoughts, he says, “I’ll do whatever it takes to bring them down.”

Yatu grins. “I believe in the Resistance. I can’t stand those traitors. They’re not as brave as you.”

“Well, being me ain’t easy.”

Gnovian tells Yatu, “It’s time for you to report to your training.” Yatu nods, and looks at Poe, beaming. After the kid runs elsewhere, Gnovian asks Poe, “Have you heard from Finn lately?”

“Nope. No sir.”

Gnovian exhales with exhaustion. “I wasn’t completely on board with the council’s decision. Though Finn is young and lacks experience, he has proven his heroism countless times. But I had to do what was right.”

“And that was siding with Citho,” Poe says.

“Even though Citho comes off as harsh, he has a good reason for doing so. When he insisted that there were traitors before, no one listened. Later, the traitors would kill many Resistance fighters, wiping out a whole base. Though Citho seems paranoid, his strong suspicions do have justifications to them. Without him, the Resistance may have fallen already.”

“You agree with his suspicions?”

“Not always. Sometimes, I have been suspicious of Citho myself.”

“You have?”

“Since you have proven loyal, and are nearly back to being a general, I will let you in on some confidential information. Citho is very secretive, and not trusting of others. He believes that only he knows what’s the right thing to do. For a while, I didn’t even know he was a double agent for the First Order.”

“He was?” Poe says, clearly faking about his ignorance.

“It was his plan to catch the suspected traitors. Though it worked, he was often absent, and no one knew where he was. Due to his seniority, few questioned him. After he exposed the traitors, we learned of his plan. But there are still many times when I do not know why he was gone.”

“Huh,” Poe says. “That does sound strange.”

Gnovian nods, “I must be going. Stay strong, soldier.” He leaves.

Poe immediately turns the transmitter on HQ-7 back on. “Finn!” he frantically whispers, “You good?”

There is a silence. But then, the transmitter crackles. “Yeah.” Finn has won over the huge creature.

Poe guides Finn along the rest of the way, and Finn manages to reach the right location. He searches for the records, and finds a small, old drive. Since the Resistance is busy fighting the First Order, no one is keeping track of these files.

But right next to the file, he sees another record. Someone had nearly cracked it, but didn’t finish. Finn opens it up, and sees it again: the red pendant inscribed with three fangs. The exact same one he saw in the Force vision of Fortuna. He is drawn further into it, and reads: “I have avoided the assassination attempt on my life. But an unfortunate accident has transpired. As I was enacting it, it approached me, and the next thing I knew, it was transported elsewhere. I do not know where it lies now, but I only pray that it is trapped there forever. If you ever encounter it, you will know, for it wears a red pendant with markings that can be found nowhere else in the galaxy.” The rest of the message is undecipherable.

“What does this all mean?” Finn whispers to himself. But he knows he is in a race against time. He quickly snatches the medical records he needs, and finds his way back.

POE exclaims, “It’s still locked?” He and Finn are in the isolated room again.

“There’s some sort of security system in it. I don’t know how we’re gonna crack it.” Finn says with disappointment.

“The more people who are in on this, the riskier it gets. But there’s one person we know who’s already in.”

Finn scoffs. “You’re not seriously thinking about contacting her?”

“Why not?”

“She could’ve been lying about those other files!”

“Finn,” Poe puts his shoulder on his friend, “You’re being paranoid. Who are you, Citho?”

“I-” Finn takes a minute to think, and then admits, “Okay. Maybe I just didn’t wanna trust her. Maybe she was right, and I’m just not thinking straight. But if she says anything whack, I’ll know what side she’s on.”

They contact Merilia through a communication device.

They hear a reply, “You guys finally found something?”

Poe says, “We got Citho’s medical records.”

“You WHAT?”

Finn explains to her about the force visions he’s seen. Merilia exhales deeply. “Well, that doesn’t seem any crazier than teleporting screws. But you risked stealing all those files just on some hunch?”

“I’m sure that guy in the hood was Citho,” Finn insists.

“There’s just not enough evidence. There’s a big chance you’ll find out wrong once you look in these records.”

“And what if I’m right?”

“Then we’ll all still get in trouble, but maybe we’ll get more leeway for saving the Resistance. Anyways, it’s not like I have anything to lose now. Send me those files.”

They secretly send a copy of the records over to her. They hear her speak again, “Bad news, guys.”

“What’s going on?” Finn asks.

“These files are heavily encrypted. With all these droid guards around, I can only do this behind their backs, which is going to slow things down. It’ll take me a while to get in them, and figure out if they were tampered or not.”

Finn sighs. “How long?”

“A couple of days. Possibly a week. It’ll help if you find a way to distract the droids for me. Do the same thing you did last time.”

“Alright, guess we don’t have a choice,” Finn says. He looks at Poe, who appears to be deep in thought, and doubtful. Finn asks him, “You okay?”

Poe stands up and straightens himself out. He rubs a hand on his face and says, “This is way too much for me.”

“What’s gotten into you?” Finn says.

“I ran into Yatu. The kid looks up to me. I remembered why I started fighting for the Resistance. I’ve got too many people who need me; I can’t let them down.”

Merilia overhears him, and tries to offer words of advice. “I know what you’re feeling. When I was younger and joined the New Republic, I thought the same way. But when I started hearing reports about how the New Republic wanted to ignore the plights of the Jurials, and they were forcing everyone to think the same way, I couldn’t stand it. I realized that if I was to stand up for what I think is right, I learned I had to lose all of my friends.”

Poe doesn’t reply, but is somewhat more reassured. The words also resonate with Finn. He begins to trust Merilia. Finn tells her, “Maybe some of what you say is right. I’ve been with the First Order so long, blindly following their orders, that it’s been hard to get used to thinking for myself. And now I’ve got a responsibility to look for the truth, too? It was much easier when I was scrubbing plasma rifles for the commanding officers.”

Poe steps in and says, “Believe it or not, buddy, once you’re deep in the Resistance, you feel the same way.”

“Well, I don’t have all the answers either.” Merilia says, “We’re all in this together.”

Finn nods. Then, he remembers something else. He contacts Rey through the soul instrument she gave him.

“Rey,” Finn says. He hears a reply. “Finn, did you find it?”

“Yeah, but it’s encrypted. We got someone on our side who said it’s gonna take some time to crack it open.”

Poe eavesdrops, and whispers to Finn, “Hey, is that Rey? Can you give her a message?”

“Uh, sure.”

“Tell her I said hi.”

“Poe says ‘hi’,” Finn tells Rey.

“Tell him I said ‘hi’ too!” Rey replies.

“Oh yeah,” Poe says, “Can you give her another message? I’ve been feeling bad about this one.”

“What?”

“Tell her I took her zorplos from the fridge.”

Finn tells Rey, “Poe said he took your zorplos.”

“What?” Rey fumes, “Well, tell him I know what happened between him and Leslie!”

Finn sighs, annoyed. “Rey is pissed and says she knows what went on with you and Leslie.”

“Aw, come on!” Poe exclaims, “Those zorplos were sitting there forever, and who knows how long she’d be gone! Well, tell her-”

“ENOUGH!” Finn shouts. “I’m not some delivery boy, okay! Let’s wait for Merilia to do her thing. We gotta do all we can to make sure they don’t catch onto her.”

REY shuffles through pages upon pages of a hologram in the library of an aquatic dome. Aquatic humanoids mind their own business, lost in their own holograms. Frustrated that she can’t find clues to the next soul object, she gives up for the day, and walks out of the library to her dark, isolated chamber. She thinks back to that world again, and remembers Ben’s words.

“Ignore it all. This is the only thing that matters.”

The moment still felt surreal to her. She never thought she would see that world again. She never thought anyone would believe her that it exists. But it was there.

The terrifying, white robed demon. The inferno of the light. Was there a way to make them go away? She thinks back to Ben, sitting in the darkness. But she also remembers his time in the light, as that young child Anakin. How he would speak of the valiant feats of the Jedi. How he said he would be the greatest hero of them all, because it was his destiny. All these things would never come true.

No, she thinks. Is it really too late? She doesn’t want to believe it. Ben has to change. There must be something else he’s hiding that’s getting in the way. If she finds it, and knows him better, then he will be free to be in the light again.

She sits down and begins meditating. She searches for Ben’s soul coordinates. She envisions that red-violet beach, and feels the breeze of its ember sands.

Chapter 19- The Twin Kyber Crystals

Kylo sits alone in his chambers, shuts his eyes in meditation, and tries to reach for that world again. But he can’t reach it. Though he has already tried many times, he does not give up. Then, one day, the unexpected happens- he opens his eyes, and he is back on the red-violet beach, sitting on the sand.

He doesn't turn around, but senses someone behind him. He says, "You've come back."

Rey bites her lip, trying her hardest to not show any expression in her face. "I sensed that there was something you still wanted to show me."

Ben stands up, turns around and faces her. "Will you come with me further into the darkness? Can I get you to trust it?"

Rey replies, "You may try."

Ben walks her through the beach, and they walk up its cliffs, entering a darker place. One not enveloped in total blackness, but casting a melancholic shade across the grey rocks. Everything is silent now. At first, Rey shivers, slightly afraid, but she soon begins to accept the stillness for what it is: her own sense of peace. The calmness finds its way through her, and she takes a deep breath.

"Do you know what that is?" Ben asks her.

"Solitude. An old friend."

They reach the top of the mountainous cliffs, and beneath them roars the mighty clash of the sea. And then, as Rey looks down, she sees there is more- she sees all the disgusting, vile people on Jakku she had told Ben about. They were beneath them, sitting on top of rocks, unable to leave, lest they be drowned by the clashing waves around them.

Ben continues, looking down from the cliffs, "Not just solitude. But when we are here, there is no one better than us. No one to tell us what to do, no one who is capable of challenging us. A fair universe would reward those who worked the hardest. The Force would ensure that would happen. We both have such strong ambition; we deserve this."

He turns to Rey, and says, "Now you understand."

Rey peers down from the mountain, and inside, she is filled by a deep, blooming of pride. No longer was she the girl who was helpless, a runt who was kicked around by nasty traders and merchants. No one would ever tell her she had no value in this universe ever again. She grasped an absolute power that those

who had hurt her could never have. And then, as soon as she looks down again, she sees the rocks that her tormentors were sitting on top of come crashing down. They cry out in fear, and struggle to stay afloat, but the waves drag them away.

Startled, she looks at Ben, and sees his hand clenching down towards the rocks. “Ben!” she cries out, “What are you doing?”

Ben stops. Perplexed, he asks her, “What do you mean?”

“This... this is what you wanted me to trust in? This is what you wish for?” Disgusted, Rey walks away from the cliffs, and down towards the mountain.

Ben looks hurt and regretful. He follows Rey down, and notices she has not gone down any further, but is leaning on a rocky wall, waiting for him.

“I’m sorry,” he tells her, “I’ll never show you such a thing ever again.”

Rey shakes her head, “You thought I would understand, didn’t you? That’s why, in Snoke’s chamber, you told me I was nobody? You were trying to manipulate me, to use my own desires against me?”

Ben refutes her, saying, “And I was wrong! I wish I could take it all back.”

Rey finally looks back at him. “But deep down, do you truly mean it?”

He does not reply. After a moment of silence, Rey speaks up again, “Can things really go back to the way they were?”

Ben tells her, “There is only one way. One of us will have to change for the other.”

Rey sighs. “Back then, I couldn’t bring myself to kill you. It was selfish- I endangered the entire Resistance because you had something that I did not want to lose. Ben... you are the only one who sees the Force the way that I do. As a guardian who helps its strongest believers in their time of need, punishing their tormentors, and making the universe a fairer place. You are the only one who believes me.

And though you want to make it so that everyone sees the world in the same way... it comes at too high of a cost."

Worry seeps into Ben. He feels that Rey is slipping away from him. In his dread, he blurts out, "But it doesn't have to be this way. I can change."

The words hit Rey deep inside, and she immediately says, "What?"

"Forget about ruling the galaxy. That's not important. What's important is you."

Rey is taken back, but cannot bring herself to smile. She replies, "Then the only way we can be together is if you help Luke and I defeat the First Order, and save the Force from its disruptions."

Ben suddenly reverts, becoming angry, "You know what he did to me!"

Rey says, "You are mistaken! He ignited his lightsaber for only one moment; he regretted it and did not want to go through with it! He didn't plan to do that; something came over him and he lost control!"

Kylo laughs, "And you want to follow a man with such little self control? I saw how he changed over the years. He became more cowardly, more paranoid. That moment showcased his true self- showing what he truly saw me as."

"But now he's back to who he was before. A hero who tries to help everyone, and understand them."

"He told you that, didn't he? He is nothing more than a hypocrite. He never tried to understand me. Who I truly was."

Rey knows this, but denies it. "I don't know what actually happened between you two. But the entire galaxy is in danger. We need his help to put a stop to both the First Order and the Force disruptions."

Ben doesn't reply. Rey continues, "If you truly want to end this war, to have things go back to the way they were, then don't do it for Luke. Do it for me." Ben remains silent, unable to answer, and Rey, with reluctance, believes that it is now truly over. She begins to fade away.

In the spur of the moment, Ben calls for her, shouting, “Then I will.” Rey is shocked and tries to reach out for him, but as she is fading, she cannot touch him. He frantically searches for something to say. He remembers. In his parting words, Ben desperately tells her, “The First Order knows you have one of the twin crystals. I know where the other one is.”

“Where?” Rey asks him. But it is too late; she has faded away, and Ben wakes up back in the physical world as Kylo Ren.

He puts on his helmet, and walks out of his chambers, slowly re-establishing himself back in his true reality. He commands his officers, inspects the Imperial Tie Fighters, and berates Hux. As he walks by, he sees Serei trying to pull a prank on a lower ranking officer, and tells her to knock it off, saying that she’s being unproductive. Serei rolls her eyes at him and walks away, but once Kylo departs, she resumes her prank.

Can he truly throw all of this away? When he does, what will he be left with? He thinks back to the behemoth that lies in the light that resides within him. Luke created it. How could Rey support such a person? Does she even have a way to destroy the behemoth? Taking his helmet off, he curls his hands up and presses them into his forehead, torn apart by his thoughts.

Hailden sees Kylo standing above an empty chamber and approaches him. “Kylo, we are ready to land in Bafuoy.”

Kylo walks over to him, and responds, “Good. And Hailden, there is another matter I wish to speak to you about.”

The two begin walking through the corridor. Hailden asks, “What is it?”

“We have conquered the trade federation. Allied ourselves with powerful star systems. Any day now, I feel the turning point will come. And we will be able to crush the Resistance once and for all. We have come a long way from being Luke’s students. We made... considerable sacrifices.”

“They were for a greater cause.”

“Truly, it was a great moment to kill those who mocked and tormented me, saying I was an inferior swordsman. But do you ever regret going against them? Not only did we lose our enemies, but what little friends we had, too.”

Hailden sighs, and with honesty, says, “They were my friends when I told them I believed in Luke, just like they did. But deep down, something separated us. Because I could not be satisfied with such empty lies. Once they knew that of me... they were the ones who turned.”

Kylo nods, “That was what I had thought.” The two stop walking, reaching the nearly finished Aquillian. It is pitch black and sleek, but constantly shapeshifting, like an unstable ferrofluid. Hints of a dark jade hide throughout the beast. Something about it seemed alive. As if it was watching the two generals with a menacing glare.

He continues, “Could they have ever accepted us, for who we truly were? Or only if we had lied to ourselves and turned to the light?”

Hailden replies, “You already know the answer.”

THE next day, the breeze shuffles the sands of the red-violet beach. Rey is waiting there, staring out into the ocean, where Ben was before. She looks worried, but inside, she feels a small hope grow inside of her. Though apprehensive, she tries to smile, as her dreams that she thought she could never reach now have a chance of coming true.

Ben appears behind her, and she turns around. She whispers, “Were you telling the truth?”

Ben replies, “I was.”

Rey looks like she is about to cry, but holds it back. “I hope you know just how much this means to me.”

Ben walks up to her and grasps both of her hands in his own. “The other kyber crystal is on a planet called Inimoni. It’s in a terrifying region between the two hemispheres: Nissidha. There are tunnels in it that are safe for traveling, but if anyone, even droids, ventures out of them, they’ll be snatched away by phantom creatures called the Resepi. They can be hurt, but outside of Nissidha’s tunnels, there are so many, that the only way to stop them from swarming you is by using one of the twin kyber crystals. The one you want is somewhere outside of them. You have to bring yours.” He pauses. “With both of them... we’ll be strong enough to stop the First Order, and whoever is disturbing the Force.”

Just as he finishes, Rey notices that Ben’s hands are shaking, and she presses her hands into his with reassurance. She tells him, “I know it is hard for you. But I trust you.”

Ben replies, “No matter where I go, in the eyes of everyone, I will be seen as a monster.”

“No,” Rey tells him, “Not to me.”

The world fades away, and Kylo is left alone in his chamber. He walks out, and Serei and Hailden are there, waiting to hear back from him. He announces to them, “The trap has been set.”

Serei sarcastically scoffs at him, “I’m sure it was your master plan all along. You totally didn’t just improvise that because you lost your cool in front of that girl.”

Kylo glares at her, “Your words waste my time. Hailden, Serei, lead our troops into Inimoni. It’s time for this war to end.” He clutches a dark jade kyber crystal in his hand.

Chapter 20- Inimoni, The Light

Inside of an aquatic dome, Rey is flicking through the Jedi texts. She whispers to herself, “Could it really be? This can’t be a coincidence...”

Elsewhere, in the room of another aquatic dome, Luke is meditating. Rey interrupts him.

“I found it,” she says, “The next soul object.”

Luke leaves his trance, and stands up to face her. “Where?” he asks.

“On Inimoni. That’s also where the other twin kyber crystal is.”

Luke freezes. Something about the planet’s name makes him tense up. After a moment, he says, “They’re on the same planet?”

“I couldn’t believe it either. But I figured out from the texts that this twin kyber crystal, whatever it is, was born on the same planet as the next soul object we need.”

“That’s good news. So you also figured out where they are from the texts?”

“I-” Rey suddenly stops herself. I can’t tell him, she thinks. She tells Luke, “I did.”

“You seem like you’re having a hard time believing that. But I’m surprised about this whole thing, too.” He pauses. “I’ve been to Inimoni before.”

“You have? Every planet with a soul object that we’ve visited... you’ve been to all of them before?”

“Each of those planets was having its own problems. The New Republic sent me to them to sort them out.”

“So Inimoni was another planet you saved?”

Luke doesn’t immediately answer. After a moment, he says, “I made many mistakes on Inimoni.”

“M-mistakes?” Rey asks, surprised.

“I’ll tell you about them on our way there. You need to be prepared to know what happened.”

Rey shakes her head. “No. I don’t need you telling me. I’ll see it myself and make up my own mind.”

Luke sighs. “I wouldn’t recommend that. But if that’s what you want, then have at it.” He heads towards another room, getting supplies ready. Rey puts a hand to her lips. She can’t believe she just lied to Luke. But more so, she had heard something she did not want to hear: Luke had made mistakes. She remembers what the Watchers said. Were they telling the truth? She doesn’t want to believe it. It can’t be, she thinks to herself. It must only be true from a certain point of view.

LUKE’S X-wing and the Myrioi Osprey approach a planet, one hemisphere which is covered in roaring, dark red storms, and the other which emits an incredible blue light. In between them, there lies a vertical

stripe, but Rey has a hard time seeing it. Thinking that she's too tired, she shuts her eyes and opens them again to try to re-focus on the stripe, but something about it is too hazy, as if it was shifting in and out of her view. She can't comprehend it. And then she realizes what's happening: seeing the vertical stripe is like seeing a black hole.

From the cockpit of her ship, Rey gapes at the planet and can't believe what she's looking at. Then she snaps back into reality, and through a soul instrument, she asks Luke, "Which side do we land on?"

Luke replies, "The light side."

The ships penetrate through the blinding light, and enter into a world of endless silver and glass-like skies. As they descend down towards its floating surfaces, the gray silvers transcend into whiter and whiter illuminations, until they reveal a world with sapphire palaces and cities. They land on a liquid silver platform, which forms into a solid just as the ship hovers above it. Before them is a gigantic palace with an imposing dome on top.

They depart from their crafts, and are greeted by tall creatures with blue skin and wings. "Luke Skywalker," one of them gently speaks. Luke greets the creature, and the others start greeting him too. Rey smiles, reassured that the Watchers are wrong, and that Luke is beloved. But then she notices that although there is a peaceful expression on their faces, at the same time, there is a hidden unease.

The creatures speak again, "Welcome back to the city of Prim. We, the Tau, are devoted to the Jedi. Since the dawn of our civilization, we have sworn to our ancestors to worship the Jedi. We are grateful for your past efforts in aiding our planet."

Luke nods, but does not smile. He tells them, "We're here to deal with the recent disturbances in the Force. We think that we can stop them through a 'soul guardian'. We are also in search of twin kyber crystals; we already have one of them. Can you help us?"

"Certainly. But first, let us show you how we have been doing. We will get to that matter very soon." The Tau gesture Luke to follow them, and they walk towards the palace that lies before them, ignoring Rey. Rey shoots a confused look towards Luke, who motions with a hand for Rey to follow him. He tells the Tau, "My apprentice, Rey, is here with me, too."

They take one glance at her, and one of them says, "Ah, yes. Well then." They continue to walk away and ignore her. Rey gets irritated, and treads along behind them. In the sky, she notices caravan ships, transporting and storing supplies, moving along. There is something dubious about them, but she can't

quite put her finger on what it is. Seeing that she's being left behind by the crowd, she drops the thought and hurries along.

The interior is drooped by a colossal curtain, letting in the light, but shrouding the windows. The Tau guide Luke around the palace, and show off their rich jewelry and ornaments. "This is a very fine piece, right here. Without your help, we would never have been able to find it."

Luke tries to change the subject, "And how are the people doing?"

One Tau replies, "Mostly no troubles. Ever since you aided us, we have been much better off. Now, this piece here is a recently acquired beauty..."

Luke asks again, "No more poverty?"

The Tau answers, "Far fewer. To continue, this was acquired through a recent celebration..."

Rey interrupts him, "What does any of this have to do with the kyber crystals?"

The Tau stop, and stare at her. Luke steps in for her, "She's right. I appreciate your compliments, but we've got bigger things to deal with. Drop the facade and show us what's really going on."

One of the Tau, with a strange hat, sighs, and wipes his hand above him; the colossal curtain swoops away, revealing swarms upon swarms of distorted buildings slowly bending around in the sky, as if a flock of demened, abstract sculptures was living above the palace. Rey gasps.

A Tau with the hat continues, "Our government has confined these abominations away from the city. Whenever one is found, it is placed within the roofs above this palace. We... do not believe this has anything to do with you."

Luke tells him, "No, it does. It's not just Inimoni; we've seen anomalies from many parts of the galaxy. The Force is being disturbed, and somehow, I'm connected to all this."

The Tau with the hat says, “These anomalies are here because the Skor continue to upset the natural ways of the light side. They continue to terrorize our people. The Skor have taken advantage of our generosity and have tried to conquer our lands for themselves. As negotiators, we are left with a difficult task.”

Luke asks, “And the crystal?”

“We did not inform you of such a thing last time because it is unimportant. It is a relic from long ago, entrapped somewhere in the Nissidha, where the Resepi lie. Now, we have far better technologies to keep the Resepi away.”

Rey, annoyed at the Tau’s avoidance of the subject, defiantly says, “Do you even know where the crystal is? You’re wasting our time!”

The Tau all glare at her at once. Rey glares at them back. Luke steps in between them, his back facing Rey, and he asks the Tau, “Everyone here wants to stop these Force disruptions. She’s brash, but I trust her. All she wants to do is help the planet.”

The hatted Tau huffs with indignation. “She? Help us? We sensed it when she landed. There is far too much darkness in her to do good.”

Rey tenses up and is ready to grab the hatted Tau by his fancy collar, but Luke puts his hand on her shoulder and calms her down. Then he faces the Tau again, “Don’t speak to her like that. Do you have any idea about all the good things she’s done so far?”

The Tau realize what they’ve just did, and bow down to Luke. The hatted Tau speaks again, “We apologize for our insolence, Master Luke. Please let us continue our talks.”

Rey scoffs at him. She says sarcastically, “So that ‘darkness’ in me just suddenly went away? I’m sure you will all treat me with the greatest respect now. All these talks are just a waste of time.” She turns around and leaves. Luke follows and as they’re walking, he tells her, “These guys are total jerks. Remember to not let them get to you. Just breathe. Meditate. I’ll deal with them from here.”

Luke stays in the palace, and Rey walks out. She stomps her foot in anger, and starts strolling through the silver plains of the floating city. There is no one else on the path but her. As she takes time to cool off, she starts to notice the serene wisps floating through the lampshades on the paths. And then, the soft, ocean-

like ground that she treads upon. It's nothing like she's seen before. She takes a deep breath, and begins to forget the Tau.

As she's walking, she suddenly hears a familiar sound. The turn of a rusty gear. A rusty tool. Nothing like this should be in this lofty city. She turns towards it and sees a young human girl, no older than 11, with long blonde hair and a dirty, ashy face. She is wearing rags, and is crouched down over a mechanical device, trying to twist its gears inside.

Curious, Rey walks over to the girl. "Hey," she whispers. The girl looks at Rey, but doesn't say a word. She goes back to twisting the gears on the device. Rey tries to talk to her again, "My name is Rey. What's yours?" The girl, without looking at Rey, says, "Litha."

"Where are your parents?" The girl doesn't respond. Rey tries to change the topic, "I haven't seen another human around here, we're the only ones. Are you from here?"

The girl shakes her head. She's silent now. But she doesn't try to push Rey away. Rey watches her fiddle with the device, her hands moving in a sophisticated pattern, her eyes gazed into a calm trance. Rey knows what's she's doing; it's all very familiar to her. She tries to talk to Litha again: "That's a KJ-38. I've worked with a few before."

Now the girl glances up, and replies, "It's different from the other parts here. I like it."

Rey smiles, and the girl mirrors her with a slight smile too, but it quickly dies off. Her eyes move past Rey, looking behind her into the distance. They're now struck with fear.

Rey turns around and for the first time, sees three Tau standing on the paths of the city. They seem to have come out of their homes. They stare at the two with suspicion. Unrest permeates throughout the atmosphere.

"What are you staring at?" Rey asks them, irritated.

One of the Tau replies, "You're not Tau. You're spies for the Skor, aren't you?"

"What? Who are the Skor?"

“Don’t play dumb. The Skor have attacked us our entire lives.” The Tau raises his hand, and Rey sees that it’s a fake one. She looks down and sees the Tau has a prosthetic leg too; she looks around, and the 2 other Tau all have prosthetics.

“What happened?” she asks them.

The Tau sighs. “So she’s an outsider.” Another Tau answers, “If only the Skor stayed where they deserved to stay, none of this would have happened. They wouldn’t be able to attack us.”

“Stayed where?” Rey asks. But then, she senses something is off. She looks back towards Litha, and realizes she’s gone. “Litha!” she shouts. She runs through the city, looking for her. “Someone come out, there’s a girl who’s by herself, without her parents! Has anyone seen her?” But no one responds. The homes around her remain silent; she knows there are Tau inside, but they choose to shut themselves in.

Then, as she heads into a narrower and narrower alleyway, emerging in a less affluent region of the city, she notices a change in energy. “She’s here,” Rey whispers. She starts to walk towards a broken down home, seemingly abandoned. She touches the metal, round door on the outside. There is a button for a transmitter, and she presses it. “I’m looking for Litha,” she speaks into the microphone. There is a long pause, and suddenly, the door opens.

Chapter 21- History

Rey walks into the house. Though shabby, it is well lit, and somewhat cozy. The silver liquid that shines through the paths of the city are now sitting still within the home, nearly dry. The glints of sapphire are unpolished and old. She heads into a room and sees Litha on the floor, still playing with the mechanical device, and next to her sits, on a chair, an old woman with purple skin, wings like the Tau, and a scorpion-like tail. She reminds Rey of the old Jurial she had met months ago.

The old woman speaks up with a rough accent, “The name’s Drunev. Litha said that she just met you, and that you’re a nice one. Didn’t you, Litha?” Litha nods. Drunev continues, “She ran off without her mask again. The air here ain’t good for her cuz she’s got weak lungs. And I was in the middle of a nap. She’s lucky she wasn’t out there too long.”

Now it’s Rey’s turn to introduce herself. “I’m Rey, I came here with my master, Luke Skywalker, to try to save the Force from being torn apart on this planet.”

“Ahh... Luke. He’s returned. Yes, continue.”

“What’s happening around here? Why do the Tau never come out of their homes? Why is everyone so scared? Where did Litha come from?”

“Too many questions!’ Drunev blares out, and Rey winces. Now she realizes she’s nothing like the old Jurial, at least when she gets annoyed. Drunev continues, “One question at a time! Litha. She is from Tatoonie.”

“Luke’s home? But that’s so far from here.”

“She said she was chased by soldiers. Was captured and bound to a ship with other children. Managed to escape and take a pod, and found herself on Inimoni. That much, I know.”

“So, you’ve been caring for her this whole time?”

“For a few days. No one else would risk their lives over some child they’ve never seen before.”

“But why? Why are you the only one?”

Drunev stands up. Her wings flutter. “See these?” Then, her tail swishes. “Now see this? I’m half Tau, half Skor. I’ve already been shunned by the community. I have nothing to lose if I take in this young girl.”

“Why do the Tau and Skor hate each other so much?”

Drunev sighs. “It’s a long history. It’s not a history any Inimoni outsider would tell you. The Tau and Skor keep it to themselves, so that they can feel superior to outsiders.”

Rey walks closer to her. Litha looks up and eyes Rey, and though surprised, Rey softly smiles. Litha smiles back. Drunev continues, “Do you really want to hear it?”

Rey nods.

[Flashbacks are seen]

Drunev begins telling a tale, her voice more hushed and majestic, leaving her rough manner of speaking behind: “Long ago, before the Tau and the Skor, the predecessors of both the Jedi and the Sith tended to the Moktow, who were tasked with guarding incredible powers.”

Rey gasps. “The Sith worked with the Jedi?”

“No interruptions! Yes, yes. But they were not close. Both were sects of larger orders, and had been entrusted to oversee the Moktow. A terrible regime, the Faceless, had oppressed their galaxy. Though we don’t know much about what the Faceless had done, it’s known that only by working together could the two orders defeat them. However, the powers of the regime were found to be indestructible. To keep them away from those who would use them for harm, the two orders sealed them away in immortal guardians who were loyal to their cause. The Moktow guardians were a flock of the purest souls, but were corruptible. Faceless elites were executed, but found a way to live on past death. They whispered into the ears of the Moktow, luring them towards the forbidden energies of the powers they were assigned to guard. The Moktow could not resist. They were manipulated into giving up their bodies to be used as hosts for their deceased corruptors, betraying their purpose for existing. But they did not realize that the powers were enchanted in such a way that they would become repulsed to their new, corrupted forms. The powers were ripped away from the Moktow by the two orders, and manifested as a physical, jade crystal. Without the powers, the Moktow became the Resepi.”

Drunev looks back at Rey, who has her mouth wide open in awe. Drunev crackles, “Ha, a lot to take in, isn’t it? I’ll give you a minute.”

Rey hangs her head down, and whispers to herself, “The soul object already is in an artifact... it IS the kyber crystal.” Raising her voice, she asks Drunev, “But the crystal was torn apart.”

“Yes,” Drunev says, “Each order took the powers from the Moktow in their own way. So the crystal was inherently born with two unstable energies trapped within. The proto-Sith believed they had to use these powers to defeat the Resepi. The proto-Jedi did not, believing that if the proto-Sith toyed with them, they would become that which they sought to defeat. They clashed, and the crystal split in two. With the splitting of the crystal, the factions engaged in conquering resource territories that eventually led to segregating their technologies into two distinct types, both which were weaker than their whole. It is said that only a few of these unbroken technologies remain, but if they were to be found, they may have the potential to control both types simultaneously. I will tell you, that if they were to reunite their technologies, the tech’s capabilities would be restored. But this never came to be. After many wars,

leaders from both divisions proposed that by using two crystals, they could ward the Resepi away by entrapping them within Nissidha, the Prime Meridian of Inimoni, each side vowing to guard their own hemisphere. Due to genetic isolation, these sides evolved into the Tau and the Skor.”

“Then...” Rey whispers.

Drunev rambles on, “But the crystals were stolen, allowing the Resepi to rain terror upon the planet. The crystals exchanged many hands, until someone used them to birth a terrible beast on a stone and sand planet, whose name has been lost to our history. A hero from Inimoni emerged, defeating the beast. However, he was only able to retrieve one crystal. A war waged between the Tau and Skor to determine who should have the crystal to keep the Resepi away. In the ensuing chaos, after the Skor double crossed the Tau, the crystal was lost within Nissidha, allowing the Resepi to invade both lands. All hope was lost. But then, the hero discovered a ritual, usable only by those with Faceless blood, to create forces like the jade kyber crystal. He also discovered that he, too, was a descendant of the Faceless. By convincing the last remaining descendants of the Faceless, an elitist and stubborn group, they enacted the ritual, whose power was too much for them to handle. They sacrificed themselves to create many new crystals, which were far weaker than the original jade crystal but were plentiful enough to entrap the Resepi once again. But though the war was over, the tensions on both sides did not dissipate. Centuries of propaganda had corrupted their minds. Since then, the two sides have been at odds with one another, blaming each side for forcing the hero to lose his life.”

Drunev finishes, and asks Rey, “Need another minute?”

Rey nods. She walks towards Litha, and sits down next to her. Litha is lost in her own world, but is not sad. She is focused on the device before her, and on nothing else. Rey sees that she is having trouble with a small piece. Rey reaches towards it, but Litha looks up at her with worried eyes, and shakes her head. Rey smiles and nods. Litha nods too, and goes back to her task. “I think you’ll figure it out,” Rey whispers to her. “You’re almost finished, anyways.” Litha nods again.

Drunev tells Rey, “It’s been good to have company around, but I can’t keep her here forever.”

“Why not?”

“It may not seem like it, but this is a war torn city. We repair its buildings fast, but not its people. Any time now, I fear another fight is going to break out here. You have to take her away.”

“Me? But I’ll put her in danger. Luke and I have to-”

“I get that. But I can’t just leave her like this. She’s got no place safe to live. Can’t you take some time out of your journey to help her?”

Rey looks at Litha. Though Litha keeps eyeing her device, Rey can tell that Litha is listening, and that she feels uneasy. Rey whispers to her, “You’re afraid? You want to leave?” Litha nods. Rey tells her, “I won’t let those soldiers lay a hand on you. I promise.”

Suddenly, a boom outside is heard. Litha jumps up. Drunev furrows her brow, and says, “The Skor have started attacking again.” Another boom is heard, and screams of civilians ring out. Footsteps pound the ground and splash along the silvery liquid. A shot fires above the roof of the house and shatters it, dropping a waterfall of grey down to the floor, all over Litha’s device and startling the young girl. Litha jumps up again and runs towards Drunev, hugging her.

Rey starts up her transmitter and says, “BB-8, cloak and bring the Osprey to my coordinates.” She turns to Drunev, “My ship is coming. I’ll find somewhere safe for her.”

Drunev says, “Take this mask. She can’t breathe the air here too long. Once she leaves Iniomni, she can take it off.” Drunev hands her an accessory resembling a gas mask, and tells Litha to go towards Rey. Rey reaches her hand out. Slowly, Litha leaves Drunev, and touches Rey’s fingers. Drunev continues, “There’s one more thing you should know: the ancient ones knew a way to end the Resepi.”

“How?”

“We don’t know anymore. But they couldn’t do it. All we know is they needed a tremendous amount of energy-” She’s cut off as another explosion rocks the house.

A loud engine roar is heard, along with confused exclams. “What the hell is that?” a soldier yells. Light shimmers above exposed roof of the house, and the Osprey is gradually uncloaked, hovering above. A ladder is let down.

“Come with us,” Rey tells Drunev.

Drunev shakes her head. She walks over to a chest, and snaps it open. Inside is a blaster. “I may be both Tau and Skor, but I’ve lived my whole life as a Tau. And I’ll die protecting my neighbors, even if they don’t want me to.” She shambles towards the door.

Litha reaches out for her, but Rey shields her away. She helps Litha get the mask on, and tries to get her up the ladder. "May the Force be with you," Rey tells Drunev. Drunev grunts and flicks the back of her hand towards them, not turning around. She opens the front entrance door.

The ladder to the Osprey rolls back up, and Rey and Litha are transported into the ship. The Myriori Osprey flies off.

Chapter 22- Inimoni, The Dark

As it's flying, the Osprey cloaks itself and becomes invisible. They've escaped from the city, and are now flying over a vast, abandoned landscape of floating surfaces and buildings. Rey is in the cockpit, navigating the ship. Litha and BB-8 are next to her. Suddenly, she hears a disjointed murmur. It's coming from her inner soul instrument. She speaks into it, "Luke, is that you?"

"Looks like the Tau don't have any information about the crystal, and Skor have just attacked the city, so they're busy at the moment. It looks like we don't have a choice."

"What do you mean?"

"If we're to find this crystal, we're going to have to head over to speak to the leaders in the other hemisphere... it's where the other inhabitants, the Skor, are at." Rey hears Luke sigh over the transmitter. "Maybe they have a lead. Fly out of the planet and meet me at these coordinates on the other side."

But just then, a building below her begins to contort. Startled, Rey tries to speak into the transmitter again, but there is no signal. And then, more buildings begin to contort, and rise up into the sky. The sky darkens, and suddenly, the Osprey begins to feel a force pushing it down from above, dragging it into the ground.

Litha clutches onto Rey, who holds onto her tighter. The young girl is trembling, and Rey reassures her, "If you believe in the Force, it will protect you." She says to BB-8, "We can't leave the atmosphere! We have to find a way out of this Force distortion!"

They soar through the field of twisting buildings and surfaces, which curl into terrifying abominations and are now hurtling through the air at high speeds. The Osprey narrowly avoids several. And then, the soul instrument's signal begins to fade in again. Ahead of them is something which cannot be comprehended or seen, but is felt. It is Nissidha.

“We have head there to escape the distortion!”

Rey tries to comfort Litha, and the Osprey flies into Nissidha. Rey braces herself, preparing for the worst. But when they enter, they're in a wide region, narrowly lit. From far away, there are surfaces, shaping the region into some sort of tunnel. Outside of the tunnel, however, there is howling. There are flocks of something that are whipping past the tunnel fast, and howling. Rey checks the navigation map.

She tells BB-8, “Gravity is weakest in the center where we are; it's as if we're in space. But it's strong on these surfaces around us. I think that if we were to land on them, we could walk around. You can even stand on the ceilings of these tunnels...”

As they traverse the barren tunnels, they encounter enormous expanses, mimicking the empty stretches of outer space. But other passageways are achingly narrow and tight. The huge variation in sizes makes Rey dizzy.

Hours pass, and the Osprey is still traveling through Nissidha. While BB-8 remains vigilant on the lookout, Litha begins to grow weary. She sits in a large chair, close to Rey. She is nervous and doesn't want to go to sleep, but can hardly keep her eyes open anymore.

Rey sees her and whispers, “Hey, you don't have to kick yourself awake. I'll watch over everything for you.”

Litha nods, and dozes off. Rey thinks to herself, I have to make sure nothing gets to her. I have to do this. Though she strains to keep herself on the lookout with BB-8, eventually, she dozes off, too.

The night passes, and the Osprey finally finds its way out, and enters a dark world full of swirling red storms. It heads towards the coordinates given by Luke. When they get there, it is an isolated wilderness, full of black, curled up plants. Luke is waiting for them. He asks them, “What happened? I lost your signal so I tried to tracking you. I felt you were there, but I still had no idea where you were.”

Rey replies, “I was caught up in a Force distortion and couldn’t leave the atmosphere. I had to take the long way through Nissidha. And-”

“I’m glad you’re safe. But who’s that?”

Luke is looking at the Osprey and sees Litha, with her mask on, peering out from behind one of its doors. Rey says, “Her name is Litha. She was staying with a caretaker after she escaped from soldiers on Tatoonie. She wears a mask because her body can’t handle the Inimoni air. But we were attacked, and I’ve been trying to keep her safe.”

“Tatoonie?” Luke closes his eyes, his face grey. “I have not heard someone besides myself mention that name in a long time.”

“Why do you think they were after her?”

“We don’t have time to think about it. But if she is in danger, we have to find somewhere safe we can drop her off. First, let’s head into Kru; it’s a Skor city.”

Rey nods. She says, “Litha’s caretaker also told me about the history of Inimoni. I also found what the soul object here is. I’ll tell you what she said as we fly to Kru.”

THE ships penetrate through the cloudy darkness, and enter into a world of black spikes and mountain-sized stalagmites protruding from the ground. Red rain drizzles from above, and there is a constant hum of storms and crackles of lightening. Their ships land on a platform of cold stone in the city, a solemn place filled with black granite-like architecture and winding roads and hills.

Rey tells Litha to wait in the Osprey, and BB-8 guards her. As soon as Rey steps foot on the ground, she expects the same warm welcome that greeted Luke on Etilma. But someone hurls a strange appliance towards her, and she dodges it.

“Hey!” she shouts at the appliance chucker, who looks similar to a Tau but has red skin, no wings, and a scorpion-like tail, “What was that about?”

The Skor yells back, “We don’t need him mucking up in our own issues again! Get that Skywalker outta here!”

Then Luke steps out, and the Skor glares at him, but soon scuffles away. Rey looks up at Luke, who is staring blankly straight ahead. She does not want to question him to know why that just happened.

When they head into the city, Rey sees that it is a worn down slum. There are Skor living on the streets, living in makeshift tents. All around, she hears people cough, and beg for food. As they walk through the streets, various Skor walk by and sneer at them. Throughout the street, she hears people calling Luke names. One woman yells, "It was your fault that we're in this mess!" They walk past her.

Then, a mob of people walk up to them. They shout right in Luke's face, "First you can't solve our problems, now, after the First Order got a new leader, we learn this Kylo Ren is your nephew. Can't the Skywalkers do anything right?"

Rey steps in between Luke and the mob. She glares at the Skor and says, "You don't know a single thing about them."

One man bellows back, "You're too young to get it. For the longest time, the whole galaxy was all about those Skywalkers. Now we see them for who they truly are: a family that thinks it's so important, so it deserves to rule over us all. They're so blind they can't see that all they're good for is swinging a light stick around." He turns to Luke, and says, "Why should we listen to anything else you have to say?"

Luke says, with a straight face, "There's more important issues now. You all saw the Force disruptions happening. I'm here to put an end to them."

"Pff- hah!" The mob starts laughing. One of the Skors says, "Best for you to just stay away. When you do speak to our leaders, I hope they try you in court as a criminal." Luke and Rey walk past the mob and continue down the road.

Rey has her head down, hugging her own criss-crossed arms. No, it's can't be, she thinks to herself. Were the Watchers right?

As they're walking, Luke says to her, "Now do you want to know what happened?" Reluctantly, Rey says, "Tell me."

[Flashbacks are seen]

“I was sent by the New Republic to deal with the conflict between the Tau and the Skor. The crystals warding off the Resepi were, and still are, getting weaker, and when they break, Nissidha will swallow the entire planet. Only the major cities, which are fortified with the stronger crystals, will be safe. The Tau and Skor fought to take over these cities for themselves, since they refuse to live with one another. Each side thinks the other side deserves to live outside of the safe locations. They think the other side started this war and should pay for what they’ve done.”

“That’s horrible! They have to choose who lives outside?”

“I couldn’t let one side be devoured by Nissidha. If the two sides were willing to live next to one another, many of them could all fit into the cities. I tried to find some way to evacuate the rest as refugees to other planets. But for centuries, the Tau and Skor killed each other whenever they ever came in contact.”

“What did you do?”

“Though it was incredibly hard, I managed to get leaders from both sides to diplomatically negotiate and form peace treaties. But in the end... it all fell apart. I was tricked by the Tau, whom I felt sorry for because of their history of being deceived by the Skor. I ignored all the red flags. The Tau broke the peace treaty, doing what the Skor did to them in the past. They believed the Skor couldn’t be trusted. I couldn’t stop Tau leaders from pushing Skor away from most of the safe cities, and preventing them from obtaining positions of influence.”

“I knew there was something off about those Tau! How did you stop them?”

“I couldn’t stand to see the Skor being treated like this, so I did all I could to give them a voice, providing them with the resources and encouragement that allowed them to band together and speak up for their rights. But this backfired; instead of negotiating, the Skor used these resources for violent means, and attacked Tau cities. When I saw this, I dissociated myself from the Skor rebellion, and called for a peaceful approach. The Skor did not like this. The Tau believed I had endangered them too, since if the Skor were forced to live under Tau rule and had no way to rebel, there wouldn’t be any wars and violence in the Tau cities. However, the Tau refuse to openly admit this, as they are unwaveringly devoted to the Jedi.”

Rey clutches her own arms even tighter. Then she says, “You saw the good in both the Tau and the Skor. You believed they would eventually do the same.”

“Many times, I could get people to realize the error of their ways. I was able to turn my father, Darth Vader, back to the light, and he saved me from the Emperor.”

“I believe that, too. Just because someone is on the dark side, it doesn’t mean all of the light has left them!”

Luke pauses. “But not everyone thinks like that. Some think that sometimes, you have to choose a side. If the sides can’t come to an understanding, the only way to end the fighting is when one side wins out over the other. If this isn’t done, then everyone will just suffer. Inimoni wasn’t the only planet I couldn’t save from civil war. There were others.”

They continue walking in silence. She thinks to herself: How can someone know what’s the right side to choose if both have their faults? How can she ever fight against innocents? She remembers the Watchers’ words: the good have the duty to stop the Force from falling into the wrong hands. Is it worth sacrificing one’s selfless attachments to an unobtainable ideal to save the greater good?

The duo reach the outside of an incredible palace, with Gothic-like architecture combined with a myriad of psychedelic swirls and patterns. A guard stops them.

“I’m here to speak with the leaders of Kru,” Luke tells him. The guard doesn’t budge. Then, a group of Skor wearing robes walks out of the palace. One of them says, “We heard your transmitted request to meet about the Force disruptions. Though we doubt you can help our people with them, since we historically honor the Force and those who are faithful to it, we are willing to entertain your ideas.” They let Luke and Rey into the palace.

As they are walking, a thin, tall Skor leader with a sharp face turns to Rey and tells her, “My name is Yamados. Who are you?”

“I’m Rey. I’m Luke’s apprentice.”

“A surprise to be sure. We all sense great darkness in you.”

“What?” Rey says, indignant.

Yamados chuckles. “Don’t take it the wrong way. That was a compliment.”

They reach a large meeting room, and see Tau and Skor leaders arguing over the recent attack on Prim.

“Your people have attacked us again!” a Tau leader shouts.

“It had nothing to do with our government! It was a rogue rebel group that enacted it! Don’t play the moral high card when the Tau broke the treaty!”

“That was too long ago; it is useless to muse over it now. It was also done because we had good evidence that the Skor were about to do the same. The Tau have vowed to never break a treaty again. But you Skor, on the other hand...”

The Skor leaders motion Luke to follow them, and he enters another meeting room, where even more Tau and Skor leaders are flinging insults at one another.

As they argue, Yamados whispers to Rey, “Which side do you believe?”

Rey thinks for a moment, and then says, “Both have their merits. But the Tau were the ones who shut the Skor away from the safe cities.”

“So you know your history. Do you think that was right?”

Rey shakes her head. “They broke the treaty. I don’t like people who kick others down.”

Yamados grins. “Well then, if you are willing to learn more, I have something to show you.”

Rey’s interest is piqued. “About what?”

“About the Tau.” From behind his back, he hands Rey a transmitter, who grabs it from behind her.

Yamados continues, “When you find yourself free, contact me.” Rey, not knowing how to respond, doesn’t say a word. But just then, she feels something off in the room. Just above a Skor diplomat who is

on the lower floor, there is an ominous presence. She turns towards one of the corners of the upper floor, and sees a shadow moving. She breaks formation and sprints upstairs.

“What are you doing?” a Tau leader screams at her. The guards rush to pursue her. But she doesn’t stop, and ignites her lightsaber, cutting down a shadow hidden in the room. Its arm is chopped off, and in the hands of the severed limb lies a plasma knife. The figure screams in agony, and the guards seize him. Luke and the other leaders barge out of the other room.

“An assassin?” a Tau leader exclaims.

Yamados rushes to inspect the severed limb. “A rogue Skor assassin,” he says.

“What?” the Tau leader says with great surprise, “What was he doing here?”

The other Tau leaders inspect the scene. One of them says, “Based on his position, he was trying to assassinate this Skor diplomat.” She points to the diplomat.

“One of their own?” the Tau leader says.

“No,” Yamados shakes his head, and says, “From a rogue organization. He was trying to cause more chaos by killing one of the few links to diplomacy between our governments. As you can clearly see, our government does not work with the rogues. We did not attack Prim today.”

Now leaders from both sides are murmuring. Luke walks up to Rey and tells her, “What did I say about being reckless, kid?”

Rey raises her brow at him, and says, “But I just saved the diplomat from an assassination.”

Luke chuckles. “Well, I guess it worked out this time. But don’t think you’ll get lucky every time.”

Rey sighs. “So, did you find out anything about the kyber crystal?”

“Unfortunately, I didn’t. The Skor don’t know, either.”

As the leaders work out the mess that just transpired, a Tau leader gets a briefing through her transmitter. She and several other Tau leaders walk over to Luke. “Master Skywalker,” she says, “Ever since you alerted us to the kyber crystal, we have sent scouts through Nissidha to search for it, and sent researchers to determine its location. We believe we have found it.”

“What?” Luke exclaims, “But your scientists said it would be impossible to find.”

“Yes, that is true,” the Tau leader says, “But fortune was on our side, it seems. Bless the Force.”

Rey notices something off. She remembers back in the first half of the poem she read. Was it supposed to be this easy? Or is she overthinking it? She can’t find a way to pursue the thought any further.

Another Tau leader speaks, “We will prepare an expedition team to obtain this crystal, and send them out in two days. In the meantime, we know how tired you must be from your journey. Tonight, we invite you to a banquet hosted by our people.”

Rey stands there awkwardly. She thinks to herself: Invite just Luke? I’m right here, too!

Luke coughs. “And, what about my apprentice?”

The Tau leader takes a deep breath, and then says, “Ah, well, we were hoping it was a formal dinner reserved for only the most distinguished leaders.”

“I believe my apprentice has demonstrated her abilities quite well. Did you see how she took out that assassin?”

“Yes, but she-”

Luke walks over to the Tau leaders. As he does, they slightly shirk down, though they do not move and are frozen in place. Luke speaks again, “Yes, but?”

The Tau leader is slightly trembling, greatly intimidated, and says, “Yes, I think we will reconsider our position. She is invited, too.”

Rey smiles. The Tau leaders walk away. Rey asks Luke, “What about Litha?”

“We’ll get the crystal in 3 days time,” Luke answers, “After that, we’ll focus all our efforts on finding a new home for her.” Then he turns to Rey, grins, and says, “Ever been to a Tau banquet before? Kid, you’re not gonna believe what you see.”

IN a marble-esque room adorned with sapphire, a lengthy Byzantine blue carpet and numerous chandeliers, Tau royals with fancy robes are sitting by a long, silver plated dinner table. Luke and Rey enter through the doors, dressed in splendid Tau attire, and sit down at the table.

During the dinner, Rey witnesses a slew of dishes, from all across the galaxy, that she had heard of, but had never seen before in person. As she stuffs herself, she nearly passes out from the endless amount of food being served. Finally, she throws in the towel, and buries her head in her arms sitting on the table. She looks up again, and yelps when she sees Luke chugging a glass of blue milk.

Luke hears the noise, and turns to look at her. “What?” he says.

Before Rey can answer, a Tau server walks up to Luke and says, “Master Skywalker, we know you quite admire the blue and green milks. We can serve you as many as you wish.”

“Nah,” Luke grins and says, “Let the others have some too, I wouldn’t want to hog it all.”

“We have... several barrels of it, Master Skywalker.”

Many more servers walk out, carrying trays of blue and green milk. Luke eyes them, and laughs, trying to play it down. They give the milk to the guests, and give Luke several glasses. They place a glass of green milk in front of Rey, who looks at it with mix of fear and disgust.

As Luke is chugging down the glasses in front of him, he sees Rey’s green milk, which she doesn’t even touch. He asks her, “You gonna finish that?”

Hesitantly, Rey replies, “Um... no.” Luke grabs it and chugs it while Rey side eyes the sight with utter repulsion.

The banquet ends. As Luke and Rey are walking out, Rey breathes a sign of relief. Suddenly, Luke stumbles over and passes out. Rey gasps. The Tau rush to help him.

As they panic, one of the doctors says, “Who gave him the blue milk infused with Jomti? You know that makes humans pass out!”

One Tau server quietly speaks up, “Um... I’m sorry, sir, I forgot! It was an accident!”

The Tau bosses chew him out. Rey turns to the Tau doctor and frantically asks, “How long will he be out?”

“I’d say... about 15 hours. He’ll be awake before our expedition.” The guards carry Luke out of the room.

Rey heads into her chambers, and as she prepares to sleep, she reaches into her robe and her hand comes across the transmitter that Yamados gave her. She whispers to herself, “A secret about the Tau?” She lies in bed for several hours, pondering on what to do. Finally, she makes up her mind and decides to use the transmitter.

Chapter 23- Revolution

The Myriori Osprey flies through the Skor landscape, and lands back in Kru. Inside the Osprey, Rey grabs a few flash bombs. She tells Litha that she’ll be back. Yamados and Rey walk through a hidden passageway in the wilderness.

“What is it you want to show me?” Rey asks.

Yamados replies, “Did you catch the Tau leader saying that the Tau will never break a treaty again? Our scouts have discovered several of them on Kru grounds. They’re surverying the land, devising ways to break another agreement and take Kru over. See for yourself.”

They reach a small opening behind the mangled, thorny Kru vegetation, and Rey’s eyes widen when she realizes Yamados is right- she sees several important Tau leaders surveying the land, discussing their

plans to drive the Skor out of it. They're accompanied by a platoon of sturdy guards. They are hovering around a strange, opaque orb that lies on a stand.

"So, this is the only surviving ancient relic that can infiltrate the controls of both Skor and Tau systems, and either bolster or shut them down?" a Tau leader inquires.

"Yes," another one replies, "We found it lying dormant, in total secrecy. The Skor are not aware that it is here. Against it, they do not stand a chance. Even if they protest our methods, they cannot do anything about it. The catch is, the orb will only open itself to those with incredible amount of inner Force potential. It only needs a small sample from someone to tell. Fortunately, we have devised technology that can artificially mimic just that..."

Rey clenches her fist with indignation. She whispers to Yamados, "How could Luke ever side with these scoundrels?"

Yamados sighs. "He was deceived. He was a victim of his own idealism and naive optimism. Though I do not completely agree with the Skor rogues, they were fighting for a good cause. For Luke to abandon his own movement... it destroyed the only hope that many of us had left."

Rey can't stand it any longer. And then, in a moment's instant, she hatches a plan. She starts to stand up. "Hey," Yamados frantically whispers to her, "Get down, they'll see you! We have to do this another way!"

But Rey is not listening, and rushes out of the thorns, throwing a flash bomb into the scene, and ignites her lightsaber. She startles the leaders, cuts through a guard's shield and reaches the orb, placing her hand over it. The guards surround her with their plasma lances. Rey stands firm with a fierce fighting position.

"What are you doing?" a Tau leader angrily shouts at her.

"I'm using your own weapon against you."

The Tau leaders laugh. "That was your plan? Do you realize the orb only grants access to those it deems worthy? Only the Jedi with the greatest inner potential, whether it was realized or not, have been able to activate it! Guards!" The guards shift into a different formation, ready to attack.

Rey panics. She senses the sharp points of the plasma lances leering at her. At any moment now, they would charge in. She doesn't stand a chance. There's only one way she can get out of this- she has to enact her plan. This time, she has a way to trick them.

Rey shuts her eyes and lets down her surrogate. But the Watchers don't appear. Her nerves racing, she tries to channel her energy through the orb. She feels a slight tingle- she feels the invisible threads that run through the orb and into every device on the planet. They are all powered by the same frequency of the Force. As she tries to push everything through, she grunts, but then unleashes gasps for air. Nothing has happened.

But then, there's a flash. In an instant, she's transported before the four Watchers yet again. She is now in a realm where a thousand years lasts one second in the physical world.

Kiyla sees her and exclaims, "We were worried for you! Are you hurt, child?"

Rey replies, "I am. I did not listen, and so I paid the price." She shows Kiyla her hand, and Kiyla gasps.

"I saw what Luke did," Rey says, "I do not agree with him anymore. So I've decided to contact you behind his back."

Kiyla smiles and tells her, "We are glad that you now understand us."

Alstaire says, "Truly. Then we shall return your power. Together, we will win against the First Order."

"Yes. I have learned my lesson," Rey sternly states. But she cannot help herself from shaking just a bit.

The Watchers notice her unease. Kiyla speaks up, "Is something amiss, young one?"

Alstaire says, "Are you certain... you believe in us? Tell us what ails you, child."

Rey's nerves begin to race, but she calms herself down. Even though she has a hidden plan, she still is genuinely curious about the Watchers' goals. "If we are to save the galaxy... do we still have to harm it?"

Alstaire reassures her, “We try to avoid violence as best as we can, but sometimes, it is a necessity. Though we do not believe in depriving people of the Force, you must keep in mind that the Force is not food or pleasure; people don’t need it to be happy. Such a weapon needs to be guarded against those who seek to use it to shatter peace in exchange for their own lust for power. Not everyone ascribes to the right morals that allow one to judge whether someone should be executed or not; this is just an extension of the same philosophy.”

“Will the people accept it?”

Alstaire tells her, “Every soul desires peace.”

Rey replies, “Then I believe in your cause. I need your power to help these people. But I cannot let all of my surrogate down just yet, when Luke is so close by. He would get suspicious. Please, just lend me a little, so I can do whatever bidding you wish of me.”

She feels a slight surge in power; as it courses through her shoulders, her arms, and her fingers. She gasps, and slowly, she senses that a hint of her power has emerged back inside her in the physical world. And as soon as it does, she tries to put the rest of her surrogate back up. But something is not right. The Watchers stare at her with great distrust. And then Alstaire speaks again:

“We saw through your lies. You did not mean everything you said. We know you are only using us.”

Rey panics, and fumbles; she has a hard time fully enacting her surrogate. Alstaire continues:

“But no matter how much you lie to us, we are willing to help you. We will temporarily lend you back your power. In time, you will come to understand that you need us, just as you do now. And as you learn more, you will know we are just trying to help you. For you have been Chosen by the Force.”

Rey yells back in denial, “You’re wrong! I haven’t been chosen by anyone!”

“You have been lied to. Look within yourself.” Rey glares at him, her heartbeat striking faster and faster. Her fingers race to retrieve the barrier. Alstaire continues, “Deeper... much, much deeper within.”

Finally, Rey unleashes her surrogate, and is blown back out into the physical world. The guards charge at her, but suddenly a blast of extraordinary energy emits out from the orb and blows all the guards and

leaders away. When they can get up again, they see a formidable presence before them: an aura of the purest form of the Force surrounds Rey. The orb is now shattered. Rey senses that the quick surge of the Force has now left her.

“What- what did you do?” a Tau leader shouts.

Rey coolly replies, “I’ve strengthened the Skor technology, and weakened the Tau technology. The Tau are in no position to boss the Skor around ever again.”

“Impossible! Guards!”

The guards charge at Rey again, but when they do, their plasma weapons fizzle out and explode against their own wielders, knocking them out.

The Tau leaders stand there, agape at Rey. She speaks again, “You deceived the Skor. You deceived Luke. And now, everyone will know what you did. Tell Luke and all of Inimoni, or I will order the Skor to this location, and launch an attack on you.”

The leaders panic. “No!” one of them pleads, “You cannot do this!”

“Then do what I say. And give the Skor back their cities. Go back to your own. Never return.”

From behind the vegetation, Yamados is holding a transmission device. He is broadcasting all of this to the Skor media sector. It is being shown live to all of Inimoni.

LUKE groans. He rubs his forehead, and sits up from his bed. “How long have I been out for?” he says to himself. Just then, he notices a hologram of a report being displayed. His eyes widen.

He rushes out of the chambers, and runs into hordes of panicking Tau leaders.

“She’s discovered our plot and compromised our systems!” one says to another.

Luke runs down a corridor, and reaches a grand meeting room, with a vast, cathedral-like ceiling. In the middle, he sees Rey facing away from him, talking with both Tau and Skor leaders.

“Rey!” Luke shouts. Rey turns around. Luke shouts again, “What did you do?”

“I ended the war!” Rey exclaims. Luke finally reaches her, and then looks towards the Tau and Skor leaders. To his surprise, he sees both sides calming discussing with one another. They are working out many compromises.

Rey tells Luke, “Did you hear the reports? The Tau were planning to-”

“Yeah, I heard about everything.” He looks at the Tau leaders with sheer disappointment. He tells them, “One time just wasn’t enough for you all, was it?” They hang their heads in shame.

Sensing the opportunity, the Skor leaders bite at them. “And we want Prim, too.”

Startled, Luke eyes the Skor leaders now. “No! You’re asking for too much. We have to work out a better compromise!”

Rey interrupts, but since this is her first time in a political negotiation and she doesn’t want to embarrass herself, she tries to be as courteous as she can, “But the Skor have lost so much when their former capital was taken over. Shouldn’t they deserve to take part of Prim?”

“What? No!” Luke cries out. “Rey, I need a moment with you.” The two walk away from the leaders, exit the room, and stand outside in the hallway.

Luke starts talking, “Rey, you’ve stopped the Tau from doing something terrible. But that doesn’t mean you can just stomp all over them.”

“I’m not! I’m trying to be as fair as I can.”

“Taking away whatever is left of the Tau’s dignity is not going to stop the hatred both sides have for each other. The Tau are just gonna get angry, and they’ll rebel.”

“How do you know that? It hasn’t even been a day yet. Haven’t you already tried to make peace? The treaties, the negotiations- none of them work because the Tau keep breaking them!”

Luke sighs. “That’s true.” He sighs again, and tries to think of what to say. “We don’t know how this is going to work out. There have been planets where something like this has happened before. But we can’t tell what will happen just by looking at them. Each situation is different, and complex.”

“But... both sides have promised to end the war now. The Tau will never be in a position to double cross the Skor ever again.”

“You used the orb as a weapon to intimidate the Tau? That’s not what the Force is about!”

“I don’t understand!” Rey shouts, both in disappointment and confusion, “Why are you upset? We’ve found a way to end the war. Isn’t this how we’re fighting the Watchers? We’re using the Force to attack them before they can attack us!”

Luke shakes his head, and calmly but firmly tells her, “The Force is not a weapon. It can be used to attack. It can be used to kill. But only as a way to protect others.”

“That’s what I’m using it for. To protect the Skor.”

“The Skor leaders are going overboard with their demands. Taking away Prim isn’t protecting the Skor; it’s an act of revenge. The Tau living in Prim are going to suffer if they’re governed by Skor.”

Rey is suddenly reminded of Drunev. She shuts her eyes when she remembers her, and forces herself to believe that she survived the attack.

Luke continues, “You’re young. If I was your age, I wouldn’t be able to handle something like this. But back then, I was never in the position that you are in now.”

Rey huffs in frustration, but soon, calms down too. She looks away from Luke, and down to the side. “I know you wouldn’t have liked to do things this way, but can’t you give it a chance?”

Luke tries to find something to say, but can't. He looks around him, and sees more holograms displaying the reports. Skor rogues have announced, for the first time, that they will stop the attacks. Skor are celebrating in the streets, cheering for Rey, their new savior. Tau civilians are claiming to be relieved that the attacks will cease. Luke sighs. He looks away from the hologram, and back at Rey, "Kid... sometimes, an old guy like me may be stuck in his old ways. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad. But if what you did turns out to be the best solution, then, I give credit where credit is due."

Rey gives a side smile, somewhat happy, but also somewhat despondent, knowing that Luke isn't completely on board with her. She tries to change the subject, "So if it's not a weapon, what is the Force to you?"

Luke answers, "To me, it gives me the strength to see the good in people, even if it's hard to do. Through it, each being expresses their own voice in the universe. With the Force, you can actually change the universe with your own hands. You just have to do it in a way that sits well with others."

He pauses. Then he continues, "So, about that orb. I guess I underestimated you. You do have a lot of potential in you, even after the Watchers took it away."

Rey realizes what she just did, and tries her best to lie, saying, "It was because of your teachings that I was able to find my inner power!"

Luke slightly smiles, "Then I suppose I got a part in saving Inimoni, too. Even though, most of the time, you've just been teaching yourself..."

Rey quickly refutes, and now says with sincerity, "Yes, but if I didn't use your principles to guide me, I would never have ended up in the right place!"

Luke smiles even more now. "Then that's good to hear. Well, our journey here isn't over. We're gonna have to follow the expedition team into Nissidha. And we're going to get that crystal."

REY heads back into her chamber, and plomps down on the bed. She tries to close her eyes, but so much is on her mind, and she has a hard time sleeping. Lost in her thoughts, something from deep down begins to emerge. It's been with her this whole time, but she has been fighting it: an emptiness. She winces; she wants to curl up, and wants it to go away. But suddenly, she senses that she's not alone. There's a voice, perhaps her imagination- it echoes the words of Kiyla and Alstaire. As she listens to it, something else begins to flicker inside of her. A warmth. A familiarity. The emptiness begins to dissipate. And Rey smiles as she hears those words: "You have been Chosen by the Force."

But then, she rubs her head into her pillow. Stop it, she thinks to herself. That's not possible. Soon, filled with warmth, she begins to doze off.

Chapter 24- The Phantom Assassins

In their royal halls, the Tau are in a state of great disarray. Many call for urgent meetings, running into the chambers of sleeping politicians and waking up their entire families, informing them of the insane news that just transpired. But there are a few Tau who reject the call to action. They seal themselves within their bedrooms, lips sealed, as if they are hiding a great secret. Though the news rattles their very bones, there is another worry that they have not finished dealing with. One that could bring great shame to their entire legacy.

In a lofty chamber, a Tau politician lies awake at night, with the sins of her actions forbidding her from sleep. Nervous, her eyes dart around her black room, searching for the presence. But it is not there this time. She wonders if there was another way. She wonders if what she did was right. There were other Tau- those still loyal to the Skywalkers- who doubted the plan. What would her ancestors think of her? She eyed their alter, its faint glow in her room. The guilt was overwhelming her, and she had to get up on her own.

Her feet leave the bed, and there is a soft thud. She pauses, worried.

She sees nothing unusual in her room. But now, there is a presence. The soft hum of a plasma knife points behind her back. A voice whispers to her, "Scream or alert anyone in any way, and we will kill your daughter."

"I- I'm sorry," the politician whimpers, "I was just getting up."

"Don't forget we are always monitoring you. We sensed great doubt in your thoughts just now." He shows her a hologram, and she sees her daughter bound with many others. She shivers. The voice continues, "You did well in telling Luke Skywalker that the crystal's been found. So be good and let's continue our partnership. It's not over yet."

DAY breaks. On a cloaked First Order ship traveling through Nissidha, a troupe of phantom assassins appears. They wear animalistic masks, and are cloaked in shadows. Plasma knives are sheathed to their

thighs. They walk over to Serei and Hailden, who are out of armor. Hailden unsheathes his wings, and Serei whips her scorpion-like tail.

One assassin speaks, “We have infiltrated their ranks and taken hostage the loved ones of many key figures. These are the ones we must puppet, as they have the weakest wills and will surely submit to us. Both Tau and Skor needed to be manipulated in order to ensure our operation proceeds in secrecy. By our calculations, we have secured the perfect places to hide the hostages.”

“Then the plan is nearly complete,” Hailden says. “Carry out the final acts.” The assassin nods, and after the ship passes through a shadow, the troupe disappears in the blink of an eye.

Serei breathes a sigh of relief. “I can never get used to that. Those are some creepy dudes.”

Hailden walks over to a hologram scanner of the environment around them. Nissidha. A place he knew like the back of his hand.

Serei notices what her friend is doing, and says, “These tunnels were cozier the last time I saw them.”

“They’ve changed much since we were children,” Hailden replies.

“They were good for hiding after stealing some food.”

“Hiding from Skor isn’t that hard,” Hailden quips.

“Harder than hiding from Tau. If I hadn’t bumped into you, I would’ve thought all Tau sucked at looking for things,” Serei quips back. Hailden smirks.

Serei walks towards a device, waves her hand next to it, and a spiky fruit materializes in her hand. She takes a bite and says, “Kylo didn’t even hesitate to use your idea.”

Hailden responds, “He trusts that we know this planet well. He knows I’ve been preparing for this my whole life. Ever since my father cleverly stole that crystal from the Resepi, in the hopes of creating his superweapon, I’ve spent years looking for the other one.”

“Yeah, sorry again on behalf of all Skor for catching and executing him.”

“If only they just listened to what he had to say. I put myself in danger for hiding the crystal inside of my soul. But I knew that one day, I would create the Aquillian. I would use it to end wars, and fulfill my father’s dream.” He pauses. “Just like what that girl did with the orb.”

Serei takes another bite of the spiky fruit, and slowly nods while raising a brow. “Whatever you say,” she says.

ON another cloaked First Order ship, Kylo Ren sits nearly motionless on a daunting throne. Hux stands below him, supervising the team of ship operators. A troupe of assassins appears behind them.

“Supreme leader,” one of them rasps, “The trap is set.”

“Good,” Kylo says in a low voice, “Now all we need to do is to lure her in. Do it.” The assassins disappear.

Hux turns to Kylo, “Supreme leader, reports say that there may be a few missteps in our plan. Shall we prepare plan B? Our troops have only been ordered to lure the girl into the Resepi however they can, but have not coordinated to threaten the hostages yet.”

“Missteps? Then correct them, we don’t have time to practice plan B!” Kylo yells. “I already told you that it’s too risky to simply just ambush and capture her. We need to be sure that she has the crystal, and we need to snatch it from her. She would never tell us where it is. She’d die before that happens.”

“Perhaps if we threatened to kill the hostages, she would comply.”

“No,” Kylo firmly asserts, “Who knows how corrupted Luke’s teachings have made her. He thinks about society in the long term, choosing them over his personal attachments. And that shall be his downfall.”

“Yes, Supreme Leader. Then after we obtain the crystal, we will kill her on sight.”

“Hux, are you deaf? Stupid? I told you to stun her! She has knowledge of the Jedi texts. They will prove useful to us.”

“But Supreme Leader, isn’t-”

“DON’T QUESTION ME,” Kylo booms.

“Yes, Supreme Leader. I apologize for stepping out of line.” Hux turns away from him. After he does, his expression changes to annoyance and hatred for Kylo Ren.

BURSTS of cheers and celebrations ring throughout the streets. In a floating city filled with emerald streaks, Rey and Luke sit in a landcruiser as it follows several other military vehicles through a crowd. Though it is a Tau city, droves of Skor are being transported in, and Tau, hunching down and depressed, and being transported out.

“Let us cheer for our new savior, Rey!”

“We’ll return this city’s atmosphere to its Skor roots!”

But when they see Luke, they start booing again. Rey shoots them a dirty look and they stop, going back to cheering. Rey looks at Luke. He appears to be somewhat happy, but is mostly despondent.

Next to her is Yamados. Yamados whispers to Rey, “Never in a million years would I think the war would be ended in a single day, by a single girl.” Rey smiles, and says, “But I’m not done here just yet. I have to get that kyber crystal.” Yamados nods. He tells her, “Since it is an expedition, not a combat mission, I presume you’ll be leaving your starfighters with us, too?”

“Yes.” She thinks back to Litha, who she told to stay in the Osprey and hide. She can’t risk any spies finding the young girl. “But leave the Osprey alone.”

“I’ll take good care of everything.”

A COLOSSAL Tau carrier ship flies towards Nissidha, followed by a battalion of Tau and Skor ships. The Tau and Skor are reluctant to work with one another. But since both sides have advantages in their own technology, Rey has ordered them to both follow her in the expedition.

“Hey,” Luke talks to Rey through the soul instrument, “You sense that?”

“I know. Nissidha is a sacred expanse.”

Luke grins. “You’re getting better at this, kid.”

Upon reaching the tunnels of Nissidha, a Tau guide tells Rey, “This is where the Resepi lie. The crystal is far past these boundaries. If you are to retrieve it, you must use your other twin kyber crystal to ward the swarms away, lest you be snatched away and drained of your life force.”

Luke nods to Rey, who signals a hand sign to BB-8. But just then, Rey notices something suspicious. She tells BB-8 to stand down for now.

The Tau guides look at her with nervousness. “Is something wrong?”

“Yes,” she replies, “Something is. I read a poem in the Jedi texts about how heroes of the past retrieved the crystal from its birth place. It was not given to them willingly. Every event I’ve encountered so far has a mirrored counterpart in the poem. But not this part.”

“T-that is just a book! Surely you cannot adhere to it so dogmatically!”

Rey senses the nervousness in the guide’s voice. She looks around her. Shutting off the distractions, she focuses on the subtle details. The fidgeting of the guides. The contradictions they didn’t address. Something about this seems... too easy. She looks towards Luke, who picks up on her distress and begins to become suspicious, too. And then it dawns on her. She signals to BB-8 to call it off.

“I can’t take the crystal out.”

“Why not?” a guide asks with great fear and panic.

“Because I know this is a trap.”

She turns around, and points, “There!” Rey shoots her hand out and uses the Force to push an invisible phantom hiding in thin air, but it manages to break her grip and maneuver into a fighting stance. Luke and Rey draw out their lightsabers and, with their backs facing one another, counter the shards of light hurled towards them. The Tau soldiers who aren’t threatened with hostages fight back. Outside the ship, Tau and Skor fighters attempt to attack incoming First Order ships, slowing them down from getting to the main carrier, but are quickly outnumbered and massacred.

The duo find a place to hide. Rey pushes on a transmitter, “Yamados, we were set up! We need back up! Send the pulse to disable the transmitters!”

“It’d take a while, you have to give us time!” Yamados shouts back.

In the ensuing battle, Luke and Rey take out several phantom assassins. As Rey catches her breath, she hears Luke shout, “How did the First Order know we’re here?” He eyes Rey with suspicion. Then, the truth dawns on him too. He whispers to her, “You weren’t led here by the Jedi texts.”

Suddenly, after all the assassins are taken out, someone begins to board the ship. After many soldiers step through, the smoke clears, and Rey’s heart begins to ache. Standing before her is Kylo Ren, without his mask. He looks at Rey, and they lock eyes. She is in disbelief. He’s trying to fight a storm within him. But then, with as much conviction as he can, he tells her, “You knew, deep down, this was the only way.”

A flood of hatred and betrayal rushes in, and something is broken inside of her. Unable to take it anymore, she yells, “The only way? After all we saw together, how could you still do this?”

Now, Luke steps in. Upon seeing him, Kylo starts barking, “Fire on that man!” But Luke stops the blasters, and force pushes the soldiers out of the way. Kylo retaliates, but is pushed back and locked in place. His soldiers are locked in place too.

A stern disappointment grows over Luke, whose hand is still extended. Without looking at Rey, he says, “You never learned.” Rey whispers back, “It was different this time. I saw something else. He’s hurting inside. But he said he wanted to change. I had to help!”

“He’s a lost cause!”

Just then, Kylo and his soldiers manage to break out of the grip. His soldiers fire at Luke and Rey, who stop their blasts in the air, and Luke locks the soldiers in place again. But before they can parry the blasts

away, Kylo force pushes against the duo, and they're all locked in a stalemate. He hovers his free hand over a transmitter next to his ear. "Not another move. Or else the hostages will die."

"Hostages?" Luke simmers, and barks back, "Kid, you're in for it now."

"Give me the crystal," Kylo demands, "You have 10 seconds."

As Kylo counts down, Luke side eyes Rey. "Don't. I sense he knows where the other crystal is. He'll have both and the Resistance won't stand a chance."

Rey stares at Kylo. Five. Four. She shuts her eyes. Yamados, she thinks to herself. Please hurry. Three. Two. Kylo finally pushes down on his transmitter and yells, "Kill them!" Rey cries out, "I'll-" But she stops; there is no response from the transmitter. Sensing the opportunity, Rey shouts at BB-8, "Shut off the lights!" BB-8, who has been hiding, turns off the ship's lights, and suddenly the frozen blaster shots ring out and hit the walls in all directions. The soldiers turn on their night vision. In the darkness, a red lightsaber with a cross guard is ignited. And then, blue and green lightsabers blaze out and start slashing down the soldiers.

Just then, a huge blast fires upon the ship, and it's torn apart. The soldiers fly out and the three Force warriors try to use the Force to hold on. BB-8 holds on with a cable and screams as it dangles in the air. Rey sees the massive world of Nissidha around her. It is cold and looming, and it sends chills down her spine. In the nick of time, the Myriori Osprey and X-wing, boarded by R2, approach the crashing ship, and Luke, Rey and BB-8 let go, jump onto their ships, and fly away. Just as the ship is about to crash, a Tie fighter approaches and Kylo jumps onto it, entering the cockpit. He follows the X-wing, but is met with a wall of Tau fighters, which severely hinder his pursuit. The Tau ships are silver blue, with wide, titanium wings swooping behind. Two First Order fighters are on the Osprey's tail.

Inside of the Osprey, Rey, followed by BB-8, sees Yamados. He's piloting the ship, and Rey takes over, making him go down to the gunner seat right next to her. "Nice going with the transmitters," he says, "The First Order can't coordinate with each other now, but since Inimoni transmitters rely on a different frequency, we're good to go."

"I told you not to touch the Osprey!"

Rey maneuvers the Osprey in a spin to avoid First Order blasts, and Yamados shoots down one First Order ship. He yells out, "It just started moving on its own! I went in to investigate, and the next moment it started flying! I didn't have time to get off, so I piloted it to you."

“How did you know how to operate this thing?” Rey asks. Yamados looks worried, and hesitates to reply. Then, Rey feels a tug on her robe. She looks towards it and sees Litha.

“You brought her along?” Rey yells, angry.

“I didn’t know anyone was in here!”

Rey softly says to Litha, “You heard the commotion and got scared? You were tinkering with the Osprey’s auto-pilot and looking for a way to escape?” Litha nods. While still piloting, Rey hugs her with her free hand. “BB-8,” she orders, “Keep her safe.” BB-8 whirls and extends a robot rod out towards Litha. The girl grips onto BB-8, and is led away.

Yamados says, “We’ve discovered the First Order is keeping hostages, and we located that they’re in our compromised caravan ships. The good news is that we have instruments which send out electromagnetic pulses that will knock out any foreigners who are on Inimoni ships.” He takes down another First Order fighter. “We gave one to that droid in the X-wing.”

“That’s... oddly specific.”

“It was built to keep foreign thieves away. Tau and Skor have immunities to the pulse. Once the soliders are knocked out, we’ll board the ships and rescue the hostages. Our soldiers will take care of the caravans outside Nissidha, and we’ll deal with the ones here.”

Rey relays the information to Luke, and they rush to save the hostages. A caravan is spotted. They are closely tailed by First Order ships. The Tau coordinate among themselves.

“This is Concave Leader. Report in.”

“Tenth ellipse standing by.”

“Fourth sphere standing by.”

“Fourth conic standing by.”

“Eighth sphere standing by.”

They continue their coordination. Concave Leader says, “Our weapons have been weakened. But our ships are still just as fast and adept. Do not let them fire a shot at that X-wing.”

Luke hears this and says, “Tau, this is a suicide mission. You’ll be acting as living shields!”

“We have to save those hostages!”

A sinking feeling seeps into Rey. “I’m sorry,” she whispers. Yamados overhears her, and says, “Don’t worry about that now.”

A squadron of First Order ships charge at them as they approach the caravan. They fire at the X-wing, which dodges and fires back, hitting several. But from behind, one of them surprises Luke. It fires at him, and a Tau ship flies in between them.

“I’m hit!” Fourth sphere says.

“You gotta get out of there!” Luke shouts as his X-wing rushes towards the caravan. But more First Order ships approach. Rey throws the Osprey towards Luke’s direction, yet she is too far away. Another First Order ship sneaks up and fires at the X-wing, and Fourth sphere again.

“It’s got me, it’s got-” Fourth sphere explodes.

A barrage of fire rains down on the X-wing. Just when it looks about it’s about to be the end for it, Luke hears a distorted, yet familiar, voice. “Use the Force, Luke.” He can’t tell if it’s his imagination or not. But it imbues him with the confidence to outmaneuver the rain of fire. The X-wing pushes through and a huge pulse is emitted, rattling the caravan and knocking out the First Order officers before they can process what hit them. A Tau ship approaches the caravan. “We’ll take it from here.”

Luke closes his eyes and mourns. He charges his X-wing towards the next caravan. But it’s being pulled away, and is approaching the boundaries of the tunnel, towards a portal that leads to the Resepi.

Luke says, "If those caravans get out of the tunnel, we'll have no choice but to use the crystal to get it out. They're trying to lure us in; we have to hurry!"

Working together, the squadron manages to save the caravan before it falls in. Then, from the corner of her eye, Rey spots another caravan, and breaks away from the pack to fly towards it. First Order starfighters follow suit to tail her. Just as they're about to fire on the Osprey, they're hit by multiple blasts. From the corner of her eye, Rey sees an incredible sight: sleek ships of red, mounted by monumental cannons.

"This is the Skor captain of the Vector bridge. Report in."

"Red prism standing by."

"Blue diamond standing by."

"Red pentagon standing by."

The Skor ships surround the Osprey, acting as its guards. The captain says, "The Tau took all the good flying parts for themselves, but now we've got the better weapons. Let's show those Tau bastards how it's done."

Luke hears the transmission, and says, "Vector Leader, this isn't a competition. Coordinate with the Tau to fire on the enemy while the Tau focuses on driving them into vulnerable spots where you can get clear shots in."

"Skor squadron," the Skor captain commands, "Ignore transmissions from the Tau and foreign syndicates."

Luke heaves a disappointed, angered sigh. The Tau stick to protecting Luke, while the Skor adhere to Rey. With their disadvantage in power, their ships are outmatched and gunned down like expendable prey. Luke and Rey push through as fast as they can, trying to stop as many the ships from sacrificing themselves.

They manage to save nearly all the caravans. There is only one left, and Rey spots it. But just before she can get close enough to it to send out the pulse, she hears a worrisome voice on the transmitter, "The First

Order has gotten their transmitters back up! They're telling the caravan guards to kill the hostages if anyone gets any closer! They want her to give up the crystal!"

Luke yells out, "Rey, back out! You won't get close enough in time!"

Rey is at a loss now. But a fire stirs inside of her as she looks inside of herself, runs the calculations, and realizes her master is wrong.

"I can get there," she says. Luke shouts back, "Don't be reckless!"

Rey looks at Yamados, who says, "I saw you with the orb. I trust in you."

The Osprey charges straight into the First Order brigade. They fire upon her, destroying nearly all of her Skor guards. And then, one of them hits the main shield. It penetrates through, blasting into the gunner's seat. Rey hears a harrowing scream.

"YAMADOS!" she cries out. But she can do nothing about it. His body is knocked out of the seat and is motionless. Blood streams down from his temple and all the way down through the tips of his fingers. The Osprey begins to heal itself, sealing off the hole. Rey shuts her eyes in mourning. "BB-8," she orders, "Pilot." She reaches for the gunner seat, and grasps the pulsating instrument.

The Osprey accelerates faster and faster towards the caravan. Upon seeing the sight, the First Order guards nod to one another, and ready their blasters.

An overwhelming pressure starts to crush Rey inside. She thinks back to Drunev. She must have given her life protecting her neighbors. Both the Tau and Skor have given their lives to protect their own people. Rey thinks back to Litha, whom she prays is in a safe place on this ship. She can't let her die. Though the Osprey is still much too far away for the pulse to reach, Rey realizes that it's now or never. She activates the pulse.

A jarring boom blasts out, but as it expands more and more outwards, it begins to die down. But Rey won't give up. She reaches further and further down into the instrument, holding her eyes shut, trying to reach down into it just like she did with the orb. And then, with every inch of her power, she feels the pulse accelerating again. She cries out one last time, and throws the pulse outwards with all her might. It waves through with an immense strength and is pushed out farther, much farther that it should have gone, and pierces the final caravan.

Chapter 25- Inimoni, The Balance

The sudden acceleration of the pulse knocks back the brigade of First Order starfighters. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Skor ships fire and destroy the brigade.

Rey opens her eyes again. "I did it," she whispers.

"You're clear," Concave Leader announces, "Let's bring them home."

Luke breathes a sign of relief. He can't believe what just happened. R2 whirls. Luke tells to him, "Two in a row? Maybe I was wrong the entire time."

A Tau ship approaches the caravan. But just before it can reach it, a ghastly looking ship apparates out of nowhere, and guns the Tau ship down. Inside of the apparition is a phantom assassin.

"The First Order is trying to get the caravans back!" Vector Leader exclaims, "Pilots, protect those ships!"

They struggle to save the existing caravans in Nissdha, but one by one, the phantom assassins pop out and ambush the ships. Stronger, more fortified First Order starfighters charge in and fire wildly. They are led by Hailden and Serei.

Kylo's voice is now drenched in desperation. "Amp up the attack!" The First Order ships recklessly spew their blasters everywhere, and in their chaotic rampage against the Tau ships, they shatter the surfaces of the tunnels. It begins to crumble. Rey senses a foreboding anxiety, and gasps. Slowly, a darkness seeps into the tunnels. The Resepi begin to flow through.

The tunnels begin to shift now, as if it was an organic creature, and the boundaries crash into ships all around them. Nissidha has become a behemoth of ever-shifting corridors, and Rey narrowly manages to avoid being sandwiched in. Tunnels now boom and bust into big and small passageways. They shoot up and separate ships fighting one another.

The shadows snatch every ship in the way- Tau, Skor and First Order alike- and crush them, dragging them back into the forbidden depths of Nissidha. With each crush, there is a frightening wail; Rey can't tell if it's from the pilot or the Resepi. With their lack of coordination, Tau and Skor do not stand a chance against these new demons. The Tau ships are too weak to destroy a shadow, and the Skor ships are too slow to outmaneuver them. The Resepi draw closer and closer towards the caravans, and the people on board cry out in fear.

"Order your ships to coordinate with each other!" Luke yells out at both the Tau and Skor captains.

Concave Leader yells back, "And trust the Skor with our lives?"

"You say that right after your schemes have been exposed?" Vector Leader bites back.

Luke intervenes, "There's no time for this! The only way we're all getting out alive is if you both work out a plan together!"

The captains hesitate. But when the Resepi finally snatch several caravans, they enact upon the orders that they swore to never do.

Concave Leader commands his brigade, "Whatever you think about the Skor, forget it. You are not a civilian. You are a soldier. We'll be combining our forces with the Tau. Drive these shadowy bastards outta here!"

The Tau and Skor concoct a new strategy, one utilizing the strengths of the other side to cover for their own weaknesses. While the Tau act to herd the enemy ships away from offensive Skor lines and into vulnerable positions, the Skor move less, lowering their defenses to concentrate on the accuracy of their attacks, relying on the Tau to keep them safe. As a Tau ship fires upon a Resepi shadow to drive it away from the slower Skor, the Skor finds the perfect shot, and fires at the shadow, vaporizing it with its cannons as it emits a deafening screech. The First Order ghost ships swerve in the new opening of Tau, but the Skor fire their blazing hot cannons at them, evaporating the First Order assassins.

"Let's drive them back!" Luke exclaims. He heads towards a caravan attacked by Resepi. But on his tail is a Tie fighter, piloted by Kylo Ren.

Luke tries to outmaneuver his nephew, but Kylo mirrors his movements with fluidity. "I can predict your every move," Kylo whispers to himself. "You can't escape."

Luke flies through a ring of Resepi, and Kylo follows suit, dodging them. Now the Resepi are encroaching closer and closer onto the caravan. Luke realizes that he has no choice but to go straight as fast as he can and fire upon the monsters.

Kylo knows this too. He flies straight behind Luke. He readies his navigation computer to lock onto the X-wing. "This is the end, 'Master'."

But before he can fire, a loud blast quakes his starfighter and pushes him out of Luke's path, making the Tie Fighter spin out of control. Rey has intercepted Kylo Ren.

"I got him!" Rey exclaims. Luke fires upon the Resepi and saves the caravan.

As his Tie Fighter swirls towards the tunnel's surfaces, Kylo Ren launches himself out and evacuates. He lands on the surface, and finds that other fighters have, too. He speaks into his transmitter, "Get me a new ship." He ignites his blade and cuts down anyone who tries to attack him.

Luke breathes a sign of relief. But just as he tries to fly around the caravan, his ship is shot by a piercing beam. The X-wing is going down. Hailden has intervened and shot him.

Luke quickly evacuates and lands on the surface, too. "R2!" he shouts. "Get the X-wing outta here and fix it up!"

Hailden and Serei's ships close in on the Osprey. Rey tries to outrun them, but they prove to be far faster and more agile. Out of seemingly nowhere, a horde of Resepi rush into Hailden and Serei's ships. As they're about to crash, the two generals evacuate and land on the surface. Their lightsabers lash out and they join the brawl.

All four combatants fight their way through the crowd, acrobatically avoiding the Resepi, waiting for their backup ships to arrive. The tunnels shift, and crush many of the fighters in their way. Using the Force, the four manage to hold on and avoid the disaster. Everyone else has fallen through to somewhere else. Luke re-adjusts himself, and claws his way back to a four-sided platform. There, each of them on their own side of the platform's ends, are Serei, Hailden and Kylo.

They stand there for a moment. Only the hums of their lightsabers are heard. They are all ready to attack. But then, Luke starts walking towards the center, and breaks the silence: “You’ve all grown so much. I wish I could say I was proud.”

Kylo shouts back, “All you did was hold us back!” He runs towards Luke, and his two generals follow suit. They clash lightsabers. Luke duels all three of them at once. He takes a squarely, defensive stance, pushing his former students away with the Force and keeping his distance between them. Hailden is pushed away and slams the ground with a vibration, and Luke jumps up, avoiding it. Serei shoots her hand up in the air and cries out, and the shattered ruins of the tunnels coalesce, then rush into Luke like a flock of bats. He slashes them away, and braces to push himself through, emerging on the other side where Kylo strikes at him. Luke counters, and the two are locked in a stalemate. Luke retracts and protects himself against Serei and Hailden, who attack him on the other side.

Just then, there is a low rumbling. In an instant, a barrier shoots up between Luke and his students, and they all narrowly avoid it, jumping back in different directions. The tunnels are shifting even more erratically now. The four combatants are separated.

Luke regains his composure, and looks up. On the other side of a thin barrier is Serei. She is walking back and forth, as if she was stalking him. Luke tries to speak with her, “You were always my most gifted student. But you were lazy. And had a short attention span.”

“Meditation just wasn’t my thing,” Serei coolly replies.

“You certainly enjoyed the sparring lessons.”

Serei smirks. “I wouldn’t have minded if you gave me more of those.”

“I still can.”

Serei laughs. “Sounds fun. But I know it’d just come with a catch.”

She snaps and flicks her fingers, and Luke rolls out of the way of a piercing jet of metallic, poisonous liquid. He continues dodging it, and finally gets in a position where he can force push the liquid out of the way, back towards Serei. The liquid flows back into Serei’s fingers. Then, the barrier between them abruptly shifts away and Serei strikes down on Luke, who shields himself with his lightsaber. They duel

for a brief moment and suddenly, another barrier shifts and Hailden joins the fight. Luke fights them both off, and Serei is separated.

Hailden and Luke stare at one another, but do not attack. Hailden stands his ground in a defensive stance. He speaks up, "I believed in you. You saved us from this war ravaged planet. But you could not live up to be who you claimed you were."

Luke does not budge. But a regretful sorrow lies upon his face. He replies, "Perhaps it was my fault. I couldn't be who you wanted."

"I had time to contemplate. And I realized that wasn't your mistake. You still cling onto that ideal. But that's not what reality is. I saw what happened on this planet. I heard of your new apprentice, and what she's accomplished."

"We don't know how this will turn out in the long run."

"But already, it is more promising than anything you have ever done. When the treaty you proposed was signed, there was only an anxious aminosity. But now Skor are cheering on the streets. Attacks have ceased upon the Tau cities. However, the wrong side has won. The Skor are not fit to govern."

"You think you can do a better job?"

"We shall see."

Luke and Hailden walk towards one another, getting faster and faster, and throw their lightsabers down. As they clash, Hailden surprises Luke many times. Luke is taken back, and becomes more defensive than before. Then, the barriers shift again and Luke suddenly feels the Force choking him by his neck; it's not Hailden, but someone else. He quickly wrangles himself out and points his lightsaber towards Hailden, frantically searching for the new foe. Then, the barriers shift, and Hailden disappears. Luke can see nothing. When the barriers shift again, in Hailden's place, is Kylo. There is a thin barrier, rushing through with lowly screeching Resepi, separating the master and his former student.

Luke tries to catch his breath. Kylo speaks up, "What have you been doing to Rey?"

"How did you two get so close? How did you two even contact each other?"

Kylo chuckles. “She never told you? I know her better than you. I see her dark side. The part you will never get.”

Luke retaliates and says, “The dark side isn’t natural. It’s not something to embrace. And she knows this.”

“You’re forcing her to think that way! Just like what you did with me! And look what I’ve become!”

“You did that yourself! I did all I could to save you!”

“No... you twisted me, tried to make me into the Skywalker you wanted. I couldn’t escape you; there was no one there to help me. You think that if I became a bounty hunter, that I would do all of this? You let me fall into the wrong hands. You’ll do the same to her!”

“She’s nothing like you.”

“You have no idea how much she IS like me. And I won’t let you take her away!”

Kylo slams his saber down on Luke, and the two duel with intense fury, fighting for their lives.

From above, Rey is flying the Osprey, and sees Luke and Kylo fighting. For a moment, she is lost in her thoughts. It can’t be, she thinks. She is torn, unable to choose between her master and Ben. But in that second of distraction, a horde of Resepi consume the Osprey, destroying its exteriors. Rey snaps back and manages to escape, but the damage is done. Its cannons are gone.

“BB-8, I need you to fly the Osprey away. You need to keep Litha safe with someone else. Come back on another transport ship.”

Rey evacuates and lands on the surface. From far away, she sees Luke and Kylo dueling. In between them is a myriad of First Order soldiers. She ignites her blue lightsaber and parries their shots, slashing through her enemies. But the shifting tunnels make her lose her balance. She regains her composure, and continues to run towards Luke and Kylo.

They're so close now, she thinks to herself. Then, just before they're within her reach, a blast pounds her arm, and she drops her lightsaber. The tunnels then shift again, and now Luke and Kylo are out of sight, along with the other soldiers. Rey is alone. She scrambles to find her lightsaber. She spots it, but upon another shift of the tunnels, it falls through a small hole, with a diameter as big as a person. Rey runs towards the hole and jumps into it.

As Luke and Kylo are dueling, the tunnels open up the barriers and Serei and Hailden are now visible. They run towards them, but Luke and Kylo are too far away. They are so concentrated in their duel that they do not realize they are getting deeper and deeper into a tunnel, and that the only entrance out is about to be swallowed up.

"Kylo!" Serei shouts, "We have to get out of here!" Kylo ignores her. The two general leave the entrance, and Luke realizes what's about to happen.

Kylo thrusts his lightsaber towards Luke, who jumps up and is now holding onto a ladder of his repaired X-wing. Kylo bellows out and tries to use the Force to bring the ladder down, but the X-wing zooms out of the tunnel entrance. Kylo runs towards it using Force speed, but it's too late. The only entrance has now closed into a hole the size of a small blaster. Kylo speaks into his transmitter, "Order a ship to my location."

A ship flies by, but it's too large to enter the tunnel. It tries shooting at it, but for some reason, the tunnel has been layered and fortified by boundary material many times over, and has hardened to become impenetrable.

"Damn it," he whispers to himself. "I'll have to wait." From faraway, at the ends of the tunnels, he hears dreadful wails. The Resepi are coming. He speaks to the transmitter again, "Send over a small droid. Bring the kyber crystal."

Rey feverishly tries to search for her lightsaber. She runs through the tunnel, and sees the entrance closing off. She runs towards it, but it's too late. Due to the shifting tunnels, she and Kylo Ren are trapped in the same location. The barriers move again, and she sees her lightsaber. But before she can pick it up, a black boot stomps down over it. She looks up, and Kylo Ren is standing over her with his cross guard lightsaber ignited. A small droid, carrying a jade kyber crystal, hovers besides him.

"This belongs to me." He picks up his grandfather's weapon and exchanges it with the droid's crystal. The droid, carrying the lightsaber, flies off, leaving Kylo with the crystal. Rey and Kylo lock eyes in hatred.

“Why did you lie to me?” Rey calls out, “You were so close to changing!”

“You wanted me to give up something that was a part of me! You didn’t care for me. Not for who I truly was.”

“Then if this is who you really are, I want nothing to do with it.”

The words stab into Kylo. Then he says, “An swarm of Resepi will be here any moment now. Call your crystal in, and you can ward them away.”

“I’d rather die than risk it falling into the wrong hands.”

“Then come with me. I’m your only means of escape.”

Rey glares at him. “I’ll never go with you.”

The tunnels shift again, separating them. Just then, Rey hears the screeches of the Resepi. She realizes what has just transpired- she told Kylo that she never wanted to see him again. But the thought tears a hole inside of her. She doesn’t know why. But she can’t stand it. As she runs from the incoming screams, she wishes none of this ever happened. She wishes things truly could go back to the way they were.

The Tau and Skor ships are close to evacuating the caravans out of Nissidha. Vector Leader announces, “The First Order has been defeated in the major cities. Almost no civilian casualties. All that’s left is getting the caravans out of here.”

Concave Leader replies, “There’s a caravan full of Tau that no one has taken back yet! We have to get to it before one of the First Order guards on it wakes up!”

The X-wing destroys a string of First Order ships. Luke hears the broadcast, and turns around to try to head back into the tunnels. But it’s not easy getting through. Walls of Resepi block his way, and he tries his best to get around them.

As Rey runs through the tunnels to escape the Resepi, she notices that the entrance has re-opened again, and is big enough for a ship to fly through. She runs towards it, but suddenly stops, and sees it: the last

caravan. She speaks into a transmitter, “BB-8, I found the last caravan. You have to fly a transport ship to me and drag the caravan away.”

As soon as she finishes, she looks up, and the caravan transport door is opening. Standing there is a First Order officer, and he is pointing a blaster at a kneeling hostage.

“Give up the crystal,” he barks at her.

But just then, the Resepi grab onto the caravan ship. “Close the doors!” the officer shouts. The ships start to close. But it’s too late, and he falls out of the caravan. Just as the kneeling hostage is about to too, the other Tau on the ship grab him, and the doors close. The Resepi swoop down and tear the officer apart, draining him of his life energy until he is a dry corpse.

But now the Resepi try to break apart the caravan ship and drag it away into the depths of Nissidha. She tries to use the Force to drag the caravan towards her, but it’s too heavy; the Resepi are too powerful. She panics, and realizes that there is only one way she can save the people on the ship. She shuts her eyes, and whispers “Come to me.”

She awakens in the darkness, and before her stand the four Watchers. She hears a gentle, but nervous voice call out. “Where are you? We can’t see you!”

“I’m in a sacred expanse. But I have reached out to you.”

Alstaire speaks up, “You seem different. More sincere. Your eyes are starting to open.”

“Please, there are people in danger! I need my power back.”

“We will give you what we can.” Rey feels a surge of power return. She feels as if she is nearly re-invigorated. But not all of it is back. She yells, “Where’s the rest? You’re keeping it away from me!”

“We wish to trust you. But we do not want to be backstabbed again. If we are to give you all of your power, we have to be sure you are on our side. Can we ask something of you?”

“Anything.”

“We sense you wield a terrible weapon. One that is so great, that no one should ever use it. We need it to make sure it does not fall into the wrong hands. You must give us the ruby artifact you possess.”

Rey reaches deep within her soul, grabs the cube, and nearly hands it over. But then, she stops. “I can’t.”

“Please,” Kiyla begs, “You don’t know what terrible powers lie within. They will destroy you!”

“What are you going to do with it?” Rey asks.

“We wish to keep it safe.”

“I don’t trust you.”

“Then you are trying to trick us.”

“No, I’m not! There truly are people in danger! I wish you could see!”

“If there are, then why won’t you trust in us?” Alstaire questions. Rey hesitates. Then, she feels the connection fading away. She yells out, “Don’t go!” But Kiyla shakes her head, and hangs it down with disappointment. Alstaire does the same. The Watchers fade away.

Rey snaps back to the physical world, and she is still pulling the caravan away from the Resepi. She is stronger now, but the power is not nearly enough. The tunnels shift again, and Kylo runs into the scene. The tunnels block him from going any further, but he is able to see what is happening. He witnesses Rey reaching out and trying her hardest to save the people. He is at a loss as to what to do. He doesn’t want to see her in such pain, and wishes to help. But then he stops himself. No, he thinks. I can never go back.

As Rey struggles against the Resepi, she calls out with desperation, and remembers all the Tau on board. With every inch of her determination, she tugs, and miraculously, the caravan slowly starts to be released from the clutches of the Resepi.

Just then, a ship flies through, and fires on the shadow creatures. They screech and are driven away. BB-8 is piloting the ship, and it swoops in to grab the caravan with many strong cables. Straining, BB-8 manages to latch onto the caravan.

“BB-8! Get them out of here!” BB-8 hurries and flies the ship away.

Rey slightly smiles, and tries to catch her breath. She’s used up so much energy, and feels her strength leaving. “They’re saved,” she whispers to herself. But suddenly, she hears the swarm of Resepi rise up again. And then from behind, the monsters grab her and toss her up in the air.

“Rey!” Kylo calls out. The tunnel barriers shift, and Kylo is able to run through. However, it’s too late. Rey tries to use the Force to push the Repesi away, but they overwhelm her. They drag her near the surface of the tunnels, and she is seconds away from the forbidden realm of Nissidha.

Outside Nissidha, the Tau worry for the remaining caravan. “My son is there!” a Tau cries out. Then, a transport ship flies out of Nissidha, holding onto the last caravan. Luke senses BB-8 is on board. “She did it,” he says. The Tau overhear him. “She... saved us?” one of them says, with great surprise.

But suddenly, an emptiness gnaws at Luke. He clutches his heart, and feels like he cannot detect Rey’s life force anymore. “Rey!” he hoarsely shouts. He tries to rush in, but a legion of Resepi block his way, and he cannot move in any further.

As the Resepi pull Rey towards the forbidden realms of Nissidha, Kylo runs after them, clutching the jade green kyber crystal in his hand. Just when Rey sees him, she’s pulled through a portal into the forbidden realms. Kylo immediately jumps in after her.

The world is like a canvas of charcoal; phantoms streak throughout, suffocating every hint of space there is. But all around Kylo is an aura of dark jade light. He feels the pressure choking in, as if he was in the deepest parts of an ocean. He searches around for Rey, mouthing her name, but there is no sound. And then he sees her. She is weakened, her life fragile. She looks him in the eyes, and then he sees it- a grinning Resepi shadow, gripping her shoulders, standing tall and thin above her. It gestures towards Kylo, taunting him to come closer. Kylo pushes himself towards it, and suddenly, the grinning shadow thrusts itself into Rey. She gasps, and calls out, locking her eyes with Kylo. Her eyes are shutting ever faster. Then they finally close.

With tremendous worry, Kylo tries to push himself faster, pushing away the Resepi around him, and finally reaches Rey. The Resepi are flickered away by the warm, jade light. They hover around it, stalking the two with their watchful gaze. Kylo places his gloved hand onto her. He feels no life. He’s in anguish

now, not knowing what to do. Then he senses it- the grinning Resepi is still within her. He knows what he has to do now, and there's no going back. He takes the kyber crystal, and using the Force, he imbues it within Rey.

She senses nothing. She is not in the physical world anymore, nor is she in any place she is familiar with. But there are remnants of things she knows. The carnival- but it is fading. The beach- but she can't feel the breeze. And then she sees the cliffs, and the haunting darkness in Ben's world. She steps towards it, and sees the smiling shadow. The darkness grows ever larger, enveloping her whole world until there is nothing left. But then she senses it. A growing, green aura. The smiling shadow protests in rage as it's exorcised out and dissipated.

Rey wakes up to what looks like a canvas brushed with thick charcoal. She coughs, and looks around her. Resepi are everywhere. But she is surrounded by jade, and no Resepi dares to touch within. Then she feels a hand on her chest. It's cold, but she knows who it is. She touches his hand, and then sees Kylo, weakened and struggling to hold on, his last remaining shred of life clinging onto Rey. His eyes can hardly open. Resepi are pulling at his feet, grabbing onto his legs, clawing their way up closer and closer to him.

'Get away from him!' Rey mouths. There is no sound. She places her hand onto Kylo's cheek, and he gathers enough strength to look up at her. Suddenly, the aura begins to pulse stronger and stronger. Rey gazes into Kylo's eyes, and places her fingers over his. An energy is transferred in between them. It channels through Rey, then into Kylo, and then is emitted into the aura. A faint screeching is heard, and it becomes louder. The Resepi fly around erratically, sensing that they're in danger. Rey grasps onto Kylo's hand, and a blinding light explodes out of them, eliminating all the Resepi nearby.

REY, holding onto an unconscious Kylo, has carved a path out the forbidden realms of Nissidha, and has found an exit, far away from everyone else. They've escaped Nissidha. She gently places Kylo down, and stands over him. She hesitates for a moment, wondering if she can bring him with her. But she realizes she can't, and whispers, "You were right. All we'll do is hurt you again." She walks away.

Hours pass, and a First Order ship lands near Kylo. Hailden, Serei and Hux step out. Upon seeing Kylo's unconscious body, Hux rolls his eyes and mutters, "Not again."

Hailden walks over to the body. "The crystal is gone."

"What?" Hux exclaims. He shakes his head, furious. "That fool. He messed it all up. How are we ever going to get out of this one..."

Serei walks up next to Hailden and says, “I never thought I’d see Skor and Tau working together. I mean, besides us, of course.”

Hailden replies, “This peace will be short-lived. Even if the Skor and Tau try to make a truce again, it will only end in betrayal.”

A CARRIER ship flies through Nissidha, and Rey and BB-8 are inside. She asks BB-8 where the Osprey is, and if Litha is safe. BB-8 whirls. Rey says, “So it’s being repaired by Tau and they’re taking care of Litha? That’s good to hear.” Though it is risky to let people know of her, there’s not much else Rey can do as of now. The Tau and Skor leaders need her to help keep the peace by acting as a shared icon for the people. The ship lands back where all the Tau and Skor are gathered. As one, they cheer and announce that with their combined efforts, they have driven the First Order away.

Rey walks up to a ceremonial platform, and closes her eyes, bringing her hands over her chest. Slowly, one of the twin jade kyber crystals emerges from her body. She motions to BB-8, who hands her the other twin crystal. As she cradles the two together, a pulse resonates, and Rey can feel just how strong it is. Not only does it reach her, but she feels the weaker crystal barriers near her feet resonate in response, too. “A tremendous amount of energy,” she whispers, recalling Drunev’s words. Then she suddenly remembers a passage she read in the Jedi texts, and consults Inimoni seers for confirmation.

A seer gasps, “Yes,” he exclaims, “If these twin crystals vibrate as one, and are present near the smaller set of crystals, they will all work together to generate a legendary energy. One strong enough to not just seal away the Resepi, but to eradicate them all once and for all. Perhaps this was a truth once known by our ancestors, when they worked together as one. And now it has been rediscovered.”

Luke walks up the ceremonial stairs too, and looks at Rey. He tells her, “I know a way to harmonically synchronize their frequencies.” Rey nods.

A montage is seen of Luke instructing Rey on how to forge the twin crystals into a lightsaber. Meanwhile, Tau and Skor work side by side to construct a strange device, following instructions from an ancient scroll. Luke sees the two sides cooperating and remarks, “Looks like they’re finally admitting their past, instead of hiding from it.”

Rey gives off a soft smile. “It looks like I was wrong about the Tau.”

Luke chuckles, “But if the Tau still thought they were holier-than-thou, and their trickery wasn’t exposed, I don’t think they would’ve admitted their faults so easily and worked with the Skor.”

Finally, the new lightsaber is completed. She ignites one side, and then the other. A jade aura emits from its two blades. She stares in awe at her work. She places it inside of the strange device, and it echoes in rhythm with the weaker horde of barrier crystals. The echoes grow louder and stronger, until in a sudden burst, it shines throughout all the land, spreading through all of Inimoni. When Rey can finally see again, she looks towards the direction of Nissidha. The Resepi are gone, and so is Nissidha. There is only barren space where it once was.

Tau and Skor seers approach her. One of them says, "Thank you for helping us realize our roots. Though we do not expect our people to have all of their conflicts solved just yet, we believe it is a step in a new direction. We pray that it will all go well."

Deep down, Rey wants his words to be true. But an aching voice calls after her. She fights it, telling it to go away. It hides.

"That's my hope, too" Luke replies. Then he turns to Rey, "There's something special between you and those crystals. This lightsaber belongs to you now."

Rey reaches out towards the handle, the jade light illuminating her face. She takes it.

"I sense great potential in it," the Seer tells her, "If one with incredible power were to wield it in the right way, who knows what magnificent forces it would unleash? You must train yourself to use it wisely. In time, you will discover its true potential."

Rey and Luke leave the ceremonial temple. Rey remarks to Luke, "You said you've been on every planet with a soul object. I think I'm beginning to see why."

Luke replies, "These places are where the Force vibes the strongest. They're also the hubs you'd want to break if you were to disrupt the Force. Each time I've been sent here, I've had to deal with conflicts, too. So not only are they conflicts between people, but they're conflicts in the Force?"

"Something like that. And now there's only one of them left- the most important one, the one may be take control away from whoever's doing all this." She pauses, and changes the subject. "It was my selfish attachment to Ben that caused all this. I won't let my attachments stop me from doing the right thing ever again." She then tries to explain the concept of world bridges to Luke, who has a hard time understanding.

Luke simply nods, and offers his words of advice. "I've been thinking about you and Ben. I don't know how you're both connected. But maybe it's best to forget about whatever link that is- it's done you more harm than good. You're stuck in a hard place, and have to make hard decisions. Just always keep in mind that you have to do things for the greater good."

Rey thinks back to her duties, and remembers the Osprey. Finally free from having to act as a savior for Inimoni, she rushes to the location where BB-8 said it was. But standing before her is a massacre. A blazing inferno.

Rey rushes inside the burning building, and sees mechanics who have been slaughtered. The Osprey is gone. She runs up to one who is still clinging onto life.

"Who did this? When?" she cries out to him.

The mechanic weakly answers, "T-Tatooine mercenaries. When one of us saw them coming, she flew the Osprey away. Before the mercenaries left, they sent scouts to steal parts from us that they n-needed for something, I don't know. And they... saw her. They took her away."

THE repaired Osprey lands near Rey, who is now pacing. Luke's X-wing lands near her, too.

"Luke, Litha's been captured! We have to go save her!"

Upon hearing the word Tatooine, Luke exhales, deep in excruciating thought. Then he replies, "For the longest time, I've been trying to run from my home. But we promised we'd protect this girl. It's time for me to face one of his most regretful mistakes."

Chapter 26- Home

The X-wing and Osprey land near a rugged city full of sand. There are dust clouds everywhere, and the buildings are in shambles. Rey, Luke, R2 and BB-8 are greeted by a hunched over, old Dug with a long, white beard.

"Luke Skywalker! My old friend!" the Dug laughs.

Luke walks out and welcomes the old Dug. “Thanks for responding to the signal. Rey, this is Viq.”

“Pleasure to meet ya,” Viq chuckles, “Say, has she been given the mist?”

Luke shakes his head, “You said the herd immunity would be enough.”

“Right, right.”

Luke says to Rey, “Viq’s a merchant with many connections and knows the place well. He’ll help us find Litha.”

“Ah... the young girl,” Viq says with sadness, “I have a good idea where she’s been taken.”

“Where?” Rey asks with worry.

“We’ll have to head into the city. But Luke, you okay with stepping foot in there?”

Luke replies, “I have to know how Tatoonie’s doing now.”

As they’re walking into the city, Rey whispers to Viq, “What happened on Tatoonie?”

Viq whispers back, “Something very bad. Living here is a death sentence.”

When they get to the entrance, a group of civilians, armed with chained weapons and blasters, is waiting around. They spot Luke and snarl.

“What are you doing here?” one of them hisses, and points his blaster towards Luke. Rey is ready to retaliate, but Luke tells her to stand down. She looks back at the civilians, who glare at Luke with the hellbent intent on murdering him.

“He’s just here to buy some power converters,” Viq says to assuage the hostiles, “Leave him be.”

An ugly looking alien without a nose spits at the ground. “Power converters are in another town. We’re outta them.”

Luke says, “Then I’ll be heading there.” The aliens continue to snarl at him. R2 follows Luke, and BB-8 whirls in sadness, not wanting to leave his droid friend. Rey tries to stop him, but Viq whispers to her, “He knows this is the right thing to do. He doesn’t want any trouble. We have to focus on finding that girl.”

Luke turns around to leave, and Rey shoots a glance at him, hoping to ask him for answers. But he does not appear to want to give any. Dozens of questions race through Rey’s mind. How could anyone hate Luke this much? Not even Inimoni was this hostile, and they had blamed Luke for not being able to stop their centuries long war.

When Rey steps into the city, she sees a disjointed, misshapen landscape filled with broken buildings, bandits stalking them in the alleyway corners, and puddles of muddy water lying around. Broken glass litters the streets. Beggars lie in despondence and agony on the sand, warmed by only small flames. Orphans walk around, bleeding all over, asking for help. Rey tries to go help one, but when she does, she is overwhelmed by all the other orphans staring at her, waiting for help, too. Viq tells her that it’s hopeless and to let it go.

But it would only get more enigmatic. Rey starts to notice patches of bright green grass blending into the ground. How could there be any vegetation? As they step through, the grass becomes more and more prominent, and curled up flowers with faint colors even beginning appearing. Now Rey peers into the distance, and sees a titanic cloud of opaque smoke, obscuring a menacing, mountainous figure. She realizes what the grass is: a blight produced that is encroaching onto the desert land.

“So,” Viq coughs, “Wondering how I know Luke?”

“Y-yes,” Rey stutters, as she was just zoning out. “I have a lot of questions.”

“Heh, well we’ve got a walk. Luke was sent here by the New Republic. Since I knew the towns well, and Luke was just a farmboy who had never been to most of Tatoonie, I showed him around.”

They reach a stall where Viq rents a landspeeder. They approach the strange clouds of smoke, and when Rey emerges on the other side, she sees expanses of forests and meadows, a jarring sight that greatly contrasts with the desert just around them. The figure is about to be revealed. Rey's mouth is agape with awe.

The figure is revealed to be a mountainous slug with wings, moping around in a dream-like state within the smoky clouds. It sits upon a meadow, and heavily armed guards with plasma lances and white, marble-like armor are protecting it. Surrounding the creature are hordes of humans, wearing well-kept and loose robes, casually relaxing and aloof. The humans saunter over to the behemoth, carrying jeweled chalices, and reach into the thick wisps of smoke; when they bring their hands out, their chalice is now filled with a sort of drink. Then they would graciously thank the behemoth.

The smoke floats near the landspeeder. Viq says something to Rey, but she can hardly hear him now. She starts to drift into a hypnotic, carefree state...

Suddenly, she feels someone shaking her and she snaps out of it. Viq is tossing her back and forth with one of his foot-hands. "Hey, I told you not to breathe it in!" The landspeeder finally passes through the smoke and leaves it.

"What was that?" Rey asks.

"That's a Deira," Viq says, "An ascended, derivative form of a Hutt. They branched off from each other eons ago."

"I want to know what happened," Rey says, "Tell me everything." The merchant sighs.

[flashbacks are seen while Viq narrates]

"For millenia, a plague had ravaged our planet, killing many of the plants. Then, a few decades ago, this plague mutated to harm not just certain plants, but all kinds of life. Every species was affected by the plague differently, but on average, 1 out of 3 died. Just as all hope was lost, our knights in shining armor arrived. They called themselves the Sera, humans who worshipped the Deira, who provided the Sera with vast quantities of knowledge, infrastructure, wealth- all great things you could possibly dream of. In exchange, the Sera were tasked with finding and colonizing planets that contained the Xin, a resource that the Deira needed to survive.

The Sera had detected an abundance of Xin on Tatoonie, hidden in the ancient plant fossils buried deep within the ground, reachable through the long fungi-like roots of the Taloom Cacti. The only way to salvage this Xin was by saving the environment. The plague was hypothesized to not be some viral disease, but rather some parasitic, invisible wisp that invades life forms. Using the instruments of the Deira, they rushed to discover a ward to drive these wisps out, and miraculously, one- in the form of a certain type of Deira's mist- was found. Tatoonie welcomed the Sera with open arms. To the joy of the majority, the plague was receding! Unfortunately, there was one minority group that had adverse reactions to the antidote: Tatoonie human natives.

The plague killed 1 out of 100 of humans per generation, but now 1 out of 4 of Tatoonie humans died from the antidote. Due to millennia of the Deira's selective breeding, the Sera humans were immune to the mist's adverse effects. To wipe the plague from carriers, it was required that every living being came in contact with the mist. To prevent the plague from spreading, no one was allowed to leave our planet without the antidote. The Sera estimated that it would take a few centuries to eradicate the plague, but given the birth and death rates, no species would die off. With the Deira, water was being farmed from moisture farms again, and even lush plant life was returning. The majority of the planet sided with the Sera, and so the humans were ignored.

But then, children of the Sera began disappearing. The Sera begged the New Republic, whom they had close ties with, for help. After many of their politicians failed, Luke was sent to deal with the matter. He was informed that a radical group of humans, the Incendiaries, were using the children as leverage in negotiations to drive the mist away from humans. The humans had tried many means to plead with the Sera, but this kidnapping was the only method that had worked- the children, who were special carriers of the Deira's resources, were too valuable to Sera society. They allowed a few humans to live in secluded locations; however, the plague would live on through them.

Luke understood the emotions felt by both sides, but was totally against the methods that both resorted to. In a noble, but idealistic, attempt to mend the two broken groups, he tirelessly worked to negotiate with leaders of the Sera and of the Incendiaries. The Sera, in their arrogance, believed the Deira's mist was the only answer, and dismissed trying to find other solutions. Luke asserted that this was not the only way, and if everyone came together to find a solution, they could find a different way to save the planet. Many Sera leaders tried to drive Luke away, but with the help of a group of young Sera scholars who looked up to Luke and his heroic legacy, Luke was able to stay.

Luke's efforts were beginning to be realized- leaders from both sides were meeting and thinking of alternative methods to deal with the plague. But this diplomacy took too long, and so those who were against Luke continued to induce the mist into unwilling humans, or continued to kidnap Sera children. Luke was deceived by these people who broke their promise, but repeatedly asked for forgiveness and second chances. When the mother of the Incendiaries' leader, Geoff, tried to leave her containment camp to visit her dying granddaughter who lived amongst the Sera, she was captured by Sera troops and was forcefully administered the mist. She died before she could reach her family. In his anger, Geoff ordered the murder of kidnapped children, hoping to strike fear into the Sera to force them to leave the planet.

Instead, it did not go as he thought. The Sera retaliated by waging a war on the native humans, who were able to fight back by striking a deal with armies of exiled Mandalorians. Luke tried to stop the war, but he was no match for the hatred that had brewed on both sides. The New Republic, torn apart trying to deal with all the in-fighting on other, more important, planets, had already given up.”

Viq finishes, and Rey can only stare into the distance, with great sorrow in her face. It was worse than she had thought. It was worse than on Inimoni, where the two sides had a shared history that allowed them to come together. There was nothing good that the Tatoonie human natives and Sera could possibly share.

Viq continues, “But it gets worse. Only certain Deira could produce the mist. The Incendiaries, thinking that without the mist, the Sera would have no more power over Tatoonie, assassinated those Deira. However, it was soon discovered that both human progeny and young humans children exposed to the mist were producing the antidote inside themselves up until the age of 10. Unfortunately, the only way to drain the antidote out was by killing the kids. But with the help of atrocious propaganda, the Sera felt little guilt for farming these younglings.”

Rey jumps up, “Is that what they’re doing to Litha? We can’t let them do this!”

The landspeeder begins to slow down, and in the distance is a prison-like complex. The duo is hidden behind a rock formation. Viq tells her, “This is where she would be kept. We have to be careful. There are guards all around. I’ll tell you how to get into the civilian database.” Rey nods. She slowly sneaks into the complex, where there are no bars that let her see inside. Instead, people are kept behind fortified, metal walls, and cannot be seen- only their muffled pleads are heard. Rey tries to do everything she can to push them out of her mind, and finally reaches the database. She tries to search for Litha, looking by name, appearance, date of capture- everything she could to find her. But she’s simply not there.

Suddenly, she hears footsteps. She hides, and sees a guard on the corner. Then, she remembers a trick she had been practicing. She announces, “Soldier, this is your commander.” The guard stops in place and straightens himself up. “Yes, Ma’am!” Rey steps out in front of him, and continues, “You will tell me what you know of that girl named “Litha”. The one who had a mask on when she was recaptured.”

“Ma’am, when we first saw her, we couldn’t find her in the civilian database. She wasn’t in the Sera database either. So probably a bastard child that the natives kept hidden. She had trace amounts of the antidote in her; we couldn’t let that go to waste.”

Rey is disgusted by how little regard for life the guard and his superiors have. She says, “If she was Sera, you wouldn’t have farmed her, would you?”

“No Ma’am.”

Rey is moments away from striking the guard. But she manages to calm herself down. “Where is she now?”

“She was last seen in cell 86334. But, she might have been transferred. The next sacrifice is about to commence soon. But I’m not highly ranked enough to know where.”

Rey’s heart begins to pounce. It can’t be, she thinks to herself. “That is all. You are dismissed.”

Rey rushes to cell 86334, and opens the large doors. There, she finds no one. There is only a mask.

TATOONIE is near sunset. Outside of the city, in a heavy shade below a cliff, Rey walks over to Viq. Viq gestures to her, and she shakes her head, and tells him what happened. Viq sighs.

“I wish I knew where the next ritual is held,” Viq says with despondence, “But there’s too many of those ceremonial farms. She could be anywhere.”

“Can you try to find out?”

“I’ll try my best. Once I do, I know some Incendiaries who can help us. They’re still trying to save children from these farms.”

Rey tries to look up to the sky, wishing for hope. But she notices something is off. “I thought there were two suns on Tatoonie,” she asks.

“There still are. But the emissions from the war have polluted the sky. Now, we can only see one.” With great sorrow, Viq is about to leave. Just as he does, he says, “Oh, and Luke’s back. Just in case you wanted to see him.”

REY slowly walks over to a rocky plain, with only a few craters protruding. She finds Luke standing over a crater, staring at a unary sunset. As the two watch the sun set over in Tatoonie, Luke solemnly looks at Rey and says, “They said I wasn’t strong enough to take a side. But I just couldn’t let one of them hurt the other.”

Rey softly whispers, not sure if what she's saying is right, "You were in a hard position. You did what you thought was best." Her staff is lodged in the sand, and she leans on it for support as the weight of every word she chooses to speak bears down on her. The heavy sun beams down on her face, forcing her to be reminded of her own prison that she grew up on, Jakku. But even Jakku seems like a paradise compared to what Tatoonie has become.

Luke turns to her and says, "It's what I think is right. But not what everyone thinks. For a long time, I've been haunted by what I had done. This whole war could have been avoided. I was called weak, cowardly... by those who thought I was an idealist. I thought I wasn't. This whole time I've been with you, revisiting all these planets, I've thought about this a lot. And I'm starting to make peace. But there's just something inside that's holding me back, and I can't push past it."

"It's not too late. We saved Inimoni. We can still save Tatoonie."

"I want to. But not everything can be solved by a lucky *deus ex machina*."

Rey shuts her eyes, and knows Luke is telling the truth. Then she says, "We can still save Litha."

"I think that's all I can do now."

Chapter 27- The Departure

Hux walks through the First Order base, and into an industrial room, where the Aquilian is nearly complete. Since Kylo is still unconscious, he has temporarily assumed command. His subordinates report to him, "Sir, our spies saw an X-wing leave Inimoni and head towards Tatoonie."

"Then we will set another trap there."

Serei walks by, and laughs. "Pff, she'll never fall for another trap like that again."

"You insolent pest! I'll have you-"

“Geez, I didn’t think anyone could be less intimidating than Whinelo.” She pops some sort of snack in her mouth and struts away. Fuming, Hux murmurs, “I’ll show her what real power is.” He faces an engineer, “Is this weapon operational?”

“It can’t do even one-hundreth of what it should do at full power. If we had both crystals, it would not only be highly maneuverable, but it can take out several planets in an instant. But it works. There are shards of the crystal lodged within its circuits.” He brings up a diagram of the inner workings.

Hux inspects it and asks, “Why are all these shards clustered together?”

“When they’re in the circuits, they combine with the other materials and somehow are all attracted to each other.”

Hux thinks for a moment. “So... what you’re saying is it’d attract all jade kyber crystals towards it? Even the ones now in that girl’s lightsaber?”

“Theoretically, yes.”

“Then set course for Tatoonie. I have a plan.”

“Sir, we have been testing for compatible pilots. Shall I-”

“No. I will pilot it.”

“Y-you? Sir-”

“Did I stutter? I want your team to show me how to harness the true power of the Aquilian!”

IT’S been several days since Merilia was given the records to crack. Finn waits around twiddling his thumbs. And then, there is a crackling on his transmitter.

“I’ve almost got it,” Merilia says, “I also found it hasn’t been tampered with. But there’s one part that I can’t crack using my Unravel. I’ll send what I have over; I’ve put the remaining portion in a new format that’s droids friendly, so maybe that old droid you guys have can do it.”

“HQ-7? I’m not so sure about that...”

“We don’t have a choice. I’m sending the files now.” But suddenly, a loud voice yells, “Hey! What are you doing?”

“They shouldn’t be back so soon!” Merilia whispers. Her results are nearly sent over. But then it’s cut off. The guard yells, “What’s all this? A transmitter? Have you been continuing to spy on us? Give me that!”

Just before they confiscate the transmitter, Merilia stops the transfer to prevent them from tracing back to Finn. “Merilia!” Finn shouts. But the transmission ends.

REY walks through a town, asking for information about the ceremonial farms. But no one has a lead. She tries to find anyone who knows Litha, but no one knows who she is, either. A day has already passed, and it is morning. Just then, Rey hears a voice: “Merilia’s been discovered. They took the records! I need your help to find a way to get to them.”

“Finn, it’s too risky!”

“Just listen to me. Remember those soul worlds you told me about? They’re how each living being sees the Force. I have a strong feeling that Merilia’s ‘Unravel’ uses the Force to extract the records’ data. So whatever she got could be in her soul world, and I can seal it within a soul artifact!”

“That’s so insane! I don’t even have time to teach you all that now!”

“What are you even up to? We have to do this for the Resistance!”

“I need to save this girl who’s about to be killed!”

Finn exhales with exhaustion. “It won’t take long. Just give me an hour.”

“A- an hour?” Rey throws her hands up in the air. “I’m actually insulted. Do you know how long it took me to learn all this after my powers were taken away?”

“You saw how I could Force project. Something weird is going on with me. Just give me a chance.”

Rey sighs. “Fine. Just an hour. Nothing more.”

And within just one hour, Finn learned it all.

Rey is pouting. “I can’t believe it. Patience, Luke, really?”

“So, I’ve been thinking, what happens if someone dies in the soul world?” Finn asks.

“I’ve never really thought about it.”

“Well, I guess that’s not worth thinking about either,” Finn says. “If I find anything, I’ll let you know.”

Rey sighs again. “Finn...” Their transmission ends.

IN the isolated chamber, Finn starts to meditate. It’s incredibly difficult. Faint images vibe through, and then disappear. He keeps on trying to hold onto them, but they slip away. “C’mon,” he whispers to himself. And then, a spark kicks off. Suddenly, a whole realm of paths pushes itself into Finn’s mind, ballooning outwards with incredible acceleration. Before him is a winding maze of bridges. Finn looks at his hands. It’s not a dream- it feels real. He’s not in the Resistance ship anymore. He’s found his whole self in this other world.

ON Tatoonie, Rey feels drained and hopeless. She’s asked everywhere, but nothing is helping her. She walks into a cantina, and sits down at a booth, tired. Unexpectedly, someone in rags comes up next to her.

“Pst,” the shady woman whispers. Rey looks up. The shady woman whispers again, “The name’s Maggie. I heard you were looking for a young blonde girl named Litha?”

Rey perks up, “Yes! You know where she is?”

“She’s at a ceremonial farm at these coordinates. Follow me.”

REY, Luke and their droids follow Maggie in a landspeeder through a mountain pass, and emerge to see a ceremonial farm off in the distance. Surrounding it is a village, but no one is outside of their homes. Looming over everything are three large figures, as big as Destroyers. The Deira. There are rocky cliffs all around them, and below is a quaint meadow, a blight that has attached itself onto the desert land, with guards all around, forming a fence around the meadow. Rey lies down on her front, looks through binoculars, and sees that inside of the circle are hundreds upon hundreds of children. And then she sees her: Litha. She shuts her eyes, and feels Litha is trying to ask the Force to save her. The young girl whispers, “Please save me. I believe in you.” Rey tries to answer back, not knowing if Litha can hear her, “It will always be with you. I promise.”

She whispers in a transmitter, “Viq, we found her. Are the Incendiaries ready?”

Viq answers, “We’re all set. Heading towards your coordinates. Can you send us visuals?”

Rey sends the visuals, and Viq says, “Oh... this is not good.”

“What’s wrong?”

“You see that?” Rey looks further, and in the distance are gigantic walking machines, and scores of starfighters. Viq continues, “We’re completely outmatched. There’s no way we’re getting past those barriers. And there’s three Deira.”

“What about them?”

“They’re not fighters, they’re creators and gardeners. But if our troops get near them, they’ll be trapped in trances. This is one of the most fortified farms I’ve ever seen.”

“We have to try!” Suddenly, she feels a hand on her shoulder. Luke whispers to Rey, “Do you sense that?”

Rey gets up, focuses, and feels it too. “Can it really be? The last remaining soul object?”

“This is definitely not just a coincidence anymore. And there’s someone else here.”

Rey concentrates even harder, and notices something along the mountain. She whispers, “It’s heading towards the soul object. It’s almost there.”

“That must be whoever is taking these powers away; we have to stop it before it gets to the most important soul object!”

“But we need to get to Litha!” Rey shouts, “Viq said they need as much help as they can get. You have to help them!”

“I want to save her too. But even with all of us combined, we don’t stand a chance- if we go in, not only can we not save them, but they’ll kill all of us. We have to make hard decisions. Those sacrifices have gone on for years; even if we somehow stop this one, they’ll still be more. We have to focus on what we actually can change.”

“You’re just letting her die? How could you?”

“I’m trying to save the whole galaxy!” Luke pauses, and feels the entity moving even closer near the soul object. “There’s no more time. We have to go.” He turns around.

“Luke. LUKE!” Rey shouts. She can’t believe it. Was this the man she looked up to? A man who would just let a child die? She wastes no time running down the cliffs. She has to get to Litha. From behind her, Maggie slyly grins.

FINN walks through the dream-like world. “How do I find the right bridge again?” he says to himself. Before he can figure it out, he feels that someone else is there. It’s trying to find him. From afar, he sees something with a monstrous mask and a suit of armor. “Who is that?” Finn whispers to himself. But he has no time for any questions. He’s spotted

Finn tries to turn back, but the armored stalker chases him in pursuit, hellbent on hunting him down. Finn follows a bridge into a portal and jumps into it, and a voice calls out to him, “Go there; you will find help.” He emerges in someone’s soul world. There are starfighters everywhere, fighting against an opposing enemy force. One lands next to him, and from it emerges Poe.

“Poe?” Finn exclaims.

“I’m Poe Dameron, hero of the Resistance. You in trouble?” The Poe lookalike doesn’t recognize him at all. Then Finn looks around him. He’s in Juri. The starfighters are attacking Jurials, who are shouting, “Down with the Resistance!” Then it dawns on him- he’s not in Poe’s world. He’s in Yatu’s.

“Poe, someone’s chasing after me. I need your help escaping and getting to Merilia’s world.”

“I got your back!” the Poe cognition exclaims. Just then, the armored stalker appears behind him. Finn hops in the starfighter, and the Poe cognition takes off. Finn looks around, “How do I get from here to another world?”

Cognition Poe answers, “You have to look for a portal somewhere. Where is it...” Then he spots it and points. “We’re flying towards that!” The starfighter accelerates. But just behind it, an enemy starfighter has emerged. The armored stalker is inside.

HUX lies in wait inside of the Aquilian. He speaks into a transmitter, “I see her coming. The trap worked after all. And the Sera will be given all the Xin they want.” He is seized with utmost pride.

He hears someone talk back, “Why’d we even need a trap? Can’t we just ambush her?” It’s Serei.

Annoyed, Hux yells, “We have to make sure she’s armed and ready for combat! That way, she would have her lightsaber with her!”

Hailden replies, “It would be quite foolish for someone to part with their lightsaber.”

Serei rolls her eyes, “No one EVER leaves it behind. Hux, you really don’t know anything about the Force.”

“Silence!” He looks back to still see Rey running towards them. But then, she pauses. Something is wrong.

REY senses a strange presence. She thinks back to Maggie, trying to remember how she talked to her. She seemed suspicious, and then, she notices her mannerisms were off. Like those phantom assassins she saw. Was she one in disguise? Rey then peers into the distance, and closes her eyes. It's not just Tatoonie ships. More lie in wait- including two generals whose presence she's felt before. The First Order is here.

Rey speaks into her transmitter, "Viq, you can't go through the planned route. The First Order is here and they're working with the Sera. You'll have to take an alternate direction, you can surprise them better that way."

IN the Aquilian, Hux fumes. "Why is she stopping?"

Hailden replies, "She must have discovered that it's a trap."

Hux fumes, "Damn it!"

"You do know she's alone." Serei says, "You can attack her right there."

Hux shakes his fist. "If she discovered us, she must have a counter trap."

Serei says, "I think you're overthinking this."

Hux pauses for a moment, and then screams, "Damn it. DAMN. All soldiers, fire upon that girl!"

From the distance, ships begin to emerge. They loom higher and higher. Rey steps back, and begins to run. But the ships just come too fast. "FIRE!" Hux screams. Just as they're about to get close enough, something shoots them down. Starfighters have arrived to save her. It's the Incendiaries.

Rey ignites her double bladed lightsaber and charges in, a lone warrior. Hux readies the Aquilian. In the darkness, there is a sleekness lining it, but it is hard to see. The weapon roars, ready to battle. And then it emerges from the shadows.

Luke hikes across the mountain, carefully listening for the other entity. He reaches a cave, and steps inside. A familiar yet distorted voice calls to him. "Luke..."

Luke winces in pain. It's the voice he heard back on Ettilma, and when he was on his X-wing on Inimoni. The voice speaks to him again. "Trust your feelings. Stay true to what you believe in."

Luke fights the pain and steps in further. The soul object is just ahead. But there is something in the way.

"Show yourself," Luke declares.

The entity laughs. From the darkness of the shadows, a figure, cloaked in all black and breathing heavily, steps forward. It is wearing a mask that Luke had never seen before- skeletal, sharp, but commanding. The figure takes its helmet off. And before him, with menacing yellow eyes and a deep red scar, is another Luke Skywalker.

"No... no, it can't be," Luke says in disbelief, "Who are you?"

THE armored stalker's ship flies with incredible speed towards Finn.

"Poe, he's almost got us!"

"Not if I can help it!" Cognition Poe thrusts forward, and the ship heads out of the portal, and Finn is hit with a pounding crash- he's blinded and can't see anything anymore. He sees and hears nothing. But he gradually regains his sight and his hearing. He wakes up and is in a warm home, lying on a furnished fuzzy carpet.

"I take it you must be Finn."

Finn gets up, turns around, and sees a woman sitting down on a sofa, dressed in household robes. He sits down across from the sofa. There is something vaguely familiar about her. And then Finn realizes who it is: "You're Paige. Rose's sister."

Cognition Paige replies, “I am. Look at us- two heroes of the Resistance, sitting together, in my sister’s house. Rose will be ecstatic when she comes back home.”

Finn remembers how he lied to Rose, claiming that he was trying to regain the trust of the Resistance. “No. I’m not who Rose thinks I am. Not like you.”

“Well, I don’t know you that well, but from what Rose has said, you’re the kind of guy who always tries to do what’s right. Even if it means losing everything.”

Finn looks up. “She still thinks I’m a good guy?”

“I knew the risks of becoming a pilot,” Paige tells him, “I had to take care of my sister, but I also had to fight for what’s right. And I knew that if I died, Rose would be alone. But I still did it.”

“Because if you didn’t, you wouldn’t be someone Rose could look up to.”

“Deep down, Rose wants to do what’s right. But she doesn’t know who to follow. The heroes everyone wants to be, the ones on the Resistance posters? Or someone else?”

Suddenly, there’s a knock on the metallic door. “It’s here,” Finn says in a panic. “Paige, how do I get from this place to someone else’s world?”

“Take this.” She takes a necklace off of her, and says, “Think of where you want to be. You will be guided there.”

Finn grasps the necklace, and concentrates hard. Merilia. How do I get into her soul world? I have to connect to her, to want to understand her. How does she see the Force? What does she want it to do?

The door opens, and in steps the armored stalker. And now that it is fully in his view, Finn sees the unexpected: the stalker is wearing a red pendant inscribed with three fangs, the exact one he had seen on Fortuna. It raises a gun towards Finn.

“GO!” Cognition Paige steps in between them, and the armored stalker shoots her. Suddenly, Finn is transported out of Rose’s soul world, and again, into blackness. He opens his eyes, and he’s standing in a

dimly lit circle, and six figures stand around it, facing away with their backs towards him. They don't utter a word. Outside of the circle, there is only darkness. "This is it," Finn whispers, "Merilia's."

THE massive First Order and Tatoonie ships charge at the Incendiaries, blasting them to pieces easily. The children are confused and crying. Incendiary soldiers drop from aircraft and land down to fight the Sera guards. But the thick wisps of smoke permeate through, and many are incapacitated. Others hold a scarf over their face to stop themselves from inhaling it. But all of them, dazed or not, are quickly slaughtered by the army of First Order soldiers.

The villagers are now screaming, trying to shut themselves in. But they can't escape the impacts of the bombs, and several houses are destroyed.

"We have to minimize civilian casualties!" an Incendiary pilot shouts, "Those are Tatoonie natives down-"

But before he can finish, his ship is blasted by a thin, spiraling beam. "AAGH!" the pilot screams, and his ship crashes and explodes. The culprit flies into the picture: a gigantic, sleek and sharp ship, with a frame resembling a Naboo royal starship. The Aquilian. It has a long tail and rounded head, and is smooth black with dark, Oxford blue linings. Ten Incendiary ships fire towards it, but beams fire from the Aquilian's legion of cannons, evaporating all of them at once.

Hux laughs, "See this? This is what TRUE power is! Can your miserable little Force do this?"

Serei and Hailden trail behind Hux in their own ships. Serei's face is deadpan and annoyed.

A whole fleet of ships now attack the Aquilian, along with a gigantic battleship. The Aquilian shapeshifts: Its tail flexibly bends and separates into many prongs that face outwards in several directions. As the Incendiaries approach, each of the prongs blazes out white hot lasers, crushing the fleet with ease.

Rey narrowly dodges the beams fired upon her by Tie Fighters. She still has her surrogate on, and can hardly reflect anything back. I need the Force, she thinks to herself. But she knows she can't let it down. Luke told her not to.

Just then, towering above the puny humans, Sarlacc-like monsters with six legs burst out of the sands, consuming Incendiary ships flying above. One of them spots Rey, and charges at her. She tries to run, but

she's not fast enough. A tongue lashes out from the monster and grabs her by the neck. She screams in anguish, shuts her eyes, and relinquishes her surrogate- but not all the way down.

Darkness. Rey is not in the physical world anymore, but she's choking in so much pain, that she can hardly see anything. Her vision is blurred. A low voice speaks to her: "You need it?" Alstaire says.

"Just... a little," she gasps.

Suddenly she's thrown back into the physical world, and a surge of power flows through her. She throws her lightsaber behind her and slashes the tongue of the monster, and it roars in agony. She reaches out and the lightsaber returns to her hand.

I can't believe I took some of my surrogate down, she thinks to herself. But she has no time to contemplate. More monsters charge at her, and she uses the Force to jump away from them.

LUKE stands steadfast in the dark cave, facing his grinning counterpart. It speaks:

"I know this is what you fear the most. To turn to the dark side."

"As I should," Luke says with powerful conviction, "Its selfish nature is unnatural."

The yellow eyed Luke laughs. "So is becoming a selfless savior."

"It may be an ideal, but it's an ideal I will always strive towards!"

"And will you drag others into your forlorn endeavors?"

"All I try to do is help them find the good within themselves. Everyone has to try to understand each other."

"Then why did you not try to understand Ben?"

“I saw the good in him. I couldn’t let him give in to his darkness.”

“But he did. It was inevitable.”

“So what was I supposed to do? Just let him roam around killing people?”

The Sith-inflicted Luke grins. “Do you stop the carnivores from killing? Rise and fall. Boom and bust. If you cannot live with the fact your utopian ideal must be sacrificed for the greater good, then you are not living in reality. To even strive for such a difficult ideal is risky and foolish.”

Luke refutes him, and declares, “You’re saying that I should just let one side stomp all over the another, because for the winner, it’s safer that way? Even though the truth is there’s good in both of them? No. Never. Jedi don’t give up.”

“Your ideal is a paradox.” The scarred Luke walks closer, and says, “You force yourself to be the quintessential hero, and yet don’t realize that you are nothing more than a hypocrite. You mislead others to do the same. They will succumb to the pressure.”

“Not everyone! The Jedi won’t!”

“You are obsessed with debating with me,” the scarred Luke smirks, “Why... it seems you think I have all the answers.”

Luke reaches for his lightsaber. He doesn’t want to hear it. He doesn’t want this fiend to take his optimism away. When his fingers touch the cold, hard metallic surface of the saber’s handle, he remembers what he felt that one unspeakable night. The night he gave up. All those failures, all of them telling him that he was wrong. It was foolish to strive towards it. In that one moment, he was tempted to relinquish his virtuous ideal. Because deep down, he knew he was never fit to assume it.

The other Luke speaks again, “Deep down, you don’t want everyone to be at peace. Those who tend to the darkness are too dangerous to be left alive. Even if they do not harm anyone yet, you fear them. And now, you realize that if you are to keep everyone else safe, you must kill those with too much darkness within, before they commit their crimes! Now you understand how I truly feel- even if those consumed by darkness have good in them, they will destroy everyone you love!”

Luke swiftly reaches for his lightsaber. Outside of the cave, an ignition cries out.

THE sarlacc-like monsters continue to pounce on four legs towards Rey, fighting off the Incendiary ships that pester them like flies. Rey sees a clear route to the circle, and runs as fast as she can towards it. She sees the children cry out for her, but the guards continue to keep them in place. The mist spreads even further into the crowd. Rey blinks, and sees ghostly figures emerge out of the mist, wearing little but adorned with jewelry all over, and carrying knives. She blinks, and they're gone, as if they were mirages.

She cries out, "Litha!" A young blonde girl shuffles past the other children, and reaches the edge of the circle. "Rey!" she shouts. Before Rey can get to her, a tall, large gigantic creature steps in between. Rey tries to slice it, but the creature swats her out of the way. Then it charges towards her, and she dodges it. She tries to Force push it, but it barely budes. Rey manages to roll past it and run towards Litha, and nearly grabs the girl's hand. But from the corner of an eye, she spots a guard a few feet away firing a blaster towards her head. He shoots, and Rey closes her eyes, and is transported out of the physical realm. Now, her surrogate is more than halfway down.

Everything is still blurry, but she sees an outline. It's Kiyla. Rey pleads with her, "I have to save her! I need more of it!"

Kiyla speaks to her: "We will never let them hurt you." A power surges within her, even greater than the last.

She is shot back into the physical world, and just before the blast hits her, she freezes it in place, and dissipates it. She Force pushes the guard out of the way and grabs onto Litha. The young girl whispers, "I kept on believing in it. The Force."

Rey tells her, "I did, too." With fierce determination to protect Litha, Rey slashes through the guards who try to attack her. She grabs onto Litha with one arm, and starts running towards an Incendiary ship that has landed, and a soldier motions for them to board. But the Aquilian destroys it before they can get near.

Rey thinks to herself: I have to keep my surrogate up again. She tries to restore it, but it's beginning to wear down and slip away. She thinks again: But is that what's important now? Why is keeping the surrogate up so much more important to Luke than saving Litha?

FINN walks carefully towards the figures. Alright, he thinks to himself. This is it. In a commanding tone, he sternly tells one of them, "I need Merilia's work on those records."

The figure suddenly turns around, and it is wearing a mask. “How can you be trusted?” it says.

“Why not? Because I used to be part of the First Order?”

Another masked figure turns around, and says, “Such is the life of a spy. One cannot know who to trust. You must prove yourself with evidence.”

Finn scoffs. “This again? Why’s that so important?”

Yet another masked figure revolves and faces Finn, “Isn’t that what Citho did to accuse you?”

Finn presses his fist into his skull, fighting the thought. But he admits, “Yeah. I guess so.”

The first figure speaks again. “So why are you accusing Citho when you have so little evidence?”

“Because I know there’s something going on, but I don’t have any answers so far!”

A fourth figure revolves around and speaks, “So you use him as a scapegoat?”

“No. I don’t want to say it’s Citho. I just want to know who’s a traitor or not.”

There is silence. The figures slowly begin turning around again, their backs facing Finn. And then, Finn realizes that during all this, he hasn’t been truthful to himself.

He speaks up, “I lied. I want to accuse him. I hate him for all the stuff he’s put me and others through. Throwing accusations left and right, lumping everyone he doesn’t like as a ‘traitor’. I just want him to get a taste of his own medicine.”

The figures don’t move. But then, a fifth figure turns around. It says, “But do you also want to find the true traitors, if any, for the sake of the Resistance?”

Finn pauses. And then he says, “Both. I want to do both.”

“Then you must be prepared for what you are about to see. If you want to fight for the Resistance, you must strive for the truth, and only the truth- you cannot live in a world of denial and lies.”

“I know.”

“Then take it, and see.” The figure opens its fist, and in its palm is a hologram, teeming with information. Finn walks near it, its light illuminating onto his face. He hovers his hand over his chest, and a pyramidal artifact appears. The hologram begins vibrating, and there is a burst of white light- the hologram has infused itself into the artifact.

Just then, a plasma sword stabs through one of the figures, and it gasps, then collapses. Finn turns around to see the armored stalker. He says to it, “You can’t stop me. I will find the truth.” And then, the world around him breaks apart. He falls farther and farther down into the darkness, until at last, he wakes up.

He’s back in the Resistance base, in the isolated room. HQ-7 is right next to him. Finn is holding a pyramidal artifact in his hands, and then, it suddenly turns into an electronic drive. Finn looks at a heatmap next to him. Someone is approaching. “It can’t be... is it in the real world too?”

He places the drive inside of HQ-7. “Finish the job, HQ-7!”

THE green lightsaber drops to the cavern floor. Someone is standing over it, and someone else falls. The victor steps through the cave, and emerges in another area.

It is dimly lit, with harshly pressed stones, but the sound of flowing water echoes somewhere far away. As Luke walks through, he sees strange plants all around him, trying to grow. But the weeds are suffocating them, constraining them from thriving. By instinct, Luke grasps onto the weeds, and pulls them out. The plants suddenly start growing again.

But then he sees other plants. Ones with thorns all over- they’re a danger to others. But as of now, they aren’t constricting anything. He goes to touch them, but stops. From the shadows, someone emerges. A short, mousy being, dressed as a gardener.

It says, “The Jedi tend to a garden. They must pull the weeds away, yet they cannot stop every plant from growing. They must learn the difference between the weeds and the thorns.”

Luke responds to it, "I wanted everyone to have the Force. To have their own freedom. But how can I let these thorns roam free, and possibly harm others?"

"The light and the dark. Is that all there is to it?"

Luke ponders for a moment, and then, a thought sparks inside. "Gardeners. Negotiators. Everyone deserves to have the Force. But the Jedi are there to keep the peace, to make sure each plant lives in harmony, not taking up the entire garden for themselves."

The short creature looks at Luke, and tries to smile. But sadness cannot leave it.

Luke remembers what he came here for. "The soul object. It's nearby."

At the center of the garden, he sees a lotus-like plant. He walks over, and waves his hand over it. It slowly unfurls. But once it is open, Luke's eyes widen. He sees a small golden seed, and picks it up. It is only when it is in his hands does he realize what really happened. He whispers, "No..."

He turns to the short creature. "This is a fake."

The short creature replies, "It planted it here."

"This... this was all a trap to lure me here. It wanted me to see what I'd done to Tatoonie. To destroy me. Where is the real one?"

"It was stolen from me long ago."

Luke runs outside of the garden, to where he met his Sith-inflicted nightmare. But nothing is there anymore. He kneels down. The small guardian slowly walks next to him.

Luke tells it, "I thought Rey and I could find a power to reverse everything that's been done. But we've already found all that's left, and there's no such thing. Was it all for nothing?" Luke says, hopeless.

The short creature puts its hand on Luke's shoulder, and mourns with him. But then, Luke shakes his head. "No," he states. Gradually, he stands up again, and looks back to the garden. "I'll never stop saying it. Jedi don't give up. And so won't she. I have to go back. I can't let her face that entire army alone."

The gardener thinks for a moment. And then it says, "She may be the key to all this."

Chapter 29- Inner Power

The file is nearly cracked. HQ-7 whirls with intensity. Finn looks at the map; the figure is approaching closer. He readies his blaster. "Come on, you old bot!" And then, it's cracked open.

Finn slowly approaches the hologram that has just appeared. But when he gets close, he can only gape at it. "Could it really be?..."

THE Incendiary fighters are struggling to survive. They call in backup, but the Aquilian lets out an expansive blast, roasting everything around it. On the ground, Rey continues to hold onto Litha, trying to protect her as best as she can.

She's sprinting towards another rescue carrier, but a heavy object pounds into the ground before her, fluttering out a gust of roaring wind and sand. It's the Aquilian. A wall of Incendiary fighters forms between them, trying to block it from attacking her. But it is futile. The Aquilian fires upon them, taking them down one by one, their screams cascading louder and louder.

In the superweapon, Hux grins madly, but just then, he receives a transmission. It's from a Sera. "Do not harm that young girl! She is needed in the ritual!" Hux seethes. He stops firing wildly, and switches to a sniping system. He tries to lock onto Rey.

Rey senses she is being tracked. Using the Force, she tries to shake it off. But the more she struggles, the weaker and more tired she gets.

Then, there is a booming voice. One Deira has spoken: "It is time to begin the ritual."

Rey looks into the crowd, and out of the mists, there is something concrete forming- beings that are not quite real, but not imaginary, emerge. They grab onto several children.

“Get away from them!” Rey screams. Yet she is too far away, and can do nothing but watch. The entities pull out their knives, raise them high, and stab the few children they’ve grabbed onto, draining them of their antidote.

“NO!” Rey shouts in mourning desperation. Now, the wall of ships behind her is nearly broken. She begins to feel a pull. “What’s happening?” she whispers in a panic. Then, she sees it: the Aquilian is pulling her lightsaber towards it, getting faster and faster as she gets nearer. Her fingers loosen, and the lightsaber flies off, but she holds onto it using all the Force she has. She tries to stomp down on the sand with her feet, but she can’t resist it.

“YES!” Hux shouts, “IT WORKS! HAHA!”

Rey tries her hardest to fight it, while Litha whimpers, trembling. And in her moment of struggle, the wisps break their way in; one of the ghostly mirages snatches Litha from Rey, who sees the young girl being dragged away.

“Litha!” Rey calls out. Litha reaches her hand out and shouts, “Rey!”

Rey reaches out towards Litha with the Force, but she’s too weak to use it to hold onto both the lightsaber and the young girl. Rey wants to let go of the lightsaber, but knows what incredible powers it has, and that the First Order can use it to decimate the galaxy. She has to choose. Litha? Or the galaxy? Before she can, an enormous hand grabs onto her face, and thrusts her into the air. A giant has gotten hold of her, and now her grip on the Force is weakening. She can’t see Litha anymore- she can’t see anything anymore.

She is on the brink of defeat.

I have to do it, she thinks to herself. No matter what the cost.

“ALSTAIR! KIYLA!”

The shadows apperate, but they are blurred. Rey is still in so much pain and desperation that she can’t see them for what they are.

“Give it back,” Rey whispers in her dark, disturbing trance. “All of it.”

Kiyla gently replies, “We sense the danger too. A child, crying so close by. She’s in trouble. We have to help her.”

But then, there is only silence. Rey knows why. “You’ll only give it back if I can prove that I will use my powers for good?”

“Yes,” Alstaire says, “You know what you must do.”

Rey begins to bring up the ruby cube from within her. Her surrogate falls more and more. The artifact materializes, but then, she stops it before it fully does. She hesitates. She thinks to herself: Once I do this, there is no going back.

She hears Alstaire softly reassure her, “There is no time. This is the only way.”

Rey whispers, “I take back what I said. Just a little bit more.”

“It is not enough.”

“Please...”

“You have to give up your attachments,” Alstaire says. “Everyone has to. For the greater good.”

Selfishness, selflessness. Rey remembers. Now it’s starting to become clearer.

Kiyla shouts, “You have to save her! Do not make the same mistakes as Luke!”

Upon hearing his name, Rey braces herself, curls her fingers into a fist, and pulls the cube out from her. Alstaire reaches his hand over and takes it.

He says, “Your journey has been long and hard, but now you finally understand. You have been Chosen by the Force.”

A great aura begins to radiate from Rey. It's different from anything she's ever felt before.

"What is this? I never felt this way before. It's... so, so much more than I've ever felt."

"We have given you more than you originally had. You deserve it. Ah, and I sense another," Alstaire observes, "The twin kyber crystals. With more than just your power back, they are amplifying within you, heralding in a new emergence. It is time for you to realize your true destiny. Unleash your inner power!"

JADE light smashes through the battlefield, emanating from Rey, and bursting through everything. All the fighters look around, wondering what just happened. The giant tries to tighten his hold on Rey, but he can't. He feels his hand getting weaker, getting looser. And then, he sees it.

Rey hovers her hands over the giant's, and they are pulling his thick fingers out wider and wider. The giant stares in both fear and amazement, and at last, Rey releases herself from his grasp. Something is brewing within her. Her hands spread out, and she is levitating in the air, an invisible energy clutching her in place. A molten, pale gold sheath encroaches through her metal hand, superseding its gray skeleton. Her eyes begin to glow jade, and she lets out of a mighty battle cry.

She force pushes the giant all the way into the sky until he can be seen no more. Two First Order ships descend upon her, but with only one hand, she stops them in place, and they cannot fire. She swipes them away and they crash and explode. All around her, invisible threads of the Force twist and destroy all her enemies. She waves her hands towards the mist, and it disappears, releasing all of the children while the mirages cry out in anguish. The soldiers are released from their trance. Many transport ships swoop down and the soldiers usher the children, including Litha, on board. Rey reaches back towards the jade lightsaber, and wrenches it from Hux.

"What the hell is this?" Hux shouts. He thrusts harder onto the Aquilian, but it's no use. Rey snatches the lightsaber back, and ignites its two blades. She slashes towards a Tatoonie walking machine, and it splits in two, destroying even the cliffs behind it.

A sarlacc-like monster lunges towards her, and just as it's about to bite in, its jaws lock outwards. With her immense Force power, Rey holds open the monsters massive jaws, and in one swift motion, rips it apart. More sarlacc-like monsters lunge towards her, and Rey twirls her lightsaber and decimates them.

With this pivotal change in the tides of battle, the Incendiaries rally together and press on with a new, invigorated spirit. They charge towards the First Order ships, picking them apart as they lose formation and scramble to get back together.

Rey jumps up, and is floating in the air. She falls backwards and lands on a nearby cliff. She stares at them. The three Deira. Her true targets.

The Deira are defenseless. She readies her lightsaber. But just then, the Aquilian and three starfighters appear before her.

“As I said... you don’t know what REAL power is!” Hux shouts.

The starfighters and Aquilian attack her, and she jumps from cliff to cliff, avoiding them. Rey jumps down and slices through a starfighter, cutting it in half. The Aquilian shapeshifts again, and its prongs elongate to great lengths. Rey narrowly dodges them. Incendiary starships join the fray, picking apart the First Order starfighters. Rey lands back on a cliff, and now, it’s only her and Hux.

She runs towards the Aquilian, and slices down upon it. But as she tightly grips her lightsaber and it runs alongside the superweapon’s exterior, sparks flying in her faces as she yells, it doesn’t penetrate at all. She lands back on a cliff.

Hux exclaims, “This armor is invincible! Not even the Death Star is as resilient!”

The Aquilian’s prongs aggregate together in several more focused, and more powerful, cannons. They start to charge.

Rey runs alongside the cliffs as the Aquilian fires upon her. She thinks to herself: I can’t even scratch it!

A blast hits her, and she’s dazed. Sensing the opportunity, Hux uses the attractive fields of the crystal shards to pull the lightsaber away from Rey again. This time, however, he focuses all his prongs on the act. Rey uses the Force to pull the lightsaber back, and the two are in an ensuing tug of war. Hux fires upon Rey fervently, who uses the Force to stop the blasts in place. But now, she’s struggling.

With all her might, Rey tries to turn the blasts around. Slowly, she manages to do so, and releases them, hitting Hux, who drops his grip on the lightsaber, and Rey retrieves it from the air. But suddenly, another

prong sucks her in, and more prongs pin her and the lightsaber onto the Aquilian. She feels a pulsating echo- the vibrations of the shards within the Aquilian. They're similar to the crystal.

Rey manages to push herself away, and sees the exposed crystals Hux used to draw her in. She reaches out her lightsaber towards them, focusing hard, and several fly out of the ship towards Rey, who dodges them.

"What?" Hux grits his teeth. He fires several beams at Rey again, but they're weaker. They both sense this.

As Rey battles with Hux, the Incendiary ships fire upon one of the Deira. It is swarmed by an entire legion, and bellows out in pain and they take it down, its lasers stabbing through its sluggish skin and spewing blue blood everywhere. The Deira dies. Its mist ascends into the sky, and in the next moment, the thundering reaction unleashes rain all over the desert plains. However, the sarlacc-like creatures snatch up all the ships around its corpse. The Incendiary fleet has lost almost all of its ships, and there are still two Deira left.

Rey continues to use the same trick on Hux. Sensing an opening, she then runs on the cliff towards one of the Deira, and is now so close to it. But the Aquilian gets in between. It is greatly weakened now, but Hux doesn't give up. He yells out one last battle cry as he charges the dying Aquilian towards Rey, mustering all the energy he can into one massive, concentrated blast. He corners Rey in a cliff; she realizes there is only one way she can go. She jumps into the air, raising her double bladed lightsaber, and slashes through the Aquilian. The momentum pushes her through the other side, and she immediately slices off the head of the Deira, ending the ritual it was performing.

At the last minute, Hux escapes from the exploding Aquilian in an escape pod. With the two Deira dead, and the Aquilian destroyed, the last Deira panics and calls in a large transport ship. A beam falls upon it, and slowly, it fades away into the ship. The ship retreats.

"Well, would you look at that," Serei remarks.

"All units, retreat!" Hailden announces. All of the First Order falls back, leaving the planet.

Rey kneels down on one knee, exhausted. She looks towards the children. Many of them have been evacuated, but many still remain. She searches for Litha, and asks an Incendiary soldier, "Have you seen a blonde girl with an ashy face? Her name is Litha."

The soldier stares at Rey agape, astonished that this transcendental warrior is speaking to him. But then he regains his senses. “Sorry, but I don’t know who Litha is, and there’s tons of kids like that here. We can’t focus on just one of them now; we have to calm them down and make sure everything stays organized. We need help keeping a look of these children and finding their parents.”

Rey looks all around her. She gradually is fading out of war, and now, the gravity of the situation finally hits her. Hundreds of children stand around, lost and vulnerable. Incendiary soldiers dash towards them to keep them safe, but the sheer volume of them overwhelms the helpers. A young boy, with scars all over, looks up towards Rey. Rey thinks to herself, Litha is either here or has been evacuated. Someone has to be with her. But all these children need my help right now. As she calms the children down, she begins to realize the significance of this moment. They’re all safe now, she thinks to herself. The Watchers really did it. They do care.

FINN stares at the hologram below. “No...” he whispers. But now, he must grasp the cold, hard truth: Citho was not on Fortuna that day.

The doors of the isolated chamber open. Finn points his blaster towards it, but then a grave look descends upon his face. Citho is standing before Finn. The general sees the blaster, and the floating hologram. “My health records?” he seethes. “Guards, seize him!”

Chapter 30- Sacrifice

In the distance, Luke feels a searing pain. He rushes out of the cave, down the cliffs, and towards the bloodied battlefield. As he crosses the grim aftermath in disbelief, Incendiary soldiers stare at him, their expressions empty and comfortless. A shiver runs down his fingertips. It’s telling him that he’s needed, that there’s no time to waste, so he dashes towards it, only to find Rey reaching her hand out to touch a young child’s hand, with all the other children lifelessly looking at her in awe while bodies and blood pile all around them. The pouring rain drips down on their faces. Rey and the younglings seem oblivious to the surrounding chaos.

As Luke walks through, not knowing what just transpired. Rey suddenly senses something, and without seeing Luke, she puts up the surrogate again. She feels the immense power that just surged through start rapidly draining, and then, she is left barren. Luke steps in the ceremonial circle, and Rey tries to act as if the surrogate had been up the whole time. But it’s too late.

“How did you do this?” Luke asks. He spots the jade lightsaber handle in her hand. “That resonance. It’s fading fast, but it’s still strong. It’s different from anything I’ve ever felt before.” And then, the truth descends upon him. “You got your powers back. They reacted with the crystals.”

“I had to,” Rey sternly replies.

“You actually did it. I didn’t think you were foolish enough to do it, but you did. You spoke with the Watchers!”

“And why’s that so bad? Don’t you realize there was no other way? Did you want these children to die?”

“No! How could you ever think I would? But all this must have come at a cost. Why did the Watchers give you back your powers?”

Rey is silent. It slowly dawns on Luke what happened. “What did they ask for?”

“It was only one soul artifact.”

“You gave them one?” Luke is furious. “Rey, after all we worked for? After all we’d done?”

“Do you even know what those soul artifacts do?” Rey asks ruthlessly. Luke doesn’t respond. She continues, “Do you even know what the Watchers want? They’re trying to help defeat the First Order and save the galaxy!”

“At the expense of the Force!”

“That soul artifact was a danger to everyone! I couldn’t let it fall into the wrong hands.”

“You just did.”

“No. The Sith, the First Order. The Sera. Those are the ones who would make the Force suffer. How could you let them have it? The Force should only be allowed to help those it wants!”

“You don’t get to decide that!” Luke yells back.

“And why should they? They’re just being selfish! They have to let go of their attachments, too!”

Luke is paralyzed. He had hoped she would be the key. The answer. But now, he realized that she had been hiding something from him this whole time. “I can’t believe what I’m hearing. It was a mistake to give you a second chance. This is just like with Ben all over again.”

“Or maybe it was my mistake to have trained under you. Do you remember how I was able to save Inimoni? That was all the Watchers’ doing. I’ve... I’ve been talking with them ever since we went there. And now they’ve helped me save everyone here! Who’s going to stop the First Order, if not the Watchers? You? You care more about being a Jedi than about saving people. You couldn’t even save Tatoonie.”

The entire village has come out. Parents run towards the children when they see Luke; not because they feel safe now, but because they fear him. From afar, they gaze at him with worry. Luke, in pain, sees all the distraught and disappointment etched in their faces. At the same time, the people look towards Rey, their savior, who is standing tall. But she doesn’t feel proud at all. She feels cut by the words she just said.

When she notices Luke’s anguish, she feels a sense of guilt. She got what she wanted- proof that she is not a nobody, that she has the power to fix all those horrible atrocities that were out of reach before- but at the expense of her teacher. A turmoil brews inside of her. Selfishness, selflessness. It was so clear for one moment. But now, it is collapsing back into a muddled mess.

“It’s true I couldn’t choose sides,” Luke says, his tone quiet and subdued, “But it wasn’t because I was indecisive. It was because I believed there was good in every one of them. I was so naive. I couldn’t see that they were often just using me. I wish I knew earlier what you truly felt, too.”

“Don’t say that!” Rey cries out, “I’ve always wanted to believe in Luke Skywalker. Ever since I was a child, I’d always dreamed of training with you. I just didn’t know who you really were.”

“And now, who do you think I am?”

Rey wants to lie, but she can’t anymore. With a sincere, but soft whisper, she tries her hardest to tell the truth. “Someone who couldn’t let go of his selfish ideals. Those were ideals I wanted to believe in, too.”

Even though I had so many doubts, I still had faith in you. But how could I pretend that everyone would just get along?"

"It's not an easy thing to do."

"This whole time, I couldn't let that belief go. But you taught me that I had to give up what was closest to me for the greater good. At first, I didn't know what was holding me back. And then I realized: I was so selfish. I wasn't thinking about everyone else. I was just thinking about you."

Luke shuts his eyes. The rain drops down, heavy and light. Then he tells her, "I was wrong in saying you were a mistake. You did what you thought was best. But I can't ever agree with the Watchers. I'm sorry I couldn't make you see the Force the way I did. I failed my students. And now, I have failed my home twice."

Rey, now holding back tears in defiance, tries to speak, but her conflicting emotions push her to look away from Luke. Unlike other times, she does not run away. She walks away into the village, leaving Luke to stand there as the villagers gaze upon him. Slowly, they turn away and depart too, leaving him alone in the blood stained battlefield. The rain stops. The sun sets.

As Rey walks through the barren landscape, she wipes her tears with her hands, but almost suddenly, she stops crying. She remembers who she did all of this for.

"Litha!" She calls for the girl, asking Incendiary soldiers and villagers if they had seen her. But they haven't. She runs through the markets, getting lost in the crowd of villagers. Luke walks back into the village, but Rey has gone so far, that he can't find her. With her surrogate up, he can't see her. With her soul transmitter blocked from him, he can't talk to her. "Rey!" he shouts. But there is no response.

Rey pushes through the crowds, asking everyone she comes across. And finally, a thin woman in rags says, "I saw a girl... someone whom I had never seen before. She went there. Into the Abandoned."

Rey asks, "You have to tell me where that is."

The woman slightly trembles. "We dare not go there. It has such a terrible history. Massacres, wars, genocides. We had lost everything. The Sera, too. Some say there are even ghosts."

“Then she can’t be there. I need to find her. Please.”

The thin woman nods. She tells Rey how to get there, and lets her borrow a landspeeder. Rey races into the Abandoned, not knowing what lies there.

WHEN she arrives, she is surrounded by ruins. There is no sound, no chatter; only a haunting breeze. As she steps through the broken stones, she feels someone watching her, as if there really were ghosts. Rey shivers, but presses on. She imagines what Litha must be feeling. She can’t let her be alone.

And then, she sees someone. From far away, in a dark alleyway, there is a figure. As she approaches, she can see who it is. An ashen face. Long, blonde hair.

“Litha!” Rey calls out. The young girl turns around. But when she sees Rey, she doesn’t smile. There is no emotion on her face.

Rey is struck with a sudden coldness. She looks around her, and realizes she is inside of the alleyway. There is something dreadfully familiar about it. The narrowness. The solitude. She realizes what it reminds her of: the place where she was cornered as a child on Jakku.

She tries to get it out of her thoughts. She turns back to the young girl. “Litha,” Rey calls out again, “I’ve been looking all over for you. We need to leave. It’s not safe here.”

The little girl doesn’t respond. Something seems off. As Rey moves towards her, she reaches out to try to touch Litha’s hair, like she had always done, to reassure her that she’s safe. But just as she does, she gasps. Her fingers fall through and touch nothing. And Litha is starting to fade away.

“No, no, please come back!” she begs. But it’s too late. Litha is gone.

Suddenly, it all starts to come together. This whole time, none of the villagers knew who she was. No one did. She didn’t even have a record in the registry.

“She couldn’t have been,” Rey whispers. “She couldn’t have been a Force disruption.” But she knows it’s true. Litha was an apparition.

And then, Rey realizes that she is alone. There is not a single soul in sight. Only remnants of tragedy echo through the corridors. She shuts her eyes, and can only see the harrowing figures of the men who cornered her as a child. She opens them again.

Who can she call? The Watchers? Luke? She is torn apart, not knowing whom she can truly trust. In deep isolation and torment, she longs for an answer.

“There’s only one place I can go to now,” she whispers to herself. The Resistance. She can’t stand the possibility of losing her only remaining family.

“Finn,” she speaks into her soul instrument, “Finn, I need to talk to you.”

But there is no response.

Chapter 31- The Red Pendant

The Resistance guards point a gun behind Finn’s back, forcing him to walk through the corridors in handcuffs. Just then, Finn senses an incoming message, as if someone is trying to contact him.

He thinks to himself: Rey? But something is blocking the message from coming through. And gradually, the signal begins to die down, fading faster until he can’t even sense the soul instrument to contact her anymore.

The guards all reach a central meeting spot, and Finn sees that someone else is there: Merilia, beaten and cuffed.

Gnovian and Citho approach the scene. Citho is furious. “I knew it. Traitors. They were working together!”

Gnovian sighs. “Finn. What were you trying to do?”

“I had a feeling that Citho was a traitor.”

Citho screams at him, “YOU THOUGHT WHAT? ON WHAT GROUNDS?”

“Well, you didn’t need any when you accused me,” Finn bites back. A guard punches Finn.

“Hey!” Gnovian commands. “Don’t hit them! Let us listen to what they have to say.”

Finn peers at Citho, and says, “I saw a Force vision. That you were on Fortuna, and speaking to someone about causing the Force disruptions. I figured you were going to use them against the Resistance.” Finn then tells them the date, time, and coordinates he saw him at.

“A Force vision? Ridiculous! This boy’s gone mad!” Citho exclaims.

Gnovian tells Finn, “I can assure you that General Citho was with me throughout that entire day.”

Merilia interrupts him “That was during the Axilim Skirmish.”

“Who said you could speak?” Citho says, glaring at her.

Merilia ignores him. “I remember. Gnovian, an elite Axilim assassin was tracking you, but its aircraft was never found.”

“Yes,” Gnovian replies, “We later discovered it had been intercepted by mercenaries who stole its equipment. Thank Fortune that occurred, as it would have been deadly had that assassin gotten to me.”

Gnovian and Citho take their leave. The guards throw them in transportable jail cells, and drag them along. Suddenly, Finn is struck by an idea. It’s all starting to come together.

Finn closes his eyes, and meditates. And he is transported back into the soul world, standing before all the bridges. In the distance, he sees it: the armored stalker.

“HEY!” Finn shouts at it, “I wanna ask you something!”

The armored stalker snaps its head towards Finn. With a menacing stride, it starts walking. And then, it runs.

Finn tries his hardest not to budge. Damn it, he thinks to himself. This is either the best or worst idea I've had this week.

Just as the stalker is about to come closer, Finn fumbles to think about what to say, and then he yells, "I'm not here on Resistance orders!"

The stalker stops. It is so close now that Finn can see its red pendant inscribed with three fangs. In a ghostly echo, he speaks. "Resistance clothes. Resistance insignia. If you aren't Resistance, what are you?"

"I'm trying to find the truth. This apparel, it's, uh," Finn thinks for a moment, "It's just a disguise. I think I know who you're looking for. I'm looking for him, too."

The stalker hisses. "Who?"

"Gnovian."

The stalker peers at Finn. In a low voice, it says, "He sent me here. Trapped in this enigmatic world. Never aging. Never dying. I was ordered by my King to kill him. But now, I have my own reasons to enact his death."

Finn awkwardly stares at the stalker. Oh man, he thinks to himself. This guy isn't messing around. Finn thinks: I don't wanna kill Gnovian, no matter how suspicious he is. I gotta think fast.

"I can help you find him." Damn it, he thinks. Shouldn't have said that.

"Where is he?" the armored stalker hisses.

"I- I think I can get to his soul world. Once you're there, I can find a way out for you," Finn lies.

The stalker backs off. "Show me."

FINN takes a deep breath, and feels something guiding him. He reaches a bridge, and is about to touch it, but then stops. A distorted voice, the same one he has been hearing many times, speaks to him: "This isn't the bridge you're looking for."

Finn senses it's not just a voice, but an apparition is there. He speaks back to it, "Who are you?" But it doesn't respond.

"What is it?" the stalker asks with a ghostly hiss, impatient.

"Nothing." Finn continues to walk along the path, and finds it. He enters the portal at the end, and the stalker follows.

When he arrives, he sees that he's in an orderly, grand colosseum. Statues stand tall throughout, and a fire burns in a goblet in the center. It's trying to burn something, to destroy it. But no matter how hot it blazes, the object remains intact. Finn walks closer to it. It's a spherical globe.

"A soul artifact," he whispers, "But who made it?" He hovers his hand over it. It's much more fortified than any he's ever felt before. Whoever made it must have kept something important inside, and someone else has been trying to break it apart, but with no success.

Finn reaches down further, but exclaims "Ow!" as he retracts his hand away from the flames.

"My patience is wearing thin," the stalker tells him, "This is the way out?"

"Yeah- uh, just give me a minute," Finn improvises. And then, he hears the voice: "When the fire strikes you, you shall become more powerful than you could possibly imagine." Finn shuts his eyes. The Resistance. He told that figure in Merilia's world that he wanted to give his life for it. And this time, he can't back down.

He gnaws his teeth, reaches his hand down towards the flame, and yells out in pain. But he pushes through, and touches the sphere.

Suddenly, he's transported into another world. A giant spherical hologram appears before him. He reaches into it, and something flows into him. Then he realizes what has happened: he sees it all. All the information stored in the hologram, he reads it. It's evidence. Evidence someone has collected about the true nature of this war.

He reaches out, and the world around him collapses. Now, he is in a dimly lit, royal room. There is a figure there. When Finn sees it, he seizes up. He doesn't know what to think. And then, he sees the entire event play out.

"HEY!" the armored stalker yells, and when Finn awakens, he's back in this colosseum, and the stalker has pointed a gun at him. Finn looks back to the flame, and the sphere is gone. But now, he feels it inside of him.

"You said we'd get out," it hisses.

Finn mutters, "Oh crap." The armored stalker catches on. "You liar..."

But before the stalker can pull the trigger, a gigantic, lion-like creature snatches the stalker away. Finn is aghast, but wastes no time. He shuts his eyes, concentrating hard to get out of the soul world. He snaps back into the physical world.

"Merilia," he whispers, "I found something important."

She looks towards Finn's prison cell. "Didn't you just screw us both over with this Citho thing?"

"I was wrong. But that's because I was doing it without any good evidence. But not this time. I got it."

Merilia raises her brow at him, and whispers, "You got evidence? About what?"

"The real traitors."

"How strong?"

“Very.”

Merilia pauses for a second. Then she says, “Well, I don’t have anything to lose now. Alright, then we gotta get that evidence somewhere safe. We’re getting out of here.”

“Er... how?”

Merilia grabs her arm, and out from her skin, a transmitter seethes out, as if it was emerging from the water. “My associate.” She hits a few buttons on the transmitter, and whispers, “Execute it.”

Suddenly, the alarms start blarring. Everything on the Resistance base is running haywire- screens are randomly flashing, equipment is flying loose, and droids are going crazy. Then, Merilia and Finn’s prison doors open, and they fall out. Merilia kicks at a guard, and hits another one, then grabs their blasters. She throws one to Finn.

“Head to the dome hangar bay!” she declares.

Elsewhere, Citho is raging again. Gnovian orders the base, “Two captives on the loose! Order them to be tracked down!”

Poe and Rose run in. “Sir!” Poe barks out, “Who?”

Gnovian replies, “Finn and Merilia.” Anguish falls upon Rose’s face. “What?” she whispers, “But he was trying to do his best to redeem himself.” Gnovian shakes his head in gloom. Rose whispers again, “No... that’s why he needed the master key...”

Poe walks out, his face stern and expressionless, but inside, he is cursing at himself. Damn it, he thinks. They got caught! However, to avoid suspicion, he now has no choice but to work with the Resistance to track them down.

Resistance soldiers head to their positions. Chewbacca is seen grabbing a bowcaster.

Finally, Finn and Merilia manage to get to the dome hangar bay. A wide, circular dome looms over them. They spot the ships and escape pods. However, once they get inside, Merilia realizes that it's not so easy. "They're locked!" she exclaims. "It's gonna take me a while to get them loose."

As Finn sits inside, wishing for Merilia to hurry up, he shuts his eyes. And then, he's suddenly plunged out of the physical world.

"What the- I know I didn't do this!" he shouts. Just then, a hooded figure grabs him from behind. Its grip is strong, reinforced by the Force. It's wearing the same robes as the being on Fortuna.

In a distorted voice, the hooded figure whispers, "You wonder why you can't contact her anymore? We picked up your transmissions. Though it was difficult, we succeeded in severing your connection."

Finn grunts and in a hushed tone, he bites back, "You can't hide the truth."

The hooded figure reaches into Finn's mind, and as Finn is screaming, it fumbles around, and finds something. The figure reaches its hand back out, and an instrument emerges with it. "Coordinates to contact Luke Skywalker?" With one swift motion, the figure crushes the instrument in its hand.

"Damn you!" Finn says. The hooded figure smiles, "Now, I will find that spherical artifact, and take back what's mine."

But just then, a blue lightsaber strikes at the hooded figure, who dodges it, and Finn manages to break loose of its grip. He can't see anyone, but the blue lightsaber is fading again. The hooded figure has disappeared. Finn now knows what it was: A Force Projection. One more sophisticated than any he had ever heard about.

The distorted voice he had heard many times before speaks to him again: "You must pass on the evidence to someone before it is stolen! Show them the truth!" And then, the darkness around Finn collapses, and he is back in the escape pod. Merilia still hasn't cracked them loose.

"Who can I pass it on to?" Finn says to himself. Then, he remembers. The last coordinates. The ones Rey told him to contact as a last resort.

“C’mon,” Finn says with a hustle, “Whoever this is, you gotta see this!” He shuts his eyes, and locks the coordinates in.

Chapter 32- The Climatic Truth

In the First Order base medical room, Kylo lies unconscious. But suddenly, the Force begins to stir inside him once again. He sees himself in the darkness again, but this time, he’s alone. Then a mysterious figure fades into his view. A cape droops down, but its entire body is masked by a haze. But though Kylo can’t see its face, he senses that it is staring straight into him. Does he want him to speak? Does he want him to kneel down before it?

“What do you want?” Kylo asks it, standing upright. The figure has a familiarity. But one that is still too foreign, too obscured, to become known.

It speaks with a deep, booming voice: “I sense a great disturbance within you. You must resolve it.”

“Disturbance?” Kylo looks within, and then, he remembers. “The crystal. I gave it to her.”

“And now you will face its consequences.”

The words send a tremor through him. “I am prepared. If the Resistance has captured me, then it is my fault alone. I should never have trusted her. I knew it from the start.”

“Do not make such hasty assumptions,” the figure speaks in a commanding tone, “You are being connected back to the Force. Awaken, and see.”

Suddenly, a jolting pang throbs in Kylo’s head. He feels himself pulled out of the darkness, falling. And then he opens his eyes. He’s not in the Resistance base, but in the First Order. How? He sees a medical officer, who says, “How are you feeling, Supreme Leader?”

“Where is she? That girl from the Resistance?”

“We don’t know. On Inimoni, we found your unconscious body, alone. We do not know what transpired in your battle, but we assumed she must have gotten away.”

Kylo thinks to himself: She saved him? He thinks back to Nissidha- when he gave the crystal to her. When he took her hands in the jade light, and the energy surged through them both. He remembers her warmth, as they held together, their bond being the only thing keeping them alive against the shadows stalking around them. He whispers, “I was wrong.” And then, upon their escape, she could’ve turned him over to the Resistance. But she didn’t.

The jolt. He had to find what it was, and where it came from. He stumbles out of the medical bed, and into the open armory outside. Serei and Hailden spot him.

“Hey,” Serei calls out, “Just woke up?”

Kylo groans. “I sensed an aching pain. Damn it, something’s not right. Keep an eye on me. Don’t let anyone else follow.” Serei looks at Hailden and shrugs. The two generals follow Kylo into an isolated room.

“Damn it... the Force... what’s happening?” Kylo mutters.

Then he hears a voice, “Hey, you there?”

Kylo shuts his eyes. And he senses it.

“Who is that... why... why are you here?” Then Kylo spots him. “The traitor!”

Finn turns around. “Kylo Ren? Rey gave me the coordinates to KYLO REN?!?”

“Rey. Rey gave you this?” Kylo seethes. He looks ready to kill his former soldier.

“Whoa, whoa, hold up!” Finn says, “I had no idea it was gonna be you.” But then he pauses. His face grows solemn. In a serious, grim voice, he tells Kylo, “You have to see this.”

“See what?” Kylo says, his voice growing more subdued. Finn apparates the spherical artifact, and says, “I’ll have to open up a bridge to you so I can show you this. It’s about Leia.”

“Leia?” Kylo says, his voice almost cracking.

“Just trust me.”

Kylo is thrust back into the physical world. Next to him, a dark rift in space is forming, and growing ever larger. A deep voice calls to him to touch it. There’s a message he needs to see. Kylo reaches his hand out. His eyes close as he reaches in, to protect against the torrential darkness blasting against his face.

“Kylo!” Serei shouts, “What the hell are you doing?”

Hailden says to her, “Something’s not right. We have to stop him!” The two generals rush towards Kylo, but are caught up in the dark rift.

The next moment, Kylo opens his eyes. He’s not in the isolated chamber anymore, but in pitch black darkness. Serei and Hailden are there, too. They look around, and see Finn and Kylo.

Hailden says to Finn, “Who are you?”

Just as Finn is about to answer, he’s pulled out of the world. Back in the physical world, several Resistance soldiers have opened up the escape pod, and are dragging him out. Finn looks over and sees Merilia being dragged from her escape pod too.

“You have to listen to me!” Finn shouts. He sees Poe and Chewbacca standing in the same room. There are around twenty five soldiers. Poe motions to the soldiers holding onto Finn, “Whoa, easy there!” Poe turns to Finn, and states, “I’m on orders.”

“Poe, I’ve gotta show everyone here what I found! It’s about Leia!”

Poe freezes, like a deer caught in headlights. “What? What did you find?”

Finn shuts his eyes again, and tries to make the artifact appear. Reach in, that distorted voice tells him. Reach in and trust me. Finn feels the apparition alongside him, and together, they gather enough strength to pull the message into the consciousness of everyone in the room.

A dark rift forms in the hangar, and now all the soldiers find themselves in the pitch black darkness, next to the three First Order generals.

“It’s you!” Poe fiercely shouts at Kylo.

Kylo glares at him. The two sides are ready to fight. But before they can, each of their consciousness is transported out of the darkness, and they are now in a white room.

A massive globe hologram appears in the center, teeming with information, big enough to separate everyone.

“What’s that?” Poe asks Finn.

“All the evidence Leia found. Enough to expose what’s really been going on.”

Everyone is eyeing the globe in awe, and Poe reaches out and touches it. The others follow suit. Suddenly, a flood of information is relayed into each of them. Evidence of what happened.

Then, each one reaches out of the globe.

Kylo yells out in pure rage. “IMPOSSIBLE!” Serei can’t believe what she saw, either. Hailden is astonished, not knowing what to say.

The Resistance soldiers start shouting and murmuring amongst themselves. Merilia has shut her eyes, deep in thought. Chewbacca roars.

Poe’s heart is pounding erratically, and he can hardly catch his breath. Exasperated, he asks Finn, “What am I even reading? This- this is what she knew?”

“And that’s not all,” Finn replies. He shuts his eyes again, and works with the voice inside to change the scenery. Now each of them finds themselves in this individual projection, each one being a lone audience member watching this past event unfold.

A figure is in a dimly lit, royal room. The shadows obfuscate her face. Another man walks in through an entrance, standing above a higher platform with stairs that lead down. Gnovian. He says to her, “General Leia Organa.”

In a distorted voice, as if speaking through a hologram, Leia responds, “I know what all of you have done. Now the galaxy will know, too.”

Leia raises her hand to grab a faraway sphere, and it is pulled towards her. But suddenly, Gnovian raises his hand, too. And the sphere is tugged towards him. Leia notices and pulls with even greater might, so that the sphere is suspended in between her and Gnovian. But then, another figure walks in next to Gnovian. It’s Citho, and he also grabs hold of the device with the Force. And then another figure. And another. Soon, six figures have appeared to join Gnovian, and snatch the sphere away.

Citho raises his hand. Out of thin air, a plasma dagger materializes, levitating above. He strikes his hand down towards Leia, and the dagger is thrown. But she stops it in the air.

One by one, five other figures materialize daggers, and hurl them towards Leia. She stops each one, suspending them in the air. Gnovian stands by, not moving, only watching. But soon more daggers materialize, and she becomes overwhelmed. She grows weary, tired. And finally, she loses her grip, and accepts her fate. The first dagger flies into her. She clenches her teeth, not wanting to scream. A second one. A third. And one after the other, they all find their way in her. She gasps, and can hardly say a word.

Finally, at long last, Gnovian raises his hand. A dagger apparates above, but then, he pauses. “For the Resistance,” he says with pride. And then, he strikes his hand down.

Everyone is thrust back into the pitch black darkness again.

“No!” Poe screams, “Why... JUST WHY?!” All the other soldiers have lost their minds, too. Some can’t contain their anger, others have been drained of all hope.

Kylo is kneeling on the floor, his palms holding himself up with intensity. A pale terror reigns upon his face. He can hardly speak, he can hardly whisper. Serei and Hailden see him. Serei kneels down next to him, while Hailden puts his hand on Kylo's shoulder.

The darkness is dissipating. In the next moment, everyone has found themselves transported into a mental projection of the dimly lit, royal room they just saw. Finn looks towards the entrance. And standing before them all is Gnovian, Citho, and the other five figures.

"YOU BASTARDS!" Poe shouts. He fires his blaster at them, but it goes through, hitting the walls behind them.

Kylo yells out with fury, and thrusts his hand out towards them, shaking. But nothing moves. The Force does nothing.

Merilia shouts at them, "You said she died from an illness. But you killed her!"

Citho chuckles. "It was an illness. We were slowly poisoning her. But it took far too long, so there was a change in plans."

Gnovian curtly follows through on Citho's words. "We could not let her expose us. All that we had ever worked for, all that was needed to achieve our new world- she wanted to take it away."

"New world?" Finn yells at them, "When everything was crashing down around us, the Resistance gave us hope- but this whole time, it was just a lie!"

"The First Order," Hailden coldly says to the seven figures, "It was never real."

Citho smirks, and boasts, "A perfect plan."

Merilia scoffs. "Perfect? Leia was going to out you all."

Gnovian replies, "We thought we could trick her, but instead, she caught on. In secret, she had gathered nearly all the evidence needed to expose us. And then, we discovered that she had found the smoking gun. We didn't think anyone could do it."

Kylo glares at the seven. In a low voice, he mutters, "But that doesn't explain it all. Unless..." His eyes widen. Inside, the pain boils so intensely. He's unable to control himself anymore, and yells out, "THIS WHOLE TIME!" He runs towards the seven, igniting his lightsaber, prepared to slash at all of them with every inch of his soul. But just as he is about to get to them, the entire scene becomes distorted, and everyone is thrown back into the pitch black darkness. Kylo is knocked down to the ground, rendered unconscious. The seven figures still stand before them, joining them in this non-physical realm.

And then, there is a sudden emergence. It wakes Kylo up, and still on the ground, he opens his eyes. Sandals. A robe. He looks above, and towering above all that stand in the darkness, he sees that ghastly man.

Snoke.

"You faked your own death!" Kylo seethes at him.

The deformed tyrant chuckles, "So now you know the truth, Skywalker. I will tell you all the rest. Some of you may understand. Some of you will realize I have been in the right the whole time."

He continues, his voice booming now: "I orchestrated the events that would lead to the rise of the First Order! I foresaw that a Resistance would rise in response. Those who were devoted to our cause infiltrated these movements from within, ascertained everything went as I had wanted, and waited to take over when the time was right. Unfortunately, I could not stop Leia from joining as one of its main founders."

Finn yells at him, "Why did you do it? For power? Greed?"

Snoke laughs. "No. To unite the galaxy. The New Republic was a failed system. It had allowed infighting to plague the galaxy, it had dissolved trust and camaraderie with the societies it had vowed to keep safe."

"You underestimate the people," Poe tells Snoke in defiance, "You can't unite everyone. There will always be a rebel!"

"You are the ones who underestimate my power! You cannot fathom the strength that is growing in me. Rituals to drain wills- they are nearly within my grasp. To make those who wish to rebel see the error of

their ways. To outcast them, to let them join society only if they comply. For it is far better to be at peace than to fight.”

“I don’t get it,” Finn mutters, “If you have such a power, why did you have to get everyone to trust in the Resistance? In the Neo Republic?”

“Because the rituals will only work when the Force is broken down. The Force wills itself into cyclical patterns. It carries them out by puppeteering all things- even the trees and the rocks. To usher in a new era of patterns, the old must be destroyed. Trick it into its old routine, but let it flow into the wrong bodies. Confuse it into creating wars it was never supposed to create. Eventually, it lose its sense of control. Like domesticating a wild animal!”

Merilia thinks for a moment, and then says, “It’s driven by belief. You disguised yourself as the Force. As the dark, and the light. So that whenever others look for the light and see the Neo Republic, it wouldn’t be the real Force- it would be you, instead.”

“Yes, YES! I am the galaxy’s new savior! The new will of the Force! The old Force was flawed; it empowered the misguided, the cruel. Because of it, all hope had nearly been lost forever.”

Hailden realizes what he means. “Luke Skywalker had failed.”

Snoke grins. “I had to destroy the Skywalker name to get the people to turn towards ME. Well, it wasn’t hard; the Skywalkers had already done most of the work themselves. But I found the perfect, finishing blow. One who was already torn by the darkness within. You, my ‘young apprentice.’ You would be the one to prove that the Skywalkers could not be trusted with their power.”

“You used me,” Kylo hushes in a low voice.

“The First Order was always meant to lose,” Hailden remarks.

Snoke, filled with pride, answers, “Yes. I could not micromanage every aspect of this massive organization. But its fate is well under my control. And I have planned it so that the entire galaxy will eventually turn against it and its unforgivable crimes, and support the Neo Republic.”

And then, Kylo realizes there is something amiss. An even greater secret was being kept hidden. His face grows blank, and he looks straight at Snoke. “You used us.”

Snoke raises his brow at Kylo. “So. You know.”

Finn senses something is wrong, too “Us?” he shouts at Kylo, “Who?”

Kylo whispers, “Rey.”

Snoke glares at him. “I did no such thing.”

“She believed in you!” Kylo yells back.

“And so I protected her!”

With his suspicions now confirmed, the truth dawns on Kylo. “The Force. It was never the one that came to us in our time of need. It was you.”

Finn’s eyes widen. He remembers what Rey had told him about Jakku.

Snoke snarls at everyone standing before him. Kylo continues, “Snoke was never real. Who are you, really? Show yourself!”

Snoke begins to sink down, his head falling, his arms dropping. The soldiers clamor and gasp, but Gnovian, Citho and the five figures stand steadfast and motionless. And then, there is a sudden shatter. Snoke’s chest is broken open, but nothing can be seen inside. His neck and skull crack apart, and the pieces begin to tumble down. Finn can only stare in awe and fear at this shattering doll. And finally, every piece has fallen to the ground. Standing before them all is a tall, middle aged human male, royally dressed, with a sharp, pointed face and a rugged beard. “My name is Alstaire,” he proclaims. “Alstaire Obsidian.”

From the shadows, out steps a tall, middle aged human female with kind, caring eyes. “And I am Kiyla.” Two other figures appear but wait in the shadows.

Kylo shouts at them, “Every time I was alone. Every time I wished for someone to be there. I thought it had its own soul. But it wasn’t the Force I saw. You were the ones who came to me.”

Kiyla gently replies, “We needed to get you to believe. So you could trust us.”

“So you could manipulate me! Why us?” Kylo growls.

Alstaire booms, “It was an unforeseen consequence of the rituals we used to imbue our Chosen ones with the Force. The Chosen would lead our new world, and be the saviors that people pray to. But our Chosen did not receive it. The Force had tried to escape, running towards whomever it could find, with no reason in particular. It found her, and the other children. But it was too much for your young minds to handle. Children need hope, they need protection! We gave that to you!”

Kylo steps back, “I knew it. It wasn’t just me and Rey. But the others, too.”

Alstaire says, “You met them on the bridges we had summoned, that we used to interact with each being’s connection to the Force. We did not know you children found a way to sneak into them. It is hard to restrict access to bridges, but we are getting stronger at doing so at every passing moment.”

Kiyla looks at Kylo with sincere sorrow, and says, “We wanted to help you all. We saw there was great potential in all of you, and we wanted to nurture it. But the others were too afraid, too doubtful. They could not handle the power gifted to them.”

“What did you do?” Kylo whispers, and his voice grows louder, angrier, “What did you do to them?”

Kiyla softly tells him, “Now they smile all day, and are at peace.”

“Smile all day? It can’t be...” Kylo, reaching deep into his connection to the Force, realizes the truth. “I know what happened. They couldn’t handle the Force, so the only way to save them was by severing their connection to it. But you cut in too deep. You erased their minds. They don’t even think anymore!”

Alstaire steps in, and says, “We deeply regret it. But... there was one girl who could handle it. From the moment we met her, we believed she could. Out of all the children, she believed in us the strongest, never wavering.”

“You used her. She’s nothing more than your pawn, your figurehead!” Kylo shouts.

“We gave everything for her! She was a nobody, abandoned by her junk trader parents. And now she has hope. She has meaning. She has guidance!”

“Guidance?” Kylo shouts. And then, he whispers, “Guidance.” He tells Alstaire, “You couldn’t control the rituals. You don’t know how to manipulate everything the way you want. You’re all in over your heads. The Force has spiraled out of your reach and that’s what’s causing all the disruptions.”

“Yes,” Alstaire admits, and then asserts, “But with every passing moment, we are improving.”

Kylo scoffs. “By the time you realize it, the universe will have torn itself apart.”

Alstaire booms at him in anger, “Luke had already done that himself! He came back to his home, promising that he would save its children from those native scoundrels. When nearly all of our people rejected his message, we were the only ones who stood up for him. But that whole time, we had been lied to. He was a madman, blindly devoted to that hopeless ideal. Do you know what it’s like to lose your future? To hear the younglings’ screams, begging for mercy?”

Hailden shuts his eyes. In a austere tone, he says, “You lost someone.”

Kiyla quickly whispers, in despair, “He couldn’t save her.”

“That’s why we had to get him to realize what he had done,” Alstaire coldly says, “To punish him for his mistakes.”

Finn, puzzled, asks, “What did you do?”

Alstaire replies, “To enact the rituals, we needed to tear the Skywalkers from the Force. We went to him, asking him why he couldn’t save her. Ashamed and guilty, he let us into his world. And slowly, we were able to bring him down. Just as he had done to us.”

“He trusted you,” Merilia whispers, “You took advantage of that trust.”

“That blind trust is what had hurt us. He needed to feel just how torturous its consequences can be. But in our new world, we will not make the same mistakes.”

Poe steps in. “People like me will never agree with your new world.”

“That’s why we needed the war,” Alstaire counters.

“A fake one,” Serei scoffs, “The only way you can get people on your side is by tricking them.”

“People are too short sighted to see the big picture. They don’t know what’s good for them. Sometimes, the only way to get a child to take their medicine is by hiding it in their food.”

Serei raises a brow at him. “So you think of us as children? Man, you guys got some issues.”

The former Resistance fighters poise themselves up against the Watchers. Without a single shred of doubt, they are prepared to fight against their new enemy. Nothing that Alstaire says can sway them. He sighs. He looks towards Kiyla, who nods. Alstaire then looks at Kylo, “I was there for you when no one else was. I felt how much you hated Luke. We will be able to bring him down.”

Kylo refutes them. “You’re right, I do hate him. But I hate you all even more.”

“We had hoped one of you would understand. But now, you leave us with no choice.” Alstaire’s voice reverberates outwards. “You will become enemies of the entire galaxy.”

Finn counters him. “Once they see what Leia had found, they’ll join us against you. We’ll expose the truth!”

Alstaire roars a mighty laugh. “You still underestimate our powers!” Kiyla reaches out towards Finn, and Finn chokes. Above his chest, the spherical artifact apparates. The others rush to stop her, but she pushes them out of the way. However, Kylo is able to hold on, as he is slowly being dragged towards the spherical artifact, as if it had its own gravitational pull.

“What?” Alstaire snarls, “How are you doing this?”

“I feel the resonance of it,” Kylo says, his mouth agape in amazement, “I know it. My mother.”

Kiyla turns to Alstaire and says, “That artifact’s protection spell must be have a special connection to the Skywalker blood!”

Kylo is snapped into the artifact, and he gasps. Finn is released and he catches his breath. Kylo looks towards his chest and places his hands all around, confused as to what just happened. And then, it dawns on him.

“I feel it inside me.”

“Then get it out!” Finn yells at him.

Kiyla speaks, “The artifact is now sealed within him. He has the power to show it to others, but now there are only two ways to take it from him. If he willingly sacrifices his own life, or if he is killed by one whom he loves. His murderer will decide the fate of the artifact.”

Kylo stares at her, dread descending upon him. Kiyla continues, “If he is killed any other way, no one can predict where the artifact will apparte in the galaxy.”

Finn looks at Kylo, and says, “Hey. We can’t let them win. You have to come with us.”

Kylo looks around him. At Finn. At Poe. At the entire Resistance. There is not a single drop within him that cares for them. To him, they are nothing.

Alstaire laughs. “Ah, killed by a loved one. Yes, I sense it. I know. She is the one.”

Kylo growls at him, “She will never join you!”

Alstaire laughs even harder. “You cannot escape the Resistance. We will get the entire galaxy to hunt you down. Unless you want them to kill you, you will be forced to fight back. And she will see that you have chosen yourself over innocents. She will turn on you!”

Kylo yells back, "You're wrong. You know nothing of Rey!"

Finn is surprised. He looks at Poe, who is also in shock. He thinks to himself: Rey, and Kylo?

Kiyla shakes her head. "No, you are the one who doesn't know how much all this means to her. The hope that we have given her is the only thing keeping her happy. You can't ever tell her the truth. If she finds out, she'd be devastated."

Kylo wants to refute her, but he can't speak. He tries to deny it. But deep down, her words pierce at him. Could Kiyla be right?

Finn shouts back, "I don't know what any of you want with Rey, but she doesn't deserve to be caught up in any of this!"

"Rey knows we care for her," Alstaire says coolly. "She gave us this gift by her own free will." Before him apparates a ruby cube.

"A soul artifact!" Finn exclaims. "She couldn't have..."

Alstaire smiles. "Its power... you cannot even comprehend it." He clenches his fist and shatters the ruby cube. A red mist seeps out, and disappears.

"What did you just do?" Finn yells.

"Now, no matter what you say, no matter what evidence you present, no matter how much you plead to anyone, even the ones who love you, if they have even a hint of doubt, they will never believe you!"

Kiyla continues speaking for Alstaire, "Anyone who has not yet seen what is inside the spherical artifact will now doubt it. And over time, paranoia and distrust will be inflicted upon the galaxy. There will be only one that they will never doubt: the Neo Republic."

The Watchers begin to fade away. "Hey!" Finn runs after them and yells, "I'm not done talking to you!"

He looks towards Kylo, who is fading away too. "Poe! We can't let them get to Kylo! We gotta protect him." Kylo glares at him, looking down on someone he sees as inferior. But he knows there is no other choice.

Poe, with great reluctance, nods. "We won't let them win."

The former Resistance fighters fade from the pitch black darkness. They find themselves back in the physical world, in the looming dome of the hangar bay. The seven figures are gone, and so are the First Order generals and the Watchers. But suddenly, an alarm blares out.

"ALL UNITS, THERE ARE TRAITORS IN THE BASE. GET TO YOUR POSITIONS AND CAPTURE THEM."

Chapter 33- Escape

The Resistance fighters run towards the ships in the hangar, but their former allies step in front of them. One soldier says, "Don't resist. We don't want to hurt you."

Finn replies, "Hey, let's talk this through. I can prove that--"

"But you're an exception!" The soldier points his gun at Finn, but Merilia fires first and shoots his hand. The soldiers make their way through the hangar, and several jump in starfighters, and take off. Everyone becomes separated.

"AFTER THEM!" Citho yells into the microphone. Resistance fighters head into their starfighters, and chase after their former allies. Inside, the starfighters fire at one another, destroying the infrastructure around them.

Finn runs towards a ship, but before he can get near, someone steps in between. Rose is pointing a blaster at him.

"Rose," Finn softly says. "Rose, I'm sorry."

“Why, Finn, why? I thought I could trust you. How could you use me like that?”

“Rose, the Resistance and the First Order are fighting a fake war! The real enemy is whoever is pulling the strings! Come with me and I’ll have time explain!”

Rose shakes her head, “I don’t believe you. You lied to me once. Why would I ever trust you again?” She hits a trigger on her blaster, and it whirls, preparing to fire. Finn shuts his eyes.

Suddenly, there is a rumbling. The roofing of the dome begins to fall, making Rose lose her balance and aim; the blaster fires onto a wall behind Finn. Rose and Finn run out of the way. Finn looks back, and sees that his path to the ships is blocked. He has to find an alternate route.

Finn crawls into an escape duct, and tries to find his way through the maze. Just then, he bumps into someone. It’s Poe. They crawl and talk together.

“Poe, I thought you got to a starfighter!”

“I wish! If I did we’d be outta here already!”

“Okay, so what’s the plan now?”

“One word: HQ-7.”

“Again? AGAIN? Poe, I think it’s time for you to come clean.”

“What?”

“You just miss BB-8 and are just using HQ-7 to fill whatever hole he left behind!”

Poe pauses for a moment. “Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

They emerge on the other side, but just then, guns point at them. They look up, and see Riff and Jim.

“So it was you who impersonated me!” Riff yells at Finn angrily.

“Look, it was just a one time thing.”

But then, other Resistance fighters run into the picture, and see the two and their doppelgangers.

“Hey!” Poe yells at them, “Little bit of help, guys? This Poe guy is getting on my nerves!”

“Y-yeah! Finn too!” Finn follows through.

Jim rolls his eyes. “Seriously, guys? I’m Jim. How the hell does anyone even think we look alike?” There is silence, as everyone, even Riff, agrees that it’s hard to tell.

“Damn it,” a Resistance soldier exclaims. “This is why I asked them to give us name tags.”

They go back and forth, asking each one different questions, but still can’t make up their mind. Finally, one Resistance soldier yells, “I CAN’T TAKE IT ANYMORE!” and Finn shuts his eyes. He hears blasters go off, and when he opens his eyes again, Jim and Riff are lying on the ground. Finn and Poe quickly shoot at the Resistance fighters and knock them out.

Poe kneels down on the ground, trying to wake Jim and Riff up. He rocks Jim back and forth. “Fake Poe! Fake Finn! Noooooooo!”

Finn shakes his head and remarks, “They gave their lives for the cause...”

Just then, they hear footsteps, and take off again. Poe manages to find HQ-7. Other former Resistance fighters join them, too.

“HQ-7! You came!” Poe exclaims.

“What? I thought you admitted he was just sitting in for BB-8!”

“Well, he is kinda useful in his own way.”

Finn sighs. HQ-7 opens a door to a secret room, and a long escape ship is there. It is like a long raft boat, with a windowed covering on top. They all get in with HQ-7. But there’s no steering stick or pilot controls.

“How do we pilot this thing?” Finn asks.

“We don’t. Only a droid can.”

Suddenly, the room is rocked. The escape pod is thrust out into space, and then, it slows down to nearly a halt. The former Resistance fighters gaze in awe as they see starfighters tussling with their former allies. The Resistance starfighters spot the accused traitors, and descend upon them.

“HQ-7, punch it!” Poe shouts.

HQ-7 beeps and punches it, and the ship booms with a dramatic flare. But the scene pans out to show a wider view of the space battle. The escape ship is now only moving slightly faster.

“WE’RE ALL GONNA DIE!” Finn shouts.

In the nick of time, something else shoots at the Resistance starfighters, and they spin out in space. The Millennium Falcon swoops downwards, and Chewbacca roars.

“YEAH!” Finn yells out. But before he can say anything else, there’s a sudden explosion, and the escape pod is pushed back into the Resistance base, crashing into one of the rooms.

KYLO finds himself back in the First Order base. He is paralyzed and in pain. Hailden stands still, deep in thought. Serei immediately says, “We were gonna lose this whole time? If I’m not getting my own castle, I’m outta here!”

Kylo mutters, “At any moment, their spies will find a way to turn the First Order on us. We have to move fast.”

Kylo and Serei walk to the exit of the room, but Hailden doesn't budge. Serei raises her brow and asks him, "Hey, are you coming or not?"

Hailden, now broken out of his thoughts, replies, "Yes. I now know what I must do."

FINN wakes up, coughing. The escape ship has crashed into the base, and is in a dangerous inferno. As he regains his vision, he sees people putting on emergency spacesuits and jumping out of the ship, back towards the Resistance base. He does the same.

When he gets back on, he meets up with Poe and HQ-7, and they start running again.

"What now? Still HQ-7?" Finn asks.

"Merilia's got a different plan."

"Oh thank the Whills."

"Poe!," Merilia shouts through Poe's transmitter, "Gather everyone still on the base and head towards 2347-c!"

They run into another corridor, but it is far more heavily guarded than before. Resistance fighters start firing, and they shoot back. But they're outnumbered.

"We gotta go the other way!"

They head towards a different direction, chased by a ton of Resistance fighters, and are nearly approaching the hangar door.

"They're onto us, we can't make it!"

But as they approach the hangar entrance, the doors begin to open. And when Finn sees who emerges, he is stunned.

“FN-2187,” the emerging, armored soldier says chillingly.

“Phasma,” Finn says, glaring.

Phasma is carrying an astronomically large gun, and aims it forwards. This is it, Finn thinks. All this, just to be killed by my dead former boss.

She fires, and when Finn looks around, the former Resistance fighters are unscathed. But the ones who were chasing them are not.

Finn looks at her with bewilderment. But just then, Merilia runs past him, and sees Phasma. She nods at her, and Phasma nods back. Merilia looks at Finn, who is frozen in place, and gestures at him to move. “Come on!”

As Finn is running, he shouts to Merilia, “You two know each other?”

“That’s my associate. Like I said, she owes me one.”

“Man, if Phasma owes you something, I don’t wanna ask any more questions.” He thinks to himself: Merilia must got some dirt or blackmail on her.

Phasma starts firing behind them, keeping the rear of the pack secure, and the former Resistance fighters run onto the ships to board them. After they get on, Phasma says to Merilia, “I found a technical defect on sector G during recon. Their firepower is much weaker if we fly by it.”

Merilia declares, “Great, then let’s blow past it and get outta here!”

Chapter 34- Exile and Defeat

As the trio of First Order generals run through a corridor, sneaking past their former soldiers, Serei whispers to Kylo, “Where are you thinking about going now?”

“I have to find her,” Kylo says, “She has to know.”

Serei sighs. “You know, you can always just come with me and Hailden. I mean, I don’t think we can go to Inimoni anymore, but there’s always more sacred expanses. Hide out, live free.”

“I can’t leave her.”

“Well,” Serei tries to find something to say, but gives up. “I guess you’re pretty set on this, huh? What if she kills you?”

Kylo ponders. But he doesn’t answer. He can’t find anything to say.

Serei lets out a long exhale. “Just let me and Hailden know if she starts acting weird. I got your back.”

After turning into another hallway, Kylo stops. He murmurs, “I sense it. The spies are nearby. They’ve got control of the weapons and the ships.” They turn to head another way. Kylo continues, “There’s only one escape that hasn’t been blocked.”

The trio head into a large room, and find themselves standing on a high tower, where many more obsidian black towers are in view. There is a low hum amidst the total silence. There are no electronic panels, and the only visible lights are dimly lit and placed alongside the edges of the towers. Below, far away, lie escape ships.

Serei turns to Kylo. “You go first. We’ll keep watch on top.”

Kylo nods. He jumps down from the high tower, the falling wind gusting through his First Order uniform, and he Force lands. He looks above, and waits for Serei to jump down. But something is wrong.

There is a force that he has never felt before. Yet, he feels as if it has been near him the entire time. Where there was a concealed darkness, now the darkness is being commanded. It is walking, its footsteps growing heavier and heavier. Marching.

And, for a brief moment, it disappears.

Serei notices Kylo is not feeling well. “Hey,” she asks. “You okay?”

Suddenly, a red light pierces through her chest; she gasps, and is kicked off the high tower.

“NO!” Kylo yells out in desperation. Serei’s body is falling, faster and faster, and Kylo catches her with the Force, gently bringing her towards him, and down into his arms.

Blood leaks from the corner of her lips. Her eyes are getting weaker, and she glances at Kylo. With a frail voice, one still in denial, she whispers to him, “He... he couldn’t have...”

When Kylo gazes into her eyes, he senses it. The familiarity. They were more alike than he had ever realized. It is only in her last moments does he see.

Kylo shoots his head up and stares at the high tower. There, wielding a dark red lightsaber with intense ferocity, stands Hailden, his face expressionless, but infused with more determination than Kylo had ever felt in his life. His stance is tall, and hauntingly familiar. He had seen it before- he had seen it in Rey. And now, fear begins to crawl down Kylo’s spine.

Hailden jumps down, falling faster than a powerful cannon blast, and lands softly in front of Kylo and his dying friend. He speaks, “I knew I couldn’t change her stubborn mind. I could only change my own.”

Serei tries to hold on, but is finding it harder to do so. She finally succumbs to her wounds, dying in Kylo’s arms. Kylo trembles, but there is nothing else he can do. He lets her down.

“Did she mean nothing to you?” Kylo yells at Hailden.

“Does the galaxy mean nothing to you?” Hailden booms back. “All my life, I have searched for it. Luke didn’t have the answer. Neither did the First Order. But now, I have finally found it. And you are so selfish that you cannot see just how grand and breathtaking it all is.”

“You want them to oppress you? To tell you what to do?”

“It is the only way to achieve peace in the galaxy! And if I need to sacrifice my very soul, then let it be!”

Kylo ignites his lightsaber, and Luke’s two former students clash their blades.

POE has taken control of a Resistance starfighter, and is single-handedly distracting an incoming fleet. Finn sits in a gunner seat of Merilia’s ship, while HQ-7 works on repairs. Phasma joins them, ruthlessly taking down Resistance fighters like they were nothing. The Millennium Falcon charges through the cannons, taking them out. The former Resistance fighters struggle to fight on.

IN the ensuing duel, Kylo and Hailden are closely matched. Kylo slashes upwards at Hailden, but he easily dodges it. He continues to dodge, letting Kylo use his own rage against himself, and finally, he senses an opening, and strikes down on Kylo. Kylo manages to catch it, and the Oxblood red, sparking fires crepitate onto one another. However, Hailden soon finds his weakness, and exploits it. He cuts on Kylo’s arm, leaving a trailing scar, and Kylo seethes. Kylo escapes by falling down a shaft. Hailden uses the opportunity to speak into his transmitter.

“Hux,” Hailden orders.

“Yes, general.”

“The Supreme Leader is a traitor. I want every available unit to search the base and capture him. Take him alive.”

“You- you- you...” Hux stammers, trying to comprehend what the hell is going on, “Do you have the authority to do this?” Just then, Hux receives reports from First Order intel that Kylo is a traitor. As he reads it over, he exclaims, “I see. Then let us proceed.”

ALSTAIR and Kiyla convene with the other Watchers.

“What shall we do?” one of the hidden Watchers asks.

Alstaire replies, “Kylo and the others will be facing off against the First Order and the Resistance. We cannot let that happen. The galaxy must unite against one enemy. That is the only way to tame the patterns and bend them to our will.”

“We must do it,” Kiyla curtly says, “Its time is over. Kill it. Then, turn every soul in the galaxy against the last obstacle in our way. We shall herald in the Neo Republic as a savior that all will lay down their lives for.”

THE Falcon swoops down and rescues Poe from an incoming attack.

“Nice one!” Poe shouts. Chewbacca roars back. The former Resistance fighters have almost pushed through, and are in a position to escape.

However, a starfighter starts shooting at Poe. He dodges it, maneuvers behind it, and is just about to shoot at it. But then he hears the incoming transmission. It sounds like a young boy: “You traitor!”

Poe is speechless. He recognizes it. The one on the starfighter he is about to shoot is Yatu.

Yatu knows Poe is behind him. Poe’s in a clear position to shoot, and all the kid can do is wait for his death. The young boy, his voice gruff and hiding a behind a mask of fear and pain, says, “What are you waiting for? You already let everyone down by being a traitor! Are you gonna let them think you’re a coward, too?”

In a moment Poe could never imagine before, his hands shake as he grips the controls. He hesitates. And then he makes his decision; he lets Yatu go. Poe manages to escape Yatu, and the boy can’t find his hero anymore.

“This is what a traitor does?” Yatu yells, holding back his pain, “Then I’ll never be like you!”

Finn and Merilia, in one of the last former fighters left, continue to try to find an opening. But just then, they see some starfighters departing the fight. They are starting up their hyperdrive and jumping someplace else.

“Merilia, did you see that?” Finn says, “Some of them are leaving!”

“They’re being called somewhere else. But what could be so urgent? Unless...”

Kylo sneaks through his former base. He knows each and every one of its secrets, and stealthily travels down its inner workings. But just then, he hears a blast. It is getting nearby. And then, an enormous explosion hits above him, and blows him out. Kylo coughs as he gets up. When he does, he realizes where he is. The main weapons and ship room. Standing before him are nearly every conceivable type of First Order ship, and they descend upon him.

He runs off, into the corridors and hallways of the First Order base, and stormtroopers fire upon him. He reflects the shot and slashes through his former soldiers, leaving a massacre in his wake. But then, the ships and large weaponry continue to trail him. They fire upon him, and he uses the Force to stop them in place. But he's overwhelmed. They get in a few shots, and Kylo seethes. He runs into another room, but is ambushed by even more gigantic, terrorizing machines.

He fights through them, but doesn't stand a chance. He's forced to retreat, and find another escape. But one by one, he is barricaded from them. There is only one left.

An entire army of stormtroopers swarm him. Kylo cuts through them, but is reckless and messy. He's hit several times. He manages to sprint past, and seal them off with a massive metal door. He runs into another large weapon room. It is as vast a battlefield, and the ships and machines lie in wait for him.

He has no choice now. Using every last bit of strength he has, he fights against the colossal army, stopping blasts in the air, redirecting them, pushing everything out of his way. But he cannot withstand its ultimate might. They fire chaotically, hitting everything, as capturing Kylo is all that matters. Fires spread and blaze all around them. The blasts pound all over his body, and he screams. Blood drips down from his skull, and down his chin. When he can see again, he looks at his left hand. But it is gone; it is nothing more than a bloody stump. He stumbles into the shadows, trying to hide, and collapses. They cannot see him for now. But they are coming.

As Kylo feels himself slipping away, he hears a voice. It is one he has never heard before. But it is profoundly connected to his soul. Loud and booming, the deep voice tells him, "Get up."

Kylo's eyes fly open. "Grandfather?" he whispers.

Just then, he hears all the machines moving towards him. Using his last remaining strength, he pushes himself up. Energy surges through him once more, and he tells himself: no matter what happens, I will fight until my dying breath.

Kylo sprints through the shadows, and the machines can't find him anymore. There is silence. But just then, there is a roar. Kylo jumps out from the ledges near the ceiling, landing on top of a starfighter.

Using all the Force he can gather, he howls out and rips open the hatch, throwing the pilot out of the cockpit, and stealing it for himself. He flies the ship out of the base and into space. The ships follow, firing everything they have upon him, but he dodges them all. And then, in one final move, he punches the starfighter forward. It escapes into lightspeed using its hyperdrive.

The starfighters descend back into the base. Hux walks over. “Damn it,” he says to himself. “The one chance I had to get that runt.” But suddenly, the alarms blare again. “What’s that?” he asks one of his subordinates.

From one of the main ship hangars, there is a gigantic explosion, and Resistance starfighters emerge, blasting everything on the base in sight.

A subordinate responds, “Sir, the Resistance is attacking us!”

“What?” Hux shouts, in a panic, “How could they possibly find us?”

Standing above all else, Hailden watches. The darkness descends upon his face. “It’s time.”

ON the escaped starfighter, Kylo tries to catch his breath, but his wounds gnaw at him. He tries to stop the pain of the bleeding, using the Force to hold himself together as hard as he can. In the cold, metallic cockpit, he is alone. He shuts his eyes. But then, he remembers.

“Rey,” he whispers.

FARAWAY, on the desert planet of Tatooine, Rey is walking through the sands with only her staff and lightsaber handle in her grasp. There is no one else there; not even BB-8. The unary sunset is fading away. It will soon be night again.

But she hears it. She stops, and whispers, “Kylo?”

Chapter 35- Revival of the Force

A Resistance ship lands on a dusty planet. There is almost no one there; it is shrouded in secrecy. Merilia and Finn exit. They march through the dust clouds and enter a hidden, underground metallic complex. Inside, the walls are stone, and the floor is full of light brown dirt. There, they see the former Resistance fighters who have escaped: Poe, HQ-7, Chewbacca, and a few others. Their spirits are withered; they are torn at having to fight their former allies. In a faraway corner, Phasma sits by herself, staring into a drink that she's stirring.

When they see Merilia and Finn, Poe walks over, and welcomes them, thankful that they are safe. But despair does not leave his face. All the other former Resistance fighters have their attention focused elsewhere, on a hologram they're all circled around. As Finn walks towards it, he hears what is being broadcasted. In a low tone, he says, "It's... over already?"

The hologram announces: "The Resistance has defeated the First Order! It is an wondrous time. The entire galaxy is in celebration as the Neo Republic prepares to clean up the aftermath. Resistance Leaders Gnovian and Citho have vowed to carry on the duties needed to transition the galaxy out of this long standing conflict."

Holograms of Gnovian and Citho are seen, parading around a ceremonial palace. Poe smashes his fist onto a table. He grits his teeth. "Those bastards!"

Through the hologram, Gnovian starts speaking: "My fellow rebels, we have fought long and hard. And now, the First Order has been defeated. Though I wish to rejoice, our troubles are not over yet. We have received reports that the First Order Supreme Leader, Kylo Ren, has escaped. And we have information that he was aided by our very own- traitors who are sympathetic to the First Order. These villainous dissidents have pledged to protect the former Supreme Leader, and they have rallied under a new banner name: The Second Order."

Finn scoffs. "Well, that's original."

Merilia coldly remarks, "They're still using the same old story."

Finn can't stand seeing Gnovian weave lies anymore. He turns away from the hologram, and sits down elsewhere, throwing his head into his hands, devoid of hope.

THE single sun of the desert planet lingers in the sky. Though it has nearly set, it seems to stay still for the longest time. Luke sits on a rock near a village. He is poignantly deep in thought, and stares straight out ahead. That voice he had heard back in the cave. That nostalgically, familiar voice. As he ponders on it, a young girl with short, ashy brown hair walks by.

“You’re Master Skywalker, aren’t you?” she asks.

Luke turns to face her. “Why, yes I am.”

“My mother told me you were a bad man.”

“Bad? Why does she say that?”

The young girl thinks for a second. And then she answers, “I don’t know.”

“Well, what do you think a bad man is?”

The girl thinks again. She replies, “Someone who hurts me and my friends.”

“Do you think the bad man should be hurt, too?”

She shakes her head. “I don’t want to hurt anyone.”

Luke tries to smile, and says, “Most people don’t.”

But the answer doesn’t satisfy the girl. Confused, and lost, she sits down on a rock next to Luke. “Why did my friends hurt me?”

“Well, what did they do?”

The young girl is overcome with sadness. “I was hungry, so my mom gave me some bread. My friends asked me if they could have some. I wanted to share, but I couldn’t break it apart. Then when I wasn’t looking, they took the whole thing away.”

Luke feels sorry for the girl. He reaches into a pocket in his robes, and pulls out a leather-like cover. He opens it, and there is dried up food. “Here,” he softly says to her. The girl takes some, eats it, and smiles.

As she is chewing, Luke tries to find the right thing to say. And then, it comes to him. He says to the girl, “Are you ever going to share again?”

She shakes her head. Luke continues, “Next time, I’m sure you’ll catch their tricks. But that doesn’t mean you have to stop sharing forever. When you want to get something done, you have to try, over and over again, and don’t give up. Each time you try, you’ll learn from your mistakes.”

“I want to get better,” the girl says, “I don’t want to be tricked.” She perks up, looking at the sunset. “Can you teach me?”

“I can. It’s not something that you’ll learn in a day or two. You have to keep at it your whole life. Even now, I’m still learning. But, I can give you a few tips.”

[A voice over of Luke is heard, as it overlays with several scenes]

“Sometimes, you know who is good or bad.”

A village of Wotuiis guard over their sacred landscape, harmoniously working together.

“Other times, it’s harder to say.”

Back on Iniomni, the Tau begin to come out of their houses, watching as the Skor land in their city.

“But no matter what happens, we all have to keep doing what we think is right.”

Rose is seen fixing up and polishing C-3PO, who exclaims, “Oh, I do hope they’re alright.”

“Even if we fall again and again.”

Yatu stares out through a window of the Resistance base, gazing into the endless field of stars in space.

“Because doing the right thing can be very hard.”

In the ruined, scarred First Order base, Hailden stands tall over the wreckage, looking down over a charred high tower.

“We can’t do it alone. We have to work together. But sometimes when we try to get close to others, we push them away.”

A First Order starfighter has landed in a thick, jungle planet, and there is no one inside. Inside of the jungle, in the middle of a shallow lake of water, Kylo sits on an island of soft, fertile soil. He looks up, and though the vegetation is dense, a sliver of light pours through. And from the light, Rey steps in, and the two lock eyes.

LUKE finishes speaking his monologue to the girl. The girl is now looking at the Jedi master, her hands on her knees, listening with her heart. Luke tells her, “If you want to learn to be good, you can’t stop yourself from getting hurt. But just remember, everyone else is on the same journey you’re on. If we all work together, and hold each other up, then even if we have bad times, the good times will come, too.”

FINN walks through the metallic complex with an electronic broom in his hand, sweeping the floors. He passes by Phasma, who doesn’t even look up at him. They don’t say a word to each other. He walks by Poe who is speaking with Merilia, and suddenly, there’s a soft clink in the distance.

“Shh!” Finn whispers, “Do you hear that?”

Poe and Merilia look around. Poe nods to her, and they get up, with their hands near their belt and blaster. They head towards the back entrance, enter the main planning room, and hear a door open in the distance. Almost all the former Resistance fighters have now gathered together and walk towards the sounds. They stop in place, and get behind cover. They watch the cavern-like tunnel leading from the back entrance into the planning room. The clinks continue, then stop. Now, there are footsteps, lightly patting on the dirt. Someone is inside the stone walls.

The former Resistance fighters huddle up. In the center are maps and holograms sprawled out on a table, the result of endless hours of determined work. They wait. The footsteps are coming closer. And then, someone enters through the cavern-like tunnel.

A hooded figure wearing a tan robe steps in the room, with a lightsaber tucked on its side. The figure pulls its hood back, uncovering his face. He is a man with a brown, rugged mustache and beard, and a combed set of hair. Finn, Poe and the other fighters start to stand up, not knowing what to expect, and the man greets them.

“Hello there.”

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REVIVAL OF THE FORCE

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[To be continued...]