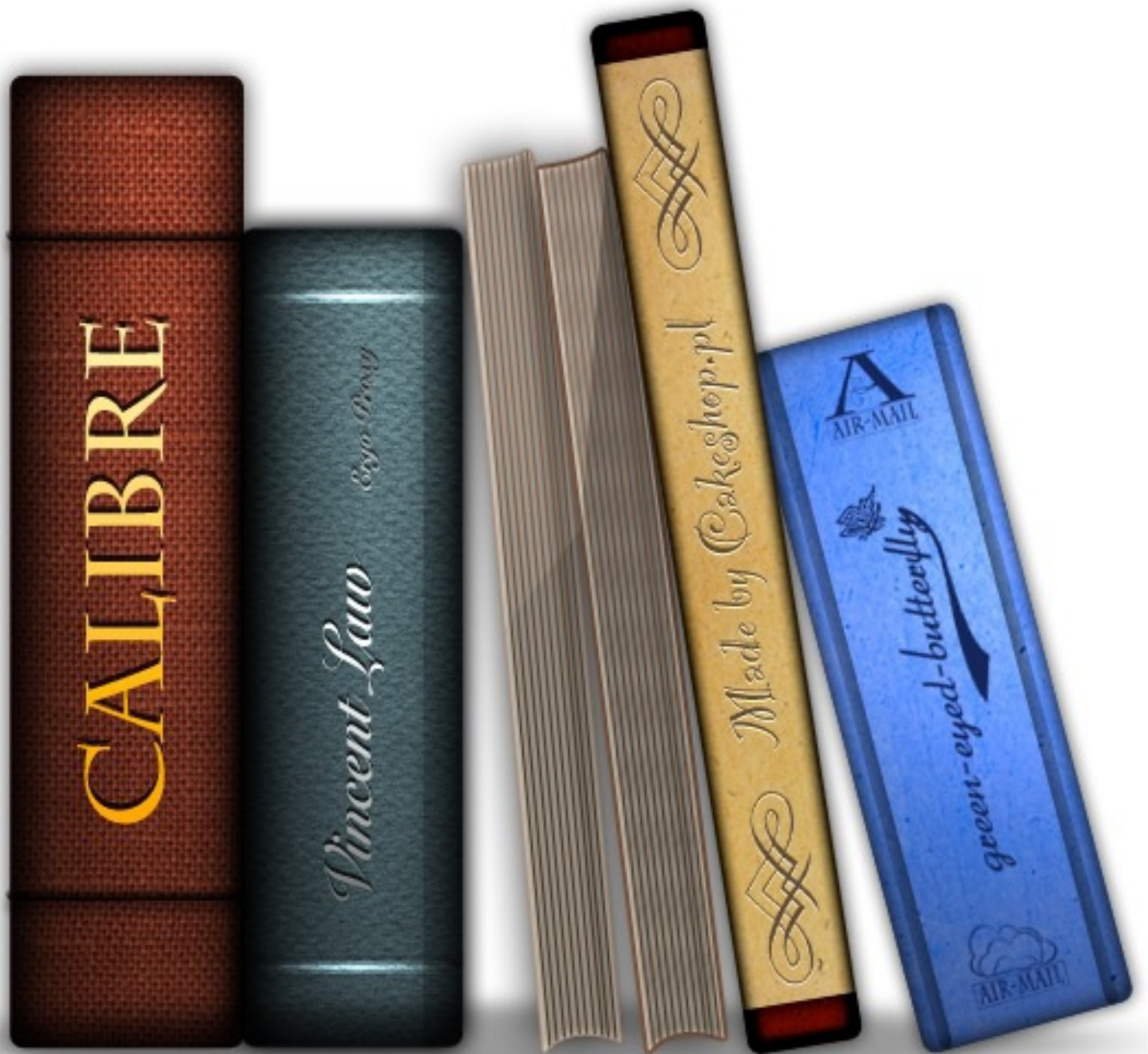


# [Short Stories]

## My Last Dream (Sean Smith)



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Star Wars

My Last Dream

By Sean Smith

Laree Captison lay silently in her bed. Her thoughts rolled peacefully through her mind as she slept.

Quietly at first, the alarm buzzed, beckoning her from her sleep. She moaned softly, splaying out her arm and swatting at the alarm. As she feared, she had waited too long. The lights all shot on, throwing out their blinding light.

“NO!” she whispered. “Lights off!” They all shut down. She’d forgotten the back up, of course, for days like this. The window switched to transparent mode, letting in a stream of bright sunlight. She sat up irritably and glanced at the doorway.

Her mother Kistra stood there with her arms crossed. She wore her usual purple and green jumpsuit with a yellow collar. “Now, young lady. It’s time for you to get up,” she said.

Laree sighed. “Yes, mother.” She swung her legs over the edge of the bed and waited for her mother to leave and the door to shut. Once they had, she got up and changed into a green dress. She stood before the mirror, tying her long brown hair back. She hated wearing her hair that way, but that’s how mother wanted it. Didn’t leave her much choice.

After a bite to eat, Laree was finally set free. She hurried down the large Kabalian roadside toward her best friend Brici’s house. Se lived in a much larger house, a much more common size than Laree’s, since her mother believed in an old religion which wouldn’t allow her much more. She always said she already pushed it, but thought it evened out in the Balance since she had a daughter.

Laree walked up to the huge brown house. Two wings came out from the main body with a fantastic effect. She walked up to the door. It shot open, as she was expected. She stepped inside.

Inside was a strange quiet. “Brici?” Laree called out. “Brici?”

Suddenly the walls on both sides seemed to explode in at her. Smoke rose all around as Laree screamed and ducked her head. Out of the smoke, flames, and debris rose a man. “Laree,” he said in a low but quiet voice. She scuttled away from him.

He raised a hand, and suddenly Laree couldn’t move. He gestured coldly, and Laree found herself turning around. His hand drew nearer him, hauling Laree along as if by rope. She found herself unable to turn away, could not even think straight. She just looked up at him in fear.

When she was close enough, he laid his hand on her head. He stroked her hair gently, pulling her hair loose. He lay his palm on her forehead, and lights went out for Laree.

She awoke sometime later. She moaned as her stiff joints struggled to move again. Her eyes

opened last, after she'd felt her way around realizing she was on a tough, temporary bed, most likely aboard a ship.

As she began to look up, the strange man looked down at her coldly a moment, then suddenly began looking gentle again and smiled. He reached out and brushed her hair out of her eyes, and began stroking the beautiful hair as if she were some sort of cat. "Ah, yes, you certainly are a strong one. Not many can wake from my sleep trance. No one your age, at least. You have a fantastic future before you," he said.

"What?" she asked quietly, fearfully. "Who are you?"

He looked at the girl with deep, sad eyes. "I am your father," he said.

"My...father? But he...you..." she started. She could not complete the statement. She was confused and unable to concentrate on where she was. Besides that she'd never known her father. She'd been told he'd gone away when she was very young for some reason or another.

So for all she knew this man could be her father. She looked at him closely a moment. She didn't see any kind of resemblance. "Are you really...?" she asked quietly.

He nodded slowly. "But you must call me Lord Hethrir where we are going. No, don't ask any questions. I am taking you to a place where you can learn to use your special talent with other children your age," he said.

"Like school?"

Hethrir laughed and ran his hand through her hair. "Yes, just a bit. Do you like school?" he asked.

Laree shrugged. "It's ok."

He smiled. "Good, good. Now get back to sleep, my child, we still have some ways to go.

She sighed. "Ok," she said and lay back down on the hard bed. Hethrir just stroked her hair gently and stared up at the ceiling, lost in thought. He could indeed sense something great in the girl's future.

When she woke again, Laree was in a dark room. She felt sore, just like before, having been out for a number of days more. Over her stood a figure in strange robes, unlike anything she'd ever seen on Kabal. She cowered back in fear at the strange looking thing.

"Get up," the figure ordered. "Now." Laree jumped to her feet. "With all the others!" She looked up at him, confused. He sighed angrily, pointing violently through a door.

"Where's...my father?" Laree asked hesitantly.

The boy looked puzzled a moment, then suddenly laughed. "Oh, he'll be around soon enough."

She thought the reply strange, but decided to get out of the strange boy's company. She hurried

through the indicated doorway.

On the other side was a long line of other young beings of all sorts of species. She found another human girl around her age. “What’s going on?” she whispered.

The girl turned around, green hair turning with her. “I don’t know exactly,” she said in heavy-accented basic. “But it’s scary, I hear.”

=NARRATIVE=

And that it was. That day they were given their quarters, in a deep level of wherever they were. The quarters was hardly that, just dark rooms behind dark doors to dark halls.

Living there was hell. The children were given little food, forced to study up on propaganda. They all became part of the “Empire Reborn”. The more she was put through, the more Laree was convinced Hethrir was lying. She knew for sure he could not be her father after some of the stories she’d heard from other kids.

Besides all this, Laree excelled in her studies. In merely a year she’d passed to the level of helper. The next level was a huge jump, but she earned it four years later. At that time she had to take the final test.

=END NARRATIVE=

She’d heard stories about the Proctorial Ceremony. When she was younger, the other kids had told terrible stories they’d heard from their friends. They said the Proctor-to-be was eaten by a huge gold monster. The Proctor’s who had passed the test, along with the helper’s who wished to obtain it, glorified it as the final test between childhood and manhood—they all remarked on the fact no female had ever passed it.

Laree didn’t look forward to the day. She was brought aboard Hethrir’s ship and they set out for the place only known as “The Asylum” to those in the Empire Reborn.

The gold-plated ship landed on the station. A quartet of Proctor’s went down the ramp first, followed by Hethrir and Laree by his side. They marched down a prearranged path toward the creature known as Waru’s shrine.

As they neared it, many civilians joined in the march, as it was a ritual that happened often. It was supposed to be an amazing ceremony to those who watched.

They entered the long hall into the main room. Soon, they came up to Waru himself. “Hethrir, my friend,” the golden creature called. “You have brought me another subject?”

Hethrir moved forward, towing Laree with him and leaving the Proctors behind. “Yes, Waru. This girl here,” he said. “She has reached the time of her Initiation.”

“Girl? Heh,” the creature snorted. “No matter. Bring her forward.” Hethrir did so.

Laree quaked in fear as she was left alone on the altar. A number of spectators watched. Waru began to spread, his golden body coming nearer to her. In moments the liquid gold was over her, flowing over her body. She attempted to get away, but was stuck like glue. Strange sensations began running through her mind as she felt the alien use its powers on her. Not quite like the Force she was learning about, but something like it.

As the strange fluid cleansed her, she also felt strengthened. Seemingly moments after it had begun, she was thrown out of the golden light. She looked up blinkingly, up into the face of Hethrir. "It was successful," he said emotionlessly.

"I am glad I was able to strengthen this young girl. One day, perhaps, our deal shall be completed," Waru spoke loudly.

"And let us hope it is soon," Hethrir said, retrieving Laree and the rest of his party.

"Of course, Friend Hethrir. Let it be soon."

Upon returning, Laree found her new quarters. It was a much lighter room, and much higher up in the world-craft. She went quickly to the midday meal, which had just been called. It was a Proctor and helper only event, the children ate only twice a day.

The crowd of Proctors and helpers was incredibly loud. Laree pulled up a seat and sat down at the proctor's table, between two boys a few years older than herself. As she sat down, conversations at the table stopped. Every face turned toward her. Did I do something wrong? she wondered.

The boy on her left glanced at her a moment, then turned back to the rest of the silent group. He slammed his fist into the table, drawing attention. "C'mon, guys, just be easy on the new kid," he said. The others looked at him doubtfully, but began chuckling. Conversations started up again, and the food was devoured.

Laree turned to the boy next to her. "Thank you," she whispered.

He smiled. "No problem. My name is Krejt, and..." he stopped, about to introduce his friend on her other side. Instead he gazed closer. "You have amazing eyes."

Laree blushed. "Thank you," she said even quieter this time. She ate and talked quietly with Krejt.

Suddenly Mikla, the Head Proctor, a male of merely sixteen, stood from the head of the table. "It is time to return to our studies, my friends," he said in a deep menacing voice.

"C'mon, we'd better go," Krejt said to Laree.

"Can we talk somewhere?" Laree asked, not wanting to leave her new friend.

"Sure," he said as they stood. They left the room together and moved down the hall. "So, how old are you?" he asked.

“I’m about a week short of twelve. You?” she asked.

“I’m fifteen. I could’ve sworn you were at least fourteen. You’ve grown up fast. You’re a beautiful young woman,” Krejt said. Laree blushed again, and Krejt smiled. “But,” he said seriously, wiping the smile from his face. “You shouldn’t feel invincible. You’ve been here a long time, I’m sure, but most of the Proctors have been here all their lives, or pretty close. No girl’s ever become a Proctor before. Now, I don’t know if you can tell what I’m getting at...”

Laree looked at him a moment. “I think I do...but so far, five years of hell seem to have just, well, reversed. Being a Proctor has been great so far,” she said.

“Maybe, Laree, but you can’t possibly understand what some of these people have gone through. Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” he said, and walked off.

Laree returned to her room, unable to get the conversation out of her mind. Restlessly, she slept.

A week later, Laree went through her usual routine. That day she was twelve, but she didn’t think anyone knew it. But someone did. Unbeknownst to her, someone watched her the whole day, quietly calculating every move to perfectly fit in with her normal routine so she would not notice.

Laree tiredly stepped into her room. She glanced up, and shocked, fell back a step. On her bed, waiting, sat Mikla, the Head Proctor. “What are you doing here?” Laree asked.

“I had heard of your birth day, I merely wanted to congratulate you,” he said. “Congratulations.”

“Good, now get out,” Laree said. “You know you’re not supposed to be out of your room this late.”

Mikla stood and walked toward her. “I do not fear Lord Hethrir. He would not dare do anything to me. He’s trained me too well.” He sat back down on the bed and patted it next to him. “Come here, Laree.”

She slowly moved forward and sat beside him, afraid to do anything else.

“You don’t know what it’s like here yet, Laree,” Mikla said. “This place may seem bad at first, but it gets lonely later on. Me, I’ve been here since I was three. Hethrir kidnapped me then.” He gently stroked her hair. He took a long breath and turned to look at her, and suddenly struck forward and kissed her.

Her eyes opened wide. She reached up and threw him off of her. “What are you—” she started, but suddenly he was back on her. She held him off with one hand and slapped him hard with the other. “Stop it!” she shouted.

Mikla held his stinging cheek and glared angrily at the young girl who had struck him. He balled up his fist and hit her hard across the face. She fell back, crying, as he came back over her, but she still tried to fight him off. With the same hand he backhanded her. Her deep green eyes kept open, barely conscious, as Mikla turned out the light.

Krejt sat with the other Proctors at the breakfast table. His eyes kept drifting to the empty seat beside him, where Laree should have been sitting. But she was missing. She had no reason to skip, and Lord Hethrir never allowed such a thing anyway. He waited and waited for the time he could leave and go look for her.

Finally, Krejt was allowed to leave. He hurried down the long hallways toward Laree's room. He knocked on the door. "Laree? Are you in there?" he called. He put his ear to the door, but heard nothing. Hesitantly, he pushed the door open. He looked into the dark room a moment, then flipped on the light.

His jaw fell open at the sight. On the bed, Laree lay on her back, completely naked and unconscious. Her face was bruised and tears still rolled silently down her cheek. On the floor by the bed her tattered clothes lay. "Laree," his lips formed her name, but his voice would not work.

Krejt ran up to his friends side. He grabbed her by the shoulders and tried to shake her awake. "Laree? Are you ok? Laree?" he said frantically. He could feel she was alive, but her face was in terrible shape, and of course there was the matter of her clothes.

Laree moaned as she began to squirm. "Krejt?" she whispered.

"Yes, I'm here," he said. He helped her into a sitting position and sat beside her. He put his arm around her shoulders. "Are you ok?"

"I'm fine," she said. She lay her hand on his, but as she did so her arm touched her chest. "My clothes..." she said, not remembering for a moment. But it all came back then. Her hand dropped back to her side. "You were right. I should have listened to you."

"I wish I hadn't been right, Laree. Do you have any other clothes?" he asked, knowing that most did not.

"No," Laree said, beginning to cry again as everything came back to her.

"Shh, Laree. You're ok now." He put his hand on her hair and calm her—

Laree jerked back in a crying frenzy. She threw her back against the wall and she pushed Krejt off the bed with her legs. "Don't—just don't—" she said.

Krejt stood up and looked at Laree sorrowfully. "I didn't know—" he started.

"I'm sorry..." she said, searching for something to say. "I'm sorry. Please, just hold me. You're the only one I trust anymore."

He nodded. "But I think you should get dressed first. I think Mikla can find—"

Laree's eyes opened wide a moment, then she just turned over and began crying in her pillow, sobbing loudly. Muffled, she said, "No..."

“Mikla?!” Krejt said angrily. “I’ll kill that…” he trailed off as he looked down at the poor girl, “later.” He moved back to her side and turned her over, getting her back up, sitting against the wall still sobbing. He sat next to her and hugged her. “Things will get better. I won’t let anything else happen to you.” She glanced at him, smiled and put her arms around him.

“Lord Hethrir,” Mikla bowed before his master.

Hethrir just looked coldly at him a moment. “Mikla, you cannot hide anything from me,” he said.

“What do you mean, m’Lord?” Mikla asked.

“Your sense. It seems so…bright, today. Why is that?”

Mikla panicked. “I don’t understand.”

“Don’t worry, boy. There is no time for you to be punished for what you did to that girl. But do not *EVER* try to hide something from me. I have kept an eye on her, and I think she will make it. And that boy, Krejt, I want him out,” Hethrir said, “eliminated. Do whatever, I want him out of the picture. He has too much compassion to be one of us.”

Mikla smiled evilly. “Yes, m’Lord.”

Krejt stepped forward, lunging with his lightsaber. Mikla parried and thrust with a motion that would have sliced half Krejt’s head off. He stopped a moment early, calling an end to the practice battle. “You need work, Krejt,” Mikla said coldly.

“I will try harder, Mikla,” he said, with a veiled threat he hoped would not be noticed.

“When everyone leaves, stay behind. Lord Hethrir would like a word with you.”

After another half hour of practice, the other Proctors began to clear out from the above ground training grounds. Laree lingered a moment, looking back at Mikla and Krejt, who were not moving to leave. At a slight nod of Krejt, she moved on and went back underground.

Once everyone was gone, Krejt turned to Mikla. “So, where’s Lord Hethrir?” he asked.

“He’ll be here shortly,” Mikla said. “So, how’s your little friend?”

“You stay away from her,” Krejt said angrily.

“But why? We’re such good friends now. She must have told you about us.”

“Oh, yeah, she sure did. And if you go anywhere near her again, I’ll—” suddenly he gasped for air as his throat contracted.

“You’ll what? Cough all over me?” Mikla said with a laugh. He looked to the figure who stood behind Krejt. “Excellent timing, Lord Hethrir. As always.”



Hethrir gestured, and Krejt fell to the ground, unconscious. “We will not kill him,” he said. “I have a much better plan. He can still be very useful to us.”

“If you think so, Lord Hethrir,” Mikla said in disappointment.

“Come now, we must begin preparations.”

Laree checked her assignment for the day. It was one of her favorites, helping new students settle in and such. She enjoyed the opportunities to talk with the children.

As she walked down a cross-corridor, someone hit her in the side, knocking her over. Tigris stood over her. “I’m so sorry!” he exclaimed, helping her up. “Are you all right, Ms. Captison?”

“Yes, quite all right, Tigris,” she said with a smile. Perhaps it was a bit cruel since she knew he liked her. “Why were you in such a hurry, anyway?”

“Hmm?” he asked, confused. “Oh...them,” he said, pointing to two children who were watching and giggling at Tigris. “Stop that!” He moved to chase them some more.

Laree held him back. She laughed as she looked at the young kids. “Giving you trouble, are they? Come here, children,” she called sweetly.

The kids looked at each other, exchanged a few silent words, shrugged and came forward toward Laree. She knelt by them. “Hello. What are your names?” she asked.

The boy spoke first. “I’m Jacen.”

“I’m Jaina,” his sister said. “Who are you?”

“My name is Laree.” She glanced back at Tigris, who was gazing at her in awe. “Where are you taking them?”

“Hethrir told me to bring them to Mikla to begin wi—”

Suddenly Laree dropped flat to the ground and began crying. Jacen and Jaina backed away. Tigris gathered his courage and knelt next to Laree. “What did I say? Are you ok?” he asked.

Laree sat up against the wall, sniffing and gathering her wits. “It was nothing you said,” she lied. “It was just...nothing. I’ll be fine. Get on your way now, Tigris. Goodbye, Jacen and Jaina.” Tigris walked off with the pair.

Laree stood up, unable to remember where she was going before. She just started back, toward Krejt’s room. She’d checked and found he was supposed to be meditating inside. He wouldn’t mind if she interrupted.

When she came up to his door, his friend Tjern, who was from the same planet, already stood with his back against it, looking depressed. He looked up and gazed at her sadly. “I thought you’d come

here as soon as you heard,” he said quietly.

“As soon as I heard what?” she asked.

“You mean you didn’t hear?” he asked, surprised.

“Hear what?” Laree asked again.

“Krejt...he’s disappeared. No one’s seen him since practice ended.”

“Not Krejt...This place just can’t get any worse,” Laree said, trying hard not to cry again.

“If you were here as long as I’ve been, you wouldn’t believe that,” Tjern said.

“If you’d been through what I have, you’d see a reason to keep hope,” Laree said, staring at the ground. “But I felt something before. Something has changed here, and I think we might get out soon.”

“I certainly hope so, Laree. It’s getting late, we’d better be going.”

“Goodbye, Tjern. I hope Krejt shows up,” she said, walking away, back toward her room. She opened the door and walked in, tiredly throwing herself on the bed.

She shut her eyes, too tired to change her clothes. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. “Uch,” she muttered. “Come in.”

Mikla stepped in. “Why thank you, Laree. You’re so hospitable this eve,” he said, laughing. He walked toward her.

Laree’s eyes opened wide. “No...stay away from me! Lord Hethrir will—”

“Lord Hethrir knows exactly what I’ve done,” Mikla gloated. “All he made me do was get rid of our good old friend, Krejt.”

Laree began crying quietly. “You killed Krejt.”

“Yes, I did,” he said with a smile as he sat on the bed beside her.

“Stay *away* from me! I’m warning you!” Laree said threateningly, though the effect was lost in her tears.

“What will you do...” he stealthily thrust his hand to her throat, “scream?”

With a rush of adrenaline, Laree rolled out of his grip and off her bed. She landed in a crouch, quickly standing up. Her lightsaber jumped to her hand and ignited. Mikla moved to stand, but Laree instinctively struck him down. He screamed in pain as he crumpled over on top of the bed.

She looked down with wide, tearful eyes at the body that lay upon her bed. What have I done? she

wondered.

Suddenly another voice wondered the same thing. “What have you done?” Hethrir demanded from the doorway.

Laree looked at him nervously. “I didn’t mean to...he—he forced me to do it,” she said truthfully.

“You killed the Head Proctor,” he said, ignoring her excuses. He gestured, and her lightsaber died. “You have any idea what the punishment is?”

“Well...no, Lord Hethrir.”

“Silly girl. I would ordinarily kill the person myself, but I have something a little better in store for you.”

=NARRATIVE=

She had been brought to the lowest levels there were. Far below the surface, even deeper than the children’s quarters. She was kept there in solitary, never allowed to leave, and fed badly.

Despite this, she survived alone with her thoughts of Krejt, her mother, and a dream of one day being allowed to leave.

=END NARRATIVE=

The ship exited hyperspace. They piloted directly for the world craft, now pulling into orbit around the planet. “So, all the children are still on there?” Luke asked Leia.

“Yes, possibly an entire next generation of Jedi. Plus all the Proctors and helpers, of course,” she said.

“Of course,” Luke smiled as the ship neared the ground. They landed, Luke, Leia, and Rillao getting off. The children wanted to stay aboard.

Rillao went down into the base, looking for some sort of records or something to aid them. Leia and Luke walked until they found the group of children left there earlier. “Hello again, children,” Leia said. They didn’t speak.

“Shy, aren’t they?” Luke said. He looked around at the desolate desert-like surroundings, and could sense their fear. They had much reason to be shy. He asked Leia, “Have you found the Head Proctor?”

“No, I don’t think so. He’s probably hidden somewhere,” she said.

One of the Proctor prisoners decided to speak up. “Mikla was murdered awhile ago. Hethrir never replaced him,” he said.

“Well, that’s one down,” Luke said. “Now, we’ll be returning all of you home, once we find out where that is. You Proctors, of course, once you speak with your family are welcome to my academy.”

Most of the children nodded, but all was silent for a few minutes. Suddenly, Rillao returned. “I found some records, though they’re very sketchy,” she said. “Mostly just first names of everyone he’s brought here.” She handed Luke a hand-written list.

They took a few minutes and went down the list, marking ones that were present. “That’s it. Everyone’s marked off, except three here which all seem to have been marked off previously.” He looked at it closely, reading beneath the scratches. “Mikla, who we know is dead, someone named Krejt and a Laree.” He looked up at the Proctors. “Anyone know anything about them?”

The same Proctor spoke up again. He seemed to be the only one with the courage to speak. “All three of them were killed.”

“How unfortunate. Well, we’d better get all of you out of here. Might as well get started now.”

After clearing the children from the world craft, Luke glanced back at it through the cockpit window onboard the Falcon. “I don’t know, Han. I think we missed something. I’ve got to go back down there,” he said.

“Kid, is this some weird feeling or one of those Jedi things?” Han asked.

“They’re both the same thing. You’ve got to bring us back down.”

“Ok, sure,” Han muttered, swinging the ship around. An angry roar came from the intercom. “No, nothing’s wrong. Luke wants to go back down. Check the hyperdrive again during the delay—might as well be safe.” Chewie growled an acknowledgment as Han brought the ship down to the world craft.

Luke stepped down the ramp onto the sand once again. He walked away, down into the barracks area. He reached out with his senses, looking for anyone, or anything, that may have been left behind. It was dark, so he mostly relied on the Force as he moved far down into the ground.

It had been hours of searching, and he’d nearly given up. He passed by the children’s barracks again, unable to find any other place he could look. With no where to go, he looked completely through his mind. He knew there had to be some secret passage or such, but did not bother to uncover it.

As his mind swept deep through the place, he felt something. The stirring of another mind, very confused and sad, but one with barely uncovered power. He moved toward it, hitting a door release with his mind. The wall opened up.

From that room, he felt the person’s attention move to him. “You’re free now,” he spoke. “If you wish to leave.” He could just barely make out the figure’s nod. The figure stood, and Luke lead their way back to the surface.

As they stepped out into the light, Luke got his first good look at his new student. The beautiful young girl stood before him, her pale face shifting into a smile for probably the first time in a long time. Her eyes were shut as she seemed to study the feelings of the sun on her skin, something she had obviously not experienced in a long time. He just watched her for a minute, until she spoke.

“You’ve set the others free?” she asked in a strained voice.

“Everyone, except Mikla, Krejt, and Laree. I suppose you’re Laree though,” Luke said.

“Yes,” she said, a tear coming to her eye.

“Do you know where the other two are?”

Laree lowered her head. She couldn’t say why, but she felt like she could tell this man, and she felt like she had to tell someone. She divulged the whole story of what had happened. He stood there thoughtfully and listened. He didn’t bother to try to comfort her. He did better. He got her onboard the Falcon, and they lifted off, never to return. ~~~~~

The Sith Returneth

“Dad! Why do I have to go to this place?” Chris asked his father in disgust.

His father leaned over the hyperspace levers. “They’re your own kind, son. They’ll be able to help you with your...problem.” He brought the ship from hyperspace. The small cylindrical ship had a small crescent around it, the tips lasercannons. It slowed down as it entered the planet’s atmosphere.

Luke Skywalker, head of the Jedi Order, moved to greet the strange looking spacecraft that had just landed. He reached out to it through the Force. What he touched amazed him, he felt one human presence and a strange empty spot nearby. He drew nearer.

The ship’s hatch opened awkwardly and from it dropped two humans. One was in his mid forties, Luke guessed, medium height, strong build, with brown hair and eyes. The other looked much the same but seemed to be only in his teens. Luke approached them, mystified.

“Uh, hello,” Luke blurted out, still only able to sense the older man’s presence. “May I help you?”

“I am Ulic Qel-droma, a descendant of Ulic and Cay Qel-droma. This is my son, Chris,” he said, tilting his head to the young boy.

“I am Luke Skywalker, head of our academy here. What do you wish of me?”

“This boy is dangerous,” Ulic said. “To the entire galaxy.”

Luke smiled. “Dangerous? Him?”

“He is trained as a Jedi...self trained, I suppose. I don’t quite understand it myself.” He turned to Chris. “Show him, my son.” Chris pulled back the sleeve of his shirt to reveal his hellish red veins. He sensed Luke wasn’t exactly convinced, so he shifted his hand toward the ground a meter away. A

large red flame consumed his hand, exploded out into the ground destroying it in a shower of sparks and flames. "I need you to take care of him."

Luke turned to the boy, his eyes wide. "How did you learn to do this?"

"My masters taught me everything," Chris said, replacing his tunic's sleeve. "But I can control it," he said viciously, glaring at his father.

"Your masters? I thought you were self trained?" Luke asked, digging for information.

"No one believes me when I speak of my masters. But I have four of them, and meet with them to train every night."

"Who are they?"

"Why the four greatest Force-users of all time, of course: Freedon Nadd, Exar Kun, Naga Sadow, and Emperor Palpatine. They have taught me since I was very young."

"But they are all dead," Luke said, repulsed by what the boy said.

"Why do you think I meet them in the Force itself?"

"That is enough!" Ulic shouted. "No more lies. They will not get you out of this place. Until you are better, you stay." Ulic jumped in the hatch and the ship immediately flew off.

"Tell me, Chris," Luke said, walking toward the great temple with him, "is what you say true?"

"How could I lie? They've been teaching me since I was five. Exar Kun taught me the lightsaber \_\_\_"

"You have a lightsaber?" Luke asked.

"Sure. Freedon Nadd shows me all his Dark Side tricks, Naga Sadow teaches me about alchemy \_\_\_"

"You know the ancient art of alchemy, transforming things into monsters, too?" Luke said, becoming more than a little afraid.

"Yes. Then Palpy, as I like to call him, teaches me his Dark junk. Mostly lightning and other intimidating tricks, but some of it's very useful. He also showed me how to combine will and anger into—"

"Into a huge Force storm that rends the fabric of space itself," Luke said, interrupting again. "I've seen that one."

"Yes, they tell me all sorts of stories. Every night they have another tale." His eyes blanked out a moment, then came back. "I can also shift my own mass through space, giving me the power of

teleportation. It's quite fun." Chris spoke with a young, toothy smile then teleported himself a few feet ahead. "See?"

"But there is a down side. I am the Dark Lord of the Sith. And I can't stop it."

"Why not?" Luke asked.

"I am like this because when I was very young, I was injected with 'Sith Poison'. The first time I felt a shred of anger, I became emotionally unstable. And then my masters appeared."

Luke thought about that a moment. "This 'Sith Poison', is there some antidote? Something that will help you?"

"No," Chris said, running a hand through his short brown hair. "It's permanent. But I came here to see if you could do anything for me. I've regained my stability, and I can control my powers, but I have no wish to be the Dark Lord. Or to use the Dark Side at all."

Nearing the temple, Luke once again reached for the boy's presence. Once again, he felt nothing. "Why can I not sense you?"

"I always wear my 'Sith cloak', as a proper Dark Lord should."

"You're not going to try to recruit my Jedi as Sith. I don't want to destroy you. And your masters had better not. We only destroyed Exar Kun seven years ago."

"You have nothing to fear of me." He was momentarily distracted by a young woman, a Jedi trainee, walking past them. His head turned as she went by. "Nothing to fear..." he continued, blinking his eyes.

"C'mon kid," Luke said, grinning that he had someone to call 'kid', "I'll show you where you can rest a bit."

Chris turned back to him. "I'd rather look around awhile, if that's ok."

"Sure. Since you'll be joining us, you have free run of the temple. But don't leave." Luke strode off.

Chris looked down the empty halls. He closed his eyes a moment, and when he opened them again he was outside the temple. He ran swiftly through the jungle, toward the temple with the statue of Exar Kun in front. He stopped a moment, gazing at it. Chris knelt before it, muttering in an ancient, long since dead language.

Chris felt a gust of air behind him. He turned, standing. "Hello, my Master."

Exar Kun approached him, his ghostly figure darkening. "Your presence here has helped me to return. But I may only speak to you. You must destroy Skywalker."

“I cannot destroy him, he’s too strong.”

“You know as well as I do that you would have no problem to destroy him. He is an enemy of the Sith. His students are a perfect place to continue our line, as I noted years ago.”

“Yes, m’lord. I must be returning.” Chris knelt once again, then disappeared. He was once again in the temple, now in the great hall. He looked around at the dozen or so apprentices, listening to Master Skywalker speak.

“And here he is,” Skywalker said, gesturing back to Chris. “Chris Qel-droma, Dark Lord of the Sith.”

Chris felt their surprise as they looked at him. He knew what they were thinking. He was so young, and they no doubt greatly underestimated his power. He reappeared beside Skywalker. “Master,” he nodded. Skywalker nodded back.

“He looks like I did seven years ago...and he’s even using the Sith cloak,” Kyp Durrion said from the audience.

“But you couldn’t teleport, Kyp. My master regards to you as ‘weak’. Exar Kun had such high hopes for you,” Chris said coolly, looking down at Kyp.

“Did he?” Kyp asked. “And how would you know?”

“He told me, of course. He told me about most of you.”

“That is enough for now, Chris. Perhaps another time—” Luke said.

“Sure,” Chris muttered, fading out into the hallway. He walked for a long time, lonely. He could sense everyone still in the great hall, but suddenly another presence snagged his attention. He walked toward it, guided by instinct. He came to a locked door to a private quarters. Hesitantly, Chris rang the bell.

A moment later the door shot open. Inside was a small, undecorated room. Near the back, a young woman sat, facing the doorway. She was in a meditative stance, her long brown hair over her hood. Chris stared at her a moment, finding her deep green eyes strangely hypnotic. “Uh, hello,” Chris whispered, unable to manage much more.

“Hello...who are you?” she asked, standing up.

Chris looked her up and down a moment. She was slightly taller than him, and incredibly beautiful, by anyone’s standards. “Chris Qel-droma, D—” he halted. “Chris. May I come in?” he attempted, prepared to be turned down.

She swung her hair to the side. “Alright.” Chris stepped in, closing the door. “I’m Laree. You new here?” Her eyes glistened in the light.



“Yeah, I...just got in,” he said, still mesmerized by her eyes. “Why aren’t you in the great hall with all of Master Skywalker’s other students?”

“I just got here myself. I’m trying to get accustomed to the place.”

“I know. I sense your untrained power.”

Laree smiled. “I wish I could say the same about you...” she looked a bit troubled. “I guess I’m out of practice. I can’t sense you at all.”

“Oh, no,” Chris chuckled softly. Mentally, he removed his Sith cloak. “That better?” he smiled broadly at her.

“You feel...dark.” She took a cautious step back.

Chris put the cloak around him again. “I’m trying to get over it...really,” he said, silently cursing himself for getting into this. “But it’s part of my blood. And my masters would never let me loose. They’re very strict.” He looked up at her, putting her image forever in his memory. “See you around,” he said, hoping it were true. He disappeared.

He reappeared once again by Skywalker. They walked down the hall. “So, Luke, tell me about Laree...” he said, matching Skywalker’s pace.

“Ok,” Luke said, smiling. “We found her mixed in with some of Hethrir’s forces. I believe she’s 16. You meet her, kid?”

“Don’t call me kid. And yes.” Chris disappeared again, ending up in his room. He felt tired from his long journey, and had a lot to think about. He lay down on his bed, falling asleep quickly.

He found himself in a vast pool of black, four glowing spirits standing before him. “My Masters,” he knelt. “What do you wish?”

Exar Kun moved forward. “Do as Skywalker says, at first. You must build his trust to the point where turning on him will seem his own fault. And the girl. She would be perfect for the matter we discussed some time ago. You know how to proceed. On your way, Our student.”

Chris bowed his head. He woke up a moment later. He sat up a moment, thinking. He didn’t really want to do as his Masters ordered, but he had no real choice. It was a part of him, and in the time since he’d first met them, he’d learned to revere them.

Though, looking back he realized something else. With the reverence he had for them, he’d grown to fear them. But now he’d grown beyond that, he knew. He acted solely out of respect for what they had done in times long before his own. His fear of them had died.

Chris looked out the small window, more of a missing block in the wall. It was still dark outside, he hadn’t slept long. Suddenly another, somewhat familiar presence touched him, making him tingle. Chris? it called to him.

Laree? he called back to the other mind.

Come to my room, I need to speak with you. Chris's head shot up, and he was completely awake. He teleported to her room.

“What is it, Laree?”

“I had this dream... it scares me.” She sat on the bed, shivering.

Chris sat next to her and put his arm around her. “It's ok. Tell me about it, what happened?” he asked, concerned for his new friend.

“It was like I was in space, without stars. And there were these four ghosts who started to talk to me. They talked about you, and us, and everything seemed so real.” She lay her head on his shoulder.

“You mean they came to you?” Chris asked, enraged. “Damn them. Dead bastards. I must speak to them.” His eyes closed.

It was as dark as ever. Silently, Chris confronted his Masters. In the distance he could just make out Laree's shouts at his now limp body. “This is my ordeal, Masters. You are to stay out of it.”

“You are wrong, as always. As a Dark Lord, it is understandable that you want to dominate,” Exar Kun said. “But you must restart the Sith path. As the future bearer of your children, she had to be prepared.”

“All you did was scare the daylights out of her. Let Skywalker and I train her. You are to leave her alone!” Chris stepped forward, his eyes and mind flaring.

Freedon Nadd stepped up. “Good, Chris. Good. We will leave her alone. You are to continue her training, not Skywalker. We will only help if you wish us to. You are a fine Dark Lord, you have mastered all the areas well.”

“But,” Palpatine put in, “you must kill Skywalker. Soon. As a sort of revenge for your masters.”

“I shall obey, my masters. But keep your promises.”

Chris awoke. Blinking his eyes, he saw Master Skywalker and Laree hovering above him. “Are you ok?” Laree asked, laying her hand on his forehead.

“Yeah,” Chris said, “I was just...sleeping.”

Luke raised an eyebrow. “Do you always talk in your sleep? Who were you talking to?”

“I had to speak to my masters.” He sat up slowly. “They were... not obeying my orders,” he said, looking up at Laree.

“You order them around?” Skywalker asked.

“If they want me to do as they wish, they must listen to me. Such are the ways of training in the Dark Side. And I couldn’t let them bother Laree anymore.”

Laree looked puzzled. “You mean those were your masters?”

Chris nodded sadly.

“What are you two talking about?” Skywalker asked. He turned to Chris. “Your masters visited her? Why? You said they wouldn’t go after any of my students.”

“Don’t worry, Master. I’ve got it under control. But—” Chris stopped. Suddenly he was pulled into another stasis.

“Chris!” Laree shouted.

It was different. Everything looked the same, the completely black background, but there was only one spirit. He was small, and hunched over himself. A strange sense of peace reigned over the usual aggression he felt in this place. “You are... Yoda,” he said, reaching out to the spirit through the Force.

“That is right,” the apparition said in a creaky voice. “And you are free.”

“Free? Master Yoda, what do you mean?”

“Your Masters will no longer be bothering you. Or teaching. I have stopped them, so you may continue on your own path. But I am still unable to do anything for your Sith blood. You will be the Dark Lord for the rest of your life. Sorry I am. You will have various troubles through your life, but I believe you can find a way to use your Dark powers for good.” He began fading. “Goodbye, my student.”

Chris awoke again. “Yoda!” he shouted. Now he saw a number of people looking down at him.

Skywalker broke through the crowd. “What, did you see Yoda?”

“Yes. He destroyed my masters, or stopped them from seeing me anymore. They can no longer affect me.”

A shadow rippled through the room. “Wrong!” shouted a voice, a strong one, the voice of Exar Kun. “We were all returned to our original systems, to once again haunt them.” Everyone was able to see and hear Exar Kun.

“Master Yoda is my Master now. And he told me I’d have to do this!” Chris raised both his hands. “Everyone out!” The Jedi all scurried out, except Master Skywalker and Laree, who stood behind Chris. He held his hands before him. A huge, bright red flame of pure Dark Side energy flowed from them to Exar Kun’s spirit.

“No!” screamed Exar Kun. “We didn’t teach you to do this!” Both the flame and the spirit exploded in a red flash of light. Chris stood sweating and panting for breath.

“You...destroyed him.” Skywalker said. “It took all twelve of my students to do that the first time.”

“Master Yoda told me I’d find a good way to use my powers. But,” Chris added regretfully, “he also said there’s no way to heal me.”

With a sad look, Laree came forward and hugged him. “Hey, it’s ok. That was amazing!”

“I think I know what Master Yoda wanted you to do. All these times, people thought they’d destroyed these ancient spirits. They’d actually just misplaced them. But they didn’t have the power, as you do. You can finally rid the galaxy of these monstrosities in the Force.” Luke’s sense became anxious.

Holding Laree, Chris’s sense became more anxious. “Maybe,” he muttered. He teleported himself and Laree to her room. “Force sure is useful, eh?” he grinned.

“I guess,” Laree said, smiling and sitting on the bed. The drab room was slightly small, but a respectable space, and lit badly. “Why’d you bring me here?”

“Well, I’m going away for awhile, and I don’t know when or if I’ll be back,” he sat next to her. “And, well, I—wanted to say goodbye.”

“Are you coming on to me?”

Chris sighed. Well, it had been worth a shot. Of course, being the nice guy he was, he began to apologize. “I’m sorry. I—”

Laree looked up into his eyes. “Shh... It’s ok. I feel the same way.” She kissed him long and hard.

Chris shifted closer to her, putting his arms around her, and slowly lowering her back. He kissed her neck — when something snagged his attention. He shut and locked the door with the Force.

Chris woke up by Laree’s side in the morning. He moaned softly, not feeling very rested. He groggily stood up and got dressed, then put his Jedi robe on over that. He pecked Laree on the cheek, thinking how much he’d miss her. He unlocked the door and went out into the hallway, shutting it again.

Chris hurried down the halls looking for Skywalker. “I thought you were leaving for Onderon last night?” Luke asked, coming up behind Chris and matching his pace.

Chris jumped at his voice. “Don’t do that!” he said, catching his breath. He remembered what Skywalker had asked. “Well I can travel instantaneously, and I, er, fell asleep early last night.” He hoped his Sith cloak could hide his feelings.

“I won’t ask any questions,” Luke said, eyeing him strangely. Chris’s sense was definitely different, and his Sith cloak was weak. All in all, not Chris-like. “When will you be leaving?”

“How about right now?” Chris shut his eyes, using the Force to shift his mass into a place in his mind’s eye. He found himself right in the massive tomb formed by the Jedi as the resting place of the Iziz royal family and Freedon Nadd. He took a moment to look around at the sarcophagi then shouted “Nadd, show yourself!”

There was no response. “As your student,” Chris continued, “I am here to demand my right. A student must be able to destroy their own masters. You know this. I know this. Come face your destiny!”

Nadd finally appeared, his spirit now larger and with a fiery light. “Yes, my student. You are right. But I must also warn you: your other masters will not give in. They will do everything within their power to destroy you.”

“Yet I will still deal with them.” Chris dispensed with the spirit. “Seeya.”

Chris closed his eyes, focusing on a picture of the stories and descriptions he had received from Naga Sadow. When his teleport ended, Chris found himself back in the temple on Yavin 4. He saw Master Skywalker glance at him strangely. “Blast! I forgot, Naga Sadow is from this world too!”

“Can you find him?” Skywalker asked.

“Sure I can.” Chris quickly teleported again. He was now far below the surface of Yavin 4. He took a step back in fear.

A huge red monster stood before him. Its large claws glistened in the light, his scales standing out. It roared loudly. “Don’t try this with me!” Chris shouted. “You taught me everything!”

Chris raised his hand toward the monster. Using the Dark Side, he used his alchemy knowledge to turn the monster into a small harmless rodent.

Chris stood on the ledge, above a huge chasm. At the bottom was an ancient ship and a number of the monsters, preparing it. Reaching out, Chris started an avalanche from above. The ceiling collapsed on the chasm. Once the smoke was gone, Chris saw Naga’s spirit coming forward. Without exchanging words, he destroyed Sadow.

Chris teleported back to Master Skywalker. “Master, three down. Only Palpatine’s left.”

“Maybe I should come with you. He’s bound to be ready for you.”

“No, I can take care of myself. To the east of here, you’ll find a huge hole in the ground. There’s wreckage of a ship and hundreds of dead aliens.”

“Your doing?” Luke asked.

“Well they weren’t there before.” Chris once again disappeared.

It was a horrific sight. When Chris appeared, the Imperials were ready. There was a squad of

troopers in flanking position, and a pair of the Emperor's sentinels moved to grab him. He ducked and rolled to the side, his lightsaber jumping into his hand and igniting. He swung it over his head, catching the sentinels.

He held his saber to the side in his left side, pointing to the troopers with his right. They began to open fire with stun shots. Using ancient Sith magic, Chris made their weapons begin to burn through their gloves. The guns began to melt. Several screams rose into the air.

Chris's saber leaped from his hand, cutting down a sentinel he hadn't even seen. He felt a dark presence, enter from the turbolift. "Hello, Siell Vias. Prepare to die."

"You speak tough, kid, but can you follow through?" Siell ignited his lightsaber.

Chris gestured wearily, and Siell's lightsaber sputtered to a stop. "I'd say I'm full of surprises." He reached out with the Force and yanked at Siell's very presence. His body exploded with Dark side energy.

"Very good, my student. I sense you have destroyed your other three instructors." Chris turned to see a very young Palpatine, once again 18.

"As I will you, Palpy." He disignited his saber, waving the handle in the air. "Right now a Force storm—which you taught me to create—is destroying the orbiting fleet."

"I admit, you are powerful. But I am the master." Palpatine raised his hand, throwing blue lightning out at his former apprentice.

With weary concentration, Chris Force-repelled the sizzling energy. "Palpatine, your reign in this galaxy is over." Chris raised his own hand, hitting Palpatine with a hard Force smack. Palpatine flew back into the wall.

"Is that all you can do, boy? I think I'll take you with a lightsaber." Palpatine picked himself off the ground. He pulled out and ignited a red lightsaber.

"Palpy, you know I could easily destroy that saber, then rip your heart out while it was still beating. Yet I restrain from even laughing."

"Don't call me Palpy!" Palpatine ran forward toward Chris, swinging his lightsaber in rage. Half a meter away he took a long swing at Chris.

Chris simply blocked the lightsaber with his forearm. He grabbed Palpatine by the throat, lifting him a foot off the ground.

Palpatine called upon his own Force storm. He'd always thought it was ok to die, if you can take your opponent with you. He had more clones anyway. He brought his storm down on the building, tearing it to shreds. It neared Chris and himself.

Chris dropped his grip, turning toward the storm. He turned back to Palpatine, throwing Dark

energies at him, tearing his spirits precarious grip to the body.

The Force storm caught up with them. Palpatine's body flew around, dead, with his spirit trying to remain still. Chris steadied his mind, teleporting himself away to another part of the city. Chris reached deep down in his power, and took control of Palpatine's Force storm. With Palp's body and spirit within it, he sent it back to space and set it into hyperspace, never to return.

Chris, sensing his original Force storm had completely dispensed with the orbital fleet, called it down to wreak havoc on the throne-world of Byss. Half an hour later he teleported out, back to Yavin 4.

"Mission accomplished," Chris smiled to Skywalker. "Well, mostly anyway. Palpatine's been trapped in hyperspace."

"Not bad, Chris. Can he get out?" Luke asked, awed by the boy's power.

"Not unless someone calls upon that specific Force storm. And I'm the only person left in the entire galaxy with the knowledge to. And I'm not planning on doing that any time soon." Laree entered the hall, brushed her hair from her face. "Hey, Laree."

"You're back. Did you...kill them?"

"Thanks to Yoda. They'll never bother anyone again. Not even me. They're probably sorry they ever did." He smiled and hugged her. Holding her with one arm, Chris turned back to Skywalker. "Master, could we take a little vacation perhaps?"

Skywalker thought a moment. "I'm sorry, Chris, Laree needs to begin her training here. You of course, are welcome to come and go. Your training is beyond complete."

"Then let me train her, Master. You have much to do here. And, if you let me train her, you will have Yoda train her. She's seen my masters before, and Yoda is my new Master. And besides, you know you can't stop me."

"Yeah, right. Well let's ask her, ok?" He looked to Laree.

Laree took a step away from Chris. "I'm sorry, but I came to train under Master Skywalker."

Chris looked at the ground. "I understand." He looked up to Skywalker. "You'll of course contact Coruscant of my arrival."

"Coruscant? Wait!" Skywalker said, but too late. Chris disappeared. "Yeah, I'd better warn Coruscant. A few thousand extra troops, remove the orbital fleet, for starters."

"He won't cause any destruction," Laree said. "He just wants to meet with some of the people he's heard so much about." She saw Luke's eyes on her. "That's what he just told me."

Chris found himself on the landing pad on the Imperial palace roof. There was a good deal of air

traffic and a number of landing shuttles and freighters and other craft. He put his hood on and walked to the doorway into the palace.

Inside the palace, he walked toward the main hall. Someone tapped his shoulder, making him whirl around automatically. "Excuse me, but do you have some identification?" the palace security guard asked.

"Uh, no." Chris resisted his natural urge to use the Force on the guard.

"Well minors aren't allowed free run here. We'll have to question you." The guard grabbed Chris's arm.

"Do you mean interrogate? If there's any pain involved, you could be making a mistake..."

"We are not the Empire. We do not torture our...guests."

In a few minutes they had reached the questioning center. The guard sat Chris down in a large black chair, in a room of pure white. It hurt his eyes.

An old woman with black-grey hair entered the room and dismissed the guard. She sat in a smaller chair across from Chris. "Hello," she said, sounding very friendly. "What's your name, son?"

"I am Chris Qel-droma, of Ossus."

"I thought no one lived on Ossus?" she asked wonderingly.

"Well I was born there. I've always kept it as part of my title."

"Where do you live now?" she leaned forward.

"All over."

"Not specific enough. Where do you live?"

"Cinthral. A world on the edge of this galaxy. Undiscovered by the Republic, as of yet."

"How did you get here? You were not observed coming off any ship."

"I... was a stowaway. I jumped on a shipment of spice from the Smugglers Alliance."

"You're here illegally?"

"They found me. They said they would clear me. I can prove it, if you'd just let me see the Head of State for two minutes."

"She is extremely busy. You could be an assassin. But I do think you've been lying. Tell me the truth."



Chris sighed. "Ok. I'm a Dark Lord of the Sith, sent here by Master Skywalker of Yavin 4. I am Chris Qel-droma of Ossus. I now live on Yavin 4 in the academy. Master Skywalker should have contacted Leia by now, telling her of my arrival. Do you need my spouses name?" The woman's eyes were wide with the sudden burst of information. "I don't have one anyway."

"Yes, well... I'll have to check that with someone a little higher up. Just a moment." She stepped out of the room. A pair of binders jumped around Chris's wrists. He melted them away.

A few minutes later, the woman returned. With her came a tall Calamarian. "This is Admiral Ackbar, palace security," the woman said. She looked at Chris, sitting with his chin on his palm. "Your binders—"

"I found them uncomfortable. Admiral," Chris nodded.

"Qel-droma. Why are you here on Coruscant?"

"I already told her. Master Skywalker said I could come. It's a sort of reward."

"Reward for what?"

"I destroyed my masters and have learned to use my Sith magic for good."

Ackbar thought a moment. "We've called Organa Solo. She says her brother has not contacted her. And all you have proved is that you possess the power to kill." He was thinking about those binders. "She tells me you lied once already. What is the truth?"

"You have the truth, Admiral. I would never harm the Republic. I just finished destroying the Empire."

"Are you saying you're the reason for these crazy reports from our sentry's on Byss?"

"You mean the destruction of the entire fleet and most of the planet itself? That would be me."

"What's to stop you from doing the same here?"

"Nothing. The Emperor was there to stop me on Byss. He failed. But I just want to take a vacation here."

"We will have to keep you here until Organa Solo can get here. We will have guards at the doors." He began to leave—

"That's not going to work," Chris said.

Ackbar turned back to him. "What do you mean?"

"I teleported to this planet. I can teleport out of this room. But only if I'm angered."

“Then you will not be angered. Qel-droma.” He left with the woman.

Chris meditated in the bright room. It was a few hours before the door opened again. In stepped Leia Organa Solo, flanked by Han Solo and Chewbacca. “Oh, heroes of the Rebellion, right at my door. Organa Solo.” Chris got up from his seat and knelt before Leia. “The Sith have a high regard for ones in power,” he explained.

“You may rise,” Leia said. Chris stood. “My brother has not contacted me about you. I don’t think I can let you out.”

“Do you wish me to bring him here?” Chris asked softly.

She looked at Han. His blaster hand was itching. “What do you mean?”

“I’ll be right back.” Chris knelt and disappeared.

On Yavin 4, Chris spoke to Master Skywalker. “Come on, Master. You have to come. I told them I would bring you back.”

“I can’t.”

“You’ll be right back. Just tell them to let me go.”

“You must convince them yourself. This whole vacation is a test. I’ve talked with Laree, if you get through this she’ll go to Coruscant. Now go.”

“Yes, Master,” Chris said resignedly, and disappeared.

A few minutes after he’d disappeared, Chris once again was in the room. “He would not come.”

“I’m sorry, Chris,” Leia said. “It’s too potentially dangerous to let you out. And I can’t tell if your telling the truth... or if you’re really even here.”

“Huh? Oh, that. My Sith cloak. It comes with the Sith blood. I can only remove it for a few moments.” He shut his eyes. “There. Master Skywalker sent me.”

“Right. Why?” Leia asked, now able to sense the truth.

“As a vacation. I recently destroyed my four Sith masters, with the help of Yoda. I need some time off.”

“Ok, you got it.” She turned around. “Commander, this boy is to be allowed anywhere he wishes to go. And find him a guest suite.”

“Better make it two,” Chris added, smiling. He saw Han staring, his eyes slits. Chris shrugged. “My girlfriend,” he explained.

Everyone left the room, leaving Chris alone. He disappeared, reappearing at the main entrance of the palace, with Laree by his side. “Isn’t it magnificent?” Chris asked.

There was nothing quite like the Imperial palace. Laree was overawed by the sight. There were probably more beautiful places in the galaxy, but nothing quite on the scale of either size of structure or in number of visitors and workers. Together, they rambled around the palace, making off the wall comments for a pair of teens from backwater know-nothing planets.

After a bit of exploring, Chris and Laree came to their adjoining rooms, in part of the old section of the palace, bearing hinged doors. He swung open the door and stepped into the room. It was nicely furnished with some odd paintings, a couch, a few chairs, and two adjoining room. One to his bedroom, no doubt, and one to her separate room. The lights brightened as they entered.

The comm pinged. Chris plopped down by the couch unit, flicking the switch lightly. “Qel-droma.”

“Hello Chris, this is Leia Organa Solo. I’d like to request your and Laree’s presence here, for an early dinner, if that’s all right,” her voice came through the comm.

“We’d be honored, Your Highness. When shall it be?” Chris jumped into formal mode.

“Right now. I’m sorry I called so late, but—”

“No reason to apologize, Your Highness. It was my own fault,” Chris said, but not from the comm. Leia spun around on one foot, shaking her head. “I’m sorry, I guess it wasn’t exactly proper protocol to jump in here like that.”

Chris and Laree came up to the table where Han, Chewbacca, Jacen, Jaina, and Anakin already sat. Leia introduced them and they sat down.

Dinner was rather good, Chris thought. Though he didn’t have much to compare to. There were long conversations about Chris, but Laree seemed rather out of it. She stared silently at the children, a bewildered look on her face as she ate slowly. Every time someone purposely dragged her into the conversation, she casually backed out. Something was certainly wrong, but this wasn’t the place.

After dinner, the children all slipped away to their room. “May I speak to the children a moment?” Chris asked.

“All right,” Leia said, more trusting than Chris would have thought.

As Chris went in with the children, Leia pulled Laree into another room. “What’s wrong, Laree?”

“Nothing, Your Highness,” Laree said nervously.

“Laree, something is wrong. It’s ok. I just want to help you.”

“It’s...your children. They bring back memories...of Hethrir’s prison.”

Shocked for a moment, Leia's mind raced. Chris, going with the children... but no, it seemed obvious he didn't know what was wrong either. "What happened there? I thought the Proctors were treated fairly well."

"I wasn't. I was different."

Leia immediately understood. Laree was female, and quite beautiful. "That must have been terrible," she breathed quietly.

"You have no idea. I finally killed one of them in defense, Hethrir threw me into the underground dungeons with the little children, and I saw yours," Laree began sobbing quietly. "I never said anything to Chris."

"Probably a good idea, at the time. But you have to say something."

"I can't. And you mustn't. He's liable to...get angry."

"You got a point there. I'm sorry I can't help you."

Chris walked into the children's room. As expected, they were far from asleep. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing," the three of them said, jumping in front of something to block it.

"Oh, come on. You don't have to hide your little non-working droid from me. It's not like I'm one of them."

"Them?" Jacen asked carefully, indignant.

"You know, the adults. I only put that show on for them. You know, I'm only five years older than you. In fact," Chris added, "I'll prove my goodwill." Reaching out with the Force, he pulled the droid up and over to himself, put it on the ground. "Fooling with these old ones again? Well, ok." For a few seconds, a red halo surrounded the droid and Chris.

The droid sputtered to a start. It turned to the children. "Mistress, masters, what do you wish?"

"And you'll find he won't die out. No offense, Anakin. I know that was a bad part."

Who was this man—boy? Jaina wondered. He seemed to know everything they'd gotten in trouble about, at least since that droid. She had to admit he was faster than Anakin, but she didn't like what she felt when that red light had appeared. And he was huge—how could he only be five years older? Oddly enough, Jaina found she could not tell if he was lying. You too? her brother spoke into her mind.

Yes. I don't like this.

"Don't like what, Jaina? Ooh, sorry," Chris said.

“You’re like Hethrir,” Jaina glared. “You stay away from us.” She pulled Anakin back.

“I’m not like Hethrir. I’m one of you. I just wasn’t so privileged when I was younger.” He stepped forward. “Take my hand Jaina.” He smiled.

Jaina’s arms quivered around her brother.

“Oh, come on, Jaina. I promise, you’ll like it. Remember when your Uncle tossed you in the air when you were small? How would you like an advanced variation of that?”

That got Jaina’s attention. Putting fear aside, she reached out and took Chris’s hand. Suddenly she was standing on her bed. “Huh?” She looked around disbelieving.

“Interesting, eh? Call it teleporting, discovered it myself. Jacen?” Now that he’d gotten the hang of it, Chris was able to ‘port them without needing their hands. The children all giggled in delight as Chris threw them around the room.

Han Solo heard his children laughing with Chris, up in their room. Chewie bellowed. “I know, I don’t like it either. Seems to me he’s settin’ us up for a fall. With his power, he could be the universe’s youngest Emperor.” Just then, Leia and Laree entered again, Laree blinking tears from her eyes. Things sure weren’t going right.

Later that night, Chris and Laree sat in silence in their room. The air between them was still, both wishing they knew what exactly to say. They sat opposite each other, fidgeting in the awkward moment. Laree took a deep, preparing breath, and broke the silence. “Chris...I’ve got to tell you something,” she said quietly.

Chris looked up, glad he hadn’t had to ask. “Yes, Laree?” he asked.

She tried to choose her words carefully. “Chris...” She couldn’t keep still, so she stood up and paced. “You have no idea how hard this is for me to tell you...”

“Then just tell me,” Chris said.

“Ok,” she whispered and turned back toward him. She managed to hold back the tears this time. “You see, when we...well, it wasn’t my first time.”

“You’re kidding,” Chris said disbelievingly.

“No, I’m not,” she said.

Understanding crossed Chris’s face. He hopped up to his feet and stood in front of Laree, glaring at her angrily. “So what you’re telling me is that you had another boyfriend before me.”

“No, that’s not what I—”

“Don’t lie to *me*, Laree,” he said.

“But that’s *not* what I mean. I’m telling you that—” she started.

“Don’t you tell me what you’re telling me. You think I don’t understand?” he asked, cutting her off again.

“Well apparently not.”

“Oh, you bet I understand—”

This time she cut him off. “Chris, I was raped,” she said insistently.

Chris seemed to shrink. At least his anger did. “What?” he asked, shocked by the revelation.

Laree hung her head shamefully and stared at the ground. “I’m sorry I never told you...but...” she trailed off.

“I...understand, I guess, why you wouldn’t,” he said quietly. He put his arms around her, resting her head on his shoulder. His face suddenly became very stern. “Who was it, Laree? Do you know?” he whispered into her ear.

“Well...not exactly. I mean, I was concious and all, but I didn’t know many people in Hethrir’s prison,” she said.

Chris pulled back from her a moment, unable to calm his mind. His mouth hung open as he searched for words. He glanced at her a moment, but couldn’t. He hung his head and stared at the ground. He thought a moment, wondering what he was doing. She was the one in pain, not him. He glanced up again, holding there this time, stood slowly and hugged her warmly. “I’m sorry,” he whispered.

Quite sometime later, Laree and Chris returned to Yavin 4. After Laree had told Chris about Hethrir’s prison, the vacation had vastly improved. They’d done all sorts of things they enjoyed, and had a great time besides everything disclosed. Skywalker greeted them. “Welcome back, my students.”

“Master,” they both said.

“How was your trip?”

“Han Solo was very distrustful,” Chris said. “Your niece and nephews were fun though,” he smiled.

“What’s wrong?” Luke asked, looking to Laree for an answer. He got it. “She told you.”

Chris looked angrily at Laree. “You mean even he knew?”

She looked right back. “What do you expect? He found me.”

Chris shut his eyes a moment, visibly calming himself. He took a deep breath before opening his eyes and continuing. “Anywhoo. Master, while we were away I got to thinking. From personal experience, I recognize how a number of students learning their lessons in one place is simpler. But I also think that being alone with four masters helped me speed along. I know you can’t exactly do that, but why don’t you choose your best two of three students, to train personally? You know you’re not really needed here, and since you resigned your position with the New Republic, I’d think it would be the perfect time.”

“Some proposal. You’ve nearly convinced me, though the idea has crossed my mind. Do you have a good idea where to set it up?” Luke asked.

“No, but I have a strange feeling you do. Maybe a nice, peaceful world you’ve visited. Choose the same way you did this place.”

“Leia chose it.”

“So be it.”

“Ok, maybe I do have an idea. But I don’t think it’s a good one. I’ll talk to you about it later.”

“Ok, sure.” All three of them went their separate ways. Ten minutes later, Chris met with Luke in his quarters. “Now tell me about your idea,” Chris said.

“Well there’s this girl...” Luke began.

“It always starts that way,” Chris chuckled.

“Shut up,” Luke blushed. “Anyway, I met her 15 years ago. She isn’t beautiful exactly, but striking. Pale brown hair, one green eye, and one gray. If we hadn’t met in a planetary Imperial senate room, and she hadn’t hated Jedi, I would of had a chance. But the Falcon, that still gives me hope.”

“How could that huge hunk of junk give anyone hope?” Chris joked.

“She kissed me onboard the Falcon.”

“Oh boy, one kiss? Geeze, act as if it was your only time...”

“Well I don’t like including all the times I kissed my sister, ok?” Luke said, not really sarcastic. “But it was different with Gaeriel. Gaeriel Captison. I felt this strange pulsing Force around her, her very presence taking on a seductive flavor. But she said she would never leave Bakura.”

“So this is your chance to go to her. Not a bad plan, if you think she’d go for it. You mentioned she hated Jedi. Would she appreciate a Jedi master teaching his Jedi apprentices?” Chris asked.

“We’ll see,” Luke said, raising an eyebrow.

“I have to know where it is first, or what it looks like. Or at least a name.”

“Bakura. A nice, peaceful world not so far from Tatooine.”

“I can take you as far as Mos Eisley, you can get yourself a ship from there,” Chris said.

“If I meet another Han Solo, I’ll get you back. But it’s a deal.”

A moment later they were on Tatooine, in Mos Eisley. Chris disappeared again. Alone, Luke walked into the cantina. He was greeted by the old familiar smells, and a room filled with various species from all over the galaxy. It looked somehow different, without stormtroopers. He walked up to the bar and ordered a drink.

He turned his back to the counter and looked around the bar. He hated to mis-use the Force like this, but he had no choice. He waved his hand, and a few thousand credits appeared in it. He stuffed it in his pocket, after waving it around fairly. It was moments until a rugged looking humanoid walked up to him. “You’d be needing passage off-world. How much ya got?” he asked.

Luke looked up at the unusually tall, nondescript man. “Is it a fast ship?”

“Depends on where you’re going.”

“I need to go to a planet called Bakura. Is it fast?” Luke asked.

“Bakura, heh? Just so happens I have a shipment to pick up there somewhere on my list. I could push up the date, if you’ve got the cash.”

“How much, and is it fast?”

“Four thousand. And no.”

“Three thousand.” Good thing it’s slow, Luke thought, I need to think about this.

“Thirty five hundred.”

“Done. Where shall I meet you?”

“Docking bay 94. Be there as soon as you can, I wanna pull out tonight.” The man walked off.

“94?” Luke mumbled. This was getting too eerie.

An hour later, Luke met the man on an average looking bulk freighter, remodeled for more cargo space and weaponry. The Wepler’s Jern lifted off and flew through hyperspace, for Bakura.

Nearly a day later, Luke was thrown off the ship onto the Bakuran spaceport soil. They’d found out his little money trick when he found he was a little short. He got to his feet, dusted himself off and threw his hood back over his head. He rented a repulsor vehicle, and set off for the old portion of the city, hoping they hadn’t moved.



What about Eppie? He'd have to check on her later, of course. He'd never properly talked to her after she'd healed herself. Shedding speed, Luke neared the Captison mansion.

The mansion looked every bit as enchanting as it ever had. It's smooth white front gleamed in his eyes. He stopped right in front and stepped off his craft. Everything was so dream-like. Timidly, he stepped up to the door and prepared himself. He hoped he wasn't barging in.

Luke tapped the annunciator.

As his finger touched the cold metal button, a thousand memories of the day he'd first come to the Captison mansion flew through his mind. He remembered her Aunt Tiree and Uncle Yeorg, the Prime Minister. He remembered how nervous Leia had felt as Tiree wore the black cape draped around her shoulders.

But most of all, he remembered *her*. How he'd stepped inside, and suddenly his senses were overtaken by her presence. How she'd treated him that night with venomous hatred for him, as he was a Jedi. But nothing could turn him away. And now, fifteen years later, he returned. He hoped she at least would not turn him away right off.

As his thoughts drifted back, the door opened. As Luke had expected, from times past, it was not a servant answering, but Gaeriel herself. His senses stopped registering anything else. Her presence seemed to reach out to him, more seductive in flavor than ever before. For a moment he was at a loss of where he was and fell back a step.

Her unmatched eyes looked at him strangely. "Yes? Who are you?"

Only now did Luke really use his eyes to look at her. Her pale brown hair was down, perfectly still in the calm air of the planet. She looked just the way she had—perhaps even better. Time had been good. Then something struck him. Who am I? Could she have forgotten? No dummy, the hood. Sure enough, it blocked all light from his face. He removed it.

"L-Luke!" she said in a shocked whisper. She came out and hugged him warmly. "Come in! Where have you been for the past fifteen years?"

"It's a long, long story," Luke said, smiling as he entered. The inside of the mansion was nearly exactly the same. But Gaeriel's presence pulsed at him so brightly, he found it hard to concentrate on the details.

"Sit down," Gaeri said, motioning to a repulsor chair. Luke sat, Gaeriel across from him in another chair. "So, where have you been?"

"All over."

"Never here. I've always wondered... why did you never come back? Before now?"

This was a hard one. "At first...well, you sent me away. There was a job to be done and I had to attend to it."

“I didn’t send you away... not exactly. And you mean you’ve defeated the Empire?” He nodded. “Wait a minute. Weren’t you the Minister of State quite recently?”

“I was. But Mon Mothma was right, all us war heroes need action. Peace is by far the worst time to be in government. Too many internal problems. For a time, I was tempted to proclaim my self Emperor just to stir up some excitement,” he smiled. “Woulda done it, too, if my sister hadn’t stopped me.”

Gaeri looked a little shocked. “Your sister?”

“Oh, you didn’t know? I thought that was public knowledge by now. You know Leia Organa Solo, Chief of State, part of the original Alliance delegation to this world.”

“That was your sister?”

“Yes,” he said. “How’s Eppie?” he asked, changing the subject before he felt obligated to tell about his father.

“She’s fine. I’m sure she’d love to see you again. What have you been doing, before politics?” Gaeriel asked.

“I’ve... formed a Jedi academy. My students have been learning well, I don’t even need to be there anymore.”

“You’re... training more Jedi,” she reached for her pendant, but her hand stopped and fell back to her lap. “Good. I realize Eppie was right when she told me about you. About Jedi.”

Just then, Prime Minister Captison entered. “Gaeri, who are you talking to—” he saw Luke. “Minister Skywalker?”

Luke stood up and shook the prime ministers hand. “Minister Captison. I am no longer Prime Minister of the Republic. I resigned a week ago,” Luke said, as nicely as he could.

Captison smiled. “I know. But what shall I call you?”

“Luke. I have no formal name, except to my students. But ‘Master Skywalker’ doesn’t sound right in public.”

“All right, Luke. I won’t bother you two any further. Good day,” he said as he left.

Luke sat back down. “Now about why I was here. One of my students— my greatest one, mind you—told me that i should set up a little Jedi spot on some world, my choice. You know, to train my best students intensely. I saw it as...my chance.”

“Who was this student?” Gaeri asked, a bit suspicious.

“A young boy that recently came to my moon. He’s... special. A Dark Lord of the Sith,” it was

time. “Like my father. Darth Vader.”

“Darth Vader. Your...father? That-that thing... that killed the Emperor?” Gaeri asked.

“I prefer to call him Anakin. And I’d prefer you did too,” Luke said, showing his first shade of anger toward Gaeri.

“I’m sorry, but... it’s a shock. Now, you said this boy was a Dark Lord? How old is he?”

“He’s fifteen. But you’d be surprised. He’s more powerful than I am. He really amazes me. One week, and he’s fallen in love with one of my students. He’s really taught me a lot. Two weeks ago, I was a zombie,” Luke said truthfully.

“In one week? Isn’t that kinda fast?”

Afraid at what she was hinting at, Luke decided to take it literally. “Not really, both he and Laree were new to my school. They were destined to hit it off.” Gaeri had a strange look in her eye. “What is it?”

“I... knew a Laree. But she ran away nearly ten years ago.”

A thought struck Luke. “Where’d you meet her, on Bakura?”

“No, not here. Somewhere else.”

“Then I bet she didn’t run away. No, she definately didn’t. How could she run away, at only six?” Luke asked.

“How’d you know she was six?” Gaeri asked, near tears.

“She didn’t run away. That must be her. She was kidnapped by a Dark Jedi, and put in prisonment for a time. Hethrir trained her to be strong in the Force. She quickly rose to Proctor. I’d imagine her family had thought she’d run away. But we saved all of those, once Hethrir kidnapped my neice and nephews, and we traced them. Do you know where we could find her family?”

“Well... my sister lives on Ketrann now.”

“Your...sister?” Luke’s mind clicked. Make Gaeri’s gray eye green... “Blazes! She looks just like you! She’s your neice and...” Luke’s face turned less enthusiastic. “If Chris marries her, and I married you, that would make him my—gulp—nephew!” Gaeri’s laughs carried through the night.

“You’re from Ketrann?” Chris asked Laree.

“I think so. I can’t really remember. Hethrir worked quite hard to make us forget our past lives, our family. I think my mother died. At least that’s what he told me. And with me missing she may have moved back in with the rest of her family.”

“Where is that?”

“I can’t remember exactly,” Laree said. “But my aunt and grand aunt and uncle live there.”

“Do you have a name, on any of them? Your own last name?” Chris asked, eager to help.

“I’m... Captison. At least that’s my mother’s last name. I don’t remember my father.”

“Captison...? That sounds so familiar...” Chris knew he’d heard it. He closed his eyes, his mind rerunning at full speed everything he’d heard in the past few weeks. “But it was different with Gaeriel. Gaeriel Captison.”

“Huh?”

“That’s what Master Skywalker said to me. Just before he went off to meet her. Don’t you get it Laree? Master Skywalker’s in love with your aunt!” A terrible realization hit him. “If I married you, and he married her, that would make him my—gulp—uncle!” Laree’s laughs carried through the night.

In the morning Chris began his galactic sweeps for Master Skywalker. He swept over the galaxy with his mind, searching out the singular mind, to pinpoint it’s location.

An hour later, he had it. “Laree,” he called. “I found him.” He teleported them there. “Master?”

Luke lay unconscious on the repulsorbed. “Don’t you call me uncle!”

“But I didn’t—”

Luke awoke. He sighed. “It was just a dream.” He saw Chris. “What the—?”

“No wonder I couldn’t find you. You’re still barely conscious. Master, we came just as we figured out that—”

“Gaeriel’s her aunt? Yes, I found that too. Go talk to her, Laree. She thinks she knows where your mother is. I don’t know about your mother, but you sure do look like Gaeri. Go, I would like to talk to Chris.” She left to find Gaeriel. “Look Chris, I know neither of us wants us to be related. But it looks like it’s unavoidable. The Captisons are a wonderful family, from those I’ve met. Gaeri’s parents are dead, but her aunt and uncle are nice enough.

“But I have to warn you. Even though you have all the good intentions in the galaxy, Laree’s mother will hate you. And her, probably.”

“That religious thing you mentioned earlier. She follows it?”

“Much more than Gaeri ever did. She probably blames me for Laree’s disappearance. But she should still love to see her. Just be ready, ok?”

“I’ll try.”

“Gaeri?” Laree called out into the dark room.

“Lights,” Gaeri whispered, and they came on. “Laree. Luke was right!”

“Yes, he was. And so was Chris.” She hurried forward and hugged her aunt. “I missed you so much. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” They sat down on the bed. “What happened?”

“Hethrir. He staged my runaway and the note. He made me one of his students. I was easily able to complete his little tasks, like igniting the lightsaber through the Force. I became a Helper, and was later advanced to Proctor, the heads of the organization.

“That’s when the trouble started. By then I was fourteen. No other girls ever made it up to Proctor. I was alone. I was defenseless. They sensed that. I’d grown into quite a woman, Hethrir once said. He warned me what that may mean. But it was soon after that it began.” Her face was haunted.

“It’s ok to cry,” Gaeri whispered. “You didn’t do anything wrong. It’s not your fault.”

“Oh, I know that. I knew that. But I couldn’t take it. Once, I just drew my lightsaber and slashed the guy in half. And I can’t cry. I had enough when I cried on the Chief of State a week ago.”

“But you’re strong. You trust Chris. That’s a pretty powerful start. And beside all that happened to you, you had the mind to realize you were made for each other. I never realized that with Luke.”

“How could you? You don’t understand the Force, the Force that binds love together. But he’ll show you, Luke will, if you want him to. He could train us both.”

“I don’t have any Force potential.”

“Sure you do,” Laree said. “I can sense it. Hasn’t Master Skywalker tried to get you to accept his training?”

“No.”

“Well he must have noticed. I’ll ask him about it.”

“Of course, of course. Let’s go see Uncle Yeorg and Aunt Tiree.” Gaeri took Laree’s hand, taking her from the room.

Luke jumped on the speeder, and accelerated toward the Bakur complex. He’d already checked that Eppie still lived there. Minutes later, he was at her door. He pushed the annunciator.

A moment later, the door opened. Eppie stepped back from the open door, looking at Luke. “Master Skywalker, what are you doing here?” she asked, surprised.

“Oh, nothing much. But I couldn’t visit with out checking in on you.” He walked in at her gesture.

“How are you doing?”

“I’m fine. Thanks to you, of course.”

“I did nothing. You did it yourself. Believe me, I had no idea you could heal yourself that well. It took me nearly another year to recover from my lesser injury.”

“You weren’t a master then.”

“You weren’t even a knight.”

“I was an old woman, wise in my own way. Not to mention inactive, as I’m sure you were not. Now, why are you back on Bakura?” Eppie asked.

“Reuniting family, perhaps adding some new additions.”

“What exactly do you mean?”

“I’ve found Gaeriel’s niece. Of course I didn’t know and brought her to my academy, to train. One of my students fell in love with her. And—”

“You and Gaeriel finally, eh? Not bad, three Captisons in one day. And more soon, heh? Yes, yes. All in good time.”

Luke blushed, suddenly embarrassed. And, he asked himself, why is she starting to sound like Yoda. This was far too strange. “Um, I have to go now. Don’t wanna be late, you know. Goodbye, Eppie.”

“Goodbye,” she hardly got out before he fled out the door. “What’s with him?”

What do they expect me to do? Chris asked himself. Luke is out somewhere, Laree is with Gaeri somewhere, where does that leave me? He plopped back down on the repulsor-chair. For the second time, his hand flared angrily.

He gave in to a long standing habit. He teleported to Coruscant.

The New Republic had never found the Emperor’s throne room in the very upper level of the palace. He sat in the Emperor’s throne, his hand’s throbbing quieting. He hit the switch on the arm panel, turning the chair around to face the large circular window.

The throne room was built high enough to always be in the clouds. The Emperor had long ago manipulated them so that his dark presence would brew up a lightning storm. His visitors always found it intimidating. The clouds did their work for Chris too, but in stronger force. The crackles of lightning illuminated his face, and his spirit.

He laughed out loud, a deep, throaty, evil laugh. The sound continued to echo, just as the Emperor designed.

Someone entered. "What in blazes was that?" He saw Chris in the Emperor's throne. "Who are you? What are you doing in here? Where is this?"

"That's a lot of questions." He reached out for the man's mind. "Approach, my servant, and you will know the answers."

"Yes, my master," he said as he approached.

"I will be visiting here occasionally. You are to report to me then."

"How will I know when, master, and on what?"

"You will know when. You are to keep an eye on the Chief of State. You as a person are sacrifice, but you must get your information back to me. Do not take unnecessary risks," Chris said. "Now go."

"Yes, master," the man said, turning away and exiting. The hidden door closed and locked.

Chris teleported back to the Captison mansion. "Hello, Chris. Where have you been?" Luke asked.

"Nowhere, Master. Just...around."

"Ok, kid. Just stay around here from now on, ok?"

"Don't call me kid!" Chris said.

Luke walked up to Gaeriel. "Why are you mad at me?" he asked. "What did I do?"

She whirled toward him. "I'm not angry. It's just... why didn't you ever tell me I could become a Jedi?" she asked. "I'd think that you would love the idea."

"Wait a minute. What do you mean?"

"I was talking to Laree before. Well, she told me everything. But she also suggested I be trained, by you. I acted just like you did, but she insisted that she could sense my strength. Why do you not want me to be a Jedi?"

"It's not that I don't want you to be a Jedi. I just didn't know you could be one."

"You didn't know? Laree said she could plainly sense it. And she's untrained. You're supposed to be a master," she said, anger creeping into her voice.

Luke sighed. "I'll level with you. I admit, I can't sense your strength. Anyone else, it's easy. You, impossible."

"And why is that?"

"Because your very presence makes my Force sense tingle. If I sweep you with the Force I feel

this energizing effect, something I've never felt from anyone before. Back fifteen years ago, I felt it. That's why I didn't give up until the end. Now, let me try something." He laid his hand on her head, reaching out with the Force. He reached into her deepest section of the brain, and, not completely unexpectedly, was thrust to the ground. He smiled up at her.

"Is that a good thing?" Gaeriel asked.

"It means the power's there," he said, reaching out a hand. Gaeriel helped him up. "I'd love to train you. If you don't think your sister will mind hating the entire family for turning against her."

"The galaxy needs the Jedi. Eventually she'll even realize it."

All this talk of Gaeriel and Jedi, brought back old memories of his first, and fallen, apprentice, Dev Sibwarra. A boy he hadn't thought about in fifteen years. He would have been thirty now, had I saved him. His last memories of Gaeriel came with it. He shook himself out of it. He could still do right there, at least. And Chris, he's just like Dev. Everything was perfect.

Gaeriel obviously sensed this too. She shook her head. "No, Luke. Not yet."

Luke nodded absently. "I have to go." He walked off.

"Luke? Go where?"

"I have to talk to Chris."

"Chris," Luke said. Chris was sitting next to Laree on the bed, again.

"Master?"

"I need to go to Coruscant. I have to talk to Leia." Chris didn't move. "Well come on!"

He sighed and shook his head. "I can't do this for you forever, master. It may only take a minute of my time, but don't bother me if I'm busy, ok?"

"Sure, kid. C'mon, send me." Next thing he saw was the vast corridor overflowed with beings, human and not. The council had just broken up. He ran to catch up with Leia.

"Luke, when'd you get in?" she asked with a smile.

"About fifteen seconds ago."

"Oh, Chris, right. Why'd you want to speak with me?" she asked as they walked down the corridor.

"I needed to tell you about—wait a second. We're being watched." He searched through the crowd with the Force. "Security guard. About ten meters back. Taking notes on everything you do."



“What should we do?” Past knowledge automatically threw out the possibility of stopping.

“Just keep walking. I’ll take him out,” Luke said. He reached out with the Force and tricked the man’s mind into seeing what he wanted him to see. Luke stopped, but the man didn’t notice him and walked right into him. Luke’s hand shot to the man’s throat and picked him up an inch. “Who are you?”

“I will not tell you.”

“Who sent you?”

“My master,” the man said.

“Who is this master?” Luke asked, Leia coming up behind him.

“I do not know his name.”

“He’s telling you what to say right now, isn’t he? Any one would resist at death, yet you do not. Yes, he has you under hypnosis.” Luke put him back on the ground. He tried to free the man’s mind with the Force, but found himself repulsed by the controlling party. “This is Chris’s work. That’s where he was before. He came here, where the Emperor’s presence is still very powerful. In a way you cannot destroy.”

“Are you sure, Luke?” Leia asked.

“Yes. He’ll never be fully true to the Light, I recognize that now. But I can’t believe he was planning your assassination. That’s going too far. I have to stop him from coming back here.”

“Maybe he’d listen to Laree.”

“Speaking of Laree, can we talk in your suite? I don’t feel comfortable out here.” They hurried upstairs to the higher levels of the palace and went into Leia’s room.

“So, what do you think that was all about?” Leia asked.

“I think Chris is getting scared, or nervous. Needed to take it out on someone. He probably had no intention to hurt you. He wouldn’t have sent me if he did.”

“Chris, scared, or nervous? Why would he be scared?”

“Well,” Luke sighed. “This isn’t exactly the way I wanted to tell you, but both I and Chris are getting married, soon.”

Leia’s eyes opened wide. “Married?”

“Yes, we both had the good fortune to venture into a Captison’s life.”

“Captison? You... you’re back with Gaeriel! But Luke, what other Captison is there? And what about Laree?” Leia asked.

“Have you ever taken the time to ponder over what Laree’s last name is? Of course, I hadn’t found out until quite recently myself...”

“She’s a Captison?”

“Well her mother was. Her father is still unknown. But she’s Gaeriel’s niece. They’d thought she ran away ten years ago.”

“But she was taken by Hethrir and— well, now she has family at least.”

“Right. As long as Chris doesn’t go about killing any of us.”

“You’re going to be—” she chuckled “—Chris’s uncle!”

Luke groaned. “It’s true then. I was hoping the law didn’t carry that far. I mean, the in-law of an in-law? Why can’t we bend the rules?”

“Is it really that bad? He could teach you a few moves. I watched him with that lightsaber. Whatever art that is he acquired on his homeworld, it looks real impressive done with a lightsaber. And he probably knows more things you could use.”

“I guess so. He is the best lightsaber-handler in the known galaxy, probably in all history. And he already taught me this.” Luke raised his hand outstretched, his fist partially opened. In the blink of an eye, his lightsaber grip appeared within it, igniting and he pulled it back in a defensive position. He then disignited it and made it disappear the same way.

“Where does it go?” Leia asked.

Luke showed her that it went back to his belt, where it came from. “Doesn’t really serve a purpose,” he said, “But it is quite impressive. Now back to business. I’m setting up a little training facility on Bakura. So far I’m just training Gaeri and Laree, but if any other powerful students come in that either deserve my direct instruction, or can’t learn any other way, they will be admitted.”

“In other words anyone you want or any trouble makers.”

“Exactly,” Luke said.

“Then you’ll train my children there, eventually?”

“Actually, I was thinking about bringing Jacen and Jaina back with me. They should begin their training,” Luke said.

“They’re only ten,” Leia insisted. “You didn’t begin until you were eighteen.”

“Chris was a Master when he was eight.”

“That’s different.”

“Is it?”

“Yes. He had no choice.”

“True, but it has worked for the better. I think the twins are ready to begin their training, and I don’t think you’ll stand in their way,” Luke said.

Leia sighed. “All right. But I’ll have to find time to visit. I don’t think Anakin will be happy any other way. Neither would I.”

“Of course you can visit. You’ll have to come to the wedding anyway. That’ll work as the first visit.”

She glanced at her chrono. “The children should be back with Han any minute.” The door opened behind her, and she turned to meet them. Han entered, followed by the children and Chewie. Chewie bellowed to Luke.

“Hey, Chewie. Hey, Han.” Luke looked to Leia.

“Han, Luke wants to bring the twins back with him to begin their training. On Bakura.”

“Bakura? What’s on Bakura?” Han asked.

“My new private training center. Only the strongest train there, now. It’s time for your children to be among them. There’s no time to elaborate, Chris is bringing us back now. Leia will speak for me. Goodbye.” Luke, Jacen, and Jaina disappeared.

“What about Anakin?” Han asked. “And what’s this deal with Bakura?”

“He’ll take Anakin in time,” Leia said. “And he’s getting married on Bakura, soon.”

“The kid’s getting married? To that senator?” Han asked, unbelieving yet happy for his friend/brother-in-law.

“Right. And I think it’s about time.”

“When will they be back?” Anakin asked.

“Not for awhile, Anakin. But you’ll go with them soon.”

“Wow. Where are we?” Jacen asked. He looked over at the wall, its strange glassy surface filled with strange looking trees that waved in an unseen wind.

“This is the Captison mansion on Bakura. Your home, for awhile. I’m sorry you can’t be with your parents, but they could interfere with your training,” Luke said, guiding them upstairs.

“It’s ok, Uncle Luke. Can we still call you Uncle Luke?” Jaina asked.

Luke smiled back at her. “Of course you can. You two may be my students, but family first.”

“Really? Will that go for me too, `Master`?” Gaeriel stood at the top of the steps in a bright green jumpsuit looking down at the children.

“Yeah, and what about us?” Chris and Laree came from behind, down the stairs.

“Great, I think I just committed myself.” He knelt by the twins. “Look, you two are the only ones already in my family, would you mind calling me `master`?”

“I guess not, Unc—Master,” Jaina said. “Master,” Jacen said.

You only have to keep it up around them, children, he said into their minds.

“Skywalker—” Chris began. He’d heard what Luke’d thought to the twins.

Be quiet, Chris. You already know you don’t call me master, Luke said to Chris.

“Ok, Skywalker. For now.” Chris teleported away.

“Where’s he going?” Laree asked. “What’d you say to him?”

“I didn’t say anything. He’s going to Coruscant. I don’t know what set him off. Too bad I threw his agent in the brig. Of course he gets high on lightning.”

“Excuse me?” Laree said. “What are you talking about?”

“I caught his agent watching me and Leia. And he has an addiction to cause lightning storms at the palace, from the Emperor’s chambers. Palpatine’s presence is still very powerful there. But he’ll be back.”

“Can’t you make him stop?” Gaeri asked.

“I can’t make him do anything. But he’s back already. Now come on, children. Upstairs.” He took them the rest of the way to their room. In it were two twin beds, side by side, and not much else.

“Uncle Luke?” Jaina asked.

“Yes, Jaina?”

“What’s wrong with Chris?” she asked, looking up at her uncle.

“Nothing’s wrong with him. Not exactly. I’m doing all I can to save him from the Dark Side. I want

you two to stay away from him, if you can. I think I know what I have to do.”

Luke left the twins, the door shutting automatically behind him. He walked down stairs to Laree. “Where’s Chris?”

“He went to bed.”

“Good,” Luke said. “I need you to do me a favor.”

“What, Master?” she asked.

“Tomorrow we’ll be beginning everyone’s training. You can already use a lightsaber, right?” he asked. She nodded. “Good. I’ll show you a few things, then I want you to challenge me to a duel. Don’t go easy. Fight fierce. It’s the only way to save Chris.”

“If you think it will work. How is that supposed to work?” she asked.

“You’ll see. It won’t work if you know. But I think I can convince him that I am his master now. And Yoda.”

“Yes, Master. I will do my best. Until morning,” she bowed her head.

“Until morning,” Luke nodded. Laree went upstairs quietly.

“Do you really think you can convince him you’re stronger?” Gaeriel asked from behind him.

Luke turned to face her. As if I hadn’t known she was standing there. “Not necessarily stronger. Just an equal, demanding respect. That should be enough to bring him back for good. But he’ll still be endowed with the Dark Side, that can not be helped, I’m afraid.”

“That’s too bad,” she said truthfully. “His skills in teleportation are amazing, but they shouldn’t cost him his soul.”

“His soul was claimed the day he was born, the day the Emperor died.”

“That must hurt. C’mon, Luke, let’s go to bed. It’s getting late.”

“Oh, right,” he said, glancing at his chrono. “I’m on Coruscant time.”

“I’ll show you where you may sleep.” Gaeriel showed him upstairs, through a number of halls, finally coming to a stop before a door, which opened at her touch. “I hope it isn’t too small.”

Luke looked into the room, noted it’s large bed and wide spread walls. “Too small won’t be a problem, Gaeri,” he said, surprised. How could she think it was too small for him, he thought as he stepped into the room.

“Oh, good.” Gaeri stepped into the room also, the door shutting behind her. She saw Luke’s look

of surprise. “There aren’t many guest rooms, Luke. If you mind, I can—”

“No, no. It’s fine, if you don’t mind,” Luke said, wondering if he was doing the right thing. Maybe he should leave. It was her house.

They both felt awkward. “I... I think I’ll just sleep like this tonight,” Gaeriel said.

“Right,” Luke said, slipping his robe off over his head, his black pants and tunic were revealed underneath. They both timidly got into the bed, turning away from each other.

Luke could plainly sense her nervousness, a nervousness that was not unknown in his own mind. Feeling childish as if back on Tatooine all those years ago, Luke tried to gain his courage and he turned over toward Gaeriel. She already faced him.

They looked deep into each others’ eyes, and both understood. They didn’t need to do anything to prove their love for one another, the love was there, between them. In the Force. But they still kissed. They got comfortable, exchanged goodnights, and Gaeri shut the lights off.

Night was hell. Chris’s mind kept wandering in these impossible dreams and nightmares. Nothing could help. His masters were gone, Master Skywalker was no Master. And Yoda mysteriously left him alone.

There were lightsaber duels, fighting all over the planet, everyone trying to get the upper hand and rule the galaxy. The fight went on forever, contestant after contestant dieing. But more kept coming. The whole scene was in havoc, until sometime later one person arose to power: Chris himself. He hadn’t even been battling.

He awoke in a heavy cake of sweat. Chris didn’t exactly hate the dream, rising to power was pretty good. It’s what the dream meant that scared him. And he had a pretty good idea what it meant.

In his mind, it meant that he could change the feelings of people around him, perhaps alter them to his advantage. He believed he’d turned all those people in the dream against each other, so they’d deal with each other and think they were going to win, when they just helped him do the dirty work. And he had a strange feeling he was right.

This brought him a new aspect of the Force, a new sensing ability. He felt strengthened with the knowledge of powers beyond his masters. He searched now, with his new ability, searched around the planet, sorting through presences, sensing much more clearly.

His mind stopped. In this very house, he could distinctly sense the presence of another—one with the same ability. He was too tired, and there were too many Force-sensitives in the building, to figure out who it was. He drifted back to sleep, forgetting that presence.

Luckily, Gaeriel woke first. She found herself nuzzled by Luke’s side, her arm draped over him. She carefully got up without bothering him, straightened her clothes, and went out into the hallway. She walked quietly down the stairs.

Gaeriel went to the kitchen and grabbed a bite to eat. Eating it hungrily, Gaeri walked out into the dining room. “Aunt Tiree, what are you doing up?”

Aunt Tiree sat hunched over a datapad, looked up at Gaeriel. “I’ve just been looking over some records. What are you doing up? It’s quite early for a weekend, for you. I’m sorry if you didn’t like your accommodations, but we just didn’t have the space.”

“No, it was...ok, Aunt Tiree. I just happened to wake up, for the better, I suppose,” Gaeriel said and walked out of the dining room. She went into the study to think for awhile.

Laree woke up groaning. She felt sickly. What had she dreamt? She couldn’t remember, but that didn’t make her like it any more. She sat up for a moment, looking around the room. There were various ornaments, posters, pictures, and the like. As she’d found out earlier, this was Gaeriel’s room.

Also as she’d found out, the room was equipped with a wall to wall stereo system. She turned some soft music on as she dressed. Her own clothes were dirty, so she borrowed some from her aunt. She looked at herself in the mirror. The green Bakuran jumpsuit matched her eyes perfectly. She pulled her long brown hair around, over her chest.

She turned the music off and left the room, the door shutting behind her.

Luke woke up slowly, and in stages. It had been far too long since he’d actually slept, instead of the Jedi trance. He stood up, slid into his Jedi robe, and unhooked his saber. He threw it on the bed. He wouldn’t be using it today.

Luke walked out of the room. He calmly walked downstairs. He glanced at the dining room where Gaeri, Tiree, and Laree were talking. But Chris was nowhere around.

Luke reached out with the Force to find Chris. He quickly walked toward Chris’s room, and opened it. Inside, Chris lay on the ground sweating, unconcious. “Chris!” Luke shouted. He knelt by the boys head, reaching his hand out on his forehead. A little Force energizing made Chris shoot up into a sitting position.

“What the!?” Chris shouted, breathing hard.

“You ok, kid?” Luke asked.

“Not if you keep calling me ‘kid’. But yeah, I’m ok. Just had some dreams... weird dreams.” Chris climbed to his feet. He walked into a separate bathroom and washed the sweat off his face.

“You’ll be ok. C’mon, we have to start training.” kid he added silently. Chris glared as they left the room and went to the dining room. “Excuse us, Mrs. Captison, but we have to begin today’s training, so...”

Tiree looked up at him. “Understood, Master Skywalker. Go right ahead.” Luke, Chris, Gaeriel, and Laree left the mansion. The sky was clear, a very light blue. They walked out to a clearing a few

dozen meters from the house.

“Now,” Luke said, “I’ll work with Laree for now. Chris, you work with Gaeriel. Show ‘er the basics.” Luke and Laree walked a few meters beyond Chris and Gaeri.

“Ok,” Chris said as Luke began showing Laree some lightsaber techniques. “Now, the only way to using and trusting the Force, is to trust yourself. Do you trust yourself?”

“Uh...I guess so,” Gaeri said.

With a bit of viciousness, Chris said, “You must know. Do you trust yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Now the main way of controlling the Force is—”

Luke cut in, “You don’t control the Force. The Force helps you. Remember that Chris.”

“Right, Master.” He turned to Gaeri. “What he said.”

“Good, Laree,” Luke said as she thrust her saber in the air, pulled back and bocked, and continued in intervening arcs and angles.

Laree stopped. “Master, how ‘bout a test duel?”

“I don’t know. Think you’re up to it?” Luke asked.

“Sure do.” Laree stood in the classic offensive position.

“Fine by me.” Luke reached out his hand, and a long staff appeared within it. He swung it around in his hand, then held it firm with both hands.

“Uh...Master, where’s your lightsaber?” Laree asked.

“What, you afraid of a staff and a little bit of Force?”

“No, I’m not afraid,” Laree said, lunging.

Blocking, Luke said, “You will be,” and smiled. He swung forward with the other end of the staff, which Laree ducked and swung upward. Luke caught the blade on the staff between his hands. He swung sideways, catching her on the leg and knocking Laree down on her back.

“Sorry, Laree,” Luke said, helping her back to her feet.

“Nice move, Master, but can you do it with an experienced swordsmen?” Chris asked, drawing and igniting his lightsaber. He spun it between his fingers in a very impressive circle. No one else could ever handle a saber like that. He readied for battle with his saber in a deathgrip. He held it



across his face, his eyes glaring right over it.

Luke made the first move, thrusting one side of his staff forward, which Chris easily blocked, throwing all his weight into it, and nearly knocking Luke off his point of balance. Recovered, Luke did a triple backflip out of the danger zone and threw his robe to the ground. He leaped forward again at Chris, swinging his staff.

Chris dodged to the right, Luke flying past him and landing in a roll and jumped to his feet. Chris lunged forward, but Luke parried again. They held position a few seconds, then Chris flipped over Luke, turned quickly, and took a shot that should have split Luke's head in half, right down the middle. But Luke brought the staff over his head, blocking just in time, and twisted his body around under it to face Chris.

Holding Chris's saber up with one end of the staff, Luke hit him in his side with the other. As Chris reacted, Luke hit him with a knee shot, and caught him in the stomach as he went down. "Don't get cocky, Chris."

Chris lay on the ground, his face covered with surprise. He didn't think he could lose. Not to Master Skywalker. A month ago, this may have made him incredibly angry. But now, it only gave him a new respect for his Master. The fight may have been pure luck, but Luke had pulled it off. He deserved something for that. Chris just lay there, still as if stunned. And he was.

Luke smiled thinly down at him. "You've gotta watch for those low blows."

Chris leaped to his feet, disengaged his saber and hooked it to his belt. Luke's staff dematerialized. "If I was a few inches taller, I would have been able to get out of that."

"Well you're not, and you weren't. I win," Luke said.

Chris sighed. "Yeah, you do. This time."

Luke stood silent a few moments. "Well that's enough lightsaber training for now."

"Uh, Luke—Master. What about me?" Gaeriel asked.

"You'll get a lightsaber in time. Now, I'd like to do some endurance training. But I don't know if there's a suitable place on the planet for that. Gaeri?"

"What kind of area?"

"A good place to run, with obstacles, preferably natural ones," Luke said.

"No, there's no good place for that anywhere on the planet."

"Hmm. Chris, where'd you train physically?" Luke asked.

"I never did," Chris answered.

“We could go to some other planet,” Laree suggested. “How about wherever you trained, Master?”

“I was thinking about that, but it’s not really the place for... some people to train,” Luke said.

“And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“Well to be perfectly honest, the whole planet’s a mud ball.”

“Oh, well then—” Laree started.

“That’s fine,” Gaeriel cut her off. “We can do anything you did when you were in training. That is unless you can’t do it...?”

“Without Yoda standing on my shoulders? I think I’ll be able to,” Luke said, nodding for emphasis.

“Fine. Then let’s go,” Gaeriel said.

“Fine. Chris?”

Dagobah. It’s grim, misty light shining over them, the Jedi looked around at their surroundings. “This way. We’ll start at Yoda’s home.” It was the best marker, though far deteriorated, and still a distance from the Dark Side cave. He guided them through the dense ground foliage under their feet as they ducked branches.

Soon, they came to Yoda’s home. It was little different from the rest of the area now, but it still felt like Yoda was there, at least partially. “So this was Yoda’s home,” Chris whispered.

“It used to be a lot bigger, fifteen years ago. Although I could hardly fit in then.”

“So, what are we gonna do now, L—Master?” Gaeriel asked, throwing a small branch out of her hair.

“Like I said, endurance. Run a few hours, stand one one hand while lifting rocks, that sort of thing. Which would you prefer first?” Luke asked.

“The rock thing,” Gaeriel said.

“Run,” Laree said.

“I’ll go with you,” Chris said. The two sprinted off.

“Ok, what do I do?” Gaeri asked.

Luke rolled his shoulders a moment. “Try this.” He lay his hands on the ground, and thrust his legs up, staying upright. “Then...” Luke raised his left arm from the ground. “And then...” A large stone rose fluidly into the air, Luke controlling it’s glide. He put it down and got back to his feet. “You

think you can do that?"

"I'll try..." Gaeri said, preparing herself.

"There is no try. You will do it, or you won't, there is no in between."

"Ok, geeze, Luke, really." She shook her head. She got her hands on the mucky ground, concentrating hard, and thrust her legs up.

"Good," Luke said. He held her hair up from the mud with the Force. "Keep both hands for now. Try the rock."

Gaeri shut her eyes tight, and the rock began to wobble in place.

"Gaeri, it doesn't matter how hard you shut your eyes. Use your mind, let yourself relax. Relax into the Force." Gaeri took a slow breath and noticeably relaxed. The rock lifted, still a bit wobbly. She attempted to lift one hand off the ground, but lost her balance and tumbled to the ground.

"I was close," she shrugged.

"Yes, you were. That's enough for now. We'd better go `interrupt' Chris and Laree."

"What do you mean?" Gaeriel asked.

"You know what I mean."

They sat down on the log, and Chris kissed Laree again. They put their arms around each other—something nagged at Chris's mind. He released Laree and pulled away. "They're coming. We'd better get moving. I don't think we can let them catch us."

"But they already know—"

"No they don't. They don't know everything. And I'd like to keep it that way for awhile." Chris jumped up and began running, motioning for Laree to follow, though she already was. "C'mon, Laree!" he shouted. He leaped for a vine over a small pond, and swung across.

Laree stopped at the edge. "Um, Chris? Where's that vine?" Laree asked.

"Huh?" Chris asked, a bit nervous. But he felt it on his leg. "Shit!" He slapped the snake-like creature off. It slithered back toward him, its jaws opening wide with its bare teeth growling and hissing. He attempted to destroy it with his Dark power, but it somehow repelled his power. It ran away into a dark cave.

He stared at the cave. At its head was an old, twisted tree. He walked slowly toward it, almost against his will. Everything but the cave faded from his vision. He could vaguely hear Laree's questions, and Luke joining in, warning him away. But he could not listen. He entered the cave.

He was hit hard with strange smells of strange foliage. He walked through the mysterious cave, parting the plants with the Force. He had to see what there was inside.

“Where’s he going?” Laree asked Luke.

“Perhaps to his death,” Luke said. “Or perhaps his destiny. Maybe both.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Gaeriel asked.

“That cave... is powerful in the Dark Side. Yoda killed a Dark Jedi from Bpfashh there. I’ve experienced two very disturbing visions in there.”

“What kind of visions?” Laree asked.

“Well, the first time, I faced Darth Vader in a lightsaber battle. I sliced his head off, but it opened to show my own face. I still don’t really know if that was supposed to mean I would eventually face myself in battle, must defeat my Dark Side, or that Darth Vader was my father. The second time I saw Mara Jade killing me at Jabba’s.”

“And since he already has Dark power... it could be terrible. We have to help him!” Laree said.

“No, that’s the exact reason he must deal with it himself.”

As his friends spoke outside, Chris confronted the exact thing they had feared. An image of a beautiful woman stared at him coldly. Just seeing her told him how dangerous she was. Her long brownish-grey hair rippled lightly in a wind that was not there.

He felt a strange surge of energy and felt his lightsaber, which he’d unknowingly raised, fizzle and die. He prepared to lash out at the image, when it disappeared. In mourning and enraged, Chris held his destroyed lightsaber as he left the cave.

As he came out, Luke, Laree, and Gaeriel rushed toward him. “What happened to your saber?” Luke asked. Laree hugged Chris, though he was careful not to drop his lightsaber.

“She destroyed it.”

“Who’s `she’?” Gaeriel asked.

“I don’t know. I saw her. But I didn’t just see her. She saw me, too. It was real. She may be millions of lightyears away, but she was here, or I was there. I’m confused.”

“I’d imagine,” Luke said. “Are you sure you don’t know who it is?”

“I don’t have any idea what her name is. But she could be dangerous. If I could have only seen the background behind her—”

“There was a background? Couldn’t you teleport there, then?” Luke asked.

“I hardly caught a glimpse of it, Master.”

“That’s enough. You know how to look back at it.”

Chris shook his head. “I can’t. My eyes didn’t see her. I’ve looked back, I see nothing. But I think she’ll be looking for you and your Jedi. This could be a fine time to go back to Yavin for awhile.”

“I think you’re right.” He turned around toward Laree and Gaeri. “I’m sorry your training here has been cut off early. Perhaps we’ll return sometime. Now let’s just go back to Yoda’s before we get out of here.” They all went back to Yoda’s old house. Luke picked up a tree branch that lay on the ground, made it dematerialize like his own staff. “Ok, let’s go.”

Rishiaa paced the length of the bridge of her Star Destroyer, the Parallel, for up to this time it had never been touched in battle. “Set your course for Yavin, Commander.”

“But M’Lord, you just said he was on Dagobah—”

“He’s on Yavin now.”

The Commander straightened, bearing all his military experience. “A trip from Dagobah to Yavin is estimated at at least six days.”

“Do not question my orders. Or would you like to join our good friend Commander Kilms?”

“Um, no my Lord.” He nodded at the navigator and went back to his post.

Rishiaa whirled around in her dark black cape and left the bridge. Everything was going right into place, just as she had planned. Now she could easily take out the Jedi Master, his students, and abduct the Dark Lord of the Sith at the same time.

The Dark Lord. The only person that could possibly stand in her way to achieve her greatest goals. First, to become Dark Lord herself. Second, to destroy the New Republic and establish a new Sith Empire. His appearance amazed her. She’d expected an aging man with a fearsome look in his eye. Not some runt teenager. However he’d beaten her to learning the Sith, she had no idea.

“I have an idea,” Chris said. Luke waited for him to continue.

“What is it, Chris?” Luke asked.

“We wait. She’s coming now. It’s not like we can evacuate, anyway. There are too many students, and far too few ships. And despite everything, you should know I’m not all-powerful. Not quite yet.”

“This is no time to joke, Chris. Everything we’ve built up here is in danger.”

“Actually, I don’t think I am. I’m pretty sure she’ll invade, kill all of you, and kidnap me. She probably wants me to train her.”

“Thanks for your concern. You know she’ll kill you anyway,” Luke said.

“She can’t kill me. Nor can she kill you. For we are the Masters, and for all her power, she is but a learner. She needs at least one of us alive. Of course, which one depends on her plans.”

“Ok, so what are her possible plans?” Luke asked, assuming Chris knew what he was talking about.

“Well, she may want to just learn a few new tricks, or perhaps make use of your knowledge in the Republic. Of course what’s far more likely is that she wants to resurrect the Dark Side in the galaxy, in which case I’d be the obvious choice.” Chris added, “Good luck.”

“Thanks, kid.”

Klaxons rang in both their minds. “Great. Well, here we go,” Luke said. He searched the space around Yavin with his mind. “Star destroyer. Coming this way, full speed.” He turned to Chris. “We have no defenses here. Just a couple of fighters, including my old X-wing.”

“Well that’s going to have to do. We don’t have to destroy them. Just let them catch us.”

“I doubt if they’ll hold negotiations.” Luke and Chris satrred off for the hangar in the basement of the temple.

When they arrived, they were greeted by flurry of beeps and whistles. Luke’s X-wing came on it’s repulsor-lifts right up to him. “Good work, Artoo.” Luke began to climb the ladder. “Chris, there’s another X-wing down a few meters.” He climbed into the cockpit, dropping the ladder.

“I see it.” Chris ran over to the X-wing fighter, jumped in and readied the controls. Without a droid, he just thrust Force energies into the systems, bringing them to life all at once, in record time.

The two X-wings shot out of the hangar in tight formation. At the same time, and with enough distance from the moon, they switched to their sublight engines. “Red Two to Red One, you got a plan yet?” Chris asked.

“Negative, Red Two. Just go in and blow them away. It’s not a good idea to get caught yet. I’m sure of that. But we’ll get plenty of chances, kid.”

“Don’t call me kid.” Their fighters came within visual sighting of the Star Destroyer. “I.D. on the Sd. The Parallel. Not much for names, is she?”

Luke didn’t reply as a ranging shot was fired from the Parallel. He accelerated to full speed and pulled further away from Chris. He masterfully swept in on the destroyer, dodging fire and hitting it’s tough shields.

Chris went in with an attack run on the shield generators, atop the control tower. He let lose three proton torpedoes before going evasive. He went into a sharp turn and blew away a missile that was on his tail. Just then, Luke swepted in and finished off the generator with lasers.

“M’Lord, starboard shields are dead. The fighters are too quick, our gunners extremely inexperienced. And they’re perfectly synchronized,” the Commander informed Rishiaa.

“Reinforce them, you idiot. And of course they’re in perfect formation, those are two master Force users out there. Get a tractor beam on them.” She glared up at the viewscreen and put her hand on the Sith emblem over her heart. The Sith would return. She could feel it.

Chris shot at the temporarily unprotected starboard side. Many little explosions brightened his day. He swung around again, taking a few pot shots at the other shield generator.

Exactly on schedule, Luke shot three torpedoes into the shield generator, making it explode and knocking out the rest of the destroyers shield systems. “They’ll be changing this ship’s name!” Chris crowed. He took out a turbolaser turret that’d been pestering him.

“Yeah, this one won’t even be able to fly straight anymore,” Luke agreed. “It’s almost completed it’s orbit around Yavin. Leave it alone until we know if it’s running or coming.”

“Fine with me, Master. Though it’s my first space battle, it’s been really fun.”

“Damn them!” Rishiaa shouted. She watched in anger as the two X-wings circled around the star destroyer, not doing any damage, and not getting any damage. “Get reinforcements. Call in that weak-minded admiral, what’s-her-name. You know the one.”

“Right. We just called her in.” The Commander walked away before Rishiaa would get real angry, which he knew she would.

But she didn’t. She just ran a hand through her hair and sat down.

Chris felt her try to break into his mind first. He easily blocked her out, using her own powers on a higher level. She had no hope to match him. He fired a weak warning shot into the destroyer’s bridge, doing no damage.

Next it was Luke’s turn. He could feel her probe, and attempt to take over his mind. Holding onto the Light, he repulsed her. He sensed her power, Dark, but not without it’s limit. Though he was sure he wouldn’t have thought that a few days ago, before he had proved himself a Master.

She tried to smother him in Darkness, extinguish his hope. She obviously did not know Luke Skywalker. He’d had a lot more taste of the Dark Side than he was prepared to admit. Son of a Dark Lord, Emperor’s apprentice, it all made him more oblivious to the Dark Side, once he passed through. He reached out to her mind. We have more than enough firepower to finish you off.

Of course you do. Her answer came. Then he caught it: a sense of emergence from hyperspace. Another destroyer sped toward them, come to it’s master’s aid. It’s turbolasers shot at them.

“Watch it, Chris. Big guns below.” Luke started for the destroyer.

“No, Luke. I’ll take this one alone,” Chris said. He pushed his engine to full speed. “Whoa, talk

about bad condition destroyers. Someone oughta rename the Gorgon the Junkpile.”

“You mean that’s Admiral Daala?”

“Who’s Admiral Daala?” Chris asked, flying wildly.

“Nevermind, you were only eight,” Luke said.

“Right.” It was time to demonstrate to this woman Dark Lord wanna-be what a real Dark Lord could do. He reached out with the Force, the Dark Side he knew, and surrounded the new coming destroyer. Little by little, it was covered with a reddish light, from which no weapon penetrated. He made the light pull in, squeeze the Gorgon. It exploded in a shower of sparks and metal.

“Chris!? What did you do?” Luke shouted at him.

“I...don’t know, Master. I couldn’t help myself. It just happened. But it worked.” The Parallel shrunk slowly, and soon jumped to hyperspace.

“Yes, it did, but if you ever pull a stunt like that again—!” Luke broke off.

“You know I can’t help it. Let’s go back to base.” The two X-wings formed on each other’s wings and sped down to the moon, ducking quietly into the hangar bay.

Gaeriel and Laree waited for them right by their fighters. Chris and Luke jumped to the ground. “What the blazes happened up there?” Laree asked.

“Nothing much,” Chris said. “Just a couple of star destroyers.”

“Two fighters against two star destroyers? How could they lose with odds like those?” Gaeriel asked.

“She knows how she lost. We—he—destroyed one of them and crippled the other.” Luke walked past them all, turned back. “She’ll be back, but we have to find her first. I have some nav charts in the old war room. Let’s go.”

“Lord Rishiaa, as you know the X-wing crafts managed to completely destroy the Gorgon and badly damage the Parallel. What do you propose we do?” Commander Winsub asked.

“Shut up, you weak-minded idiot. They are already on their way here. We’ll capture them yet. You are to set up all our troops around this room. They’ll come straight here. I’m sure of it.”

“Yes, m’Lord,” the Commander left the room and barked orders heard before the door closed.

“We can’t go straight there. It’s too dangerous,” Luke said. “She’s bound to be ready for that. Besides which, we have to check on the twins. I forgot all about them.”

“That’s right, so did I,” Gaeriel said, concerned. “She wouldn’t try for them, would she?”



“No, she’s definitely after us. She probably hasn’t even thought of a hostage plan. She’s not much for tactics, quite obviously,” Luke said.

“Ok, so we go to Bakura,” Chris said. He concentrated a few moments, and they were in the Captison mansion.

“I’ll just go check on them,” Luke said, scurrying upstairs. He opened the door to the twins’ room. “Jacen, Jaina, are you two ok?”

“Of course, Uncle Luke. What kind of trouble would we get into?” Jaina asked innocently.

“I don’t know. What kind?” Luke asked suspiciously.

“Uncle Luke—Master—we’re not like that any more. Can’t you trust us? We’ve changed. Really,” Jacen said.

“Really?” Luke asked. “And what brought this about?”

“Uh…” Jacen thought about it.

“We just realized the wrongs of our ways,” Jaina said.

“Right, that’s it,” Jacen said.

“See, I told you what a bad influence Chris would be. And never use what he says word for word. You kids have a lot to learn,” Luke said, and left.

“How’d he know?” Jacen and Jaina asked each other.

Back downstairs, Luke rejoined the rest of the group. “They’re fine,” Luke said, looking at Chris who began staring down the hall in the opposite direction.

“So do we go now?” Laree asked.

“No. I go now. I want to check it out first,” Luke said.

“I don’t think so,” Chris said. “You’re reckless. Thanks to me, of course. You need someone to cover you.”

“No I don’t. I am not reckless. Now either you send me, or I’ll go myself.”

Chris took that as a challenge. “And how do you propose to go about doing that?” Luke disappeared in a blue halo.

“He’s gone. Chris, that isn’t your usual technique,” Gaeriel said.

“Uh…” Chris said. Covering up, “I felt like a change.”

Luke found himself in a long metal corridor. He sensed guards all over, but none in immediate range. He walked forward, finding his shoes clank on the ground. Silently, he slipped them off, continuing barefoot.

A stormtrooper in black armor came from the cross corridor. "You will come over here," Luke said.

"I will come over there," the trooper said. The trooper did.

"Good." Luke looked through the man's mind through the Force, breaking its defenses. He took an image of a map of the building, then stunned the man with a pulse to the correct system. The man clattered to the floor.

"Don't move!" another trooper shouted. He'd heard the noise and come running. He held his blaster rifle on Luke, standing a few meters away. "Keep your hands where I can see them!" He took a cautious step forward.

Luke raised his hand, but bent his wrist to catch the trooper's rifle as it flew at him. "Is this good enough?" Luke asked, shooting the trooper on stun. This time he lowered the trooper carefully with the Force and continued on his way.

With a mental picture of the base's map, Luke moved toward the main control room, where whoever it was would probably be. As he neared, he could indeed sense her ahead.

As he came closer, he was greeted by a hail of blaster fire. Sparks exploded behind him as he ducked. He waved his hand, and the fire suddenly stopped. A number of muffled shouts flew through the air. A trooper came at him, fist flying. Luke ducked it, the trooper crashing into the wall.

Luke strode on past a row of fallen black-armored stormtroopers. The door into the control room opened before him, and he stepped inside. As he'd expected, it was much more a throne room than control room. He looked around the vast but highly nondescript room. At the head, atop a staircase similar to the Emperor's own, was a huge command chair, like the Emperor's own. But the figure in the chair was nothing like the Emperor. It was a slender, highly attractive female with brown-gray hair and dark brown eyes. They lit up. "Skywalker, I'm so glad you were able to find your way here. Not that I had any doubt."

"You're none too sure of security. You'd be glad to know I didn't kill any of your men. Though I should have," Luke said, walking up to her.

"Yes, I know you didn't. I am Rishiaa, of Symptl, this world as you must know. Where are your companions? You're all rather late."

"They won't be coming. We decided to decline your so polite offer," Luke said, coming up the stairs.

"Really? Then why did you come?" she asked, her voice a deadly calm.

“Naturally, I wish to bring you and your forces over to the Republic. Forget your Sith dwellings and become a Jedi. We could use you.”

“No, I think I’d rather complete my vow and become the Dark Lord, or Lady, at least. Now do I have to bring that kid here or will you?”

“He’s not going to come at all—” Luke started.

“Quiet, Master,” Chris said from down the room, his voice carried throughout it. Always showing off, he appeared in a flash of red flames. He walked up to the others slowly, menacingly.

The intimidation died when Rishiaa noticed the boy was shorter than Luke, and didn’t look all that scary. “How could you have learned so much in so little time? You look even younger in person.”

Chris stopped himself from making a crack. “I’ve trained every night for ten years, with four masters. They taught me everything they knew. They made me Dark Lord of the Sith. Ahead of some other ‘wanna-be’, they said.” Chris restrained from chuckling.

She simply smiled, not taking offense. “How rightful for you—both of you—to share your knowledge and combine it into one person. I think I’ll do,” Rishiaa said.

“We’d have to take control of your forces, and there’s no way you’ll be learning the ways of the Sith from us. The Sith are to die with Chris,” Luke said.

“How unfortunate.”

Luke wondered at her reply, when lights went out and he fell in a clump on the ground. “Myrkr ecology is so very helpful,” Rishiaa said. “Guards, pick up Skywalker and take him to his cell.”

“You plan to do that with me too?” Chris asked. “I’ll save you the trouble.” He slapped a pair of binders on himself. Chris took the mind of one of the troopers, making him slap the one with the ysalamiri on the shoulder. The trooper walked toward Chris.

“What kind of Sith lord are you, giving up without a fight?” Rishiaa asked.

“I am of the purest Sith blood. And the fight has not yet begun. But it will.” Chris practically escorted himself out of the room.

Rishiaa flicked on the comm. “Commander?”

“Yes m’lord?” Commander Winsub asked.

“Send a squad of stormtroopers to Yavin 4. We need some leverage to keep Skywalker and Qel-Droma where we put them. Send back any prisoners and take position to destroy the temples at my order.”

“Yes, m’lord. They’ll leave within an hour.”

“Oh, and have Qel-Droma sent to my personal quarters in two hours.” Rishiaa shut off the comm and meditated.

Chris was thrown into the room. It was certainly a big change from his cell. Bigger, darker... not much else. “What is it now?” he growled.

“Quiet,” the guard hissed. He shoved Chris further into the room then exited, locking the door.

Making use of an old teaching from Freedom Nadd, Chris saw everything in the room, despite there being no light. The room still seemed to be empty. But then he hit a spot that was darker than the rest of the room. He walked forward.

“You may remove your binders,” Rishiaa said quietly. Chris melted them to slag as they fell from his hands. His lightsaber appeared in his hand, and he attached it to his belt. “Good. Now we will begin my training.”

“What’s the point?” Chris asked. “You’ll never become Dark Lord. Not while I’m alive, and I’ll outlive you by a long shot.”

“Really? I can change that.”

Chris laughed. “Of course you can. I believe you.” He made a choking sound.

She glared a moment, then leaped forward with her red-bladed lightsaber coming down toward Chris. Without thinking, he blocked the blow with his forearm, reaching for his saber with his other hand. He brought it up, taking a step back from her. He spun the saber about him, in incredibly hard to match circles.

Rishiaa struck forward with a quick near lethal slash—when her lightsaber died. It exploded in her hand, leaving faint scars of heat. She screamed and fell to her knees clutching her hand. Chris looked down at her, disigned his lightsaber, and returned it to his belt.

Thirty stormtroopers klanked down the ramp, their blaster rifles across their chests. They split into groups of five, two going around the sides, and three right in the entrance.

All the students could sense the raid. Those few that had blasters lined up for an ambush, the lightsaber-users behind them. Kam Solusar, behind him Laree and Gaeriel, took careful aim and took down a trooper. With near perfect reaction-time, the other troopers whirled toward him and shot with deadly accuracy. But Kam was a Jedi. He dodged the shots, taking down another trooper.

Laree came forward toward the troopers, her lightsaber deflecting their fire. Kam swapped his blaster for his lightsaber and joined in. The two of them quickly finished the group off.

But the danger was just starting. Hardly trained at all, Gaeriel was near defenseless. She stayed back from the main battle. But from behind her, someone jabbed a blaster into her head. She nearly screamed when another trooper, further back, hit her with a stun shot in the back, cutting it short. She lost consciousness.

Laree looked up just in time to see Gaeriel fall. The troopers hauled her back, and Laree started after them. She stopped as one of the troopers raised their hand, a small silver ball inside it. Her eyes widened as she stepped back.

Kam also saw the trooper. Reaching out with the Force, he attempted to disarm the detonator, but found for some reason he couldn't. He just couldn't concentrate on the spot with the Force.

A strange feeling overcame both Kam and Laree. It was like becoming blind suddenly, completely unable to do anything. Nearly at the same time, they were hit by stun shots and fell to the ground.

From orbit, the Commander of Rishiaa's fleet watched the battle on a holoscreen. The comm came alive. "Sir, all Jedi students have been neutralized or destroyed."

"Good," the Commander muttered. Looking out the viewport, he saw that the temple was partially on fire, and a few troopers could be seen around the perimeter. "Take a few prisoners back to the shuttle and take them back to base. Lord Rishiaa wants them right away."

"Yes, sir."

"You!" the trooper shouted as he entered Gaeriel's makeshift cell. "Get up. Come with me!" he gestured violently with his blaster.

"I'm coming," Gaeriel muttered, strangling her fear. She struggled to get up with her binded wrists. The trooper growled impatiently, stepping in and yanking her to her feet. She followed the trooper outside into the hall.

"Get up here," the trooper hissed, thrusting Gaeri ahead of him. He kept his blaster in her back, forcing her forward.

Gaeriel was marched down the halls, and outside the main entrance. "Where now?" she asked.

"Left," the trooper muttered, never loosening the sharp blaster in her back. Gaeriel turned, saw the shuttle, and walked onto it.

Onboard were two other students already. Kam and Laree, Kam holding Laree who looked still unconscious, her head slanted with a mild gash, blood already drying. "Laree," Gaeriel breathed, rushing toward her niece, trooper or not. She sat by her, running her hand over the wound.

"She shouldn't have resisted," Kam said. He knew a good bit about when to resist, and when to restrain.

The shuttle lurched as it picked itself off the ground, the ramp closing. The shuttle quickly rose to orbit, gained it's bearings and set out through hyperspace.

Luke Skywalker sat calmly in his standard-issue Imperial cell. He meditated, allowing himself to open to the universe, to sense everything, the whole of the galaxy running through him.

He sensed it. He focused on Yavin. He sensed his academy, everything he'd fought so hard and worked so long for, being destroyed. He was able to pick up a mental image—he saw the academy covered with stormtroopers, littered with fires.

He sighed, shook his head, and broke the contact coming back to the present. A trooper came in the door, helping him back. “You. Time for prisoners to—”

“You will leave me alone,” Luke said, reaching for the man's mind.

“I will leave you alone,” the trooper repeated.

“Goodbye,” Luke said.

“Goodbye.” The trooper left, locking the cell door.

When would they learn? Luke wondered. That must have been the tenth time since he arrived.

“No, no, no!” Chris shouted, watching Rishiaa practice. “Look, do you hear anything I'm saying? You don't want your lightsaber to absorb the blast, the Force knows how you manage to get it to do that in the first place. Deflect the blast, change it's aim so that it will hit your target, or another target.”

Gritting her teeth, Rishiaa tried again. She'd talked Chris into training her after what had happened before, so she now stood fighting a remote with Chris's lightsaber. She caught a blast on the saber, spun it wildly, blocking two other quick blasts. The remote fell to the floor, dead. “Is that good enough?” she asked.

“Yes, finally. Were you even a Jedi, you'd have done that on your first shot.”

“I don't want to be a Jedi, I want—” Her pocket comm buzzed from her belt. Scooping it up and switching it on, she said, “Yes, what is it?”

“The shuttles from Yavin have returned, with prisoners,” the Commander said. “Looks like they have five prisoners. Four humans and one alien. The troops have stayed behind, as ordered, inside the temple on the fourth moon.”

“Shut up, you idiot,” Rishiaa growled. “Don't bother me here.”

“I am sorry, m'Lord,” the Commander said, breaking the connection.

Too late. “What prisoners?” Chris growled.

“Stand still or I'll kill them,” Rishiaa threatened. When Chris got the look in his eye that he was going to kill her, she decided to speak again. “They caught Laree. If I die, so does she. It's your choice, Chris. Do you want to kill her?”

“I won't kill you. Nor shall I train you any longer.”

“A few hours ago, that could have been a threat, Chris. But I think I’ve found another path to the Sith.”

“Well good. Master Skywalker doesn’t know, but the Sith will rise again. We will return, as it has been foretold. It is unavoidable. The galaxy is in great danger,” Chris said sadly.

“And you have a choice, Chris,” Rishiaa said. “You can be one of the underlings against the rising, or you may lead it. It’s your choice, Chris. You have the power to command, and the conflict to go against your own. Which will it be?” she looked up at him as she took a seat.

“I… I don’t know yet.”

Lando Calrissian landed the Lady Luck down on Coruscant. He locked up the ship, and went out of the hangar.

It was about time he came for another visit, he thought. He hadn’t been to Coruscant for awhile, and perhaps with good reason— when he did, he always got into trouble. Old gambling debts, new gambling debts, all the same, Coruscant just was not his place. Yet he felt strangely compelled to come once again.

Lando walked down the familiar paths to Han Solo’s apartment. He rang the bell, and the door opened. “Hey Han, what’s up?” he asked, looking at Han’s somber face.

“Hi, Lando. We’re getting the space kicked out of us again. Someone new now, with new forces. Not very experienced. How’s your day?” Han asked.

“More Imperials, huh? I told you cutting down the military was a bad idea. Never waste a good thing,” Lando said.

“Yeah, but we thought we’d taken care of things with Imperials.” Han looked closely at Lando. “You know something about this?”

Lando shrugged. “I heard rumors.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Han asked. “What’ve you heard?”

Lando smiled. “You shouldn’t have dropped out of the business. Something about Symptl, some little backwater planet like so many other places. I hear there’s a woman in charge over there.”

“A woman? In charge of Imperials? Yeah, right. But I’ll have to check out this Symptl. Bye, Lando,” Han moved to shut the door.

“What, I can’t even come in?” Lando asked, frowning.

Han smiled and shook his head. “Nope.” He shut the door.

“Oh, thanks,” Lando muttered.

Rishiaa had struck the truth. Chris had a choice. He now sat in his cell pondering over his answer. He himself, as a person, did not want to join her. But he could not deny what he was. And he was a Sith.

So there was his answer. He had no choice. Whether it be of his own intentions or of whatever guided him in times of need, he had to join her. It wouldn't be much of a change for him, as the Dark Side had taken him long before. And he knew it would forever be in control of him.

He heard a loud banging sound, realized it was the next cell over being shut. He reached out to see if it was one of the prisoners... Laree! his senses shouted. And her sense was not good. Once again using Sith magic, Chris lay his right hand on the wall between the cells, making the thick metal part into a doorway.

Laree looked up groggily when Chris came into her cell. "Ugh... Chris?" she moaned, holding her head.

Chris shook his head and knelt by her, putting his hand on the wound. Maybe he was getting closer to the Light. He didn't feel angry at whoever hurt Laree. "You ok?"

"Yeah... I'll be fine."

"Good," Chris said, allowing his door to close. "Because... I don't know when I'll see you again."

"What?" Laree looked surprised.

Chris took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, Laree. I can't explain. I don't know what's happening to me... but I can't stop it." He looked at her with sad eyes and kissed her. "I have to go." He got up and hurried out the door.

He walked calmly down the hall, toward Skywalker's cell. He reached out with the Force, opening it as he came up to it. "Master," he said. "It's time for you to go. Take your students. Leave this place."

"You're my student too, Chris. I will not leave without you," Luke said. He walked up to Chris.

"Look Master, this is your chance. I have to stay here. I must fulfill my destiny," Chris said.

"Not if that means having you destroyed," Luke insisted. "I don't know how many times people have told me my destiny, yet only one of them came true. Your destiny cannot be decided yet."

"Master, you know I am a danger to myself, to the people around me, to the galaxy. If you don't let me do this..." Chris said.

"I don't know about that," Luke said. "But I know I cannot stop you. I will take my students and leave." Chris walked away from the doorway. Luke quickly opened all of his students' cells, and they all met up in the hall. "Where's Kyp?" Luke asked.



“I didn’t see him,” Kam said. Gaeriel and Laree agreed.

“I think he was brought to Rishiaa,” Cilgal said.

“Then he is lost, with Chris,” Luke said sadly. “We have to leave, before things get worse around here. He led them at a quick pace toward the hangar bays in the west wing of the base. The halls were suspiciously empty. “I wonder what they’re up to.”

“Whatever it is, it can’t be good,” Kam said. He was ahead of the rest of the group, already opening the doors to the hangar bay. They all walked in, amazed to see it empty but a small shuttle.

“That will have to do,” Luke said. The Jedia all piled into the small space vehicle. In time, the ship had finished its very slow preflight sequence, and they were off.

“All troops have been transferred aboard the Star Destroyers, m’Lord,” Commander Winsub reported.

“Good. We shall be arriving in minutes,” Rishiaa said, turning off the comm. She looked around the now fully lit room, noticing Chris and Kyp quarreling over some other petty thing that didn’t matter. She could hear Chris insulting Kyp in the ancient Sith tongue, Kyp having no idea what he was saying. She cleared her throat loudly. “Chris?”

Chris broke his conversation, turned to Rishiaa. “Oh, right.” He teleported the three of them up into orbit, inside the Star Destroyer Crishia, no doubt named for Rishiaa’s fallen mother. For once he was glad to have his Sith cloak, what he was doing, pretending and all, was making him extremely nervous and doubtful. Luckily they could not sense it, and it was not very noticeable. “See, you can’t do that,” Chris said to Kyp, keeping up his front against Kyp.

“If I knew how—” Kyp started, but was cut off by Chris repeating an old saying he’d heard in Sith language. “See, I’ve heard that one before. You just said, ‘If you knew how, you would not need to.’ But it doesn’t make any sense!” Kyp complained.

Chris merely chuckled, following Rishiaa to the command section of the bridge, Kyp following him. “Is the fleet prepared?” Rishiaa asked Commander Winsub.

“Yes, m’Lord. All fourteen of your destroyers have been prepped and loaded with troops and fighters. The nav crews are getting our best route,” Winsub reported.

“Good work, Commander. When will we arrive at Coruscant?” Rishiaa asked.

“ETA is in thirty-eight hours.” He checked a screen. “Navigation has finished their calculations, we will drop out of lightspeed one quarter of a lightyear out-system.”

This was it, Chris told himself. If he waited any longer, it would be too late. Reaching out with the Force, he pushed his mind into the Navigation area. He shifted their calculations to a place he knew well. He reached out further, extending the changes to all the star destroyers in the fleet.

“That’s odd,” Commander Winsub said leaning over one of his screens. “The ETA just changed to sixteen hours.”

Chris looked at the screen nervously. He manipulated it’s mechanisms, making static appear on the screen and a loud hissing sound emanate from it’s overheated circuits.

“Oh, must have blown a fuse,” the Commander said, shutting down the screen’s power.

“Be sure everything is correct after we enter hyperspace, Commander,” Rishiaa said. “We cannot allow delay.”

“Yes, m’Lord. We shall make the jump to hyperspace in five minutes. I will go check on the systems, with your permission?”

“Permission granted, Commander.” Winsub nodded and left the bridge. “You can continue fighting,” she said jokingly to Kyp and Chris. They did.

Han and Leia looked up at the huge towers of screens in the Coruscant traffic control tower. “There it is,” a controller spoke up. “Obviously a Star Destroyer, modified transponder signals. Trying to register as one of our Mon Cal cruisers. They don’t exactly fit the requirements.”

“Only one?” Leia asked, walking over to the controllers station. There was indeed only one.

“Maybe a scout?” Han suggested. “See how our defenses are, then come in with the heavy guns or send reports and fade.”

“We will stop them from doing either,” Admiral Ackbar said from the comm. As soon as Luke had warned them, Ackbar had gone up to his flagship, the Mon Calamari cruiser Defiance. His ship could now be seen advancing on the star destroyer, two more Calamari cruisers and three frigates forming behind it.

“Clear all traffic from the area,” Leia ordered the controller. She went back down to the main level, hauling Han by his arm. “We’ve got to get to the war room.”

The war room was a good bit busy for the minor danger of the singular star destroyer. Aides ran about, people looking over scanners, the whole place was in chaos. Leia and Han walked over to where General Bel Iblis stood. “Have any other destroyers shown up, General?”

“No, Your Highness, still only the one. Which doesn’t make any sense, those probes we sent out detected at least thirteen star destroyers in the new fleet,” the General said.

“Has NRI figured out anything?” Han asked.

“They sent out a few probes, a couple specialized to determine hyperspace trails. They believe that the rest of the fleet may have been somehow diverted. Their life probes also detect near no lifeforms left on the planet.”

“That’s very strange,” Leia said. She glanced at the main display, seeing that the destroyer was rapidly losing its shields to the numerous attackers. “Tell the NRI to trace those hyperspace trails, if they haven’t already. We need to know where they went. A fleet that large must be stopped.”

“Yes your Your Highness, I believe they have already started after them. They should find the fleet within hours.” Back on the main display, the star destroyer’s shields began to fail. Moments later, it fell prey to an enormous hail of proton torpedoes.

“ETA five minutes,” Commander Winsub reported, now back in the bridge after finding nothing wrong with the circuits.

“Good,” Chris muttered. It was time. Gritting teeth he drew his lightsaber and ignited it, cutting down the Commander. He whirled toward Kyp who had already drawn his own lightsaber. “Kyp, don’t do this. Go back to Master Skywalker. I won’t hurt you then.”

“Skywalker is weak, as are you. Kyp, finish him off,” Rishiaa said, taking a step back from them.

Chris and Kyp’s lightsabers clashed violently, Kyp swung around to Chris’s side, which he parried and slashed up, catching Kyp’s lightsaber. “Kyp, I won’t fight you. You have to return to Master Skywalker.”

“Kyp, don’t listen to him,” Rishiaa whispered.

“I’m not.” Kyp lunged forward. Chris sidestepped the blow, whirling the opposite direction, leaving a burning slash mark on Kyp’s side. Kyp shrieked and fell back a step. They both returned to ready stances, Kyp with one hand on his wound.

A moment later, the destroyer exited hyperspace. Chris could sense the power of this system. He drew upon that power, and teleported Kyp to Yavin four. He held his lightsaber pointed to the ground, looking at Rishiaa. “Your reign will end now.”

“Wherever this is you have brought us, it will hardly help you,” Rishiaa said.

“You have no idea how much it will help me,” Chris said, and disappeared, reappearing on the ground of the planet. “My masters, forgive me, but I am a Jedi, and a Sith. I cannot do anything about my actions,” he spoke to the ground and air of the planet. The planet Korriban. Resting place of the Sith.

“My Masters, my ancestors,” Chris began, “as i have said, forgive me. But you all know what I do is justified. The Coming of the Sith has ended. But like the Jedi, they will no doubt rise again. For this, I ask of you to help me in this task I must complete,” Chris said, now able to make out several points of presence of numerous ancient Dark Lords. His words had attracted their attention. “Give me a link to your power, the power of all the Sith.”

Chris stood straight, his eyes closed, holding his hands down to the ground and concentrating deeply. From the ground, bolts of energy arose into his hands as he rose them toward the sky. Two lightning bolts struck from the sky, holding on to his upraised palms. The sky turned a dark purple

around him as he drew upon the power.

With the lightning came fire, a huge encompassing flame around Chris. He could feel the fire singing him, but felt no pain. He knew this was his end anyway, his final sacrifice for the good of the galaxy. He could also feel his ancestors manipulating his own great power, creating a field of Force energy around the solar system, denying the star destroyers the right to elude in hyperspace.

Back in control of his own power, Chris was allowed to destroy the star himself. Perhaps the Sith would not do it themselves, though they knew it must be done. He powered the star with Force energy, making it implode on itself and forcing it to go supernova. With a blaze of brilliant light the star exploded outward, destroying the star destroyers.

Of course the star wouldn't stop there. But time seemed to slow around Chris. He could see the blazing light through his eyelids, final thoughts running through his head. Images of everyone he'd met so recently flashed before him. He smiled at the thought of himself having a near death experience when he was probably already dead.

"Help me," Luke said, the strain showing like a wound on his face. "I can't get him by myself."

Laree, Gaeriel, and Kam Solusar, who had all been watching and hoping, began to show the same strain as they opened their minds and power to Luke.

"I... think I've got him." Just then, Chris appeared standing up in front of them. Everyone stared at him as he fell in a clump to the ground. "I hope we're not too late." He ran his hand over the boy's head, pulling back. "He's hot. And his mind is silent."

Laree ran over, tears falling from her eyes. She lay her hand on her chest. "So's his heart," she said, sobbing.

"Don't give up yet, Laree," Luke said, laying a hand on her shoulder. "Kam, get Cilgal in here. Maybe she can help."

Kam left, returning a few moments later with Cilgal. Cilgal knelt by Chris's seemingly dead body. She lay her hand on his head, reaching in him with her healing powers in the Force. "I don't know what I can do, Master. This one is gone."

"Damnit, no he's not!" Luke shouted, tears falling. What had he said just days ago? This boy was just like Dev. Was he going to allow him to die at the same age, from the same burns?

Cilgal glanced at Luke, back to Chris's weathered body. She reached inside him, trying to restart his heart. She pumped his blood through it for him, thrust his blood throughout his organs. She kept it running like that for awhile, trying her hardest to revive the boy.

Minutes later, she stood up. "I'm sorry, that's all I can do." Chris still did not move. As Cilgal prepared to leave the room, Luke saw it. Chris's leg twitched. Luke's face brightened up from the grim state it had been set in. Chris moaned softly, turning his head to the side, spitting up blood. He

moved his burned arms and legs, struggling as hard as he could to get up.

“No, Chris. Don’t move,” Luke said. “We’ll get you to a medic. Just stay still.”

Days later, Chris lay in a bed on Coruscant, slowly regaining consciousness. He breathed in the cool, fresh hospital air. Only now did he really feel anything since the star had exploded. He felt the air, his own power, pulsing within him anew, a new sense of inner piece.

The door opened, Laree, Luke, and Gaeriel entering with Too-Onebee. “He has healed well, his body reacted to the bacta perfectly. He has now regained consciousness.”

They all took spots on the side of Chris’s bed, smiling. “See Chris?” Luke asked. “I told you I wouldn’t let you die.”

“You should have,” Chris said quietly, struggling for his voice.

“Don’t talk like that, Chris. You did a great thing. You destroyed practically Rishiaa’s entire fleet,” Laree said.

“Practically?” Chris asked.

“Don’t worry about that, Chris. Coruscant defenses easily took them out,” Gaeriel said.

Chris nodded weakly. He turned his head toward Luke. “The Sith were to all die out. Why did you save me?” Chris asked.

“We don’t let friends die,” Luke said smiling.

“I am not a friend. I am a Sith. I was to die.” Chris spoke with conviction. “I wanted to die.”

“Look Chris, you did what was right. You used your Dark power to power the Light. It just wasn’t your time.”

“That’s not true. How can you use Darkness for Light?” Chris asked.

“Chris, without Darkness there can be no Light. You have wiped so much Darkness from this galaxy, how could the Jedi survive without your own Great Darkness?” Luke said, only partially sarcastic.

“But... it didn’t help things at all. I’m the same as I was.”

Before Luke could reply, the door opened again, Kyp walking in. He went up to Chris’s side, smiling. “Chris, despite everything at least I had the sense to stay inside the Sun Crusher when I blew up a star. What were you thinking, standing out in the open?”

“I... liked the sensations,” Chris said, smiling for the first time. “What else could I have done, anyway? Besides leave you there to die, I mean.”

“Well that always was a possibility. But it’s too much fun to yell at you in Sith language.”

“Heh. I bet.” Kyp ran a hand through Chris’s hair. “Seeya, Buddy. I’ve gotta go.” Kyp left the room again.

Too-OneBee came closer to Chris, laying a sensor on the boy's chest. "Sir, I believe you need rest."

"I feel fine, droid," Chris said.

"You may, sir, but your body needs healing. I've assigned a watcher-droid to you. Six-bee-nine, please come in," Too-OneBee said. A small roundish droid flew in, its underside flat with repulsor lifts elevating it. It floated over beside Chris, laying a sensor on him. "Good. Now if all you humans would please leave, Chris needs his rest." Too-OneBee led all the others out.

"Goodday, Master. Your condition has definitely improved from your earlier state," Six-Bee said.

"Oh no, not another talking droid," Chris moaned.

"I'm sorry, Master. Do you wish me to stay quiet?" the droid asked.

Chris thought a moment. "Do you tell stories?" Chris asked, wondering if this droid had any magical sleeping powers like Threepio.

"No, Sir, I'm primarily a medical droid. I tell no stories, though I could download one from the main computer if you wish."

"You do that. I feel like a nice story."

~~~~~ The Rise of the Sith Chris walked down the old pathway leading to the remains of the ancient tower of Imuntom on the planet Scieth. His newfound friend followed him, Six-Bee floating along behind him silently. "Six-Bee, you picking anything up on your scanners yet?" Chris asked. "Master Chris, you know you always sense things before my weak sensors can pick them up. I wish you'd stop taunting me like that," the small round topped, flat-bottomed droid said. Chris turned to him with a smile. "Look Six-Bee, I keep you along because you help me relax. You don't want me to turn you to scrap or something, do you?" Chris asked. Six-Bee muttered something in cybernetic code, thinking Chris wouldn't hear. "I heard that," Chris said. "I'm sorry, Master. You reprogrammed me, after all, so it's your own fault. I'm supposed to be looking out for your health on Coruscant. I should not have helped you escape the planet, or even the medical facility. And by the way sir, where are we?" "Six-Bee, we're on Scieth, remember?" Chris shook his head and turned back to the path, heading down it shoving twigs out of his way with the Force. "I'm sorry sir," the droid said, hovering after him. "But you said to find out for myself from your ships circuits. That ship you stole is far from ordinary, I couldn't access it with my medic-oriented connectors." "Droid, you keep talking to me like I'm listening," Chris said. He could feel the droid's sense change to hurt. Someone had programmed this droid well. "I'm just kidding, Six-Bee." "Well I'm sorry sir, but I cannot yet detect a human's sense as you apparently can mine." Chris shoved a huge leaf-covered branch out of his way. A hundred meters beyond, he could see the huge temple he'd been looking for. "Is that our destination, Master?" "Yes, it, Six-Bee. Run a scan on it for me," Chris said. "Sir, you know I cannot—" "Run a scan for human presences, Six-Bee. I know you can detect life." "Oh," the droid said. "Yes, there are human-like presences inside. I cannot determine if they are actually human." "Good, at least there's someone in there. Any droids or machinery?" Chris asked. Six-Bee attempted to scan the area for machinery. "I cannot detect that from

here. It could be the distance, or perhaps the thick slab of stone walls. You're lucky my life-detectors are strong enough to get readings through *that*." "Luck has nothing to do with it, droid. You need some upgrading." Chris walked down the hill toward the temple, his senses sweeping over it to check the presences himself. He could have done that in the first place, but he liked the droid to think he had more use than he did. Chris and Six-Bee neared the huge gate into the temple. As Chris stepped in he felt a certain Darkness, not unlike he was used to. Before he'd walked even a meter, he heard a shriek, turned quickly, his hand darting for his lightsaber. He saw a man crumple to the ground, stunned. Chris turned in amazement to the droid. "Those with the knowledge to help save the knowledge to kill," Six-Bee said. "Thanks. I can't believe I didn't sense that. Keep watch," Chris said, smiling at the droid. "Yes, Master." Chris turned back around, walking slowly down the halls. He found he really could not sense anything but the opponents minds, making him all the more thankful for the little droid. Meters beyond, Chris finally did feel something. He lunged at his belt, drawing his lightsaber and igniting it. With the saber in one hand, he deflected the blaster bolt that shot at the droid, his other hand splaying forward as the attacker's blaster jumped into it. "Master!" the droid shouted. Chris caught himself, just before he shot the attacker through the head. He set the blaster for stun, then shot him. He held his saber low, his blaster high, and looked around with a strange look in his eye. "Thank you, Six-Bee." Chris continued on down the mysterious hallway, keeping an eye in all directions. As he walked, he stepped on a stone that gave way. "Duck!" he needlessly shouted at the droid as he fell to his knees. A booby trap set off, firing an arrow right over Chris's head. Chris stood up again, setting off again for the main hall of the temple. "Master, perhaps you should form a plan of attack. You don't know what other kinds of defences these primitive beings may have. I may be but a medical droid, but I have been around. An arrow that fine striking you where it would have would have dug right into your heart and sliced through your lung," Six-Bee informed Chris. "Oh, thanks, Six. I really wanted to know that." Chris just continued on, ignoring the droids concerns. "You don't know what we're after here. But I do." "Then I would like to hear what it is that's so important to you, Master Chris," Six-Bee said. "It's an object, one of extreme value," Chris said, glancing around a corner before turning onto it. "It has to be destroyed. Or Master Skywalker may want it." "Oh," the droid replied simply. He hadn't expected a very clear answer from Chris, as he never got one. He hovered smoothly behind Chris, keeping in the boy's rhythm of step. After a number of other turns, Chris walked up to a wall, inspecting it. "This is it. I can't find an entrance though..." he brought up his saber, and in three quick slashes kicked the slab of stone in. He waved away the dust that rose from the stone. "Master, that dust can damage my circuits. I'll wait out here," Six-Bee said, hovering a few feet back. "Ok, Six-Bee. I'll be right back." Chris stepped into the dark room, but Chris created his own light. He looked around the huge stone room, finding a large altar in the center. He walked up to it in awe. The altar itself seemed to pulse with power, understandably from what it held. It was tall, with a small hole in the middle, containing what he was after. It was draped over with a velvet covering. He came up to it, walking up the lower steps. He reached up into the gap, removing the covering and taking a cool piece of metal in his hands. He grabbed it, rolling to the side just in time to avoid the small explosions he'd just triggered. The whole altar went up. Chris jumped to his feet, hooking his lightsaber and blaster to his belt and sprinted out of the hall, back to his droid. He breathed hard for a moment, but Six-Bee extended some sort of probe to him, which relaxed him. "Did you get whatever it was?" Six-Bee asked. "Yes," Chris said, holding up the ancient lightsaber. "Does that mean we will be going back to Coruscant? I almost wish we didn't have to. They'll deactivate me for sure," Six-Bee said, a tinge of sadness in his mechanical voice. "Don't worry, Six. I'll defend you. You're a good friend, and a great help. Let's go," Chris said, tilting his head back



towards the way they'd come in. "Sir, perhaps it would be easier if you teleported us back to the shuttle. My repulsors really do need a brake. They aren't supposed to run for multiple hours at a time," Six-Bee said. "All right, Six." Chris closed his eyes lightly, reopened them to find himself in the shuttle. "I still don't understand it. My sensors felt and saw nothing," Six-Bee said, distressed. "You can't pick up on the Force." Chris sat in the pilot's seat. He brought up the ramp and began the ship's preflight sequence. "And," he added, "You're supposed to discourage me from using the Dark Side, and you were programmed with a list of what that includes. And it includes teleporting." "I know, Master, but my repulsor-lifts would not have survived the trip back, their batteries have nearly died," Six-Bee said, lowering himself onto the floor of the shuttle. A little red light lit up on him, meaning he was recharging. "Can you talk while you charge?" Chris asked, not expecting an answer. He brought the shuttle up off the ground and pulled up at full speed for space. "Yes, I can. But it will slow my recharging. Do you wish me to keep my speech mechanism engaged?" the droid asked. "No, no. Just wondering," Chris said. At least he knew the droid would hear him if something went wrong. After getting the coordinates from the nav computer, Chris pulled back the hyperspace levers. "Has Chris been found yet?" Laree asked the medical droid. She paced around the medical suite where Chris had recently lain. "No, Chris has not been found anywhere on the planet. It's been too long, he could have easily escaped the planet," the droid's voice came back. "He also ran off with Six-Bee." The shuttle rocked violently, throwing Six-Bee and Chris to the side, Six-Bee crashing into the side and Chris on top of him. "Sorry, Six," Chris said, getting back in the pilot's seat. "Some sort of disturbance..." "It is all right, Master. No internal or external damage. Perhaps we should just forget this happened, right, Master?" the droid asked, sounding hopeful. Chris smiled down at the droid. "All right, for now. I want to get back to Coruscant. But I've saved those coordinates. We'll be back." "I think you really need an astromech droid, not a simple medical droid. Your condition is fine, and you have successfully kept from the Dark Side. You don't need me," Six-Bee said, sometime later. "Oh, c'mon Six-Bee. Give yourself some credit. You're a lot more valuable than some rusty old R2 unit," Chris said. "And you're a good friend." "Why thank you, sir. You aren't so bad—for a human." The droid floated itself back onto the chair and lowered itself into the cushion. It reached out with a number of appendages, buckling itself in. "But I sometimes doubt my use. You ask me to do things I am not able to do with my medical equipment." "I know, Six-Bee. That's why I want to get back to Coruscant and upgrade you, if you don't mind," Chris said. "On the contrary, Master, I would like to be able to do what you ask of me. And my sensors were apparently damaged just now, my primary check was not accurate." "Ok." Chris checked the time for reentry, guessed about five more seconds than estimated. He waited the minute, then pulled back on the hyperspace levers. The whirls of color faded to starlines, then back to normal stars as they reverted to realspace. Coruscant gleamed shortly away. "This is the shuttle Lindimbia, requesting permission for landing in the medical hangar, lower Imperial city," Six-Bee said into the comm, as Chris had suggested. "Permission denied. Hangar has been closed for inspection. Diversion to palace roof is possible," the controller said. "Damn, they know we stole this ship," Chris whispered. "Quiet, Master." Six-Bee let go of the mute button. "That will do fine, send final coordinates." The coordinates popped up on their screens, and Chris flew, carefully following them. When they landed on the landing platform, Chris took a deep breath and lowered the ramp. Six-Bee detached himself from the copilots seat, turning on his repulsor-lifts and following Chris down the ramp. Chris bowed his head, staring at the ground when he reached the hangar floor. "Did you get it?" Luke asked. He stood a meter away, staring at the boy and his droid. "Yes, I did, Master," Chris said, keeping his head down. Silently he detached the ancient saber from his belt, held it out to Master Skywalker in both hands. Skywalker took the ancient

saber in one hand and ignited it. The blade quickly snapped into existence, its dark purple light illuminating his face. "This is the Sith object you were after," Luke stated. "Yes, it was exactly where they said it would be." "You should not have run away from the medical center," Luke said. He looked at the droid. "And *you* should not have helped him." "I had no choice, sir, he adjusted my program—" the droid started. "I want to keep him," Chris said. "He's good to have around. And will you destroy the saber, or shall I?" "Later," Luke said, disigniting the saber. "For now, you have everyone worried half to death. You'd better go explain to them." Luke turned back to the droid. "Six-Bee, report to Too-OneBee facility four-see-six-twelve." "No," Chris said. "Six-Bee stays with me." Chris waved the droid to follow as he walked past Skywalker into the palace. He walked downstairs to the medical wing, where he could feel everyone waiting. Six-Bee hovered behind him. Chris came down the final stairs to the medical room. "I'm back," he called down. He came down to see Laree and Gaeriel talking to the Too-OneBee droid. Laree looked over at him, and walked to him. Laree slapped him. "Where the blazes did you go?" Chris was furious in surprise, but felt a pain in his leg as he collapsed. "Oh, thanks, Six-Bee. Maybe I'll turn you in after all." "Too-OneBee would disagree, Master. It is my designation to keep you from getting angry," Six-Bee said. "Pretty soon I'll just get mad at you..." Chris trailed off as he got back to his feet. "C'mon, Chris, where'd you go?" Laree asked again. "You're just in critical condition a week, get better, disappear, what's with that?" "I had to do it, Laree. It's my job as the last of the Sith to destroy Sith objects. I had to recover this lightsaber that Six-Bee had mentioned in one of his stories, which turned out to be true," Chris said, hoping she'd buy it. It *was* the truth after all. "Well I just hope you had fun," Laree said viciously. "Actually, I did. First there was—" "Shut up, Chris." Laree pushed past him and went upstairs. Chris looked around, confused. "Blazes, you'd think we were married or something..." "Actually, sir," Six-Bee said coming around to face him, "That would be legally impossible. You are both far under-aged." "Thanks for the update, Six, but I kind of knew that," Chris said. He walked over to Gaeriel, tapped her on the shoulder. She turned toward him. "What are you talking to Too-OneBee about?" "How to keep you in the center this time," Gaeriel said. "What? But I'm fine!" Chris insisted. "Too-OneBee thinks you may have internal injuries that your activity just now has brought upon you. He'll have to operate," Gaeriel said. "Bye." She walked past him and went up the stairs to the turbolift. "Operate? Six, c'mon old friend, you can help me out of this one..." Chris said hopefully. "I'm afraid not, sir. My premature scans showed no evidence of any damage internally, but now I can most assuredly pick up the dangers. As you humans often call it, you will have to go 'under the knife'," the droid said. "I hate operations!" Chris insisted. "Done well, you have," a voice called out to Chris when he was unconscious. He saw the form near him. "Use your power for good, you have. Now what is it you do?" "I don't understand, Master Yoda," Chris spoke to the bluish spirit. "Day light is upon you... but soon night must fall." That, Chris understood. "But my droid will help me stay away—" "Droid? Heh. Worthless they are, at times. More shall you need, if you are not to be turned," Yoda said in his usual quizzical way. "Of course, Master, but what?" Chris asked. "Closest to you are they who may help you." The spirit faded as Chris regained consciousness. "There you are, Sir. Your operation has been completed," Too-OneBee backed from Chris. "Am I allowed to leave yet?" Chris asked, wanting to get as far from the medical wing as he could. "I'm afraid not, sir. You need to stay settled for at least a day, or the condition will once again become chronic," Too-OneBee left the room. "Oh, great," Chris said. The door opened again, and Six-Bee hovered in. "Good day again, Master," the droid said cheerfully. "They allowed me those upgrades while you were out. My new systems are one hundred percent functional." The droid came to Chris's side, placing his health-watching sensor on the boy. "Good, Six. What did they give you?" Chris asked. "Metal sensors, and a

computer connection accessor. I've also changed around my programming, as you have requested. I can hack through most encryptions." "That's very good, Six. You'll be a lot of help, I'm sure. But for now, I need some sleep." Chris closed his eyes and shut down his mind. "Of course, Master," the droid said, shutting down all but his sensory and repulsor systems. "He'll be ok," Luke said. "And I'm sure he's sorry, Laree." "Yeah, I bet," Laree said, her green eyes still angry. Luke shook his head. He looked around at his apartment, disappointed in how Laree was acting. "Anyway, I think we should get his father back here. To show him how he's doing." "The kid has a father?" Gaeriel asked. "Acts like an orphan to me." "Well his father kind of ditched him on Yavin four. And that's why it's important to get him back here," Luke said. "What's that going to do?" Laree asked. "I don't know. Just seems like the right thing to do," Luke said. Laree shook her head and walked off. Luke watched her go sadly. "Don't worry, Luke. She'll get over it," Gaeriel said, putting an arm around him. "Why do you really want his father to come?" "It's about time they met their future in-laws," Luke smiled. "I thought so," Gaeriel said, returning the smile. Later that day, Gaeriel and Luke met up again to talk. Gaeriel walked up to Luke, shaking her head. "Something's wrong," she said. "Laree isn't acting like herself. I was just talking to her... something is very wrong, Luke." "I've noticed too, Gaeriel," Luke said sadly. "I don't understand it yet, either. But you're definitely right. I'm worried too." Luke left Gaeriel standing there, walking down the hall toward the turbolift-tube. He rode it down to the medical level, stepping down the final stairs. He walked into Chris's room, where the boy now lay asleep. "I'm sorry, no visitors—" Too-OneBee started. Luke gestured, shutting the droid down. He knew what was wrong. He walked up to Chris. "I'm sorry, sir, but Master Chris must rest—" Six-Bee piped up from beside Chris. "I know what I'm doing, Six-Bee. He will not be harmed." Luke walked up to the boy, grabbed him by the collar. Silently he lifted him up, waking him up. Chris's eyes opened, surprised he was no longer laying down on the bed. "Hey—Master!" he said, shocked. "Chris, you idiot! How could you do this?" Luke asked, his voice angry. Chris shook his head, trying to ward off the bad dream. "What are you talking about?" He was far too surprised to match Luke's anger. Luke dropped him back to the bed. "You—Laree... How could you?" "I still have no idea what you're talking about, Master..." "I'll give you one thing, Chris. You did discover a new way to spread your 'Sith blood'." That hit Chris. Him, Laree, that time in the academy before he'd gone away, the Sith blood... Uh-oh. "You don't mean that..." Chris said. "That's exactly what I mean. When you ran away, she got angry at you, understandably. Since then, she's been completely out of control. And you know exactly why," Luke said. "Master, I didn't know. I'm sorry, but I didn't know this would happen!" Chris said desperately. Luke cooled down a bit. "I know you didn't, but you still shouldn't have done it." How could he make Master Skywalker understand? "Can she be helped? Maybe it hasn't completely affected her yet," he said. "I already thought of that, Chris. But what's the point?" Luke asked truthfully. Chris had to admit he was right. Sad as it was, it was unavoidable. "At least she can't be trained to be a Sith. I'll see to that." "You don't really know that. You've said yourself the Sith will return. How do you know this isn't part of that? You, Laree, your future children. One mighty Sith family?" Luke asked. "Master, I've changed. If I can control myself, Laree easily can do so." "How long did it take you to control yourself?" "Years," Chris replied sadly. "But that doesn't count, I was caught in a family that hated me, an outcast from my own world. Laree is nothing like that," Chris said. "Well I want you to make sure of that. Go away with her for awhile, rebuild her confidence and control. Let her trust you, and us," Luke said. "I understand, Master. Where would you wish us to go?" Chris asked, trusting his Master knew what he was talking about. It didn't really sound like it would work. It hadn't for him. "Well there's a nice place on the edge of the galaxy," Luke said. "Named Cinthral." Chris shook his head. "No, no. You can't want me to go home.

I can't go home," Chris laughed, as if it were a joke. Skywalker's idea was worse than he thought. Luke stared at Chris monotonously for a few moments. "You will go to Cinthral, Chris. I don't know why exactly, but it's a good idea. You should meet with your family again." "What about Laree? She'd be bored to blazes! There's nothing there, Luke, believe me, I'd lived there long enough," Chris said. "How about Ketrann? Laree might like meeting her mother... You know, girls like that kinda stuff." "Chris, go!" Luke commanded. Chris hung his head. "Ok, Master," he muttered, his teeth clenched. "But I don't like it. C'mon, Six. Let's go." Chris walked toward the stairway, Six-Bee following. On the way, Six emitted a strange electromagnetic pulse into his shut-down comrade, starting the systems of Too-OneBee. "Hey, Six, where'd you learn to do that?" Chris asked enthusiastically, walking backwards to face the droid. "Master Chris, all now-a-day droid models have electromagnetic pulse sensory emitters for just such an occasion," the droid said matter-of-factly. Chris raised an eyebrow at the droid. "Right. I'm sorry I asked." Chris turned back around, trying to remember what the name of the thing was. "Apology accepted, sir," Six said. Chris turned to the droid again, shaking his head. But he sensed something — could Six be sarcastic? Might have to ask him sometime. He turned back and went up the stairs and inside the turbolift. "Oh Blazes, you want me to meet your family?" Laree asked. They were in their temporary room near where they'd been on their earlier trip to Coruscant. "No. Actually, I'd rather not meet my family. Believe me, you can't hate this any more than I do," Chris said. "Then why go?" Laree asked. "That's a good question. But Master Skywalker really wants us to go for some reason. It's some crazed obsession to him." Laree laughed. "I bet it is. Well, never disappoint the Master, do we?" she sighed. "Apparently not." That night, Laree, Chris, and Six-Bee loaded into a shuttle and took to space. Luke watched them go. "I don't know why I made them go," he said to Gaeriel who stood beside him. "I thought it was the right thing...but now I'm not so sure. This could be a mistake." "What could happen, Luke? And whatever does, it's not your fault. I'm sure they'll make plenty of trouble themselves," Gaeriel smiled, trying to comfort him. She failed. "I don't know, Gaeri. I've got a bad feeling about this." Chris pulled the ship from hyperspace. Out the viewport was a huge orbiting spacedock. It was obviously ancient, the whole thing had the look as if it had been put back together a hundred times. Parts of it were rusted, taken down to the planet to be repaired and rained upon. It was not very good condition and extremely dangerous for ships to berth upon. Two strange spherical ships crossed by awkward crescents flew speedily toward them. "Chris, watch it!" Laree shouted as the strange ships opened fire. "Shh, Laree." Chris tapped a key, a preprogrammed lasercannon opening fire back at the attackers. It clipped both the ships' wings, diverting their paths into eachothers'. "Oh, great work, Chris. I'm sure they'll let us go now," Laree said. "Don't worry, Laree. Everything is as planned," Chris said. The comm-unit came alive. "Chris, My Son, why do you return?" "Master Skywalker thought that I should, Father. If it is of no bother," Chris replied into the comm. Laree muted the comm a moment. "You really are a suck-up," she smiled. "You live a lot longer," Chris smiled back, removing her hand from the comm. "Of course, My Son, you may return. You are always welcome at home, if you are better?" Ulic asked. "Well...Yes, I am, Father," Chris said, wanting to at least be able to land. He pulled the ship beyond the spaceport, down toward the groundport. He landed the shuttle on the ground, looking around at the old-style lights all around the 'port. "When was the last time they upgraded this place?" Laree asked. The whole place looked ancient. "Remember, this world still isn't part of the Republic. And they don't want to be. If it weren't for me, they probably would go on forever without knowing about eachother." Chris shut down the systems, lowering the ramp. They walked down the ramp, Six-Bee floating silently behind them. At the foot of the ramp stood Chris's father, Ulic. He looked just like a larger version of Chris, Laree thought. The two

stood a meter apart. "Father," Chris said. Ulic looked past Chris, scrutinizing Laree and Six-Bee. "Son. Who are your companions?" he asked. He raised an eyebrow, glancing back at Laree. Chris chuckled at his father. "This is Laree Captison and Six-Bee, the latter of medical relations." "Then are you better, or do you need constant attention?" Ulic asked, looking back at his son. "There is no 'better' for me, Father. I am what I am. And this is how I am," Chris said. "But the droid does help me a lot." Chris knew his father's unspoken thought. He just shook his head with a smile. Ulic smiled back, came forward and hugged his son. "We'll get you a room in a hotel. There's no room left in the house, what with your new brother and all." "I have a new brother?" Chris asked, releasing his father. Was I away that long? "Yes, you'll get to see him. Come, we must hurry if we're to get there before dark," Ulic said. Laree trudged through the moist ground, breathing the surprisingly thick air. She looked at Chris, who was walking calmly next to his father, breathing normally. He must have gotten used to this air when he was very young. She certainly couldn't now. They passed through a large park filled with trees and plants of all odd sorts. She didn't miss Chris's father's occasional glances back at her. She didn't know what to do exactly, but by luck they hit the city far sooner than she'd expected. As expected though, it looked like nothing she'd ever seen before. It wasn't the technologically advanced built up city that most planets had served as a main port or capital. There were tall and short buildings alike, but they all had a certain primitive air to them, built up of old metal and such. Ulic guided them through up to a large building made of stone and metal. He told them it was the hotel he'd mentioned, and then took them a few long blocks beyond to a number of medium sized private homes. "Ah, home," Chris whispered as he looked at the old house where he'd spent his childhood. Unlike some mushy reunions, hatred filled his heart. This was home, alright. The place he hated. Laree looked at the place carefully. It looked plain, nothing special at all. Just like the other dozen spread around the area. "Come on, inside now," Ulic said. He pushed them along inside. Inside the door was a long white hall, seemingly completely out of place. Chris squinted his eyes, muttering, "I hate white." They walked on, coming to a large living room, just how Chris had remembered it. There were a few entertainment holos, unexpected for this world. To the side sat an older woman on a couch, her gray-brown hair behind her as she read. She looked up at the newcomers. "Ulic, you're lucky he came back." "Your mother didn't exactly agree with what I did," Ulic told Chris. "I don't mind anymore, mom. I wasn't meant to remain here, it's good I got out," Chris spoke to his mother. "Is it?" she asked. She switched to her native tongue, which Chris understood easily. "Who the hell is she?" Chris replied in the same language, "She's one of Skywalker's other apprentices." "She's quite an attractive youth. You'll have to watch your father." Chris smiled. "I know. I take it he still hasn't translated this language?" She smiled. "Nope. And he never will." They switched to Basic. "Really? That's great, where is he?" Chris asked, picking up from a reasonably understandable spot. "He's asleep now," she said. "Maybe you would like to get settled in the hotel and come back later." "Yeah, Chris. That sounds good," Laree said. In other words, 'let's get out of here.' "Yeah, ok." His dad moved to guide them back out — "No, dad. I know the way. You don't have to come." "Ok, Chris," Ulic said. Chris and Laree retraced their steps outside and up to the hotel building. They walked up to the front desk, a curly haired human standing before it. "Good day," the clerk said in purposefully accented basic. "May I help you two?" "Uh, yes," Chris said, matching his accent mockingly. He chuckled, using his own voice. "We would like a room." "Ah, of course. Name?" the clerk asked. "I'm Chris Qel-Droma." "Ah, yes. Your father has notified us of your arrival. Your room has been prepared, it is —" "I know what room," Chris cut him off. "C'mon Laree, and —" he looked quickly around for his other companion. "Well, c'mon Laree," he said, seizing her hand. He led her up a series of turbolifts, up to the highest level of the hotel. "This is the private Qel-Droma quarters," he

said, keying the door open with his palm print. “Whoa,” Laree breathed as she looked into the room. It was much nicer — perhaps larger — than the Qel-Droma house. It was incredibly fancy, pictures draped around, couches littered around. And at the head a huge window, with a single ancient black chair before it. They stepped inside, the door shutting behind them. “Perhaps I should have warned you. The Qel-Droma’s at one time ruled over this planet. This was the throne-room. We dropped out of power long ago, but we’ve always kept control of this place,” Chris said. “It’s amazing. Looks kind of like Coruscant up here,” Laree said. “It should,” Chris said. “It was modeled after it. But now, I’d better go back down. You get settled up here, I’ll get us something to eat and I’ve got to find Six-Bee.” “Right, I thought we were missing something. Go ahead,” Laree said, moving into the room, walking up to the window. It was a magnificent view. “Ok, I’ll be right back,” Chris said. He went out the door, walking back down the turbolifts to the lobby. He went out the exit to the outside park. Now that he was alone, Chris allowed himself to struggle to breath. He was far from used to the air any more, but he couldn’t show it in front of anyone that knew him. He fell in step with a number of other humans walking up the road. He’d been walking only about ten minutes, when he felt a sharp pain in his back. His back automatically froze, recognizing the sting. “Keep moving,” a low, muffled voice said from behind him. “And don’t turn around,” the garbled voice added. Chris kept walking nervously, afraid to use his powers in public. He remembered what it had been like when he was younger, living here. He safely probed the man’s mind. He didn’t like what he felt. “What do you want?” he whispered. The man did not reply. “C’mon, I’m worthless. Just let me go,” Chris said, not pleadingly, but perhaps the man would fall for his words. “You’re worth a lot to me,” the man replied coldly. “Really? How much?” Chris asked, taking it that he was some profiteer out to catch him. “A million credits,” the low voice replied. “A *million* credits?” Chris asked, startled. “Blazes I’m valuable.” “Yeah, kid, and I intend to collect. Not every day I get that much for such an easy job. So stay quiet.” That’s it, Chris thought, he called me ‘kid’. Using his martial arts skills — which he’d learned on this planet, thankfully — he took a quick step forward, swinging his body around, his foot up, kicking the blaster from the man’s hand. He caught the gloved hand exactly on target, the blaster going flying off to the ground. Chris glanced at his armored opponent, noting in a split second his nearly unarmored legs. He ducked down, swinging his leg around and knocking the man off his feet. During the distraction, he reached to his belt and reluctantly drew and ignited his lightsaber. The man cursed, laying his left hand on his right wrist. From it, three projectiles flew at Chris. He caught two of them quickly, but the third one got through and homed in on his lightsaber. He dropped it, just as the projectile hit it. The man slapped his knee, a larger projectile shooting out from a hidden launcher below his knee armor. It struck Chris right on, disabling his movement. He shivered a moment, then crumpled to the floor. Boba-Fett stood over the boy, lifting him up and hauling him over into an empty alley nearby. He sat down by the unconscious youth, planning what he’d do with the cash as he reached into his belt pack and rearmed his wrist and knee projectiles. Hours later, Boba-Fett still sat by the boy in the alleyway. Chris stirred. “It’s about time,” Fett muttered. Chris moaned quietly, his entire body sore. He used the Force to awaken himself. “Hmm, you’re a Jedi, now wake yourself up,” Fett said in his muffled voice. Chris could now take a moment to study him. He wore a blueish helmet, the rest of his armor the same. He had what looked like a wookiee skin as a cloak. The design of the armor seemed vaguely familiar, but he couldn’t place it. “Who are you?” Chris asked. “I’m Boba-Fett, and you’re Chris Qel-Droma, my road to cash. But you will also help me. There’s another who came with you. Get her here. She’s nearly as valuable as you.” “And why should I help you?” Chris asked. “Because you don’t have a choice,” Fett said, bringing his blaster to bear on Chris’s head. “I know where you’re staying, precisely where she is, everything about you. And, your droid,”

Fett said, and Chris could feel his smile behind his mask. "Ok, fine. But I still won't help you," Chris said. Boba-Fett took a handful of his shirt, standing up and pulling him with him. Silently, he tapped a control and they shot into the air as his rocket pack ignited. Chris's eyes opened wide as the ground rolled quickly beneath them, Boba-Fett nearing the hotel. He definitely picked up the air of authority Fett had, he was experienced all right. Fett was also one for entrances. He flew right up to the window of the Qel-Droma suite, hovering before it. He knocked the supposed-unbreakable glass in with a flurry of arm-missiles. The window exploded inward. Fett lowered himself and Chris inside the room, shutting down his jet pack. "Where is she?" Fett growled. "I don't know, you're in charge," Chris said. Fett heard it: the faint snap-hiss. He whirled at the sound. "Damn, another Jedi." Good thing he packed lots of anti-weapon missiles. He raised his arm, slapping his wrist with his other hand. Laree blocked the three missiles, but Fett turned his wrist over, launching his rope, which spun itself around Laree. Her hands were pinned to her sides, and she dropped her saber, disigniting itself. She fell to the side, unable to keep her balance. "You are pretty good, Fett. Two Jedi, not a bad catch for a bounty hunter," Chris said. Fett turned to him. "Shut up. I don't want to have to rope you too." He backed from Chris over to Laree, keeping his blaster on target. He slipped a little slip of metal between Laree and the ropes, an anti-grav mini device to make her lighter so he could carry them both. He picked up her lightsaber, fastening it to his belt and picked her up. He walked over to Chris, grabbing him by the collar again. By the window, he ignited his jet pack, setting out for the spaceport. Soon after, Fett landed again in front of a strange looking space craft. It looked kind of like a huge animal head, but metal and engines on the bottom. Fett retracted his grappling from Laree, shoving her and Chris up the ramp of the strange ship. "Get on board," he said coldly. This was it. His last chance to save them, Chris knew. He spun around in a blur of motion, his foot coming up to catch Fett in the helmet. Unfortunately, Fett did catch it, throwing him back. Chris had a last choice. He yanked Fett inside the ship with the Force, throwing Laree out of it. He found that Fett's missile had harmed his mind more than he'd thought, he found he could not teleport. Chris saw Laree scurry away from the ship, her lightsaber jumping back into her hand. But Fett was quick, he shut the ramp, trapping his more valuable prey. He jumped into the cockpit found everything ready as he had set, and took off before the lovely Jedi tore any holes in his ship. "Strap in," Fett growled. "No wait, I'll help you," Fett turned around, his wrist outward. His grappling hook jumped out and around Chris. "Uh, thanks," Chris said. Chris tried to get comfortable for his trip to... "Where are we going?" he asked Fett. "You'll see." Laree waited desperately for the old holocomm unit to connect to Coruscant. "Oh, c'mon damnit..." she muttered to herself. She looked around the room, Chris's mother and father watching her. Finally there was a click and Master Skywalker's face appeared on the screen, albeit blurry. "Laree? What's wrong?" Luke asked. "Master Skywalker! Someone kidnapped Chris, I barely got away!" Laree said hysterically. Luke's eyes opened wide. "Who was it? I somehow knew it was a bad idea to send you two there... And who could kidnap *Chris*?" "I don't know... some man in strange blue armor, a bounty hunter. He said we were worth millions to him." "That's strange. Do you have any idea where they went?" "No, he never said. He didn't speak much while we were flying on his jet pack." "Jet pack? Blazes, a bounty hunter in blue armor with a jet pack? He got you with his grappling hook, Fett did, didn't he?" Luke asked. "You mean you know who it was?" Laree asked. "Yes, but that hardly helps. Boba-Fett is a murderous bounty hunter, one of the best in the business. He'll work for anyone who's got the cash to pay for his work," Luke said. "But even him defeating Chris is hard to believe." "Well he did it," Laree said. "Some weird rockets he had." "Don't have to tell me, Laree. I've dealt with Fett before. He's a tough one, but we should be able to track him. I'll be there to pick you up soon," Luke said, cutting the transmission. Laree looked up at Chris's father.

“We’ll find Chris,” she said. “Can’t he just teleport back?” Ulic asked. “He always had in the past.” Laree shook her head. “Fett’s missiles have some sort of lasting affect on him, which won’t let him ‘port.” “Fett’s back?” Leia asked. “And he’s not after me and Han?” “That’s hard to believe, kid,” Han agreed. “Well not if you look at how Laree said they were worth *millions*. I don’t know who would put that much cash up for them, but it is probable Fett would jump at that. Even after he found out they were two Jedi,” Luke said. “But how do we find him then?” Leia asked. Han had a strange feeling... “You’re not thinking...” “Well Lando *is* the obvious choice when asking about bounties. Something this big must be floating around out there, unless they went directly to Fett which is doubtful,” Luke said. “Well ok, I’ll ask him then. But I don’t like this, kid,” Han said. “Don’t worry, Han. Neither do I.” The *Slave I* dropped out of hyperspace. Fett masterfully brought it down to the ground, engines only shutting off at the last possible second. Fett shut down the cockpit — ready to jump back in a moment’s notice — and went out to the main hold. “Get up,” he growled at Chris, holding his blaster steady once again. “You do not have to cover me,” Chris said, getting up. “I know what planet we’re on.” Sure enough, Chris felt empty. Completely blind to everything around him, he drew upon what his eyes saw, which he did not do very often. “Why do smugglers want *me*?” he asked Fett. “Just shut up and come with me,” Fett said. He walked in front of Chris down the ramp, his blaster slung across his chest. They walked through the thick forest of Myrkr. Chris spotted a number of the small brown snake-like creatures that stopped the Force from existing here. They went on for about ten minutes when Chris felt danger. He knew it wasn’t his Force sense, as he had none, so surely Boba felt it too. He did. Chris had hardly seen the large animal jump at him, when Boba used a flame-thrower on it, making it run away in pain and whimpering. Soon, they came to the edge of a large designation of buildings. Three guards Chris hadn’t seen came into sight, blasters armed. Fett said, “I have the boy.” The guards all recognized Fett. “Good work, Boba-Fett. The Commander will see you right away.” “As you wish,” Fett muttered. Fett walked up to the nearest building, keying the door open and stepping in with Chris behind him. They walked down the old hallways, loaded with doors leading to other halls and barracks. Fett came over to a door not unlike the others, opened it and came in dragging Chris. “Ah, Mr. Fett. Good work. I knew I could trust you to keep your end of the deal,” a deep voiced man said from the center of the room. He sat beneath a large tree covered with ysalamiri. “But where is the girl?” “She escaped,” Fett said simply. “No matter, Fett. It is understandable, as I somehow forgot to mention they were two Jedi. Capturing this one is supposed to be impossible, which is why I called upon the best. You can pick up your other nine hundred thousand credits at your leisure.” The man looked at Chris a moment, back to Fett. “Leave us.” “As you wish,” Fett nodded his blue-helmeted head and left. Chris walked up toward the Commander. “Who are you?” he asked. “I am Commander Levem, of this smuggling society. Naturally, you wonder what one of you Jedi has to do with my nice little organization, located on the one world no Jedi willfully lands upon.” Levem said, “But I have a personal fight with you.” “Really?” Chris asked. “That’s interesting. A smuggling lord wanting little old me... why?” Chris asked, turning serious again. This really didn’t make much sense. “You killed Rishiaa.” “Yes, that I did. So?” Chris asked. “So,” Levem said, “I lost half my business. And a bit more.” “You lose your business, so you put a million credit bounty on my head? That hardly helps,” Chris said. “What do you know about revenge? I would think you’d understand that subject. Because of you I’ve lost my steady cash flow, so naturally you must be destroyed.” “And Myrkr is good a place as any, eh?” Chris said. “And you wanted Laree too... tell me, how much were you offering Fett for her?” “Only a quarter of a million. Of course, if he got you both it would have been a million and a half. But I think Fett may still come through with her,” Lavem said. “What?” Chris asked. Lavem smiled at him. “Surely you didn’t think he’d run off



with an easy half million yet to be made. He really is the best bounty hunter left in the galaxy. Since poor IG-88 was destroyed coming after you,” he said sadly. “Hey, I’ve heard of that hunter. He was a useful tool my parents used, since he once came to our world. You mean I destroyed him?” Chris asked, getting excited. He may have destroyed the most dangerous bounty hunter in the galaxy! “Well if you don’t remember, it doesn’t matter.” “Oh,” Chris said disappointed. “Where’s my droid? Did Fett bring him?” “Fett brought no droid. And you have taken too much of my time already. Good day, Qel-Droma.” Chris started to hate that saying, as the stun shot hit him and he blacked out. Han, Luke, and Laree sat in the Qel-Droma suite in the hotel. Luke looked at the broken glass of the window a moment, then reached out with his mind. “It’s no use. I can’t find him. Can you sense him, Laree?” Luke asked. “No. He’s not conscious, I think. I can’t tell,” she said. Luke turned to Han. “Sorry, Han, but this didn’t work. We’ll have to talk to Lando.” Han sighed. “Fine, kid. Let’s get back to the shuttle.” Chewie sat hunched over the remains of the droid Six-Bee. He fiddled with the parts, hooking the ones that fit. He grabbed a tool, welding pieces together. A little piece zapped his hand and sent him howling. “Chewie?” Han called from the ramp of the Falcon. Chewie bellowed as he hurried over to the ramp. He roared a question. “No, they couldn’t find anything. Get the Falcon ready for flight, willya Chewie?” Han asked. Chewie roared. “Forget the droid for now, I’ll get Luke to fix him up.” Han came up the ramp, soon followed by Luke and Laree. “Luke, you can fix old Six-Bee, right?” “Of course, Han. He may know something that can help us,” Luke said. On the table, the pieces of Six-Bee began to float around, hooking together and welding themselves. “Right, kid.” Han left for the cockpit to help Chewie. Luke sat down by the Falcon’s holoboard, Laree sitting across from him. They spoke distractedly, both concentrating partially on the droid. Minutes later, the droid sputtered back to life. “Master Chris!” it shouted. “Look out, bounty hunters!” he spoke the last words he’d hoped to get in before it was too late. But it was already too late. He spoke again as his sensor sweep finished. “Master Luke, Mistress Laree. Where’s Master Chris?” Luke stood up and walked over to the droid. “What happened to you, Six?” he asked. “Well I was following the Master and Mistress when my sensors picked up machinery coming toward us. On a world such as Cinthral, I found that strange. I made visual contact with an old-fashioned assassin droid. I was able to shut him down with my sensors, and he fell in pile of mud and his systems all died. Then I was shot from behind by a very low blaster, no doubt inaudible by a human’s ear. I was finished off after everyone had gotten far enough away,” Six-Bee said. “Hmm. Well, that still doesn’t help us tell where they came from. We’ll still have to see Lando,” Luke said. He sat back down by the holoboard. “Ah, yessir. Captain Calrissian of the space-vessel *Lady Luck*.” The droid hovered on its repulsor-lifts, floating over to the holoboard. Six lowered himself down on the bench beside Luke. “Master, would you like to play this game against a simple medical droid?” Luke smiled. “You’re far from simple. You could probably beat me in moments.” “Given the complex design of this game, I project that that would be literally impossible. Minutes, perhaps,” Six-Bee said. Luke buckled in as the Falcon began to lurch. “Ok, Six-Bee,” he said, keying the board on. “Your move.” Mara Jade walked slowly down the ramp of her ship. She shuddered as the familiar winds stirred her long reddish hair. This planet had too many memories of both good and bad times. Here on Myrkr had been the place where she’d finally felt normal again, working for Karrde. It was also where she was called to work by her master when Luke Skywalker ran into them. She had no wish to return. She looked around her ship, spotting the man in charge of unloading her cargo. She walked up to him. “Hey, where’s my money?” she asked. “I was promised payment on delivery.” The man turned toward her glaring green eyes. “I know, Jade, but we’ve run into a couple of economic troubles, you see, and…” “Look. I don’t care about your little problems. I made my delivery, as promised, and I expect to be paid, as promised.

I'm not even getting much for this run. How can you have lost so much money you can't pay off twenty thousand?" she asked. "Well, only the higher-ups really know. But I've heard it's something about Jedi." "Like Jedi would ever bother your little operation as long as it was here. I want to talk to Commander Levem about this," Mara said. "You can't talk to the Commander," he said. "You'll get your money as soon as we can get it." "Then you'll get this equipment as soon as we get the credits," Mara said. She turned to her own workers. "Load the ship back up—" "No, no. That's not necessary. We can work this out," he said. "Either I get my money, or I talk to Commander Levem about it," Mara said coolly. "I don't know about that. I will see what I can do, though." Mara shoved her "guide" out of her way. She marched on quickly, toward the main room where Karrde once stayed. She knew this base far better than anyone else possibly could, including Karrde himself. She stormed into the room with the huge tree where Commander Levem sat. "Oh, Mara Jade," Levem said. "An honor to meet you again." "Cut the crap, Levem. Why can't you pay off your suppliers?" Mara asked. "Well the truth is I have lost half my business," Levem said. "And offered a large sum for the capture of the person at fault." "So that's where the Jedi come in," Mara said. "Which of Skywalker's students was at fault?" "You know better than to think I'd actually tell you." "Yeah, I do. How much did you offer?" she asked. "One million credits alone, one and a half with his friend too," Levem said. "No wonder you have such problems. You should learn a thing or two before you offer a bounty hunter that kind of money." The comm buzzed. "Sir," a voice blurted out. "Boba-Fett has picked up his bounty on Qel-Droma, and—" In anger Levem jammed his fist down on the unit, smoke rising from the damaged circuits. "Qel-Droma, eh? You'd better pay up now, Levem. I wouldn't want to have to damage your position in any way," Mara said. "Of course, Jade. We'll get you your money. Just stand right there and don't move." Mara wondered at that. "What?" A guard had come up behind her, now throwing his arm around her neck, cutting off her breathing. She blacked out in moments, unconscious. She awoke hours later in one of the small windowless rooms Karrde had sometimes used as extra storage. She leaned against the wall groggily, reaching down to her ankle. Amateurs, she thought at her captures as she pulled her mini blaster from its sheath. Well, now Mara had one choice. She had to get out, and in revenge, might as well bring the Qel-Droma kid with her. She stood up and walked over to the door. She set her blaster to its tightest beam, and shot a hole through the door's locking mechanism. She opened the door and stepped out into the hallway, hunting for Qel-Droma. Chris awoke, sitting up on the bed in his cellroom. He couldn't remember much, until he tried to aid his memory with the Force. Then it all came flooding back to him. He looked at himself, covered in average brown, tattered clothes. He stood up and walked around in circles, trying to get his blood circulating in his numbed legs. Minutes later, there was a knock at the door. He walked forward, curious. "Qel-Droma?" a voice whispered. "Yeah?" he shouted back. "Shut up. Get back from the door." He backed away, just as a laser blast shot through the door and right by his hand. The door opened, revealing a woman he'd never seen before. She stood with a blaster in one hand, her spice-brown colored hair flowing down her back. Her green eyes glared as she stepped in and shut the door. "You want to get out of here?" "Huh?" Chris asked, distracted by her green eyes. She reminded him of Laree. "Do you want to get out?" Mara asked. "Oh, yeah, right. Let's go," Chris said, walking toward the door. Mara stopped him. "I'll go first," she said, gripping her blaster. Chris shrugged, letting Mara pass. She stepped out into the hall. She whimpered in surprise as a blaster jumped to her head. Chris leaped forward with a jumping front kick, catching the wrist of the man with the blaster, making it go flying. He moved forward, gripping the man's arm and turning it backwards, forcing him to the wall. He struck the guy's spine with his elbow, and he fell to the ground, unable to move. "You should be more careful," Chris smiled at Mara. "Thanks, Chris," she muttered

as they continued on. "Lando's gotta be crazy to come here," Han said, looking out the viewport at the huge asteroids floating around, trying to destroy his ship. He flew expertly through the Cron Drift, looking for the asteroid with the hidden old Rebel base. "Well he said something about a good game," Luke offered. "It's over there," he said, pointing to one of the larger asteroids through the viewport. "Yeah, I got it kid," Han said. He swung the controls toward the asteroid, landing in minutes. Luke went back to the ramp, stepping down it as it opened. "So, whadaya need, Luke?" a voice called from the base of the ramp. Lando stood at the foot of the ramp, his beige clothes and cape still in the reprocessed asteroid air. "Lando, you know anything about a huge bounty going out for a 'Qel-Droma'?" Luke asked. Lando rubbed his stubble of a beard, thinking hard. "How large? I may not have caught the name." "A million credits." Lando's eyes lit for a moment in surprise. "A million? No wonder I haven't heard, Luke, that much and every *civilian* in the galaxy would jump at it." "I thought so. But there's still a way you can help us. We recovered this," Luke said as the remains of a droid floated over to his feet. "None of us understand it. I thought you may." Luke picked up the head of the droid and hurled it at Lando, who caught it. Lando inspected the head carefully. "I don't believe it," he breathed. He looked up at Luke. "Where'd you get this? This is IG-88!" "I thought so," Han said to noone in particular from on board the Falcon. "Lando," Luke said. "Do you think you could access it's memory banks or something? We have to know where Boba-Fett took Chris." "I can try," Lando said. "Blazes, I wish I had my lightsaber," Chris said as he thrust his knee into another guard's groin. He grabbed the man by the head and hit that with his knee before throwing him back to the ground. "You know you wouldn't be any good with it," Mara said as she cautiously caught up with Chris, gripping one of the guard's blaster rifles. "No, I'd hardly be a shade slower than with the Force. I trained with normal swords for years before I built my first lightsaber," Chris said. "Of course, now I'm up to my third." "Yeah, well we don't have time. We have to get out of this place and back to my freighter. This way," she tilted her head down a side passageway. She walked in front with a sure grip on her blaster, a jaunty air to her walk. Chris followed closely, his fists balled up and prepared for a fight. Chris couldn't have seen it, and he didn't. He just suddenly felt a sharp pain in his back, a number of tingling, painful points. He yelled in pain as he fell forward, his hands thrashing about. The vornskr ripped his teeth from Chris's back, taking flesh and cloth with them. The vornskr slapped it's whiplike tail across the back of his head, and lunged forward again, biting deeply into Chris's leg as he howled in pain. Mara whirled around, bringing her blaster up and shot the vornskr through the head. It's mouth slackened on Chris's calf. He threw it from his body and stood up shivering badly. They walked for a few minutes, no longer disturbed. Mara walked up to a doorway, which she shot open. She stepped through quickly, much more cautious this time, and Chris followed, still limping badly. Chris struggled to walk on through the forest toward Mara's ship. "I can't make it like this," he muttered, falling to his knees. "You'll be ok. You've just lost a lot of blood," Mara said. She helped him up and held him around his back, keeping her sleeve over his wound to stop the bleeding as she helped him forward. Finally they came up to the modified bulk cruiser of Jade's. Mara moved forward, still pulling Chris along, toward the downed ramp. She hauled Chris and herself up the ramp. She spotted her Lieutenant. "Lieutenant, we have to go immediately. This trip has already gotten bad enough," she said. "Yes, ma'am," the Lieutenant saluted and hurried off toward the bridge. "Just a bit further, Chris," Mara said as she closed the ramp and helped him down the corridor. They soon came to the medical bunks, where she lay him down on his stomach. She took some disinfectant and rubbed it into the wound on his back, which made him start howling again. "Don't be so childish," she said as she slapped synthflesh on Chris's back. She turned him over onto his back, to keep more pressure on it. She carefully lay his whipped head on the soft

pillow. "Rest for awhile," she said and left the medical room. Chris was asleep in seconds. Gaeriel sat in on the meeting of the New Republic council. She'd been cleared, of course, by Leia Organa Solo. She shifted her long blue skirt as she watched them debate over a number of issues, watching them closely in interest. Not that it was all that exciting. The council's debate was not unlike her own senatorial debates were. Long, hard, and rather unrequired. Even the Chief of State was distracted, not paying much attention. The council broke up, a number of councilors escaping outside. Gaeri dragged herself to alertness as Leia came toward her. "Your Highness," she said, getting to her feet. Leia shook her head. "You don't have to call me that, Gaeriel," she said. "All right, Leia," Gaeriel said. "Is there any other part of the palace you may show me? It's an amazing place." "Um, yeah—" Leia broke off. A strange look came over her face and she shut her eyes a moment. "Leia? Are you ok?" Gaeriel asked. "Yeah," Leia breathed quietly as she opened her eyes. "That was Luke. They think they've found where Chris was taken to. They're on their way to Myrkr, now." "Myrkr?" Gaeriel asked. "Where's that?" "Don't ask. It's a place no Jedi wants to be at, since the Force does not exist there. They're going to have their hands full," Leia said. "Here we are, kid," Han said from the pilots seat aboard the Millennium Falcon. "Ready?" "Ready," Luke said. Han reached forward, pulling back the hyperdrive levers. The ship quickly slowed from hyperspace, showing the large looming turquoise sphere of Myrkr. "Ok, you can land. There's no way to prepare for something like this." Luke stood behind Han as he brought the Falcon down toward the planet. When they came within a kilometer of the surface, Luke was struck blind. He staggered a moment before regaining his balance. "Whoa, you ok, kid?" Han asked. Recovering, Luke said, "Yeah, I'm ok," in a weak voice. "I'll check on Laree," he said a little stronger. He turned and left the cockpit, going into the main hold. He walked up to Laree and Chewie at the holoboard. "Laree, are you ok?" She smiled up at him. "I feel like I'm five again," she said, "And to me, that's a very good thing." The Sith blood must be dependant upon the Force, Luke thought. Good. Han brought the Falcon smoothly to rest nearby the old smuggler base, where they assumed they'd find Chris. IG-88 hadn't had exact ground coordinates. As they landed, a bulk freighter on the other side of the building took off and climbed for space. Luke came down the ramp first, followed by Laree and Six-Bee. "Han," he called up into the main hold, "I'll call if we need you." "Sure, kid. Good luck," Han said. Luke sighed. "Since we're *here* I'll accept that," he muttered. "C'mon, Laree. Chris has to be in there." "I know, Master," she said. The trio walked up toward the main doors to the base. A couple of guards in civilian clothing stopped them. "Hold it right there," one of the guards shouted. "Who are you?" the guard asked, eyeing the shadowy figures in robes. He couldn't see their faces. "Come forward and show yourselves. Hands up!" They didn't have much of a choice. Luke and Laree came forward with their hands over their heads. "The hoods," the guard said. Luke complied first, removing his hood, looking calmly at the guard. Laree reluctantly removed her hood, blinking her deep green eyes at the sudden brightness. She pulled her long, illustrious brown hair out from under her robe. One of the guards openly stared at Laree, but the other one knew Luke was the one to talk to. "Are you armed?" he asked. Quite a trusting guard, Luke thought. "No, we have no weapons," he said. "I trust you," the guard said. "Jedi don't play those sorts of games when they know they'd lose. Now, why have you come here at all, Jedi?" These robes make it too obvious, Luke thought, next time I'll change. "We're looking for a friend. May we speak to whoever's in charge?" Luke asked. "I'll see what I can do. Come over here, nice and slow," he said, still a bit precocious. Luke and Laree did. "Just a moment..." the guard ran a sensor over their bodies. "I suppose you can enter." Luke and Laree went past the guards, into the building. The other guard nodded to Laree as she passed. Once they had passed through, the guard closed the door, then smacked the other guard upside the head. "Thanks for your help, Josh." Josh

held his head. “What?” he asked, confused. “Keep your mind on the job, man.” “Oh, right,” Josh said blankly, his mind wandering. Luke and Laree wandered around the base, searching out the person in charge. They were completely lost of course, without the Force and unable to find anyone. They walked for a long period of time before they came up on a human carrying a datapad, overlooking a broken unit of some kind. Luke approached the human. “Uh, excuse me,” he said and the human looked up. It was not human at all apparently, it had a strange distorted face even though it looked human from behind. He couldn’t tell what gender it was. “We’re kind of lost. Where’s the chief of this outpost?” It tilted its head and spoke in a deep voice, “Down there, guarded by a pack of vornskrs. Shouldn’t bother you at all,” it said, returning to its work. “Vornskrs? Uh, thanks,” Luke said, walking away and bringing Laree with him. “Those vornskrs are going to kill us if we try to get past them.” “What *is* a vornskr?” Laree asked. “Predators that hunt their prey with the Force. They love attacking Jedi.” “Then maybe we should just look around and try not to run into any,” Laree suggested. “Chris is somewhere around here, he’s gotta be.” “Alright, but we’d better not split up. Remember, Fett was after you too. I think that they’d have put him somewhere over here...” Luke said, bringing Laree down another hall. They entered one of the doors on that side, into a small room. Laree stepped inside stooping to the ground by the bed. She picked something out from under it. “Here’s his clothes,” she said quietly, coming up, holding the black pants and tunic. “So he *was* here. Now we’ll have to get past those vornskrs to —” “No need,” said a strong voice from behind him.

Luke turned slowly around. The man glared down at him. “Are you the chief of this organization?” he asked.

“I am Commander Levem. What do you want here, Jedi?” Levem asked.

“We want our friend back, who you had Boba-Fett capture. Where is he?” Luke asked. He looked at the side a moment, to assure himself Laree was out of Levem’s vision.

“That’s right, Fett did capture him,” Levem said, “but he escaped. I want to find him more than you possibly could, Jedi.”

“What did Chris ever do to you and your organization that you would put a deathmark on his head?” Luke asked.

“As I told him, he destroyed my organization nearly completely. Revenge is sweet among us smugglers,” Levem said.

“Do you know how he escaped?” Luke asked.

“Might as well tell you. I think it was Mara Jade who helped him out, she was pretty miffed at me at the time,” Levem said helpfully.

“Mara Jade? Thank you, Levem. We’ll be going now,” Luke said.

“‘We’?” Levem asked.

“Yes, we,” Laree said, coming behind Luke as he stepped past Levem. She looked up at him a

moment, then quickly followed Luke out of the building.

“Hey!” Levem shouted uselessly after them.

Laree and Luke hurried to the Falcon, meeting Han at the ramp. “Han, Chris has already escaped, with Mara Jade. I just hope she sets him loose,” Luke said.

“Who *is* Mara Jade?” Laree asked.

“No one, Laree. Chris will be returned, I know he will. We can go anytime, Han,” Luke said.

“Sure, kid. Chewie and me have finished the repairs on the Falcon. We can go anytime.”

They all piled aboard the Falcon, as it clunkily took off and cleared the forest. It shot for space. About a kilometer off the ground, Luke sighed a long breath he had held, glad he could finally use his powers again. He glanced at Laree, seeing how she felt worse than she had without the Force. He could feel the wave of aggression overtake her and walk to her side, helping her to the holoboard. “Just relax,” he whispered as he sat her down. He’d told her earlier what he thought was wrong.

“I’ll try,” Laree said, her green eyes showing exactly how she felt. Luke accepted her answer.

Chris woke up, still half asleep despite his attempts. His whole body seemed to howl in pain at him. Those parts of him that hadn’t been severed by the vornskr were sore, and his head ached badly.

He sat up slowly, but to his body he might as well have gone at the speed of light. A thousand new jabs of pain entered his body. He gritted his teeth against the pain, to no avail. Even his teeth hurt. How long was I out? he wondered. Groaning, he got to the edge of the med. bed, lay his feet down painfully. He strained to get up, making it after a few minutes. He walked forward, still limping badly on his wounded leg.

Chris got himself up to the door and pushed the release. He limped down the long freighter hallway, toward what he knew was the bridge. As he dragged himself to the hatch, he stumbled and fell before it, yelling in pain for help.

The door opened, and Mara stepped through. She knelt by Chris. “Are you OK? What’re you doing? Or trying to do,” she said, helping him up.

“Thank you...Mara,” Chris said quietly.

“You shouldn’t be up yet. But since you are, we’re nearly to Coruscant now. You look terrible. Get back to the med. center.” Chris sighed and began to turn around slowly. “No, wait, I’ll help you,” she said resignedly. She came toward Chris and put her arm around him and helped him back to the med. section. She got him to go to sleep and returned to the bridge.

Some time later Chris had finally reawaken. He felt better, but not by much. He wasn’t able to heal himself, his mind was far too mixed up to concentrate enough. He shivered, thinking of being put into another bacta tank. He could still smell it on his breath.

“Hey, you awake?” Mara asked quietly from beside the bed. Chris looked at her a moment, trying to bring his concentration back. She now wore a brown shipsuit, her long spice-brown hair flowing loosely. He looked up at her green eyes, moaning ‘Laree...’ silently.

“I just got a funny feeling...Like I’m not gonna see her again,” Chris said quietly.

“See who?” Mara asked.

“Huh?” Chris said as if he hadn’t known he’d spoken out loud. “Oh, no one. Nevermind. Just, help me up.” She did, and with her help they made it to the freighter’s ramp. It slowly slid down before them as someone in the bridge triggered it to. They walked down the ramp.

Laree looked up hopefully at the freighter. She’d cooled down when they arrived at Coruscant, only a short time ago. She waited a moment as the ramp lowered itself to the ground. Down the ramp came two figures. Chris came down in tattered beige clothes, moving far smoother than she would have thought after the description of what had happened. But her eyes widened. By Chris’s side was a woman, her hand draped around his waist as his was her shoulders. She had long brown hair and her green eyes searched the landscape, coming to a stop at her own.

A hurt look came across her face as she thought about Chris and this woman...Mara, she believed. Her mind threw suggestions at her that not long ago would have seemed silly, but right now was unavoidable and took control of her mind, her thinking completely shattered by these thoughts. She tried to awaken herself as she watched him talk quietly at the bottom of the ramp with Master Skywalker.

Jealousy. She knew her mind was overtaken with it, but stood unable to move because of it. She didn’t quite understand why, as it seemed so silly. Mara had to be at least twice Chris’s age. But her subconscious wouldn’t allow her to think any other way. Completely confused, she turned and left the scene. On her way off, she forgot her other thoughts and her subconscious’s thoughts took over.

“Thank the Force you’re OK, Chris. What happened?” Luke asked.

“Same old, same old,” Chris smiled painfully. He watched Laree walk off. “Where’s she going?” he asked sadly.

Luke turned his head, seeing Laree enter a turbolift. He turned back around. “I don’t know,” he said quietly. He turned to Mara with a smile. “Thanks again, Mara. You want to kill a guy, then you keep getting caught coming back.”

“This is the last time, Luke. You don’t know how strenuous this is becoming,” she returned the smile. “I only rescued him in revenge for Levem.”

“I didn’t like him much either. You going now?”

“Yeah, I’ve got a schedule to keep. I’ll probably see you again sometime, Luke,” she started up the ramp.

“Yeah, probably. Bye, Mara,” Luke said as she walked to the top of the ramp and it began to pull up. Luke turned to Chris. “You may want to go talk to Laree.”

“Yeah, that would probably be a good idea,” Chris said. He lucked up into Luke’s eyes. “Master?” Luke nodded his consent, and Chris teleported away.

Chris reappeared outside Laree’s room. He walked up to the door. “Hey, um, Laree?”

He felt a hand on his shoulder as Gaeriel came up behind him. “I don’t know what you did, Chris, but you’ve really got her upset now. She’s locked herself in there and won’t talk. You’ve really messed things up. I think she’s leaving,” she said.

“What?” Chris asked. “I didn’t do anything this time!” He slammed his fist into the door. “Dammit, Laree, let me in!”

“I don’t think so, Chris,” she shouted back at him.

“I don’t want to get in there myself,” Chris threatened. Suddenly he was thrust to the ground and to the side, as the door opened where he’d just been. Out stepped Laree with a full suitcase. She walked up to Gaeriel, hauling it along with her.

“I’m going to mom,” Laree said to Gaeriel. Gaeriel simply nodded and Laree slowly walked down the hall.

Recovering, Chris said, “You’re just going to let her go?”

“It’s her own choice. She’s welcome to go back to my sister if she wants. And personally, I doubt if you didn’t do anything to her,” Gaeriel said.

“But I didn’t!” Chris insisted. “I haven’t seen her for awhile, remember? I haven’t had time to do any more stupid things,” he said truthfully.

“Then you’d better hurry to explain that to her.”

“I’ll try,” Chris said. He focused his mind on Laree’s presence, and immediately teleported there. They were nearby a landing pit where a shuttle had just landed and was picking up passengers. He walked up to Laree and grabbed her by the arm. “Laree, stop. What’s wrong?”

She turned toward him. “As if you don’t know,” she said, her green eyes angry.

“No, that’s right, I don’t,” he said. “Look, it’s not you talking. I know what you’re going through. But it’ll pass eventually, as it did for me. You’re completely overreacting at nothing at all. Don’t do this, Laree. I love you.”

“You love me? Have you ever told me that before? It’s just to make me stay, isn’t it. One of your twisted lines,” she said.



“Hey, I told you once—”

“It didn’t count then.”

“What do you mean it didn’t count then?” he asked, tightening his grip on her arm.

“Stay away from me!” she shouted, drawing the attention of a number of stander-bys. She yanked her arm from his hand. She lifted it up at him, a red flame leaping from it, compacting his chest and knocking him back a meter and to the ground. Her eyes opened wide as she realized what she had done, but she just turned and fled up the ramp of the shuttle to Ketrann.

“Laree,” Chris moaned, edging himself forward on his arms, unable to stand temporarily. ‘Don’t do this,’ he pleaded with her silently. He felt her shut him out of her mind. After a few moments he jumped to his feet angrily, feeling a new strength. “Fine!” he shouted to her, although she couldn’t hear. He was just making a scene. “See if I care! I don’t need you. I’ll find someone else—better!” He held his hands before his face, flaring angrily in a way they hadn’t for some time. He thrust them to his sides quickly and disappeared in a huge tower of fire.

A number of scared shouts and yells rose in the air. One man who’d seen the whole thing commented as he boarded the shuttle—“That guy has problems.”

Laree felt different suddenly as she sensed Chris disappear in a fire of rage. She wasn’t in control of herself still, but was overcome with grief and began sobbing quietly. Despite her regrets, she found herself still strangely unable to get off the shuttle and go back to him—she could just sit there and mourn her own actions.

She felt a hand on her head. She glanced up at a man with dark black hair and green eyes just like hers. He stroked her hair slightly. Strangely enough, she didn’t find herself either angry or scared. She felt a certain peace from the man and felt somehow close to him. “Mind if I sit here?” he asked quietly, indicating the seat next to hers. She shook her head, and he sat down. He pulled his hand back and clasped them together. “I saw what happened out there,” he said after a long time, when the shuttle began lifting off. “Why was that kid bothering you?” he asked, sounding genuinely concerned.

She looked at him, wiping a tear from her face with her thumb. “He wasn’t bothering me,” she said, trying to smile reassuringly. “And he’s only a year younger than me, hardly a kid.”

“I know,” the man said, looking away. A minute later he finally looked back. “He didn’t—” he searched for words, “—do anything to you, did he?”

“Well—not the way you mean,” she said quietly.

The man nodded. He touched her chin, turning her face toward him. “You really cared for him, Laree, didn’t you?” She nodded. “Then why’d you do it?”

“I don’t know,” she said, turning away from him, embarrassed. She stayed silent for some time, as they made the jump to hyperspace.

Chris reappeared in his own room. His tattered clothing had purposely been destroyed in his teleporting, as he didn't want to bother taking it off. He ran to his bedroom, pulling out a suitcase. He opened it, and got out a dark black suit. It was his true Sith uniform, which his Masters had gotten him.

Chris hurried into the tight-fitting black suit. It still fit perfectly. Across his chest spanned a large Sith emblem, its golden color drawing upon the Force, acting like a number of other Sith artifacts. Chris kneeled, the way he'd been shown, and clipped on a long black cape to the edges of the emblem, acting like a conductive wire and thrusting Force power —Dark Power— through him.

He felt at peace in this clothing, though it strengthened the Dark Side. His only peace *was* the Dark Side.

As a sort of test, he waved his hand and blew the bedroom door in. He didn't care if Master Skywalker felt it. No one could stand in his way now. Feeling completely refreshed in his old ways from long before he'd been dragged to Skywalker's academy, he walked out the demolished bedroom door and left his room.

He walked for a very long time around the Imperial Palace. He decided there was a problem, after a short time. He sensed no fear. And a Dark Lord required fear. He reached out with his newly discovered powers, manipulating the emotions of all those near him. With an evil smile, their fear began running through him. That's better, he thought.

After hours of walking, he found himself very bored and lonely. He walked down into the lower levels of the palace, not quite down to the slums, but only down to one of the very old museums. He loomed in the Sith quarter, wondering if any of the few passing people knew that he was a living example of that part of the museum. He ran his hands over the cases of Sith artifacts, feeling their weak power when compared to his own mixed with his Sith emblem.

He mused to himself. What am I doing? Laree's gone, so? Why should I do this? I should be here, but I should do something more like this... He drew upon the Force with his own strength, mixed with the emblem's strength. From the emblem a steady bolt of energy flew into the cases of artifacts, and destroyed them in moments. The cases lay empty.

He smiled to himself. He didn't like Dark Power exactly, but he liked using it for good. And for the first time in a number of hours, he felt good. If only Laree could be there.

He silently cursed himself as his subconscious threw depressing memories and feelings at him. The loneliness flooded his mind. He leaned against the wall, trying to regain his mind from despair.

As he stood there breathing carefully, someone entered the room. He looked up at the newcomer. It was a young girl, fourteen or so he guessed, but not nearly as hardened as himself or Laree. She had shoulder length jet black hair and sweet brown eyes. She wore a nice blue dress. She was pretty, but not Laree.

He caught himself. What am I doing? He asked himself. She left me. Her loss, I can't go compare

every girl in the galaxy to her. "Hello...?" he said, reluctant to steal the information from her mind.

She smiled at him. "My name is Jenika. How about yours?" Jenika asked.

"I am Chris Qel-Droma, Jedi Knight," he said, eagerly showing off as was his natural nature. That was the one thing he never bothered to take control of.

"You're a Jedi? Aren't you a little young?" she asked, although her sense became intrigued.

"It's a really, really long story, believe me," he said with a smile. Should he warn her? He liked this girl, but he decided it could wait until they were alone. He looked around at the empty room. Well, not alone, but somewhere else, he thought.

"I'd like to hear it. Is there somewhere we could go?"

"I don't know," Chris said. "I'm kind of new to Coruscant."

"Too bad. So am I, I'm sort of on a vacation, though it hasn't been much of one," Jenika said.

"I understand that," Chris said. "Place gets rather boring. We could talk at my place, though," he suggested. She shrugged acceptance and he took her hand and quickly guided her far up the palace, through a number of turbolifts, up to his apartment. He opened the door to the large room. It was the same one as he'd shared with Laree their first visit, he suddenly realized, and that brought back a fresh wave of memories.

His face must have shown it. "Something wrong?" Jenika asked, concerned.

"Hmm?" Chris asked, coming back to the present. "Oh, no, nothing."

After walking around the room a moment, Jenika turned back to Chris. "How'd you get this huge room?"

"I'm a student of the Chief of State's brother, and I know her, too," Chris said, thinking back to that night. That was the night Laree had told him about the abuse she had endured in Hethrir's prison. "Please, sit down," he said quietly.

She sat down on the couch, and he sat next to her, facing her. He liked her, she was very nice, and friendly. She had to know, whatever the outcome. "Actually, I'm more of a Jedi Master. A Dark Jedi Master," he said, hoping she knew herself what that meant.

"C'mon, Chris, you don't have to make things up to impress me," Jenika said. She hadn't thought Chris was like that.

Apparently she didn't know. "Jenika," he said, "I wish I *were* making this up. But it's been with me a long time, it's in my blood."

"You seem preoccupied, even while you're talking about something like that," she said. "What is

it, Chris?”

He'd hoped he could wait until talking with Master Skywalker to talk about this. He looked up into her eyes, but then stared at the floor. He couldn't get himself to look at her as he spoke.

Chris found himself pouring his heart out. He told Jenika everything, all about Laree, some of the things that had happened lately about her, and the final blow she had dealt at him. She sat still quietly, listening carefully as he spoke.

“Why did she turn against you that last time, what did you do?” she asked, eager to help.

“I don't know, that's the thing I don't understand,” he said. “She just ran off as soon as I and Mara Jade stepped off the ramp of the freighter.”

“Who's Mara Jade?”

“Mara's an old smuggler. Well, not old she's gorgeous, actually.”

Jenika held her head in her hand in disgust. “And you said she was practically carrying you off the ship,” she said.

“Well, yeah,” Chris said.

“Chris, it's pretty obvious then. You said you somehow spread that...disease to her, right?” He nodded slowly, still not understanding. “Think about it. She can't control her feelings, and suddenly back you come after being away for some time with a beautiful woman clinging to you. You may not see it, but from my point of view, I understand her actions completely.”

“That's silly, though. Mara Jade's at least twice my age. She wouldn't...”

“But she did, Chris,” Jenika said. “I know you still love her, that much is obvious. I suggest you go after her.”

Chris looked up at her, not quite believing what she was saying. But he also knew Jenika was right. He leaned forward and hugged her. “Thank you. You've really helped me. You're not exactly what I expected, but turned out a lot better,” he said. He released her.

“Hey, any time, Chris. Maybe I'll see you again sometime. I'd better get going, and so should you,” she said standing up. With another smile, she left the room.

He lay his hand on the Sith emblem, using its strength to find Laree. He found her, but she was in hyperspace and currently unreachable. He waited calmly.

Laree sat comfortably in her seat onboard the shuttle. She had her hair over her arm, using it like a pillow as she slept. She felt a minor probing of her mind and woke up suddenly. “Chris,” she growled angrily.

The man next to her turned away from his datapad. “Are you OK?” he asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine. He just doesn’t give up.”

“I understand. We’re almost to Ketrann, I think we’ve nearly pulled out of hyperspace. I’ll be right back,” he said, standing up and walking up to the cockpit, entering it.

Laree sat clutching her suitcase nervously. She was returning home. Her mother would be so glad to see her again, wouldn’t she? Master Skywalker had mentioned that her mother may either hate or be afraid of her, as she was now a Jedi. But she could make her understand, tell her what she’d gone through and how much she’d suffered over the years. Or she hoped.

She sensed the moment the shuttle emerged from hyperspace. A moment later, she sensed something else as Chris suddenly appeared in the aisle between seats. “What are you doing?” she asked angrily.

“I’m sorry, Laree, I didn’t understand what happened that set you off. But I do now, and I just wanted to tell you that I hardly even know Mara, and I *was* terribly injured,” Chris said desperately.

“OK, let’s say I was wrong. How’d you figure out what it was? If that’s it.”

“Well, Jenika told me—”

Laree’s eyes seemed to flare in rage. “Jenika? Who’s Jenika?” she asked.

He mentally slapped his forehead and cursed. “She’s—”

“Don’t try to explain, Chris. Just go home,” she said.

“I am not going to leave here without you, Laree. I can explain about Jenika, really—” He broke off and fell back a step as the man who sat next to Laree punched him in the stomach.

“Just leave her alone,” he said angrily.

Chris’s anger rose to an all new high. He drew his fist back, slamming it in a backfist into the man’s jaw, making him fall back to the ground, bloody. “Fine!” Chris shouted. “Have it your way, Laree. I’ve tried to patch things up enough. *BUT I DON’T CARE ANYMORE.*” He disappeared before she had a chance to reply.

“Good,” Laree muttered. She dropped her suitcase and moved to the man’s side, helping him to his seat and dabbing at his wound with a piece of cloth she’d found in a medpack under the seat. “You didn’t have to do that,” she said quietly.

“Yes I did. I couldn’t stand by and watch anymore,” the man said. He placed his hand on hers, drawing it away. “I’m OK.”

“Why do you care about me so much?” Laree asked.

The man shrugged. "I don't know. But I want to talk to your mother about what's been going on with that boy."

In his rage, Chris had teleported blindly. Luckily, he hadn't teleported into deep space like he thought he would have if he ever did blindly teleport. He found himself on a strange reddish brown planet with no apparent life, at least on the surface. But below, he did indeed feel life presence's. But that didn't make a difference. He was out of Control.

He reached out with the Force, grasping at the sun of the cold planet. He had to do it. He couldn't hold back. The star began to go nova, and he teleported away.

He reappeared on a planet unfamiliar to him. He sensed a presence somewhere around him, the one he was hunting for. He looked around the huge crowd, the poor looking people completely ignoring him.

He had a strange feeling about one of the people he passed. He whirled around, grabbing the man by the back of his tunic and knocking him forward. Chris held him down with one knee, laying his hands on the man's head, and stealing information from it. His saber jumped from his belt and ignited itself, blocking the blaster shots the man's body guard began shooting. It struck the guard down, then returned to its Master's belt.

Chris dropped the man's head, standing up. "Thanks a bunch," he muttered and started walking off.

Half an hour later, he came up to a locked, tattered old door. He touched his Sith emblem, and a huge Force blow impacted the door and knocked it in. Chris stepped inside. "Mr. Fett. We have a matter to discuss."

Luke was sitting in his room speaking with Gaeriel when he felt a scream of a hundred thousand voices and a million other lifefoms. Breathing hard, he brought his concentration back to Gaeriel, who he saw felt the same thing. "They've both gone over the deep end," Luke said. "But I think Chris just dropped further."

"He really can not handle rejection," Gaeriel said.

"Him? She had no reason to act the way she did anyway. I know how she can't control herself anymore, but it didn't seem like anything happened to set her off," Luke said.

"She told me. It was Mara," Gaeriel said.

Luke's face melted with understanding. "Blazes," he whispered. "If I'd known then—" he stopped himself. "And now they're both lost to the Dark Side over eachother."

"It's like I told you fifteen years ago. Except it isn't you who has turned to the Dark Side and hates those which you love. It would be easier if it was," Gaeriel said.

"At the time what you said hurt. Now I think I'm beginning to see the truth about it."

“Laree? We’ve landed,” the man said. He stroked her hair softly as she awoke. They’d been caught in a bit of a problem when the engine had died and they’d had to dock with a repair station, so Laree had taken a nap.

“I’m up,” she mumbled. She pushed her bangs from her eyes and casually removed his hand from her hair. “Please don’t stroke my hair. Don’t ever do that,” she said quietly, calmly controlled for the time being.

“Why not?” he asked. He pulled his hand back and picked up his baggage.

“Just—just don’t.” She picked up her suitcase with one hand, finding her other hand naturally gripping her lightsaber.

The man found the reply strange, but accepted it. They both got up and went down the lowered ramp with a few other passengers.

Laree went over to the side of the landing area, the man following her. “Are you really going to talk to my mother?” she asked. He nodded. “Fine,” she said resignedly. “She should be here soon, I contacted her from the shuttle.”

After a few minutes of waiting, a woman came within view. She had long brown hair like her own, over an old but intact red dress. The woman’s brown eyes locked on Laree’s a moment as she came forward. Laree dropped her suitcase, leaving it in the care of the man who was watching them with a smile. Laree met her mother Kistra in a huge hug between family that hadn’t seen each other for a long time. “Mom,” Laree whispered tearfully.

Kistra released her, but kept Laree’s hand in her own. “Laree, what happened?” she asked. “And where did you find him?” she shot a venomous look at the man who stood back a few meters.

“You mean you know who he is?” Laree asked. “I just met him on the shuttle.”

“You could say I know who he is,” Kistra said, still glaring back at the man.

“Now come on, Kistra, this is no way to go about your reunion with your daughter,” he said. “Leave me out of it for now.”

His reaction made it all too obvious. Laree turned to the once stranger with wide eyes, her mouth partially open. “You’re…”

“Your father, yes,” he finished for her.

“That’s why you reacted like that,” she breathed. “You had me scared there. No one strokes my hair.”

“I was wondering about that,” he said. “Why is that? I always did when you were very young.”

“I can’t tell you here,” she said, turning to her mother. “Can we go home and talk?”

“Of course, dear,” Kistra said.

They’d been talking in Kistra’s home for a short time. It was fairly empty as Laree had suspected from what Master Skywalker said. What there was was very plain. “You always did look more like your father,” Kistra told Laree. “You only got my hair.”

“Mother... I inherited a lot more than your hair,” Laree said, reluctant to specifically say what.

“And what is that, dear?” she asked.

Laree drew her lightsaber from her belt, sure her mother would recognize it. She did. “I inherited your Jedi power.”

Kistra was shocked. “The Jedi are responsible for the downfall of this galaxy. How could you turn against your mother after you ran away?”

“None of what you have just said is true though, Mom,” Laree said quietly. She began to tell them both exactly what had happened with every detail she could remember. She told about her kidnapping, her being trained unwillingly, and the abuses. “So you see,” she said as the conclusion to her story, “that’s why you can’t stroke my hair. Only one person does anymo—” she stopped herself. That had almost become part of the story, she knew, but Chris was gone.

Both of their faces had turned pale white for their daughter. “I’m so sorry,” her father said. “That one was that boy, though, wasn’t it?” She blinked and looked away, ignoring his question.

“So it’s not your fault you became a Jedi, you were forced to...among other things?” Kistra asked.

Despite everything Laree was telling, her mother kept focusing on the fact she was a Jedi. “No, mother, I want to be a Jedi. And...I don’t have a choice any more,” she said.

“Because you’re already trained,” Kistra said.

“No, not that. I’m hardly trained. It’s in my blood now... but in the wrong way.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“That boy did something, didn’t he?” her father asked, becoming angry again.

“Well... it was as much my fault as it was his. You see, he had this poison injected in him a long time ago, which made him act the way you saw. But when we... well, you know, he unknowingly spread it to me which made me react to him the way you saw,” she spoke softly. “You really risked your life hitting him, Father. Even without the Force he could have taken you.”

“Did he rape you like the others?” Kistra asked with more anger than she’d probably felt in her life.

“No,” her father answered for her. “From what I saw she really loved him.”



“I did...still do, I guess.” She looked at her father. “I really screwed things up up there, didn’t I?” she asked sadly.

“Yes, you did,” he said. “But I think you can fix it. You’ve been acting much better now, and he was only angry because you were. If you could find him, you could probably patch things up.”

“I hope so,” she said and hugged her father. Her mother watched in pain.

“Fett,” Chris said, “It’s just so nice to see you again. I didn’t think I’d ever get the pleasure. But the Sith were never ones to take defeat lightly. And I am a Sith.”

“I wasn’t afraid of the Lord Vader either,” Fett said coldly.

“I’m not asking you to fear me,” Chris smiled. “I’m going to show you why you may wish to fear me, and if you do not, cause you justifiable pain. Much pain,” he said.

“Let’s see your worst, kid.”

“You couldn’t handle the sight of someone enduring my worst,” Chris said.

“You overestimate your own powers. Kid, I’ve endured things far beyond anything you could imagine,” Fett said.

“You know nothing of the Sith. We’ve existed for millennia. What they knew then, I know now. And with their knowledge, I bring forth your destruction. You’ve destroyed my life.” No sooner had they both drawn their weapons, when Chris touched his Sith emblem, it focusing his power into Fett. With its help he took control of the weak-minded bounty hunter. He didn’t just take control of him like any other person in the galaxy. Fett’s mind ceased and was overrun with Chris’s own, like an extension of him.

Chris had heard stories of times when people had done this sort of mind merging before. The other half was supposed to be fun to keep around, and if you wanted to kill them, you just send them to Myrkr, where your mind will separate and they die instantly. There was no turning back.

The old Sith artifact took care of keeping Fett under control. Chris had been given the emblem for that purpose—it was the singly most powerful Sith object ever introduced to the galaxy. He and Fett teleported to Cinthral.

They stood in the same alleyway by the same street as where Chris had been caught. “You remember this place, Fett? No, of course you don’t, I’ve taken over your mind, sorry. I guess you’re already dead.” He sent a thought into the little part of Fett’s mind that was still his own. Fett scurried away. Chris returned to his home.

“Do you think it will work?” Laree asked her father.

“Laree, you still love him, and he must still love you. Does it really matter if it works, as long as you try?” he asked.

“Well, I guess,” she said. “I can easily find him and get to him, but what do I say? I mean, would *you* take me back after everything I’ve done?”

“Laree, I know what you’ve been through and all. Don’t blame yourself for everything. What happened in the past wasn’t your fault, and what’s happening now isn’t. But you can fix this, and I think you should.”

“OK. Thank you for leaving mom out of this. You know how she is,” Laree said thankfully. He just nodded and gave her a look with those green eyes of his—and her own—meaning it was time she get going. She hugged him warmly and thanked him for his help. “I think I can use his own powers to bring me to him. It should work,” she said, finishing the sentence a bit strained. She shut her eyes, concentrating deeply. She disappeared a moment later.

“Goodbye, my daughter,” her father whispered after her.

“Come now, son, what happened that was so terrible?” Ulic asked Chris.

Chris looked around the living room of his parents’ home, reluctant to answer. “I don’t know, nothing really happened. That’s just what made me get so angry, and I still am. She got completely set off over nothing,” Chris said.

“And what was this nothing?”

“She just saw Mara Jade helping me walk down a ramp, that’s all. It doesn’t make any sense, really, and when I realized what it was and tried to explain everything we just ended screaming again—” he broke off as his concentration was shattered. He fell to his knees, gripping his temple. He held on to Fett’s mind—and his own—by hardly a thread, but took a few moments to recover. He remembered the emblem after a moment, and used its power to aid him again.

“Son, are you all right?” Ulic asked, not all that concerned. He knew Chris could handle it.

“Yeah, I’m OK,” he said standing up slowly, still holding his head. “There,” he muttered as the feeling faded and he dropped his hand back to his side. “That was strange.”

“Uh-oh,” Ulic muttered as he looked at the doorway.

Chris turned around on one foot, half expecting—exactly what he saw. Laree stood there in all her beauty, wearing those same green Bakuran clothes she’d grown so accustomed to. His anger boiled only a little. “I thought it was you,” he said coldly.

“Chris,” she said, coming forward toward him, “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said those things, but you shouldn’t of either. I’m willing to talk now—alone.”

Chris nodded and walked up to her, and together they walked outside the building and out to the center of the city, where the park was located. They were quiet for a few minutes, when Chris decided he’d better start. “So, you came back, did you?”

“I’m not crawling back to you, if that’s what you’re thinking,” she said. “I’m just giving you a chance. I shouldn’t have blown up like that. You can start with explaining this ‘Jenika’ person.”

“Jenika’s this girl I met on Coruscant. When we talked, I just ended up telling her all about you and everything that’s happened lately. She helped me figure out what had set you off, and what I should do,” he said quietly, “though that didn’t help much.”

“Oh, yeah. The shuttle. I apologize for my father,” she said.

“That guy was your father?” he asked, thinking back. “Oh, I should have known. Look at those eyes,” he said, looking up at Laree’s.

She smiled attractively. “I didn’t know either at the time. He really had me scared when he stroked my hair.” Chris nodded his understanding. “Well, I guess this means we’ve patched things up?”

“I guess,” he shrugged. “You’ve really got to learn to teleport yourself. When you drew on my power, you nearly knocked me out.”

“Sorry,” she said simply. She looked at him closely a moment, only now noticing what he’d been wearing. “Why are you wearing your Sith suit?”

“Do you really have to ask?” he asked with a hint of anger in his voice. Laree stepped forward and hugged him in apology, and he hugged back, grateful they were back together.

But the hug meant a lot more than prove they were reunited. The Sith emblem on Chris’s suit came to life, thrusting Dark Side energies into the two people it now pressed against. It seemed as if it had waited centuries to do what it was now doing, and it had.

Both Chris and Laree caught waves of aggression and anger from the emblem. Anger which neither of them really felt, it seemed completely aimless, yet it consumed them. This time, though, it did not turn them against one another. They released each other and stood fast, another figure joining them among the trees. It was a huge humanoid, it seemed, yet obviously long deceased. It wore a long brown robe and strange horns it seemed from its helmet. It gripped a very strange looking staff.

“My soul has finally been released from the emblem you wear,” the figure said. “The two of yours potentially Dark Power has allowed me to leave and set you both upon your destinies.” His face was shadowed, but they both knew he looked at Chris. “Qel-Droma. I have watched you since you were born. I instructed your Master’s in how to go about teaching you. I made it possible for you to learn far beyond them. I also had them give you the emblem you now wear, empowered with my spirit.”

The figure went on. “I once met with your Great Ancestor, Ulic Qel-Droma, four thousand years ago. I brought the Sith upon him, but you are a far greater student. You have been the Dark Lord for seven years now, and I commend you for a job well carried out. You are perhaps the greatest Sith ever to dwell among our ranks. And you are to carry the title of Dark Lord as long as you live.”

Chris found himself bowing his head to the figure. “Thank you, my Master,” he said.

The figure turned his attention to Laree. “And you, my dear Laree Captison, you have the Sith within you. You too are to become a great one among us. And for that reason, I proclaim you the first in a line to be as great as the Dark Lords—You are the Dark Lady of the Sith,” he said.

Laree bowed to the figure. “It is an honor to be among your kind,” she said.

The figure dawned his huge hands with long nails before them. “And you both are to carry out your destinies together, Dark Lord and Lady Qel-Droma.” Pure Dark Side energies flew from his hands, catching on to the emblem Chris wore. It split itself in half in a sort of slash at an angle across it, half of it remaining on his uniform and the other attaching itself to Laree’s tunic. “I will now return to the amulets, my students, and will forever be with you. Together, with yourselves and the amulets as one, you will be unstoppable,” the figure said as he began to fade. His energies flowed into the amulets.

“You may now kiss the bride,” Chris muttered and gave Laree a quick one on the lips.

“What was that for?” she asked.

“Didn’t you catch it?” he asked. “‘My dear Laree Captison,’ at first. Closing: ‘Lord and Lady Qel-Droma’.”

“So we’re…” she stopped short.

“In the eyes of the Sith, at least.”

“I see,” she smiled, moved forward and kissed Chris. “So, what do we do first?”

“I’ve got a strange feeling of revenge coming on. But I want to teach you to teleport first. When you made me teleport you, I nearly lost my mind control over Boba-Fett,” Chris said, walking with her back to his house.

“You have control over Fett? What’re you making him do?” she asked, intrigued.

“I decided to kill him. He’s on his way to Myrkr. And that’s where we should go as soon as possible. We’ll ‘port to his ship and thank him for the ride, then kill Levem while we’re there,” Chris said. “Everything that’s happened is their fault.”

“That’s a good plan. I can see why you’ve been the Dark Lord so long.”

“Now don’t get jealous. The Dark Ladies are to eventually equal the Dark Lords, remember? And I’ll help you speed that process along.”

Gaeriel and Luke lay asleep in their bed on Coruscant. Gaeriel suddenly awoke with a start, springing up to a sitting position. “No!” she shouted.

Luke pulled himself up slowly. “What’s wrong, Gaeri?” he asked tiredly.

“Didn’t you feel that? Something terrible has happened, Luke. To both of them.”

“I was afraid of this,” Luke said. He put his arm around her, tried to comfort her. “It will be all right, Gaeri. We’ll see what we can do in the morning when we go back to Bakura.”

“I don’t know if it can wait. But it’s not like we have a choice, is it?”

“No,” Luke said sadly.

After a number of hours being taught how to teleport correctly, Laree thought she was ready. “OK,” she said, “I’ve got it.” She shut her eyes a moment, disappearing in a flash and reappearing across the room. “In time, I’ll be able to keep up with even you.”

“Don’t get your hopes up, Laree,” he grinned. “You’ll never teleport as well as me, it’s inventor.”

“Whatever,” Laree said disbelievingly. “We’d better hurry if we’re going to catch up with Fett.”

“Right. I want my third lightsaber back. Though my fourth works much better,” Chris said.

“What’re we waiting for?”

“Nothing. Let’s go.” They both centered their concentration on a spot just outside two kilometers of Myrkr, where a ship had just left hyperspace. They teleported inside that ship.

Laree walked over to the cockpit where Boba-Fett sat. “If I hit him, would you feel it?” Laree asked Chris.

“Yes, I have complete control over his systems. So don’t you even think about it,” Chris said coldly. He knew she would do it, if she wanted to.

“You’re my husband, Chris, or so we think. It’s my right,” she smiled sarcastically.

“Don’t, Laree. We only have minutes until we lose the Force. I don’t want to already be in pain.”

“Chris, why don’t we just destroy the entire system?” Laree asked. “That would be a nice test for us, and we would be rid of this world without the Force.”

“That’s been on my mind, too. But think about it a moment. Isn’t this much more fulfilling, doing it in person?” Chris asked.

“Yes, I suppose it is. This Sith stuff is certainly closely related with revenge, isn’t it?” Laree asked.

“Laree, you are the Dark Lady of the Sith. Don’t call it ‘Sith stuff’ anymore, OK?”

“Yeah, I’m the Dark Lady. Which also means I’m an equal to you, and I’d appreciate being treated as such.”

“When have I treated you any other way?” Chris asked. “Oh, nevermind. We’re in the bubble.

We'll be landing in minutes." He felt the wooziness that came with the loss of the Force, he saw Laree also unbalanced. He moved to her side and put his arm around her waist. "Kind of nice without the Force, isn't it?"

"Actually, yes," Laree said.

Chris wondered at what to say next. Without the Force, things that had always seemed impossible to say were now easy, as he was unaffected by his Sith blood. "Did I ever tell you I loved you?" he asked quietly as he lay his other hand on her shoulder.

"I love you, too," she said as she lay her soft cheek on his hand.

He smiled and lay his head against hers. "Now let's kick some butt," he said.

"Right."

The two young lovers had piloted the ship down to the surface, discarding Fett's dead body in the cargo hold. They came down the ramp, holding their ignited lightsabers before them. They went over to the base, Chris in front, as he could fight with a high degree even without the Force.

Two guards stood at the entrance, bringing up their blasters to track Chris and Laree. "I'll take 'em," Chris whispered. Laree disigned her saber in response, knowing it was worthless for her to try to use. Chris sprinted forward toward the guards, leaping into the air some distance away and doing a flip, landing behind them. He sluggishly, without the Force, cut one of the guards down, catching the other one with a kick to the back before he could take Laree down. He caught the bewildered man with his saber after a moment of brief hesitation.

That was it. His answer. He couldn't even resist the Dark Side without the Force, he was hopelessly lost within it. Laree saw it too, but knew she could do nothing, as she probably would have done the same. "Let's go in," he said as she caught up with him. "Ladies first," he waved her forward as he held the door open.

She shook her head. "I don't think so. You go first," she said. He shrugged, letting himself through the doorway, but still holding it open for her. "Thank you," she muttered.

They went throughout the base, Chris pretending it was some rough-'em-up beat-'em-up game. Laree watched Chris with grim satisfaction. They fought their way toward the room in which Levem stayed. Chris stumbled upon a trigger for the door, and it shot open. They stepped in. "Good day, Mr. Levem," Laree said. "Remember us?"

Levem sat in his chair beneath the tree of ysalamiri. "Why of course," he said, gently stroking one of the ysalamir. "Now, what is it you wish to speak to me about?"

"We don't want to speak with you," Laree said. "We want to kill you," she drew a blaster from behind her back, bringing it to bear on his head. Suddenly a blaster bolt struck the weapon, knocking it from her hand in a smoldering pile of scrap.

“Anti-weapon droids. Not much in the way of hospitality,” Levem said.

“Neither do we, Levem,” Chris said coldly. “Laree, let me use our powers combined.”

“Uh, hello, Chris? Where’ve you been? We’re on Myrkr, remember?” she asked, thinking Chris had lost it.

Chris looked into her eyes. “Laree, just trust me. The ancient said together we would be unstoppable—this is our chance to prove it.” Laree saw that he meant business, offered her hand as a link, which he took in his own gratefully. He turned back to Levem, who began to look a bit sick.

“What, what are you doing?” Levem asked. He was breathing strangely and had a touch of fear in his eye.

“I get it,” Laree said. Chris looked at her with a smile as she continued. “The Dark Side is everywhere, Levem,” she said. “Everywhere. In your own heart, it dwells supreme. Whether with or without the Force itself, we are the Masters of the Dark Side. And we may manipulate it even when we may not use the Force.”

“Right,” Chris said. “The Ancients gave us these amulets as a focusing of power, Dark Power. Not Force Power. And through the power of the Dark Side, you now lay upon your grave.”

Luke and Gaeriel had arrived at Bakura earlier in the day. They’d checked on the twins, making sure that Yeorg and Tiree Captison had been as capable to take care of them as they hoped, and luckily they were. They had also apologized for the long delay. They now attempted to get a good rest before they had to go out again, after Chris and Laree.

Luke had a disturbing dream. Not a dream, really, but a vision. He saw the changes within both Chris and Laree take place, a huge looming figure strengthening them. Soon after it had begun, it took an even more disturbing twist.

Chris stood before him, clad in his Sith suit. He looked at Luke directly, proving it was far more than what Luke had already witnessed. His cloak waved behind him realistically. “I know I could have teleported and told you this in person, but I thought this more showing of power,” Chris said in Luke’s dream.

“You were probably right,” Luke said. “Now what is it you want to tell me?”

“Let’s start pleasantly,” Chris said. “Laree and I are back together.”

“I already knew that,” Luke said.

“Then do you also know what happened?” Chris asked.

“No, but Gaeri does. Tell me.”

“We were visited by an ancient Sith. He married us. We are now the Dark Lord and Lady of the

Sith. Since then, we've killed Fett and Levem, and are preparing a coup d'etat on the Cinthral government. We'll be in control in no time. And you will not interfere."

"You expect me to sit idly by while you do who knows what?" Luke asked.

"I didn't say that. I know you would never do that, give me some credit. I just wanted to tell you it was hopeless," Chris said, and the dream faded.

Gaeriel saw Luke was awake too. "We have to do something, Luke," she said quietly.

"I know, Gaeri," Luke said. "Well, Chris and Laree are back together, but at what cost to the galaxy?" he wondered out loud.

"A great one." ~~~~~

Luke turned slowly around. The man glared down at him. "Are you the chief of this organization?" he asked.

"I am Commander Levem. What do you want here, Jedi?" Levem asked.

"We want our friend back, who you had Boba-Fett capture. Where is he?" Luke asked. He looked at the side a moment, to assure himself Laree was out of Levem's vision.

"That's right, Fett did capture him," Levem said, "but he escaped. I want to find him more than you possibly could, Jedi."

"What did Chris ever do to you and your organization that you would put a deathmark on his head?" Luke asked.

"As I told him, he destroyed my organization nearly completely. Revenge is sweet among us smugglers," Levem said.

"Do you know how he escaped?" Luke asked.

"Might as well tell you. I think it was Mara Jade who helped him out, she was pretty miffed at me at the time," Levem said helpfully.

"Mara Jade? Thank you, Levem. We'll be going now," Luke said.

"We'?" Levem asked.

"Yes, we," Laree said, coming behind Luke as he stepped past Levem. She looked up at him a moment, then quickly followed Luke out of the building.

"Hey!" Levem shouted uselessly after them.

Laree and Luke hurried to the Falcon, meeting Han at the ramp. "Han, Chris has already escaped,



with Mara Jade. I just hope she sets him lose,” Luke said.

“Who *is* Mara Jade?” Laree asked.

“No one, Laree. Chris will be returned, I know he will. We can go anytime, Han,” Luke said.

“Sure, kid. Chewie and me have finished the repairs on the Falcon. We can go anytime.”

They all piled aboard the Falcon, as it clunkily took off and cleared the forest. It shot for space. About a kilometer off the ground, Luke sighed a long breath he had held, glad he could finally use his powers again. He glanced at Laree, seeing how she felt worse than she had without the Force. He could feel the wave of aggression overtake her and walk to her side, helping her to the holoboard. “Just relax,” he whispered as he sat her down. He’d told her earlier what he thought was wrong.

“I’ll try,” Laree said, her green eyes showing exactly how she felt. Luke accepted her answer.

Chris woke up, still half asleep despite his attempts. His whole body seemed to howl in pain at him. Those parts of him that hadn’t been severed by the vornskr were sore, and his head ached badly.

He sat up slowly, but to his body he might as well have gone at the speed of light. A thousand new jabs of pain entered his body. He gritted his teeth against the pain, to no avail. Even his teeth hurt. How long was I out? he wondered. Groaning, he got to the edge of the med. bed, lay his feet down painfully. He strained to get up, making it after a few minutes. He walked forward, still limping badly on his wounded leg.

Chris got himself up to the door and pushed the release. He limped down the long freighter hallway, toward what he knew was the bridge. As he dragged himself to the hatch, he stumbled and fell before it, yelling in pain for help.

The door opened, and Mara stepped through. She knelt by Chris. “Are you OK? What’re you doing? Or trying to do,” she said, helping him up.

“Thank you...Mara,” Chris said quietly.

“You shouldn’t be up yet. But since you are, we’re nearly to Coruscant now. You look terrible. Get back to the med. center.” Chris sighed and began to turn around slowly. “No, wait, I’ll help you,” she said resignedly. She came toward Chris and put her arm around him and helped him back to the med. section. She got him to go to sleep and returned to the bridge.

Some time later Chris had finally reawaken. He felt better, but not by much. He wasn’t able to heal himself, his mind was far too mixed up to concentrate enough. He shivered, thinking of being put into another bacta tank. He could still smell it on his breath.

“Hey, you awake?” Mara asked quietly from beside the bed. Chris looked at her a moment, trying to bring his concentration back. She now wore a brown shipsuit, her long spice-brown hair flowing loosely. He looked up at her green eyes, moaning ‘Laree...’ silently.

“I just got a funny feeling...Like I’m not gonna see her again,” Chris said quietly.

“See who?” Mara asked.

“Huh?” Chris said as if he hadn’t known he’d spoken out loud. “Oh, no one. Nevermind. Just, help me up.” She did, and with her help they made it to the freighter’s ramp. It slowly slid down before them as someone in the bridge triggered it to. They walked down the ramp.

Laree looked up hopefully at the freighter. She’d cooled down when they arrived at Coruscant, only a short time ago. She waited a moment as the ramp lowered itself to the ground. Down the ramp came two figures. Chris came down in tattered beige clothes, moving far smoother than she would have thought after the description of what had happened. But her eyes widened. By Chris’s side was a woman, her hand draped around his waist as his was her shoulders. She had long brown hair and her green eyes searched the landscape, coming to a stop at her own.

A hurt look came across her face as she thought about Chris and this woman...Mara, she believed. Her mind threw suggestions at her that not long ago would have seemed silly, but right now was unavoidable and took control of her mind, her thinking completely shattered by these thoughts. She tried to awaken herself as she watched him talk quietly at the bottom of the ramp with Master Skywalker.

Jealousy. She knew her mind was overtaken with it, but stood unable to move because of it. She didn’t quite understand why, as it seemed so silly. Mara had to be at least twice Chris’s age. But her subconscious wouldn’t allow her to think any other way. Completely confused, she turned and left the scene. On her way off, she forgot her other thoughts and her subconscious’s thoughts took over.

“Thank the Force you’re OK, Chris. What happened?” Luke asked.

“Same old, same old,” Chris smiled painfully. He watched Laree walk off. “Where’s she going?” he asked sadly.

Luke turned his head, seeing Laree enter a turbolift. He turned back around. “I don’t know,” he said quietly. He turned to Mara with a smile. “Thanks again, Mara. You want to kill a guy, then you keep getting caught coming back.”

“This is the last time, Luke. You don’t know how strenuous this is becoming,” she returned the smile. “I only rescued him in revenge for Levem.”

“I didn’t like him much either. You going now?”

“Yeah, I’ve got a schedule to keep. I’ll probably see you again sometime, Luke,” she started up the ramp.

“Yeah, probably. Bye, Mara,” Luke said as she walked to the top of the ramp and it began to pull up. Luke turned to Chris. “You may want to go talk to Laree.”

“Yeah, that would probably be a good idea,” Chris said. He lucked up into Luke’s eyes. “Master?”

Luke nodded his consent, and Chris teleported away.

Chris reappeared outside Laree's room. He walked up to the door. "Hey, um, Laree?"

He felt a hand on his shoulder as Gaeriel came up behind him. "I don't know what you did, Chris, but you've really got her upset now. She's locked herself in there and won't talk. You've really messed things up. I think she's leaving," she said.

"What?" Chris asked. "I didn't do anything this time!" He slammed his fist into the door. "Dammit, Laree, let me in!"

"I don't think so, Chris," she shouted back at him.

"I don't want to get in there myself," Chris threatened. Suddenly he was thrust to the ground and to the side, as the door opened where he'd just been. Out stepped Laree with a full suitcase. She walked up to Gaeriel, hauling it along with her.

"I'm going to mom," Laree said to Gaeriel. Gaeriel simply nodded and Laree slowly walked down the hall.

Recovering, Chris said, "You're just going to let her go?"

"It's her own choice. She's welcome to go back to my sister if she wants. And personally, I doubt if you didn't do anything to her," Gaeriel said.

"But I didn't!" Chris insisted. "I haven't seen her for awhile, remember? I haven't had time to do any more stupid things," he said truthfully.

"Then you'd better hurry to explain that to her."

"I'll try," Chris said. He focused his mind on Laree's presence, and immediately teleported there. They were nearby a landing pit where a shuttle had just landed and was picking up passengers. He walked up to Laree and grabbed her by the arm. "Laree, stop. What's wrong?"

She turned toward him. "As if you don't know," she said, her green eyes angry.

"No, that's right, I don't," he said. "Look, it's not you talking. I know what you're going through. But it'll pass eventually, as it did for me. You're completely overreacting at nothing at all. Don't do this, Laree. I love you."

"You love me? Have you ever told me that before? It's just to make me stay, isn't it. One of your twisted lines," she said.

"Hey, I told you once—"

"It didn't count then."

“What do you mean it didn’t count then?” he asked, tightening his grip on her arm.

“Stay away from me!” she shouted, drawing the attention of a number of stander-bys. She yanked her arm from his hand. She lifted it up at him, a red flame leaping from it, compacting his chest and knocking him back a meter and to the ground. Her eyes opened wide as she realized what she had done, but she just turned and fled up the ramp of the shuttle to Ketrann.

“Laree,” Chris moaned, edging himself forward on his arms, unable to stand temporarily. ‘Don’t do this,’ he pleaded with her silently. He felt her shut him out of her mind. After a few moments he jumped to his feet angrily, feeling a new strength. “Fine!” he shouted to her, although she couldn’t hear. He was just making a scene. “See if I care! I don’t need you. I’ll find someone else—better!” He held his hands before his face, flaring angrily in a way they hadn’t for some time. He thrust them to his sides quickly and disappeared in a huge tower of fire.

A number of scared shouts and yells rose in the air. One man who’d seen the whole thing commented as he boarded the shuttle—”That guy has problems.”

Laree felt different suddenly as she sensed Chris disappear in a fire of rage. She wasn’t in control of herself still, but was overcome with grief and began sobbing quietly. Despite her regrets, she found herself still strangely unable to get off the shuttle and go back to him—she could just sit there and mourn her own actions.

She felt a hand on her head. She glanced up at a man with dark black hair and green eyes just like hers. He stroked her hair slightly. Strangely enough, she didn’t find herself either angry or scared. She felt a certain peace from the man and felt somehow close to him. “Mind if I sit here?” he asked quietly, indicating the seat next to hers. She shook her head, and he sat down. He pulled his hand back and clasped them together. “I saw what happened out there,” he said after a long time, when the shuttle began lifting off. “Why was that kid bothering you?” he asked, sounding genuinely concerned.

She looked at him, wiping a tear from her face with her thumb. “He wasn’t bothering me,” she said, trying to smile reassuringly. “And he’s only a year younger than me, hardly a kid.”

“I know,” the man said, looking away. A minute later he finally looked back. “He didn’t—” he searched for words, “—do anything to you, did he?”

“Well—not the way you mean,” she said quietly.

The man nodded. He touched her chin, turning her face toward him. “You really cared for him, Laree, didn’t you?” She nodded. “Then why’d you do it?”

“I don’t know,” she said, turning away from him, embarrassed. She stayed silent for some time, as they made the jump to hyperspace.

Chris reappeared in his own room. His tattered clothing had purposely been destroyed in his teleporting, as he didn’t want to bother taking it off. He ran to his bedroom, pulling out a suitcase. He opened it, and got out a dark black suit. It was his true Sith uniform, which his Masters had gotten

him.

Chris hurried into the tight-fitting black suit. It still fit perfectly. Across his chest spanned a large Sith emblem, its golden color drawing upon the Force, acting like a number of other Sith artifacts. Chris knelt, the way he'd been shown, and clipped on a long black cape to the edges of the emblem, acting like a conductive wire and thrusting Force power —Dark Power— through him.

He felt at peace in this clothing, though it strengthened the Dark Side. His only peace *was* the Dark Side.

As a sort of test, he waved his hand and blew the bedroom door in. He didn't care if Master Skywalker felt it. No one could stand in his way now. Feeling completely refreshed in his old ways from long before he'd been dragged to Skywalker's academy, he walked out the demolished bedroom door and left his room.

He walked for a very long time around the Imperial Palace. He decided there was a problem, after a short time. He sensed no fear. And a Dark Lord required fear. He reached out with his newly discovered powers, manipulating the emotions of all those near him. With an evil smile, their fear began running through him. That's better, he thought.

After hours of walking, he found himself very bored and lonely. He walked down into the lower levels of the palace, not quite down to the slums, but only down to one of the very old museums. He loomed in the Sith quarter, wondering if any of the few passing people knew that he was a living example of that part of the museum. He ran his hands over the cases of Sith artifacts, feeling their weak power when compared to his own mixed with his Sith emblem.

He mused to himself. What am I doing? Laree's gone, so? Why should I do this? I should be here, but I should do something more like this... He drew upon the Force with his own strength, mixed with the emblem's strength. From the emblem a steady bolt of energy flew into the cases of artifacts, and destroyed them in moments. The cases lay empty.

He smiled to himself. He didn't like Dark Power exactly, but he liked using it for good. And for the first time in a number of hours, he felt good. If only Laree could be there.

He silently cursed himself as his subconscious threw depressing memories and feelings at him. The loneliness flooded his mind. He leaned against the wall, trying to regain his mind from despair.

As he stood there breathing carefully, someone entered the room. He looked up at the newcomer. It was a young girl, fourteen or so he guessed, but not nearly as hardened as himself or Laree. She had shoulder length jet black hair and sweet brown eyes. She wore a nice blue dress. She was pretty, but not Laree.

He caught himself. What am I doing? He asked himself. She left me. Her loss, I can't go compare every girl in the galaxy to her. "Hello...?" he said, reluctant to steal the information from her mind.

She smiled at him. "My name is Jenika. How about yours?" Jenika asked.

“I am Chris Qel-Droma, Jedi Knight,” he said, eagerly showing off as was his natural nature. That was the one thing he never bothered to take control of.

“You’re a Jedi? Aren’t you a little young?” she asked, although her sense became intrigued.

“It’s a really, really long story, believe me,” he said with a smile. Should he warn her? He liked this girl, but he decided it could wait until they were alone. He looked around at the empty room. Well, not alone, but somewhere else, he thought.

“I’d like to hear it. Is there somewhere we could go?”

“I don’t know,” Chris said. “I’m kind of new to Coruscant.”

“Too bad. So am I, I’m sort of on a vacation, though it hasn’t been much of one,” Jenika said.

“I understand that,” Chris said. “Place gets rather boring. We could talk at my place, though,” he suggested. She shrugged acceptance and he took her hand and quickly guided her far up the palace, through a number of turbolifts, up to his apartment. He opened the door to the large room. It was the same one as he’d shared with Laree their first visit, he suddenly realized, and that brought back a fresh wave of memories.

His face must have shown it. “Something wrong?” Jenika asked, concerned.

“Hmm?” Chris asked, coming back to the present. “Oh, no, nothing.”

After walking around the room a moment, Jenika turned back to Chris. “How’d you get this huge room?”

“I’m a student of the Chief of State’s brother, and I know her, too,” Chris said, thinking back to that night. That was the night Laree had told him about the abuse she had endured in Hethrir’s prison. “Please, sit down,” he said quietly.

She sat down on the couch, and he sat next to her, facing her. He liked her, she was very nice, and friendly. She had to know, whatever the outcome. “Actually, I’m more of a Jedi Master. A Dark Jedi Master,” he said, hoping she knew herself what that meant.

“C’mon, Chris, you don’t have to make things up to impress me,” Jenika said. She hadn’t thought Chris was like that.

Apparently she didn’t know. “Jenika,” he said, “I wish I *were* making this up. But it’s been with me a long time, it’s in my blood.”

“You seem preoccupied, even while you’re talking about something like that,” she said. “What is it, Chris?”

He’d hoped he could wait until talking with Master Skywalker to talk about this. He looked up into her eyes, but then stared at the floor. He couldn’t get himself to look at her as he spoke.

Chris found himself pouring his heart out. He told Jenika everything, all about Laree, some of the things that had happened lately about her, and the final blow she had dealt at him. She sat still quietly, listening carefully as he spoke.

“Why did she turn against you that last time, what did you do?” she asked, eager to help.

“I don’t know, that’s the thing I don’t understand,” he said. “She just ran off as soon as I and Mara Jade stepped off the ramp of the freighter.”

“Who’s Mara Jade?”

“Mara’s an old smuggler. Well, not old she’s gorgeous, actually.”

Jenika held her head in her hand in disgust. “And you said she was practically carrying you off the ship,” she said.

“Well, yeah,” Chris said.

“Chris, it’s pretty obvious then. You said you somehow spread that...disease to her, right?” He nodded slowly, still not understanding. “Think about it. She can’t control her feelings, and suddenly back you come after being away for some time with a beautiful woman clinging to you. You may not see it, but from my point of view, I understand her actions completely.”

“That’s silly, though. Mara Jade’s at least twice my age. She wouldn’t...”

“But she did, Chris,” Jenika said. “I know you still love her, that much is obvious. I suggest you go after her.”

Chris looked up at her, not quite believing what she was saying. But he also knew Jenika was right. He leaned forward and hugged her. “Thank you. You’ve really helped me. You’re not exactly what I expected, but turned out a lot better,” he said. He released her.

“Hey, any time, Chris. Maybe I’ll see you again sometime. I’d better get going, and so should you,” she said standing up. With another smile, she left the room.

He lay his hand on the Sith emblem, using its strength to find Laree. He found her, but she was in hyperspace and currently unreachable. He waited calmly.

Laree sat comfortably in her seat onboard the shuttle. She had her hair over her arm, using it like a pillow as she slept. She felt a minor probing of her mind and woke up suddenly. “Chris,” she growled angrily.

The man next to her turned away from his datapad. “Are you OK?” he asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine. He just doesn’t give up.”

“I understand. We’re almost to Ketrann, I think we’ve nearly pulled out of hyperspace. I’ll be right

back,” he said, standing up and walking up to the cockpit, entering it.

Laree sat clutching her suitcase nervously. She was returning home. Her mother would be so glad to see her again, wouldn't she? Master Skywalker had mentioned that her mother may either hate or be afraid of her, as she was now a Jedi. But she could make her understand, tell her what she'd gone through and how much she'd suffered over the years. Or she hoped.

She sensed the moment the shuttle emerged from hyperspace. A moment later, she sensed something else as Chris suddenly appeared in the aisle between seats. “What are you doing?” she asked angrily.

“I'm sorry, Laree, I didn't understand what happened that set you off. But I do now, and I just wanted to tell you that I hardly even know Mara, and I *was* terribly injured,” Chris said desperately.

“OK, let's say I was wrong. How'd you figure out what it was? If that's it.”

“Well, Jenika told me—”

Laree's eyes seemed to flare in rage. “Jenika? Who's Jenika?” she asked.

He mentally slapped his forehead and cursed. “She's—”

“Don't try to explain, Chris. Just go home,” she said.

“I am not going to leave here without you, Laree. I can explain about Jenika, really—” He broke off and fell back a step as the man who sat next to Laree punched him in the stomach.

“Just leave her alone,” he said angrily.

Chris's anger rose to an all new high. He drew his fist back, slamming it in a backfist into the man's jaw, making him fall back to the ground, bloody. “Fine!” Chris shouted. “Have it your way, Laree. I've tried to patch things up enough. *BUT I DON'T CARE ANYMORE.*” He disappeared before she had a chance to reply.

“Good,” Laree muttered. She dropped her suitcase and moved to the man's side, helping him to his seat and dabbing at his wound with a piece of cloth she'd found in a medpack under the seat. “You didn't have to do that,” she said quietly.

“Yes I did. I couldn't stand by and watch anymore,” the man said. He placed his hand on hers, drawing it away. “I'm OK.”

“Why do you care about me so much?” Laree asked.

The man shrugged. “I don't know. But I want to talk to your mother about what's been going on with that boy.”

In his rage, Chris had teleported blindly. Luckily, he hadn't teleported into deep space like he



thought he would have if he ever did blindly teleport. He found himself on a strange reddish brown planet with no apparent life, at least on the surface. But below, he did indeed feel life presence's. But that didn't make a difference. He was out of Control.

He reached out with the Force, grasping at the sun of the cold planet. He had to do it. He couldn't hold back. The star began to go nova, and he teleported away.

He reappeared on a planet unfamiliar to him. He sensed a presence somewhere around him, the one he was hunting for. He looked around the huge crowd, the poor looking people completely ignoring him.

He had a strange feeling about one of the people he passed. He whirled around, grabbing the man by the back of his tunic and knocking him forward. Chris held him down with one knee, laying his hands on the man's head, and stealing information from it. His saber jumped from his belt and ignited itself, blocking the blaster shots the man's body guard began shooting. It struck the guard down, then returned to its Master's belt.

Chris dropped the man's head, standing up. "Thanks a bunch," he muttered and started walking off.

Half an hour later, he came up to a locked, tattered old door. He touched his Sith emblem, and a huge Force blow impacted the door and knocked it in. Chris stepped inside. "Mr. Fett. We have a matter to discuss."

Luke was sitting in his room speaking with Gaeriel when he felt a scream of a hundred thousand voices and a million other lifeforms. Breathing hard, he brought his concentration back to Gaeriel, who he saw felt the same thing. "They've both gone over the deep end," Luke said. "But I think Chris just dropped further."

"He really can not handle rejection," Gaeriel said.

"Him? She had no reason to act the way she did anyway. I know how she can't control herself anymore, but it didn't seem like anything happened to set her off," Luke said.

"She told me. It was Mara," Gaeriel said.

Luke's face melted with understanding. "Blazes," he whispered. "If I'd known then—" he stopped himself. "And now they're both lost to the Dark Side over eachother."

"It's like I told you fifteen years ago. Except it isn't you who has turned to the Dark Side and hates those which you love. It would be easier if it was," Gaeriel said.

"At the time what you said hurt. Now I think I'm beginning to see the truth about it."

"Laree? We've landed," the man said. He stroked her hair softly as she awoke. They'd been caught in a bit of a problem when the engine had died and they'd had to dock with a repair station, so Laree had taken a nap.

“I’m up,” she mumbled. She pushed her bangs from her eyes and casually removed his hand from her hair. “Please don’t stroke my hair. Don’t ever do that,” she said quietly, calmly controlled for the time being.

“Why not?” he asked. He pulled his hand back and picked up his baggage.

“Just—just don’t.” She picked up her suitcase with one hand, finding her other hand naturally gripping her lightsaber.

The man found the reply strange, but accepted it. They both got up and went down the lowered ramp with a few other passengers.

Laree went over to the side of the landing area, the man following her. “Are you really going to talk to my mother?” she asked. He nodded. “Fine,” she said resignedly. “She should be here soon, I contacted her from the shuttle.”

After a few minutes of waiting, a woman came within view. She had long brown hair like her own, over an old but intact red dress. The woman’s brown eyes locked on Laree’s a moment as she came forward. Laree dropped her suitcase, leaving it in the care of the man who was watching them with a smile. Laree met her mother Kistra in a huge hug between family that hadn’t seen each other for a long time. “Mom,” Laree whispered tearfully.

Kistra released her, but kept Laree’s hand in her own. “Laree, what happened?” she asked. “And where did you find him?” she shot a venomous look at the man who stood back a few meters.

“You mean you know who he is?” Laree asked. “I just met him on the shuttle.”

“You could say I know who he is,” Kistra said, still glaring back at the man.

“Now come on, Kistra, this is no way to go about your reunion with your daughter,” he said. “Leave me out of it for now.”

His reaction made it all too obvious. Laree turned to the once stranger with wide eyes, her mouth partially open. “You’re…”

“Your father, yes,” he finished for her.

“That’s why you reacted like that,” she breathed. “You had me scared there. No one strokes my hair.”

“I was wondering about that,” he said. “Why is that? I always did when you were very young.”

“I can’t tell you here,” she said, turning to her mother. “Can we go home and talk?”

“Of course, dear,” Kistra said.

They’d been talking in Kistra’s home for a short time. It was fairly empty as Laree had suspected

from what Master Skywalker said. What there was was very plain. “You always did look more like your father,” Kistra told Laree. “You only got my hair.”

“Mother... I inherited a lot more than your hair,” Laree said, reluctant to specifically say what.

“And what is that, dear?” she asked.

Laree drew her lightsaber from her belt, sure her mother would recognize it. She did. “I inherited your Jedi power.”

Kistra was shocked. “The Jedi are responsible for the downfall of this galaxy. How could you turn against your mother after you ran away?”

“None of what you have just said is true though, Mom,” Laree said quietly. She began to tell them both exactly what had happened with every detail she could remember. She told about her kidnapping, her being trained unwillingly, and the abuses. “So you see,” she said as the conclusion to her story, “that’s why you can’t stroke my hair. Only one person does anymo—” she stopped herself. That had almost become part of the story, she knew, but Chris was gone.

Both of their faces had turned pale white for their daughter. “I’m so sorry,” her father said. “That one was that boy, though, wasn’t it?” She blinked and looked away, ignoring his question.

“So it’s not your fault you became a Jedi, you were forced to...among other things?” Kistra asked.

Despite everything Laree was telling, her mother kept focusing on the fact she was a Jedi. “No, mother, I want to be a Jedi. And...I don’t have a choice any more,” she said.

“Because you’re already trained,” Kistra said.

“No, not that. I’m hardly trained. It’s in my blood now... but in the wrong way.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“That boy did something, didn’t he?” her father asked, becoming angry again.

“Well... it was as much my fault as it was his. You see, he had this poison injected in him a long time ago, which made him act the way you saw. But when we... well, you know, he unknowingly spread it to me which made me react to him the way you saw,” she spoke softly. “You really risked your life hitting him, Father. Even without the Force he could have taken you.”

“Did he rape you like the others?” Kistra asked with more anger than she’d probably felt in her life.

“No,” her father answered for her. “From what I saw she really loved him.”

“I did...still do, I guess.” She looked at her father. “I really screwed things up up there, didn’t I?” she asked sadly.

“Yes, you did,” he said. “But I think you can fix it. You’ve been acting much better now, and he was only angry because you were. If you could find him, you could probably patch things up.”

“I hope so,” she said and hugged her father. Her mother watched in pain.

“Fett,” Chris said, “It’s just so nice to see you again. I didn’t think I’d ever get the pleasure. But the Sith were never ones to take defeat lightly. And I am a Sith.”

“I wasn’t afraid of the Lord Vader either,” Fett said coldly.

“I’m not asking you to fear me,” Chris smiled. “I’m going to show you why you may wish to fear me, and if you do not, cause you justifiable pain. Much pain,” he said.

“Let’s see your worst, kid.”

“You couldn’t handle the sight of someone enduring my worst,” Chris said.

“You overestimate your own powers. Kid, I’ve endured things far beyond anything you could imagine,” Fett said.

“You know nothing of the Sith. We’ve existed for millennia. What they knew then, I know now. And with their knowledge, I bring forth your destruction. You’ve destroyed my life.” No sooner had they both drawn their weapons, when Chris touched his Sith emblem, it focusing his power into Fett. With its help he took control of the weak-minded bounty hunter. He didn’t just take control of him like any other person in the galaxy. Fett’s mind ceased and was overrun with Chris’s own, like an extension of him.

Chris had heard stories of times when people had done this sort of mind merging before. The other half was supposed to be fun to keep around, and if you wanted to kill them, you just send them to Myrkr, where your mind will separate and they die instantly. There was no turning back.

The old Sith artifact took care of keeping Fett under control. Chris had been given the emblem for that purpose—it was the singly most powerful Sith object ever introduced to the galaxy. He and Fett teleported to Cinthral.

They stood in the same alleyway by the same street as where Chris had been caught. “You remember this place, Fett? No, of course you don’t, I’ve taken over your mind, sorry. I guess you’re already dead.” He sent a thought into the little part of Fett’s mind that was still his own. Fett scurried away. Chris returned to his home.

“Do you think it will work?” Laree asked her father.

“Laree, you still love him, and he must still love you. Does it really matter if it works, as long as you try?” he asked.

“Well, I guess,” she said. “I can easily find him and get to him, but what do I say? I mean, would *you* take me back after everything I’ve done?”

“Laree, I know what you’ve been through and all. Don’t blame yourself for everything. What happened in the past wasn’t your fault, and what’s happening now isn’t. But you can fix this, and I think you should.”

“OK. Thank you for leaving mom out of this. You know how she is,” Laree said thankfully. He just nodded and gave her a look with those green eyes of his—and her own— meaning it was time she get going. She hugged him warmly and thanked him for his help. “I think I can use his own powers to bring me to him. It should work,” she said, finishing the sentence a bit strained. She shut her eyes, concentrating deeply. She disappeared a moment later.

“Goodbye, my daughter,” her father whispered after her.

“Come now, son, what happened that was so terrible?” Ulic asked Chris.

Chris looked around the living room of his parents’ home, reluctant to answer. “I don’t know, nothing really happened. That’s just what made me get so angry, and I still am. She got completely set off over nothing,” Chris said.

“And what was this nothing?”

“She just saw Mara Jade helping me walk down a ramp, that’s all. It doesn’t make any sense, really, and when I realized what it was and tried to explain everything we just ended screaming again—” he broke off as his concentration was shattered. He fell to his knees, gripping his temple. He held on to Fett’s mind—and his own—by hardly a thread, but took a few moments to recover. He remembered the emblem after a moment, and used its power to aid him again.

“Son, are you all right?” Ulic asked, not all that concerned. He knew Chris could handle it.

“Yeah, I’m OK,” he said standing up slowly, still holding his head. “There,” he muttered as the feeling faded and he dropped his hand back to his side. “That was strange.”

“Uh-oh,” Ulic muttered as he looked at the doorway.

Chris turned around on one foot, half expecting—exactly what he saw. Laree stood there in all her beauty, wearing those same green Bakuran clothes she’d grown so accustomed to. His anger boiled only a little. “I thought it was you,” he said coldly.

“Chris,” she said, coming forward toward him, “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said those things, but you shouldn’t of either. I’m willing to talk now—alone.”

Chris nodded and walked up to her, and together they walked outside the building and out to the center of the city, where the park was located. They were quiet for a few minutes, when Chris decided he’d better start. “So, you came back, did you?”

“I’m not crawling back to you, if that’s what you’re thinking,” she said. “I’m just giving you a chance. I shouldn’t have blown up like that. You can start with explaining this ‘Jenika’ person.”

“Jenika’s this girl I met on Coruscant. When we talked, I just ended up telling her all about you and everything that’s happened lately. She helped me figure out what had set you off, and what I should do,” he said quietly, “though that didn’t help much.”

“Oh, yeah. The shuttle. I apologize for my father,” she said.

“That guy was your father?” he asked, thinking back. “Oh, I should have known. Look at those eyes,” he said, looking up at Laree’s.

She smiled attractively. “I didn’t know either at the time. He really had me scared when he stroked my hair.” Chris nodded his understanding. “Well, I guess this means we’ve patched things up?”

“I guess,” he shrugged. “You’ve really got to learn to teleport yourself. When you drew on my power, you nearly knocked me out.”

“Sorry,” she said simply. She looked at him closely a moment, only now noticing what he’d been wearing. “Why are you wearing your Sith suit?”

“Do you really have to ask?” he asked with a hint of anger in his voice. Laree stepped forward and hugged him in apology, and he hugged back, grateful they were back together.

But the hug meant a lot more than prove they were reunited. The Sith emblem on Chris’s suit came to life, thrusting Dark Side energies into the two people it now pressed against. It seemed as if it had waited centuries to do what it was now doing, and it had.

Both Chris and Laree caught waves of aggression and anger from the emblem. Anger which neither of them really felt, it seemed completely aimless, yet it consumed them. This time, though, it did not turn them against one another. They released each other and stood fast, another figure joining them among the trees. It was a huge humanoid, it seemed, yet obviously long deceased. It wore a long brown robe and strange horns it seemed from its helmet. It gripped a very strange looking staff.

“My soul has finally been released from the emblem you wear,” the figure said. “The two of yours potentially Dark Power has allowed me to leave and set you both upon your destinies.” His face was shadowed, but they both knew he looked at Chris. “Qel-Droma. I have watched you since you were born. I instructed your Master’s in how to go about teaching you. I made it possible for you to learn far beyond them. I also had them give you the emblem you now wear, empowered with my spirit.”

The figure went on. “I once met with your Great Ancestor, Ulic Qel-Droma, four thousand years ago. I brought the Sith upon him, but you are a far greater student. You have been the Dark Lord for seven years now, and I commend you for a job well carried out. You are perhaps the greatest Sith ever to dwell among our ranks. And you are to carry the title of Dark Lord as long as you live.”

Chris found himself bowing his head to the figure. “Thank you, my Master,” he said.

The figure turned his attention to Laree. “And you, my dear Laree Captison, you have the Sith within you. You too are to become a great one among us. And for that reason, I proclaim you the first in a line to be as great as the Dark Lords—You are the Dark Lady of the Sith,” he said.

Laree bowed to the figure. "It is an honor to be among your kind," she said.

The figure dawned his huge hands with long nails before them. "And you both are to carry out your destinies together, Dark Lord and Lady Qel-Droma." Pure Dark Side energies flew from his hands, catching on to the emblem Chris wore. It split itself in half in a sort of slash at an angle across it, half of it remaining on his uniform and the other attaching itself to Laree's tunic. "I will now return to the amulets, my students, and will forever be with you. Together, with yourselves and the amulets as one, you will be unstoppable," the figure said as he began to fade. His energies flowed into the amulets.

"You may now kiss the bride," Chris muttered and gave Laree a quick one on the lips.

"What was that for?" she asked.

"Didn't you catch it?" he asked. "'My dear Laree Captison,' at first. Closing: 'Lord and Lady Qel-Droma'."

"So we're..." she stopped short.

"In the eyes of the Sith, at least."

"I see," she smiled, moved forward and kissed Chris. "So, what do we do first?"

"I've got a strange feeling of revenge coming on. But I want to teach you to teleport first. When you made me teleport you, I nearly lost my mind control over Boba-Fett," Chris said, walking with her back to his house.

"You have control over Fett? What're you making him do?" she asked, intrigued.

"I decided to kill him. He's on his way to Myrkr. And that's where we should go as soon as possible. We'll 'port to his ship and thank him for the ride, then kill Levem while we're there," Chris said. "Everything that's happened is their fault."

"That's a good plan. I can see why you've been the Dark Lord so long."

"Now don't get jealous. The Dark Ladies are to eventually equal the Dark Lords, remember? And I'll help you speed that process along."

Gaeriel and Luke lay asleep in their bed on Coruscant. Gaeriel suddenly awoke with a start, springing up to a sitting position. "No!" she shouted.

Luke pulled himself up slowly. "What's wrong, Gaeri?" he asked tiredly.

"Didn't you feel that? Something terrible has happened, Luke. To both of them."

"I was afraid of this," Luke said. He put his arm around her, tried to comfort her. "It will be all right, Gaeri. We'll see what we can do in the morning when we go back to Bakura."

“I don’t know if it can wait. But it’s not like we have a choice, is it?”

“No,” Luke said sadly.

After a number of hours being taught how to teleport correctly, Laree thought she was ready. “OK,” she said, “I’ve got it.” She shut her eyes a moment, disappearing in a flash and reappearing across the room. “In time, I’ll be able to keep up with even you.”

“Don’t get your hopes up, Laree,” he grinned. “You’ll never teleport as well as me, it’s inventor.”

“Whatever,” Laree said disbelievingly. “We’d better hurry if we’re going to catch up with Fett.”

“Right. I want my third lightsaber back. Though my fourth works much better,” Chris said.

“What’re we waiting for?”

“Nothing. Let’s go.” They both centered their concentration on a spot just outside two kilometers of Myrkr, where a ship had just left hyperspace. They teleported inside that ship.

Laree walked over to the cockpit where Boba-Fett sat. “If I hit him, would you feel it?” Laree asked Chris.

“Yes, I have complete control over his systems. So don’t you even think about it,” Chris said coldly. He knew she would do it, if she wanted to.

“You’re my husband, Chris, or so we think. It’s my right,” she smiled sarcastically.

“Don’t, Laree. We only have minutes until we lose the Force. I don’t want to already be in pain.”

“Chris, why don’t we just destroy the entire system?” Laree asked. “That would be a nice test for us, and we would be rid of this world without the Force.”

“That’s been on my mind, too. But think about it a moment. Isn’t this much more fulfilling, doing it in person?” Chris asked.

“Yes, I suppose it is. This Sith stuff is certainly closely related with revenge, isn’t it?” Laree asked.

“Laree, you are the Dark Lady of the Sith. Don’t call it ‘Sith stuff’ anymore, OK?”

“Yeah, I’m the Dark Lady. Which also means I’m an equal to you, and I’d appreciate being treated as such.”

“When have I treated you any other way?” Chris asked. “Oh, nevermind. We’re in the bubble. We’ll be landing in minutes.” He felt the wooziness that came with the loss of the Force, he saw Laree also unbalanced. He moved to her side and put his arm around her waist. “Kind of nice without the Force, isn’t it?”



“Actually, yes,” Laree said.

Chris wondered at what to say next. Without the Force, things that had always seemed impossible to say were now easy, as he was unaffected by his Sith blood. “Did I ever tell you I loved you?” he asked quietly as he lay his other hand on her shoulder.

“I love you, too,” she said as she lay her soft cheek on his hand.

He smiled and lay his head against hers. “Now let’s kick some butt,” he said.

“Right.”

The two young lovers had piloted the ship down to the surface, discarding Fett’s dead body in the cargo hold. They came down the ramp, holding their ignited lightsabers before them. They went over to the base, Chris in front, as he could fight with a high degree even without the Force.

Two guards stood at the entrance, bringing up their blasters to track Chris and Laree. “I’ll take ‘em,” Chris whispered. Laree disigned her saber in response, knowing it was worthless for her to try to use. Chris sprinted forward toward the guards, leaping into the air some distance away and doing a flip, landing behind them. He sluggishly, without the Force, cut one of the guards down, catching the other one with a kick to the back before he could take Laree down. He caught the bewildered man with his saber after a moment of brief hesitation.

That was it. His answer. He couldn’t even resist the Dark Side without the Force, he was hopelessly lost within it. Laree saw it too, but knew she could do nothing, as she probably would have done the same. “Let’s go in,” he said as she caught up with him. “Ladies first,” he waved her forward as he held the door open.

She shook her head. “I don’t think so. You go first,” she said. He shrugged, letting himself through the doorway, but still holding it open for her. “Thank you,” she muttered.

They went throughout the base, Chris pretending it was some rough-‘em-up beat-‘em-up game. Laree watched Chris with grim satisfaction. They fought their way toward the room in which Levem stayed. Chris stumbled upon a trigger for the door, and it shot open. They stepped in. “Good day, Mr. Levem,” Laree said. “Remember us?”

Levem sat in his chair beneath the tree of ysalamiri. “Why of course,” he said, gently stroking one of the ysalamir. “Now, what is it you wish to speak to me about?”

“We don’t want to speak with you,” Laree said. “We want to kill you,” she drew a blaster from behind her back, bringing it to bear on his head. Suddenly a blaster bolt struck the weapon, knocking it from her hand in a smoldering pile of scrap.

“Anti-weapon droids. Not much in the way of hospitality,” Levem said.

“Neither do we, Levem,” Chris said coldly. “Laree, let me use our powers combined.”

“Uh, hello, Chris? Where’ve you been? We’re on Myrkr, remember?” she asked, thinking Chris had lost it.

Chris looked into her eyes. “Laree, just trust me. The ancient said together we would be unstoppable—this is our chance to prove it.” Laree saw that he meant business, offered her hand as a link, which he took in his own gratefully. He turned back to Levem, who began to look a bit sick.

“What, what are you doing?” Levem asked. He was breathing strangely and had a touch of fear in his eye.

“I get it,” Laree said. Chris looked at her with a smile as she continued. “The Dark Side is everywhere, Levem,” she said. “Everywhere. In your own heart, it dwells supreme. Whether with or without the Force itself, we are the Masters of the Dark Side. And we may manipulate it even when we may not use the Force.”

“Right,” Chris said. “The Ancients gave us these amulets as a focusing of power, Dark Power. Not Force Power. And through the power of the Dark Side, you now lay upon your grave.”

Luke and Gaeriel had arrived at Bakura earlier in the day. They’d checked on the twins, making sure that Yeorg and Tiree Captison had been as capable to take care of them as they hoped, and luckily they were. They had also apologized for the long delay. They now attempted to get a good rest before they had to go out again, after Chris and Laree.

Luke had a disturbing dream. Not a dream, really, but a vision. He saw the changes within both Chris and Laree take place, a huge looming figure strengthening them. Soon after it had begun, it took an even more disturbing twist.

Chris stood before him, clad in his Sith suit. He looked at Luke directly, proving it was far more than what Luke had already witnessed. His cloak waved behind him realistically. “I know I could have teleported and told you this in person, but I thought this more showing of power,” Chris said in Luke’s dream.

“You were probably right,” Luke said. “Now what is it you want to tell me?”

“Let’s start pleasantly,” Chris said. “Laree and I are back together.”

“I already knew that,” Luke said.

“Then do you also know what happened?” Chris asked.

“No, but Gaeri does. Tell me.”

“We were visited by an ancient Sith. He married us. We are now the Dark Lord and Lady of the Sith. Since then, we’ve killed Fett and Levem, and are preparing a coup d’etat on the Cinthral government. We’ll be in control in no time. And you will not interfere.”

“You expect me to sit idly by while you do who knows what?” Luke asked.

“I didn’t say that. I know you would never do that, give me some credit. I just wanted to tell you it was hopeless,” Chris said, and the dream faded.

Gaeriel saw Luke was awake too. “We have to do something, Luke,” she said quietly.

“I know, Gaeri,” Luke said. “Well, Chris and Laree are back together, but at what cost to the galaxy?” he wondered out loud.

“A great one.” ~~~~~

Chris Qel-Droma walked around the grounds of the Cinthralin school in the middle of the capital city. It’d been months since he’d attended, but that’s not what he was here to do. He had to find his oldest friend.

He waited outside as school began to let out. He’d left Laree, his wife now, back in the hotel in their makeshift throne-room. Silently, he waited.

A thousand kids began to fly out of the building as the bell rang. He reached out with his mind, searching for his friend among the numerous students.

Suddenly someone spoke up behind him. “Chris?” the voice asked quietly. He whirled around toward it. Before him stood Sandra, in a loose red shirt and tight jeans as she smiled at him.

“Oh. Hey, Sandra,” Chris muttered.

“Geeze, such an enthusiastic welcome for your girlfriend,” Sandra replied.

“You’re not my girlfriend,” Chris insisted. Sandra glared at him. “Look, I know we’d been going out for nearly a year, but—”

“But you found someone else these past three months you were away,” she said sadly. “Chris... and we were going to get married soon.”

“Well...I’ve already gotten that far.”

“So you fell in love with a girl, married her and made love to her too.”

“Close enough.”

“Then why are you here?” Sandra asked. “Obviously not looking for me.”

“Actually, I was looking for Josh,” Chris said, sad he had hurt the girl like that.

“Oh. You’ll find him out behind the school. You know him better than I do, you figure it out,” Sandra said and stormed off.

With a sad shake of his head, Chris started off for the blacktop behind the school. Sure enough, Josh was there. And he was in trouble. Twenty larger boys surrounded him.

Now this was not exactly strange. Josh had always been revealing gangs and such in the school, and they always fought him. Of course, he was the single greatest fighter in the system, and probably the galaxy.

Looked like it was one of those times. Chris strode forward toward them, as Josh took his fighting position. “Hey, Josh,” he muttered as he walked up behind him, fluidly removing his cape and dropping it to the ground. He took up position next to his old friend.

“Back so soon, Chris?” Josh asked, not expecting an answer. A few of the other boys began to draw vibroblades.

One of the boys lunged forward toward Josh with his blade. Josh blocked it, twisting his arm around the others’ and twisting it backwards. As the boy bent down, Josh kned him in the chest.

Captain Mihad sat in his command seat on board the Star Destroyer Garrett. He wore the old Imperial style military suit and had short gray hair. he was tall, and lean, and old.

Old, he thought. He shook his head. I am old all right, but the Empire is still alive within my crew. It may be dead everywhere, but this crew acts as if in the days of old.

“Sir,” Lieutenant Hensch interrupted. “We’re preparing to exit hyperspace. And...well, if you—”

“We’re going through with this, Lieutenant. I have been prepared to relinquish command of this craft for some time now, my time has passed. The crew should be passed on to a younger commander, a more competent one,” Mihad said sadly.

“Sir,” Hensch said quietly, saddened by his Captain’s despair. “You’re the only one who was able to keep command after Endor—and the only one still around today.”

“But what good have we done? I haven’t harmed the rebellion in over seven years. This star destroyer is the only one left in my fleet,” Mihad said.

“Yes, sir,” Hensch sighed. “Exiting hyperspace now, sir.”

“Approach the planet slowly, drop all shields and defenses. They must not be angered by our appearance. Hail the planet as soon as we are within visual range of the capital.”

“Yes, sir!” Hensch said enthusiastically. He turned from the Captain, barking out a long string of orders.

Mihad leaned back his head and shut his eyes. "I wish I was still an Admiral," he whispered. He'd been demoted back to Captain by the Emperor himself at his return to power. Palpatine had thought he was a weakling for doing nothing against the rebellion, but for all the Dark Sider's knowledge, Palpatine had always failed to see the truth behind situations.

Mihad himself had a little Force about him, he knew. Perhaps Palpatine hadn't drawn any attention to the fact on purpose. But Mihad knew that a time would come, when much more potential leaders for new times of war would arise. And he believed he would find them here.

"We've pulled out of hyperspace, Captain, and are entering orbit around the planet," a crewer reported.

"Good," Mihad said. "Hensch, get the planet's leaders on the holocomm. Surrender the ship, then transfer the signal to my personal quarters," he said. "I will be there shortly."

"As you wish, Captain," the Lieutenant said. Mihad stood and left the bridge of the destroyer. Hensch rushed to complete his tasks.

The Captain sat in the huge black chair of the Garrett's command quarters. The room was the same deep black of the chair, forever in darkness as it's original user, Darth Vader, had designed. It was perfect for meditation, though Mihad used it for no such purpose. It was a wonderful center of all onboard computers and systems. The one place besides the bridge he could really keep command of the ship.

A buzz called his attention down to the control board where an orange light shone brightly through the darkness. He pushed the orange button.

A full size hologram appeared before Mihad's eyes. The hologram formed the shape of a young boy, hands draped down his sides. One hand fingered his lightsaber defensively.

"Who are you?" Mihad asked, openly conveying his surprise. "There must be some mistake." He tapped another switch, opening another channel to the bridge. "Hensch, where is the leader of this world?" he asked in an angry voice.

"Well, actually sir—" Hensch started.

The hologram gestured, and the comm connection with the bridge died. Mihad glanced up in surprise. By all known laws of holocomm technology, there was no way the boy should have been able to see what he was doing. And the audio had been cut. The boy gestured again, and suddenly spoke. "Captain, I have already accepted your ship for my fleet."

"You mean...you're in control of this planet?" Mihad asked.

"Who'd you expect, Moff Tarkin?" he replied sarcastically. "I am Chris Qel-Droma, Dark Lord of the Sith."

"Dark Lord? Ahh...well, then you are indeed the one I seek! All my forces are yours. They will

serve you as faithfully as they did I and the Lord Vader.”

“Lord Vader’s ship? It is an honor, Captain, but why bother speaking with me yourself?” Chris asked.

“Well, to be perfectly frank, sir—My Lord—I have received word about a new technology from some of my Intelligence agents,” Mihad said.

“What sort of technology? Another world-devestator type? I think the galaxy has had enough of those feeble machines,” Chris said.

“No, not exactly like that. Details are still incredibly sketchy, My Lord, but this seems to be some invincible energy source—one that can’t run out. Not yet anyway.”

“Cool. How?” Chris asked, losing his formality with interest.

“We don’t know exactly. It’s being developed by a group of pirates, led by some mysterious person my agents have not been able to find. They have witnessed number of tests, though, and all reading show the shields to be completely invincible. It’s codename is the ‘Force Source.’” he said.

“So, you think that this source is worth pretty much anything...and so you come to me to retrieve it for you,” Chris said.

“That is not my intention, I assure you, My Lord—”

“Did Lord Vader stand for your lies?” Chris asked coldly. After a moment he smiled warmly. “I assure *you*, Captain, I would love to go get this ‘Force Source’ for you...or myself, I presume, if you do turn your forces over.”

“I will, My Lord. I, as you can see, am nearing the end of my command. I wish to turn it over to a younger generation. And, while I do so, I might as well pass it on a little better than how it was created.”

“Excellent idea, Captain. I shall leave as soon as possible. Should I send my friends up to relieve you of command?” Chris asked.

“Send them at your leisure. The ship is all yours,” Mihad said.

Suddenly, the hologram began to grow texture, and colors turned more real. In a split second, the whole thing was replaced by flesh, and the boy was there. A moment later, two more figures appeared. Another young boy, and a beautiful young woman.

Chris stepped forward. “This is Laree...Qel-Droma, Dark Lady of the Sith. And this is...Josh,” Chris said with a shrug. “They’ll stay here while I’ll go infiltrate that pirate camp.” Chris suddenly faded into nothingness.

Captain Mihad stood up and walked toward the children. “Lady of the Sith?” he asked

wonderingly. He always enjoyed new knowledge. “I don’t know much about the Sith at all, but what I have has only been of the Dark Lords. Perhaps you could tell me a little.”

“I’d be glad to, Captain...”

“Leia, I just don’t know what to do!” Luke said. He paced back and forth in front of the comm board.

“What can you do, Luke? All you can do—for now—is wait. I’ve got the NRI looking for them, but they’ll take awhile. There’s some other ‘more important’ matter to deal with at the moment. They won’t even tell me about it until they’re sure,” Leia’s voice said from the comm.

“I still don’t know,” Luke whispered. “Gaeriel—this is killing her. She feels all these things from her niece. Something terrible has happened.”

“Well, I don’t see things getting better anytime soon. The Empire’s gone, but this isn’t any easier to deal with. I’m sorry, Luke, but I can’t help you on this one.”

“I’m beginning to think no one can.”

Chris quickly changed into something more civilian like than his Sith suit, threw his lightsaber onto the couch, and immediately teleported away.

He found himself in a long, bright, empty hallway. For the moment, at least, he hadn’t been found. But he knew that wasn’t about to last. He walked on.

To his surprise, he found the control room, still undiscovered. He stayed outside the open doorway, listening to the people inside.

“Damn it,” came a man’s voice. “Another of those ships came too close and were sucked out of hyperspace. Quick, cloak the project before that freighter get’s any closer.”

“Cloaking...” another man said as the small prototype outside the window began fading. As the freighter came within range, it completely disappeared.

“Too close,” said the first voice. “They may or may not have seen it. Use the new disarming sensors. It’s time for an unscheduled test.”

“Yes, sir. “Pinpointing now.” His fingers tapped loudly on the keys.

There was silence for a moment, as something happened in near-space. “Excellent work, Lieutenant. Now pull the freighter into cargo baythree for questioning.”

“Thank you, sir. Immediately, sir.”

Suddenly there was a tap on his shoulder. Chris spun around, instinctively reaching for his saber, but held back. “What do you think you’re doing?” asked a boy about five years older than himself.

“I was about to ask you the same thing.” He reached out to the boy with the Force. “You will go about your business.”

“Are you insane?”

Chris’s mind tricks never failed, so the boy must have had his own power. He drew his blaster threateningly. “Go about your business, boy.”

The other drew and ignited a blindingly bright green lightsaber. “Who you calling ‘boy’, kid?”

“Don’t make me hurt you,” Chris said.

“I don’t think your threats are gonna work, kid,” he said, looking down at him coldly.

“You wouldn’t touch me,” Chris said, deciding to intimidate him with his knowledge. He could read him like an open book. “You are far too compassionate. You would not hurt anyone, or anything, without reason. That’s what got you here, isn’t it? Pleasantly out of someone’s way.”

His cold look melted away. “I suppose you’re right,” he said and disignited his saber.

“Who did it?” Chris asked.

“Did what?”

“Sent you here.”

He stared at the ground. “Lord Hethrir.”

“No need to respect a dead man like him. If you even know that he’s dead,” Chris said.

“He’s dead?” His eyes brightened.

“Has been for five years. What’s your name?”

“I’m Krejt. I am...was one of Hethrir’s Proctor’s. Who are you?” Krejt asked.

“Chris Qel-Droma, Dark Lord of the Sith. You don’t want to stay here, do you?” Krejt shook his head. “Good. Then you can help me escape with this ‘Force Source’ thing.”

“That’s going to be tough. It’s security is top-notch both human and in itself. Hethrir designed it himself. And there are three other Proctor’s in here who would definately remain loyal to even a dead Hethrir,” Krejt said.

“We’ll deal with them as they present themselves,” Chris said.

Glancing behind Chris, Krejt said, “Too late.”

A couple of older boys began walking toward them as Chris turned around. “Who you talking to,



Krejtyboy?” one of them asked.

“Lord Hethrir’s dead. How would you like to be once again by his side?” Krejt threatened.

He laughed. “You can certainly talk it, but I already know you never would. Now answer my question.”

“You’re probably right. I may not kill you, but he would,” Krejt said, tilting his head toward Chris.

Chris held his right hand up, a red flame jumping from it into the Proctor who had spoken. He held him there, as he saw the other trying to draw his lightsaber. He gestured violently with his left hand, the silent Proctor flying into the hallway wall and being pinned there a foot off the ground. He suddenly turned his hand over, balling it in a fist, and both Proctors died instantly and fell to the ground.

Krejt stood by silently, his eyes wide and his mouth hung open just a bit. Chris glanced at him, nearly regretting his actions, but not quite. “Come on, we’d best be going.”

They went on down the hallway, Krejt leading Chris to the archive where all the original plans and some of the upgrades were kept.

They stepped into the room. In the back, a figure dressed in Proctorial robes looked up from his datapad. “What—” he began.

In a flash of anger, Krejt drew and ignited his saber, rushing forward and cut down the Proctor. His eyes opened even wider than before, and he backed away from the slain Proctor.

“What made you do that?” Chris asked, knowing it must have been something *very* powerful to make him that angry.

“That’s the Head Proctor’s little brother. He looks so much like Mikla. I thought he was Mikla.”

“What did this Mikla do to you?”

“Nothing to me... He raped my best friend,” Krejt said, near tears with his memories.

Chris swallowed. “You don’t mean...Laree?”

Krejt brightened. “You know her?” he asked.

“Yeah, I do,” Chris said. “You could kinda say we’re married.”

Krejt looked puzzled. “To you?”

Chris looked at him angrily. “Is that so surprising?” Krejt started to speak—”I know, ‘no offense or anything’. Thanks a lot. Anyway, she’s a lot different now, I’m sure.”

“What do you mean?” Krejt asked.

“Well, you see...when I—we...well, she...um...Maybe you just better see for yourself,” Chris said.

“That made no sense whatsoever, so I guess I will,” Krejt said with a smile.

“So, how do we get out of here with the project?” Chris asked.

“Don’t ask me. You’re running the show.”

“Hmm. Thanks again,” Chris muttered, beginning to think seriously. “Now, I could just teleport everything to Cinthral. Of course, that’s not much fun, is it?”

“Nope. We’ll have to destroy this entire station anyway. Some of the most advanced fighters of old—old, since we pretty much stopped war-craft production—are stored here. I’ve got a couple in mind. We should get to the hangar,” Krejt suggested.

“Um...right. Exactly what I was thinking too,” Chris said. “Of course, I have a little to add. Since there are such great fighters here, and of course the project itself, I think I will bring in my Star Destroyer to recieve it all. Once the battle has ended, of course.”

“Of course. Now, let’s go.” Krejt nodded toward the hall to their right. He led Chris expertly down the hall, intertwining their path to go right through security holes he’d known of for years and never reported. He’d hoped this day would come.

After a half hour jog, they arrived. A huge, clear tunnel led across space from their present asteroid to the hangar asteroid. Before that tunnel was a large security door.

Krejt stepped up to the door, pressing his palm into the sensor at it’s side. Suddenly an alarm blaired. “Stang! They must have already found the other Proctors,” he said.

“Ug. We gotta hurry, step aside!” Chris ordered, and Krejt did so. He raised his hand, and the door exploded inward into the crystal tunnel.

“Good work. Come on!” Krejt said, jumping into the tunnel and running through as Chris followed.

As they neared the end, other footsteps could be heard nearing the entrance. “We’ve gotta destroy the tunnel,” Chris said.

“We can’t, there’s no door on this side,” Krejt said.

Chris closed his eyes a moment in thought. “I’ll handle it. You go prepare a couple of fighters,” he said. Krejt ran off oward a squad of TIE Defenders.

Chris reached out with his mind. He felt the sense of the desparate pirates, out to atch him. He knew they could not. He focused a bit, and the tunnel suddenly split in a spot. Much quicker han Chris

had expected, the gap widened and the vacuum rushed in.

He splayed out both hands in retaliation a moment before the vacuum of deep space caught up. Just in time, he caught the air and vacuum, and held them separate as the pirates were sucked out. He strained to maintain his grip. It was a matter of life and death.

“Um...Krejt, think you could HURRY IT UP!?!” Chris shouted.

“All’s ready, Chris, two TIE D’s, ready to go!” Krejt shouted back. “Just don’t lose your concentration before you’re inside your ship.” He took his own advise and ducked back into the ship, perfectly safe.

“Thanks a lot,” Chris muttered. He reached his hand to his chest, on the half Sith emblem he wore. He once again drew upon it’s power, and once assured it was safe, he sprinted toward the other TIE D. He jumped in the open hatch and quickly pulled it down.

Just when he relaxed, his barrier broke and vacuum tore into the hangar. He brought the ship on-line, and skipped the wobbly repulsor lifts TIE’s were noted for, and just ignited the engine since he was already in vacuum. A kilometer from the asteroid, he met up with Krejt who had done the same a few minutes earlier.

“So, what now, hotshot?” Krejt asked on the comm.

“You any good in a fighter?” Chris asked.

“You’re looking at the master.”

“Yeah, right. Good thing though, here they come,” Chris said as the other four TIE D’s launched from the hangar. Obviously there was some emergency air lock they hadn’t expected.

Another six TIE Fighters launched, then three Interceptors and three Bombers. And the dogfight began.

“You see, this ship is much better off than when it was built. There’ve been twenty turbolasers added, thirty ion cannon, and the shields are nearly six times as powerful. This ship’s efficiency rating last time it was in battle was three hundred and forty six point two percent. Lord Vader wouldn’t have dreamt of leaving it if not for the Executor,” Captain Mihad said to Laree.

Suddenly the emblem on Laree’s jumpsuit began to pulse with a red light. “What’s that?” Mihad asked.

Laree shrugged. “Chris must be using his half for something. They always interact like that,” Laree said.

“I see,” Mihad said thoughtfully. “Could he be in trouble?”

“I doubt it.”

“Great,” Krejt said. “Now we’re in trouble.”

Chris was too busy to reply. He quickly cut his propulsion, a TIE Fighter which’d been tailing him streaming past. He shot it to dust expertly. “What is it, Krejt?” he asked, breathing heavily.

“The project—it’s got a self destruct. If the alarm is set off, it waits one hour for someone to shut it down. Otherwise...you don’t want to know,” Krejt spoke into the comm.

“Oh, wonderful. How long do we have?”

“Let’s say...not quite a minute.”

“Well then, we’d better hurry. How do we dismantle it?” Chris asked.

“We can’t. The main unit is stored on that prototype ship, but there’s a secondary defensive unit on the asteroid right behind us. That unit will emit some sort of ray that set’s off the main one’s self destruct. When that thing goes, so does half this sector,” Krejt explained.

Chris whistled. “Impressive. We’d better stop that ray thing then.” A thought suddenly struck him. “This is the Force Source, right? If it uses the Force, we could easily stop anything it may do to destroy itself...”

“That’s true. I once heard it’s only weakness was the Jedi Knights,” Krejt said. “Let’s do it.”

They both centered their concentration on the lone asteroid. Easily, they found the unit. At that moment, it emitted a bright red beam which shot from it at the speed of light toward it’s master unit. Using the same barrier effect he had earlier, Chris stopped the beam midway on it’s path. He strained harder than before, for this time he battled another great Force user...the machine itself. But he had another weapon. He touched the cold metal of his Sith emblem.

He strained to speak. “Umm..Krejt? Will it stop?”

“Yes, it will,” Krejt said. He focused instead on the machine itself, and quickly dismantled it. The beam stopped.

“Why didn’t you do that in the first place?” Chris asked, letting his barrier drop.

“I wanted to see if you could handle it,” Krejt said. Chris could sense his smile.

“I hate it when people test my powers,” Chris said.

“That better not be a threat. Look kid, just get your Star Destroyer over here now. Their defenses are beat,” Krejt said.

“Don’t call me kid,” Chris said, and began firing at Krejt’s Tie D. He quickly stopped. “Nah, not worth it. They’re on their way.”

“Finally,” Krejt said, rebalancing his shields.

An hour later, the Garrett arrived. From its main hangar dropped a huge ship, used as a pick-up ship for the fighters. It slowly flew around, capturing all the fighter’s Chris and Krejt had purposely disabled and not destroyed. It also picked up Chris and Krejt themselves, as the Garrett itself hooked a tractor beam onto the Force Source and reeled it in.

Soon after it launched, the hangar-ship returned to the Garrett, filled with fighters and prisoners. As it landed, two Assault Transports launched to capture the base.

Chris and Krejt walked down the ramp, onto the metal deck of the Garrett’s hangar bay. “Is Laree here?” Krejt asked.

“She’s probably on the bridge,” Chris said. “Might as well teleport.” He shut his eyes a moment, and both of them were on the bridge.

“What?” Krejt asked, baffled. “Why didn’t you tell me you could do that?”

“Why didn’t you tell me to just dismantle that defense mechanism? I think we’re even,” Chris said.

“Who are you talking to?” Laree asked from beside the Captain’s chair. she turned to look at Chris.

“Laree, I’d like to introduce—” Chris started.

“Krejt!!!” Laree shouted. She hurried over to them. “You’re alive!”

“Hey, so are you!” Krejt grinned.

“You two have a lot of catching up to do. I’ll just go talk to the Captain,” Chris said and walked off.

“Where’ve you been?” Laree asked. “I thought you’d been killed.”

“No, Hethrir just sent me away to his secret project. I didn’t think I’d ever get out, and wouldn’t have if not for Chris,” Krejt said. “He said you’d be different...why is that?”

“Well, I’m the Dark Lady of the Sith now,” Laree said.

“And he’s the Dark Lord, so I guess you would be married...But wait. *You’ve* turned to the Dark Side? You’re the kindest person I’ve ever known!” Krejt said.

“That’s probably what he meant...it’s his fault though,” Laree said.

“No it isn’t!” Chris shouted. He’d heard that part of the conversation, but he returned to speaking with the Captain.

Krejt looked puzzled. "I still don't get it."

"It's very complicated," Laree said. "See, when Chris was five, he drank this strange poison. It made him... uncontrollable, and turned him to the Dark Side. He learned the ways of the Sith and became the Dark Lord. I met him some time later in the Jedi Academy. When we..." she glanced at Krejt to make sure he understood and continued. "Well, it spread to me."

"You don't act it," Krejt said.

"Not right now, but believe me, she has," Chris once again spoke up. He turned back to the Captain as Laree and Krejt walked out of the room chatting. "If we don't like it, we can always let it self destruct somewhere. Krejt said it would blow up pretty nicely."

"I doubt we'll be doing that if half my reports are correct. And from the research we've already done, I think it may be exactly as we've heard. The schematics were saved from the base, so we could even produce more units," Mihad said.

"I don't think that's necessary. One unit for the Garrett itself would be sufficient, probably. And I've got an idea exactly how to make it work for this ship," Chris said. He could sense Mihad's doubt. "The original designer was quite obviously a Force user, so don't doubt my own plans."

"Of course not, m'Lord. I am sorry. If you could draw your idea up I would love to see it, and perhaps we could get to work on it," Mihad said.

"I will." He walked off toward his quarters to get started.

Captain Mihad sat back in his large black chair. On the veivscreen before him, Chris's schematics for the Force Source were displayed. Included, was a recording of every question he knew Mihad would ask. He looked at it, intrigued.

"Interesting," he admitted to himself. "But why not make smaller units for fighters and transports and such?"

"That's stupid," the recording answered. "One master unit's all ya need."

Mihad shrugged. "I guess." Chris's plans had one unit that would supply energy to the Garrett's shield generators, which would have to be modified slightly. They would be able to send short bursts of energy into other ships, energizing their shields when needed. Also, the Garrett's shields would be impenetrable.

"Now this I don't understand," Mihad said, feeling a little silly talking to a recording. "What's wrong with our current turbolasers?"

"We wouldn't be replacing them, Captain," his answer came. "It merely calls for two superlasers, which would be powered solely by the Force Source. They would be incredibly powerful. Not a Death Star, but damage to a Cruiser."

“I see. Can my scientists look over this before I send it on?”

“If you want, Captain. But better make it quick.” The recording stopped.

Jan-lo fought violently with the controls of the small NRI ship. “Seiko, get over here. There’s some sort of disturbance,” she called into the open hatch.

Seiko, a man much older than she, stepped inside. “What’s wrong?” he asked, as if not noticing he was being tossed about.

“We’re being pulled out of hyperspace,” Jan-lo said.

Seiko looked at the control panel. “We’re pretty close to our coordinates. Pull us out of hyperspace before you tear us apart,” he said.

“Ok,” she said, reaching for the lever. She pulled it back, but nothing happened. “Shoot...”

Suddenly the whole ship jerked, throwing Jan-lo and Seiko both through the hatch. Slowly they came back, and found they were no longer in hyperspace. But they also found something else.

A Star Destroyer.

Hovering hardly a kilometer in front of them, was an Imperial destroyer in the midst of a few asteroids. The ship’s tower section was covered with scaffolding as crews scrambled to finish repairs. They did not seem to notice the small ship.

“I thought they said this was definitely not an Imperial project,” Seiko muttered.

“Everyone’s wrong now and then,” Jan-lo said. “I just hope we can jump to hyperspace again.” She pulled back the hyperspace lever—no such luck. “Ok, now we’re in trouble.”

“We won’t give up without a fight. We’ve got to get back to Coruscant. Maximum shields, full speed. Let’s get out of here,” Seiko ordered.

“Good idea,” Jan-lo muttered, quickly complying.

“Sir!” Lieutenant Hensch shouted. “Captain, an unidentified ship has entered the...system.”

“Get me some readings on the ship,” he said. His display board lit up, and he began reading it. “Damn this scaffolding. We can’t get a visual?”

“No sir,” Hensch said.

“Then send out a pair of TIE Defenders to investigate. It would seem the ship is trying to escape,” Mihad ordered.

“Yes, sir,” Hensch said, punching in the order to be sent to the pilots. “On their way.”

“Oh no. Here they come,” Jan-lo said quietly. From the huge ship dropped two small grey points, some sort of TIE Fighters.

“Faster,” Seiko said. “We have to keep out of range.”

Jan-lo glanced at the sensors. “Those things are fast. They’re three times our speed. If we can’t jump to hyperspace soon, we’re doomed,” she said.

Already one of the TIE’s took a ranging shot. It brushed right by the hull.

“We’re unarmed. It’s futile, we can’t make it. Initiate an information dump to the nearest Republic base. Something big’s up here,” Seiko said.

“Ok,” she said, when suddenly the ship jerked again. Were we hit? she wondered. She looked up at the view port.

The mottle of hyperspace was before her. “Thank the Force. The engines—they must have still been set for hyperspace. We’ll be back on Coruscant in no time,” Jan-lo said.

“Captain, the ship has made the jump to hyperspace,” Hensch reported.

“No matter. We gave them no hint of what we’re doing. Recall the Defenders,” Mihad said.

“Yes, sir.”

“How long until the additions are complete?” Mihad asked.

Hensch checked one of his boards. “Estimated twelve hours until operational,” he said.

“Excellent. If this really works...well, I don’t have to tell you. Keep me updated on the progress.”

“Of course, sir,” Hensch said.

“Also, have navigation set up a course to any rebel stronghold near Coruscant,” Mihad said. “I do not want to delay our first battle. I may be turning command over to our Dark Lord, soon, but I must first make up for years of not acting.”

“Right away, sir.”

Soon after arriving back at Coruscant, Seiko and Jan-lo met with the Head of State, Leia Organa Solo. “Something very big is happening,” Jan-lo said.

Leia sat down and listened intently.

“They’re still analyzing our sensor readings, but I’m pretty sure of what I saw,” Seiko said. “I’d done this run before, you understand. I know what the place looked like. It seemed that the pirates—or whoever they were—had been conquered by rogue Imperials who stole their technology. I’m quite



sure the base was in ruins, and a lot of work was being done to that destroyer.”

Leia thought a moment. “They could be incredibly dangerous then, I assume. Though the information on this project has been hidden from me. What does it do?” she asked.

“It’s a power source, reported to be unending. It could make a ship’s shields completely impenetrable,” Seiko said.

“And to top it off they’re using much of the last technological advances the Empire made. Those fighters they threw at us were TIE Defenders, the most advanced fighters we’ve yet seen,” Jan-lo added.

“What do you suggest we do?” Leia asked.

“We can’t say until we’ve analyzed every option. Direct assault on this one could be a huge mistake,” Seiko said.

“I understand,” Leia said. “Report back to me as soon as you can. Something like this could put Coruscant itself in danger.”

“Of course, Your Highness. We’ll return to HQ right away.”

“Building is complete, sir,” Hensch reported. “All old systems are one hundred percent functional. New systems are being tested now.”

“Perfect. Are enhanced sensors working?” Mihad asked.

“Yes sir, much more effective than the old. It can detect most anything from much greater distances,” Hensch said.

“Good. The only other test I’m interested in for now is the superlasers. I still do not agree with dual emplacements. Are they tested?” Mihad asked.

“They’re testing is going to begin now. Shall I direct the main view port toward it?” Hensch asked.

“Yes. This should be interesting.”

As the destroyer turned slowly, the view port began to center on a lone asteroid. A few moments later, a bright green laser flew from outside of view, and the asteroid disappeared in a shower of sparks and space dust.

“Amazing,” Mihad breathed. “What was the size of that asteroid?”

“Approximately the size of a Class IV moon. That of course was both lasers into one, alone they would be much weaker, though fire at double rate,” Hensch said, himself impressed.

“This is perfect,” Mihad said. “And I trust the shields are—”

“Invincible?” Hensch interrupted. “But of course, Captain. All systems—\_all\_ systems—are functioning.”

“Be careful, Lieutenant. Do not depend on this ship’s proposed infallibility. For all we know, this ship could completely malfunction and where would we be then?” Mihad asked.

“I understand, sir,” he said, and there was a grim silence a few moments. “Shall I order the start of our maiden voyage?”

“Yes. It is worth any risk. This will be the greatest Imperial victory in history,” Mihad said.

“I am sure it will be, sir.” Hensch began barking orders to Navigation and Engineering. Two minutes later, the ship jumped to hyperspace.

Chris walked up to the captain’s chair. “Is everything ready?” he asked.

“Yes m’Lord, all systems have checked out. We will exit hyperspace in approximately three minutes,” Mihad said.

“Great. Where are we hitting?” Chris asked.

“It’s called Coruscun. It’s a twin system of Coruscant, only a few light years off. The rebels have a pretty large base there,” Mihad said.

“Couldn’t reinforcements arrive quickly?” Chris asked.

“Does it matter?” Mihad asked with an evil smile.

Chris laughed. “I suppose not.”

Hensch spoke up. “Sir, m’Lord, we are exiting hyperspace.”

The view port faded as the bright colors of hyperspace disappeared, turning into a scene of a planet. The planet was large and vibrant with life, not much like its industrialized twin. Around it orbited three Mon Calamari cruisers, four Nebulon B frigates, and a number of smaller craft.

“This will be an excellent show of our new weaponry. Lieutenant, launch all TIE’s. Defenders are to attack the Mon Cals, the bombers and Advanced assist. Regular fighters fly cover with the Interceptors,” Mihad ordered.

“Right away, sir,” Hensch said, running off barking orders and preparing the ship for battle.

As a number of flights of fighters launched from the Garrett, the rebel forces pulled themselves together in a defensive formation. They began launching their own X-Wing and A-Wing fighters. The ancient ones, when compared to the TIE Defenders and Advanced.

The ships sensor workers kept a close eye on the shields of the fighters. All the fighters were equipped with shields, the ones not designed for it with weaker ones. But if they got low, a mere key could make them invincible for a time. The new power source was simply amazing.

“The battle is going well. No losses, as expected. The rebels have lost an estimated thirty-six fighters, and two frigates and a cruiser have lost their shields,” Hensch reported.

Chris watched the view port, greatly impressed. He, momentarily, took command. “Don’t destroy anything. I want everything to be captured. The planet too. Have the Defenders disable everything they can, and bring the Garrett into range,” he ordered.

“As you wish, m’Lord,” Hensch said, nodding the order on to another officer.

The battle began to become larger as the Garrett pulled closer. The cruisers began adjusting their aim toward it, letting the fighters go take care of each other.

“Shield op?” Chris called.

“Reading one hundred percent, m’Lord,” his reply came from across the bridge.

“Excellent. That frigate, the one that hasn’t been touched,” Chris said.

“Yes, m’Lord?” Hensch asked.

“Destroy it. Use the superlasers,” he said.

“Yes, m’Lord,” Hensch said, keying in the proper order. “Firing in 3...2...1. Now.” A bright green light once again shot out, this time in it’s path an actual target. It struck the frigate, which instantly exploded in a huge ball of flames. The flames caught on to another nearby frigate, which started floating out of control and on fire.

“Get that frigate a tractor beam lock,” Mihad ordered. “We don’t have enough ships to send out nearly all our troops, so we might as well bring them to us.” Hensch did so without replying, and the frigate stopped in it’s insane flight and began floating slowly toward the destroyer. “It is a wonderful day for the Empire.”

“My Empire,” Chris said. He remembered Laree. “Our Empire.”

“Mayday! Task force two-six-three is falling, repeat, task force two-six-three is falling!” Keyan Farlander shouted into the comm. “C’mon, Coruscant, you can hear me!” He stood nervously aboard the bridge of the flaming frigate.

“I wish it was just me and my X-Wing again,” he said to himself. Now he felt responsible for all the lives being lost out in battle. Including perhaps his own. He looked out at the grim scene. Upon seeing the devastation of his fighters, a thought occurred. “Or maybe not,” he muttered.

“Task force two-six-three, what is wrong?” the comm sounded like an angel in heaven.

“Thank the Force you could hear me. Anyway, there’s one destroyer attacking us. We need reinforcements!” Keyan shouted.

The comm was silent a moment. “This says you have three Calamari cruisers and four frigates. One destroyer should be no problem, and we don’t have ships to waste,” the voice said.

“You don’t understand. Something is different about this destroyer. It’s got more advanced fighters, which we can’t destroy a single one of, we can’t pierce it’s shields, we can’t damage them even, and a minute ago it used this huge laser that completely obliterated one of my frigates and nearly disabled my own ship!” Keyan shouted in a frenzy. “You’ve got to send something!”

“Is this a prank?”

“No! This is General Keyan Farlander, requesting assistance in battle on Coruscun!” Keyan shouted, irritated with the person on the comm. “Look just send me anything—everything you’ve got!”

“The Defiance itself has been sent to check your claim,” the man said.

“And it has it’s usual wing of four other cruisers?” Keyan asked.

“Naturally.”

The battle went well for the Imperials. Two of the cruisers had been disabled, and the third was making a futile attempt to run. Of course, the Force Source also had the talent of pulling ships out of hyperspace, and keeping them from it. The three remaining frigates had been neutralized, and the one in tow came nearly to the hangar bay, where it would be boarded.

“Ok, before we hook up with the frigate launch all troop assault transports to capture the other ships,” the Captain ordered.

“Already done, sir,” Hensch reported.

“Good. You of course know the correct procedure for direct stormtrooper assault on a frigate?” he asked.

“Of course. The command section is brought into the hangar, the rest held outside,” Hensch said.

“Correct.”

A few moments later, “Done.”

“Then send all remaining troops,” Chris ordered. “And I will go myself. This is the command ship, after all.”

“Yes, m’Lord,” both Mihad and Hensch said. Hensch added, “Good luck.”

“Luck has nothing to do with it,” Chris muttered and left the bridge. He hurried down the bustling

hallway of the Star Destroyer and jumped in a turbolift down to the hangar bay.

He arrived there just as many of the troops did, and stepped from the turbo lift. He walked over to the huge hunk of ship which hung within the even larger hangar bay. A number of stormtroopers were stepping inside it through a gap in the hull they had created. He stood beside the gap, and heard the blaster noise, smelt the harsh ozone they created. He straightened his black clothes and cape and waited for the last troops to enter.

A few minutes later, when the last of the troopers had gone inside and he could hear the fight had moved further inside the ship, he stepped inside. It looked like any ship, bright metal hallways, leading many places you may want to go and many places you wouldn't. He followed the last pair of troopers further inside, searching for the battle.

Soon enough, they found it. Ten rebel soldiers stood, ducking behind scraps of metal and bulkheads for cover, fighting over thirty heavily trained stormtroopers and one young boy. Chris held back and just ducked behind a few of his troops for the time being. But soon, he got bored and pulled his own blaster, firing at the rebels and adding to the noise.

Minutes later, they conquered this group of rebels, and not long after that found the ship devoid of more soldiers. The stormtroopers spread out and took prisoners, bringing them back out to the hangar as Chris roamed through the frigate.

He found his way to the bridge. It was empty, everyone had fled. Except for a single man, the leader of the force, standing by his screen in a New Republic uniform with a sad expression on his face. It faded to anger as he saw Chris. "Who are you, boy?"

Chris gestured and the man's throat contracted and he began to choke. "Watch who you call boy," he said threateningly.

To Chris's surprise, the blow was reversed, and he was suddenly choking as the man smiled. "And watch who you mess with. I'm General Keyan Farlander, and it's a pleasure to meet you," he said sarcastically.

Chris released Keyan's grip. "And you obviously don't know who I am," he said. He jerked his hand up, and Keyan flew back a meter and to the floor. "I am Chris Qel-Droma, Dark Lord of the Sith. And this is my flagship, the Garrett."

"I don't care who you are. Just kill me now and get it over with," Keyan said, slowly standing up.

Chris looked thoughtful a moment. "No," he decided. "You obviously know the Dark Side pretty well. I think I could attune your talents nicely."

"I'd like to see you try," Keyan spit out.

"It's not healthy to underestimate me," Chris said.

"Please, put me in prison. Just shut up," Keyan said.

Chris waved his hand angrily, and Keyan disappeared. He fell harshly to the ground of an Imperial prison cell. Chris calmly walked out of the captured frigate.

As he walked down the long hallway back to the bridge, an announcement sounded. “Lord Qel-Droma, please come to the bridge immediately. Emergency.” He stopped delaying and teleported directly.

“What’s wrong?” he asked the captain. “Did something malfunction?”

“No, m’Lord. On the contrary, I wanted to know what I should do about them,” Mihad said, gesturing up at the view port.

Chris looked up. Five more Calamarian cruisers flew right toward them, prepped for battle. “Reinforcements have arrived,” he muttered. “Deal with them.”

“But m’Lord, that is the Defiance in lead, the Rebel Flagship. The others are no doubt elite. If we were to destroy one—perhaps two—they could run back to Coruscant, and help us much more. Do you agree?” Mihad asked.

“Ah..yes, Captain. Wonderful plan. Make it so,” Chris said.

“Right away, m’Lord,” Hensch said, already working the coordinates in. Three minutes later, two Calamari cruisers ceased to exist.

The remaining three began to reverse their direction. “They’re retreating as expected,” Mihad said. “I want to know what they’re telling Coruscant.”

Hensch did not acknowledge, but latched into the old rebel signal. “Coruscant; task force two-six-three has been captured! Only one loss of a frigate, all other ships taken over. Coruscant too is expected to fall,” said a deep, throaty voice Chris recognized as Admiral Ackbar. “Some sort of laser beam destroyed two of my ships—we are retreating. The Imperials now have a stronghold within range of Coruscant, alert the Head of State.”

The Calamarian ships began shrinking and shrinking as they tried to get away. Abruptly Ackbar spoke again. “Something here is keeping us from hyperspace,” he said.

“Open our end of the channel,” Mihad ordered. He glanced at his panel, where a bright light shone meaning he could speak. “Admiral Ackbar. This is Captain Mihad of the Star Destroyer Garrett. We have indeed captured Coruscant and its task force. The Garrett is unstoppable using the new Force Source.” He cut the audio. “Relay that to Coruscant,” he ordered Hensch.

“Done, sir,” the Lieutenant said a moment later.

“Excellent. Give each ship a temp skeleton crew and divert all troops to the planet,” Mihad said as the cruisers disappeared into hyperspace.

“This system has fallen,” Hensch smiled as he forwarded the order.

Leia hustled into the war room. The room was extremely busy, considering their seemed to be no problem.

“Your Highness,” General Bel Iblis said, walking up to Leia. He wore his military uniform, a ring of sweat around the collar.

“What is wrong, General?” Leia asked.

“I’m sorry we had to call so late, Your Highness. But we felt it necessary to inform you of our situation,” Garm said. “We received a distress signal from General Farlander of task force two-six-three, calling for reinforcements. One star destroyer was attacking his three Calamarian cruisers and four Nebulon frigates, and was crushing them.”

“That’s odd,” Leia said, puzzled.

“Yes, it is. We sent five cruisers—the Defiance’s flight. We just recieved a signal from Admiral Ackbar stating two of his cruisers were destroyed and the others fleeing through normal space, unable to jump to hyperspace,” he said, and took a deep breath. “One of the frigates was destroyed, and all other ships in the task force captured, along with the planet. To top it off, the Imperials sent a message saying the same thing and that ‘The Garrett is unstoppable with the new Force Source.’”

“How is all this possible?” Leia said, not sure she could believe the reports.

“We’re not sure. The NRI is working on it, and already have some guesses. They think it could be that mysterious project they’ve been researching at work,” the General said.

Leia looked thoughtful a moment. “I was informed that the site of the project had been found in rubbles, with a Star Destroyer floating by making repairs,” she said.

“Yes, that’s true. And if all the specs on the project are correct, this most likely would be it. Though it would seem their specs for it were a little underestimated.”

“Wait a minute,” Leia said. “Let’s say it *is* an unending power source. It’s named the Force Source. If it’s possible for a machine to draw upon the Force...”

“Then a Jedi could disable it, perhaps. Interesting idea. Man versus machine, Force to Force,” Bel Iblis said, amused.

“It’s our best chance. Coruscant could fall if this new technology is not dealt with. I’ll get my brother here, if anyone it’ll be him who can stop it,” Leia said, hoping Luke wouldn’t mind.

“Good idea. Coruscun is very close, remember. I’m sure the Imperials won’t waste any time. I don’t think we’re all ready to move back to Da Soocha,” he said.

“It wouldn’t work, Chris knows all about Da Soocha and Pinnacle Base,” Leia blurted out.

“What?”

Leia had a strange look on her face, wondering why she'd said that. "I don't know. Nevermind. Let's get to work."

Luke awoke from the dream at the loud ping of the comm. Thankful the dream was over, he tiredly walked to the holocomm and turned it on. "Yes?"

His sister's face appeared before him. She too looked tired, her hair casually hanging down her back. "Luke, we need you on Coruscant," she said.

"What? Why? I can't just—" he started.

"There's an emergency. Imperials just struck and conquered a nearby system. We think they'll target Coruscant next," Leia said.

"Sounds bad," Luke muttered. "Why do you need me there?"

"The destroyer's powered by something called the 'Force Source'. We're thinking that if it actually does use the Force, you might be able to stop it."

That snagged his weary attention. "That's very interesting," he said. "But is that possible? A machine which could utilize the Force..."

"It's invincible," Leia said. "You're our last hope."

Luke thought about that a few minutes. "We'll be there as soon as possible," he said, and shut off the comm.

"So, now we have to leave here too?" Gaeriel asked from behind him.

"I think it's for the better," Luke said. "I have a very strange feeling about this whole 'Force Source' thing."

"Maybe we should bring the twins along this time," Gaeri suggested.

"No. If Coruscant really *is* in danger, they could be our only hope."

A week later, there was still a huge bustle in the war room on Coruscant. Everyone running estimates of when exactly the attack would come, if ever. Reports flew in every hour of what was happening on Coruscun, and it was believed they would not be waiting much longer.

In the midst of the chaos, Leia Organa Solo sat, anxiously awaiting the arrival of her brother. If he could stop the destroyer's power-flow, this whole thing could be for nothing.

Just as this thought passed through her mind, Luke entered the war room. He walked through the havoc, toward Leia. "So, when's the attack coming?" he asked.

"Noone knows," Leia said. "I'm glad you could make it, Luke. If you were able to make it's



systems falter for even a moment, we may be able to take advantage of it.”

“I’ll do my best. This thing was developed by a bunch of pirates, it can’t use the Force all too in depth,” Luke said, almost hopeful.

“Well, the NRI’s been questioning that. They think the pirates may have just been a front, with some master-mind really in charge of the project,” Leia said.

“Even so—” Luke started. Suddenly alarms went off, all over the war room. Luke looked up quickly to the space viewer, seeing a destroyer, and shortly behind it three Nebulon B Frigates. A moment later, three Calamari cruisers appeared in front of it. In perfect formation, they neared Coruscant’s outermost forces.

“Someone shut those things up!” General Bel Iblis shouted loudly. A moment later, the alarms ceased. “Finally,” he breathed. “Get me some stats, now! Analyze those ships and get me all the info we got.”

Leia looked to Luke who was staring at the image of the star destroyer. “Do you feel something?” she asked as the Coruscant defenses began to fire on the forwardmost Mon-Cal cruisers.

“Yes,” Luke whispered. “The destroyer is definitely endowed very strongly in the Force. I’m going to attempt to stop it now,” he said. He reached out with his mind, sweeping over the huge destroyer, sensing the surge of its power. He reached into it, trying to reverse it with its own power. Suddenly a huge blast of energy hit him, and he flew back a few meters and fell to the ground.

Leia knelt down next to him, helping him sit up slowly. “Are you ok? Was that some sort of defense mechanism?” she asked.

“I’ll be fine..” he wandered off a moment. “It was too purposeful to be automatic. I felt another power there, besides the mechanical one.”

“Another Jedi?” Leia wondered.

“Not just any Jedi,” Luke shook his head. He pointed to the screen with a weak hand. “That’s Chris up there.”

Chris glared coldly down at the planet as he smacked Master Skywalker hard for what he’d tried to do. “Full speed,” he muttered. “I want to attack now!”

“M’Lord, we are already going as fast as we dare. The Force Source is not designed for speed. We’ll be attacking within moments, besides,” Captain Mihad said.

“Good. I want this to be a clean victory. If we conquer the capital, there’s no stopping us.”

Laree and Krejt sat in her and Chris’s quarters. “Why are you like this Laree? I know you’re not evil.”

“I already told you. It’s in my blood now.”

“I can’t believe that. Whatever Chris has, and gave you, there must be limitations. You two aren’t like this all the time, are you?” Krejt asked.

“No,” Laree said. “We’ve been a lot worse. You see, it’s complicated. Everything seems fine, but then one thing happens that sets one of us off. Then that sets the other one off. That’s how all this happened, but since we ended up both angry we ended up back together.”

“I just can’t understand you, Laree. This isn’t you. It may be Chris, after all, he’s been like this for most of his life. But you’ve only been exposed to it a few months,” Krejt said.

“I know. Master Skywalker said he could help me...but I didn’t want him to.”

“Why not?”

“Because it would just happen again.”

Krejt shook his head. “You make no sense.. When you were six, you were kidnapped by a man claiming to be your father. All he was though was an evil Jedi, out to bring back the Old Empire. He made your life miserable. Other..things made you miserable. Years later you were freed, by the good people at the New Republic. Now, here you are doing exactly what Hethrir would have done. Don’t you see, Laree? You’re doing just as Hethrir would want you to. You’re hurting those you really care about, and who really care about you. I’m not saying Chris doesn’t, but you have to help him see what he’s doing. What you’re doing here isn’t right. I hope I’m getting through to you.”

Laree just sat there with a bewildered look on her face. Deep down, in her heart, she knew he was right. “This is the second time you’ve given me great advise. But this time I’m going to act on it. Come on, I’ve got an idea.” She got up with Krejt, and they walked out to talk about their deed, and to do it.

Not soon after it had arrived, the Garrett herself came into range of the orbiting Coruscant fleet. The seventy turbolasers all started firing in unison, beginning to crush they’re opposition along with the ion cannons. The republic ships returned fire through the huge onslaught.

The huge orbiting spheres set themselves in firing positions to cover the other ships and draw fire from the Garrett. The Garrett’s defenders, the three Mon Cals and three Nebulon B’s, spread out and assisted in the battle with their new, loyal, crews.

The Garrett also dropped it’s compliment of TIE fighters. Thirty-six TIE Defenders, twenty-seven TIE Interceptors, Twelve TIE Advanced, and thirteen TIE Bombers shot through space to take down ships out of range of their mother-ships.

The space above Coruscant quickly became littered with debris from destroyed ships and damage. The whole galaxy seemed to light up as a thousand turbolasers flew through the sky.

Chris looked over the battle with a grim smile on his face. As he watched the action unfold, he

thought he saw everything moving farther away. "Um, Captain.." he muttered.

"I noticed too, m'Lord. Lieutenant?" Mihad said.

Hensch was looking from borad to board, panel to panel. He could not find the problem. "I don't understand, sir. But we seem to be moving away from the battle. I have no control over the ship."

"Could the Force Source have a bug?"

"I don't believe so, sir. I'm beginning to recieve data on the location of the perpertraitor. It would seem someone broke into our main computer," Hensch reported. "And we've been locked out."

"Could Coruscant have done this?" Chris asked.

"No, m'Lord. Someone *aboard the ship* is doing this. We have no choice but to call a full retreat or else we'll just lose our other ships."

Chris gritted his teeth. "So be it. Find whoever did this and bring them to *me*. They will pay dearly," Chris ordered and stormed from the bridge.

"What is it?" Bel Iblis asked the most aide who was most fighting for attention.

"General, the star destroyer is retreating!" the man called out.

"What? That's preposterous!" the General exclaimed.

Everyone turned to the visual, suddenly everything was silent. The General himself looked awed. The destroyer was going directly backwards, and it's assisting ships were beginning to follow it.

"Look out," said the General. "It could be just a feint."

"It's not, sir," someone said. "The star destroyer just cleared hyperspace."

At that, a cheer rose from the crowd. Not much later, the other ships too had disappeared into hyperspace and nothing was left to do but clean up the mess. Luke and Leia released a sigh of relief, but they both wondered.. "What the hell is Chris up to?"

Chris sat in his dark meditation room, barely able to contain his anger. He'd been so close. So utterly close to his prize. And someone had stolen it away from him.

Suddenly his comm pinged. "M'Lord, we have found the traitor," Lieutenant Hensch said.

"Good. Bring him to me," Chris replied.

"Um, yes, sir," Hensch stammered.

Chris turned his seat toward the door, awaiting his..visitor. When the door finally shot open, his

mouth fell wide open. “What the—?”

Laree stood there in her green jumpsuit, the half Sith emblem plastered upon her chest, her hair rustling a little beneath the vent. “You.. wanted to see me..m’Lord?” she asked.

“Laree..you..you didn’t..” Chris started.

“I did.”

The softening he felt faded, his hard glare coming back to play. “So, you’ve fallen for the Light Side again,” he said. “All well and good, but you’ve betrayed my empire, and me. Traitors do not fair well in the Empire!” Unconsciously, he’d lifted a hand from the arm rest. He pummeled Laree with lightning. “No, every traitor is treated the same,” he said as he released another bolt. “You are no different from if a stormtrooper betrayed me.” He could plainly see, and sense, her fear. “You are expendable.” He released another, more powerful bolt, filled with all the anger and hatred his heart had gathered. Laree collapsed with a scream.

Chris stood up from his chair. He calmly walked toward the door, stepping over Laree. He could sense she was still alive, a little at least, maybe in cardiac aresp or something. As he stepped out into the hall, he told two stormtroopers to go pick her up, then find Krejt, since he was sure this was his fault, and dismiss both of them in a shuttle.

Krejt was given a shuttle, an unconscious, but living, Laree, and one hour to leave the Garrett’s hangar bay for good. He boarded the shuttle, dragging Laree along as gently as he could. He strapped her in the copilots seat for the ride and sat in the pilots chair.

As he prepped the engines for lift-off, he reached over and put his hand on Laree’s head. Once again, he tried to awaken her with the Force. Again, he was repelled. Whatever had happened to her, it must have been Force-inflicted. He returned to his controls and after flipping on the repulsors, maneuvered the shuttle out of the star destroyer.

He looked into the back view, to the fleet he was leaving. The ships stood dormant, awaiting further orders. The Garrett had dropped from hyperspace only a few light years from Coruscant, and not long after the other ships had arrived. Krejt set the navicomputer to take them back to the war-torn Coruscant, and hoped they wouldn’t be blown out of the sky on entry.

He glanced at Laree. She still wasn’t breathing, her lifeless body beginning to lose it’s glimmer as her spirit nearly lost it’s precarious grip to it. He had to hurry, and pulled back the hyperspace levers.

Not much later, he pushed those levers back and exited hyperspace. “Imperial shuttle,” the comm spoke up immediately, “Leave this system immediately or you will be fired upon.” He could make out two X-wing fighters changing courses toward him.

“This shuttle comes in peace,” Krejt responded. As a gesture, he shut down his shields and made sure his weapons were not up at all. “I have an injured woman aboard, who will die if you turn us away.”

“That is of no concern to us. The planetary shields go down for no one until everything is secure.”

“They’re not coming back. We just ran away from the Garrett, and she’s on a course home now. You’ll have plenty of time to clean up later! My best friend’s life is at stake,” Krejt exclaimed.

“We’re forwarding your request to Coruscant. Go to coordinates eight-four-six-twelve-nine-two and wait.”

With a sigh Krejt did exactly that.

The war room was beginning to clear out, but Luke and Leia stayed around to see things were being fixed properly.

“Madame Chief of State,” a comm op called. Leia weaved her way over. “There’s a very insistent Imperial shuttle wanting to land at once. The pilot claims to have an injured woman aboard. We have plenty of injuries ourselves, and can’t lower the planetary shields..?”

“Give them a five second opening. If they are Imperial, we’ll show them the mercy of the New Republic. If not, we still have some room in the medical center,” Leia said.

“OK, I gave them clearance. A medic team will meet them.”

“Good.”

“I’m going to meet them too,” Luke said. “I sense something..”

Leia turned toward him. “Luke, if it is an Imperial, whether from Chris’s or not, you could be in danger.”

“No, I wouldn’t be. There’s a pilot, and definitely an unconscious person up there. No one else.” He didn’t wait for a response, immediately leaving the war room and to the shuttle’s landing point at the top of the palace.

As Luke waited, the ambulance arrived. They waited for five minutes before the shuttle came down, and lowered it’s ramp.

The ambulance crew ran up the ramp with a small repulsor bed to move the injured party. A moment later they came back down, a young woman laying flat on the bed.

Luke recognized her immediately. “Laree!” he exclaimed. He stopped the head medic. “Is she going to be ok?” he asked.

“We can’t say yet,” the man replied. “She’s in cardiac aresp. We don’t know how long she may have been like this. It may be too late already,” he said and got on the ambulance, which quickly fled toward the medical center.

A minute later a young man Luke had never seen before stepped off the ramp. “Who are you?”

Luke asked. "I was expecting Chris Qel-Droma."

"Chris? He's insane. My name is Krejt, I'm a good friend of Laree's," Krejt said.

"You were in Hethrir's, weren't you?" Luke asked.

"Yes, that's right. Until I tried to get Mikla for what he did to Laree and was sent away."

"A welcome friend then," Luke smiled. "Come, we'll see how she's doing."

"What's happened?" Chris asked Captain Mihad.

"I'm not sure, sir. Our course back to Cinthral seems to have led us into some sort of trap," Mihad said.

"A trap? Set by who?"

"That's what we cannot tell. There are no ships anywhere. But *something* is pulling us toward the planet. I'm afraid we may crash!"

"Crash?" Chris asked. "But what could pull a ship this size down?"

"Nothing could, sir! But we're already entering the atmosphere," Mihad said.

"Deploy the repulsors as best you can. Let's land this thing like a feather."

"Star destroyers are not built to land on ground, but I'll do my best."

Berra Stra stood in the forest with her clan sisters, watching as the monstrous ship came closer and closer to hitting the ground only two kilometers away. She glanced at the others, many of them still concentrating on pulling the ship down into the planet. Suddenly, old Tannath spoke.

"Such power," she said. "It's been awhile since we've had off-worlders."

"Yes, it has been," Augwyne said. "More and more sisters are leaving, and we've no males to have more daughters. This could be a great opportunity."

As they spoke, the huge ship crashed down into the planet. The ground buckled as it settled in, creating large clouds of dust mixed with leaking gases.

Suddenly a figure appeared just a dozen meters away from the awaiting witches. He stood there, overlooking the damage to the ship. It took him a moment to realize that there was anyone besides him out there. He whirled around.

"Hey, what's going on here?" he asked.

Some of the younger witches licked their lips lustily at the sight of the handsome young boy.

Chris got the hint. “Now wait a minute..” He shut his eyes a moment, retrieving a bit of information from one of the weaker witches. “Dathomir.. but.. The witches of Dathomir.. Now I’m in trouble..” he muttered.

“We will not hurt you, if you do not struggle,” Augwyne said.

“You can’t just — look, I’m flattered, really, but I—”

The witches didn’t allow him to finish the statement. Suddenly a fierce storm popped up around him, and before he could think they struck his mind and his vision as well. He’d never been challenged by a dozen driven women before, and he quickly collapsed. In his last moment of consciousness, he tried to use his Sith emblem to help him, but it’s halved power could not. It’s other half did not respond. His last thoughts were of whether Laree was OK or not.

Luke watched as Laree’s eyes fluttered open. “Are you ok, Laree?” he asked quietly, leaning forward to her from his seat.

After coughing a few times, Laree answered. “Yes, I think I’ll be ok. Is Krejt here?”

“He’s upstairs,” Luke said.

Suddenly a man emerged from the turbolift. “We’d received word this girl was doing better,” he said. “I pity you, girl. Your troubles are no where near over.”

Luke turned to him. “What do you mean?”

“I am here representing the Republic’s Senate. A meeting has been set up for one week from today. I have here,” he said, holding out a set of papers, “formal requests..more like orders for a Laree Captison to attend, on trial for treason.”

Chris opened his eyes. He rubbed them a moment, trying to clear them and straighten out his mind. As he looked up into the ceiling, a slender, female face moved into his vision. “You awake?” she asked.

Chris sat up, shaking his head. “Ugg..” he moaned.

“Please, tell me of the name you moaned in your sleep. ‘Laree’, I believe. Are you her slave?” the woman asked.

“Slave?” he asked. But then he remembered something about the way these witches worked with their slaves. If he had an owner already, he couldn’t be claimed.. “Yes.”

She thought a moment. Then she grabbed him by the hand and flew out the door, dragging him along. They ended up in the warroom in front of many of the other witches. She took him to Augwyne.

“What is it, Katrine?” Augwyne asked.

“He claims to be the property of a ‘Laree’,” she said.

“Is this true?” Augwyne asked Chris.

“Yeah,” Chris said.

“You don’t seem completely sure of that. Why not?”

“Well, two reasons,” Chris said admittingly. “I’m not exactly a slave. We were—are—in love. Well, that’s the other thing. I don’t know if she’s still alive.”

“And how could you lose track of something like that?” Augwyne asked.

“She was injured badly when I sent her off my ship to go to Coruscant. I.. don’t know if she made it,” Chris said, lowering his head to stare at the ground.

Augwyne pondered over the situation a few moments. “You have made a convincing case. Indeed, this woman you seek is alive. But not for long, I’m afraid. We’ve heard from Coruscant that a young woman by the name of Laree Captison is going on trial next week for treason.”

“What!?” Chris shouted. “They can’t! She didn’t...” Chris started. Maybe Laree hadn’t done anything, but Coruscant had no way of knowing. It was up to him. “I trust you’ll take care of my ship and crew,” he said.

“Indeed. They’ll be taken care of well.”

Chris disappeared.

Laree Captison entered the Senators’ conference a broken woman. Her hope had fled, her hands bound like those of a criminal, and here she was one. She walked up to the center, guided only by the guards holding her shoulders as she stared at the ground.

“I now call to order this senatorial conference, for the trial of Laree Captison,” called the Speaker, standing in the center of the huge room with Laree. He turned to her. “Laree Captison, do you know of what is it you are being tried?”

“Yes,” she said in a cracked voice.

“How do you plead?” Complete silence in the room.

Just as Laree began to speak, a loud, strong, resonating voice called everyone’s attention. “Not guilty.”

A hushed gasp went throughout the crowd. People began to whisper. “Who said that?” asked the Speaker.

Suddenly, a meter before him, a bright blue cloud appeared, soon forming into the shape of a young



boy. "I lead the attack on Coruscant," Chris said. "She turned my ship away. She saved this planet and everyone on it. Release her and I turn myself in."

The speaker called a small meeting between himself and the other judges, and took them into a separate room. While they were gone, Chris and Laree had a chance to talk a bit, though still under guard.

"Chris, you don't have to do this," Laree said.

"Yes I do," he whispered. "This is it, Laree. My actions could have gotten you killed. I don't ever want something like this to happen again. Even if it means I must die. I've finally seen the true meaning of the Dark Side — when you'd even harm those you love for power. Never again."

She could see in his eyes just how serious he was. The reentry of the speaker took away the chance to respond.

"The council and I have agreed to accept your offer," the speaker said to Chris. He turned to the crowd. "Since he admits to his crimes, the punishment will be taken immediately. Execution has been scheduled for tomorrow morning." He turned back to the guards. "Take him away."

One of the guards stripped Laree's binders and put them on Chris. Then two guards began to push and shove him out of the room. He just let them. Laree too left with an escort: a hundred reporters followed her right up until she slammed and locked her door on them. She leaned back against the door, and wiped the tears from her eyes.

The next morning Laree went with Luke and Gaeriel to see Chris for the last time. Luke went ahead and talked to the guards. "You've got to let us see the boy," he said.

The guard shook his head. "I'm sorry, but regulations permit no one under these circumstances. Not even someone as respected as yourself."

After a few more minutes of getting nowhere, Luke returned to the others. "No such luck," he said. "They won't let us in."

"Then I want to watch it happen," Laree said.

"Are you sure?" Gaeriel asked her.

"Yes."

Chris was thrown into the light room, a dozen soldiers before him. Up the wall was a sheet of glass that he could not see through, but could sense the spectators behind it. One of the presences there snagged his attention, and he looked toward it and smiled. Chris briskly walked before the firing procession, and awaited his death with that smile on his face.

The tears began to fall from Laree's eyes again as she watched Chris get in place. The smile on his face bewildered her, but could not comfort her. She saw as the soldiers began to get in place. An

announcement was made, telling the recorder to record what was happening.

All too soon, a burst of light forced the two-way mirror to go into darkened mode. A few minutes later, Laree could see what had happened. She began to cry ecstatically. Making a scene, she jumped from her seat and ran out of the room.

Luke stayed in his seat, looking at the body of his ex-student. A thought occurred to him. Why hadn't he exploded with dark side energies, or his body disappeared right out of his clothes? Perhaps the darkened glass had masked it. Or perhaps not everything was as it should... but he could not be sure.

That night Laree lay in her bed with the light off. Quietly, she sobbed into her pillow.

She lay like that half the night, when suddenly someone began to stroke her back. She immediately flipped over, looking up at the shadow that she could barely make out before her. Her fear overshadowed her sorrow for the moment, and she muttered "lights," so she could see the intruder.

After a moment of blindness as the bright lights came up, Laree screamed. Chris was standing there! "You're...but you were..."

"I'm here, Laree. That's all that matters. I'm a new man, I guess you could say," Chris said.

Laree smiled a bit as she began to cry harder, and she jumped up and hugged him to make sure he was real. "I thought you were... How did you...?" she asked, still not able to get complete thoughts out.

"I've had this thing planned from minute one. I had to save you, and I knew there was no way to clear my name of what I've done. So I literally got my name cleared from the records by getting killed. Me and Josh have been building that clone for a week now. I controlled it through that trial, and that night up until the execution — the thing died because I took my mind away, not from the blasters. So, everything's worked out — besides the fact I'm dead," Chris grinned.

"I knew it!" said a new voice from the doorway.

Chris turned his head, but could not pull away from his beloved. "Master Skywalker! What are you doing here so late?"

"I knew that was a trick this morning! And I could tell you'd come to Laree first chance you got. And I've got news for you — you may be dead, but you were never alive," Luke said.

"What?" Laree and Chris asked at the same time.

"Chris here was never a citizen of the Republic. They took record that an "unknown alien to the republic" was executed. They can't try you again, and your agreement with the Senate to save Laree was legally binding. Your plan worked, alright. All you've got to do is apply for citizenship and you're alive again — and Leia and I would be willing to pull some strings," Luke said with a smile.

"That would be great, master," Chris said. "But could you leave us alone a moment?"

“Sure,” Luke said, leaving and shutting the door behind him.

“You have no idea how much I missed you, how sad I was when I thought you’d died,” Laree said. “Why couldn’t you tell me?”

“I couldn’t risk anyone knowing. I mean, they knew our relationship. What do you expect them to be thinking if we were both just fine and dandy?” Chris asked. “But, I have a more important question for you.”

Laree waited for him to go on. “Well?”

“Well,” Chris said, “I’ve learned a lot from this whole thing. I meant what I said in the court room. I swear I’ll never let anyone hurt you — including myself — again.” He stepped back from her a bit, taking her hand in his as he kneeled down. “I love you, Laree. Will you marry me?”

In an attempt to lengthen the moment and make it seem she was thinking about it, Laree wiped the drying tears from her face. But she couldn’t hold it long. “Yes!” she let out, enthusiastically.

Chris practically leaped back up, throwing his arms around her, and kissed her.

So they tied the knot, legally this time. They had a double ceremony with Luke Skywalker and Laree’s aunt Gaeriel, only two weeks after “The day Chris was killed” which became a sort of joke between them. Their parents and families attended, giving them their blessing.

But the real blessing came one month after that.

It was a big occasion at the Captison mansion on Bakura, the one month anniversary. All the Captisons were there, including Laree’s mother, Kistra. Also now staying on the planet, though not in the mansion, were Krejt and Josh.

Luke tapped a glass, calling attention to the crowd. “I’d just like to say how great it’s been to stay here on Bakura — but I’m afraid I can’t burden Uncle Yeorg and Aunt Tiree anymore. The Jedi will be moving back to Yavin 4 as soon as possible,” he said.

A groan could be heard from more than one student. Yeorg spoke, “Why is that? It is a pleasure to have you all here.”

“I’m sorry, but I do have my reasons.”

Everyone stood in silence for a few minutes. Laree nudged Chris to speak. “Oof. Uh, um, Master. Maybe — if you don’t mind — Laree and I want to stay here for awhile,” he said.

“I need you to help me at the academy, Chris. Why do you two have to stay?” Luke asked.

“We’ve talked this out, and we think it’s best. Laree’s pregnant,” Chris said.

At that, everyone started talking and congratulating the couple. “Congratulations, you two,” Luke

said. "Stay if you wish. You've still got a great destiny before you."