Star Wars IX- The Balance of the Force

by bee_stings

Summary

Following the events after The Last Jedi. My interpretation of Episode IV. New characters are based on actors who've been cast. Big fan of the movies and books. I am a massive Reylo shipper- #Reyloisendgame, but there is nothing mature rated or not appropriate for say 12-year-old plus. The prologue is an accumulation of quotes that inspired me from Force Awakens, Revenge of the Sith and Grey Jedi Code.

"I appreciated how much you fleshed out the story. truly making it a potential movie in the franchise. I can't not mention the romance. You truly made Ben and Rey's relationship believable on many levels. From his temper and passion to his devotion to Rey, I loved how you didn't make light of his past so that we can accept him easier. They complete each other and their love brings balance to the universe and gives them what they have always wanted - true acceptance and companionship."

"I have not encountered anything so truly amazing since 'Bloodline' (Claudia Grey)."

"I have read so much fanfiction, normally I don't read smutless stories, but this one is so well written, beautiful ending and I couldn't stop today until I finished it."

"This is one of, if not the best Reylo books I have read so far."
Prologue

Chapter Summary

Quotes that inspired me to write this story. They will crop up within my story.

-X- Selection of quotes from the novelisation of Force Awakens and Revenge of the Sith that inspired me along with the Grey Jedi Code. -X-
First comes the day, then comes the night
After the darkness shines through the light
The difference they say is only made right
By resolving of Grey through refined Jedi sight.
Then comes the night.

First comes the day

After the darkness shines through the light.

The difference, they say, is only made right

By the resolving of grey
There is no light without dark
Through passion, I gain focus
Through knowledge, I gain power
Through serenity, I gain strength
Through victory, I gain harmony
There is only the force.

Grey Jedi Code
The dark is generous.

Its first gift is concealment: our true faces lie in the dark beneath our skins, our true hearts remain shadowed deeper still. But the greatest concealment lies not in protecting our secret truths, but in hiding from us the truths of others.

The dark protects us from what we dare not know.

Its second gift is comforting illusion: the ease of gentle dreams in night's embrace, the beauty that imagination brings to what would repel in day's harsh light. But the greatest of its comforts is the illusion that the dark is temporary: that every night brings a new day. Because it is the day that is temporary. Day is the illusion.

Its third gift is the light itself: as days are defined by the nights that divide them, as stars are defined by the infinite black through which they wheel, the dark embraces the light and brings it forth from the centre of its own self.
With each victory of the light, it is the dark that wins.

The dark is generous, and it is patient. It is the dark that seeds cruelty into justice, that drops contempt into compassion, that poisons love with grains of doubt. The dark can be patient because the slightest drop of rain will cause those seeds to sprout. The rain will come, and the seeds will sprout, for the dark is the soil in which they grow, and it is the clouds above them, and it waits behind the star that gives them light. The dark's patience is infinite. Eventually, even stars burn out.

The dark is generous, and it is patient, and it always wins. It always wins because it is everywhere. Walk in the midday sun, and the dark is with you, attached to the soles of your feet. The brightest light casts the darkest shadow.

The dark is generous, and it is patient, and it always wins- but in the heart of its strength lies weakness: one lone candle is enough to hold it back. Love is more than a candle. Love can ignite the stars.

Revenge of the Sith
The Dream

A woman sits at a table in a stone shelter. The domed stone hut is sparsely furnished and old; the stones are dark with stains from the moss which has been cleaned away since they made this their home. Since they've lived here there have been many changes to make it a home- the table, a fireplace, benches, the open holes for windows have shutters and cloth to keep out the rain, wind, and snow during the storm and winter seasons. The wooden shutters, door, and table are from things they have scavenged from the island- the door is from an x-wing long since abandoned. There are extra rooms off this main one, huts they had joined to this one for the sleeping quarters. In each is a simple bed with handmade blankets for a simple, peaceful life. On the table at which she sits are some purple native flowers in a small cup. The flowers are similar to those that had once adorned her home in the sand. Unlike those flowers, however, these are plentiful in supply she can never bear to part with them they were so rare as she'd grown up, so they are scattered around the hut on ledges and next to beds dried but still beautiful.

She sits reading an ancient book; pouring over the words she's read many times before, pouring over the beautiful illustrations of the original Jedi, tracing the dark side and light side of the image gently with her index finger. She looks up and sighs, tucking her loose flowing hair back behind her ears. 'Yes,' she reaffirms to herself; this was the right course.

The door to outside opens and along with a waft of fresh, moist air bounds a young boy he is slight in figure and tall for his age with a mop of untameable black hair. She can feel his excitement, and she smiles at him warmly.

"Mother, come see what father taught me" he cries.

She stands and pulls the hood of her cloak over her head as he takes her hand and gleefully pulls her into the daylight outside.

The wind whips gently at the hair that has escaped from beneath her hood. It's not full storm season yet, and the binary suns are still giving warmth to the day. The boy eagerly leads her across the grass towards the cliff edge where the crouched figure of a man waiting. A large dark cowl covers his entire person, but it's clear even given his current crouched position and clothing that he's tall and broad.

The little boy lets go of her hand, and she stands next to the crouched figure, resting a hand gently on his shoulder. The little boy sits, crossed legged opposite them and closes his eyes, breathing deeply.

"Focus and breathe; let the Force flow through you." The man says encouragingly, his deep voice calm.

Slowly, rocks scattered around the boy from earlier practise, start to float around him, he stacks them in the air. He opens his eyes and smiles up at the woman. Lifting rocks, she thinks to herself. Funny how this is how it always starts, despite what Master Luke had told her all those years ago.

"Congratulations sweetheart, I'm so proud."

The little boy lets the rocks float back down and rises. The man at her side also rises, and as he does, he puts his arm around the woman's waist. She turns and looks at him. His mass of dark hair covers most of his face, but his eyes always so dark and intense are visible as is the scar. It starts far above his eyebrow and runs across his face and down beneath his clothing. It's the scar that she
gave him all those years ago, in a battle in the snow when they were on opposite sides of the same war. It has faded over the years, but it's still there, a constant reminder of a past they must never forget. He stares at her intently, as she traces it lightly with her fingers. When they truly look at each other like this, they see beneath the surface at the others very heart and soul.

He doesn't need to read her mind to know what she's feeling or thinking. She's thinking about the past, her eyes glistening with pride and other emotions—both happy and sad. He leans his head down towards her and kisses her softly, his arms wrapping just a little tighter around her waist. For a moment, and it's just a moment, there is a deepening of shared emotion; they are one. To them, those moments are almost an eternity, as their minds become one through the Force and lifetimes past, present and future merge. When the kiss ends, he gives a warm lopsided smile, boring into her with his eyes. Gently he releases her from his grasp then turns and scoops the boy up with one arm and embraces him tightly, ruffling the boy's hair with his face, breathing him in deeply.

"Well done my boy" he whispers into the boy's hair.

Without looking at her he extends his free hand to her, she takes it, and they walk, hand in hand, back to their home as behind them the binary suns begin to lower casting the world into hues of crimson, pink and yellow.
In a small, simple wooden cabin built amongst the tall tree branches on Ealor, Rey suddenly sits upright on her bunk, gasping clutching her chest. It is dark outside and raining heavily, the sound making a comforting patter on the roof, a few drops coming through the gaps in the ceiling. She can't have been asleep long; dawn here comes early. She can feel the moisture in the air through the open holes that are windows, the humidity now is like the air in the dream, but that moisture was from the sea, cold and with hints of salt. She scrambles out of her sheet and swings her legs over the side of the bunk planting her feet on the rough floor attempting to give herself grounding, still breathing hard, hand on her chest feeling her heart beneath her touch sending its rapid pulses through her bloodstream.

"Just a dream, it was just a dream," she says aloud attempting to calm herself, but the feeling doesn't dissipate, and her heart is still racing. She stands and walks towards the doorway to the fresh air outside, trying to get the images out; a child her child and his. She feels sick and faint, is this a panic attack?

She walks outside her hut and stands in the rain holding onto the wooden railing of the platform around the cabin tightly to give her balance. She is high up in the trees, and the dark outline of trees is pretty much all she can see except for the moon which is diffusing a bluish-grey light over the landscape, lighting up the droplets as they cascade from the sky. She tilts her head back, closing her eyes, allowing the rain to fall onto her face, cleansing her. She's only in her simple wrap undergarments and the night air is cold, and the rain is soaking her through, making her loose hair cling to her face, neck, and back. She doesn't care; it is helping, something else to think about, anything but that dream, that boy, that kiss. She shivers slightly, her skin prickling due to the wet and cold.

Breathe Rey just breathe, she wills herself and closes her eyes. Breathe. It was just a dream, just a dream.

In the Supreme Leaders quarters of the new First Order's Supremacy Ship, Supreme Leader Kylo Ren suddenly sits bolt upright in his large bed breathing hard. He never sleeps well or long, but this is different. He reaches up to his chest where the boy had been hugging him tightly, and he'd held him just as tight. He can still smell the scent of his hair, a mixture of salt from the sea and native plants. He pulls the thin black sheet off him and places his bare feet on the cold hard dark floor and puts his head in his hands, pulling his hair out of his face and breathes hard.

"Just a dream, it was just a dream," saying the words out loud he hopes to satiate his roiling emotions, the conflict of the feelings of the dream with the ones he usually feels. It doesn't work. He stands and steps a little uneasily but purposefully across his quarters to the sink and turns on the water dispenser, throwing full handfuls of cold water onto his face. Over the sink is a mirror, he stares at his reflection, trying to calm his emotions.

It had been a long time since he'd seen her face, in person or a vision or through the Force bond that still existed between them. The memory of her beauty tormented him from the first time he saw her. The last time they'd seen each other she was stood on the gangway to his father's ship the Millennium Falcon, her face awash with sadness but also disappointment. He'd known then that what he'd said to Luke about destroying her had been a bold, impetuous lie both to himself and Luke; he would no longer destroy her than himself. He wanted her, needed her, but just like the door she'd closed on the ship, their bond had remained that way- closed. He'd thought of her since,
felt nudges on his consciousness at times, and he could sense her, albeit remotely, her strong light presence like a ripple in the Force that grew stronger as she did, but he'd kept his mind shut. He longed for her, but he couldn't forget her betrayal, she'd rejected him, abandoned him, like his father and mother before her. She'd made her choice as he had made his. Different sides of the same never-ending war between darkness and light, he is Supreme Leader of the First Order, and she is a leader of the Resistance nothing could change that now. Snoke was dead, so his admission that the bond was by his doing was a lie. The bond wasn't gone, but by their mutual will, it was closed.

The last time he'd seen anything like this dream had been when their hands had touched, while she was on Ahch-To. He was haunted by that moment by what he'd seen and what he thought would undoubtedly be but hadn't come to pass. This vision, this dream was different though he'd felt something deep in his stomach and in his chest something he hadn't felt since they'd touched hands and fought side by side - a sense of belonging. The alienation and loneliness that hung around him like armour had gone, all be it temporarily. In the dream, he'd felt contentment, love, and remnants of it lingered now. He shuddered with staggered breaths as he looked at his reflection; he could see that weakness, the fragility caused by emotional attachments. He watched the conflicting emotions flitting across his face and behind his eyes as he attempted to regain control. With one fast, impulsive motion, he smashed the mirror with his right hand. The mirror shattered, but the glass stayed where it was, distorting his image into multiple partial images with no complete reflection.

"Isn't that fitting" he mused to himself, the image reflected was a perfect depiction of his muddled thoughts.

He looked down at his hand and ran the blood off under the water dispenser.

As he clenched his fists into balls and breathed out deeply attempting to meditate, there was a pensive knock on his chamber door.

"Supreme Leader?"

He paced over to the door, angrily and pressed the button to open it. A nervous stormtrooper jumped back slightly from where he'd been standing.

"Everything's fine," Kylo snapped curtly.

"Yes Supreme Leader."

Kylo abruptly shut the door; stood for a moment contemplating. There would be no more sleeping tonight; he intended to go to the training room to rid himself of this weakness immediately.

"It's nothing, just a dream," he reaffirmed to himself as he went to dress.
Rey and the Resistance

On the Resistance base on Ealor a planet in the outer rim territories, in a wooden hut high in the tree branches, Rey sat on her cot staring at her feet. She'd been dressed for hours having been unable to get back to sleep yet again. It had been so long since her dreams weren't this recurring one. Every night, every time she closed her eyes, it was the same thing- him and their child.

The last time she'd seen him, other than the dreams, was on Crait and then it had been through their bond. As she'd stood on the boarding ramp of the Millennium Falcon the bond had opened, and she could see him as he kneeled on the floor of the operations room from where the Resistance had just fled. His face awash with different emotions he had looked heartbreakingly sad, but he was also angry. Angry, his duel with Luke had been purely a distraction. Angry the Resistance had escaped due to his folly and angry at her. How she'd felt about him was of no consequence, he had made his choice for power, and it was a path she could not join him on. She'd closed the door on the Falcon and closed her mind to him at that moment. They were enemies, complicated enemies, but still enemies.

She'd sensed him since when meditating in the Force and when training with her saber; she could feel his presence. He was so strong he was undeniable as she stretched out with her feelings. She felt peaks in the Force radiating from him. She thought of him of course, of course, she knew that was ridiculous but a part of her had wanted to join him, to be with him just like she'd seen in her vision when their hands had touched on Ahch- To, but her vision had shown him turning from the dark and that hadn't happened. Ben had been there for a fleeting moment, as he killed Snoke and fought at her side, but then Kylo Ren had returned hungry for power.

It didn't change though how she felt then or now she'd been alone her whole life; she had friends now admittedly- Finn, Rose, Poe but they'd never really understand. Ben had been there when she was scared and alone. He'd taught her and listened to her when Luke had turned her away. With Ben, there had been an understanding; understanding no one else could or would ever really come close to. She'd felt a sense of belonging when they'd touched hands; completeness something she'd sought her whole life. It had felt as though they were one, like being together was meant to be. She felt haunted, haunted by a memory and a dream of a man who was gone.

Rey had realised since Crait how right Master Luke had been when he'd told her it wouldn't go the way she'd think, how naive she had been, to believe Kylo would turn if she went to him. His choice wasn't as simple as she'd assumed and she wasn't enough she understood now to turn him back to the light; he had to do it, and he had to want to. The future she knew now was too complicated to see clearly; visions of the future may come to you but interpreting them was something else. In a way, they'd both been right. He hadn't bowed before Snoke. She had stood with him. They'd both assumed that meant they'd turn; her to the dark and him to the light. They'd both assumed wrongly. There was light in Kylo yes but not enough; his desire for control and power was too strong, and she'd left him there in the throne room. She'd stood for a moment, standing over his unconscious form thinking as Luke once had that one swift strike and so much suffering could be over. She couldn't do it. There were too many possibilities; his death had not been the will of the Force. The Force wasn't finished with him yet. She would wait, however arduous. Her life on Jakku had trained her to do two things better than anyone. The first was to salvage broken things and the second was to wait. She couldn't save Ben Solo; she would have to wait for him to save himself. So far, that had not happened.

Kylo had not pursued the resistance as relentlessly as they had expected. Perhaps serious conversations regarding failures on Crait had been had. It was feasible with Luke gone that the
Resistance was no longer considered the huge threat Snoke had deemed them to be. Or perhaps Kylo had changed now Snoke wasn't controlling and manipulating him. She doubted that last one. The Force would make its will known, and she would continue to wait to know her part in it.

As a consequence of not being relentlessly pursued, the Resistance had grown and substantially. Crait had been the spark. General Organa had been rebuilding the Republic for the last year and was finally making headway. The leaders were scattered on different planets and in different systems, it was safer than having everyone in one place. Rey had chosen to stay with the main Resistance fleet with Finn, Rose, and Poe. They still moved about, but it wasn't the terrifying rush it had been before. They'd spent many months on each of the planets before moving on.

After choosing to stay with the main Resistance after Crait, Rey had spent the first month reading the ancient Jedi texts on Ikkukk with Chewie and Maz trying to find a way to fix the crystal from Luke's lightsaber after it had shattered in it's joint calling to her and Kylo Ren. It hadn't been possible; Maz, however, had known where to go to get a new crystal- Ilum and so she and Maz had left. Chewie had flown them in the Falcon and had waited while she and Maz entered the cave; it hadn't been easy. Maz had informed her that the Empire had destroyed the standard entrances centuries earlier. It took a few days of digging and climbing, but once they had scrambled into the cave, there had been crystals everywhere. Rey had not known what she was supposed to do, chisel one out of the rock? Maz, of course, in her infinite wisdom did know. Rey had bent while Maz took her hands and had told Rey what she'd told her on Takodana, with those soothing big eyes focused on her.

"Close your eyes, feel it, the Force. It moves through and surrounds every living thing. The light it's always been there. It will guide you."

Closing her eyes and reaching out with her feelings, Rey could feel a pull and keeping her eyes closed she had followed it; a crystal had called to her just as Luke's saber had. As she reached the crystal it glowed, and as she touched it, no chiselling was required, it had released itself. The crystal itself sadly was not enough, and a new saber still needed to be constructed, so they had returned to Ikkukk.

Rey rose from her bed and left her hut and held onto the railing around her cabin to steady herself and her mind, as she breathed the cold predawn air in deeply. The atmosphere on Ealor always seemed slightly moist; she could feel tiny drops of water in her nose as she breathed. It was due to the forest in which the base sat. The trees surrounded her entire vision with huts adorning their branches. The trees varied in size, but all were bigger than any she'd ever seen, which was few and in every hue of green a colour she'd rarely seen on Jakku. On the ground in a clearing were X-wings and the central command bunker with all their computers and provisions. She could see other Resistance members starting their daily schedules; maintenance and training mostly. In the clear pale blue-grey sky above she could see the outline ever so faintly of Resistance ships. This planet was beautiful; she loved forests so lush and green, so different from Jakku. She'd been to so many wondrous places since leaving Jakku all different, none gratefully as hot. Crait with the white salt and crystal foxes, Ahch-To with the sea surrounding it, Takodana with the lakes, Ilum with the Kyber crystal caves had actually been covered in snow, not like the snow she'd fought Kylo in on Star Killer base; this snow had seemed blue.

"Just a dream, just a dream," she said it out loud, yet again Kylo had entered her thoughts unwittingly, with a single idea came all her memories of him- the kidnapping, the fights, the conversations, the connection, and the dream. She needed to calm her mind, to stop thinking about him, he was gone. Her mind, however, wouldn't stop. Extremely unlikely this doesn't mean something it reminded her. You've been waiting for the Force to show you your path given that it's every night this may be the answer you've been waiting for. Her dreams of an island had been
realised with her voyage to Ahch-To after all. She gave an exasperated sigh.

"You ok?"

Rey turned to see Rose. The petite woman was smiling at her a smile that touched every feature on her face, including her eyes. Rose was so kind; Rey could see why Finn was so taken with her. It was different from her and Finn's friendship. Rose had lifted him up, believed in him and made him better, a man who'd wanted to remain a part of the Resistance and become a great leader. With Rey he'd been loyal to a fault, he was her first friend, and she was his, but it hadn't felt equal on both sides; with Rose, he had that.

"I didn't sleep well," Rey replied, smiling back at her, although she was sure her smile hadn't hidden her muddled mind.

"Bad dream?" Rose responded

"Yeah," let's call it that Rey thought a bad dream.

Rose looked at her friend. The young woman was tall and slim but powerfully built, more so since she'd first met her when Rey had rescued them with the Wookie Chewie on Crait. She'd been training hard. Rey had been with Finn when Rose had woken up in a medical bed, and she had instantly known who she was. Finn had never shut up about her. On meeting Rey, Rose could see why he'd liked her so much. To Rose though Rey had seemed sad; something that Finn, of course, was oblivious too. As a fellow woman who'd felt personal family loss, Rose understood, and after her recovery, she'd made an effort to acquaint herself with the young woman. It was so lovely to find another woman she could speak to about engineering and ships. Rey had known all about parts and was a great mechanic. It was like having her sister Paige around her again. She'd told Rey all about her sister and Rey had always listened with an understanding and knowing face; loss was something she also understood. Rose had been thrilled when Rey asked for her support with her lightsaber. Rose had excitedly helped her dismantle it, studying the inner mechanics and discussing in animated tones about how it must work and what was required. When Rey had returned from Ilum with her new crystal, she'd asked for Rose's help again along with the Wookie. It was a real privilege to help create something so important; it had been exhilarating for Rose the Jedi were something from stories! It hadn't been easy, of course, and Rose did not speak Wookie, so that had been interesting. Everything with the Wookie was like that, interesting, but he was so experienced, and his huge furry paws were impressively adept at working with parts no matter how small.

Rose got the feeling Rey was keeping something from her and worryingly, that seemed to be happening more and more. Rey was becoming powerful and more knowledgeable of the Force. With this came a slight disconnect between her and her friends. Rose had noticed Poe who'd been almost falling over himself to spend time with Rey back off more and more; he'd clearly noticed it too. Finn hadn't of course, big clueless dummy, but he was her dummy.

"You can tell me anything, you know. We worry about you." Rose reached her hand to touch Rey's still holding tightly to the railing.

A wave of anguish and confusion swarmed over Rey's face, and her eyes welled.

"I know you'd like to believe that but I can't. You wouldn't understand. I'm not sure I understand it myself."

"Try me."

Rey could see Rose's sincerity. What if she told her general information about what was troubling
her, avoid the specifics. Avoid mentioning him.

"I..." She hesitated, and Rose squeezed her hand again, reassuringly. She turned from Rose and gazed back at the trees; eventually, she spoke.

"I never grieved for the loss of my family because I always thought they'd come back. Deep down, I always knew they wouldn't, but now I do feel a real loss. I'm haunted by my memories and by my dreams."

Rose gave her a sympathetic smile.
"For your parents? Or is it Luke?"

Rey looked at her with a furrowed brow. She could let Rose believe that, but what sense would it make.
"No, not for my parents and not for Luke, Luke will never really be gone."
She turned from Rose again and looked down from the railing to the ground below summoning the courage. Could she tell Rose what she had said to no one else?

"The memory is of someone, who held my hand across the stars through the Force, through a bond that only we share. Now he's gone, and I don't think he's ever coming back, and he haunts me. My dreams are of him, and every night it's the same."

Rose hadn't missed how someone had changed to him. If Rey wasn't talking about Luke, it had to be another Force user to fit with what Rey was saying. Couldn't be Finn or Poe they were here and saw Rey every day, though their tightly knit friendship had changed. Perhaps, Jakub, he'd been in Finn's initiative a while, but Rey was talking as though this person was gone permanently. She decided to ask more; but not about the person.

"What are your dreams about- the memory? The past?"

"No. The dreams appear to be about the future, but they can't be."

"Why not?"

"I saw a future before with him in it, it was solid and clear, and I was wrong. What I see now it cannot be, it just can't."

Rose wanted to press Rey, to unburden her some more but at that moment Finn came bounding up the walkway towards them all smiles, first for Rose (which she admitted made her feel special) then Rey.

"Morning ladies, are we ready for the day?"

Rose removed her hand from Rey's and turning they both smiled back at him.

Rose knew that was enough for him; couldn't pick up on a thing silly boy. He entwined his hand around Rose's, giving her a steady look. He did that every morning since Crait to check nothing was physically wrong, once he was satisfied she was ok, he kissed her gently on the cheek then turned to Rey again.

"Absolutely," she replied a mask of happiness replacing the torment which had been there moments earlier.
On the Supremacy Ship of the First Order, all the significant Generals and high ranking officials sat around a table General Valax, General Kail, Grand Admiral Skalick, Vice Admiral Renor, General Targo, Admiral Deltan and Colonel Kramer, with Supreme Leader Kylo Ren at the head of the table. A version of his previous metal helmet had returned after Crait not a full helmet but a mask. His new half mask was fashioned from the remnants of his old helmet which he'd smashed to pieces in a fit of rage against the walls of the elevator. His eyes and head were no longer fully encased. His dark eyes were now visible, but only barely his immense dark cowl had returned keeping his face within the confines of the shadows beneath. The mask did the same job his helmet had. It lowered his already deep voice further and added a slight mechanical reverberation, instilling dread in those with which he conversed with every word he spoke. Now he was Supreme Leader intimidation, and inspiring fear amongst his subordinates was necessary, he needed to seem more than a mere human. He was as foreboding and menacing as he had been before, his scars adding to the terror he inflicted. Before he'd been a faceless creature now, he appeared half man and half machine one melting into the other. Somehow this seemed more effective than when he'd been hiding within his helmet.

To Supreme Leader, Kylo Ren's right sat General Hux. General Armitage Hux was listening intently to intel about the Resistance and their attempts to rebuild the Republic from General Kail and General Valax. His face had an angry grimace, and his eyes were narrowed to slits. How had their Leader allowed this to happen? Hux, however, knew the answer to his own question. Hux knew Ren was not a fit leader; he'd proven that with the disaster on Crait. Hux had not hidden his disgust regarding that failure from the other leaders or Ren. Snoke was necessary after the Empire had fallen, but he and his apprentice were in Hux's mind a temporary measure. The military prowess of his armies, his technology would bring the galaxy to heel and under his control. He hadn't disposed of his own father and done all this to sit at the right hand of Ren! Ren was unpredictable, emotional and dangerous. One of those increasingly obsolete Force-sensitive individuals. Hux knew the Force existed; he had the bruises to prove it from the multiple times Snoke and Ren had used it against him. Hux considered the Force nothing but mystical nonsense even if it's users had enhanced skills and abilities. Snoke was dead and that suited Hux. As far as he was concerned the time of the Jedi, the Sith and all Force users was over.

Hux had to save Ren on several occasions, and he'd delighted in those moments of Ren's failure. He'd had to track and rescue Snoke's apprentice from the snow's of Starkiller Base. The embarrassing debacle on Crait where the Resistance had actually escaped because Ren had engaged in a single combat fight with the Jedi Luke Skywalker. It had all turned out to be an elaborate facade The Jedi hadn't ever actually been there. Hux had seen genuine fear in Ren's eyes that day. It had been a rare sight which he had malevolently enjoyed. Ren was a slave to his emotions, and unlike Snoke, he was not wise enough to keep his Force sorcery to himself. To Hux, Ren was a delusional, distracted emotional being. That would not do for the First Order's Supreme Leader! Hux knew to look around the table; he was not the only one who felt that way. Several other high ranking officials Grand Admiral Skalick and Vice Admiral Renor, General Valax and General Kail had fought their way to their current positions under Hux and his father's leadership. They supported him and were wary of their new self appointed Supreme Leader.

Hux had proved himself time and again rebuilding their forces single-handedly. New children being brought from the smaller planets to train to become stormtroopers, as well as those still destined from birth. His First Order troops were the combination of the Empire's clone troopers and Jedi ideas of training from childhood. It amused Hux that his troops were the real legacy of that old religion the Jedi. It hadn't been perfect though so Hux had personally looked at the training

**Supreme Leader Kylo Ren**
programme; there would be no more questioning and desertion, not like FN 2187. He'd overseen the upgrade of an old imperial Dreadnaught into their new Supremacy ship. His technicians and scientists were continuing to work on their tracking devices, in the hopes of finally bringing an end to the Resistance and the new false Republic.

Ren had been uninterested in all of it. He wanted to end the Resistance, yes, but he had no real comprehension of what that entailed. Ren was a man of action, and brute force Hux was the one with the ideas and the long term goals. He could play the long game. He'd been playing it long enough. It had started with his father; Snoke had been his next target. He was grateful to Ren and the girl for sorting out that issue. He knew Ren was involved; he wasn't stupid. The girl wasn't that powerful. She'd had help- Ren's help. The new Supreme Leader was a traitor, and when it was of the most use to Hux, he would use that to lay claim to the throne. Hux had learnt the hard way on a few occasions now that Ren wouldn't fail to use his abilities to get what he wanted. Hux had to find a way of taking those abilities off the table. He watched Ren closely; he had his spies and was acutely aware that Ren deeply mistrusted him and so he should. Hux didn't need Ren; however, Ren needed him, his army and his resources. Hux's primary objective was to get rid of Ren. He often remised himself for not shooting Ren in the throne room whilst he was unconscious, but he would have the chance again. The plan had been formulated over the months, and he had everything he needed, soon it would come to fruition. He'd hired the assassin, and he had the support of the essential members of this table, which was the majority of this table. Soon Ren would no longer be Supreme Leader.

"Supreme leader?" he questioned.

They'd been waiting around the table for some time for their leader's opinion, and Ren had been silent. He was often silent, but there was very little way of knowing if he was listening or not. Ren's face was entirely hidden within the shadow of his low cowl; he could be asleep for all they knew.

"Supreme leader," he said again a little louder. He was tempted to kick Ren in the leg; however, he knew that action would only end one way; with himself smashed against the table or wall or being choked on the spot. Hux didn't relish any of those options. As respectfully as he could muster, he kept saying 'Supreme Leader' while leaning forward to where Ren's view might be beneath the lowered hood.

Kylo's sight was interrupted by Hux's leering and disparaging face. He was speaking to him attempting to get his attention; Kylo had been deep in thought. Any noise and movements at the table blurred out by his contemplations. Kylo Ren was accomplished at meditating for hours at a time without his surroundings affecting him. His breath lowered so that to the unobservant bystander, he might not seem to be breathing at all. However, currently, he was not meditating; he was lost deep in a concerning series of thoughts- the dream, again. He was exhausted and so distracted; it had been the same every night for months. Rey and their boy on the cliff edge were burned into his every dream and waking thought. Her sunbathed beauty and their boy's wild familiar smell. The vision was plaguing him, and it was agonising.

Kylo lifted his head, allowing in a slight penetration of light. He turned his head towards Hux then around the table in recognition that they now had his attention. He fumed at himself, his already taut muscles tensed further and he flexed his gloved fists on the table. Around the table, he could see the high ranking officials tensing slightly; his anger affected the Force and the subsequent atmosphere in the room. He had no idea what he'd been asked, and he didn't care. He hadn't imagined in killing Snoke that leading the First Order would be like this. The control and the power was everything he had ever wanted, everything he'd joined the darkside for, killed and sacrificed for. He chastised himself; he should've known better. His mother was the leader of the
Republic and had been so busy and so burdened. She had abandoned him regularly to oversee matters then sent him away to his Uncle Luke. It had been his destiny to follow in her footsteps and rule the Galaxy, she was a Princess and he, he was a Prince. Those ideas of entitled power were childish; he realised now. He'd been a child playing at being a dark lord, A Jedi killer doing what he thought was required to fall further into darkness for the power. To be as renowned as his grandfather the infamous Darth Vader.

Since he'd rid himself of Snoke, however, his mind was open, free of the manipulations and invasions. As Snoke's apprentice he'd had to reign in all his emotions and thoughts, keep it boiling just under the surface. Always fearful of Snoke's intrusion into his mind and the subsequent punishment he would ultimately be subjected to. He was more self-aware, ever since the girl- Rey. She'd criticised him face value unafraid of any consequences. To her, he listened he wanted to prove to her and himself that he was more than the monster she saw.

He'd wanted to bring order to the galaxy. Finally, there would be real peace and real order, but leading the First Order was all politics. Politics was exhausting, and he definitely did not have the temperament or patience for it. Too much of your father's heart in you young Solo, Snoke's words returned to his mind. He wasn't like his mother; he was like his father, Snoke had been right. Kylo found sitting around a table tedious. Listening to self-important people debating over nothing, they simply wanted to hear their own voice to prove to themselves and others that they were as important as they believed. He wanted to take everyone he disagreed with and throw them across the room, or worse. Most of the time, he was able to restrain that urge but often not. The self-important people around the table truly despised being treated like his disposable objects to be tossed aside, at times rather literally. They like Hux did not believe he should be their leader, a bone of contention that he could feel growing daily. He could feel caution, distrust, anxiety, fear, and disdain emanating from them all in different measures. That was why he'd wanted her to join him. To bring a New Order to the galaxy- no need for all these people or the New Republic just him and her. Kylo was sure if she had taken his hand, none of it would be like this. This memory tormented him. The already tense atmosphere increased as Kylo considered her rejection again and the dream.

"Supreme Leader" Hux repeated for the third time, or possibly more Kylo had no idea. "What would you like done about the conflict dragging on, on Fondor?"

He contemplated for a moment. Fondor was an industrial planet that made munitions, and the conflict would not be some raging war but a mere standoff. He needed to get off this ship, to unleash and fight — no more debating and politics. The dreams were ruining his energy; he was unbalanced more than he'd ever been; this was a perfect opportunity.

"I'll go myself" Kylo replied

"Supreme..." Kylo cut Hux off

"I'll go myself, with my knights" He stood and stormed out the room.

Hux looked around the table at the other leaders; he attempted to suppress a smile. This was his chance, and he must take it quickly. Around the table, Hux could see those other Generals and officers, who supported him, a mutual understanding of what would happen next.

"Our Supreme Leader will go himself".
Colonel Poe Dameron sat in the base's main room of operations on Ealor. The place is dark as there are few windows due to the station being hunkered low into the earth. There are lights above, though they only give off a dim yellow glow, the primary source of light comes from the computers and screens scattered around were a few Resistance officers sit quietly sending and receiving messages, checking stock and backing up systems.

Poe sits with his elbows on the main round, holotable his head resting in his hands as he scratches at his head. Commander D'Arcy has just given him new Intel that has come in from their source on the Supremacy- Kira. Supreme Leader Kylo Ren had left the ship with his Knights for Fondor. There was a long ongoing conflict on Fondor which was causing issues for the First Order in terms of restocking of weapons and equipment. The Resistance was using the fray to restock theirs. Poe was pondering over the intelligence he'd received, could this be an opportunity worth taking and if it was how would they take it?

Poe was positive that the removal of Supreme Leader Kylo Ren would not magically make the war end. The removal of the last Supreme Leader had not affected the First Orders' directive; there were too many other high ranking officers who wanted a similar outcome. General Hux, in particular, was far too invested and if anything the predominant threat. He may not be the formidable Force wielder or head of the First Order that Kylo Ren was, but he was a strategist and still had the entire First Order at his command. Unlike Kylo, Hux would never personally put himself in a position of conflict, he was not a fighter, he was a coward who valued his life too much, but that made him dangerous. Hux had reportedly brought about his own father's demise and had been responsible for the idea of Starkiller base and the destruction of the New Republic. Sources said he was intelligent, insane and power-hungry — a psychotic coward with an army behind him. Poe sighed. The enemy seemed to be never-ending. Snoke was gone, but the First Order remained, how were they to defeat them? Thankfully dealing with the First Order and Kylo Ren wasn't Poe's responsibility alone. Others within the Republic and Resistance would make those decisions with him- Leia, Calrissian, Numb, Statura, Ematt, Finn and others. Poe would carry out their wishes.

The thought and even mention of Kylo Ren made Poe shudder, a consequence of his capture. Poe's memories of Kylo's power, the mental pain he'd caused, and what Kylo had learnt as he had callously rifled through Poe's mind. Poe knew Kylo had found more than just information useful to the downfall of the Resistance. Poe's secrets, sacred family memories and most profound fears they had all flitted across his mind's eye as Kylo had rummaged around indiscriminately. However, Poe had to remind himself as the new leader of the Resistance; he could not make this personal. Leia trusted him. He'd learnt from his mistakes to be better than the pilot she'd taken under her wing. She'd groomed him for command, and he would not let her, the Republic or the Resistance down. It was a heavy burden. He now understood Leia's actions in slapping him and demoting him. Being in charge meant making the tough decisions, not being the hero, and it was hard. Jumping in an x-wing and blowing something up wasn't, it was easy in comparison, and he missed it.

A sound of light footsteps approaching interrupted Poe's thoughts. He raised his head and looked in the direction of the noise and saw Rey. His mood instantly lightened. He liked her. He had hoped on finally spending some time with her following the rescue on Crait that there might be more, that they could be more. Finn had never shut up about her once he'd recovered from his injuries on Starkiller Base and Leia obviously thought highly of her as she'd sent her to bring her brother back from hiding. She was slight but surprisingly robust, and he was impressed by her Force sensitivity and loyalty. They had only spoken in passing before she'd gone to Ahch-To, about Finn mostly. Despite knowing her so little, he'd noticed she was different since Ahch-To, distant somehow. They'd still talked a lot since Crait, even trained together, both on the ground and in the sky. She
was a good pilot, a decent shot with a blaster and lethal with that staff of hers. Poe had a few bruises to show for it but he’d long since given up attempting to train with her, she was too skilled, he didn’t challenge her sufficiently, and he’d become increasingly busy with his official duties. Since their reunion on Crait, she’d also managed to engineer her own lightsaber. In keeping with her natural fighting style, Rae had created it in a long-handled staff form. He’d wanted to go with her to Ilum, to get the kyber crystal she needed, the lightsaber she had been using had split and the crystal shattered. She wouldn’t say how. To see such a place of history and legend was a thing of dreams but with Leia rebuilding the Republic and Resistance, he’d had to step up and so he couldn’t go with her. She’d come back with what she needed and had sat for weeks pouring over these old books with Chewie and Rose, taking the old lightsaber apart analysing it and then recreating it in a new way- into her staff saber. It was cool he didn’t mind admitting brilliant purple light from both ends of the handle creating a dual blade weapon. Watching her spinning it about was like seeing the stories his parents had told him as a kid come to life. Who’d have thought I’d know a Jedi, see one train, train with one. It was a privilege. As she’d enhanced herself, however, whatever hopes he had for them had dwindled, her disassociation with others was not coming out of choice but out of nature. Who she was becoming was so different from everyone around her, and it made her distant somehow, remote and reserved. This morning she looked burdened, the circles around her eyes had been getting darker over the last few weeks. She looked tired, and she carried herself differently like something invisible was weighing her down.

"Morning," he offered, trying to sound cheerful. He had come to some sort of decision regarding the Intel he’d received, and he would need her help.

She smiled at him. It was an enchanting smile in a lovely face he thought to himself, and she meant it genuinely. Even burdened, she was still understatedly beautiful, and due to her natural disposition, she was always so easy to smile, but it didn’t quite reach her eyes anymore. Unlike the Jedi of old these detached religious knights, aloof to be admired from afar, Rey had attachments, friends, and compassion was part of who she was but whatever was troubling her she was keeping it to herself.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Just tired," she said with an attempt at a reassuring smile as she sat next to him. She liked Poe; he was roguishly good-looking- dark wavy hair and a handsome face. Incredibly charming with an easy devilish smirk of a smile and boundless energy or he had until leading the Resistance had been passed to him. He reminded her of Han, a lot. He was a talker, confident and often cocky, but then he was older than her, Finn and Rose, maybe that was why he possessed such qualities? He was experienced within the Resistance as a pilot and fighter but also in his life experiences. The places he’d been, the people he’d met and the things he’d seen. If Leia hadn’t known his parents as a child, she wondered if he would’ve ended up where he was- a Resistance leader. She could easily imagine him as a smuggler or a bounty hunter, swindling people the way Han had with that smooth-talking mouth of his that could wrangle its way out of any situation or at least try to. Maybe that was why Leia liked him so much.

He looked at her quizzically, clearly concerned by what he saw. She knew she looked tired. The dreams were relentless, and she had to do something about it. She felt unbalanced, agitated like she needed to run. The Force wanted her to do something, but it wasn’t talking to Poe. She needed to speak to Ben; to see Ben. She’d attempted to reopen their connection over the last few weeks when the dream had become regular but had got nothing, just a sense of him, nothing more. He was maintaining a closed mind to her, but his dark presence was causing peaks in the Force that she could feel and she knew that meant something.

Poe decided not to push her. If she wanted to talk to him, she would.
"Me too. Look I'm glad you're here, we've had some Intel, and I think you might help resolve it if you're up for it?"

A chance to do something, be useful. Maybe fight, maybe fly, she didn't care as long as it meant a change to the current situation of training here on Ealor and not sleeping.

"Yeah. What's the Intel?" She asked eagerly.

Poe took a breath. He knew how Rey didn't like to talk about Kylo Ren. She always went silent, staring at the floor whenever Kylo Ren came up. He knew they had very different ideas about him. According to Rey, Kylo Ren had killed Snoke himself, and Rey insisted despite everything that he had never hurt her. If only Poe could say the same, he couldn't see Kylo Ren the same way Rey did and so he had become a mute topic of conversation.

"Supreme Leader Kylo Ren is reportedly flying to Fondor with just his Knights to deal with the conflict there, whether the conflict continues isn't the issue, but this could be a real opportunity for us."

Rey took a moment. Not alone, but not with an army. She knew very little about the Knights of Ren, no more than anyone else did. The Knights were Force-sensitive, not as naturally predisposed with the Force as Ben or herself. Padawans from Master Luke's training temple, who'd gone with Ben after he'd destroyed it. A dozen had gone, but she wasn't sure if that many still existed.

"What do you want me to do?" she said, looking directly at Poe.

"Go to Fondor. There are Resistance members there, native inhabitants who rose up against the First Order. Help them. You'll go alone in an X-Wing. I don't want to risk any fighters or pilots unnecessarily. Stop Kylo."

Poe had deliberately not said kill him. He wasn't sure how well that would go down, with anyone actually. The Supreme Leader was Leia's son, after all. Leia and Rey insisted there was still good in him, light and he knew Leia, in particular, wanted her son home.

"Capture him if you can. If you do there are shuttles on the planet you can come back in. Take R2. If you capture him, R2 can return with the X-Wing." He added.

Rey knew this wouldn't be easy, but this is what she'd wanted, what the Force seemed to be willing her to do, a chance to see him in person. She had questions, and she needed answers, and there was no one else to ask and with his mind closed to her in person was her only option. This was her only option.

"Okay," she said firmly, "When do I leave?"
Kylo Ren and his Knights were standing within the officer's hangar of the Supremacy waiting to board Kylo's personal Upsilon-class command shuttle. Its vast wings stood out from the other ships marking it as his command shuttle, appearing like a dark, grim bird of prey among smaller more minor birds. This shuttle was designed to protect their valuable passengers by having advanced sensors and armour that other shuttles did not.
Like Kylo his Knights were dressed in long black robes all with individual black and chrome style.
masks and weapons. Masks had been Kylo's armour, hiding his emotions and who he'd once been from the galaxy. His Knights; padawans who'd followed him from Luke's temple, had followed his lead in adopting and adapting their own masks. All were Force-sensitive, and when Kylo had brought them before Snoke, Snoke had been pleased, no appreciative. Only six out of the dozen who'd followed him had survived Snoke's requirements and subsequent training; if training is what you could call it. All went by their Knights of Ren name, the one they'd been born with dropped and forgotten as they'd forged themselves a place in the dark just as Kylo had. Each Knight had their preference for weapons. All the weapons had been customised as Snoke's Praetorian guards had been with electro plasma energy filaments for blades or vibro vogules to deflect sabers. Sabers could still fight against them effectively but couldn't merely slice through them as they could with almost everything else. Airez Ren was the Armoury, favouring a long metal staff but also carrying other weapons. His helmet was simple with a single narrow slit for sight although his eyes could not be seen the slit was so thin. Icesho Ren was the Monk, the vast cowl he wore went down to his knees, and he favoured his blackened Poleaxe. His mask never visible was a mould of his square hard-featured face. Baxil Ren was humanoid, and his mask showed that, by having a snout on the front. He favoured his massive double-ended club. Loccey Ren was the sniper, preferring a blaster and a bow. She was humanoid, but her mask hid that completely. It came down low over her neck; a checkered draughtboard faceplate, flat and except for the wide slit across the top for sight. The Rogue, Covex Ren was humanoid; a Trandoshan, favouring a massive curved sword and a hood from which the mask was barely visible. Kylo knew, however, that the mask followed the lines of his reptilian face. Erdu Ren was best at hand to hand combat. He carried a wicked-looking mace and a blaster that had weighted tips so it could be used as both shield and weapon. The front of his mask jutted out into a point so that it could be used in hand to hand combat rendering an opponent useless with one forward thrust of his head.

The Knights of Ren had been forced through Snoke's teachings to battle each other physically meaning the remaining six along with Kylo were elite warriors. They like Snoke's guards had specialised in Melee combat which was ruthless and persistent. None, however, were a match for their leader Kylo one-on-one, which was why he'd been named the Master of the Knights of Ren above the others. The Knights were Force-sensitive but not Force users as Kylo was, they were an instrument of the darkside, and now they acted as his personal guard. Personal guard or not Kylo knew these Knights were not necessarily loyal to him. They weren't faithful to the First Order either, they're only loyalty was to the darkside, and whoever wielded it most. Unlike Snoke's Praetorian Guard these Knights had a will of their own and Kylo could not necessarily trust them.

General Hux was standing in the shuttle bay observing the Knights waiting to board Ren's shuttle as hangar workers readied the ship. The Knights of Ren unnecessary fanatics of an archaic mythical ideal. Hux hated the Knights of Ren, almost as much as he loathed Ren himself-their leader. They did not follow the rules or structure of the First Order, just as their leader didn't. At least under Snoke, the Knights had been in the shadows as Snoke had been, useful but mostly unseen. Kylo Ren, however, had never been that wise. Now Ren was Supreme Leader the Knights were always coming and going as they wished or as Ren wished. That sort of willful independence was not something Hux wanted around his troops, regardless of their battle skills. Captain Phasma was what he wanted, elite, loyal and someone who obeyed orders. Phasma, however, was gone, killed in the light speed disaster that had destroyed the last Supremacy ship. Nevertheless, Hux had found another to replace her.

In his quest to find a way to be rid of Ren, Hux had come across a bounty hunter, an assassin. He'd employed her services to keep him safe but also to take down Ren. Hux had hidden her in plain sight, wearing a similar uniform to Phasma and acting as his right hand as Phasma had done. Chromia was the name he gave her, as she would provide none. Chromia was humanoid, and an exceptionally skilled fighter and clearly highly intelligent as all assassins should be. She didn't
have Phasma's height or power, but she was agile even in her uniform and capable. She was slight but was able to use her skills to overpower any with whom she fought. She had been able to use every weapon she'd been provided with expertly. She carried the same staff, he'd given Phasma with her at all times, but he knew up close she preferred Sai's- short-bladed forks that she hid in her armour. He'd watched her training with them; if you could call it training. She had mercilessly cut down several troopers without hesitation.

Unlike Phasma the uniform Chromia wore though the same shimmering mirror-like armour did little to hide her feminine curves. She'd told Hux openly that her natural female physicality could be extremely useful with certain weak males. Hux could appreciate that so long as she got the job, he'd employed her for done. In his presence, when they were alone, she would remove her helmet. She was light yellow-skinned with jagged red patterns, the design of which seemed to follow her strikingly sharp bone structure. Her hair and lips were also the same shade of vibrant red, and her eyes were also yellow with red rims and black pupils. Beneath her red lips were two rows of sharp pointed teeth. She reminded him of fire, not only in appearance but in personage, an unstoppable force that could not be defeated. She would listen to him intently and only offer advice if he asked for it, an excellent quality in a subordinate. To Hux, she was merely a tool, a machine an extension of his will enforced. She would follow Ren to Fondor and vowed she would be able to bring him to Hux with his abilities weakened. Hux didn't care what her methods were so long as she could do it, but he wanted Ren alive. Chromia currently stood at the entrance of the bay; she was always nearby but not too close.

Hux approached Ren, hands clasped behind his back, the stance of model military perfection. "Supreme Leader, keep in contact. We can't afford to be leaderless again, should anything go wrong."

Kylo glowered at Hux, the audacity of the man to inform him of standard protocol. Hux could clearly see his agitation but remained standing chin held high and his arms behind his back. For a non-fighting man, he took his military stance very seriously. Kylo knew to belittle Hux in his mind, however, would only make him forget how dangerous Hux was. The only reason Kylo had awoken when he did on the throne room floor was that he'd sensed impending doom. He had thought it was Rey, but it had been Hux standing over him. The blaster Hux had been reaching for suddenly hidden behind his long coat. Kylo had kept him close after that out of suspicion; it was only a matter of time before Hux tried something. Hux's rise to power was littered with those adversaries who'd stood in his way, including his father, Brendol. Hux's ambition knew no limits and Kylo had no intention of becoming another corpse for Hux to climb upon to reach his ultimate goal. Kylo knew that Hux hated him and that Hux knew he'd lied about Rey killing Snoke and the guards, however, he couldn't just kill him. The army, the fleet and other commanders followed Hux, not Kylo. They might follow Kylo's orders in his presence out of fear, but their loyalty and obedience were tenuous at best.

Hux, in particular, was openly resentful and openly reluctant to follow Kylo's orders, believing himself to be Kylo's equal. Hux often overtly or publicly offered counterarguments or disagreed, giving condescending suggestions that were precisely what Kylo had already said dimly masked as new thoughts. The man infuriated him, and often Kylo made him agree by harnessing the Force. Hux was a problem. Kylo had chosen to join the First Order to be Snoke's apprentice. He was not a genuine member of the First Order's ranks having always been outside them. Hux, however, was the First Order in every way, but he was too dangerous to merely dispose of. So far, Kylo was at a loss of about what to do about the situation. He was at a loss about most things since the dreams had come, unable to think clearly. Despite his contempt and anger, he managed a civil response.

"I leave command to you in my absence General."
Hux smiled at him or at least attempted to; it was more of a contemptuous leer. Kylo didn't think Hux had ever genuinely smiled; his face seemed incapable. The smile wasn't genuine happiness as most understood it, although Kylo knew how the same could easily be said about him. Hux hadn't even genuinely smiled when gloating over his achievements such as Snoke congratulating him on a task. Hux didn't smile despite his enjoyment watching Kylo punished for disappointing the Supreme Leader. Hux's face was disingenuous and so contrived; every smile was more of a sneer. It didn't matter.

"Yes, Supreme Leader, Thank you, Supreme Leader," he simpered. The words Supreme Leader dripping from his mouth with disdain.

Kylo turned on his heel without any further response to Hux. He stalked towards his ship and followed his Knights who boarded before him single file without a word. Despite Kylo being an accomplished pilot, a few stormtroopers also accompanied the Knights and filled in behind him to fly and operate the ship. Inferior stormtroopers like that traitor FN 2187, not worthy of anything other than menial labour jobs.

Hux watched the ship depart the hangar, its huge wings expanding further as it converted into flight mode. He gestured with his hand, and Chromia stepped forward.

"Follow him. Keep me abridged of all and any developments."

Chromia nodded and immediately headed with a handful of pre-selected troopers towards a shuttle. Hux had made sure that the right information had been readily available to the Resistance through any of their means. Kylo would be going to Fondor with just his Knights. The question was, would the Resistance do as he hoped and send the girl to deal with the situation? If he could get them both that would be truly... satisfying. He turned and left the hangar, followed by a collection of officers.
Fondor was an ugly planet, and the immense downpour of rain was not currently helping that. There was no grass or mountains just a vast flat land of dirt which was now a thick mud from the rain. It was dark, but the sky seemed hazy and dingy despite the rain; as a planet of industry, the atmosphere closest to the ground was shrouded in permanent smog from the burning of furnaces and smelting of metals. A few buildings stark blocky and just as ugly were only visible in the distance via a few dimly lit slits for windows in the darker hulking masses. Industrial buildings didn't need to look beautiful or improve the landscape they needed to be functional. What Rey assumed were the worker's homes were similarly designed; small functional boxes a little further out from the leading industrial buildings.

Rey sat in her X-Wing watching the rain hit the transparent canopy above her; the noise was deafening, she'd never seen rain quite like it. It was almost coming in waves, sheets of more torrential rain cascading over the canopy followed by a lighter sheet then a heavier one again. From the specially designed socket behind her, R2-D2 gave a series of beeps and whistles; the little droids beeps appeared anxious in their tone. Apparently, R2 did not care for the situation- the conditions being the least of the concerns the astromech droid cared to mention.

"Yeah me too," she responded. She was going to get wet. She'd packed a hooded cloak she'd used back on Ahch-To made of a slight leathery material, which there had been effective at maintaining general dryness but in this she was going to get wet cloak or not.

"You stay with the ship R2" she continued. "I'll keep my comm device to you open so you can hear what's going on, but it'll be safer if you aren't with me. If anything goes wrong head back to the Resistance immediately, do not wait for me."

R2-D2 did not like this idea, leaving without her and despite being seated securely in the droid compartment of the X-Wing, the little droid made its feeling on the matter heard. It squealed loudly, and its little barrel-shaped body rocked from side to side. Rey smiled to herself as the droid continued screeching and beeping.

"I'll be fine, R2." It was nice to have Master Luke's unit with her, it would've been nice to have BB8, but BB8 was Poe's droid, not hers and he got very little done these days without BB8 at his side. In fairness, that had always been the case.

This rain wasn't going to ease up. Rey tried the Resistance soldiers again on the short wave communicator Poe had given her.

"Machine Head, Machine Head come in."

As a planet that's sole purpose was munitions, the building of weapons and parts, Rey understood why the local Resistance group had named themselves this, but she thought it was funny regardless. Poe had informed Rey they were expecting her when she'd left the base and that had been but a few hours earlier. Worryingly there was still no response. She couldn't hear any sounds of machinery and the buildings, both factories and homes alike appeared empty what dim lights were there were scattered too sparsely.

"R2 I'm gonna check it out" she got out of the cockpit as quickly as possible to avoid the pouring
rain from drenching the ship's interior. She grabbed her lightsaber staff and her cloak, what good it would do her, pulling it on quickly and yanking the hood down as far as she could over her head. She attached the staff to her belt. She used to carry her old staff across her back with a strap, but her former staff had been a large length of wood, this one was nowhere near as heavy, mostly because it was only full-sized once ignited. She had a sizeable walk to the main buildings and where she was told to meet the Resistance group. It had seemed sensible in case something went wrong not to be too close. However, given the mud she was now stood in, she was beginning to regret that decision quickly.

"Machine Head, come in Machine Head this is Resistance Leader Rey. Come in" She tried once more, in vain.

I've got a bad feeling about this, she thought.

Rey had learnt through years of practise how to walk through the challenging landscape of Jakku with its soft sand, its heat, its surprise sinkholes and its dunes; this, however, was something else. Even the steep steps of Ahch-To were more manageable than this, even in the storms! Her boots slipped about and stuck in the deep mud. It was hard work. The mud and rain, however, was not the only reason she had a sense of foreboding. He was here; she could feel him, that undeniable presence. Like the moments just before the Force had connected them like a humming vibration of energy that was followed by their actual surroundings stilling to silence. She hadn't tried to reconnect their bond; she would see him in the flesh soon enough.

To distract her from her grim task of trudging through the mud and rain, she allowed her mind to wonder upon what she felt and expected. Her nightly dreams of Ben and their son had continued since that first one a month or so ago. She couldn't remember now; it seemed so long since her dreams had been anything else. It was always the same- the boy, her feeling of contentment, his kiss, and their home. Would anything be different though when they came face to face? She was different; no longer so naive, she understood the Force better now, and unlike Ben, she did not attempt to bend it to her will. Perhaps he'd changed as well in these last years if she had he could have, couldn't he?

The buildings she'd been trudging towards were closer now, closer but just as dark and silent as they had appeared from further away. There was no hum of machinery and given the conflict she was supposed to be supporting there were no sounds of blaster fire or shouts of men either. She thought it might have been the rain deafening any other sounds out but no because she could hear faintly yet unmistakably that erratic, unstable vibration of his lightsaber now and then as a fresh wave of lighter rain washed over her. Then she saw them; scattered out across the mud were bodies, lots of bodies. She made her way as quickly and as carefully as she could to the one closest to her. A basic metal helmet, more of a hat actually, was attached to a man's head. His face was weather-worn and slightly aged, his skin like leather had a smattering of greying stubble. A cloak similar to her own adorned his body. A large wound marked his cloak and exposed skin underneath. Not a saber by the looks of it, blaster maybe or something electro energised? Whatever the weapon had been, it had done its job regardless; there was nothing Rey could do for the man, so she carefully covered his face with his helmet.

She spoke into get open Comms device, R2 would be able to hear anything she said and anything that was spoken to her.
"R2 this is bad, everyone is dead."

Rey listened as R2 beeped erratically back at her that she should return to the ship and they should leave. The little droid was probably right, but she'd come here for a purpose, she needed to see him, and she wasn't going till she had.
"No R2... R2 I hear what you're saying, and it makes sense, but I have to do this. Ben... Kylo Ren is here, and I'm close. Just make sure everything is ready in case something goes wrong. You can't be found here and nor can the ship."

She looked back down at the man whose face she had covered; she should help anyone still alive. She closed her eyes, sensing her surroundings through the Force. She couldn't detect much, but yes, there was still fighting not far off, and he was there- Ben. She looked around her to see if there was anything that could help her navigate the terrain better when she saw a trench dug into the ground just a meter or so away.

Rey fell into the trench none too gracefully. There were boards along the bottom to walk along, and provisions, weapons, and ladders lay haphazardly against the walls. She picked up a blaster, checked its munitions levels- it couldn't hurt, she then followed the trench towards where she sensed life. She'd not been walking long along the trench as it weaved around before, even over the rain, she could hear his saber strumming loudly. Taking the nearest ladder, she ascended carefully. Cautiously peering over the top of the trench she could see a group of dark figures standing amongst a field of bodies; all the bodies were dressed similarly to the man she'd bent over moments earlier. So much death, suddenly, she froze on the step of the ladder, she'd seen this before this scene; how had she not realised earlier. Back on Takodana when Luke's saber had called to her, she'd had a vision, a Force vision and this, this right now had been one of the scenes. The rain, the bodies, the Knights, and leading them the terrifying masked creature who held a crimson screaming saber.

She took a quick breath and closed her eyes. Then again in through her nose and slowly out through the mouth stilling her mind. *It's the will of the Force. She dropped the blaster and stepped up the ladder, over the top of the trench and walked towards the group. Stay calm, stay calm; this is the will of the Force. She chanted to herself as she stepped closer and closer. This is the will of the Force, the will of the Force.*

-A-

A Resistance soldier saw a figure approaching from the trenches towards where he lay in the mud. Hadn't the captain said to expect a Jedi warrior, *was that them? What on earth was one lone Jedi going to do?* He struggled to his feet and scrambled towards them, opening his mouth to yell to get back, it was no good they were too strong. The figure approaching him was gaining ground towards him faster than he could scramble to get to them. His side burned where he'd been hit. They were so close to him now that he could see their face, her face. The Jedi was a woman, a young woman. Just as he got close enough to be heard over the rain, the woman removed her hood and stood stoically staring at the group behind him. Simultaneously the soldier felt a horrendous pain rupture his chest, like fire from the inside. A bright red reverberating light erupted from his chest. He cried in agony before the red light ripped back through him in the direction it had come from. He fell to the floor in front of the woman, forever silenced, unable to speak those words to run and save herself.

-A-

Rey watched the man scramble and falter as he tried to get to her as she walked calmly towards Kylo and his knights. Had Kylo seen her yet, surely he could sense her? Just as the man got close enough to open his mouth and yell, Kylo's fiery red lightsaber pierced his chest from behind and was then immediately retracted. The man fell nearly at her feet in a scream of pain; just as he had in her vision. His death infuriated her, but there was nothing she could do for him, there was something she could do for the galaxy, however, and this time she wouldn't give up. So she stood firm and watched as Kylo's head went from the man on the ground to her. Despite the pouring rain,
he removed his bulky cowl, and she caught sight of the familiar black and chrome mask adorning part of his face. The mask was unmistakable; similar to the one he'd worn before, although this one was different to the last. It was as though it was part of his face; the chrome metal strips framed his eyes and the lower section still fully covered his mouth. The majority of the helmet was gone. Unmistakable too was his height, his broad shoulders, his taut muscles within his dark robes and of course the strikingly individual saber and that darkly brilliant peak in the Force that surrounded him. It was him; it could be no other- Kylo Ren, Ben.

Chapter End Notes

Big fan of metal music, got machine head in my head as a code name and couldn't get it out. Sorry.
The conflict on Fondor could hardly be called a conflict at all. It was merely a small band of the local industrial workers who were supported by the Resistance; there had been no real battle; it had just been a standoff. They'd dug their trenches and stopped providing the First Order with supplies - that was it. They were machine operators, technicians, and mechanics; they were just about able to shoot a blaster but not well. They had only had the most basic of training. It was a joke to have called this a conflict. Kylo and his knights had dispatched with the forces positioned there effortlessly. It hadn't even really been a test of the simplest of their talents. Why in the stars had General Hux ever deemed this an issue? Kylo knew it was because they were supplying the Resistance instead of First Order, a matter of costs had been mentioned he dimly remembered. If Kylo might have felt angrier now having slaughtered all these people than he had with Hux in the hangar before leaving. The object of his anger became Hux rather than this pitiful excuse for a fight. It could've been dealt with via simple negotiation. In his unbalanced agitated state, he'd lost himself in a haze of red rage and been the leading force in a massacre another one to add to the list in his history with the First Order. How much did another one matter?

Kylo stood in front of his knights the rain hammering down upon his cowl and a sea of bodies surrounding them; everyone was dead. He seethed, allowing all his anger to boil within him, his blood feeling like fire within his skin. Steam almost seemed to rise from his soaked body he was so enraged. In front of him, someone was still alive and was attempting to crawl forwards, no doubt trying to flee. This wretched, pitiable man wasn't even worth his time, none of this had been worth his time. He should allow this last survivor to die slowly in the mud. Kylo looked up at that moment he felt disturbed by everything that had happened since arriving on this planet, since the dream and jaded by this man's pointless attempts to stand up. What he saw surprised him; a figure was approaching slowly.

No, he thought to himself. How had he not felt her presence? That unmistakable pull and that glow in the Force around her he could always feel distantly was now brilliantly radiant right in front of him. Had he been so distracted, so unbalanced he hadn't even noticed her merely meters from him? He felt his emotions instantly change in her closeness the boiling reducing to a simmer. Why did she always put herself in these situations- the danger of coming to him alone? It couldn't be a coincidence that the one time he'd left the ship in months, they were now on the same planet.

The man in front of him had managed to scramble to his feet and was reaching out to her. Kylo felt a surge of covetous resentment; he spun his lightsaber within his hand and thrust it forward, plunging it through the man's back. A wet slump followed the man's howl of pain as he fell lifeless to the muddy floor where she stood. One more death was nothing.

Unfazed she threw back her hood, meeting his stare head-on, the rain drenching her already wet hair onto her head and shoulders. Her face was held firm despite the rain, despite the scene of death. He wasn't sure what she was feeling; with her, he never was. He took several determined steps towards her, but she didn't move other than to raise her chin slightly. Behind him Kylo could feel his knights responding to her presence, they must have noticed a change in the Force around them. He could sense their thoughts, their preparation and their desire for a real challenge. He raised one gloved hand and froze them all, he could feel their surprise, but at least for the moment, they would be unable to do anything.

He looked at her; he could see a lightsaber attached to her belt. Impressive, since he'd last seen her, she'd constructed her own. Constructing ones own saber was a necessary right of passage. She must've acquired a new crystal, Kylo pondered to himself, as he recalled that the last crystal had
shattered in an explosion of light on board the Supremacy. She had not reached for the saber, nor
could he sense anything from her to suggest she would. From the moment he had met her on
Takodana, she was a mystery to him. He'd seen inside her mind, and they were so similar, both so
alone but he could not comprehend her. Her actions were based on something he told himself he'd
long left behind, compassion and attachment -weakness. He'd been wrong of course, Snoke had
known it the moment he'd killed his father those weaknesses were part of him too. Kylo had then
used his attachment to her against Snoke when he'd deceived and betrayed his master and killed
him. Kylo had killed Snoke for himself, an end to the criticism and punishment, to take control for
himself but also for her; he could not allow her to die he'd wanted her to join him. She hadn't though,
and now she stood there in front of him, appearing calm.

Beneath the section of his helmet that covered his mouth, his jaw moved while he deliberated over
this current situation. He couldn't forget her betrayal, and yet she was here, and there was the
dream, it couldn't be a coincidence.

"Do you have a ship?" he asked.

No response. His chest heaved as he tried to suppress his frustration with her. He extinguished his
lightsaber, attached it to his belt and reached up with his gloved hands, clicking the switches on the
side of his mask and then removed it. Without looking her in the face, he took another step towards
her, this time slightly less determined. Holding his mask under his arm, staring down at the man he
had just killed, he asked the question again.

"Do you have a ship?"

Nothing. Kylo looked up from the man on the floor into her face. He saw no malice; she was calm.
He started feeling things he only felt in her presence or when he thought of her guilt, regret, and
memories of how it felt to fight at her side. He watched as water ran freely across her face. He
raised his eyebrows at her, asking the same silent question.

"Yes."

"Then go quickly. I cannot hold them forever". Kylo pleaded, he wanted her safe, and nothing
about this situation or this place was safe. It was taking a considerable effort to still all six of his
Knights behind him frozen. The Knights were not strong in the Force, but they were not weak-
minded fools, not like your average soldier or average being for that matter. Some were beginning
to fight the hold, and all were beginning to question him? Why hadn't he killed this woman
yet? Particularly worrying was that several were wondering why he was their leader when he was
using the Force against them in order to converse with a lightside Force user.

Rey frowned at him and his comment and leaning slightly on one foot she peered past him;
squinting in the downpour at his Knights. She realised they were frozen in place, Rey had assumed
the hand gesture had been a command, not a Force hold. She turned back to him. His eyes were
pleading, like in the throne room when he'd asked her to join him. That memory still haunted her
and unconsciously made her take a small gasp of air, as the emotions threatened to break her calm.

"I'm not leaving without you."

Kylo had not expected that response. He examined her, genuine surprise lifted his eyebrows further
and made his normally glaring eyes open in alarm; however, this was very quickly replaced she
saw by anger.

"You think you can take me as your prisoner? Back to that pathetic excuse for a Resistance base?
To your wretched treasonous friends". He spat the words at her sarcastically.
She looked at him in silence, still utterly calm. He began to regret what he'd just said as that clearly wasn't her intention.

"Why are you here?" He asked angrily taking another step forward and leaning even further toward her. They were literally an arm's length from each other, and his raging eyes searched her face, his breathing heavy and hard.

"You know why."
Suddenly her face changed as she looked at him, softened as it had in the Force bond on Ahch-To.

"It's the will of the Force. The memory of you and our bond haunts me. Have you had the dream too?"
Rey genuinely wasn't sure if Ben was having the dream, but if it was the will of the Force, as she believed it was, then she couldn't be the only one having it. Ben's emotions causing peaks in the Force could be due to the dream; although with his temper, she couldn't be sure. It was a risk to mention it, but it worked, and Ben instantly moved back from his previous stance. His tight mouth now opened as he released haggard quick unmeasured breaths, attempting to compose his mind and his face. This is why he wears a mask, Rey thought, to hide, to hide his emotions and the real person beneath and pretend to be a monstrous creature. It was easy to be scared or hate the creature in a mask, but as Ben, as a man conversation, understanding and empathy had been possible on both sides.

Kylo took a step back again and stared back at the ground, the dream she'd had it too. It didn't mean anything. He'd seen the future when they'd touched hands through the Force. That future hadn't come true; she hadn't turned, and she hadn't joined him. The dream was the same thing, and it didn't mean anything, it was just a dream, wasn't it? His mouth worked, he held his lips between his teeth then released them as he tried to decide what he was going to do. Sadly, however, that time had run out. With his mind distracted his hold on his knights had faltered, and he could very clearly sense they were no longer his knights.

No time to think, only actions, everything was going to change- again.

He looked at Rey, his wet hair now falling across his eyes. He dropped his mask and reached for his saber.

Through gritted teeth, he announced his intention, "Get ready."

He spun on his feet, his back no longer to his Knights but to her. His saber drawn and poised in his fighting position; he pointed it towards them as he stood between them and her. Behind him, he felt her stance change, and in what peripheral vision he had with the rain and his hair, he could see purple light shimmering all about him.

He glared down the hilt of his lightsaber in their direction.
"It is not my desire to kill you, any of you," he cried at them "I relinquish my leadership of the Knights of Ren, you are free to do as you will, but we are leaving, the girl and I."

The Knights stood silently rain smattering their helmets and their black capes and cowls hanging heavily from their frames. Their weapons were poised but unmoving. One stepped forward- Covex Ren, his broad sword at his side. He was strongest after Kylo, and he always spoke for the others.

"You are no longer worthy of being our leader," the voice was rasping and deep like small stones grating underfoot.

"We are an instrument of the darkside, and you are no longer wholly of the dark. Leave but know
this, should our paths cross again, Kylo Ren, your life will be the Knights to take."

Kylo said nothing but extinguished his lightsaber changed his stance and bowed his head slightly to his knights, in respect and acknowledgement of their statement. They were not friends by any stretch of any imagination, far from it but they had fought together, suffered together under Snoke. They had competed for leadership as master and Covex's words were a respectful acceptance that he could go in peace for everything that had previously passed between them, for now at least. Kylo had every intention of taking that opportunity before minds changed.

"Where's your ship?" He asked her almost whispering, turning slightly from the Knights to look at her.

Rey shook her head, "It's an X-wing, only room for one".

She was still holding her lightsaber ignited looking at the knights, but she turned to him when he didn't respond. If Kylo was able to give a sarcastic facial expression the one on his face right now was it, his head cocked slightly, eyes wide and his mouth scowled, but then it all changed to one that could've been on his father's face, eyebrows lowered, and a faint smirk touched one corner.

"Follow me."
R2-D2 had heard the entire situation unfold clearly from the safety of the x-wing. Unlike organics, the droid could hear clearly despite the raging storm around both its position and the source of the comms device, the organic Rey. Rey, unlike so many organics R2 had encountered spoke to the droid as though it were another lifeform. Like most organics, however, Rey suffered similar faults amongst which were poor forward planning, poor analysis of a situation and stubbornness for a decision despite excellent calculations to counter otherwise. She had ignored R2's dissection of the circumstances along with the calculated predictions and had headed off towards the only living creatures R2's sensors could pick up on. R2's audio sensors had listened to the entire conversation Rey had had; with both herself as she walked further away in the rain and then with Kylo Ren. As new information had become available, R2 had calculated the numerous potential outcomes. Rey's choice to leave with Kylo Ren was not one R2 had predicted. Organics, R2 recalled were notoriously unpredictable and erratic; their behaviour was rarely a simple calculation of odds. When the comms had ended, R2 begrudgingly did as instructed. Refusing a direct order was impossible, merely protesting it was, which R2 had done before Rey had left. So R2 fired up the X-wing leaving Fondor and headed back to Ealor.

Chromia had followed The Supreme Leader to Fondor as General Hux had requested. She had watched the whole scene unfold from her Xi Class light Shuttle while standing in the doorway of the lowered boarding ramp. So that the shuttle could remain hidden all power was off. The torrential downpour was blowing into her as she stood partially concealed in the shuttle's doorway using the electronbinoculars. What had unfolded had amused her.

She had seen the girl land her X-Wing alone and head towards Kylo Ren and his Knights alone. As the girl had vacated the trench, Chromia had seen Kylo Ren freeze his Knights, after some interchange he had turned to defend her. She had watched the exchange between Kylo and his Knights, disappointed not to see more of a fight. Watching Kylo and his Knights kill all those Resistance fighters hadn't been as exhilarating as it could have been. Not one of the Resistance fighters had the ability to outmanoeuvre such skilled adversaries. It had been a quick and easy killing of all those present. Their numbers had stood for nothing against the Supreme Leader and his Knights of Ren, but still, there had been no flair or fun. She could tell Kylo had enjoyed it; he'd moved like an unstoppable force cutting anything down in his path. Whether the Knights had revelled in the massacre was more difficult to tell. Kylo's emotions were evident even with his mask on, via his body's movements and posture. The Knights were utterly devoid of any emotion; they merely went through the perfected trained motions for whichever fighting strategy was most efficient.

Chromia knew Kylo, and this girl were both powerful Force wielders, exceptionally strong with the Force. Chromia was strong too, not as strong as these two were, but she was not merely a Force-sensitive. She had never come across a presence like Kylo Ren before, and she was drawn to his dark presence and power. When the girl had landed, Chromia could feel her presence, equally as strong as Kylo's presence but the girl's allegiance was for the light. When Hux had bought her services, his disdain for the Force had been apparent. Chromia had, therefore, kept her abilities secret deeming it unnecessary for Hux to be aware. Chromia was an assassin, a hunter, skilled at bringing down those who were Force-sensitive or strong with the Force. Her abilities were helpful but not essential in doing so. For this specific mission, Chromia had acquired vials of Senflax-an immobilising neurotoxin; the effect of which would be to disconnect Kylo Ren and the girl from the Force as per Hux's request. She had used it in the past with a perfect track record of effectiveness. However, as a preventative to ensure success, she also had with her several
stormtroopers with both blasters and flame throwers. For a powerful Force user such as Kylo Ren, it wasn't difficult to freeze a blaster shot in its path. The trick to take Jedi or Sith's hostage was to overpower them with the amount and with something unpredictable, hence the flame throwers.

Chromia had an excellent reputation in her chosen career, but she had never previously received favours like those which Hux had bestowed upon her as his guard. The silver shimmering stormtrooper armour, complete with crimson lined cape and the extendable metal staff were some of the most beautiful things she'd ever owned. The armour would certainly come in handy, it was however rather distinct, glistening brightly in both the dark and the light. She even liked the name-Chromia, having never had much attachment to the slave name she'd been born with. She appreciated Hux, he was dangerously mad, but the power he had was something that appealed to her. As Hux's ally, they could be unstoppable, ruling the First Order at his side was something she could envision for a potential future.

For this particular mission, she had deemed it impractical to be wearing the armour he'd given her; an assassin should not be so easily seen. She was dressed in her old assassin clothing, black and practical made of a material that was light but also deflective. It wouldn't stop a saber or a sword, but it would protect from long-range blaster shots. It clung to her body tightly allowing for manoeuvrability which the stormtrooper armour did not. She was, however, wearing the cape that Hux had given her. The red-lined cape made her feel powerful; it added a sense of authority and danger to her personage. The cloak perfectly matched her wild hair and jagged animalistic markings of her skin.

The scene she'd been watching came to a close, and now a new opportunity arose, one she thought Hux might appreciate and she wanted. The Knight's of Ren were leaderless standing in the remnants of a battle with nowhere to go- abandoned and betrayed by their leader. She had a chance to give the Knights a new leader- her. Kylo Ren had taken the girl to his ship, and the girl's X-Wing had taken off without her; there was a chance to find the location of the Resistance.

Her hand reached for the saber she kept on her utility belt. She'd taken it by deadly force from a Sith its blade shone red when ignited. She'd collected a few in her time as an assassin, but this saber was the one she liked most, the weight, the feel, the way it spoke to her. It might be because, unlike the others, this one was red when ignited, but she didn't know enough about kyber crystals and colours to understand what the colours meant. It suited her and got the job done that was all that mattered. She stepped fully off the gangway of the shuttle, ignited the blade and strode out into the rain. The Knights of Ren followed the darkside, and she was of the darkside. As she'd anticipated the Knights sensed her as she made her presence known by stopping several metres from their position. It was a safe distance in case she was false in her belief that they would follow her and had to be dealt with but close enough to converse. As a group, they turned in her direction.

"Are you Sith?" One asked, his cowl hung low and heavy with rain, his mask invisible in the shadow beneath, a substantial broad sword in his hand- Covex. While with Hux, she'd made every opportunity to study the Knights including weapons, masks, names and fighting style. With the Knights as Kylo's guards, it was necessary to learn all she could. Doing the essential research in her line of work was imperative to avoid disaster and death.

"I am a darkside user, and I can offer you what you desire," she called back. Her red hair was whipping about in the wind, along with her cloak. She felt confident; she hoped she appeared it.

"What is it we desire?" Another responded- Airez Ren, his plain ugly mask and metal staff identifying him.

"Power."
The Knights didn't look at each other, Covex merely stepped forward. He was the dominant of the group, especially now Kylo was no longer present to lead them.

"Whom do you serve?" He growled his voice grating like stone despite everything around them sounding wet.

"The true leader of the First Order, General Hux."

The Knight dipped his head, was he disappointed with that answer? The Knights cared little for the First Order or their leaders. They were separate to the ranks of the First Order they only cared about the darkness. Chromia needed to offer them something further, something they truly desired.

"Follow me, and I can give you war, power and most importantly, revenge, revenge on your old master and leader, Kylo Ren."

That seemed to peak interest, several heads raised. Covex stepped forward further.

"We will follow you until you can no longer meet your end of the bargain."

She nodded her agreement, turned and lead the way back to her shuttle, behind her she heard the Knights follow without a word. At the shuttle she stood surveying from the bottom of the gangway as one by one the Knights boarded the shuttle and then she followed in behind them.

Inside the shuttle, Chromia set to whether the other tasks she hoped she could achieve could be met- the location of the Resistance and bringing Hux Kylo and the girl. Hux had mentioned the girl briefly. Hux believed Kylo was a traitor with this girl, a scavenger of Jakku who'd ascended to Jedi of the Resistance. Chromia thought it strange that a Jedi would be so involved with a dark user like Kylo Ren and not fight him but leave with him willingly.

She strode into the cockpit of the shuttle.

"Can you track the X-Wing?" She asked

"Too late Captain it's already made the jump to light speed. We have located the Supreme Leader's ship through the various methods the General gave us. It's currently just off the planet."

In his distrust of the Supreme Leader, Hux had hidden tracking devices on everything- Kylo's clothing, his ship, his Knights clothing. Even if the tracking on the ship's actual drive was disabled, there were several others concealed on board the vessel within its computers that they could follow. Hux had taken no chances; he was a man who believed in the advances of technology and right now, his faith was paying off.

"Let the General know where the Supreme Leaders' ship is headed. Catching it in a tractor beam is our best bet. Let him know he'll have them both. Kylo Ren and the girl."

"Yes, Captain." The stormtrooper replied.

"Whichever ship responds is the one we head for, I want extra squads of troops with blasters and flamethrowers ready on our arrival."

"Yes, Captain." The trooper replied again, immediately opening communications.

Satisfied Chromia left the cockpit to give the troops with her and the Knights she now had the information to imprison Kylo Ren and the girl alive. It wasn't going to be easy, but it was possible and an exciting challenge. With the Knights with her, it would be quite the spectacle.
The Kiss

Aboard the Upsilon-class command shuttle, Kylo had gone straight to the cockpit. Rey had dealt with the stormtroopers who had been on board using a simple Jedi mind control trick to make them forget what had happened and to leave the ship.

He was currently sat at the control panel searching for the tracking settings in the ships drive system; there it was, he disabled it. He then started the takeoff procedure, and as he did so, Rey entered the cockpit. She sat in the co-pilots seat and began to look through the controls, helping with the takeoff procedure without needing to speak to him about what was required.

"Have you disabled the tracking?" She asked without looking at him still deftly flitting around the controls.

"Yes," he curtly responded while continuing with the procedures. They were utterly in tune with each other's commands.

"Where are we heading?"

Kylo stopped in his procedure; he had no idea. Where would be safe? He was a fugitive from the First Order, a wanted man from both sides of the War. This was a huge mistake, but it was too late now, it was all far too late.

"I don't know," he said as he started to manoeuvre the craft off the ground and into the planet's atmosphere.

"We could go to the Resistance," she offered.

He glared over at her, head dipped. "The Resistance. I wouldn't go there even if I could."

"Because they're a bunch of wretched traitors? Isn't that what you are now?" Rey responded calmly while not taking her eyes from the instrument panel in front of her.

Kylo scoffed quietly to himself though she had a valid point. He started thinking about all the planets he knew. They needed somewhere remote, not attached to the Resistance or First Order, somewhere safe. He remembered loving Chandrila as a child, but that was Resistance and New Republic territory. Dathomir? His parents had told him they'd decided to get married there. No, Kylo didn't want to think about that. What was that other planet, beginning with D with the Jedi temple? Devaron- perfect! He looked up the planet's coordinates to put into the computer, how far away was it, could they get there?

While the computer was dealing with the logistics, Kylo rose without a word and headed out of the cockpit. Rey paused for a moment looking out the viewing window into the dark, watching the rain trickle over the thick glass as the shuttle rose steadily, before following him. Kylo had headed down the corridor to a small room containing a bunk, his private quarters she realised, away from the troops. He was removing his sodden clothing- belt, cowl and robe. He pulled some dry clothes from a rack on one side of the small room. She wondered to herself if she'd lain here after he'd kidnapped her on Takodana. Kylo didn't look at her but knew she was standing in the doorway watching him. He took some more clothes from the rack, inspected them then held them out to her; still not looking at her.

"They are unlikely to fit, but they are dry."
She removed her cloak and stepped towards him to take the clothes; black of course, they were.

"Thank you" she replied as she accepted them.

He removed another layer and was then stood bare-chested in front of her. So pale. She'd seen him like this before during their bond on Ahch-To but never in the actual physical flesh. His attitude towards her seeing his body hadn't changed. He was unembarrassed and unashamed. He was strong and broad with large muscled arms and shoulders. What she noticed now which she hadn't before were all the marks and scars. She could always see the injury she'd given him; it ran from above his right eye down to his collar bone. There was a round scar on his left shoulder which again she was responsible for when she'd thrust Luke's saber at him. There was a scar on his ribs on the left from the bowcaster blast Chewie had shot, when Han had died, at Ben's hands. Rey could now see a network of what looked like little veins all across his body a light purple, they were barely visible, but she could see them. What was that? She stood staring when a layer of black fabric covered everything and brought her back to reality. She fell forward slightly surprised by herself, steadying herself on the doorway as she looked up and realised he was looking at her. She blushed. Well, that's embarrassing, she thought.

He was now fully dressed, a simple black top covering those marks. No First Order uniform, no cowl, no helmet and no gloves. Everything he used to hide behind was gone. His dark hair was drying back into waves framing his long face, his dark, striking eyes boring into hers intensely. She was suddenly very grateful she was leaning on the doorway for stability. His gaze was like the one from the elevator in the Supremacy; intimate and it made her as nervous now as it had then.

Kylo observed every inch of her slowly and carefully. Her hair was drying, and it appeared longer than it had been the last time he'd seen her when she'd come to the Supremacy. It was tied back in the same fashion when he'd first see her on Takodanna, but a few strands had escaped framing her face in a slight curl. He hadn't forgotten how beautiful she was, her delicate features and hazel brown eyes encompassed by long lashes. He roamed every inch of her slim yet shapely frame taking in every detail, details he had burned into his memory.

She looked down at the clothing she was still holding in her hand. Kylo followed her look and then moved out of the room past her.

"I'll give you some space."

He hadn't made it back to the cockpit before she called him from the doorway to his quarters.

"Ben."

He stopped mid-step and lowered his head, his shoulders rising and falling deeply at the sound of her saying his name. No, not this time, this time I'll not be seduced.

"Don't call me that."

She moved quickly to stand directly in front of him.

"That is your name, who you are, your true self. The more you try to hide from it and run from it, the more you make it the truth". She was trying to look him in the eyes. At her height, beneath him, it was s, but he was avoiding looking at her directly. He attempted to step around her, to get to the cockpit, check the computer's calculations and get them to their destination. She blocked him. She started to reach for his face to make him look at her. He couldn't afford for her to touch him, so he took a step back and allowed his gaze to meet hers. He set his jaw and held his chin high, his usual determined stoic stance. He was surprised by what he saw compassion and empathy but also a rigid
determination. She was going to make him talk. This was not going to go smoothly or well.

"I know you've had the dream too. I see it in your eyes. Tell me what you saw."

His shoulders rose and fell deeply again as he tried to repress a tide of emotions.

"Say it," she said, just as he had back in the throne room and as he had then she took a step towards him and repeated it, "say it".

His mouth worked, and his jaw moved uncomfortably teeth clenching and lips puffing out as he took shorter and shorter breaths. Without really meaning to the words escaped from his mouth and an overwhelming feeling took over him, "a child... our child," he blurted. The words muffled and distorted as he'd attempted to suppress them while they simultaneously escaped. He tried to breathe through his nose to calm himself, but it was jagged like he'd exerted himself.

She nodded and her stance relaxed arms and shoulders dropping, in what looked like relief. "I see him too; every night when I go to sleep. Every time I close my eyes."

She'd stepped forward again and reached her hand up tentatively when she sensed no resistance from him she placed it palm flat against his chest. As she did so, he felt a rush, like a wind rising inside-the The Force. It was connecting them, just as it had when their hands had touched across the galaxies and when they'd fought back to back in the throne room. What he felt, however, was so much more, so much stronger. He could feel a sense of light flowing from her hand into his chest, and he could feel his darkness doing the same. He could see her mind and the truth in what she had said. It was the same dream. Her eyes were welling with tears. He knew she could feel everything, just as he did.

"No," he stepped back from her just enough to break away from her hand's touch. He felt nervous and angry. "No. You left me to die. I offered you everything, and you rejected me". Those last few words were nearly a shout. He couldn't simply forget the pain of her rejection of her betrayal. He'd saved her, and she'd left him on the floor of the Supremacy throne room, unconscious and at the mercy of Hux.

She nodded her head in acknowledgement of this. Her bold stare and position hadn't changed, but her hand was back at her side.

"I'm sorry." It was simple, and she meant it. She looked down, having to admit to something she wasn't proud of wasn't easy. Her shoulders shrugged despite herself."I didn't want anything. I didn't want to rule galaxies. I didn't want power. I never did, and I still don't. That's not what I came there for; I came there for you. I...I acted thoughtlessly, and I'm sorry."

"You came because you thought I'd turn. Join the Resistance and save your friends!" He was shouting now accusatory, his hand pointing at her in rage.

"You saved me so you could take Snoke's place and all his power for yourself and because you thought I'd turn and stand at your side." She spat back at him, leaning heavily on her foot closer to him. Her arm thrown in the air as she glared up at him while he glared right back.

She broke the stalemate first taking a breath and repositioning her footing, looking at the floor as she composed herself. Taking another deep breath through her nose and out through the mouth, then Rey looked back up at him calm and resolved. He was hurt, and she'd hurt him, but she could also see his acknowledgement that what she'd said was also the truth. They'd both had an agenda on top of anything else they may have felt for each other.

"We both saw what we wanted to see Ben, and we weren't completely wrong. You didn't bow before Snoke, and I did stand with you."
She'd moved closer to him again. One more step and they'd be touching he stood his ground not moving, and he managed to control his breathing though it took an effort. She was right. She'd become so much wiser, and she was so much more in control of her emotions than he could ever be. He could never understand given her heritage and her stature how she could do things he couldn't. He admired her, he was intrigued by her, and he was impressed. She had learnt much in the time since they'd last seen each other and now she was teaching him.

"What is it that you want?" he asked her his head dipped. From beneath his lowered brow, he searched her face and eyes intently for clues of an answer, particularly the one he hoped to find. Her gaze had not faltered from his; she looked at him, unblinking her beautiful hazel eyes soft, and her expression perfectly peaceful. She was directly below him now, and she'd started to raise her hand again to touch him, his chest, his face, his hair he wasn't sure. He was confident, without reading her mind that what she wanted, was what he wanted- just you. He was saying it in his mind, and he could hear it in hers.

Her lips parted slightly, "do you not know?" It came out as a sigh.

"Yes," he wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her towards him, his other hand reaching for her face, touching the tendrils of her hair that hung around it. As their lips touched, it was hard, almost desperate. Neither of them had ever done this before. Her one hand was against his chest again, and she could feel his heart racing beneath her fingertips. She could feel the heat and the darkness of him under her touch, flowing to her. She held his face with her other hand slowly reaching up behind his ear, resting it on his jaw, entwining her fingers in his hair then moving slightly to the back of his neck. As she did so, the fervour of their kiss reduced and the pressure of their foreheads on each other decreased as they allowed the kiss to become tender. His grasp around her waist relaxed a little as he realised she wasn't going to slap him or run away. This was what they both wanted and what the Force wanted. As if in response to both of them understanding this, the world around them went silent. All they could hear was the others heart beating and the quiet hum of energy. Every part of their body that touched the others' seemed to be pulsating, as light and dark met like electricity. A real breeze began swirling around them, rifling their hair. Rey thought she could sense a light getting brighter behind her closed eyelids and it felt as though it was coming from them.

They both paused clinging to each other; eyes closed foreheads touching and breathing hard their hands tangled in each others hair. Ben kissed her again, sweetly and then opened his eyes. Rae was smiling at him; he was changed the burden of darkness lifted, but it had gone before, and it could return she reminded herself. Questions were racing through her mind. What had they felt? What was that energy? That light? Had it come from them? She was about to ask one of those questions when his expression changed. Oh no the darkness is returning she thought, but that wasn't it. Concern? Anxiety? No worse- fear! She could sense it rolling off him then she noticed the noise around her alarms. How long had they been going off?

"No," he released her and rushed to the cockpit.

He'd been distracted that he'd done nothing to get them to safety and now it was too late. Alarms were sounding all over the cockpit's display, and he could see a ship filling the window where only moments earlier empty space had been. They were caught in the tractor beam of a First Order ship. He turned to her and said a single word, "Hux".
Fighting Together

Back on board, the Star Destroyer Chromia was reviewing the plan which had been formulated upon the shuttle. Her stormtroopers and the Knights were ready. The stormtroopers would rain blaster shots, the Knights hand to hand combat, the flame throwers would aim their fire at Kylo Ren and the girl if at any point they appeared to be overpowering their forces. Chromia herself would be in a hidden position behind the shuttle once it was in the hanger ready to administer the Senflax. She had her extendable metal staff and had put her chrome uniform on for protection, all but the helmet- she needed to be able to see clearly.

From the viewing window above the hangar Hux watched Chromia organise her squad, he stood with his arms stiffly behind his back, chest puffed out, the calm exterior hiding the pounding in his chest. This was the moment he'd been waiting for, been planning for; the leadership of the First Order and Galaxy would soon be rightfully his, and he was anxious with anticipation. Given the Knights were now following Chromia's command, an unexpected but not unwelcome surprise, they should have enough resources to take down Ren and the girl. Hux would have them both! He'd have the treacherous Ren and that scavenger. On Ren, Hux planned all manner of torture, for every humiliation received at Ren's hands and for all the times Snoke had overlooked him in favour of his treacherous apprentice. On the girl, he'd use whatever it took to find out where the Resistance was. The end was now, it would all be over soon, and it would all be his. If Chromia was to be believed the Knights loyalty could be counted on for now. Once Ren was Hux's prisoner, he would consider what to do with them, they were elite yes but not real soldiers, not like his soldiers. Hux was brought out of his plans at the sight of Kylo's Upsilon-class command shuttle finally being brought into the hangar. Chromia was looking up at him from below, and he nodded a sign to her that she could commence. Let's see if she genuinely was Phasma's true replacement.

-X-

Inside the shuttle, Kylo and Rey had their lightsabers ready, for what Kylo wasn't sure but it was nothing good. He was frightened, a feeling he'd not felt in years. He'd never felt frightened for his own life or any injuries he might gain. He was scared for Rey, for what Hux would do to her, the information she had. Everything was within Hux's grasp, and all he had to do was take it. Together they had to make sure they made that as difficult as possible. He cursed himself again for allowing her to distract him earlier because now he'd put her in real danger.

The shuttle was being brought into the hangar; the whole ship was creaking and shaking; complaining at having been dragged in via the tractor beam. It landed ungraciously throwing Kylo and Rey off balance temporarily. There was no point delaying the inevitable. The door was currently locked, but now aboard the Star Destroyer, Hux's officers would be able to open the door by accessing the ship's computer.

He looked to Rey, she seemed surprisingly calm, and he scolded himself for allowing his emotions to flow so freely. Her eyes were squinted, and she looked as though she was ready to sprint. He smiled to himself until the gangway door to his shuttle opened with a rush of air. A slither of exterior light was visible around the door. As it slowly started to lower the slither increased as the hangar bay became more apparent. Outside a small squadron of troops became visible, immediately in front of the gangway and alarmingly interspersed between them were his Knights. No, not my Knights, he reminded himself, not anymore. To each side of the squad were troopers with flame throwers.

Rey was assessing the situation he could see.
"Stay close to each other; we're stronger together. Be careful of the flame throwers. I'll take care of any blaster fire. Beware the Knights; they are skilled fighters like Snoke's Praetorian and with those same ultrasonic enhanced weapons that defy lightsabers. They won't hesitate to do what is necessary."

She nodded that she'd heard.

"Ok, then." He said to himself more than to her. He stepped forward lightsaber ignited but not up; no one was firing yet. They were all waiting. Rey followed to his left her staff lightsaber ignited. They stepped off the gangway and onto the hangar floor and behind them, he heard the hatch cover close.

Rey looked around the hangar, too many she thought to herself. The Praetorian guard had been a test, but this would be very difficult and if they succeeded what then? Would they be able to escape? She looked up to the viewing window, as Kylo had said there was Hux. He wanted them alive, but how could he hope to keep two such Force wielders prisoner?

Hux's voice came through the hangar on a speaker from his position in the viewing window.

"Supreme Leader," Hux said his voice was dripping with disdain his mouth a tight sneer."I always knew you were a traitor. Your defiance is futile you will not escape."

With that last statement blaster fire sounded throughout the hangar and it began at last.

-X-

Ben froze the blaster fire as he said he would and threw it back at the troopers immobilising a few. As the red blast bolts flew four of the Knight's stepped forward to engage them. Rey readied herself then sensed something else the troopers with the flame throwers were launching as well.

The fire flamed out at her and with a struggle she held it at bay and threw the trooper controlling it across the hangar. The nature of flames was troublesome to try and control, too volatile, moving its general path was all Rey could manage. She allowed the fire's path to continue towards her, but above her, she could still feel the heat inches above her head, but then it was gone. The Knights assailed her and next to her they were battling Ben as he struggled with fire from the flame thrower and it spiralled around him.

"Take out the trooper," she shouted at him as she encountered the first Knight "the fire is too difficult to control."

The second Knight also immediately engaged her. The first Knight had a staff, and he was meeting her blow for blow. He was strong, and she couldn't read him at all behind his mask. Damn Force-sensitive with elite training, she cursed. The second Knight had a bat of some description, and he went for her legs. Rey managed to block that, but as she did, the first Knight's staff caught her across the face, and she spun onto her knees. Her cheekbone stung where the Knight had struck her, and she could also feel burnt skin and blood. No time to consider further she immediately had to lift her staff to block the same bat-wielding Knight from bringing it down on her head. Rey growled through gritted teeth and strained to stop him. She then felt a sharp whack against her ribs as the other Knight caught her with the staff again. Rey knelt on the floor exhausted and hurt-too many, too much. She could sense the flame throwers about to bombard them again she used the Force to push the Knights away from her and then to move the fire but as she did she felt a sharp prick in the back of her arm. Everything suddenly changed.

-X-
Kylo froze the blaster fire and had thrown it back at the troopers; he was now battling two Knights- Covex and Baxil and a tremendous amount of fire coming from the flame thrower. It encompassed him, and he could feel its heat searing his skin as he just held it at bay. Rey shouted to him about the fire, and he did as she said. He let the fire move towards him but changed it's direction slightly to directly in front of him; at the two Knights, he was battling. Baxil moved away; however, Covex did not. He used that moment to get rid of the flame thrower by using the Force to throw him against the hangar wall. Another Knight, Icesho replaced Baxil who'd moved away from the fire. Kylo now had two again Icesho with his long black axe and the other Covex with his massive broad blade. Despite Kylo whirling while blocking and parrying, the Knights were used to his fighting style from their years of previous training together. Icesho managed to catch his shoulder with his axe. He grunted in pain before engaging Icesho more. He sensed the troops with blasters reassembling — too many, too much.

He stopped the blaster fire again throwing it where he could, but due to the onslaught, he couldn't stop Covex with his broad blade in one hand punching him hard in the face with the other. The punch knocked him, and he bent down, and Icesho used this opportunity to slash up Kylo's back with his axe. Kylo strained backwards in pain and looking up at the viewing window howled through gritted teeth. Through his mass of dark, steaming hair, he could see Hux was smirking; he was genuinely enjoying this. Kylo looked back at the Icesho and Covex and started to rise, spitting blood from the punch to his face onto the floor. Then he noticed it; he couldn't sense Rey anymore. No. The immediate alarm he'd sensed dissipated as he could still hear her battling next to him. IN his peripheral vision, he could still see her saber twirling about her. Why couldn't he sense her? He raised his lightsaber with great pain to block Covex again; then, he felt a peculiar sharp scratch in his leg. He threw Covex off and spun to see a wild-looking red-haired chrome stormtrooper- Hux's guard. She was on her back, having slid in from behind them and had stabbed in the leg with a cylindrical glass tube. He looked at her in alarm; she was smiling. He pulled the vial from his leg there was a needle attached to the end with his blood smeared on it, and he could already feel something, a withdrawing of his senses, his abilities. Oh, stars, what is this? That's why he couldn't sense her. He whipped his head away from the woman to Rey, she was still fighting, but he could see desperation and fear on her face. She was holding back Erdu Ren with his silver sword from cutting her in two when Baxil Ren wielding his bat caught her across the face, and she went down hard. Kylo lashed out with his lightsaber at the two Knights by him, slashing at them in desperation, throwing them back then he rushed to her side. He crouched over her; his saber held above his head to protect them both.

"Enough," he cried out, staring up at the viewing window at Hux. "Enough!"

Kylo extinguished his saber and held Rey in his lap. Everything stopped- blaster fire, actual fire but the Knights stood around him just in case. He could hear the troopers picking themselves back up and dealing with the injured. Behind him, the chrome woman was standing to attention awaiting Hux's arrival on the hangar floor.

"Rey," he pleaded urgently. She was alive he could tell not because he could sense her, he couldn't sense anything, but because he could see her chest moving as she breathed. There were cuts on her arms and angry red welts on her face and her hair drenched with sweat.

He heard steps marching in his direction, and a pair of pristine black boots stopped directly in front of him- Hux.

-X-

It took Ren a while, but he finally raised his eyes from his lowered position to look at him. Ren was severely wounded, blood stained his lips, and there was a tear in his clothing at the shoulder.
that was bleeding. His face was already bruising purple along the cheekbone. Hux could see just over the top of Ren's head a considerable gash running the length of his back which was bleeding freely. He could see the anger in Ren's eyes, the resentment but also the resignation. *Good.*

Ren spat blood onto the floor again then spoke quietly. "Do what you want to me, but don't hurt the girl anymore."

Hux nearly guffawed. "You are in no position to make demands Ren," he spat. "Take them!"

-X-

Kylo was pulled to his feet, and a gasp of pain escaped his mouth, the wound on his back was dire he could tell. Binders were placed on his wrists, and he watched as several troopers took Rey away on a makeshift gurney. So this is how you take Force users into custody. What had that woman injected them with? He vehemently hated Hux but had to admire that the man had done his research. He had no idea how he was going to get them out of this, but he knew as long as he could get Rey safe that would be enough.
Kylo was restrained horizontally upon a rack; his legs and arms bound. How ironic that he was somewhere he'd put so many in the past. He reflected on the fact that his current situation was fate; that for everything he'd ever done in service of the darkside, this was fair payment. His back was a fiery rage where Icesho Ren had slashed up the length of his spine. The wound had been tended to with stitches by medical droids, but he was a prisoner about to be tortured, so there had been no anaesthetic. His jaw and cheek ached, and his eye was swollen from Covex Ren hitting him, he could barely open it, and his mouth still tasted of blood. He only wore undergarments, and the table was cold against his skin. His skin felt damp from a cold feverish sweat, and even the parts of his body not directly in contact with the table felt cold due to the blood he'd lost he assumed. Hux stood with his back to him quietly discussing what was to happen next with the chrome suited stormtrooper. She wasn't a stormtrooper whatever she was she wasn't a stormtrooper. He strained to hear their conversation but couldn't hear anything; he tried to reach out with the Force. He closed his eyes willing it to come to him, but all he could feel was a sludgy mud like feeling in his mind, his body felt numb; he was cut off. What had that been, it had been a few hours, and he was still utterly disconnected? He could see multiple vials on the table next to Hux, whatever it was that he and Rey had been injected with there was more of it. That meant several things:- One- The effects were technically temporary and would wear off eventually, which was good. Two- Hux had an ample supply, meaning he could keep himself and Rey in this state at his mercy for some time. That was bad. Without the Force, Kylo and Rey were normal; good fighters yes, but no better than anyone else.

Hux was finally done with his conversation with the woman; he turned and walked towards Kylo. He looked Kylo up and down, his expression gloating, a sense of pleasure tinting the corners of his mouth.

"You've no idea how long I've waited for this moment."

Kylo could guess it was from the moment he'd been introduced as Snoke's apprentice and confidant trusted to Snoke's plans and schemes- above Hux.

Kylo looked at him with his eyes only, his head was strapped down, and he couldn't move it freely.

"Where's R...the girl?"

Hux waved a hand in dismissal of Ren's need to know where she was. Every time that scavenger had been involved with Ren, his judgement had wavered, and now he knew why. Kylo was in league with her and with the resistance. "She's in a holding cell until she regains consciousness. Her time will come. I have questions for her".

Kylo's hands clenched into balls on the table and his body tensed as he attempted fruitlessly to free himself from the restraints. Teeth clenched a growl escaped his mouth as he fought against the bindings, but it was futile, and as he gave up his attempt, his body banged against the table. He tried and failed to reach out for the Force again. Hux smiled cruelly down at him.

"I wouldn't worry about the girl right now, Ren." He raised his left hand, and the chrome dressed woman approached the table.

"Chromia here is very skilled; she'll truly make this hurt and with your ...abilities ... blocked it will last until I say otherwise".
"You got what you wanted Hux. The First Order is at your command. You are the Supreme Leader now. I can't give you anything; I don't know anything".

"Who said I wanted anything?"

Kylo had not expected that. His mouth thinned to a line; his breath shuddered from his chest. Then as much as he could, keeping what element of pride he could muster he raised his chin slightly, (with the straps on his head it wasn't much) and stared calmly back at Hux in a statement of acceptance of whatever was to come. Hux gave an amused smirk, and one corner of his mouth twitched slightly. The woman stepped forward. "How familiar are you with the Embrace of Pain?"

-X-

It was quite possibly the first time Kylo had ever screamed, honestly screamed but it was not the last. Never had he endured such excruciating torment, electric currents of searing power shot through his body at short intervals, each jolt more painfully powerful than the last. He was used to pain under Snoke, who had regularly used his Force lightning against him in punishment. Snoke's treatment, however, seemed timid in comparison to this; embrace of pain indeed. He'd long given up squirming against the restraints to free himself. It was all he could do to stay conscious, but his body wracked reflexively despite himself. Kylo soon learned that this agony was but one of the many the Embrace of Pain could administer, and although the other methods were different, they were no less agonising.

-X-

Rey woke with a start. Her head was pounding; her side hurt as she breathed and she couldn't sense.... anything. Her insides felt empty. She tried to reach out with her feelings, but her mind felt clogged, thick and heavy. She sat up on the metal bench she was laid on, a hand immediately reaching for her head. A large bump met her fingertips, and her gentle touch was enough to make the bump ache. "Ah".

She turned her legs around slowly to place her feet on the floor and took in her surroundings — a small metal room. A holding cell dimly lit with no windows and no furniture other than the bench she sat on and next to the bench was a tray with a beaker of water on it. She bent and picked it up gratefully taking several big gulps, then held her side as pain vibrated through her as she swallowed. She looked down at herself then, her saber was missing, but her clothes and boots remained untouched, they were damp to the feel, and she was cold.

What had happened? She tried to think. I went to Fondor; Ben was there. We took his ship. He kissed me. The First Order. The fight- fire and blasters and Knights. Then it had all gone horribly wrong when she'd felt that sharp prick in her arm. There had been a wild red-haired, chrome stormtrooper on the floor behind her, holding something in Rey's arm. The woman had turned away from Rey and stabbed something into Ben's leg. Rey remembered feeling like she was losing something, losing herself. She remembered defending herself, terrified by the change she could feel in her senses and then there was nothing. She must have been knocked out.

Where was Ben?

As if in answer, she heard an agonised muffled howl from somewhere near her cell, she froze.

The door to her cell suddenly raised, and General Hux entered, flanked on either side by a stormtrooper.

"Good you're awake" the stormtroopers on either side of him strode towards her, one holding a pair of restraint cuffs. The other abrasively took her arm and yanked her forward.
"All right, all right" she retorted as her feet stumbled. She looked at the stormtrooper holding the binders and raised her hands to them. The binders were attached around Rey's wrists, and then the stormtrooper stood to her other side and took hold of her arm.

She cocked her head sarcastically at Hux. His only response was a mild tic of his mouth that was almost a sneer then he turned out of her cell, and she was dragged after him by the two stormtroopers. As she walked, her head pounded and her muscles ached. She tried to pay attention to her surroundings for a possible way to escape. They turned left then left again then stopped abruptly. Hux was standing in front of a large black wall with a console in front of him, he pressed something on the console display and the wall started to lift upwards- a screen. As the screen rose, another agonised growl could be heard, more clearly this time she realised. She could feel the panic rising in her throat and chest and get body tensed.

The screen rose some more, and the window showed a room on the other side, dimly lit. Rey caught a glimpse of something silver and shining, no chrome, that woman was in there the one who'd injected her and Ben. Then she saw part of a restraint table. As the screen rose slowly, the scene unfolded before her horror-stricken eyes. Rey's face fell in shock at what she now saw.

Ben was strapped to a restraint table at a forty-five-degree angle which held him upside down; his hair falling from his head and his body wrenched and wracked against the meal table and the restraints that kept him in place. Torturing him was... she had no idea what it was some sort of machine? It pulsed as though it were living, and from it, she could see electric blue light. Currently, a haze surrounded Ben and the device as steam rose from Ben's bare-chest. Those little purple veins she'd seen back on the shuttle were vibrant, as though the fire was running through him under his skin. From the pulsing device, needles were inserted into his arms and legs, and from them, the electric blue light seemed more intensive. There were red and yellow seeping sores all over him. His eyes were squeezed tightly shut every muscle tensed against the restraints, and he was roaring in agony!

Rey tried to step forward, but the stormtroopers held her in place. She tried to calm her thoughts, but her eyes welled with tears, and she whimpered.

"Ben."

Hux turned around at the sound of her whimper to face her; a look was gleeful malice shaping his expression an imbalanced sneer touched the one side of his face.

Hux had been correct; he could see it in her eyes.

"So you have compassion for him too, well perhaps you'll give me what I want without any further unpleasantness."

His arm gestured towards the window and scene of torture on the other side. He sounded as though they were talking about a misunderstanding or a bet that had gone wrong, not the violent abuse of an individual, an individual who knew nothing! *Callous monster.* It wasn't that long ago she'd thought this about Ben, but now she was face to face with Hux she understood the true meaning. He reminded her so much of Snoke, Snoke's true apprentice. She was weak without the Force, and there was no way she could defend herself from him. She had valuable information about the Resistance, the New Republic, and she couldn't give it to him. She would not give it to him. Hux watched her expression change, her stance. Defiance. He squinted slightly in annoyance, but he had expected as much.

"As you wish," he turned from her back to the window and nodded at the woman in chrome. She went to the device, pressed something that Rey couldn't see. The machine removed the needles from Ben's flesh leaving deep puncture wounds that bled freely. Different thicker needles retracted
from the device, from these needles something dripped onto Ben's skin. She could hear fizzing as the liquid continued dropping making contact and vapour rose - the liquid was acid! The skin underneath the drops changed from yellow, then to red as the acid deepened the wounds and blood began to run from each area bubbling. Ben's body shook violently under the restraints, eyes flying open as he growled in torturous agony through clenched teeth.

Rey closed her eyes to the scene, but Ben's cries of pain could not be blocked out, and she shuddered. She kept them closed, trying to still her nerves she could not give Hux an inch. When she reopened them, she stared at the scene ahead with her head held high, not deeming to look at Hux; Rey feared if she did, she might plead with him. Rey allowed tears to roll freely down her face as Ben burned before her.

"Take her away," Hux demanded without turning back around.

Rey was brusquely pulled away by her guards back to her cell. Rey knew Ben couldn't hear her, but despite herself, in her mind, she repeated a single phrase hold on Ben, hold on.
The Escape Plan

Colonel Poe Dameron was stood to attention at the holotable at the command centre at the Resistance's base on Ealor. He was waiting for the other leaders to join the meeting; he needed to speak to Princess Leia, General Organa head of the New Republic, General Calrissian, Leia's second in command with regards to the New Republic's leaders. Colonel Dameron was also waiting on the heads of the Resistance:- Admiral Nunb and General Ematt. All the Resistances' previous leaders most notably the renowned Admiral Ackbar were dead after the First Order attack after fleeing D'Qar, those who were left had to step in and step up- including Poe. Colonel Poe Dameron, it did have a nice ring to it, but as a result of his promotion, he'd been sat or stood at this table more and more. What he had to tell the other leaders was mostly bad news; some was information; interesting information; but nothing that would necessarily lead anywhere but to more bad news.

R2-D2 had returned to base without Rey; this hadn't been wholly a surprise if she'd been able to capture Kylo Ren with the ground fighters on Fondor that had been the plan. However, from the open comms device, Rey had been wearing, R2-D2 was able to ascertain that the ground troops were mostly dead on arrival. R2-D2 had overheard her encounter with Kylo Ren, and R2 had gone on to beep animatedly that Kylo Ren had turned on his Knights and that Rey and the Supreme Leader had fled- together! Poe had asked R2 many questions, but the droid had said the comms device had cut out, R2 assumed due to the transport in which Rey had fled leaving planetside and had as ordered returned to base. Although all this news had alarmed Poe, the information that followed had given Poe every reason to fear and request this meeting with the other leaders.

After Crait, Finn had come to Leia with a suggestion- infiltrate the First Order. He had given a good argument. Most stormtroopers like Finn had no choice in their membership they were programmed from childhood if not from birth to be soldiers and obey. They were nameless, and with the helmets on, faceless soldiers. In the troops' barracks, however, when given time to rest and eat troopers had interacted with each other, they were a close-knit team, even friends. Given the option to be something else, anything else, have a genuine home, how many stormtroopers might also deflect? Finn's plan was for a few members of the Resistance to infiltrate each ship and recruit, potentially bring the First Order down from the inside or at least provide useful intelligence. Finn had trained a small group- enough for one to two on each ship, eventually increasing that number over time. He'd taught them fighting styles, how to stand, and how to respond to the higher officers. When a conflict of low significance they knew about was taking place, they'd capture a lone stormtrooper or two- swap the clothes and a Resistance fighter had taken their place aboard the returning shuttle. The captured stormtroopers were then given a choice- freedom or join the Resistance. Poe had been surprised that all had chosen the Resistance, Finn reminded him however it wasn't necessarily because they believed in the cause, it was more likely because they had nowhere else to go. Every stormtrooper was an orphan, and the First Order was their home.

Poe had received his recent worrying and dreadful news from three separate resistance fighters within the First Order. Both Jakub and Kira had made contact from onboard the Supremacy, and then equivalent information from Altor on one of the Dreadnaught's had confirmed the situation. Poe was pulled out of these deliberations when the holotable in front of him finally came to life- Leia, Nunb and Ematt greeted him.

"Good morning, Princess, we've had intel that I feel you all should be aware of. I've called you here to discuss our next steps".

Even through the hologram, Poe could see Leia cringe when he called her Princess. The members
of the New Republic had insisted she no longer be referred to as General. As the leader of the Resistance she'd been General Organa, as the voice of the New Republic her former title was necessary- they had said. "Necessary, how could you call yourself a Princess when the world you were Princess on was long gone", had been Leia's argument. Her annoyance had simply amused Poe, the memory of what Lor San Tekka had said stirred "To me she's royalty" and she was. Leia had told Poe once about her mother, not her adopted mother who was, in fact, Queen of Alderaan, but her birth mother- Padme Amidala, once Queen of Naboo. Apparently on Naboo Queen was a political title, someone voted into power to serve the Senate. Poe had smiled at her and told her to consider the title Princess to be the same thing, the Resistance and Republic had voted, and she was their leader, their voice. That had brought an end to her arguments, but she still grimaced whenever someone said it.

"Get on with it Poe" Leia retorted, without using his new title, a slight glint of a smile in her eyes as if to say two could play that game. Poe nodded.

"As you know Rey went on a lone mission to Fondor to attempt to help the native Resistance fighters in their conflict and potentially capture Supreme Leader Kylo Ren. She has not returned. R2-D2 informs me she left Fondor with Supreme Leader Kylo Ren. I've since had intel from Jakub and Kira onboard the Supremacy that General Hux sent his guard Chromia to follow Supreme Leader Kylo Ren and that Hux has now also left the Supremacy. Altor has informed us General Hux is now aboard his Dreadnought, as are Supreme Leader Kylo Ren and Rey. Altor informed us that they are both prisoners." Poe paused, viewing the furrowed brows and concerned expressions on the three holograms in front of him, this next bit was going to make those expressions even worse. "Altor has also said that Kylo Ren's is being tortured and that Hux is planning to go back to the Supremacy with the prisoners who will stand trial for their crimes." Poe attempted to keep his face stoic; he knew, however, that what he'd just said would have been hard for Leia to hear.

Even on the hologram, he could see her distress; her face had fallen, her hand had come into view as she held her face. Best to continue Poe thought, get it over with.

"If our intelligence is to be believed, and I have no reason to doubt it, then General Hux intends to establish himself as Kylo Ren's successor and take over leadership of the First Order and become Supreme Leader. With Rey as his prisoner, I'm advising as a precaution that we all evacuate our current positions."

Since the issues on D'Qar transports had always been fully fueled and computer systems backed up, but that still wouldn't mean an evacuation would be quick, it would just be slightly faster.

"Agreed" General Ematt responded first "We'll start moving the troops immediately.

"The ships will be at your destinations and ready for the departure to Maridun" Nunb followed. Maridun was the next planet they'd planned to use once Ealor became compromised. A mostly uninhabited grassland but there would be some basic buildings left behind after the Clone Wars that they could utilise.

Leia spoke, "What about Rey?"

"As long as you agree with the course of action Princess, I thought we might discuss that matter privately?" Poe offered.

She nodded. "General Ematt, Admiral Nunb you have your orders. I'll inform our New Republic members to evacuate."

The two other holograms disappeared, and Poe and Leia were alone.
He sat, looking at the table.

"I'm so sorry, Leia." He had no love for Kylo Ren, none what so ever. He was a monster, but Leia he cared for deeply, and he knew how much she'd lost and how much this would hurt her.

"What do you propose to do Colonel?"

Poe raised his head. "A small rescue mission, if you agree. We'll use our spies already on the Supremacy and Finn. More numbers will cause more notice. Keep it quiet we need to be stealthy. The First Order doesn't know we've infiltrated their ranks. I'd ask Chewie, but both he and his ship are too recognisable, although we will need a diversion. I'll have to think about that one" Poe paused again, not wanting to cause Leia any more pain. "We need to do this quickly, Altor says the torture has been going on for at least a day, by the time we can do anything it'll be longer. Rey has crucial information we can't be sure she hasn't been tortured herself or what General Hux already knows".

"I trust you to do what is needed, bring them home. I'll meet you at the next base on Maridun."

"Yes, Princess, I'll keep you updated. Stay safe and may the Force be with you."

Leia lowered the hand from her face, despite the concern and gave a meek yet brave smile. Through the hologram, Leia's soft gaze was intense and captivating, her words full of deep feeling and meaning.

"May the Force be with us all".

Leia's hologram disconnected and Poe was left alone. Bring them home, not Rey home, that's what she'd said. It didn't matter, right now he needed a plan, he stood- he needed to talk to Chewie, Finn and Rose, Poe excited the command centre and headed outside. Outside the main building, Poe found Finn and Rose helping Commander Connix to organise groups with siphoning any fuel still on base, loading the last of the munitions and resources and most importantly the purge of the computers.

"Finn, Rose I need you. Sorry, Connix." He looked at Connix apologetically but knew she was more than capable of balancing all the leftover tasks. Looking up from her checklist, she just nodded at him and continued her job. She was efficiency personified, and thank the Force for that.

Rose and Finn filed in alongside Poe as he wandered away from the base while concurrently filling them in on the situation and the task; come up with a rescue plan. Hopefully, they would not be on ships for long after the evacuation, but Poe wanted to take in the fresh air while they could- he couldn't face the table inside the base anymore today.

"Ok, so we need to get on board the Supremacy, cause a distraction, get Rey out of the prison cells and then get to Maridun. Is that about it?" Finn broke the task down, making it sound ludicrous.

"Yeah," Poe knew it sounded crazy, but given what Finn and Rose had achieved, and nearly realised trying to stop a tracking system, he felt pretty confident they could come up with something.

"Jakub and Kira are on the Supremacy; we can get word to them to support you from the inside, the issue is the distraction so you can get Rey out. The other issue is getting you in."

"Me?" Finn and Rose simultaneously pointed at themselves and spoke in unison. Rose, however, had a little more distress in her face than Finn.

Poe looked to Rose. "You're a little short to be a stormtrooper, and honestly I think you're talents
would be better served in creating the distraction, could you, you know hack something? Slice something?"

Relief washed over Rose's face followed by amusement, "I'm not a slicer you know that, but if we get on board I could hack the system with a device I have... what system would I hack to cause a distraction though? Alarms would be good?" Rose was thinking out loud; this was precisely what Poe had hoped for and let her brilliant mind work.

"The maintenance systems!" Finn piped in. Poe smiled as the two animatedly started to virtually read each other's thoughts and finish each other's sentences. Their relationship was adorable, and they were just perfect for each other, raising each other up, challenging each other. Poe's mind flitted to Rey sadly for a moment, for what had never been, as quickly as the image occurred to him, he shook it away. Now was not the time.

"Evacuation and fire procedures would cause havoc!" Rose was exclaiming, almost jumping in her excitement.

"That's brilliant!" Poe chimed in. "How do we get a device onboard though? Jakub and Kira are already on board, and we haven't got time to find a small conflict involving stormtroopers to get one of you up there." He jumped to the next problem.

"We'll need a ship, uniforms and we'll need a code breaker to get us onboard undetected." Finn countered.

"We've got spare stormtrooper uniforms right, from your initiative? I think I can help on the pilot and code breaker front" Poe turned and started walking quickly back towards the base heading for where the ships and shuttles were situated, Rose and Finn trotting after him.

Poe found Chewie standing yowling at Maz Kanata while she argued back, wrench in hand on the hull of the Millennium Falcon, Porgs were chirping all around the ship, big soft mountain Poe thought on observing the scene.

"Chewie, we need your help, you too Maz."

Maz hollered at Chewie to get her down, and he obliged.

"We need you to sneak aboard the Supremacy so we can rescue Rey. Finn and Rose will sort out everything else."

Chewie looked at Maz, and she attached her spectacles, eyeing Poe, Finn and Rose up curiously.

"That's it, rescue Rey?"

"That's it" Poe confirmed. Leia had said them, but that really wasn't important and didn't drastically change their current need. "You can do it, right?"

"Of course we can do it!" Maz refuted an air of irritation in her voice at the suggestion that she even needed to be asked. Chewie barked in agreement.

"Then get going we don't have much time."

All four of them nodded at Poe then Finn and Rose ran off to get what they needed. Chewie yowled at Maz and Maz chucked the wrench to the side of the Falcon. "It'll be fine" she yelled back.
Poe didn't feel particularly confident about their odds, but he certainly felt better now there was a plan. Now to get out of here, he thought to himself, and he dashed back in the direction of the main building to go through the checklists with Connix.
Rey sat slumped against the wall of her prison cell, head in her hands, her elbows perched up resting on her knees. How long had she been here? The dim lights in her cell never went off to give a sense of day or night. There had been no real food either to provide a time frame, once some basic rations and water had been delivered. The agonised distant cries had been another constant, at times there had been breaks, and Rey had tried to reach out with her feelings to check if Ben was still alive, but she was still numb, and she couldn't sense a thing. Sometimes the screams came with a furious shaking of her surroundings, Ben's abilities returning Rey guessed but the roars of pain that followed were just that- roars. They were keeping him deadened from the Force during his torture; no risks were being taken. During one break in the howls, she'd meditated and started to feel that same awakening sensation she'd felt on Ahch-To, shortly after though the chrome stormtrooper had entered the cell with two other stormtroopers. Rey had been restrained against the wall, and the sharp prick on her arm and the numbing sensation confirmed the drug had been re-administered.

Several times the chrome woman had entered with Hux and a Knight of Ren or a contraption- a dark metal globe that hovered on its independent repulsors. Metal arms protruded from its side each equipped with delicate but barbaric instruments. With the Knight present they'd questions, and every time Rey had remained silent, the Knight had hit her- ribs and stomach mostly but also her legs and back. When the contraption was present, her silence had invoked its monstrous purpose. She had managed to restrain her outcries to muffled sounds against that particular interrogation. Her body ached now, and her face was moist from her tears; however, the tears were not for her physical pain. She'd been considering a way to escape, but everything involved being stronger or having the Force to trick a guard and then, then what? She felt hopeless even if she had the Force rescuing Ben, and the two of them escaping while injured, him badly, seemed utterly impossible. She'd escaped before but had used the Force, Poe had escaped before but with Finn. She needed help, would Poe come for her? Were resistance members on this ship? They were her and Ben's only hope.

It was quiet around her cell now eerily so and had been for quite some time now. No more screams, no roars, no vibrations and Rey feared the worst. Her breath became unsteady as she tried not to panic. As if in answer to her unasked question the door to her cell opened, she looked up and then stood. What was it this time? More injections? Maybe some food and water? She was hungry and weak she had to admit, but that indeed was the least of her problems.

Two stormtroopers stood in the doorway, holding Ben, his legs dragged behind him, his head hung down, and his arms were being held above him by the troopers who were gripping him at the elbows. They unceremoniously flung him into the room then another trooper from behind them placed a tray of food and water into the room and then closed the door.

Rey rushed to his crumpled body, "Ben? Ben?" She cried as she gently swept the hair from his face. He was unconscious but breathing; though it was shallow. Looking from his face, she permitted herself to look at the extent of the damage to his person. What she saw was worse than she had imagined seeing him from the other side of the screen, attached to that table with the machine above him. His body was a map of torture: deep red and yellow sores and blisters from the acid. Multiple puncture wounds riddled in his arms, torso and legs from the needles and the dark purple veins were painted across his entire body, making his already fair skin seem translucent. A sizeable angry red wound ran up the length of his back weeping slightly, at least it didn't look infected, it had been stitched, although unskillfully. They'd also made a weak attempt to redress him, having only partially dressed him in simple black trousers, nothing was covering his torso,
and his feet were bare.

Rey stood and retrieved the rough sheet from the metal platform. There was no way even if she wasn't injured that she'd get him onto the bench— he was not a small person and lying upon the floor Ben's body seemed even more significant as his unconscious form filled the cell floor. Rey would have to do what she could for him where he lay. With a considerable effort, she managed as gently as she could to flip him over onto his back with the blanket beneath him. She rested his head upon her lap to support his head. Rey moistened the edge of the blanket with some water from the beaker and smoothed it across his face. Surprisingly his face was the one thing they'd left untouched, though his one eye was swollen from the fight in the hangar. She moistened the sheet again, parting his lips and squeezed the water in, she did this a few times and eventually, he opened and closed his mouth on his own. Pulling the blanket over the top of him cocooning him, she now brought the beaker to his lips and allowed small trickles to enter his mouth. It continued like that for a while and then his eyes fluttered and he looked up at her.

"Rey." It was a hoarse dry sound, nothing like his normal voice. He tried to reach a hand to her, but all he managed was a shift beneath the blanket. "Are you ok?"

"Am I ok?" She replied incredulously, "let's worry about you, alright?"

He didn't argue, closing his eyes again.

"They didn't even ask me anything," Ben whispered, "not that I had anything to tell."

Rey stroked his hair.

"It'll be ok; the Resistance will come for us." She hoped she sounded confident, but if she was in Poe's position, would she rescue her? It seemed a considerable risk.

"They'll come for you" Ben answered, reopening his eyes and giving her a sadly resigned stare.

"I told you already; I'm not going anywhere without you."

There was no more talking; she just held him as he slept. Rey must have fallen asleep too because she woke with a jolt to the noise of the cell door opening, but it was only a stormtrooper with clothes, boots, food and water. Regardless she clung to Ben protectively not that she imagined her presence would make much difference if they planned to remove him.

"You'll be escorted to the Supremacy to stand trial in the morning."

Rey had no sense of time since being in the cell. How long they'd been there or what time it was now.

"How long till then?" she queried.

"Twelve hours" without another word the stormtrooper left, the door closing behind them, leaving Rey and Ben alone again.

With some effort, Rey managed to heave Ben up some more so he was still resting but was more upright his head lay upon her chest now rather than her lap. He stirred and she offered him the food and water. While she did this, she became aware of a familiar feeling on the back of her neck like she was cold like her hair was standing on end — the Force. The injection must be wearing off. Where Ben leaned against her, she could feel his muscles tense slightly. Struggling slightly, he sat upright and turned around to face her.
"Do you feel it?" She whispered, afraid that maybe someone was listening in on them and the chrome stormtrooper would return with her vials.

He nodded, "give me your hands".

Rey obliged, placing her hands within his. His enveloped hers.

"Close your eyes and focus on the Force, reach out with your feelings".

She did, and with his hands covering hers that same sensation of awakening struck her. She could feel it rising within her, and behind her closed eyes, she could sense a light getting brighter and brighter just as it had when they had kissed before everything had gone so awry. Her eyes flung open, and Ben was gazing at her, an awestruck expression on his face.

"Keep holding on," Ben said as he shrugged the blanket off from his shoulders and straightened his posture, closing his eyes he focused, taking in long deep breaths. Rey watched in avid fascination as the yellow, and red sores across his chest appeared to fade, the swelling around his eye reduced. As she watched all this, she noticed the ache in her ribs and face reduce. Ben's breathing became laboured, and his exhales harsh, whatever they were channelling through the Force was taking its toll on him physically.

After a few moments or possibly a few hours Rey couldn't tell, Ben opened his eyes and allowed the grasp on her hands to relax. She was looking at him directly intently searching for answers or at least acknowledgement that she'd not imagined it. She could feel his large thumb stroking the top of her hand as he looked down, apparently studying every detail of her hands in his.

Ben could sense her questions, but he wasn't sure he had any answers or at least not any he was sure of, so avoided looking at her directly. He observed the remnants of food and water and clothes. He reached over for the plate and placed it between them, taking some and then nudging the plate towards her. He sipped the water from the beaker on his own, letting the water swill around his parched mouth then swallowed. Again he placed it between them for her to help herself. Had she forgone her individual needs for his sake? It was her nature, but they both needed to be capable and competent. He reached for the clothes then with some effort, leaning back, on the one hand, he got into a crouched position and then finally stood upright. He pulled the boots on and then with increased effort lugged the top over his head though not without a few rumbles and grunts of pain. When he was finished dressing, he looked over to her. Rey was standing too; she'd taken the opportunity to change when he had- she was dragging the top down over her bound torso, and as she did, he caught a glimpse of her bruised ribs. The sight of her injury caused him to sharply inhale as he felt that familiar anger rise in him. She turned to him when she heard his breath, noticing that he was gazing at her, a mournful expression on his face but his eyes fiery with rage. She stepped towards him and reached her hand up, sweeping hair out of his eyes and bringing her palm to rest against his cheek. Ben allowed his face to relax into her hand, nuzzling into it almost, closing his eyes, he sighed and brought his hand up to encompass hers. He leaned forward slightly resting his head upon her shoulder.

"We should get some rest," he breathed into her neck.

They'd argued about who should take the bunk and then when neither of them would succumb they agreed they'd rest on the floor together. Rey had argued that as she was in the better condition, out of the two of them, that she would lean against the wall and Ben could lean against her. He was too exhausted to disagree anymore, and he agreed. Despite Ben's large frame, he managed to curl up neatly between her raised knees as he leant upon her chest. Despite all that had happened, Ben fell asleep quickly listening to her heart beating while she stroked his head. A memory stirred into his subconscious as sleep took him, of his mother stroking his hair, soothing him whenever he had
been ill or awakened from a nightmare curled up on her lap. A memory of a time before his training, before Snoke when he’d been young and innocent; it was so long ago, another lifetime it seemed. It was a sweet memory, and instead of fleeing from it as he would typically have done in rage and anger he allowed it to consume him, and Ben slept peacefully dreaming of his mother, an island, Rey and their son.
Supreme Leader Hux

Hux found the Supreme Leaders Quarters aboard the Supremacy ship to be more sparsely furnished than he'd had imagined. Ren held few personal effects; there were a few clothes, nothing very telling. The only item of significance and particular value sat on top of a table, the remains of a helmet; the helmet of Darth Vader. Hux peered down at the remains intrigued. He'd heard the stories, the Galatic Empire's most celebrated warrior turned traitor. Vader had murdered the Empire's illustrious leader, Emperor Palpatine, to save his son the supposed hero of the Rebel Alliance Luke Skywalker the Jedi Knight. The infamous Sith Lord had by all accounts been terrifying to behold and with a temper that Hux found familiar in Ren. Ren appeared to have followed in his grandfather's footsteps. A disappointment to the cause, turning traitor as Darth Vader had, murdering his master, having been swayed by emotion for another. Unlike Vader, it was not Skywalker that had swayed Ren from his path, but the scavenger girl who'd murdered Snoke with Ren. Emotional attachment of any kind was a weakness something Hux neither understood nor had time for.

Hux would have Ren's room cleared and make it his soon enough, not that it would take very long. He headed towards the throne room, which was directly linked to the quarters and escape shuttle. Hux approached the throne, removing his gloves to feel the cold, smooth metal. He sat; this was his moment, and he was savouring every minute, to imprint it on his memory permanently. Yes, he could almost feel the power this throne offered, he breathed deeply and purposefully as he surveyed the room from this vantage point. Hux had considered the trial and subsequent execution of Ren and the girl being via holo; the throne had holo commands allowing communication virtually to anywhere. Hux understood the value of the HoloNet from the Empire's propaganda. He wanted the trial to be a demonstration and a display of power, as Starkiller Base had been when he'd destroyed the New Republic.

The doors to the throne room elevator opened, and General Kail, General Valax, Vice Admiral Renor and Grand Admiral Skalick departed one after the other. These senior members were his most active supporters. Hux was unsure however of General Kail and General Valaxs' loyalty, especially if a situation occurred that threatened his position or theirs. H'ed informed them all of Ren's capture, the torture he'd kept between himself and Chromia. He'd tasked them with finding a suitable place for the execution, the preparations for the war to follow and most importantly finding the location of the Republic. He sat in the throne, hands placed strategically on each side as they walked towards him, and when they were close enough, he nodded. Grand Admiral Skalick was a tall thin man with a narrow pointed face. He’d previously been one of Hux's father's men but now supported Hux after Brendol's untimely demise. He spoke first.

"Supreme Leader, I believe I have found the planet on which the execution can take place".

'Supreme Leader', Hux truly enjoyed how that sounded, to have it said to him rather than him saying it. He waved his hand so that Skalick would continue.

"Planet Ruusan. It's a barren planet so will be safe for our forces to land on, it's the site of an old battle so unlikely to have any Resistance."

"Ideal Grand Admiral, you've done well. I leave it to you to prepare all our forces to head there. The trial will be held here as a formality before the public execution".

As Hux said here, his hand pointed down at the throne; he wanted the trial to be here in the throne room itself. Hux believed that to be particularly fitting as this was the site of the previous assassination and treason. It had been on the former Supremacy, but that was inconsequential.
"Grand Admiral I also want an inventory of our ships and ground weapons, I want to be fully prepared for this war. I rely on you and Vice Admiral Renor to assist me with our strategies for the ground and air attacks."

Grand Admiral Skalick inclined his head. Hux surveyed the others all standing to attention.

"Do we have any information regarding the Resistance? The Republic? We know that false Princess is leading them, but where?" Since Hux had taken over leadership prioritising destroying their enemies had become renewed, something the leaders in this room endorsed.

General Kail responded first, "Supreme Leader we've looked into this matter as requested; however, our sources are giving conflicting information."

Kail was a short woman incredibly intelligent and had trained in multiple forms of combat. Kail was harsh in nature and looks. Her hair scraped off her face in a tight bun, and her eyebrows were so fair she looked as though she didn't have any. Looking at her was disconcerting; she was so difficult to comprehend.

Hux raised one eyebrow; this was not the news he wanted to hear. He wanted results, and quickly, the execution would be the catalyst to spur their forces into the final solution, ending the Resistance and the Republic. They had no StarKiller Base, but that didn't concern Hux. They would rely on their superior forces, their superior weapons to gain certain victory not to mention they far outnumbered the Resistance. The execution was the perfect propaganda to trigger a heightened sense of destruction and duty in the troops, and he would need to utilise that energy quickly, but they needed a destination. Until a destination was achieved, the execution and subsequent war would be dead in the water. He was so invested in his plans he hadn't considered that it might take some time to locate the Republic.

General Valax now spoke. The complete opposite of General Kail, Valax was a huge man. Enormous in height, very broad and incredibly muscled; his uniform seemed to strain against his every movement. Every feature of the man's face matched his body- large dark eyebrows, a large nose, a tight mouth and square jaw.

"Supreme Leader," Valax's deep voice boomed around the room. "What General Kail means to say is we've had information from multiple sources with multiple locations for the Republic. On the surface, it doesn't appear to correspond, but we believe this means the Republic is separated on several planets. They've obviously made a strategic decision in order to make them more difficult to destroy".

Hux nodded his understanding, clever.

General Valax continued, "we have however had several confirmed reports that the main Resistance is on Ealor. How would you like to proceed Supreme Leader?"

Some good news, Hux considered. No Republic but something on the Resistance. They would need more information to be sure.

"Have scouts check out the validity of Ealor as the Resistance base, continue to get information General Valax and keep me informed. I want to know where the leader of the Republic, that Princess, is. We need to know both before the execution can take place. Vice Admiral Renor make sure all ground troops and pilots are prepared once this information is verified".

Vice Admiral Renor had been silent throughout the entire meeting, quiet but observant, his pale eyes never leaving Hux. Another older member of the leaders but ruthless his thin grey hair made a
distinctive widow's peak across his pale, stern face.

"Yes Supreme Leader," Valax and Renor spoke in unison.

"Grand Admiral Skalick I want you to aid General Kail and General Valax with hunting the Resistance down."

Grand Admiral Skalick inclined his head again. This veteran of the Empire didn't talk unnecessarily; he'd been commanding so long the slightest movement of his hand or face spoke volumes. His Captain's and subordinates upon his ship had learned to decipher these inclinations through years of service.

The doors of the Throne Room elevator opened behind the officials with a mechanic hiss and Hux looked up. A chrome stormtrooper walked towards the group, holding a silver staff, the red cape flowing behind them. The corner of Hux's mouth turned up slightly to one side as she approached, behind her the six dark-clad Knights of Ren followed. Hux could see the leaders in front of him stiffen their stances slightly. Hux's bodyguard and her Knight's made them nervous- good. He had these leaders support, but it didn't hurt to have such warriors to make sure that support continued. For Chromia, Hux stood, the First Order leaders moved aside, and she strode to meet him.

"Supreme Leader, you're prisoners are on board. They have been....." she paused, ".... treated as you requested."

Chromia, Hux knew, was referring to the injections to make sure Ren and the girl were still unable to use their powers. Hux had been delighted with how things aboard the Dreadnaught had gone, pleased even. He'd sadistically enjoyed watching Ren's torture. The only thing that had been a problem had been the girl. They'd used every kind of First Order strategy to get information from her and failed. The one time Ren might have been helpful. Hux had to admit that some Force abilities were extremely useful and reading minds had undoubtedly been one of them. Ren had never failed when interrogating prisoners to acquire the desired information, well until the girl. No matter. It was only a matter of time till they got what they needed, and then he wouldn't need the information from the girl.

"Leave us" Hux demanded eyeing his leaders, with a curt nod they all departed briskly.

Cromia turned her helmet-encased head towards the knights that had followed her; they moved to the sides of the throne room silent and ominous. She then turned back to face Hux; he was looking down at her expectantly, not speaking. She removed her helmet, letting her red hair free. Hux was disappointed to see the wild hair had been tamed, braided running down from the top of her head and ending in a coil at her shoulders. Hux genuinely smiled then for the braid reminded him of a snake. He stepped towards her; he had become reliant on her advice and judgement. Her company gratified him. He was surprised by how much he enjoyed looking at her feral face. The stark contrast of the red markings on her skin contoured her features and her flame-like eyes. She bore back at him with those fierce blazing eyes, Hux felt they were actually burning him for he could feel the heat on his skin. Hux had never felt any attachment for anyone or anything, but if this creature were ever to leave him, he would miss her he felt.

"Everything is ready for the execution of the prisoners Supreme Leader."

Hux revelled in the way she said that- Supreme Leader, she almost purred the 'r' lingering on Supreme before continuing.

"You acquired it then? May I see it?" He asked, brimming with excitement.
She turned and nodded to one of the Knights who brought forward two large rods, placing them on the floor next to Chromia. Chromia knelt to stand the rods up vertically but kept them separated by a distance. A different Knight stepped forward and handed her an electrostaff Chromia activated it into and touched the staff to one of the rods. Lines of vibrant electricity ignited between the rods, straight red lines that buzzed loudly and gave off a red hue in between.

Hux's smile increased, but the glint in his eyes was savage. The red glow that reflected across his face monstrously, as Hux imagined the scenario of how this instrument of death would be used. She had found it, the electroguillotine and it was beautiful a clean killing machine, a creation of science and to Hux that made it a mechanism of infinite beauty.
Jakub and the Initiative.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Aboard the Supremacy ship within the stormtroopers barracks, a single trooper sat secretly in a storage cupboard, helmet removed and hands-free of his protective gloves he held a small device.

"Come in Black Leader, come in Black Leader," he whispered.

"This is Black Leader, go ahead".

"Package is aboard the Supremacy, extraction required. I repeat package is aboard the Supremacy."

"Copy that Black soldier, extraction planned for fourteen hundred tomorrow, expect to receive Gold soldier."

"Copy that"

The lone trooper replaced the device into his boot. It wasn't comfortable, but as Finn had told them in training, no one ever checked inside your shoes. Jakub went to stroke his hand through his hair in thought then recalled not for the first time that his hair was gone, a requirement of joining Finn's trooper initiative. Troopers don't have lovely flowing locks Finn had said derisively, taking a strand of Jakub's long mousey brown hair between his fingers.

Jakub had been one of the first to join the initiative taking the place of FB 1123 and had been reasonably successful; he'd gotten lots of useful intelligence and converted squadrons of troops. He wasn't arrogant or naïve enough to think that conversion was a full conversion, more a new way of thinking and a spreading of discontent. He'd conversed with entire squadrons of troops while in their barracks (troopers slept and relaxed in massive halls) and they were ordinary people, often young and until recently relatively untested. They didn't enjoy war, and he'd often found a new young trooper or two crying at their bunk or sitting in silence. Given another choice, he believed many would defect. He'd even befriended several troopers outside of his squadron's quarters, troopers he knew would be helpful in achieving the extraction of Rey. Right now Jakub needed to see PR 2357 from prisoner security.

Jakub stepped out of the cupboard and went over to his designated bunk put on his helmet and gloves. Just another faceless, nameless stormtrooper; at least it made infiltration easier. Picking his blaster up, Jakub headed out of the quarters towards the detention block. He'd seen Rey on Thyferra when he'd joined the Resistance. While there Finn had started the initiative and Jakub had signed up, Rey had tested him in combat as had Finn, so when he saw her escorted out of the main hangar dressed in black and cuffed, he knew the information he'd got from Altor was right. She hadn't been alone either a tall, dark man had been with her, a distinctive scar running the length of his face, also cuffed, looking slightly dishevelled, shoulders hung low. Hadn't Altor said Kylo Ren was also prisoner? Hadn't his own intel here aboard the Supremacy from Kira given similar information? Kira was disguised as an officer placing her on the bridge, her intelligence had to be right, but this man couldn't be Kylo Ren could he?

Jakub had never come into contact with the Supreme Leader Kylo Ren while on the Supremacy, but he'd heard stories about him, mostly from other troopers. They described him as a masked warrior nightmare, not just because he was a dark Jedi but because of his violent mood swings. Stormtroopers warned each other if Supreme Leader Kylo Ren was stalking the corridors of the
Supremacy in case he lashed out at some unfortunate passerby. Destroying equipment on a whim and dragging people towards him or throwing them across rooms or corridors by using the Force. The Supreme Leader's personal training rooms interior was regularly obliterated, and he could be heard in there at all hours, his screaming red saber destroying everything.

Poe had told them all during their initial training that Kylo Ren could stop a blaster shot in its path. He was, by all accounts terrifying! The man Jakub had seen hadn't looked terrifying. He was big, massive in fact and the scar along his face was significantly menacing, but this man wasn't terrifying to behold. To Jakub, the man had seemed broken and demoralised. Jakub had to trust his intel was right; either way, the objective was to save Rey whether that man was Kylo Ren or not didn't matter.

At the detention block, Jakub could see several troopers; it was impossible to tell who was who by merely looking. Nothing was distinguishable between the low ranking troopers. Thankfully not recognising one another wasn't something that stormtroopers found impolite.

"I'm looking for PR 2357."

"Who's asking for him?"

"Trooper FB 1123"

"He's over by cell 47."

Jakub nodded and headed down the cell block. PR 2357 was standing to attention outside.

"Hey, buddy, it's FB." Privately troopers didn't use the numbers as it was annoying long, it almost felt like a nickname using the letters at the beginning. However, occasionally out of your squadron or known circle it could become confusing there were just so many troopers.

"Hey FB," the trooper acknowledged him back. "What do you need?"

"I heard you had new prisoners, caught a glimpse of them in the hangar. Who you got in there?" Jakub asked.

"You won't believe it, go on take a look".

Jakub peered through the viewing slot, with the helmet on as well it was tough to see. Inside he could make out two figures; one was Rey and the other the tall man he'd seen with her. They were sat on the floor legs crossed facing each one another, holding hands eyes closed. Strange.

"Who are they?" Jakub asked, looking back at PR 2357.

"That's Supreme... I mean that's Kylo Ren!" PR exclaimed, clearly shocked at Jakub's lack of knowledge. So Jakub's information had been right. He knew the girl, of course, but PR went on to tell him anyway, "The girl with him, killed Supreme Leader Snoke."

"Really? Her?"

"They're being put on trial tomorrow afternoon in the throne room."

"Oh yeah, what time is that show?" Jakub tried to ask casually to draw less suspicious attention.

"Fourteen hundred."

Jakub nodded. He had everything he needed; he knew the cell number and time. Tomorrow just
before fourteen hundred he'd be at this cell, breaking Rey and potentially Kylo Ren out. He felt awful for PR 2357; tomorrow he was going to have a bad day, a really terrible day.

-X-

The Millennium Falcon was in hyperspace heading towards the First Order Supremacy ship. Chewbacca was in the pilot's seat with Maz Kanata at his side sat in the co-pilot seat. Porgs were scattered around the cockpit, why Chewie put up with them, Maz could not comprehend. Chewie had explained that some had made their way onto the ship and he felt obliged to let them stay, something about feeling guilty after spit roasting one on Ahch-To. Maz still didn't see why that was relevant, but it wasn't her ship. It wasn't Chewie's either; it would always be Han's. Maz felt a pang of sadness over their old friend, she had told him he'd been running from the fight for too long, and now he was gone.

There were very few humans who over her long life she'd truly liked; Han, however, had been one of them. Born on that Force forsaken planet Corellia he'd escaped, become a pilot and a smuggler and married a princess. Few in life could boast such a change in circumstances. She smiled to herself sadly- scoundrel, that's what Leia had always called him. Their love for each other had never faded Maz could see it whenever Han had chosen to come to Takodana, but the weight of what had happened with Ben was too heavy, and they had allowed themselves to drift apart. Ben Solo, Maz had felt his presence in the Force when he was born, a surge of energy, the girl's awakening in the vaults of Takodana had been another such surge. Maz wasn't sure what it meant, her life had been a long one, but the will of the Force was often unclear. She'd seen war after war fought in the name of power; the Force intermingled throughout it all. For centuries there had been peace but not balance. The Sith had risen, and hundreds of Jedi had been slaughtered with Darth Vader's creation and the dissolution of the Senate. The rise of the Rebel Alliance to overthrow the Emperor and the Galactic Empire. The establishment of the New Republic and now the First Order and the Resistance. It never truly ended, but she had sensed something new with the girl. Perhaps there might finally be an end to all of it. Poe had told them to save Rey, but Maz had seen in his eyes that he was hiding something. Finn and Rose had let slip that Rey but also Kylo Ren had been captured, and both were prisoners. Maz had every intention of doing what Han had failed to do, not through anything he could have known, done or controlled of course but Maz intended to bring Ben Solo home. Maz sensed the two of them together, the girl and Ben could follow a different path and finally perhaps true peace would come to the Galaxy.

A tremendous howl from Chewie made Maz recoil from her ruminations; they had come out of hyperspace, time to work, Maz deftly sliced a section of the shield with the equipment she'd brought with her so that they could board undetected. Finn had told them about a hangar used by maintenance and manned only by computer systems and droids; that was the hangar they steered towards. The dumping of the ships rubbish didn't need troopers, and that was useful for them. Maz hollered back to the main hold and lounge area where Rose and Finn were preparing. "Rose! Get up here time to work your magic!"

The Falcon landed in the empty hangar; there was nothing around them except cubes of compacted rubbish. Chewie turned everything onto low power to avoid any possible detection as Rose came along the corridor to the cockpit, her hacking device in her hands. "Finn's ready, can't do much till he's in, he needs to connect the other device into one of the control panels."

Finn entered the cockpit in full stormtrooper armour complete with a blaster. It had been a long time since he'd worn the uniform and he'd forgotten how uncomfortable and restrictive it was.

Rose handed him the smaller device that linked to hers, and he took it in his gloved hand. "OK lower the boarding ramp let's do this!"
"Be careful and keep in contact," Rose cried after him as he strolled confidently back towards the main cargo hold.

He turned to her, "I will."

"May the Force be with you."

Inside his helmet, Finn smiled, Rose couldn't see it, but from the slight smile that touched her face, he could tell she knew. He nodded at her and disembarked. From the safety of the cockpit Maz, Chewie and Rose watched Finn make his way across the hangar to a control panel, he opened it and attached the device Rose had given him then turned back towards the freighter and gave the viewing port of the cockpit a thumbs up.

Using the ship's communication, Rose responded, "you can use your comms device inside your helmet dummy! You're going to need to once we can't see you anymore, remember!"

Finn gave another thumbs up and left the hangar bay. Rose gave an exasperated sigh; she could see Maz and Chewie looking at her incredulously in mild disbelief.

"I know, I know. It'll be fine," Rose responded. Finn's favourite phrase she hoped it was true.

Rose started hacking the system. First, she intercepted the maintenance hangar system, checking for messages to the bridge about an unknown ship entering. So far, nothing had happened. Guess the droids are preoccupied with their work, not programmed to do anything else. Made sense, the service droids in the cleaning area hadn't done anything when Finn, DJ and herself and stolen uniforms. OK fire alarms should also be in the maintenance system; as soon as Finn gave the signal that he had Rey, she would signal the alarms. Rose would also release the escape pods- havoc. She smiled as she worked.

Chapter End Notes

So I'm a maths teacher, for those geeks out there reading this the trooper digits are maths orientated, again sorry.
In cell 47, of the detention block aboard the Supremacy ship, Kylo Ren was pacing. He could feel the effects of the injection fading, Rey and himself had been injected again on leaving the Dreadnought in a shuttle for the Supremacy. Restrained by binders Rey and Kylo had been accompanied on their shuttle voyage by troopers armed with blasters and flamethrowers and by the Knights of Ren. Fighting back then would've achieved nothing, so they'd accepted movement to the Supremacy. Once in cell 47, they were provided with more food, new clothing and they were even permitted to separately use a refresher with actual water, not just a sonic shower. Evidently, Hux wanted them to look unharmed for trial, make a real show of it.

Kylo's tread increased as he paced back and forth, the cell was small, a maximum of ten steps from one end to the door at the other and that tenth step was decreasing as his stride got larger in agitation. Rey was at the refresher; she'd insisted he go first. It hadn't been the experience he'd hoped it would be; his wounds stung as the water hit his body, but on his face at least the sensation was cleansing. Kylo had felt improved until he'd returned to the cell and started thinking. He was trying to jumble a lot of questions, and as a result, he could feel his natural impulse to lash out at all of it growing. What was the light they could sense when they held hands? How were they able to heal each other? How were they able to reduce the effects of the injection? What were they being dosed with? How were they going to escape? The only questions Kylo had mildly been able to answer were the first two; he vaguely remembered reading something from his training with Luke. Kylo couldn't get a tangible hold on the memory, they were the least important, however, and so far any plan of escape was eluding him.

The door to the cell opened, and Rey stood in the doorway, a stormtrooper on either side, her damp hair hanging around her face. He stopped his pacing and turned to her. Her presence instantly soothing his rabid thoughts, she made him better, stronger, and he did the same for her. He knew now his compassion for her wasn't a weakness; his feelings for her gave him focus.

The door to the cell remained open, and he noticed binders restrained her. A stormtrooper held another pair in his hands, "Time for your trial".

Kylo moved forwards, hands held out in front of him, staring the trooper down as the binders were placed around his wrists. They walked down the corridors stopping at an elevator, Kylo knew this was the elevator to the throne room. They stood in the elevator in silence as the light changed dark, light, dark, light as it ascended the floors. The elevator door opened and in a somewhat similar representation of when Kylo had brought Rey to Snoke, they were taken forwards by the stormtroopers.

In a semi-circle panning out from the throne sat the leaders of the First Order and in the throne sat Hux. A gloating sneer on his face at the sight of Kylo and Rey being brought towards him, directly behind him stood the chrome stormtrooper, without her helmet.

"Kylo Ren you come here, charged with treason for conspiring with the Resistance and aiding a Resistance fighter in the assassination of Supreme Leader Snoke. Rey of Jakku you are charged with the assassination of Supreme Leader Snoke. How do you plead?"

Kylo looked towards the voice, General Targo, one of the few First Order leaders he hadn't minded, perhaps a trial and not merely an execution had been her idea. She was not one of those who wholly supported Hux; she was intelligent and hard-working. Targo had gained ascension to the highest level because she had worked to be there, not through Hux's influence.
He looked to Rey, who thankfully appeared to have chosen stubborn silence. Kylo had no intention of doing the same.

"I am not of the Resistance, and I have not conspired with them." Rey was glaring at him fervently, but he continued. "I'm the one that assassinated Snoke- not the girl; I lied when I said it was her. It was me, just me".

Hux's sneer increased at this, he had known the girl hadn't acted alone and was grateful for the outcome, but that Kylo had been the perpetrator of Supreme Leader's Snoke demise made his plan effortless and straightforward.

"You're with the girl now, found fleeing Fondor with her, having turned on your Knights. How can you deny this is not a collaboration with the Resistance? It explains all your failings as Supreme Leader and your assassination of Supreme Leader Snoke."

Kylo couldn't deny Hux's logic, what was his excuse? His mouth worked as he tightened his lips and raised his chin, glowering at Hux in defiance. Eventually, through gritted teeth, he responded.

"I wanted no harm to come to the girl, for her to be my apprentice and lead the First Order at my side". It was the truth, and he knew as he said it he'd provided Hux with everything to seal his fate. That was fine with him; he more than deserved to die for everything he'd ever done in service of Snoke and for the power the darkside offered.

"I believe Kylo Ren has given us the evidence we need. I believe Kylo Ren is guilty of collaborating with the Resistance, of treachery and treason and for assassinating Supreme Leader Snoke. The punishment for such treason is death. All those in favour raise your hand." Grand Admiral Skalick spoke this time, Kylo recalled this man never spoke unless it was favourable for him to do so; it had made Kylo wary of him, more so than those who had liked to hear their own voices. An observant snake of a man, with a long forehead in a long face that made him look like one. Kylo eyed the room as all but three of the leaders General Targo, Admiral Deltan and Colonel Kramer raised their hands. He remained emotionless and resolute. Hux stood, a gloating scornful sneer spreading across his face, eyes full of malice.

"Kylo Ren you are sentenced to death by electroguillotine for your crimes against the First Order." Hux turned his attention to Rey. "Rey of Jakku for your part in Kylo Ren's crimes you are also sentenced to death by electroguillotine." Hux raised his hand "Chromia, take them back to their cells and make sure they are given...everything they need until we arrive at Ruusan."

Rage filled Kylo, and he was moving towards Hux, shouting, "Hux. You can't. It was me, all me. Let her go. Hux! Hux!" His shouts increased in volume till he was yelling in desperate fury. Hux had turned his back on him, however, and the stormtrooper holding his arm yanked him backwards. He elbowed the trooper in the helmet but with the armour on it barely made a difference to the stormtroopers vice-like grip. He continued wrestling and bellowing as the chrome stormtrooper, Chromia, who was now at his side, hit him across the back with her staff. His wound screamed in pain, making him fall to his knees, from all fours, he turned his head to stare venomously at her.

"Ben!" Rey's voice suddenly called to him. He turned from Chromia to Rey; she was shaking her head at him holding her bound hands up, a pleading look in her eyes. Don't do this. He thought he could hear her voice begging him inside his head.

He took a deep breath looking back at the floor then slowly got to his feet, looking back at Chromia as boldly as he could; he composed himself and allowed himself to be escorted with Rey towards the elevator.
Inside the elevator he purposefully eyed Chromia. The assassin was humanoid with yellow skin and red markings that made her face animalistic, her eyes were the same, and her hair was bright red, no longer a wild flame billowing around her head but a braid running down the centre of her skull. His steadfast gaze did not bother her, and she fearlessly stared back.

"Are you Sith?" His Knights had joined her she must be connected to the Force.

"I am of the darkness, but I am no Sith. I am... connected to the Force, but not on the same level as the pair of you." She glanced at Rey, "however, as I'm sure you are both aware, I have many other... skills that make me powerful, perhaps more powerful than even you." She pointed her yellow finger at him and dared to touch his chest as she said 'you'. He knew his face was a grimace; his teeth were clenched so hard together they ached.

"You mean your injections?" He snarled at her through gritted teeth.

She smiled back at him, red lips parting over pointed feral teeth. She was very close to him, like a predator before it pounces on its prey. She even looked hungry for something, what that something was Kylo wasn't sure.

"Guess what," Rey interrupted the interchange, "it's worn off."

With that Rey took his hand, the surge of Force immediately appeared, and she threw Chromia at the elevator wall and before Chromia could get up the trooper who had been holding his arm struck her in the head with the butt of his blaster. Kylo starred around the elevator in disbelief, at Rey who was crouching over Chromia, then at the troopers, then back at Rey.

"Rey?"

-Rey-

Rey sat in her cell as Ben was taken to the refresher, she had insisted he go first. Due to their meditating together he was healing, she had no idea how, but it wasn't quite enough. The wound on his back stopped him from standing fully upright, hunching his shoulders. There were still marks from the acid all over his body, and she could see a difference behind his eyes, that ferocious blazing anger seemed to have been replaced by a slight apathy, a resolution to his fate. She needed him stronger if they were going to get out of here, but she had no idea how much time she had or how she could achieve it. The chrome trooper administered her drug prior to their arrival on the Supremacy, but the effects were waning. After the last injection Rae's senses hadn't numbed at all and as soon as herself and Ben had sat, holding hands, breathing deeply and healing each other; the Force had risen in them both. Just before they'd been injected that last time, she had felt stronger than she'd ever felt- more connected, his strengths combined with hers, his knowledge had increased her power but she also felt her serenity gave him strength. They were truly stronger together. As she sat there the door to her cell opened, a stormtrooper entered, and she stood, it was her turn for the refresher. To her surprise, the door shut behind them, and the stormtrooper removed their helmet.

"Jakub?" Rey embraced her friend in a grateful squeeze. They had met during Finn's initiative training. A tall, lanky young man with an ample smile in a broad jaw, he'd had lovely floppy mousy brown hair and soft blond stubble until he'd enlisted with Finn. Pulling back from him, beaming up, she asked, "What are you doing here?"

Jakub smiled at her. "What do you think? This is your rescue. I have to be quick. Finn is the other stormtrooper with me, with Kylo Ren right now. We'll be escorting you to the trial, and on our return, we'll make our move. Finn has told me a serious distraction is going to be used- alarms or
something. We then have to make our way straight to the maintenance hangar."

Before Rey could ask any more questions, Jakub put his helmet back on and took her to the refresher. When she finished, she noticed another stormtrooper outside her cell. That must be Finn; her heart was pounding with anticipation. *Stay calm; this is it.*

She and Ben were escorted down several corridors Jakub holding her arm, Finn holding Ben's. They stopped at an elevator and entered. The elevator opened on a vast familiar-looking space, not red like the old one had been, but the same layout and straight ahead of them sat in a throne was Hux. She didn't feel as frightened as she had when she'd seen Snoke at the end of the room, but given the number of people surrounding him and the chrome stormtrooper who was behind, there was a definite sense of anxiety. A woman stood and spoke to Ben about his crimes and then to her. She had no intention of speaking, so instead surveyed the room. The Knights of Ren were present, stood behind Hux and his chrome stormtrooper; she studied the woman more closely. Rey had never encountered a humanoid-like her with that yellow and red skin and red hair. She stood confidently in her shining armour. Rey then noted attached to her belt were three lightsabers! One was hers, another was Ben's, and the other Rey didn't recognise, it must be hers. *Was she a Sith?* It didn't really matter, whatever the escape plan was they would need their lightsabers back. Rey had painstakingly made hers and leaving it there was not an option, not for her.

The woman had stopped speaking, and Ben was responding, taking the blame, essentially committing himself to death. She stared at him in utter shock. She heard Hux ask Ben to explain himself and then a sinister-looking pale man asked for a vote regarding Ben's guilt. Surprisingly Rey noticed three members of the semi-circle didn't raise their hands in support of execution. Hux then pronounced a sentence of death to them both- she had expected that. Ben, however, clearly hadn't and started shouting and moving towards Hux. Hux's guard- Chromia he'd called her- simultaneously moved forward striking Ben in the back and Ben fell to his knees.

"Ben!" she cried, shaking her head, holding her hands up in a sign of surrender, hoping he could sense her urgency and her mind *don't do this.*

Ben thankfully stopped resisting and allowed himself to be taken towards the elevator. Within the elevator, Ben meaning to or not was distracting Chromia, and Chromia was enjoying it. Rey felt Jakub release her arm, turning to him; he released the binders around his wrists. She then watched covetously as the yellow and crimson woman touched Ben's chest. Rey felt a surge within her, and she grabbed Ben's hand and using the increased Force that instantly flowed between them she let Chromia know the injections were no longer working by throwing her against the elevator wall. Finn then hit Chromia on the head with the butt of his blaster knocking her out. Rey let go of Ben's hand; she was breathing heavily, she'd never felt jealous before but the way that woman had been looking at him, speaking to him. She bent down over Chromia to retrieve her and Ben's lightsabers from the belt around the woman's waist.

"Rey?" Ben was staring at her utterly bewildered and at the two troopers.

Rey stood, handing him his lightsaber, "did I not tell you we'd infiltrated the First Order troops?" She feigned innocence; she knew she hadn't told him.

His bewildered gaze turned into an annoyed glare; she could see his jaw tense- there was that fiery strength they needed.

"No, you didn't."

He looked to the troopers. Jakub raised a hand in a sign of greeting. Ben then turned to Finn. Finn did nothing but spoke into a hidden comms device.
"Falcon this is Gold Trooper, package acquired, start the distraction."

The elevator doors opened, and as they did so, alarms started blaring the overhead lights went off, and the red emergency lights started flashing. Finn pressed a button on the elevator, and they all stepped out quickly, leaving the unconscious Chromia to ascend.

Jakub handed Rey the binders, "best to keep up the facade."

Rey took them and placed them around her hands, hiding her saber.

"This way," Finn took Ben by the arm leading the way, Jakub took Rey's arm, and they followed hurriedly after them.
Back on the Millennium Falcon

Finn led Kylo Ren down the corridors, holding onto his elbow, walking with a sense of purpose but not so briskly as to draw attention. Inside his helmet he was muttering to himself—*keep calm, the plan will work, this is working* and why was he saving this man? Finn had not understood the situation when Poe had told them that Rey had left with Kylo Ren; apparently, it was out of choice. After everything Kylo had done, torturing Poe, nearly killing him and killing Han, Finn couldn't understand why she was with him, why they were rescuing him.

"I can hear you," Kylo whispered out the side of his mouth through gritted teeth to Finn.

Finn picked up the pace slightly ignoring him, "keep walking" he said sternly, gripping Kylo's arm a little tighter.

"You there," a Commander was walking towards them. Finn abruptly halted as did Kylo and next to him Jakub and Rey did the same. "Where are you taking these prisoners?"

"Emergency procedure Commander, we're taking the prisoners to an escape shuttle, to board another ship."

"The escape pods have launched it's a full system failure; go to hangar twelve and be quick about it."

"Yes, Commander".

The Commander rushed past them, and Finn and the others continued, not far now to the maintenance hangar, and then they'd be safe. Few more turns, few more corridors, troops of stormtroopers were marching in different directions, officers and commanders were frantically trying to fix the issues. Finally, they turned into the maintenance hangar, but as they did so, blasts sounded behind them. *It couldn't be easy, just once.*

-X-

Rose stood on the boarding ramp of the Falcon, nervously looking around the hangar, her hacking device still in her hands. Since the alarms had gone off, Rose had to continue controlling systems to avoid the sirens being turned off. She could hear the commotion before she saw it. Shouts and blaster fire and then she saw two troopers- that had to be Jakub and Finn because with them were Rey and Kylo Ren. Rey and Kylo were fending off blaster shots with their sabers, and Jakub and Finn were blasting back.

One of the troopers shouted to her, "Get inside, start taking off"- Finn. She dashed inside yelling down the corridors as she did so to Chewie.

"We've got trouble, start to take off."

-X-

Finn ran towards the boarding ramp, occasionally turning to continue blasting. Rey was close behind him and then Jakub. Kylo was the furthest behind, and as he turned to join them, he was hit by a blaster in the shoulder. Rey started to run back towards him as Finn blasted the troopers entering the hangar to help protect them. Kylo was moving faster now but not enough and as he tried to defend himself from the blaster shots, another caught him near the ribs, and he spun onto his back onto the boarding ramp.
Jakub!" Rey yelled, "help me!"

Jakub went to Kylo and pulled his arm over his head and dragged him up. "Force be damned, you're heavy," he cursed as he heaved him into the ship.

"Let's go, let's go, close the main hatch!" Finn yelled towards the cockpit.

Rey was now on the boarding ramp, stood in front of Jakub and Kylo defending them from any further injuries while walking backwards, Finn stood next to her blasting anything that moved.

"Let's go, punch it!" He yelled again.

The main hatchway was closing slowly, so the ship was defending them more and more and then finally it shut. Behind the closed door, Finn could hear the barrage of fire harmlessly hitting the exterior of the freighter, and he allowed himself to let out a sigh of relief. The low pitched rumble of the engines of the Falcon became a deafening roar as the ship left the hangar and spun around fast before jumping straight to light speed. Finn removed his helmet and before he could do anything else Rey had him in a tight hug, "you came for me. Again! Thank you! Thank you!"

Finn held her against him, his best friend, "anytime."

Finn could sense Rose's presence at his side, he withdrew his hold on Rey, and she immediately turned and embraced Rose.

"Rose that was incredible, the alarms, just brilliant!"

"Don't forget the escape pods too!" Rose replied, animatedly.

Finn smiled at the two women as they embraced, pulled apart to speak excitedly and then hugged again. They were both so technically minded; he loved that they had that bond. Finn's affectionate gaze was disrupted, however, by a giant wall of fur as it strode purposefully past him directly to where Jakub was holding up Kylo Ren who was clutching his side. Finn watched as Jakub disengaged his hold from Kylo, sensing an air of urgency in Chewie's approach that did not include him. Kylo froze on the spot apprehension washing over his features as the Wookie, without even a howl or grunt extended his arm, grabbed Kylo around the neck, picking him up off the floor and slammed him into the wall bellowing at him. His roars were bloodcurdling as he held Kylo in a ferocious grip. Everyone was now staring at the scene before them in shock until Maz hurried in, "Chewbacca!" she yelled.

Rey's shock broke, and she immediately went to Chewie's arm, trying to loosen his grip on Kylo's neck. "Chewie stop, stop!"

Kylo was struggling to breathe while both hands held Chewie's giant hand on his neck, his feet struggling to acquire a footing as he was held just off the floor.

"Chewbacca, you put Han Solo's son down. Now!" Maz demanded while tapping him on the leg in a lambasting manner.

Chewie thrust his face closer to Kylo's while maintaining his grip on him and barked one more time then let go and stepped back. Kylo fell onto all fours coughing. Rey bent at his side and gently touched his shoulder, but he forcefully shrugged her off. Grasping his ribs with one hand he stood up, standing as straight as he could manage, his neck red from where Chewie had held him. He was almost panting, but the struggling to breathe now seemed to be more emotional than from the physical exertion. Chewie proceeded to growl and bawl at him, a sequence which Finn assumed was a sentence of some sort. Really must work on my Wookie. Rey stood at Kylo's side; her face
had fallen her eyes had gone glassy. Han, Chewie was talking about Han and he could see from Kylo's similar expression that he understood everything Chewie had said.

Kylo's jaw was tense, and he was breathing hard, "I know. I'm sorry. I'd take it back if I could but I can't." In between each short statement, Kylo gave a laboured pant, his shoulders rising and falling quickly, his head shaking slightly, "I can't." Looking at him, Finn thought he appeared genuine in his distress.

Chewie yipped at Kylo then retreated to the cockpit, Maz nodded at Kylo and then followed Chewie to the cockpit. Everyone else stood staring at Kylo, Rey took a step towards him but halted as he raised the hand not holding onto his ribs, giving her a crestfallen look, he then turned and went down the corridor in the opposite direction to the cockpit.

Finn took this opportunity, "Rey what is he doing here? What is going on, you're acting as if you care for him?"

Rey looked down at the floor giving a deep sigh, "I can't explain it, and you wouldn't understand if I told you". Now raising her head, she looked at Finn entreatingly. "Know that he's not what you think, not anymore. Trust me. Please."

Rose took Finn's hand, a gesture he knew was begging him not to say what he was thinking, which was WHAT?

"Of course Rey," Rose answered, the hand gesture had a secondary purpose, Finn's mutual agreement albeit under duress.

-X-

Rey found Ben sat on the floor of the forward hold, leaning against the wall elbows on raised knees holding his head, his hands clenching his hair. She knew he'd heard her coming or sensed her presence; she stood for a moment looking down at him. She could feel the air around him taut as his feelings threatened to overwhelm him. She sat down next to him, she didn't touch him, and she didn't say anything. Slowly Rey could feel the tension around them reduce and eventually Ben released his grasp on his head and tilted his head up to the ceiling of the forward hold, resting it on the wall. Finally, not looking at her, he spoke.

"You should've left me there to die," his breathing was laboured as he said it, Rey knew he was hurt physically, but that wasn't what was making this difficult for him. He was battling a different kind of pain- grief and guilt, and he needed to let it out, so she didn't respond just continued to listen.

"I'm a monster, and I deserved my fate. I don't deserve to be free of my pain, of the things I've done. Why did you come for me, bring me with you?"

"You know why," now Rey looked at him, he was looking at her, imploringly, smears of blood from his hands on his face, "and you're not a monster."

"Yes, I am." He was no longer imploring but anxious and insistent that she understand his meaning. "I killed my father! I've tortured people, killed innocent people all for myself and the power the darkside gave me or for Snoke. You don't know all the things I've done in the name of that cause. The things I've allowed to happen. I'm the enemy; your enemy and part of me will always be that."

Rey shifted her position to face him, disengaging her back from the wall, she crossed her legs and looked down at the hand that was closest to her and took it in hers. She breathed deeply as the
Force flowed between them.

"You've done monstrous things yes, but those actions do not define who you are. That's not who you are. I know who you are, who you truly are—the good and the bad, the light and the dark. It's what you do now, what you do next that's what matters. Now you're free to be you. No manipulations, no expectations. You're free to make your own path." She raised her eyes to look at him and saw his eyes glazed with tears, a single one escaping down the side of his face, falling into his scar.

"It's too late," he shuddered, then looked down at her hand in his, then back up at her mournfully. "You can't save me. My father couldn't save me. Luke couldn't save me. You can't save me, Rey."

She smiled a faint compassionate smile, "No, I can't, just as they couldn't."
He looked at her then in sad resignation. She continued holding his resigned look. "Only you can do that, but I'll help you, I'll stand with you."

She tilted her head empathically, raising the other hand and placing it on his face, he closed his eyes, and she felt his roiling emotions calm, the tense air melting away and giving rise to that familiar breeze, a breeze she knew came from them. She felt shivers running through her body. She released her hand from his face, and Ben's eyes opened, and he looked down at their enclosed hand.

"I can't do this," Ben confessed.

"Do what?" Rey queried, feeling a slight panic that he was going to ignore it all and return to what he'd always done and been.

"Face them, any of them, all of them; Chewie, my mother and all those Resistance members."
"Poe," she reminded him, grateful that he was fearful of the reactions of all those he'd hurt and did not intend to abandon her.

"Urgh," Ben's head dropped, and instinctively the hand not holding hers ran through his hair, pulling it from his face. "I really can't do this take me back to the Supremacy. Anywhere but this ship and where it's headed."

Ben was trying to lighten an extremely awkward situation, one he thoroughly wished to avoid.

"Sure, you can. Han wanted you home, Leia wants you home. So does Chewie just give it time, give them time; don't let it all be in vain."

Ben raised his head, looking up at her with sorrowful eyes, nodding slightly in admission. Rey smiled again and got to her feet, pulling him gently to join her.

"Come on; we've arrived, let the recrimination begin."

Now he was standing Ben looked down at her, his deep admiring regard making her cheeks blush, she took the hand she'd been holding and re-positioned it around her shoulders so she could help him walk, she moved her arm closest to him around his back. Ben's gaze on her was interrupted as her fingers clasped his side, and he flinched, taking in a short sharp breathe of air through gritted teeth as the pain in his back and ribs disturbed him.

"And medical, let's get you to the medical bay first and foremost."
Hux and his Assassin

Supreme Leader Hux had taken his position back on the throne as he watched his prisoners depart the throne room. A malevolent smile spread across his face; he allowed his position to alter slightly, settling down into the metal throne, allowing himself to be embraced. It was all coming together; next would be the execution and then the war. The elevator doors closed with that usual quiet hiss, and the elevator descended.

"General Kail," the woman came from her chair to his side and stood in front of him. "Have we had a confirmed location for the Resistance? Are they on Ealor?"

"They were Supreme Leader, the base has been abandoned, we are currently attempting to find....."

General Kail was cut off mid-sentence by sudden blaring alarms and lights, moments later the elevator reappeared, and the door opened to reveal a single figure slumped against the wall; a figured dressed in chrome with yellow skin and bright red hair. Hux rose furiously from the throne and began marching towards the elevator, as he did so out of the corner of his eye, he could see something, lots of something's exiting the ship. He halted and turned to look out of the viewing window; an incensed astonishment came over him as he realised what was happening- the escape pods all over the ship were launching.

Hux turned on his heel, "someone remove her from the elevator and take her to my quarters." As Hux reached the throne, he touched the holo that allowed him to speak to the bridge. "Captain Peavey, what is happening?"

Captain Peavey stood to attention in the holo, "Supreme Leader we appear to be experiencing a massive maintenance fault."

"I can see and hear that, Captain, why are the escape pods launching?"

"We think we're being sliced Supreme Leader; we're attempting to find the source."

Realisation hit Hux in a wave. "Captain this is an escape plan by the prisoners Kylo Ren and that girl. Find the source of the hacking. Send troops to search for the prisoners. Traitors in our midst are likely aiding them." That was the only conceivable way Hux could think of for Chromia to have been tricked and subsequently rendered unconscious.

"Yes Supreme Leader."

The holo ended. Hux could see two of the leaders had taken Chromia's form as requested out of the throne room. Hux turned to face his throne, behind it the Knights of Ren stood like statues the current alarming situation appearing to be of little concern to them. Hux fumed, this is what happened when you allowed such free-minded individuals into the ranks. No care for their betters or duty.

"Well! Your former leader is escaping. Are you going to do something about it?"

One of the dark Knights moved forward. Helmeted, dressed head to toe in black they were ominous, no faces just masks, a dark deadly presence.

"We follow the one named Chromia, not you. She is of the darkness; you are not."

Hux lost his temper; this trial and subsequent execution was an accumulation of months of planning to have his war and clear the galaxy of disorder once and for all. He reached inside his
coat for his hidden blaster, the one he always carried. Without taking his eyes off the Knight that had just spoken, he blasted one at random. The Knight fell to the floor dead.

"Chromia serves me, which means you serve me." He now pointed his blaster at the Knight that had stepped forward, "go find Kylo Ren."

The Knight stepped forward, no acknowledgement given but the four remaining Knights followed him to the elevator, appearing to be unfazed by their dead comrade.

Hux then turned to the leaders still sat around the throne room, how were they all still sitting there?

"Well! Do your jobs! Find the Resistance, find that so-called Princess! Find my prisoners and prepare for war, I may not get my execution, but we will have a war to end all wars!" Hux was shouting intensely; he could see the nervous faces of a few leaders. Some, Grand Admiral Skalick and Vice Admiral Renor maintained their calm despite the alarms, lights and murder, they even managed a curt 'Supreme Leader' as they walked purposefully towards the elevator with the other leaders.

Hux didn't watch them leave; instead, he headed straight to his quarters Chromia had some answering to do.

-X-

Chromia awoke in a room she was familiar with, but not where she recalled being before waking. What was she doing here in Hux's quarters? She struggled to think and tried to sit up from where she'd been lying on the Supreme Leaders bed and felt a pang as her head rushed. She felt up with her hand and could feel a lump on the top of her forehead. She'd been in the throne room at the trial. Kylo Ren had started to lash out, and she'd taken charge. She remembered the interchange with Kylo Ren in the elevator, how she'd gloatingly admitted to being of the darkside and touched his chest, feeling the Force raging within him. Chromia had grown to admire him, and as humans went, he was not unpleasant to look at so tall and powerful. He'd taken the torture she had inflicted on him surprisingly well, withstanding more than she thought any human could have. His darkness and power were intriguing to her, and when she had been that close to him in the elevator she could feel it, but that shouldn't have been possible, not with the vials of Senflax she'd been injecting him with. She remembered how the girl, Rey said something, and to her utter surprise had harnessed the Force to throw her into the opposite wall. How had the injections stopped working? From her position on the floor of the elevator, the last thing she saw was a trooper wielding his blaster and bringing the butt of it down hard on her skull; she must've been knocked unconscious. She growled again enraged as she got to her feet, they'd escaped, and they'd had help. Shooting pain in her head caused a momentary misbalance. The stormtroopers who'd been present in the elevator had helped them, were there traitors in the First Order? Hux needed to be informed of that. She could only imagine his fury; he'd wanted that public execution to rally the troops and bring about the final solution, a war to end it all and seize control of the galaxy.

At that moment Hux stormed into the room, red-faced and fuming, hands clenched at his sides and jaw tight, Chromia stood without moving, following his movements solely with her eyes. He stood directly in front of her, nose flaring as he breathed hard. She didn't see it coming, but with the back of his arm and hand, he struck her hard across the face catching her high across her cheekbone. Her head jolted to the side, but her feet stood firm, she turned her head and stared back at him. She'd had far worse in her lifetime; Hux couldn't hurt her no matter how hard he might try. She was annoyed at herself that she'd disappointed him. As she stared back at him stoically, she noticed his breathing become shallower and the colour in his face reduce he appreciated her unemotional response to his outburst.
"What happened?" He demanded through clenched teeth, his words spoken clearly and concisely.

"I got distracted Supreme Leader, I apologise. The Senflax had stopped working, and I wasn't aware, but I should have realised. The girl, Rey, threw me using the Force and... Supreme Leader more concerning, Kylo Ren and the girl had help. The stormtroopers in the elevator were with them, helping them; one knocked me unconscious."

"How did the Senflax stop working? You guaranteed me results."

"I don't know Supreme Leader; it has always been effective in the past. I've never seen it stop working this quickly before and I have used extra dosages to be sure. They must be even stronger than we imagined. I should've realised."

"Ah yes, your trophies, you appear to be short a few." Hux was looking down at her belt. Chromia looked down, and only her own saber was there, Kylo Ren and the girls were missing.

She snarled, at which Hux smirked. He stepped forward and seized her jaw hard.

"What are you going to do about your failure?"

It was difficult for her to talk because he had such a grip on her face. She pondered for a moment then hissed through her teeth.

"Have your execution on Russan as intended, rally the troops and have your war."

He inched his face closer, the red rising again to fill his face. "I can't have the execution without the prisoners!" As he spoke, he got louder until the last word prisoners was a shout through a clenched jaw and gritted teeth.

She didn't even blink but inched her face closer to him, allowing her sharp teeth to show through a cruel smile as she whispered her meaning.

"No one knows what the girl looks like but your leaders, choose another girl, any girl. Any other traitors amongst the First Order execute them too."

Hux searched her flame-like eyes; the ruthless ambition she could see in his eyes she knew matched her own. He loosened his grip on her face and sneered. He approved of her plan.

"How do we find the traitors in our midst?"

"Question the troops. Start with the guard on duty at the cell 47; he must have seen something or know something."

Hux contemplated for a moment, "PR 2357." He looked up the main lights had flickered back on, and the alarms had mercifully ceased.

"Find trooper PR 2357, question him, do what you need to, report to me immediately once you have something tangible".

Hux stormed out of the quarters and back to the throne room, heading immediately to the throne and engaging the holo, instantly a blue holo version of Captain Peavey appeared standing to attention.

"Supreme Leader, We've managed to stop the slice on our maintenance system. It appears a freighter was docked in the maintenance hangar. Our troops engaged the prisoners and the two
troopers aiding them as they entered the hangar. They've reported that one of the prisoners was
injured, but all four assailants escaped on the ship."

"Were you able to track it, Captain Peavey?"

"No Supreme Leader as we were unaware of it being on board, or when it departed, we have been
unable to track it. It wasn't a standard ship of the Resistance; from all accounts, it looked like a
cargo ship."

Hux recalled a cargo ship that had infuriated Ren on Crait and that had been on Starkiller Base, a
piece of junk by all accounts.

"Captain Peavey, get information out that the First Order is looking for a ship of that description, a
cargo ship acquainted with the Resistance and track a course for Ruusan."

"Yes Supreme Leader."
Colonel Poe Dameron sat in his quarters on his bunk; it made a nice change from sitting at the holo table at the command centre. It was late on Maridun the light outside was a dusky glow through the slot window in his quarters; outside would be a sea of grass and not much else; the site of a great war during the years of the Senate. The Resistance had chosen Maridun for that exact reason it was empty of life, but due to being used during the war it had outcrops of buildings which they'd quickly converted into a temporary base. Poe was preparing to get some sleep though he doubted he'd get any, he hadn't slept for more than an hour or so since they'd had news of the prisoners and the evacuation of Ealor. As Poe removed his jacket, he could hear a commotion from outside; had Princess Leia finally arrived? Several other members of the New Republic had arrived, including her deputy and loyal friend General Lando Calrissian, but she had not. Admiral Nunb had sent a ship to collect her, but communication to them had so far had failed. Leia was in the outer rim, but she should have been here by now or at least communicated. Poe's fretting was disturbed by BB8 rolling in beeping and tooting animatedly; the little droids head spinning back and forth on its spherical body as it tried to get Poe to gain a sense of urgency and join it.

"Slow down, buddy, give me the short version."

BB8 beeped again, more slowly, if a droid could be sarcastic or condescending BB8's beeps were achieving that sense as its head tilted back and then to the side as though rolling its eyes or sighing.

"They're back!" Poe jumped to his feet and ran out of his quarters towards the base's exit where the ships were docked, BB8 struggling to keep up at his side. The Millennium Falcon was there, and despite the late hour a crowd had gathered, the ramp was down, and the Resistance members on board were departing, Rose, Finn, Jakub, Chewie and Maz. There were cheers and friends to all were running over embracing them or patting them on the back. Jakub, in particular, was enjoying being around friends Poe could see he'd been away from them all for so long. His wide grin huge and his white teeth were showing as he embraced comrades. Then everything changed, literally everyone including Poe froze and a deafening silence suddenly fell over the crowd as Rey came down the ramp with her arm around Kylo Ren! Poe's mouth dropped in shock. He knew it had been a possibility that Kylo Ren would be with them but not like this, not with his arm around Rey. What was she doing? Poe felt resentment rising in him; he closed his mouth and held his lips tight and stalked towards the pair.

-X-

Rey was helping Ben down the boarding ramp; she could hear the excited cheers of her friends and smiled at the greetings. Jakub had such a crowd around him, she was glad; he and Kira had been gone in the First Order initiative for so long. She could feel the moisture of Ben's blood on her arm, and she tried to pick up their pace. However, Ben's body went rigid under her touch, and she looked up at him and then looked in the direction of his gaze. It had become eerily quiet; silent even. All the excited friends and comrades were staring in her direction, no correction, in Ben's direction. She could see a mixture of emotions on the faces around her anger, disbelief, shock, confusion, hurt and fear. People were shaking their heads; she had known it wasn't going to be easy bringing Ben to the Resistance. She knew the hurt he'd caused those closest to her, but the impact he'd had on the whole Resistance was something she hadn't considered. She'd convinced him this was the right thing to do, that it would be hard but that he'd be accepted, oh stars was she wrong? Was bringing him here a bad idea? Next, to her, Ben removed his arm from around her shoulder and attempted to stand unaided. She heard him hiss through his teeth as he held his ribs. She remained at his side watching the faces of her friends survey her in a way she was unaccustomed
with; not with a welcoming kindness but uncertainty. Poe was stalking towards them, and he
looked furious his lips tight, and his eyes had an unfamiliar dark tone. Poe stopped in front of them,
staring directly up at Ben not even glancing at her, he was breathing rapidly, and she could tell he
was trying to make a decision. Ben looked back without emotion or malice, patiently waiting for
whatever Poe was trying to decide. Poe took one deep breathe the decision made and punched Ben
in the face hard, a decently weighted right hook. Ben's head veered towards her but other than that
his posture somehow remained unchanged. His hair had fallen across his face, and he pursed his
lips containing his anger. He then, purposefully and slowly turned his head back towards Poe,
saying nothing but holding Poe's gaze, inviting another punch if that was what Poe wanted. Poe
gave a dissatisfied smirk and stepped slightly to the side to allow Ben to walk past him if he chose
to.

The crowd of Resistance fighters and pilots Rey noticed had increased since the exchange and had
remained just as silent. She reached for Ben to aid him but removing his hand from his ribs; he
held a blood-soaked hand out to her as a gesture not to assist him. He raised his head and addressed
the crowd.

"I know none of you wants me here, but know that I come here as your willing prisoner to end this
conflict once and for all- at your side. I don't expect you to like me or forgive me, but I will do
what I can. When the First Order is done, I will accept whatever fate your leader's judge fair." Ben's
gaze surveyed the crowd as he did this, scanning everyone.

Rey smiled faintly, he had dreaded this, and he'd faced it head high acknowledging the past and
accepting the consequences, with a plan of reconciliation. He was, indeed Leia's son. She stepped
towards him and this time he allowed her to support him, his arm going back around her neck as
she helped him manoeuvre forwards. Poe fell in beside her on her free side.

"Thank you," she whispered to Poe, knowing full well that Ben could hear.

Poe didn't answer her gratitude he just gestured and picked up his pace stepping ahead of them
slightly, "Medical is this way." She knew he was angry and upset. He was the leader of the
Resistance. Without any communication, she'd brought the bleeding body of the enemy's leader, a
man who had tortured him personally, into the core of their base. She'd betrayed his trust. She had
a lot of talking to do, and mostly that would be apologising and she would once Ben was soundly
in medical.

They were walking down a long corridor and at the end was the medical bay. Dr Kalonia had been
uninterested in the commotion unless it came her way, as she was standing at a supply cabinet
checking inventory. The sounds of footsteps and laboured breathing cutting short any plans she'd
had for doing a bit of admin for the evening. She didn't need to check Ben to know he was injured
and she referred to Rey, "Sit him here please," and then to Ben, "I'm going to have to cut your
clothes off".

Ben didn't respond just raised his arms to allow her unrestricted access. Dr Kalonia cut Ben's top
off carefully and surveyed his injuries a look of concern increasing as she went from the blaster
shots to the now open wound on his back. Rey watched as the doctor scrutinised those same small
purple veins she could see. Rey could tell the Dr was disturbed by what she was seeing and Rey
started to tap her fingers apprehensively, clearly, that tapping got noticeable as the Dr turned to
Rey.

"Are you injured at all?"

"Nothing, a good night's sleep, won't solve."
"Then get one. He'll be here a while. You're no good to either of us like this. Go on." The Dr dismissively waved her hand at Rey, like she was trying to get something annoying out of her face.

Rey gave Ben a pensive look and left medical as she stepped out the doorway she noticed Poe leaning against the wall, arms folded, resting on one leg with the other bent against the wall. He was waiting for her, and on hearing her approach, he looked up, and the look he gave her made her feel such guilt. He was such a good, decent man, and he didn't deserve the way she'd treated his leadership and worse their friendship. She took a deep breath in through the nose and out again.

"Po..." was as far as she got before he raised his hand.

"Was this always your intention? To bring him back to the Resistance?"

"No. I didn't intend anything... other than not leaving him."

"Leaving him! Rey, he's the leader of the First Order- our enemy! He's a murderer! A monster! What is going on? Talk to me."

Poe's brow had furrowed in concern and empathy; he wanted to understand and help and so at that moment she decided to divulge everything that had happened between herself and Ben from the moment he'd kidnapped her on Takodana.

"We're going to need a drink; you got any firewater?"

Poe smiled, any animosity melting away, "Yeah I have," nudging her gently with his shoulder, his hands in his pockets, he led the way to his quarters. Once inside he poured them both a glass and Rey told him everything. They're bond being formed, how Ben had helped her when Luke hadn't, how she'd gone to him on the Supremacy after they'd touched hands through the bond and how he'd killed Snoke then offered her his hand to lead the galaxy with him. She left out the dream. By the end of her tale, Rey was confident the speed of her voice meant anything she was trying to say was unintelligible. Poe's gaze was steady on her the whole time unless he was topping their firewater back up, she'd noticed he'd topped his far more than her own. He was eyeing his glass now as she breathed rapidly, she'd needed to share that information with someone, and she was glad it was Poe; Leia had known some but not all.

Finally, he spoke, "OK, I can't say I agree with you, and I can't say I like it, but if you say we can trust him then that's enough for me."

Rey reached out for his hand not holding the drink, "Thank you".

Poe stood drinking the last of his firewater, and as Rey sipped the last drop, she felt suddenly exhausted, and the amount of firewater she'd drunk was going to help her sleep.

"Come on, let's get you a bunk," Poe gestured towards the door, and together they left. Poe found her a room not far from his, Rey thanked him again and without a seconds thought she lay fully clothed lay on the bunk and fell into a deep sleep, a sleep filled with a salty breeze and an excitable young boy lifting rocks and a large handsome man who made her feel complete. The dream came as it always did but this time no longer with anxiety but with hope.

-X-

Rey awoke to the sound of people chattering and the sounds of squads training she smiled she'd missed that sound. She'd not been gone long, but it felt like a lifetime after the time on the Supremacy when all she could hear were Ben's screams. Ben! She bolted up in her bunk, and after a moments head rush, she launched herself upright. She had dried blood all over herself and her
cot, she groaned to herself. *I'll deal with that later.* Cleaned and dressed in grey Resistance clothes she headed back to the medical bay, except she wasn't entirely sure where she was or where medical was. Eventually, after a few wrong turns, she found it, she didn't knock on the door but walked straight in, and a transparent cylinder suffused with bacta fluid filled her vision. Inside Ben hung vertically fully submerged with breathing apparatus over his mouth, his dark hair floating around him like a spectral creature and his large frame magnified strangely by the cylindrical tanks glass and the healing liquid within.

Rey's hand went to her mouth as she stared in astonishment at his floating form. Dr Kalonia appeared at her side, Rae hadn't heard or noticed the woman's presence she was so absorbed and disturbed by the scene in front of her.

"The bacta tank was necessary; he had too many injuries and too many old wounds not properly treated."

Rey turned to her the Dr's statement pulling her from one concern into another, "What do you mean old wounds?"

Dr Kalonia tilted her head and took a breath then pressing her lips together, handed Rey her analysis while explaining the gist of it out loud.
"Most of his bones have been broken previously, some more than once. The scar on his abdomen had internal issues. The wound on his back was significant as were the punctures and acid burns, not to mention the new blaster wounds. It was the veins I was worried about, I've seen them before, just the once years ago now but never this pronounced."

At that statement, Rey looked up, "What? The faint purple ones all over his body?"

"Yes. They're from being a victim of Force lightning. It runs through the veins, making them glow and if used intensively or over extensive periods marks them permanently like that. From looking at his body, I'd say he's been subjected to more physical pain than anyone I've ever treated."

Rey turned from the Dr, handing back the analysis and stepped towards the bacta tank and inside Ben's floating form. She placed a hand on the glass, lowered her head onto it and closed her eyes, allowing a tear to trickle down her cheek.
Executions

Within the barracks of the lowly troopers onboard the Supremacy the atmosphere was in stark contrast to what it had been just a day before. Instead of friendly banter and jokes, there was now quiet tension. Eye contact with fellow troopers was avoided as feelings of hostility and suspicion were rife; another trooper had defected and betrayed them releasing prisoners- again! First FN2187 and now FB1123. Who else was a secret member of the Resistance? Who would be interrogated by Chromia next? Guard PR2357 had been questioned brutally, about what had occurred during his watch, resulting in the escape of Kylo Ren and the scavenger Jedi.

The tension was just as present on the bridge where Kira Calrissian sat at her station, worrying whether she was overdoing her pretence of calm. She had urgent news for Colonel Dameron, but since Jakub's breakout, she hadn't been alone or unwatched long enough to send it. She was terrified. She could feel everyone's eyes on her, not because she was explicitly suspected, but because everyone was. She had no way of escaping herself, and Chromia was questioning everyone. Had she and Jakub been careful enough? No one had suspected him before, but now they knew; she had no more reason to panic than before, didn't she?

A hand on Kira's shoulder made her jump. Preoccupied with thoughts and faking calm she hadn't heard the footsteps approach or seen the shimmering chrome uniform in her peripheral vision- Chromia. Kira sucked in an anxious breath and hoped her face didn't betray her heart leaping into her throat.

"Chromia. How may I assist you?" Kira said managing to keep her voice level.

Chromia's red and yellow animalistic face gave a sinister smirk, and a sense of dread overcame Kira Calrissian.

-X-

On the bridge of the First Order's lead destroyer, Grand Admiral Skalick stood on the deck to survey the planet they've arrived at through the viewing window. Following the trial onboard the Supremacy, he had personally taken the lead in attempting to find the Resistance and the Princess. Where General Kail and General Valax had failed, Grand Admiral Skalick had succeeded and quickly. Skalick couldn't comprehend how those two blithering idiots were in such positions of power. He knew, however, the answer to his own question- Supreme Leader Hux had promoted people who were useful to him. Vice Admiral Renor and himself had been part of the First Order in the days when Hux's father, Commander Brendol Hux had been building their armies. A mixture of the Jedi concepts of loyalty and the Republic's clone stormtroopers training, using both ideas. Taking children or having them conscripted at birth, it had been genius! Renor and himself had moved up the ranks through an unflinching and relentless desire for self-advancement. When Armitage Hux conspired against his father and had his right-hand Phasma murder him, it had made sense to endorse Armitage as their next leader. Armitage Hux possessed that same self-serving ruthlessness Skalick considered imperative.

Grand Admiral Skalick had found the Princess and had reported to Supreme Leader Hux to ascertain whether Hux wanted her as a prisoner or for his execution on Ruusan. Hux had made it clear he wanted no margin for error. 'Eliminate her, by any means necessary Grand Admiral'. Skalick had every intention of enforcing that command, grim face set, his officers ready to rain cannon fire on his order. They patiently waited for the vessel holding the Princess to leave the planet. It was a privilege to be the one who would bring an end to her influence, once she was gone, everything for the Resistance and Republic would fall apart.
Finally, a YKL-37R Nova Courier exited the planet. Skalick was familiar with this craft, a safe option to transport the head of the Republic. The YKL-37R were small and manoeuvrable only requiring a small crew and with excellent weaponry, but it would make no difference against a ship such as a Dreadnought. He wasn't sure this was the ship they'd been waiting for, but that was of little bearing to Skalick.

"Fire at will."
It was a direct and unemotional command, and he watched as the craft was consumed by cannon fire and exploded in a burst of bright light.

"Confirm that was the ship we'd been waiting for before you inform General Hux."

In the last moments of her life, Princess Leia, General Organa reflected briefly. It had been an enormous adventure each moment of love and achievement intertwined with sadness and regret. She considered all those she had loved and lost- Han, Luke, her home and family of Alderaan and the most painful loss of all her son, Ben. As the pilot informed her of a situation, she already had a sense of, she sat eyes closed and reached out with her feelings. It was futile to attempt to avoid what was now inevitable and in her last moments, she was desperate to do just one thing. She reached out further and further, past her ships panicking crew, past the Dreadnought sat in space opposite them which was preparing to fire. She reached out into the vastness of space, feeling herself between the stars, searching past planets for that presence that she could always feel no matter how far away. She finally sensed it clearly, different to how it had been previously, not a raging mass of darkness; the darkness had dimmed, and rage was gone. Eyes still closed she smiled sadly to herself. She'd been right there was still light in him, and he was changing, but she wouldn't get to see him again.
"Ben," she whispered as the world vanished in bright, explosive light and her physical form disappeared between the stars her essence stretching across those galaxies reaching for her son.

-X-

Within the bacta tank suspended in the medical fluid, Kylo's body suddenly convulsed, and his eyes shot open. \(\textit{No!}\) He kicked his legs to reach the top of the tank and wrenched the breathing apparatus off his face. Two medical droids were instantly at his side, forcefully beeping as he attempted to get a grip on the tank and get out. He needed to .... to .... he didn't know what he needed, but he wanted to be out of this tank. The Dr who'd been treating him came into the room at the sounds of droids and alarms.

"What do you think you're doing? You need more time. You're not fully recovered. How are you awake?"

Ben turned to her perched at the top of the tank, arms holding him up on the side.
"I don't care. Just get me out of here even if it's for a moment. Please".
His voice was a mixture of desperation and rage; his face similar, brow furrowed and mouth grim. Dr Kalonia obliged and got him a large blanket to wrap over his shoulders. Despite having been in the tank healing, he felt weak. He immediately sat, elbows on his knees with his fingers intertwined, his dripping head resting on his thumbs. He reached out with the Force, but he knew it hadn't been a dream or a nightmare. Eyes squeezed shut he felt what he knew he'd feel, nothing; his mother was gone. The instruments, cabinets and furniture around him started vibrating and rattling as he struggled with his emotions.

Rey burst into the room concerned by what she'd felt in the Force and what Ben's reaction to it would be. She had every reason to be worried about Dr Kalonia's welfare. What she saw in the doorway washed away those concerns and instantly replaced it with heartache and grief for both herself and Ben. Leia was gone.

The objects in the room stopped vibrating and rattling, Kylo lifted his head from his clenched hands and turned to Rey. The dripping wet curls of hair couldn't hide his crestfallen face; wretchedness etched on every feature. He turned from her lowering his head into his open hands and embraced the pain and regret he now felt. He would never see her again, never get the chance to say sorry, to be what she had wanted- her son. He allowed his raw feelings to flow into every part of him instead of hiding or controlling them. Ultimately he would be stronger if his emotions were unfettered and so he embraced his pain, regret and grief.

-X-

On Ruusan the First Order had set up their base, ships were d, and troops were standing to attention in vast squadrons. Supreme Leader Hux had an announcement before the war started. Altor stood amongst his squad feeling very nervous; what was he going to do in order to leave the First Order before this war happened? Surely he'd be unable to defect along with all those soldiers he felt he'd gotten through to while the war was being fought? Too many questions. There was no privacy on this planet within the makeshift barracks, unlike onboard the Dreadnought and he had found no way to contact the Resistance.

Supreme Leader Hux walked out onto the raised platform; high ranking officers were already there as were five dark, ominous figures. Hux's chin was held high and grim every inch of him immaculate in his uniform and long dark coat.

"Today is a momentous day for the First Order. The leader of the loathsome Republic, that misleading and counterfeit Princess is dead at the hands of Grand Admiral Skalick. This is the first
day of our sterilisation of those false ideas, the first day of our final solution, of our war! There were traitors in our midst, those who would help the treacherous Resistance and today we bring one before you to pay for their crime."

Altar was immobilised by fear, did anyone know he was one of the traitors Hux was speaking of, and if not who was the traitor they'd found. He was quite sure Jakub had gotten out when Rey was rescued. He saw a chrome stormtrooper walk out onto the raised platform, they were all stood facing and with her was a young woman. Oh no, Kira. Kira had joined the initiative when he and Jakub had, they'd both had trooper roles, but Kira had an officer's position. As the daughter of a politician and New Republic leader Lando Calrissian, she had skills to allow a deeper infiltration; an infiltration that had clearly failed.

Chromia stood on the platform, holding the traitor by the elbow, they had found her reasonably easily. PR 2357 was very willing, after Chromia's unique form of persuasion, to give the digits of the trooper who had come to the prison cell and quizzed him. He couldn't be sure that FB 1123 was the trooper who had knocked him out and escaped with the prisoners, but it made sense. He had desperately shared anything to remove the failure and further punishment from himself.

Chromia had then questioned the squad FB 1123 had belonged to. He was gone, and their stories were all similar. He'd openly spoken of disliking the conflict, of wanting more to his life and spreading discontent. She had asked the troopers if they'd noticed anything else odd. A trooper mentioned that he had seen him with a female officer and it hadn't looked official. Stormtroopers and officers did not socialise, particularly without helmets on. She got a description of the woman and headed to the bridge to look for her. Chromia had found a slight bronze woman sitting at her station on the Supremacy; she certainly looked the part. Chromia had taken her immediately to the prison cells. The woman had been quiet and did as instructed; someone who was innocent would have resisted more. That was all Chromia had needed. The Supreme Leader needed a girl to replace the one who had escaped, and this one would suffice regardless of actual guilt.

On the platform, Chromia beckoned two of her Knights to step forward with the electroguillotine. She forced the girl to her knees, by squeezing her shoulder hard, keeping her grip on the girl's neck, Chromia thrust her head between the two poles up to her shoulders. Chromia let go of the girl and held out her hand to her side, and another Knight handed her an electrostaff. She looked towards the Supreme Leader Hux, awaiting his command. Below her, the girl's back rapidly rose and fell as she tried to steady herself, accepting the inevitable. Good for her, a noble death.

"Execute the traitor."

Chromia touched the electrostaff to one of the poles, and the electroguillotine ignited. The only sound was the buzzing of the electroguillotine and the body as it slumped to the side headless.

Altar felt sick; he was aware that unlike the troopers around him, he was twitching slightly, his apprehension and distress having a physical reaction. Don't lose it now; keep it together.

Hux turned from the platform, Chromia and the corpse to the troops.

"TODAY IS THE LAST DAY OF THE REPUBLIC, OF THE RESISTANCE AND ALL SYSTEMS WILL NOW BOW TO THE FIRST ORDER!"

Around Altar, the troops raised a hand and gave a shout of solidarity. Altar did the same, but inside his feelings were of anger and sorrow; poor Kira and poor General Calrissian. Altar was also running through several issues- how was he going to get word to the Resistance? How was he going to get out of here?
The Grey

The Resistance and the New Republic members were all stood outside the main base door. The base was dug into the ground and covered with grass; the grass was everywhere. On top of the base stood Lando Calrissian, he was preparing to talk, to tell the Resistance that despite their loses they would continue and they would fight. Lando had tried to work on what he was going to say, but he couldn't think of anything but Kira. His beautiful, strong daughter who'd joined the Resistance and become a spy in the First Order had been cruelly executed by the new Supreme Leader-Hux, to demonstrate his power and rally his troops. How was Lando supposed to rally their troops with Kira and Leia gone? He had to get them to draw strength from their loss, never give up, never surrender; this is why we fight- for those we love.

Lando felt he would never be ready, but he couldn't hold off any longer, he could sense the despair, and he needed to fix that if they had a chance. He raised his head and surveyed the gathered crowd.

"By now I'm sure you've all heard the news, our leader, Princess Leia, General Organa, is gone. Killed by the First Order to weaken us, BUT WE ARE NOT WEAK! We've all lost people we care for at the hands of those who believe the galaxy needs order under their rules. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and... and daughters.

Lando struggled for the briefest moment as he said daughter, a slight falter in his speech. *Use it* he told himself.

"Our grief unites us and makes us strong. The Deaths Of Those We Have Loved Will Not Be In Vain. For This Is What We Fight For, We Fight For Our Freedom, AND FOR THOSE WE LOVE!"

The crowd cheered in agreement heads nodding and arms raised in unity.

"We will take the fight to them. Check your weapons, check your ships and be ready. We Are The Spark Of Hope In The Galaxy, and WE WILL NOT BE EXTINGUISHED. WE WILL BRING THE FIRST ORDER DOWN."

Lando stepped back, and the crowd cheered again. He breathed heavily; he hoped it would be enough. Now the real plans had to be made. To his left, Colonel Poe Dameron stepped forward and raised both his hands and the crowd hushed.

"We have great plans to make, but this is the time. We've only ever had a glimmer of hope, a small chance to defeat the First Order, but that glimmer has grown. We have more numbers than we've ever had, but the First Order is vast in comparison. Leia never gave up, never gave up fighting, fighting for what she knew was right and for those she loved. We will be working on plans, anyone you think will join us, ask them and anyone who thinks can help, tell us. We're going to need everything we've got and more."

He stepped back and signalled to Lando.

Lando went to the two metal memorials that had been constructed, with a flaming torch in his hand, one after the other he ignited the beacons. Bearing the light in his hand, he turned back to the crowd.

"For Kira. For Leia! MAY THE FORCE BE WITH US!"

"MAY THE FORCE BE WITH US!" The crowd roared back
Kylo was standing arms crossed, looking over the ocean of grass as the breeze swayed it giving the impression of waves. Dusk had fallen and above the sea of grey grass was a clear sky scattered with stars. He had been let out of the bacta tank a day ago thankfully not to return although the doctor insisted on twice-daily check-ups. He had watched the speeches that Lando and Poe had given with Rey standing at his side, and he'd felt conflicted. His mother had groomed Poe for leadership, a son to her that he had failed to be and within that idea had been that familiar resentful feeling he'd often felt towards his mother. He understood now, however, that his mother had chosen Poe because he had chosen Snoke and the First Order. His choices had made hers for her. Kylo's resentment was now turned in on himself becoming a mountain of regret. He was also conflicted for he understood the Resistance's beliefs about the First Order, but the First Order, or at least not all of the First Order was not what the Resistance thought, and he'd need to make them see that. Being here didn't mean he was part of the Resistance, but he had said he would do what he could. He'd fight with Rey, and he wouldn't let anything happen to her; he couldn't let anything happen to her.

It was just him and Rey now she was the only other presence he could feel in the Force. Whenever he reached out with the Force before he'd sensed his mother, she had always been there, but now she was gone. Kylo sighed gravely watching the waves of grass, different hues of grey- darker and lighter in places as far as the eye could see. As he watched it, he sensed something. It wasn't Rey, but it was like when the bond between them had flickered a presence sparking into place. He tilted his head slightly as the sense got stronger he turned fully and saw something that he did not expect. The ghostly blue apparition of his Uncle, Luke Skywalker, stood in front of him. He didn't look like he had on Crait, his hair was longer, he had a full beard, and he looked weather-beaten.

"Hey, kid. You look terrible."

Kylo's chest heaved against his tightly crossed arms as he breathed deeply, his face devoid of emotion like the mask he had always worn. Kylo didn't say anything he just surveyed Luke. The last time he'd seen him, it had been a deception, an illusion. He'd technically have killed him twice, three times actually if he'd been there in the flesh, but he hadn't. The lust for revenge had been quelled the animosity, however, had not.

"You know I said to Rey, when I saw you two touching hands across the galaxies on Ahch-To, that she'd opened herself to the dark for a pair of pretty eyes." Luke was staring out at the grasses, "seeing you here I'd say you opened yourself to the light for a pair just as pretty". Luke turned back to Kylo and smiled at him. Kylo again remained silent, and Luke turned back to the grass.

"Your mother would be pleased you're here; that you're home. She's not really gone. No-one's ever really gone she's in you and all around you in the Force."

Kylo's eyes narrowed in anguish, but he still refused to speak.

"They thought our father, Anakin Skywalker, Darth Vader was the one who was prophesied the one who would bring balance to the Force. The Jedi Order had legions of Jedi, and when my father became a Sith aiding Palpatine- Darth Sidious- with the Jedi massacre there was almost balance, but then Leia and I were born. It's just you and Rey now, and together you are something different and potentially formidable. Powerful light and powerful dark a real balance in the Force.

First comes the day, then comes the night,
After the darkness, Shines through the light,
The difference they say is only made right
By the resolving of Grey through refined Jedi sight."
Kylo was observing Luke his stature unchanged in a pretence of disinterest in what he was being told. His face, however, showed quite differently; eyes no longer narrowed, and his eyebrows were arched in curiosity. Luke turned to him again.

"You are the last Skywalker, and with Rey, you are the true legacy of my father- the prophecy fulfilled; the balance in the Force."

Now Kylo unfolded his arms. He had always admired his Grandfather the most powerful Sith that ever lived, and before that, a powerful Jedi. He had wanted to finish what his Grandfather had started, and without realising it or meaning to, somehow in abandoning the First Order and joining Rey, it was possible he, they would.

Luke searched his nephew's face; he'd always struggled to read him. Ben wore his emotions openly, but they were still a jumble that Luke couldn't see through clearly. Unlike the Jedi of old Luke felt feelings were not part of the darkside, they had saved his father from himself in the end due to their mutual love for each other. It made sense, therefore due to Luke's teachings that Ben used his emotions, but as a young Padawan, those emotions had been mostly angst and fear. This had subsequently led Luke to the greatest mistake he'd ever made and ultimate failure. That fleeting shameful moment where Luke thought in his hubris that he could end it all. Seeing him now, he could see how little he'd ever truly been able to comprehend his complex nephew.

Finally, Ben spoke his eyes down talking to the floor, "by the resolving of Grey through refined Jedi sight, what does that mean?"

Luke smiled sadly, stubborn boy, just like his mother.

"The Grey Jedi code. There is no light without dark. Through passion, I gain focus. Through knowledge, I gain power. Through serenity, I gain strength. Through victory, I gain harmony. There is only the Force."

Ben nodded eyes still down absorbing the information he'd been given fitting it into what he'd experienced with Rey.

"You've achieved things, done things you didn't know were possible- with her, haven't you?"

Ben's eye lifted, and he nodded again swallowing. Luke waited patiently.

"We healed each other. We were able to overcome this drug given to disconnect us from the Force. When we... touch we can feel the Force, and I can see a light getting brighter and there is wind around us. Power, power like I have never known."

Luke nodded, "it's the will of the Force."

Kylo felt an overwhelming urge to ask his Uncle about the dream, was it indeed the future and the will of the Force? He knew his Grandfather had fought against a vision he'd had of the future, a dream in which his wife Padme died in childbirth, but by fighting it, he made it a reality. If he hadn't would the outcome, have been different? He had loved her but wanted the power to save her. Kylo felt the opposite he'd wanted the power until all he wished for was Rey and for the dream to come true. He opened his mouth slightly to speak and then decided against it. As he did so, he felt a familiar presence, and he inclined his head as though hearing for it and sensing it.

Luke spoke, "here she comes." He smiled again at Kylo, "see you around, kid."

Kylo shuddered as he breathed in. His father had always called him that, and he watched his Uncle's apparition walk away from him slowly becoming fainter almost evaporating and dissolving
into the atmosphere as he moved and eventually he was gone.

Kylo turned to face Rey as she walked towards him with concern in her eyes her loose hair blowing in the breeze. Once she reached him, she stood close searching his face unspeaking. He wasn't sure if it was a good thing that they didn't need to speak to know what the other was thinking. Right now he didn't feel like talking he reached out to her and pulled her into an embrace closing his eyes and breathing her in. He tried to calm his mind of everything that had happened and everything he'd been told. He could feel her hands holding onto him tightly. His mother had cared for her, treated her like a daughter Rey had lost someone she cared for too.

Rey pulled back from him slightly reached both hands up to his face and pulled it towards her own. Their foreheads touching, she looked into his eyes, and he could feel the wind around them pick up and swirl about them as their hair rose off their shoulders. As he looked at her, the grey grass around them disappeared in a glow of light that got brighter and brighter. He tilted his head and closed the gap between them allowing their lips to touch; he pulled her closer from his hands on her hips she entwined he fingers in his hair at the nape of his neck. The wind around them increased, becoming a spiralling cyclone as their kiss became deeper in hopes of diminishing their mutual pain. The light rising in intensity until Kylo pulled back from her and looked around; their hair and clothing still being whipped about them. The light was so bright he had to squint, and he turned his head back to her.

"You see this; you feel this?"

She nodded.

"I think I know what it is."

"It's the Force," she stated matter of factly.

The wind and the light dimmed, leaving them just standing amongst the grass as though nothing has happened. Kylo decided to share what Luke had told him but not that it was Luke that had told him.

"When I was training with Luke, I... read something, lots of things but ...," he took a deep breath.

"First comes the day, then comes the night, After the darkness, Shines through the light, The difference they say is only made right By the resolving of Grey through refined Jedi sight. I think we're the Grey bringing the balance to the Force."

She listened intently, and he watched realisation and recollection wash over her face.

"Come with me."
Rey could sense Ben feeling awkward standing behind her in her quarters as she rifled around her belongings that had been brought there by Rose. At last, she found it and handed it to him an ancient Jedi text one of several she had studied with Chewie and Rose.

"How have you got this?" Ben looked from the book to her astonishment in his face. He recognised it he must've thought it had been destroyed when he destroyed the temple.

"I took them from Ahch-To when Luke refused to leave with me before I came to you. Look," she showed him the page she wanted him to see- an illustration of the original Jedi all drawn in black and white- balance. She then flipped to another page and on it was the Grey Jedi Code. As Ben read the passage, she spoke it out loud.

"I'm the light, and you're the dark. Through our passion, we gain focus. Through knowledge, we gain power. Through serenity, we gain strength. Through victory, we gain harmony. There is only the Force."

She took the book from him placing it back where she found it intertwining her fingers into his. They both inhaled as they felt the Force increase and flow between them.

"I was frightened, and I wanted to know my place in all of this. Where Luke refused me, you didn't. When I felt alone, you were there. You said I came from nothing, that I am nothing but not to you."

Ben shook his head at the memory of what he'd said ashamed at how it had sounded; it hadn't been what he'd meant, "You're not nothing, you were never nothing."

"I am a scavenger and you, you're a Prince." She interrupted him.

Ben turned away from her embarrassedly sniffing and smiling in amusement then gazing back at
her, "My mother was a Princess, and my father was a smuggler, my grandmother was a Queen, and my Grandfather was a slave. What we were or are doesn't matter. You're not nothing, you were never nothing, especially not to me."

"What am I to you?" She asked her intertwined fingers, moving his hand around as she looked up at him.

"Everything," he replied earnestly.

"I understand now you are my place in all of this. It's just us now," Rey said, looking at their interlocked fingers. She then turned her head and focused on the door of her room and using the Force shut it with her mind. Looking up at the light, she turned it off, so the only light came from the stars through the window.

She turned back to him, released her hand from his and reached for the bottom of his top and gently lifted it up and over his head. She looked at his scared body the puncture wounds and acid burns had faded since his torture; however, she traced some of the more prominent purple veins and scars with her fingers. Rey then removed her grey jacket and the top she wore beneath that, leaving only her wraps. Ben stood rooted to the spot in fear looking at her, she could tell that he understood her intention and he was petrified. She felt the same fear and uncertainty, but his anxiety made her feel better. Here, as in the throne room, they were on the same level, same experience. She leaned up and brushed his lips with her's whispering softly

"Don't be afraid I feel it too. Just let go."

Ben kissed her back and slowly Rey stepped back towards her bunk, bringing him with her. At the cot, she sat and leaned back onto the bunk, pulling Ben gently on top of her as she did so.
Rey opened her eyes; her head was arched back on her bunk, and she was looking at the ceiling of her quarters. She could feel Ben quivering and shaking above her just as the room and her belongings around the room had been only moments earlier. Some objects lay scattered across the room where they'd fallen from the air. She tilted her head to look at Ben he was perched upon his forearms just above her his hair hanging in his face as he breathed staggered panting breaths. His ordinarily cool skin was warm to the touch. She reached a hand up to his face and tucked his hair back.

"You ok? You're trembling."

He managed a nod and a quiet murmur of confession that he was through jagged breaths.

"Mmm-hmm, I'll be alright."

He lowered himself back down onto her and nuzzled into her neck as they embraced each other in mutual bliss one; however, that was sadly short-lived as a knock at the door made them both jump. A self-conscious and embarrassed detangling of limbs and blankets followed as Rey attempted to make herself decent to open the door.

"Rey?" A muffled query came from the other side of the door, followed by another knock.

-On the other side of the door, Poe stood fretting. He'd been at the table in central command with Finn, Rose, General Ematt, Admiral Numb and General Calrissian. They'd been talking for hours going over their resources considering potential plans, but they'd achieved very little. Everyone was too saddened by the day's events, too tired from evacuating from their previous positions but also anxious about what lay ahead.

Poe had been leaning back in his chair- it was late, really late. There were no windows in the command room, but he could see his droid charging in the corner, and Rose was practically asleep on Finn's shoulders stirring every time he gave an agitated gesture before nestling back. Poe smiled one day he hoped to have someone to lean on it felt as though anyone he'd got close to was gone, except Rey. The way she'd spoken about Kylo Ren and the way she looked at him. Poe shook those ideas from his mind there was no point reflecting on what could have been any more, any hope he might've had abandoned; it had never really been.

Poe sat forward, "I'm calling time. Let's get some rest, and we'll start properly tomorrow."

As everyone rose from the table to shuffle off, Poe patting each of them on the back and shaking hands in a gesture of farewell for the evening, the room began to shake. Everyone looked alarmed, and Rose woke up from her slumber, leaning on Finn. BB8 disconnected from where the droid had been charging. If it were the First Order, they'd have heard some alarms or warnings- something! BB8 beeped confirming they weren't being attacked.
"Asteroid? Earthquake?" Poe asked his droid BB8 beeping, suggesting that there was no way of knowing if an asteroid had hit the planet. Calculations could be done, but it would be easier to go outside and check. With regards to an Earthquake, it was possible, but BB8's data showed no signs that this planet had ever suffered seismic activity before.

"Ok, ok let's go check it out."

Structurally everything seemed fine and outside was just the night sky and an ocean of grey grass swaying in the breeze. The shaking had stopped, and a realisation hit Poe, could it have been the Force? Rey or Kylo Ren could have done this with the Force. It had been a taxing, emotional day, for both of them, perhaps the shaking they'd felt was an uncontrollable surge in the Force emitting from one of them. Poe told Finn to go to Kylo's quarters while he had headed straight to Rey's door, which is now where he found himself leaning against the door frame straining to hear. Finn returned, shaking his head and stood leaning on the other wall. Poe knocked again more agitated this time and concerned.

"Rey you in there? Is everything ok? The compound was shaking," he asked.

"Yeah, everything's fine. Sorry," a muffled response came back from behind the door.

"So it was you? Do you know where Kylo is? It could've been him- right?"

Rey opened the door, and Poe who'd been leaning on it fell in slightly.

"Woah. Sorry," Poe nearly fell into her as the door opened and he raised his hands to balance himself, placing them on the doorframe. She smiled at him. He looked exhausted and a little deflated. Not his usual charismatic self but then Leia had been his mentor, and his job as a leader was only getting harder.

"Ben's here.... we were reading the Jedi texts trying out new things.... lost track of time.... sorry." Poe's brow furrowed with concern, and Rey could sense he didn't quite believe her about the books, it must be so late. She was a terrible liar, and she always had been.

"Ok, but you're ok?" He scanned her face while she nodded at him smiling. She looked flushed, and her loose hair was tangled as though she'd been training. The top she was wearing was way too big, and it appeared to be the only thing she was wearing. Behind her, Poe could see objects scattered about the room on the floor. Training?

"Ok. We could do with your input tomorrow at the table for the plans." Poe gestured at Finn behind him as he spoke.

"I'll be there," she smiled back at his request.

"Ok. Goodnight". Poe leaned back off the door frame running his hands through his hair and rubbing his face. He turned and walked towards his quarters, Finn following behind, giving Rey a slightly knowing grin.

Rey rolled her eyes back at him.

"Night," she called after him, "get some rest you look like you need it."

Poe raised a hand absently to acknowledge he'd heard while continuing to walk and then entered his quarters.
Rey closed the door with a sigh of relief then turned to give Ben a sheepish smile. Other than sitting up and covering himself with the sheet for a semblance of modesty he'd not moved managing to be silent on her bunk while the conversation at the door had gone on.

"You'll be joining us at that table tomorrow. Your input will be invaluable."
Ben groaned as she clambered back under the sheet with him.

-X-

Ben was stood looking at the beacons that had been lit for his mother and Kira, Lando's daughter. They were spirals of silver metal creating a cone, the flames flickering around the cone changing the colours on the metal—purples, blues, yellows and greens. He stood reminiscing about the events of yesterday—the speeches, Luke and then the experience with Rey. It had been a naive stumbling yet gentle union. He had been terrified, and she had been equally nervous. The contents of the room had been shaking. The Force between them had been so strong flowing through them and around them. As things had climaxed items had crashed to the floor as they'd unknowingly made items around the room float. He'd been trembling as he'd looked down at her, her soft hazel eyes wide behind her lashes her cheeks blushed and lips rouged. She'd looked more beautiful than he'd ever seen her at that moment. As he lay atop her each embraced in the other's arms, it had seemed forever an eternity that they were sharing.

The knock on the door from the pilot Dameron had brought them back to stark reality with an embarrassing jolt. Rey had told him he would be joining the commanders' table today with her an idea he did not relish. Ben had awoken as predawn light entered her quarters she'd been nestled within his arms, and her hair was loose across the bunk, and he'd breathed her in deeply. His mind had begun racing, and he realised the necessity to be outside; he needed the breeze and the sound of the grass to quell the tide of emotions within him, so he'd snuck out while she slept. Today would be difficult, and he would need to keep his temper. Eyes closed, he embraced his current feelings of grief and regret but also bliss. Memories of his mother and father when he'd been younger entered his mind. His father, taking him flying and boasting he'd be a great pilot. His mother, reading to him and Rey beneath him as she gently tucked his hair from his face and asked him if he was ok. My passions make me stronger.

-X-

Lando Calrissian sat at the table in the base's headquarters; he was exhausted. Sleep had not come easily, and when it had, it was riddled with dreams of Kira some loving memories others tormenting over the moments of her tragic and horrific end. Looking to his left Poe Dameron didn't look any better his elbow was on the table and his hand was in his hair holding his head up. Dark circles ringed his eyes. They'd sat up late last night talking strategy but not getting anywhere; it hadn't been the right time. Lando doubted there would ever be a right time and while tossing and turning in his quarters, he'd come up with something. General Ematt, Admiral Nunb, Chewbacca and Maz Kanata sat at the table all veterans of this conflict like himself. Commander Connix young fresh and efficient, Commander Snap Wexley, Commander D'Acy and Admiral Statura were also present. Lando didn't know these members as well as the others, but they were seasoned and committed. At the other end of the table sat Ben Solo and behind him stood Rey, her hand on his chair. Something was going on between those two Lando recognised the public attempt at friendship. He smiled Han and Leia had done the same thing a pretence of being friends when they had never been friends. Out of love, Leia had travelled light years to find Han risking her own life. These two had done the same for each other and clearly felt just as strongly as Han and Leia had. Lando smiled sadly at his memories and the current loss of both his friends and his family. Shaking his head gently to dislodge these thoughts and get to business, he turned to C-3PO.
"3P0, would you get the table a jug of coffee I know it's not part of your protocol, but I think we're going to need it. When you're back, we'll go over your calculations".

Lando had asked C-3P0 last night to check the entire inventory at their disposal and to look at the most likely and successful outcomes with R2-D2. C-3P0 wandered off muttering and complaining out loud that this was not part of a protocol droids proper functions. When Lando had agreed to join the New Republic council Leia had gifted 3P0 to him, and Lando had never known a droid to complain so much, it was very efficient, however.

Once 3P0 returned, Lando sipped his cup gratefully, holding the warmth to him for comfort. He listened to the calculations as 3P0 rattled them off, too many statistics for him, he had always been more of a gambling man.

"Ok, I have an idea so let's discuss if it's a possibility and if not let's come up with something better," all eyes around the table were on him, so Lando continued.

"The First Order is preparing for an all-out war, and I think we should take the opportunity to bring the fight to them before they get a chance to prepare fully. They have greater numbers and greater weapons. We are outgunned and outnumbered, but we do not need to be outmanoeuvred. The Resistance has always been strong at guerrilla tactics, so let's utilise it. We know the First Order is on Ruusan so let's surprise them as much as we can before they get the chance to get into proper battle formation before they can get their AT-TAs, AT-STs and AT- M6s manned."

He saw nodding around the table; Poe stood purposefully and spoke first.

"Can we get any of our ground resources to Ruusan- our artillery tanks/ armoured tanks?"

Admiral Nunb nodded answering in his native tongue, "Not all but some. If we truly want a surprise we can't land too many of our transport ships, they need to be loaded with as many fighters as possible, we'll also need our squadrons from the sky they'll be more effective".

"Agreed," General Ematt nodded, "my experience tells me the more cover we have from above, the safer are troops will be."

"No problem, our squadrons are trained and ready. R2 how many X-Wings have we got? Enough for five squadrons?" Poe queried.

R2 chirped and beeped that they had five rusty squadrons or four reasonable ones.

Rose piped in, "we've done what we can to maintain them, but some were just too damaged or too old, we've worked with worse." Poe knew she was referring to the rusty V-4X-D Ski speeders they'd used on Crait.

Chewbacca howled.

"Thanks, Chewie the Millenium Falcon's presence will be greatly appreciated".

Lando looked at Rey and Ben "Can we count on you two to travel with Chewie, to fight with our ground forces?"

"Frontline, Rey responded.

Lando smiled at Rey then looked at Ben, it was though darkness hung around him, his face set grimly.
Ben sat leaning back in his chair at the table with all the other leaders who were deliberating what was to be done next. He hadn't wanted the chair, but Rey had insisted over his preferred position of standing in a corner and hiding. He really hadn't wanted to be present, and he hadn't wanted to be part of the negotiations. He didn't have the right to sit at this table, but Rey had reasoned his point of view was valid and necessary, and so here he sat.

Right now, everyone around the table reminded him of the table on the Supremacy ship. Self-important people who liked hearing their own voices; however, these people told themselves that they were the good guys. That any plans and casualties inflicted was fair because they were right. Ben rested his head in his hands, feeling more and more tense and annoyed. He knew Rey could sense his emotions; she'd placed her hand on his chair, hoping it would calm him. It hadn't, and it would only be a matter of time before the others around the table would feel it too.

"Ben?" He heard his name and looked up from under his lowered brow.

"Ben, what are your feelings on this matter?" Lando queried. In Lando, he could see a mildly nervous expression and one he recognised from being a child- don't lose your temper; with his mother specifically, it was do not embarrass me. Ben sighed heavily andshrugging his shoulders minutely, lifted his head from his hands and held them up to the side of his head almost in a sign of surrender. Don't shoot the messenger.

"The problem is, you think you're the good guys." There were mutterings of disagreement and disapproval amongst the others at the table. He raised one hand up to make his point.

"Most of the First Order didn't have a choice. The First Order raised them or kidnapped them. Indoctrinated and brainwashed with ideas and propaganda. The First Order on the lowest level are friends almost family, and it's all they've ever known. Ask him, he knows!" Ben gestured towards Finn.

"The stormtroopers of the First Order aren't clones like the Empire. They are just people, people following orders. They are almost prisoners themselves, they had no choice, and they aren't inherently bad or evil. Deserting the First Order isn't possible- he's the only one who's managed." Ben gestured again to Finn.

"By having the Resistance win and the First Order lose the cycle continues as it always has. The Emperor overthrows the Senate, the Alliance overthrows the Empire, Alliance is overthrown by the First Order; it's time to let the past die, let it all die. You need a change, a balance- a truce. If no one feels like the loser the need to rebel against the winner disappears". He'd become animated his hands rising or coming down with every point.

"So what we just let everyone go? The leaders of the First Order? Hux?" Poe asked his arms crossed against his chest.

"No, not everyone, but there are still good and decent people. Military strategists who made their way in the First Order for their skills- Admiral Deltan, Colonel Kramer and General Targo is a respectable woman. You could work with them to create a new order. There are those in Hux's pocket- Vice Admiral Renor and Grand Admiral Skalick who are worthy of your hatred and then there's Hux. Hux is...." Ben paused, aware of what he was about to say and how everything he was about to say could also be referenced to himself, "he's a monster. He's insane, power-hungry and a murderer. He's a coward and weak but with the entire First Order at his command and that makes him extremely dangerous".
Poe bent over the table, placing his palms flat on the table's surface and glared down at Ben.

"What about you? You've murdered people. Didn't you also choose the First Order?"

Ben leaned forward in his seat meeting Poe's glare his eyes narrowed. Despite not standing, his ferocity caused silence to fall across the room. His look was genuinely menacing.

"Yes, I did. I know exactly what I am and what I've done." His head cocked slightly to the side a slightly malicious smirk touched his face, "you should know, shouldn't you? Am I in your nightmares?"

"ENOUGH!" Lando shouted as he stood sharply slamming his hands on the table as he did so.

Poe immediately straightened embarrassed; he'd let it get personal.

Ben sat back in his chair his nostrils flaring, his jaw moving to the side and lips pursing as he reattempted composure.

"Pair of hot head flyboys the pair of you" Lando retorted.

Poe let out a surprising burst of laughter. Ben allowed himself an amused snort, and the mood lightened.

"Ben has already handed himself over as a willing prisoner of the Resistance. His information is invaluable, and there will be consequences for his crimes, but now is not the time to decide them." Lando diffused the atmosphere, and after a moment, Ben spoke again quietly looking at no one just staring at the wall.

"Whatever happens after this war, whatever world is created I don't get to live in it; I know that. You can't do the things I've done and get to live in that world but you..." Ben now turned to Lando and Poe both still standing, "you have a chance to change everything. You both need to think long term. How do we make peace? You need to convince them to join you in a truce."

Maz Kanata spoke now sensing acceptance from Lando of Ben's point a position she agreed with.

"I've been alive longer than any of you, a millennium, in that time I've seen every war fought between the light and the dark. The Jedi, the Sith, the Rebel Alliance, the Empire and now the Resistance and the First Order. It's the same fight it's always been, and unless we make this change now, it will be the same fight going on for another millennium."

Lando was nodding, "how do we contact these leaders, Ben?"
Preparations

Rose was checking the X-wings over with Poe five squadrons was going to be tight but the more, the better. She could sense Poe was fractious and not merely because of his legitimate concerns over the war they were about to engage in. Finn had been training with the ground forces, General Ematt had been checking weapons and tanks, and Admiral Nunb with Admiral Statura had landed their large MC80 star cruisers to take the tanks and troops to Ruusan. Rose had been busy with anything and everything that needed someone who understood technical engineering. Rey had been helping where she could, but she'd been training a lot with Kyl.... Ben. Must remember to call him Ben.

Rose had never met Kylo Ren she'd just heard stories across the galaxy and from the personal experiences of Finn and Poe. She had come into contact with General Hux she'd personally bitten that callous man through his gloved hands when he'd reached for her necklace when she and Finn had sneaked on board the old Supremacy ship. She'd seen Ben at the table a few days ago glowering up at Poe, darkness seeming to expand from his person and he'd taunted Poe cruelly about Poe's torture at his hands. Rose could see he was disturbed and deeply. She'd seen him floating in the bacta tank when she'd visited Rey, his body riddled with scars. His existence she could see had been moulded by pain, but she found him difficult to be around or to even look at with that massive scar running down his face and those dark eyes. He was often silent a man of few words, and he was huge, mind you everyone was huge compared to Rose damn my inherited height. Small and feisty that's what Finn said about her, and she smiled to herself. Rey had barely left Ben's side, and Rose couldn't quite understand why. Rey had tried to attempt to explain that it was their bond through the Force that had occurred years earlier when he'd kidnapped her that meant they were bound- always and that together they were better and stronger. Rose had tried to argue in the nicest way she could that he was a horrible person how could Rey be with someone so cruel. Rey had smiled at her sadly admitting that yes he could be dark and cruel, abusive even but not to her. With her, he was changing the darkness, pain and anger fading as a different man emerged. He's not changing physically thought Rose allowing a judder to run down her he was intensely scary. In the distance, she could see them in the grass their sabers shimmering and buzzing as they trained.

"Rose!"

Rose turned from looking in the direction of Rey and Ben and turned to look at Poe his hands were on his hips eyebrows arched in expectation and exasperation.

"Hhmm, sorry, what?"

He turned to look where her gaze had been, and his hands fell from his hips, and his face fell as he sighed.

"Sorry Poe, what did you say?" Rose realised in gazing at Rey and Ben she'd now caused Poe to do the same and she knew how he felt about all of that, so she tried to keep him on track. She failed.

"How can she be with him, that monstrous creature, how?" He looked from the sabers twirling in the distance to look at Rose.

Rose gave a weak sympathetic smile, Poe had held a torch for Rey, but as her powers had grown, she'd changed. Since Fondor she was different from watching them train now it was clear her power had increased the same Rey was still in there, but her abilities had made people nervous, not to mention the towering looming shadowy figure who was ever-present at her side. Poe knew it
would never be he'd known before Rey went to Fondor, but that didn't change the fact that he was not happy about her relationship with Ben. Ben was the opposite of Poe; Rose didn't think Ben was capable of smiling, although at the moment Poe was struggling with that affliction too.

"I can't answer that for you, Poe. I thought she talked to you about him when she first brought him here?"

"She did, but it's more than that now you saw him at the table the other day and how she stood by him, and he was in her room late the other night."

Rose looked down, blushing slightly. Finn had gone with Poe after the compound had shaken the other evening and on returning to their quarters told her that Ben had been in Rey's room- reading! He had been like a little boy gossiping, but like Poe, the amusement of what was going on had quickly dissipated as it dawned on Finn who the man in Rey's room had been, the same man who'd severely injured him. These were the issues the men around her were struggling to comprehend. In all fairness, Rose was struggling a little herself, but she understood Rey's loneliness and how she felt a bond with someone so similar to herself, so identical in regards to that loneliness and having the Force. Rose couldn't see any similarities beyond that.

She placed a hand on Poe's shoulder and told him what she'd told Finn.

"We can't help who we love." She said this as much about Rey and Ben as she did about Poe's disappointment. "Now do we want five squadrons or are we going to stick with the four."

Poe ran a hand through his hair, sighing deeply, "four, get any spares to the MC80's". These ships were only going to be used planetside; there were separate squadrons with pilots on board the MC80 Star Cruisers manned by Admiral Nunb and Admiral Statura. Commander Snap Wexley would be the leader of those pilots.

"Alright then, now do we have enough pilots?"

Poe gave her a lopsided smile, "well, you'll be there, and so will I so we'll be fine."

He wrapped his arm around her neck and dragged her off as she tried to argue not for the first time that she was not a pilot but a technician.

-X-

Finn had been training with the ground forces for months they'd acquired blasters but also hand-to-hand weapons- staffs and Z6 riot control batons. Finn loved the riot batons they were manoeuvrable and could give a hefty hit by the ability to rotate it about and if that failed you could send your assailant a nasty electric shock. The Resistance didn't have the kind of weapons and armour that the First Order had, but they'd done their best to provide their fighters with helmets although most armour was useless against blaster fire. Finn often wondered why the troopers bothered, but he supposed it did protect from hand to hand assaults.

He had enough ground forces with General Ematt for six divisions, three of which would go with the armoured tanks and General Ematt. The other three divisions would go with Ben, Rey and himself. It had been decided that as the Knights of Ren were on the planet that Ben and Rey should be with the ground troops. Poe and Rose would be defending the forces from the sky with four maybe five squadrons of X-Wings. From chatting with Rose, he imagined it would only be four; five had been unlikely. Admiral Nunb and Admiral Statura would be dealing with the First Order ships just outside the planet with Commander Snap Wexley. Finn felt a bit hopeful.
Altor had been in regular contact with them since the execution; sneaking out nightly to provide them with everything they needed. He had delivered his exact location so they could find a safe place to land their transports. Having surveyed the planet's terrain they had found a valley on the planet where they could stay and wait for Altor and the other spies to join them. Altor had also informed them where the specific Generals and Admirals were- General Kail, General Valax, General Targo, Colonel Kramer and Supreme Leader Hux were currently planet side along with his personal guard Chromia and the Knights of Ren. Grand Admiral Skalick, Vice Admiral Renor and Admiral Deltan were in three separate Dreadnoughts just outside the planet's atmosphere. Lando Calrissian had already left with Maz and Chewie on the Millennium Falcon to sneak on board Admiral Deltan's Dreadnought in an attempt to negotiate with the Admiral and get him to join them in peace before the rest of the Resistance departed. Finn was glad he did not have that job.

Finn was currently walking through the grass towards two swirling sabers. It had been a while since he'd seen Rey fight with a saber. Her style had become aggressive and more powerful. Unlike Ben, she utilised skills like flipping and jumping in an attempt to outmanoeuvre his brute strength. Finn recalled the battle in the snow how he had taken up a saber himself, Kyl... Ben had been injured, striking his side and dripping blood onto the snow but despite that, he'd been formidable, and Finn had been terribly injured, unconscious in medical for some time. Watching him and Rey training now Finn could see Ben had held back. It appeared all the injuries had healed well as he bent backwards, crouched down low, jumped up and charged at Rey. The fire in his appearance wasn't the anger it had been when Finn had fought him. That fire had been sinister hate as he cruelly burnt Finn's shoulder and then slashed up his back. Rose liked his scars Finn smiled to himself. Finn was tolerating Ben for Rey's sake, but he had to admit how different Ben was around her. He would look at her calmly admiringly, his rage gone, however, still didn't mean Finn had to like him. Finn watched as Ben managed to disarm Rey and then stood over her and then bent his head to kiss her gently. *I knew it!* Rey was a terrible liar; he'd known they weren't reading books the night the compound had shaken. Ben was nothing like the other Resistance members he was cold and silent, but he was changing, and that was because of Rey. He listened to Rey took criticism from her without lashing out. Finn had overheard her reprimanding him for his behaviour towards Poe at the table, he'd tried to linger to listen to what was being said, but Rose had tugged him away. He couldn't help but enjoy Rey chastising the great Kylo Ren. He smiled again and continued to watch them train in awe.

-X-

Ben pulled away from her kiss, and she opened her eyes and looked at him.

"Again," he said as using the Force he called her saber to her which she deftly caught and as she gave him a wicked grin she ignited her saber and spun it into her starting position. Opposite Ben's eyes glinted in a slight smirk reaching just one side of his face. He crouched one hand on the floor one leg straight out to the side and his saber drawn in the other hand. He swung it at her legs, but she leapt over him entirely. He must've sensed her plan of attack because he spun on his feet to block her subsequent strike down and then he slowly stood still holding the block. Her arms began to shake with the pressure, and she knew what he was trying to prove, she needed to be cunning and use the Force. Her fighting style was skilled, but against a Knight of Ren or several, it would not be enough. It hadn't been last time. She extinguished the part of the lightsaber that was holding Ben's saber, and she concurrently crouched down knocking his legs out from under him with hers and as Ben fell forward losing his balance she used the Force to take his saber from him. He rolled over and looked at her from the ground as she stood over him with both sabers.

"Better."
She extinguished both sabers and attached hers to her belt and offered him her hand and he gratefully accepted it as he rose to his feet taking his saber and attaching it to his belt. He was gazing down at her, he was pleased with her progress, but she could see him struggling with a decision.

"Rey if anything happens tomorrow..."

"Shhh," she interrupted him, placing a hand on his chest.

"I love you."

Well, that wasn't what she'd expected she knew of course how she felt and that he felt the same. Like all feelings with Ben, he felt it deeply and channelled it she could feel its presence in the Force around him.

"I know," she intertwined her fingers with his not taking her eyes off his. This time he actually smiled, and it was genuine.
"My father said that to my mother every time she told him she loved him."

Rey smiled back then responded honestly, "I don't understand it, and I can't control it but I truly, deeply love you. I'm yours, and you are mine."

Ben leaned his head gently down to hers again resting it upon hers, then with his hand, he tilted her chin up, and their lips met a gentle kiss that lingered and deepened that said everything they had wanted to say to each other but had denied out of fear. No more hiding, no more fear. They were the last hope.
Outside the atmosphere of Ruusan upon the bridge of one of three Dreadnoughts stood Vice Admiral Deltan. He was deep in thought while surveying the empty space; he was concerned- very concerned. Supreme Leader Hux had ordered himself Admiral Skalick and Vice Admiral Renor to load the Dreadnoughts and prepare to find the Resistance and take his war to them. Deltan had followed his orders like a dutiful member of the First Order, but he increasingly disliked the decisions of those in charge.

He was a veteran of the First Order and like Skalick, Renor and Targo the Galactic Empire before that. Unlike Hux, Deltan did not have the same extremely skewed version of history which had no doubt been fed to Hux by his father, Brendol. Deltan was aware of the lies and the truths that had brought about the Galactic Empire. Hux genuinely believed that the Jedi had rebelled against the Senate and it's appointed leader. That, of course, was a lie. Like Snoke, Senator Palpatine had been a deception a long-planned deception and order 66 was a massacre of the Jedi. There had been no rebellion; it was all to dissolve the Senate and end democracy in the galaxy.

The subsequent rise of the First Order from the remnants of the Empire had been a chance for Deltan who believed in order. On joining the ranks, however, yet another mythical Force wielder was pulling all the strings, the strings of the entire galaxy like a malevolent puppeteer. Deltan had wanted to bring order to the outer rims and to abolish slavery. He'd been idealistic about what could be achieved- idealistic and foolish. Hoping the First Order would be the fixing of injustice and would provide security to the galaxy. He'd thought of leaving the First Order, more than once, but once you were in the First Order defecting wasn't an option. Only death could you release you from that contract.

Hux had always exhibited the attitude of one who had climbed far and fast and by methods questionable, if examined carefully. Hux possessed twisted genius certainly, but that twisted element was becoming increasingly sadistic. The creation of Starkiller Base along with the destruction of three planets loyal to the Republic, the slow, deliberate decimation of the Resistance on their small ships and then the trial of Kylo Ren and that girl. It had been perfectly clear to Deltan that some severe torture had occurred on board Vice Admiral Renor's ship. Kylo Ren had been unable to stand straight and the way he had cried out when the female humanoid Chromia had struck him. Deltan had seen Kylo Ren fight in enough conflicts to know the man did not merely fall down hollering in pain over the hit from a staff. Worst of all, of course, was the recent execution. Deltan sighed to himself at the memory of the beheading of that poor girl. She had been steadfast and brave and young, so young, too young. She was a member of the Resistance yes but not one deserving of a public death via electroguillotine; no one deserved that fate. It was beastly and unbecoming of the civil-military prowess and hard work that the First Order had accomplished, that he had accomplished. Deltan had voted against execution along with two other high ranking officers- General Targo he knew felt as he did as did Colonel Kramer. That had been three against four, five including Supreme Leader Hux and so they'd been outvoted. He knew General Kail, and General Valax had no backbone and would happily follow whoever could guarantee their survival; currently, that was Hux.

"Admiral Deltan, Sir, we're being hailed."

Deltan turned to his head communications officer, pulled out of his deliberations.

"By whom?"

"Unknown ship Sir."
Deltan's eyebrows arched in surprise. Who could be hailing them? He scanned the space through the viewing windows on the deck. He couldn't see anything.

On seeing the Admiral peering into the empty space, the officer spoke again, "I believe the ship may be cloaked Admiral."

Deltan considered for a moment, "very well. I'll take it in my quarters." Admiral Deltan left the deck promptly and headed for his quarters to received the hail. An unknown, cloaked ship was hailing him, and he didn't want his officers to hear; one could never be too careful. On arriving at his quarters, he pressed his holo by his desk. The blue image of a man in a cloak flickered into view.

"This is Admiral Deltan, to whom am I speaking."

"My name is Lando Calrissian; I am the leader of the New Republic and the Resistance. I'm contacting you as an envoy to ask you to negotiate with me for the sake of the galaxy. I implore you to join us to make a truce for lasting peace."

Deltan was shocked, he had assumed the hail was from Targo or Kramer, but that wouldn't have explained the cloaking. He hadn't imagined the Republic or the Resistance would ever have contacted him personally. His shock he imagined must show all over his face. He had heard of Calrissian, a veteran of the days of the Empire and Rebel Alliance, like himself. The Baron of planet Bespin-admittedly it was no more than a city in the clouds before joining the rebels and blowing up the second death star. It made sense that this man had taken over from the previous leader General Organa. Princess Leia was how Deltan had known her until her demise at Skalick's hands. Calrissian was an old friend of the late Princess by all accounts. He relaxed in his chair, his hand on chin his index finger across his face and his lips resting on the rest of his fingers as he contemplated. This could be an opportunity to do what all he wanted to achieve; finally use the First Order to do good in the galaxy and bring order to those lawless planets. Anything rather than it's current directive of fear, intimidation and mass murder for what? Power? Admiral Deltan enjoyed his position with regards to the power and control he'd achieved of his ship. His leadership over his pilots and troops guaranteed they're loyalty, but power over the entire galaxy was not something he'd ever craved.

"I'm listening Calrissian, what is that you're proposing?" Even through the hologram Deltan could see Calrissian give a relieved sigh. He couldn't hear it, but he visibly saw it as the shoulders and head relaxed ever so slightly. Not a true military man.

"Join us. Our forces are headed to Ruusan as we speak and we want to end this with as few casualties as possible. Help us end this before more innocent people give their lives."

"Am I the only leader you've contacted?" Deltan queried. If they had gone to others first, the decision was easy. He knew Skalick and Renor were Hux's loyal men, loyal to a fault as long as it served their own disdainful prerequisites and this war did. They would revel in every moment of it.

"At the moment, yes."

Deltan gave a small crooked smile at that- good. The course now would be challenging, but his choice was easily made.

"May I ask why you felt I was the one to contact?"

"Ben Solo... Kylo Ren, your previous Supreme Leader, advised us of a few high ranking First Order officers who may not share Hux's vision and who might be willing to listen to reason."
"He's with you? Him and the girl?"

"Not personally but they are with the Resistance yes."

So they had escaped successfully. Deltan was somewhat astonished that Kylo Ren who had wanted to destroy every minute element of the Resistance had actually joined them.

"The other officers he advised you of are General Targo and Commander Kramer I assume?"

The holo of Calrissian simply nodded back. Also good, if they were to make any reasonable impact Deltan would need them too. He was surprised Kylo Ren had noticed himself and the others enough to know their names. Let alone discern that they weren't as steadfast to the First Order's directive. Kylo Ren had always worn his mask, however, so anything was possible from inside that helmet of his. Deltan, Targo and Kramer were amongst the minority of officers who'd not been physically assaulted by Kylo Ren in one of his fits of rage. Perhaps that was memorable in some way.

"What may I ask are your plans if I do join you?"

"Our task will be dealing with the other Dreadnoughts and dealing with Grand Admiral Skalick and Vice Admiral Renor. Once this is all over as I said we want to make a new Senate like the Senate of old. A true democracy where everyone has a right to be heard overrun by my leaders and yours. Our two sides together will be a formidable force, but for peace and prosperity".

Deltan was nodding, "what of those who won't join you? Hux?"

Calrissian raised his arms out at his side almost shrugging, "that all depends- a trial, life in Sunspot Prison. A lot of variables could happen between now and then."

Deltan appreciated that Calrissian hadn't said death or execution although it was no more than Hux deserved. He raised a hand to ask Calrissian to wait a moment. He opened his communication to the bridge.

"Captain, please open hangar two, and have our guest escorted to the bridge."

In his holo, Calrissian turned to instruct someone Deltan could neither hear nor see.

"Thank you, Admiral."

Deltan nodded his head. Turned the holo off and headed back to the bridge.

-X-

Aboard the Millennium Falcon Lando sat down with a thud relief washing over him. That had gone surprisingly well; he just really hoped it wasn't a trick. It didn't feel like a trick. Out of everyone, Lando thought he should be able to tell if someone was lying or had ulterior motives from his years of sitting around gambling tables.

Admiral Deltan had reminded him of General Ematt. He was a military man with exceptional intelligence and manners, but his face was rugged and worn from years of war, his hair short and greying. He'd had no facial hair, but he looked like a man who was never truly cleanly shaven.

Lando could hear Chewie hollering loudly and Maz trying to calm him and failing which was getting the Wookie even more incensed. He got up and walked to the cockpit and directly to the pilot seat where the Wookie sat resting a hand on the Wookie's large furry shoulder.
"Chewie, I'll be fine. As soon as I'm on board, join the Resistance on Russan they will need all the help they can get. Let Commander D'Arcy know we've been successful, and I'll stay in contact."

Chewie barked in response as he flew the Millennium Falcon into hangar two.

"Here we go."

-X-

On Maridun Commander D'Arcy had been left in charge of coordinating all their forces and she stood at the command screen with all communications open. Colonel Dameron's efforts were needed in the air. According to him, there was no one better especially as she'd have Commander Connix and C3P0, Princess Leia's droid, assisting her.

"Connix, give the order for our fleet to advance," came General Calrissian's order.

The entire fleet was waiting to jump to light speed above Maridun's atmosphere. The fleet would land the troops and tanks in Russan's valley before the two MC80's joined the Dreadnought Calrissian was on to engage the other two Dreadnoughts.

"May the Force be with us," she said it quietly to herself. Around the room, however, D'Arcy heard Connix and the other officer's whisper it too as the command was relayed to their forces above.
It was late at night and quiet on Ruusan, and for the fifth and final time, Altor was sneaking out of the barracks where he and the other troopers slept. Altor was dressed plainly in the black base layers the troopers wore underneath their uniform having stripped off his armour and left it in the barracks. The only symbol he'd brought with him from his time amongst the First Order was his blaster, he'd become quite attached to it in his time as a spy and no doubt it would be helpful. Currently, he was crouched in the woods behind the makeshift barracks. Altor would be meeting the other spies here as well as any troopers they thought might join them. Altor had three with him, not many, he was sure he could have got more, but the noise was not worth the risk and had more been absent; it would have drawn attention. He didn't know who the other spies were by face only by name; he'd joined the initiative early and been located on Vice Admiral Renor's Dreadnought from the beginning. He was hunched in the dirt in silence, trying to blend into the ground. He watched as small groups in black scurried their way over to the woods. He shifted with his small group to join the new groups. Everyone was hunkered low as they approached looking anxiously at each other; one of them finally spoke.

"Altor?"

Altor let out a huge sigh, "Yeah."

"Caleb", "Hally", "Roan", "Eva," each of the spies introduced themselves nervously raising a hand in greeting. Each had three or four First Order deserters with them who were looking apprehensively about them. They were so young, so many of them were so young.

"This way, keep quiet and keep down." Altor knew where the valley was so he led the way, and the group followed as silently as they could creeping along as close to the ground as possible, occasionally pausing to check the way was clear from behind a tree trunk. The valley was nearby but not so close that you could hear the ships and transports landing. It was a good hour-long walk, and at this speed trying to remain hidden, it would be longer.

-X-

Admiral Nunb and Admiral Statura came out of light speed in the system around Ruusan purposefully avoiding being directly outside Ruusan, they were cloaked, but anything to avoid detection was worth doing. From here Admiral Statura could release their transports to the planet with their forces. Admiral Nunb, however, had to lower into Ruusan's atmosphere in order to land their tanks.

"Slowly Captain, slow and gentle we want to avoid all detection" Admiral Nunb commanded to his Captain in his native tongue; all the crew on his ship had been under his command long enough to learn his language. Admiral Nien Nunb knew all about being discreet. Before joining the Alliance under Princess Leia Organa, he'd been an arms dealer and a smuggler and a good one. Princess Leia had said to her himself "Only you could have smuggled an entire rescue craft under the Empire's noses," that was years ago now and Nunb was a veteran pilot and now an experienced leader of the Resistance. The MC80 Star Cruiser descended through Ruusan's dark sky, the hum of the engines lost in the breeze running through the valley, it landed gently, and vast swathes of dust wafted around it.

"Nicely done Captain, inform General Ematt they can depart our forces and the tanks."

Down in the loading bay, General Ematt stood with his three squadrons in front of them the bay
door lowered, and the tanks departed. General Ematt said nothing merely raised a hand and the fleet followed the tanks into the dark, dusty valley.

At the rear of the loading bay, Rey went to move forward, but Ben grasped her hand, holding her back a moment, and she looked at his face with concern. She saw a look she hadn't seen since their bond had begun during his interrogation of her on Starkiller Base when she'd managed to read his mind as he had read hers and found his greatest fear; that he'd never be as strong as Darth Vader, his grandfather.

"Ben, what is it? What's wrong?" She had stopped trying to pull him forward with her and was facing him concerned.

He was breathing hard; his other hand was tense at his side. He looked at her intently. Once he had wanted everything for himself, but now he wanted everything for her. In his heart, he was afraid, terrified that anything might happen to her.

He grasped her arm hard, "don't leave my side. No matter what happens, you stand with me. I won't lose you."

His words made her anxious, but she tried to still his anxiety and now her own.

"Never," she said as she squeezed his hand and again pulled him forward to follow the troops. They walked forward together hands intertwined as they departed the ship. Behind them the boarding ramp raised and the Star Cruiser very slowly ascended towards the sky to join Admiral Statura. Clouds of swirling dust rose and blew in all directions creating a brown fog through which they could barely see the heavy-duty transports containing the rest of the fighters landing around them.

Commander Finn stood with his squadron onboard one such transport. The squadron fighters inside were tightly packed almost wedged together; there weren't many transports, and they needed every soldier. As the hatch opened a sense of relief from the hot and stuffy interior came over the group,
and Finn led the way into the dust-filled air outside.

"Here we go," he said to himself as they joined the squadrons already waiting.

Led by General Ematt, the troops made their way tentatively through the valley. Squinting in the predawn light the haze of unsettled earth, making it even more challenging to see, General Ematt could make out a dark moving mass ahead of them. As they moved closer, he could see it was a small group of people all dressed in black. To his left Commander Finn approached them bidding the rest of the squadrons to hold back.

"Altor?" Finn couldn't see clearly, but Altor had to be in amongst the group somewhere.

A man stepped forward with short bristly blond hair and a large button nose. He was short in stature and his ears stuck out a little- Altor. Finn gave a grin stepped forward and embraced the man in a firm embrace banging him hard on the back.

"Good to see you, buddy."

"You too man, you too."

Jakub moved from his squadron to join them. As Finn, Jakub and Altor greeted each other, the other spies and First Order deserters, General Ematt's communications device crackled into life.

"General Ematt, come in this is Calrissian."

"Reading you loud and clear Calrissian, go ahead."

"General Targo's division and Commander Kramer's squadron will be joining us. They will meet you just before dawn at the edge of the valley, just outside the encampment. We'll still be outnumbered, but it's a lot better odds. May the Force be with us."

"May the Force be with us." General Ematt spoke back into the communicator. He turned to Altor "How long is the walk to the First Order's encampment?"

"About an hour or so. Dawn is in a few hours."

"Commander, Jakub, get your squadrons into battle formations. Altor you and your troopers are with me." The troops around them started to arrange themselves into their squads, check their weapons, adjust their helmets and those with the tanks boarded or stood next to them. Slowly they advanced forward.

-X-

General Targo had received an encrypted call from Admiral Deltan very late. She took the call privately as she did all Admiral Deltan's encrypted calls there had been more of these calls recently since their mutual discontent about their roles and their leader.

Admiral Deltan had the leader of the Republic, and the Resistance aboard his Dreadnought and Admiral Deltan was going to join them for peace. General Targo had required as much persuading as he had they'd both been looking for a way out or a different path and the Republic had offered it to them. It seemed too easy but accepting the offer was easy; the execution would not be. The First Order was vast, and even with her division and Kramer's joining the Resistance the numbers were still not favourable. Admiral Deltan had said that the troops of Resistance fighters were on Ruusan in a valley close by and would be heading towards the First Order encampment just before dawn. There would be no sleep tonight as General Targo left her quarters, met with Kramer and started
organising their divisions and troops.

Hux's training was faultless; stormtroopers were loyal, and the First Order was their home, but their individual leaders were their parents and Supreme Leader Hux was a stranger to them, someone to be feared who ranted at them from far away. He did not know them, and he did not care; General Targo knew her entire division personally as did Kramer. The division's loyalty was to her. She went to her division's quarters; most of them were readying for bed or already in bed those that weren't stood to attention.

"At ease. I apologise for the lateness of the hour," she paused mildly apprehensive, but she did not have time for apprehension. "Admiral Deltan, Colonel Kramer and I are joining the Resistance in their efforts to bring peace to the galaxy. I understand this may be a shock to all of you; however, we have had misgivings about the First Order's directive since Supreme Leader Snoke was killed and if we're honest before then. If you aren't with us we understand, and you are free to leave; however, I would ask you do you really want a lifetime of war, a lifetime of fighting. We have a chance for something else, something better."

Her entire division was standing now and looking at her intently. Her Captain SQ 1491 stepped forward.

"We're with you, mam".

She nodded, "I'm afraid we need to prepare now. Armour on, and that means full-battle gear, blasters checked, we meet the Resistance in three hours. Oh, and I want each of you to have a distinctive red mark on your armour I don't want anyone getting shot by the Resistance by accident."

-X-

Directly above the valley hovering in the space outside Ruusan Admiral Nunb's Star Cruiser joined Admiral Statura's.

"Colonel Dameron, your squadrons can depart." Admiral Statura gave the command from the deck. Once they'd departed he and Nunb would join Admiral Deltan's Dreadnought in position against the other two.

In the hangar, Poe was sat in the cockpit of his X-wing, and he felt... great, nervous but great. This would be a challenge, and he had missed this feeling. He felt at home in a cockpit with his hands moving over the instrumentation feeling the ship coming to life around him as he ignited the engines and it began to hover.

"BB8, how are we looking back there?" Poe spoke into the mic on his helmet.

BB8 chirped and tweeted back at Poe, Poe got the impression from BB8's beeps that the little droid was as excited as he was.

"Yeah me too buddy. Red pilots, this is Red Leader check-in."

Poe got confirmation from his squadron pilots "Red Two standing by," Rose responded, "Red Three standing by", "Red Four standing by", "Red Five standing by". Full house.

"Blue Leader, Black Leader, White Leader, we all set?"

A moment of static white noise filled Poe's headpiece as each of the squadrons checked their pilots. One by one, they responded.
"Ready to execute on your command Red Leader."

The double wings on Poe's X-Wing split apart displaying four wings. The wing-mounted armament and quadruple engines deployed which would give Poe maximum firepower and manoeuvrability. I love these ships!

Poe left the hangar, followed by the red assault squadron, then Blue Leader and their assault squadron. On Admiral Nunb's ship, he could see Black squadron and White Squadron departing their hangar. All four squadrons aimed for the planet's surface to defend their troops swooping low into the valley and slowing their pace to hover above the soldiers. Poe was lower than the other ships, enjoying testing his unpractised skills. In the predawn light he could make out General Ematt, Commander Finn and Jakub at the front of their squadrons about to meet the division of red marked troopers, and at the front with them, Poe could see two shimmering lights one red and one purple- Rey and Ben.
Aboard the bridge of the Supremacy Dreadnought Captain Peavey had an uninterrupted view of the First Order's encampment on Ruusan. To the left were the shuttles on which General Kail, General Targo and General Valax occupied along with Colonel Kramer and behind the shuttles were the troopers' barracks and behind those was a light scattering of trees. What Captain Peavey saw however gave him great cause for concern, their base was under siege. Blasters were shooting in all directions from ground forces supported by tanks. X-Wings in the sky were bombarding shuttles and barracks with laser fire, and they were all heading this way.

"Wake Supreme Leader Hux, get his bodyguard out there now with her Knights. Get all Tie crews to their fighters to defend our divisions. Inform Vice Admiral Renor, Grand Admiral Skalick and Admiral Deltan we're under attack. Get crews in our AT-ATs and AT-M6s now!"

Captain Peavey's command was relayed quickly and within the hangars of the Dreadnought red lights began flashing, and insistent alarms started ringing as ground crews frantically got Tie fighters ready and flight suited pilots manned their ships. Stormtroopers hastily set up the AT-ATs and AT-M6s and clambered into the cockpit or the hold.

-X-

Outside Supreme Leader Hux's personal quarters Chromia woke from her bunk with a start. Since the issues at the trial, Hux liked to keep her close by; her quarters had been moved directly outside Hux's door. Red lights were flashing, and alarms were sounding. Had they been hacked again? Was there a fire? She threw the blanket off and got to her feet. As she did so, a trooper opened the door stood to attention. She could sense embarrassment from the helmeted trooper regarding her barely-dressed form, as the soldiers head wouldn't look directly at her, focusing instead on a nearby wall.

"Chromia Mam, we're under attack from the Resistance. My orders are to wake Supreme Leader Hux."

"I'll do it, leave," she snarled, and the trooper nodded and quickly left with the door automatically closing behind them as they did so.

Behind her, the door to Hux's quarters opened, and he stood in the doorway. He looked bewildered, and his bright auburn hair for once wasn't immaculately combed back but dishevelled. He was dressed in simple black trousers and nothing else. He was so pale in stark contrast to the black surroundings his skin was translucent, almost glowing. Kylo Ren had been just as pale, but bigger and broader than Hux. Kylo's body had been riddled with the scars of his life's battles; he was a true warrior. Chromia enjoyed Hux's tenacity, his ruthlessness and viciousness but he was not a man of physical strength or force. It was his mind that was his strength, his ideas and desires, that and the superior technological forces at his command.

"What's going on?" He queried dazed and confused and half asleep.

"We're under attack." She started to dress as she spoke pulling on her skin tight dark assassin suit and over the top, she placed parts of her chrome armour- shin plates, forearm plates, shoulder plates and chest plates. The full armour was impressive but not what she would need. She was aware Hux was watching her as she did so. She went to reach for her helmet when he grabbed her hand. She turned to look at him.
"What if something should happen?" The *something* he referred to was to her, but the apprehension in his face and behind his eyes was only personal concern regarding himself. What would happen to him, if something should befall her? She came close to him, he was taller than her, and he was almost as tall as Kylo Ren yet due to being less ominous he'd never seemed as tall. Looking up at him, she replied.

"I do not fear death," she smiled at him pointed teeth showing; impulsively she grabbed his face and planted her lips on his in a hard kiss. "Stay here."

She grabbed her belt on which was her lightsaber and her newly commissioned enhanced ultrasonic Sai's and her helmet. She gave him a genuine devious smirk, death or not this fight was going to be enjoyable and if the girl were there with Kylo, it would be a great test, a worthy one and without another word or looking back she left Hux standing in his doorway bewildered. In the hallway outside the five Knights of Ren were waiting- Baxil, Airez, Icesho, Covex and Erdu. Hux had shot Loccey Ren while she'd lain unconscious after Kylo Ren and the girl had escaped. Of all the knights that could've been lost in that moment of anger, Loccey had been the best to lose, Chromia had no need for a sniper she needed the hand to hand warriors, and she had them. Silently they followed her down the corridors towards the hangar to board an AT-AT.

-X-

In the atmosphere above, Ruusan Admiral Skalick stood grim-faced on the bridge of his ship. He had received Captain Peavey's message, but he could've done with it at least ten minutes ago. He was fully aware that they were under attack. Two Star Cruisers had appeared in the space opposite himself and Renor's Dreadnoughts, having uncloaked and before he or Renor could do anything Admiral Deltan's Dreadnought had repositioned itself into an attack position to join them, all he could do was raise their deflector shields. Even with the shields up the Star Cruisers had proceeded to blast ion cannon fire and turbo blaster fire towards them, Admiral Deltan's autocannon fire had ultimately brought down Vice Admiral Renor's Dreadnought which was now falling slowly towards the planet's surface. Fire blazing from one side as it began to split in two, escape pods launching as well as Tie fighters and shuttles, anything the officers and troops on board could evacuate in to avoid their fate.

Admiral Skalick had already given the order to re-prime their cannons and for their pilots to man their Tie fighters and in the space between the three remaining ships Skalick now watched, his long face drawn, as an intergalactic battle between Tie's and X-wings and a vessel that looked like a cargo ship took place around them.

-X-

Inside his X-Wing, Snap Wexley was leading Gold Squadron.

"Bronze Leader, protect our Star Cruisers, Gold Squadron take out the Dreadnought's cannons. We'll have to get up close and personal."

"Copy that Gold Leader, we're with you."

Bronze Squadron was chasing the Tie fighters, and through Snap Wexley's canopy, he could see the small explosions as enemy Ties, and friendly X-Wings were vaporised. He could just make out the Millennium Falcon dexterously manoeuvring taking out Ties protecting their pilots from unfriendly fire. He couldn't concentrate on that now they needed to take out those cannons. They had no bombardiers since D'Qar so taking out the cannons was their best bet to desecrate the last Dreadnought, rendering it useless. Colonel Dameron had advised getting close to the ship's hull; the cannons had been designed to take out enemy Star Cruisers so smaller vessels like the X-Wings
in Gold Squadron were too fast and could get too close for the cannons to target. Admiral Deltan's Dreadnought had come under heavy fire taking out Vice Admiral Renor's ship and could no longer help them in taking out Admiral Skalick on the remaining Dreadnought. Getting close and taking out the enemies weapons was their only choice. Each member of Wexley's Gold squadron moved deftly around the hull turning the cannons to dust.

"Gold Four, watch your positioning you're too ...," Snap Wexley stopped mid command as gold four plummeted into the hull in a ball of fire and light.

One cannon left, Wexley fired and turned it to smoking scrap.

"Gold Squadron we're done here, all surface cannons cleared, return to the Star Cruisers and target those Tie fighters."

Wexley's ship rose up from the hull flipped, and double backed on itself, and the rest of the squadron followed his lead and spread out targeting the Tie's that were raining fire on Deltan's failing Dreadnought and on the Resistance Star Cruisers.

In the Falcon Chewie was hollering swinging in high arcs and whirling between ships, his Porg pets were screeching on his instrumentation and Maz was firing from the large rotating bubble which protruded from the side of the freighter.

"I've missed this ship," she yelled as she activated the firing grip again and a Tie erupted in multicoloured light in front of her.

-X-

On the ground, all divisions were engaged in combat; the blaster fire all around them was deafening and relentless. Finn was using his riot baton raising it high, striking down, swinging it to the left and the right shooting shocks of electricity at all those who approached him. He'd been trained his whole life for this and in hand to hand combat he'd been elite within his division, he'd fought Kylo Ren, lost admittedly, but he had, and he'd fought against and killed Phasma not through being better or stronger but being smart and utilising his surroundings. This was a challenge yes but not like Ren or Phasma had been, the troopers he engaged with now were far less skilled, and he jabbed and rained blows in every direction. All around him troopers were engaged with Resistance fighters and troopers with red marks upon their armour. General Ematt and Jakub were blasting anything that approached skilfully flanking their tanks which were advancing the entire ground force forward. In the sky above them was the screaming noise of Tie fighters and the roaring of X-wings as each tried to defend their troops. Rose was up there; he hoped she was ok.

-X-

Rose was not an accomplished pilot she couldn't do half the manoeuvres Poe was executing, but she was managing, just about, to hold her own. She hadn't been vaporised yet, and she'd even managed to take down a Tie; something positive she told herself. Mostly for Rose and some of the less seasoned Resistance pilots it was a game of predator and prey, the positions changing in the sky as they swooped and soared one moment the predator and the next moment the prey. Initially, before the First Order had been aware of their presence, it had been a simple task, in comparison to the current situation anyway. Rose, along with the other squadrons, had blasted the shuttles and troops barracks, but once the Ties had left the grounded Dreadnought's hangar, the circumstances had changed.

Below her Rose could see the combat and blaster fire, and in amongst it, she saw a mesmerising purple light next to an illuminating red one. While she went as low as she could handle, she noticed
something approaching. *Oh no.*

"Red Leader, this is Red Two. Do you see that? They've managed to handle some of those AT-ATs and AT-M6s."

"I see them, Red two. Red Squadron, Blue Squadron file off, focus all fire on the AT-TAs and AT-M6s, defend our ground forces. White Squadron, Black squadron keep those Tie fighters busy."

A succession of, "copy that Red leader," filled the comms. With Poe leading the way, the two Squadrons flew towards the Dreadnought ready to engage in the task of bringing down the First Orders deadly ATs.
Onboard one of the four AT-TAs that had left the Supremacy Dreadnought Chromia and her Knights stood with at least thirty other stormtroopers ready to deploy; they needed to be in the midst of the battle to engage the girl and Kylo Ren and to do that this had been the fastest option. The AT-AT lumbered forwards and inside the occupants were lurched from side to side, they were far from graceful, no all-terrain carrier was, but it was a capable machine of war. The AT-AT had wasted no time engaging it's laser cannons to full use. Chromia could hear the sounds of X-Wings roaring close to the roof of the upper deck and the sounds of conflict below. Suddenly the whole AT-AT leaned forward, within the decks the troopers, Knights and Chromia had to cling to the restraints to avoid falling forward. From the cockpit, the Sergeant yelled.

"They've destroyed our front two knee joints we're going down, deploy now."

The deployment staging platform opened. Chromia went to the edge; it was a long way down but not as high as it could be with the AT-AT slumping forward on it's damaged front legs. Chromia nimbly leapt from the platform using the deployment harness and landed neatly on the ground. Her Knights followed her, and as a group, they walked towards the advancing Resistance troops weapons exposed and ready. Chromia ignited her saber and sliced at the Resistance fighter in front of her. To her left and right the Knights heaved their way forwards axe hacking, bat bashing, broad sword cleaving, long curved sword slashing and staff striking. They were all making their way towards the moving purple and red light just ahead and the circle of troopers fighting around the pair of sabers and the Jedi who wielded them.

-X-

One AT-AT was down, there were three still moving forward, and there was still the enormous AT-M6 to contend with. Colonel Poe Dameron had told his Squadrons to aim for the knees to bring them down, but it wasn't easy. They were competing with cannon fire from the AT's themselves and then Tie's were still on their tails. Poe was flying close to an AT swerving between the legs shooting each of the legs, he could see some of his pilots attempting to do the same, but Blue Four's cockpit burst into flame as she was struck by cannon fire. Flying as best she could she crashed into the legs of one of the ATs, and the walker immediately collapsed into the X-wing crushing it completely, the fire from the ship igniting the AT becoming one colossal flame. Poe cursed to himself, but at least that was another one down. Red Six tried to avoid laser fire and ended up spiralling and crashing into the woods nearby. Poe dived as close to the ground as he could before rising sharply looping back towards the ATs he could see one of their Resistance tanks engulfed in flames. The ATs were blasting great holes in the ground throwing Resistance fighters and troopers alike into the air.

"White Squadron, target the ATs, I repeat target the ATs, get them down."

As Poe looped back again with Blue and Red Squadron what was left of White Squadron joined them.

"Target the cockpits and the legs," he commanded.

Laser fire cascaded towards the two ATs that were left from his pilots, cockpits and legs their target. White Two, however, was flying dead at the AT-M6 aiming straight for the cockpit but not just with his laser fire but with his X-Wing narrowly avoiding the cannon fire as he got closer and closer.
"White Two, that's suicide! Desist that's an order!" Poe hollered into his helmet.

White Two, however, wasn't listening and crashed straight into the AT-M6s cockpit line a manned bomb. It's fuel igniting into a cascade of flame and debris. The walking death machine stopped moving and stood still then exploded from within hurling great chunks of jagged metal around the vicinity, smoke and fire rising from the great exposed openings, it fell forward throwing earth and metal upwards as it landed in a crumbled smoking motionless heap.

Poe sighed sickened by the loss of another friend, another pilot. No time to dwell on grief now there were still two ATs moving forwards churning up the ground troops indiscriminately.

-X-

Rey looked up from the trooper she'd just struck as they fell to her feet their white armour singed black where her staff saber had cut through, she could see the burnt flesh beneath. She was damp and hot from the exertion her face moist and covered in dirt. She could feel her hair sticking to her head and neck where it had escaped her binding. She felt conflicted about every soldier she'd struck down, they were all like Finn, but sadly her option right now was to kill or be killed. Each time the conflict rose, another soldier would blast fire at her and so her resolution to live would emerge. In her sight now, however, was not another lowly soldier but the black-garbed Lords of Darkness; the Knights of Ren and with them the flame-haired humanoid- Chromia.

She changed her position to meet them, spinning her staff saber agilely in her hands.

"Ben!"

To her side, Ben forced his saber down between the gap in the armour of the trooper in front of him at the neck and shoulders, the trooper's neck hung grotesquely to the side, as Ben wrenched his saber back. Unlike her, she could sense Ben exhilaration, hungry almost and the troopers were not testing his ability enough to quell his brutal desire to fight. He looked at her through a mass of damp black hair, his dark eyes burning with need and rage, a darkness that would always be there. It was a part of him. Ben turned from her and looked in the direction of her stance. He stood up straight and took his duelling stance at her side.

The Knight with the staff and one with the bat charged for her, the other three went for Ben. She blocked the staff and threw the Knight brandishing it off then struck the Knight with the bat in the head her staff saber sparking off the metal helmet. She heard a grunt from inside as the metal melted and she cut through to the skull within. The Knight swung out with the bat to knock her, but she ducked. She let the Force lead her, flow through her, she was it's weapon. She could sense the staff-wielding Knight behind her. She extinguished her saber to spin it quickly in her hand into a vertical position, as she bent down and pointed one end to the ground. As she sensed the Knight immediately behind her, she reignited it, piercing the Knight behind her through the chest. She straightened extinguishing her saber again and heard the clatter as the Knight hit the ground. The bat-wielding Knight advanced again; she blocked his blow with the right of her staff. With both hands on his bat, he was forcing her right side back; he was far stronger than her.

"Use it," she told herself. Stepping forward with her left foot, she allowed his momentum to help her strike with the left side of her saber. He lost his balance as she stopped fighting with the right side of her staff. He had nothing to block her with and her saber engaged with his body and continued, splitting him in two. Rey's arms were throbbing with the exertion. She was feeling drained and sick, but out of nowhere, the Knight with the massive curved sword was suddenly on her. He was brutishly powerful and struck her saber, pinning it to the ground, she was growling with the effort unable to throw him off. He turned from her slightly bearing his sword down against her staff, forcing her further downward. Using the momentum of her attempts to hold him back, he spun and brought his
arm around and down on her other side. Rey screamed as the Knight struck her left arm with his curved sword cleaving it from her body. The pain was excruciating, and she could smell the odour of her own seared flesh. Despite the sonic blade the Knight had used, burning her flesh like a saber, she was bleeding freely. Her head spun, and she collapsed to her knees as she squeezed her arm to attempt to stop the agony, but it did little to stop the flow, and she watched her life's blood ebbing out onto the floor around her. Before the Knight could assault her again and put an end to her, he dropped his sword, her sight blurred and she began to lose consciousness slumping forwards. The Knight appeared to be stuck in position. As blackness took her, she heard a thunderous roar and thought she felt the ground shake.

-X-

Erdu Ren, Icesho Ren and Covex Ren headed for Ben while Baxil Ren and Airez Ren went for Rey. Ben preferred these odds to the alternative; he would rather battle with three than have Rey do so.

Erdu Ren's mace swung sideways at him, and Ben spun under it slashing at Erdu's back as he rose up behind him. Immediately he had to block Icesho's poleaxe as the Knight attempted to bring it down upon his head. Now Covex was heading for him; Ben bent a leg then thrust up using that momentum to shove Icesho off him. He swung at Covex, striking the Knight in his left side and he heard a grunt and saw the black garb spark and burn. Covex turned from him grasping his bleeding ribs. Behind him, Ben could sense Erdu had recovered though not fully and he turned to bring his saber under him as he did so and plunged the saber up into Erdu's chest. Ben kicked Erdu's slumped body from his saber and then lowered his position again spinning on his foot sweeping his saber out towards Icesho's legs. He cut through one of Icesho's legs with his saber severing it from his body and Icesho fell to the ground as his balance faltered. As Icesho lay on the floor attempting to get himself up, Ben pierced his back through the top of the shoulders with his saber. Icesho leaned back on his arms and quaked with pain, the intensity of his shuddering increasing until he suddenly stillled, arms giving way, and his helmeted head struck the floor. Ben removed his saber from Icesho's corpse, and as he did so, he heard Rey scream. He turned to her in fear and saw a nightmare. Covex had abandoned battling him and had engaged Rey, and he was now standing over her slumped form, her blood mixing with the dirt on the ground, her amputated arm at her side. Ben harnessed the Force and reached out towards Covex, and the Knight dropped his weapon and stood motionless as a stone where Ben held him. Hands shaking with fury Ben channelled the Force, his hand became a claw, and he slowly clenched his fingers inwards as if grasping something invisible in the air. In front of him, Covex Ren's helmet began to crumple in on itself, crushing the skull beneath. Arms and legs were folding in on themselves unnaturally, and bone shattered. Ben could hear the crunching sound of the skull and bone splintering mixed with a sickening gurgling sound as Covex's lungs and throat were filled with green life fluid. Green blood seeped out through his broken helmet and ripped clothing. Ben's hand eventually clenched fully shut, his nails cutting into his palm with the intensity of his grasp and an anguished furious roar erupted from him as hate and rage flowed freely shaking his entire body as he allowed Covex's mangled carcass to fall to the floor.

Ben temporarily stood shaking with fury savouring his moment of revenge, he wanted to go to Rey, but he wasn't done yet, he still had to deal with her- Chromia. Chromia, stood surveying him and now he was finished with Covex she turned her saber towards him. He could still feel Rey's presence faint but there. This wouldn't take long he went deep within himself connecting with the Force stilling his racing heart then faced Chromia. She grinned at him savagely, pointed teeth showing.
"It's just us now Jedi," she said scornfully touching her tongue to her spiked teeth smiling hungrily.

Through gritted teeth, he snarled back, "You're wrong."
He spun his saber in his hand and lowered his body slightly coiling his muscles into a mild crouch and placed one leg forward. His hand instinctively flexed around the handle of his saber as he patiently waited for her to strike.

She charged. She was skilled and agile, but he had the Force to read her moves and right now he was channelling all his rage and passion, and he easily sidestepped her charge. Spinning he then blocked her strike and held it, he was the superior power in this format, and he easily deflected her advance propelling her saber down. Swinging his saber back up, he struck her left arm high on the shoulder, her armour falling from where his saber had sheared it, burning her flesh beneath. She cried out and stepped back from him surprised that he had got the better of her.

"If I must, I'll destroy you one piece at a time," he glowered over the hilt of his saber at her then gave her a devious lopsided smirk.

This time he charged swinging his saber at her, she blocked but was unable to hold him back and using his height and strength he started to force his saber towards her, the hilt closing in on her chest. She leapt back throwing his saber off, but he read that too, and as she thrust him off her, he harnessed the Force to draw her saber from her outstretched arms. It spun off over his head extinguishing as it did so. From her belt, she pulled her Sais and one in each hand she charged again this time slashing with one Sai and aiming a windmill kick at his chest. He blocked the Sai and leaned back away from her boot. Leaning far back on his legs using the Force to stop him falling, he watched her leg fly across his vision as it went past his head. He got back upright spun and swinging his saber from his shoulder brought it down towards her with all his strength: she held it from cleaving her through the chest with her Sai. Their faces' were inches from each other, and she was grinning that feral smile, and he was snarling ferociously. He knew what she was about to do and he let her, he grabbed her shoulder with his left hand as with the Sai not holding back his saber she stabbed him in his thigh hoping he'd pull back. She grinned even wider up at his face as he grunted, feeling the Sai penetrate his flesh. She thought she was winning. He smiled back now, enjoying the sudden confusion in her face. He extinguished his saber temporarily to get past her Sai's block and then reignited it. The hilt of his saber was melting the front of her chrome chest plate, and he could see the fiery red light extended behind her. She was impaled, the brilliant length of his saber burning through clothing, flesh and bone. He was panting his face so close to hers that they were almost touching.

"I told you, you were wrong," he spat the words at her in uncontrolled rage, "I am no Jedi!"

He pulled his saber from her chest and utilising the Force palm out he held Chromia where she stood not allowing her to fall and he stepped back from her, pulling the Sai from his leg. Harnessing all his rage, he turned from her then with his full strength mustered he spun on his foot his saber held high and severed Chromia's head from her body. He surveyed her headless body for a moment before dropping it callously to the floor. He stood for a moment stilling his mind, breathing hard willing the rage to dissipate then rushed to Rey's side dropping to his knees.
"Captain, open communication channels to the Resistance I wish to speak with them." Grand Admiral Skalick had surveyed all the possible options under which he would not end up like Vice Admiral Renor- doomed. His main objective now was his survival at any cost. Skalick had received communication from General Kail and General Valax that General Targo and Commander Kramer had forsaken them for the Resistance. Skalick was more than aware that Kail and Valax would surrender if it meant their lives would be spared. The autocannons had been decimated by the Resistance pilots who'd swept in close with their X-Wings blasting them to useless fragments of metal. A Dreadnoughts only major weakness was that autocannons were its only weapon, particularly in a battle like this. Skalick's autocannons were now useless. He could jump to light speed, but to what end? The shields were waning against the relentless fire from the two Star Cruisers. It would only be a matter of time, so the choice was to entreat with the enemy or die. Skalick knew which he preferred.

"This is Lando Calrissian, Leader of the Resistance, what can I do for you Grand Admiral Skalick?"

Skalick appreciated that the man had used his full title there was never any need he felt to ignore proper etiquette.

"I have no desire for myself, my crew or my ship to join Vice-Admiral Renor's fate. I'm fully aware several of our high ranking officers from the First Order have joined you. I see no point in my or my crew's sacrifice. What must we do in order to ensure that it is achievable?"

There was a long silence the Resistance were deliberating.

"Call back your Ties; we'll call back our X-Wings. You will hand yourself over to the Resistance, and I'll come personally to accept your surrender."

Skalick noticed the leader had said nothing further of the fate that awaited on handing himself over.

"What happens once I surrender?" He queried. Another pause not as long but filled with tension.

"Eventually, there will be a trial." The reply was unemotional.

"I see."

Skalick did not like the sound of these terms. Who was there in this galaxy fit to judge his actions? None, not even his Supreme Leader. It then dawned on Skalick that he could allow the conflict to end, he could oblige this leader of the Resistance to board his ship take him prisoner and then carve out an alternative solution one that didn't involve him on trial or imprisoned.

"Very well." It was fortunate they had not communicated through holo or Calrissian would've seen a sinister expression enter Skalick's already long grim face. A mildly disturbing smile etched the corners of his mouth as he brought his palms and long fingers together with the ruminations of a plan.

-X-

Aboard the Admiral Deltan's Dreadnought Lando Calrissian's communication with Grand Admiral Skalick ended and through the observation window he could see the Tie's pulling back to their
ship.

"Call our X-Wings back!"

His communication was relayed to the Star Cruisers by the communications officer to his right. Admiral Deltan stepped forward his brow lined with concern.

"You can't trust him. He's a snake of a man. He's as bad as Hux, worse even. He's not like the others. He's not going to hand himself over willingly if he thinks prison or death is likely."

"Agreed. Hail the Falcon I'll use it for my transport." Lando ordered the communications officer.

"You can't seriously still be considering going over to him? Their defences are nearly depleted; it's over! Don't give him any leverage." Deltan pleaded with him.

"I will not risk a crew of that magnitude, let alone the countless soldiers for one man. I'll go to him and if necessary, kill him, but I will not be responsible for the loss of any more lives, not if we have an alternative."

Deltan smiled at him; it was a sad smile in a face Lando sensed had known as much death and heartache as he had. Deltan understood the point of this truce was to save people; it wasn't about winning. Lando was no fool he knew Skalick planned some coup, but with Maz and Chewie with him, he did not need to fear the likes of Grand Admiral Skalick. He offered Deltan his hand, and the Admiral took it in a warm embrace, reaching his other hand to Lando's elbow.

"May the Force be with you."

Lando smiled back at Deltan with genuine warmth. This man was a good ally; he hoped Targo and Kramer would be just as good.

"And also with you."

Their clasped hands released and Lando headed towards the hangar to await Chewie and The Falcon.

-X-

"Where are we going now?" Maz yelled as she scrambled out of the lower quad-laser turret, her head spinning slightly, having been in the seat revolving this way and that in the bubble for quite some time.

Chewie barked and hollered back as she entered the cockpit and sat in the co-pilots seat.

"He wants us to take him where?" Maz asked.

Chewie yipped again.

"That's absurd. That vile man isn't going to surrender himself willingly. What is he thinking?"

Chewie shrugged his broad furry shoulders and gave a low moan.

In the hangar, Lando was waiting for them the boarding ramp lowered, and along with a small handful of Deltan's elite troopers, Lando boarded the falcon.

"How's my ship?" Lando queried.
Chewie agitatedly yowled at him, and Maz laughed in amusement; it hadn't been Lando's ship for years. The most desired heap of junk in the galaxy. Anyone who'd owned it had fallen in love and to be fair to Lando it was his first love.

"I take it you have a plan Calrissian? Maz enquired giving him a sceptical look through her gigantic spectacles.

"I'll need Chewie and his bowcaster," Lando grinned at her. Good, she thought at least he has a plan.

"Fly casual Chewie, you know, nice and slow like you're not in a hurry," Lando advised.

Chewie barked at him sarcastically. They entered the hangar of Skalick's Dreadnought, and Maz left her seat in the cockpit heading back to the turret on the falcon to ready their cannons. Chewie hid on the edge of docking ring if Skalick didn't come willingly, which was the most likely scenario Chewie was to deal with Skalick with his bowcaster. All Skalick's officers should fall with his demise or at least that was their hope. The boarding ramp lowered and back in the bubble Maz set her sights on the group awaiting their convoy. She could see Calrissian walk calmly down the ramp his long cloak flapping behind him. That man and his cloaks one for every occasion she mused to herself. Deltan's troopers with him filed behind she couldn't see Chewie, but she knew he would be lying in the doorway of the falcon waiting, his bowcaster aimed and ready.

Calrissian held his arms out from his sides in an open, almost warm greeting. He was such an excellent actor and so good at these false pleasantries Maz thought to herself that was the gambler in him, sidle up and smile.

"Grand Admiral Skalick, as promised I've come to accept your surrender and to take you into custody personally," Calrissian jovially declared as though meeting an old friend.

Skalick simpered at him and raised one long pointed boney finger, and the troops with him aimed their blasters at them. Maz couldn't see, but Lando smiled. Chewie needed no more than the threat to strike; he was incredibly accurate, almost artistic with his handcrafted bowcaster. He blasted Skalick square in the chest and Skalick fell backwards, his gloating simper frozen on his long face permanently. Even his hand remained in its pointed position as he lay dead upon the floor. A few troopers who'd been with Skalick started firing, and a few of the troopers with Calrissian fired back in defence. Calrissian himself just stooped down covering himself with his arm sweeping his cloak around him as though that would help protect him. Maz aimed the cannons at a Tie fighter nearby and demolished it in a ball of spitting light, sparks flying. It was enough of a warning for everyone to stop.

Calrissian rose back up, brushing invisible dust from his cloak. Then looking to Skalick's troops, he exuberantly engaged them with arms out again in greeting with a smile on his face.

"We accept your surrender."

Maz watched the troops hold up their arms and drop their blasters and smiled to herself. It was over, well nearly, for them, it was done. Maz suddenly gasped, her arm reaching for her chest as she struggled to breathe. She felt an enormous tremor in the Force. Someone was in great pain, and there were only two possible people that could be. Oh no!

-X-

The surface of Ruusan was ablaze and decimated by craters. The bodies of Resistance fighters and troopers alike littered the ground united in death. The carcasses of flaming tanks, AT-TAs, X-
Wings and Ties were scattered where they'd fallen, their burnt metal strewn across the landscape. The sky above was engulfed in smoke, and the vast body of the falling Dreadnought was piercing the atmosphere with fiery clouds looking like a hideous monster setting the sky alight in its dreadful vengeance as it plummeted to its inevitable death. The battle on the ground was still not over. The Resistance Squadrons were severely diminished but were still battling in the air with the screaming Ties. Only two tanks were left, and they had been concentrating all their power on taking down the last AT-AT. Red Leader through various dives and swoops in between the legs had done enough damage to bring the final AT-AT down, but there were too many Ties, and the pilots couldn't protect the troops, avoid the Ties and take down the last AT.

Jakub was hunkered low near one of the remaining tanks shouting frantically to those controlling it inside, his face filthy with dirt and blood his sweat streaking it like tears.

"Focus on the knee joints or the cockpit! Use a missile!"

They were desperate and running low on everything with the AT-TA down they'd stand a better chance, not a good chance but a better one. Continuing to blast laser cannon fire at the knees the tank launched its missile and it struck the AT-AT in the bulk of its body, not the cockpit, but that was of little consequence the results would thankfully be the same.

"Get down!" Jakub cried to any fighters within the vicinity as the missile exploded and the body of the AT-AT ripped asunder. Jagged metal sprouting from where straight edges had been. Pieces broke off flying in every direction, and the cockpit erupted in a burst of light and the AT-AT crumbled where it had been standing; beneath it, troopers fled attempting to avoid being crushed.

Jakub jumped up, arm raised, "Yes!"

General Ematt was stood beside him, "Don't get cocky kid, it's not over yet. Resistance forces reform the lines."

General Targo and Commander Finn joined them their fighters reforming what was left of their divisions behind them.

"Fire on my command," General Ematt hollered loudly raising his hand high, and all the fighters raised their blasters.

"Fire!" blaster fire struck the scattered enemy ahead of them, causing those who had survived the AT's obliteration to scatter even further.

General Ematt was about to command fire again when his communicator buzzed at his side.

"General Ematt this is Lando Calrissian, Grand Admiral Skalick and Vice Admiral Renor are dead. It's as good as over."

Before Ematt could confirm he'd heard, a strong gust of wind lurched himself and all the ground troops friendly or otherwise to their right. They struggled in vain against it. There was a furious agonised cry, "NO". The pull of air suddenly changed to the opposite direction as though a wave had been released. The blowing gale knocked everyone off their feet onto the ground; had they been struck by an autocannon? No can't we'd all be vaporised, Ematt wondered to himself, he felt dazed, and he couldn't move. Commander Finn was next to him at his side, and he watched the younger commander struggle to his feet scrambling in the dirt using his hands to get traction as he ran towards where the strange wind had dragged them then thrown them back. As he ran, Ematt could hear him shouting a single word, "Rey!"
Saving Rey

Ben stood over Rey with his arms clenched tightly at his side as he surveyed her damaged body and her amputated limb. He felt that same wind he'd felt when they kissed drawing to him like a receding tide a flowing current of Force energy, and he was at the heart of it. Sinking to his knees desolately, Ben scooped her bloody body up into his arms. She was still bleeding, reigniting his saber and grimacing Ben touched it's fiery bolt to her arm cauterising the wound; at least that would stop any further bleeding. She was usually always warm and with sun-soaked skin, but now she was cold and painfully pale, grey-tinged around the delicate features of her face. Before his duel with Chromia, he could faintly feel her undeniable presence in the Force, but now not even that faint glimmer seemed to remain. He pulled her close to him, rocking back and forth, willing her to move to breathe, for him to feel something. He tried to heal her as they had healed each other before back on the Supremacy but he couldn't still his terrified thoughts, without her presence and her light no matter how far he'd come out of the dark that ability was beyond him.

"Rey, Rey. Please. Rey," he whispered as he brushed her hair and dirt from her face.

His despair overwhelmed him, and he felt his familiar pain, anger and loneliness rising up and taking hold; he pulled her to him holding her cold limp body against his chest. The Force energy within him was an ocean; he could feel it inside him gaining, increasing and swelling. He couldn't contain it now, and he didn't want to, he let go, and in a roar of pure anguish, he cried out. The roar crescendoed until he ran out of breath. The Force of his release crashed out from him like that same wave that had ebbed to him, and all around him everyone and everything flew to the ground knocked over by the sheer magnitude of his suffering.

"Please. This wasn't the will of the Force. Please. Help me. Please." Ben knew he was only speaking to himself; no one could help. He was forsaken.

The world around him went utterly silent. No more screaming Ties, no roaring X-Wings and a sudden familiar feeling rose on the back of his neck; a tremor in the Force but it wasn't Rey. He heard a strange voice break the silence and raising his head; he saw three shimmering blue forms.

"See us he can."

Ben stared at the ethereal shapes two were men, one of whom he recognised, the other was a small alien with enormous ears that stuck out absurdly. He knew who that was.
"Luke? Yoda?" He looked at the other man, he was young not much older than himself he imagined so it couldn't be Obi-Wan. That man, however, was the one who stepped closer to him placing an arm on his shoulder looking at him directly. He seemed so familiar somehow. Luke went to his other side, planting his arm on his other shoulder.

"It's ok son," the young man spoke.

Yoda came in front of him and placed his hand on Rey.

"Please save her. Please. I can't, I tried. Without her, I'm not strong enough. Please." Ben looked from Yoda to Luke to the young man. Yoda cocked his head and pursed his lips.

"So sure are you? Do, or do not there is no try." He looked at Luke and the young man and nodded. Luke and Yoda closed their eyes seemingly in meditation. The young man crouched at Ben's side not removing his hand from his shoulder.

"Close your eyes son, reach out with your feelings."

Then Yoda spoke
"Life creates it makes it grow; its energy surrounds us and binds us luminous beings are we."

Ben did as commanded closing his eyes and calming his breathing; he focused on those words, his feelings and the Force. To his left, Luke spoke his familiar voice soothing him as it never had before as he concentrated.

"Through passion, I gain focus. Through knowledge, I gain power. Through serenity, I gain strength. There is only the Force."
Ben breathed deeply, and now the young man to his right was speaking.

"Let it flow. The dark can be generous, but within its heart is one weakness that one lone candle can hold back. Hold on to her. Feel your love for her. Love is more than a candle; love can ignite the stars."

Ben thought of the first moment he'd come across her as she'd blasted fire at him in the woods of Takodana, how he'd touched her face and read her mind during his interrogation of her aboard the Supremacy finding how alike they were and how lonely. He saw the island, their island from their dream. Their fight in the snow when the Force within her had truly awoken. Touching hands across the galaxies and fighting the Praetorian side by side. Her standing in the rain on Fondor and their kiss and her beneath him on Maridun, her telling him she loved him. From within him and around him, he now felt that familiar light, he felt it grow, and he felt the wind rising as it had whenever they touched.

"Save her, you can."

Yoda sounded far away, but within the Force, he could feel her again. He opened his eyes and looked down she was breathing faintly, eyes still closed, she was still horribly pale but alive. The ghostly figures still surrounded him.

Through shuddering breaths, he spoke, "thank you."

Luke smiled and started to fade, Yoda did next. The young man crouched at his side remained.

"Get her to medical son; there are limits to what we can do."

Ben got to his feet, hastily taking her unconscious form in his arms effortlessly. He looked questioningly at the young man. He spoke as if he knew him, but Ben couldn't recall knowing anyone like this person who appeared familiar enough to call him son and powerful within the Force. The man smiled, hearing his questioning.

"You've begged me for guidance and help for years. Only those with the light can move beyond this world in the Force in this way, only those with the light can see us in return."

The realisation hit Ben, his hero and his family Anakin Skywalker had come to him in his time of need.

"Grandfather?" He said it as a question, but he knew the answer.

-X-

Rey felt cold, and it was dark so dark. She felt heavy, and as though she was sinking lower and lower, darker and darker as though she was being dragged down. It felt like the ominous cave she'd fallen in beneath Ahch-To. Just as cold and just as dark but not as frightening. The darkness felt like an undertow it felt peaceful, and she didn't want to resist it. She could hear a strange voice from far away.

"Life creates it makes it grow; its energy surrounds us and binds us luminous beings are we."

What was that? Where was she? She tried to remember, to move, but the darkness called her, and she wanted to let go and fall deeper and deeper. Another voice interrupted her dark drifting peace now.

"The dark can be generous, but within its heart is one weakness that one lone candle can hold back.
Hold on to her. Feel your love for her. Love is more than a candle; love can ignite the stars."

Love. Rey remembered her friends- Finn, Rose, Poe, Chewie. She remembered Leia and Han and Luke and Ben. Ben, she loved Ben yes she remembered. Suddenly it wasn't all darkness; there was a far off light above her. She fought towards it, but her legs felt heavy she couldn't move; she struggled to reach it, but she kept trying, and it got brighter and brighter and the heaviness on her reduced. White light filled everything then everything changed she was stood looking over a glistening, sparkling lake; she'd never seen a world so beautiful. The sun felt warm against her cool skin. *Why was she so cold?* She couldn't recall. To her right, a scene caught her attention under a rose-covered arbour, a beautiful young woman in a white gown and veil stood hand in hand with a young Jedi knight with a mechanical arm. *Was this a dream?* A man stood before them with his arms raised over their heads, reciting some ancient words. Words said the woman and man kissed. The scene changed. Rey was now standing on a planet that was all fire, burning and spitting flames, black sand and rock and a river of lava. The same young man and woman but this scene was far removed from the one she had just seen. The man looked different a huge scar just like Ben's ran down his face across his right eye, and his eyes were crimson red and burning; like the world on which they stood. The woman was heavily pregnant grasping her throat pleading with the man his hand out in a tight fist as he screamed "Never!"

This wasn't a dream it was a nightmare. She closed her eyes, willing herself to wake up. The scene changed again, and she saw Luke, much younger standing on a platform clasping his handless arm to himself as he screamed "No!" at a terrifying obsidian helmeted figure; then Luke flung himself back into the abyss below. The scene changed again Luke writhing on the floor in agony as a hooded demon cackled, blinding bolts of energy cascading from spidery arms. Darth Vader was looking from Luke to the sorcerer then lurching forward grabbing the cowled monster from behind heaving him over a bridge into a black chasm below. The scene flitted and changed once more to Luke holding a man, more machine than man as he spoke desperately, "I have to save you." The man within the machine was whispering back words full of sorrow, "You already have."

The scene changed again to one she'd seen herself, Ben, piercing Han's chest from front to back and Han reaching up to touch his son's face before falling, vanishing into the depths of Starkiller base. The scene changed again to the throne room and Snoke being sliced in two as her hand caught her saber and Ben looking at her as they turned to fight. Ben holding out a hand to her in supplication, imploring her, "Please". Again the scene changed, and she was looking up at him, stroking his hair from his eyes, "you ok? You're trembling," she heard herself say.

She shouldn't be here something was wrong, what had happened? She closed her eyes, trying to remember. *Why had she seen all that? What did it mean? Wake up Rey, wake up.*

"I'll come back for you sweetheart. I promise," a voice said it, and it seemed closer than the ones she'd heard previously. It was that voice the voice from her dreams from her vision on Takodana; it was a voice she knew. Ben. She could sense him. Awareness came to Rey slowly. She couldn't move; she was so weak, and she couldn't open her eyes and her arm burnt with unbridled pain. Whatever had happened though she was safe she was with Ben.

-X-

Ben strode purposefully across the battlefield carrying Rey tightly to his chest towards the valley and the transports. He could feel Rey breathing faintly. It was curious that he should be bearing her in this way once more. The first time he'd met her, he recalled carrying her towards his ship this way. This time his urgency was more significant, there were medical supplies on those transports, something for now until they could get back to Dr Kalonia on Maridun. He heard Finn before he saw him, the ex-trooper was charging in his direction screaming Rey's name, the stupid fool
actually darted in front of him to survey the damage stopping him short. He looked at Finn, not attempting to hide his annoyance. How was it possible to be genuinely this oblivious?

"Rey? Rey?" Finn was yelling at her as if he'd magically wake her up.

Ben glowered at him, she was simple enough to hold, but he needed to hurry, and this was not helping.

"She's alive. I need to get her to the transports; I need medical supplies." Ben imagined the mention of medical would be enough to get Finn out of the way; it wasn't.

"Now!" He stated sarcastically and thrust his head to the left signally for Finn to get out of the way. Finn stayed in his path, looking down at Rey's arm horror-stricken.

Eventually, he looked up at Ben. "Oh, right. Sorry. I'm coming with you."

"Fantastic." That was the last thing Ben needed this imbecile attempting to help. He picked up his pace as he eyed the transports ahead.

As he'd hoped the transports had medical equipment, not much but enough. He placed Rey gently down on the medical bunk. If Finn was going to stick around, he could make himself useful.

"I need bacta patches and an antiseptic field generator."

"Ok, I'm on it." Finn began rummaging loudly, Ben didn't like him but had to credit Finn's steadfast loyalty to his friend. Ben had never really had any friends, so someone helping in this way without any promise of reward for their efforts was foreign to him. Finn came back to his side with a mass of medical supplies. Ben raised an eyebrow; the ex-trooper had grabbed everything and was looking at him expectantly. Ben found what he was looking for wrapped the bacta patch around Rey's arm and then attached the antiseptic field generator around her. He grabbed a smaller piece for his own leg; disappointingly there was nothing to relieve his own pain, but the bacta patch would hold his injury at bay for the time being. Ben placed his large hand on her forehead; she was still cool to the touch but warmer than she had been, the healing field generator was working. He felt a rush of relief wash over him as he bent down and kissed her softly.

"I'll come back for you sweetheart I promise. I'm coming back".

Satisfied she would be ok he turned to Finn.

"Stay with her. Keep her safe." He told Finn as he turned to leave.

"Where are you going?" Finn asked, sounding confused.

"It's not over, we're not done yet," he replied as he allowed himself one more glance at Rey then stalked out of the transport back up the valley. He strode determinedly getting faster and faster, wounds and fatigue were forgotten as a single purpose filled his mind spurring him on. Hux.
Prisoner Hux

Since Ben had taken Rey to the transports in the valley, the conflict outside the Supremacy had changed substantially. Ties were no longer screeching in the sky overhead, and X-Wings were not roaring after them either; the sky was quiet but filled with a mixture of orange flame and grey smoke. Vice Admiral Renor's dreadnought had finally come to rest the impact of its body's weight with the ground crushing and flattening vast sections. The air around its carcass rippled with heat and smoke swirled about it. The metallic debris of X-wings, Ties and ATs lay strewn about. No one on the ground was fighting any more, and vast swathes of white stormtroopers were standing in unfamiliar positions of surrender blasters down and hands above their heads. As Ben approached, he could see the pilot Poe Dameron, General Ematt, General Targo and Colonel Kramer meeting with General Kail and Valax. He stalked forward purposefully as he neared the group he could see Kail and Valax flinch away as if preparing to be struck down no doubt. As much as that would please him right now to lash out Ben contained that impulse, he was saving it all for Hux, not to mention if he did it would undo everything they were trying to achieve. Patience, he told himself.

Poe spoke to him first on his arrival.

"Solo. Where's Rey?"

Ben had to take a moment before he responded. The pilot had called him Solo and had asked about Rey; it was like a double punch to his gut. When he did answer, it was curt and direct avoiding as much detail as possible, keeping his emotions in check. It would be alright; she would be alright.

"At the transports. Injured. FN... Finn is with her. Have they all surrendered?"

Now General Ematt spoke.

"All but those still aboard the Supremacy. We are ready to advance when you are."

They were looking at him to lead them. How had things changed so much that he had gone from being their enemy determined to destroy every last one of them and everything they stood for to joining them and now leading them? Of course, Ben knew what had happened it was still unbelievable how something as simple as a shared dream had changed him completely and brought him back from the darkness to this moment. This was the right thing.

"Let's proceed then." Ben ignited his saber and led the way forward straight towards the surrendered troops, as they approached, however, the surrendered regiments moved aside, creating a direct path towards the grounded ship. There would still be soldiers and troops aboard, but it was good as over.

-X-

Aboard the Supremacy Captain Peavey had watched the situation unfolding. They had been no support from the sky, Vice Admiral Renor had been killed, and his Dreadnought had since plummeted colliding with the planet's surface nearby. He'd had communication from unknown Resistance leaders aboard Grand Admiral Skalick's Dreadnought informing him that the ship was under their command and that Skalick was also dead. He had watched their ATs become decimated heaps of junk and to avoid any more unnecessary loses he'd called the remaining Ties back after he'd seen a wave of energy knock all the troops fighting on the ground to the floor. Peavey didn't know what the source of that energy was and he didn't care. Hux had barricaded himself in his
quarters, refusing to leave until his guard Chromia returned, but as far as Peavey was concerned he was in charge now, and that demon-ness bodyguard of Hux's was dead. Peavey had seen flashes of red light, but since the crash of energy, there was nothing. Those were his men and women fighting out there, and he wasn't going to sacrifice anymore on a lost cause. He now watched the remaining surrendered troops part into two halves, and an unstable red light was moving forwards along with the Resistance troops, progressively getting closer. That was definitely not Chromia that was Kylo Ren. This battle and in fact the First Order were as good as over.

"Take me down to meet them," Peavey commanded one of his officers in the control room. Captain Peavey had every intention of doing this correctly and unlike Hux with his dignity intact.

Captain Peavey exited the ship, and with a handful of officers, he stood under the ships' shadow awaiting the approaching host. He felt apprehensive, but it seemed the Resistance had been merciful to anyone who had surrendered. Peavey hoped that was where this endeavour was heading. He could now see the leaders of the horde clearly and the towering form of Kylo Ren carrying that red burning sword. Captain Peavey gulped nervously; he'd seen the previous Supreme Leader a handful of times upon the bridge with Hux always masked, he was intimidating and Peavey felt no shame in feeling afraid of the man. He'd heard enough stories from fellow officers who'd been dragged, choked and thrown to know the man was formidable and had a reckless temper. He wasn't any less intimidating without the mask dark eyes and with a large scar running down his face across one of them.

Kylo Ren stopped less than a metre from him and although Peavey did not alter his footing or stance from his respectful military pose his hands clenched each other hard behind him and his head did lean back slightly, fearful of being lanced on that fiery red bolt. Nobody spoke, and Peavey didn't dare look at anyone other than Kylo who when he finally did speak did so in a deep voice, his words short and precise.

"Captain Peavey, where is Hux?"

"In his quarters," Peavey blurted nervously. He then paused calming himself and then continued, "he's unaware of my being here, though he is aware to a certain extent of the situation."

"A certain extent?" Kylo raised an eyebrow at Peavey his body tense and ready.

"I take it Chromia, and the Knights are dead?"

"Yes," another short, curt response.

"Our Supreme Leader is unaware of that as I only suspected. He is ignorant of our Ties and troops having been recalled or of Kail and Valax's surrender. He is only aware that one Dreadnought is down, that Skalick is dead and that Targo and Kramer joined you."

Kylo simply nodded. Now another man spoke.

"Captain Peavey, I'm Colonel Dameron. Are you here to surrender your forces and your ship?"

Peavey apprehensively allowed himself to address the new speaker.

"I am Colonel, yes. I want no more of my soldiers to die for something I believe is already over."

Colonel Dameron spoke to the other Resistance members around them.

"General Ematt, take over the Captain's surrender. Solo and I will deal with Hux, Jakub you and your division come with us. Solo lead the way."

A handful of Resistance fighters followed Kylo Ren towards the ship; Captain Peavey watched
them go the same way he'd just come from and wondered to himself why they were referring to Kylo Ren as Solo?

-X-

Ben headed inside the Supremacy he knew the corridors of this ship intimately but the familiar buzz and mechanical hum that had calmed him during sleepless nights before, now made his agitation increase. He headed to his old quarters his pace determined his boots an insistent click on the floor, and he could sense the men with him struggling to keep up; it didn't matter he didn't need them. The doors to his quarters with shut and Ben knew before he even pressed the button to release the doors that they had been overridden to stay shut. He took his saber and thrust it into the doors. Around his weapon, the doors started melting; they would open soon enough. There were safety procedures that would not allow a door to stay shut when extreme heat was applied.

"Blaster's ready," he growled at Poe, Jakub and the others.

The melted hole increased until the door opened Ben instantly deflected several poorly aimed blaster shots. Hux had no real military experience; he wasn't a soldier; he was a scientist with ideas and a savagely misguided view of his place in the future of the galaxy. Harnessing the Force Ben reached out with his lightsaber free hand and froze Hux where he stood then lowered Hux's blaster hand to his side. Hux looked different from how Ben was used to seeing him, unhinged madness behind his eyes. Desperation had made him sloppy both mentally and physically. It would be so easy to break his neck or to make him shoot himself with the blaster. No one need know Ben had done it he could compel the division with him, that Hux had committed suicide easily enough. He stood for several moments deliberating with himself Hux frozen, staring at him in fear. Ben couldn't stir up that spiteful hate he'd once had for the man, looking at Hux like this Ben felt almost sorry for him. Ben then wondered to himself if this was how Rey had felt when she'd closed their connection had he been a mad man resolute on a dark quest for power.

Ben stepped towards Hux closely scrutinising Hux's face and letting go of his hold ever so slightly. Then spoke a calm command.

"You will drop your weapon."

Hux's fingers released the blaster, and it fell to the floor at his feet. Ben raised his saber to Hux's shoulder the red light shimmering off Hux's terrified face. He could so easily remove his head as he had his guard Chromia's.

"The First Order is dead," he paused, savouring the realisation and defeat reaching Hux's eyes. "You are a prisoner of the New Republic. Try to accept your fate with an ounce of dignity."

Hux managed to mutter through a tense mouth. "You were always treacherous scum."

Ben merely smiled at him maliciously harnessing the Force further he squeezed Hux's throat. Hux couldn't even pull at his throat; his hands were pinned at his sides; he just gasped through his locked face turning from red to nearly purple. Behind him, Ben could hear Poe and the other fighters whispering and questioning if they should, or more importantly could, do something. Eventually, he released his hold on Hux's throat; it wasn't his life to take. Hux's life would serve a purpose for the creation of the new galaxy. Calming himself, he turned his head slightly to speak behind him while maintaining his focus clearly on Hux.

"Colonel Dameron, do you have the binders?"

Behind him, Poe came forwards with the binders in hand.
"Yeah, right here."

"Then take him prisoner."

Ben extinguished his lightsaber, reattaching it to his belt then moved Hux's arms up against his will. Poe placed the binders around Hux's hands and then stepped back. Harnessing the force further Ben lifted Hux's body so that it hovered just above the floor then Ben moved him across the room. Ben made Hux exit the room, closely followed by the rest of the Resistance soldiers, and all the while Hux was attempting to fight and shout out but was unable to do a thing against Ben's will, his face reddening in his futile efforts.

As they exited the Dreadnought stepping into the burning sky and fields, Ben let his control of Hux go. Hux stumbled forward from the unexpected release, having been fighting against Ben's hold, and fell to his knees in front of General Ematt. The older General looked down at Hux, bemused by what he saw.

"Supreme Leader Hux I assume."

Hux didn't respond merely glowered up at him, Jakub came up to his side and dragged him up.

Ben sighed it was over- well almost. Poe was at his side, and he turned to him and held out his hands.

"It's time. It's over."

Poe looked at Ben's outstretched arms his hands together, ready for the binders and then looked up to his face. Ben could see Poe deliberating with himself, why was he reflecting? Poe hated him and with good reason. There was little Ben didn't know about the pilot having sifted through every corner and recess of his mind.

"Is it necessary?" Poe asked.

"The First Order forces and yours need to see I'm not a free man. Now it's over, and the fighting is done they need to see. It's the right thing to do." He raised his hands a little more to Poe.

Poe sighed, it was a show, a formality but Ben was right; it was a necessary one, and he reluctantly got another pair of binders from General Ematt and placed them around Ben's wrists. If Ben wanted to, he could probably break out or use the Force to convince anyone he should be let free, but he knew the show of guilt needed to be seen that Hux wasn't solely responsible and that he had to pay for the choices he'd made and the consequences of his actions. Poe stood at Ben's side as they walked back through the crowds towards the transports, he didn't coerce him or even take him by the arm Poe just allowed Ben to walk his head held high accepting of whatever the future had in store.
Behind her closed eyes, Rey could sense light coming from somewhere on her left, and it was warming her gently. She no longer felt cold, and her arm was no longer a burning fury that she recalled it had been previously. She allowed her eyes to flutter open not entirely sure how long she'd been here, here being a room she recognised- the medical bay from the Resistance Base on Maridun. Memory flooded back of the conflict on Russan, and she was anxious to know what had happened on Ruusan, had they been successful? Her eyes opened fully, and she tried to get up but remembered that using her one arm was not an option not anymore. She leaned to the right and using her right hand she got herself into an upright position and surveyed her left arm or more accurately what was left of it; it ended rather abruptly just below her elbow. As she looked at the place, her hand should've been her friends within the room stirred disturbed into waking. Finn was at her side first wrapping her in a firm embrace.

"How are you feeling?" Rose enquired from Finn's side.

Finn released her and looked at her intently.

"I'm ok. Honestly. What happened? Did we win?"

Poe answered all these questions standing to her left.

"Hux is our prisoner; the trial will be taking place in a few days. Skalick and Renor are dead. Kail and Valax surrendered as well as the majority of the troops. After the trial, we'll be allowing the stormtroopers to do what they wish, join the Republic and stay a trooper to police the galaxy or leave for whatever life they choose."

Rey listened intently pleased with how things had unfolded, she was, however, noticing a willful absence within the information Poe was giving her.

"And Ben?"

Poe gave her a look then Rose and Finn and then back to Rey and sighed. Rey felt her nerves rising but reminded herself if something awful had happened, she would have noticed a disturbance in the Force. Wouldn't she? She'd been unconscious would she have noticed a disturbance. Before her mind completely unravelled into chaos, Rey reminded herself she'd feel or sense his absence in the Force.

"He's in a cell," Poe finally said.

"A cell?" Now Rey was annoyed.

"His choice," Poe said arms raised in defence, "he said there needed to be a show that now it was over he was not a free man."

"Take me to him," she demanded.

Poe's face showed Rey that he was not particularly pleased by her request; it could be because he felt she should be in medical still resting or it could be that Poe didn't want her to see Ben. She raised her eyebrows to him.

"I'll bring him here," Poe responded a slightly annoyed exasperated expression on his face.
"Thank you."

Poe pointed at her, "rest! Dr Kalonia will be here soon about your new arm."

"New arm?" Rey questioned, and Poe stopped where he was in the doorway of medical.

"Yeah, she's been working on it while you were sleeping," Poe answered.

Rey looked down at her missing arm, a mechanical arm, like Luke and the man she'd seen while unconscious. Who was he? Who was the woman?

"It's a mechno-arm covered in synthetic skin, it looks great," Rose chirped in, "you won't be able to tell the difference."

Rey smiled at her friend and how excited she was regarding the science behind her new limb. At that moment, Dr Kalonia entered medical with the arm. Rey was surprised by how human the arm looked the mechanisms were covered in fake skin; they'd even matched her skin tone though her freckles were missing. Dr Kalonia went to Rey's left side, and with the help of one of the technical, medical droids fitted the arm.

"I'm going to lock it into place; you may feel a slightly uncomfortable sensation."

Rey readied herself and nodded. She felt the bionic arm fuse to her with a strange tingling. The droid then fitted a metallic strip to her arm and some apparatus that started pulsating, and she began to feel the fingers. As she brought her fingers in towards her palm and back out again, Ben entered the room with Poe at his side binders around his wrists. Rey fumed.

"Why is he restrained?" She demanded of Poe.

"Because I asked to be," Ben responded calmly. He twitched his hands slightly, and the binders came away, and he placed them on a table nearby.

"We'll leave you two alone." Rose murmured dragging Finn by the arm. Poe stood in the doorway for a moment longer, then also left along with Dr Kalonia. They were alone, she reached out to Ben with her hand, and he took it in his. The Force flowed between them instantly soothing her, and she breathed deeply as relief washed over her.

"Ben, why are you doing this?"

She didn't need to be specific with regards to what she meant he would know exactly.

"I'm not one of you Rey, and if I go unpunished for my crimes regardless of my recent actions, the New Republic will start with people resenting its founding decisions, on both sides. If this is to truly work, I have to play my part and accept my guilt and whatever fate the Republic decides is fair."

His face was resolved, and she knew nothing she could say to him would change his mind, and so Rey decided to talk to him about the vision she'd seen instead.

"Ben, when I was unconscious, I saw these scenes of the past Luke with Vader, you and I, but I also saw a young man and a young woman. He had a mechno-arm like this one," she raised her left arm as she said this then continued. "He was a Jedi, but he married her and then I... I think he killed her and she was pregnant. Why would I see that? Do you know who they were?"

"Did they say anything?" Ben was interested but seemed unsurprised.
"No, I just saw scenes, but what brought me back was something I heard, it sounded far away, something about love igniting the stars."

Now Ben smiled though sadly, "Anakin."

"What?"

"You saw Anakin Skywalker, my grandfather. I saw him too, and he said those words to me as we brought you back. Love is more than a candle; love can ignite the stars."

"We?"

He smiled again.
"Yes, we. Luke, Anakin and Yoda some of the greatest Jedi that ever lived."

Rey nodded. She had no idea who Yoda was, that could be a question for another time.
"Was the woman your grandmother?"

"Must have been," Ben knew very little about his paternal grandmother Padme, his mother had never known her as she died shortly after giving birth to her and Luke. All he knew was that Anakin and Padme's love was against the rules of the Jedi order but that they had married regardless. Ultimately their union had been doomed when Anakin's power became corrupted, and he'd become The Dark Lord Vader breaking her heart.

"Why did I see all those things?"

Ben shrugged, there was a multitude of possible reasons, but he wasn't sure of any. It could be the prophecy fulfilled at Luke had said. It had started with Anakin, and it ended with him and Rey—true balance in the Force. It could be that their love was what Anakin's for Padme should've been if not for the Emperor. Whatever the reason, it gave him hope and peace. He raised his hand to her face, her hair was loose about her shoulders, and he liked it like this.

"I don't know," not a complete lie but it was complicated and could wait for another time, "you're here, and that's all I care about, but you should rest some more." He removed his hands from hers and went to retrieve his binders.

"I've rested enough," she said as she threw back the sheet swinging her legs around.

"No arguments!" He gave her the binders and held out his arms to her submissively for her to place them on. She did as he bid her and watched him leave the room as she begrudgingly got back under the covers.

-X-

Lando Calrissian sat at a long table on the top of the base of Maridun, around the table were General Targo, Admiral Deltan, Colonel Dameron, General Ematt, Admiral Numb and Admiral Statura. These were the jury members who would sentence the prisoners in the trials today; democracy would be reborn with this Senate. Lando, however, was not feeling particularly positive about the proceedings. Supreme Leader Hux had not taken to his imprisonment well shouting furiously at all hours or throwing himself against the walls in apparent agony. The man had come undone with the demise of the First Order with him as it's Supreme Leader and the death of his bodyguard. Ben Solo had been the complete opposite sitting silently in his cell like a devoted religious cleric, Hux's wailings from the adjacent cell not so much as eliciting a flinch or blink.

A crowd of Resistance fighters, officers both First Order and Resistance alike and ex troopers were
stood in the grass below intermingled with each other; they were all just people now. You could no longer tell them apart, except for those few who hadn't managed to acquire something else to wear and were still in the everyday black undergarments of the stormtrooper. They were all stood waiting; it was time to begin. Lando stood.

"Bring out the first prisoner."

Hux was vehemently yelling, spitting and kicking as he was hauled before the table.

"Armitage Hux, previously Supreme Leader and General of the First Order you stand before this council accused of crimes against the Galaxy. For mass genocide, unlawful assassination, murder and torture. How do you plead?"

Everyone knew Hux's plea was inconsequential to the resolution that had been decided, but the formalities had to be observed.

"How dare you presume to judge me!" Hux spat at them.

The man looked seriously deranged as though he'd been tearing at his hair and his face, red scratches were visible along with flakes of dried blood. They had provided him with his military clothing out of respect which Hux did not deserve, but it looked mangled. All of Hux's previous pride gone and only a shell of the man he'd once been was left.

"Very well, Armitage Hux you are sentenced to life imprisonment on Sunspot prison. May the Force grant you a short life. Bring out the next prisoner."

Hux was dragged away, still shouting and struggling as Ben Solo walked forward, tilting his head to the side as he passed Hux avoiding the enraged man's flailing restrained limbs. Ben stood before the table sombrely chin tilted up determined and steadfast.

"Ben Solo, previously Supreme Leader Kylo Ren and Leader of the Knights of Ren you stand before this council accused of crimes against the Galaxy. Genocide of innocent civilians, murder and torture. Do you have anything to say in your defence?"

As Lando spoke, he heard gasps from the crowd some of them had not known this man was Kylo Ren and those that had, had not known his actual name and heritage- the son Princess Leia General Organa and her husband the Rebellion General and the most famous smuggler of all time. Ben looked at the table lips pursing as Lando had read the list of crimes.

"No." A single spoken word said firmly in a deep low tone.

Lando had expected something, for Ben to mention Snoke or what he'd done for the Resistance. He looked at the other members at the table, but they looked as confounded as he did.

"Very well, however, this council cannot ignore your actions since leaving the First Order, and these actions will be taken into account. For the assassination of Supreme Leader Snoke and for supporting the Resistance to bring about this new Senate we will show leniency."

Rey had come to Lando before the trial, and an agreement had been struck, Lando hadn't liked the price, but he had no intention of breaking his word, and in his eyes at least Ben had redeemed himself enough.

"This council sentences you to exile. You are banished to the outer regions. Never to return."

Lando saw Ben's shoulders shudder as he breathed out heavily his face poignantly sad. Lando
couldn't help feeling a pang of guilt at the sentence; this was Han and Leia's son and he Lando, their best friend, was banishing him forever. However, Rey had told him this was the only way for the balance to be maintained without users of the Force being part of it. Ben's words from the table as they'd made their plans echoed back to him, 'let it all die.' No more Jedi, no more Sith nothing and therefore a real and lasting peace.

"Escort the prisoner back to his cell. May the Force be with you young Solo."

Large groups of the crowd raised an arm and cried out, "May the Force be with you". Lando was not surprised by the camaraderie shown Ben had proved himself, Ben however clearly was and he surveyed the crowd moved by a sense of belonging he'd never felt previously.

-X-

Rey stood in her quarters packing the ancient Jedi texts, her saber, blankets and some clothes into a large bag. She had very few personal belongings, and she would take what she knew was needed from around the base, where they were going she'd been before she had a good idea of what they'd need. She heard a tap behind her, Poe was at her door.

"Hey, packing?" Poe seemed less tired his eyes were twinkling again his usual spark had returned. The burden of leadership removed he was free to be himself- a charming rogue. Rey felt a mild tug on her chest of a possibility that had never been and now never would be. He was a good friend, and she was going to miss him terribly.

"Yeah." She took the pillow from her bunk and rolled it into her bag.

"How long will it take you to get to Ahch-To?" He queried brightly.

"Few days." Chewie had requested to escort them personally, and she hadn't wanted it any other way.

"So you'll be back in... what.... a week?"

Oh no. Rey looked at his beaming face and watched it change as he read the expression on hers. She was biting her lips, and her eyebrows were furrowed together.

"No! Rey... you can't. Don't do this." He pleaded her reaching for her hands. She let him take them.

"Poe," she held his hands firm and looked directly at him, he might not understand, but she would make him accept it. "I've been alone my whole life. Would you truly ask me to spend the rest of it alone regretting what I'd lost?"

Poe looked incredulously at her, "you're not alone, you have Finn, Rose, Chewie, Maz, Lando, Jakub, Altor.... me."

There it was again that pang in her chest speaking of a life that could've been, but it hadn't been the will of the Force; it wasn't her destiny. She smiled at him sadly, "and I'm alone, I'm apart from you all because I'm different. Ben is like me; he understands me."

"You're nothing like him." Poe insisted, but she could tell Poe didn't honestly believe that as he said it, not anymore.

"We're bound; from the moment the Force in me awoke we were bound to each other, till death." She sighed.
"I would rather one life in exile with him than spend the rest of my day's alone yearning for him,
only seeing him across the stars."

Poe removed his hands from hers; he was accepting what she said, and he didn't like it.

"You love him don't you; it's not just... a bond through the Force."

Rey looked at the floor embarrassed she had said it to Ben but confirming it to others was something else. Her head lowered; she looked up at him through lowered lashes; she took a painful breath, "yes."

Poe searched her face then shaking his head sighing deeply, "Ok... what do you guys need?"

She looked up and smiled then spontaneously wrapped her arms around his neck in a warm, grateful embrace.

"Thank you. I can't tell you how much I'm going to miss you, all of you."

"Oh hey you can't get rid of us that easily we'll be visiting, in fact, you'll be lucky if Finn doesn't stow aboard the ship."

Rey laughed into Poe's hair.

"Come on let's get you some rations and... what else do you need?"

They left Rey's quarters together bumping shoulders joking together as they went off to raid the Resistance supplies.

-X-

Finn stood hand in hand with Rose, his emotions leaping in and out of his throat as he watched Rey and Ben say their farewells. Poe put a reassuring arm around his shoulder.

"You ok there, buddy? Keeping it together?"

"I don't like this Poe," Finn didn't look at him just continued looking at the crowd around Rey and Ben as everyone wanted to shake the two Jedi's hands.

"Yeah, me neither," Poe replied.

Rey and Ben finally approached the three of them; Rey stepped towards them as a group smiling kindly. As a mass, they embraced her from all sides. Finn could hear her laughing, but he could also feel her tears on his cheek. As they pulled back, Rey was wiping her tears from her face. To his right, Rose was doing the same.

"We'll be seeing you, Rey," Finn affirmed.
She nodded and smiled and allowed a few more tears to fall across her face.

"May the Force be with you." He managed just to hold his emotions in check as he did so.

"And also with you," she gave a big sigh and placed her hand on Finn's shoulder then turned to join Ben who'd stood behind her, his face utterly impassive. Ben gave Poe a curt nod of respect and Poe nodded back.

"Take care of her Solo," Finn advised Ben.

"I will," he replied as Rey reached for his hand. He took it is his, and together they turned from the group towards the Millennium Falcon. Chewie was on the boarding ramp of the falcon with Maz at his side. Rey and Ben walked through the throng up the ramp and at the top Rey turned and waved at the crowd and slowly she disappeared from sight as the boarding hatch rose. The engines ignited, and the freighter hovered above the ground and then to whoops and cheers the Falcon turned and exited Maridun's atmosphere.

Finn stood watching the empty sky with Rose and Poe long after the crowd had dispersed, clutching Rose's hand tightly. He turned to her.

"I love you, you know."

She smiled at him, "course I know dummy. I love you too." She grasped his face and kissed him, "and I'm not going anywhere."

"Good," Finn smiled back at her.

Poe grabbed them both around the shoulders, rolling his eyes.

"Come on love birds I can't cope with any more of this, I've got a bottle of firewater in my quarters, and you're gonna help me drink it."

The three of them walked to the base entrance, arms around each other as the sun on Maridun began to set turning the world outside grey.
Epilogue - The Dream is Real

The Lanais were the caretakers of Ahch-To, and they had been cohabiting with the new inhabitants for a few years now, the female inhabitant Alcida-Auka remembered from when the last outsider had been residing with them. He'd said it was his niece Alcida-Auka hadn't been sure how honest that was. The woman before had been a rude, destructive girl destroying the rock face, blasting holes in the huts, but she was different now. Like the last outsider, the girl had learnt their language as did the tall, dark man with her who appeared to be her companion. They did chores and gathered food alongside the Lanai, and they appeared each month at the Festival of Return.

When the pair had first arrived, they had taken up accommodation in one of a cluster of huts and later they had requested permission from the Lanai to merge together several of the shelters. The man had even made a covering for the huts using mud, sand and water from around the island to make the shelters more weatherproof. Their presence didn't affect the island as the woman's had when she had resided here previously it was in harmony with the island. Alcida-Auka had seen the pair walk together staring out over the sea or meditating high up on the cliffs or during the warm summer months she had even seen them swimming and bathing together in the shallows.

The woman had returned the old religious relics thought lost from the lightning hitting the ancient Uneti stump, bursting it to flames. As a sign of gratitude and mark of respect Alcida-Auka had taken the pair to the store where all the belongings of past inhabitants were kept. The man, in particular, had seemed moved by the robes, weapon, star compass and a pair of golden cubes on a chain that the last outsider had left. It turned out the previous outsider had been his Uncle, which meant the woman, therefore, couldn't possibly have been that former outsider's niece- these companions were not brother and sister. Right there in the store beside Alcida-Auka, they had embraced in shared grief. Alcida-Auka was not Force-sensitive, but she knew it flowed through this pair more strongly than anyone else who'd been on the island before, they were two halves of the Force, that together made one. Not long after the moment with the belongings, at one of the Lanais' monthly Festivals, the Lanai had performed at the pair's request a ceremony of sorts where the two had made life vows to each other.

Sometime after that, Alcida-Auka, her daughter and a few other caretakers had supported the pair in bringing a baby into the world, a strong baby boy. In all her time on this island, a human child had never been born here. There was no such stories of human babes, not even in the old songs they sang to each other.

Surprisingly even the presence of the babe had not affected the daily life on the island much. Although at times it was less peaceful, chores were still done, the moss was still cleared, and the maintenance of the island went on as it always would ready for any who came to this sacred place.

-X-

Rey sits at a driftwood table in a stone hut. The domed shelter is sparsely furnished and old; the stones are dark with stains from the moss, which has long since been cleared away. Since they've lived here, changes have been made to make it a home- a table, a fireplace, benches, the open holes for windows have shutters and cloth to keep out the wind and rain during the storm season. They have combined several of the huts, with the Lania's permission of course, so there are sleeping quarters off this main one. One quarter belongs to her and Ben and the other to their son, furnished with simple beds and handmade blankets. A simple, peaceful life.

Rey sits reading an ancient book, pouring over the words she's read many times before;

There is no light without dark.
Through passion, I gain focus.
Through knowledge, I gain power.
Through serenity, I gain strength.
Through victory, I gain harmony.
There is only the Force.

She turns to the beautiful illustrations of the original Jedi, tracing the dark side and light side of the image gently with her index finger she looks up and sighs, 'Yes' she reaffirms to herself this was the right course it was the will of the Force.

Since their arrival on Ahch-To, the woman Rey was is a shadow of the woman she now is; now she is Ben Solo's wife. The Lanais carried out a ceremony for them at one of the monthly festivals on the beach below them. The word wife, however, was too weak to encapsulate the truth of their situation. She belongs to Ben, and he belongs to her. Ben's love for her was a direct, unashamed passion. He shared his deepest feelings with her honestly and openly without doubt or shame, and that included his darkest fears. Rey knew his faults just as he did; no longer the prideful entitled man he'd been but joyful, generous and passionately devoted. He could, however, at times still be moody and quick to anger. Ben was and will always be a wild animal tamed by her hands and the island helps him control those elements of his personality. He took relief from the cleansing rush of air sprinkled with saltwater on the edges of the cliff. He'd be there now she knew with their son. Maz had been right all those years ago, the belonging she'd sought had not been behind her, it had been ahead. At the time she had thought it was in reference to finding Luke and becoming a Jedi. She knew now, however, it had been about Ben. It had always been about Ben.

Rey rose from her position at the table; her back ached from having sat at the bench too long. She wanted to see them both and watch the suns set before night fell.

-X-

Ben crouches down on the cliff edge a large dark hooded cloak covers his entire person sheltering him from the wind despite this, his dark hair whips in front of his eyes, but it doesn't affect his focus on the object of his gaze. The wind has turned cold, singing to him of the snow that will be covering the island soon enough. They've been preparing for this with the Lanais for months, salting fish and drying kelp. Opposite him, the focus of his intense gaze is his son Bail crossed legged, and eyes closed breathing deeply. He is the exact image of the boy he dreamt of all those years ago night after night. Even the smell of him makes Ben's stomach turn with the memory of that dream, which has somehow come to fruition. Bail smells of this island- salt and grass and peace. Despite how long they've been here, however, to him, Rey's scent is reminiscent of Jakku, her beautiful skin forever warm and freckled from years in the blistering sun and sand.

"Focus and breathe, let the Force flow through you," he says encouragingly to Bail.

Slowly, rocks scattered around the boy from earlier practise, begin to float around him, and he stacks them in the air. He opens his eyes and smiles at Ben.

"Well done my boy," he smiles genuinely, smiling has become more common to him now. He knows he is still quiet and reflective, but joy, smiling, and actual laughter have become commonplace in his day to day life. Happiness and belonging was never something he felt he deserved or could have, but he has it, and he is grateful.

Ben senses Rey joining them before he sees or hears her. Knowing her every thought and move gives him peace of mind, even when she leaves the island to visit the Republic and old friends on the core worlds, he can still feel her across the galaxies and hear her inside his head as he meditates high up on the cliffs or in the caves. She's in his soul, bound forever.
"Congratulations sweetheart, I'm so proud... lifting rocks?" She laughs, and Ben beams at her from beneath his hood.

Her hood is up protecting her from the vigorous breeze, but a few long strands of silken brown hair have escaped and flutter freely around her face. Her beautiful oval eyes are warm and serene. To him, she's glowing, but to him, she's always beautiful; however, right now, her aura within the Force is shimmering. He rises to stand at her side, possessively placing an arm around her waist the other resting on her stomach. He gazes down at her allowing himself to fall deeply into her eyes, losing himself in her beauty as she traces the scar that runs across his face with her hand and her eyes glisten.

"Is it true, what I can sense, and what I can feel?" He asks her his hand resting upon her stomach, sensing a change he's felt before.

"Yes, I believe so. We're going to have another baby. I can sense her." She smiles back at him.

"Her?" His eyebrows rise as he questions her.

"I think so, can't you feel it, feel her?"

He could, a tiny spark in the Force filled with infinite possibilities and futures, he could even see the girl and woman she might become. He didn't need to respond out loud for her to know. He leaned down and kissed her softly, her body pressed against his. His arm wrapping just a little tighter around her waist as he deepens the kiss, he could lose himself here. For a moment and it's just a moment there is a deepening of shared emotion; they are one. To them, these moments are almost an eternity as their minds become one through the Force. When the kiss ends, he scoops the boy up with one arm and embraces him tightly ruffling the boy's hair with his face and breathing him in deeply.

His arm still around Rey they watch as the binary suns set over Ahch-To casting the world into hues of crimson, pink and yellow before walking back to their home.
The First Time

Chapter Summary

This is the love scene between chapter 21 The Grey and 22 The Plan. Nothing racy or above say a PG 12.

Kylo looked down at Rey in absolute terror; his lack of clothing didn't phase him. He was unashamed of his physical form scars and all, and he didn't care who saw it, however, the fact that Rey was tracing his scars with her fingers, that she'd locked the door and turned off the lights was instilling this sense of terror in him a fear the like of which he'd never encountered.

He could see her mind and her intention, and he was... nervous. She was in front of him in a mild state of undress though wrappings covered her breasts and she still wore her leggings. He'd never seen anything so beautiful. Even in the dim glow from the moon and stars from the small window to the side, he could see her sun-touched skin, scattered with beautiful darker marks- freckles; like the stars across a nights sky. Having spent many years aboard ships with his body entirely covered, he thought his skin compared to hers was incredibly pale, boring even, compared to the flesh before him. He looked down at her in awe Kylo could sense her lack of experience matched his own and that they both had a vague comprehension of what they were about to engage in and yet Rey showed no sign of apprehension her features were soft and gentle. She stood on her toes and brushed her lips against his.

"Don't be afraid I feel it too. Let go."

He closed his eyes and lightly kissed her back and then allowed her to lead him towards her bunk desperately trying in vain to control his breathing. She leant back, pulling him on top of her. He was concerned about allowing his whole weight to lie upon her so he propped himself up with one arm while the other held her face so he could take her in.

Lips touched softly and tentatively their mouths brushing lightly, their kisses gentle, delicate caresses. As they gave way too their feelings and heightened emotions, they became more explorative as lips parted, allowing tongues to touch and dance together.

Rey felt Ben begin to relax slowly, allowing the weight of his body to rest upon her fully as her hands went into his hair and traced his broad back. Their kisses became more feverish, and Rey shifted her body, raising one leg to allow Ben to lie more comfortably between her thighs as he moved from kissing her mouth to her neck and collarbone. His lips were warm and soft against her bare skin, and she leaned into him as her hands tangled within his dark locks and breathy sighs escaped her lips. Rey wanted more- more skin against skin more intimacy and so she moved both hands to his chest and pushed against him so she could sit back up. Ben sat across from her, his face a mixture of confusion and disappointment until Rey reached for where her wrappings around her top half were secured, and she began to undo them. At no point did she take her eyes from his; they were hungry, needy, and despite all that behind them all was that element of fear. He breathed each breath heavily, causing his shoulders to shudder as he watched her release herself.

Rey leaned to the floor and placed her wrappings down but kept her arms wrapped across herself, hiding her newly nakedness from him. Kylo leaned forward and grasped her face and kissed her hard, lips colliding with his sense of urgency. He pulled her to him, and they knelt now upon the
bunk. Kylo could feel more of her now than he could before her soft breasts and her beating heart against his chest as his hands traced up the length of her bare back, feeling every curve carefully. His desire for her clear Rey relaxed and entwined her arms about his neck. Again the kisses became deeper, more frantic, as though they were each other's oxygen, as though without the other's lips on theirs they couldn't breathe. Kylo pulled her head back gently by her hair to taste her neck and where that elegant neck met her shoulders. Rey gasped out, and Kylo no longer fearful began to lower her down; he wanted more. His desire for her and this feeling, this burning in his veins taking hold as they descended back upon the bed, Rey lying beneath him. Their shared kisses continued this time feverish and longing to start, an all-consuming need for each other and the connection being within each other gave. Desire driving away all thoughts until Rey bit Kylo's lip gently, and he felt her hands move from clinging to his back, reaching around for his trousers. It was a silent instruction. He sat back from her and removed the clothing that remained. When he looked back at her, he saw she'd done the same and now sat with her knees drawn up to her chest and arms wrapped around herself apparently still uncomfortable with her nakedness before him, unaware that he considered her to be perfection in human form.

Kylo smiled gently at her insecurity and turned to her and reached for her right foot, pulling it slowly and gently from her towards him. He stroked up her lean muscular calf, resting his hand temporarily behind her knee. He gave her a heartfelt smile before planting a gentle kiss upon her leg. As he came closer toward her, he stroked higher up her leg, bringing his hand to rest on the back of her thigh. He hovered above her as she shimmied herself to a lying position beneath him. Rey was surprised by his smile, so genuine and now so sure, his initial fear gone. She felt a little nervous now as she looked up at him but ready, she wanted this. She raised her left leg around him as he relinquished his hold slowly to lie atop her. Her hips tilted to meet his, and they seemed to fit perfectly. The air between them vibrated with their hot nervous breaths as they began to move as one in unison, hips connecting, bodies uniting in synchronisation. Rey clung to Ben, her fingers raking his back for purchase. Their kisses between their gasping breaths were now long, lingering and intense as though they were genuinely attempting to become one in every respect. This was what it was supposed to feel like; they were one. His darkness her light, two sides of the same Force now one.

Ben took one of her hands and entwined their fingers and held it above her head. Rey's free hand grasped his shoulder as she held onto him, never taking her eyes from his as they moved together. His eyes seemed illuminated around the shadow of his hair, which fell forward in dark waves. Rey's beautiful dark lashed eyes never faltered from his as he lost himself in their joint motions, in this inexplicably building furore. Faster, deeper he wanted all of her, to be buried within her, to be absorbed by her. Rey only faltered from his intense gaze when she began to feel a sensation she couldn't explain in her core take hold of her, and she began to arch her neck back. Her warm flesh shivered with the building sensation. Ben reached his hand down her spine to hold her form to him not wanting any space between their interlocked bodies. She could see a bright light around her- the Force. The feeling built and built running through her body like electricity from where Ben's hips collided with hers. Reaching an inevitable climax until eventually, it overflowed, and she cried out, grasping Ben's hips as he tensed his hand clenching on their interlaced hands. He exhaled sharply with a growl shuddering above her.

Ben removed his one hand from Rey's back, allowing her to relax onto the bunk fully. Propping himself up above her trying to regain his breathing, but it came in haggard short bursts. The air between them felt cold against their warm moist flesh. The brilliant white Force light dimmed, and
objects around them which had been suspended in air due to the surge of Force energy crashed to the ground.

Eventually, Rey tilted her head up and looked at him, reaching a hand to tuck a wave of dark hair away from his face.

"You ok? You're trembling." Her query came as almost a pant, she too was struggling to regain her normal state.

Ben managed a nod and murmured "Mmm-hmm, I'll be alright."
He gave her a passionate short, breathy kiss before he relaxed down onto her and buried his face in her neck. They lay entangled in mutual bliss in each others' embrace. They were one.
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