Balancing Act

by Asami_T

Summary

Anakin Skywalker may be dying, but he has another mission to fulfill-- to help bring balance to a world that has not known balance for a century...

Notes

This is sort of a "update when I feel like writing it" fanfic, just to let you know ahead of time. I'm not pursuing this with any sort of structural rigidity or intent like A Kind of Magic or A Different Dojo. This is sort of my "palate cleanser", of sorts. This fic will contain a lot of things that maybe don't make a ton of sense, but I ask your patience and forgiveness since this is the first time I've really written a fic that's... inside the Star Wars or Avatar: TLA universes. It's complex.
The Exiled Prince

His lungs burned with the hot ash of Mustafar, the searing pain radiating through his chest reminding him of a time long passed now—of his greatest failure… and now, he couldn’t move. His prosthetics were ruined, all suffering terminal damage from the Emperor’s lightning attack.

‘A worthy sacrifice,’ Anakin thought. ‘in order to bring balance to the Force.’

All he could do is look upon his son as his respirator began to fail, the breaths he could take becoming more and more labored with each gasp.

“Remove the mask, Luke,” He said gently—he was tired of issuing commands.

“No, father, you’ll die,” Luke said, frowning.

‘He’s so much like Padmé,’ Anakin thought morosely.

“It’s too late for that, nothing can stop that now,” Anakin said sadly. He knew his life was beginning to falter, and he’d soon be gone. “Please remove it– I want to look upon you with my own eyes, son.”

Luke disengaged the kriitting mask he’d lived in for twenty years, and lifted it away from his charred and ruined skin with a hiss, finally expelling the last of the recycled and treated oxygen.

Anakin saw color for the first time since his duel with Obi-Wan on Mustafar. He’d known the Empire was no stranger to muted gray tones, but the sight before him confirmed it. In the sea of drab gray and the flickering yellow and orange flames of a station on the brink of annihilation, Anakin couldn’t help but smile at the sight of his son, his sandy-blond hair and aqua-blue eyes standing out from the awful darkness of the Empire.

“Luke,” Anakin rasped as the burning in his lungs intensified. “Tell your sister… you were right. About me…”

His mind began to wander—back to those heat-soaked days on Tatooine, to the dusky nights on Coruscant, to the burning ash of Mustafar… and he felt a well of regret bubbling in his chest. How he would take it all back, if he could.

“But you cannot, Anakin,” A sage voice said, and Anakin opened his eyes to an endless expanse of white. Obi-Wan’s faced him with a critical eye. “But perhaps there is something you can do…”

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With a gasp of air, a short redhead emerged from a small fountain, looking around wildly. She stepped out of the water and wrung the water out of her shirt as she looked around. Everything was… almost upside down, and she was quite alone, with nothing but stone and ceramics dotting the underside of the cliff-face she was standing under.

“Pops?” She called out, her voice bouncing off the stone walls and buildings, earning no reply. She frowned. “Mister Guide?”

There was no way the Jusenkyo springs were portals. Ranma rejected the idea as silly, surely the guide would’ve said something if they were— then again… she and Genma didn’t exactly listen when he was warning them about the curses.
She grimaced at the thought of her curse, and frowned as she sat down on the rim of the fountain.

“So now what am I s’posed ta do?” She said, frowning. Her survival instincts, sharp, refined from a life of roughing it in the woods, kicked in.

“I suppose I should look for wood to make a fire,”

Ranma slid off the stone fountain and wandered deeper into the large monastic temple.

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Oozora Hibari awoke with a start. Something was wrong—very wrong. The usual sounds of a Nerima morning were absent, as was the usual sound of her family being loud and raucous; like Tsubame trying to sneak in to steal back her clothes, for instance… or Suzume trying to come in to ambush her and wake her up like she sometimes did.

Hibari looked around her bedroom and found that it… wasn’t her bedroom. It was a stone room with spartan accommodations that looked like it hadn’t been touched in years, save for the bed which was still fresh and soft like it was brand new.

“Oh, hello?” She called out. “Daddy? Tsubame? Tsugumi? Suzume? Anybody?” She stood up and shook the cobwebs out of her head and padded to the wooden door in the corner of the room. She reached down for the small blade she always kept strapped to her ankle, and pulled it out.

In an unfamiliar place, it was better to be armed for any circumstance, than to be a victim.

The stone hallways were well designed, but were faded from years of neglect. Hibari looked wide-eyed at the murals painted on the walls.

“This isn’t Japan,” She murmured, touching one of the pictographs of a large bison-like creature. The humans painted on the mural certainly looked like your typical Buddhist priests, but they had blue arrows on their skin.

She frowned, and went to look at more of the mural, curious about the beautiful, intricate decorations.

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Darth Va—Anakin Skywalker awoke once again, feeling a well of annoyance surging through him.

He really just wanted to die a proper death, and not be forced to live another life. But, despite this, gone was the discomfort of his incredibly clumsy respirator, the burning feeling of his charred lungs, and an unfamiliar feeling of cool air dancing on his extremities, including the arm he lost during the Clone Wars.

He allowed his eyes to open and took in his surroundings. The stone room wasn’t that small, but reminded him well of some of the smaller, more tribal planets he’d visited in his life. It was a distinctly mountainous place, very much the polar opposite of Tatooine.

At least he wasn’t back there.

The first thing Anakin decided to do upon awaking, was reach out into the Force. The familiar hum of the entire universe’s energy around him seemed very close to what he was accustomed to—yet different. He could tell where ever it was he had ended up, the Force was in serious pain…and that the Force itself was exponentially stronger than back home. Rising from his bed, he looked around
at the room carefully before noticing some trinkets in the corner of the room, covered in dust.

With a gesture, the small ceramic trinket flew into his hand, and Anakin gave an appreciative nod. The Force had replied, much as it always had—and he felt the singing power of the Light once again within him.

The Dark was still there, that much was clear—but he would have to resist the urge to fall back to it… or at the very least learn to keep it controlled. It would not do to succumb to the hatred and violence of the Sith again.

Stepping out into the corridor, Anakin wished he had his lightsaber with him—a weapon in an unfamiliar place was better than nothing at all.

However, the beautiful murals decorating the walls reminded him much of rudimentary Jedi temples he’d visited. Was that what this was, a temple?

Pictographs of people guiding the wind with their hands was a clear indicator of a society that used The Force for elemental manipulation—much like his Master Palpatine had manipulated lightning with his hands.

As he approached a three-way split in the corridor, his Force senses told him that someone was also approaching, and so he stopped.

“Hello?” Anakin called out to the unseen force.

From the darkened corridor, a young woman with long blonde hair emerged. She couldn’t have been much older than her 16th year, Anakin reasoned. She was carrying a small blade in her hand, and looked at Anakin warily.

“I’m sorry to bother you,” Anakin bowed his head deferentially. “I’m wondering where I am—I just woke up here.”

“I don’t know where we are,” The girl said, shrugging. “I’m in the same boat you are.”

“I see,” Anakin said with a frown. “Anakin Skywalker,” He bowed his head a second time, this time in introduction. “Jedi Knight. What’s your name?”

“Hibari Oozora,” The girl said with a nod. “Nice to meet you. I was just looking at these murals—I’m fascinated what kind of culture could design such a thing,”

“Whomever they were,” Anakin said, with a gesture to the other parts of the mural he’d been looking at, “They were Force users, certainly.”

“The Force?” Hibari asked faintly, raising an eyebrow.

“The Force is…the energy of the universe, really. It binds and joins with everything. It is the light, and the dark.”

“Yin and yang,” Hibari said, before glancing at Anakin’s confused expression. “It’s an ancient Chinese concept—yin and yang, light and dark. Always in perpetual balance. They compliment each other.”

Anakin blinked in surprise. “Yes, that’s… that’s correct, though some would believe the light must prevail over dark— or vice versa.”
“That’s a silly thing to think,” Hibari observed.

“Yes, well,” Anakin said, rubbing his chin appreciatively. “You wil-should come with me. I wouldn’t want a young lady such as yourself to be hurt here.”

Hibari looked at him briefly before nodding. “Alright, but I’ve got my eye on you, Anakin.”

The two walked down the dimly lit corridor a little more, with Anakin closing his eyes and allowing the Force to guide him. He could feel another person wandering around the temple— they were even brighter in the Force than the young charge behind him, and Anakin could only wonder the odds of that were— two Force-Sensitives and a Master, packed with powerful potential at that, in the same confined space.

They soon emerged into an antechamber, where a young girl—perhaps the same age as Hibari, was standing, looking up at large statues built into the walls. Her red hair was tied back into a ponytail, and she was wearing a white gi that was dripping water, leaving little pooling trails behind her.

She seemed to be alerted to their presence as soon as Anakin stepped into the chamber, and turned to face them, suspicion clear on her face.

“We mean you no harm,” Anakin said firmly, trying his best to not use the Vader voice. “I’m Anakin Skywalker, and this is Hibari Oozora,” He said, gesturing to himself and his companion.

“Ranma. Ranma Saotome,” The girl said, dryly. “D’ya also end up here via Jusenkyo?”

“No, we woke up here,” Hibari said. “What’s a Jusenkyo?”

“These… mystical springs in China… ah, nevermind,” Ranma shook their head before crossing the antechamber and peering up at Anakin’s face.

“D’ya know where we are?”

“No, unfortunately— that’s why Hibari and I were looking around. I… sensed you were also exploring and I wanted to see if maybe you knew,” Anakin said plainly. “But in the mean time, you’re going to end up sick if you don’t dry out. Hibari,”

He turned to face the blonde. “I want you to find some wooden items—nothing that’s obviously sacred or important, but chairs, trinkets, personal effects. Things like that— gather them up and bring them back here to the antechamber.”

“Aye, captain!” Hibari did a faux salute.

“I’ll go search for some bedding to set up sleeping accommodations here,” Anakin said before scratching his chin. “And Ranma, you just wait here. I’ll also search for something dry for you to wear.”

Two of the party of three split up and went searching for supplies. Anakin was thankful for his strength and force power as he was quickly able to gather the bedding from three of the abandoned quarters and brought them out to the antechamber, laying them out and arranging them so they could sleep on them.

He then proceeded to search for clothing supplies— he didn’t find anything of substance, but did find some old blankets which he gave to Ranma to wear until her gi was dry.

Hibari soon returned with handfuls of wooden effects— toy dolls, spinner tops, broken down chairs,
and chords of wood.

Ranma and Anakin worked to set the fire up, with Anakin calling into the Force to ignite the piled up kindling. The fire sparked and roared the life, bathing the three in a warm glow and heat. Gently urging Ranma over to a shadowy corner of the chamber, Ranma soon returned, wrapped completely in the blankets, carrying her soaked clothes.

The three soon settled down to a silence as they sat around the fire.

“We need water and food,” Anakin said quietly. “What does the outside look like, Ranma?”

“We’re on the underside of a mountain cliff,” Ranma said, shrugging. “I’m sure there’s some path in this temple that takes you up to the surface– how else would people have gotten here?”

“If they were Force users,” Anakin said, running his thumb over his finger. “Then they likely didn’t need a physical access way–they likely used The Force to get in and out of the temple.”

The comment had lead to Anakin explaining The Force to Ranma. The teenager was considerably interested in the idea, as she happily proclaimed herself to be a martial artist, and very much interested in learning new techniques. She had been even more excited when Anakin had talked about his past as a Jedi– though he left much unsaid, mostly for the sake of brevity and preserving some privacy. Ranma had known he was a swordsman, and performed many kata over the course of his over three decades as a Force user.

Ranma, on her part, was intensely interested in a trade– she wanted to learn all about the Force and the kind of Jedi things he did, and in exchange, she could teach him some stuff from a particular martial arts form called the School of Indiscriminate Grappling.

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General Iroh sipped his tea pensively, trying to steady himself as the ship gently bobbed in the rough seas. He wasn’t quite looking forward to spending the foreseeable future on the ocean, bouncing from port to port; but he felt a strong sense of duty towards his nephew. His thoughts turned decidedly dark as he thought over his loathesome brother.

Ozai was… a complicated person. Unlike Iroh, he never gave much thought to spiritual ideas– and instead surrounded himself by people who believed in the unburdened zeal of technological progress, giving way to much of the weapons of war the Fire Nation now used to inflict horrors upon the innocents of the four nations. Iroh had once believed in the Fire Nation’s destiny– and believed that it was his destiny to march upon Ba Sing Se, and see it brought low before his father’s armies.

Lu Ten’s death had changed that– a punishment, Iroh believed, for the sins of the nation, and of his pride.

And now, perhaps, he had a chance to make up for that.

Prince Zuko, his thirteen year old nephew, the unwanted son of Ozai, sat across from him, a deep scowl etched into his young face, and his left eye covered in bandages, hiding the deep burns on his face. Iroh had decided to follow his nephew into exile, with the hopes of guiding him to some semblence of peace, and redeeming the sins of his family and nation.

Perhaps it was a selfish action– but he could feel the roiling turmoil beneath Zuko’s heart, and that made him queasy.
“May the spirits damn you, Ozai,” Iroh thought glumly to himself.

Prince Zuko suddenly stood up and cast a critical eye to the world around him. The thirteen year old was no stranger to emulating his haughty sister, and he turned to face Iroh.

“We should set a course for the Western Air Temple, start our search there,” Zuko said firmly.

Iroh sighed, and took a drink of tea. “Prince Zuko, the Avatar has not been sighed in close to one hundred years. I doubt you’ll find him simply living in one of the abandoned Air Temples.”

“It’s a start,” Zuko repeated.

Iroh nodded, before signaling to one of the deckhands, and relaying the orders to be given to the helmsman. He then turned back to his nephew.

“Zuko, you must rest. It hasn’t even been a week since the events in the capital, and you need to recuperate.”

“I feel fine,” Zuko protested, his frown deepening. He turned away from his uncle and Iroh frowned deeply.

“You’ve hardly gotten any sleep since we set sail. Nephew, you need to rest.”

“I’ll rest later,” Zuko repeated in a low growl.

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They’d found a way to gather up some water– the fountain just outside the antechamber gathered from some unseen subterranean aquifer, and was very suitable for gathering water for sustenance and bathing. As they’d managed to find a copper pot to start heating some of the water up for bathing, both Ranma and Hibari looked nervous for similar, yet different reasons.

“Y’know how I told you two I was at a place called Jusenkyo?” Ranma asked.

“Of course,” Anakin said with a smile. “What about it, Ranma?”

“Well, they’re called the Springs of Sorrow for a reason. I fell into one of them which sent me here. I fell into the Spring of Drowned Girl.”

“… Spring of Drowned Girl?” Hibari asked, her eyes glimmering for a moment. “That’s a thing?!”

“Yeah,” Ranma said with a subdued look on her face. She looked at the cup of hot water in her hand and dumped it on herself, suddenly shooting up a few centimeters and turning back into her birth form. Anakin blinked in surprise, and Hibari bristled in shock.

“That’s fascinating,” Anakin said. “The Force… twitched around you. By the Divines, if I try hard enough, I can hear Yoda talking about the mysteriousness of the Force.”

Hibari, on the other hand, was still in shock. “You… you…”

She let out a groan of annoyance and covered her face. “All the time I’ve spent trying to find hormones, all the breast forms– and you can just magically turn into a girl! That’s so not fair!”

“Wait, Hibari you’re-”

“A girl,” Hibari said, her eyes flashing dangerously, in a way that made Anakin smirk in pride. If
looks could blow up starships, then all the Rebels would’ve needed to destroy the Death Star was her. She almost reminded him of the Imperial Senator from Alderaan– a wave of nausea about what he’d done to a planet that didn’t even exist in this universe made him want to throw up.

He quickly threw those feelings to the Force, hoping they’d go away for now.

He took a calming breath.

“A girl who was maybe born into the wrong form,” Anakin said with a nod. “Many people in the galaxy that I have had the fortune to meet… or misfortune to meet, depending on the circumstance, were in similar conditions. It is too bad there is no supply of bacta or medical droids here– that situation could be easily rectified.”

Hibari frowned and grumbled to herself, and Anakin reassuringly patted the girl’s shoulder. “Neither one of us will pass judgement on you for things you can’t control.”

“Thanks, Anakin,” She said with a smile.

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Once everyone had gone to sleep, Anakin was still awake. He stepped out from the antechamber and stood near the fountain, staring into the glistening water at his reflection. It was the first time he’d gotten a good look at himself since he’d… died.

He wasn’t young anymore, obviously, and his eyes betrayed his long, painful past– but he looked better than he had since Mustafar– but he didn’t look that old either. His sandy-brown hair was short, reminding him more of his Padawan days than his time as a Knight, and he was clean-shaven.

Divines– Obi-Wan. When he’d seen his former master on the Death Star, before their last duel, Obi-Wan looked nothing like the 57 year old man he was. He’d looked nearly twenty years older. Something, Anakin figured, was attributed to the emotional strife of their penultimate encounter on Mustafar, and his subsequent life as a hermit on Tatooine. The desert was an unforgiving mistress, and took time in her stride.

Anakin had to admit to himself– Obi-Wan hiding himself and Luke on Tatooine was genius. Nobody had known better than Obi-Wan that he’d never intended to return to that ball of miserable dust as long as he was alive.

He’d never been good at putting aside emotions like a good Jedi, and as a Sith Lord… diving deep into your violent emotions had been encouraged. Mandatory, even.

Anakin simply frowned at the water and looked away from himself. That child had spoke of yin and yang, and Anakin figured that might have a point. Gray Jedi were a very old concept, dating back to thousands of years before Anakin’s life. The general idea of someone who toed the line between light and dark without surrendering to either was an inspired tale.

Of course, the Masters at the Jedi Temple had never cared much for that. Derivation from the Jedi Code was wrong, and was to be condemned. Anakin supposed that such ideas were dead now, along with all the people he’d cut down in their prime.

A well of sick began to rise in his stomach once again, and Anakin desperately closed off that entire avenue of thought. He did a great deal of awful things in Order 66– Obi-Wan had told him he could not undo what was done, but could do better in other universes– ones in need of balance that had long since been unbalanced.
Anakin had taken notice of the temple’s derelict status. A civilization had once existed here, the pictographic murals had told him as much. Genuine Force users, living in harmony with nature and creatures, bending the winds with their Force powers. But they had all gone—why?

A sense of foreboding in the Force had told him whatever the reason was, it couldn’t have been good.

But the more pressing issue, in his mind, was the fact he was now responsible for two children. Both were nearly adults, and seemed perfectly capable of handling their own, but Anakin did feel a certain… responsibility to keep after the two, particularly in such an unfamiliar and strange place.

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Anakin had found a rigged-up way to get to the top-side of the mountainous cliff-face, and it fell upon him to gather supplies each day. He would frequently explore the untamed wilds on the mountainous island, and found it quite easy to gather fish with a wooden pole in the small inlet at the base of the hill— the only one he could observe due to the size of the cliff faces, and how large the island was.

On the sixth day of their residing on the island, Anakin had emerged from the underside of the mountainous formation, and stopped at the top of a small trail leading up to it. Down, quite a long distance away, sailing into the inlet was a small steel boat, billowing ugly black smoke like Coruscant’s industrial district. Frowning to himself, Anakin quickly rapelled down from the ledge and landed with a billow of dust.

“Ranma, Hibari– there’s others on the island. Hide everything, we have no way of knowing how dangerous these people are, and between some wooden staves and a knife, we won’t stand much chance on our own.”

Anakin, Ranma and Hibari quickly moved to pack everything away from sight, and the three sat in the dark silence of the antechamber waiting. Eventually, another set of ropes dropped where Anakin’s was, and two figures roped down from the top.

One was a portly man in his middle age, and a much shorter, younger one. Both were clad in dark red armor, and Anakin narrowed his eyes carefully.

The child didn’t have much of a Force presence— he had some, but nothing compared to the old man. He practically radiated the Force. If he had to guess, the man’s force powers weren’t too far off from Yoda or Palpatine. Most certainly a threat, but what sort of threat was the question.

“I told you, Prince Zuko,” the old man said quietly. “There is nothing here— the Air Nomads have been gone for nearly a hundred years. The Avatar, if he even survived, would have likely died a long time ago.”

“No,” Zuko said, glancing down. “There were people here,” He knelt down and observed something before his eyes darted over to the antechamber. “There, the footprints go in there.”

Anakin swore—how could he have forgotten to get rid of their footprints?

He gripped his wooden spear and breathed deeply.

‘May the Force guide me,’

He stepped out from the antechamber, it raised defensively towards the young prince.
Iroh blinked in surprise at the presence of someone— and Anakin could feel a perceptible mood shift.

“Nephew,” Iroh started, before Zuko folded his arms and looked at Anakin, clearly unafraid.

“You there, peasant,” Zuko commanded. “Where is the Avatar?”

“I wouldn’t know anything about that. How about you tell me who you are instead?” Anakin asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I am Zuko, Crown Prince of the Fire Nation. I know you’re hiding something in there,” He pointed into the antechamber.

“Nephew, please…” Iroh said, wincing.

“No.” Anakin said, simply. “Not really. And even if I was hiding something, I am not your slave, boy.”

Zuko snarled and unleashed a blast of fire at Anakin. Anakin’s very old Sith and Jedi training seemed to take over as he leapt clean over the Prince before taking his legs out from under him with a sweep of his wooden staff. Zuko fell onto the stone floor, and growled.

He climbed to his feet and launched another barrage of fireballs at Anakin, who either dodged them wholly or deflected them with The Force. This went on for a few more minutes before Iroh loudly interrupted Zuko.

“That is quite enough!” Iroh admonished his nephew, before looking at Anakin warily. “Zuko, attacking someone without justification or out of rage is more dishonorable than what you did in that war room. Keep control of yourself.”

“Wise words,” Anakin said, a hint of sorrow in his voice. “Rage is very addictive— intoxicating almost. Down that path is the Dark Side.”

“Indeed,” Iroh said, glancing at his nephew again before giving a courteous smile. “I am General Iroh. We were not aware there was anybody squatting here— these temples have been abandoned for nearly a century.”

“I can tell,” Anakin said. “No, we’re… not really squatters. Well, sort of. Tell me, General, Do you believe in… strange coincidences?”

“The spirits are almost always mischievous,” Iroh said knowingly, smiling. “I can tell you are very close to the spirits, if that is what you’re asking.”

Anakin nodded. “I am Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker,” He said, smiling a bit at calling himself again. He certainly couldn’t go about calling himself ‘Sith Lord Anakin Skywalker’, even if nobody had any idea what being *Darth Vader* meant.

“I’m afraid I don’t know of a group called the Jedi,” Iroh said, raising an eyebrow. “Must be small.”

“Not quite— like I said, if you believe in strange occurrences, me and my two friends were sent here from different universes.”

Iroh blinked and nodded. “Anything’s possible when the spirits decide to be mischievous. But you surely understand it is a bit doubtful that you can be from another universe?”
“I come from a place called Tatooine, and my two friends in there,” Anakin said with a gesture to the antechamber. “They are from a place called Earth. The Jedi Order was a monastic group, whom practiced a philosophical doctrine in relation to a concept called ‘The Force’.”

“Fascinating,” Iroh said. “Do you mind telling me what those abilities were you demonstrated when you were fighting my nephew? It was certainly not like any bending I’ve seen.”

“As I said, I am a Jedi. I was using The Force. It is a metaphysical state that exists and binds all energy in the universe together. From what I gather, your nephew was using it to create fire blasts.”

Iroh looked pensive before nodding. “Knight Skywalker, I would be honoured if you and your friends would join us for a hot meal. I imagine you have been scrounging for very little on this island.”

“We get by,” Anakin said with a shrug. “Your offer is… interesting, but we have only just met,”

“I understand your reluctance,” Iroh said, raising his hands. “Please, as honoured guests.”

Anakin hesitated, and then nodded. “That’ll work. General, do you mind if I speak to your nephew momentarily?”

“Good,” Iroh said, grinning ear to ear, before looking at his nephew whom was sulking against the wall. “Zuko, come over here.”

Zuko got to his feet and trudged over to where Anakin and Iroh were standing.

“Zuko, Knight Skywalker has something he wants to say to you.”

Anakin sighed and knelt to get closer to Zuko’s eye level. “Zuko– I understand you must be feeling very angry. Your presence in the Force is radiating it in spades. I promise you, the Dark Side is not where you want to go. It will promise you power, and success, and honor… and love, and it will let you down. You’ll become so drunk on it you won’t realize you’re killing yourself and the others you depend on.”

He rose to his feet, looking distant.

“Trust me,” He said, faintly.

Zuko was still scowling, and simply turned away from him and made to climb up the ropes back to the surface.

“I apologize for my nephew’s curtness. He is… dealing with some issues from home,” Iroh said, frowning. “I will see you this evening, Knight Skywalker.” Iroh then made his way to the ropes, and disappeared up the pulley, leaving Anakin alone once again. He sighed and turned to face the opening to the antechamber.

“You can come out, you two,” He said quietly, and Ranma and Hibari both emerged.

“I coulda taken that twerp,” Ranma muttered, looking offended, and folding his arms across his chest.

“Yes, but I’d rather not put a child in harm’s way, Ranma,” Anakin chided. “You’ll have your chance should they challenge us on their ship– but I doubt the older man is going to be that stupid. He knew what I was capable of,” He said, his eyes growing distant again.
Visions of a past long buried surfaced, and Anakin blinked them away.

“Now,” Anakin said, pursing his lips. “They’re inviting us onto their ship, but something I always believed during the Clone Wars was to never trust the unknown. But, given I was always called the Hero With No Fear on the holocrons, I think we’ll manage.”

He looked thoughtful for a moment. “I don’t have an army of droids, or a lightsaber, but what I do have is tactics… so here’s what we’re going to do…”

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Iroh stood pensively next to his nephew as the elder of the three squatters began to climb the gangplank. It was here that Iroh could fully appraise the man who duelled his nephew. On the surface, the man seemed quite unassuming. But Iroh could tell, underneath the surface, the man was a practical typhoon of power, waves of it radiating off his very existence.

“Welcome,” Iroh greeted fondly, clasping Anakin’s hand. “Knight Skywalker and companions. As promised, you will be our honoured guests while you’re aboard our ship.”

“I hope you understand our recalcitrance to trust, General,” Anakin said, a slight tone of deference in his voice. “We are strangers in this land, and your ship and soldiers can be… quite intimidating.”

“I give you my word, Knight Skywalker, you and your charges will not be harmed while aboard this ship. Why don’t you join us for some tea before we have supper?” Iroh asked, smiling serenly.

Anakin nodded, before smiling. “You say you’re a General? Perhaps we can exchange stories. I have quite a few to tell of my time in the Clone Wars.”

Anakin regaled some of his adventures as a General in the Grand Army of the Republic over jasmine tea, as well as a dinner portion of fluffy white rice and roast duck. A lot of his memories of his time in the GAR had gone— replaced with the tyranny he’d helped unleash upon the galaxy.

“I’m going to bed,” Prince Zuko had nearly snarled in the middle of Anakin’s recollection of the Second Battle of Geonosis. He stormed off to wherever he slept. Anakin raised an eyebrow at the young man’s demeanour.

“Is he always like that?” He asked.

Iroh sighed. “Yes,” He said, picking at his food. “The boy has a lot of pent-up anger, and I blame my brother for it. He has done nothing but torment the boy since he was born,”

Iroh began to then tell Anakin the story of his family’s own history—the conquest of the world, and his brother’s web of intrigue to have him supplanted as Crown Prince, and the implication that he was involved in the death of Fire Lord Azulon and his own wife, Ursa.

Anakin felt a pang of sympathy for Zuko. He remembered all too well the death of his mother (and the death of Padmé for that matter) and how both incidents nearly drove him mad with grief.

“The world is out of balance,” Anakin murmured. “You said the air nomads are extinct,”

“That is the rumour,” Iroh said with a sigh. “The last Avatar would have been an Air Nomad, but he has not been seen in over a century, and my brother has insisted that my nephew redeem himself by doing what has been to this point impossible.”
“Your nephew and his problems…” Anakin began, thinking. “They’re familiar to me.”

“How so?” Iroh asked, sipping his tea.

“When I was freed from slavery,” Anakin began, noticing Iroh’s wince. “the Jedi took me to their temple on Coruscant. The process of becoming a Jedi was so fundamentally opposed to who I was. I had to forgo emotional attachment, but I couldn’t.”

He sighed and looked pensive. “I was so afraid of losing the love of my life that I allowed my anger and frustrations to consume me. It didn’t help I was having visions put into my head by an evil man with the intent of corrupting me, but… I have made a lot of mistakes.”

Iroh breathed in and out, before nodding solemnly.

“Now I begin to understand the feelings that radiate from you, Knight Skywalker. You are seeking balance like us all, aren’t you?”

“I think so,” Anakin said quietly, taking another drink. “I was sent here by my former master to help bring balance to this world.”

Iroh nodded sagely, stroking his beard. “It is unwise to say such things in front of a Fire Nation general.”

Anakin stared at the old man, his eyes narrowed, before Iroh raised a hand.

“I would not be so stupid as to believe I could take you on in a fight, it would destroy the ship and likely kill everyone on it,” Iroh said simply. “But I am not just a Fire Nation general,”

He dug around his pocket and placed a small circular wooden chit on the table between them. The chit was decorated with a large white flower.

“As Grandmaster of the Order of the White Lotus, I am perhaps exactly the person whom you should speak to. Knight, I would be honored if you joined us for a game of pai sho tonight. It will certainly be a fascinating game.”
The Western Air Temple

Chapter Notes

Just as a general note: This is actually the first time I've written a full fanfiction for Star Wars OR ATLA-- it's gonna be rough, it's gonna be kinda questionable in places. I'm tryin' my best but I'm just a tired girl with no money and no time to do things. Enjoy it for what it is, though!

That evening, Anakin found himself sitting on the dimly lit bridge, in the company of General Iroh, the helmsman, and a small selection of the ship's crewmen.

Pai sho was an incredibly fascinating game to Anakin. It reminded him slightly of some of the more cerebral strategy games the old Jedi had played before the Empire.

He patiently watched as General Iroh single-handedly demolished the other players raking in a small pile of angular copper and silver coins, with a stylized flame etched into them. After sliding his small collection into a pouch, the General's face took on a serious and solemn expression.

"Now that our game is concluded, on to business," He said crisply. "Gentlemen, I'd like to introduce you to Knight Anakin Skywalker."

There were murmurings of welcome and Anakin bowed his head in respect to the men in the room.

"Can we trust him, General?" The helmsman said, warily eyeing Anakin.

"We just picked these people up in one of the old air temples-- how can we know they won't sell us for a hot meal? Or to get into the Fire Lord's good graces?" The helmsman asked, cocking an eyebrow in concern.

Iroh nodded serenely and took a sip of tea.

"That is a real concern," He said. "We don't know. But the way Knight Skywalker was willing to talk Prince Zuko down despite him being a far superior opponent, and the passion in which he defended his two charges, and the way his presence seems to sing with spiritual energy... I have faith that we can trust him, regardless of his past. To that end, he and I have been talking, and we believe it's time to make our move."

"Our move? Are you genuinely suggesting we turn our back on the Fire Nation?" One of the crewmen said in a low voice. "General, that was just us shooting the shit over booze-- it's treason! They'll have us all strung up for that!"

"So, we won't allow them to catch us," Iroh said, raising an eyebrow. "We'll keep up the illusion of business as usual, sailing the ocean in search of the Avatar-- because that's what we're doing. The Fire Lord and his band of cronies doesn't need to know about our true intentions."

The confused expressions had Iroh sighing heavily. "I have no intentions of changing the particular mission parameter my brother set for Prince Zuko. But instead of handing him over to my brother, we help him restore balance." He explained.
Murmuring erupted through the small group, before the helmsman chimed in.

"Is everyone onboard willing to go along with this?" The helmsman said, looking serious.

"I specifically chose all of you due to our past connections as members of the Order of the White Lotus, and some of the field reports I was given about your... recalcitrance to support the embargo of the non-occupied portions of the Earth Kingdom. As it is, our ship has a skeleton crew-- there's maybe one or two people who will need convincing, other than that, we should be quite well-positioned right now." Iroh said, shrugging.

"When are we doing it?" The helmsman asked, looking contemplative.

"Once we visit the next port-of-call, we'll gather supplies, weapons, food, and once we've set off, we'll set the plan into motion."

There were murmurings of agreement, before Iroh looked at Anakin.

"What do you think, Knight Skywalker?"

"I think it will work, but I must profess I don't know much about the internal mechinations of your people," Anakin said, nodding. "I'm glad we're going to a port-of-call, though. I've got a small shopping list I'd like to gather, if you don't mind, General?"

"Of course not," Iroh said. "We'll be heading east of here tonight, and hopefully within a day or two we'll arrive to the colonies and be able to get supplies from the Hu Xin provinces. Even if the colonies are ostensibly safe, I would exercise caution--particularly for you and your charges."

...  
"Your Highness, please," The ship's doctor pleaded as Zuko growled at him. "I'm simply trying to clean your wound. You wouldn't want to get gangrene, would you?"

Zuko sighed and allowed the doctor to remove the bandage over his burnt eye, and gently apply the salve and balms needed to soothe the burning skin. While the doctor was busy, the large iron door opened and the man from the temple entered, concern etched across his face.

"What do you want?" Zuko nearly spat at the man, who looked at him with a serenity that made Zuko want to vomit.

"Of course, you are, anger is a valid emotion." Anakin said, gently sitting down at the edge of the medical cot. "Once you're done here with the doctor, Prince Zuko, I should like to spar with you."

"Spar? With me?" Zuko said, surprised. "But... you don't bend? Why do you want to spar with me?"

"Hmm," Anakin said, before smiling knowingly. "Fifteen minutes, Prince Zuko. On the deck--your uncle will be there and will officiate."

"Uh," Zuko seemed at a loss for words, the fire in his hostility snuffed out. "Okay..."

Fifteen minutes later, the doctor having felt satisfied enough that Zuko's eye was clean and
wouldn't become infected, Zuko was now standing on the deck of the ship, staring at the older man who was talking to the two teenagers who had come aboard the ship with him, as well as his Uncle. Anakin turned to see him and gave a nod. He handed his cup of tea to Zuko's uncle and walked to the centre of the deck.

"Prince Zuko," He said, smiling. "I would like to see your firebending in action. We will duel briefly."

He accepted a wooden staff from Iroh and took his stance. Zuko breathed in and took a punch, a stream of fire flying towards Anakin. The Jedi swung his staff, and the fire deflected, ricocheting off into the ocean. Zuko went on the offensive, his attacks being quickly dispatched by the master. He barely got started before the Jedi got close enough to sweep Zuko off his feet and pin him to the deck.

"What?!" Zuko said, giving a frustrated look at the Jedi. "How could you do that so easily?"

"Again," was all Anakin replied with, before standing up and walking back to his original position. Zuko growled and went on the offensive again, this time trying to avoid Anakin's foot sweeping. However, as Zuko tried to close the gap himself, he found himself grappled and tossed onto his back by the Jedi. Stunned, Zuko let out a wheeze before Anakin nodded.

"You allow your anger to blind you, Zuko!" Anakin said firmly, glancing down at the teenager. He helped the young man to his feet before dusting him off. "Anger will give you power, but it will burn you out quicker. You need to find a new emotion to channel your power through."

Zuko stared at the man. "Why are you doing this?"

"Because I don't want you to fall," Anakin said, his eyes flashing iridescent gold, not too dissimilar from Zuko's own eyes, but with more fire behind it than the young man had ever seen in his life.

Zuko staggered backwards as Anakin took in a deep breath and allowed the Dark to bleed off, his eyes returning to their usual aqua blue.

"Anger and frustration got the better of me," Anakin said, his voice thick with emotion. "and it cost me everything. I lost the love of my life, my children, and eventually my life. My freedom. I became a slave to the darkness. I won't let the same happen to you, Zuko. You're only a child, it shouldn't... be this way for you."

Zuko didn't say anything before Anakin sighed and shook his head.

"You're young," He said wistfully with a smile. "You've got so much change to go through before you're an adult, but you need to know now that wallowing in self-pity over what happened will not fix things-- and will not make your father love you any more than he already does."

Zuko scowled at the sudden mention of his father. "What do you know about my father?"

"I don't, but I've known men like your father in my life. Self-serving and power-hungry. They seek unlimited power and will cut down anybody who stands in their way-- at any cost."

"Prince Zuko," Iroh said, stepping forward. "There is nobody who knows my brother better than I do. Knight Skywalker is not lying about Fire Lord Ozai."

Memories from Zuko's past filtered forward, gently guided by the conversation at hand. It had been before his mother's disappearance, before his exile, his father had been boasting about one of
Azula's accomplishments at the academy, her... natural prowess as a firebender. Zuko remembered feeling jealous, and trying to declare his worth... and getting nowhere. The contempt on his father's face was haunting, and the words that followed even more so.

"Your sister was born lucky," Ozai had told him. "You were merely lucky to be born,"

Zuko blinked back some tears that had formed from the memory of his father and stared at his uncle.

"What do I do now, Uncle?" He asked, his voice cracking.

"Come here," Iroh said, before accepting his nephew in a hug.

"Zuko," Anakin said quietly. "I want you to take your anger, your frustration, your resentment. Those feelings you have for your father and your sister. I want you to take them, ball them up as much as you can, and release them into the spirits. Let them flow away."

Zuko, still wrapped in a hug from Iroh, closed his eyes and took in a deep breath. He held it for a moment before exhaling. The boy visibly sagged against his uncle.

"Uncle, I'm kinda tired," Zuko said weakly, his eyes still closed.

"Of course, Prince Zuko. Get some rest. A young man needs his rest," Iroh said with a fond nod. "We'll be here when you awake, and then Anakin and I will discuss with you our next move."

"Alright," Zuko said meekly, before slowly ambling down the stairs.

"Hey, Zuko, wait up!" Ranma said, dashing past Anakin and Iroh before coming to the prince's side. "You look like you could use some help, buddy," Ranma said, before Hibari quickly flanked the other side of the young prince.

"Yeah!" She said, smiling. Zuko returned a weak smile, and the trio of teenagers descended into the interior of the ship.

"You're a very wise man, Anakin," Iroh said with a smile. "I haven't been able to get my nephew to let go like that."

"The Force is a powerful thing, and emotions can guide you into some of the worst places. He's going to still feel resentment towards his father and his sister... and he's still going to hurt so much, but he'll heal." Anakin said quietly, before breathing in the sea air.

"I think fate is trying to tell me something," Anakin said dryly.

"What's that?" Iroh asked, glancing at his new friend.

Anakin laughed, and smiled. "I think I'm going to have to restart the Jedi Order. The Force here is hurting-- maybe I can help heal the wounds."

Iroh nodded once, before turning towards the stairs. "Come with me, Knight Skywalker. Let's have some tea. Perhaps you can tell me more about the Jedi Order."

... Ranma and Hibari sat quietly in Zuko's chambers, watching the young teenager sleep soundly.

"What do you make of all this, Ranma-kun?" Hibari asked innocently, glancing at her companion
"There's a lot of really dumb stuff goin' on here," Ranma murmured, massaging the bridge of his nose. "These folks seem like they're real good martial artists, which is nice, but I feel completely lost. I kinda miss Pops. He may have been an asshole, but he was my asshole, if that makes sense."

"I understand completely-- I feel the same way about my family. Daddy was always mean about me and being who I am, but I still loved him. Besides, who's going to take over the clan once he's gone?"

"The clan?" Ranma asked, blinking in surprise.

"Yeah-- uh, Daddy's an oyabun!" She said, sheepishly.

"You're Yakuza?" Ranma asked, slack jawed. "No wonder you know your way around a knife. I just thought you were talented with knives, but fuck..."

"I hope this doesn't change how you feel about me, Ranma," She said, her eyebrows furrowing. "I don't enjoy hurting people, if that makes you feel any better."

"I mean, of course it doesn't. It's just kinda jarring to learn, that's all." He looked away and looked pensive. "Besides, if we're in a strange world, it might not be a bad idea to know some of the shit Yakuza thugs know... I haven't had a buncha encounters with the Yakuza, but I've had more than my fair share of run-ins with the Triads thanks to Pops. Those dudes don't joke."

"No, they don't," Hibari said simply, before shrugging. "I'm sure this world has a criminal underground. You're right, knowing how to be a Yakuza boss can come in handy... but I don't want to be a Yakuza boss."

She shrugged. "Don't get me wrong, there's a lot of great perks that go along with it, but that's just not what I wanna do with my life."

"I get it," Ranma said with a nod. "Well, we're not in Japan anymore. You can be whatever you wanna be, ya don't have to be a Yakuza oyabun here."

"I'll keep that in mind," Hibari said warmly, grinning at her new friend. "Where in Japan are you from?"

"I don't remember much about when I was a kid," Ranma said with a furrowed brow. "Pops dragged me off for martial arts trainin' when I was just a sprout, and so I've been bouncin' all around Japan for years. I... sort of remember these big canals that ran through the neighbourhood I grew up in before we left."

"No way," Hibari said, gasping. "You're from Nerima too?"

"Nerima... that sounds familiar. I think that's it," Ranma said, nodding. "But I spent most of my life before we went to China livin' the nomadic life. The most time I spent anywhere was Setagaya for a time when I was in Middle School, and then Osaka for a bit. I had a friend there; he was a nice guy."

"Was he?" Hibari asked. "What was he like?"

"He was just like me in a lotta ways, loud, brash, kicked butt. He was my best friend-- his name was... Ucchan, I think, it's been so long I've forgotten most of what I remember. We... left one day with his Pops' okonomiyaki cart. Ukyo was gonna come with us, but Pops told me to not worry
about it. I remember feelin' real hurt. But I dunno, after..."

A shiver passed down Ranma's spine. "... something happened, and I don't remember much from when I was a kid no more."

Hibari grimaced at the way Ranna shivered. She decided to not approach that topic for fear of offending her new friend, and simply rubbed his back.

"It'll be alright, Ranma. Everything'll be fine," She said soothingly.

...

Zuko's eyes opened, and he took in a deep breath. His lungs ached, his head hurt, and he was drenched in sweat. He managed to sit up in his cot and looked around the room. The familiar faces of the two kids who'd come aboard the ship with the 'Jedi Knight' were sleeping on chairs, leaning against each other. Zuko swung himself over, and his feet met the cold metal floor.

He stood up, wobbling a bit as his balance nearly betrayed him. Putting on slippers, he made his way up to the deck of the ship, where Iroh and Anakin were once more standing together, staring at the rising sun as it began to appear over the horizon.

"Prince Zuko," Iroh said without having to look. "Come, join us."

Zuko quietly approached and accepted the cup of tea from Iroh. He looked at the dark liquid intently for a moment before begrudgingly taking a sip of it. After a minute, he looked at the two men.

"Why do I feel so sick?" Zuko asked, his voice hoarse and wavering.

"Because you're letting go of your anger and your body and spirit is responding," Iroh said with a smile. "Come, this is no place for a young man to catch his death. Let's go down to the mess."

The two older men escorted Zuko down to the mess hall and sat him on one of the benches. Anakin took up a position across from Zuko and was joined by Iroh. Zuko sighed loudly.

"Prince Zuko, listen to me," Iroh said firmly. "I will always love you. You are my nephew, and I will never abandon you. Do you understand that?"

Zuko nodded. "I just... I just don't know why my father doesn't love me,

"Zuko, our family has, for longer than I would care to remember, valued hate and anger over maturity. Your sister is perhaps the best example of the family's lunacy made manifest."

"Azula," Zuko said contemplatively, before nodding. "Father always did like her more."

"Because she was aggressive, perfectionist, and ruthless. You are none of those things without being forced to be," Iroh observed. "You are much like your mother... and, should you learn discipline and allow yourself to let go of fear and anger, your great-grandfather."

"Great-grandfather... Fire Lord Sozin was the one who started the war? Wasn't he just as ruthless as Azula, and my father?"
"Remember that you have two great-grandparents, Zuko," Iroh sniffed. "It was no mistake that your mother was plucked out of a small Fire Nation village to marry your father. I remember sitting in on the discussions about whom Prince Ozai should marry. Remember, I was the Crown Prince once."

He looked distant. "Your mother was chosen because her grandfather was an important man, and they felt that all the children of such a union would have unbelievable power. Your great-grandfather is Avatar Roku."

"What?" Zuko asked, blinking in surprise.

"Oh yes," Iroh said with a nod.

"How is that possible?" Zuko asked in disbelief. "Avatar Roku lived over a hundred years ago!"

"It is uncommon, but not impossible for women to have children much later in life. Ta Min had your grandmother when she was 67-- and then your grandmother had your mother when she was 62."

"Huh," Zuko said idly. "I guess that makes sense."

"Our plans haven't changed that much, Prince Zuko," Iroh said calmly. "We are still going to go looking for the Avatar, but not to bring him back to the capital city in chains--"

"--we're going to help him restore balance to the four nations," Zuko said.

"Yes," Iroh said fondly, smiling. "The world should be at peace, you know-- a century of war has done untold horrors to every nation, including our own. We should strive to be more like the first carriers of fire, not the destructive warmongering fools we've turned into."

After scraping together some breakfast for Zuko, the young Prince returned to his quarters and fell back asleep--he slept off and on for a couple days after that, only rising long enough to put something on his stomach.

On the third day, he awoke feeling much better than he had since he'd been exiled. Climbing out of bed, he noticed Ranma once again sleeping in his room, having been keeping watch overnight.

A glimmer of mischief appeared in Zuko's eyes before he gently nudged the foreign boy. Ranma's slate eyes popped open and he looked at the Prince.

"Zuko? Good to see ya back among the living, bud," Ranma said tiredly, yawning. "What's up?"

"You said you're a good martial artist?"

"The best!" Ranma proclaimed with a cheeky grin.

"I want to practice with you on the deck," Zuko said. "If that's alright."

"Yeah, sure, I need to keep up my katas anyway-- Pops would find a way to cross the different dimensions and kill me if I didn't. I'll meet ya on the deck in ten minutes, lemme go get some grub."

Ten minutes later, Ranma was walking Zuko through several Anything Goes katas on the deck of the ship, with Iroh (who often spent his mornings on the deck watching the horizons, as there was very little else to do) watching their sparring with piqued interest.
"The purpose of Anything Goes Martial Arts is to make your opponent unable to read your moves," Ranma said with a nod to his partner. "My Pops' school is mostly based on a mix of aerial styles--we combine a buncha martial arts styles from back home." He went through a fluid combo of punches and kicks, and Iroh nodded appreciatively.

He guided Zuko through a few combos, and the young man was quite an adept learner of this new strategy.

"If you combine this with your firebending, you'd probably be able to take on almost anyone, though I'm pretty sure Anakin n' your uncle'd still kick your ass."

"I don't doubt that," Zuko said calmly as he went through Ranma's kata once again. "I can teach you some of the basics of our style of fighting, if you want," He said, glancing at the older boy.

Ranma grinned. "I'm always happy to learn another martial art. I can't shoot fire from my fingers like you can, Zuko, but I'm no slouch with my punches."

Once Zuko had finished following Ranma's kata, Zuko lead Ranma through the typical basic exercises of rudimentary firebending. After a couple hours of the back and forth, there was a sudden horn from the bridge tower.

"Dead ahead! We're approaching the bay!" The helmsman cried out, and from beyond a rocky outcropping, the inlet of a bay, and subsequently, the heart of the Hu Xin provinces appeared before them.

"Ah, we're arriving," Iroh said fondly. "Prince Zuko, Ranma, why don't you two go freshen up while I take care of the docking procedures?"

"Yes, Uncle," Zuko said with a nod before gesturing for Ranma to follow. Ranma followed the prince down into the interior of the ship, and Iroh grinned to himself. He was quite pleased to see his nephew's change in demeanour, and his befriending a child of similar age. Maybe there was hope for his nephew after all!

After dealing with the docking procedure, and the annoying bureaucrats who wanted to pay their respects to the great General Iroh (while making back-handed comments about the disgraced traitor Prince), Iroh patiently waited for the party of people to be prepared to enter town.

Anakin was the first to emerge from the interior of the ship and accepted an offered bag of coins from Iroh.

"I doubt I'll need all of this, but thank you, General." Anakin said, smiling as Ranma and Hibari emerged from the ship, wearing Fire Nation attire, nothing indicating nobility, but certainly something that would allow them to pass unmolested through town.

One of Anakin's first stops was a garment shop in the marketplace, and he turned to face Ranma and Hibari.

"Go ahead and grab what you'd like to have, we'll meet at the merchant's counter in twenty minutes," He said firmly. "Make sure you grab a range of things, not just what immediately catches your eye. We're going to be in multiple climates."

The kids dashed off to search through the garment piles for clothes they liked, and Anakin went back to looking through certain fabric swatches. He had an idea forming in the back of his head and wanted to see it done properly.
When the trio of inter-dimensional travelers returned to the ship some time later, Iroh was quite surprised at their change in appearance. Anakin was wearing long black overcoat, maroon long-sleeved tunic and grey trousers with a utility belt. The blonde girl was dressed in very bright red tunic and white trousers and radiated a certain amount of confidence. And the young man who was with them was wearing a jet-black jacket, decorated in elaborate dragon embossing, with dark red trousers and black slippers. Altogether, they looked like they fit into this world, but were distinct.

"We should have more than enough clothes to travel the world with," Anakin said with a slight smile. "I'm sure there will be more ports of call later,"

"Yes, but some may not be in friendly waters," Iroh said quietly. "Nobody dares impede the Fire Nation, but... there are still those who resist."

"As they should," Anakin replied.

"Yes," Iroh agreed. "But there is still some danger to our mission. We will still be sailing on a ship flying the war banner of the Fire Nation. It is entirely possible we may face members of the other two remaining nations in their mission to stymie the war effort and keep the Fire Nation from total victory in the war."

"General, I have been in far worse situations than that, believe me," Anakin said tiredly, thinking back to the blood he'd spilled in his rage at the galaxy. "This will be nothing if not a breeze."

Sitting alone in his spartan quarters onboard the Fire Navy vessel, Anakin was going over his plans, and the reality of the situation he found himself in. He was actually going to rebuild the Jedi Order on this world-- Darth Vader, the enforcer of Darth Sidious, was going to restore the Jedi Order and all that it entailed.

However, Anakin was already ruminating on the failures of the last Jedi Order he encountered. The concepts of separating young children from their families, shutting off Force users from emotion and passion, and subsequently seeking a paramount monasticism were not going to work. The memories were long worn-away, and fuzzy, but Anakin recalled the core tenements of the Jedi Order from his early days as a Padawan.

*There is no emotion, there is peace.*

Anakin's personal experiences didn't quite agree with that. Emotion was everywhere, the universe practically bled the kriffing stuff. Peace too, was never a guarantee-- and was almost never a constant thing, unless you were flush with enough credits to live in a place that was practically untouchable. Once you strayed beyond Coruscant or Corellia, into the Inner Rim and beyond, peace was never at hand. Between the Trade Federation's war with Naboo when he was a child, to the Clone Wars he fought so hard in, to the Galactic Empire and the constant whack-a-womp running around trying to hunt down the Rebel Alliance and the last of the Jedi.

Peace didn't exist because of the Force-- Peace existed because some people tried their best to instill it in a troubled galaxy. But where that lead was a troubled question Anakin didn't feel like answering. Negative peace in the form of the Empire he'd help foster and grow... or positive peace,
where nobody died and planets weren't blown into rock and ash.

Personal peace often came from emotional stability. Depriving a child of their mother, or depriving a person of their loved one would never instill personal peace into a being. All it would do is breed hatred and resentment-- Anakin knew from kriffing experience on that one.

There is no ignorance, there is knowledge.

Anakin couldn't find much fault in this. Ignorance was an easy way to get yourself killed-- misunderstanding a situation, not reading a room, falling into an obvious trap or honeypot... all these things were far too easy to do if you weren't knowledgable. However, Anakin did recognize that knowledge was a dangerous thing at times. The Sith holocrons and the knowledge that men like Sidious, Yoda, and Dooku held could cause untold suffering-- and it often did. Being wise and precise was a much better way of going about things than blind zeal for knowledge.

There is no passion, there is serenity.

Another conflicting line that Anakin didn't quite fathom. Passion and serenity did not have to be linear opposites. Passion could draw someone to do great deeds of valor and kindness, and could feed into serenity in feeling content about one's lot in life, the work they did to better all people, and extending charity and kindness to all. Finding a symbiosis of the two would be best, Anakin thought carefully-- he'd have to reword that.

There is no chaos, there is harmony.

Chaos begat harmony. Harmony begat chaos.

"It's like that girl Hibari said," Anakin murmured quietly to himself. "Yin-yang. Balancing dark and light. Night and day."

Why didn't they think about this during the Republic? Stupid Jedi...

There is no death, there is the Force.

This line was not something Anakin wanted to approach right now. Clearly death was just one big joke to the Force, and particularly to highly competent masters of the Force, and the idea of Sidious' shadow running around causing mayhem back home was not something Anakin wanted to consider in the slightest.

Thinking over the Jedi Code and the implications it had in his youth, and how he could apply it to new youth, made him briefly consider the other code that dictated his life. The Sith code was very... complicated. Through passion you gain strength, through strength you gain power, through power you gain victory, and through victory you break the chains.

The Force could free you from your bondage, but the Sith code was... insidious. Hah. Sidious. Ironic.

"I need to bridge the two together and create something that doesn't encourage endless carnage and surrendering to your weakest and most base of emotions... but also not encourage people to be like the Jedi from back home," Anakin said to himself, thinking. If Yoda were here, he'd likely lecture Anakin on meddling with the Jedi Code that has been passed down from council to council over thousands of years-- He doubted Obi-Wan and Mace Windu's responses would be any different.

The Emperor would probably encourage him to corrupt the youth and create a new Empire here on this little world. The framework was certainly already prepared, the Fire Nation fed itself through
the same sort of Dark Side bantha shit that the Galactic Empire had.

Anakin, however, very specifically refused to succumb to that he’d done enough mindless murder and genocide for several lifetimes thank you very much you deformed lightning fetishist Sith bastard.

Putting aside the theological and philosophical things, Anakin would have to do his best to teach them kata-- he actually thought about enlisting Ranma’s help in developing new kata based on the weapons available to them. There were no lightsabers here, and the chances of him being able to engineer one any time soon was slim. He could probably build one using some basic metals given the quality of the ship he was sitting in-- but he’d need a replacement for the kyber crystal.

There were just too many things to deal with right now.
It hadn’t taken many days before Zuko had folded back up on himself. The various crewmen of the Tanai had tried to avoid their pint-sized commanding officer as much as possible, as he seemed intent on being on the warpath and voicing his clear displeasure at everyone’s very existence. Nobody quite understood what had set the young prince off and brought him back to his surly self.

Iroh sighed and let the steel door of the interior of the ship close behind him, smothering the pubescent rantings of Prince Zuko as he harangued one of the patrolling lieutenants for some innocuous offense. He rubbed the bridge of his nose to offset an oncoming headache and looked to see one of the young interdimensional visitors on the deck of the ship, staring out into the ocean.

“A copper piece for your thoughts, young Ranma?” Iroh asked as he approached the morose looking redhead.

Ranma glanced over at him and shrugged. “Just feelin’ a little homesick, I guess. I never thought I’d miss my shitty old man so much until he was gone.”

“For better or worse, he’s your father?” Iroh suggested, and Ranma fixed him with a look.

“You too, huh?”

Iroh nodded. “My father was Fire Lord Azulon. I made him quite proud with my accomplishments. I became the Dragon of the West, and laid siege to Ba Sing Se, the largest city in the Earth Kingdom. But his love turned to scorn and contempt as soon as my humanity shone through the perfect prince he’d come to expect.”

Ranma nodded. “My Pops is kinda the same way. He wanted me to be a man among men, the best martial artist on Earth. I’ve been travelin’ with him for so long, I forgot what home looked like. I even forgot my own Ma.”

Iroh nodded quietly, looking pensive. “I understand your pain... ultimately, my father willed my brother be his successor upon his death bed—a death that I still find very suspicious to this very day,” He said quietly.

Ranma nodded. She scratched at her neck and looked at Iroh again. “There’s... also something else that’s bothering me. You... you guys have been very trusting of us so far, almost... friendly. Why?”

Iroh’s eyes didn’t move from the azure horizon. “When my son, Lu Ten, died in the Battle of Ba Sing Se,”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Ranma said with a frown.

“It’s been many years since then, I’ve... come to terms with it,” Iroh said, shaking his head. “But
when it happened—I was shattered. When I saw his cold, unmoving body, realizing we’d never get to go home again together…” He trailed off, looking haunted. It took Iroh a moment to find himself again.

“I realized the spiritual cost of the war that the Fire Nation had unleashed on our world. Is there merit to the abolition of the Earth Kingdom, and the deconstruction of the caste-driven societies that dot the landscape there? Perhaps, but not at the expense of a century of genocide and destruction that irrevocably damages the very fabric of our world.”

Iroh took a deep breath, and he exhaled a burst of fire, causing the young martial artist to jump a bit in shock.

“Regardless, I have since taken the view that Agni has chosen Zuko and I to pay penance,” He said firmly, with a nod.

“Penance?” Ranma asked, confused.

“Ah… we are to pay for what our nation has done. Through loss, struggle, and growth, if that makes sense.”

“Ah,” Ranma replied, nodding.

“I have been thinking since we left the capital city about how to go about doing this… and when we discovered you three in that Air Temple, I realized this presented an immense opportunity. Your companion, Anakin, he positively radiates spiritual energy—as do you and your blonde friend, to a great degree. Together, I have a very deep feeling that all three of you can play an important role in restoring balance.”

“But to restore balance, we need that Avatar guy,” Ranma replied, looking at the elderly general.

“Yes, the Avatar is essential to balancing out the world… I hope the Spirits will guide us in our mission to find him. But it won’t be easy, he’s been missing for a century,”

“General, we’ll find this Avatar guy. I’m Ranma Saotome, and Ranma Saotome don’t ever lose.”

Iroh simply smiled at the young woman. “Would you care for some tea, Ranma?”

The young redhead brightened considerably and nodded. “Please!”

…

The blonde Yakuza heiress covered her ears as she heard the young prince of the Fire Nation pass by again, screeching at another non-commissioned officer. As he passed by the door to her quarters once again, she grabbed him by the collar and yanked him over the threshold.

“How dare you touch me like that, you peasant!” Zuko screeched, but Hibari had an iron grip on his shirt, and he eventually stopped resisting.

“Now that you’ve stopped throwing your temper tantrum,” Hibari said dryly, she gently pulled him over to a chair and dropped him in it. “You’re going to tell me what’s bothering you.”

“You wouldn’t understand,” Zuko said, visibly scowling.

“I wouldn’t understand a kid like you having daddy issues?” Hibari asked with a raised eyebrow. “Perhaps I should tell ya the story of the day I turned six,”
“So, for background knowledge since you aren’t Japanese,” Hibari began, staring at the prince’s golden eyes with her blue ones. “The Yakuza are a group of criminal gangs that exist all over Japan. We generally aren’t very nice people—many Yakuza oyabun and enforcers I know have killed a lot of people.”

She looked away from the prince for a moment. “So, my sixth birthday. This was back when Mom was still around, and she did her best to shield me from what Daddy did for a living. But at my sixth birthday party, he decided that I was now old enough to be part of the family business.”

“Come on, son,” She said, imitating a slurring baritone. “It’s time you finally see what your old pops does, and what you’ll do some day.”

“Our driver took us to this warehouse in Taito,” Hibari continued, looking haunted. “Inside was this man. This man… he had gotten into some debt and couldn’t repay what was owed. Millions of yen—which is a lot of money where I come from. When we got there, he was… covered in blood, his ear had been sliced off, and he was pouring it by the buckets from the hole.”

She shook her head. “Reiko, the enforcer who picked me up from school every day, pulled out this little tiny pistol—a pistol is a weapon that launches projectiles using gunpowder, if that makes sense to you. Think of a mini cannon, or something—and handed it off to Daddy,” Hibari stopped and took a deep breath.

“Daddy simply walks up to the guy and puts a bullet clean through his head. The man was dead before he hit the ground. I was six and I had the fortune to watch my father summarily execute a man for not paying his debt.”

She shook her head in disgust. “My father never acknowledged that I was his daughter—he preferred to find ways to force me to be a man, and he drank sake all the time, burying himself in liquor to forget his dead wife, and all the unsanctioned corpses he left behind as an oyabun.”

Zuko looked properly terrified and nodded.

“Trust me, kid, if there’s anybody who’ll understand what it means to come from a royally fucked up family, it’s me,” Hibari finished, her eyes shaded with a lot of emotions.

“Today’s the second anniversary since my Mom disappeared,” Zuko said, his eyes beginning to tear up. “She woke me up one night, hugged me, told me never to forget who I was… and stuff. I think about what she said a lot.”

Hibari swept across the room and hugged the young prince tightly. “I’m sorry to hear that Zuko.”

“She’s out there somewhere. The only thing I want to do more than find the Avatar is find her. Maybe once I bring the Avatar back to Father, he’ll revoke my banishment and I can go find her,” Zuko said into Hibari’s blouse, tears freely falling.

Somehow, Hibari doubted that Zuko’s father would ever do that. From the second-hand impressions she’d gotten from both Iroh and Zuko, he seemed like the kind of man her father would toast. Domineering and driven for perfectionism and idealism, refusing anything that deviated from the norm.

She sighed and hugged the young prince tighter.
Meditation had been one of the only things that kept Anakin somewhat tethered to reality throughout his time as Darth Vader. And now, in this new world, it was a good way for him to focus on the things that needed addressing first and foremost.

But unfortunately, the Force here was humming with conflict. The fact that matters spiritual seemed to touch everyone in this world so deeply, along with the fact that embodiments of the balance between Light and Dark had mortal form and walked among the Earth.

Something itched at the back of his mind, about a mission he’d undertaken many years ago with Ahsoka and Obi-Wan. He’d remembered being stranded on Mortis... and then waking up back at the Jedi Temple. Neither Ahsoka nor Obi-Wan had been inclined to speak to him about the events of that day, but something in his brain nagged at him, telling him it had been much like what he was feeling now.

Finding the Avatar would be just the first step on the path to restoring balance to the Force here. The Force was coiled up, twisted and knotted in such a way that betrayed long-lasting damage. It would take concentrated effort and conscious decision to restore a balance long since upset.

Anakin sighed and gave up trying to meditate. The Force was not being conducive to relaxation right now. He cast his eyes back towards the small desk in his quarters. His journal (which he used to keep track of his thoughts, feelings, and eventual plans) was laying open, and he let out a deep sigh.

He wasn’t entirely concerned about people here being able to read it, and what he’d written down in it, unless they suddenly gained the ability to read Aurebesh.

Before he fell to the Sith, Anakin had been fluent in Amatakka (the pre-Hutt language of Tatooine shared among the slave class), Huttese, Basic (good ol’ Galactic Basic, a language used many times to scare noncoms and arrogant admirals into line with the Emperor’s policies...) and Binary (the language of droids), with him having passing conversational skill in Twileki, Togruti (learned from Ahsoka), and Nubæ (A language he’d learned from Padmé and Palpatine, both of whom spoke it more often than they spoke Basic.)

During his time as Darth Vader, he’d spoken almost exclusively Binary and Basic in public, with the occasional use of Huttese when conversing with the Hutt clans to get them to toe the Imperial line... but his private thoughts and meditations through the long and painful period of his life had been done entirely in the language of his ancestors. Small victories for him in a time laden with darkness.

It had been a deep surprise to him when he arrived on this little planet, that seemingly everyone he’d met spoke Togruti—Ranma and Hibari called it “Japanese”, and Iroh had mentioned it being “Agni City Dialect”, but to Anakin it was the very same language he’d heard Ahsoka swearing in on a regular basis when something went wrong on a missions.

At least, this was the case until they’d arrived in the Hu Xin provinces (or Akatsuki, according to the Fire Nation maps). It seemed that in the Earth Kingdom, they spoke a different language—very similar in some respects, but utterly alien in others. A lot of the higher classes, such as the merchants and nobles, spoke both Agni City Dialect and Ba Sing Se Dialect.

Anakin only wondered how much different things were in the isolated sections of the world, the polar regions, and what the old Air Nomads sounded like before they were all killed off. He’d been a huge nerd for linguistics before his fall to the Sith, and his time here was doing wonders to rekindle that ancient love affair.
A knock on the steel door to his quarters jarred him from his thoughts, and he set the hawk-feather quill down on his journal. He waved his hand as he turned to face the door. It opened of its own volition, and General Iroh stood standing in the doorway.

“Knight Skywalker,” Iroh said with a smile. “I thought I should inform you that there has been a slight change of plans.”

“Oh?”

Anakin observed the naval chart, and the distant gray clouds. The clouds occasionally lit up bright before dying out.

“We’re not going to be able to visit the Southern Air Temple safely yet. The currents aren’t favorable, and the weather is too severe.” The helmsman, Kyou said, gesturing at their position on the map.

“What’s the plan then?” Ranma asked, looking at Kyou and Iroh.

Iroh scratched his beard and pointed to the Southern Water Tribe. “We could begin our investigation of the Southern Water Tribe instead. There are quite a few icebergs and ice floes there, so it will take time.”

“Would the Avatar have fled there?” Anakin asked, raising an eyebrow. “You said the village was effectively wiped out by now.”

“It’s possible he may be living in one of the large mountain caves near the village, though,” one of the officers contributed.

“Then, helmsman, set a course for the Southern Water Tribe,” Iroh said firmly, before grasping Anakin’s shoulder.

“General Skywalker, stay for a word, would you please?”

As the officers left the room to attend to their required duties for a change in course, Iroh waited until they’d left before nodding.

“We need to plan—I would prefer to not have to cause any damage to the Southern Water Tribe if I can help it. Even going in incognito may not work. There’s a good chance the members of the Southern tribe will recognize Akago and realize we’re Fire Nation. Then… it may turn bloody,” Iroh said, looking contemplative.

“I learned as a Jedi that sometimes the easiest missions are smaller ones. A few of us will go into the village on a small boat or something, and make contact,” Anakin suggested. “Hibari, Ranma and I will go, with one member of your party as an assistant to help us with interpreting cultural matters.”

Iroh looked contemplative before nodding. “Prince Zuko and I will remain on-board,” He said sagely. “I’ll send you with Lieutenant Yoriko. She served with the diplomatic corps before being drafted.”

“How many days will it be before we’re in range?” Anakin asked curiously.

“At least four,” Iroh said with a sniff. “We’re sailing against currents. We don’t want to overload
Yoriko shielded her eyes as she stepped out onto the deck of the Tanai. One objection to a thinly veiled ultimatum to one of the regional warlords of the Earth Kingdom and she’d been shipped off to the Royal Navy as a draftee. Her skill in the diplomatic corps was the farthest thing from useful in His Majesty’s Navy… that was, until she got stuck on the Tanai.

Her diplomatic expertise had drawn the attention of General Iroh, the Dragon of the West, and she’d been attached to the Tanai as a scribe and granted a field commission of lieutenant.

“Lieutenant,” the foreign man said with a smile, his untraceable accent lingering over his words. “I’m General Anakin Skywalker, it’s a pleasure to meet your acquaintance.”

“Likewise, General,” Yoriko said, shaking the man’s hand. “I’m Lieutenant Yoriko Otani. I was informed you wished to see me?”

“Yes, we’re going to be conducting a diplomatic mission to the Southern Water Tribe. The General and I are hoping to prevent any sort of conflict or fighting by going in a small group. You will be joining myself and my associates, and serve as our attaché, and help us negotiate a favorable settlement,” He said, his voice carrying a tone that brooked no argument. He seemed to grin sheepishly. “You can of course, decline if you so wish. The General and I won’t hold it against you.”

“It would be my honor, sir. I was in the Diplomatic Corps before I was drafted by the Navy—it will be nice to get back into my element. Guard duty and scribe-work can only be so interesting.”

“I understand completely,” Anakin said with a nod. “Once we’re prepared to set out, the four of us will board one of the lifeboats and navigate to shore, where we will then hike the remaining distance to the Water Tribe settlement.”

Four days and some change later, the Tanai was moored in the freezing waters of the South Pole, and anticipation was lingering. Anakin was packing away supplies onto the sizable wooden boat as they prepared to sail inland. Soon, Yoriko, Ranma, Hibari and Anakin were crowded onto the small boat, Ranma and Anakin rowing with ferocity towards the shoreline.

“It’s likely that the tribesmen will be able to communicate with us, but I warn you to be prepared for hostility,” Yoriko said quietly. “We’ve done quite a lot of damage to this village.”

“I understand,” Anakin said quietly, frowning.

Eventually, they reached an embankment, and disembarked. Lifting their supplies onto their backs (Ranma insisting on carrying the largest and heaviest package, claiming he was more than capable of handling it), the quartet slowly began the trudging march towards the Southern Water Tribe.

Hibari looked at Anakin. “Aren’t you freezing, Anakin?”

“No,” Anakin replied with a smile. “The Force allows me to… project a small field around me of warmth that keeps me from dealing with the freezing climate. I’d have extended it to all of you but it’s an incredibly taxing process. That, and just so we aren’t completely reliant on each other to stay together if we’re separated for whatever reason. I promise that in time, you will learn how to do it yourself.”
As they crested a small hill overlooking the Water Tribe village, they surveilled the region. The most obvious thing to notice was a nearly overturned Fire Nation vessel moored in the nearby ice field.

“I’m not even going to ask about that. Stay vigilant, all of you,” Anakin instructed quietly. “I want the three of you to stay behind me.”

Anakin proceeded ahead at a brisk pace, his robes whipping around him in the Southern breeze. As he grew closer to the small entrance quarry to the village, he found himself confronted with several men carrying spears.

“That’s close enough,” One of the men commanded, levelling his spear.

“I mean you no harm,” Anakin said quietly. “My name is Anakin Skywalker, Jedi Knight.”

The man raised his eyebrow in confusion. “What in the spirits’ name is a Jedi?”

Anakin sighed and unclipped his robe. “We are a group of monastic warriors; whose sole goal is to bring balance to The Force. I don’t believe I got your name, sir.”

“Hakoda. I’m Chief of the Southern Water Tribe.” Hakoda said, eyes narrowed. “How did you get out this far alone?”

“I am not alone, my three companions are some distance behind me, I did not wish to put them in harm’s way. Two of them are children, after all.”

Hakoda didn’t lower his spear. “I notice you speak the Agni City Dialect.” He said, though Anakin felt it was probably something closer to an accusation.

“If you believe I am a member of the Fire Nation, I promise you—I am not. I am not here to cause you any harm,” Anakin said with a smile. “Would a demonstration satisfy you, Chief?”

He looked around and pointed to a rather sizable rock a few dozen meters away. “See that rock? Watch.”

Anakin flexed his hand and willed the Force to bring the rock to him. The sizable rock took some doing, but it blew free of the snow, hurdling towards Anakin before he commanded it to stop just shy of him.

“And now,” Anakin said, before willing it with as much Force Push as he could muster. The rock careened off into the distance, the distant sound of a splash being the only indicator that it had returned to the ground.

Anakin turned and gestured to Hibari, Ranma and Yoriko, who were hiding behind a snowdrift. The three quickly began to descend the path towards the entrance to the Southern Water Tribe.

“What exactly brings you here?” Hakoda asked as he led Anakin into his village.

“I am searching for the person known as the Avatar,” Anakin said simply. “They are imperative to restoring balance in the Force.”

As they arrived in the center of the village, Anakin looked around before gesturing to Yoriko, who quickly began to unload her bag into the center of town.

“In a gesture of faith,” Anakin said to Hakoda, a smile on his lips. “I would like to gift your tribe
some supplies.”

“That’s remarkably generous of you, erm, Anakin,” Hakoda said, blinking in surprise.

“The Jedi Order commandeered a Fire Nation vessel not too long ago,” Anakin said happily. “And we’ve found it quite easy to requisition supplies that may be of better use to you and yours.”

“Impressive. It’s about time someone put a hurt on those genocidal maniacs,” Hakoda said grimly, before shaking his head. The entire village was beginning to assemble in the center of town. “Knight Skywalker, this is the village.”

There weren’t that many people left, and Anakin felt a little upset at that. Hakoda smiled and gestured to the oldest woman in town. “This is my mother, Kanna.”

“Call me Gran-Gran, everyone does,” Gran-Gran said with a smile.

“It is my honor to meet you,” Anakin said, bowing deferentially to her. “In my culture, the grandmothers are the wisest, carrying the stories of our ancestors and spirits and teaching them to the children of the quarter.”

“Where are you from, Anakin?” Hakoda asked, eyebrow raised.

“A small desert village, the name is long lost now—I’m sure the desert has reclaimed it,” Anakin lied—certainly trying to put Mos Espa out of his mind.

There were smatterings of murmurs among the crowd, and Hakoda gestured to the two younger people in front of Gran-Gran. One was a girl no older than 10 or 11 standard years, with cute braids running down the fronts of her face—the other was a boy with a haircut not dissimilar from some of the other men in the tribe—he was no older than Zuko was.

“My daughter Katara, and my son Sokka,” Hakoda introduced them.

“A pleasure to meet you both,” Anakin said with a smile, which the two kids reciprocated.

“As for your search for the Avatar…” Hakoda said quietly. “I am still unsure if there can be trust between us.”

“That is as expected,” Anakin said primly. “But of no consequence—I am here on good faith, and good faith alone.”

Hakoda nodded. “What do you intend to do with the Avatar once you have him?” He asked, frowning.

“Find him a teacher for the elements he still needs to conquer, and then help him restore balance to the Force,”

“What is this… Force thing you’re talking about?” Another one of the Water Tribesmen said, entering the conversation. “Was it that Earthbending trick you did earlier?”

Anakin blinked and looked at the man, cocking his head in the way he did many times as Darth Vader. “I am not an Earthbender. I am a Jedi. It can be difficult to explain. Perhaps we should discuss this over tea?”

…

This tea is tzai.
Or at the very least, a rough approximation of it. Upon his first sip, Anakin felt a sudden rush of longing for his mother, and the very sharp feelings of loss. Hakoda had noticed Anakin’s sudden change in disposition.

“Anakin, are you alright?”

“This tea… reminds me of home,” Anakin said, almost fondly. He took another long draught. “How do you prepare it?”

“There are some herbs that can still grow in this climate,” Kanna said, interrupting her son before he could respond. “We use them as a basis for our herbal teas.”

“Delicious,” Anakin said, smiling at the old matriarch. He set his cup down on the small tray in front of him before clearing his throat. “As I’ve said, I am a Jedi. I don’t… *bend elements* per se, but bend the energy that exists throughout all things. For instance;”

Anakin gestured with his hand, and the tray his tea was sitting on elevated several inches off the ground, startling Hakoda. The tray then settled back to the ground.

“Fascinating,” Hakoda said quietly. “So, you’ve said you wish to help the Avatar restore balance? What would this entail?”

“The deposition or destruction of the Fire Lord Ozai, and an end to this war,” Anakin said simply. “Surely you wish the same goal, Chief Hakoda. Your village has suffered enough at the hands of those in the Fire Nation with intent to kill everyone who stands in their way.”

Hakoda hardened his chin and nodded. “I lost my wife… during the raids,”

Anakin frowned and bowed his head. “My deepest sympathies, Chief. I too, lost my wife during a very dark time in my life.”

Hakoda gave him a wry smile. “Did you have any children, Anakin?”

“I did,” Anakin said, smiling. “Two, a boy and a girl. But I never got the chance to meet them until they were adults. *Lukka* followed in my footsteps and became a Jedi, but Leia… my dear Leia became a diplomat, and a leader.”

Hakoda nodded. “My daughter, Katara. She is the last waterbender of our village. The Fire Nation has killed all of them off now.”

Anakin nodded. “Those who are helping us in our goal to restore balance have told us much about what has become of your village… it will be entirely up to you, *but*, should anybody wish to accompany us, we welcome them with open arms.”

Hakoda rubbed his chin appreciatively. “We have been considering a naval campaign to interdict Fire Nation shipping in the region. Can I give you my answer later?”

“Of course.” Anakin said, rising to his feet.

“The boy, Aang… I believe he may be the Avatar, but he’s only a kid.”

Anakin nodded carefully. “Children are often the saddest casualties of war—drawn into something they had no decision in starting, and forced to suffer as a result. I simply wish to speak to him, and nothing more.”
Anakin left the tent and cast a glance around the village, to find Ranma and Hibari talking to the chief’s two kids, Sokka and Katara. The young monk was standing nearby. Anakin strode over to the group.

“Kids, do you mind if I speak to Aang alone?” Anakin asked, and Katara eyed him wearily before glancing at Aang, who nodded his assent.

Anakin gestured for Aang to follow him to a more private area.

“It’s good to meet you, Aang. My name is Anakin Skywalker,” Anakin said with a smile. “Knight, Jedi Order.”

“It’s nice to meet you, sir,” Aang said, feeling a little unnerved, and being unable to place why he was feeling so unnerved.

Anakin smiled. “You are the Avatar,” he observed.

Aang eyed him.

“I… How can you tell?” Aang asked, dumbfounded.

“You are the last Airbender,” Anakin observed. “But even if we were to assume more than one survived the last century of genocide, your presence in the Force is bright.”


Anakin chuckled. “The Force is a spiritual energy that binds all living things together. As a Jedi, I am able to… sense people’s presences in the Force, particularly when they are not skilled at shielding it.”

Aang didn’t say anything and Anakin took a deep breath. “How old are you, Aang?”

“Twelve,” the boy replied, and Anakin shook his head.

“Why do old men always feel like they have to push responsibility on a kid’s head?” Anakin questioned, feeling frustrated. “Aang, the world is in dire straits. But I do not require you to do everything on your own.”

“Katara’s told me… that airbenders haven’t been seen in a hundred years. You mentioned that I was the last airbender. Mr. Skywalker… what happened to the Air Nomads?”

“I can’t profess to know myself. The Force brought me and my two companions here from different places—much different places. But from what I’ve been told… you may very well be the last of the Air Nomads.”

Aang seemed a little stunned, and rubbed his neck. “Maybe they’re all in hiding! You can’t get to an Air Temple without flying bison! And I doubt the Fire Nation has flying bison.”

Anakin sighed. “My companions and I woke up in one of the Air Temple. The Western one, in fact. It was utterly abandoned,” Anakin said, drawing the small ceramic trinket from the Air Temple and placing it in Aang’s hand.

Aang stared at it and Anakin placed a hand on the young boy’s shoulder.

“I understand how you must be feeling,” Anakin said quietly.
Aang sharply looked up at Anakin with tears in his eyes, ready to deliver to the Jedi a stern rebuke. He blinked in surprise as he made eye contact, and things suddenly shifted.

Aang was standing in an endless desert, a young blonde haired boy tearfully parting with a woman he… strangely knew to be the boy’s mother. The two older men, both wearing monastic robes, escorted him onto a large… ship… that raised from the sky and disappeared into the atmosphere.

The blonde boy was standing before a council of elders, people just like the monks, who refused to train him because he was afraid. The older of the two masters from the previous vision, a dark-haired man who seemed frustrated, declared he would train him himself.

The boy was older now, carrying a blue sword made of light, slicing through metal soldiers.


Suddenly, on a planet, lava and fire burning all around them, Aang felt nothing but pain and darkness.

“You were meant to bring balance to the Force, not leave it in darkness! You were my brother, Anakin!”

Aang felt the burning, the pain, the loss. Anakin’s gaping loss at the death of his wife, and his child.

“The ability to destroy a planet is inconsequential compared to the power of the Force.”


“I have been waiting for this day for a long time, Kenobi.”

“The Force is strong with this one.”

“He is the son of Anakin Skywalker.” The surprise, the shock, the betrayal that surged through Anakin’s kneeling form. Resolution to destroy the Emperor boiling in his stomach, seething rage.

“I am your father.”

“It is too late for me, son.”

The tingling feeling of lightning in the air as Luke was electrocuted. The resolution to end it, and the shooting pain of lightning short-circuiting that which kept Anakin alive as he grabbed the Emperor and threw him down a hole in the battlestation.

“Tell your sister… you were right…” and then nothingness.

In an instant, Aang was jerked back to the real world, the sudden rush of real sensations making him vomit into the snow, before he sunk to his knees and passed out.
Anakin was quite concerned about the young Avatar. The boy’s natural talent with The Force had caught Anakin entirely by surprise, and his shields had opened wide for the boy, allowing the young man to see everything.

He repressed a shudder of his own. There were things in his mind he didn’t want anybody to see, let alone a twelve-year-old child. He hadn’t even come to terms with all the terrible things he did in his life, the last thing he wanted was to have to share that with someone involuntarily.

The fact that a twelve-year-old child had gotten to see all that he became, all that he did… well, he felt responsible for the young man now. It was his duty to do what was right and make sure he wasn’t hurting because of what he saw. Make sure he hadn’t corrupted a child so resolutely with his atrocities.

During the night, Anakin kept a tired vigil over the young man, reverting back to his Vader-esque ways of avoiding sleeping. Either catching micro-naps while standing or sitting in view of the boy, or meditating in the shallow eddies of the Force. During one of his meditation sessions, Anakin began to feel the Force shifting and bending in the most unusual of ways.

Opening his eyes, he came face to face with an old man wearing attire that didn’t look out of place compared to Iroh and other Fire Nation people. The man was pensively watching Aang, a glow surrounding him.

_A Force ghost._

Anakin cleared his throat to get the man’s attention, and the man’s golden eyes shot to him in alarm.

“Who are you?” Anakin asked, frowning at the glowing figure.

The old man drew himself up to a more regal position, looking distinctly uncertain. “My name is Roku, I am Aang’s predecessor as Avatar. I don’t understand this… how can you see me? Only the Avatar can commune with spirits,” He said, the deep shock evident in his voice.

“I’m not exactly from these parts, Avatar Roku,” Anakin said wryly, leaning back in his chair. “I’m from another universe. Another plane of existence, even. I’m called a Jedi, I have command of something called The Force, the sort of cosmic… everything? I guess? And where I come from, many Force users have learned to remain immortal while within The Force, becoming ghostly projections of themselves, kind of like how you are now.”

Roku looked pensive before nodding. He seemed to believe Anakin’s explanation for what it was.

“I have come for two reasons,” Roku said. “The first being that Aang has… woken up. His spirit has been dormant for nearly a century, and secondly, because I sensed a great disturbance within him.”

“Aang has an unnatural talent in The Force, no doubt because of his spiritual presence as Avatar. He… caught me off-guard and read my memories,” Anakin said wryly. “And all the horror that comes along with it.”

Roku regarded the Jedi carefully. “You said you come from another universe? Would you mind if-”
“I am not a book to be read,” Anakin interrupted sharply, welling up with annoyance at the presumptiveness of the old Avatar. It was always like that with old masters. Yoda, Windu, and Obi-Wan had all choked on their presumptuousness and arrogance. He took a deep breath to release his mounting frustrations, and batted away the tendrils of the dark that nipped at his heels.

“But should you insist… here is but a mere sample of what my universe contains,” He drawled slowly.

Anakin closed his eyes and searched his memories. He recalled the day Alderaan was destroyed quite clearly. The Force shattered with the deaths of billions, and all Anakin remembered was how much he wanted to choke Tarkin to death right there on the Death Star, vividly wanting to feel the bones in Tarkin’s neck shatter.

He did not like the Rebels, they were merely a testament to the fallen Republic and all that it stood for in allowing men like Sidious to rise to power, but he did not see the use in destroying a peaceful planet—particularly one like Alderaan.

Anakin opened his mind to the Force and found Roku’s presence—indeed, a Force ghost. He sent the memory of the destruction of Alderaan, and his emotions then, to the old man.

Roku’s eyes widened and he looked incredibly disturbed. “Your universe is… quite advanced… yet violent.”

“Understatement,” Anakin replied sourly. “And I will not sit here and pretend that I am happy with what I have heard about this child and his destiny. I have had more than my fair share of stingy old men insisting on children shouldering the future of all sentient life on their shoulders. I had to do it once, and I will be condemned to Sith hells if I permit Aang to shoulder it.”

The Dark Side nipped at him again, and Anakin snapped his eyes shut and took a deep breath. When he opened them again, Roku was staring at him.

“Fascinating,” Roku said quietly. “I don’t believe I got your name?”

“I have gone by many names—but my name now is Anakin Skywalker,” Anakin replied, and the Light sang. “I am a Jedi Knight… or, I was,” he finished weakly, his memories taking him back once more.

The younglings…

“Knight Skywalker,” Roku drew himself up to his full height, and Anakin felt his presence in the Force burn nearly as bright as Yoda’s. Nearly as bright as his. “We will speak again.”

He vanished, like a flame had been snuffed out. Anakin stretched out into the Force and found nothing quite like Avatar Roku in it.

Sithspit, Anakin thought. The last thing he needed, and frankly the last thing this young Avatar needed was more meddling old masters.

The young man began to stir, and Anakin sat back as Aang’s eyes opened. The boy’s light gray eyes made contact with his aqua ones, and the boy’s eyes widened in fear, before they hardened into mistrust.

“You killed them,” Aang said, voice uncharacteristically hard for a boy of twelve.

“I did,” Anakin said simply. “I cannot take back what was done in another universe. I fell from the
light and became Darth Vader, the enforcer of evil in a galaxy. I thought I was free, but I had simply been consigned to slavery for the second time."

“Slavery. That… that’s a thing in your… reality?” Aang said quietly.

“It is,” Anakin said, letting out a deep sigh. “I don’t think I ever stopped being a slave. First to Gardulla, then to Watto, then to the Jedi, then to the Sith.”

Aang looked pensive and seemed to think deeper on what he’d seen. “You’re full of regrets,” Aang observed, and Anakin nodded.

“I never knew I had a son,” Anakin said quietly, running his hand through his hair. “I was told by my master that he’d died with my wife, that I had killed them in my rage. When I found out Luke was my son, I was desperate and confused. He coaxed me back to the light, and then… I died. And I woke up in your universe. The Force often works in mysterious ways.”

“What’s The Force?” Aang asked, raising an eyebrow.

Anakin looked at the bald monk carefully and shrugged. “It’s the very spiritual energy that binds the universe together. Light and dark, the very nature of existence.”

“Sounds like something the monks would say,” Aang said quietly, laying back in his cot. “Right after I turned twelve, the monks called me into their meeting room and told me I was the Avatar. Everyone… began to shy away from me then. I felt upset and worried—then they started planning on moving me to another Air Temple! Without telling me!”

Anakin felt a strong sympathy and understanding.

“Old Masters hardly ever understand things from the point of view of a padawan,” Anakin said, a hint of steel in his voice as he recalled the arrogance and audacity of the Jedi Order. The way they’d treated him… and the way they’d treated Ahsoka.


“Padawan. It’s a Jedi term for an apprentice, or learner. We take apprentices as children and teach them the ways of the Force, and one day, they become full Knights like me,” Anakin said, ignoring the guilt pooling in his chest.

Impostor. Traitor. Sith.

“But you’re not really a Knight, are you?” Aang asked, glancing at Anakin. “You’re… one of the people on the Dark Side.”

“I was,” Anakin said, his own voice gaining a glint of Vader-esque steel. “And always will be to some degree, a Sith Lord. I am taking conscious steps to turn away from that part of myself and embrace the light,” He continued, frowning deeply.

“I understand—the monks used to teach us all the time about letting go of hate and anger, and embrace peace and serenity,” Aang said. “I never understood how people could hate. But there were those who had trouble doing that.”

“Sounds like the Jedi and Air Nomads weren’t very different people, Aang,” Anakin said quietly. “I came here to offer my help to you— I would never let you face destiny alone. A twelve-year-old boy is not a weapon of war, and there is no reason a child should be expected to win a fight alone.”
“Katara wants a teacher,” Aang said aloud, and Anakin raised an eyebrow. “She’s a waterbender but hasn’t got anyone to teach her,” He said.

Anakin nodded. “If Hakoda gives his blessing, we could take her with us. Aang, I want you to understand the ship I’ve come here on belongs to the Fire Nation. The people on it are Fire Nation.”

Aang nodded. “My friend Bumi once told me that you always had to look at all the possibilities. I’d still like to go along with you. It’s been nearly a hundred years since I left the air temples. I’d like to see what’s become of them. There might still be an airbender out there.”

Anakin nodded. “I will speak to Hakoda. In the mean time, young Avatar, get some rest.”

…

Hakoda took a drink of tea and looked at the Jedi Knight carefully. “You wish to train my daughter and my son?”

“Yes,” Anakin said, nodding his head. “Your children both show great potential in the Force. Your son, though unable to bend elements like his sister, can learn the ways of the Jedi and become a universal force of good for the world, and from what I understand, young Katara is seeking a waterbending master. I would be honoured to help her in that mission, so that she may reach her full potential.”

Hakoda stroked his beard. “We are set to leave soon to assist in weakening the Fire Nation’s naval control over the southwestern Earth Kingdom. I was going to leave Sokka and Katara in my mother’s capable hands, but…”

He looked at his mother. “What do you think, mother?”

“There is no future for them here,” Kanna said, frowning. “The Southern Water Tribe is on the verge of extinction—and forcing Sokka and Katara to remain here would be an unconscionable waste of their potential.”

Hakoda grimaced. “I see your point; this war has destroyed nearly everything. I am just reluctant because they represent the future of our tribe.”

“They will become stronger, wiser and learn the disciplines of the Jedi way, and then they may return to help you,” Anakin said, memories of a distant planet covered in sand, millions in slavery and a lonely woman dying helplessly. “This will not be goodbye forever, Chief Hakoda. I would not permit that.”

“Your point is made, Jedi Knight,” Hakoda said, bowing his head. “I leave Katara and Sokka in your care.”

Anakin smiled. “You will not regret this, Chief Hakoda.”

“I hope not, Knight Skywalker,” Hakoda said with a sigh.

…

The next morning, as the sun hung low in the misty, crisp frosty horizon, Anakin was sitting in the tent he’d been offered, meditating quietly. He was alerted to someone opening the flap to his tent and opened his eyes to see the young Avatar peering in.
“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt your meditation-” the young airbender said. “I thought of something. I’ve got a, uh, flying bison.”

“You have a flying bison?” Anakin asked, dumbfounded.

“Will there be room for him on the ship?” Aang asked, rubbing his neck.

“I’m sure we can figure something out,” Anakin said with a shrug. “Your companion might be very useful if we need to go undercover. How many people can be seated on him?”

“Oh, more than enough,” Aang said with a smile. “Appa’s huge!”

Anakin gave his own grin in response. “Good, I think it’ll be easier to get back to the ship if we have you, Katara and Sokka on the bison, and my party in our boat.”

They set off toward the Tanai just as the sky was turning from the bluish-pink into rich honey-gold.

As their small wooden boat waded through the water at a leisurely pace, Anakin peered up at the sky and the large bison above them. He let out a happy sigh—so many years were spent locked inside that kripping suit, unable to enjoy even the most fundamental aspects of life.

It was a nice return to form for him, made him feel almost human again after so long of being a cold, relentless machine. As the Southern Water Tribe left them behind and they approached the Tanai, Anakin idly wondered if they were intentionally limiting the range of their exploration with it, and determined that they may have to eventually leave it behind somewhere. That was a problem for another day, though.

The boat was pulled up toward the deck, and Anakin stepped off with Ranma and Hibari in tow, along with Yoriko, who looked like she was going to freeze half to death just from being outside.

“Excuse me, General—I need a warm bath,” She chattered through her teeth, disappearing into the interior of the ship. Anakin snorted as Aang’s large bison lighted and landed on the deck of the ship. Anakin strode over to the bison, joined by Iroh and Zuko.

Aang and the two Water Tribe youngsters peered down at the trio, and Anakin smiled. “Welcome to the Tanai, Aang, Katara, Sokka—we would be honoured if you would join us for tea.”

... 

In a tea room, the three children were seated across from Iroh and Anakin, who were quite blissfully drinking tea—Iroh had a piping hot cup of jasmine tea, and Anakin had his preferred herbal tea, the comforting embrace of his mother’s tzai recipe.

“Allow me to introduce myself,” Iroh said. “I am General Iroh—Grandmaster of the Order of the White Lotus. Long have we existed to create balance between the nations, but it is only recently we have been strong enough to act. In no small part due to the arrival of Anakin—we believe that we may now be able to end the tyranny of my brother and restore balance to the four nations.”

Katara and Sokka both looked at Aang for leadership—the eleven-year-old Katara and twelve-year-old Sokka both felt clearly out of their depth compared to the Avatar. Aang hesitated before nodding. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, General Iroh. You… said your brother? The Fire Lord?”

“Fire Lord Ozai, yes, my brother,” Iroh said, shaking his head. “An unending disgrace and shame I do not think I will ever successfully make up for—but I can try. Anakin and I have had many discussions on how we will help you, Avatar, restore balance.”
“And establish Anakin’s Jedi Order here,” Aang said, nodding to Anakin.

“Yes,” Anakin said with a wry smile. “Part of me has been thinking that perhaps you and I could work together on that. The Jedi Order and the Air Nomads are… similar enough, I think.”

Aang nodded, unwilling to commit to anything yet. “So, what’s our plan?”

“We’re going to set sail for the Southern Air Temple, find out the ultimate fate of your people—and begin planning rallying people together to end the tyranny of the Fire Lord. There is a long road ahead for us, young Avatar.”

…

It took them approximately a week to reach the Southern Air Temple, but in that week, Anakin decided to begin the formal aspects of training his new nascent younglings in the ways of the Force.

“Good morning, Initiates,” Anakin said, folding his hands behind his back as he observed Zuko, Ranma, Hibari, Aang, Katara and Sokka standing in formation. “Today begins your greatest journey. All power in the universe stems from the Force—your bending abilities, for those who have them, are an extension of your Force manipulation abilities. You will learn to grow beyond that and master the ways of the Force.”

While he began lecturing them on the fundamentals of the Force, Anakin wondered how the kriff he was going to properly set up the ‘learning system’ here. He was one Master (a title he didn’t think he deserved in the slightest, to be completely honest with himself, a sharp contrast to his petulance during the Clone Wars…) and now he had six younglings to teach.

The part of him that was still Darth Vader angrily noted that the Jedi Order had failed him and failed the galaxy and had perished under a sea of clone troopers for that exact reason—why bother emulating it?

The part of him that was trying to desperately to claw back to the light rebutted that the Sith system of apprentices murdering masters wasn’t any better.

Anakin decided the first lesson would be best served by having his new Jedi go through meditation exercises independently. It allowed him more time to deal with his own roiling emotions and uncertainty, and start the younglings on the path to achieving emotional stability.

He could tell Katara still harbored strong lingering resentment for the loss of her mother; Sokka harbored intense resentment and feelings of inadequacy for being a non-bender; Aang harbored strong feelings of terror and fear for the loss of his people and his role as the Avatar, and Zuko was just unending waves of self-loathing and anger over his mother.

Ranma and Hibari were far less emotionally unstable than the four younglings from this universe, and they had already some minor experience in the Force from the lessons they’d gotten from Anakin before they’d been found by Iroh and Zuko.

…

Deciding to go down the line, he decided to start with lightly probing them in the Force. First, he reached out to Katara. The fire that burned around her was quite fierce, and Anakin wanted to explore that feeling with her. As his Force presence approached, he felt the apprehension of the young waterbender, but bidded her to trust in him, and trust in the feeling she was getting from the Force as it wrapped around her.
She relaxed only slightly, and Anakin saw the true depth of her emotional scarring. The loss of her mother was an unbelievable pain, and one Anakin doubted he could heal without proper closure for her. Beyond the anger, there was ambition to be better than she was. That was not a negative emotion to harness, and with it, Anakin thought, she could become a master unparalleled by any other.

He reached into the Force and sought an answer for the path to take with her. His first instinct was to help her achieve closure by exacting vengeance upon the man who had done the deed— but the Force had pointed him back to the Tusken Raiders, and the terrible atrocities he’d brought upon them. No, clearly, revenge would not do. He would have to help her work past this issue some other way.

He moved on to the next person in the line-up. Sokka was just as emotional as his sister, but his emotions weren’t anger over his dead mother, Anakin got the very large impression that the boy was resentful of his sister’s skill with waterbending, and self-doubt raged like a torrent. Anakin repeated the same process in opening him up to the Force and draping it around him like a blanket. Reassurance, he felt, would work best here.

‘You are strong in the Force, young Sokka. You have great potential, and you will make a fine Jedi.’

Anakin sent the young man some images, instantaneous creations of his own design. He thought of the young man in front of him, but older. Much like his father back at the South Pole, but wearing Jedi robes and carrying a lightsaber. He felt Sokka’s insecurities ebb away ever so slightly, but the boy remained a bit distrustful and disbelieving. Anakin knew he wouldn’t be able to fix that right away, but he sent him good feelings and warmth through the Force.

Aang was next— and as soon as Anakin touched Aang in the force, Anakin felt the Force sing. An unbroken thread in the Force appeared before them, Anakin could see hundreds of people he’d never met before, but knew their names. In the malestrom, Anakin could hear Aang’s presence in the Force, that same feeling of terror and being overwhelmed. Anakin grabbed the fabric of the Force, and wrapped it around Aang tightly. The boy had seen all his bad memories, perhaps it was time for some good ones.

The rush of wind through his hair as he hurdled across the finish line at the Boonta Eve Classic, the sight of his wife-to-be in the meadow outside Varykino, their marriage overlooking the lakes, him and Obi-Wan having a personal moment together after the heat of battle, laughing, Obi-Wan giving him an exasperated look. Ahsoka, his first Padawan, looking up at him, not in fear, or in anger, but in happiness.

‘We are more than what the masters define us as, Aang. Remember the good moments in your life, do not let the responsibility drown you.’

And Anakin saw it.

A wise old monk making fruit pies with Aang, the two laughing like a father and son. Playing in the courtyards, creating these little balls of air to scoot around on, playing with the lemurs and bison, enjoying a mix of care-free reverence and piety.

‘Your future is not yet written. I would say that you are in good company. Think of the friendships you’re going to have.’

Anakin felt Aang’s tightness in his chest loosen, and felt gratefulness in the Force. The boy seemed relaxed now, and far less worried than he had been before.
Moving onto the next pupil of his— Zuko and Aang were very close to each other in terms of their presence in the Force. When Anakin pressed upon Zuko’s presence in the Force, he noticed a strand as well, running through to someone. He narrowed his eyes once more at Avatar Roku. This old man was appearing in too many places. Annoyance welled within him, the same familiar annoyance he often got at Masters Windu and Yoda before Order 66.

Ignoring the thread for the moment, he focused on the young prince’s emotions.

The first component of it was a burning desire for approval— he got the distinct impression the boy would do nearly anything to win his father’s approval, despite his growing uncertainty that his father was a good man at all. He craved paternal affection, something Anakin got the impression was freely shared with another member of the boy’s family.

Zuko would need more time to achieve some internal balance— he was well on his way, but he remained a deeply conflicted child; he knew the young man found no stock in peaceful meditation nor teas (to be honest, until his later years, neither had Anakin), and so Anakin began to think of ways to do combat meditation with the young prince.

Moving on— Ranma and Hibari were unique individuals in their own right. Ranma was quite adept at centering his emotions, but he still carried a restlessness with him that was all too familiar. The boy had some regrets, Anakin could see the leaking memories of friends abandoned or lost because of his father— Hibari was much the same way, she had regrets herself over past actions, but beneath that was a desire to be herself and not need the approval of others to be seen that way.

He hummed in contemplation.

“You may all stop meditating for now,” He instructed, and they all opened their eyes to look at him.

“From first impressions, all of you have terrific potential to become good Jedi. In the old teachings taught to me by my master, I would insist on being able to release your emotions and put them to one side, but I acknowledge that might not be possible for all of you,” Anakin said, casting a look at his pupils.

He took a deep breath and shook his head. “I will speak to each of you individually in order to see what we can do about getting you the help you need to find your center, and achieve harmony with yourself and the world around you,” He finished, smiling wanly.

…

Anakin looked down at the notepad on his desk. He had been ordering the young Jedi from ‘easiest to help’ and ‘hardest to help’. Katara and Zuko both ranked as the hardest to help. Their trauma was so deeply-seated that it would take years, if not longer, to fully achieve their peace. They needed closure, and that would involve tracking people down, confronting enemies, and solving problems he didn’t have the power to solve quite yet.

He would have to come up with ways to help them along slowly so that it didn’t eat them alive as it did him all those years ago.

Sokka, Ranma and Hibari didn’t concern him nearly as much. With a little guidance and special attention, Sokka would prosper well— and with things to do, and a vested interest in the future of this world, Ranma and Hibari would find new purpose.

They’d all find new purpose, hopefully for the better.
Sokka, he already had ideas percolating in his head as to what the young boy could do. Training him seriously in the tenements of the Jedi, treating him like he wasn’t weaker than his sister and Aang would go a long way to helping him heal the doubts in his heart. If he could fashion lightsabers (he still had to think about that and if it could be done with the antiquated technology of this world), he would see to it the boy was capable of building himself one.

But, first thing was first. They were heading right for the Southern Air Temple. Anakin knew that it would be an emotional time for Aang, and he needed to be all-hands on that to keep Aang from being overwhelmed. He knew what it was like to lose yourself in anger… he didn’t want a child that young to experience it.

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