Acid Rain

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Acid Rain

by planningconquest

Summary

Luke, captured and imprisoned at Bast Castle, attempts to escape. His plan is foiled by an acid storm and an angry Sith.
Chapter 1

I do not own Star Wars

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Based off the idea that Vader managed to snag Luke off Hoth before he took off and took him to Bast Castle on Vijn all the while on Bast Castle, for a few days, he’s been trying to escape.

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For almost a week Luke had been locked away in the upper floors a literal castle. He knew it was the top floors because the expansive windows that showed the raining and dangerous landscape of the planet were a lot higher off the mountainside. Also, Luke could sense the troopers and security officers and people who worked on the floors below. Their imprints on the force were delicate and bright against the bleakness of the landscape and the situation.

He tried very hard not to sulk, surrounded as he was by the most lavish and opulent suite he had ever seen. Decorations and artwork that would cost small fortunes were alongside furniture so extravagant it was almost miracle they weren’t tasteless. It seemed a shame to ruin the aesthetic with a whiney attitude.

However, even books and holo-films combined with mechanical manuals of all kinds and droid schematics could not distract him from the fact he was a prisoner. Vader, who had managed to subdue him in an embarrassingly short duel on Hoth following the Imperial invasion, had rendered him unconsciousness. Luke had woken in the suite more suited for royalty like Leia just days later with none of the aches and pains of his wampa encounter.

He hadn’t spoken to anyone since arriving at the castle (Even now he couldn’t believe it was real) except for a med-droid that had been both fussy and unpleasant. Luke sighed and sank into the pale blue couch and stared out the window.

Even Artoo had been removed, sitting away with a restraining bolt probably fuming.

His captor, Vader, had remained curiously absent. Though the supernova of dark power skirted just on the edge of his perception as if Vader, like Luke, did not want to confront the other. In great contrast to the previous impression of Vader when they had been dueling or engaged in a dogfight, there was no anger or bitter fury. As untrained as he was it was impossible to ignore the presence of the Sith Lord. Even if he was the length of a castle away.

Luke, having already exhausted his efforts to escape, tried to stave off his anger. Bad enough to have been bested so easily and in full view of a squad of Stormtroopers he was locked away by the very man who had killed his father. For all his adventures and by-the-seat-of-his-pants plans he had never expected to end up like one of the Princesses in the old stories. Locked away by a horrible villain, isolated and lonely with seemingly no chance of escape; if Han ever found about this he’d laugh himself sick before getting on with the rescue. Somehow he didn’t think he’d be getting a rescue anytime soon.

“If only Artoo was here.” Luke, kicked his heel into the carpet again, “Then I could.”

Luke whirled around at the sound of the door hissing open. His face contorted into confusion when no one stood in the open door. R2 rolled into his view and beeped furiously. “Artoo!” Elated he leapt over the sofa and scrambled to kneel beside his astromech. “Artoo! Where have you been?” Even if he couldn’t understand the rapid beeping it was still nice to see someone familiar. The door, which
remained open, revealed nothing beyond except a long empty hallway.

“Is this a rescue?” A half-smile curled his lips when Artoo answered with a bright bleep.

“Alright then!” Following the droid into the hallway he noted that no one was near, the bright pinpricks of the other people were all far away while the sun of Darth Vader’s presence was among them. No one was anywhere near. Down the hallway, which seemed both opulent and cold, Luke went. Past two doors which did not open at his approach until he came upon a turbolift. “Artoo, get in to the system and plot me a way past the soldiers.” Tweeting at him Artoo followed his orders. A projected blue map came to life a moment later with dots across it. In a sight that made the rebel pilots stomach twist, a large black dot stood amongst a group a blue. His best inference was that Vader was in a conference with his officers. “Alright,” he remained crouching while a green line appeared. “This is through the ducts, Artoo. You won’t be able to follow me.”

A moment later, following a snort from the droid, a blue one appeared.

The map, which lead him to the hanger bay, seemed so simple when he was looking at it. Moments later he was crawling along an access duct that squeezed his shoulder his blood pounding in his ears. Excitement thrummed through his veins while fear, an ever present clinging black parasite, whispered that he would not succeed. Luke ignored the claim and continued onward hoping against hope that Vader and his cronies would take no notice of his absence.

Vader knew something happened the moment his son’s excitement spiked in the Force. It was impossible to miss due to Luke’s habit of broadcasting his emotions as loudly as possible. Luke, who had been confined for the past week, should have no reason to be so pleased. A fact that pained Vader yet he was unwilling to confront the youth and introduce him to the castle staff until he knew the boy was not about to attack them. So, when a sudden thrill ran through the Force he left his superfluous meeting.

Captain Tang, a dark skinned woman with pleasing competence who stood in as the majordomo of the palace knew to fall silent when he stood.

“Captain, remain alert. I believe a prisoner has escaped.”

“Aye milord,” she reached for her comlink only to stop when he raised a hand.

“No, we do not wish to alert the prisoner we know of his escape. No doubt he is attempting to reach the hanger.”

“Milord, there is an acid storm due in just ten minutes.” She frowned, “The blast doors and insulation will be dropped in just a few minutes. If the prisoner is outside after they are dropped there is little chance we would be able to retrieve them alive.”

“He will not succeed in leaving these walls,” Fury rose in his chest at the very thought of his son caught in the deadly storm. That he should be allowed out of his chambers in the first place was already a great annoyance. When Vader discovered the traitor who had aided him (for he knew Luke could not have escaped on his own) they would curse they day they had been born.

“Ready the shields but do not drop them until I command. All troopers set for stun. Anyone who brings harm to the boy will be dealt with.”

“Aye milord.” Her sharp brown eyes snapped to her subordinates, “Begin storm protocol.” The rest of her words vanished when he stalked from the room. Without a doubt Luke would be looking to
escape on a ship and it as far too dangerous with the incoming storm for him to do so.

Luke’s head snapped up as the volcanic heat of Dark Side that indicated Vader, began to move. A low, sweeping net settled over the castle; searching for him and his hiding place.
Invisible. Luke thought, I’m not here! He could not get caught! Clinging to the idea of invisible and silent, Luke felt the dark side pass over him without a twitch of attention to his precarious perch in the hanger rafter.

Somehow the boy was shielding himself. The previously bright spot in the force that was pulsing with life and energy had vanished. Vader felt his shriveled soul keen in misery at the disappearance of that warmth. While impressive for such an untrained student it was unnatural for something so wholesome to become nothing. It pained Vader to admit a small amount of pride even as he huffed in irritation. The dim signature was still near the hanger and he could not allow Luke to venture into such danger.

The fact Luke had faced such dangers that made flying through an acid storm seem tame was conveniently ignored until the time at which he could punish the Rebellion for such crimes.

If Luke was not in the middle of a daring escape he would have taken more time to gape and oogle the Starfighters assembled. Some were so rare and ancient that only the obscenely wealthy could have possibly afforded them. Even the modified TIE fighter only caught his attention for a moment.

This was the hanger that serviced the troopers ships or the pilots stationed at the castle. It seemed, with each ship he passed, it was the private collection of the Sith Lord himself.

“Oh.” His voice cracked under the strain of his shock. Artoo, just meters away, twittered away while rolling happily in front of his x-wing. “Good job Artoo!” His ship sat just alongside an elegant spacecraft that looked more delicate than anything a hulking Sith Lord ought to own.

“We just need.” A sudden shivering in the Force had him ducking beneath his x-wing and slapping a hand over where he imagined Artoo’s mouth would be.

Echoing through the hanger bay was the chilling hiss of Vader’s iconic respirator. A few choice huttese curses filtered through his mind as he raced to come up with a working escape plan.


Young one! Indignation smothered the fear for a brief moment.

“An acid storm is due to arrive in mere minutes. One capable of dissolving human flesh and rendering ship useless do you wish to be caught in the midst of such a tempest?”

Throwing caution to the wind since because he was pretty sure the Vader’s explanation was false anyway. Why would he live in castle on a planet that suffered from acid storms? Why would he live somewhere he couldn’t fly in the storms?

Crouching low to the ground behind the Starfighters landing strut he could see Vader’s black boots as he stalked around the hanger. (He wasn’t sure how the Sith Lord hadn’t found him yet but he wasn’t complaining.) Vader was almost 200 feet away and marching around the expansive form a clone wars Jedi Starfighter. “It’s better than being dragged in for a public execution!”
Vader stopped moving, reversing to follow the sound of his voice. Luke would have to chance stealing a ship late but he couldn’t get caught again here.

“That is not your intended fate.” Darting beneath the elegant expansive of the luxury ship Luke focused again the black boots as they began moving around the closer ships. “Do not make me drag you from your hiding place young Skywalker.” Familiar indignation spiked again as the rebel pilot scurried beneath three different ships putting more distance between him and Sith Lord.

He was not some reluctant child to be dragged anywhere.

There were just six ships between him and the hanger doors and Vader was stalking close his respirator somehow making the expansive room seem smaller and smaller with every exhale. Swallowing down the sudden rise in feat he nodded to Artoo who shot from beneath the x-wing toward the opposite wall, shrieking the entire way.

“Kriffin’ hell!” A shuddering groan of machinery alerted the pilot that the hanger doors were beginning to slide shut. With Artoo hopefully a successful distraction and knowing that his window of opportunity to escape was closing fast Luke shot from beneath the green ship and toward the landing pad.

What he hadn’t noticed in his moments deliberation under the belly of the ship was the disappearance of both Vader’s regulated breathing and the sight of his boots. Which was why his sprint toward the doors, still closing, was interrupted by a flying red lightsaber that had been thrown by a fast approaching Sith Lord.

Luke threw himself downward to avoid the swing saber blade, crashing ungainly into the floor as the red lightsaber sailed just inches from his head. He landed in a tangled heap of limbs on the duracreet floor, his Imperial style clothes offering no resistance or padding to the ache of his collapse.

“Damn!” His attempt to pull himself into a standing position to continue his escape was cut short at the sudden appearance of the Darth Vader. Luke’s mouth ran dry and a cold chill slipped along his spine as the still glowing lightsaber was recalled to slap back into the gloved hand.

“That was,” Whatever Vader was about to say was cut off by Artoo extending his prod and jabbing it into his knee with a triumphant shriek.

“Come on Artoo!” Luke shot to his feet and around the Sith Lord whose leg had collapsed.

Fury swelled around the Sith Lord as the insolent droid shocked him. Shocked him! He struggled to stand with his knee prosthetic protesting the sudden electrical charge.

Luke swept around him shouting at the impertinent droid only for his commands to turn to shocked swearing. Even partially immobile he had little concern with the boy escaping. His hunt through the ships had been entertaining yet Luke’s distraction had been futile. He would not be swayed from his mission to find his son. Nothing would stand in his way. Fury, a kind he had never experienced before, born from the deliberately foolish actions of the boy ignited in his chest.

Reaching out with the dark side he wrapped Luke in tendrils of the dark side, freezing him where he stood.

“NO!” The boy’s desperation sang through the Force as the doors closed with a final ‘thud’

“Enough.” Vader growled. Luke must have sensed his rising anger as he quieted but his bright blue eyes (so much like his own) blazed with righteous fury.

“Let me go!” Keeping a tight hold of the squirming former rebel he reached for his comlink and
signaled the Captain. “Captain, tell you men to stand down and continue with storm protocol. I have apprehended the prisoner.”

“Aye milord.” When she disconnected he turned toward his son.

His anger, which moments ago had put volcanos and supernovas to shame, now quieted. It burned in his chest and levelled out to allow for almost clam deliberation. Vader would never approach his child if the anger that had prompted the death of his beloved mother was a danger to the young blond.

“That,” he snarled finally moving to stand in front of the immobilized pilot, wide blazing blue eyes glared up at him, “Was a foolish choice.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

There is a spanking.

There were a few times when Luke could remember having been so frightened and angry at the same time. Cold terror was sliding down his spine while bound by the force grip. Unable to move Luke’s only defense was glaring at Vader.

Vader loomed mere inches away from the rebel pilot. His ire palpable in the force and impossible to ignore, Luke bore the brunt of his fury. Had he been able to move he would have twisted away or thrashed around.

“That was a foolish choice.” Luke swallowed down the sudden impression of an irate Uncle Owen who had witnessed one of Luke’s many infractions. “Come.” A solid, massive hand clamped onto his shoulder just as the force grip was released. Twisting away from it did nothing except prompt the Sith Lord to tighten his grip. It was beginning to hurt.

“Let go!” He shouted, still trying to pull his aching shoulder away from the vice-like grip. To his concertation the grip only tightened, squeezing the bone and muscle in a way it was not meant to be squeezed.

“Silence!” Vader thundered. Sulking but unwilling to anger the Sith further, Luke subsided. He settled for glaring at the ships they marched past, the same ones he had ducked between and hidden under. He had been so close! If he’d made it outside he was sure there would be a way for him to escape. No place like this would be without escape tunnels or secret entrances. At least that’s the way it should have been. He was unwilling to consider the possibility that Vader had told the truth about the rain storms.

They emerged onto the original floor from which Luke had escape. Vader kept a tight grip on his shoulder the entire length of the increasingly awkward turbolift journey. His mind jumped to the different tortures Leia had spoken of. Different ways the Empire employed to destroy its prisoners and victims all crowded into his head.

Vader, the Emperors enforcer and the Supreme Commander of the Imperial Navy, did not need to voice his true ire or threaten beyond a single word. Anger swirled through the force and clung to Luke who could feel the promise of retribution hanging in the air.

It was not a comfortable feeling.

Luke stumbled as he was pushed into an unmarked door. One of the doors which had not, oddly enough, opened at his approached during his escape. An access code later Luke found himself in what looked like a sitting room that could have been removed from one of the show rooms of an expensive furniture store. His shock and surprise at finding himself in place that seemed to alien in the utilitarian castle was cut short as the door slid shut with a finalistic sort of hiss. Finding himself alone in the room with Darth Vader washed away his admiration of the interior decorating.

Before the pilot could exclaim, on no uncertain terms, that he was not going to be giving the Sith
Lord the barest scrap of anything resembling information—he was cut off.

“Did you,” The rumbling bass vibrated his bones as Luke took a minute step away from the looming Sith Lord. “Bother to contemplate the consequences of your actions boy? Or did you rush, heedlessly, into danger armed only with your righteousness and hope?”

“I wasn’t rushing into danger!” Luke wasn’t sure how he’d ended up on the defensive and didn’t like it one bit. “I was rushing away from it!” Away from you!

“Did you heed my words?” Flat disbelief should not be a weapon and yet it was one being levelled at the hopeful jedi. “Acid storms are not to be taken lightly.”

“You could have been lying!” Luke protested only just managing to stop himself before he threw his arms wide. “A way to keep me in the hanger.” The hissing of the respirator was the only noise to puncture the relative quite while Luke glowered and Vader pondered.

It was hard not to take insult at Luke’s suspicion of lies yet it made sense. The boy was a prisoner and Vader had been hunting him ruthlessly for three years so it wasn’t a stretch to assume the Sith would lie to him. Still, it stung as did not make a habit of lying save for extreme cases.

“No.” Luke paused in his mental tirade of curse words, “I am not in the habit of lying in the face of such a danger.”

“You!”

“Have you known me to lie?”

“Well…no.”

“Then it is settled.” Vader paused, unsure while Luke watched him carefully with his combined sulk and glare. “You still maintain rushing from the hanger was the wisest of choices?”

“I would have taken my ship,” Luke snapped, “But you got there too fast. How’d you know I’d escaped anyway? We didn’t trigger any alarms.”

“Answer the question Skywalker.”

“Alright! Fine!” Crossing his arms he replied, “It was the best idea I had.”

“Very well.” Vader grabbed his sons arm and pulled his startled offspring toward the convenient couch. When he’d had it installed this was not what had been on his mind. Still, it would do for his purpose. Luke didn’t have time to shout in astonishment or defiance when Vader, all two and half meters of him, sank onto the couch. He would, however, deny until his dying day the squawk that made it past his lips when the Sith Lord yanked him across his armored knees. The armor dug uncomfortably into his stomach and Luke gaped at the carpet which was now far too close to his face. He would also deny the yelp that jumped from his mouth when a gloved hand descended upon his vulnerable rear with frighteningly firm resolve.

“What? OW! STOP! HEY!” Utterly stupefied by his position Luke’s reaction to the sudden slap was delayed. However, as soon as he registered the fact that, yes, he was actually draped across Darth Vader’s knees he began to protest.

Embarrassment began to offset the surprise as soon as he sucked in a sharp breath of negate the
sudden sting. Trashing got him nowhere except now his left hand was now pinned to his back by the same hand that was holding him down.

“HEY!” Luke’s protests fell upon unheeding ears until the rebel pilot turned to cursing.

Luke’s cursing was an imaginative use of Huttese that verged on poetic that Vader would have been impressed with if it were not for the fact it was directed at him.

“Language,” He scolded. The next eight or so slaps were much harder than the previous to ensure the lesson was learned. Luke’s pained gasp cut off into a strangled high-pitched squeak as the boy did his best to swallow his tongue.

Luke had to suck down his swearing as the methodical and evenly timed spanks worsened following his diatribe. He had no interest in suffering a spanking but making it worse was not a good plan. With his left hand pinned to his back, Luke dug his right into the couch in an effort to ground himself. As absurd as the scene was there was no escape. Pinned thoroughly in the time honored positioned of the unwillingly disciplined and with no lecture to contemplate or ponder. Luke had nothing to distract him from the humiliation and blossoming pain. His face flushed a bright pink as each smack reminded him exactly who was dispensing the spanking. He didn’t want to give Vader the satisfaction of reacting.

Vader sensed the very moment Luke braced himself. Unwilling to react because of sheer pride or having to suffer the later embarrassment being worse because of it. He did not care very much. Luke’s stubbornness was a family borne trait and it would make sense for him to cling to the last semblance of dignity he could muster when being punished. Spankings were not the typical punishment for attempted escapes from rebels especially those Vader had taken a personal interest in. If Luke had not been preoccupied with the steadily increasing pain in his upturned rear he would have been suspicious. With the same methodical and efficient manner he conducted military campaigns Vader continued to chastise his reckless offspring.

There was nothing to distract Luke from the building fire on his backside. Each smack only increased the stinging burn while he could no nothing save suffer it and hopefully suffer it in silence. Even the Force seemed to radiate disappointment and the parental scolding that made ignoring the humiliating spanking impossible. He could not hide.

It might be considered cheating to use his parental force bond with Luke to channel disappointment at the boy but Vader thought it was fair play. Luke’s distress was apparent and obvious in the force; the keening distress was searching for comfort and relief.

Stuck as he was Luke couldn’t help but squirm. Vader’s hands were big and firm and his paltry Imperial made clothes did nothing to insulate him from the force of his blows. Each spank made him twitch or flinch, legs kicking upward uselessly while his left fingers curled and uncurled against the hand pinning him down. He tried to bury his face into the corner of the couch cushion; the thick seam pressed between his eyes only drew attention to the prickling tears. A soft whimper slanted sideways into a half-squeak jumped past trembling lips. Of all the indignities and pain he’d suffered as a rebel they seemed nothing when compared to the unrelenting spanking.

Luke wanted to jump away, to run away, to escape the pain and embarrassment even as another soft agonized noise was unwillingly verbalized. Hot tears were building beneath fluttering eyelids. He was not going to cry! He was not going to cry! It hurt! Progressively getting harder and harder to suffer the painful blows in silence. Vader spanked firmly and with the intention of ensuring he did not leave a single inch of his exposed rear unpunished.

He squeaked again, gasping and twisting to try and find a nonexistent escape route. Armored dug
even deeper into his stomach as his right hand clutched at the couch harder. Prompted by a particular stinking slap another whimper joined the symphony. Vader’s mechanical breathing was punctuated by the precise smacks that echoed through the room. They were followed quickly by another and then another and then another until the slaps were a beat of their own. Each one built upon the other, worsening the sting on his unprotected bottom. Luke tried to muffle his unwilling cries while his legs jerked and twitched in automatic reaction.

Vader sensed the boy was nearing his breaking point. Soft, reluctant and deeply shamed cries were beginning to shake Luke’s lean shoulders. He was doing his best to cling to dignity even as his body betrayed him. Soon who was spanking him would not become an issue.

He hadn’t realized he was weeping until it was past the fact. Until his body, overridden by the continuously mounting ache, reacted accordingly and tears fell hot and steady from stinging eyes. The slid onto the couch beneath his face until a patch grew on the fabric. It took all of Luke’s effort not to sob in an ugly or loud manner but he guessed Vader already knew he was crying. Short legs kicked again with increasing intensity as the pain blossomed until it seemed entirely unbearable.

Luke sobbed harder under the unforgiving onslaught. His shoulder heaved, legs kicked again while his left hand pulled against the restraining grip. He kicked his left leg one last time before going still and surrendering.

At Luke’s submission Vader knew he had limited time to continue before the punishment would need to end. The boy had gone limp across his knees, accepting of the spanking even as he hated it. There was no more trying to end it or alleviate it, simply trying to survive until the end. Luke’s cried deepened under the last round of finishing spanks, ineffectively muffled by the blue fabric. For a moment Vader paused before he released the boy’s hand and felt it curl around his leg. For it had been a fairly harsh punishment, taking close to ten minutes to get the desired results.

The rebel pilot continued to weep, tears sliding down his face while Vader guided him to his feet with tenderness he couldn’t have anticipated the Sith Lord knowing. Both black gloved hands rested on his shoulders even as he stared determinedly at the ground. Hot liquid splashed onto black leather as one hand reached under his chin and tilted his head back. Luke’s bottom lip trembled even as his sobbing continued while he stared into the black face plates of his captor and punisher. He said nothing, drawing in a shuddering and shaking breath that prompted more teardrops to slide downward. Even more tears clung to long blonde eyelashes that shivered on their perches as Luke blinked and looked away.

“It was not your escape I take issue with Skywalker,” Vader said, the rumbling bass of his voice a gentle hush of thunder. “Your reckless willingness to rush headlong into life-threatening situation while ignoring all advice and warning is the issue I took.” For a moment panic built in the shining blue eyes as the obvious remembrance of the boys other reckless adventures flashed through his mind.

“You!”

“We will speak later young Skywalker.” Vader continued over the protest. His land slid back to rest on his shoulders while he guided him from the living area and back into the hallway. “When you are less distressed.”

@#@#@

Once Luke was back in his original suite Vader returned to his own rooms and sank gratefully into
his meditation chamber.

Luke did not want to move. He didn’t want to think about moving or anything that resembled motion. Each time he took a step his body reminded him with vengeance of what had only just happened. Unsure of how he kept his composure in front of the Sith even for such a short amount of time the pilot jerkily made his way toward the bed and sank into it. Since removing his boots seemed far too much of an effort Luke settled down onto his stomach and buried his face into the closest pillow.

Artoo was gone and he was left with a burning and humiliating reminder of what happened if his escape attempt failed. Well…his reckless escape attempt.

He wrapped his arms around the pillow and continued to weep, seeking solace where there seemed to be none.
Sequestered as he was in his meditation chamber there was nothing to distract Vader from the glowing presence of his son. Luke surpassed Tatooines suns by so much there was little reason in comparing the two. Such a bright light in the midst of all encompassing darkness... it gave Vader the opportunity to bask in the perfection and warmth without stretching his own power out. His sons glow was enough to soothe the withered and bitter organ he had once called his heart.

Even now, as Luke’s pain and unhappiness flickered about Vader could only appreciate just how bright the boy was. Reaching out though the bond he sighed at the tumultuous mental state. He was alternating between embarrassment, misery and sadness with pain dispersed occasionally.

Unsure and awkward Vader reached to soothe his miserable offspring, cradling his presence as best he could without dimming it. For a moment his son flailed against the incorporeal touch, much like an infant throwing a tantrum. Tossing all of his anger at the (unknown to Luke) Sith Lord it took just a few minutes before Luke had exhausted his temper. He sank against Vader’s presence, much to his shock, and stayed.

Luke scrubbed away tears from his face and pushed it back into the abused pillow he had been clutching most of the afternoon. Since he was unable to put any weight on his rear Luke was stuck with lying on his stomach and sulking. There wasn’t much he could do in the way of escape planning or even small acts of defiance.

Vader’s punishment had put a swift end to any ideas he had entertained about overtly antagonizing the Sith. Curling into a loose ball he sniffed back another rush of tears and hiccupped.

The force seemed darker now, pulsing around him with gentle reassurances and consoling brushes. Luke buried his face further into the pillow, angry and pushed it away. Ashamed and irritated he did his best to ignore the artless skimming touches that did their best to comfort him. For a few minutes he succeeded until, with a resigned sigh, he sank into the proffered comfort.

Once, when he was younger, Luke had found and fought a kryat dragon out in the wastes. He didn’t recall the entire incident but he could, with startling clarity, remember what it felt like. Standing before the enraged beast while it roared total dominance over the desert, massive and powerful and unbending. He had stood before the genuine child of the desert and watched as it had revealed that nothing could stand before it unscathed. At the very moment Luke felt as if the dragon had taken him as a piece of treasure and was bent on keeping and protecting him. Since treasure was not usually wont to escape the dragon had curled up around him with every intention of hiding Luke away.

He wondered if that was what the force usually did.

There was no one left to tell him. Shuddering under another threatening sob Luke clenched his eyes shut. Escape was going to wait because even rebels needed an occasion to mope around. Also, he didn’t want to know what Vader would do if he tried right on the heels of the initial failed escape.
Luke’s signature calmed and eventually evened out, signaling to the Sith that he had fallen asleep. It seemed his first attempt at comforting someone in almost twenty years had been successful. If Vader was the type to then he would have acknowledged the personal pride at the fact. Instead he brushed one last consoling touch against his son’s bright aura and focused on data pad that had been waiting for his attention since the morning.

But…the words before him swam, unfocused. He had not been intending to discipline his son in such a manner yet he had seemed to get the reaction he desired. Luke had abandoned his intentions of such escapes, though Vader had no doubt more were coming. There was also the miserable and grudging acceptance of Vader’s authority and command that would have pleased him more if it hadn’t followed after the spanking. But he was still Luke’s father and his responsibility was clear even if the boy did not know.

He would have to tell Luke and soon.

Until then. A moment later the bright holograph form of Captain Tang waited before him.

“Milord?”

“Captain,” He rumbled and felt around her emotions. Captain Tang was an excellent majordomo and an even better tank commander. Unfortunately she had been a Separatist tank commander and her name had gone into Clone War infamy which was the only reason he did not have her assigned to an active battle group. As always her emotions were akin to a waiting predator, calm until chaos was demanded. “Where is the astromech droid?”

“The droid is under heavy guard as per your instructions milord.” She paused and her nose twitched, “He is causing trouble.”

“As expected Captain.” He would have to speak to R2 first. “I will be coming down shortly, ensure the droid does not escape again.”

“Aye milord.” Captain Tang saluted as Vader switched off the device. R2 had managed to override and destroy his restraining bolt. Something he himself had programmed into the droid almost 23 years ago to help R2 escape capture more easily from Dooku. It was amusing how things had come full circle.

R2 was sitting in the middle of a ring of tense storm troopers all who were pointing their weapons at his domed head. He didn’t seem very impressed with them and was cycling through some impressive insults in binary. Vader had once taught him those. Since none of the troopers could actually translate binary he wasn’t too concerned.

“Leave,” He commanded and ignored them as they marched swiftly from the room. Once they had R2 had extended his prod and jabbed it toward Vader with a nasty squeal. “Calm yourself R2-D2.” Vader held the furious droid back with a simple force push. “No undue harm has come to your master.”

:Undue harm: R2 twittered at him, his optic moving in a circle :Explain:

“I do not take commands from droids,” Vader replied, “But I will indulge your presumption this once. Luke has not suffered any last effects from the repercussions of his escape.”

:Repercussions: R2 sparked his extension again :Listen here you black clad:

“Your master is in no danger droid. Provided you do not attempt such a foolish escape again. Aiding the boy was more dangerous than leaving him a prisoner.”
My directive is to protect Master Luke: R2 folded his extension back with a miffed beep. Your platitudes do not reassure me. You have spent too much time and money hunting him.

“Nevertheless know that Luke will not come to any harm by my doing.” Vader glowered at the derisive snort R2 produced.

Then what was ‘undue harm’: The droid demanded.

“A punishment that will only become an unpleasant memory.” He knows Luke is not about to forget it either.

That:

“You may see your master and continue to serve so long as your wild and reckless escape attempts are no longer exercised. Should you lead the boy astray again you will be fitted with a proper restraining bolt.”

No:

“Then accept command protocol,” Vader listed a string of numbers and letter that sent R2 reeling backwards in shock, shrieking and beeping. He waited while the droid began shaking back and force.

IMPOSSIBLE: R2 spat at him and once again extended his extension

“No it is not.” Vader paused, “Would anyone else have known your command protocols?”

After a moment R2 beeped: No:

“Then do not try to understand. Simply accept the facts as they are.” R2 zipped back and forth across the cell, imitating pacing.

Where is Master Luke:

“Luke is where he should be,” Vader replied, “If you wish to join him then follow me.”

Fine: With the air of a put upon caretaker R2 followed at Vader’s heel and spat a few clever insults at Captain Tang who had been waiting outside. A single dark eyebrow rose and she almost smiled.

“Do you understand binary Captain?” Vader paused and faced his majordomo.

“I do milord, quite well.”

“Very well,” Gesturing to the droid he continued his journey to Luke’s chambers.

The sitting room was empty when Vader opened the door. R2 wheeled ahead of him and made a direct course for the bedroom. Twittering softly he stopped next to the rumpled bed and bumped the frame. As expected Luke was asleep, curled up in the middle of the messy blankets with one arm thrown across the snuggled pillow in an innocent imitation of holding a lover. His body shifted and a spike of discomfort rang through the force. Luke huffed for a second until his breathing evened out again.

R2 gave a final beep and began powering down, following his master into sleep. Vader hovered at the bedroom’s threshold watching for just a minute.

Outside the large windows that were designed to maximize the limited beauty of Vjun the acid storm
raged. Violent and primitive against the protective shields of the castle, Vader well knew what would have happened if Luke had been caught in such a fury. So, while his punishment was unpleasant for both of them it was far better than the alternative.

He retreated from the room and allowed the doors to slide shut.

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Luke woke up with a headache, a dry mouth and an ache that reminded him sharply of what had happened. Groaning he kept his eyes closed and sighed deeply. It wasn’t until the familiar beeping of R2 prompted him up. Luke flailed around for a moment and tumbled off the bed, wrapped in his blankets.

“R2!” He exclaimed and fought to untangle himself from the blankets. Luke yelped as he fell over and landed on his rear. “OUCH!” R2 beeped, concerned as his pilot jumped to his feet and rubbed at his rear. “Ow, ow, gah! When does it stop hurting?”


“How, I’m not hurt. Well, not badly and.” His breath hitched, “I’m going to be okay.”

He wasn’t sure how a droid could make his beeping sounding like a sarcastic rejoinder but R2 succeeded.

“Seriously R2,” Kneeling down he hugged the squat body, “I’m glad to see you.”

Luke took ten minutes to wash his face and change into a fresh set of clothes. Then he moved into the sitting room where R2 had plugged into the terminal. A few words were waiting on the screen on his data pad.

:What happened:

“Um,” Luke tugged at his collar and glanced out the window. His attention focused on the beyond the bay windows. “Oh.” He had flown in storms once, hurricanes and solar storms but all of them in the safety of his x-wing. For his viewpoint he could see the absolutely vicious storm in all of its unbridled glory. “Oh.” He jerked as R2 squealed at him. “Sorry Artoo, just got distracted.”


“It...well...I got...I got in trouble.” Embarrassment raged through him mingled with anger and resignation. “Next time we try to escape we’re not going to be doing right before an acid storm.”

:You still haven’t explained the what happened:

“I don’t want to talk about it,” voice muffled slightly by the fact Luke had buried his face into his hands, “Really, I don’t.” Beeping mournfully R2 tapped his metal extension onto Luke’s leg.

“Thanks buddy.” He looked back up when Artoo whistled for his attention.

:Will the parental discipline impede your escape:

“What! How? No! He! How did you know?”

:I simply compiled and analyzed the data: He glared at the gloating droid

“It was not parental.” Even if it had seemed weirdly parental but still awful, there was no other word to describe what had happened. Rebel pilots got shot trying to escape. Rebel pilots who blew up the
Death Star got dragged to the Imperial Center and shot in a public execution. Rebel pilots who had been dodging the Imperial dragnet lead by Vader and his posse of bounty hunters got thrown into a prison and/or forced to join Vader’s collection of Inquisitors. Rebel pilots who had been trying to escape did not get dragged around like an unruly child tossed over armored knees and then spanked by aforementioned Sith Lord unless there was very good reason. Of course rebel pilots also got thrown in a cell instead a collection of tastefully decorated rooms. Luke groaned again, “I don’t know what’s going on!”

Beeping again Artoo nudged his master and Luke sighed. “Thanks buddy. I wish Ben was here to help me. He’d know what to do.” His simmering hatred of Vader had been cooled beneath the copious amounts of sulking. Even being disciplined by his father’s killer hadn’t been enough to re-ignite it. Luke was too drawn and confused to muster any energy for anger. “It doesn’t make any sense. I thought he was going to kill me on Hoth and then on his big ship and possibly bring me here to an execution or even dark side training like Ben said except he hasn’t. Why would Vader go through all the effort and why would he settle for something so…different,” His face went hot again because it wasn’t every day the Hero of the Alliance got spanked by the Supreme Command of the Imperial Navy. “If Vader didn’t want me alive but there hasn’t been any attempt at training!” Luke crossed his arms and began to pace. “I’m missing something!”

Vader would have gone to Luke’s room as soon as he felt Luke wake. He would have gone to explain except that his fleet paperwork had piled up again. The datapad beneath his fingers warped and began creaking as the Sith was forced to remain at his desk.

“Captain!” He barked into his comlink.

“Milord?” Captain Tang responded as promptly as ever.

“Have a meal delivered to the prisoner.”

“Aye milord.”

“And stay with him until I have arrived.” Instead of confusion Tang’s mind began cycling through the information she had and why Vader would assign her such a task. “Speak with him and answer his questions. I trust you will use discretion?”

“Aye milord.” The former tank commander waited for a minutes, “Do you need anything else?”

“I want no disturbances.” He snapped his comm unit into pieces as he felt Captain Tang begin to comply with his orders. He had no wish for Luke to remain utterly friendless while he was in Bast Castle and he definitely didn’t want to give the boy any more time to sulk. It would give Luke the opportunity to solidify his already poor opinion of Vader.

#S#S#3

Captain Tang had been given many strange orders in her tenure as a Separatist General so being commanded to entertain a prisoner for a few hours was not the oddest thing she had ever done. It didn’t even register as a top ten on her list of ‘strangest things done.’ Still, as she moved down the last length of hallway in Lord Vader’s private quarters, the sentiment still remained. It was a very strange.

Behind, the serving droid waited with programmed patience as the Captained waited before the last door. At her command it slid open and she caught sight of the blond rebel. He was pacing around the sitting room looking pensive and whirled around as she stepped over the threshold.
When the rebel had been brought out from the shuttle he had been cuffed and impressively chained. The orange uniform he’d been wearing was torn and bloody. He’d been hauled across the landing pad by the collar of his flight suit by a clearly irritated Lord Vader.

Now he looked much cleaner, the cuts and scrapes had been healed while the blood had been cleaned off. The rebel looked much younger than he had when he’d been kicking and hollering on his way in. Bright blue eyes peered at her from beneath a blond fringe as she nodded.

“Good morning.”

#$#$

TBC
Chapter 4

Luke hadn’t been expecting company with the exception of Vader he had guessed he would remain isolated and alone. That didn’t seem to be the case.

The woman who was waiting just inside the room was followed by a serving droid. A kind he had only seen at palaces or high end restaurants. Luke focused on the tray it was carrying and only blinked when it disappeared into the little office that he hadn’t used yet.

“Good afternoon,” She repeated and Luke forced his eyes to shift toward her. He was hungry.

“Um…hello.”

“I am Captain Tang, the resident steward and I have been instructed to keep you company.” Luke blinked again and frowned.

“Instructed? By whom?”

“Lord Vader.” Her lean tan face did not shift a single iota but the impression of humor was clear. “I have also been instructed to bring you your food. I should be waiting and ready now.” Captain Tang gestured toward the office, “Please.”

“Uh.” Refusing would be a terrible idea on several accounts so he kept her clearly in his sight while retreating to the slightly smaller room. The office desk did actually have food and a lot of it. For someone who had grown up on Tatooine and had spent the last three years living off Alliance food it looked spectacular. All of his meals had looked spectacular.

“The cook had good taste.” Captain Tang said as Luke slid into his seat with only a slight grimace of soreness. There was no way he would reveal just how uncomfortable it was to sit, even now.

“Excuse me?” Captain Tang folded gracefully into her own chair.

“The fish,” Her nod adjusted his attention to the food, “it’s one from Naboo. I don’t remember what they’re called but I remember they are delicious.”

For an absurd moment the offer to let her have some lingered on his tongue until he forced it down.

“So it’s good?”

“Very,” she assured him. “If prepared right you don’t even have to worry about poison.” With a forkful of steaming fish just inches from his mouth Luke gaped across the desk and dropped it.

“What!”

“Oh yes, it’s one of the most dangerous fish in the Nubian oceans not because of the size but because of how toxic it is.” The Captain continued as if she hadn’t noticed his rapidly paling face or total astonishment. “There are 67 steps to preparing it.”

“Um,” The pilot swallowed, “I don’t think I’m…” He looked back up just in time to catch a crooked grin tilt the Captains mouth. “HEY!”

“Yes,” her words were slathered in false innocence as she blinked. “What is it?”

“Never mind,” feeling foolish he picked his fork back up, “It’s nothing.”
“As you say,” Her tone only rankled the pilot and he glared. Captain Tang twitched her eyebrows but fell silent. She stood at the average height of a lady looking to be in her early forties. Dark brown eyes matched equally dark brown hair sprinkled with light gray. Her lean stature added to the air of military exactness Luke hadn’t seen in many Imperials. Yes, most of them were stiff and proper but few had the air of a seasoned commander or even less looked comfortable in their uniform. She was a good five or six shades darker than Luke and wore a uniform that was Imperial gray but vastly different. The lines seemed sleeker and more fashionable with more decoration upon her chest that were not the standard Imperial promotion. On her left shoulder was the cog but upon her left was a patch he didn’t recognize in the slightest. The collar was not a stiff number that stood straight all around but rather it laid flat against her collarbone and moved upwards. Bright brass buttons dotted down her torso that sparkled under the bright lights.


“A pleasure,” Tang inclined her head, “Then I suppose you were headed for the ships when you tried to escape yesterday?”

“Oh, yes.” He wondered how much she knew and hoped that it was limited.

“A little reckless trying to steal a ship and head for the friendly skies when they aren’t actually all that friendly,” Luke blushed and ducked his head.

“I got that.” Her crisp diction belayed a sharp accent that Luke had never heard before but somehow added another layer of subtle sarcasm to her words. “I got that.”

“I hope so.” Unsettled he didn’t say anything else until he had managed to clear the tray.

Tang waited until the boy had eaten all of his food before speaking again. She didn’t want to impede his feeding; he looked scrawny and underfed as it was.

“And did you like the fish?” His sulking glare was enough to make the entire assignment worth it.

“It was great,” Skywalker replied.

“I’ll send your compliments onto the chef then.”

“Thank you.” He pushed the tray away and frowned her direction.

“You may ask your question,” Vader had been clear on the fact.

“Oh,” Skywalker waited and sighed, “How did you become the steward of Vader?”

“Simple, there was no one else to do the job and he trusted no one else.” She didn’t add that she had been dragged from a former Separatist medical ship at blaster point by bitter clones. “And I was the most qualified.”

“So how long have you been with the Empire?” Obviously he was making pointless small talk but it was better than nothing.

“I have been with the Empire just over 20 years.” Her lips twitched as the rebels face contorted and then twisted.

“With the Empire? Does that mean you did other stuff before that? Other military stuff?” His bright blue eyes sparkled with sudden excitement and curiosity, “Did you serve in the Clone Wars?”
“You are very clever.” She said, a little impressed he’d caught her deliberate word choice, “Yes, I
did serve in the Clone Wars.”

“Really!” An alarming shade of hero worship swamped over his gaze as he stared, “Did you know
any of the jedi commanders? Did you know Obi Wan Kenobi or Anakin Skywalker? Oh geez, did
you…?” His voice trailed off and a deep blush painted his cheeks. Luke settled back into his seat
with a mumbled ‘sorry.’ “I forget people don’t like talking about it because it’s pretty horrible and
war isn’t something that should really be applauded but..I..um.”

“I’m not insulted.” Actually, she’s a little flattered even though it’s clear he thinks she was a
Republic commander. “Thank though, for your apology. Most people wouldn’t consider it. And no,
I did not serve with any of the Jedi thought I did my hardest to try and kill some.” Her flat tone
obviously left the boy expecting something different. So it was amusing when his expression shifted
to one of deep shock. “I was a Separatist,” She clarified, “I would like to argue that I still am though
the Imperial cog says otherwise.”

“I.”

“You seem a little confused.” He shifted in his seat and then grimaced. Interesting. Not because of
something she had said but because he was obviously in some manner of pain. Very interesting.
“What is confusing you?”

“You were a Separatist?” Tang nodded. “But.”

“We existed; we didn’t just die off and vanish into history when the Republic fell. Well, most of us
didn’t die off and vanish. Okay, a few of us didn’t die off and vanish. The higher ranking officers
couldn’t hide and got executed save for a few.”

“You tried to kill the Jedi?” His confusion only worsened by the sadness that had taken root,
“Why?”

“They tried to kill me. Fair is fair and I didn’t like them anyway. It was war young Skywalker,”
tanned cheeks twitched, “It happens.”

“But the Jedi were good!” Tang felt astonishment sweep through her system, “They defended the
Republic! They stood for.”

“What exactly?” Distaste thinned out her lips, “What did the jedi stand for and what did the Republic
stand for? Specifically?”

“Well, democracy and justice. Peace and harmony.”

“Spoken like a true fool who has listened to nothing except rebel propaganda and even worse, jedi
propaganda. Your grasp of history…it concerns me.”

“The jedi did not have propaganda!” Luke snapped, “That’s not.”

“Oh they most certainly did,” She wondered if she was taking it too far but dropped the thought,
“Never trust anything a jedi has ever told you at face value. It is next to worthless.” Anger and
frustration and more than a little confusion warred for room on his young face until Luke finally
sucked in a deep breath and his expression cleared.

“Are you sure you’re not saying that because you’ve fought a war against them?” Skywalker’s
young face looked strangely intense, “What if you’re quoting Separatist propaganda just like you
think I was quoting the Alliance stuff?”
“Well said,” She nodded at him, “But I have 10 years battlefield experience on my belt so I know what I’m talking about. My memories serve me correctly so I stand by what I said.”

“The Republic stood for justice and peace,” Skywalker said again, his voice lined with steel and youthful faith that Tang almost envied.

“The Republic had a slave army lead by commanders who were blasphemers and heretics in their own religion. It was fueled by greed and corruption and paid for by those it abused. It allowed for unchecked lechery and lawlessness all under guise of ‘freedom’.” Her flatness jerked the boy out of whatever righteous funk he found himself in.

“That can’t be right!”

“Of course it is. Those clones were slaves and were owned by the Republic. Sentient beings bound by inhibitor chips and with no chance to find a life aside from military. They were bought and paid for to die under the command of the Jedi.” She glanced toward the window, “You’ve have been listening to whatever the rebels tell you too trustingly.”

“I don’t…” Skywalker looked as if someone had just told him the Emperor had once been a freelance stripper. Clearly unable to find his bearings or a solid argument the boy lapsed into silence. Tang was fine with quiet and knew the blond would be asking more questions when he found one he could ask. Ten minutes later she was vindicated. “Why did you say not to take anything a jedi says at face value?”

“Several reasons,” Propping her right ankle on her left knee she nodded to herself, “First off, the Jedi were masters at saying one thing and meaning another. They couldn’t and wouldn’t lie outright but they had no trouble bending or distorting the truth. So while it wouldn’t be a complete lie it was close enough that you couldn’t tell the difference.”

“But it’s still the truth even if it’s just from a certain point of view.” Skywalker protested, obviously willing to throw himself down for the reputation of a dying religion. He flinched backward at her harsh bark of laughter.

“No it isn’t,” her fingers drummed against the armrest, “From a certain point of view is a pretty version of bias. And a lie by omission is still a lie and that’s what the fools didn’t understand. Think about it, what is the truth?”

“The truth?” Skywalker swallowed and blinked, “I don’t understand.”

“The truth,” She said, settling herself in for the explanation, “is reality and reality is truth. So, when a person relays the truth they are painting the proper picture of reality. You tell the whole story. However, when you lie you aren’t presenting the truth. You don’t show the true reality. When you fail to convey the whole reality it turns into a lie. Politicians and lawyers ignore this distinction and tell you that anything that isn’t an outright lie is the truth.”

“But they’re wrong,” Skywalker prompted.

“Most definitely, it is much easier to tell any flavor of a lie than the whole truth.”

“So you think the Jedi lied?” The obvious and unspoken plea for her to be wrong was almost heartbreaking. He did not want his heroes torn from their pedestal. Tang would have been merciful except she was taking a distinct vicious pleasure in doing so.

“All the damn time and they were bias as all hell.” Tang bit back on her swears, “Yes, they lied. What did they tell you?”
“I…” Long eyelash brushed against lean cheeks as Skywalker gazed down at the desktop. He remained quiet for several seconds before jumping to another topic, “Why did you say the clones were slaves?”

“You’re from Tatooine right?” He nodded, “I’m sure you’ve seen slavery up close.” Another nod, “They were bound by the same rules as slave except their chips forced them to obey all commands instead of blowing them away. All decisions were out of their hands and they had no chance to be free. Their lives were designed to end on command with no questions asked.”

“But didn’t the jedi care about them?”

“I’m sure some of them did but when I commanded droids they used their clones in the same manner I used my clankers. If they did care about the clones it was different and a bit strange since they didn’t acknowledge the relative youth of the clones or the fact they were slaves or even that they could form attachments at all. For where I stood it was actually pretty sickening.”


“Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” his voice muffled as he sank further and further down the chair, “I’ve never heard any of this before.”

“I’m not surprised. You’ve either heard the Imperial announcements that the Jedi were traitors and awful or the rebel material that tells you that the jedi were saintly guardians.”

“But the jedi weren’t traitors?” Again hope infused his voice.

“No, not to the Republic but they did betray themselves and their doctrine by accepting the military command of the clone army. As much as I didn’t like them or their work they didn’t deserve what happened.”

“Okay.” Luke swallowed down the sudden lump in his throat and shrugged to himself. He could continue down the avenue about jedi but he could tell that Captain Tang would indulge him but Luke wasn’t sure he wanted to hear it. “What did you do during the Clone Wars? If you don’t mind telling me.”

“I don’t,” She waved a hand with supreme unconcern; “It was very simple. I told tanks where to go and troops what to do. Nothing too exciting or note-worthy for the history books through I did write a book on tank command and military operations.”

“Oh yes, the Imperial academies use it as a textbook.” Luke coughed and stared at the woman who looked for all the world like a smug nexu. “It’s anonymous of course but they think it was written by some long dead General. Fortunately I still get royalties but the book isn’t in the public circulation. I think the students have to be a definite command track to get access which is why I overcharge. Plus, the book is heavily redacted and censored.”


“Yes,” He blushed a bit when she shook her head, “You are a little too naïve to be doing what you do. There’s an unedited copy in this little office library so it should prove interesting.” Luke glanced at the rows and rows of book files that lined the shelves and felt a little foolish for not having looked at any of them before. “There are a bunch of books that you should enjoy and should prove
highly educational. You need as many as you can get.”

“I’m not stupid,” Luke protested but he didn’t feel insulted.

“I’m not saying you are but there are some glaring gaps in your education that need fixing.” A light that should warn Luke of something ignited in her flat brown eyes. “This is the most interesting conversation I’ve had in ages.”

“I’ve got another question,” Luke waited until Captain Tang was waiting and he smiled weakly at her. “But it’s about the jedi.”

“Oh,” Her annoyance irritation lasted for only minute before she gestured for him to continue, “Did you ever hear of one called Darth Vader?”

“Oh?” For once it was nice to hear someone else inarticulate. She hadn’t been lying their entire conversation which was the only reason he had stayed to listen to the explanations. “No, there was never a jedi named Darth Vader.” It was the truth and his stomach still swooped low and dizziness struck. “Vader didn’t come onto the scene until about a month after the Clone Wars ended. That was the first I’d heard of him. Why?”

“It’s just,” Should he tell her? “Ben.”

“Ben?”

“Obi wan,” She nodded, “Told me that…” his fists clenched as the familiar anger washed around his edges, “A young jedi named Darth Vader betrayed and murdered my father.”

“Well,” Captain Tangs reply came on the heels of his explanation without pause, “That’s not true. Kenobi lied to you.” Even as the force told him the Captain was not lying Luke still wanted to protest.

“Ben wouldn’t lie to me!”

“Well he did,” she shrugged, “I don’t know how your father died but it wasn’t at Lord Vader’s hand.”

“Why would Ben lie to me?” It didn’t make any sense for Ben to tell him Vader had killed his father.

“To hide something from you,” Tang pursed her lips, “Or even to get you to do something for him or probably for his own means. Remember what I said, never take anything at face value.”

“So…from a…certain point of view Vader betrayed and murdered my father but…”

“In all actuality that truth it probably much different, like I said, skewed perceptions and bias were part of the Jedi doctrine.”

“But that still doesn’t explain why he would lie to me.”

“I don’t know,” Tang, to his eternal relief, didn’t sound irritated at his continuous disbelief. “But motivation is a tricky thing to understand. Why people do anything could range from a number of things. Vader was motivated to hunt you because you blew up the Death Star. That made sense but what motivates him to keep you here,” She gestured to the handsome office and the connecting bed room and living space. “Is beyond me.” Luke stared into the distance as he finally began wondering why Vader had…punished him in such a manner. The Sith Lords explanation had been because Luke was reckless with his life and endangered himself stupidly. If he took Captain Tangs advice he
questioned the motivation behind it then...he was still confused.

“You don’t have an idea?” Luke pushed and her mouth twisted.

“I have one but it’s a little absurd even for me.”

“Well?”

“No thank you Skywalker,” She shook her head and waved her hands at him, “I’m not explaining it because I’m still figuring it out.”

“Fair enough,” Luke felt the usual ache lessening the longer he managed to ignore it. “Do you always spend mornings tossing bombs at people and watching them struggle to juggle them all?”

“Only if I think they can handle it,” Came the easy reply, “You seem to have adjusted fine.”

“I guess,” He felt his shoulder slump, “Sure.” Luke watched the Captain produce a comm unit and then frowned when he saw or heard nothing. Tang was obviously listening to someone and it wasn’t until he noticed the headset hooked over her ear that it made sense. A small microphone rested on her neck which she tapped.

“Get the files ready for me to review. I’ll be down soon.” She clicked the unit off and offered him an apologetic smile. “I’m sorry to leave early but I do have a rather pressing matter to attend to. Will you be alright on your own?”

“Yes,” He stood as she did and held out a hand, “Thank you for the food and the conversation.”

“Of course,” She smiled and shook his hand, “I’m sure I’ve left you with a lot to think about.”

“Yes,” Luke followed her from the office, “You did.” He winched and rubbed at his rear absently as he watched the Captain depart, followed by the droid she’d brought. His brow furrowed when her eyebrows shot upward and she bit down on a grin.

“Oh.” A faint wheeze made it past tight lips as humor and amusement blossomed in the force, “Oh, well I guess that makes a lot of sense.” Horror clung to his chest when Captain Tang gave a mocking salute and waltzed into the hallway, chuckling.

She knew.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

People talk and somethings get explained and the force gets a little drunk on happy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Luke had settled himself in the armchair closest to the window while brooding. Artoo sat next to the chair and occasionally beeped to himself. Legs curled up under him, Luke watched the desolate landscape as he mulled over what the captain had said.

She was right. Luke needed to understand what he was defending.

He turned the data pad over in his hands and glanced at the small pile of book chips that waited patiently nearby.

The History of the Galactic Republic
Politics of the Clone Wars
Ethics and Morals of War
The Culture of the Jedi Order
From Below: 100 Stories of Average Soldiers of the Grand Army of the Republic
Where Did the Republic Go Wrong
Rise of the Empire

Luke had never shied away from hard work and he certainly hadn’t stinted on his studies, what little he had. Yet, he sighed and shivered; it was a fairly formidable pile of work. The last file he added to the pile was Collected Papers of Tang. He sensed that the Captain had been holding something back with her explanation of her work but he wasn’t sure. There was a lot of information to sift through and he needed to get started. With a final pat to Artoo he slid the first book into the reader and began to read.

Captain Tang had done her job and she had done it well. Vader did not begrudge the fact she had left his son to attend to her duties. Even if she wasn’t waging war against the Republic he still used her valuable experience to plan operations against pirates, swoop gangs and troublesome rebel planets. Still, Luke had been distracted from escape and the lingering pain and embarrassment of his punishment. It was what he had intended all along.

The Sith hovered in his office for a few minutes, reading the mood of his son and finding the blond distracted and occupied. Obviously he had dived into the books available or he was preparing for another escape. Somehow Vader doubted the latter.

Outside the door he could sense Luke’s thoughts more clearly. It was definite he was reading and was obviously engrossed in whichever book had caught his fancy. Keying the door open he observed in silence.

Luke had curled up in the armchair, Artoo dutifully at his side and a pile of book chips on the small side table. Bright blue eyes were skipping over the words with pleasing speed, the boy obviously
digesting and processing the information quickly. A flare of pride raced through the Sith Lord before he thought to smother it.

“Oh!” Luke had finally noticed him and jumped to his feet before nearly tripping over them. “Hey.” He finished a little lamely and ran a lean hand through mused blond locks.

“Skywalker.” Vader began and paused. Luke shifted a bit and clenched the data pad between his fingers and swallowed.

“How old is Captain Tang?” Well, he hadn’t been expecting that. Luke ran another hand through his already messy hair and blushed, “I’m just a little curious because she seems pretty young and she says she did a whole lot during the war and she knows a whole lot and…” His blush deepened as his words trailed off into a quiet cough.

“Captain Tang has just turned 40 years old.” There was no harm in telling the boy since Tang would not have told him her story.

“Oh.” Again silence permeated the room while the two men stared at each other. After it had stretched long enough Vader spoke again.

“I trust you are recovered fully?” This time Luke scowled as an unbidden blush rose again.

“Yes,” He said; a touch resentfully. Vader pondered the apparent bitterness and did not respond. With a pathetic wave at the surrounding furniture Luke spoke again, “What am I doing here?”

“You are a prisoner.”

“Prisoners who blew up the Death Star don’t get locked away in furnished suites,” Luke pointed out and Vader was inclined to agree. “I thought you’d drag me to the Imperial Center for a public execution.” His son blanched and retreated as Vader’s rage swept through the force with the primal hatred of a wild beast. He roared a silent defiance to fate and destiny before drawing the fury back to avoid unsettling his son.

Luke had already drawn back, wide eyed and startled.

“If I,” Vader snarled, raising a fist to chest level, “Were to punish you as I saw fit for your actions aboard the Death Star and your foolhardy actions during the Battle of Yavin, Skywalker. You would remember your initial punishment with fondness.” What little color remained in Luke’s face drained as Luke retreated even further away from his (unknown to him) father. “Fortunately for you, you were not in my custody or under my jurisdiction. Mark my words young one. I have every intention of curbing your wild streak of thoughtlessness that fuels your imprudent adventures. “

“You.” Luke’s indignation flared wildly in the force and he stepped forward. The image of his beloved mother facing down pirates and senators rose, unbidden to Vader’s mind. “You have no right!”

“I have every right!” The dragon beneath the armor rose again, threatening and protective at the same time.

“Excuse me!” Biting sarcasm whipped around the room as Luke stood his ground, “I didn’t realize that was usually how the Supreme Command of the Imperial Navy dealt with rebels! I thought it involved a lot more drugs and electricity.”

Luke wondered if he had pushed Vader too far when the room dropped to freezing temperatures. Black fury surged through the force nearly drowning the hopeful jedi in a torrent of rage.
“You are correct.” Again the force surged but the darkness had been replaced the shining endorsement that made the next few words frighteningly true. “It is how fathers deal with wayward sons.”

“No.” Luke staggered backward again, a hand reached out to brace him against the window, “NO!” The force pulsed, pleased around Vader’s half spoken truth. And it was the truth; Luke could feel it deep in his bones and beneath his whirling denial and horror, he rejoiced.

Points and evidence connected, snapping into place in mere seconds while Vader remained motionless and seemingly impassive.

Artoo’s word choice regarding ‘parental discipline’ How Artoo knew he did not understand but it was obvious.

Captain’s Tang explanation that Vader had never been a Jedi during the clone wars because he hadn’t appeared to exist yet.

The suite of rooms fit for a prince. ‘A Sith Prince’ a traitorous part of his mind whispered.

The book files that had been banned from public circulation.

The food that cost more than a month wages.

Vader and his unwillingness to take him to the Emperor. Vader and his anger of Luke’s escape and his anger over Luke’s recklessness.

Even the spanking, while shocking and horrible, made sense. No permanent damage had been done, it had not been public and it had made Vader’s point.

“You…” weakly he staggered back into his armchair, shaking and confused. “But…” He settled his face into his hands while Vader stepped across the room with deliberate slowness. “Father?” A muttered word, a pleading hope that it was not so; even as it was the jubilant warble of a lonely orphan.

“My son,” Vader placed a large hand on his shoulder and bent to one knee to be eye level with Luke.

“But.” A hundred truths tore through the room. His bottom lip trembled. “Ben he…he lied to me.” Captain Tang had already told him this but now it was real. Now the evidence was holding his shoulder and so very close. “He lied.”

“Yes.” The single word admission was all it took for Luke to begin trembling. Frightened and confused the pilot remained seated, shaking and hugging himself.

“He lied to me.” Bright, shining eyes turned up toward the blank mask, “You’re here. You’re alive.”

“I am.”

“He lied to me!” Shivering, Luke sniffed back the sudden onset of tears. He felt hot and cold at the same time all while the sensation of free falling in his x-wing rushed through his system. “What… what’s wrong with me?”

“Your body is reacting to extreme emotional stress.” Vader replied and moved his hand to cup Luke’s face. “Many people react differently and as an adult you will do much differently than when you were young.”
“I… I can’t.” The blond gulped a breath of air before half sliding from his seat to fall into Vader’s waiting arms. Still kneeling, the Sith Lord held his son close, one hand around his shoulders and the other along his waist.

“Breath my son,” He commanded. Vader could feel the violent trembling even encased in armor while Luke pressed himself closer. Though the force he could sense the heartbeat beneath the hissing of the respirator and after a few unsteady breaths Luke began to feel his heart return to normal. Still shaky and unsteady he continued to lean against his Father while he reveled the Force’s jubilant celebration. A large hand wrapped around his shoulder and pulled him closer.

Once again the possessive dragon crowed in victory as the angel was surrounded and loved by the darkness it wielded.

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Palpatine’s yellowed and hellish eyes shot open as the force went spinning with glee and victory. Light blossomed, blinding around him and began threading across the stars in a harmonious dance with the dark.

The bleak press of despair and fury that had cloaked the galaxy over in depression, lessened and, as one, the sentient on every planet and moon; aboard every ships whether freighter or Starfighter or destroyer, those who crouched in crumbling cities and all who went about daily lives undisturbed by the unfolding civil war….

They all breathed easier. Movement came easier, thoughts moved faster and laughter began to ring through nurseries and child centers the universe over. Adults smiled, inexplicable and confused but still pleased.

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Leia, folded in the co-pilots chair of the Falcon felt hope and peace begin to bloom in her chest in a way it hadn’t since the destruction of her home. Haziness that had clung to her eyes for so long the universe and stars seemed almost blinding once it had gone. Energy rushed through her veins as the galaxy called to her, hypnotic and demanding yet gentle and loving at the same time.

Chewbacca growled at her as she began punching random numbers into the navigational system. :What are you doing?:

“I don’t know,” she replied, voice distant and eyes glazed. Electricity buzzed along her skin until she felt she would combust. “Hans gone and Luke’s been missing since Hoth. But he’s still alive! I can feel it!”

:Princess!: Chewbacca roared in the cockpit as she continued to power up the ship. :What?:

“We need to go here Chewie!” Leia jabbed a slender finger toward the destination, already accepted by the computer. “I don’t know why but I know we’ll get some answers. It could lead up to Luke!”

:How do you know?:

“I,” Leia glared out the waiting galaxy and deepened her scowl. “I don’t know but I have to find out. For Han and for Luke and the Alliance, they’re needed. The Alliance needs Luke and Han.” She folded her arms and refused to look back at the towering alien, “I need Luke and Han.”

:Do you know where it is?:
“No,” she squared her shoulders and turned back around, “But we’ll bet answers about Luke. Can you get the ground technicians to load us up for a trip? Supplies and fuel, the likes?”

:I will: Chewbacca howled in agreement and set a huge paw on her head. Leia graced him with a tight, tired smile. :Get that golden nightmare ready.: 

“I’ll get Threepio,” Leia agreed and both went to work.

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Alone in his swamp former Grandmaster of the Jedi Order Yoda lifted his head toward the sky. Green bat-like ears twitched in something like astonishment. For several seconds he peered at the sky before stomping back to his little hut, muttering.

“Unfitting it is,” He croaked at the smirking ghostly form of Qui Gon Jinn, “To be so glib of the fate of the galaxy.”

“Excuse me master,” Qui Gon bowed, both mocking and respectful, “It’s not often I get to prove the entire council wrong. Even if it is post-mortem.”

“Darkness will forever dominate his fate.” Yoda rebuked, settling into his hut and frowning at the ghost.

“Obviously you’re a little wrong on that respect.” The now dead maverick jedi grinned and almost bounced in place. “Even you aren’t infallible master.”

“Know this, I do. Gloat, you should not.”

“I’m not gloating…I’m gloating a little but it is much deserved gloating. I’ve been waiting my entire unlife for this moment.”

Chapter End Notes

Think of Captain Tang as Captain Dietrich (from the Rat Patrol) and Erwin Rommel (genuine historical figure) rolled into a babes form.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

I hope this is what you were all expecting. Fluff and family bonding, plus clues for the clever.

It didn’t occur to Luke until after the fact that he was in fact ‘cuddling’ Darth Vader. And that fact that Darth Vader, his father, was cuddling him back. Upon the realization a deep red blush crawled up his neck and swept across his cheeks. Pulling back, heart keening in despair, he settled back into the armchair and stared.

His father. Darth Vader was his father.

Sith Lord, Terror of the Rebel Alliance, Destroyer of Worlds, Right Hand of Palpatine. There were so many names the galaxy had bestowed upon him. All chosen to (and wholly inadequate to) describe the fury and terror of the Sith Lord.

“You,” Words failed him as Luke brushed a hand along the iconic armored chest. Vader, his father, remained kneeling for a minute long before rising to his incredible height. “Father.”

“Luke,” aware that his overwhelming size might cause his son to stop talking, he sat a little awkwardly on the little couch.

Luke swallowed down purely reflexive fright when the black mask continued to stare at him. “What now?” He had been drifting along with confusion and no concrete idea of a future and now…his whole understanding of the galaxy had been destroyed in one day. What was he supposed to learn how to be a jedi now? What was the Alliance going to do about the Empire? What was he expected to do now? Now that he was Darth Vader’s son there would be…. Luke’s breath hitched again and he covered his eyes and listened to his speeding heart rate.

“Do not be frightened my son,” Vader reached across the small gap to settle a grip onto his shoulder, “The future will come as it wills. Until such time as the galaxy demands my attention you have it.”

Exactly what a lonely orphan wanted.

Exactly what Luke was frightened of.

“Alright,” swallowing down his fright Luke glanced back at his father through his eyelashes.

“Perhaps you could tell me of your life on Tatooine.” Vader offered a fairly diplomatic topic.

“Well,” the phantom pain of his Aunt and Uncle’s loss stabbed though his heart, “I lived with Aunt Beru and Uncle Own, and we were moisture farmers. It wasn’t very exciting out there except that I got to go flying sometimes.”

“You enjoy flying?”

“Yes!” Luke’s excitement bloomed outward; Vader basked in the innocent light. “I love flying, taking my x-wing out is the best!”
“It seemed very well maintained,” Vader acknowledged, “I am impressed with your modifications.”

“I like to tinker, Artoo helps sometimes. I don’t,” he glanced at the window. “Suppose we could go to my x-wing.”

Vader paused before nodding and standing. “Very well.” Luke’s shyness did not escape the Sith Lord. His conversation with Tang might have come easily but Tang was skilled in interrogation and gathering information from people. He would bet his castle on Tang wringing information out of the most stout hearted Imperial fanatic without them even noticing. Vader, on the other hand, did not know what to say. He had not spoken at length to anyone for almost 23 years.

What was he going to do?

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Captain Tang would love for the opportunity to visit a secluded beach planet and drink sweet fizzy drinks through curly straws. Having the chance to eat her fill of delicious snacks and more unhealthy foods would not go amiss. She would also love the opportunity to also watch the entire Empire burn in a fantastic blaze and observe the Confederacy rise from the ashes.

(She missed the days after a successful planetary invasion when her troops looted through the castles and palaces for all sorts of treasures and booty. It took a few years but Tang had managed to assemble a collection of jewelry worth more than some planets. Plus there were some fantastic pieces of art and small sculptures that were still locked in a dungeon somewhere in the mid-rim.)

Instead, she was on Vjun watching as the small, underfed rebel followed on Lord Vader’s heels while looking decidedly shell shocked. Honestly, she had been expecting both of them to be occupied until later in the afternoon. Vader had only been upstairs an hour.

“Lord Vader.” She snapped of a salute that would have made Count Dooku impressed.

“Captain Tang.” Luke nodded at her and offered a weak smile.

“Nothing’s happened in the last hour,” She said, “Except that we’ve got some intel on…” She cast a glance to the blond who leaned forward. Vader nodded for her to continue. “Princess Leia and the wookie. Apparently they both blasted out of the last known rebel base with a burning tail. They didn’t give any reason.”

“You’ve got spies in the fleet!” The second hand embarrassment almost sent a blush to Tang’s own face when Vader turned his mask toward his son. Somehow he managed flat disbelief without saying a word. “What?”

“The only stranger thing is that a new Galactic Citizen Poll of Happiness just came back and it looks like personal pleasure is up by 25%.”

“Is that all Captain?”

“At the moment.” Count Dooku rose to her mind and she could almost taste the tea he’d serve when they discussed invasion plans. He hadn’t done that with anyone else on his council probably because few of them could actually consume human food but still…at least she never had to worry about getting strangled with the older man.

“You’ve got spies in the fleet!” Luke said again as if someone would come and deny it. He turned a betrayed and offended gaze on the towering Sith. Tang would have wondered where he got the gumption to do so except she knew that the small blond was Vader’s son. “What?”
Tang wanted to sit him down and explain a few things about how war worked. The deep itch to explain and educate began twitching as her mouth fought a smirking frown.

“I find your lack of education….disturbing.” Vader intoned and whirled around, cape unfurling behind him. Luke gaped at his back as the Sith waved a hand at him. “Come.” With a final pout at the man’s back the rebel followed, shoulder slumped.

“I knew you had spies in the fleet,” Luke said, skipping to catch up with his father. “But we could never find them! It didn’t seem real.”

“My son,” Vader punched in a quick code and waved his son forward into the hanger.

“You know,” Luke said, looking over the gleaming rows of ships, “Last time I came in here I was crawling through a vent.”

“My son, do take care to read the books that have been provided.”

“I was educated!” Luke rebuked, “They don’t teach military strategy in Tatooine Primary School.”

“You have led the Rouge Squadron for three years my son,” Vader replied, hooking his thumbs on his belt, “And you claim to not understand military strategy.”

Luke shrugged and sighed, “It’s different. I’m picking it up as I go and there are a lot of veterans around me. Plus, half of what I do is reckless and crazy.”

“Yes,” Vader growled, “I am well aware.” His son offered a weak smile.

“I’m not sure of the details or the different points but I get the concepts really easily. I don’t have the experience that Tang does or you. I’m a pilot, not a spy.” Luke stuffed his hands into his pockets and hunched his shoulders with deliberate false innocence. “But those books are promising.”

“Of all of them I recommend Tang’s collected papers and letters. She might have been exclusively Army but her Navy skills are nothing to ignore.”

“Alright,” Luke’s smile bloomed as he took in the familiar sight of the shining ships. “Oh wow! Where did you get all these?”

“Many of them I have flown at one point or another others….I…acquired.”

“So you collect ships.” Luke skittered toward a ship that he couldn’t recognize. “What’s this one?”

“This was a Separatist Officer Starfighter, transport class.”

“Intrepid?”

“The name of the ship,” Vader said, “This one used to belong to Captain Tang.”

“You stole her ship?”

“No,” Vader huffed in two parts amusement and three parts irritation, “I acquired the ship long before I acquired the Captain.”

“Does she know it’s here?”

“She does.”
“Does she get the chance to fly it?”

“No, there are not more meetings for her to attend.” Luke winced in sympathy. “This is the only ship of its kind. Only 10 were ever made. It was almost impossible to catch on scanners due to the meteorite frame.”

“What?”

“A meteor was melted down and recast to create the parts for the ship. Weapons and shielding were much advanced for the time and would hold up well in a battle even now. This was also the forbearer for the x-wing.”

“I can see that.” Luke ran an admiring hand along the classic design, “What happened to the other 9?”

“Count Dooku owned four and the last five belonged to his other High Generals.”

“Fascinating.” He knew most of Rouge Squadron would give their x-wings just for a chance to look at it. “I thought she liked tanks though?”

“She does, though her personal tank now rests in the Courasant Clone Wars Museum.”

“Really?” Laughing to himself Luke moved onto the next ship. “Which one is your favorite?”

“I do not have a favorite,” Vader lied, “As a Sith Lord I do not hold materialistic value.”

Luke’s expression shifted downward into a wry smirk, “Right, you’re not possessive at all…..”

“Do not be glib my son,” Vader said without any real command, “But I do favor my current TIE advanced.”

“Oh no!” Luke wandered over to another ship, a thick and stocky green number that had obviously seen better days, “Those haven’t got any shields.”

“I am well aware.” Vader followed his sons movements at a more sedate pace, quietly enthused by his sons excitement.

Luke seemed to have shaken off the sulking misery that had been so obvious through their bond earlier in the day. Now that the shadow of his punishment had been shaken off Luke seemed perfectly prepared to start anew. His happiness was enough for Vader at the moment
Chapter 7

Artoo had booster jets. Luke didn’t know this until his father (VADER) had started this fact once the droid had complained to the both of them.

“Booster jets?” His father paused and turned the imposing black helmet toward him.

“Yes,” Came the reply, Vader clenched a fist and snarled wordlessly, “Booster jets, excellent for short term flights but not for distances. It enables it to reach what might have been previously inaccessable.”

“You wouldn’t happen to know this from…experience? Would you?” Luke leaned back a bit and tilted his head to look his father full on. “I’ve heard some…stories.”

“Those stories are irrelevant my son,” Vader snapped and Luke took a step away. Noticing this he calmed, forcing his anger away. “I am no longer tied to what has been.”

“Of course you are,” Luke, paused, on hand on the Artoo and the other holding the proffered hydrospanner, “How else can I be you son if you weren’t Anakin.”

“NO!” Vader barked, cutting his son off with a flare of anger and anguish. A deeper pain that Luke could only begin to comprehend washed around the force and dimmed the room. A love so deep that even all the darkness in the galaxy could not dim it, affection so true that even self-denial did not survive. The barest image of a brown haired woman with a loving smile and beautiful gown flashed along Luke’s force perceptions. It left him dizzy and confused. “Anakin is gone! Dead! Stricken by his own weakness and foolishness.”

Luke swallowed, the dark side swelled and wrapped around Vader. It cast him into solitude and shadows, the fuel of madness and melancholy. Lost so far in his gloom and self-enforced contrition it was obvious that Vader had begun losing himself in the seductive and hollow promises of the empty darkness.

“Father.” The surroundings of Vader’s personal workshop vanished, leaving the two men standing in oblivion. As softly as possible Luke spoke, voice vibrating with uncertainty and youthful vigor, “Father. Please.”

Darth Vader could feel the dark slipping into his chest and blood, poisoning his mind and rousing the ever-present bitterness into a vile creation. This was not the bright anger and righteous passion of his youth. This was not the life and electricity that had once swept through his body, calling to the living force in its entirety. The light and the dark had been balanced once, before he had slipped into the void. Long before Palpatine had finally showed his hands that had blackened his light and infected his natural dark.

He had become evil. The same evil had had despised in his Master and the same evil that bound his mother in chains. Corrupted anger, twisted into an unrecognizable mangle until there was nothing but hatred standing atop the bruised remained of his love.

Staring through the red tint of his mask, Vader watched Luke reached toward him. A bright, glowing light that the darkness shrank away from, hissing and spitting but ultimately overwhelmed by purity. Light encased every inch of his slender form, from the smallest hair that refused to lay flat to the same that had was held before his clenched fist.

Against love, hatred held no chance.
Luke smiled, small and sad at him. Inherent goodness and passion that flared behind shockingly blue eyes.

“Father.” Luke set his fingers against the thick leather gloves. Evil abandoned its stolen host and fled, shrieking back towards its creator leaving and emptiness in Vader that he had never expected or experience.

Only sheer force of will, the force and his prosthetics kept him from staggering sideways into a wall. His hand uncurled, allowing Luke to slip delicate appendages into the potentially crushing grip. Astonished and a little frightened, Vader accepted the gesture, curling his own fingers to clasp around his sons.

Luke was still glowing, a supernova in the force that continued to grow and draw power even as the boy simply stood. He probably did not realize he had drawn on the force to try and reach his father. He did not recognize the sheer power of banishing a cloak of evil had required, how Luke had simply *reached* and done what would have taken a Master hours.

Vader drew him closer and rest his other hand on the blond crown of Luke’s head. Luke did not protest the touch, leaning into the embrace with astonishing joy.

Palpatine had taken him apart, ripping him away from the truth and sinking him into a cesspool of misery that had twisted his perception. Natural anger and natural dark rested in ones heart as purely as natural love and natural light. Once, when he had been a slave Vader had rested all four together in easy harmony, tempered and taught by his mother.

The jedi had come along and proclaimed that three were dangerous and he could only have the light. His friend, the Chancellor had told him two of them were weaknesses.

They were both fools, the Jedi and Palpatine.

You could not have light without darkness and there was not life without joy or anger. Once could not exist without the other. Only those with true dedication to evil could sink and abandon the root of their souls.

With a stomach that could no longer tolerate actual food Vader felt sick.

“I’m sorry, Father.” Luke murmured, muffled by the armor and his own sudden shyness. “You could never wrong me, my son,” Vader rumbled, holding his son closer. Quietly, too much so for the vocoder to pick he added, “My angel.”

Somewhere around them Artoo whistled to himself and bumped against both their legs.

Leia had yet to abandon the cockpit of the Falcon. She hoped to stave off the inevitable dreams and nightmares that dogged her sleep by refusing to even consider it. For a moment she sighed, staring into hyperspace before sucking down the last of her tea.

:Are you going to stay in here the entire time?: Chewbacca asked, sticking his shaggy head through the door.

"I might," she replied and yawned explosively, startling herself. "Sorry."

:You need to sleep Leia: Chewbacca roared and the Princess lolled her head to the side, comfortable
in his presence the way she wasn’t with so many.

"I'm fine Chewie." Leia yawned again and blinked heavily. For several minutes she sat still, eyes growing heavier and heavier by the minute until the horrible realization that the wookiee had slipped her a sleeping pill dawned. "Chewie," she whined, feeling younger that she ever had. "No!"

:It is herbs: Chewbacca said, lifting her from the chair and cradling her slender form in his huge arms, :There should be no dreams:

"You don't know that," she mumbled into his hairy chest, "You don't."

:You need sleep:

"I'm afraid to sleep." Defenses had vanished under the trust she placed in the loyal wookiee, "I'm afraid of what I'll see."

:I will watch out for you.: Chewbacca moaned as softly as he could, settling her into Hans old bunk. He tucked the heavy blanket around her shoulders and added an extra pillow.

Leia yawned again, unable to stifle it and sank into the spacers bunk. At the moment it felt more comfortable than her own bed back in Aldera had ever felt. She wasn't quite aware of why she was so willing to sleep. Not simply the herbs or the tea or the ready made bunk. Rather, it was the sensation of pure affection and hope that reached across the stars to reassure her.

It made her think of Luke.

Luke, who had stood against the darkness of the Death Star. Luke who had banished the evil with a single, well-placed shot.

Luke, her friend.

Luke, her brother, whispered a tiny voice in the back of her head that Leia did not hear as she was already sinking into the welcoming embrace of sleep. The light followed, holding her close even as the dark that hovered nearby watched, curious and protecting.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Luke gets sent off to bed and Captain Tang and Vader discuss politics and parenting. Qui-Gon makes an appearance keeping up with the tradition of Jedi being confusing and slightly unreliable.

Luke, much to his chagrin, was sent off to bed after a few hours of pouring over Starfighter schematics and debating different modifications for droids. It was with deep reluctance that he obeyed his father and followed behind as he was escorted through the castle back to his floor.

“I’m fine with staying awake for a few more hours,” He protested, “Leaving the fighter in such a shape is practically a crime. I could get it done.”

“The fighter will still be there when you awake,” His father replied, pressing a hand against his back to escort him into the turbolift, “You have been awake for far too long.”

“I can stay up longer than this you know,” Luke pointed out and cringed with Vader’s helmet swung toward him, a dangerous edge to his force signature.

“Your proven inability to care for even your most basic needs while in the arms of the Rebel Alliance have only vindicated the need to ensure you are in bed at a reasonable hour.” Luke blushed and his stomach swooped low.

“Father! I’m not a child!”

“No?” Luke shrugged his shoulders and glowered at the metal walls, “Then why would you willingly do something so negative to your health?”

“Necessity,” the reply was stuck between a sulk and snap, “I’m a rebel, we don’t sleep all that much, we can’t.”

“Another reason you are in need of my guidance.” Vader intoned, privately enjoying Luke’s teenager like irritation. “Consorting with anarchists and failure to care for yourself. It is good I managed to acquire you when I did.”

“They aren’t anarchists!” He protested, “And I can take care of myself just fine! I’m still alive aren’t I?”

“Only through constant divine intervention,” Vade retorted as the doors swept open, “It is a true miracle.”

“HEY!”

Vader pushed Luke through the doors and wagged a finger in his face, “To bed with you, young one. I will know if you fail to comply.” The doors slid shut before Luke could begin to form a reply. He could feel Luke’s embarrassment and irritation and even deeper, perhaps not realized by the boy himself, happiness.
Luke sighed as the doors slid shut and ran a hand through his hair. At least Vader hadn’t offered to tuck him in or something equally horribly embarrassing. He might have been happy to meet his father and spend hours talking ships but there was a line to be drawn somewhere. Luke wondered if Vader even viewed him as an actual adult and not some tantrum throwing pre-teen. Though, he had taken ‘teenage rebellion’ to a whole new level.

He wiped some grease away from his nose and sighed, he’d have to take a shower. Luke had avoided taking a shower his entire time in Bast castle, unwilling to remain vulnerable for long but at this point it was an exercise in futility. As much as he would have loved to stay up and possibly get back to his books it didn’t seem to be a good idea to disobey Vader more than strictly necessary. He might get away with some smart ass comments and witty retorts (which his father had trounced him with his own rapier wit) but Luke knew outright disobedience wasn’t going to fly.

Captain Tang was already in his office when he emerged from Luke’s floor. Her thousand light year stare out the window only echoed the unsettling quiet he felt from her person. The barest hints of images and sensation were flashing through the force.

He knew, even now, that she suffered from nightmares and flashbacks. Sometimes he could see them when she dropped her shields long enough.

“Captain,” Vader might have been a Sith Lord but he was also intimately aware of the effects of PTSD.

“Milord,” she straightened her jacket and nodded, giving no indication she had just been in the thrall of a waking nightmare. “Is the boy back in his suite?”

“He is, I am also aware you know of the particulars of his stay.”

“Your son,” Captain Tang nodded, “I understand.”

“Yes and you must know that you cannot keep Luke here longer than three or four weeks.” Only deep respect for the Captain kept him from cutting her down where she stood.

“Indeed.” The thought of living without the company of his son enraged him. To be lost from the effortless light and beauty his son exuded would be an agony worse than death. An agony worse than his force-damned suit. As much as Vader wanted to he could not keep his son here forever but that did not mean he would concede this fact gracefully. “However, there are many gaps in his education. He must be trained in the Force; his power cannot go unformed for long before it becomes a danger to himself and others”

“I agree.” The woman sighed, “The education we can fix easily, he seems to be an eager student with an obvious aptitude for strategy but his power will need to be trained by…”

“A jedi?” To have his son trained as a jedi would be the greatest insult Vader could imagine. Again the captain was treading dangerous waters.

“It physically pains me to say this,” Tang conceded, “But yes. Fortunately the boy seems secure in his own self and I doubt he could fall head first into the doctrine of the old order. With enough education combined with his experience he’ll be skeptical enough to learn without…failing.”

“You believe he should not be trained as a Sith?”

Captain Tang did not answer, she didn’t need to. The idea of the light Luke embodied becoming
sullied by evil and depravity was sickening. An unbidden image of Luke, draped in black and kneeling before Palpatine was enough to send rage swirling through his system. His son was free born! His son was meant by the Force and destiny to be free, always and forever.

Corellions would collectively renounce flying and drinking before Vader would allow Luke to become a slave for his Master.

Snow would fall on Tatooine and Jabba the Hutt would free his slaves before Vader would allow Palpatine to sink his claws into one the pure lights left in the galaxy.

“We must destroy the Emperor.”

“I agree.”

Vader clasped his hands behind his back.

“What do you propose to do once he’s dead?” Tang wondered, Vader sense her mind shifting through hundreds of possibilities. There was a good reason he respected her so much more than many of his own generals.

“I cannot remain on Vjun for long,” Vader said. “My master will become suspicious.”

“Luke cannot be left on his own either,” Tang added, “He’s young and wild. He needs social interaction and his friends.”

“His ‘friends’ Vader spat the word, “Are a proven danger to him.”

“Luke is a proven danger to himself,” She pointed out, “That doesn’t change the fact he needs to leave sooner or later.” Vader growled. “You can also make peace with the Alliance. Work on the Emperor’s destruction from the inside and out. The fleet is loyal to you and you alone, not Palpatine. With intelligence leaked from the ISB or from the inquisitors you’ll have an excellent excuse to begin de-stabilizing Isards power base and the Grand Moff’s you don’t like.”

That was why he kept Captain Tang. She gave voice to his thoughts he did not wish to utter aloud.

“Grand Admiral Thrawn may or may not listen, it depends on what he wants but if you manage to destroy the Emperor and the Death Star 2 he’ll go where the tide takes him.”

“You believe Thrawn will fall into line should I defeat my Master?” Genuinely curious now he turned to face the woman.

“Thrawn is loyal to the Empire, not the Emperor.” She pointed out, “He’s spit enough on the Imperial doctrine enough to make him dangerous enough to send to the outer rim to make sure he behaves himself.”

“This is not a plan,” Vader said and she nodded.

“It’s the beginning of a plan.”

“You will begin tutoring my son,” Vader commanded and relished her astonishment that bled into the force. “There is much he needs to learn and only a short time left.”

“Lord Vader.”

“I am entrusting you with my son’s education, Captain,” he rumbled.
“Do you think it wise?” He should have had a firmer hand with the Captain, established more boundaries of commander and commended. Her question cannot go unanswered.

“I would trust no one else,” Vader said. Not himself, he is to angry, volatile and biased; certainly not Kenobi or any member of the Rebel Alliance and most definitely not an Imperial.

“I’m flattered.” Captain Tang said, and it was the truth. “How long are you keeping Luke in Bast Castle?”

“I have not yet decided.” Allowing the boy to roam the wild galaxy is both unappealing and unavoidable.

3434

Luke draped the towel over his shoulders and wiped the mirror clear of steam. Clean and dressed he’s just about ready to turn in when the sound of someone speaking emerged from the hallway.

He paused. His father had come back up and none of the officers were here.

Who could it be?

Curious and intrigued he crept from the refresher toward the sound of the voice, someone was humming. Down the hallway and into the sitting room attached to his bedroom Luke kept his alarm under careful control and frowned when he opened the door.

No one was there.


The man/thing/ghost was tall, towering from six feet with kind hazel eyes and a gentle smile. His long hair reached his shoulders and thick beard, he worse an exact copy of Ben’s old robes. Luke gaped and swallowed down his sudden astonishment.

“Hi,” he replied, Aunt Beru’s old teaching to behave himself and be polite ringing his ears. “Um, I’m fine. How are you?”

“I am dead at the moment,” The Jedi (what else could he be?) said, tucking his arms into his sleeves.

“Oh,” Luke blinked, wondering what he had been fed to make him hallucinate dead jedi. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Don’t be, young one,” The man said, his deep voice calming and kind, “I have been dead for over 40 years. I’ve grown accustomed to it.”

“Okay,” confused, he eased into the room and continued to stare. “Who are you?”

“I am Qui-Gon Jinn,” the dead man bowed slightly, “Former Jedi Master. Your father, Anakin Skywalker, was my grand-padawan.”


“Why not!!”
“You are in your father’s castle; he would be sensed and banished in seconds. Anakin is still very bitter in regards to Obi Wan. I am here to speak to you.”

“Oh,” Luke dropped into his favored armchair and sighed, “What can I do for you?”

“Luke,” Qui-Gon tucked his hands away again, “Your father doesn’t intend to keep you here forever. At some point you will leave and then you must find a Master to teach you.”


“She is correct on some account but no one is infallible.” His deep voice rumbled gently when Luke sighed again. “As much as you will learn soon you must keep and open heart and open mind.”

“I think I can do that.” Even before he had been taught by the Alliance he had been taught and loved by his wonderful Aunt. Aunt Beru had passed down many of his Grandmothers teachings.

“Well,” Qui-Gon tilted his head and smiled, “When you leave look for Master Yoda in the Dagobah system. He will train you.”

“Really?”

“Yes, I would stay longer but I recall your father had ordered you go to bed. We will speak later, young Luke.”

“Um,” Luke nodded as the dead jedi bowed and vanished. “Okay.” The focused attention of his father bore down on him and he sensed irritation. “I’m going, I’m going to bed.”

Once he slipped under his blankets and flipped off the light the focused attention slipped away and Luke offered a small, reassuring brush in reply.

I’m going to bed, he thought and patted Artoo on his doomed head when he came rolling beside his bed. “‘Night Artoo.” The droid whistled back and began powering down. On the edge of sleep he felt his father run another scan over his form before shifting his attention away. In the dark, Luke smiled.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary


“There are a number of things you need to understand before we begin.” Captain Tang’s voice was filled with a layer of excitement and wrapped in professionalism. “The galaxy is wide and horrible place filled with countless horrors and nightmares that happen every day and every hour.”

Luke blinked from his seat before her desk. He was in Captain Tang’s office, a handsome affair that had obviously been put together by the woman herself. The desk was a solid wooden number with matching chairs on the opposite side. A number of datapads were piled on one corner with a small replica tank sitting on the other. Holo pictures dotted the walls alongside many flimsiplast images that Luke hadn’t had the opportunity to inspect. When his father had come up to his rooms that morning he had expected to return to the fighter they had been repairing.

No such luck.

Vader had escorted his to an empty office and told him to mind the Captain and behave himself. Apparently he saw fit to assign the older woman as his tutor.

“A tutor!” Luke had gaped at the blank mask and looked past the man toward the hallway. “What’s wrong with just reading those books?”

“Those books will not provide all of the proper information,” Vader had replied, shifting to cover the entire doorway, “Captain Tang is a capable and brilliant woman. You will respect her teachings, young one.”

“What could she teach me what I can’t pick up from the books?” The situation reminded him a little too much of getting dropped off at school by Uncle Owen. Embarrassment swamped through his system.

“Much, my son,” Vader then intoned, “Mind yourself.”


“Good morning,” the automatic reply came despite her strange greeting.

“Take a seat, rebel,” Tang took her seat and nodded to Vader, “Come on then! I’ve got things to teach you.”

And now Luke found himself in the strangest situation yet. Well, second strangest. No matter what the galaxy said he didn’t think it would ever get more peculiar than getting punished by Darth Vader.

“So,” He refocused as the Captain continued to speak, “That being said you must know that there is always the hope for improvement. You can’t begin to improve until you understand.”
“You’re teaching me history?”

“Oh yes, also economics and different branches of social studies.” Tang lifted a delicate tea cup to her lips and sipped, “I learned from one of the most educated men in the galaxy at the time. I’ve got an excellent base and some great references.”

“Are you sure you’re not just gloating because you get to ruin my world view?”

“There’s that,” Tang admitted with a sly grin he almost didn’t catch, “It’s not every day someone gets to teach a Skywalker and have them listen. I’m pretty sure this will go down in history. I’ll be remembered as the woman who taught Luke Skywalker!”

“I think,” Luke frowned, sifting through the information he had on the Captain, “You’ve already gone down in history.”

“Oh,” Her sharp smile was small and almost invisible against the backdrop of her constantly neutral expression. “Oh yes.”

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Leia watched as Lando Calrissian smiled, charming his dinner companion. She hadn’t wanted to return to Cloud City were the gambler and scoundrel had betrayed her and Han but Lando sold information.

His companion blushed, flattered under the attention when Lando leaned a little closer with a bright smile.

Good. Straightening her non-descript clothes and touching her blaster in reassurance to herself, Leia swept toward the Baron-Administrator.

Lando did not see her until she slammed a hand onto the table. His face ran a little pale when he followed the limp to her entirely unamused expression and furious eyes.

“Calrissian,” Infusing her voice with a deliberate Tatooine accent Luke had taught her she continued, “I want a word.”

“I’m sorry,” the man gave a weak smile and wrapped an arm around his companion, “As you see I’m otherwise occupied.” Leia smiled apologetically at the other man who eyed her obvious blaster and furious expression.

“Calrissian, if you don’t come with me now I’m going to take the opportunity to announce to your entire city just what.”

“I’m coming,” Lando stood up quickly, “I’m coming. Excuse me,” his dark eyes turned back to the other man, “I apologise the interruption, could we continue this at a later date?”

“Oh sure,” the pale man nodded and glanced between the Princess and the Baron-Administrator, “Try not to get killed.”

“Oh course,” Lando blew him a quick kiss and fell into step beside the Princess. “Now, Princesses, I really hope you’re not holding what happened against me?”

“I am,” She jammed a blaster into his side and leaned in close, feining companionship that kept the others of Cloud City from noticing the weapon. Lando stiffened and swallowed as she lead him toward his office. “Don’t bother calling for your men. I’ve got them locked up at the moment.”
“Did you hurt them?” Leia snorted.

“I’m not the Empire and I’m not you,” The doors to his office slid open and she pushed him through, “They’re fine.” Lando blanched when Chewbacca growled at him.

“Chewie!”

“Don’t bother,” Leia commanded, “We aren’t in the mood for your false charms. You handed Han off to Boba Fett.”

“Hans on Tatooine at Jabba’s palace!” Lando said quickly, “And I wouldn’t have given him up or you but Fett and that Admiral guy threatened Cloud City.”

“Protecting your investment?” Leia bite out and was satisfied when a glower finally fell over the man’s features.

“Protecting my citizens,” Lando snapped, “What do you want?”

“I need to know where Vader is,” Chewbacca came to loom on his other side and growled.

“Oh,” Lando swallowed and glanced toward his console, “I can help you with that.”

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Vader did not have cameras installed in the Captain Tang’s office out of respect for her privacy so he did not know exactly how his son’s lessons were proceeding. As much as he told himself only an obsessed neurotic would watch over their child’s history lessons, Vader wished he hadn’t given into Tang’s demands.

All thoughts flew out of his head the second his comm unit lit up.

“Admiral.” Admiral Firmus Piett bowed, “What is it?”

“Lord Vader,” his pinched, worried expression tightened, “The Executor had continued with the patrol pattern as you’ve commanded. Another smuggler has been arrested.”

“I see; what other news of the Fleet?”

“I have written up a report and sent it to you, milord,” Admiral Piett’s expression smoothed out a bit, “However, there is an anomaly with the most recent smuggler arrest.”

“What is it?”

“The young woman is an underage teenager,” The admiral admitted and Vader agreed it was a little strange, “However, her ship is a small freighter with several illegal weapons mounted. I am unsure how to proceed given her…youthful nature.”

“I will arrive aboard the Executor in a few hours,” Vader said, surprising himself and the Admiral. Normally he would not lower himself to deal with smugglers expect there is an idea forming. “I will deal with the smugglers myself. In the meantime….” Admiral Piett’s force signature wavered in confusion but his expression never changed as Vader gave his orders.

“It will be done, milord,” Piett bowed again as Vader cut off the call. Seething to himself he admitted that his business would take him away from his son for at least a day. He did not want to leave, especially when he had only just begun to make progress with his son except…..
Opportunities did not come every day. His plans to destroy Palaptine and the distasteful Empire he had helped create would need to begin immediately. Admiral Piett might have been loath to execute a teenager but there were other officers who wouldn’t think twice. The man had always been a little soft hearted toward younger people of any species. For a moment Vader entertained the notion of introducing the man to Luke.

He did need to catch up on fleet paperwork which was almost impossible to focus on with the bright glow of his son nearby.

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Luke found it impossible to ignore the Captain when she began speaking. She taught with the straightforward manner of military report but with flair of an accomplished storyteller. Dull lines from his old textbooks began exciting adventures, illuminated by the truth of their background. Full of political upheaval, shocking affairs and a hidden ruthlessness no one ever told.

She answered all of his questions honestly and Luke wondered how someone managed to have so much information in their head at once. The conversation died away as the door opened and Vader stepped through, hand hooked into his belt.


“What?” Confused he was halfway through standing before he caught himself.

“Go,” his father ordered and with little choice he left the room. As soon as the door slid shut had stooped down and pressed an ear against the metal. He couldn’t hear much.

“Captain,” Vader loomed before the desk and noted the two tea cups and several different books open to pictures of battlefields. “I have business on the Executor and will be gone for a day, two at most.”

“Of course,” Captain Tang waited for him to continue.

“I expect Luke to be looked and I wished to be alerted of any…mischief he manages to stir up.”

“Aye,” He felt her private amusement and sighed to himself.

“You are to continue the lessons at your discretion.”

“Aye, are you planning on telling Luke?”

“There is no need,” Vader slapped the door controls open and Luke collapsed onto the carpet within the office. The blond scrambled to his feet, blushing and brushing down his shirt. “Eavesdropping is both juvenile and rude, my son.” He admonished and Luke’s signature flared with guilt.

“You’re leaving?” Fierce joy gripped at Vader’s heart when he heard Luke’s shy question. Only through the force did he know that Luke did not really want him to go.

“Only for a short time,” He replied, “I will return within the day.”


“I expect,” Vader said and Luke caught the deliberate parental commanding tone, “that you will obey the Captain and heed her teachings.”

had not been raised under the blazing sons of Tatooine. They did nothing to foster discreet citizens.

Bored, bored, bored, bored and more bored.

When Doora had begun smuggler and gunrunning she had always known that there would a time she got snagged by the Imperials. Then it would be up to her to get away. She had always been fairly confident she could escape an Imperial cell but at the moment the smuggler was seriously reconsidering her earlier presumptions.

Apparently they made shipboard cells a lot better than dirt side ones.

“Hey!” Doora shouted at the top of her lungs just for the sake of hearing something beside the rumbling of the engines and her own breathing. “HEY! HEY! HEY!” Stifling a yawn she leaned back against the thin metal bed protruding from the wall. All of her gadgets and tools had been taken away, the search done with much higher skill than previous ones. They had even found the little lock pick set and blade that were in the soles of her boots.

Doora’s feet were now only clad in socks.

With every pocket empty and her boots confiscated she had never felt more exposed. She hoped something would happen soon.

The smugglers had been pathetic and predictable. Most of them had run slaves, spice and guns so he disposed of them with little ceremony. Their pleas for mercy and begging had only served to amuse him.

“Lord Vader,” He watched, dispassionate, as troopers dragged the body away. A terrified Sergeant stepped forward with a datapad in hand, “The recording of the girls arrest.”

Vader summoned the pad and clicked for the recording to begin. At first he frowned, amused at the child’s obvious intent to escape until…Vader’s head titled backward in surprise. Once the Executor had blocked a hyperspace escape the smuggler had turned her scrappy little freighter on the TIE pursuers with feral and vicious intent.

The little blue ship chewed through a good number of fighters, skipping and dipping around the battle with incredible skill all while blasting at his pilots.

It was good that the pilot had only been using ion shots; otherwise Death Squadron would be replacing a good number of pilots. It was equally good for the smuggler, if she had been using normal bolts he would have to strangle her on principle in revenge for his favored squadron. This was not what he had been expecting when Piett had mentioned, “Something peculiar.”

“Sergeant,” Closing down the recording he whirled on the trembling man, “Summon Colonel Fel to my office and send a medical officer to evaluate the remaining smuggler.”

“Yes, milord.”
Ten minutes later Vader watched as Colonel Fel marched into his office and saluted.

“Milord.” The man came to attention and Vader felt his patience wearing thin.

“Take a seat Colonel,” He ordered and almost relished the man’s astonishment. “I want your honest assessment of the young smugglers piloting ability.”

“Milord,” Fel pondered for a minute, “In comparison to Imperial standards she is easily an Advanced cadet if not higher.”

“Have you had to opportunity to meet with the youngling?” Fel’s expression furrowed as his word choice confused him enough to derailed his train of thought.

“I have not milord, though I am grateful only ion shots were used.” The ace pilot frowned, “I have been told she is underage.”

“Indeed,” Vader stood and clasped his hands behind his back, walking toward the viewport he watched the waiting stars.

It’s absurd and ridiculous, the possessive dragon beneath his armor is roaring, spoiling for a new treasure. He knows is bizarre and strange that he wants nothing more than to keep the smuggler.

There is too much work to be done. The Emperor to overthrow, the Alliance to make peace with, his son to dote upon and educate, fleet paperwork to catch up on….and. There is no explanation as to why he wants to use the smuggler.

Her flying is sloppy and an obvious side effect of being so young but the ingenuity is there. She flies with reckless abandon of a corellian and with the unrestrained violence of a pirate. The smuggler can be used; there are positions open in Death Squadron that need filling. Positions he had not wanted to fill until he had found the right people.

Vader was well aware of the Empires continued insistence that humans were superior and that human males were the highest order of perfection in the universe. He snorted to himself. Excluding so many brilliant people from active combat duty and alienating over half the galactic population was a foolish move on Palpatine’s part.

A foolish move he intends to exploit.

The force hums in approval at his plan the more he mulls it over.

Palpatine will be destroyed by the very people he oppressed, degraded and ignored. He clenched his fist and heard the Colonel shifted warily behind him.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Vader sort of kidnaps someone and Luke gets himself in a lot of trouble.

The first detail Lord Vader focused on, oddly enough, was the fact the smuggler was wearing bright purple socks with small starships stitched into them. Her worn, battered flight-suit was accented by a jacket that looked like it had been picked up from a gutter and never repaired. There were items obviously missing from her usual ensemble the indicated the smuggler could shift herself to look like a lifeless vagabond.

Nut browned skin that indicated a number of hours spent outside working were a little odd. Most spacers developed pale skin. Vader wondered what a pilot was doing planet side long enough to develop a tan. Bright hazel eyes stared, bold and irritated at him from beneath an untamed mop of black hair that was too short to brush her shoulders and long enough to be wild. The girl was sitting on the floor and leaning against the metal bed and muttering to herself.

When he swept into the cramped cell in his most intimidating fashion it took a good minute for her to push herself to her feet. Obviously she had little respect for authority.

For a minute neither spoke, the girl observed quietly and pursed her lips.

“So who talks first?” She asked, insolence near dripping from her words, “Do you talk first or do I?”

“I believe,” Vader said, somewhat amused by the scrawny, underfed teenager, “You have already spoken.” The girl, whose name had been all but dragged forcibly from her, Doora; just shrugged at him.

He held out a hand and the Sergeant behind him placed a datapad into it. “You are fortunate, youngling,” The Sergeant’s force signature flared in surprise both at his wording and heatless tone. “That you were using ion shots otherwise you would not have survived this encounter.”

He enjoyed the flare of fear that lite up her eyes.

“Tell me, young one. What do you know of Imperial law? Excluding the ones you seem to most frequently flaunt.”

“What?” Her voice was loud, abrasive and reminded him of Corellians except she did not seem corellian. “Why?”

“Allow me elaborate, what do you know of the Imperial conscription law?”

“What!”

“Lord Vader,” A thin, reedy man with oversized glasses and an illfitting uniform squeezed in behind the Sith. “Considering the girl is actually underage, at only 16 standard years old the Navy can’t… actually conscript her.” He man cut off with a gasp of terror when Vader turned toward him. Across the cell Doora was obviously relieved.
“Is that so?” Three words that had struck terror in the heart of stronger man than the Navy assigned lawyer. Vader was honestly surprised that he managed to continue speaking.

“Unless there is a contract signed with parental permission the legal age to join military forces is….” The lawyer cringed backward, swallowing hard, “18.”

“Well,” Doora clapped her hands together as if the noise would banish the sith and the lawyer, “It’s a good thing they’re both dead. Are we done here? I’ve got shit to do and you’re both in my way.”

“And what,” Vader intoned with clear threat to both the teenager and the officers behind him. All of them cringed in tandem. “Would the courts see fit to do with this…young smuggler?”

“Well,” Again the lawyer swallowed, “A youth correctional facility.”

“Prison,” she muttered.

“Or either assigning her to a work camp or even fostering her out to a family.”

“A good, philanthropist!” Heavy sarcasm coated her words as Doora rolled her eyes only lean away from the suddenly looming Sith.

“One way or the other, child,” He growled, bearing down on the late-blooming teen, “You will serve the Empire and pay retribution for flaunting its laws.” Doora collapsed onto the bed in an effort to back away; her knees had knocked into the protruding metal and sent her sprawling. She gaped up, terrified, “Lieutenant.”

“Milord.” The possessive desire to horde valuables and lives so characteristic of the Sith, flared into a raging, uncontrolled wildfire at the thought of losing access to such flying skill. It’s a ridiculous sensation that reminds him far too much of Palpatine acquiring Inquisitors.

But the dragon will be satisfied.

“Arrange for foster papers for young Doora,” He maintained eye contact, ensuring that she understood his meaning perfectly. Color drained from her face as she caught on much faster than his own officer.

“And who should I….”

“Myself,” Vader straightened. For several seconds the officer choked on his own shock before tossing a hasty salute and skittering from the room.

“You can’t do that!” Fear forgotten, indignation colored her words as the smuggler shouted at him. Given how well he seemed to be managing his own offspring Vader felt confident he could direct another teenager.

“Oh?” Doora swallowed and leaned back as he stepped forward once again, “I believe, child,” Fury darkened her gazed, “That the law sides with me on this matter, despite your childish outburst and clearly thoughtless words.”

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Doora’s stomach had relocated somewhere near her toes and showed no signs of reemerging. Cold had seeped in her every single bone and the gnawing hunger that plagued her every waking moment only sharpened with fear.
Vader. Lord Vader, Supreme Command of the Imperial Navy and Heir to the Empire was planning on fostering her simply for…for what?

“WHY?” Even her voice, normally louder than everyone else, seemed to have spiked in volume. If she didn’t know any better she’d say the way Lord Vader settled his hands on his hips was supremely smug. “WHAT!”

“You will fly under the Imperial cog, youngling,” the patronizing tone that seemed to exist only in her head only managed to send her fury rising toward volcanic levels, “If you are old enough to break laws then in turn you are old enough to uphold them. No matter what they might claim.”

“That’s never going to happen!” The Stormtroopers behind the black Sith shifted in muted astonishment as her limited common sense took a hike. “I won’t.”

“You will find,” He was close, too close but Doora didn’t dare back away again, “I have limited patience and very little of that is reserved for disobedient younglings. You will do as I command or you will discover just how unpleasant I can be to insolent teenagers.”

All of her dreams of flying the galaxy, answering to no one and keeping her hard won freedom vanished under the gleaming artificial lights of the Imperial cell.

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Luke did not enjoy the sensation the told him he was misbehaving in a way that his father would not approve. He pushed it back and down as he stepped from the turbolift and into the corridor that connected his father’s rooms.

It wasn’t as if he hadn’t been told he wasn’t allowed to explore the rest of the castle.

Or that Vader and Tang had to escort him everywhere.

None of these arguments lessened the feeling that if he got caught he’d be in a boat load of trouble. What his father might do if he found him wandering through his office, poking at the minimalist decorations, he wasn’t sure. Luke paused before the rotating projection of a blue and green planet. It stood directly before his father’s desk and was on display from every angle. He didn’t recognize it.

Through the next door he found a sight that nearly made him fall over in shock. A wide black, egg like contraption sat in the center of the room. It didn’t take much of a brain to understand exactly what it was for. Swallowing, Luke stepped forward and the uneasy sense of disobedience only worsened the closer he got.

“Oh,” the room was steeped in misery, anger and hatred. The darkness pulsed around him, seeking the fringes of his light and digging its fingers in. He swallowed before stepping even closer to the egg. Carefully the rebel pressed his fingers against the cold black metal and leaped backward a second later.

Self-loathing, fear, anger, hatred, misery. All of it latched onto the boy, shrieking in his head and send his limbs trembling. The maelstrom of emotions did not die out as he scrambled from the room and into the door directly opposite.

Luke yelped as he fell backward when the door he had fallen against slid open and dumped him into a darkened chamber. For several minutes he could only hear his own breathing.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Luke breaks some stuff. Vader signs some papers. Doora is angry but kinda helpless. Tang is irritated but resigned and wishes she could start indulging in booze.

For several moments the only thing Luke could hear was his own breathing. He tensed as a faint mechanical whirring reached his ears and began to rise in both pitch and speed.

“Sithin’ Hells!” Just as a bright red lightsaber blazed into existence and came slicing down on his position, Luke threw himself sideways.

Only to almost become skewered with another lightsaber, with an ugly curse he scrambled away from the advancing droids and ducked again when the force screamed an urgent warning.

“Oh Hells!”

Signing the required paperwork to foster a known criminal was taking much longer than Vader had anticipated. He paused for a moment as confusion and shock flared across the bond. It fact, it felt as if Luke was getting into some mischief. He forced himself not to rush to the help. There were still spies on the Executor who answered to the Emperor and Vader had no intention of leading them to his son.

His chest constricted in fear as another spike of worry flared through his son.

For now he could only rely on the skills of his majordomo.

Tang had plenty experience to sense explosions and potential death. Which was why her head shot up just as she was about to start on her own lunch. Vader had only been gone for a day and Luke had been left mostly to his own devices.

That would explain why the alarms wired to Vader’s rooms had been set off just moments after she looked away from her lunch.

“Captain?” The clone to her left watched her rise with annoyance written in the small tilt of her mouth. “What is it?”

She checked her datapad before sighing, “Get the fire extinguisher out and come with me.” Shoving her chair back the Captain sprinted from the lunch area and ran toward the turbolift, knowing that the clones would follow.

Luke’s clothes were singed and his eyes were watering from the smoke. His….battle with the droids was mostly comprised of dodging and ducking. Five of the towering monstrosities had started out the
attack and a well thrown canister of something that had proven to be both flammable and explosive had taken out three.

He cursed, ducking to the side to avoid a swing and wished that he hadn’t been foolish enough to leave his rooms.

Luke stumbled along the still smoldering floor and gaped when the door slid back to reveal Captain Tang.

“Duck!” She barked and he obeyed without question. Two well placed shots flew by his head and the sound of two droids clattering to the floor followed a moment later. “Get those extinguishers in here!” The Captain re-holstered her weapon and stepped aside for five clones, all with fire foam canisters at the ready to enter.

He picked himself off the floor and rubbed at his smoking clothes, coughing. Unwilling to see the expression on her face, the pilot continued to pat down his clothes and generally ignore the Captain.

“Well, Skywalker,” Luke looked up and despaired at the firm expression on her face that might have been labeled blank except for the irritated gleam in her eyes. “I had suspected that perhaps Lord Vader had been paranoid or perhaps exaggerating but it seems your propensity for destruction is impossible to describe with hyperbole.”

Luke blushed and flinched when her gaze turned flinty.

“Come along then, the medical officer is going to need to make sure you’re not injured too badly.”

“Uh, this was an accident.” He said quickly, “I didn’t know how the droids got started.”

“Of course, fortunately I don’t have to deal with you. I will be leaving that to Lord Vader.” The flash of astonished terror in his eyes almost made up for the fact that repairing the training room was going to cost a small fortune. She certainly didn’t envy the boy.

Doora wasn’t sure if she was living a nightmare or if she was actually awake. Nothing would explain the suspiciously well-made and well fitted outfit she was now dressed in as per the order of….her heart squeezed painfully and she glowered that the wall.

She brushed down the front of her shirt and hissed with distaste as the door slid open to reveal an officer and three Stormtroopers.

“Miss Doora,” The man, gave the slightest of nods, “How are you feeling?” The medical officer produced a datapad and passed it over. “There are multiple nutritional guidelines I expect you to follow. You have been fairly mal-nourished and have been missing several vaccines that will be administered within the next month.” Her mouth twitched in an aborted swear word she didn’t dare spit while Stormtroopers kept weapons trained on her. “I will be getting progress reports each week I want to see some improvement. You have twenty pounds to gain before you’re at the basic level of teenage health.”

“Uh-huh.” The nightmare felt awfully realistic.

“I’ve been tasked with escorting you to the hanger bay,” The medic said and gestured toward the door. “Please follow me.” Growling to herself but fully aware of the weapons trained on her person Doora followed the lanky man.
Vader was waiting to leave. The shuttle had been refueled and packed with the necessary supplies for the young smuggler and gunrunner and for his son. His impatience was unsettling the deck officers, the technicians working on random ships and the Stormtroopers guarding the various doors.

What was taking so long?

The Sith forced himself to remain still and patient, something he had struggled to master as a Jedi, killing his troops would do little for him now.

There.

Doora’s face was set in a well-defined and well-practiced frown that cast her whole face in shadows. She walked behind the medic and before three troopers with weapons set to stun. No one was under the illusion that Doora was somehow harmless or less dangerous than other prisoners because she was an underfed smuggler.

That probably made her more dangerous.

“Lord Vader,” The medic saluted and gestured back to the sulking teenager who glared, bold and fierce at the Sith, “Doora, as you have requested.”

“Excellent,” he said and noted the datapad clutched between in Doora’s fingers. Her grip was tight and her whole body vibrated with fury and suppressed anger. He began a mental countdown to her inevitable tantrum. “You are dismissed.” The medic and troopers saluted, making themselves scarce in the speedy way the only his officers could.

For several seconds he gazed at the hunched figure. She was dressed in clothes characteristic of a cadet at the academies and looked positively miserable in said clothes. Doora even looked a little healthier.

“I trust,” he began, “That you have no complaints regarding your medical evaluation.” Her bitter expression did not lessen as she jerked her head in a ‘No’ gesture. “Very well,” Vader gestured toward the shuttle ramp, “Come along.” Doora waited for several insolent seconds before taking stiff and awkward steps toward the ramp. Obviously she would not be boarding before him, conceding the fight Vader boarded the ship before her. Several seconds later she followed, obviously furious and still spoiling for a fight. “Strap in,” He commanded and sensed the indignation flare in the force.

What was it about teenagers that made them think they were omnipotent?

Doora forced herself to remain calm while strapping into the seat lining the rear portion of the shuttle. She left Vader to pilot the craft, like hell was she going to be getting into the same room as him without being forced.

Where ever she was being taken she was pretty sure she could steal a ship and escape from.

Vjun looked as unappealing as ever when he emerged from hyperspace. It was a comfort which he had not expected. His bond with Luke had calmed but there was still a tense nervousness that pervaded the bond.
Vader wondered what was wrong.

“Boy what an ugly planet.” The Sith had sense the girl’s approach but he did not want to frighten her away. He had three weeks to gain her loyalty and had every intention of starting now.

“You are correct in your assessment,” he replied and Doora was surprised, “The unattractiveness is only worsened by the acid rainstorms that plague the surface. Too dangerous to fly through and none have survived unshielded.”

“Acid storms?” She echoed, latching onto the tantalizingly interesting piece of information, “What? Why would you live on a planet where you couldn’t fly through the storms?”

“There are many reasons,” Vader replied and began transmitting the necessary codes to secure a landing. “None of which concern you.” She made a noise of irritation. “Take your seat, young one. Our flight will not be a smooth one.”

Tang watched the blinking green dot that indicated Lord Vader with something akin to relief. She didn’t need force sensitivity to know that Luke was not eagerly awaiting the arrival of his father and it was throwing off her peace of mind. His sulking nervousness was not helping anyone.

Her peace was further tossed aside when Vader swept out of his shuttle twenty minutes later with a confused teenager trailing on his heels. She did not recognize this teenager and was unsettled by her presence.

“Captain.”

“Lord Vader,” She tossed a salute.

“Have young Doora assigned to a secured room in the East Wing.” The Sith rumbled. Said girl glared at Vader’s back and Tang appreciated her obvious boldness.

“Aye,” She waved a few clones forward and gestured at the scrappy girl, “Men.”

“HEY!” Doora jumped back two feet and raised her hands, as if prepping for a fight. “I don’t think so. What’s going on?”

“I should think that obvious,” Vader replied, turning in a slow, deliberate manner to face the former smuggler, “Unless your hearing is also damaged.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Doora spat, her glare drifting around the hanger to land on the Captain who raised a perfectly sarcastic eyebrow.

“If you want to sleep on a stone floor,” Tang said, “Then by all means but I suppose a room might be more comfortable, not to mention private.”

“I don’t trust you,” Doora snapped.

“That’s very wise of you,” The majordomo.

“You will do as commanded, child,” Vader raised a finger to wave in her face, “Or you will find yourself spending the next three weeks in a genuine cell.”
For several seconds Doora vibrated in place and finally lowered her arms. “Fine.”

Both Captain and Sith watched her warily follow the clones from the hanger, occasionally casting a nervous glance back at the pair before disappearing from view.

“Captain,” Vader began without preamble, “What has transpired during my absence?” She didn’t seem surprised, merely annoyed which only showed through her force signature and the slightest downward tilt of her eyebrows. Her usual pose of one hand on her hip and the other hanging loosely in front of her stomach holding a stylus, did not change.

“I suppose random destruction must be an inherited trait, milord.” Her eyes flickered toward the direction of Luke’s rooms, “The young rebel has managed to destroy almost 60 percent of your dueling sale along with 5 of your droids. I have the security holo here.”

Vader gaped behind his mask as the holo played and then continued to gape as it played again. At first it was infrared and showed Luke simply collapsed backward into the room, he had suspicion the his son had also attempted to get into the other rooms, before his droids activated. The room remained dark until Luke set fire to a good portion of the room. Here his heart squeezed and fury swelled.

Fire. There was so much of it.

“He has been checked out by the medic and cleared. No injuries but his clothes were damaged beyond repair and he needs a haircut now.”

“I see.”

“And,” The major domo tried to continue but he held up a hand.

“I will see to the boy Captain. I wish for you to see to the young Doora.”

“Ah yes, what is a smuggler doing here?”

“Tomorrow,” he said, “We will discuss our plan. I have a new idea to propose.”

“A group of spec ops that will work in tandem with our alliance with the rebels?” She said, “I see. Impressive. I suppose you want to gain the loyalty of the smuggler.”

“Yes,” If Vader were not so focused on his son he would have been impressed by the former Separatist. “I want you to…soften her attitude up until I arrive.”

“As you command,” Captain Tang tossed another salute and followed him from the room. “Spec ops teams. I love spec ops teams.”

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Luke sensed the exact moment his father entered orbit.

More to the point he could sense his father’s spike in anger as Captain Tang no doubt made her report and told him what had transpired.

He tugged at his collar and placed a hand on Artoo while his nervousness spiked again. Luke was in trouble and there was really no way around it.

So concerned with the glowing presence of Vader he made no note of the second person who had arrived on the shuttle. He tensed as the black sun that was his father began moving toward Luke’s
room.

Oh boy was he in trouble.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary


The closer he steps to Luke’s rooms the more he can sense his son’s nervousness. It vibrates the force with a tense sort of energy that grates on the edge of his own perception. The burning desire to explain is also resting there, seeking him out and poking with persistence that Luke probably does not realize he is broadcasting.

Vader paused before the turbolift, stretching out with the force to gauge the extent of Luke’s mood. “Hmmm,” he pressed the command to close the turbolift doors and ascended upwards.

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Luke forced himself to stop tapping out a nervous beat on the top of Artoo’s dome. With every passing second moment he could feel his father getting closer and closer. He had no idea what to think.

Vader had promised, ominously and honestly, that he would be…curbing Luke’s “wild streak.” He had no idea where an honest mistake would fall on his father’s scale of ‘wild’ and he had no idea what his Father would do if he did not like his explanation.

If he bothered to wait for an explanation.

Luke squirmed in his seat and began tapping a beat atop Artoo’s metal head. His heart beat sped up as he heard the turbolift hiss into place and the doors slide back. From his seat he could hear the familiar hissing respirator that echoed through the force and the hall.

Closer and closer until the door opened to reveal the terrifying and intimidating portrait of his father. Luke swallowed and watched carefully as Vader stepped into the room and the door slid shut.

“Perhaps,” The neutral, flat tone made Luke cringe even further back into the seat, “You would care to explain why my training room is now a charred memory.”

“I…” he swallowed and looked away, embarrassment flooding his system, “I got lost and sort of…fell…into the room.”

“Got lost?” The half-voiced question was clear and Luke reluctantly explained; hating just how childish and young he sounded.

“I went…exploring.” Vader tilted his head to side and waited. “I got…curious and looked around the castle. Some of the other rooms and I just…went up and found….I guess they were your rooms.”

“My private rooms.”

Luke hunched over, the direct and pointed statement clear and scolding.
“There was a….” Even now he wasn’t sure what to call the giant black egg but he forged on, “a large…egg.” The force flattened out as Vader paused, his breathing almost seeming to stop except for the hissing of his respirator. “I touched it and the force…” Luke remembered the anguish and agony that had thrown him backward, “It…screamed and it hurt”

“That,” Vader said almost distantly, “Was my hyperbaric chamber.”

“Oh?” For the first time Luke actually looked up at his father, blue eyes peered cautiously behind the blond fringe. Silence fell, Luke unsure how to continue and Vader staring into the distance and pondering just what Luke had felt to feel the force scream.

No jedi or even sith he had ever met had ever felt the Force as anything besides Light or Dark. Never had Vader heard of a contact with the force being painful. It was life itself; it connected the entire galaxy and every being in it. Even Vader had never been harmed by the force.

Luke. Vader refocused his gaze on his son and hesitated.

“What happened?”

“I fell out of the room and then fell into the training room. It was dark and then the droids attacked.”

“I see.” Luke hunched his shoulders even further and Vader wondered, in the back of his mind, if he had ever been so contrite in his life. Possibly not. Again silence and Vader focused on the previous issue, anger over the training room forgotten. “You said the force screamed. Describe this.”


“I am not so cruel as to needlessly punish for a mistake that was little of your own making. I am well aware what a sudden connection to the force can do to a person and I can deduce what would be prompted when said connection is painful and unexpected. However, this does not mean you will get out of helping in the repairs of the room.”

“I can do that,” Luke said, eyes soft and expression a tad lighter, “I used to help Uncle Owen fix things around the far all the time.”

Even after all this time Luke still manage to retain his innate farm boy honesty. Vader marveled at it.

“I suppose it was far too much to hope that you would ever obey every command. I can only be thankful that your years in the rebellion have ensured you are able to defend yourself armed with even the most primitive of weapons. Curiosity itself it not a crime however you must be careful. It can be dangerous if not curbed. So,” to ease the nervousness that was still lurking around his son he settled, somewhat awkwardly, into the opposite chair. “Explain.”

“I,” Luke’s expression became pained again and he ducked his head, “I don’t know. All I did was touch it and then…” Luke rubbed his arms and leaned gratefully against a mournfully beeping Artoo. “Thanks buddy.” Now that he’s not focused on just how badly his father will react to the destruction of his training salle the memory of the Force, the FORCE, screaming. It was enough to make him sick.

He shivered and noted that his father was waiting still.

“It just sort of screamed. It hurt,” he said, hating how his voice wobbled and his eyes began to sting. “There was screaming and I could feel so much pain, hatred and sadness. The connection hurt and then I got attacked by droids so I couldn’t pay attention to it.”
Vader, for all of his injuries and pain, was never wronged by the Force. He had always sunk into its power, dark or light, with ease that most Jedi and Sith had envied. Either side it had welcomed him home, as if he were made to be one with the living force. There was no frame of reference for Luke’s injury. His attention was again diverted to Luke who had buried his face in his hands, shoulder shivering.

“Father,” The tears were obvious in his voice but Vader did not see them. “Ben said I had to use to use the force but.” His voice trailed off and Vader moved before he realized what he had done. With a sweep of one arm he tossed his heavy cape over Luke’s shoulder and pulled him close, sitting beside him. Luke’s eyes were blown wide, tears still clinging to his delicate eyelashes as he stared up at Vader, half enveloped in the heavy cloak. For a moment Luke only stared before burying his face into his father’s shoulder. Vader wrapped an arm around his shoulders and his other hand cradled the back of his head. “It hurt,” Luke cried, clutching at his armor, “It’s not supposed to hurt!”

“No,” he intoned, holding the delicate, hell rising teenager in his arms, “It is not.”

“There was so much pain!” Beneath his massive limbs Vader felt Luke’s shoulders shudder when he hiccuped. “And anger, it was so cold. Colder than Hoth.” Wordless, Vader simply held his distraught offspring, “It felt like claws were digging in my head and just thinking hurt.”

Luke did not have the presence of mind to be embarrassed by his current situation. He was not anyway. Never had he expected touching the Force, as much as he could manage, to hurt him so much.

It feels like a betrayal. A betrayal of the worst kind. Had Ben lied to him when he told him about the Force? He had already lied about his father, what more would one lie be? And yet, somewhere in his mind he acknowledged that whatever had happened was an anomaly and unexpected. Even Vader did not seem to know what would create such a reaction. Luke wondered for a moment, past his tears, if that was what it felt like to be his father.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary


Doora had never had so much space to herself. Well, there was her ship but since it was a depleted, ornery piece of junk it didn’t really count. Most of her time on that thing was working on repairs and trying to keep the air filters from collapsing in on itself. This room…Doora stared around, was like nothing she had ever seen.

It was big, small by some rich kids standards and it was furnished.

Furnished!

The smuggler took a second step into the room and absorbed the sight of a bed (bigger than any she had ever seen in person), a dresser, a wooden wardrobe (she didn’t even think those existed anymore) Someone had stuck a desk and a chair in another corner of the room next to a bookshelf. She couldn’t believe it.

Through a small door on the left there was a full sized refresher that looked stocked and ready to go. Doora took a deep breath and walked up to the bed. After moments contemplation she kicked the fame and pressed her hands into the blanket.

The thing gives a lot more than she expected and Doora pitched forward. Only to find herself flopping around on a cloud.

“OOOOOOOOHHHHHHHH.” Foregoing her battle with the fabric, Doora sank into the bed with a deeply appreciative sigh. “UHHHHHHHH!” Her eyes flickered shut and the orphan inhaled the scene of cleanliness the likes of which she had never known.

‘I didn’t even known something could smell like this’ she thought and wiggled around until she curled up in lose call in the middle of the bed.

“I believe,” Doora shot upwards as a new voice rang from the entrance. She found herself staring at the lean, tan form of the woman Vader had been speaking to in the hanger. The witty lady who had told Door to not trust her, “A bed is a marked difference from a decrepit ship that should have been scrapped decades ago.”

“Hey! The ‘Lady Dream’ was a good ship.”

“Of course,” The woman conceded without actually conceding, “It was.” Dark brown eyes swept up and down the awkwardly bent orphan and then flickered around the room. “Are you settling well?”

“Who are you?” Doora demanded, scrambling off the bed in an effort to look something other than a tangled up toddler. “What’s going on? Why are you here?” The woman’s lean and handsome face did not shift in the slightest; the calm and observant gaze that rested on Doora went uninterrupted despite her best efforts.

“I,” The officer said, a hand moving to her hip in a relaxed yet formal manner that was obviously normal for her, one hip cocked out slightly and opposite knee slightly bent. She looked like some of the old, formal officers from the holos Doora had seen once in a museum. “Am the Major-domo of
“Bast Castle, Captain Tang. You may address me as Captain or ma’am.”

“Uh?”

“You are in Bast Castle, Lord Vader’s personal residence. And, since you are now legally his responsibility you are to be quartered here.”

Doora’s stomach swooped as she remembered that particular fact. “I’m not,” she hissed and Captain Tang raised an unimpressed eyebrow.

“Regardless of your personal feelings,” Captain continued, “You are and shall remain so. I suggest that you do not drag your heels on this matter as Lord Vader is an expert of…making. his. point.”

“WHY!”

“I am unaware of his motivations but Lord Vader does everything for a reason.” Doora bristled at the Captain’s private amusement, “Even fostering half-feral smugglers.”

“FERAL?”

“If you insist on proving my point then, by all means,” Tang waved a hand with deceptive casualness, “Be my guest. However, I am here to inform you of the rules of the Castle.”

“Rules,” The smuggler said in the same tone most police officers spat the word ‘spice’.

“Indeed,” With a slow blink Doora nodded toward the window. “First, you are not to interfere with any of the work, of any sort, that goes on in this castle. Should any of your…actions…interfere with the going ons of Bast Castle be rest assured you will be punished.” Doora did not flinch, having grown up as a street rat left her petty jaded to any threat any Imperial could make. “Second, there are duties and assignments that you are going to be tasked with. While those have not been decided upon know you will need to attend to them.”

“Duties? Like what?” Confused, Doora tilted her head to the side and frowned.

“Education, assignments and studies.”

“WHAT?”

“I hope you learn new words, Doora.” The smuggler jerked when her name was spoken with clipped, assured tones that sounded so military it was almost like a title. “There are others things to say.”

“Um,” She swallowed and glanced around the room. “I…” Her voice trailed off and she glared at the woman.

“I will be speaking with to you at length later,” Tang promised, “But until then there are more pressing matters to attend to.” The major-domo stepped to the side to reveal a white haired man of about 45 years with a basket of various tools under his arm. “Quartermaster, this is Doora. Doora, this is the Quartermaster. He needs to take your measurements for your wardrobe.”

“What?”

“Really, Doora. We will need to focus on expanding your vocabulary.” Doora ignored Tang and watched the man unfold a small stool and gesture towards it. With a deeply suspicious glare she stepped up.
“If your hands go anywhere I don’t like,” She snapped, “I’m going to knock your teeth down the back of your throat.”

“You’ll have to move fast,” the man extended a little yellow measuring tape, “To beat the Captain.”

“None of those under my command will harm you.” Tang interjected, staring Doora dead-on. The sheer command presence in her voice hand the teen nodding, “Your door will only open to a specific few.”

“So it can lock?”

“It can.” The man glanced at the Captain and continued to keep a professional distance when he could manage.

“Alright,” He stepped away and began writing numbers into a small datapad, “I’ve got what I need. Do you have any color preference?”

“Uh….” Doora glanced at Tang, floundering.

“Use your discretion, Rock. I’m sure you will do well.”

“Aye Captain!” After a minute he was gone his tools with him.

“What that a clone?”

“Rock is a clone,” Tang said pointedly, “They are not ‘its’ hopefully you will learn more of their names in the coming days.”

“Uh, I’m not expecting to survive the next few days.” Vader isn’t known for his temper and Doora will be damned before she does anything for the Empire. Mostly out of sheer spite.

“It will be him against you, Doora.” Tang said, an eyebrow rising, “Unstoppable force meets immovable object and I’m going to bet on the sure thing.”

Doora decided to not explain to the woman that the only reason she had survived to 16 was out of sheer stubbornness and she’s dumb enough to disrespect a Sith Lord simply because she can.

“Uh huh.”

“Don’t do anything stupid, Doora,” Tang warned, “Eat, shower and then go to sleep. You’re going to want to be fully charged for tomorrow.”

“What’s tomorrow?”

“Work.”

With that Captain Tang swept out of the room, leaving Doora alone.

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Vader left Luke to his studies and with the strict instruction that the young pilot was to be in bed at the usual appointed hour. He knew the moment that Luke had only given a tired and miserable nod that he must discover why the force had behaved the way it had.
He glared out the ruined landscape of Vjun and pondered.

The answers were lost with the Jedi, the only being who could have formulated a guess was Obi-Wan Kenobi and Kenobi had died by his hand.

Except.

Vader stared out the window and wondered when Anakin Skywalker had begun speaking and thinking again.

The plan he considered was worthy of Skywalker’s reckless stupidity and his roughish daring attitude. Should the plan fail Vader would have a public execution, the Emperors enforcer or not. What remained of his body would be tortured live on the holonet before it was disintegrated for all to see.

Palpatine would prove his strength and dominion over the galaxy if that would happen but.

But Luke could not touch the force. His son was scarred from and by the very thing that made him special, unique. Vader reminded himself that he would not care any less for Luke even if he hadn’t been born with astronomical force potential. His child was precious either way.

However, it presented the conundrum that needed to be solved.

“Captain.”

“Aye.”

“Report to my office immediately.”

Tang arrived much faster than he anticipated and found himself turning to greet the woman. She was frowning, which was no unusual except there was a contemplative expression lurking beneath it.

“Milord?”

“I need a burglar.”

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Technically Luke was supposed to be asleep. Or at least in bed but his mind was buzzing and his head was pounding with a killer headache, hoping his Father was distracted he slipped into the turbolift and went down.

Being cut off from the force was like being a sensory deprivation chamber. All of the things had had never noticed he used it for were gone. He couldn’t not sense his father or the officers and clones of the castle; he couldn’t even sense the slumping darkness that hung over the galaxy. Ever since he had left Tatooine the gray shroud had clung to everything he saw and heard until now, when he couldn’t feel a thing.

The thought that someone could walk around the corner and he wouldn’t see them until it was too late was more than a little disconcerting.
With nothing to change into except the gray sleep clothes that she had been given aboard the Executor, Doora slipped into the ugly Imperial clothes and sighed.

The food was good, the shower even better considering it was real water and the pressure had been nothing short of magical

She might be able to deal with whatever came next.

Doora stopped and glanced toward the door, someone was outside and poking at the. Her stomach swooped low and she glanced around for a weapon.

Nothing.

Just as the door slid open she grabbed her boot and tossed it at the blond head that appeared, yelling.

With a fierce cry she tackled the person right outside her door and knocked the man down.

“Ow, hey! Watch it.”

Luke hadn’t really been expecting to get attacked but apparently he had hacked his way into someone’s bedroom.

“I’m sorry,” he covered up his face to avoid the stinging punches the landed along his torso and stomach. “I didn’t know that was a bedroom! Stop punching me!”

“Punk,” the girl straddling his legs punched his arms a last time before clambering off, “What’s the big idea! Huh! Why’d you hack someone’s door?”

Luke blinked from his position on the floor and then blinked again. The girl was small, stunted with fiery hazel eyes that stared past a noble nose and out of a pinched and sour expression. Well, it explained why her punching had almost no strength behind them. Obviously she had missed a few meals somewhere along the line.

“I’m sorry,” he repeated, cursing the force and climbing to his feet. “I didn’t know.”

“So you go hacking all locked doors?”

“Not really,” He rubbed the back of his head, “Let’s start over.” Holding out a hand he sent her an encouraging smile, one that usually got him what he wanted. “I’m Luke Skywalker.”

The girl, tiny and underfed, continued to glare before she shook his hand, “Doora. What are you doing here anyway? You’re not a clone.”

“No,” Luke floundered, unsure how to continue but Aunt Beru began speaking over his shoulder. “Um, would you like some tea?”

“Tea?”

“Yeah,” Seeing that Doora was about to retreat into her room and since he really couldn’t stand to be alone right now, he spoke quickly. “Please, as an apology. The kitchen should be that way and I was
going to make tea.”

“Well,” Doora cast him a glare but the tenseness in her shoulders lessened, “Sure.”

Luke discovered the kitchen with ease, using his long ago honed skill of tracking down food of any variety. A skill honed by three years in the Rebel alliance and even longer living on Tatooine.

The obviously commercial room was empty save for three droids charging in their docks. It looked promising and he was pretty sure that he could find the supplies for tea.

“What does he need a kitchen this big for?” Doora trailed in behind him looking irritated and annoyed but her expression cleared into awe at the sight of the room. “Wow.”

“He’s not the only person who lives here,” Said Luke, no need to ask who ‘he’ was. “I know there are a few troopers who live here.”

“That’s strange.” Luke rummaged through a few cabinets until he produced a delicate bag of something that was labeled in an odd language. “What’s that?”

“Tea…I think.” He opened the bag and took a sniff, “I’m pretty sure it’s tea.”

“Let me look.” The rebel passed the bag to the smuggler who sniffed as well. “You know, I’m not sure.”

“I’ll keep looking,” He said, “I don’t want to poison us by drinking something toxic.”

“If it was toxic why would he keep it in the kitchen?”


“You’ve met her too?” Doora wondered and from the corner of his eye he saw her trace a pattern on the metal work table. “What are you doing here anyway?”

“Well,” He sighed and then picked up bag clearly labeled tea. “Ha! I found some.”

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“The information to help him stored in my Masters vault. I, since he has not seen fit to inform me of its existence, cannot gain entry.”

“So what we need a burglar skilled enough to steal jedi holocrons from a vault that has never been broken into and may or may not exist?” Tang didn’t often sound befuddled or irritated but now her voice was tinged with annoyance. “Milord, surely.”

“I do not know,” He thundered, whirling on the lean former Separatist who did not flinch, “How to help him! My experience with this is limited and as such I will have to turn to the only source of information. The jedi master of the Old Republic are the most likely source of information.”
“By your own admission you are supposed to know nothing of this vault. If someone breaks into and
steals those holocrons then you will be the prime suspect.” Tang pointed out, “Unless.”

“I assure you, Captain.” Vader clenched a fist and wallowed in the memories of pain at the hands of
Palpatine, “He will not suspect my involvement.”

“Milord.”

“The Emperor operates under the delusion that I am nothing more than a fool, unable and incapable
of long-term scheming and rational thought. A blunt instrument for his use and amusement. If there is
treachery,” He relished the next thought, “It will arise from the ISB and Isard and her ilk.”

“Ah,” Her voice was both soft with a surprising amount of concern and pity but steeled with a
vicious glee that arose when she had the opportunity to destroy her enemies. “I see.”

“Captain,” he settled into his usual pose with one hand hooked in his belt and other held a chest
level, “Have you any suggestions?”

“I do.” Her expression only highlighted the conqueror’s might and joy that swelled beneath her
chest. It had been far too long since she had unleashed hell upon an unsuspecting galaxy. “There’s
one in particular I’m thinking of that you agent, Jixton, would need to get in contact with.”

“Excellent. I will leave the details to you then?”

“I will need a chip of all the information you possess about this mystery vault but yes, I will
manage.”

“I think, Captain, you are far too gleeful.”

“I disagree,” Her voice pitched low in an effort to cover the underlying glee that only a trained ear
would hear, “This is the first time I am going to be breaking into a vault without the side of artillery. I
am just the right amount of gleeful.”

“Without the aid of artillery?” He had not doubt what the captain was going to say next.

“I was the conqueror,” She replied, pleased with herself in the understated way that was normal for
her, “Of course I helped myself to their planetary treasures. Besides, no one ever got around to
asking about them after the war ended and Empire came to conquer them in my place.”

“Get to work, Captain.”

“Aye.” She swept from the room, smug and excited.

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Luke had learned both from Leia and his Aunt how to properly brew tea. His years with Rouge
Squadron had furthered his skill when his fellow pilots took the opportunity to share their world’s
customs and their favorite relaxation techniques. He noticed but said nothing how fascinated Doora
seemed with the whole process.

“Do you drink tea?” He asked, looking away to give her the time and privacy to form an answer.

“Not really,” she replied, sounding both defensive and angry but a little subdued, “Sometimes.”

“Well, it’s pretty great.” He turned and settled a cup in front of the obviously stunted kid teen, “Here
you go. I’m not sure what flavor it is but it smelled kind a sweet.” Luke settled on top of a
convenient stool and sipped the scalding liquid. It was sweet with a biter undertone that made it perfect. “Not a bad brew.”

Doora didn’t reply, sipping at her own cup and glaring at the thin liquid.

“What’s a rebel doing here?” She finally asked, not looking at him. “I thought you’d get a public execution.”

“So did I,” Luke said, unsure if he was supposed to tell about his relationship with Vader. “What about you?”

“If you can believe it, it’s a little stranger. I didn’t think he was the type to go and adopt all the orphan space jockeys he came across but I guess I was wrong.”

Luke blinked at her and set his cup down with a deliberate slowness that finally made her look up.

“What?” He wasn’t sure he’d heard what he’d heard but the defeated, miserable tone matched his when he first arrived exactly.

“Sure, I’ve been a smuggler and gun-runner as long as I can remember.” She said, missing his pointing gape. “One day the Empire comes knocking on my door and drags me outta my ship. Then it turns out I’ve impressed a bunch of people with my flying. That’s not surprising, I did learn from the best on the Outer Rim but the crazy part was when he told me I was going to be flying for the Empire.”

“They can’t do that.” Luke latched onto the sentence that made sense. “You’re obviously too young and you said orphan right? They can only take applicants younger than 18 if they have parental permission. I know, I tried.”

“You wanted to join the Empire?” A silent ‘you idiot’ tacked onto the end that Luke chose to ignore.

“I wanted to fly.” He said, “I would have even settled for being a smuggler if it meant I could fly. I wanted to grow up flying.” Luke sighed, trying his hardest to surpass the old bitterness.

“Trust me,” Doora spat, “It’s not as glamorous as the new reels make it look. Everything about it sucks. It’s cold all the time, there’s no good company. The food is artificial and crappy and then there’s the whole ‘can I even get a job’ thing. The hutt wanted to kidnap me and toss me into a slave ring and then I almost got made into some brothel girl when a old boss but bitter. You grow up hungry, cold and lonely and at the mercy of everyone else until you learn to shoot straight and throw a punch.”

Luke reeled backward and gaped, mouth opening and closing a few times.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

“Most people don’t,” Doora’s bitterness seemed spent and she sighed, “It doesn’t matter. We’re both prisoners and there’s one asthmatic jerk we can blame it on.”

“We’re not prisoners,” Luke pointed out, “Prisoners wouldn’t be able to sneak out to get tea.” He felt vindicated when she shrugged, still irritated but could find no reply. “Anyway…did you really get…” He felt jealousy squirming its way up his spine until he fairly spewed the word, “Adopted.”

“Sort of,” She glanced at his expression and frowned, “I got fostered. It happens sometimes on the nice planets where the government doesn’t exist to screw everyone over. That and it happens in those stupid holo films. I didn’t think fostering actually happened and I sure as hell didn’t think that it
was done by…you know.” She waved a hand and gestured upwards. “Him.”

“Fostered….just to fly?”

“That’s what it looks like.” Doora slumped against the table and settled her forehead on her arms, “As soon as I turn 17 which he’s probably going to make happen in the next few weeks. Then it’s off to fly….unless.” She sat up and looked at the Luke, “Have you tried to escape from this place?”

“I, uh….,” Luke glanced away, a blush blooming over his cheeks as he remembered exactly what happened last time. “Yes.”

“What happened?”

“The acid rain,” he said, forcing out a version of the story. He would be centuries dead before he told anyone what happened. “I couldn’t fly during the rain storm and it started when I got out of the room. Then… I… got caught.” He swallowed as her face twisted into a confused expression.

“What?”

“Don’t try to steal a ship or go outside the shielding when there’s a rain storm.” He said fervently, “That’s a rule you don’t want to break.”

“The only one I heard was to not mess with any of the people who lived here or interfere with the work that goes on.” Doora shrugged, “No one mentioned anything else.”

“Then perhaps,” Luke yelped and leapt backward while Dooras grip on her mug tightened so quickly the thing shattered in her hand. Darth Vader emerged from the shadowy entrance and both teenagers froze, startled and frightened. Neither of them moved beyond their initial motions with the primitive hope that if they did not then Vader would not see them. The automatic response and defense system in all teenagers when discovered breaking rules began to activate. “You might be forgiven for your obvious indiscretion.”

Luke stared at his father, the familiar sinking sensation in his stomach returning. Doora looked as if she had swallowed a lemon or had looked up on a sultry image of Tarkin.

“I distinctly recall ordering you to bed, young one.” Vader turned his mask toward Luke who glanced at the floor and then toward Doora whose mouth had fallen open; seemingly oblivious to the tea spilling over her hands. “Unless the Captain’s memory has suddenly become totally null and void then you have also been command to bed.”

“Uh,” Completely out of her depth and more than a little confused, Doora shrugged, “She….suggested it?”

“A suggestion from the Captain is tantamount to a command.” Vader intoned.

“Right so,” Luke’s eyes widened as he caught the defense and sarcastic tone infusing her tone. Shaking his head slowly at her while she subsided with a sulky glare. Doora’s voice trailed off.

“My orders are not to be ignored.” Vader continued after a long stare at the smuggler, “You are to obey my commands, regardless of your personal feelings.” Luke glanced shamefully at the floor, “There are rules to be followed and chief among them is a proper, healthy bed time. For the both of you.”

“Bedtimes are real?” Doora blurted out, still gaping at the scene. She was unsure if she hadn’t fallen into an alternate reality because here. Darth Vader! Was standing there and….scolding them. And

“They do.” Vader confirmed, “And you are to adhere to yours.”

“I have a bedtime?” She must have fallen into an alternate universe. This didn’t make any sense. “Why would I need a bed time? I’ve only been awake for 16 hours. I haven’t needed one so far. This is ridiculous.”

“It is necessary for one as young as the two of you.” Luke blushed even deeper while Doora almost jumped off her stool in her fury.

“I’m not a kid!”

“Do not,” Vader said, the growl of the respirator someone even more dangerous than before. Luke tensed, unsure if his father would strike at the younger person. “Take such a tone with me. I do not tolerate disrespect or disobedience.” If possible, Doora’s expression became even more mutinous but Vader turned back to Luke. “The two of you will return to your rooms. At once.”

For several seconds neither moved until Luke stood up. Doora finally moved to dispose of the remains of her cup. Arms crossed over his chest Vader watched Luke and Doora exchange wary glances before moving towards the door. He stepped to one side and began moving toward the smugglers room knowing that Luke would prompt her to follow.

Twin footsteps echoing behind him told him he was right. Once he keyed the girls room open he waited as she seemed to suck down her considerable pride and finally march past him.


“I expect to be obeyed,” Vader said, wondering to himself if Luke was jealous. His force signature gave no sign of it.

“Father, did you really foster Doora just so you could make her fly for you?” The offended, righteous tone was something he recognized from his beloved Padme. Defending those who could not defend themselves was obviously hereditary.

He did not reply as he pushed Luke towards the turbolift,

“Doora will have her uses,” He said instead.

“Father!” Luke protested as he was steered down the hall toward his own bedroom, “You can’t do that. It’s not right!”

“I do not expect you to understand,” The sith said. The door slid open and he prompted his son across the threshold.

“I don’t understand why I’ve got a bedtime,” Luke groused, crossing his arms and glaring at his father, “We were just talking and having tea.”

“You have been assigned a bedtime, Luke. For multiple reasons, chief among them that young ones need more sleep so as to grow healthy.” Luke’s blush deepened somewhat and he looked away, grumbling. “Secondly because you have shown distain toward personal health in the past, I plan to rectify this.”

“Father,” His son gained back some of his wind and mirrored his pose; hands on his hips, “Why?”
“I expect to be obeyed,” Vader said again, not really wanting to brush off his son but knowing that this conversation couldn’t take place at the moment. Galactic domination was not a conversation so late at night. “You are aware of the consequences of disobedience.” He said, “Return to bed.”

“Father!” Luke protested but Vader clamped a hand on his shoulder and began pushing him toward the bedroom. “Why? Doora is a smuggler but.”

“This is a conversation for another time, my son.” His rising frustration was not helped by Luke digging in heels into the carpet and pulling backward.

“You can’t do that to someone! She’s too young to be fighting in a war. Besides,” Vader paused and stared impassively down at his son who continued to babble onward.

“I have said,” He said firmly, “That this is not the conversation for tonight.”

“It is!” Luke insisted, “You went and came back with a smuggler who is apparently, legally my sister! You fostered a smuggler just so you could forcibly conscript her. There so much to talk about and it is important.”

“Are you jealous of Doora?”

“No!” Luke said truthfully, “I don’t want her to suffer or have to do anything she doesn’t want to. She’s a person and ought to live the life she wants.”

Vader wondered if Luke knew just how naïve he sounded at the moment. The consequences of Doora’s choices, as limited as they had been, were beginning to show and if Doora were to choose the life she wanted she would not doubt continue to be a feral, barely educated law-breaker with her own interests at heart. The more time Vader spent around teenagers the more he realized they would not make good decisions for themselves unless there was a firm guiding hand.

“I will not repeat myself, my son. We will discuss the particulars of,”

“Father!” The plaintive whine was turned into a sharp yelp as Vader lost what little patience he had with his insubordinate offspring. It only took a few swift motions to hook an arm around Luke’s waist and hoist the small blond off the floor. A moment later a few definite swats ensured that Luke was now listening to his reprimands. “OW! STOP!”

“Three times I have ordered you to drop the issue.” He said, Luke still hanging from his arm and holding very, very, very still. “Three times you have ignored me. As I told Doora, I do not tolerate disrespect or disobedience. Not from smuggler and most definitely not from my own son.” Luke squeaked beneath a next stinging slap. “Am I clear?”

“Yes, very clear.”

“Very well,” He set his son on his feet and watched the blond vanish into his bedroom with a speed not often seen outside of space battle. After a moment he sensed his son settling into his bed and Vader finally retreated.

In his own chambers he sighed, closing his eyes against the harsh white interior. There was so much to do.

A vault beneath the former jedi temple to be emptied.

A truce between himself and the Rebel Alliance in an effort to begin ending Palpatine’s reign.

There needed to be a suitable burglar to steal the holocrons. There had to be contact with the finicky
and bureaucratic Rebel Alliance. He needed to find more members to form a specialized black ops team that would fly beneath Palpatine’s condescending gaze. Vader needed to begin destabilizing the ISB’s power base and that of the Black Sun.

Perhaps most of all he needed to find a way to help Luke reconnect to the force. After a moment’s thought he reached toward his son to find that Luke, while understandably annoyed, was more contemplative. Luke might not have been able to sense his father but Vader could still feel Luke. And it seemed the Luke had just as many thoughts on his mind that his father did.

Doora settled into bed and took another deep breath. Her heart had finally stopped trying to burst out of her chest from reflexive fear of being in the Sith Lord’s presence. She hadn’t expected to see Vader, in all of his intimidating and awe-inducing glory, to appear in the doorway.

Stuff like that only happened in bad holo flicks. Stuff like being told to go to bed like she was some little brat in an old fairy tale by said fairy tale’s villain also only happened in bad holo flicks.

She didn’t like it. She didn’t like it one bit. With a sigh she pulled the blankets closer and listened to the relative silence of her room. Encased in the decadent bed she could hear the rain fizzling against the shield and the sound of the howling, shrieking wind.

Squirming in discomfort it took a few moments for Luke to get comfortable. The humiliating result of his rancor behavior was making lying down unpleasant. Thankfully his father had not been in the mood to issue more of a punishment. He rolled over to his side and stared at a quietly beeping Artoo.

“You know,” he said to the astromech, “If you had come with me then I bet I could have blamed the whole thing on you.” Artoo beeped in strident protest and bumped against the bed, annoyed. “I’m joking Artoo,” he shook his head and patted Artoo’s, “That was my fault. I really should have just shut up.” The droid beeped again. “No, thankfully he wasn’t too harsh. Sort of a…reminder.” Luke blushed and his arm swung down to hang of the side of the bed. “An unpleasant reminder. But! There is a girl here I want you to meet. Her name is Doora and she used to be a smuggler. I think you might like her, she kinda reminds me of Han.”

Artoo swiveled his dome and beeped again.

“No Artoo, she seems nice but mostly…alone and sad. Besides, I need to make friends with her. She’s the only other teenager here and technically she’s my little sister.” Artoo gave a loud shriek that had Luke clamping his hands over his ears. “I’m not sure what you’re saying but don’t worry. She’s not my actual sister, Father went and fostered her. She…she going to be conscripted soon or so it sounds like.” That idea left a terrible taste in his mouth and he knew that he would have no chance of changing his Father’s mind.

He sighed and settled back into the blankets.

“I’ll tell you about it in the morning, Artoo. I’m tired.”
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Luke tries to bond with Doora. Doora sulks. Leia goes on a warpath and Chewbacca follows gleefully. Yet another OC shows up late with starbucks she stole alongside a de-canonized EU character who should not have been de-canonized. Tang wants to kill someone and Luke helps out with repairs. Doora falls asleep and Vader keeps up with his low-key spying on Luke.

Doora had never in her wildest dream imagined that there could be so much information to learn in the whole galaxy.

Sure, she knew there was stuff she would never know. Partly because of her pathetic station in life as someone who’s only hope of survival was criminal action and partly because she had never imagined how technical life could be.

Alongside the sudden and terrifying pile of textbooks and instruction manuals she now had to read, there was a whole group dedicated simply to military life and maneuvers. There were wing formations she had to study and practice, the understanding of military comm chatter, military poise and behavior, how to survive life aboard a star destroyer and how to survive as a TIE pilot. Hundreds of rules to learn, not to mention etiquette and proper social graces that she lacked. Thankfully, she thought, she was simply supposed to be an expendable pilot. If someone tried to teach her how to lead other pilots into battle or even lead in general then Doora might just step into the acid storms and be done with it.

As it was she stared at the formidable pile of book chips and swallowed.

“Why am I doing this?”

Captain Tang did not look up from her paperwork. Her office was apparently the designated classroom for both of the castle’s teenagers because Luke was in another chair with a datapad and a focused expression. Past the impressive transperisteel window another storm was lashing at the shields and throwing impressive amounts of dust about.

“What?” Luke looked up from his equations on fuel and food consumption for troops and ships.

“Why am I doing this?” She didn’t dare say what she really felt in front of someone who obviously reported directly to the asthmatic bastard who had gotten her into this mess. Doora would rather be evading Hutt pirates rather than trying to understand military protocol.

“Well,” Tang shifted a report to one side, “Do you have anything better to do?”

She’s stuck, physically unable to resist whatever was coming. A glorified prisoner, semi-free but she was never going to delude herself that a single mistake would end her short and miserable life. Strong-armed into a position she had never even considered. The hand that stuck her here was a firm one, made of durasteel and only barely covered with a thin sheet of velvet.

Doora was a tool. A pet project by someone who could afford to toss away lives and money as if
they had no importance.

No one cared here and no one ever would.

“No,” she replied, staring again at the books. She has nowhere to go, no one to turn to for help and no chance of surviving more than a year. But, for the first time she’s not hungry and not cold and her bed it safe from all invaders. “I really don’t.”

Leia felt sick as she reviewed the information Lando had managed to acquire for them. Behind her, Chewbacca sensed her unease and settled a huge paw on her head.

“I have never heard of Vjun.”

“I’m not surprised,” Lando said, leaning back in his chair, looking worn and aged. “I had to get that information from Talon Karrde, dangerous man. Apparently that information is so secret that even the Emperor’s spies seem to meet untimely and sticky ends whenever they discover it. As far as we can tell it’s some sort of retreat for Vader but no one’s had the guts to fly up and take a look. But if he’s got your Skywalker prisoner then he’s there.”

“Do you have anything besides this?” Leia demanded, knowing she was being a little harsh and not really caring. “Schematic, images, historical zoning information?”

“Princess,” The scoundrel spread his arms in surrender, “I was lucky to get this. This is all there is. [You cannot expect us to believe that.] Chewbacca growled and Lando paled.

“Look, this was all I could get and I know it’s not much but there it is.”

[And what of Han?]

“Han’s been taken to Jabba the Hutt on Tatooine,” Leia’s glare turned darker as Lando shrugged, his entire body drooping and sad. “Still in carbonite.”

“Well,” Leia slid her blaster back its holster and nodded to Chewbacca, “It seems our business here is concluded. Chewie?”

[None of this will reach the Empire’s ears] snarled the wookie who kept his bowcaster firmly trained on the miserable Baron Administrator as he retreated from the office. [Princess, I suppose we are going to find this ‘Vjun’.]

“Of course,” Leia marched with iron in her step and a wildfire in her eyes, sending Cloud City citizens scattering and flattening themselves into walls and doors. Before the passionate maelstrom of vindictive fury that embodied the slender, delicate princess whose face betrayed none of her thoughts; no one stood a chance. “We need Luke to help rescue Han and if that means we’re storming Vader’s stronghold then so be it.” Leia swept toward the ‘Falcon’ with the sureness and poise of an avenging goddess, ready to rend the Empire apart for her friend.

Captain Tang had given both teenagers something she called a ‘recess’ stating, “It won’t do you any good if you’re brains start blurring information together. Take a break and meet me back here in an hour.”
Doora had had every intention of scampering back to her room to hide and possibly take a nap but the second the Captain had dismissed them Skywalker had all but begged her to come with him to the hanger.

"Why the hell would I do that?" Neither noticed how Captain Tang raised an eyebrow at the two of them but said nothing while they dithered just outside her office.

"You’re a pilot, right? This is an x-wing!"

"So?"

"Also, I could use some help looking at this other fighter that I’ve been working on." Doora was ready to punch the hopelessly excited blond in the nose but the underlying danger that lurked beneath his eyes was enough to give her pause. He reminded her of some of the farmers she had met. He was friendly, warm and stupidly enthusiastic to make friends but ready to defend himself and others if pushed.

"Uh…" she looked at him a little longer and decided she didn’t want to antagonize the sleeping dragon, "Sure. But you have got to stop touching me."

"Sorry, sorry." Luke held his hand far away from her as he led the way to the hanger, passing a few clones he greeted even as they gave cautious nods.

So Doora found herself perched on the wing of a ship over two hundred years old as she examined the decrepit engine casing. Luke Skywalker, the poster boy for the Rebellion, was welding and soldering inside the engine block.

"Well," Luke slid the welding mask up and past the dirt and oil ringing around his eyes, sweat dripped along his forehead and neck, "What do you think?"

"What makes you think I know what I’m doing?"

Luke’s smile was enigmatic and a little confusing; as if he knew something about Doora she herself didn’t know. Instead of giving a proper reply the boy shrugged, "Well?"

"Huh, punk." With a few muttered curse words she looked at the engine casing again and glowered at the abused metal, "If you want this thing to be space worthy again then that means we’d need to recast a new engine casing."

"Come again," he dug a finger in his ear and frowned.

"They don’t make engine casting like this anymore," Doora said, "Factories don’t have it and they don’t make it. It is a couple hundred years old. If you wanted to make this space worthy we’d have to make a new casing which means we’d have to make the mold and cast the metal ourselves."

"Oh…have you done this before?"

"My ship needed a new engine block and I had to do the same thing about three years ago." She said nothing more despite the obvious curious gaze the bored into her back. "We’ll need some Tradinar ore. A bunch of it if we wanted to recast the whole thing."

"You can fabricate the parts?"
Stiffly, Doora replied, “Yes.”

“Oh wow! I don’t know how to do that; I can do mechanics and that sort of stuff but definitely not part fabrication. I only thought that would be done in factories.”

“People have been smithing long before they figured out how to mechanize an assembly line.” She scoffed and continued to frown at the metal. “What about your section?”

“Well, the connections are clear and set up and there aren’t any more tears along the wires but I’m pretty sure those could be replaced if we really wanted to make this thing sturdy but…” Luke paused and looked down when Artoo whistled from the floor. “What is it?”

Artoo beeped a few times and Luke nodded, “I think our hour is up.”

“Urgh,” Doora felt her chest constrict as she considered the x-wing not far from their current ship. “Come on,” Luke had jumped to the floor and was looking back up at her with a clear, open and inviting expression, “We’ll get lunch soon too.”

Doora sighed and nodded, following behind the rebel pilot. At least there was food in all of this.

#$#$#

Gohan had been a thief as long as she remembered. Born and raised in the heart of a an Imperial penal planet by varying people who passed in and out of her life. Officially a prisoner she couldn’t leave without a pardon but unofficially….oh then she could leave.

And leave she did.

Gohan could squeeze and manipulate her way past anyone and into anywhere. Her tongue was crafted of the finest silver and with words she could warp a person’s reality into what she wanted.

Her first time off-planet had been unnoticed, despite the fact there was a daily roll-call, and she had broken into a Grand-moffs vault. Gohan had made off with several millions worth of jewelry and art that she had immediately hidden away. She ran rings around the prison warden, befuddled the Stormtroopers on duty and managed to snitch, steal and drain anyone stupid enough to get close enough.

She had managed to confuse two shipments, one containing the contents of a zoo and the other the collected art of one secret Grand Admiral Thrawn. The alien’s whole art collection was waiting at the bottom of a Corellian ocean for its new master while Thrawn fumed and cursed over his missing artifacts.

(The fact that Thrawn was the only person in the galaxy she had ever seen that looked like her was completely ignored. )

By time she had reached 20 years Gohan effectively ran the whole planet, holding the warden in her pocket with dubiously sincere flatter and the threat to reveal the truth of his incompetence. The only reason the man had never been replaced was because no one had ever escaped from his prison planet. Which was another fact of life that Gohan had manipulated.

The enclosed commands were ignored in favor of allowing the prisoners to tame the planet and build their lives but they still couldn’t leave.
“Oh little Gohan!” The blue skinned thief and con artist set her forbidden datapad on her lap and grinned up at the massive, overweight guard that had been here years before the Empire had come through; back when the planet was run first by the Republic and later by the Separatists. The guard, Lolz, was a kindly older fellow with generous girth and twinkling blue eyes. Even as a human he didn’t seem inclined to treat the prisoners the same way some of the Stormtroopers did. Lolz was more interested in food and money and flirting with pretty women. He had trouble keeping his weapon with him because Gohan had the habit of stealing it. “Ohhhhh, is that a datapad?”

“A what?” With a harmless grin she slid off the rainbarrel she’d been resting on and smirked at him.

“Oh, Gohan! You know you are not supposed to have a datapad. It is expressly ‘forbidden’!” His words were slanted by his rippling jowls and his funny stilted accent. “Oh, please tell it wasn’t a datapad!”

“Okay,” the human had been the only stable and constant in her life ever since she had been born on the miserable rock with no crime to her name. A fact that no longer held true all things considered. “It wasn’t a datapad.”

“Humph, I will trust you for now,” He waved a pudgy finger at her and she grinned, “Though I know I probably shouldn’t.”

“Oh come on Lolzy!” Her grin was sharp and toothy that sent another prisoner crossing the street back to the opposite side, “You don’t trust me? I’m hurt.”

“Oh,” Lolz patted her untamed mass of blue black hair and chuckled, “You remind me of my little Gerti when she was young. Always getting into trouble she was!”

“I’ll have to meet little Gerti!” Gohan said, “She sounds amazing.”

“Well,” Lolz’s dull gaze sharpened, “You know you cannot leave the planet! Do not say such things, it makes me very nervous.” He words rose and dropped with the musical accent.

“Sorry Lolzy,” She said, purely unrepentant. “So, what do you want?”

“What! Makes you think I want anything?” Lolz leaned against the outside wall of the rundown hospital the prisoners had built and staffed with their own. He mopped his impressively sized forehead and sighed, taking Gohan’s previously vacated spot on the rain barrel. “Walking so much is so tiring! I feel so old.”

Sighing, Gohan removed a piece of forbidden candy from her pocket and slid it into his hand, “Come on Lolz, what do you need? A three day pass, new shoes? Tell your favorite granddaughter.”

“Really,” Gohan reached toward the new and shiny little pin on the guards collar that Lolz no doubt missed when the spy pinned it to him. Unlike most of the other officers and guards Lolz was allowed to keep his Separatist uniform. Mostly because the Empire did not want to spend money fitting someone so fat with the standard grays “What did you tell him?”
“Nothing!” Lolz shook his flabby head and smiled at the much younger person, “I know nothing!”

“Good job Lolz,” quick as she could, Gohan yanked the little cog pin off his lapel and dropped it to the dust, a second later she had it ground to parts and Lolz was looking at her curiously. “Don’t worry about it, big guy,” with a harmless shrug she patted his large arm, “You never looked good with Imperial bling anyway.”

“Oh I know!” Lolz patted his forehead again with his stained handkerchief, “I much preferred the Separatists. They were so nice and then we got so many of those poor clone fellows. Can you imagine? Being so young and looking so old and then forced to fight in the terrible war? I always felt sorry for them, those poor boys.”

Since most of the clones had banded together and began farming the western hemisphere Gohan didn’t feel too bad for them. They made good food and had the best stories. Since the planet didn’t really have public transport it was kinda hard getting to them though.

“Hey, big guy, you might want to head back to the Tower.”

“Why? I just got comfortable.”

“I’m about to have a business meeting,” Gohan said, “and I don’t want you around in case it gets ugly.”

“OH! NO! Please, please do not get into a fight Gohan, then you get locked in the cooler and I do not want to lock you in the cooler. It is not nice for either of us.”

“I’m not promising anything,” Gohan passed him another piece of candy, “But if you hurry back there might be some cake from lunch left to snack on.”

“How do you know what the officers are having for lunch?” Lolz asked but tottered to his feet and began wandering toward the tower, “Actually, I do not want to know. Never mind.”

For several seconds Gohan watched the wide frame of the guard wander down the half shanty town before she leaned back against the hospital wall. She pulled her hat low to cover her eyes and presented the image of a prisoner resting in the sunshine.

“You caught that thing pretty quick.” The voice was deep and Corellian. A wide shadow fell on the dirt before her boots, “I’m impressed.”

“Well,” Gohan tilted her head back, flicking her hat out of her eyes and smirking at the newcomer. He was not a guest of her planet, the wild gaze of someone who had just seen hyperspace was still fresh in his eyes and the faint scent of metal and ozone drifted off him. His wide, square and handsome face was definitely new and Gohan was intrigued.

“I know what doesn’t belong here.”

“Then you’d know yourself.” The stranger shrugged and nodded toward the cantina, the first sturdy building they’d ever built once the fences had come down. “Actually, I do not want to know. Never mind.”

Once both were seated at a slightly slanted table, each with pale mead in hand, the stranger began to talk.
“So, for someone so pretty you’ve got an impressive and non-existent rap sheet.”

“So you’ve got an impressive and non-existent rap sheet.”

“Who me? My only crime was being born on this rock. Not my fault and I don’t have a rap sheet.”

“Right.” The man leaned across the table, casual and dangerous, “So that’s why Thawn’s pretty little collection is still collecting slime and mollusks at the ocean floor.”

“I,” Gohan sipped her drink, “Have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Look, kid. My Uncle isn’t interested in handing you over to the impressive and high-ranking people you’ve scammed and burgled in the last six years, which he could but then he wouldn’t get what he wants.”

“And what does your uncle want? You haven’t even introduced yourself yet.”

“Me,” He held out a hand, “I’m Wrenga Jixton, and you can call me Jix.”

“Gohan, potentially at your service,” the blue thief smiled, as false as she could manage, “What does your Uncle want?”

“He needs a vault emptied,” Jix said, “the most secure and secret vault in the whole galaxy.”

“You sound like a terrible promotional video,” Gohan said bluntly, “What’s in it for me?”

“Well, aside from the whole, you’ll be pardoned thing? You’ve got a sizeable amount of cash waiting at the end of the line.”

“I don’t make deals through a middle man,” she said, “looking out the window that still hadn’t been repaired from the last brawl, “I meet this uncle of yours otherwise no deal. But me meeting him isn’t me agreeing to take the gig,” she smiled at his own appreciative smirk, “Got it?”

“I was hoping you’d say that.”

Ten minutes later Lolz was watching his favorite prisoner wander into the restricted space port with a back pack of supplies and a case hovering behind her.

“Oh no! Gohan,” Lolz waddled over and dithered beside the alien, “Please, Please! Tell me you aren’t leaving. You know you cannot! You are a prisoner, it is forbidden.”

“Don’t worry Lolzy,” Gohan patted his stomach as she approached the decrepit and rusted ship that the ISB agent had arrived on, “I’m just going on a business trip. I’ll be back in a few days.”

“You can’t!” Agahst but not at all surprised he sized the straps of her backpack, “Please, you cannot got missing. I’ll get in trouble, you’ll get in trouble.”

“It’s okay Lolzy, if the warden needs me my second will be taking my calls. If you need me just ask for the guys at the cantina. The world isn’t going to end just because I’ve been gone for a while, things can run smoothly without me.”

“Oh! Gohan!”

“Hey,” both stopped as the Corellian leaned out of the ship, “We’ve got clearance to take off.”

“Yes!”

“Oh, well,” she shrugged, “Too bad. I’m off.” With a few steps she boarded the unknown vessel and disappeared from view.

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Vader was watching through the security cameras as Luke helped the few clones in the rebuilding of his training room. True to his word he had not allowed the boy to go unpunished for the destruction of said room. With easy grace and unbridled energy the boy had easily charmed his way into their affections, trading jokes and humorous observations as they worked.

“Lord Vader,” his comm unit blinked and he opened it to reveal Captain Tang with pursed lips. Obviously his agent had just made contact, “Your…agent has made contact and requests a word.”

“Patch him through, Captain.”

“Aye,” She image blinked out only to be replaced by the grinning and insolent form of WrenGA Jixton. Automatically his hands curled to fists as his patience thinned, the man strained his tamper at the best of times.

“Hey there Uncle D!” WrenGA said, loud and irreverent as usual, “I’ve picked up some choice bugler meat. I think you’ll be impressed.”

“Speak quickly, Jixton.”

“She wants to meet you, won’t take the job unless she know whose payin’. She’s a smart cookie and I thought you could hire her!”

“This….Gohan, your impressions?”

“Well,” the man looked over his shoulder at something beyond the pick-up range of his communicator, “Smart and dangerous, she practically runs that little penal planet she was born on. Got the Warden and most every-body else in her pocket, smart and I think you could use her.”

“I am aware of her reputation, Jixton. I want images and records.”

“She doesn’t have records, no one does here except the POW’s but I’m sending a holo through to you in a minute. What do you want me to do with her?”

“Bring her to Vjun,” what was another person in his castle brimming with dissidents, criminals and rebels? “And when you arrive,” he raised a hand at the smirking Corellian, “Take great care not to antagonize Captain Tang. She had requested permission to execute you, permission that I might give if you give me reason to.”

“I hear ya Uncle D!” The man waved and the call cut off. Shaking his head over so slightly Vader refocused his attention back on Luke who was lifted a board into place with great focus and care.

Luke was frightened to touch the force and unwilling to reach into the power he held. It befuddled his father and, he would never admit to it, it frightened him as well. His son was a well spring of the force, a living, shining beacon of purity and light. To have such light dimmed and gray was unnatural, it would not do.
It could not last.

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Tang gritted her teeth knowing the irritating Corellian was enroute to the castle. “Please,” she muttered to the spirit of her dead mentor, “Please let me kill him this time. Let me kill him.”

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Doora flopped onto her bed, groaning and kicked her boots off with little care. She hadn’t known her head could hold so much information. Numbers and facts blurred on the inside of her eyelids as she closed her eyes, intent of resting them. She’d be awake for dinner or whatever they sent.

The smuggler was asleep before she could count to ten.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary


Luke didn’t mind being stuck with Captain Tang learning. Understanding how wars were really fought without the military glorification of both the Rebellion and the Empire was fascinating. If he were to echo Captain Tang’s assessment, backed up by an overwhelming amount of information and evidence, the jedi commanded their troopers with the same amount of skill a first year Army academy student would. There was much to learn and still he felt he had not dived far into the information available.

The rebel didn’t mind dealing with a skittish and feral Doora, who still glared suspiciously at him whenever he entered the room. Or the clones who would hang around curiously while pretending they weren’t hanging around.

He did, however, want to spend more time with his father.

Because his connected to the force was severed (and he wasn’t going to touch the connection with a seven foot pole) it was impossible to gauge how his father felt. The constant interaction of their force was something he didn’t know he had until it was gone.

“Where are you going?” Doora, suspicious and curious, glanced up from her own manual on TIE communication regulations.

“I’m not sure,” he relied and glanced toward the door, “But I’m going.”

The two had found a small, mostly empty room that had several desks and a few chairs. It made a convenient room to study in or to simply escape the constant gaze of the ever watchful clones. Today, Doora had splayed out three different datapads and was flipping her way through them as fast as possible.

“I’ll be back, okay.”

“Sure.” Her stubborn anger did not lessen as he slipped into the hallway and sighed. Two clones were situated on either side of the door.

“Hello,” he said, hoping they would answer him, “Could you tell me where Vader is?”

Both clones stiffened and finally the one on the left spoke up, “You could find Lord Vader in his office.”

“Thank you,” his said, sincere and did not notice how both clones gaped at him behind their helmets.
“So,” one whispered to other, “Do we watch the girl or the Prince?”

“Uh, I say we stick with the flight risk,” the second replied, “I don’t think Prince Vader is about to escape…again.”

“Agreed,” Both clones straightened to perfect parade ground attention when Captain Tang came sweeping around the corner. As always the sight of the lean woman inspired equal parts admiration and fear. She moved as if the galaxy itself was to bow at her feet, sure and confident and the battle hardened glint in her brown eyes was always a welcome for clones who could finally relate to an officer.

“Stroller, Sweets.”

“Ma’am,” If possible they straightened further as she stopped before them.

“Who is within?”

“Just the smuggler ma’am, Prince Vader has gone to find Lord Vader.”

“I see,” For several seconds she looked at them before waving the door open and paced inside.

Luke found his father’s office with no trouble. It was just down the hall from his training room and hyperbaric chamber, a door he had not opened and a room he had not destroyed. For several seconds he waited outside the door, unsure if he should enter.

He started as the door slid back and his father’s voice boomed from the interior, “If you wish to lurk then so be it,” Vader said, “However, you will find speaking much easier when done in person.”

“Um,” Luke peered around the corner, blushing a little as his father watched him from his desk.

“Well?”

“I’m coming in.” Vader’s desk was a tall, sturdy affair constructed out of a black metal. It seemed to hold an entire fleet’s worth of paperwork, if the piles of flimsiplast and data chips meant anything. Vader himself was holding an astonishingly small stylus in his left hand with a datapad held in the other. Luke got the sudden image of Vader wearing a pair of old-fashioned spectacles and a strange vest that he sometimes saw in old holo-films. He smiled.

Neither of them said anything for a moment until Luke ventured, “Father?”

“I believe, you one,” The Sith said almost admonishing him, “That you are supposed to be studying at the moment.”

“Yes.”

“Then you must be here for a particular reason.”

“I..I wanted to speak to you.” Luke ventured, suddenly terrified that Vader had no interest in him beyond trying to have him become an apprentice. Parental connection aside it wasn’t much of stretch to assume that Vader would use such a connection for his own use. Luke wondered, frightened, if he had been too bold in assessing Vader’s initial opinion of him. Thinking that the heavily armored sith lord, synonymous with destruction and subjugation might unbend enough from his lofty heights to care for some farm boy turned rebel might have been an act of supreme arrogance.
“I see,” Vader set his stylus down and then his datapad, “Perhaps it concerns your sudden and completely inexplicable suspicion regarding our connection and my plans respecting your future.” Since Luke could not sense what Vader what feeling through the Force he was left to rely on the flat tone of the artificially synthesized voice.

“Well,” he paused, taking a deep breath and steeling his nerve, “yes.”

“I assure you, my son,” Luke jolted but did not venture closer to the desk, lurking next to the door, “I will ensure that never will you be forced to address the Emperor as ‘master’ or to pressure you into the Sith dogma.” If possible, his voice turned gentle, “You are light made incarnate, pure and perfect.” Luke blushed, “An example of perfect humanity, not to be soiled by the evil that is the Emperor. I am your father. I will protect from his schemes and the abominations he has created.”

“Father.”

“You will live free,” Vader continued, voice harsh as his fist tightened and Luke heard leather creaking, “Of both the Sith and the Jedi, their useless platitudes and single minded motions. Know this, my son, of all my wealth and possessions it is you I value above all.”

“Father.” Luke face was flushed a bright pink as he watched his Father standing, looming above the scattered examples of Imperial bureaucracy

“Does this reassure you? Lacking your connection to the living force you have no other word to take than mine.”

“Well,” the pilot ducked his head, a little overwhelmed by such firm proclamations, “You did say you don’t lie.” Luke watched through his eyelashes, wondering if he could venture forth the question that had been plaguing him.

“You may ask your questions,” his father proclaimed and this time Luke frowned.

“Are you reading my mind?”

“Even disconnected from the force, my son, you project your thoughts loudly. You are an open book, obvious to anyone who can read body language.”

“I thought I was getting better,” Luke admitted, tucking an arm behind his body and clutching his elbow, “I guess not.”

“Your question?” Vader prompted, taking his seat again and motioning for Luke to take one as well.

“Well,” Luke bit his lip and watch his father carefully, “I was hoping you might tell me…about my mother.” Vader visibly stiffened, become a boulder of regulated breathing and leather armor. Luke cringed at his blunt wording and wondered if he could take back his question.

“I don’t know anything about her,” he continued, “I don’t know her name or where she was from.”

“Obi-wan never told you?” His fists clenched and the temperature plunged.

“No.” Luke flinched backward as Vader stood abruptly and marched toward the window at the desolate landscape. Silence fell as his father stared outward, saying nothing and silhouette against the weak sunlight from above.

Finally he spoke, voice lined with steel and fury, “Concealing the nature of our relationship I could understand and possibly sympathize.” Vader did not turn and Luke got the distinct impression someone had messed up and he hoped it wasn’t him. “However, to hide the truth of your mother and
the heritage you have inherited from the both of us is deplorable. That you lack even the basic understanding of your birthright is perhaps Obi-wans greatest crime.”

“Father?”

Vader watched the landscape for a moment longer before answering his son. The great pain that accompanied every memory of his angel rose to the forefront, drowning out the physical pain of his suit. He could still see her, standing before him smiling. So proud and strong, sure of herself and her righteous but as much pain as her memory caused his son deserved to know. To understand the nobility he had inherited and the position to which he rightfully belonged.

“If your mother,” he said with great difficulty, “was Padme Amidala,” Luke gasped as if he recognized the name, “Senator of Naboo and served as its Queen for two terms. She rid her planet of the Trade Federation blockade, freeing her people from the droid armies. She protected the freedom and rights of her people even as war consumed the galaxy, time and again she proved herself a warrior to protect herself and others around her. During the Clone War she advocated for peace even as other cried for war.”

“Senator Amidala! She’s my mother?!”

“Yes,” he turned to observe Luke’s openly astonished expression, “you have heard of her before now?” He hoped so, Tang’s lessons ought to have covered something other than why the Republic was such a festering mess of corruption. She should have focused a few ‘who’s who’ while discussing that bygone era.

“Yes, Leia,” he hesitated, unwilling to mention the other rebels, “she’s told me about her. They admire her a whole lot.”

“Just as they should, she was an admirable woman.”

“My mother, really?”


“Your,” gob smacked his son fell silent. “Wife!”

“Indeed,” a little amused he settled back into his seat, “my wife.”

Tang could easily dislike the young smuggler either because of her profession or the simple fact her attitude could have been forced through the unholy union of a cactus patch and a temperamental old ship. It would be so easy to allow the familiar prejudice of the clones and the Empire to cloud her assessment of the teenager.

If the girl didn’t remind Tang so much of herself when she was younger.

The directionless rage, the fury and loneliness that came with isolation and the constant fight for survival, abandoned and alone in a galaxy that did not care while forced to slog her way into some semblance of a future.

There were, of course, vast differences between the two but Tang could identify the most common factors between them.

Doora, despite the new wardrobe, still looked like a rumpled piece of smuggling scum. The wary air
of a prey ready to bolt at the slightest motions still clung to her. That, Tang did not relate to.

Tang had always been the predator, hunting and destroying with a vengeance. Destruction came easily with rage.

“Good afternoon.” Doora had taken up residence in the most easily defensible corner of the room. Sharp hazel eyes peered from beneath a fly-away fringe of dull brown hair.

“What do you want?”

“The proper reply,” Tang sank gracefully into the chair previously vacated by the blond rebel, “Is either, ‘good afternoon’ or ‘hello, how are you.’”

“What if I don’t care?”

“Etiquette does not care for your personal feelings,” she replied, the ghost of Count Dooku leaning into her words, “And Lord Vader’s officers aboard the Executor are much less forgiving than I regarding perceived disrespect.”

“You’re forgiving?”

“I am the epitome of mercy compared to Imperial officers,” she said, noting the hostility was igniting as usual, “And while I’m sure you have much to do I am here to offer advice.”

“Really?” Sarcasm came naturally to teenagers but Tang had never been fond of it.

“Yes,” she clasped her hands lightly over her stomach and watched the girl for a few moments. “This isn’t going to be easy for you. Where you stand is on the platform designed and built by Lord Vader. Should you fail, well, I’m sure your imagination can come up with something suitably frightening.”

“Thanks.”

“You won’t lie to yourself, Doora. You know you’re simply an experiment which makes this all the more dangerous.”

“Your point?”

“Failure is not an option.” Tang stared levelly at the girl, “You are a survivalist and have proven yourself a worthy opponent to his legions of fighters and pilots. Against all odds you survived to adolescence and you have cultivated skills to ensure your continued survival.” Tang tilted her head to the side, “It would a a genuine shame to see such potential die due an incurable case of pride.”

“I don’t have pride,” Doora spat, “Can’t afford it.”

“Stubbornness as well, can’t afford that all things considered.”

“I’m not.”

“Lord Vader has shown an astonishing amount of mercy considering how much you have flaunted the laws and his own commands. I have no seen the likes of it…ever and I have no doubt that any leeway afforded in Bast Castle will vanish the moment you set foot back on his flagship.”

“So what’s your point?” Doora shifted, glancing at the door and then back toward the window. “You saying I’m going to be shit out of luck?”
“Yes, and soon. There will be no grace period and there will be no net to catch you should you fall.”

“And?”


“Like some damned puppet?”

“Yes,” Tang admitted, “I don’t agree and it is fairly distasteful but unless you do want to die then you need to learn.”

“I’m overflowing with confidence.”

“Well,” Tang kept her smirk under wraps but enjoyed a moment of private amusement, “Even the most unexpected situation can bear fruit. It is simply a matter of patience and planning. A longer term investment, perhaps?”

“I don’t like you.” Doora said after a moment of quiet consideration. “At all.”

“Not many do.” Tang admitted, “That does not concern me.”

“You,” the smuggler pointed a hand at her, “want me,” she pointed the fingers back at herself, “To play nice and jump on the Imperial assembly line and let them dress me up just so I can survive.”

“Are you going to pretend you were free while fighting for survival every minute of every day?” Tang wondered, “The chance of creating something new is presented, albeit forcefully, and you don’t want it.”

“I don’t have much of a choice,” Doora snapped, “And what else am I supposed to do?”

“That is a good question.” Tang shook her foot and watched the girl a little longer, “What do you think of your studies?”

“They take forever.”

“Of course,” Tang did not mention that Doora was managing to slip over two years of academy work into a single month. Nor did she mention that her piloting skills were on par with those belonging to Colonel Fel and his ace pilots. “A gem in the rough takes a while to polish but that usually means it outshines all others.”

“Flattery,” Doora snorted, disgusted.

Tang spread her hands and smiled, “I learned from the best.”

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Luke felt his mind was spinning and he was falling into some twilight zone.

Mother. His mother. A queen and senator. It was unbelievable.

“Your mother,” Vader continued, “thought, correctly, the child would be a boy. I presumed the child would be a girl.”

“Ah,” Luke stared at the holo of his mother, astonished and more than a little awed. She looked perfect, flawless in her senatorial gown even as she gave the viewer a secret, warm smile as if she knew a secret they did not. “I don’t know what to say.”
Vader sighed; too low to be picked up by the vocoder, he did not wish to speak of his wife or the circumstances of their marriage.

“Take the holo,” he said and relished the astonishment his son radiated, “Return to your studies. We will speak on this topic at a later date.”

“Alright,” Luke accepted the small circle of metal and plastic, hesitating for a moment before saying, “Thank you father.”

“Go,” he said, weakly, glad beyond all reason that Luke could not sense his anguish. “I am sure the Captain has more to teach you.” Vader was rewarded when a look of extreme concertation worked its way onto Luke’s face.

“I swear! I have statistics and numbers and calculations drooling from my ears every single time I talk to her. I had no idea what it took to actually wage a war.”

“Most do not,” Vader replied, a little amused, “It is a fine and delicate art with a grand and impressive history.”

“Well,” Luke obvious was going to disagree with something he said but instead decided to fold gracefully as he could manage, “Alright.”

Wrenga had been pretty sure he started out the trip with most of the credits Vader gave him to cover all contingencies. Two sabacc games later and a strange one she called ‘poker’, Gohan owned just about everything on the ship except the ship, his clothes and Jixton himself.

“Where did you learn to play like that?” He watched, irritated and a little awed as the blue skinned alien began running her hands over the control panel, “I can play but I’m pretty sure what you just did was either insanely good cheating and/or magic.”

“Well,” her toothy grin was frightening as she flashed a smile over her shoulder, “Mostly cheating.”

“Damn,” he groused, “Does that make the game invalid?”

“Oh please,” Gohan waved at him, “It only makes the game invalid if I get caught.”

“Great! Uncle D is going to wring my neck.”

“I hope not, you seem like an interesting human and I want to keep you around for a little while.”

“You just want to cheat me out of the ship.”

“There’s that.”

“Hold up,” he watched the smoothing talking thief as he wandered over to the communications panel, “Get on out of here. I’ve got a call to make and I don’t trust you.”

“That’s wise,” with a breezy smile that looked incredibly unnatural on someone who looked exactly like Thrawn, Gohan swept from the room.

“Hey Uncle D,” the blinking comm unit glared at him even as the hissing respirator filled the room. He hoped that Gohan hadn’t messed around with his comm unit at some point, “We’re about a day out.”
“Make haste, Jixton,” Vader threatened, “I have little patience for your time wasting.”

“I’m working on it but this Gohan is a slippery little punk.”

“I am not interested in your failures,” Vader snarled and Jixton swallowed and tugged at his collar, “Your excuses are useless.”

“Alright, making our way as fast as possible, still waiting for clearance to jump from Corellia, didn’t want to rock the boat by jumping in randomly.”

“Very well.” With a frightening sort of finality the comm shut off and Jix was left staring that the unit. He sighed and rubbed his head only to turn around to find a widely smirking Gohan.

“Well,” she said, lava tinted eyes dangerous and flinty, “This is interesting.”

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Luke and Doora managed to make sharing a cup of tea before bedtime into a sort of ritual. Doora would scrounge out the tea and Luke would prepare it under her watchful gaze.

“So where’d you go?” She finally asked as Luke poured boiling water over the tea leaves.

“To speak to someone,” he answered, biting his lip.

“It couldn’t have been Tang,” she grumped, someone tangling her arms even tighter together, “She was talkn’ to me.”

“What did the Captain want?”

“To tell me,” Doora cast her gaze about the shining kitchen and glowered at the shining tabletop, “that I ought to just go along with the High Lord Asthmatic says because otherwise I’m going to end up pretty dead pretty fast.”

“I don’t agree with it,” Luke said, not looking her direction. She stared at him when he shrugged, “It’s not right to do that just so he can try out some silly idea and force someone to fight in a war.”

“This is Vader we’re talking about. When does he ever care about right or wrong?”

Luke sighed, wondering how he could reconcile his father with the 20 year image of a suppressor and murderer.

How could his mother, Queen and Senator, have loved someone who could and would crush whole cultures beneath his heel?

“He must have been different,” he said and found Doora frowning at him.

“I don’t know why you’re suddenly babbling to yourself,” she said, waving her mug at him, “But we’ve got twenty minutes before our super nannies decide to cart us out of here. I want tea.”

“Alright,” Luke smiled at the straight forward teenager and flicked the side of the teapot, “This is supposed to be green tea but I don’t really know what that means. It should taste okay.”

“Don’t overthink it,” she said, “Just pour the tea.”

“Alright, alright.” He smiled at the smuggler. No longer swamped in ill-fitting sleeping clothes she looked somehow tinier than before. They might have been equal in lacking height but Luke had
muscle on his bones. He really hoped his father was going to make sure she managed to get enough to eat while aboard the Executor. Doora made grabby hands at him and he poured her a mug of tea. “Don’t forget to add the sugar.”

“I drink it hard and straight,” she said, sucking down a long gulp, “Sugar is too sweet for me.”

“Sugar is supposed to be sweet.”

“Yeah well, leave off it. I don’t like it.”

“That’s fine,” Luke had his own incurable sweet tooth that was impossible to manage at the best of times, “More for me.”

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“Did you intend for them to start bonding?”

“I did not.” Vader and Tang watched the security holos as the two teenagers began bickering over various piloting techniques and engine parts. “It seems to be a side effect of Luke’s…”

“Charm?” Tang prompted, “He is a rather cheerful fellow.”

“Indeed.” Vader watched his son laugh and then poke a teasing statement at the humored but still scowling smuggler, “I presume you spoke to the girl.”

“I did and she might calm down just enough for you to stick her aboard your flagship or she might just try and jump ship as soon as possible.”

“Jixton is one day out. I want no one between my office and the landing pad; ensure the Luke is properly distracted and that Doora will not see my…guest.”

“The burglar?”

“Yes.” He felt the stifled sigh in the force and felt her temper begin to strain simply at the thought of dealing with Jixton. “And captain.”

“Milord?”

“Do keep your temper around the foolish Corellian,” he ordered, “Should I give you license to kill him then and only then may you.”

“Aye,” she didn’t sound happy but that did not concern the Sith.

“We must prepare to contact the Rebel Alliance,” he said, focusing on Luke’s smile as Doora began speaking. Obviously the smuggler was sharing one story or another.

“Your agents are trying to isolate Mothma or one of their generals but since Princess Organa had gone off onto a mission that our agents have yet to discover they’re in a little disarray.”

“Typical,” he might have snorted if it were not painful and a most un-sith like action, “At the sign of trouble they begin to collapse. They are not better fit to lead the galaxy than Palpatine.”

“Once we locate Princess Organa,” Tang continued, tapping away on her datapad, “We ought to isolate her and present the idea of a partial treaty.”

“Organa is more likely to shoot before listening to a proposal.”
“She’s also the only reasonable person on their council of relics and fools,” Tang said, “We’re keeping an eye out for her but it’s not like she’s going to crash land on our front step.”

Vader gave no reply. Instead he kept his attention on the teenagers as they shared a cup of tea and stories. Seeing that his was not going to be speaking further Captain Tang retreated without another word.

It would be his. The galaxy, the empire. All of it would be Vader’s.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Palpatine is creepy and arrogant. Vader hates his boss and meet Gohan. Gohan plans a heist. Luke and Vader talk some and Vader discovers that ghosts have been wafting around his castle.

Palpatine shifted his old bones for a more comfortable position as he listened to the force. It had been quite coy recently, pulling away from his commands and failing to part for his inspection and it seemed reluctant to show anything beyond what he already knew.

Odd and odder.

The force was his to command his to rule, just as he ruled the entire galaxy! It could not hide from him. The ancient sith lord wrestled the darkness into submission and cackled with glee when it bowed.

He was the eternal master of life and death.

For several moments he reveled in the pulsing darkness. He had no felt the rippling of new force user in several days. No bright pulses of light and happiness the likes of which had bowled him over not so long ago. Whatever had caused the beginning destruction of his galaxy wide shroud was gone.

Emperor Palpatine watched the guards and reached out to touch the shattering and shredding shroud. Three years he had spent creating that shroud. It was designed to confuse the jedi and conceal his power and it had brought the down fall of his own master. It had also stood for 30 years only to fall beneath something or someone who must have been the embodiment of light.

Only one person could have achieved such an accomplishment at the height of his power except that Vader was encased in his own self-loathing and hatred. Fully mired in the dark side and sinking in his own despair with no sign of returning.

Vader was a puppet and a tool.

A fool who had once carried delusions of grandeur and power but ultimately failed due his own sentiment and pathetic inability to allow the past to die.

Palpatine twitched his nose beneath his cowl and glowered at the skyline.

The young rebel who had destroyed the death star had vanished.


When he was found he would craft a new apprentice, stronger than the foolish Vader and a true heir to his Sith dynasty.

“Captain,” he commanded. The red guard approached and bowed low, “Make contact with Lord Vader.”
There is a possessive dragon that lurks beneath the black armor. That wraps around his heart and reaches far and farther into his person that he knows. Vader is a dragon, mighty fierce and dangerous.

The dragon is absurdly pleased to discover that, not only is Doora living up the expectations that the force had whispered to him, she is exceeding them.

Properly indoctrinated she will make a great pilot and he has no doubt she would become a great leader. For now, though, she must survive his tests.

(The dragon purrs, content, when he reviews her simulation scores)

“Lord Vader,” Captain Tang marched in, her expression as calm as ever even as her presence twists in discomfort, “The Emperor is making contact. Piett is routing it though the ships transmitters so none will know the difference but he’s calling.”

“My chambers are clear?” He asked, sliding the datapad away and standing.

“Clear.”

“And the boy?”

“Distracted.”

“Very well.”

Palpatine allowed Vader to await his convenience, kneeling before him with his helmeted head bowed. His observation of the man revealed little, his distance was too far for him to get an accurate reading.

“I have sensed a great disturbance in the force.” He said.

“I have felt it, my master.”

“The son of Anakin Skywalker must not become a jedi. His could destroy us.”

“He is a boy,” Vader replied, finally looking up, “A harmless child with no one to teach him. I destroyed Obi-wan before him.”

“Regardless,” Palpatine waved the thought off, “he has gained power and knowledge through the memories of the jedi. He cannot be allowed to continue.”

“If he could be turned,” his apprentice bargained, “He could be a powerful ally.”

“Can it be done?” The Emperor watched as Vader bowed his head.

“He will join us or die.”

“Find him, Lord Vader.” Palpatine commanded, “And bring him before me. Together we shall turn him to the truth of the force.”

“As you command, my master.” The connection was severed and Palpatine leaved back into his
throne, gloating and triumphant.

His new apprentice would be delivered in due course. Assured that Vader would not seek to usurp his throne Palpatine allowed himself a smile. Once the man had been great but now he was simply a shadow of what he had once been. A shadow of a jedi and a poor excuse for a sith.

Gohan watched the castle through the viewport. It was a massive, sprawling affair with a courtyard in the middle and several towers that sprang up along the edges. The classic and gothic styles of the building showed it was easily over a thousand years old.

She was impressed and told Jixton so.

“I’m glad,” the man huffed under his breath, “Uncle D’ll be flattered when you tell him that.”

“Anything to impress Lord Vader,” she replied, keeping her red eyes on the hanger and landing pad they dipped into. “I didn’t expect an actual castle though.”

“Nor did I but the boss likes it.”

“Right.” Gohan reached into the co-pilot seat and hefted her backpack onto her shoulders. There wasn’t going to be much she could do if Vader decided to kill her. Even on her back water prison planet she knew the stories about the armored Starfighter pilot. “Anything in particular you want me to say?”

“Look,” Jixton didn’t turn from the controls but his tone indicated that he would if he could, “I don’t like you much.”

“That’s because you’re a bad gambler.”

“So I,” he continued, ignoring her, “Don’t care what you say and I hope that I get the excuse to kill you.”

“Good to know,” she said, “Do you always treat your dates like this?”

“You’re way too young to be my date.” Jixton said and noted that Vader was already standing in the hanger, obviously impatient. “Heads up,” he said, turning around to find the ship empty and his readouts telling him that the loading ramp had already been extended, “Oh hell!”

Gohan had not survived her life thus far by being overly stupid. Reckless? Yes. Stupid? No. The second she saw Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith and Supreme Commander of the Imperial Navy she knew better than to antagonize him. Keeping him waiting was not going to be an option so she made for the loading ramp as soon as the Corellian set the ship down.

The ships about her were standard military design, obviously he was housing troops here but she had no doubt his private hanger was somewhere along here.

“Lord Vader,” she snapped a sloppy salute and grinned at the impassive black mask, “I’m honored you welcomed me here yourself.”

“Thief,” he growled, “I have little patience for game or your amusement. Save your platitudes. I have ordered you here for a specific reason. I joined you here not as a matter of a respect but of
impatience. You will follow me and should you attempt anything foolish your existence will be considerably shortened. Am I clear?"

“Absolutely,” she keep smiling even as he turned his back on her and began striding along the rows of dropships and Starfighters. “Coming Jixton?”

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Captain Tang rubbed her nose she waited for the appearance of the obnoxious Corellian agent and the Sith she obeyed.

“I need a vacation.” She muttered and whirled about when Vader’s thundering steps and presence opened his office doors. “Lord Vader.” The former Separatist saluted. He gave no indication he had seen or heard her.

“Hey there!” A blue skinned alien with flat red eyes wandered in after the Sith and waved at her. Tang narrowed her eyes, recognizing her species and the alien in particular.

“Gohan,” if the other one was taken aback she didn’t show it, “A pleasure.”

“I’m at a loss,” Gohan smirked and extended hand, “Such a lovely image such as yourself surly has an equally beautiful name.”

“You may call me Captain.” Tang retorted coolly, accepting the handshake.

“To business,” Vader growled and both women fell silent. “Now.”

“Right,” Gohan wrapped her arms around herself and stared at the armored fighter, “Your man says you’ve got a job you’d like me to do. One you’ll hire a prisoner for.”

“I am well aware,” Vader said, “That you have the ability to leave your planet at any given moment and that you control a sizeable number of my officers and Stormtroopers. Do not play coy.”

“I won’t but I reserve the right to say no,” she waved at him and then nodded, “But go on.”

“There is a vault,” Vader keyed a few commands into the holo-projector imbedded in the table. Gohan gave a low whistle, “Beneath the Imperial palace. It needs to be emptied immediately.”

“You’re in a rush,” Gohan observed but she didn’t sound mocking, her attention was focused on the schematics. “This isn’t going to be an easy job.”

“What are your impressions?” Vader demanded.

“If half of these security measures actually exist I’d tell it couldn’t be done.” She admitted. Tang blinked and wondered what the girl would come up with next. “What exactly do you want emptied?”

“It is none of your concern.”

“It is, actually,” she replied, “I need to know what I’m stealing so I can form a proper plan.”

“It is,” Vader paused and both women waited for him to continue, “The contents of the Jedi vaults, moved from their home in the temple to the Emperors private viewing gallery.”

“Viewing gallery?” Gohan asked, “What kind?”
“The vault also holds various other artifacts and pieces of art. Most of it stolen and confiscated from their home planets.”

“You wanted it emptied right?” Gohan nodded and smiled at the obviously irate sith, “Who do you want me to frame?”

“Frame?” Vader watched the young alien closely. She could not have been older than Luke but there was none of the remaining hopeful innocence and lingering naïveté that was so characteristic of his son. Gohan was young but she was danger and not to be ignored.

“Do you want me to make it look like it was done by Black Sun or another criminal organization? I can pin it on the Hutts if you like.”

Vader was torn, on one hand he could dismantle the criminal empire belonging to the sneering and smug falleen or he could bring the hutts righteous ruin.

If he was commanded to destroy the hutts then the innocents oppressed by them, slaves and not, would only become fresh victims.

“Black Sun.”

“As you wish,” her smiled ticked upward, “I’m also going to need my crew. This isn’t a one person job.”

“Your crew will be acceptable so long as you do not tell who has hired you.”

“Alright.” Vader could sense her brain churning through calculations and logistics, “But first, before we shake on it. How much are you paying us?”

“If you are successful and no one suspects my involvement.” Vader named a price so astronomical Tang scoffed and Gohan’s read eyes bulged outward.

“Yeah,” she chuckled and held out a hand, “I’ll take the job, Boss.”

“Acceptable,” the Sith shook her hand, “How soon can you begin?”

“I can begin as soon as I’ve got my crew assembled and a ship, as bland as you can make it but this is going to take a good three weeks to get through. This security can’t go in just a few days.”

“That is unacceptable,” He growled and felt the familiar urge to strangle the insolent and relaxed alien.

“I can do this well,” she said, “or I can do it fast. This isn’t just a smash and grab job. This is a heist and the likes of which the galaxy has never seen. I know you’re in a rush,” she said, “But you will have to wait. A month is the fastest I can do this.”

He paused and looked toward Captain Tang who only gave a miniscule shrug. Stuck in his conundrum Vader wondered what he was supposed to do now. Vader was scheduled to rejoin the fleet in just two and half weeks and Doora with him. Luke was supposed to have been headed off to a rebel base with holocrons in hand and his connection to the force re-established.

It was too risky for his father to train him as either a jedi or a sith and since Palpatine had ordered him to locate the boy there was no choice in the matter.

“Very well,” he snarled and held out a hand meaningfully, applying the slightest of pressure to her
neck, “Should you fail…”

“Got it,” she wheezed but did not reach for her neck. “But a dead thief is no use in your eventual usurpiong of the Emperor.”

“My plans are of little importance to you,” he growled, “You will remain discreet or you will suffer for your arrogance and presumption.”

“Clear.” Tang nodded at him and he removed the pressure from the alien’s neck.

“So,” Gohan rubbed her hands together, a shrewd glint in her eyes that made Lord Vader instantly wary. “Shall we get started?”

Luke was debating quietly to himself if he ought to open the book chip that Tang had slipped him or if he should wait until he had left Bast Castle. She had mentioned something along the lines of, “Banned from circulation and considered highly seditious.”

“Banned by the Empire,” he’d asked and cringed at the small smile and nod that meant Tang was reveling in some quiet victory or another.

“No,” she had replied, “They were banned by the Old Republic.” She had nodded to him and vanished through the doors toward Doora who was slogging her way through equations.

The rebel bit his lip. His hand hovered of the access port but steadied when the door slid open to reveal two clones.

“Yes?”

“Lord Vader has requested your presence,” one said and Luke nodded, slipping the chip into his pocket and feeling it burn a hole right through to his skin.

“I’m coming.” He followed the two clones, “Can I get your names?”

“Sir?”

“Your names,” Luke said, “You’ve got them right, not just numbers.”

“We do sir,” the group stepped into the turbolift.

“Well,” he smiled at the two masks when they turned toward him in either shock or confusion. It was odd, speaking to people without the force to rely on. Almost like a section of his soul was gone, missing and in pain.

“I’m Books, sir,” the one on the right finally said, “That there is Rain.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” the Rebel wondered if he was coming off a little too much like an outer rim farmboy. Three years in the rebellion had tempered that shining ignorance somewhat but seasoned veterans and spacers often acted as if Luke was a fool in an x-wing.

“Thank you, sir.” Rain piped up.


“I’m Luke Skywalker, Commander of the Rebel Alliance.” Both clones gave tiny snorts and he wondered why.
“Of course sir,” Books stepped out of the turbolift once the doors opened and nodded for the rebel and his brother to follow. “This way please.”

Luke felt tension shiver up his spine as Books marched before him and Rain followed behind. This felt a little more prison-like then his week isolated in his rooms. Their destination seemed his father’s office. What his father wanted he didn’t know and he was pretty sure the book that the Captain had slipped him was both valuable and that his father did not know of its existence. If he did then perhaps his father was displeased with the woman and him.

“Thank you sergeant,” Vader was standing before the transparisteel and watching the most recent rainstorm, “You are dismissed.”


“Your inability to touch the force has become an issue.” His father said finally. Luke waited and decided not to mention that he probably could touch the force but was too frightened to. He just hadn’t tested this theory since he had destroyed his father’s training room. “I have sought an answer from the Jedi holocrons.”

“Holocrons?” He had seen some of those while in the custody of Grakkus the Hutt and scattered throughout his adventures with the Alliance.

“Indeed, the Emperor took them as a prize from the destroyed temple. Some of them precede the construction of the temple itself and hold the most closely guarded secrets in existence.”

“But the Emperor has them.”

“Not for much longer,” Vader vowed, “but here we have reached a problem.”

“Besides the fact that they’re held by the Emperor?” He didn’t mean to sound as bitterly sarcastic as he did and cringed when his father finally turned toward him.

“Yes,” after a moment of silence the Sith continued, “my agent will…liberate… the various treasures yet they will only be complete after a considerable amount of time has passed. Far too much time for you to remain in Bast Castle inconspicuously as I am already rescheduled to rejoin the fleet in two weeks’ time it would be far too suspicious for me to stay.”

“What did you want the holocrons for specifically?”

“To discover a method to reconnect you to the force and to continue your training when you rejoin the rebel fleet.”

“Oh.” Luke felt the familiar sensation of fee-falling into oblivion and cleared his throat even as his brain shrieked for him to remain silent. “What about an actual jedi? Would they be able to help me?”

“I killed Obi-wan.” Vader said, “There is no one left to teach you.”

“Ah…” Luke couched and tabbed his fingers against his chest and squirmed under the sudden heavy gaze. “What if…there was a teacher?”

“If they were skilled and knowledgeable enough they might left this block and train you.” His father sounded suspicious, “But all jedi are dead.”

“Not all of them,” Luke whispered and cringed when his father straightened to an impossible height.
“Explain yourself,” Vader growled, suddenly Luke was reminded that not only had his father created the Empire alongside the Emperor he was responsible for the destruction of the jedi as a whole.

“Yoda,” he muttered.

“Yoda.” His father snarled and whirled to face the window again his mood beginning to match the violent fury of the acid storm. “And where,” the growl of his vocoder almost silky, “did you hear this name?”

“Well,” Luke’s rebel train instinct to run toward the nearest exit when face with such a dangerous opponent began to tingle and he wondered if he should not have mentioned it. “Someone told me.”

“Who?”

“Ah….another jedi.”

“Luke, I have no patience for wordplay and deliberate misunderstandings. Explain…now.”

“The jedi was dead,” Luke said. Despite his fathers orders he did not want to explain, “He showed up in my rooms and he told me that I could find a teacher named Yoda.”

“What was this Jedi’s name?”


“Impossible, Jinn was killed nearly 30 years ago.”

“I know,” Luke said, “That’s what he said but he told me I could go to Yoda.”

“What else did Jinn tell you?”

“That I ought to listen to you and go to bed,” Luke added.

“Did he tell you where to find Master Yoda?”

“Yes,” the rebel admitted quietly, “He did.”

“I see.” Leather creaked as the sith clenched his mechanical hands, furious in way he not been in ages. To see Luke become the slave of the Jedi dogma would be more painful and agonizing then his own fall to the darkness. It was equal to Luke falling into the evil that held a violent and merciless grip on Vader.

The passion and emotions that made his son so uniquely perfect, a stunning combination of Padme and Anakin, to simply be washed away by the emotionless heartlessness of the Jedi.

Vader despised it.

They might have drawn on the light but they were not any flavor of good.

“Are you going to stop me?” The dragon in his chest roared a yes, furious and possessive. Yet, he looked back at Luke. Standing next to his desk with such hopeful fear in his shining blue eyes tempered with determination and steel. His slender form was poised to flee the room and Vader swallowed down the anger.

“No,” he forced the admission past his lips, “I will not.”

“Oh,” the tension trickled out from Luke’s form.
“Come, my son.” He gestured toward the door, “I am told your progress on the fighter has been most promising.”

“Ah.” Luke frowned at him but nodded. “I guess. Doora’s been helping me.” Luke trailed after Vader and he sensed the astonishment at his seemingly sudden change in mood. But his mood had not changed, he was still furious.

Vader still wanted to reach across the stars and strangle the minuscule jedi master with his bare hands. He still wanted to unleash unholy terror upon the galaxy.

Yet he was unwilling to unnerve his son further. Luke was still too insecure of their relationship for him to lose temper in front of him.

“Have you discovered way to repair the ship?” He asked and noted Luke’s tension draining.

“Sure!” Luke stuffed his hands into his pockets, “There’s a few things that need done.” And just like that his son had calmed.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Doora Does some thinking. Leia has an AWAKENING (she also wrecks a ship) Chewbacca is chill around small teenagers and Vader wishes he could put leashes on teens. Luke does a bit of sulking but basically doesn’t show up.
Read if you actually like Doora

Doora was awake long before her usual time. Still wrapped in her heavy blankets she squirmed a bit before pushing her head out of the bundle of fabric and surveying the her room. Nothing had changed, her books and datapads were still stacked atop her desk along with her flight suit draped across the edge of her bed. The black helmet that she hated so much was perched on the edge of her chair with the gleaming black eye plates straight at her.

Doora bared her teeth at the helmet and began wiggling her way out of her covers. Outside the skies seemed calm and there was weak sunlight illuminating her room while the former smuggler struggled into her Imperial issued clothes. They weren’t as comfortable or as pleasant as her smuggling clothes but they were much warmer.

Her stomach twisted as she picked up the iron gray jacket and sneered. There was a symbol that every pilot in the galaxy knew, stitched into the right arm. The sign of ‘Vader’s Fist’ his elite and deadly troops that were feared the galaxy over. She hadn’t worn it yet because it felt like a branding at best and a wearable slave transmitter at worst. Almost as if Vader had claimed her at his beyond simply fostering her. To own her.

With a snort of disgust she dropped it and looked about for the little white scarf that she had been given as part of the standard uniform of a TIE pilot. She didn’t understand that bit but the thing was pure white, just three feet long and apparently it went with her formal dress uniform. Doora didn’t know if she would ever wear her dress uniform but the scarf was an inexplicable comfort and joy in her ‘imprisonment’.

Dressed in her drab grays she smirked at her reflection in the refresher while wrapping the little scarf around her neck.

It turned out that going for walks was not forbidden. As long as she stayed within the marked paths through the rocks and didn’t touch any standing water and was ready to run back to the castle in case a sudden storm rolled up. She thought it was a little odd that Vader had walking paths through a rock garden but didn’t think too much on it.

Doora was more concerned with her private musing and kicked at a pebble.

So far she didn’t mind the stuff she was learning. It was interesting and it would help her so it as necessary. Doora almost enjoyed Captain Tang’s company except that the Captain was clearly holding her at arm’s length while watching every move she made carefully. Unlike some of the Imp officers she had seen the dark skinned woman had the battle hardened edge of someone who knew exactly what she was capable of and no afraid to get what she wanted. If the smuggler was honest with herself she wanted to like the Captain.
To have the refined polish and still the ability to command instant respect of clones and the Dark Lord who sometimes swooped in on their lessons like a descending plague. Luke seemed both awed and wary of the lean woman and obviously respected her greatly despite the fact Doora saw Tang stomp all over Luke’s arguments in debates consistently. She still wasn’t sure who Tang was or why she seemed a lot like a holo film antagonist come to life or a secret scattered to dust that was brushing past her ears in the gusting wind of time.

Still, Doora shoved her hands in pockets and stared miserably at the clear sky above.

What she wouldn’t give for the chance to go fly right now. To soar into the void and loose herself among the stars without a worry or a car, Doora sucked in a humid breath and sighed.

She liked Luke well enough. He was honest and earnest with a genuine desire to befriend her. Despite her best efforts of ignoring him he seemed intent on making her like him. Which was so easy to do because he was stupidly and inexplicably nice.

Not only was the farmboy nice he was kind and pleasant which sometimes made Doora want to punch his face. No one was ever that nice without having alternative motives and Luke just seemed a little too perfect.

He was probably one of Vader’s other….projects.

A sudden shrieking of metal ripping through the atmosphere and the scream of TIE fighters was enough to pull the teen from her musings.

Just entering atmosphere just before the horizon was a battered old shuttle with two TIE’s in pursuit.

“Oh boy.” She looked back at the distant form of the castle and wondered what in the Seven Hells was going on.

Leia swore, struggling with the controls as the TIE’s made another screaming pass at their contrary little shuttle.

Chewbacca echoed her sentiment from the co-pilots chair.

“We should have brought the Falcon,” she snarled, twisting around to avoid the next blast of cannon fire, “I can’t believe I let Lando convince me to take a different ship.”

[The Falcon is safer right now] Woofed the Wookie, and cursed again as the ship twisted and began shuddering even more.

“We’re going to be crash landing this,” the Princess commanded, steadying herself in her chair and flicking her gaze over the engine readout, “It’s going to be really uncomfortable. Get ready.”

[Try to not kill us] Chewie growled and braced himself as well, huge claws above the control.

“Get ready to kill the engines.” Leia rolled the ship on more time and aimed for the smoothest looking section of planet beneath them, “On my mark.” The screaming ship shrieked again, “NOW.” Chewbacca flicked the necessary switches and howled when the ship dropped like a stone. Plummetsing toward the planet at heart stopping speeds. Leia’s teeth were bared, eyes shining with manic glee while she forced the ship to roll again.

“NOW!” Her voice thundered through the tiny cock pit and unknowingly across the force.
Vader jolted in his seat while he watched the footage of the tiny shuttle breaking the blockade about his hope. His next commands were barked directly in the ears of the pilots to not destroy the ship and to break off the attack.

A shout of triumph and joy echoed through the force, swamping Vader with Princess Leia’s second hand thrill when her engines ignited and sent the ship careening through the lower atmosphere.

(On the ground Doora watched as the ship screamed past, trailing parts and smoke, before it smashed into the rocks, skidding along until it finally slowed to a squealing halt.)

Still wrapped firmly in her crash wedding, Leia heaved a deep breath and looked toward her companion. Chewbacca was growling to himself and shutting down switches looking unharmed but definitely mused.

“That was an excellent crash.”

[Those TIEs will still be in pursuit] Chewbacca said, unhooking himself from his seat [we need to leave this ship and take cover.]

“Agreed,” The Princess forced her shaking hands to unstrap herself while adrenaline and something else ignited her blood to a boiling point. She felt both parts exhausted and exhilarated in way she had never before. Lightening was racing beneath her skin and igniting more energy than she knew what to do with.

Doora watched the smoke raising just a few dozen klicks. It only takes a few moments to completely ignore whatever warnings the Captain might have said or any of the clones before she’s running toward the distant crash. She leapt over rocks and abandoned the path, making a beeline for the wreckage.

“TANG!” Vader swept through his castle, clones on his heels, lightsaber in one hand and ready to destroy all who would wish his son harm.

“Lord Vader,” Captain Tang nodded the moment the door slid back and waved at the hologram in front of her.

“The attacks are not agents of the Emperor,” he snapped, “It is Princess Organa and an escort.”

“This is convenient,” Tang stopped in her swift motions to summon troops, “If they survive the wreck I think this could work.”

“The princess lives,” Vader stalked toward the shining hologram, his Seargents filed in behind him. “As does her companion. Where are the children?”

“Luke was locked down the second the first alert came through,” Tang was filtering through the scrolling information on her datapad with a speed that would have made his own Generals jealous and insecure. “Doora was last seen in the gardens and left the sight of the cameras. We assume she did what came to mind and is investigating the crash site herself.”

His hands curled into fists and he growled low in his throat.

“Send troops to retrieve the Princess and her companion, unharmed. Have Doora retrieved and
confined to her room.” Vader does not have time to deal with the contrary smuggler and her foolishness but he will get around to it. “Ensure that Luke is unaware of what is happening and prepare the conference room.”

“Aye,” Tang clicked the communicator around her neck and began relaying orders. The Sith stalked from the room toward the hanger were his troopers were assembling. He had every intention of accompanying them to capture the Princess.

He could still sense the pulsing iron energy of the former Senator. Bright and powerful and so much like Luke’s he felt a little dizzy trying to remind himself that Princess Leia was not, in fact, Luke. Luke was in his room and Vader sensed his confusion and irritation at being locked away so rudely. The several guards in his room were probably not helping things.

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Leia sensed the person around the boulder before she saw her.

The girl wore Imperial grays, a white scarf wrapped around her neck both casual and formal and stared at the rebels with unabashed interest.

“That was a hell of a wreck,” The girl said, piercing hazel eyes that bored into Leia, “Some hella fine piloting though.”

“Thank you.” Leia said.

“You’re in a lot of trouble,” she said seriously, “there’s only one house on this rock and you’re not going to like who owns it.”

“I am well aware this is Vader’s residence.” The boulder field was quiet save for the Imperial heavy breathing and Chewbacca’s snuffling.

“Then what do you want with him?”

“I am searching for someone else,” the Princess drew herself up, “Who are you?”

“I’m not a rebel and I’m not an Imp,” she held out a hand, “I’m Doora, who are you looking for?”

“Luke Skywalker,” something is whispering for her to trust the girl at the moment. That she can provide answers. “Is he here?”

“Oh he’s here alright,” Doora wondered why the crazy lady heavily armed and with a gleam in her eyes she had only ever seen in the mad and martyrs, was even going to bother. The wookie might make a dent in Vader’s armor but they’d both end up dead. “In the castle,” she pointed toward the building, “It won’t do you much good because you’ll be dead before you can get to him.”

“Perhaps,” Leia now knew where he was holding Luke and could mount an Alliance based rescue. If they could get off the planet.

“Oh no,” Doora nodded and waved at the Chewbacca, “Hey, but the two of you are going to die because Luke is never leaving that place.”

“You sound much like an Imperial for someone who claims to not be and Imperial.”

“I’m telling you like it is.” Doora shrugged and sauntered over to look at the wookie, “What’s your
name?"

[I am Chewbacca] He introduced himself. Leia sense the surprise that clung to him, so few people addressed him directly it was an honest surprise.

“Hi, Chewbacca.” Doora seemed to hesitate and shuffled, “Do you mind if I hug you?”

Leia raised an eyebrow but said nothing.

[Why?] The wookie watch the small human carefully. She was short and with the haggard leanness of someone who had grown up alone. A feral glint still remained in her eyes that he could recognize lightyears away.

“You look an awful lot like a person I used to know,” she said and poked his hairy arm, “They were really cool and they had the same shade of brown.”

[Alright] Chewbacca had seen more than his fair share of abandoned children of all species. He had once helped over two dozen escape slavery. Han had always accused him of being soft for kids and he was never going to contest it. Slender yet muscular arms wrapped around his waist but the hug only lasted for a few seconds. Apparently embarrassed, Doora sprang back and blushed.

“Thanks.”

“Now,” Leia could feel a cold sun comprised of darkness moving their direction, “We need to move.”

“I wouldn’t do that.” Doora said, clasping her hands behind her back, “unless you’ve got an escape plan in the next few hours. The acid rain storms on the planet prevent any and all ships from flying though. Plus, what they do to organic material is pretty disgusting.”

“Acid rain!”

“Yes.” The whine of engines approaching cut the three of them off. “Looks like Tang moves pretty damn fast!”

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The dropship swayed as it slowed to an acceptable speed for dismounting. The troops and clones gathered behind him were ecstatic to finally engage in combat. It had been a while since their last tour of duty and most were itching for a fight.

“I want them alive,” he commanded and eyed the rapidly approaching crowd. Vader could pick out Doora, who was radiating concern and a faint glow of a happiness that he had never seen before. Princess Leia was burning with righteous fury and a newly realized force affinity. Her power was stretching and jumping about like a child commanded to stand still for an extended period of time.

The wookie held his bowcaster but none of them looked ready to pick a fight.

His troops would be disappointed.

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Luke paced his bedroom in high dudgeon. Ten clones were placed inside his rooms and around the doors. Their weapons were ready and none of them had been pleased to leave him alone in one room. It had taken several pleas and some carefully applied wide-eyed expressions that he used to get
Rouge Squadron to stop messing around; to get them to agree to it.

Something had happened and he wanted to know what was going on.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

People do some talking. Vader is a drama queen. You get a little more information on Tang (you need to like her! I live for OC validation from my readers) Also, Luke and Leia talk and Vader discovers something everyone in the fandom already knows. In other news Gohan is still antagonizing Jixton and Doora get's herself in trouble.

Doora was understandably intimidated when Vader, in clear view from the ground and framed by the open dropship bay doors. His cape billowed in the wind and he stood tall without anchoring himself to anything. A dozen troopers were clear behind him and created a backdrop of white with sporadic black.

It was rather impressive and intimidating.

It was really intimidating when Vader leapt directly down from the ship a good twenty feet from the scorched and scattered rock, to land eight feet away from the rag tag group of criminals. Considering the last time Doora had seen him stalking across a landscape it had been while confined in a prison cell, she was understandably nervous.

Vader had been on the edge of complete and bloody violence then and she wasn’t sure how he’d react right now. Still, Doora made herself as small as possible and ducked behind the wookie.

“Princess Organa.” The terrifying bass of his voice should not have been heard over the roar and thunder of the ship and the approaching clone troopers. Their white forms rushing to form an encompassing circle, trapping the rebels and the smuggler.

“Lord Vader,” Leia’s grip on her blaster tightened and then she allowed her hands to drop to her side. No sense in upsetting trigger happy storm troopers.

“You have made a foolish choice coming here, Princess.” Vader’s helmet shifted just slightly to show Doora he was looking her direction for just a second. “What could possibly bring you to my door step? Other than a premature desire for death?”

“Nothing so dramatic, Vader.” She said, voice iron with a volcano building in her chest. A firestorm of emotions swirling beneath her skin, “I’m looking for someone.”

“And you intended to find them here?” He gestured to his troopers who had not said a word, “Are you suicidal or merely foolish?”

“No,” her voice turning into grinding ashes, “It is.”

With almost a careless wave the Sith cut her off, “Fortunately for your deluded band of anarchists I have use of you Organa. Troopers.” Vader watched as Organa, her force presence blinding and brand new, flare wildly again before she wrestled her emotions under a blank storm of well-contained anger. Her weapons were taken and the wookie only barely surrendered his bowcaster. Doora was frisked but nothing turned up. The former smuggler was detached from the group and flanked by two clones.
Doora was unable to sense their radiating disapproval. Obviously they understood what exactly she
had done.

Vader would have been amused if he hadn’t been focusing on the Princess. Regal as ever, head high
and eyes hooded she surveyed his troops with the distain of a dissatisfied Empress. Just as she had
done three years ago before the Death Star, Princess Organa held onto her impressive dignity and
pride.

She was so much like…. The Sith jerked his head to the side to push away the thought, focusing instead on the smuggler. Her
aura of nervousness was vastly different from Luke. While he had feared punishment and
disappointed Doora feared for life and limb. A deep seated trauma was pulling towards the surface of
her thoughts which the girl was only just managing to keep down.

Interesting.

“Return them to the castle,” he commanded, using sign language to convey his secret orders to the
troops restraining Doora with a hand. “Ensure neither the wookie or the Princess do anything…
foolish.” Organa, surrounded by clones, stared down at him but said nothing. He waved them away
and turned to face the second drop ship.

Princess Leia’s innate force ability was awakening, rising to the surface and stretching to find
limitations. Encountering none and Vader was more than a little impressed by the sheer power that
rested in her bones.

“Lord Vader.” Tang’s voice rang in his ear.

“What is it?”

“Radar shows a storm inbound. You have two hours to take shelter.”

“Acknowledged,” The sith faced the uneasily shifting smuggler and waved her and the troopers
toward the landing drop ship. He said nothing, knowing that silence could be even more frightening
than words.

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Gohan had been confined to the bowels of the castle with Jixton as her only company.

“So,” she sketched another line on the datapad and watched through the corner of her eyes as the
human lounged, bored, on the closest sofa. “What do you think is going on?”

“Oh no!” Jixton leapt upwards, waving a hand in her face and scowling, “Don’t talk! Don’t speak,
just do whatever you’re supposed to be doing.” Spending extended time in the presence made the
Corellian sure that the alien could sell a freezer unit to wampas on Hoth, mud to the Gungans, and
she could probably con a Hutt out of a dozen or so slaves with just a few clever words.

Being around Gohan was an unpleasant experience and he felt the nauseating cling of vertigo that
was his only indicator that the thief had run another lap around him. As long as she didn’t speak
Jixton didn’t have too much of a problem.

He glowered at the alien who only smiled at him.

“Any guesses?”
“I don’t know anything.” He snapped, flopping back onto the couch, “Are you almost ready? We need to get started soon.”

“You don’t know what I’m supposed to be doing.” Gohan pointed out, with a flick of her finger she was poised to project the highly seditious plan she had concocted, “Do you want to?”

“NO!” Wrenga growled and clapped his hands over his eyes, “NO! Just can it and work!”

“Alright,” Smug humor was sliding off her words as she returned to planning. “It is a fascinating plan. Brilliant and it borders on genius.”

“I don’t care.” Jixton begged that Vader would remove him from the isolated prison he’d locked the two conspirators in. Anything would be better than dealing with the slippery alien that was far too much like a certain Grand Admiral for him to be comfortable.

Gohan chuckled, pushing her sleeves up again and tucked her stylus into her hair. “Alright, but you’ll be sorry you won’t know what happens.”

“I don’t care,” A tiny voice in the back of his head whispered otherwise but the spy crushed that thought.

“So you say.” Gohan returned to her work on planning the most brilliant heist in the modern galactic history. (If she did say so herself.)

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Tang had met Padme Amidala exactly once during the course of the war.

Once was more than enough.

The senator had only six or so years on the High General, not that the woman would have known. Tang had spent four years beneath the disguise of a methane breathing alien. No one, save for Grevious and Dooku had known the High General was actually a human and that she was so young.

On par with the jedi knights and padawans that antagonized the war into a fever pitch. Though Tang did not have the power of the force nor was she supported by the bloated arrogance of an oversized government or buoyed by an elitist cult of monks.

Senator Amidala had been their prisoner, captured sneaking through the compound with a little R2 unit and a few of her body guards. Her troops had been killed and Tang had ordered the Senator to be confined in a stasis filed, cuffed and suspended with all of her tools removed. Even the ones Amidala thought she had hidden.

Curiosity had drawn her to the prison cell to observe the suspended Senator who had glared with every inch of her might.

“You have gone too far High General!” The senator had proclaimed, brown eyes blazing with righteousness and fury. “I am a senator of the Galactic Republic, you have no.”

“I have every grounds to keep you here.” Tang’s voice was a distorted mechanical noise that could have been connected to the supposed species but was actually the fault of the vocoder that rested on her throat. “You have infiltrated as a spy, Senator.” It had been mesmerizing to see the woman silence herself but her eyes had spoken for her. Expressive and magnificent all on their own. “This is
an enemy base and you were not under the flag of diplomacy, nor were your armed guards.”

“This was.”

“Not a diplomatic mission,” Tang had cut her off, “And under such circumstances I could command your death and none would fault me. You’re actions are not those of a senator but a spy, recordings will vindicate me.”

“High General.”

“Senator,” voice quiet (Tang had been recovering from a near kiss of an artillery blast that had thrown her back twenty feet into a wall. Her body was still recovering and speaking at any length was tiring.) “For your sake, be silent.” Tang had waited a few more minutes, flanked by two magna droids whose weapons sparked dangerously. “I will not command your death.” She couldn’t tell if Amidala had been grateful or angry at that point. “And you will be returned to neutral ground to be recovered by the Republic.”

“And what do you plan before then?” Her low, beautiful voice tinged with steel and fire had made the High General smile. The senator might have had a passing relationship with death and the fury of battle but Tang had been born into a war and forged by the heat of conflict. Raised on the killing fields and formed by total hatred and fury.

The disguised Separatist was not intimidated and the senator’s questions had been met with only silence as Tang turned and left the cell. Enthralled by the sheer presence of the woman who moved into a room and immediately all knew she was present. The grace of a Queen, the dignity of an Empress.

She was impressive.

Tang had ransomed the Senator back to a local admiral (not a Jedi) for several of her captains and a good deal of money. She hadn’t seen the senator ever again in person, though her presence in intelligence reports had been a near constant thing. Always followed by Anakin Skywalker and Obi wan Kenobi.

Once was enough for Tang to take a single look at Princess Leia Organa and know that Senator Amidala had survived the end of the war long enough to bear a child.

Flanked by Stormtroopers and followed by a wookie Tang knew as Chewbacca, the resemblance to the late Republic politician was obvious. The past was echoed forward in the manner in which the Princess held herself, fiery and strong and with the ever present righteous temper that had propelled Amidala through the Senate.

Even the hard stare she directed at her captor was the same except this one was aimed at Tang’s current employer.

“Princess Organa,” with a shallow bow, Tang drew the younger woman’s attention away from the Sith, “It is an honor. Welcome, Chewbacca as well.” The wookie eyed her but did not reply and Tang wondered at the fact neither of them was wearing cuffs.

“Captain,” Vader swept into the corridor. The Captain saw the slender form of Doora being escorted the opposite direction. “To me.” With a bow to the two rebels, Tang strode after him toward his office. The troopers would escort both of them to the conference room and wait until their commanders returned.

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“I presume that Admiral Piett has contacted you with further details of our newest distraction?” Vader whirled about just as the doors shut behind Tang.

“He has and I’m impressed with your idea.” She proffered the datapad, “the information from the accountants and the various number crunchers aboard the Executor.”

“I see.” Vader perused his latest plan and admired the handiwork of his ranking accountant. This was not a small project and to have completed it in only two weeks was admirable.

“We can present our plans to the Princess if she is willing to listen though the hellspawn of the late Senator Amidala might prove as unbending as her mother.”

Vader went still, the ghost of Anakin Skywalker screaming, as Tang continued speaking. Logistics, numbers, espionage, assignations, and all manner of illegal activity but he was not listening.

Hellsapwn of the late Senator Amidala. That was what Tang said and it was ringing in his ears because the force is screaming for acknowledgement of truth.

“Captain,” his growl must have been wilder, deeper and more agitated because the wary edge to the woman was sharped to a point. She was ready to flee if it became necessary. “What did you say?”

“The politicians will be more than happy to flock to your newest social plan but considering it is only a guise I don’t think it will survive the transition of government unless.

“No,” he barked, “Before, speaking of the Princess.”

“I said she was the hell spawn of Senator Amidala,” Tang said, voice firm but quiet.

“What evidence do you have regarding this?” He should not be asking her. He ought to be performing a blood test to see if she is correct and not totally insane. He shouldn’t listen to the ramblings of a forgotten past.

“None, yet.” Tang drew herself up, “I met Senator Amidala only once and I have no doubt that Princess Organa was her child. I believe the morticians on Naboo have disguised her body to ensure the deception that her child was killed with would live on.”

Vader knew this. He knew this beyond certainty having been through this avenue of thought with Aphra and her ridiculous attitude.

Survived. Luke survived and….Vader breathed out of sync with his respirator, a sound which Captain Tang obviously caught if her sharp stare was anything to go by.

Leia had survived.

Twins.

“Have a blood test done to confirm this,” he commanded. Somehow his voice managing to relay the orders even as he wanted to scream into oblivion, “Have Skywalker’s room emptied of troopers and leave him and the Princess to get reacquainted.”

“And our negotiations?” Vader would feel Tang’s annoyance and irritation at the delay but did not much care.

“Will be delayed,” He spat his temper fraying under the sudden knowledge that had been discovered. Lea’s force presence was flaring, stretching and growing with every second, a brilliant gold light that
was beginning to blind Vader. She was a magnificent as her brother. He did not need a blood test to
know that Tang had been (astonishingly, shockingly and incredibly) right.

Vader retreated to his meditation chamber and sank into his chair.

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Luke watched, bemused, as the clones and troopers in the rooms began to file out. Commanded by
an unknown order that must have been relayed through their helmets. He followed them through the
doors until they filed into the turbolift and were carried out of sight. Suddenly alone in his suite was
more confusing than anything to date.

“What is going on?” He muttered to himself. R2 had been removed several hours earlier with the
words, “might be a safety hazard.” Left in his place. Luke didn’t want to admit that he’d use Artoo to
escape for the second time so he hadn’t put up much of a fight.

No one was left to answer.

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Leia Organa had not survived years on Imperial Center as a Senator or an entire life in politics and
high society by being easily intimidated. She had faced down Vader, been interrogated by him and
tortured by his droids.

She had watched her planet burn at the command of a sneering man whose evil was surpassed by
few. Vader himself had had to restrain her from killing Tarkin then and there.

Missions for the Alliance, suicide or otherwise, were met with determination and cold calculation.

Politics and managing to keep a rebellion alive in the age of terror and suppression she did even as
her own heart flagged with the collective grief of her remaining citizens. Even three years after her
home world’s destruction she stood tall and unyielding.

“Captain,” Chewbacca growled a greeting on the heels of her own. The conference room they had
been locked in was empty of any tools that might have aided their escape. Leia had scouted the room
before taking a seat. She did not stand when the doors open to reveal the tan human woman in an
unfamiliar uniform.

“Princess Organa,” She gave the barest inclination of her head, “Please come with me.”

“I will not play any of Vader’s games,” the Princess declared, “I will not be summoned.”

“Of course not,” the woman’s intense neutral expression did not shift but a light ignited deep in her
brown eyes, “This is a trip to the medic. You may have suffered complications from the crash and he
wishes to ensure you won’t drop dead suddenly.”

“I!”

“Of course if you don’t want anything for your bruising then by all means,” the Captain gestured
toward the door, “I am to escort you to your temporary quarters.”

Leia waited before turning to Chewbacca. They leaned closer and she began whispering to the
wookie. After a moments deliberation they drew apart.

“What of my companion?”
“He will also be examined if he so chooses. Though his quarters are separate from yours.”

Leia watched the lady carefully, noting her bearing and expressions. Military but not Imperial and obviously an agent of Vader and a person of great intelligence.

“Absolutely not,” she rose to her feet. She does not trust Vader and she does not trust the agents of Vader. “If a medic would like to look over my condition then they may come here. I am well aware of what Vader can choose to do to his prisoners.”

A flash of something, intense and hooded violence was enough to make Leia watch her eyes closer.

“Very well, a medic will be sent to you, though if you want to rest please come with me.” Leia caught the tone and understood, within those few words, the dynamic Vader had set.

Initially they had been, at best, prisoners, and now it was clear that the Princess was now a guest. Unless Vader was planning on having her tossed into a cell through underhanded thievery was not his M.O.

Confident and proud, Leia followed, wondering just what game the Sith lord was playing.

She was led away from her wookie companion, much to the others chagrin, and deeper into the castle where strategically placed stromtroopers left her in no doubt. She might be a guest but this was still Lord Vader’s residence.

“You have me at a disadvantage,” Leia said finally, feeling the giant black sun that had been hovering somewhere out of her own mind, exploded into a gigantic supernova of rage. She snapped her mental shields up and glowered at the older woman’s back. “I do not know your name.”

“I am Captain Tang,” the woman replied, not turning around but gesturing into a turbo lift, “this is as far as I go. This will take you one place and one only. If you wish to leave these rooms you will need a Stormtrooper escort.” Captain Tang smiled, sharp and dangerous before ushering the Princess in, “Until later, then.”

“I await Lord Vader’s earliest convenience,” she said acidly, stepping into the turbolift and turning to face the tan woman.

“Of course.” Captain Tang bowed slightly and pressed a button, sending the princess up and away.

Leia braced herself for whatever would come next: torture droids, an attack, bad decorating but nothing prepared her for the second the doors slid open and she caught sight of a familiar blond head fiddling with the controls of the turbolift.

“LUKE!” His head shot up and he gaped at her.

“Leia?” Luke looked healthy, not at all how she had imagined finding him, and wearing well-fitting clothes. There were no traces of bruising or trauma behind his blue eyes.

“Luke.” Leia was met halfway. They seized each other, desperately happy to see the other. “What is going on?”

“I could ask you the same thing!” Luke drew back and stared at her, “I thought you were supposed to be with the Alliance! What are you doing here?”

“What am I doing here?” She felt his arms for invisible injuries, “What are you doing here?”
“I…”Luke bit his lip and glanced to the side, “I…I don’t know if I can tell you.”

“Is this about your jedi powers?” Leia demanded and followed when Luke led her to a sitting room. She caught his grimace when she sat on the blue couch and he settled onto the opposite armchair. “Or about the Death Star?” Though, to her knowledge wanted criminals did not get such comfortable quarters.

Luke wouldn’t meet her eyes and rubbed the back of his neck, blushing a little.

“No, it’s not about either.” He admitted, “But what are you doing here?”

“I came looking for you,” Leia said, straightening up. “Chewbacca came with me but Captain Tang assigned him to a different part of the castle. I’d say we were prisoners but Vader is treating us too nice.” She caught the flash in his eyes that usually indicated Luke was embarrassed about something. “Luke, what is it?”

“Well,” the pilot glanced her direction, shy and unsure, “I…can’t tell you. I…don’t know.”


“Leia,” his broke and his distress was apparent, pressing down on her, “I don’t know if you’ll still…like me if you knew. I…you’ll hate me.”

“I could never hate you.” Leia said, conviction coloring her words, “You are my friend and haven’t spent the last two weeks looking for because you aren’t. Han needs your help. I need your help.”

“Leia.” Luke looked down as if ashamed and frightened of her reaction. “Vader…he’s my father.”
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary


“He’s lying.” Leia’s flat tone was all Luke needed to drag him from the depths of horrified terror that was primed for her judgement and condemnation. He gaped, watching her drum her fingers along her knee. “He’s lying to you Luke.”

“Leia,” Luke wasn’t sure how he pushed out the words, his throat had closed up and his mouth was dry and empty.

“It’s not possible.” She stood, pacing now, “Anakin Skywalker was a general in the Grand Republic Army. He was a jedi knight, protector of the galaxy and peace.” With sharp, harsh words and bitter anger the Princess clipped each word out. “Anakin Skywalker would have never fallen to the Sith.”

“Leia.”

“Can’t you see, Luke!” Turning, Leia’s bright brown eyes were beseeching and alight with zeal, “He’s using you! He’s manipulating your desire for your father!” With a prim motion she drew her hands to her side and stared at him, “You can’t believe him. Vader is not your father.”

“That’s the thing, Leia.” Luke dropped his head into his head and sighed, shoulder slumping. “He is.”

“NO! He isn’t.” Anger distorted her words and Luke flinched before looking up. Echoing her motion he stood and stared directly into her gaze.

“He is, Leia. I felt the truth, he couldn’t lie with the force.”

“Vader is powerful.” She pointed out, holding his stare, unwavering.

“He is, but not enough to manipulate the fabric of the force itself.” Those books Tang had given him on fundamental force concepts through the galaxy had been clear on this point. “The force resonates with truth and lies are obvious to anyone who can look. I was there when he told me and he couldn’t have lied. It’s not possible.”

For a long moment neither of them said a word until Leia blew out her cheeks with a breathy sigh and stuck her fists on her hips. Luke was struck just how much her motion echoed Vader’s. He had had plenty of experience irritating the man in the last three weeks. His mouth twitched in amusement for just a second before he swallowed.

“Vader doesn’t want to hurt us.” He said.

“And he hasn’t tried to corrupt you?” Leia demanded, “An enemy one day and suddenly respected?”

Luke thought about Captain Tang, an echo from a not-so-distant past. How she would speak to Vader and how both of them shared significant, wordless stare downs. Of how Vader still respected
the woman even though it was clear neither of them liked the other.

“Yes. Leia, I think he’s trying to bring down the Empire,” Luke put his hands on her shoulders, staring at her. Begging that she would understand, hoping that her anger would not overwhelm her. “Or at least the Emperor.”

“They both need to go.” Leia snapped but she didn’t pull away from Luke. Instead, after a moment she shrugged. Anger drained and her shoulders slumped. “Luke, I was so worried about you.”

“Thanks,” he blushed when the Princess threw her arms around his neck. Luke returned the favor. The sensation of wholeness when Leia was around slotting back into its rightful place. “I’ve missed you too. What happened after Hoth?”

Leia didn’t reply until she drew back from Luke, reluctant and with very real concern in her eyes. “Luke, it wasn’t good.”

“I took out those AT-AT’s,” He muttered, eyes down cast; Dak, his gunner, loyal and frightened even when Luke let him down. Those dozens of troops in the trenches and the pilots and personally that tried to make it past the blockade. Leia and Han had been leaving on the Falcon and thankfully they hadn’t witnessed the humiliating of being dragged through the captured prisoners by Vader with a grip on his shoulder. He’d been cuff ed and gagged but still putting up a pretty big fight, as much as he had been able with Vader looming behind him. The last he’d seen of Hoth had been the kneeling Alliance personnel beneath the readied blasters of the 501st. “What happened?”

“Han and I made it out.” Leia spoke quietly, “To a place called Cloud City and there Boba Fett lured us into a trap. He threw Han in freezing carbonite and was going to collect our bounty but Chewie nearly threw him off the city platform. We escaped but the bounty hunter took him to Jabba the Hutt.”

“And the fleet?” He was almost too afraid to ask, knowing what awaited Han in the hands of the Hutt.

“Made it safely away and we received news that the 501st has imprisoned those taken on Hoth. We haven’t got much news beyond that. Mothma is sure they’re alive but…”


“I…” Luke looked into her bright eyes, “I can’t. I mean I would but right now I can’t. I…I haven’t been able to use the force for almost five days now. “

“What did!” Anger roared alive in Leia’s chest, stomping on all other emotions when she grabbed Luke’s arms, “What did he do to you?”

“It wasn’t Vader’s fault,” Luke placated, waving down her anger, “It was mine and it was an accident. Neither of us is sure how to reconnect me to the force so I’m supposed to leave to find a Jedi who can. Someone whose supposed to help me and teach me how to use the force.”

“There aren’t any Jedi left,” her bitterness apparent even to Luke’s force blind senses, “Vader killed them all.”

“Not all of them.” Her surprise made him smile, “There’s one waiting for me and Vader’s given me
permission to find him and have him teach me.”

“Vader’s permission!”

“Yes,” Luke ducked his head, suddenly embarrassed, “I had to ask, I wasn’t sure if he would just try to use me to find him but Vader isn’t. He doesn’t want to teach the Sith ways.”

“Why not?” Leia’s hands were tightening around his biceps and he smiled at her, carefully trying to cool her temper. “He’s corrupted Jedi and people to be his inquisitors. Why doesn’t he want to teach you?”

“Various reasons and….” When he’d asked Vader the answer had been embarrassing and comforting in equal parts. A deep blush that had taken too long to fade and Doora had made a crack about him meeting with his clone lover. “Leia, he wants to preserve the light. To help the galaxy and free it, he could have started forcing lessons weeks ago but he hasn’t. Well, not of the Sith kind but there have been lessons.” Leia’s befuddled frown almost made him laugh. “You…believe me. Don’t you?”

“I’m not sure what to believe.” Her voice flat and eyes sharp, “Luke, if Vader is your father.”

“He is.” The quiet words were heeded and she continued.

“I’m not...you are not like Vader and you can’t choose your parents.”

“No,” Luke thought back to the images she had shown him of her own parents, “You can’t.”

“And you…” Sighing and shaking her head Leia placed a hand on his cheek, “What are you going to do then? If Vader is your father.”

“I’m going to become a Jedi,” he said. Thunder and steel echoed and lined his words, framing them with absolute certainty and determination. “I’m going to learn how to use the force and we’re going to stop the Emperor.” Tang and his Father hadn’t actually told him of their plans but he was clever and had been a member of the Rebel Alliance. Luke knew how to parse information together and while no one had outright stated what they wanted it was pretty clear; after a while. “I won’t become a Sith. Leia, I promise.”

“Why do you think that Vader wants to help the galaxy? If he manages to overthrow the Emperor then he’ll just take his place. Everyone knows Vader and he’s a public menace, the whole galaxy would cower before an Emperor Vader.”

“Everyone but you,” Luke said, laughter bubbling up through his chest. “And I know Captain Tang would never allow anyone like Palpatine to take over the galaxy again.”

“Luke!”

“Sorry, it’s just...” He chuckled before smoothing out his expression into something more aloof and concerned. “I’m sorry. That was inappropriate humor.”

“There is nothing amusing about this situation,” Leia scolded but her own mouth was twitching with unknown humor. “Technically we’re both prisoners of Vader and.”

“Guests,” Luke said, “I think we’re more guests. Prisoners don’t get rooms like this.”

“I don’t care what it is,” Leia took a deep breath and let her anger wash away, leaving her feeling numb and tired. “I don’t care.” A bone deep terror clawed at the inside her chest, the collective grief
of all her remaining citizens along with the hope of the whole Alliance clung to her shoulders, begging attention. She glanced into Luke’s bright blue eyes, the same

“Leia,” The two hugged, “Please, please believe me.”

“It’s so….fantastical,” Leia muttered, not bothering to pull away from her friend, “It’s too strange to be false and I….” The power buzzing around and igniting her blood to a boil whispered. ‘truth, truth, truth’ to everything Luke had said. She wants it to be false, everything Luke said. She wants Vader to be the monster that lurked in her nightmares, wants him to be manipulating Luke just so the galaxy will fall back into her understand but. At the core of her being she knew he was telling the truth. All of it. “I was concerned when we wrecked but then Doora told us that this planet has acid rain storms and.”


“Yes.” The sharp angled, bitter faced teen swam into her mind’s eyes, “We were at the crash site. Chewie and I got shot down by TIE’s and we didn’t know the particulars of the planet. There she was, just sitting there.”

“Doora…” The strangest expression came over Luke’s face, “Was at the crash site?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Father’s going to be…” he watched the expression on her face and carefully said, “Furious.”

“And why does some smuggler interest Lord Vader.”

“It’s,” Luke put his head in his hands again and sank back onto the chair, “Complicated. She’s an ex-smuggler and got arrested not too long ago. For some reason or another Father’s decided to foster her and make her into a TIE pilot. He told me it was reparations for being a smuggler and gunrunner.”

“I…” Leia swallowed and then sighed, “That makes sense.”

“What!”

“Alderann had the same process. Criminals were put into a rehabilitation process. Community service and a way to give back to the community, there was a re-education process as well. Father Thought,” her voice hitched, “That if you could re-educate the criminal then you’d create or help form a good citizen. We didn’t have much crime but it did work. They are popular on Naboo and beginning to form up in Corellia.”

“I…”Luke blinked a few times, “Really?”

“Yes,” Leia rubbed her head and sighed, “I used to work with Father on those but…”After a moment of awkward silence she continued, “What do you mean she’s in trouble?”

“She technically a legal responsibility,” Luke said, “Doora is supposed to be….learning.” And now the whole thing made a lot more sense, “And I was there when the rules were stated.”

“Rules?”

“Yes?”

“This is too surreal.” Leaning back into the couch the Princess relaxed before starting up in surprise when the door slid open. “What?”
“It’s just the medical droid,” Luke said, “Don’t worry.”

“I’m…” swallowing down her retort Leia puffed out another breath, “I’m in a state of shock here.”

“You do not show signs of shock.” The droid stared, “You’re body vitals are only.”

“That’s enough,” Leia commanded, “just do your work silently.”

“As you command,” With half-bow to Luke the droid trundled toward the rebel.

Tang eyed the two fingers of fine Corellian brandy waiting in her desk, stacked atop two datapads. Bright amber liquid sloshed at her, inviting and very friendly.

“Captain,” For a moment Tang entertained the notion she was speaking to two of her Sergeant droids and not two clones.

“Yes?” She asked, not looking away from the all too tempting drink, “What is it?”

“The data file on Princess Organa. History, records and her update medical file. This is.”

“What I asked for,” Tang held out a hand and the Sargent placed the chip in her hand. “Thank you.”

“Do you need anything else, Captain,” The clone’s voice was muffled from his helmet but Tang was fairly sure she knew which one it was.

“Tell me, Stormer, do you drink?”

“No, sir.”

“Of course not,” Tang picked up her glass and drained it. “Inform me if any of our many guests decide to go on a walk. Also, do not let them go on a walk.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Now,” She mourned the loss of her liquor (expensive and stolen off a Republic cargo ship. A glass was worth over 280 credits. Let it never be said Tang did not pick up a few things from Count Dooku) and then nodded. “Go.”

“Aye,” with a sharp salute the two clones left and Tang slipped the data chip into the reader. After a few moments she sighed and let her head slide back onto her chair. “Of course, of course.” The bright words: MATERNAL MATCH, glared up at her and she rubbed her head. “I think I need a raise.” After a few swipes with her hands she manipulated a few more files and ran an analyzation program over the two. FRATERNAL MATCH came just a few minutes later as she toyed with her empty glass.

“Oh hell.” Twins. For the love of all things holy and unholy Leia Organa and Luke Skywalker were twins. Darth Vader was their father and it looked like Senator Amidala was their mother. With a few choice swear words the Captain pushed her irritation down and frowned deeply. Now she understood why Skywalker always came running when the Senator was reported to be in trouble. Blowing up ships and wrecking battle stations just for the sake of the small woman. Tang wondered what Skywalker would have done if he’d discovered she had had the woman in custody.

Well damn. With a nod to the woman’s spirit Tang filled her tumbler again. “To Senator Amidala,” she said quietly, “An admirable opponent, an honorable and just woman. A credit to her state, planet
and species; may your rest in peace and are not bothered by the nightmare your family is currently living.” Tang drained her glass and stood up, stowing the data chip in her pocket.

With Vader skulking in his room and obviously needing space and time to adjust to the idea of having an insurrectionist daughter; and the twins locked in the main suite Tang could turn her attention to the spy, the thief and the smuggler.

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Doora hadn’t been roughly manhandled when she’d been escorted into her room but it was a near thing. Neither of the escorting clones seemed pleased and she knew enough about trooper body language to know that they were allowing her to see their displeasure. Not that she cared that they were upset but it had been a little distressing (if she was honest with herself). Despite the fact they were obviously Stormtroopers and her age-old enemy she had managed to create a sort of rapport between them.

Some, mind you, she was still working on cultivating a personality tolerable to military types. It wasn’t easy and they were really picky.

Huffing and definitely not sulking, Doora flopped over her bed and pulled her knees up. She watched the brewing storm outside with a frown and twitched when the door opened.

“Oh,” she watched Captain Tang let herself in, “It’s you.”

“I would spend a great amount of time yelling at you,” Tang said, blunt and obvious, “But Lord Vader was clear all disciplinary actions were to be referred to him.”

“What?” Doora blinked at the flat tone and again at the words, “Why?” There had been a nightmarish flashback to her violent arrest aboard the Executor. She had forced it down but her breathing picked up.

“Running to the crash site of an unknown ship?” Tang raised an eyebrow, “Waiting around to speak to known rebels? Does any of this ring a bell?”

“Yeah…but?”

“You’ve obviously never considered that there might be consequences to your actions until recently.”

“Well.” Doora knew the consequences to actions. Like skipping transporting a load of slaves usually ended up with thugs jumping her in an alley and beating her up. That she’d end up beaten up and bruised with credits running slow. There were consequences to everything Doora had ever done but she figured Tang was referring to legality and the odd situation Vader had tossed her into. A dynamic she wasn’t sure how to work with.

“Not really.”

“You’ve disobeyed him. Of course he’s going to be displeased.”

“He’s a slaver.” Hot white hatred poured through her veins, “I’m a slave, a stupid piece of cannon fodder. There’s no point in sticking me with a fancy label like ‘rehabilitated criminal’ and calling it a day.” Her voice broke against her will, shedding light on her vulnerability. “He doesn’t care about me, you don’t care and none of the sleemos in this castle cares. The only person he cares about is that ditzy blond rebel.” Completely aware she was being unfair Doora’s voice cracked even further and she hated herself for being weak. For showing the steely gazed woman in front of her just how afraid she was. “All I am is some passing fancy and some stupid tool. This isn’t rehabilitation this is slavery.”
“I’ll admit,” Captain Tang ignored the tears leaking from her eyes and the fury that lurked in her glare, “I don’t agree with many of his actions but this…this is not slavery. Doora, I have seen slavery and up close and personal. I know it intimately as I’m sure you have but this is not it. This is a genuine opportunity to give you a new choice in your future.”

“Some choice,” Doora snapped, “Flying into battle. I’m underage.”

“That hasn’t stopped you before. The only thing stopping you,” the familiar ring of steel was back in the woman’s voice, “from accepting that this is not some hoax or a nightmare or simply an alternate form of slavery is your considerable and unbending pride. You don’t want to accept this might be real so you have done everything in you power to sabotage and ruin it.”

“No I haven’t,” Doora protested, forcibly pushing away her tears and snapping past the lump in her throat.

“You have,” The Captain was not sitting and didn’t seem inclined to, “And you know it.”

“No.” Never was Doora going to admit the woman was a little bit right. She was just hoping that Vade would come along when she messed up or insulted him and get it over with. A glow stick of destiny through the heart would be a pretty painless way to go. Then she could stop being so damned afraid all the time.

“And Luke is not ditzy he’s just friendly and a little naïve.” Tang continued as if Doora hadn’t spoken, “The real reason I’m here is to assign you a new assignment.”

“What?” A little uncomprehending, Doora just stared.

“A one of your in loco parentis and teacher I’m assigning you an essay.”

“I don’t know how to write essays,” Doora replied, taking the proffered datapad with a frown, “I don’t…”

“This is where you’re going to learn!” Tang said, “The instructions and information should be clear but if you need assistance your stand in tutor will be available.”

“This is a punishment!” Doora exclaimed, “You want me to squeal on myself!”

“Your simply analyzing your behavior and those expected of your and how your rancor-like stubbornness could eventually endanger the lives of your fellow pilots. That seems perfectly reasonable.”

Going toe to toe with her anger and pride was difficult but Doora managed to suck it down long enough to grind out, “Fine, I’ll write the damn essay.”

“Of course you will, though you’re still going to be in trouble.”

“I don’t see how his High Lordships of Asthma can come up with anything worse than this,” she waved the reader around for emphasis, “Essays, what sort of holo-film shit hole did I land myself in? Bedtimes, assigned essays, meal times, and lessons. You sure I didn’t fall through an alternate universe.”

“I’m sure,” Tang said, turning to leave, “Someone did at some point.” With a few muffled curses Doora stared down at the datapad while Captain Tang vanished through the door. The device didn’t seem impressed by her glower as she forced herself to admit she was going to have to stop sabotaging herself.
Even unwilling to admit it she’d have to accept the reality at some point….Doora didn’t really want to be gutted.

#$#$#$#

Jixton was not sleeping and the confused mumbles that were vocalized when Gohan said, “Oh look! Company!” Where those of irritation, not just waking up noises.

“What?” He rubbed his eyes and yawned, cricking his neck. “Oh, hey, Tang.”

“Jixton.” Captain Tang, formers Separatist High General, was flanked by two clones. Their weapons were at the ready and their body language only reflected the terse expression on her face. With great dignity Tang stalked down the stairs, glowering at the two. “Gohan.”

“Hey there,” needing no prompting, Gohan tossed her datapad to the older woman, “This is what you want to look at.”

“You have made good progress. What have you been doing Jixton?”

“He’s been asleep,” Gohan smirked, white teeth flashed from beneath blue skin. Her bright red eyes glowing with glee, “Not much else for a little spy to do, can’t trust them with operations like this.”

“Don’t push your luck, thief.” Tang warned and decided to ignore the argument that Jixton raised, yelling at the alien. The agreement escalated until she whirled on the two, “Gohan, this plan is ludicrous.”

“That plan will work, come on. You think I can’t break into that vault?”

“I think this is over –complicated and…. Tang pursed her lips, “Perhaps a little inspired.”

“Thank you,” The alien wrapped her arms around herself and waited, “Well, what now?”

“Now, the two of you are going to leave and perhaps not screw up.”

“So little faith,” Gohan shrugged and tossed a lopsided smirk to Jixton, “Come on, baby, we’re going to rob the Emperor blind.”

“Fine,” grumbling, the Corellian shook his head, “But I’m flying the ship back. You don’t.”

“That’s fine; I own everything else on that ship.”

“I don’t want to know.” Retreat seemed to be the better part of valor. Tang left the clones to escort the two to the hanger bay and retreated to the privacy of her own quarte
Vader does some self-loathing and Gohan gets ready to F#ck up Palpatines day.

Silence.
Utter silence.
Even his own breathing was muffled to his ears, lost and stuffed full of fabric. His head was empty and over flowing at the same time. Uncomprehending, Vader stared at the inside of his hyperbaric chamber. Glossy white insides reflected his blank expression.

For the perhaps the first time in his life Vader felt nothing. There was no anger, no rage, nothing…as if a sudden fit of apathy had seized him completely.

He knew what he had done. What he had done to his own progeny. His own daughter. Padme’s daughter.

Tortured…forced to watch the destruction of her home plant, the annihilation of her people and culture at the hands of Tarkin while he stood by, an accomplice.

Detached he watched his hands clench and unclench no real emotion or feeling behind the motion as the prosthetics shifted.

Leia Organa…she looked so much like her mother so very alike Padme it cut across his soul rending his apathy asunder and showering the desert in unshed tears. Vader had long since lost the ability to cry and had lost his inclination to cry for even longer though now he wished for the ability.

He closed his eyes, pushing away the harsh light of the chamber to focus on the mental image of his long lost wife.

The fire, the drive the same dragoness drive to protect the innocent, to aid the downtrodden and defend the abused, again and again Princess Leia had shown her willingness to flaunt Imperial norms and customs. To snub those who would hold her in distain to lift the despairing from their darkness and into the light.

Though, he would be lying if he admitted he was not just a little concerned on how much Leia echoed him. Her surging anger and temper was only the beginning. He had seen her on the battle field, as confident and cool as he had once been as a young man.

Vader could see the dragon lurking in her shadows. A shadow to consume those who would inconvenience her crusade, a shadow that could easily prey on her suddenly realized force sensitivity. He marveled at the heat and strength of her temper for a moment before considering what evils she could do in the name of good.

The same crime as the jedi.

A weak breath pushed past his lips and Vader wondered if he had ever felt so empty. If he had even
been so blank that he could not rouse himself from his seat.

His son. His daughter. Oh! How he had failed them. How he had failed their mother.

Luke, who had grown up in the backyard of the Hutts while knowing exactly what poverty and slavery looked like. A boy who had been thrown head first into a galactic civil war at the behest of a deluded fool. Though Luke was no longer a boy. His naïveté had been stripped away to reveal the beginnings of a truly wise person. Even as he looked like his father his whole demeanor was that of his mothers.

Luke was kind, astonishingly so; kind enough to earn the partial trust of a disillusioned smuggler and the respect of an aged commander, not to mention the admiration of several dozen clones and his own pilots.

Vader flexed his hands again.

Leia the passionate, Leia the mighty, Leia the defender, his daughter and victim of his greatest crime. So undeserving of the pain the galaxy was drowning in. Undeserving of her own pain.

He flexed his left hand and watched the leather bend.

Vader was lost.

He was unworthy of both. Unworthy of Luke’s wholehearted affection and love and unworthy of any affection Leia might have once harbored for the faceless specter that had been her biological father.

She could condemn him. She would condemn him.

With a word she could bring him ruin, destroy him to the very core of his being.

Leia had every right.

“It was twins,” away from the vocoder his voice was an unimpressive rasp, still deep but far more gentle than anyone would have expected. “A boy….a girl.” Both Padme and he had been right.

Vader stared downward, not bothering to lift his head or look away from the armor encasing his body. Black against the white backdrop, it seemed so simple and almost too much so. Hours passed like this before he took another heavily oxygenated breath and lifted his scarred head.

Only to find the gently smiling form of Qui-Gon Jinn watching him.

The man looked the exact same as he had before. Tall and welcoming even peaceful in his state of death as if nothing could bother him any longer.

“Be gone.” Vader commanded, closing his eyes and leaning back as much as he was able.

“Anakin.”

“Anakin is dead.”

“I do not believe so.”

“Believe what you will, corpse.”

“Anakin, please.”
“You have spoken to Luke.” He could still see the glowing outline of the ghost past his eyelids. It was not a hallucination.

“Yes.”

“You told him where to find Yoda.”

“To defeat the Emperor Luke must be trained in the ways of the force.”

“I suppose.” He should be horrified with himself. He should be angry. Anything to make the terrible emptiness go away. A lifetime of a feeling too much and half of one striving to empty himself of emotions and now….

He had achieved that so desired emptiness the Masters had stressed. A gateway to the force by leaving himself behind and allowing all feelings to vanish. Vader had found that ‘inner peace’ and found it underwhelming and sickening.

How had Yoda and Windu managed like this? How had they survived being so empty, so apathetic?

“They did not know any better.” Qui-Gon said, his outline moved to crouch beside the massive chair. “None of the jedi had ever been as you were. None of them could understand and in not even trying to do so they…we, failed you.”

“I am open to the force.” His bitterness coated his tongue, sharpening his words. A sith would not become so laconic and pathetic.

“Anakin, please.”

“What do you want?” He demanded. “To throw useless maxims in my face. To gloat about the light of the force, to mock my mistakes? I have murdered my wife, tortured my own daughter and allowed my son to be raised in poverty. I failed as a jedi and apparently I am incapable of being a sith else I would not find myself speaking to the spirit of an old master.”

“No, Anakin. I don’t want to mock you.”

“Then what could a jedi possibly want with me?”

“I know you have plans for the galaxy.” Did he? It didn’t seem so very important anymore. “I’ve seen the beginnings of your scheme.”

“And?”

“It is exactly what you need. Exactly what the people need, even if they do not know it themselves. What will you do?”

“I plan to rid the galaxy of my master. Luke and Leia will never be free from him if he continues.”

Two children to protect, by the force. Twins! Vader shifted a bit in his seat and opened his eyes. “I will grant them the freedom I have never had.”

“And what of the galaxy?” Qui-Gon looked so different from the jedi masters he had known. There was no judgmental or expectant look lurking his eyes. Not the shadow of distrust or dislike that had so characterized the Jedi Council and he was not condescending or cruelly distant. Vader watched the jedi warily.

“What of it?” He asked.
“What will you do with the trillions of sentients that are not your children?’”

“My children right for an idealized version of the galaxy that only propaganda and skewed nostalgia of their elders could have produced. I will not give them the reins of another Republic.”

“Anakin,” soft tingling along his head told him that the ghost was touching him. Qui-Gon rested a hand along his head with a soft smile on his lips.

“I am not Anakin.” He replied with no venom.

“Anakin, what will you do?”

“I….” he waited for a moment, thinking. He had watched the Republic destroy itself, rotting from the inside. It had abused and ruined the lives of its average citizens from an orchestrated war. In its place the Empire had fared no better, having only worsened the harm done to the average person. He remembered his conversation from long ago. Compassion was unconditional love. Compassion for the people who were not jedi, senators, commanders, criminals or leaders, that was what Padme had been so fervently protecting even as Anakin had been tasked with protecting their victimizers and their investments.

Luke fought for the moisture farmers bullied by crime lord, for the slaves with no choices to make, for the smugglers whose only life had been crime through no real fault of their own. Luke’s compassion had carried him through the rebellion because he *cared*.

Leia cared for the forgotten ideals of gluttonous government and Luke cared for the people.

“Oh.” He blinked. “I suppose to help my children in their crusades.”

“A start.” Qui-Gon’s smile widened, “I have had the distinct pleasure of gloating at Master Yoda. He was quite astonished to discover that you were not completely lost.”

“Lost?” He snorted, “I am lost.”

“We both know that is not true.”

“I can never be a jedi. I could never be a jedi.”

“I didn’t say jedi, Anakin.” Jinn said, “I only said lost and all people can be lost.”

“Why are you here?” The fallen Jedi watched the other man with tired eyes. “Have I not incurred the wrath of all jedi and their affiliates?”

“Anakin, I have never been angry with you.” Jinn replied, stepping away, “I was sad because you had been lost in evil.”

“I am still lost.” If pressed he would deny the warmth the bloomed somewhere in his heart.

“You have done well with Luke and with that little smuggler.”

“I suppose.” He didn’t feel much like a parent or anything associated with it. Vader only had his painful memories of his mother to rely on and he didn’t think he was doing anything special. Though Doora had been a lot less sulky during her simulation training as he was the only member of Death Squadron on the planet the task of training her for combat in a group had fallen to him. Tang was good but not a member of Death Squadron.

“Ahh, I struggle of every parent.” Jinn was definitely laughing at him now, “Do not worry, Anakin.
You’ll do well with the three of them.”

Vader watched the man fade into nothing and continued to stare even long after Jinn had vanished.

Gohan watched the approached of Penal Planet 13, her home and current base of operations. The dusty planet just coated with plains and dozens of humongous lakes and somewhere her posse of criminals were just waiting for her.

“Soo….you’ve be able to get off planet when I just leave you right?” Jixton asked as she stuffed her stuff into her backpack.

“We’ll be fine.” She said, “Just keep your mouth shut and we’ll call you when we’re done.”

“Alright,” he set the ship down on the landing pad and watched the blue skinned alien vacate the ship. “Don’t get into too much trouble!” He called only to hear the echo of her laughter bounce off the walls. “Crazy lady.” Jix lifted back into the sky and made for his next assignment.

Lolzy met her outside the restricted space port just as she was exiting the compound.

“GOHAN!” The man waddled his way over, his blaster held carelessly in his hand. His round face was set in a concerned frown and he waved away a few troops that wandered to close. “WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?”

She made off toward town, waving at a few of the other prisoners who slipped away to spread the news of her return.

“Look, Lolzy, do you really want to know?” She waved at a few more men, gesturing for them to assemble her favored crew.

“Yes, yes I do. You’ve missed Roll Call five times now. The Kommandant had not asked any questions but I was worried. You have been gone! You cannot escape; you know it is dangerous out there in the galaxy. An alien cannot live peacefully in this universe. You must be careful!”

“Lolzy,” Gohan paused, adjusting her pack and facing the rotund human. “Were you worried about me?”

“Of course!” He replied, patting her shoulders, “I always worry. I worry about all of you.”

“You know you don’t need to.” Though it was impossible to hate Lolz because he had such a genial disposition and frequently nagged the more hardened criminals on planet into proper behavior and healthy habits. It was quite the sight to see the fat man scolding murderous bounty hunters and violent criminals like he had somehow appointed him the entire planets father.

“I do anyway,” he said, huffing as he struggled to keep up with her pace, “What is in the bag? Gohan, what did you bring back?”

“Well,” she licked her lips and smirked at him, “I’m planning on helping my new employer into overthrowing the Empire and creating a new.”

“I KNOW NOTHING!” He yelled, clapping his hands over his ears. Do not tell me this! I cannot hear you. I am leaving!” Lolz waddled off, muttering to himself and complaining.
“That was pretty fast, mon capitaine,” A short, sturdy dark green twi’lek appeared at her elbow. Los, a fellow criminal for his actions with the Free Ryloth fleet, was the best chef on the planet and also a multi-skilled con-man. He hated the Empire with every fiber of his being just as much as he had hated the Separatists and the Republic. Los didn’t like many people but at least he liked her. “I don’t think I have ever seen you get rid of him so quickly.”

“That’s right,” she smiled at the twi’lek, “What happened while I was gone?”

“Not much, the clones in charge of agriculture need a few more farm hands and we sent those cretins who have been bothering the youth center as a punishment. The commander will knock them into shape.”

“That’s good,” Gohan wrapped an arm around his shoulders, “Look, we’ve got a heck of a job right now. Just got one and it’s a doozy. We’re going to need the whole crew.”

“Oh?” Los’ eyes lit up, “What is it?”

“I’ll tell you in time, buddy but get Andro, Kick and Newk. This is job for the five of us and make sure to tell them to meet me in the Crystal Caves.”

“Oui, mon capitaine!” Los saluted, “For Free Ryloth anything!”

“Get going, tailhead.” She waved him off, “we’re on a tight schedule!” Gohan watched the revolutionary disappear and grinned a dark, gleeful smile. A few approaching subordinates fled at the sight.

This was going to be exciting.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Vader talks to Tang and Tang throws a paperweight at his head.

Ever since his mother had been removed from his life Vader’s patience, what little of it there was to begin with, decreased dramatically.

As a jedi he had needed, desired and longed for action. As a sith he had created it, roving across the galaxy on Palpatine’s missions and on his command. Now, fresh from a conversation with the ghost of a man he had once admired Vader was ready to take action.

He was ready to salt and burn the galaxy, to plunge his Master into the nearest sun and assume the reins of governmental control. Tonight he would begin in earnest his quest to rid the citizens of the Empire of its slaver. Vader would embody vengeance itself, leaving criminals, politicians and abusers quaking in their shoes. Behind him he would bring order and control the way it should have been. Supported, advised and assisted by some of the most brilliant minds in modern galactic history Vader could not lose.

Vader would not lose.

“CAPTAIN TANG!” On the few occasions he had had to see the woman out of sorts it was usually after a heavy night of ill-advised drinking or the afternoon he returned to Bast Castle after Alderann was destroyed. That had not been the first time Tang had thrown something at him and so far it was apparently not the last. The moment he thundered into her quarters, shouting her name and strolling right into her bedroom Tang had launched a paperweight at his head.

“What?” The colored ball of glass bounced off an invisible wall, to the floor and rolled away across the carpet. Beneath her mused hair Vader saw a truly dark expression that had probably made battle droids fall apart at the joints. The vicious, dangerous snarl in her sleep addled voice would have been enough for a reprimand if the Sith had been focused on anything less important. “DO. YOU. WANT?”

“We have business to discuss.” Vader replied, feeling almost amused when Tang threw back the covers and finally moved to her feet, snarling as she did so.

“What happened? Did the Emperor declare you a traitor?” Tang pulled the sheet of the bed and wrapped it around herself.

“He did not.”

“Did Imperial Center finally explode from the sheer force of stupidity and corruptions that have been destroying it from the inside?”

“That would be fortuitous but no.”

“Then why?” The sheet around her shoulders tightened as she tensed, “Are you in my private quarters at…” She glanced to the clock, “Three in the damned morning?”
“Captain.” Vader had ideas. He had plans and courses of actions, there were orders to be relayed and soldiers to be moved, numbers to be run and information to be scrounged up. If it were any other day and any other person Vader would have thrown the Captain across the room. “I have need of your considerable and impressive skills. That galaxy is going to change and any any of my plans to succeed or to even begin to evolve beyond an embryotic stage you are needed.”

“Lord Vader,” Captain Tang’s eyebrows rose and her expression turned from steel melting fury to deep suspicion, “Was that?”

“The simple truth, Captain,” There was a certain level of professional animosity that was supposed to exist between them, “No flattery.”

“Fine,” Tang tossed the blanket back to the bed and ripped open the closet just steps away. “Then there is news.” Dutifully, Vader turned his back on Tang as she began to pull her uniform from the shelves and hangers. “Gohan touched down on Penal Planet 13 eight hours ago. Jixton was given the next assignment packet you had ordered ready.”

“Which one?”

“He’ll be planting false data on Admiral Drun that will be enough for a life in prison, or, more likely a summary execution. Though, from what you other agents have said and the numbers we’ve got back only half of the embezzlement information is falsified.”

“How much?” He couldn’t see Tang but he guessed that she had paused in her dressing.

“Well, calculating for inflation and the fact money is actually becoming scarcer……6.7 million credits.” If it were possible then Vader’s breath would have hitched as he listened to the distinctive sounds of someone pulling on pants.

6.7 million credits that had been drawn into an Admiral’s private account and stolen from the Empire.

“I told Jixton to collect the actual data from our investigator. Fake embezzlement papers will look bad when someone finds out that the real ones existed. While he’s making Admiral Drun look terrible Rae Salone is poised and ready to take his place. We know she’s already loyal to you and won’t take more than a little convincing to join in on a coup.”

“Salone will do as she is commanded.”

“Yes.”

“What else?”

“Gohan’s plan for the ‘secret’ vault verges on insanity and it is just crazy enough to work. I’ve seen strategists like her before and most of them fail but the file came back from PP13 and it looks like she has a team that makes the entire ISB look slow and flabby. I have confidence,” Tang grunted and Vader turned around just a bit, “TURN BACK!” Clearly he needed to speak to her about the proper respect due to a sith lord. “That her plan will succeed. When it does then both the Hutts and Black Sun will be in the Emperor’s cross hairs.”

That was not what he had commanded, turning Vader’s eyes widened at the sight of Captain Tang finally pulling a shirt over her shoulders, preparing to button it up.

“Excuse me!” He drew his gaze away and focused on the ceiling.
“Apologies, Captain,” Vader managed and turned back around.

“Do you also peep in on the lady officers of your ships?”

Ignoring the question entirely, Vader continued, “I commanded that Gohan frame Black Sun, not the Hutts.” He didn’t mention that most of the lady officers aboard his ship were much less afraid of him killing them and much more attack by random male officers. That had been a disconcerting fact to learn and one he had learned unintentionally. Ladies from the rank of Captain of the Secondary Bridge to the lowest engineering ensign who needed to report to the bridge would consistently bring reports and memos to him instead of Ozzel. Or they would wait until Captain Piett if Vader was occupied elsewhere. Considering he had killed more officers for irritating him than anyone in living memory it was startling.

Another reason he had killed Ozzel above Hoth.

“Captain,” He growled.

“Gohan is planning on making it look like the Black Sun is trying to be framing the Hutts. There will be two lines of misdirection for the investigators to consider and nothing relating to you will appear. Furthermore, the rest of the numbers came back from Piett and the anonymous poll you wanted.”

“How to they look?”

“The Emperor will be a fool to deny your plan. You’ll want the primary lawyers and actuaries aboard the Executor to present it. If Palpatine suspects this is a diversion.”

“This is a diversion,” He hooked his thumbs on his belt.

“We don’t want it looking like that, Milord.” He hadn’t been sure that Tang could have sounded more irritated than she had before but he had been wrong. “Because of that you’ll need to remain… obedient.” The force swelled with his distaste and her bitterness for just a moment. “No signs can be made that you could even begin to consider rebelling.” He heard her remove boots from the closet and walk back to the bed. “Everything you want done needs to be planned with contingencies by next week. Then, Princess Organa needs to leave, Prince Luke needs to head off to where ever that manipulative troll is hiding and Doora will be the new face of social reform for disadvantaged students.” The Sith finally turned toward Tang. She was pulling on he boots, tucking her pants into them and frowning at the floor. Vader wondered when she had become so comfortable in his presence that she was not even looking at him. “When we send Organa back to the Alliance Command with the information that a high profile Imperial official is prepared to fund and aid in a government overthrow they’ll likely be suspicious. We’re not planning on letting your name leak to the Alliance because they’ll have collective aneurism and become totally useless as they debate your allegiance to the Rebellion.”

“I have no allegiance to the Rebel Alliance,” Vader would never have allegiance to them. It was a preposterous idea.

“I know that,” Tang said, shoving her right foot into a boot, “You know that and Organa will likely know that. You need to give her a reason you will help and that she should not reveal your name to the Alliance. Whatever your reasons are for planning a coup is your own and I’d urge you to keep the true ones private and feed her something plausible.”

“Organa is force sensitive,” he said.

“I figured that one out on my own.”
Vader could no longer be surprised or impressed by Tang.

“She will need training.”

“She can’t have those….Specters. The rebel ones that started on Lothal. I have plans for the Lothal rebels.”

“Malachor.”

“Excuse me?” Tang finally looked up from her boots.

“There is someone on Malachor who would instruct Princess Organa with matter of the force.”

“Not Yoda?”

“Yoda’s platitudes and explanations would only compel Organa to beat him with his own gimmer lightsaber.”

“I don’t say I blame her, I’ll send Jixton to collect whoever it is once he returns. What is this person’s name?”

“Ahsoka Tano.” It did not hurt him to say his apprentice’s name as it had so many years ago when he’d stranded her on the Sith planet. He would trust no one else with Leia’s force education which she desperately needed. At the moment he could sense her nightmares loud and clear. It pained him more deeply than he wanted to admit.

“Very well then.” The woman moved toward the vanity desk across the room. She rummaged around for a hairbrush and a small wooden box. “What else?”

“Did you punish Doora for her misdeed?”

“Doora is your jurisdiction, milord,” She looked hard at the mirror, watching her hands move the brush, “I left her punishment up to you. Though, I have assigned her an essay you ought to question her on.”

“Why?”

“Doora has pride in her independence and what she imagines to be her freedom. It would be a truly punishing act for her to describe, in detail, why she was wrong. Furthermore, it will be good practice for when she reports to commanding officers.”

“Speaking from experience?”

“Of course not,” Tang set the brush down and began to twist her hair into a braid. Vader wondered just how many times he had gone through a morning similar to this with Padme; talking politics and military strategy even as she dressed for a day at the senate. Tang’s mouth pursed into a line as she reached a hand over to flip the boxes lid open to reveal two decorative and elegant hair ornaments. “I was always the highest ranking in the room.”

“Even at her age?” Now he was curious and obviously they were getting off track.

“At her age I was running a planetary civil war and looking to throw the Republic off my planet,” She shifted her hair into a bun at the back of her head and waved to the open box, “Which one do you think?”

“Excuse me.” This morning was promising to be productive but it had taken a turn for the bizarre.
“Lord Vader,” Tang’s voice hardened in a way the reminded him far too much of Padme though, he supposed, it was probably the tone of annoyed women the galaxy over. “I have had 8 hours of sleep for the past three days. I have been mentoring and tutoring two high strung and wildly stubborn students. I have also been working on a masterpiece of a plan to overthrow a government that had been put in place through a masterpiece of a plan to overthrow a government. I have been analyzing data, information and personnel reports almost non-stop. On top of that I have the added stress of working with the galaxies most prominent Sith Lord who somehow found the gumption, despite our previous agreement, to barge into my rooms at stupid o’clock in the morning. Furthermore, I know that whatever you want to try and get done over the next few days will mean that several months of work need to be condensed into a few hours. So,” Tang stared hard at him, “When I know for a fact I am about to have a very bad day I wear something beautiful to remind myself that I have made significant contributions to the galaxy and that, as a woman, a Captain and former High General, I am entitled to wear something beautiful.”

Vader would have to reaffirm his reputation as a frightening commander and ruthless killer but he would have to do it aboard the Executor.

“The silver one, now, what is your interest in the Lothal rebels?”

“You’ve assigned no less than seven inquisitors to their case file not to mention a good portion of the ISB.”

“Agent Kallus has proven a significant disappointment.”

“Agent Kallus is their inside man in the ISB,” Tang replied, sticking a length of wood through the available holes in the hairpiece, “He’s been helping them four three years now.”

“I see.” That made sense.

“Also, intelligence reports that the Lothal rebels report to a man name Jun Sato, a Commander in the Alliance forces. He’s good at his work, supply run, information acquisition, espionage and mostly silent terrorism on planets that abuse their alien population.”

“And?”

“Sato used to be one of my men. He was good if young and inexperienced. If I pull him into this quietly he’ll give the Lothal rebels to use as another cover group. With Doora distracting the public, which she needs to be taught how to do by the PR officers aboard the Executor, and Luke and Leia off doing their various rebellious activities then that should be sufficient for me to begin moving the different groups around the galaxy.” Another stick of wood was pushed into her hair and Tang stood before her mirror and smoothed over the wrinkles on her uniform. “Thoughts?”

Looming behind her, Vader considered her words. “Negotiations with Organa will be difficult and time-consuming.”

“You also cannot tell her that you are her father.” Tang said, “If you want to protect her then it must be done covertly. Organa will never accept it from you otherwise.”

“Speak carefully,” Vader warned.

“Milord, Princess Leia will know by now that Luke is your son and that you were once.”

“I do not go by that name, he is long dead.”

“Of course,” Tang nodded in agreement even as she ignored him, “But if you give even the barest
hint of this she’ll shut out out of spite.”

“Should I not inform Luke? As her brother he has a right to know.”

“I have a feeling that Yoda will tell him and if he doesn’t then I will.” Finally agreeable with her appearance Tang moved toward the door, “My sergeants have put together the lists and data we’ll need. The promising cadets and students at the academy, police officers, private investigators, truly stupid reporters that all believe in a better future if we work hard enough. We need more private boots on the ground to.”

“You took my advice well,” as both Vader and Tang moved toward the main conference room.

“Lord Vader, you said and I quote, ‘find those who the Emperor will ignore. Those disillusioned and abandoned by both the Republic and the Empire find those abused for their opinions and race and gender.’ I figured you meant to run a coup through the dozens of kinds of people who have been steadily leaned upon for tax money, military draft and volunteer duty. Basically, those who are below the poverty line, those barely above it and those in the lower and upper middle class. Anyone who is not a multi-millionaire has been steadily sucked dry at a truly astonishing rate since almost 45 years ago.”

“We will be discussing using those citizens to our advantage?”

“Yes, it would interest you to know that during the Republic 67% of investigative journalists, reporters and private investigators were taken to court and lost their licenses over truly ridiculous reasons. Most of them were looking corporations and high profiled politicians and it looks like because of that they lost their jobs and were banned from any work in that field ever again.”

“What have we done to contact them?” Both entered into the turbolift at the same time.

“The numbers on Admiral Drun were dug up by a twi’lek reporter named Linuo. He’s also willing to do more work for us as long as he is allowed to disgrace the abusive admirals and captains plus he plans on gathering enough information on former senators to make their ansectors cry.”

“And impressive man.”

“He is, apparently he was investigating Senator Rush Clovis when he was arrested.”

“We cannot create a new system of government until we can dismantle the enablers of the previous two. There are too many people who were tied to both that are still in power. Once they sense a change in policy and the direction of government they will want to invest themselves. This cannot be allowed Captain. When we re-create the galaxy it must be with the new generation, those who have suffered the arrogance and greed of the old one.”

“We,” Tang excited the turbolift hot on Vader’s heels with three clones hot on hers, “Are not allowing Mon Mothma anywhere near a seat of power?”

“Absolutely not,” Vader lowered himself into his seat as Tang accepted a hefty pile of datapad from the clones who followed them in.

“Where will that leave you?” Tang wondered.

“I have every reason to kill you at the moment,” Vader reminded her and Tang only spared him a blank stare.

“Tucker.”
“Ma’am,” The clone turned at the door.

“I know it is early but I’m going to need breakfast in the next hour.”

“Yes ma’am, what would you like?”

“Something with fruit, meat and possibly a gallon of caf.”

“Yes ma’am,” Tucker saluted and vanished from the room, leaving the two commanders alone.

“Lord Vader,” Tang was speaking with the looseness and open manner in which all sleep deprived and consistently irritated did, frankly and without reservation. Vader turned to the woman, “you just saw me half-dressed and by every single code in the galaxy you cannot kill me for at least another three weeks.”

“I am not bound by the codes of the galaxy.” He reminded her, picking up two reports of his own.

“I am well aware of that, milord but at the moment we have more pressing matter to concern ourselves with,” Tang smiled a brief, tight smile, “Such as the operations to dethrone a tyrant!”

“Indeed,” this, at least, Vader knew how to handle.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Crystal Caves had their name chosen by a new clone prisoner who, before the walls of the prisoner were knocked down and the inhabitants of the Penal Planet 13 allowed to colonize the surface, had escaped. The clone had staggered, badly wounded into the caves to find that the entire system was embedded with blue, green and red crystals. It wasn’t, perhaps, the most imaginative of names but the clone was unwilling to call it anything else. Since the cave had gone undiscovered until a search party of guards/rescuers had arrived and he had chosen it, the clone was allowed to name it.

Heavy machines and electronics didn’t work inside the cave system, making tracking inside impossible and making recording conversations a further impossibility. However, the electromagnetic chaos of the caves didn’t seem to interfere with prosthetics.

This was why Gohan had established this cave system as her office space. She took great care to respect the crystals, which hummed an inaudible tune and glimmered in the darkness, forming her office space around the natural grooves and dips of the stone. It was the perfect place to plan heist and various other illegal activities and had a part sectioned off for curious on-lookers who wanted to look at the Crystal Caves and not interfere with the bosses work.

Gohan was absurdly proud of the fact that despite the general incarceration off all the planets inhabitants they had places they could tour and visit like normal citizens.

“Boss,” the blue skinned alien paused in her perusal of the blueprints of the vault to find the too cheerful, too kind and explosive happy clone named Andro standing just outside her ‘office’.

“Andro, buddy, come on in, how’s it going?”

“Just great boss, the blasting caps we’ve put together we’ll be the firework of the century.”

“Hey, that’s great.” Gohan spread her arms and shrugged expressively when the clone paused, “What is it?”

“You’ve got that look in your eye,” he said, the wires he was fiddling with in his hands drooping in the same manner his shoulders were, “That means we’re about to get in trouble.”

“I picked us up a job,” Gohan said, “You should be grateful. All of my money and power and still no one respects me. What is wrong with children today?”

“There’s nothing wrong wi’ us,” A smirking, lean form draped in an officers overcoat of the Separatists army wandered into the room.

“Newk, I thought you’d never make it. Did some gambling get in the way?”
The human respected her too much to make a biting comment about her lengthy absence but not enough to avoid correcting her, “how many times do I h’ve to tell ya’. M’ name isn’t Newk.”

“Until you get a name that doesn’t sound like it was coughed up by a drunk wookie then we’ll talk,” Gohan replied, lifting up a few pieces of paper and handing them over to her men, “Listen up, when the others get we’ll be talking about something highly illegal and incredibly dangerous.”

“I’m all for it,” The deep melodious voice of the only Pantorian on the planet echoed from the entrance. Andro and Newk turned to greet him. “What is it?” The man was a singular being, calm, collected and seemingly without a temper. Aside from Gohan he was the only other blue skinned alien on Penal Planet 13. It helped their relationship even as it harmed it because he knew his culture and heritage which he had been perfectly willing to share with Gohan except she wanted to know who she was and where she was from. She’d accept nothing less.

“You ought to like it,” Gohan said to the older alien, “The person who hired us has no problem with alien and even better,” she held up a credit chip card and handed it to the communications officer, “This is how much he’s paying us.”

“How much is it?” Andro demanded, leaning toward the Pantorian until the mustached alien gently pushed him back, never breaking his gaze off the number.

“Well?” Newk growled from his position of slouching against the cave wall and smoking, “How much is it?”

“It is a lot,” Kick said, “Depends on what we’re doing I suppose.”

“We will be striking a blow against the Empire,” Los buzzed into the chamber, face aglow and hat askew. His lips were stretched into a wide grin even as he paused right in front of Gohan’s desk, “That is what you said! That is what we are doing!”

“It’s a blow against the Emperor,” Gohan said and waved for the men to take their usual places in the war room, “I won’t tell you who’s hiring us but they’re pissed at Palpatine and are hiring us to take a bite out of the old bastards pride and to rattle him.”

“So what are we doing exactly,” Kicked asked, still holding the chip out of Andro’s reaching.

“We’re going to be breaking into a vault to secret that even Darth Vader has never heard of it.” She said; a wild glint in her eyes, “A vault so secure it’s wired from here to kingdom come and protected by over its own legion of Royal Guard. We’re stealing what remains of the Jedi order.” Her proclamations was met with total silence and completely blank expression. “Where are my shocked reactions?”

“You know,” Newk said, after a long moment of staring at her, “You could just put a bolt through my head and save the Empire the trouble. I was locked up for fighting against the Republic and I know they wanted to look nice but I know a few dozen Stormtroopers who aren’t going to have problem kneeling me in a back alley and putting a bolt into my brain if we get caught.”

“Plus,” Andro said, his nervous expression tilting his frown, “We can’t steal that stuff. What are we going to do with it? And If Vader doesn’t know about how does the person hiring us know about it?”

“That’s a secret but the point it we’re going to be stealing it. You know I’d never ask you do something you’renot comfortable with.”

“Except that you do…and you’re going to make us to this?” Newk shook his head, “You know, m’
last General was th’s crazy person…did some thing’s w’ thanks. Dangerous things, you an’ h’m are c’t from the same cloth.”

“I should hope so,” Gohan’s expression didn’t falter from its pure, dangerous glee, “So tell me boys, are we ready to crack open Palpatine’s security forces or what?”

“It depends on how many explosives we need,” Andro said with a small smile. Andro, previously an explosives expert for Jedi General Krell had been given by the scientists of the Separatists upon his capture, a gene suppresser. It kept him looking younger than all of the other clones on the planet and at the moment he looked barely a date over forty which was more than could be said for the others. They looked to be pushing sixty.

“I will do anything to humiliate that false ruler,” Los said, giving an intense salute.

“I’ll do it,” Kick said and the room looked over toward Newk who was stubbing his cigarette out on his boot heel.

“Y’er nuts,” he said, shaking his graying head, “Bonkers and nuts but ya’ haven’t failed yet.”

“Excellent, so,” she unrolled the blueprint and waved at the group to gather close, “this is what we’re planning on doing.”

#$#$#$

Leia watched the storm outside the window with unseeing eyes. The sun had set hours ago and Luke had graciously seceded his room to her, even allowing her use of the robe she had cinched at her waist. In the dark of the bedroom, sitting at the edge of the bed, Leia pondered.

It didn’t add up. Vader’s behavior, the Captain with the oddly familiar name and the smuggler who seemed so out of place in this whole situation it was if some cosmic force had written her in to shake things up.

Nothing felt real at this point.

Why would Vader claim the Luke was his son? What sort of political motivations did he hope to exercise with Luke at the forefront? If Luke wasn’t his son and simply a tool what would he do with Luke’s loyalty? Leia knew what Luke would do for people he cared about and people he respected. She knew that if Luke had the capabilities to destroy suns.

Her frown deepened and she glowered at the storm.

“Leia,” the Princess almost jolted in her seat and turned to see Luke rubbing at his eyes with his arm and wandering into the room. He looked rumbled and tired but still smiled at her, “I can hear you thinking. You need to stop.”

“I’m sorry,” she said and shifted a bit when Luke collapsed on the bed and buried his face into a pillow. A smiled threatened as she poked his shoulder, “Luke.”

“You still don’t believe me,” he said past the blanket, “You don’t want to accept the truth.”

“The truth means that your father,” the fire in her chest roared to life from the slumbering embers, “has been slaughtering and suppression millions upon millions of sentients. It means that he helped destroy the Republic and the jedi order, not to mention my own planet. He is a war criminal and a.”

“He is not worth of redemption,” she spat, feeling hollowed out an furious. The remembered agony of her orphan status was threating her composure again.

“Leia, he wants to help,” he said, taking her hand and peering into her eyes, “He does, he doesn’t want Palpatine in charge anymore. I don’t know the details but I know what a rebellion looks like. I can see it…why can’t you?”

“I don’t…” Leia’s chest swelled and she stood up, moving toward the window.

“Do you not want to see it?” Luke’s voice was quiet and soft and devastating.

“It can’t happen!” She snarled, “This is Vader, the right hand of the emperor. He is the Supreme Command of the Imperial Navy. His fortune outpaces several star systems. He stood idly by while my home…” her voice cracked, tears welling in her eyes even as she denied them. “How am I supposed to believe that Vader has turned over? That he has changed for the better? What is supposed to make me believe that?”

“I don’t know,” Luke said, “I can’t answer that.”

“Then WHY!” Her voice rose until she was shouting at the pilot, “WHAT ARE HIS MOTIVATIONS? WHAT DOES HE WANT WITH YOU….WITH ME?”

“Leia please,” Luke stood also, “People can change, they really can but you need.”

“What?” Ice coated her tone until Luke drew back, “seven billion people! Murdered at the whim of a madman and he made me WATCH! I HAD TO WATCH! THERE IS NO EXCUSE! THERE IS NO PARDON! I WAS. TORTURED!” She had become a storm, screaming in rage and furious in her sadness. Trinkets and books were beginning to shiver on their shelves, echoing her inner turmoil as she fought to understand what was and what could be. Lightening flashed, illuminating her for a moment. Leia looked like a madwoman, hair flying about and her expression set in an ugly snarl.

[Several floors below Vader felt the stirring of the force with such a violent rush he looked up from his work and the direction of his daughter. The force roared in pain, writhing on itself as the light and dark screamed as one even as Leia continued to shout.]

“My citizens were lost that day! My parents were lost that day! Generations of culture and history were obliterated to make a point! I gambled the lives of billions and they were destoryed because I threw down the wrong hand!”

“Leia, please,” Luke was wide awake now, worried and wanting nothing more than soothe her pain.

“I,” her voice stuttered out, “Luke….he stood by and watched. I made the decision to not betray the Alliance and my planet…..gone.”

“I know what happened, Leia,” Luke said softly, “I know you didn’t have time to mourn them. I know what happened after the Death Stars destruction.”

“Gone, Luke,” Leia collapsed beside the bed, resting her head against the frame and covered her face, shoulders shaking against her will. Never in the three years since Alderaans destruction did she take the moment to mourn, to pause and allow her grief to take over. Her anger had kept her warm and moving, it fueled her every moment and each day. She had little else. Leia didn’t look over when Luke settled next to her, close but not touching.

“You know,” Luke began, a little unsure if this was the time or place, “You were there with me on
the Falcon after we escaped the Death Star. Right after Old Ben died and after I had just left my home because my Aunt and Uncle were killed. Right there, just after seeing Alderaan destroyed you gave me a blanket. You had words of comfort for me even after you watched the whole planet die.” Leia choked out another shuddering sob and turned away from her friend. Pride demanding she shove the tears and emotions back into the cell from which they escaped.

Lightning lit the room again to be followed by a monstrous roar of thunder, rain lashed against the shields while the two rebels waited in the dark.

“Leia,” carefully Luke set a hand on her shoulder while pulling the unused blanket off the bed, “I think it’s time for me to return the favor.” Without disturbing the rebel leader he tucked the blanket around her form and scooted a little closer. Leia wouldn’t look at him but buried her head further in her arms, still shaking with almost silent crying.

Slowly but surely she unwound enough to grasp at him, hugging him close while she mourned for those lost.

“You can’t blame yourself,” Luke muttered into her hair, a hand stroking down her back, “You really can’t. I think it would have happened one way or the other.” The princess didn’t reply, still crying as hard as humanly possible, her composure bursting apart at the seams.

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Vader was pacing; his agitation obvious to Tang who was ducking further and further into her seat.

“What is it?” She asked from halfway underneath the table, “What is the force telling you now?”

“My daughter is significantly distressed,” He growled, the cape lashing about as he spun about, “this is unacceptable.”

“I…what do you plan to do about it?”

“There is nothing I can do,” Vader stomped a few more steps to the end of the conference room, “I am the cause of her distress.”

“And where is Luke?”

“Luke is with her,” the force was weeping, pulling Vader closer to the brilliant lights that were his children. It begged he intercede on its behalf.

He could not.

“Then I trust Luke to help her,” Tang said, now the only thing Vader could see was the top of her head. She looked absurd.

“What are you doing?”

“This table is anchored into the floor and at the moment probably the safest place for me if you lose your temper.” She said honestly, “I don’t want to tempt fate and I dealt with Dooku at his worst so yes…I’m taking cover.”

Vader was much too agitated to make a clever response and instead focused again on his daughter’s distress. What could he do? What should he do? He was the reason Leia was weeping in the first place, the reason she was only now purging the aged sadness that had formed a shield around her
He smashed a hand against the table and whirled around, crossing his arms. He could only wait helplessly as his children overcame this obstacle.

Leia had never felt so undone. Not even on the bridge of the Death Star with Tarkin’s eyes gleaming with cruelty and evil and Vader holding her shoulder. Not even during the missions that had gone south and she had been the only one to survive. Not in Cloud City when Han was taken away.

She had never felt safe enough to unravel and expunge her finely aged misery and rage. It seemed odd to the only rations part still in her mind that she would feel safe enough to cry while imprisoned in the tower owned by her most hated enemy. In the arms of someone she considered a brother who was apparently the son of her most hated enemy.

Except that it was Luke and Luke was the one she trusted in the absence of Han and the Alliance High Command.

She tightened her grip on the blanket around her shoulders, tears still sliding down her cheeks. Luke was running his hand through her hair, muttering in a language she had never heard before. It was warm and comforting. It was like coming home.

Chapter End Notes

To anyone curious...Yes, Luke gets in trouble again and you get what most of you came for.
Chewbacca found himself spending the next day mostly alone. The only people he saw were a few clone troopers and the vague glance of another woman in a dark tan uniform. Princess Leia had been swept away by the Captain and he had been shown to a room that had obviously been hastily reformatted to welcome a wookie.

He could smell the traces of Luke Skywalker in the main hallways and the scent of the little pilot with the white scarf. It was a curiosity but he didn’t comment and he didn’t try to pick of a fight with the geriatric clones.

“Sir,” A clone just inside the door saluted and the wookie eyed him, curious. “Lord Vader has requested your presence and Captain Tang has asked for you to accompany her to the briefing room.”

His roaring response didn’t seem to rattle the trooper but Chewbacca had been around humans enough to know when they were nervous.

“Very good, sir.” He followed the clone from the room, glancing back the remains of his bloody breakfast. Whatever Vader and Tang wanted it was enough to warrant his curiosity. Most leaders and commander had ignored the Wookie and relegated him to the stupid muscle that Leia and Han dragged around. A common sentiment in humans and Imperials which made him think that these humans were going to be vastly different.

They were both standing when he entered. Lord Vader was looming beside Tang’s shoulder. She held the datapad up and was batting away his hand even as they argued.

“Agent Kallus would never agree to do anything like that. Even if the assignment was given a guise he would jump ship so fast the scanners would spin.”

“You underestimate Agent Kallus and his loyalty to the Empire.” Vader rebuked her, “He will do his duty.”

“Not if you give him this. I’ve seen his file and further more I have intelligence reports from the agents that Kallus has two contingency plans with the Rebellion in case he needs a quick getaway.”

:Hello: Chewbacca woofed a greeting, announcing himself.

“Ah, Chewbacca! Good morning and welcome.” Captain Tang tucked the datapad closer to herself as Vader’s fingers skimmed right by it. She didn’t seem to notice Lord Vader plant his hands on his hips with obvious annoyance. He could respect anyone who could be so glib with the Sith Lord and still be around.

:Good Morning: Human greetings were strange but common fact of life.
“Warrior Chewbacca,” Vader moved to the opposite end of the table, “You served during the Clone Wars under the direction of Jedi Master Yoda.”

“I did: They would not have bothered to summon him if he was going to be executed for working with a Jedi. Vader obviously wanted something else.

“My condolences,” Tang said, her bitterness apparent, “But you never, in any of your reports, seemed to indicate any sort of loyalty to the Republic or the Jedi.”

“I respected the Jedi as warriors:

“Excellent, then you won’t mind us asking for your assistance.”

“The Empire is notorious for the use of slaves: He barked and watched Tang’s expression slid into a satisfied snarl of someone who knew exactly what he was going to say next. I will not help the Empire:

“This isn’t the Empire asking,” Vader replied, “In this room we have begun the destruction of the Emperor Palpatine and all who would obey his twisted rule. There are none here who are allies to the Emperor. We ask your assistance in aiding the downfall of Emperor Palpatine.”

“You have been his chief enforcer for many years: Chewbacca observed :Why do you wish to dethrone him? Is it for the sake of seizing power yourself?:

“I do not wish to rule to galaxy,” Vader replied, his head turning toward the windows, “I am doing this for the sake of my children.”

It didn’t take a genius to work it out.

“Then why not present this proposal to Princess Leia?:

“In due time.” Tang raised her eyebrows, that particular human facial expression had always confused Chewbacca. It could mean a number of things and sometimes it was hard to tell. “We don’t want to take this to the Princess until we know she’ll be receptive to accept this proposal without losing her head.”

“Princess Leia is a wise leader.:”

“She also has a perfectly understandable and personal vendetta against Lord Vader.” Tang nodded at Chewbacca, “She’ll take serious convincing for this plan. She’ll need to be comfortable keeping secrets from the Rebel Alliance High Command and also to conceal the identity of a high ranking Imperial officer who will be leaking information and sending the Rebellion on missions. Organa will need to be able to convince that High Command that the person who is operating within the Empire does not wish them any harm and that the plan they have is really for the galaxy at large and not their own selfish purposes. Furthermore, she will need to share intelligence reports with Imperial agents that have been chosen and picked by said Imperial officer. What Princess Leia will be asked to do will make her uncomfortable and probably angry. You can convince her to do what is needed and that Lord Vader does not wish to use Alliance personnel for his own takeover of the Empire.

“Even if Princess Organa agrees to this the High Command will not:

“They’ll have to if they want the support of this high ranking Imperial.”

Chewbacca stared at the silent Sith Lord for several moments before nodding. She will not be easy to convince.:}
“She and her brother,” Vader spoke again. Any inflection to his voice swallowed by his vocoder, “Will fight for the oppressed and the disillusioned of the galaxy but to do it for the Rebel Alliance would only invite chaos in the span of two decades. If the current members of the High Command were to take the positions of power in a transitional government the remnants of the loyal Imperials would rise to destroy them with a vengeance. Surely you can see this?”

:Suppose I could not: Chewbacca hadn’t been in many surreal conversations in his two centuries of life and this was obviously fate making up for that.

“Mon Mothma was a senator of the Old Republic,” Tang waved for him to take a seat. He did and the woman settled into a seat awfully close to Vader. “She had and still has ties to many people in power at the moment. King and Queens across the galaxy not to mention she has the heads of companies and corporations who can easily swings with the wind who would be ready to bow if she became the next galactic ruler.”

:That simply means Mon Mothma can run a rebellion.: 

“Run a rebellion is not the same as running a government. The people helping the Alliance now all want something if they succeed. Very few of them care about the ideals of the Alliance and even fewer really want to see Emperor Palpatine gone. Mon Mothma cannot have debtors trying to cash in on an infant government, it’ll be chaos.”

:Perhaps:

“Furthermore, Mothma is a relic of the Old Republic. What she wants is no longer viable and was, at the time, totally corrupt. Mothma wants the galaxy to return to it ‘Former Glory’ which would be disastrous. 46% of the Old Republic Senators were corrupt and willing allowed criminals to flourish and voted in laws that would bring total ruin to the galaxy. A further 45% of Senators were slavers, owed their position to huge corporations and needed serious convincing to be re-elected. These planets and systems had deliberate systems to ensure that anyone who had a serious desire for change would never see the inside of the Senate Building. The last of the Senators were ignored, mocked and insulted by their colleagues, with the rare exception.”

:Bail Organa and Senator Amidala?:

“Indeed,” Tang slid a datapad his direction, “You must see what we mean then. Mothma will want to have what she lost but we cannot allow this. Returning the galaxy to the hands of someone who devoted to the old ideals would be to invite chaos into a galaxy that is already ready to fall into a pit. These are the numbers here which will make my point even if I haven’t yet.”

:What are your opinions on the other members of High Command?: Chewbacca directed this question to Vader who waited a moment before replying.

“The Generals are right to fight for what they perceive as freedom though their judgement is clouded by what was. They will cling to the only indication of freedom they have ever known which was a government that was not. Councilor Fey’lya is a singularly disgusting sentient with only the desires of his inconsistent and backstabbing agenda in mind. He will be arrested once our task is complete. The others are of little consequence.”

:Then I will help you but I will not betray the confidence of Princess or Luke.: 

“We will not ask that of you, Chewbacca,” Tang said her expression curiously blank, “But we have no told either one of their relations and do not plan to until a later date. Clear?”
Very well. Chewbacca roared.

“I don’t think we’re still on lock down,” Luke said and handed Leia another piece of her outfit without turning around, “WE might be able to eat breakfast with Doora.”

“The smuggler like Han?”

“You’ll like her,” He said, “But I need to get out of these rooms. I’ve been in them long enough.”

“Are you getting cabin fever?” Leia joked, “Why?”

“Because I haven’t flown in ages,” He said and lifted his eyes when Leia walked into his eye line, “I think those might have belonged to Captain Tang at one point.”

The outfit Leia wore was a wholly exotic number the likes of which Luke had never seen. It had none of the ostentatious frivolity of the Senate robes or the overdone decorations of the high class fashion. Rather, the smooth and tailored clothes looked comfortable to dance in and probably gave the wearer that ability to maneuver in the case of gun fire.

“I think it did too,” she confirmed his thoughts, “This designer was popular but was a Separatist so everything they made was erased. I only know the name because my mother once mentioned it to me.”

“You can find more things than war and whatnot to discuss with Captain Tang,” Luke beamed, “But I don’t know.”

“We need breakfast first,” Leia patted his cheek with a smile, “Father always told me that no war was ever discussed on an empty stomach.”

“How strange,” Luke followed the Princess through the suites, “I’m pretty sure it’s happened at some point.”

“Maybe,” the two stepped into the turbolift, “But I think it was a way for my father to try and make me eat those tubers for breakfast.”

“Princess Leia wouldn’t eat her vegetables?”

“I hated them,” Leia admitted a smile in her eyes. “I wouldn’t eat them. They had to bribe me.”

“Wow,” Luke shook his head and took a moment to observe the troopers on either side of the door. Unsure if they would allow him to pass he took a cautious step. When neither of them stopped them he led Leia down the hall. Luke wasn’t much surprised when the two fell into step behind them. “I always ate whatever Aunt Beru set in front of me. I didn’t do to complain about food on Tatooine.”

“I can imagine.”

“Come one,” Luke scooped up her hand, “Let’s find Doora, I think it’s time we’ve all had a conversation without Father looming over us.”

Doora was enjoying sleeping in. No one had bothered to come make sure she was ready for the day’s lessons and wherever Captain Tang had gone off to she wasn’t paying attention to the former smuggler.
Sprawled across her bed and enjoy whatever weak sunlight had the galls to beam through the wretched atmosphere and trickle through her window and onto her body. Languid and relaxed for the first time in two and a half weeks, Doora felt her temper spike into the vicious range when someone knocked.

It didn’t sound like Tang and since the door hadn’t been tossed open it couldn’t be Vader. Annoyed but curious she forced herself to stand and answer the summons.

“Hey!” It was Luke Skywalker and the woman from before Lei…Lia…she didn’t remember.

“What are you doing?” She was sleepy and wanted to get back to her dozing.

“Don’t you want to eat breakfast?” Luke asked and Doora stared at the dark haired woman wearing something that Captain Tang might have.

“I thought meals were supposed to be separate.” She said, “I though they didn’t want us talking more than necessary.”

“What wouldn’t Lord Vader want that?”

“Don’t know,” Doora yawned and leaned against the door jam, “Don’t care, who are you?”

“Leia Organa.”

“That’s right! You’re the rebel.”

“I’m a rebel too.”

“Yeah, but you’re less famous than this lady here,” Doora said, “I remember you before the Death Star…..” It probably wasn’t nice to remind the woman that her planet had been destroyed. “You used to run mercy missions on the outer rim.”

“I did.”

“There was one…..on…” Doora bit her lip, “On Lentazi, after a quake.”

“Yes,” Leia eyed her curiously, “I remember that one.’

“Right,” Doora nodded and glared at the blond, “You said breakfast.”

“I did,” Luke smiled, “I think we can wrangle some from the cook. I think he likes me.”

“Doesn’t everyone?” She asked and heard the Princess chuckle.

“Not everyone,” An exaggerated pout overcame the boys features, “Sometimes they make fun of me and call me names.” His stare cut toward Doora who only flashed him a dark, toothy smile.

“Why, do you mock Commander Skywalker?” Princess Leia asked, her voice was the frosty tone that Doora recognized as an Imperial voice. “The Hero of the Rebel Alliance?”

“The Hero of the Oppressed?” Catching onto the act, Doora affected an equally frosty tone. She sounded entirely Imperial, “Did I mock Commander Skywalker? Madam Princess, it is my most sacred duty to protect the Empire and all of its inhabitants.”

“Since I have been forbidden from violence upon the Commander,” she gave a haughty sniff and jerked her head away from the annoyed blond, “I must use what weapons I have. My words and my wits are enough to make my points.”

“For the protection of the Empire,” Princess Leia intoned, “You must continue.”
“I am right here!”

“It is a simple task, Princess,” Doora nodded with exaggerated pride, “The boy is a simpleton and a ready target for insults of all types.”

“Indeed.” True arrogance that would only come from the most high born of citizens infused her words, “I expect you to be merciless. We cannot allow.”

“LEIA! DOORA! STOP IT!” Doora ignored the half-amused pouting that the rebel pilot was affecting. Instead, she tossed a perfect salute to the smirking princess.

“I will do my duty.”

“Excellent!”

“I don’t like either of you anymore,” Luke said, marching in front of them. The three of them pretended to ignore the snickering of the troopers. “I’m eating breakfast alone.”

“You do that,” With a flirty smile Doora linked her arm with Leia’s, “I’ve got some questions for you and I’m not leaving until they’re answered.”

“What kind of questions?” Princess Leia asked with a dangerous gleam in her eyes. Doora, knowing just what kind of damage the Princess could inflict and would, didn’t waver.

“About being a princess.” Doora said, “I know how to be a rebel and how to be a smuggler but what is life as a princess like? What is like as a Senator?”

Luke didn’t waver but she knew that the blond was listening intently for the answer and Princess Leia’s eyes were not wavering from Doora’s. The smuggler was leaner and just a tad taller than the rebel and neither one was backing down.

“Well,” Leia’s smile was almost wolfish and predatory, “I can’t imagine it’s as exciting as being a smuggler but.”

“I don’t want to know what happened,” Doora waved her free hand, “I want to know the crazy stuff rich people get. Do you guys really have people cook food for you all the time?”

“This is a strange conversation.” Luke muttered but didn’t interrupt when he ushered them into the kitchen. Only a second later the three were ushered out again and toward a dining room that looked like no one had used it in years.

“Yes.”

“People to do your hair?”

“Handmaidens are common in royal houses.”

“Really?”
“Doing my hair alone takes too long.”

“Weird.” Doora sat opposite of Leia and propped her head up on her hands, “You know I’ve never been in this room before.”

“Really?” Luke had, but only in passing.


“In my room, usually though sometimes we eat in the hanger.”

“That’s true,” she sighed and plopped her head onto the table, “where is Captain Tang?”

“I don’t know?”

“Where is Chewbacca,” Leia turned to Luke and then to Doora when her friend shrugged, “Do you know?”

“I have no idea,” Doora shrugged, “I’ve been confined to quarters of the last day and half. I don’t know what’s going on?”

“Really?”

“Does anyone know what’s going on?”

“So,” Princess Organa stood and marched toward the hallway. A few minutes later she came back with a pinched frown.

“Chewbacca is currently eating his own breakfast in his room,” She said, looking concerned, “I wonder why we have been ignored for so long.”

“I don’t think we’re being ignored,” Doora pointed at the clones who were still about, “Ten credits says they’re giving him updates when he wants them. Or Captain Tang knew we’d get together because Luke is an idealist who wants the galaxy to be friendly and she wants to keep us contained and under surveillance.”


“The Princess is a guest,” Doora leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes, “I think we’re the brat kids.”

“So what does that make Captain Tang?” A wicked grin crept up Luke’s mouth and Leia raised her eyebrows at the two.

“In the line up from holo family show clichés?”

“Yeah, where is Tang?”

“Either the….” Luke frowned, “I don’t watch much holo but I think she’d be the uptight career mother.”

“Right.” Leia knew that the troopers listening in to the conversation were laughing to themselves even if she heard nothing.

“So what does that make us?”
“I think the wild, troublemaking kids,” Luke said, “The kind that just want attention. Leia?”

“I don’t want attention and remember? I’m the guest who is putting up with you two.”

“So….what is Father?” Luke smirked when Doora answered.

“I’ve seen plenty of those old shows. He’s the…what the word…”

“Nothing insulting.” The blond warned and smiled at the teenagers pout.

“Fine, obviously the pipe smoking, sweater vest wearing kind that only drinks the best vintages and doesn’t have time for his kid’s chaos,” Doora’s smile was wide and she laughed to herself, “The kind who nitpicks and spends all the time scolding the kids.”

Leia was too decorous a princess to laugh like a maniac but Luke had no such reservations. He buried his face in his arms and howled.

“And then,” Doora sucked in a huffing laugh as her laughter began to overwhelm her words, “Carries one of those briefcases and spends dinner talking about who he met at the office!”

“Every meal is planned,” Luke interjected, “There’s a strict menu and a time and place for everything. You know, like those people who don’t know what to do with themselves if they don’t have every minute planned.”

A few more clever observations and all three were laughing.

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Gohan was more than willing to revel in the astonished admiration of her group but she had work to be doing.

“What are we going to be doing about the Warden and Lolz?” Kick asked, leaning across the table to grab at the little bowl of nuts that was sitting on the map.

“I plan on taking us on a hike,” she said, “We’re going to start setting up our own communication systems so we’re going to scouting for a place. That’s going to be our cover and since the communications are impossible that far out it won’t be out of place.”

“Will the Warden buy it?”

“He’d better; he’s skimming more and more off the petty cash. If he doesn’t want a trail for embezzlement then he’ll ignore us missing for a little longer.”

“I still don’t think this is going to work?” Andro sighed, “I mean, it makes sense but stealing that garbage scow is going to be a nightmare.”

“You and I are the only ones going to Imperial Center. Kicks, you get to bomb the ISB headquarters. Set as many of their prisoners loose as possible and steal some stuff. Newk, you’re going to be robbing the Galactic Empire Treasury blind; make off with the nicest things you can get your hands on. Los,” the Twi’lek perked up, “You do your best to make the holo net go crazy. Play one of those music videos that people hate on loop for as long as possible.

“Boss,” Newk rolled his eyes as he rolled himself a new cigarette, “We know what to do.”

“I know you do,” Gohan eyed the pile of explosives that had been piling up for two days now, “I just like to remind myself how much trouble we’re going to get in.”
“You think if they catch us we’ll get a trial?” Andro asked.

“I think we’ll get a firing squad,” Kick replied, “I don’t think we’ll get a blindfold either.”

“Don’t think about it,” Gohan ordered, “We’ve got a job to do and no whole lot of time to do it. So, let’s get moving.”
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Palpatine is creepy and awful. Leia and Vader almost have a talk but Tang is not ready to indulge Skywalker family drama. Doora is an awful enabler and Luke is easily manipulated into doing something stupid.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The interesting thing about public records was the fact that they could be accessed by anyone with enough gumption to march into an Imperial outpost and demand to see them.

The most annoying thing about public records was the fact that they could be accessed by anyone with enough gumption to march into an Imperial outpost and demand to see them.

It was this reason that Emperor Palpatine gritted his teeth and fumed. There was no reason to assume that this story wasn’t going to make galactic headlines in a few weeks. There was no reason to assume that his apprentice hadn’t done this on purpose and if it had been on purpose then it spoke of a frighteningly clever manipulation of the public that Palpatine hadn’t anticipated yet.

“How have you verified the authenticity of this file yet?” The man cowering at the bottom of the dais nodded fervently.

“Yes, your majesty. It was signed by both the captain of the ship and Lord Vader himself. The notary is one that serves aboard the Executor and the whole thing is perfectly legitimate. It is odd but the entire process was legal.”

“What, my friend, are your thoughts on the matter?” Palpatine tapped the image of the dark haired teenager and frowned deeply.

“I believe it is very odd, your majesty.” Sub-Director of the Intelligence Security Bureau Allen Kon spoke with bated breath and he blinked away sweat. “Director Isard has nothing to say on the matter and we cannot wipe it from public record without arousing suspicions.”

Allen Kon was a stupidly honest man with a genuine desire to change the galaxy and Palpatine had only allowed him to continue for so long because the man had found genuine threats from other Imperial officials. Of course, he also had every moment of the man’s life under surveillance just as every other person with an iota of power did. The fool had no idea that every single one of his aides were spies.

“It is a puzzle,” Palpatine said, “one that will resolve itself in time.”

“Your majesty?”

“My apprentice is an enigma to some but I know,” Palpatine bestowed up on the man a sickly smile that left the being shaking in his boots, “every bit of his mind. I know him better than he knows himself and he is trying to replace a treasure he once lost with a cheap imitation. There is no part of Vader that I do not know.” For several seconds there was dead silence in the throne room, “Go, Sub-
Director. I am sure you have open cases to attend to.”

“Thank you for your time, your majesty,” Kon bowed and scurried from the room.

“What games are you playing, Vader?” He wondered to the mostly empty throne room. “What are you doing?”

The genuine comradery between Luke and the small teenager was enviable. Leia could not remember such relaxed company in all her years as Princess, Senator and then General. She certainly would have never insulted, however jokingly, her high powered friends and companions. Whatever shadows that lurked behind Doora’s eyes seemed to lessen every time she laughed, which, as the day went on was more and more often.

Luke’s humor, which had always been a bit skewed and morally ambiguous, was nothing compared to the smugglers. Doora’s humor was dark. It was almost gallows humor with a good number of highly inappropriate jokes that would have made rogue squadron laugh themselves sick.

Which made Leia wonder….why.

Why had Vader bothered to keep the two alive? Luke, at least, she understood. He was apparently powerful in the force and would make an excellent apprentice. Luke could fly and could crunch probability better than any program. If Luke was really Vader’s son then some element of emotional attachment had to exist and since it was Vader Leia was skeptical. She had seen how Luke lived in the castle.

Some of the books he had available had been banned on Alderann. A planet that had been famous for ignoring the censorship demands of the Empire. Vader wasn’t beyond manipulating his son because Leia had taken a look at those books. Most of them seemed completely far-fetched, nothing more than well written fairy tales.

If Leia understood why Vader had kept Luke alive then she was completely flummoxed as to why he allowed Doora to live.

She was crass, angry and bitter with no respect for authority but it was obvious, only to someone who was trained to notice, that Doora could be much worse. What use did Vader have for the smuggler? Why would he conscript her? Possessive stih tendencies aside it made no sense. Doora said it was repayment for her crimes, something she had bought a day ago but now it was different.

Lord Vader had a plan.

Leia tapped her fingers against her chair and watched the two across the room for a moment longer. It was curious.

What was he doing?

On the other side of the security cameras, Captain Tang chewed on the edge of her stylus and nodded. A moment later she returned to the conference room and waved for the attention of Vader and Chewbacca.

“Organa is suspicious,” She said, “She putting pieces together and I think it is time for her to meet the plan.”
“A solid decision,” Vader observed, “Bring Princess Organa to me.”

“Aye, milord.”

Doora wasn’t stupid. Though she often seemed slower and a bit more foolish than most one didn’t survive so long on their own by being idiotic.

She didn’t trust Vader and she knew what questions Princess Organa was thinking.

Why hadn’t she been killed yet? It wasn’t as if she hadn’t tried to antagonize the Sith but every time she pushed a button he had reacted against script.

“Princess Organa,” all three stopped their various activities to watch Captain Tang stride into the room.

“Captain Tang,” Organa’s dark eyes flashed with lightening, “Please accompany me,” Tang stepped to one side and gestured to the door, “Lord Vader would like a few words.”

“I see.” Princess Organa had an ominous way of pronouncing those two simple words. Doora shrugged and pretended to focus on the procedures in front of her. Luke blinked a few times but didn’t move. “Very well.” Leia set her borrowed datapad onto the table and with a nod to Luke, followed Captain Tang out of the room.

“So,” Doora waited until the door had been shut for a few minutes before speaking to the worried blond, “Is there any reason that Princess here is so damn odd around you? Once second she’s cool and the next she’s all warm….what’s up with that?”

“Well, she knows that Vader is my father.” The blue eyed side eye was impressive but Doora wasn’t cowed.

“So what? Technically he’s mine too.” She shook her head, “You rebels are a strange bunch.”

“Doora….I don’t think…seriously. It’s a little different.”

“How can it be? I bet he’s got you on the same program I’m on. Why else would he stick you with all that annoying book learning? You’re just a pilot, blondie. You’re really not all that special. I don’t see why everyone cares so damn much.”

Doora shook her head. She didn’t notice the contemplative look that overtook Luke’s face.

“You don’t mind being siblings?”

“I could have worse.”

Something inside his chest twinged painfully when his daughter strode into the room with the bearing of a goddess. The force flared around her, a brilliant halo proclaiming destiny and strength. Fire smoldered in her gaze and fury wreathed around her shoulders in a shawl that draped to the pits of hell.

So much like her mother.
“Princess,” he gave the barest of nods.

“Lord Vader.” She did not extend the same courtesy.

“There are many dramatic way I could begin this conversation but I assure you that they are unnecessary. You have only survived this long in my personal abode by the grace of your position and political sway. You have the ability to control and coerce the Rebel Alliance High Command and the hearts and minds of millions more. As the singular most identifiable rebel in the known galaxy you are in the unique position to do great.”

“What do you want, Vader?”

“Simply put. I want your cooperation. I have a plan to dethrone Palpatine and replace his corrupt mess of a government with a stable, more just one.”

Immediately her force signature flared with shock but her face remained impassive.

“That is quite the claim and the most arrogant assumption that I have heard yet. You think you can defeat the Emperor?”

“You believe I cannot do better than some haphazard collection of political fools with a polished memory of the past that is truly a lie?” He didn’t want to have to reeducate his daughter but he would if necessary.

“I am well aware that the Old Republic was not perfect.”

“I do not think you know the true extent of its crime but it is no matter. The plan I have for the galaxy will not restore the Republic but will replace both with a better government. I will not aid the rebellion in aiding the return of a nightmare but I will lend my power and intelligence to a proper rebellion.”

“Why would we need your help?” She demanded, “Until this moment you have been our most hated enemy.”

“Circumstances have changed,” Vader said, “I will make my demands abundantly clear and they will be non-negotiable.”

“And if I do not agree to them?”

“Then you will not leave this castle.”

“Alive?” Her voice turned brittle. Vader tucked his thumbs into his belt and allowed her to come to her own conclusions. Though there was no universe that existed where he would kill his daughter, if push came to shove he would imprison her here until the Emperor had been removed.

“These demands are for you, Princess.”

Tang nodded at Vader’s gesture and activated a datapad which she then passed to the princess.

“First, I will need access to all intelligence reports that come in and out of the Rebellion. I will need personnel records and files on every member that is signed on. Secondly, I will need to be able to pass commands to the specialized teams that answer to the rebellion. Yes, I do know about the thieves and burglars that are on contract with the Alliance.” Leia narrowed her eyes but did not speak. Vader could feel anger condensing around her to form rock and stone. “Thirdly, there are many people I need alive for the time being and they will be encountered in the course of the
rebellion. These people must be allowed to complete their missions.”

“We do not need your help, Vader.” Hoth nights weren’t much colder than her frigid tone but he was nonplussed. “We can destroy the Empire without your help.”

“You cannot,” Tang spoke up, “If you continued your tactics that you favor now that only thing you would accomplish would be a drawn out civil war that would make the clone wars look like a school yard brawl. That would only happen if the Alliance actually became a credible threat.”

“I have believed,” Leia looked through the window and then back at the Sith, “that I had seen the Empire in the highest point of arrogance when Alderann was destroy. I thought that they could not reach such ridiculous heights of foolishness but it seems I was wrong.”

“Princess.”

“NO!” her voice cut Vader off, “If you think I would hand you the Alliance on a silver platter then you’re more of an idiot than Tarkin. Why would I allow you full access to our records and our intelligence and our teams? What could you possibly offer me to even consider this proposal? Why would you think I would believe you for a second? I suppose you also want me to keep your identity from the High Command?”

“Yes.” The flat admission derailed her furious rant. Leia blinked a few times before she nodded for him to continue. “I do not trust Mothma or Fre’lya. Your Alliance will eat itself from the inside out if my name is revealed. To even begin to successfully dethrone the Emperor then I must remained anonymous.”

“A secret puppeteer?” The scathing rejoined made Tang flinch but Vader didn’t react. For several minutes the only sound was Vader’s breathing until he spoke.

“For the time being. As a show of good faith I am releasing two Thunder class destroyers from their docks two weeks ahead of schedule. The raid will look as it belongs to the Hutts but the ships will be left in the hands of the Rebellion. Furthermore, I will be releasing you and Command Skywalker back to the custody of your anarchist friends. For you, Princess, a former jedi is ready and waiting to train you.”

“I do not need training.” Leia snarled, hand curling into fists. “And this farce of a negotiation is.”

‘You have no doubt noticed the power in your heart.” Vader overran her claims with carelessness, “The electricity that floods your veins. You can sense people, their thoughts and their emotions. You can feel a thunderstorm in your soul and you do not understand. This, Princess, is the force. This is the power of the jedi and of the sith. You have this power and you must learn how to control it before you harm yourself and those around you.”

“I am not force sensitive,” She shook her head, “I have been tested every year my whole life. I am not.”

“You are and you know it. Do not deny your birthright.”

“Can we move this along?” Tang stood finally, “I realize how traumatic and important this all is but if we don’t start now we never will. Princess, you are force sensitive. Deal with it, Ahsoka Tano is waiting on the planet Malachor. She will help you. I don’t want to sound insensitive but we’re on a tight schedule. Believe it or not government coups do not wait on the sentimentality of one person. “Both Tang and Vader knew that was a lie. “We have here the opportunity to change the course of galactic history. I cannot wait, they,” Tang jabbed a hand toward the ceiling in indication of the
citizens at large, “Cannot wait. We not need the Alliance but you will ease he process. Palpatine is going down and whether or not you’re a part of that process is entirely up to you.” Her hand smack upon the datapad and she didn’t seem to notice Lord Vader’s dark glare aimed at the back of her head. “The soldiers captured at Hoth are scheduled for mass execution in eight days.”

“How dare you! They are prisoners for war!”

“Technically they aren’t,” Tang waved at Vader, “I won’t get into the rules and regulations of war that you’ve been ignoring but know that this execution is technically legal It will not happen if you agree to our demands. Those troopers deaths will be faked and the rebellion can come retrieve them later. Also, I think two Thunder class destroyers are a perfectly nice gift to show how much we want to help.”

“At this point.” Leia drew herself up in a way that made Vader appreciate how much patience Bail Organa must have had to deal with his daughter and her temper. “You have done nothing but make demands and threats. You say, Lord Vader, you have a plan to ruin the Empire and I will not even begin to consider your proposal until I know what it is.”

“Fair enough,” the holo table flickered to life. Princess Leia stared at the bright blue scene until her brain finally caught up with what she was seeing.

“You don’t think?”

“I do.”

“This is….ambitious.”

“Indeed.” When Leia did not speak further he continued, “I will grant you time to speak to your companion but you cannot contact the rebel Alliance. Whatever decision you make to today is done for the entire rebellion. Is this clear?”

“Yes,” Princess Leia waited a moment, “I will need to speak with Chewbacca.”

“Of course,” He held a hand toward the door, “Captain Tang will escort you. You have five hours.”

“Thank you,” Leia vanished from the room with Tang close behind. Moments later the ex-separatist reentered and flashed him a thumbs up.

The question of whether or not Leia will accept our proposal is what remains”

“Organa is not stupid,” Tang’s force signature was radiate smug, “She’ll agree.”

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Luke accepted the element that Doora passed him, “Where am I flying again?”

“You’re not really flying anywhere,” Doora said, “We want to see what happens if you push the ship into a redline.”

“Into redline?”

“This is just a test,” Doora checked over his buckles once last time, “We want to see if the ship holds. You go out and do some stunts and fly back It shouldn’t be that hard.”

“What about the acid rain,” Luke rolled his neck and gave Doora a thumbs up.
“I checked the radar, nothing for a few hours so we’ve got plenty of time to see if the mods to engine hold.”

“What if the ship blows up?”

“You’ve got a parachute on your back, Blue is your primary and red is your secondary, roll when you hit the ground and whatever you do don’t let the string get tangled in something. I stuck a tracker in your suit so if somethings goes wrong then we’ll be able to pick you up!”

“You don’t think….we shouldn’t do this. Father might not be happy.”

“I cannot believe you call him Father,” She rolled her eyes, “And I don’t why not. It’s not like I hacked everything and I’m sure that you’re not going to die in the fiery crash. Besides…” She smile was sharp and dark, “Think of how much fun this is going to be. You get to fly a ship over 300 years old.”

“Let’s see how fast I can get this lady moving.” Luke tightened his grip on the joystick and nodded to Door a when the windshield began to descend.

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Tang frowned as her datapad pinged with an update and nearly tossed the damn thing into a wall when she saw what it read.

“Lord Vader,” the man turned, “We have an unauthorized take off from your personal hanger bay.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey! If you're still reading this train wreck of a fic....let me know. Tell me what you think and give me your ideas b/c there is good chance I'll use them.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Doora's education shows. Luke is excited for all of a hot second. Tang can't deal with teenagers any longer. Vader (surprise, surprise) is a strict parent. Leia doesn't show up but know she's talking with Chewie about accepting Vader's offer.

Chapter Notes

A day late but done. Also, I think I've made Vader into a pretty strict parent but tell me what you think. Also! Thanks for everyone who comments. Know that I love you and hope you do it as often as humanly possible.

“How do you think the wing welds are holding?” Doora’s voice crackled of his headset while Luke twisted around in a delicate spin. “Those ones are new.”

“From what I can see,” Luke took another glance out the viewport, “They seem to be holding up just fine. I wouldn’t worry just yet.”

“And the engine lights?” The headset crackled a bit.

“Steady in the green,” he pushed more power into his forward thrust. “We’re holding clear.”

“Great!” There was an element of unrestrained excitement in her voice that Luke hadn’t heard before. “If the calibrations hold this could be the first of a new line of Starfighter engine.”

“Really?” Luke pulled back on the joystick, sending the ship hurtling toward space. “Why do you say that?”

“I may or may not design engines.” She said, “I’ve had to do it so I can rewire just about any ship in the galaxy.”

“Any ship, huh. There’s one I think you might like. My friend owns it, it’s the Millennium Falcon and I think you’d love her.”

“Your friend?” She sounded confused.

“The ship, you’d love her.”

“Oh,” Doora went silent, “Luke, take a look at the rear thruster signs and tell me what you see.”

“Hold on, the lights indicate everything is clear. Do you think the light might be faulty?”

“What does it say about landing gear?”

“That’s in the green…oh no…it’s in the red.”
“Don’t try to deploy landing gears.” Doora’s voice transformed into something that would not be out of place in an Imperial ship, calm, collected and perfectly in control she navigated the small crisis with astonishing grace. Considering this was someone Luke had witness throw a fit over assignments it was more than a little startling. “It could just be a simple miswiring on the light.”

“I hope it is.” Luke could easily land this ship without landing gear but he didn’t want to mess up their work. Plus, his father would probably be angry enough as it was and damaging the ship to an unrecognizable heap would take him somewhere he really didn’t want to go. “I don’t think Father is going to be happy with us.”

“Hmmmm, probably not.” She sounded too calm. “Alright, Luke, I want you to flick the two switches for forward and back landing gear but don’t leave them switched for more than three seconds.”

“What makes you think this is going to work?” Luke belatedly realized he didn’t have the force at his disposal and couldn’t use it to see how this might end.

“Do it, Luke.” The perfectly calm tone did help settle his haywire nerves so he did as requested. A moment later the lading gear lights flickered back to green.

“They’re back on!” He crowed, “Do you think this thing can handle a free fall?”

“I don’t see why not,” the professional coolness vanished, leaving the rough and uncouth smuggler behind. “Give it a go.”

Whooping with glee, Luke aimed the ship toward the ground and let the engine die. At a plummeting free fall he roared with excitement. There was nothing so half as satisfying as plummeting toward the impossible ground at breakneck speeds and catching the engines a few miles above rock. Just in time to pull the ship into a sharp recovery and speed, parallel to the ground, even after.

#S34

“Someone has inexpertly hacked into our systems and is piggybacking off the power.” Tang scrolled through the data on her padd with a fierce expression, “They didn’t block the launch but they’re hiding what kind of information they’re pulling up. It looks as if one person if flying and the other is monitoring the flight. If we want to know what is really going on we’re going to need to find the terminal they’re working from.” She glanced up at Vader and found herself pitying the teenager and rebel.

“Captain, Lord Vader, we’ve accounted for all of the terminals in the castle but have not located the prince and the smuggler.”

“Doora is working from a datapad,” Vader said suddenly, “Sargent, take men to the official hanger bay and do a thorough sweep of it and the adjoining rooms. Captain, we will sweep my hanger ourselves.”

“Aye,” Tang flick on the comm unit encircling her neck, “All units, if you find the two restrain them calmly. Do not attack and do not harm.”

Vader was already moving. His son, he sensed, was already in the air. Whatever bursts of static emotion he could get from the boy were all ecstatic and joyful. Apparently his son was enjoying his mischief. Leia, on the other hand, was a swarm of confused anger and stern intelligence going to work. He could not be distracted from his task of bringing his son from the skies at the moment.

“What is on the weather radar on the moment?”
“They’ve chosen their time wisely,” Tang begrudging admiration only highlighted how annoyed she was, “There isn’t anything incoming for hours. That should be more than enough time to get them down and deal with them.”

Vader did not give any reply.

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“She’s handling like a dream, Doora!” Luke’s voice was heady mix of excitement and unbridled joy that made her grin simply from listening to it.

“Great, we’re reading all clear back here.” The four datapads she had hooked up together all showed green and it was clear that their worked was holding. “I need you to try a vertical corkscrew. I need to see how the inertia dampeners handle.”

“On it,” the cameras on nose of the camera showed Luke tossing the ship into a tight formation and streaking though the cloudless Vjun skies.

“This is amazing! I should have thought of doing this a lot earlier.” Doora muttered to herself, “If I had known how easy it was to steal a ship I’d done this a lot earlier.” Too late, she heard, through the headset, the mechanical breathing of her foster father. Doora knew, in the moment when a giant hand landed on her shoulder, just how a shaak felt facing a butcher. Or how a single Starfighter felt against an entire squadron of TIEs…not the last one because she had done the last one and had not felt anywhere near a frightened as she did now. The only thing saving her from panic now was the recollection of her conversation with Luke earlier.

So far Vader had been nothing more than a self-imposed and overbearing parent and she clung to that thought when he bodily spun the pilfered chair around. She felt like a bug under the lens of a toddler's magnifying lens, exposed and tiny. In a bizarre and sudden fit of insecurity she cringed back.

“Does this not strike you as forbidden?” Vader was still holding onto her shoulder and she was trying to restart her heart. To his left she made out the tan form of Captain Tang but she didn’t engage the woman. “Or did you simply decided to act upon your contrary understanding of the dynamics of this household?”

“Um,” her voice was a few octaves too high and she wasn’t sure where this was going and didn’t like it.

“Clearly you are a poor influence upon Luke. I know that he could not be swayed to be so disobedient without inappropriate peer pressure.”

A dose of highly unseemly pleasure had Doora laughing before her gimp sense of self-preservation could kick in. “HAHAHA! SWEET! AHHH!” Doora didn’t have to time to properly duck away from the looming Sith as his grip changed from her shoulder to tear the headset from around her ears and toss them to the waiting majordomo.

“Summon Skwalker,” he growled and steadfastly ignored Doora’s yelling. “Inform him that I am… displeased.”

Tang saluted and watched Vader pull a protesting Doora from the hanger, yelling the entire way.

“YOU’RE GOING TO PULL MY EAR OFF! LET GO! THAT’S MY ONLY EAR!” Tang raised an eyebrow. “OWOWOWOWOWOWOWOWOWOWOWOWOWOWOWOW! LET GO! LET GO!” The swirling back cap vanished around the corner and eventually Doora’s protests died down as well. This Tang
attributed to the fact that they gone out of hearing range and not the fact Doora had stopped yelling. She wondered if Vader had always had the propensity to collect intolerably bad tempered teenagers or if it was a new thing of his. Watching her boss drag his unwilling foster daughter from the hanger by her ear immediately when to the “Top Twenty Things Tang Cannot Explain Properly”. Shaking her head she slipped on the headset and admired the display Doora had been pulled from. Their work on the ship must have progressed faster than she’d anticipated. Part of the work had been designed to keep Skywalker from getting a bad case of cabin fever and also working to habilitate Doora with working with someone else.

The two were an impressive team.

“Skywalker,” It did her heart good to hear his ecstatic yelling die down to sudden silence when her voice cut him off. “I have been ordered to inform you that Lord Vader is displeased with your recent stunt.”


“I’m not sure as to the fate of the smuggler though I cannot imagine it would be pleasant.”

“Is Doora alright? What happened?”

“I will make no speculations as to what awaits Doora,” She could speculate but really had no desire to. “However, I am also told that you need to make a landing as soon as possible as you too, are in hot water.”

“We’re just testing out work on the ship,” Luke grumbled and none of the cameras or readings indicated he was slowing down. “I don’t see why that ought to matter.”

“I’m not going to bother explaining it,” Tang replied, “Just know you need to come down.”

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The only thing keeping Doora from dissolving into a panicked and hysterical lump of teenager was the memory that Vader had never actually done anything to hurt her before.

Except now. When he apparently thought that the best way to drag her around the palace was to use her ear. It worked, supremely well, because he was just too tall and moved too fast for Doora to keep a comfortable pace with him. Plus, Vader seemed comfortable with ignoring everything she was saying at the moment anyway.

The moment they reached the door to her room Vader pushed her and followed second later, finally releasing her sore ear.

“You’ve ripped my ear off,” she sulked, massaging the tender appendage, “This is my good ear.” Doora wasn’t sure what she was doing. She felt as if she was speeding in free fall in a ship and unable to stop herself from digging her metaphorical grave deeper and deeper with each word. “What was that for?”

“Tell me,” Vader hooked his thumbs into his belt. The familiar sensation of impending doom returned. Doora had never had the opportunity to be called before an intimidating professor or some stern nanny but guessed the sensation was similar. “Have you taken the time to read the list of rules that the Captain provided you with or did you use it as a building material on that half-flying junk pile you’ve reconstructed?”

“It’s not half constructed!” She replied, still sulking and hoping that he would act as he had thus far
and just leave in her room for a few days. Plus, it seemed she was already in deep trouble so why not go for broke? “It flies pretty well!”

“Be silent,” the rumbling bass of his voice was even more frightening that usual. It sounded cold and dark, like the depths of space before you pulled the hyperspace lever. Doora shut up. For several minutes Vader was silent, as if organizing his thoughts. “Tell me,” he said, “At any point of your stay on Vjun have I, or any of my subordinates treated you unfairly or cruelly?”

“I…what?”

“Answer the question.”

“Does it matter?”

“Yes, it does.”

“Well you did just tear my ear off.” Doora crossed her arms and looked away. For a while the only sound was the regulated breathing of the Sith. There was a sulking, hot rage that lurked in her chest when she spat out the next few words. Correctly guessing that Vader wasn’t going to leave unless she actually answered him, “I guess not.”

“You guess?”

“Alright fine! NO! Everyone’s been fair and it’s usually my fault I got yelled at!”

“Usually?” Vader didn’t seem any happier than she but he was still pushing.

“Always,” she grumbled, “my fault.”

“Then why, for all the patience you have been granted and the many graces, would you continue to actively sabotage your opportunities by breaking as many rules as unadvisedly possible?” The man sounded much calmer now and that a lot more frightening then Vader yelling. “Seeking out a crashed ship as if those it carried could not have been dangerous to this castle and the inhabitants. Pressuring another to take a ship up that has no flown in over 200 years with only the basic work of repair! Is there nothing that seems too foolish and dangerous to you?”

Doora’s arms were entwined to tightly it was almost hard for her to breath past the pressure on her chest. She did her best to not let her bottom lip but it was difficult and being faced with her mistakes and stupidity was making it even harder. Usually she didn’t have to confront her mess-ups and would usually leave them far behind. It was hard and knowing that Vader was right made it even worse.

“Does it matter?” She wasn’t looking at him but at the window and glaring at the ugly landscape.

“Explain yourself.”

“I mean the whole point of this learning and training was so you can toss me into a TIE and watch me blow up the first few seconds into my first battle. Then you get to say I was paying my duty to society for being a smuggler and get to have the whole galaxy agree with you. There’s no point! I get to be pretty cannon fodder that people don’t feel bad about. What was the point of fostering me if you can’t wait for me to die?!” She felt her voice getting louder and louder, chest heaving with desperate and distressed breathing until Doora was shouting at the Sith. “There’s not point! I wish that Princess had shot me because then I wouldn’t have to do this stupid thing pretending to be an Imperial!” Her voice cracked much to her embarrassment and she ducked her head.
Vader didn’t respond. In fact, he didn’t even move. It as if a giant had suddenly been dropped into her room and. Doora didn’t know when she’d started calling this place ‘her room’ and that was frightening.

“Perhaps, I have not explained this situation properly.” Doora didn’t reply with the sarcastic rejoined on her tongue because if she opened her mouth she’d start crying. “You are not cannon fodder and being re-educated for an untimely death at the hands of my enemies. You are the first of many in a social program I have been constructing for some time now. As you are aware there are a distressingly number of children living in poverty and crime through no fault of their own, such as yourself. They are victims of circumstance and poorly handled history. It is my wish to institute and re-education program that will help them emerge from destitution and become prosperous citizens. You were…an experiment. To see if the program would work, thus far I would say it does not.” What he didn’t tell her was that the program was only a little over two weeks old and the collective brainchild of Tang and Vader.

“But I thought you wanted….why…what….WHAT? Why didn’t you tell me that!” Her distress was understandable so he did not reprimand her for her volume.

“That too was part of the experiment,” he lied. Vader had fully intending to do what Door had accused him of until inspiration had struck and he decided to use the unique opportunity to his advantage. This social program would serve as a useful distraction for the Emperor and the galaxy at large. Nothing of the scale he would proposing had been done in living memory which had been remarked upon by the actuaries he had had do the number crunching. It was incredibly satisfying to see the astonished expression on her face considering all of the trouble she’d caused up to this point. “I thought that if provided with a stable environment that you would begin to see that you need not fight for your survival. As you are my responsibility it is my duty care for your needs and that you would not need to. Thus taken care of you would begin to focus on education. Do not think I do not know about the horde of food you have hidden in here.”

“I…” Doora took a step back and fell silent.

“You have been anticipating needing to store food in case I had your rations cut off as punishment.”

“Uh…yeah.”

“That will not happen,” Vader promised.

“Oh.” Doora didn’t look up, feeling smaller and younger than she ever had. The hot coals in the furnace of her heart that had stoke her anger and age which had served at her fuel for so long had suddenly been doused in freezing water. Vader didn’t lie, she knew much. She hated to admit it but Vader hadn’t lied once to her.

“You must realize the mistakes you have made.” Vader spoke again, “Reckless disobedience, disrespect, and general rudeness. Do you believe that the Executor will somehow be more forgiving?”

“No.” Thin shoulder sagged when Doora finally…finally realized what she’d done.

“Why did you behave so poorly then?”

Doora’s expression tightened with a deep-seated bitterness that would take much longer to sooth. She expelled a deep breath and glowered, “I don’t know.”

“That is not an answer,” Vader rebuked her.
“I don’t know!” She waved her hand, stamping a foot. “I don’t know why I did it I just did it!”

“It did not occur to you that taking a 300 year old starship flying out not be wise? That enemies might be lying in wait for the curious wanderer? Did you not think of the considerable danger you put Luke into when pressured him into flying it?”

“You make it sound like I’m the one who did all the pressuring. Don’t you think Luke had anything to do with it? He’s the rebel pilot.”

“Luke is well-versed with my methods of discipline. He would not have risked such punishment unless he had been goaded.”

“Well…..it’s still not all my fault,” Doora sulked again.

“You still have yet to answer my question, child,” Vader observed.

“I’m not a child!” The statement was ruined when the smuggler stamped her feet. “I’m not!”

“Let me deduce for you then, shall I? Firstly, your impression of you fate clearly were an important role in your poor decision. Secondly, as I have been much distracted of late I have not had the opportunity to deal with your transgressions properly.”

“Properly? What do you mean properly?”

“Thus, you clearly felt that the consequences of your actions were negligible and mocked them. This, I suppose, is a symptom of improperly established boundaries. Am I correct?” He was right. Of course he was right. Doora didn’t need to admit it out loud, she was squirming where she stood, but was forced to anyway.

“I guess…..but what do you mean properly? That sounds ominous.”

“Indeed,” Doora wondered what the meant up to the point when he seized her arm (gently) and pulled her toward the single chair in the room. She had not reservations about throwing a squalling, shrieking fit the second it occurred to her what her foster father had planned. Having never had anything resembling a parental figure Doora was unfamiliar with the action but was well familiar with the concept.

“STOP! STOP! STOP! YOU CAN’T DO THIS! NO! NO! NO!” Vader did not grace her with a reply of any kind. His actions were inexorable and no amounts of her protests were going to make him stop. With an up close view of the carpet and folded neatly over huge armored knees Doora had almost no time to contemplate the humiliating position before the first blow landed. None of her flailing did her any good except now Vader was holding her free arm back and she was completely vulnerable. “CUT IT OUT! OW! STOP! STOP! LET GO!”

Unlike Luke, Doora did not suffer from the same brand of pride that prevented her from reacting to the spanking. She made her thoughts about the punishment clear. Doora hollered and yelled every time he spanked. Her squirming protests did nothing to deter Vader from meting out the necessary punishment to the reckless and unprincipled teenager. He said nothing, leaving what remained of his lecture until after he had finished spanking her.

Doora had been in mortifying situations before. Ones that had stripped of her dignity and pride but nothing compared to the humiliation of being punished like she was some seven year that threw a temper tantrum. She was completely immobile, a huge hand was pinning her hand to her back and the other was striking her rear with an even tempo. Each second that passed only worsened the building sting. What was worse was that Vader remained perfectly silent save for the regulated
breathing that was drowned out by the ensuing spanking. He didn’t lecture and scold like he had been doing before. He was relentless and firm, not giving Doora the slightest bit of leeway. She was well aware of the moment she started crying, noisily and deeply. Beneath the onslaught her yelling protests died off to simple crying.

When Doora stopped shouting Vader knew he had reached his objective. She had gone limp, sobs shaking her thin shoulders. When he stopped the former smuggler didn’t move until he helped her to her feet. Her crying deepened and she wouldn’t look at him, instead she buried her face in an elbow.

“I trust,” he said gently, “that I have established the boundaries you have ignored?”

Her response was tear-soaked and incompressible but Doora nodded and Vader accepted it as an answer.

“I will leave you to collect yourself,” he applied the slightest of pressure to her shoulder in the direction of her bed and retreated as soon as he could.

Vader still had his son left to deal with.

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Doora collapsed face first onto her bed. Not even bothering watch Darth Vader sweep from the room. All she wanted to do was sit here and cry. To pretend that nothing had happened and that she totally didn’t feel guilty about her general thoughtlessness. She buried her face into a pillow and cried.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

You all get what you really came here for! Plus you learn some scary stuff about Tang.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tang’s expression was curiously blank when Luke descended from this newly repaired ship. She was staring at several datapads wired together and occasionally checking one that lay on her lap.

“Where’s Doora?” He advanced slowly on the Captain, checking around for his father.

“She’s occupied at the moment.” Tang said quietly, still not looking his direction.

“Is she alright?” He couldn’t imagine what his father could do to Doora and really didn’t want to think about it. “What happened?”

“I couldn’t hazard a guess,” Tang stood and Luke swallowed back a nervous bite of fear. “Good flight?”

“Until a point,” he said carefully, “What’s wrong?”

“For me? Nothing. Though I’m sure your father has a bone to pick with you. He seemed displeased.” Luke swallowed down a sudden surge in fear and the echoing memory of his father’s dire promise resounded through his head.

“Uh…” His mouth was suddenly dry, “Why?”

“I’m not sure,” Tang rolled her shoulders and waved for him to follow, “Though I’m sure it has something to do with your flying a 300 year old fighter with only basic repairs. It might also have something to do with the unregistered and illegal take off of said fighter. Curiously enough it could have something to do with the disruptions of his negotiations. Honestly though? I’m not sure.” Tang escorted him to the waiting turbo lift while Luke felt the icy trembling of nerves that made it difficult to think clearly.


“Whatever his feelings, Lord Vader will need to articulate them himself, I am simply the majordomo.”

“Uh huh.” Luke fell silent, sensing that Tang was not going to say much to him anymore.

Tang didn’t move from the turbolift when he let him out on his own floor. She also said nothing while Luke stumbled from the lift and watched the door hiss closed.

“I’m in trouble,” he said to the empty rooms.

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His father didn’t keep him waiting long. Luke was pacing his small bedroom when he heard the turbolift arrive. The regulated hiss of the respirator was something of a comfort under normal circumstances but at the moment it was highly unnerving.

“Luke,” his father said and the rebel froze in his pacing, “I would like to have a word with you.”

“A word? How inept did he think Luke was? He might not have been tuned to the force at the moment but his father’s intent was colored all over his words.


“Hey, Father,” his smile was a little forced and felt a lot more like a grimace. “What’s?”

“Tell me,” His father cut him off for the second time and hooked his hands in his belt while Luke dithered some feet away. “What seemed prudent about your actions this morning? Did it occur to you that the ship you were flying might have been unfit for flight and practice combat maneuvers?”

“I...well...no.”

“Then it would seem that taking such a ship for a flight even though you were not cleared of a flight and that your cohort spliced a system illegally; was a good idea?”


“Then it would seem that Doora is a poor influence. You will not be associating with her again.”

“WHAT!” Luke’s head shot up and he glared at his father. “You can’t do that! It’s not like it was all her fault. You can’t say she stuffed me in the ship and made me fly it. That’s not fair!”

“I have no interest in being fair.”

“Well that’s obvious!” Luke crossed his arms over his chest to keep himself from waving his arms around like an idiot. “I just wanted to go flying and I asked her to help me! You shouldn’t be mad at her for something that was my fault.”

“It was a shared transgression then,” Vader intoned, “You still will not be speaking to the smuggler again.”

“That’s ridiculous!” Luke said, “That’s like,” he narrowed his gaze at his father, “What did you do to her?”

“I established sorely lacking boundaries,” Vader said.

“That’s not an answer.”

“It is all of an answer that you will receive.” Artoo, the curious little astromech, scooted his way to Luke’s side and whistled at the pair of them. “I will not tolerate such accusation, little droid. Mind yourself before you are fitted with a proper restraining bolt.”

Warily, Luke glanced down at the droid, “What did he say?”
“Never mind,” Vader avoided the question and ignored when Artoo thrilled again.

“What’s he saying?”

“Nothing of consequence,” Vader said and pointed toward the rooms behind them, “Go.” Luke whirled around and followed his retreating droid until a hand settled on his shoulders. He squeaked in surprise as it dragged him back toward the sitting room. “I think not, son. You are well aware to whom I was speaking.”

“Father,” Luke protested, doing his best to pull himself from his father’s unrelenting grip. “This isn’t necessary. Honestly, I get you’re upset so you don’t need to. Father, Father,” Luke’s struggles turned a little frantic when he was pulled through the sitting room door. It slid shut behind him, “Really, seriously. You don’t.”

“You displayed an unusual disregard for authority, my son,” Vader rumbled, still not releasing his squirming offspring. “Such disobedience and imprudence I might have expected from the smuggler but not from you.”

“Um,” Luke tested his father’s grip a moment further before sighing and going still, “I just wanted to go flying, I didn’t think it mattered.”

“It did and it does, did you not consider what dangers would lay within a ship of such advanced age?”

Luke was hard pressed not to roll his eyes as his father revisited the same point as before. Vader must have sensed his dissatisfaction because he shook him a bit. “Answer me.”

“No,” he sulked, “I didn’t think about it.”

“Very well.” The was a sickening brush of déjà vu across that dragged its fingers across his stomach as his father settled into the familiar blue couch and pulled him down as well.

“FATHER!” Vader wasted no time in restraining the flailing hand and pressing his free hand upon Luke’s back, “STOP! GAH!”

Whatever protests Luke would have spewed as vehemently as Doora had, vanished beneath the blow of the first spank. Unlike the squalling smuggler, Luke had the dignity to restrain himself. Vader credited his silence to his sons shocking pride.

Luke hissed in annoyance from his uncomfortably familiar position draped across his father’s knees. He wouldn’t make the mistake of cursing up a storm like he’d done last time and since that avenue to venting had been cut off Luke wasn’t going to humiliate himself like last time either.

He pulled at the grip on his arm and squawked as the blows seemed to worsen. As before, Vader was methodical and unforgiving as he punished the imprudent pilot. Luke could only gasp in pain when the building sting from his rear began building to an intolerable level. He squirmed, looking for a weakness in Vader’s grip and found none.

Luke squeezed his eyes shut against the burning onset of tears that built behind his eyes and pinched his mouth shut. Burying his face into the couch, Luke sucked in a sobbing breath.

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Vader was not angry with his son as he had been when the boy had gone rushing toward an acid rainstorm. Rather, he was disappointed with his son. Such wild imprudence and chaos seemed
reckless and wild for someone who well knew the punishment if caught. His offspring seemed to be 
reluctant as ever to submit to the painful correction but was reacting nonetheless. His shoulder 
twitched and broken, keening whimper just barely reached Vader’s ears. Luke pulled at his retraining 
hand again. This time with less energy and strength than before. Whatever dignity and pride that 
Luke wanted to cling to was wasted in this setting.

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Tears were leaking past tightly clenched eyelids as the stinging, burning agony from his rear 
worsened with each spank. Each was evenly timed on the heel of the others to ensure that Luke got 
no respite or even a moment’s peace.

He huffed out a desperate breath that turned into a trembling sob. His shoulders shook as he Luke 
attempted to bury his crying into the fabric of the cushion beneath him. Muffled sobbing echoed 
around the room; deepening every time Vader brought his firm hand down upon his offspring’s rear.

When Luke finally gave up on any attempt at escape, no mate how weak they had been to begin 
with, it was time to stop. The boy was trembling from the strength of his crying; weeping brokenly 
into the couch.

Vader felt the mildest of anger when his son refused to look his way when he helped the boy stand. 
Did he not realize he had no need to maintain any sort of image for his father? Did Luke not know 
that Vader would cherish every moment with his son? Did he not understand that nothing Luke 
could do would make Vader admire or care for him less? Luke ought not to be ashamed or 
humiliated by showing his pain and unhappiness in front of his father. It made no difference if he had 
just been punished, Vader would not think any less of his son for crying.

Luke stumbled away from him, one hand reaching out the clutch the armrest of the couch and the 
other covering his eyes. For several long seconds Luke stayed there, half falling over and crying 
from the still-fresh pain of his spanking.

With a delicate sigh Vader crossed the small distance between them and settled his hands on Luke’s 
shoulders. The blond refused to look up and resisted briefly against his father when the Sith pulled 
him into an embrace. Durasteel and armor was not the softest thing to hold someone to but Luke, 
having only recently been released from his punishment, didn’t seem to care. Obviously embarrassed 
but accepting of the gesture, Luke still did not look up but kept his eyes stubbornly cast down even 
as he continued to sob.

Vader wrapped an arm around Luke’s shoulders, feeling the shuddering beneath his metal fingers 
even as he settled a careful hand atop the shaggy blond mop of hair. After a few minutes he carefully 
pet the boys hair while wishing his hands could be restored to their previously organic nature. It was 
almost impossible for him to careful and gentle with his son but he did his best to manage.

When Luke’s crying died away it was a while before he spoke. With a voice that was both hoarse 
and soggy he said, “I’m 22 years old and a commander in the Rebel Alliance.” Vader felt amusement 
bubble up somewhere from his chest but was unable to laugh at the sulking pilot. “This is 
ridiculous.”

“I could always revisit the punishment at my leisure to ensure that my authority has truly been 
accepted,” He half-heartedly warned. “Your age and rank have clearly done so little to instill the 
proper sense of self-preservation and prudence that I seem to find myself taking all the slack. This is 
less an embarrassment for you and more of a necessity.”

“Father!” Luke pulled back but stopped when the grip on his biceps did not lessen. The shocked blue
eyes were reddened and swollen but the astonishment was clear. With a careful hand, Vader brushed away the last of the lingering tears that stained his cheeks.

“It is no matter, my son,” He rumbled, directionless rage that trembled along each syllable.

“You’re making fun of me,” Luke pouted, “You wouldn’t…..would you?”

“No,” he assured his worried son, “I would not punish without reason. As I think I have demonstrated.”

“I’ve been here for three weeks,” Luke argued, “That’s hardly enough time for me to get into enough trouble to find out.”

“Indeed.” Clearly this was not the case but Luke nodded furiously.

“People get more annoying the longer you live with them. I’m pretty sure your patience wouldn’t last that much longer if I was stuck here forever.”

“I seem to have done well enough with two misbehaving whelps under my roof.” Not to mention that mocking blue alien, Jixton, and the two rebels.


“Go rest, my son,” he ordered, gently pushing his son toward the door. “I will speak with you later.”

“I’m not a child, Father. I don’t need a nap,” Luke still obeyed and left the room when Vader had nothing to say in reply. With his son taken care of, he too, retreated and went to speak to his daughter.

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Luke groaned as he collapsed onto his bed. It was warm and comfortable and he didn’t want to move unless that castle was about to fall around his ears. His rear still ached but much less so and he didn’t feel nearly as horrible he had last time he’d been spanked. He buried his face into the blanket and sulked a little bit longer.

Luke lifted his head when Artoo whistled for his attention.

“What do you want, Artoo?” The little droid passed over a datapad and continued to whistle.

:Are you alright?:

“I’m fine, Artoo,” Luke patted the little blue and silver dome.

:You were just punished: The droid pointed out as if Luke had no idea what had happened just twenty minutes ago. : Historically people are not ‘fine’ after being punished.:

“Ok, I’m not all that fine but I’m okay for now,” Luke said, “Wait….are you fussing like Threepio?”

:I AM NOT: Artoo squawked and whirled away without another word with a few beeping grumbles the droid back into the room after a minute and settled once again by this bed, :Research suggests that humans ought to sleep to recover from severe punishment.:

“I don’t need a nap,” Luke grumbled but rolled onto his side and pulled a thin sheet over his shoulders anyway. There was no way he’d be able to sleep on his back right now. “I’m not a child.” Artoo beeped something but he didn’t bother looking about to see what the droid had said. Luke
closed his eyes and allowed himself to fall asleep.

Tang waited two hours until after Vader had dealt with Doora before knocking on her door.

“Go away!” The smuggler called, obviously sulking in her misery and hating the galaxy at large.

“That is not a nice thing to say to someone bringing treats,” Tang opened the door any way and stepped into the room.

Doora was sprawled across her bed and had lifted her face from a thick pillow to glare at the Captain.

“Go away,” her voice was quiet and almost sad and there was almost no heat of anger in her voice, “I want to be alone.”

“Of course you do,” Tang settled the tall, chilled glass on the bed side table and took the only chair in the room. “That’s for you.”

“What is it?” Doora shuffled over just enough to pick up the glass and sniff at the bright pin contents. It was chilled, frothy drink that was made from the flesh of two different fruits and some scoops of ice cream.

“I’m told it is an excellent snack, though I’ve never had one.”

“Why are you giving me one?” Doora took a sip and looked surprised. She glanced at the glass and then at the Captain.

“Because you were very recently spanked,” the teenager choked on a sip while Tang ignored her embarrassment, “Most of the information I researched suggested it is a good idea to remind that teenager that those in charge are no longer angry at them and that because they have been punished that they have been….forgiven.”

Doora was refusing to look at her and had rolled onto side to avoid looking at Captain Tang though the drink was conspicuously missing.

“Did you know about that stupid social plan of his?” She asked finally.

“Yes, it was my idea.”

“You didn’t think it would smart to tell me?”

“Would you have behaving any differently?”

“I might have,” Doora snapped, ‘If I’d known that was what would happen if I wasn’t the picture perfect foster daughter.”

“You could have tried to be perfect but I’m sure our natural tendency to wreak havoc and generally misbehave would have asserted itself eventually.”

“You saying I was screwed from the beginning?”

“Yes,” Tang didn’t laugh at the scrawny teenager when her shoulders tightened but it was near thing.

“Yeah,” she finally agreed, “you’re probably right.”
“Well,” Tang listened to the teenager slurp down her drink with a greedy fascination that probably came from never having something that tasted like it. “I also came to tell you that you and Lord Vader are leaving for the Executor in two days. You’ll be continuing your studies onboard and I’ve sent several missives to the Colonel you’ll be answer to.” Doora craned her head around and frowned. “Soontir Fel, he commands the Death Squadron and he’ll be one of the fellows in charge of you.”

“What about?”

“Lord Vader?” Doora nodded. “He commands an entire Navy he does not have the time to deal with the insignificant details that he feels his subordinates can manage.”

“Oh,” the girl looked relieved and didn’t say anything more. She didn’t even seem to mind being called an insignificant detail. “Where are you from?”

“Does it matter?”

“I guess not,” Doora settled back against the bed and seemed content but Tang relented.

“I’m from a planet called Luxtenbren.”

“I’ve never heard of it.”

“You wouldn’t have, very few people have. It’s a reclusive planet and we don’t much like outsiders. It’s rare for anyone from Luxtenbren to become spacers or to get caught up in a galactic shit storm. People on Lextenbren used to spend their time fighting and farming.”

“Who did they fight?”

“Each other,” Tang closed her eyes; the memories that lurked in her nightmares would have broken a lesser being. “When I was born the entire planet was engulfed in war. There were five factions all fighting each other and killing. It was a nightmare of a planet when I got old enough to understand what happened. It was an endless battlefield. A town that might have been untouched by war would be bombed to smithereens that night. There were more corpses than living people and my nursery rhymes were all to the sound of artillery.”

Doora hadn’t said anything but when Tang opened her eyes she found the teen gaping at her. There was undisguised pity in her eyes along with an incredible dose of admiration.

“How are you still alive?”

“I fought and I learned how to kill,” Tang had only ever told Count Dooku this story and wondered why she was telling the smuggler now. “I learned how to command men and troops. I learned that the planets population was not growing old and that three generations had been lost to the slaughter. When I took control of my faction I stormed my way across the planet and told anyone that didn’t want peace that they could kiss their futures goodbye. I forced the other factions into obedience just in time for the clone wars to start.”

“What happened,” the breathless anticipation was almost gratifying but Tang ignored it.

“The jedi invaded my planet, it was one of the first. They told us that the senate was in control of my home because we were unfit to rules ourselves.”

“It sounds like its true though.”
“So?” Tang glowered at her, “It was our home and no jumped up government halfway across the galaxy had any right to interfere. When they brought in their slave army and their monk generals it was obviously time to go to war. We were good at war and they honestly didn’t stand a chance. I sent four jedi lightsabers to Count Dooku and their heads to the Jedi Council.”

“You didn’t!”

“I did and then I got commissioned by Dooku to command a goodly number of his troops. I got another war to fight like I wanted and my planet got the peace that they wanted. I wasn’t fit for peaceful leadership on a planet ready to fight each other at the drop of a hat but I was forged by war and that was what I could do.”

“You fought in the clone wars,” Doora leaned up a bit, “You lost though.”

“People lose wars, Doora,” Tang said, “I have no intention of losing another.”

“But.”

“The rest of the day is yours.” Tang stood up, “I have delicate work to do. Oh,” she paused by the door, “what do you think of the drink?”

“I never want to see another one again,” Doora said flatly and watched Tang laugh herself from the room.

Back in own office Tang traced the rank bars that rested next to her stylus case and sighed.

High General Tang. Scourge of the Jedi. Orchestrated the Outer Rim sieges. She’d been nicknamed the Tank Fox and she’d been the object of the average clone troopers nightmares. Three years she’d bathed the stars in cloned blood only to find herself, like thousands of other, pawns in a grand scheme of an insidious little bastard that had been warm and cozy the entire war. A man who had played her boss like a puppet on a string who had played the war like a chess master.

Tang hated Palpatine for manipulating Dooku into an idiotic pawn that had stunted the war effort deliberately. She’d thought Dooku too smart to obey a wormy bastard like Sheev Palpatine and had been disappointed to discover how wrong she’d been. She would have destroyed whole sons if Dooku had asked and was sickened to discover she’d been worked over by the very politician she hated most.

Dooku had had her admiration, her trust, her respect. He’d decried the self-imposing jedi fools who thought they had divine right to command armies with no experience. Dooku had called the galactic Republic into question and had raised a government from the sloth ashes of an old one that was imploding from greed and corruption.

Tang had been flattered when he’d offered her a commission as a High General. “Your experience and expertise will be invaluable in keeping the Republic at bay from our newly established borders,” he’d said. Dooku had been something from a holo film. He had been tall, well-spoken and dressed with just enough of a dramatic flair to amuse the teenage planetary conqueror. The man had bowed to her; he had taken her hand in his and kissed the back of it despite the engine grease, the blood, and the dirt. To a 15 year old who had only ever known older men to be opposing leaders and enemies and liars Dooku was amazing.

In his war she had honed her skill to a brutal art. She’d been introduced to music, literature and at all while keeping her personal identity. Now when Tang thought about the clone wars the more she realized that if Dooku had really wanted to split the Separatists off then they could have. Tang could
have done without the help of Ventess and Grevious. With Dooku at the helm of the politics and Tang in charge of the troops they could have truly accomplished that dream.

Too bad the dream had been manufactured by a scheming little bastard that Tang wanted to take out back and leave him exposed to the elements of a rain storm.

Learning of his betrayal and the manipulations that had spawned the war had made Tang livid. Just seconds after Vader (Gods, it was strange to think he had only been 23 at the time. Still new to his armor, stumbling about in pain and unchecked rage, while she was only 19 at the time) had told her, Tang had leapt at him. What followed after was a brawl that had bloodied both of them.

In her rage, Tang had broken several pieces of his life support and bruised his poorly healed chest. Darth Vader had forgotten about his force abilities. He’d ignored his lightsaber and she, her blaster, and the two had brawled. His fresh wounds had been aggravated and Tang was sure that to this day she’d been one of the only people to hear Vader howl in agony. Their fight had been pathetically primitive and over-emotional both of them with festering mental scars that no one in the galaxy had sought to heal or to help.

It had taken years for Tang to stabilize and even longer for Vader to find some semblance of sanity after his entire soul had been ripped out.

They were alike. Tang pressed a hand to her chest and sighed. They had been so young, so angry, so alone, and the galaxy had laughed in the face of their agony.

Vader seemed to find sanity and redemption in his son. Tang would find it in galactic conquest. She would do what she’d promised Dooku. Tang would hold the galaxy in one hand and a drink in the other. Except now she wasn’t planning on destroying the sloth-like and pathetically weak Old Republic. Now, she’d been ruining an Empire that was in her way. Whatever evils it had committed didn’t matter to Tang. She hated it because it had been constructed from a personal betrayal. She hated it because she had helped create it and not the Separatist nations like she had wanted.

Tang ran her hand over the rank bars and stood when Princess Leia and Chewbacca were escorted in.

“I have an answer for Lord Vader,” Organa announced.

Tang would purge the Empire from the galaxy. She would burn it to the ground and she would revel in the Emperor’s death. The victory was soon at hand.

Chapter End Notes

It expect lots and lots of comments for indulging you people. *haughty sniff* I also hope you like it.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Talking and talking and the dinner plans.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Vader is being honest. His proposal to bring Palpatine to ruin is almost a work of art and it galls Leia to admit it. So she doesn't say this out loud an she doesn't speak of it to Captain Tang when she goes to her office.

"How soon can you get your High Command to agree to this?" Tang was now the one sitting down while Vader loomed behind her chair. Against the backdrop of the monstrous landscape and a howling rain storm, the pair looked less human and more sublime beings heralding destruction and ruin. An poetical individual would have said the two were wrathful gods ready to descend upon a heretical galaxy and drown whole planets with fire and destruction. From the barest glimpse into the force that Leia could interpret this seemed doubly true. Never before had Vader seemed so indomitable. Even when she was tortured on the Death Star and bore witness to her planets destruction the Sith had still seemed human.

"When I makes contact with them I will need to explain the situation, barring your name of course," Her nod was so polite it circled right back around to mocking.

"Take care not to mention mine as well," Tang said, "I'd rather not have the galaxy thinking I'm alive just yet."

She tilted her head with a half-frown. Tang seemed too young to bring on the frenzy that the Alliance would fall into at the utterance of her name that her wording and tone seemed to imply. Then again, Leia was also a herald of destruction to Imperial bases and knew her name was feared just as much as it was loved.

"Very well."

"Contact with the Alliance can be made from this castle," Vader spoke up, "Your call will be monitored and that is not up for discussion. I am sure you understand my reasoning."

[Agreed] Chewbacca woofed from her left, the Wookie knew her too well. [When will we leave?]

"In two days," Vader replied, the holo projector on the desk came to life and Leia was faced with the wanted posters for all of her friends. Luke's had not been updates since the Battle of Yavin. Whichever intelligence officer had stolen the picture of Luke sitting on a crate of fuel and looking directly into the camera with the drawn tired expression must have been promoted instantly. Leia's was a little newer and just fresh from the destruction of some Imperial base that a security camera had caught she was draped in sooty clothes with a blaster in one hand and a fierce expression upon her face. It was a very good holo. "Skywalker will depart to his training."

"Training?"
"The remaining Jedi master of the Jedi Council will train him in the ways of the force." A flavor of bitterness seemed to edge past his usually flat tone. "However long this takes will be of no concern of yours. Once you have left this castle with your companion you must make all due haste to the planet Malachor where you will find a well-trained and experienced force user named Ahoska Tano."

"Why do I need to fine this Tano? If I am force sensitive like you've suggested then wouldn't it make the most sense for Luke and me to rain with the same Jedi?"

"No." She blinked, a little surprise at his absolute certainty. "It is through no fault of your own, though. Master Yoda will not train you because of your anger, your passion and the intensity at which you feel these things. It was believed by the Jedi that those who felt emotions with any flavor of zeal would eventually find themselves lead to the dark side of the force and eventually to the Sith."

"I would never!" Leia exclaimed, her voice raising to a shrill decibel from her furious disbelief. Tang cringed back and covered an ear, grimacing.

Vader did not seem irritated or even moved by her outburst. He continued speaking in his astonishing professor-like manner as if she had not shouted at him. The Sith raised a hand, "Given the inclination you would be a powerful Sith lady, perhaps powerful enough to rival thr great Darth Revan herself."

"Well I…' Leia sputtered for a moment with furious disbelief.

"Which is why you must find Tano. She is not a Jedi and will give instruction far better than any Master could have ever hoped."

"You speak as if you knew her."

"I trained her," Vader said simply, "Make of that what you will."

"I'm sure you'll get the whole story from Tano," Tang waved a hand to cut Leia off before she could fire a volley of questions at the Sith. "Move on with the instructions please."

"From Malachor, Princess, you must rejoin the rebellion. Train with Tano while serving the Alliance. In three weeks time an agent of mine will contact you. This agent will be carrying several holocrons with the wisdom of the ancients. A few will be left in your possession and the others must be given to Skywalker."

"If Luke is your son then why aren't you training him," her dark eyes narrowed, "Why have Luke trained by a Jedi when you destroyed them yourself? Why send me to a teacher when you have made no secret of wanting my death in the past?"

"A change of heart," Tang spoke up before the confrontation would dissolve into an argument or a fight. Leia was raring to pick a fight and Vader was obviously willing to give back.

"I don't buy it."

"You don't have to," Tang tapped a stylus on the desk, "Whether you believe it or not is none of my concern because the truth will be the truth no matter what you think, Princess. Also, you've met Luke. I can't think of another person who would be a worst Sith Lord than he."

[That is true.] Chewie laughed.
"If I may continue," Vader growled. Tang waved for him to go on but Chewie took a few more seconds to laugh quietly. "Now, there will be several dozen missions that the rebels must take and leave their mark just as there will be several missions that my agents will take that cannot be linked back to the rebellion or myself. It is imperative that you not question the missions your troops will be given for the sake of anonymity and the safety of the mission. To be successful in the coup all must be kept secret."

"We're the Rebel Alliance," Leia said, "We can handle discreet."

"As you say," The black helmet dipped, "Do you have any questions?"

"What will happen to the Rebel Alliance when this is over?"

"Take heed, Princess; do not count your Kyrat stones before you've slain the beast." She blinked, not expecting the imparted wisdom that sounded like something Luke would say.

"Alright," she nodded, "Do you have anything else to add?"

"No, Tang will show you to the communications chamber where you will make contact with your High Command."

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"Who is this high ranking Imperial?" Mothma had had the situation explained to her three times and she still pressed for the detail Leia could not give. Ackbar didn't seem so perturbed by the idea of taking commands and ideas from an anonymous being but the others were not so agreeable.

"For the sake of the Alliance the potential that this plan could work I cannot say," she rubbed her temples. "I am sorry, Mothma but you must trust my judgement."

"We do, Princess," General Madine said, "but this is too large a decision for one to make on their own. Accepting this deal for the whole Alliance is foolish."

"They told me that ten warships will be moved and raided and passed onto the Alliance if we agree. The Kuat shipyards are due to have been leave in one day and if we take the ships we take the offer."

"Ten warships?" Madine shrugged, "With no strings attached?"

"As I have said, we must agree to take commands and orders from our benefactor. We cannot afford to be slow or picky about our allies at this stage. I have verified the persons authenticity and their willingness and not accepting their help would mean disaster from the Alliance."

"Princess Leia," Mothma spoke again, "We must discuss this among ourselves."

"Very well, I will wait for your answer." A moment later the three hour long call disconnected and Leia nearly fell backwards into the waiting chair. Since Vader had been lurking in the corner of the comm chamber she wasn't quite willing to show such gracelessness. "That went just about as well as it could have gone."

"Indeed," Vader stepped across the room to her side, "Princess, there will be a formal dinner tonight and I would appreciate your company."

"A formal dinner for what?"
"A minor celebration of the agreement between the Alliance and myself," he said. The Force quivered, he was telling the truth but not all of it.

"Who else will be attending?"

"All those of import in the castle," he replied, "that is all."

"Would you be insulted if I declined?"

"I would."

"Then I will see you at...?"

"Seven, a trooper will escort you to the dining room."

"I suppose then I will see you at dinner then, milord."

"Indeed." Vader nodded his head once and swept from the room.

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His reasons for the dinner were purely selfish. Vader wanted to see his children together once before he sent them back into a war. He wanted to see them enjoying each other's company. Vader wanted a memory of them together before the chance was taken away.

"I'll be wearing a gown then?" Tang interrupted his thinking, "I think this is a good opportunity to give Doora the chance to test out her etiquette lessons for formal dinner parties."

"That would be wise.....do you own a gown?"

"I own several," Tang replied, "You buy me one every year for my birthday."

He didn't remember this. He certainly would never do this.

"I'll see you at dinner," Tang waved and vanished from his office, leaving him to his thoughts.

Chapter End Notes

Next time you get a chapter where all the Bast Castle inhabitants are eating a formal dinner in fancy clothes.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Planning a party is just a space google away. Also this chapter, Doora and Leia duke it out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tang had done many things in her years of military service. At one point she had carried a ball in one hand for two weeks without dropping it; all for the sake of a treaty. Tang had slept in all varying degrees of wretched weather and had laid waste to whole cities. She had two political marriages that she’d dissolved hours after the wedding ceremony by cleverly executed murder schemes. She’d worn a breathing mask and a discreet exoskeleton and a cloak to conceal her species, identity, and gender. Tang had suffered tea parties with Dooku and entire sessions of the Separatist senate.

Never before had she planned a dinner party. She was usually the one it was planned for. Still, as she surveyed the formal dining room, she had done a pretty good job. Plus, the holo-net was overflowing with useless information and helpful guides for this sort of thing.

“Is the food ready?” Hovering at her elbow and keeping his eyes on her shawl as it trailed dangerously low to the floor from where it hung off her elbows, was her ever-faithful Sargent Cookie. He was Bast Castle’s resident clone chef and had poisoned her more than once trying to learn a recipe.

“The steaks are ready to be put in the broiler now, sir,” Cookie glowered at her shawl as it swung around in a graceful act when she turned, “Sir, that thing might get into the food.”

“I won’t let it, Cookie,” Tang trailed a finger down the fine silver cutlery, “Your boys have done excellent work, and extend my compliments and gratitude.”

“I will, sir. Um, how do you think it’s going to go?” Tang cast a doleful eye over the fine dinnerware. “I just don’t want any of these nice things broken.”

“Why do I feel like I’ve lived in a castle that’s a lost less of a Sith’s retreat and more of a loose coalition of fraternity brothers who view the chain of command in rather skewed?”

“Sir?”

“Look here, Cookie,” Tang sighed, “In any normal castle with someone as high ranking as Lord Vader the overall atmosphere in the castle would be vastly different. In terms of respect and such you all outclass any palace staff in the galaxy but the truth is you just don’t…. ”

“Maintain the role at all times?”

“We have all been living together too long to keep those lines a solid black,” Tang patted his shoulder, “I still have your hair-clip from our last sabacc game. At this point you are all much less ‘employees’ and far more ‘friends’ than I would have ever begun to imagine.”
“Why are you saying this?”

“I want you to know that I’m glad we all relaxed as much as we did,” Tang twirled the end of her shawl, “Because after tonight the entire galaxy will begin to shift and this castle will be at the very epicenter of that change. I am telling you and those boys eavesdropping outside the doors so you will know that it would not have been possible if not for you. Whether we go down in history as the greatest coup in all of history or as a pathetically crushed resistance you and your fellow brothers will have created.”

“I don’t see how, sir,” Cookie straightened an already perfect goblet and wiped invisible dirt off the closest plate. “All we’ve done is live here and listen to what you and Lord Vader tell us to do.”

“I’ll explain your role in history after this party is over, Cookie,” she glanced at the chrono around her wrist, “are the others in their dress blues?”

“Yes, sir,” Cookie wrung his hands together, “Should we summon them?”

“Let me get Doora in here and then you can start bringing them down.”

“Yes, sir.”

Tang paused by the door and glanced back at the table and it’s beautifully arranged settings. Princess Organa would manage the party fine. Prince Luke would be a little out of his depth and Doora would be a nervous wreck surrounded by this entire splendor. Chewbacca would probably not panic but nothing was a guarantee. She grinned; this was going to be so much fun.

Her uniform was a lot fancier than she was used to. It was composed of sleek lines, shiny buckles and boots, the white scarf and a funny looking hat she couldn’t get to settle properly on her head. Doora glowered at her reflection and fiddled with her jacket again.

“Doora!” She cringed back when the door slid open at the behest of Captain Tang, “You’re dressed, good.” Doora blinked at the woman and then blinked again.

“Wow….uh…um…”

“Articulate as always,” Tang didn’t seem amused or annoyed by Doora’s sudden inability to speak, she swept into the room. “You clean up rather well. This must be the cleanest you’ve ever been in your whole life.”

“I guess.” She wouldn’t bother with insult here because the Captain was right. “That’s fancy dress.”

“Not compared to those you’d see in the Imperial court,” Tang smoothed down the front of her gown, careful of the delicate beaded star fire pattern, “They’d think I look terrible.”

“What do they know?” If this was the stuff that she’d be seeing at dinner then Doora knew she was outclassed in every sense of the word. “You know what? I’m not feeling great. I think I should just stay in here. Don’t want to the Princess sick and stuff,” laughed weakly Doora retreated toward the refresher.

“Don’t even think about it.” Doora skipped out of reach of the captain’s grasping hand. “You’re going to attend that party and you’re going to use those etiquette skills I’ve been teaching you. You’re going to need them when you get to the Executor and beyond.”
“I don’t want to use them!” Doora whined, cringing even as she did so, “It’s weird and only useful for snotty people with too much money.”

“Manners maketh man,” Tang tossed her head, “I once thought the same way and found that using those silly snooty rules got me a lot of what I wanted.”

“What was the biggest think out got for eating with the little fork instead of the big fork?”

“A shipment of 400 heavy tanks, two dozen corvette class warships, and an entire squadron of fighters.”

“Really?” Doora fiddled with her sleeves, “But I don’t want any of that stuff. I just want…”

“What do you want to do?” Tang didn’t look her in the eyes, knowing it might frighten the ex-smuggler, but focused on patting down the lines of her uniform and brushing off invisible dust.

“I don’t know,” Doora admitted quietly, unmoving. “I thought I knew but I don’t know anymore.”

“You will figure it out,” Tang pulled the cap straight, “eventually, but tonight you can’t be worried about it.”

“Why not.” Doora’s hazel eyes had lost the manic, violent, and dangerous edge to them but it made them seem hazy and emotional. For a moment Tang could only see her younger self reflected in them. Doora was small and had, like so many others, been ignored and abandoned. Tang and Vader both understood what that felt like far more than Doora might have ever imagined. Except that the two had had more power and motivation to change their station. To be lost and confused was something they both sympathized with.

“That sort of thing can’t be thought up in one night. Thinking about something you really want needs to be considered carefully before you can decide what to do.” Tang paused, “Very careful consideration…after much consultation from your foster father… and me.”

“So basically do what you say?”

“You might find something else that interests you and you might want to make that a career. Lord Vader might shorten your conscription sentence if you express interest in a field he considers worthwhile.”

“I think the galaxy has enough conquerors and would-be-emperors,” Doora grumbled, “Fine, I’ll go to this stupid party. I hope someone gets food thrown at them.”

“So do I!”

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“I look stupid,” Luke reached to fiddle with his shirt, only to have Leia smack his hand away.

“Stop that, you’ll ruin the whole effect.” Leia, as per her usual custom, was wearing white. She looked resplendent as she added the last pin into place in her hair. Luke thought his clothes looked like someone couldn’t decide to make his outfit look Imperial or give if actual style. As it was they had combined the two to look more or less pleasing to the eye.

“I don’t like it.”

“You’ll be fine,” Leia turned away from the mirror, “You just have to survive dinner.”
“Dinner,” Luke sighed, wondering how the evening would go. Sticking so many powerful personalities at a table was bound to make the entire thing end in disaster. He wondered what his father had been thinking when he’d invited Leia. “Are you going to be alright, I know you and Father aren’t….”

“I’ll be fine, Luke.” Leia did not add she might not make it all the way through dinner due to calls from the Alliance. “We just have to eat and suffer his…small talk…and then it will be over.”

“Why are you going in then?” Luke asked, coming up behind the princess.

“Lord Vader holds all of the cards,” Leia sucked in a deep breath, pulling on the sense of calm that Luke seemed to carry around. It helped, she found, and her budding headache ebbed away. “Why are you going?”

“Father asked me.” He looked uncomfortable in his finery but sighed, “I think this is going to be a disaster.”

“Oh, it will be.” Her unspoken ‘If I have anything to say about it’ was loud and clear to the pilot. Luke opened his mouth to reply but a knock came at the door. “That’s our cue.”

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Lord Vader surveyed the dining room and the attending clones. Nothing was out of place. He’d planned more dinner parties than he cared to think about during his marriage to Padme and this one looked just as good any anyone he’d done.

“I like how it looks.” Vader turned, opening his mouth to speak but let his jaw click shut. Captain Tang was standing by the door with an uncomfortable Doora lurking at her side. What drew his attention was the gown she was. Not only its beauty, though it certainly was, but rather; Vader was fascinated by the totally alien design. No one he knew of the old Republic or even the Empire would wear something so simple. They favored heavy robes, numerous folds, a million ruffles, and miles of fabric. He suddenly remembered why he always favored Tang to any of the Empire.

She reminded him of nothing of his old or current life. Any memories associated with her did not tie back to his Jedi past. Tang drew no mental comparisons between his generals; she surpassed them all. If she made any sort of appearance in the Imperial Court she would be mocked from the room. Even clad in a beautiful gown she had too many wrinkles, white scares, and the planes on her face were harsh and firm. Tang as a star going supernova. An awe-inspiring vision of destruction that laid waste to all.

“I have excellent taste,” He said, relishing in the startled glance from Doora. The smuggler was too smart not to catch the undercurrent of their conversation.

“You do,” Tang spread her arms and drifted into the room, “Ten to one odds that something gets broken tonight.”

“No bet,” Doora was staring openly now, “I am no fool.”

“Well…..”

Such insubordination had become commonplace during the last twenty years. He chose to not focus on his rapidly deteriorating authority with Tang and focused on Doora.

“Skulking in the doorway is hardly proper behavior.” Doora edged into the room, distracted by the settings and display.
“What is all this?”

“Dinner,” Tang tapped a chair, “You’ll be sitting next to me.” Tang was seated opposite of Vader with Door on her right and Chewbacca on her left. Vader sat at the head of the table, Luke at his right and Leia on his left. All of it was rather fitting and if Tang played her cards right it was going to be glorious chaos.

“What are we going to be doing though? This is a little fancy, don’t you think?”

“Don’t stress yourself out,” Tang advised, “You can do that with Princess Organa and Lord Vader are sniping at each other halfway through the second course.”

“I can’t do this. I can’t.” Less than a month ago she had been a destitute smuggler. The sudden and abrupt change of fortunes was a little too much whiplash.

“Calm yourself, smuggler,” Vader intoned, “Events such as these will be commonplace in your future. It will behoove you to gasp these concepts as quickly as you can manage.”

“Fancy dinners and clothes,” Doora said, holding hand to her chest, counting out her breathing. “I’m just a smuggler.”

“Well.”


Leia’s smile was sharp and dangerous, “We couldn’t dare think of declining your invitation.”

Luke winced but Tang’s smile widened. Doora just looked confused and whatever his father was feeling was total mystery.

“I do apologize for distracting you from whatever meetings or entertainment that might have otherwise occupied you,” Tang indicated toward the table as Leia’s lips went pure white as she pursed them. “Please, take your seats.”

Luke waved superstitiously at his sister. Doora looked pale and shaky but managed a weak smile.

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No one seemed sure how to break the awkward silence that descended the moment the first course was laid out on the table. Tang was enjoying it too much. Doora just looked happy that no one had spoken to her. Chewbacca was more interested in cracking the shells open with his claws. Leia was primly ignoring the Sith but glanced occasionally at Luke. Whatever Vader thinking was known only to him.

The silence was only punctuated by mechanical breathing and the occasional sigh.

What did revolutionaries, criminals, and Sith have to say to each other. What topic could be brought up that would not bring about a terrible argument that would shake the castle to its very foundations.

Their common fields of interests were so vastly different. Leia glanced at Doora who was fiddling with her napkin and casting occasional glances at the door.

“Doora.” The shorter woman started visibly as all eyes turned to her, “How have you been?”

“Uh, fine.”
“Fine? How do you feel about getting stationed aboard the Executor?”

“There’ll be a lot of people onboard….I think.”

“Yes, but how do you feel about it?” Leia leaned forward, “You must feel something.”

“I guess it’ll be nice to be flying again,” She bit her lip, “I’ve missed flying.”

“Flying is pretty great,” Luke agreed, rescuing the smuggler, “But I don’t think you’ll actually be flying in open combat for a while.”

“What?” Doora glanced at Vader for confirmation, “Why not?”

“Tests,” Vader said, “Even the most talented cadet has to take a myriad of classes to test their knowledge and understanding before they are allowed to flying in combat.”

“So I won’t be flying?”

“Not immediately.”

“But I already have the training.”

“You don’t have the education,” Tang shrugged at Doora’s bitter pout, “The Empire only allows a certain caliber of officer to fly their crafts. Aboard the Executor I’m sure the screen process is even more….stringent.”

“It is.”

“There you go,” Tang smiled.

“But that seems kinda odd.”

“It will make sense in due time. After you have spent time at the Academy, of course,” Vader ignored Doora’s quiet groan of despair.

“Which academy?” Luke piped up, “There are a few dozen in the mid-rim alone.”

“Do I have to go to an academy?”

“I have yet to decide,” Vader turned toward his son, “Which one did you apply for?”

“All of them.”

“You applied to the Empire?” Leia demanded, “Why?”

“I…” Luke blinked at the sudden venom in her voice, “I was trying to get off Tatooine. I wanted to fly.”

“Enough to join the Empire?”

“There wasn’t another choice at the time,” Luke’s expression hovered between confusion and irritation, “There weren’t any choices at all.”

“The Empire, Luke. You would have fought for the Empire.”

“If I had been planning to actually enlist then, yeah, I would have been.” The sudden drop in room temperature might have been attributed to Vader but Tang was putting money on Princess Organa.
“There is nothing out in the outer rim that is anything but criminal or Imperial. Whatever people you think exist that don’t break the laws don’t enforce them don’t exist out there. The honest person cut off point is right before the outer rim and just ahead of the Core. Either way I would have become a criminal,” Luke’s breath was shallow and his grip on his fork lessened, “I would have been an Imp trained one, that’s all.”

“He’s right,” Doora chimed in, surprising herself and everyone at the table. “There isn’t anything where we’re from that wasn’t criminal. The good jobs were for Hutts and the bad ones were everything else. Just look at me and him the only big difference is that he had parents and I didn’t. We both grew up dirt poor and ended up in the same place.”

Tang took a sip of wine, exchanging a grin with Chewbacca.

“You realize that contributing to an abusive system simply by helping it or even being educated by it only strengthens its hold on the galaxy.”

“Hey!” Door jabbed her fork Leia’s direction, “Don’t spew your jumped up core sensibilities at us. I did what I had to. Survival means not caring if some Princess thinks you’re a rotten piece of Sith-spawn.” Tang glanced at the ceiling, mouthing her thanks to any gods listening. “No one I know can afford the cheerful, stupid sentiments your folk have been spewing. You want stability then you’ve got to make it and if you want to eat then you don’t listen to someone who had never faced starvation in the face who wants you to ‘behave’ and ‘do as your told’. I’d’ve turned out like this even if the Republic was still around.”

“Obedience to laws is not a death sentence,” Princess Leia said, eye flashing.

“You’re a member of the Rebel Alliance,” Doora leaned out of the way to let the clone clear away her empty place, “What do you know about obedience to laws?”

“The Rebel Alliance to Restore the Republic,” Leia nodded her thanks to the clone trooper, “I want to restore the proper administrator of the proper laws.” Her prime explanation almost sent Doora into a fit of fury.

“They haven’t changed!” Doora didn’t shout but it was a near thing “The same laws that have always been there are still there! You just don’t like the people in charge of them and everyone is a lot more obvious about how mean they are! There is literally no difference between the Republic and the Empire.”

“There are hundreds of differences,” Leia straightened, unconsciously drawing on the force for strength.

Tang wondered if Doora really knew enough about history to hold her own against a princess and was more than excited to find out.

“Any sign of unrest is policed by storm troopers and brute force. How many people are arrested for ‘rocking the boat’ and making the local governors uncomfortable? What sort of government can allow its citizens to be imprisoned in their own homes? The moment people call for change from the Empire they are silenced with force. Troops descend on their homes and ‘calm the unrest’, that is not freedom! That is fear.”

“So what did the Jedi do?” Doora’s expression was hard and vengeful, “You just described them.”

“I did not.”

“Yeah, you did. I don’t know much about history but I know that the Republic did everything like
you say the Empire does, which it does do, but they just did it was Jedi and Senate commissions. Look at the Separatists, they had every right to declare independence and who sent the galaxy in the tail spin? It was the Jedi! It was the Republic because they were entitled, rich punks who didn’t want the status quo changed!"

There was a lot more to it than that but Doora had the gist of it. Vader watched his daughter’s eyes widen and then narrow.

“You think the Empire is any different? Do you think their justified in their crimes?”

“No!” Doora sucked in a deep breath as Vader turned her direction. She caught his unspoken reprimand. After a moment of chewing on the chunk of meat now on her plate, she spoke again, “They both…” She glanced back at Vader, “They were both terrible and you can’t pretend otherwise.”

“I will admit that the Republic had its flaws,” Leia ground out while Tang signaled for her wine glass to be refilled. Chewbacca didn’t look interested in the conversation in the slightest while Luke was glancing with increasing shock, between the two women.

“Oh good,” sarcasm oozed from every syllable, “the complimentary concession. Does it come wrapped in the same paper that made the Senate look useful?”

“The Republic senate was.”

“I was talking about the Imperial senate.” The sudden vacuum of noise finally made Chewbacca look up from his food. Luke quietly mouthing something and Tang had covered her eyes with a hand.

Doora’s expression might have been forged by a star for the power behind it. Leia was matching her temper easily.

“Oh look!” Luke chimed in a little desperately, “There’s some fruit for dinner. Isn’t that nice? Leia? Doora?”

“Fruit is good,” Doora leaned back into her chair and lessened her strangled grip on her fork, “I like fruit.”

The clones that entered the room were clearly in high advanced state of discomfort that Tang did nothing to alleviate. When the meal resumed on its third course the silence returned as well.

“Captain,” Luke spoke up, “What kind of fruits are these? I don’t recognize them.”

“I think these are some from a planet in the mid-rim. The name of it escapes me at the moment.” Tang glanced at Doora. She was focusing on her fruit bowl with single-minded intensity that showed she was feeling Princess Leia’s glare. Leia was ramrod straight and glowering at her food and at Doora.

Now this was a proper dinner party.

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He had thought that Leia and Doora got along. Luke watched the two fume and wondered if they really didn’t. Until now their interactions had been civil and, Luke frowned, the more he thought about it the more he realized they had never actually talked about anything. They made comments on the food, on Luke and Vader, and on Tang but they hadn’t discussed anything important. Luke knew what happened to people who disagreed with Leia. She did not take well to being wrong and she knew that Doora was right. Or rather, she’d admit that Doora was right only to a certain degree.
“Father, when are you planning on leaving for your ship?”

“Tomorrow afternoon,” His father replied.

“Ah, alright.” Luke might not have been able to feel the force but he could still sense the undercurrents of emotions in the room. It made things a little uncomfortable and the only person enjoy themselves were Chewie and Captain Tang.

Tang found a perfectly stimulating conversation with Chewbacca for the dessert course talking about best way to maintain weapons and ships. They had swapped a few stories from the Clone War and a few recent ones by the time dinner had come to a close. Vader had said next to nothing the entire time except when Luke had managed to get him talking about ships for a minute.

“Captain,” Organa stood along with Vader and Tang, “Is there a room to which I might continue a conversation privately?”

“Yes, down the hall. It will be on the third door to your right.”

“I will speak to all of you in the morning.” Lord Vader retreated with Tang on his heels. When they were sequestered in the private sections of the palace he spoke again, “That room has security cameras?”

“Six of them,” they strode toward the security of Tang’s office, “We’ll get whatever their saying with no problems.”

“Excellent.”

Leia had done everything except physically drag Doora into the empty sitting room. Luke followed along to keep the conversation from escalating to violence (not outside the realm of possibility) and hoping to make sure they all left as friends.

It didn’t matter that Leia had once been a senator and a princess. Doora was presenting a conflicting opinion that leaned far too close to the truth. The ex-smuggler was a curiosity that.

“How much coaching did Lord Vader give you before dinner?” Leia stalked around the smuggler; a short, white mirror image of the Sith lord.

“None, I don’t need anyone’s ideas but mine.”

“What you said at dinner was much like the conversation I had with Vader this morning.”

“That’s great for you two,” Doora crossed her arms, “I was just looking and speaking.”

“A month ago you had had no formal education,” Leia argued, “either Captain Tang is the best teacher in the galaxy or you’ve been coached.”

“I call it like I see it. I’ve not well-educated but I’m well-travelled and that counts for something. I didn’t lean the way you did and that doesn’t mean I didn’t learn at all.”

“I am interested in hearing your position,” Leia said and Luke cringed as Doora’s eyes went flat with
anger.

“My position on what?”

“On the differences between the Republic and the Empire.”

“There are no differences,” Doora glowered, “I don’t care how you dress them both up. You’ve
been spoon fed a bunch of bantha shit and now your spreading it around trying to fertilize the idea
that the government hasn’t been screwing the galaxy over to the last two centuries. What you don’t
know, Princess, is that everyone is already drowning in shit.”

“How can you pretend the Empire is any better?” Leia demanded.

“It isn’t! It sucks just as much and I hate both of ‘em.”

“You weren’t alive during the Republic.”

“You weren’t either, Senator!” Doora clenched her fists at her side, “But you grew up in a fancy
palace with teams of people to do your hair! I grew up on the streets all alone! I know tons of people
who fought the Clone War and people who lived during the Republic and they hated it then and they
hate the Empire now.”

“The Empire has passed several hundred laws that restrict the average freedoms of citizens.” Leia
was near-shouting. “Lord Vader has personally enforced these laws.”

“I know that but if you think that those laws weren’t already unspoken rules then you’re stupider
than you seem!”

“The fundamental difference of the Empire and the Republic cannot be ignored! The Republic was a
system of government voted democratically by the citizens. The Empire has appointed leaders across
the galaxy and they’ve done nothing to obey the requests of individual planets.” Leia could turn
anyone to her point of view but Luke thought the problem with this argument was that she was
arguing with someone who didn’t know when to give up. Doora had sassed his father a few times,
what difference did a senator make?

“So people could pretend they were doing something? If voting changed anything then it would be
illegal.”

“It is illegal!”

“So they dropped the act!” Doora shouted, “Who cares! Everybody I know is poor and hungry and
the only people who aren’t are the core world pricks who sacrifice everyone else for their own
selfishness or the Imperials who shoot at us or they were Hutts! You can’t drag your naïve ass onto
our turf throwing your privilege around by telling us that we have to uphold the laws! Those laws
have been screwing over people like me over forever! I don’t want to uphold the laws of the Empire
or the Republic! I don’t want some pissy Sith running around killing everyone and I sure as hell
don’t want some self-entitled Jedi prick coming around and telling us that our anger is “unrest” and
we need to stop protesting.”

“A Jedi would never have!”

“That is a direct quote!” Doora roared, “They did that stuff and I know because I saw those
recordings and I met the people they ‘pacified’!” Before today Doora might not have ever put the
pieces together. She might have never seen what had come about because of bureaucratic nonsense
and politics. With the education on how to connect the dots and the bitterness in her heart, Doora
“Doora’s doing beautifully.” Tang said while Vader flipped through the datapad in his hand. “A little tarnished but she’s making her point. In a few more months she’ll be perfect.”

“You have done well, Captain.”

“Thank you, Lord Vader.”

“If you support neither the Empire nor the Republic then what sort of government would you support?”

“Geez! I can’t tell if you sound like a die-hard Imp or a really stupid Republic supporter.”

Luke rubbed his head and wondered if the conversation would die down any time soon. Leia and Doora had been arguing for almost two hours and neither of them had capitulated. Doora wasn’t really good at arguing but just being around Leia seemed to improve her skills. Leia was frustrated but impressed by the smuggler.

“I hate both of ‘em,” Doora’s inexperience with politics and debate was obvious but she hadn’t caved to Leia yet.

“Then what do you suggest for a new form of government?”

“I don’t know!” Doora threw her hands up, it was becoming an increasingly familiar gesture as the night went on. “That is for smart people like you that don’t have their heads up their...”

“Okay!” Luke jumped to his feet, “Okay, we get the picture.”

“Hey! I wasn’t finished!”

“Guys,” Luke rubbed his forehead, “You’re both just going in circles and you really need to stop. As great of points that you’re making you’re just beating them into each other.”

“I was enjoying that part,” Doora crossed her arms, “That was the fun bit but I’m going to bed because if I can’t make her listen after all this then she’ll never listen.”

“You have been arguing points your hardly understand yourself. You only have passing understanding of the politics you’ve been mocking.”


“Night, Doora.” Both rebels watched the shorter teen vacate the room. “Leia, was that necessary?”

“I wanted to discover what sort of person Lord Vader’s plan would be creating.”


“You’ll hear about it soon enough.” Leia left as well leaving Luke alone.

“She does know we share an apartment, right?” Luke followed moment later, hoping the Doora
wouldn’t hate Leia because of their argument.

“Lord Vader, I would like to take this moment to tell you that all of you children are crazy.”

“I had noted this myself, Captain.”

“Good, just making sure.”

Chapter End Notes

I plan for a very fluffy Luke and Vader scene next chapter for those who are interested.
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

People leave and stuff. Not as much fluff as was promised but enough.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Luke Skywalker is a different kind of person. He was quiet where others were loud, kind when someone was cruel, gentle instead of hard. There was a power that lurked beneath his skin, a hurricane of blood that tore through veins and beat his heart into a drum. Lightning that flashed out of his eyes when he glared. He was the wind that would sigh through the trees and the same wind that could rip whole buildings from their foundations. Tempered steel that would be a knife to cut bread or a blade to carve out hearts; he was the bedrock, the sand, and the wind of the desert.

Tang had stood at the shoulders of those who made history. She knew the kind of person who would be lauded by history no matter their crimes. Those with the magnetic, manic energy that could move mountains and lift the skies on their shoulders, Tang could identify them with little more than a glance.
She ought to know.

Tang was the one who made history too.

Knowing this, it was still a surprise to see Luke Skywalker looking so humble in his repaired, orange flight suit standing beside the behemoth that was his father.

Someone who had turned the tide of war with only a smile should not look so small. He ought to be standing tall with a wild grin turned to face his destiny. Luke should have been climbing heroically into his ship with a determined frown, bristling with weapons. Then again, Tang ran a hand over her rank bars, he was not her.

Luke was not a crusty, bitter general from a war that had been the culmination of generations of systematic oppression. He was not like Doora who was only just now discovering what it felt like to have regular meals and a proper bed. Even if they were related, Luke was not like Leia. Leia, who had been raised by those who worshiped a warped and distorted memory of a betrayed ideal who desperately wanted to do better but could only operate on what she knew.

Luke was not Vader.

Tang tightened her grip on the bag in her hands and stomped toward the x-wing and the men waiting beside it.

“You’re finally leaving, Skywalker.”

“Yes, Captain.” He looked impossibly young in his flight suit but Tang had seen younger fly into combat. Luke smiled when she brushed past the looming Sith lord to shove the bag into his hand.
“What’s this?”

“Things to continue your education,” Tang said, unsure where to put her hand she planted them on
her hips, “You’re going to speak to that idiot troll and you’ll need something to remind you that he hasn’t changed once in the last 800 years.”

“I could just remember that.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, these books and such were written by some very seditious writers and treasonous poets. This is the sort of stuff that will make Mothma’s hair turn pink. Which means you can’t let her see them.”

“I can’t hide things from my own commander,” Luke blinked and opened the bag. Information chips spilled into his hands. “Do you think she’ll try to take them from me?”

“Four of these poets were banned on her planet by her own command,” Tang said, “Don’t ever underestimate the people who only want to hear an echo in the silence they’re created. Even ones who wave the banners of revolution, don’t trust those people.”

“What’s so…dangerous about these poems and things?” Luke glanced up at his father, “They’re just poems.”

“Stories do not die,” Vader intoned, “Ideals, even ones warped by centuries of abuse, do not die. They cannot be killed even if they have been banned and erased because anyone who heard even the faintest whisper will spread them until it has become a new shout.”

“Well said, my lord.”

“Thank you.”

“Luke,” Tang nodded and awkwardly patted his shoulder, “Try to not die. If I have to suffer this man’s grieving process again I’ll bring you back from the dead to kill you myself.”

“Ah….duly noted.”

“Good,” Without another word she left father and son to say goodbye.

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“What is she going to do while I’m gone? She won’t have anyone else to terrorize.”

“Captain Tang will manage,” His father crossed his arms. He wasn’t sure how to say goodbye, he had never managed parting well. So many people had left him by dying, or walking out or leaving him to die that Vader did not know how to handle the moment.

“And you?” Luke peered past his blond fringe at him. His delicate smile compelled Vader to return the boy to his rooms and forbid him from ever leaving. He clenched a fist; he could not lock Luke away. His son had stardust in his eyes and hyperspace trailed at his heels. “Father,” he adjusted his bag, settling on hand on the tightly clenched fist.

“I will manage as well.”

“Father, we’ll see each other again,” Luke’ smile was brilliant, pure. For an instant someone else stood before him, dark hair and eyes that laughed. “This isn’t goodbye forever.”

“If fate is kind…and it so rarely is.” He felt unusually despondent; carefully he took Luke’s hand in his own. “You must heed the dangers beyond these castle walls, son.”

“I wasn’t doing well heeding the dangers in these castle walls, Father,” Luke’s impish smile
distracted him momentarily.

“What yourself, son,” He warned, “You might beyond my reach but I still expect you to remember your mortality. I will receive regular updates from my agents in the fleet.”

“Right,” Luke rolled his eyes, “Father, I’ve been managing just fine.” He did not reply and his son huffed. “You worry too much.”

“Son,” whatever levity Luke was trying to interject into the conversation was forgotten. He did not know what to say. Words formed and died before they were spoken, falling for his tongue back down to his throat. Finally he managed, “You will face the galaxy as never before, my son. Plots and treason abound with you in the center as the hope of millions.” Luke blushed, his exploits were known the galaxy over, “Learn the force, learn how to wield your power and return to help me destroy the Emperor.”

“Father,” he sighed, chest deflating. Luke looked down at the floor only to look up again when his father gently tilted his head back up. “I don’t know what you’re planning but I have faith that you can pull it off. When we make the Emperor and his cronies pay for what they’ve gone we will be together.”

“You do now know what the future holds.”

“Neither do you,” Luke said quietly, “This isn’t forever.”

There was silence for a while before Luke shook his head untangled his hand from his father’s. Pulling on his helmet he climbed into the cockpit. “Father,” Vader, unable to speak and unsure what to do, looked up. “I know you don’t like Doora but please don’t torment her. She’s really...she’s actually pretty good.”

“You will see her soon enough.” If his plan went successfully then everyone would see her. “Son,” Luke leaned out of his seat, “You must remember this before you meet Yoda.” Vader took a shallow breath and reached to take his son’s hand, carefully he pressed a carved piece of impression into his palm. “Your mother was Padme Amidala, Queen and Senator. Your grandmother was Shmi Skywalker, your uncle was Owen Lars and your aunt was Beru Lars. Your sister,” he stopped himself just in time, “You must remember where you are from and those who have helped you become the person you are now.”

“Father?”

“Do not allow the Jedi to make you forget where you are from, son,” Vader said firmly, “they will tell you that attachments will destroy you. He will tell you that emotions and passion will push you into the dark and that you will swear allegiance to the Emperor if you give into either.”

“Father.”

Vader continued as if Luke had not spoken, “Remember who you are and where you came from, I made the mistake of allowing my identity to be erased and the result stands before you now. Know where you stand and be sure of yourself.”

“I,” Luke bite his lip, opening his hand to look at the piece of jewelry resting there.

“Look at it in hyperspace, my son,” the Sith stepped away. Luke was speechless, his non-print in the force swirling with gratitude, confusion, and affection. He climbed out of his ship, Artoo whistled at him, and halfway down the ladder.
“I’m going to miss you, Father.” Luke looked down with a smile, “Even if you do get me in trouble a lot.”

“The trouble you find yourself in is of your own creation,” Vader huffed, crossing his arms. Luke was leaning away from the ladder just a few inches from his mask. It was an odd pose but one Vader has held many times in his own career as a pilot. Luke, without preamble or warning, leaned the last bit of distance between himself and his father to lay a delicate kiss on the curve of his helmet above his forehead. As a native of Tatooine he knows what that sort of kiss means, it is familial. It binds people together into a family of either blood or their own creation and it shows the greatest amount of respect and love someone can offer another.

Stunned and a little awed that his son might look beyond his monstrous suit, he said nothing when Luke scrambled back up the ladder.

“Take care of yourself, Father,” Luke waved down at him, “I’ll be done with training before you know it.”

He waved, whatever else he could have said caught in his throat and he stepped out of the range of the engine backwash.

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Luke reveled in the sensation of weightlessness as his ship hurtled through the nearly cloudless sky toward the black. He was flying. Off again on his metal wings, soaring above the dirt below and ready to throw himself in hyperspace. He clutched the joystick with trembling fingers as the castle and then the continent fell out of sight and the atmosphere thinned. The rough cord that held the precious material was wrapped around his hand and the gift was burning a hole into his hand.

“Goodbye, Father.” He couldn’t feel his father but he knew it was not a goodbye forever. They will see each other again and they will be a family. When he has the force back and he can contribute even more to the Alliance and they can destroy the Emperor. With a final glance back at Vjun, Luke pulled back on the hyperspace lever and threw himself and Artoo the direction of the mysterious Yoda.

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He remained on the landing pad, staring at the space where Luke had become indistinguishable from the sky, far longer than he should have. He has to rejoin his fleet, to hand Doora over to his Blacks and to give his daughter the coordinate of Malachor.

“Are you going to stand there all day?” Vader started a bit, invisible to anyone like the smugger standing behind him. Doora was standing a few feet back, arms wrapped around a brown duffle bag. She looked vaguely insecure, as if her bluster and sarcasm had been scrubbed away and she wasn’t sure what to do with herself anymore. Doora didn’t look as small and thin as she had two weeks ago. The haggard edges to her face and hands had softened a bit the proper food from a strict diet. (Technically she wasn’t supposed to be drinking that tea with Luke but he did not begrudge them their comfortable bonding ritual.)

“What are you doing?”

“Tang told me to get you,” Her eyes flicked to the spot where Luke’s x-wing should have been, “She says you’re on a schedule.”

“He spoke to you this morning.”
“Yeah,” She was still far too informal, “He said he was leaving and we might not see each other for a while.”

“I see.” Of course would disobey him. His heart ached as he turned back toward the sky and wished that fate had not decreed his son fly away. “Are you ready to leave?”

“….Yes…, sir.” Doora’s reluctance to say those words was enough to make him smile briefly beneath his mask. “I’m testing out this whole ‘chain of command respect thing’.”

“How is it working?” He turned the direction that Leia’s shuttle was waiting for takeoff. She and Chewbacca would fetch Ahsoka and returned to the rebellion as soon as they had her coordinates.

“I hate it,” Doora wasn’t sulking yet bit it was a near thing, “I hate saying it.”

Leia was speaking to Captain Tang in low tones when they rounded the corner. Their deliberation stopped when he came into view.

“Go to our shuttle,” he ordered the scrawny smuggle, directing her toward the other waiting ship. She huffed under her breath, shot a glare at Leia a wave to Chewbacca, and stomped off. Luke must have been a good influence on her. The differences between her behavior when he was present and when he wasn’t were clear. “Princess,” deciding that Doora was a project for later, he turned toward his actual daughter, “The coordinates you will need for Malachor.” He passed the info chip to the armed princess.

“When will you make contact with the Alliance next?”

“Only after my agent has delivered the holocrons,” He tucked his thumbs in his belt, “They will be making a scene that the Alliance would be wise to take advantage of.”

“What sort of scene,” Leia crossed her arms, “Are you going to explain any further?”

“You know it when you see it,” He had seen Gohan’s plan and knows that it is the work that will go down in history. “You have a little over two weeks to pick the ships I’ve offered. It would be wisest to use the distraction my agents create to do this.”

“What sort of distraction? The Alliance can’t just take small hints and confused gestures as directions, Lord Vader.”

“Princess,” he thinks of what a temper his master will fly into when he discovers he’s been had, “To miss such an obvious sign would mean that the Alliance is in dire straits and more idiotic than previously considered.”

“Very well,” she snatched up the chip, “We’ll be leaving now and keeping an eye out for your… distraction.”

There was nothing for him to say at this point. Vader stepped back as the ship closed and fell into step with Tang as they walked away.

“That’s two children gone,” Tang said blandly, “I’d say you’d suffer from empty nest syndrome except you’re taking the youngest to work with you.”

“Your inferences tire me,” He replied as they approached the third and final ship. Doora was sulking on the loading ramp and kicking her feet against the thick metal. They stopped just out of ear shot. “Is everything ready here?”
“Bast castle is ready to come online,” Tang said, “our agents are in place and ready to roll. The only thing we’re waiting on now is Gohan and her crew to light the signal fire.”

“Very well,” He paused and then nodded, “I will leave with the smuggler now. You know your duties, Captain.”

“I do,” She saluted, “Do you?”

“I shall manage,” he can and he will. Not just because it is necessity.

“Don’t terrorize Doora too much, sir,” Tang cast a meaningful glance at the smuggler, “She’ll manage fine, I wager, with your Blacks.”

“We shall see.” A few minutes later he’s boarding the shuttle and calling for Doora to strap herself in. He doesn’t see the wave between the two women and he doesn’t comment on the fact that she only sits in the back.

He is still remembered the soft expression on Luke’s face when he spoke to him, promising to return. It was more than he’d ever imagined and more than he could have possibly ever deserved.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Tang does get a nap. Soontir Fel meets Doora and Vader makes a brief appearance. Luke talks to Artoo about learning where you come from.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Most of the time Piett could handle anything that Vader could throw his way. If he looked upon his latest assignments like cleverly thrown curveballs that would literally blow up in his face if he failed, then he couldn’t manage to think about them without fainting. For someone who had once been a perfectly obedient servant of the Empire his latest work was downright treasonous. If he worked with Vader for much longer then he was sure that his work was going to lead him to a much darker place.

As per Lord Vader’s order it was only himself, Colonel Fel and General Veers. It was the middle of the night cycle and the rest of the hanger was abandoned save for the night crew which was making itself scarce.

“Firmus, do you know what he wants?” Veers asked, his mustache bristled as he yawned.

“I do, Max. I believe Lord Vader will give and explanation when he deems necessary and until then I’m sworn to secrecy.”

“Of course,” Veers straightened his uniform as the shuttle maneuvered its way into the hanger. Twenty minutes passed before the loading ramp lowered and Vader emerged. To the men’s surprise a scrawny figure holding a duffle bag followed after him.

“Admiral.” Piett saluted, forcing himself to not stare at the girl. She stopped a few feet away from Vader and was staring at the men with unabashed annoyance. Her shoulders were hunched and she held the bag in front of her like it was a shield. “I trust you have succeeded in your endeavor?”

“Yes, Lord Vader.”

“Good, Fel,” The man saluted. “Have you read the instructions I sent ahead?”

“Aye, milord.”

His harsh breathing was the only significant noise in the hanger. It echoed about, doubling and worsening while they waited. The girl awkwardly shifted in place but didn’t speak until Vader spoke again.

“A choice must be made tonight.” There was a tremble in his voice that made Piett wonder if his lord was more passionate than he’d considered. Instead of the near-silent apathetic man who killed indiscriminately without cause the Sith in front of him was burning with a desire. His whole person had changed in the last month. “A choice that will affect the course of galactic events and the history of every species, will you help me?”

“Aye, Lord Vader,” Fel saluted again, back ramrod straight, “I would wish to nowhere else but at
“I agree,” Veers nodded, his loyalty was commendable and impressive and Piett swallowed down a dry throat and nodded as well.

“Very well,” He waved a hand, gesturing the girl to join him. With a jolt Piett recognized her. She was the smuggler that had made a fool of Black Squadron. She was wearing an Imperial cadets uniform and blank expression. Considering the last time the Admiral had seen he she was a squalling, spitting mess of a feral child the changes were vast and impressive. He wondered what Vader had done to the girl to manage such changes. Still, she had been a lawless smuggler with pride in profession and that couldn’t have changed so quickly. It was a little distasteful to say the least. “Colonel, take the cadet and return to your business. Admiral, General with me.”

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He’d made himself awfully clear in the shuttle which was why she didn’t say anything when the Colonel gestured for him to follow her. He was a tall fell, though he had nothing on Vader, with a lean frame and a handsome face that he had been plastered over recruiting posters for a year now. She knew his wife was a famous holo-actress that was pretty good if not for the fact she had been acting in terrible movies. Doora trailed behind him, feeling a little tired and hating it.

“What is your name, Cadet?”

“Uh…Doora.” He was kinda like Tang except Tang was wholly unapologetic. So he wasn’t really like Tang but give or take a few years he could come close.

“Just Doora?”

“Yes….sir.” IF he caught her pause he didn’t mention it.

“Well, I have been briefed on your unique situation, Cadet Doora. You will not be joining in any combat missions for the time being. For now you will be housed with Black Squadron. We’re the closets to the hanger bay.” It was only a few steps away from the hanger bay, actually. Doora stepped through the open door into a clean living space. “We’re a co-ed combat squadron. This is the common room where we can gather. We live in separate rooms and we take showers on shifts but other than that we’re all very.”

“Packed in tight?” It was kinda small, she regretted taking her room on Vjun for granted.

“We also sleep in shifts. You’ll meet your primary shift crew in the morning. I expect you to be respectful and disciplined.” Fel gestured around, “These are some of the best pilots in the galaxy. The night shift pilots are in the ready room waiting action. There’s a lot of information you’ll be learning of how a ship like this works and the various details of piloting a TIE. I’ve seen your simulation scores and I’m impressed. You need to remember that this is not a simulation.”

Well he didn’t need to be so insulting. Doora nodded though.

“Since you’re a little underage and this goes against most regulations in the Navy you’ll be staying in a room of your own.” He opened a door the lead directly from the common room to reveal a cramped room with a bed hastily constructed out of part of a TIE cockpit and shelves that wouldn’t look out of place in a prison evidence room. “I do apologize about the bed, we were on a time crunch and could get anything else.”
“Uh…” what as she supposed to say to that? “It’s okay.”

“This will be your room. There’s a panic button in here in case anything happens. You’ll be joining the day shift for breakfast in five hours so I suggest getting sleep.”

“I can do that.” Doora stepped into the renovated weapons closet and turned around, “What about the other pilots?”

“They know you’re coming. You’ll be joining the other academy cadets who come to active duty ships to finish their classes and some training. Except this is a little backward.”

“I don’t see why I don’t get to fly,” she groused, dropping the bag down, “I can already fly a TIE. What’s the point of all this extra training?”

“It is protocol,” Fel said, wondering how she had not been killed while in Vader’s custody.

“Fine,” she sighed, looking a bit lost before the forlorn expression vanished, “What time do I need to get up?”

“We get up at 0700 unless we’ve been called to combat then it’ll be much earlier.”

“I can do that.” Doora dropped onto the bed and opened the end of her duffle bag.

“You will be speaking mostly to the squadron First Class Sergeants whole will help you with transitions and work. I will only be your supervisor.”

“Okay.”

“You will need to work on your formality.”

“Uh…that’s what they said,” she finally showed a little discomfort. “I’m working on it. I promise.”

“Well, you have only been a cadet for a short while. I’ll grant you that.”

“Oh, thanks.” She rubbed her arms, staring at him with an unnerving expression.

“See you in five hours.”

Soontir Fel left the renovated closet and rubbed his head. Whatever game Vader was playing with the girl he pitied her for it.

Doora didn’t care was Soontir Fel was thinking. She didn’t much care for anything at the moment other than the fact that she could feel the rumbling of the hyperdrive beneath her boots. Falling into the weird little bed she closed her eyes.

Space. She might not have been flying her lovely little ship but at least she was in space. With a sigh she curled under the blanket and fell asleep.

@#@#@#@

“I don’t like it.” Leia stomped her way back up the Millennium Falcon ramp with Chewbacca on her heels. “This too convienient.”

[I believe his intentions.] Chewbacca said as they entered the ship and began storming the empty cockpit. [I know the reputation of the Tang woman from the war. She is honest and true. She will not allow Vader to backslid on his promise.]
“He says he’ll release those prisoners! He says he’ll give us ships. This doesn’t sound too good for you.”

[I know a warriors heart.] Chewbacca said, taking his usual co-pilots seat. [I know history. I have seen those who make and those who don’t’ If you do not trust Vader then would you trust my judgement?]

Leia was silent for several worrying minutes before given a jerky nod. “We need to tell Mothma that we’re expecting a ship load of our troops back.”

[I will comm them.]

$L#$

Luke watched the lines of hyperspace streak pass for a minute before pulling out the japport snippet in his pocket. It was a handsome piece, carved with skill and care. Time had worn down the edges and some of the small symbols but the largest ones were still obvious.

A smile flickered on the edge of his face as he brushed his thumb over the top. The three circles represented the two suns and the moon. The suns showed the stresses of life and the moon carved into the little square showed the moon in the home. On Tatooine the moon represented home life, the strength that one could get from the family and its love.

The other symbols etched into the snippet made his eyes mist over as remembered what each one meant. It might have been made after a short meeting but it meant that his father had once loved his mother greatly. Not just love but an admirable sign of affection, respect, and awe. It was his art. It was his father’s view and what he had loved about his mother even before they had begun a relationship.

His father had seen so many dark days and nights; walked through the edge of insanity and had emerged from a storm with enough light in his soul to cherish his son. Luke held the snippet close to his chest and clenched his eyes shut.

This was more than a piece of decorative jewelry. It was a vow. It was a promise. Luke wiped the tear away from his eye. Artoo beeped at him and he smiled.

“I’m okay, Artoo. It’s just… I never knew much about my father when I was little and now I just…I know so much. I know of my mother. I know who they are and where they came from.” Artoo whistled. “Yes, Artoo. We organics like to know where we came from. Didn’t you ever wonder that?” The droid replied and he laughed. “You looked for your creation video? How they built you and where you came off the assembly line? Why’d you do that.”

[Queen Amildala spoke to me one day after the Naboo Crisis was over. She spoke as if I were living. She woke me up. She told me stories about the creation of Naboo. She told me stories of myths and life. She told me where she was begun. I was asked where I came from.]

“You didn’t know?”

[No, I discovered.]

“Are you glad you know?”

[I do not know yet.]
“Well I’m glad.”

They were gone. The little Prince was off to deliver the unspoken message that the Jedi Order of old was nothing more than a relic. Museum pieces she could sit back and celebrate she’d outlasted.

Vader was off to raise merry hell with his officers and taking Doora to shock the galaxy into silence.

Princess Organa was off to do whatever Rebels did when they were confused and angry. Tang pitied the next group of Stormtroopers that the Princess ripped through on a job. Chewbacca she was less worried about. He was older and much more wise than the 22 year old princess with a temper issue.

The problem, she thought while taking a sip of her drink and flipping the page of her book; was that none of these people had been taught emotional maturity. Oh, the princess could pretend the best but she’d been taught to hide them. Pretend they weren’t there and ignore them until they went away.

Vader had been taught that emotions lead to evil and then anything he might have learned was muddled by two decades of Emperor meddling. At least when her boss was in her company he’d managed better. Tang rewarded herself with another sip. She was a good influence on people.

The only one who seemed to have any idea what to do with the emotions he faced was Luke. When he was happy he smiled. When he was annoyed he made it obvious. When he was sad or in pain he cried. He didn’t lie to himself and he didn’t try to hide his emotions. It was a welcome difference from the people she’d been surrounded with her whole life.

“If you’re here to ruin my relaxation then you might as well go shoot yourself in your kneecaps,” Tang said without opening her eyes at the approach of her subordinate.

“I’m not here to do that, sir.” The clone said a bit awkwardly, “What do you think of music?” Tang leaned up a bit and lifted her sunglasses away from her eyes. Tolli was standing a few feet away with a folded piece of reflective sheet metal and a low slung chair. A small boombox rested at his feet.

“This is the best place for shade and tanning, sir.”

“Fine,” Tang dropped her glasses down and closed her eyes again, “The volume better be tolerable though.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And I want someone to bring me some ice.”

“Yes, sir.”
“Hmmm,” Tang allowed her mind to drift, relaxing for a moment as so she desperately. The hammock swayed gently and she yawned. She could hear the clone setting up his little tanning station and ignored his muttered singing along with the music.

Another breeze ruffled the blooms of the bushes, carry the heady perfume that rolled over her sense and pushed her faster toward sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I lied, sorry. Doora meets Piett a little later and they have an interesting discussion at some point. Next up! Checking on Gohan and her crew. Doora gets introduced to the Blacks. Palpatine starts planning something. (conquest) HAHA. Did you see what I did there?
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

Gohan is a genius. Doora finally talks to interested adults. Vader gives Palps a tantalizing glimpse into his mind.

Gohan was the first to tell anyone who met here that she was unapologetically ambitious. There was no job too impossible for her to tackle. No person she couldn’t befuddle with her words. Words she would use to twist around her victims, binding them to confusion and chaos until there was nothing solid left.

Still, as she hung from a support beam made a thousand years ago, Gohan observed that she might have been a little over-zealous with this plan. At the moment she was possibly the closest sentient living organism to the surface of Courasant. Miles upon miles beneath duracret and speeder traffic, Gohan adjusted her grip on her welder and checked the blinking datapad wired directly into the surveillance system.

As arrogant as she was to take this job Emperor Palpatine had to be a million times worse for building his private viewing gallery down here. The gallery was a box that had been neatly slotted into place among the support beams and crossed power couplings. If she squinted then Gohan could pretend that the little gallery looked like a fast food take out box. Since the gallery was just a very large box that had been pushed into place by an ancient tug-speeder about 30 plus years ago, Gohan figured that it wouldn’t be much trouble to push it back out.

The problems that she faced were monstrous but not insurmountable. First, the security system that the Emperor had installed was the top-of-the-line; the scourge of any splicer anywhere in the galaxy. Well, that had been the case twelve years ago. At the moment the viewing gallery was actually a little out of date. It was trouble but her hacking program had been cheerfully buzzing for two weeks now, the light would be clicking green in an hour.

None of the guards in the gallery were sentient. Antique droids, laser grids, trip-wires, motion sensors and, Gohan’s favorite, temperature sensors. The whole thing was wired to kingdom come which was completely pointless when the eight digit number to disable those extra security measures was the date of Palpatine’s coronation date.

Once the security alarms were disabled Gohan had to secure all of the painting and holocrons for transportation. The ride out would be fraught with danger and possible destruction and at the moment she was standing on top of a take-out box of art worth the entire Imperial fleet four times over.

The hard work and been done already, Gohan wiped her forehead and directed her headlamp to the newly welded shelves. Once the explosions had detached the art-box from its supports the whole thing was tilted backward onto the greased sloping ramps and slide two klicks until it would drop nearly into the garbage freighter. A few more dozen explosions would destroy the single turbolift that lead to the art-box. (Gohan had burnt what remained the corpses of the construction workers that had been left at the bottom of the shaft. It didn’t escape her notice that all of them were alien and had been slaves.) Because she was a little emotionally invested in making the Emperor hopping mad, she also had a few dozen pieces of unflattering caricature art drawn by some very gleeful political prisoners from 13. She was planning on leaving them here for someone to discover.
It was a real shame she couldn’t see his face when he found the NSFW one of him and Tarkin enjoying a ‘sensual’ bath together.

Gohan shifted and worked out the kink in her back. Privately she thought her pilots disguise waiting in the garbage freight was the best one yet. A pair of soft plastic contacts, a beautifully constructed pair of twi’lek lekku that matched her natural skin tone. A chest binder and a few plastic face prosthetics. A few swipes of make-up and a false-prosthetic hand and none of the inspectors would look twice at her. She would let them see exactly what they wanted to see.

The hardest part would be taking the art-box without triggering any of the alarms on the Emperor’s office. And that’s where her team came in.

Two weeks with the Executor Blacks was an experience like no other. Doora had to admit that she was out of her depth but didn’t mind it this time. She most interacted with the first shift of pilots that were Vader’s favored. They seemed to regard her with unapologetic curiosity. There had been some initial muttering about the Sith being her legal guardian but it had been dropped after a stern word from Soontir Fel. Everyone seemed content to ignore her and Doora them. She ate in the mess hall alone, she attended the classes with eight other academy cadets all much older than she, and she ended the night alone too. While the other pilots hung out in the common room, sharing drinks and talking, Doora ducked into her little closet.

The rest of the ship took their cues from Black Squadron, ignoring her unless she’d done something. So far she’d managed to keep her nose clean which was what she was planning on until she could leave.

Just as she slipped into the shared squadron quarters, Door yelped as a huge hand snagged her shoulder.

"'Vell, hello! Leetle Doora," Doora leaned back just far enough to look Black 4 in the face. The man was a huge, easily as tall as Vader, with a dark complexion and a thick accent that was almost incomprehensible.

"Uh, hey."

"You vant to ‘ide away again?"

"Uh, that’s the plan.” He shook his head, steering her toward the common room sitting rooms. “What are you doing?”

"You cannot ‘ide away.” Four said, gesturing black six out of his seat and pressing her into the chair, “Ve must all talk.”

“I thought the not talking was the way to go? Everyone was happy with the not talking thing.”

“I vas not happy,” Four settled, in his most intimidating fashion, into the chair opposite her. A dozen eyes were now watching the two. “You are our leetle bebe, our leetle black. Pilots her’ must be… fiends.”

“Friends?”

“Da,” Four nodded and waved over a few more pilots, “I am Vour. Who are you?”

“Um, Doora.” She hunched her shoulders and stared through the fringe of her hair at the assembled
pilots, “I thought you all knew that.”

“We did,” A woman dropped into the seat beside her, “But you’ve been hiding and I’ll admit, we haven’t been the friendliest. So, Baby Black, what are you doing here?”

“You know what I’m doing here.”

Four leaned forward, “Do you?”

“My mama told me to never be a dentist because I hate pulling teeth,” Dooora growled, “What’s the point?”

Instead of getting irritated at her insolence, Four just smiled, “I like you.”

“Uh…well, that makes someone.” His eyebrows rose and Doora didn’t dare look at the other pilots.

“I saw you sim scores,” Someone said from the back, “You sure you don’t have any academy training?”

“I’ve got a lot of experience.”

“Da,” Four nodded, “Ve remember d’ day you shot us up. It vas not a nice day.”

“Uh…it was ion shots,” she felt compelled to point out.

“Da, dat was a good think. I would have been dead.”

“Uh…sorry about that.”

“It is fine,” He waved, “Now, do you like your room?”

“I guess? I mean, it’s just a room.”

“But we made a bed out of TIE fighter. It’s cute. I thought it was cute,” The second largest man in the room, a Corellian with a tilted accent, spoke. “I was the one who designed it.”

“You designed the bed?” She blinked as a collective group of eight all turned away, blushing. “What?”

“Well,” The woman to her left spoke up, “When we head we’d get you on our team and they gave us the particulars we just sort of…lost it.”

“Da,” Four nodded, a bit sheepish, “Having a leetle black was what we always wanted.”

“I’m not a mascot,” She growled, “I tried to kill all of you at some point or another.”

“Ve vill not hold it against you,” Four laughed. His stern expression suddenly morphed into something pleasant and open, “It is okay, da? It is okay.”

“Thanks?” She shrugged a bit and sank into her seat, “I guess the bed is okay.”

“Is it cozy,” Six asked.

“Yeah, I don’t know.” She wasn’t really knowledgeable about the word cozy but it was a growing concept. “You guys are really weird.”

“Pretty much,” Someone from the back said, “So, tell us about you smuggling. You people always
have the best stories.”

“Well,” Doora watched the growing crowed with trepidation, “There was this one time, on Nal Hutta that I stole a bunch of stuff.”

“Tell me, Lord Vader, what occupies your thoughts that you must remove yourself for a month?” Emperor Palpatine stared down at the kneeling form of his apprentice, “It must be of grave importance.”

“It is, my master,” Vader did not shift and nor could Palpatine discover whatever secret Vader was holding close to himself. “But it is not yet complete.”

“And what, pray tell, is this project of yours?”

“The final step in the destruction of the Rebellion.” Vader said simply. Palpatine leaned back in his throne and frowned deeper.

“And?”

“I have not finished the calculations or preparations, my master. It is not fit to present.”

“And just how will this plan work, my foolish apprentice?”

“By removing the predominate pool of potential rebels permanently.”

“We have already begun the extermination of all sub-sentients, Vader. They are being eradicated as we speak.” Palpatine didn’t know that this was not the case.

“My master, I am referring to the human ones. The teenage humans who live and die on the streets, they who had no education are easier to sway with bright promises a false hopes. Once my calculations are complete then I will present it to you.”

“How much longer do you require?”

“Two days, my master.”

“Very well, Lord Vader, you have two days.”
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

There is some serious Force bullshit that goes down. Also Luke meets Yoda. Also, Qui
Gon is a little shit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Grandmaster of the Jedi Order Yoda waited patiently in the center of his swamp home as he felt and
heard the approach of a starship. This was it. The long awaited meeting of the last Master and
Padawan.

This was not where is should have been. Luke should have been taken as a padawan before his
thirteenth birthday. He should have grown up in the Jedi temple crèche while learning from the
wisest Knights and Masters the galaxy knew. He would have been the most sought after initiate in
the temple.

Luke Skywalker should not have come to learn the way of the Jedi in the middle of a war while
standing in a swamp.

“I don’t think that reminiscing is going to do you any good,” the ghost of Qui Gon appeared at his
shoulder. Yoda did not open his eyes. “You know that Luke would have hated temple life and even
if Anakin hadn’t fallen there was no way that the Skywalker twins would have ended up in the
crèche.”

“Know this to be true, you do not.”

“I’ve spent a good portion of the last twenty years watching him from a safe distance, Master Yoda. I
am the one who recently had a conversation with him. He does not want Luke to come here and
learn from you but has no alternative but his own Master.”

“To be Sith, he does not wish young Skywalker to be?”

“He finds the idea totally abhorrent.”

“Hmmm.” Yoda opened his eyes as the rain began. Luke’s force presence was muted and dull.
“What happened?”

“I couldn’t tell you,” Qui Gon spread his hands and shrugged, “I don’t know.”

“Unable to touch the force, young Skywalker is but able to touch Skywalker, the force is.”

“What do you think?”

“Hmmm.”

“That’s not an answer.” Both Jedi, living and dead, winced when an electronic screeched echoed
across the swamp.
“Hmm.” The familiar sounds of a distressed R2-D2 reached Yoda’s drooping ears. He sighed a bit and chewed more on his stick. “What of the sister?”

“I don’t think…” Both paused when frantic shouting echoed about the swamp. Luke was shouting something indecipherable. “He is a smart lad…I’m sure he’ll figure it out.”

“In danger, his sister might be.”

“We don’t even know what happened for sure.” Qui Gon said, “You will have to ask Luke when he gets here.”

“Hmm.” It was thirty more minutes before there was a small knock from the top of the door. Yoda didn’t bother to answer. R2 squealed a bit and he heard the boy answer, “I don’t know Artoo. Maybe Yoda is asleep.” R2 beeped again, “Don’t just go in there. It’s rude.” Opening his eyes Yoda stomped his way over to the small door and yanked it open. Luke Skywalker was a human on the shorter side of the scale. Not as short as Yoda but much smaller than his father had ever been. His blond hair was matted down with muck and rain, the orange uniform was a little worn and tired but serviceable. Behind the human was a familiar blue and white droid.

“Hello.” Luke made no motion to enter the little house even as the rain continue to pound upon his head. “I’m Luke Skywalker. You’re Yoda, I presume.”

“I am.” The bright blue eyes that swept up and down his form her not entirely judgmental and Yoda wondered what he was thinking. “Young Skywalker?”

“Yes, that’s me.”

“In from the rain, you must come.”

“Alright,” Luke crouched down and scooted his way into the house while R2 whistled outside. “Stay there little buddy. At least this isn’t acid rain.” Yoda was serving up a second bowl of soup for the young human when Luke finally maneuvered himself into a dry spot on the floor.

“A long way you have come.”

“I guess,” Luke accepted the wooden bowl and spoon.

“Captured by Vader you were?”

“Well….yes?”

“Your father I know he is.”

“Oh,” Luke hunched his shoulders, “Vader is my father. It was a lot to deal with…..”

“Why are you here?” Yoda stirred his soup a bit while Luke glanced out the window.

“I’m here to learn the ways of the force.”

“But not the ways of the Jedi?” Yoda caught the slip.

“I don’t think so.” Luke sighed a bit, “I’ve been studying the Jedi Order and philosophy and I just… there are many things I don’t agree with. There are many things I don’t think I could live by too.”

“Hmmm but disconnected from the force you are.”
“Yes,” Luke nodded and watched the diminutive Jedi a little longer. “Can you tell?”

“A hole in the force there is. A hole that is you. A bright light lost from the galaxy you are. Your connection be restored it must.”

“That’s what father said,” Luke nodded agreeably, sipping his soup. “Qui Gon said you could help me.”

“Say that did he?” Yoda glanced at the grinning form of Qui Gon and nodded. “Help you I can if willing you are.”

“I am willing.” Luke bobbed his head up and down and winced when it struck the ceiling. “I am ready to feel the force again. Not being able to sense anything feels like I’ve lost a hand.”

“Hmm, a loss of the force many padawan underwent. The Trial of Solitude it was called.”


“To teach humility and independence it was designed to do.”

“I….” Luke glanced away again, “You shouldn’t’ve done that. That isn’t your place to pull people away from their lifeline. The force is what gives them a connection to the greater universe. It’s not just a power that can be used to jump high or move fast. It helps gain insight into the secrets of our personhood and beyond. I’ve been disconnected because of great pain and agony. I can’t feel the universe and not only that I can’t seem to feel myself. To do that on purpose to a kid is just cruel. It doesn’t teach humility or independence. It teaches pain. It hurts beyond anything I’ve ever known not to feel the force, like a burn in my heart. To yank someone away and shove them into a pain that they can’t cure or fix without someone else’s permission is evil. It’s like holding them a slave or servant, holding back their dignity to perform to you standards.”

Yoda’s eyes were wide and he said nothing when Luke Skywalker looked levelly back at him.

“I read about the Trial of Solitude and I’ve studied the culture of the Jedi Order…well.” The boy blushed and bit, “I’ve studied it a little but I’ve been lectured on it a whole lot.”

“Necessary to learn to live without the force a padawan must. As citizens do.”

“A lot of people can’t feel the force and for those that do it you take it away it’s like….” Luke searched for words the familiar glow of anger so indicative of his heritage. “You get what I’m trying to say, right?”

“Hmm.” Yoda didn’t answer but continued to eat. “Eat, young Skywalker. Talk more when the sun rises we will.” He waited to see if Luke would protest and what pleasantly surprised to find that the human shrugged and ate. “No more you wish to say?”

“I do,” Luke sighed a bit, “But I’m tired and I’m not feeling well.”

“In pain you are?”

“Yes.” There was silence as they finished off the last of their soup. “Thank you for the soup.”

“Welcome you are. Sleep you should.”

“Oh. Um.” Luke glanced around the small house and shrugged. “I brought some supplies.”
“My home you will rest in.” Yoda demanded, “No arguments.”

“Alright then,” Luke’s blue eyes flashed to glance toward this waiting droid. “Is there anything you need me to help you with?”

“Your help I do not need.” Yoda said, wondering if it was Skywalker nature or just human nature to be contrary. “Sleep you must.”

“Alright,” Luke budged away from the Yoda’s pushing hands and swinging cane. “I’ll go to sleep! You don’t need to be pushy about it.”

“I do it seems.”

“No,” Luke rolled his eyes but it was in a good natured way that Yoda only poked him gently for. It took some maneuvering and shifting before Luke was stretched out on the dirt floor with his space blanket thrown over him. Blue eyes surveyed the little green alien for a moment before the human sighed a bit and rolled over. Luke curled up beneath his blanket seemingly content. Yoda could sense his distrust and confusion even as the boy turned his back on him.

Luke sighed deeply and fidgeted as if unsure if he wanted to sleep or not.

After a few hours Luke’s breath finally evened out and he was asleep. Yoda finally moved to sit beside the human’s head. In a moment he had touched upon Luke’s slumbering mind with the Force, prodding at the torn edges of his connection.

Luke had forcefully disconnected himself from the force. Why? Yoda wasn’t sure yet but it was far more understandable when he noticed the pain radiating outward from the tear. It was almost impossible for a force sensitive to forcibly disconnect themselves from the force. That Luke had actually succeeded in isolating himself was a marvel and a concern. Yoda hummed and chewed on his gimmer stick as he set about repairing the ragged edges and gently pushing the force back toward the young human. To his total astonishment the force pulled away from the grandmaster’s prodding and began approaching the boy itself.

It hovered around the human’s slumbering form almost delicately, as if unsure if it out to touch his form. Yoda’s surprise deepened further when he saw a tendril of light caress the gentle curve of Luke’s skull before sinking into his mind. Watching the scene with the force was a confusing sight as, once the force had reconnected to Luke’s mind it sank into the rest of his body. A mere instant later Yoda had to squint his eyes to observe how Luke glowed a vibrant white and blue. His whole form was encased in the light and the Jedi Master was forced to admit that he had never seen anything like it. The boy was being cradled by the Force itself as carefully and gently as a mother with an infant.

Yoda closed his eyes and ducked away from the scene and allowed young Skywalker his privacy. Whatever was happened was clearly between Luke and the force itself.

#$#$#

Luke fell asleep after a few hours of worriedly considering his fate. It wasn’t easy to sleep in a tiny mud hut with rain pounding on the roof constantly. At least it didn’t leak, which was something Luke was grateful for. He could feel the stare of the little alien on the back of his head, a stare that bored into his brain and Luke could only ignore as best as he was able.

His sleep was dreamless, empty of light and color and noise. He was suspended in a warm darkness that he would never remember when he was awake. Unconsciously he noticed when a dim light
appeared and slowly began to shine brighter and brighter. It pulsed a deep comforting rhythm as Luke felt it wrap around his form and hold him close.

Then he understood.

He had never been disconnected to the force. It had never really left him even though he couldn’t touch it. Just because the use of it was beyond him it had always been there; holding Luke in the comforting and soft blurred edges of darkness that made him feel as he was barely an infant in a uterus.

Neither good nor bad. Not Evil or Purity. It simply was. It was the sum total of everything the galaxy was made of. Order and chaos. Life and death. Sound and silence. It was the most fiery of passions and yet the most apathetic of attitudes.

You couldn’t be disconnected from something encompassed the whole of universe, from something that pulled every living and non-living being into the embrace of something was beyond sentient comprehension. Even if Luke had pulled himself away he would always be what the fates desired.

A child of the force. One way or another he would return to it.

The leaves around him trembled in time with a wind that was a breathy sigh. He found himself sitting in a sun dappled clearing that was the very picture of serenity. “I’m sorry.” Luke said quietly both real and not real in the scene he found himself in. As odd as he ought to have found his situation Luke didn’t mind. An instant later the weather changed from a clear spring day on Naboo to the most dangerous of typhoon from Kamino. Luke flinched backward as a roaring clap of thunder seemed to bounce around his head. A furious roar of a beast echoed about and Luke bowed his head. “I was afraid. I understand why you’re angry with me.” He observed the lashing rainstorm that both struck him and went through him. “I didn’t mean to be disrespectful.” Something all-powerful and all-being was not to be denied and by yanking himself away Luke had done just that. It was breaking a natural law to deny the Force.

The thunder rumbled again, this time softly, and the storm died away to become a soft press of snow. Leaves and flowers disappeared and reappeared a moment later when the sun emerged with a cheerful glow.

“You’re still not happy with me?” Luke ventured. The sun set and a moon rose. “I am sorry.” Another puff of wind ruffled his hair and the vaguest sensation of someone pressing a kiss of his forehead made the blond blush. “Thank you.” He let out a tired sigh and watched a seed fall from a tree, grow, sprout, bud, blood, and die in a matter of seconds. Minutes later a few more seeds began to sprout. When the whole clearing was full of flowers Luke couldn’t help but beam. “They’re beautiful.” He admired the bobbing blossoms and brushed a hand along a soft petal. “I don’t think I’ve seen any like it.”

A wildfire blew through a moment later. Consuming everything in flames and reducing the flower to ashes.

“STOP!” Luke screeched; leaping to his feet and yanking the blossom he had been touching toward his chest. He screwed his eyes against the agony of the fire even as the trees cracked and popped and eventually collapsed. When Luke dared opened his eyes he gaped. “Why did you do that? You destroyed everything!” Desperately he glanced down at the flower in his hand just in time to watch it to crumble to dust. “NO! Stop! WHY!? You!” Luke clenched his fists even as the dust sifted toward the scorched dirt. Even as he demanded answer a stern, parental, tap on the side of his head made him stop.
Just as fast as the clearing had burned it grew. Trees grew up besides the broken stumps of the previous generation, flowers and vines spurted up from a newly grassy earth.


Chapter End Notes

If you have questions about my thought process or address so you can come burn me at the stake just leave a comment. You’ll get an answer to both.
Leia and Ahsoka meet. Obi Wan does some bitching and Luke does some bitching and then Vader has to deal with stuff.

Leia wanted to say that Vader’s castle felt exactly like Malachor and attribute it to the Sith’s general air. Except as dark as Bast Castle had felt it had nothing on the slimy, disgusting pull of this planet, below the ship the planet’s surface seemed to vibrate with malicious glee.

“I don’t like this place,” She muttered, stretching out with her infant sense to test if she can find her supposed Jedi teacher. “It feels ugly.”

When they landed and disembarked at the place that seemed to be the nexus of the darkness on the planet, Chewbacca complained, [I can smell bodies.]

“Well, there are marks from engine backwash here,” Leia waved her hand at the area near them and pointed to the hole in the ground, “I read the reports for the Specters when they were here…they said Ahsoka died but if Vader is right then she is.”

“Alive.” A harsh voice came from Leia left, her weapon was primed and ready before a second thought crossed her mind. The person was a togruta, tall with distinctive facial markings that Leia immediately identified. She was dressed in the torn and ratted remains of a black cloak but two lightsabers hung at her hip. “Who are you?”

Lost for words, it took Leia a moment to come up with a reply. “I am Leia Organa, General of the Rebel Alliance. I come in search of Ahsoka Tano.” The togruta edged around the shadows, not stepping into the light streaming down from the hole above them.

“I am Tano.”

“I need your help.” Leia said firmly, “The galaxy is in peril.”

Tano snorted, moving away, “The galaxy is always in peril. People screaming for help all over the universe, begging the Jedi to solve their problem and when that wasn’t enough they wanted an Empire.”

“I was directed her by an Imperial,” Leia said, undaunted “He wanted me to find you so you can train me.”

“You’re force sensitive,” Tano inched a little closer, blue eyes glowing unnaturally in the dark, “I haven’t meet one since…”

“Ezra Bridger, I know. He’s alive and still a member of the Rebellion. I need training…I need help.”

“Who send you?” Ahsoka stepped forward, glancing only slightly at Chewbacca. Leia wondered if
she’d used her voice often in the last few years.

“Someone…..who wanted me to be trained in the ways of the force but not the Jedi.”

“Who was it?” Tano stepped closer, dangerous and calm.

“Vader,” Leia blurted and winched when the togruta flinched backward.

“What does he want with me?” Ahsoka snorted, moving into the shadows again and sitting down. “He’s that one who left me here.”

“I know he was once Anakin Skywalker,” Leia said, “Your teacher and I know he has a son named Luke Skywalker.”

“A son?” Leia could see the outline of Ahsoka turn her direction again. “Of course Anakin had a son. Why wouldn’t he break one more code?”

“I need to learn the ways of the Force.”

“I am not a Jedi, young one.”

“I don’t want a Jedi,” Leia said, stepping into the shadows to join the alien, “I need you.”

“Why would Vader send you here?”

“Because he had a plan.”

“To take over the galaxy?”

“To stop the Emperor. He’s joined the with Rebellion to dethrone Palpatine. There’s a plan, a good one, that we’re working on and it depends on both Vade and the Rebellion working together.”

“Vader Fell,” Ahsoka said quietly, a familiar brand of sadness seemed to echo from her form and Leia nodded.

“Yes.

“And what is he now?”

“He’s still a Sith but he’s…less like what he was before.”

“Because of his son?”


“I’ll train you,” The togruta said quietly, “I will teach you how to use the Force.” Leia inched a little closer to Chewbacca when Ahoska Tano stood up again, “It won’t be anything like what you’ve been taught about the Jedi order. It will be different, darker, more dangerous.”

“You’re not a Sith?”

“No,” Tano looked away from Leia, toward something glowing red in the distance, “But I am not a Jedi either.”

“The how?”

“I’ve been living on a Sith planet for several years, young one. I’ve been talking to the temple
“guardian,” she waved a hand the direction of the glowing.

“You’ve only spoken to a Sith temple guardian for five or so years?”

“Yes,” Ahoska’s voice was harsh but with the old hint of kindness that was only a vague undertone.

“I see,” Leia waited and held out a hand, “Welcome to the..”

“I want something in return,” Ahsoka murmured, staring at her outstretched hand, “Something of mine.”

“And?”

“For when the war is over and it will be over one day.” Deep blue eyes turned icy, dangerous and feral, “I want something from the Rebellion and from whatever government takes over.”

“I’ll see what we can do.”

“I suppose that’s the best I’ll get,” Ahsoka nodded, “I want a home.”

“The temple..”

“A real home, a house for myself and some land….my family were farmers and I want to be able to….make a home for myself.”

Leia swallowed, wondered what had happened to the woman since she’d been exiled here. This was nothing like the Ahsoka she’d heard about. The ex-jedi was darker, angrier, and harsher than anything her father had told her. “A home.”

“I don’t want to be fighting forever. I’m….tired.”

“I understand,” Leia nodded, wondering if Ahsoka’s dream would even be possible. “I’ll do my best.”

“That is the best I can expect,” Tano finally gripped her hand and shook. “Now, we’ll begin.”

“Now?”

“There is no better time to start.”

“Don’t you want to leave now?” Leia followed the woman across the rubble, picking her way past dirt and chaos, “You’ve been stranded here for years.”

“I’m not ready to leave yet,” Ahsoka tossed her answer back. It echoed against the cavern, bouncing unnervingly about. “Besides, there is something you must learn first.”

[I’ll wait with the ship] Chewbacca waved to Leia as she moved further away from. She waved back and turned to follow the distant figure of Ahsoka Tano deeper into the Sith cathedral.

#$#$#$#

“You lied to me.” Where the first words out of Luke Skywalker’s mouth when Obi Wan Kenobi appeared as a force ghost just feet outside Yoda’s little hut.

“Luke,” he held up his hands, “I did not lie to you.”
“Yes you did,” Luke’s focus didn’t break as he levitated a dozen rocks, Artoo and the diminutive Jedi Master in his chair. Having the force back was a blessing and he was never going to take it for granted. “You told me Vader betrayed and murdered my father you didn’t tell me that Vade was my father.”

“From a certain point of view.”

“You lied from all points of view,” Luke answered, his eyes finally opening to frown at the Jedi ghost, “You lied and you can’t pretend that you didn’t. There is not certain point of view.”

“Anakin Skywalker died and Vader was born in his place,” Obi Wan argued, finding himself again at the mercy of an irate Skywalker.

“Vader is still Anakin Skywalker,” Luke replied firmly, setting down a miserably beeping Artoo. “They are the same person. Vader is just what Anakin became but that doesn’t mean he’s a completely different person. He is still dark and sad and lonely to a much greater degree but he was still Anakin Skywalker.”

“No he isn’t,” Luke began stacking the rocks into an impressive pyramid, “He is only different from the man you knew.”


“Your conversation this is,” Yoda replied, still idly chewing on his gimmer stick, “Involve me you should not.”


“It is still a lie! You deliberately misled me you made me want to exact vengeance on my own father. Why?”

“You have been a prisoner for a month,” Obi Wan said, “It is a common coping tactic for prisoners to try and bond with their captor to survive. Even one such as Darth Vader can be.”

“He was not except a father to me,” Luke said firmly.

“I am sure some Sith manipulations of his are.”

“There were no manipulations.”

“He is a Sith, he is tied to the darkness forever. If he cannot be killed then the Empeor will win.”

“I won’t kill me own father,” Luke glowered and finally set the chair holding Yoda back into it’s proper place.

“It doesn’t have to be this way.” Qui Gon materialized a moment later, smiling a Luke and turning to frown at his former apprentice. “I have spoken to him recently, Obi Wan. He is not as you say.”

“Master Yoda, why aren’t you weighing in on this debate?” The oldest jedi opened his eyes with a sigh.

“Bent my ears, young Skywalker already has. No longer wish to drive a speeder into a wall do I.”
“Hmph,” Luke snorted, and leaned forward in the mud to glower at his former teacher.

“He’s already gotten to you,” Obi Wan said suddenly, “Vader has turned you to the darkness and.” Luke extended a hand and whistled. A moment later a tiny avian with leathery wings jumped on his fingers and began peeping at him. Obi Wan’s mouth opened and closed and he looked away.

“He did not want me to become a Sith,” Luke said firmly, staring at Obi Wan with an expression that reminded the man too much of Amidala. “Of course he also didn’t want me to become a Jedi but that’s moot. My point, is that I haven’t been corrupted by the Sith but I have been studying and just because I’m telling you the truth and pointing out a mistake you made doesn’t mean that I’ve suddenly become the next Darth.”

“Who has been telling you these.”

“Tang,” Obi Wan blinked, tilting his head to the side, “You may or may not remember her, she was Separatist and she works for father. She’s his major domo and tactics specialist.”

“Tang….I remember this name.” Yoda muttered, “Dangerous sentient Tang is, ruthless and violent and honorable.”

“Yeah,” Luke sighed, rubbing his nose. “I’m still mad at you Obi Wan, for lying to me and not believing me when I tell you that Father didn’t hurt me and he certainly didn’t try to force me into the Sith.”

“He’d correct, my young friend.” Qui Gon spoke up with a concerned frown directed to Obi Wan, “Anakin is Luke’s father, in his life support suit or not.”

“Master,” Obi Wan sighed.

“He really is,” Jinn said, stroking his incorporeal beard, “A rather strict father with a certain sternness you might not have expected from Anakin but nonetheless it fits him well. He is a good father, sith or not.”

“Master!”

“We should focus on training the boy. Not bickering about his father.”

“I agree,” Luke stood up, “I’m going to take a look around through, I’ve only been here a short time but I’m itching to explore.”

Qui Gon waited until the blond head had vanished behind a tree before he leaned over to Obi Wan and whispered, “That’s gotten him in trouble a few times with his Father.” Kenobi’s startled glance was equally amusing and astonishing. “Apparently he’d put himself in dangerous positions before.”

“Anakin was prone to such recklessness,” Kenobi said, “Why should it make any difference if it is his son?”

“Apparently it does.”

“That is vastly hypocritical of Anakin,” Kenobi snorted, tucking hands into his ghostly robes, “The same as with Ahsoka. Do as a I not as I have done.”

#$#$#$
Luke was back. Vader felt the soothing presence of his son’s glow from across the galaxy, lightening the force and pulling him closer. It was a soothing glow that settled across his soul like a gentle balm. ‘Son’ He reached for his son, entreating the boy to come to him. To leave the tiny Jedi and return to his side. Luke’s attention shifted toward him for a moment like a gentle spotlight and moved away. The beast inside of him purred in delight and Vader was startled out of his trance when Admiral Piett moved up to his side.

“Milord.”

“What?” He snarled, turning on the smaller man with a furious glower that the man had surely felt.

“A message is waiting for you. It is marked high priority one, milord.” Captain Piett was worried and stressed out but calm. “It comes from a call-sign ‘Intrepid.’”

Tang. It must be Tang. She must have some news.

“Very well, Admiral. You have the conn.” With a growl he swept toward his office mentally preparing to eviscerate the woman who caused him so much grief.

Chapter End Notes

Sort of a transition chapter, more interesting things happen next time! I promise you'll see your fav father-son duo having adventures and stuff.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

Economics, Politics. Reference to the Great Depression. AKA Gohan brings the Empire to it's knees.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I think this is the signal.” Leia, along with the rest of the Rebel Council, watched the scene playing on the news with identical expressions of befuddlement.

“Is this for real?” Someone from the crew pit asked, their face several shade of complete awe.

“What…what is going on here?”

“I think,” Mothma struggled to find the words to describe the images playing out before them. “This is….this is the signal. Where will those ships be waiting?”

“Here,” Ahsoka grunted, passing the human a slip of flimsy, “These co-ordinates.” The Alliance Council watched with stupefied silence as several billion credits were stolen from the Imperial treasury on live Holo.

#S#$

“WE’RE GETTING MORE REPORTS!” The security forces of ISB were scrambling as they fought to control the spirally chaos across the Core worlds. “A Jailbreak from Sing Sing 23! Eight hundred prisoners reported missing, most of them rebels captured at Hoth!”

Kallus snatched up a passing report, scanning it and tossing it away.

“What else is happening? I want updates, people!”

“The Treasury has been robbed. Troopers en route to the performance center where it took place! More converging on the treasury itself.”

“Contain all of the treasury workers,” Kallus thundered, “Lock down the spaceports. Halt all trade and monetary traffic in and out of there.”

“We don’t have the authority to shut down stock trading, sir!” A sergeant with a panicked expression turned, “The markets plummeting at an average of 5 points every 30 seconds!”

“Someone get me a line to Lord Vader!” Kallus watched the screens indicating the stock, his stomach sinking as fast as the green lines. “Now!”

“If we don’t halt trading the economy is going to be crippled!” Someone shouted; the clicking and clacking of desperate typers as they worked to control the damages.

“No one aboard the Executor is picking up!” Kallus whirled. This day was going bad to worse. “And sensors just went off in His Majesty’s personal art gallery and the Museum of Galactic
Artifacts and the Museum of Ancient Areospace Technology. Sensors going off at the gold deposits on Corellia and Lothal!

“Reports coming in from the Third Fleet! Rebels attacking!”

“Send troopers to the Gold deposits and the artifacts museum!” He had to prioritize the targets. Kallus was less concerned with the Emperor’s stolen loot and more with the money of average citizens that appeared to be vanishing into thin air.

“More robberies coming in. Riots breaking out on the Imperial Center! Crowd control is working to contain them but they’ve tied up traffic and no one’s able to get to the Museums.”

“False alarm on Lothal! Troopers on the ground report nothing is amiss, the planets on lock down.”

“Get those museums on lockdown!” Kallus shouted, “Tell them to take civilian transports if they have to.”

“Sir, the people have barricaded the main traffic routes with garbage freighters and public transports!”

Kallus dug his hands into his foreheads. “Get Naboo on the line, we need someone of a higher rank to handle this.” He did not want to be responsible for shooting civilians and destroying millions worth of public property.

“Naboo’s communications has been down since this began, sir.” A frantic Ensign working the controls of the communicator looked on the edge of tears. “We’re working to re-establish connection but I’m afraid there’s nothing.”

“Then send a holo message!”

“The holo net on Naboo is down too!”

That meant that Kallus was the highest ranking officer on the ISBS Maleficent. The ones above him had all been scheduled for a conference on Naboo. With Nabo out of reach that mean he was the one to control this. He hoped the rebels would succeed in their mission and mentally saluted the genius who had concocted this scheme.

Vader knew the chaos beyond his ship was reaching critical mass. So far, none of his crew knew anything about it. He had been forced to temporarily scuttle the Executor for the sake of Gohan’s plan, the entirety which seemed too bizarre to actually wok.

Drifting through space he had suitably threatened the head of engineering to repair the damages in a timely manner. Admiral Piett seemed beside himself with worry, as was the rest of the Alpha Bridge Crew. They were concerned for the ship, patting their consoles and muttering encouraging words under their breath.

“My lord.” Piett hovered at his side, “Engineering reports that they have successfully located the damage and I must report….sabotage.”

“Sabetoge! On this ship! Have the ship’s investigator on this case immediately. I want them found at once.”

“Yes, milord.” Piett bowed and scuttled away, concerned and frightened but relieve he was no
longer within his master’s blast radius.

"Can we raise the Imperial Palace?" Kallus wiped his forehead with a damp cloth. Just as one problem seemed to be solved another would rise and take its place. "Are we getting anyone?"

"The Palace is on lock down. The protesters haven’t tried to breach their defenses but they aren’t accepting any calls nor are they transmitting any commands."

"What?" He rubbed his sideburn. For a moment the flash of the memory of being stranded with Zeb was before his eyes. "Why would it be down in this time of crisis?"

The chaos of the command center stopped just long enough for a single thought to be shared among them.

The Emperor was hiding.

Protected by hundreds of troopers and a small army the old man was safe and leaving the galaxy to fend for itself.

"This is probably my greatest plan yet." Gohan leaned over to get a better look at the riots below the garbage barge. No one would be able to guess that she carried the Emperor’s entire stolen collection of valuables. It was a beautiful sight, those protests, the kind that had been common during the waning days of the Clone Wars. Fireworks were going off, flares and blaster joining the mess as Imperial ships tried to maneuver around the crowds and past the rioting planet. Traffic laws were always the first thing abandoned which was fine for the thief.

Chaos was glorious and brilliant and absolutely her favorite disguise for order.

"Agent Kallus!" Eight of the alarms across the galaxy had been verified as false alarms. Still working through the protesting problem he ordered the troopers across the galaxy to secure Imperial facilities and to wait them out. "The Executor had accepted a hail."

"Put them on!" He straightened his jacket just at the blue form of Darth Vader appeared.

"What is the situation, Agent Kallus?"

"Milord," first things first, "The stock market needs to be halted at once. Any more trading and the foundation of the Empire’s economy will be gone within the next," he checked the screen, "Two hours." He might have sounded brusque but he needed this to happen.

Instead of questioning him or berating his demanding tone, Vader summoned a datapad. A moment later Kallus noted the dipping arrow halt and breathed a sigh of relief.

"I want a full report, Kallus." Vader tucked his thumbs into his belt and listened as Kallus explained the situation as best he could.

"So far we have been unable to contact either the ISB command or raise the Imperial Palace. Naboo is in a communications black out and the Palace is on Delta 5 lockdown."

"I see." The ISB agents in the room breathed a simultaneous sigh of relief. With Vader back a higher
ranking officer could take control of the situation.

Vader was impressed. Not only had Gohan manage to throw the entire galaxy into panic. Her wok had made the Emperor lock himself in a secure bunker and wait the chaos out. The whole situation would paint Palpatine as a weak fool and Vader had no doubt that the agents trying to control the situation would be aware of that fact.

In order to paint himself as the benevolent savior of the tied up forces of the Empire he began to dispatch orders, drawing the fleets back into formation and sending troopers to key locations. It had been over eight hours since the whole thing had begun and if Gohan did not have the holocrons now then she never would.

“Unbelievable.” Mon Mothma gaped at the sight of ten ships dropping out of hyperspace. All fresh off the assembly line and all of the staffed by their previously captured soldiers and the political prisoners. “What are the reports saying?”

“Every significant prison has had a jailbreak. The treasury is down by 200 trillion credits, the gold deposits are down 10 percent. Public property damages range from the low 100 thousand credits on a planet to 40 million on Courasant. We’re getting reports of the riots dying down and protesters going home with leaving no trace for the ISB. Lord Vader locked up the stock market a little too late and… several…a lot of credits vanished in that eight hour period. The Emperor has made no formal announcement.”

“Where do they even store 200 trillion credits?” Mothma wondered.

“No one has claimed responsibility for the attack though, but early ISB investigations suggest that they consider Black Sun to be responsible.”

“Chaos is order we don’t understand.” Mothma turned to Ahsoka who hovered at Organa’s shoulder. “Leia, what are you sensing in the force?”

Organa, who had taken to mediating on the bridge when she was sparring, was silent.

“Someone clever….not the rebellion. Leia’s voice as trance-like, “They want chaos. They want to make noise and they desire…money.” The unfocused brown gaze unnerved everyone but Tano. “I can see them. A group…but I can’t see their features. But I am sensing their motivation.”

“What could motivate someone to do this?” Mothma wondered, unaware that Leia had heard her.

“They were paid.” The uncomfortable silence fell. Organa closed her eyes, sighing. “I can’t tell anymore than that.”

“You’ve grown powerful, Organa. Such technique is nearly impossible an average force user.

“I’m sure you will be a great Jedi, Leia.”

“I am not going to be a Jedi.” Leia stood up, brushing her clothes off.

“But Tano is.”

“I’m not a Jedi,” Ahsoska said, voice tinged with irritation. “I’ve lived on a Sith planet for the last few
years. You can’t expect me to have stayed with the light completely.”

“Of course not but.”

“Come, Leia. We’ll run through your katas again.”

Tang leaned back in her chair, sipping her iced tea with a wry smirk. The screens about her, despite the chaos they presented, were nothing more than entertainment at the moment. She could have mitigated the entire situation pretty easily but had been ordered to let it spiral out of control.

“Well,” she held out her glass for a refill. Cookie obliged quickly. “I am impressed.”

“This isn’t going to end well. This will cause an economic depression worse than the one after we lost the Death Star and that bankrupted the whole galaxy.”

“That’s the point. I hadn’t really considered an economics approach to conquest but I do thank Gohan for bringing it up.”

“I’m not sure how crippling the economy would help conquest,” Rain picked at his teeth with a sharp knife.

“Look at it this way. Corporations are basically Palpatine’s cheap concubines. They get the fat government contracts, keep most of the money and use what amounts of indentured servitude for workers. Most corporations are heavily protected by the Emperor and they are loyal to anyone who lets them get away with basically everything and rake in more and more money. They’ll silence any protesters and erase anyone who might get in either of their way. Most of them have a mercenary army that could cause significant damage. Plus, ever small business that has money invested, every retirement fund, every school and academy and every former senator would have traded frantically to keep their money safe. After all, there is no safety net when the banks do go down and the banks are owned by the Empire and only one other corporation. When trading locked in there will be runs on banks all over the galaxy and the banks will be basically empty. No vast fortunes can be withdrawn and no one will be able to take out money for themselves.”

“And?”

“The money is gone, boys. Most of it is gone. People aren’t going to be alright with that. Like fools the big bastards on top will hoard what remains of their money. Force and violence will be used on the average citizen that just lost everything and with that the galaxy will be in a tailspin. Military members won’t get any money and the biggest evil that Palpatine controlled was money and with that gone…half of our rebellion work will be done for us.”

“But the Emperor won’t allow the people to protest.”

“He won’t but he won’t be able to stop them. People will tolerate living in absolute tyranny as long as they have money to spend and with no money to spend they’ll be quick to depose anyone who they might blame.”

“But is the money safe?”

“I don’t know.” Tang sipped so more. “I sure hope so.”

“The Imperial treasury didn’t have the galaxies money though. It just had most of it.”
“That’s true, most planets have their own banks and Corellia is protected heavily from outside infringement. Has been since the early days of the Old Republic so they’ll be fine but they have significantly disrupted the cash flow of the galaxy. People are going to panic. Oh!” On the holo screen the bust of Darth Vader appeared.

“Citizens of the Empire.” All across the galaxy people were receiving the same message. Bars, library’s, public buildings and private homes. The emergency broadcast system had not been used in decades. “Now is not the time to panic or loss control. As dire and frightening as the situation I urge you to not run on the bank. Do not release more chaos than has already been. Now, in this moment, we must not allow fear to overrule out common sense. Until this situation has been resolved citizens must aid citizens. Stand united against the threatening disorder and show the fools who would inflict such damage on our Empire the strength of each person far outweighs any terror they could attempt destroy us with. Protesters, return to your homes peacefully. Troopers, remain vigilant. Police officers, security members, law enforcement you have never been needed more. Keep the peace and protect those under your jurisdiction. As a united front the Empire can overcome any of these attacks.” Vader paused. “Actions are being taken to repair the damage.” Tang’s eyebrows rose. “Take heart, citizens. All is not as desperate as it seems so long as you remain steady in your convictions.” The broadcast cut out leaving a floating Imperial cog behind.

“Well, I’m impressed twice over. That wasn’t a completely horrible speech and I think he just mitigated the damages. Nice. You know,” she tapped her teeth with a finger. “I don’t think either of us could have actually predicted the damage that Gohan would bring. There was a basic guess on how to handle her situation but I think she changed up her plan to inflict more damage.”

“Oh boy.” Cookie drained the rest of the tea. Not seeing Tang’s side eye. “This is going to be crazy.”

Doora rubbed her nose in disbelief, unsure if she out to clean out her ears.

“I dinnae believe ‘et.” Black 10 shook her head.

“Good thing I didn’t have any money to lose. Hey! Are we going to get deployed?”

“You are not getting deployed for a while, Cadet.” Fel’s stern frown made her pout. Black Four reached over and tucked the slim ex-smuggler under his arm. “And now, Lord Vader does not wish to present the image that the Empire will use excessive force on a panicking public.”

“I have a question,” The Corellian twins raised their hands, speaking as one. “Where is the Emperor in all of this?”

“Under lockdown. Protests on Imperial Center are only now dying down.”

“Where were we when this started?” Doora asked.

“The ship was sabotaged.” Fel again frowned at her, “Where you not aware?”

“I..uh…I may or may not have been napping.” She blushed furiously as Black Four cooed.

“Ze bebe must get sleep!” He exclaimed, holding her impossibly closer. “Very tired, so tired.”

“I wasn’t tired!” Doora pushed against her captor, “It was the probiotic meds I was taking.”
“Probiotic medications aren’t supposed to make people tired,” Fel pointed out. Doora’s blush deepened. “I’m not angry, Black Cadet, your health regimen states you need more sleep so a nap is a good thing.”

“Can we not focus on me?” Doora buried her face in her hands, ignoring the grinning adults around her. Fel nodded, giving her a gentle pat on the shoulder.

“Very well, onto other business.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m not big on speech writing so let me know what you think of Vader’s speech.
Chapter Summary


Panic had not died down. In fact, as Kallus sifted through the urgent messages from news stations across the galaxy, it seemed to have worsened. Thankfully, there had been no reports of looting or large-scale riots. Apparently Vader’s speech had had the desired effect to cool that panicking population.

“What is it now?” Kallus felt the entire situation was above his paygrade but apparently Vader had been impressed with his handling of the situation.

“Agent Kallus.’ Recognizing the voice, Kallus leapt to his feet with a sharp salute.

“Admiral, sir. My apologies. I was.”

“As you were Agent,” Admiral Piett waved him down, “I understand you have been under some tremendous pressure.”

“Nothing I can’t handle, sir.” Kallus retook his seat as the small man set a bottle onto the table. “Sir, I am on duty.”

“This isn’t alcohol, Agent.” Piett said, “This is what the Admirals and Captains under the Lords favor use to survive near endless amounts of work.”

“Sir?” Piett took the seat opposite him.

“It’s is a dieatary supplement. It will help with energy and keeping you muscle mass up but I do promise you that it isn’t much of a substitute for food.”

“Thank you, sir.” Soft gray eyes examined him for a moment. “I hadn’t been expected to be transferred here.”

“The Lady Ex is an impressive ship and most tend to be overwhelmed by her size.”

“She is a very impressive ship.” Obviously this was one of the men that went around to compliment his ship. “I can understand why you are proud.”

“Yes, tell me Agent. How has damage control been going?”

“Poorly, sir.” Kallus admitted, “A final total of damages make the future bleak.”

“Was this a rebel strike? They did steal ten warships and liberate a good number of prisoners to crew them.”

“No sir,” Agent Kallus rubbed his sideburns. He wished he had been pulled out by his favorite rebel
crew months ago. Imagining Admiral Piett and Ezra Bridger talking was amusing and he ducked his head to hide his smile. “Initial investigations reveal that this was perpetrated by Black Sun. We aren’t sure if it’s in tandem with the Hutt Syndicates yet. Though, that does seem to be where this is leading us.”

“Why would Black Sun initiate something as large scale as this?” Kallus almost felt like he was being tested, someone behind the Admiral was making sure his answers were the ones people wanted to hear. It was an unnerving realization. “Surely they would see that this was damage them.”

“According to various reports I’ve read through there are multiple indicators that Black Sun has been allowed to operate with impunity in Imperial space.” He swallowed, knowing exactly why Prince Xizor had been allowed to do so. “That there are several in the Court that have made deals with him and in exchange for various favors the orders have come down to leave Black Sun operations alone.” Kallus watched Piett’s expression tightened. He’d forgotten that this man had gotten his career moving by eradicating pirates and smugglers. Perhaps he would be sympathetic to Kallus. “Because this…complacency Black Sun felt confident that this sort of criminal action would not be met with any sort of retaliation. Considering what he’s gotten away with in the past it isn’t much a leap to make.”

“And the Hutt Syndicates?”

“The very same except that they’ve been allowed to operate with near immunity since the Old Republic. Since no actions were taken against them so they must be planning some sort of a merger with Black Sun or even just an operation together. It isn’t much a surprise all things considered.”

A black expression had settled over the Admiral’s features. Kallus wondered what the man was planning on.

“I was shifted to heading the investigative team from trying to control the economic fall out of these heists.”

“Would you prefer to be out in the field, agent?”

“I would, sir, but I’m honored to chosen to head the task force to hunt down these criminals.”

“Lord Vader is not an easy task master.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And what do you plan to do with your investigation once you have completed it?”

“What happens with the investigation depends entirely on what the Court will do. My opinions make little difference here.”

“Indeed?” Admiral Piett blinked slowly, “There is a new member of the crew that has had contact with the Black Sun. They might be of use.”

“Sir, I was under the impression that the screening process was stringent.”

“This cadet is a special circumstance.”

“You believe they might help with the investigation?”

“They might, but I would offer a suggestion to speak to the Cadet.”
“Thank you, sir.” Kallus wanted his Specters. He wanted to kick back onto his comfortable bunk on the Ghost and ignore Chopper and the adolescent nightmare in favor of his lasat companion. He didn’t want to be shooting the breeze with a Navy admiral that had the personal approval of Darth Vader. The thought of the last time he’d dealt with Ezra, the smirking brat on the other end of an interrogation table with every intention of beating the ISB agent into oblivion instead of knocking him out peacefully.

He wasn’t sure when wild, uncouth rebels were preferable to his own kind.

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Doora knew that outside galaxy had gone broke. Word that trickled down to her through scuttlebutt implied someone had heisted so much money they’d crashed the stock market. It didn’t impress her much and she didn’t have much sympathy for anyone else. She’d never had any money or any sort of stability and empathy wasn’t something she could afford.

“Cadet Doora,” She glanced up to Colonel Fel. He’d made her take to studying in his office despite the fact that it was miniscule. The baron had mentioned something about her getting better socialized by forced interaction with people but so far Doora had been ignored. “Have you had any interaction with Black Sun during your criminal days?”

She blinked. Fel was pleasant enough that she felt comfortable in his presence but he was still an Imperial.

“Black Sun, is that who they think did this?” She waved to the hyperspace lanes outside the window.

“Cadet,” he pinched his nose. An action that had become very familiar to her, “Please answer the question.”

“Some, gunrunning mostly. Not blockades, they hired Corellians for those gigs. But if you’re asking if I know anything about who runs and operates it I’ve got nothing. I dealt with their regional managers.”

“Would you be able to recognize the signatures of some of the favored agents of Black Sun?”

“Uh?” She frowned, unsure. “I might, it depends on what I’m looking at. But you’d need the people in the criminal divisions on Corellia to verify that. They’re the only ones who actually keep comprehensive records on any of those dudes.”

“Dudes?”

“Ugh, you people.” Doora tried to not roll her eyes, “Those gentle sentients with a disposition to murder.”

“You are keeping up with your vocabulary lists.” Fel seemed quietly pleased. Doora fumed, the bare image of Tang mocking her still in her mind. Twenty credits that Tang had personally made educational recommendations for her.

“Yeah.”

“Cadet.” Fel sighed.

“Yes, sir.” She muttered, glaring at her datapad screen. “That’s the best I’ve got.”

“Have you spoken with Black Four on helping you with your grammar?”
“I don’t need grammar help.” Doora protested. The firm expression on Fel’s face didn’t budge. He didn’t look impressed by her whining. “I can speak Rylth and Rodi just fine, plus of bunch of others. I don’t need some fancy poncey coming around ta’ help me.”

“You speak with a gutter-snipe accent and you’re grammar made the academy professor weep.”

“He didn’t weep because of that. He’d just gotten a final notice on a speeder payment.” Doora pointed out, forgetting her studying.

“Regardless, I expect to see that you have requested for Black Four’s help. He is the linguist among the Blacks and he will be useful for your future studies.”

“I don’t want to ask him.” It wasn’t anything against Black Four but his irritating habit of being affectionate and pleasant was a problem. “He’s started to offer to tuck me in. I don’t need that kind of stuff right now.”

“Cadet.”

“Does it have to be him?”

“Yes, it does. You have a good grasp on languages but to be able to take the entrance exams you must be able to speak them properly.”

“The way people speak them isn’t the Imperial way. Just because it’s neatly printed out on something they’ve used as a guideline for a few centuries doesn’t mean it’s…. She paused, savoring her word, “relevant.”

Seemingly not put off by her argument he handed her another data chip.

“Here are your new required readings. Remember that your reports need to be neatly written. I won’t accept anything that is of you best penmanship.”

Yep, Doora didn’t bother with manners as her head flop back and she released a heartfelt groan, he and Captain Tang were cut from the same cloth.

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A call came through on her comm in the middle of meditation. Leia would have ignored it except that it was the one reserved for Captain Tang and Lord Vader.

“What do you want?” She didn’t open her eyes as she used the force to call it over and turn it on. Since this area was unofficially for jedi training no one would come around.

“Organa,” Tang’s voice was small and filtered across a million light years. “There’s a base on Kashykk that needs destroying.”

“Base?”

“Actually, it’s a science laboratory.”

“Oh?” Tang’s brown eyes were waiting on the other side of the connection when Leia opened her own. “What kind of laboratory?”

“The kind the rebellion should shut down. There’s a Wookie contact waiting for you on Kashykk. He’ll take you to the laboratory and you’ll need to rescue any of the prisoners and research you can before you blow it.”
“What kind of laboratory?” Leia insisted, feeling Ahsoka enter the room.

“Your contact is known as Garrel. You’ll find him in the southern pole. Ask Chewbacca, he knows.” With a click the comm died and Captain Tang vanished.

“What’s this?”

“A deal,” Leia said, “With someone to help us take down the Empire.”

“She looked Imperial.”

“She isn’t,” Leia glanced up to the towering togruta. “Are you alright?”

“No.” Ahsoka admitted, “What will you do?”

“I’ll assemble a team. We might be waiting for Luke to finish training but that doesn’t mean we can’t go off and do it ourselves.”

“True and from what I’ve heard about Luke and how I know Yoda then they’ll be having a miserable time.”

Attachments cannot be what destroy people.” Luke sniffed from his position upside down as the rain spattered the bottom of his boots. “With respect, you’re wrong.”

“Proven and upheld this has been a pillar of jedi teaching!” Yoda smacked his cane against the ground.

“Until it wasn’t.”

“Emotions and passions destroy oneself, young padawan.”

“What about the passions of engineers or scientists? Or the passions of performers, artists, and the like? You’ve focused on the idea that passions lead to the destructions and hate but what about the passions that lead to creation, joy, and the ones that make people run head first into danger to help people.”

Attachments harm the greater good. To sacrifice many for one is not the Jedi way.”

“I don’t think that situation comes up nearly as often as people think it does.” Luke observed, pushing the blood back toward his feet with the force as Yoda grumbled with increasing irritation. “Besides, who says that rushing into the rescue isn’t for the greater good? A child getting rescued from a burning ship has the potential to be anything. And to say that leaving a child there because you’re attached to them and you’ve already gotten your target out because you have to rescue this person for the greater good. You rescue the target but leave the child for what reasons? Because you got attached and you need to get rid of it.”

“No! To manage attachments this way you should not.”

“Exactly,” Luke nodded. “But you’ve gotten the target out, the person you were sent to help, and then you need to get out because you’re a Jedi and everything you do is for the greater good.” He rolled his eyes, “And the child still dies on that ship because someone thought it would be practical to let them to.”

“This situation, hypothetical it is.”
“That’s the point.” Luke pushed another rock into the air, “but I’m applying your teachings. You tell me about attachments and practicality and for the greater good but what if you’ve been mis-applying ‘for the greater good’ for the last few centuries?”

Yoda peered through the shifting sheets of rain at the upside down padawan who seemed perfectly at ease.

“Protectors of the galaxy, the Jedi are. Protected the galaxy for millennia, we have.”


“That galaxy it was.”

“Not really, the Republic didn’t extend to the outer rim and if the Jedi wanted to protect the galaxy then why didn’t they rescue the slaves? Why’d they make deals with the Hutts instead of stopping them? Why’d they?”

“Influenced you, Vader has.” Yoda snapped. Luke concentration broke and he collapsed into a heap, His rocks thumped into the mud beside him. “Dark influence on you.”

“Father didn’t talk about you.” Luke said, his expression darkening. “He didn’t talk about the Jedi much at all. He’d try and distract me with ship building. I read books on it. I read the book on what happened. I know the details of Geniosis and I studied what happened. Besides, the person you can blame for be questioning you is Tang.” Luke nodded, mud smearing in his hair. “Tang is like that.”

“A difference this does not make.”

“You’re getting upset.” Luke observed a maddening half-smile on his face. “Really upset. How many times did someone actually question you?”

“Padawan.”

“I’m really curious because you don’t seem comfortable with answering my questions and I can only guess that you were never actually questioned on anything in the code. Does this make you uncomfortable? People asking you questions.”

“The boy has point.” Qui Gon appeared next to Luke. “You never did handle this well.”

“Your padawan, he should be.” Yoda grumbled, stumping off toward his house. “Disrespects jedi tenants he does.”

“I’m asking questions!” Luke called after him. “If it makes you feel better, Father lectured me on the same thing!”

“I wouldn’t get too upset, Luke.” Qui Gon settled into the rain while Luke grumbled to himself. “He has never been one for questions.”

“Then how could he be in charge of the Jedi. 800 years on the council and no one ever questioned him? No one ever wondered why or how or anything like that? 800 years and nothing. He got complacent.”

“Now you sound like Tang.”

“I’m just a little bitter over this,” Luke pulled himself from the mud. “It doesn’t make sense and it’s
not right. I’m basically being told to erase my human nature. You can’t tell someone to not be… human or alive. It seems just as unnatural as trying to use it for the sole purpose. Didn’t anyone think you could use the force and not Fall and still be… normal? It just seems like a lot of these pillars of Jedi beliefs are built on a whole lot of assumptions.”

When Luke looked up Qui Gon was gone.

“Of course,” he brushed down dirt from his clothes and settled into meditation. Reaching through the force he connected to the dark link in the back his mind.”

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:Father: Vader acknowledged the words with a wordless wave. :I hope your plans are going well: :

:Tang has acquired the holocrons. My agent will be returning with the necessary one to Bast Castle.: Speaking to Luke through their bond was a novel experience now that Luke had enough control to actually speak instead of just receive. His son’s voice was a balm, gentle and soothing even from their vast distances.

:Father: He sounded suspicious. For a moment the boy prodded the bond curiously, testing it and feeling it. Vader knew the exact instance his son realized what had happened so long ago. :That was cheating!: :

:I do not consider it to be.: Vader rebuffed mildly. :I did what was necessary: :

:It was cheating because I didn’t know what the force was! That couldn’t have been fair.: :

:I will not apologize for disciplining you: A thread of embarrassment reached back to him before Luke pulled it back. :

:I don’t think Yoda likes me.: Luke said after a moment. :I don’t think he likes the way I ask questions.: :

:This is unsurprising. Yoda would never acknowledge a personal failing. He would much rather pretend it was someone else’s fault.: :

:And Ben hasn’t showed up much.: Luke said. :After the first time.: :

:Is your training progressing well?: :

:I suppose, I know how to use the force but we haven’t really started on lightsaber work yet.: :

:You must fetch these holocrons, son. They will teach you what you need to know on the subject of dueling.: :

:Where should I go?: :

:Return to Bast Castle, son. Tang will be waiting for you and if you must bring Yoda then do so but your destiny waits on Vjun.: :

:It’ll be difficult to convince Yoda to get off this planet but if I do I’ll leave him with the Alliance. I think if Tang saw Yoda it would get ugly pretty fast.: :

:Agreed. You are most prudent.: 

Luke preened under the praise. :I need to go. I’m being called to dinner. We’ll speak later.:
Agreed.: With that, his son disconnected. Their daily chats were a blessing that he thought he’d never get. No matter how hard Luke was being worked he took the time and energy to connect with his father and tell him he was alright and to discuss things. Despite the fact that Vader was knee deep in an artificially created economic depression; he too spoke.

Tang was either staring to really like or loath Gohan. The blue alien had settled herself into the parlor room, sprawled over the couch. The younger being was as relaxed as someone could get without actively sleeping. There was a frightening sort of intensity in her eyes as she watched the Captain. Like a Nexu relaxed but prepared for any eventuality.

“Tang,” Gohan’s smile was sharp, “But I wanted to relax. This was quite the heist.”

“You bankrupted the galaxy to get away with it.”

“There’s that but technically I didn’t do it. Black Sun did. I’ve been contracted by the Prince before so it wasn’t much a problem to plant the evidence.”

“That won’t hold up in a court of law.”

“Then let’s not take it to a court.”

Gohan released a deep sigh, somehow melting even further into the couch.

“I hate you.” Tang said, accepting a report with updates on Doora.

“I don’t really think about you.”

Yep, Tang hated her but she could appreciate a criminal genius. “That’s fair. If you’re going to wait around then why don’t you take one of the guestrooms.”

“You’re trying to be a good hostess. That’s pretty cute all things considered.”

“I like to make people comfortable before I execute them,” Tang replied flippantly.

“I haven’t even tried to break into anything here! I’ve been good.”

“Hmm,” Tang peered over the edge of her glass. “Keep it that way and you might make it to the end in one piece.” Gohan laughed a barking sound that made Tang instantly wary.

“I’ve changed my mind. I like you and your boss. If this doesn’t go the way either of you want it then feel free to join my crew. I like to have experienced crew.” A single eye vanished when the alien winked. “I think you’ll be a good fit.”

“I’m not a criminal type,” Tang said, almost disparaging, “I’m too used to conquests and destruction of priceless things.”

“Well, the offer stands. For what it’s worth I think you’ll make a good thief.”

“Thank you.”

“Did you know they have a copy of your book, uncensored, in the prison library? The warden keeps it there because he fancied himself some sort of military genius. No idea how he got a hold of one
like that or how it’s been undiscovered but,” the smile says otherwise, “He let me read it.”

“Really?”

“There’s some good stuff in there. You’ve been quite the influence on my life!”

“No. Just…no.”

“But you have!” Gohan sprang up and bounded across the room. “I don’t think I could have done any of this without you!”

“You’re in my personal space.”

“You’ve done so much for me even though you’ve been so far away.”

“I can still kill you. You’re not indispensable.”

“You know, I think we’re so close you could practically be my.”

“I will kill you.” Tang promised as Gohan crowed the last word.

“MOTHER!”

“Hmmm, I’m giving you up for adoption.”

Gohan fell back laughing and Tang decided to ignore her.
“Where is he going?” The pilots of the Executor were no called out onto the farewell party that was assembled outside the waiting shuttle. Doora, ever aware of her precarious position, had taken it upon herself to jam into a miniscule corner of the docking bay for eavesdropping. Down below on the hanger floor, Vader and his assembled generals and admirals were discussing something. Something that Doora wanted to hear.

It had been a little over two weeks since the galaxy had been thrown into an economic tailspin and for the first time since then Vader was leaving the ship. Gossip dripped into the Death Squadron rooms and had stopped directly above the former smuggler. Four, having taken apparent control of her activities, had refused to share any information. He had convinced the others to join the infuriating scheme to keep Doora from learning anything about the outside universe and its current events. Four’s insistence that he was protecting her was as infuriating as his attempts at kindness.

“Anything interesting?” Doora was too experienced to jolt. Instead, she tilted her head down to see Colonel Fel standing beneath her hiding spot. “Good Morning, Cadet Doora.”

“Morning, sir.” She didn’t move but focused on Admiral Piett’s lips to catch what he was saying next.

“I do not believe that any communications between the Lady Ex and the Architect will be uncovered,” Piett was saying. Doora wondered who the Architect was or even if they were a person. “I have faith in our communications officer’s abilities.” Whatever Vader was saying Doora couldn’t see but it seemed to make Piett stiffen to an uncomfortable degree.

“Well?”

“Well what?” Doora glowered at Veers and Piett when they faced the shuttle away from her.

“Is there anything interesting?”

“No.” She slumped in her hidey hole, “I wasn’t intending to eavesdrop, you know.” Fel looked as if he didn’t believe a word. “I just wanted to get some space from Four’s and Seven’s nattering and they wandered in.”

“Hmmm, and that excuses you staying here?”

“Duh, it’s not my fault they’re leaving prime intel all over the place.” She caught the edge of a smile when she looked back at Fel again. “How did you find me?”

“You are wearing a tracking device,” Fel replied, “Now come down; we have some business to discuss.”

“What kind of business?”
“The sort of business that requires you to climb down from your perch, Baby Black.”

“No you too!”

“I am afraid it is catching,”

“Nooo.” She dropped her head into her hands. “Whyyy?”

“Humans, not matter what the Empire wishes to claim, will always be subject to cute things.” Fel clasped his hands behind his back. “And you are an irritating form of cute.”

“I am not.”

“It is cute that an infant rancor shares,” Fel elaborated while Doora pulled herself from her hiding spot. “So unpleasant they are cute.”

“People are so strange. You’d think we’d’ve knocked this from our systems generations ago.”

“You would think.” Colonel Fel patted her shoulder as they exited the hanger.

“I really need to get out of here.”

“You really need to get out of here.”

“I just got here.”

“I don’t care,” Tang had far too much grace to snarl at the young man but her patience was running thin. Luke had arrived for the holocrons two weeks late and had apparently convinced his Jedi teacher off his swamp planet. Two weeks of enduring Gohan’s attempted manipulations, whining, and general nuisances while they both waited. “You should have been here two weeks ago when I was feeling generous.”

“I wouldn’t want to jump into your delusions, Captain.” Luke wandered through the rows of artifacts, “But I don’t think you’ve ever been generous.”

“You’re still alive, aren’t you?”

“Father says only through divine intervention,” Luke tossed her a quick grin when he pushed a second box into his duffle bag. “I’m lucky to have made it too this point all things considered.”

“You’re not going to make it any further if you don’t hurry up.” Tang rubbed the bridge of her nose, wishing that Gohan would remove herself from Bast Castle. She would have forced the alien away except you didn’t mess with someone who would smart-mouth a Sith Lord and still be useful enough to live.

“As you wish, Captain,” the training force user picked up his final holocron with an insolent wink. “Since the thief is obviously hiding.”

“They aren’t hiding, they are preserving their identity in case something goes wrong. I can’t have some loose lipped rebel scum having the pieces of the plan to blab under torture.”

“Alright.” Luke seemed far too relaxed and calm for someone who was dealing with Yoda on a daily basis. Tang had met the troll once and had spent a few dozen hours trying to blast him off the side of a mountain by use of heavy artillery. Then again, Tang mused, Luke did have the irritating qualities
of a good person in the way that Tang did not.

“Pick up some milk and steaks when you’re out,” Tang pointed toward the exit of the stolen art gallery.

“Okay,” There was a concerning tilt to the words as Luke Skywalker wandered out of the gallery almost as quickly as he’d entered it. “Hey, are you going to be leaving Vjun any time soon?”

“Who knows?” She did but she wasn’t planning on tell him.

“Alright.”

“Hmm.” Outside the skies were clear and bright; the next storm not predicted for eight hours. “How is it going with your training?”

“It’s not all that I thought it would be.” Luke patted Artoo on his dome before he ascended his ladder. The bag was stuff into a compartment. “And Master Yoda….he doesn’t live up to the legend.”

“People rarely do.”

“Father did,” Luke brushed the hair away from his face and paused to consider the other ships in the hanger. “If I had known about you then I think I would have been impressed.”

“Perhaps, but it is best to remember the sociological and historical influences on people often elevate leaders to god-like status even in their own era. Yoda was widely regarded as an unparalleled master.”

“Well, he might be unparalleled I don’t think he’s really all correct.” Luke slid down the ladder, “A lot of what he says when talking about the Jedi Doctrine makes me uncomfortable.”

“Oh?”

“I grew up loved,” Luke shrugged, refusing to look Tang in the eye, “I think the growing up a Jedi might have been…damaging.”

“So many other Jedi handled it.”

“Because the alternatives were supposedly heretical and inferior,” He brushed chin briefly, “And they were controlled from the crèche onward. He…he wants to rebuild the Jedi Order as it was.”

“That is a terrible idea and I will not allow it.”

“I feel like I’m stuck between engine backwash and a lava pit.” Tang grimaced at his choice of words. “Mothma was ecstatic when she saw Yoda. All of them were and I just…I don’t think that he deserves such laudation.”

“Well done,” She praised, a victorious sense of vicious please welled in her chest. It would be too undignified to gloat yet.

“Well, they gave his officer’s quarters!” Luke blurted out, suddenly flushing with irritation. “And the council keeps asking me why I don’t call him Master. I don’t call him Master because he is not my master. I am not a slave; I will not be owned and just because he’s teaching me doesn’t mean I’m going to be unquestioning. It’s ridiculous, so many of them just act as if I should just be obeying every word. Mothma looked personally offended when she came into one of our discussions and
“heard us arguing.”

“Hmm.” A pleased burn of satisfaction worked its way up her chest. “I am not surprised.”

“Leia also does not call Ahsoka master.”

“They are far more than an apathetic 900 year old troll and as much as I enjoy mutual bashing of Yoda I must tell you to leave right now. Our timetable is moved up and you’re supposed to be gone now.”

“Alright.” Luke stared at her a moment, unsure, before wrapping Tang in a hug so swift she hardly had time to react. A split second later he bounded up the ladder; leaving Tang sputtering her irritation at the ship’s hull. “BYE!”

“GOOD RIDANCE!” She thundered; choosing to ignore Luke’s knowing smile when the shield locked into place. In high dungeon she stormed back into the castle, not wanting to watch the blond blast into space and back into the waiting arms of the Rebellion.

“None of the intelligence we have gathered so far has indicated to any suspects of the economic attacks nor do they give any indication of who our Imperial benefactor is.” Mon Mothma settled her pale hands on the table, looking about to the fellow members of the Council. “Imperial gossip suggests that it may be the work of Black Sun but contradicting reports of the Hutt syndicates have also followed. What we do know is that Lord Vader will be reporting to the Emperor soon. Master Yoda,” The diminuative Jedi opened his eyes slowly. “Can you give us any insight into the situation?”

“Clouded, the force still is.” He muttered, chewing thoughtfully on his gimmer stick. “Uncertain the future has become.”

“This tells us nothing!” The Bothan at the table shouted, “What good are you?”

“Councilman!” Mothma barked, “Member of the Alliance or not you will treat Master Yoda with the proper respect.”

“His own Padawan doesn’t treat him with respect,” Fre’lya snorted, “What does it matter if I do?”

“I do treat Yoda with respect,” The council turned to see Luke Skywalker descend the stairs. His orange flightsuit was still on and his hair was messy. He looked nothing like a Jedi except for the lightsaber clipped to a buckle. “Councilman, however, I do not find it necessary to be subservient like the Jedi before me.” With a nod to the assembled councilors, he set the back in front of the Jedi Grandmaster. “I retrieved the holocrons that we needed.”

“Perhaps you’ll be willing to explain your disappearance after Hoth, Skywalker.” Madine muttered. “You were gone for three months. This is not standard protocol.”


“With me the, boy was.” Luke repressed a surge of irritation and instead smiled faintly at the General across the table. “Training, he has been.” General Madine subsided but the topic wasn’t quite dropped yet. Since Skywalker’s return there was an edge to him. Something firm that hadn’t been there before while Luke was only a pilot. It wasn’t something he’d seen in many Jedi. They had usually been serene, quiet and patient but Luke was different. There was nothing to suggest that Luke was anything like Master Windu or Shaak Ti or any of them really. He and Ahsoka and
Princess Leia might not have been as trained as the Jedi of old but they were, to Madine’s rebel senses, infinitely more dangerous. “What else, is there to be said?” Madine shook his head, bringing his thoughts back to Yoda.

“We know the Vader and the Emperor are meeting today. We think it is over this financial crisis that has crippled us.”

“Crippled, the rebellion is?” Yoda seemed surprised.

“We had invested our money as well and when the heist went down our funds were wiped out and all of the shell companies we used are gone. Considering this happened to about five million other companies and such we’re not surprised but we can’t actually go anywhere without money. Our ships are down on fuel, we’re down on rations and…” An air of hopelessness overcame the room, “Rebellions are not cheap.”

“Have faith that light will come in our darkest hour, General.” Mothma said serenely. “All will be well.”

Madine felt the urge to point out the sentiment was useless in a galaxy like this and all of the assurances in it would not make sense of the current situation.

“Do we have any agents in the Imperial Palace that could report this conversation?” Madine asked, hoping despite the fact that all previous agents had been sent back in various pieces.

“Our mysterious benefactor could get us the transcripts of the conversation but we do not know if they will even be in the room.” Madine watched Skywalker’s expression flicker for a bare moment.

“See, we shall.”

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“These recent attacks are a concern, Lord Vader.” Silence fell between master and apprentice. “Explain them.”

“The Internal Security Bureau that began the initial investigation have point to Black Sun an interdependent investigators have come with the same results. Even with the investigation Agent Go’min is confident that he will be able to pinpoint where Prince Xizor and his cohorts have hidden the stolen funds.”

“Prince Xizor has grown confident,” Palpatine mused. It wasn’t often he was faced with a genuine problem of the Empire. Vader did not often report on matters concerning crime and economics. “Too confident, complacent in his power….I have allowed him too much leeway and he has bitten the hand that has fed him.” Vader, still kneeling, said nothing. “Continue.”

“The populace is in disarray. Only a few banks were insured against this sort of instance, Corellia, Kuat, and Christophsis system banks as well as a few smaller ones that cater only to small communities.”

“Yes, I did hear your speech. It was impressive; tell me, do you believe your words soothed the savage beasts?”

“Reactions to the emergency broadcast indicate that it did.”

“And why were the rioters not met with deadly force, my apprentice? You allowed them to run amok across the galaxy, wild and untethered. It suggests you are not as commanding as you would
like to believe."

“The first responder to the situation believed that deadly force would be met with galaxy-wide open rebellion.”

“Perhaps, perhaps.” Palpatine hadn’t faced a situation like this since the Old Republic when the Banking Clans had defaulted loans. It was almost thrilling to the old Sith master. “Or perhaps they would have retreated.”

“I have found, my master, that people are far more vicious in defense of their money than they are of their freedom.” Vader still did not move, even under the pining glare of the Emperor.

“Prince Xizor will be dealt with swiftly.” Palpatine seethed a moment later. “I want his head, apprentice.”

“Master.” The younger man ventured, “If you would permit me?”

“Go on.” This would be amusing. Vader attempting at politics or manipulations. Anakin Skywalker might have been a brilliant military commander and mechanic but he was a hopeless fool in everything else.

“If Xizor is placed on trial, a public trial, it will speak to the people and inform them that the Empire will not tolerate such criminal behavior.”

“What do I care of public opinion?” He snorted, “They are foolish, pathetic and weak.”

“Fools must be led, my master, and soothed. Enough fools could destroy all you have built.”

“Do you suggest my Empire is in peril from mindless hordes?” The silky question made Vader visibly wilt. It was a gratifying reaction.

“Master, I do not wish to suggest your wisdom or power is anything less than infinite.”

“Go on, Lord Vader, what do you wish to suggest then?”

“That unless changes are made then the Empire could be in peril from the citizens.”

“Rebels are unable to agree on how to fight a war, how could they even convince more to join their mindless crusade?”

“Enough people with enough reasons could destroy the Empire, it has happened before. History will vindicate my statements, master.”

“I go weary of your insolence, Lord Vader.” Lightening crackled at his fingertips, “Find the stolen funds, destroy Prince Xizor and crush the rebellion. You are not tasked with being concerned of the Empire’s future.” The armored Sith flinched at the lightening but, to the Emperor’s continued amusement, continued.

“I have the evidence, my master.”

“Evidence?” If Vader wished to play in the politicians leagues then he would permit the entertainment. For a full minute Emperor Palpatine cackled with glee, “Tell me, apprentice, is this the plan you have concocted in your past month?”

“It is.”
“Very well,” he waved a hand.

“My agents are waiting in the main greeting chamber, my master. They are far better fitted to present the evidence than I.”

After a few more moments silence he finally waved a hand. “Summon them.”

The assembled agents varied in age and size but all were human. Their uniforms suggested they all served aboard the Executor and with their calm demeanor in his presence he deduced they had had enough proximity to Vader to be collected despite their terror.

“My majesty,” The highest ranking officer offered a precise bow, his glasses slid down his nose when he straightened.

“Proceed.”

“Yes, your majesty.” A hand held holo-projector was activated. “Sir, I am a lawyer and have been for several years. My companions represent the fields of sociology, economics, and historically. We have, at the request of Lord Vader, complied evidence, data and information to answer to the best of our abilities a problem that the Empire faces at the moment.” He cleared his throat. “The initial question we were tasked with answering was to find alternative methods to defeat the rebellion; methods that did not rely on military funds or force. Our answer is not a simple one and we shall do our best to explain as precisely as possible.” He stepped aside and a muscular woman who would not look out of place in a Stormtrooper training camp, stepped forward.

“As it stands, your majesty, before the Black Sun Heist, the average galactic citizen according to the Imperial Census is riding the poverty line. Every year several million fall beneath the poverty line. This downward social traction is a trend that has been increasing consistently at .9 percent every standard years since 60 years before the clone wars. What we consider the middle class is now, for lack of a better term, an endangered species. The margin between rich and poor is shrinking and, according to the numbers and estimates will be completely gone within twenty years. At the beginning of the Clone Ward the Senate chose to push down the poverty line, despite all common sense to the contrary, so as to create better census numbers. This did little to lessen the statistics as the number of people in poverty actually took a 4 percent jump that year. Since then the poor has increased at a rate that has only been seen on backwater planets. A credit has 49 percent less spending power than it did twenty years ago while the cost of living has actually risen by half in said time period.” As she spoke graphs and charts flashed on the holo-device, “This means that people cannot pay taxes, they cannot afford families, they cannot afford travel, they cannot afford anything like a speeder, an owned home, a ship, sometimes datapads and many times upgraded technology. Basic family necessities cannot be met.”

“Reach your point, professor.”

“Well,” The woman blinked at his sarcastic tone. “It means that people will be far more willing to break that law in order to survive.”

“That is a galactic constant.”

“It does not have to be.” Palpatine glowered at the blithe woman who seemed less intimidated and more irritated.

“Your majesty,” the youngest officer stepped forward, shaking in his boots. “It may be a galactic constant that criminals will always exist but at the moment there are on average more criminals than citizens and they are only outnumbered by the military. That is…quite a lot of people. And, unlike
during the Sith Wars and the Mandalorian Uprisings there is actually an alternative choice for leadership and government.” Palpatine said nothing, “That would be the Rebellion. They have shown their willingness to accept those who will offer themselves in exchange for a rather pitiful severance package that, while pathetic, still outpaces anything they would get from the Imperial government. These citizens don’t need to be full adults either, as seen in the situation with Ezra Bridger.” A picture of a dark haired boy with a blaster pointed at Stormtroopers glowed in place of a chart. “15 when he joined the rebellion which effectively makes him a child soldier. He had been living on the streets before meetings with rebel agents. This trend of recruiting street children and more has been a growing trend among criminals. It’s not just the rebellion but the Hutts, Black Sun and every petty….pimp…in the galaxy. Turning to crime is a historical constant but if it allowed to rise then there will be war and it will be between the Empire and the collective criminals of the galaxy which, by the end of 50 years, would be those who are not already fabulously wealthy, the military, and very few else. The poverty rate is too high, the criminal rate is too high, it has been too high for some generations now but this latest catalyst I believe will push the galaxy over the edge into chaos that no government would be able to control.” He examined all of the graphs that were waiting for his approval and grudgingly had to admit that Vader’s people had done well. They were precise and well-researched.

“What is your proposal?”

“Education,” The third agent stepped forward. Palpatine frowned, their signature read as neither man or woman and even though they were standing just feet away, he couldn’t tell. “Re-educations, aid and rebuilding.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, your majesty.”

“And do you have any evidence that this proposal would work?”

“We have tested our theory out.” The images were replaced by another person, this one unrecognizable. “This is Doora, previously a smuggler, who currently is residing aboard the Executor while being monitored for improvement. Her records,” The person stepped up to hand him the datapad, “And predictions of her minders.” They were annoyingly prepared for this conversation. “She is the average human, for the most part. Heavy criminal background, an orphan, has the ability to handle a blaster and known for an aggressive temper. Through re-education and assimilation into a steady, protecting, and guiding environment Doora has shown vast improvements. Results like this we want to replicate the galaxy over.”

“It is possible too.” The first man spoke up, “Since any property can be seized if given just cause then the Black Sun fortune can be put to use to fund this project. Furthermore, children and teenagers with prospects and futures are less-likely to listen to the rhetoric of the Rebellion and join up. Installing a program to educate those hundreds of citizens that have fallen through the cracks will stall the Rebellion’s growth. They will be less likely to absorb the lies and half-truths that are so characteristic of the Rebellions propaganda.”

“I see.” He turned his gaze on Vader. The Sith still hadn’t moved. The agents were silent. “Continue.” The briefing last several hours and by the end of it they seemed hoarse and bedraggled but unbent. They spoke with nauseating enthusiasm that he hadn’t seen since the Old Republic. When the three were dismissed he finally waved for Vader to stand. “I had considered that the pilot would be a replacement for the disappointment that is Skywalker. Tell me apprentice, what is she?”

“A potentially useful took, master.”
“Not something you have attached your weak heart to. If I recall Anakin Skywalker had a favoritism for foolish and reckless children.”

“Yes, master.”

“The legality behind your adoption of this Doora child was surprising. I had considered you would simply take.”

“She does not bow to will or commands but to law.”

“A curiosity in a smuggler.”

“Yes, master.”

“You wish,” Palpatine turned on Vader with venomous hiss, face contorted into an ugly snarl, “To defeat the rebellion through altruism and kindness to lesser beings?”

“Master.”

“Spare me your pathetic groveling, Vader. I have no patience for whatever explanation you might try to give!” There was silence from his apprentice when he resettled his old bones on his throne. “You would not be planning to usurp my throne, my apprentice?”

“Master.” It was difficult for a normal person to read the body language of Vader but Palpatine had had plenty of practice. The man was trying to look as unthreatening and subservient as possible to shield himself from the Emperor’s rage. “I am loyal to you and only you.” He stretched through the Force to feel for the truth in his statement. It came sluggishly back to him but Vader’s loyalty was confirmed. “Then your plan will truly cement our Sith empire.” Palpatine praised him. Vader started, head tilted upward to stare at him. It was difficult to keep down the pleasure of successful manipulation but he managed. After all, Vader was so easy to use. “Go, apprentice. Truly you are becoming worthy of the Sith.”

“Master,” Vader dropped to a knee, bowing his head low, “my thanks.”

“When you bring this child here I wish to meet the pilot you wish to covet so.”

“Yes, Master.”

And Vader left.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

The plot gets furthered a bit and in this one Vader gets tortured.

“The law drafters we had commissioned are a little reluctant to work with us, Lord Vader.”

“Reluctant?” He hadn’t known it was possible but his paperwork had tripled since the implosion of the galactic banking systems. When he got his hands on Gohan he’d wring her blue neck. She might have put in fail safes to ensure the entire place didn’t bottom out but the panic was not letting up. The sight of the Thrwan made him want to commit an unprecedented numbers of homicides.

“Yes, Lord Vader.” Senior Aide Captain Artilna Defnaf nodded, handing him another accursed datapad. “They are refusing to cooperate.” Well that was unexpected. Beneath his mask he blinked several times as he ran over the list that Tang had compiled. All of them had been some of the staunchest supporters of peace and negotiations, they were activists and idealists of the worst sort. “They have not responded to any of the usual threats and none of them will actually begin to look over the preliminary notes that were complied.

“This is unacceptable. Summon them.”

“Milord?” Defnaf was a good officer but had little ability for mental gymnastics. Vader would not hold it against him.

“Bring them to me, Captain. I would speak with them myself.”

“My lord,” The man paled and shifted uneasily, “I do not believe any response.”

“My word is final, Captain.” Defnaf saluted and vanished. Vader almost smiled. Defnaf was the major-domo of his Imperial Center residence. He was worried, tired, and almost frail in his advanced age. His conscription had come in the early days of the Empire just before he aged out of the draft. He’d been running Vader’s day to day life more or less smoothly but he was nothing compared to the genius of Tang.

“Sir,” Eight bitter looking aliens and humans were ushered into his office, all of them still wearing their prion uniforms. Not a single one seemed frightened of him or even wary of the way he loomed over them despite sitting.

Defnaf looked to be resigning himself to having to call troopers to have their bodies dragged away.

“Meelek,” The youngest rodian glowered, silent. “You’re imprisonment came 24 years before the Battle of Yavin, during the first year of the Clone War.”

“Yes.”

“Your last piece of work was seized under suspicions of treason and destroyed.” The mutinous look deepened.

“Yes.”
“The opportunity, Lawyer, is to write and create a law for the Galactic Empire that would, in essence, do what you hoped to accomplish during the Clone Wars. To protect the wards of the state and those who have fallen between the cracks of government oversight.”

“It could, or it could simply be a pipeline push to draft all of the young innocents in the galaxy that have been abandoned into the Navy. Inflating an already oversized military into Hutt proportions.” The gungan down the line closed his eyes and began muttering prayers to the various Nubian goddesses. “Your proposal puts all of those children under the purview of the Navy and the ISB. You want to stick children you claim to rescue from abusive systems, lives, and lifestyles and stick them into environments that are even more dangerous to the young psyche.”

“She’s right,” The only human in the line, shrugged the collective attention of the room turned to him. “It’s an idea but the plans won’t work if you stick all of these people, billions of them, into military posts. What about the infrastructure, what about unskilled and skilled labor, what about the police forces, search and rescue? What about every single job that needs to be filled that can’t be done because you want a million smuggler turned pilots to work for you. Those smugglers could become mail-pilots, they could have a dozen other careers that doesn’t involve slapping the cog on their shoulders.”

“Military environments foster responsibility, education and cooperation.”

“They foster fear and compliance.”

“Rigid training and education are the best these children can hope for.”

“They can and they do hope for more, Lord Vader,” Meelek shook her head, “If that is the best they can hope for then they’re better off not even getting help from the likes of you. IF your help it only to bolster the military then forget it.”

“Plus, that would be a lot of money,” A twi’lek economist sighed when Vader turned to him, “Look, I read the preliminary reports. The Empire doesn’t have the money to do what you want. I know the proposal said to take what they’ve confiscated from Black Sun but that still leaves out….a few trillion credits you’d need to kickstart the whole thing.”

“Unless you can find the sinkhole that all the money fell into.” Defnaf shifted at the flowing conversation, a little confused by the proceedings.

“Every effort is being made by the IRS and the ISB to locate the stolen funds,” Vader watched the eight former prisoners carefully. “I know that this group were some of the most skilled law-writers of the old Republic but be warned. This is not the Old Republic. This is the Galactic Empire.” They stared at him. “We seek to make a dent in the monetary and material disparity between the average citizens and the upper echons of the Empire.”

“And who gets final say in our proposals and work? Who stands with the pen to mark out our work?”

“You will all be working in conjecture with the original group that did the research for the initial proposal.”

“Imperials?”

“Yes, along with legal aides from the Executor, the Chrimea and legal aides hired from various legal firms across the galaxy.”

“Did you actually leave enough of them alive to accomplish this? I would have thought you purged
anyone above a certain IQ level along with the Jedi. After all, idiots are so much easier to lead around by the ears.”

“Mind yourself, lawyer,” Vader replied mildly. His impatience had been fluctuating wildly and he was finding it difficult to be irritated with her. “You are not a necessary part of the equation.” Meelek’s glower could have smelted the outer plating of a star destroyer. Vader, who was made of sterner things, nodded, pleased.

“If these are the last of your complaints?”

“Hold on, we don’t want to write it!”

“You will write it because I would not have accepted your help if you had agreed to push the entire destitute population of the galaxy into the military.”

“Wait….a test?” The economist frowned, “Why?”

“To ensure that you eight were the correct choices to draft the law. Above idealism we need practicality and intelligence and wisdom. These tumultuous times call for nothing less.”

“Messa willn’ ta writes theesa law.” The gungan shrugged. “Messa Wants ta halp.” From what he saw they really hadn’t been reluctant to write the law or draft it. They were more reluctant to have to work with Vader. Which was understandable but obnoxious. If he had had the inclination he could have argued with the lawyer for hours except he had a meeting with the Emperor in an hour and he needed to prepare himself.

“Good.” He stood, “The rest of your team will be arriving within several hours. You will be housed here. Captain Defnaf has the rest of the details for you. If you are unwilling, even now, to write this law then the prison shuttle is still waiting.” He met Meelek’s gaze and felt a purr of Sithly pride when she gave a brief, reluctant nod.

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“We’re on schedule as much as we can be, at the moment, Lord Vader.” Perhaps the most irritating part of now accepting more duties was the fact that he had people jogging up to him to give him updates and information the second it came in. No longer could he wait for the report to come to his desk. He got the preliminary report and then the updated one an hour later. He was meeting aides and assistants that would never even look at him before now. Their brazen approaches emboldening everyone.

“Where is Admiral Halifax.”

“His patrol route changed and he moved closer to Nal Hutta. He’s waiting in orbit for reenforments and the orders to attack.”

“Send orders to the Second Fleet and Captain Dietrich’s squadron to be assigned to the operation.” He typed the orders into the datapad and passed it to the aide jogging beside him. “I want a detachment from the 501st attached as well. Remind Halifax that this is not a ground operation. I want Nal Hutta under blockade. Not attack. The Hutts are too be crippled, not carpet bombed from orbit.”

“At once!” The aid saluted and peeled off, making off through the Palace toward the communications center. Another took his place.
“Updates from Corellia, milord. They seem to be the first to be settling down after the heist. They’re banks are not open yet, according to your orders and they are unwilling to open them until the rest of the galaxy is as well. They’re reporting that the star destroyers deployed to their systems to keep the peace are unnecessary now that the government and the local populace are willing to cooperate.”

“The destroyer Vengeance is too remain along with four of the corvettes. I want all traffic out of the Corellian system to be monitored and searched. Each ship by the local custom officials and the ISB stationed on planet, if any ship is suspected of carrying illegal cargo then it will be impounded and its pilot detained. Inform the governor that if any spike in criminal activity, smuggling, fraud or any crime of similar nature is suspected from Corellia he will be personally held responsible. Also inform him that if he does not keep the commerce lanes clear and legal that his execution will be public and torturous. The unfiltered crime from Corellia will stop immediately.”

“Yes, sir.” The aide vanished. Corellian’s were a people of dubious morality and freethinking adventurers. They had managed to buck Imperial codes and oversight until now. Many of them would grumble but anyone would sense that now was not a moment to test the wrath of a teetering Empire.

“LORD VADER!” The crowd around him scattered as the frantic approach of the Undersecretary of the Navy. He held holo comm in one hand and a datapad in the other. “This requires your immediate attention. It was just broadcast over the holo-net!”

“Show me.” His meeting was minutes away and the Emperor would not tolerate lateness in light of Vader’s recent increase of power. The Undersecretary played the saved message and the entire room gave a collective gasp.

Grand Moff Miigta of the Outer Rim and Director of the ISB Isard stood side by side, equal expression of bitterness and cruel humor on their faces. “This is a message for Lord Vader and the Emperor. The Outer Rim is not under the sovereign control of Grand Moff Miigta and Director Isard. Within the last month it has become clear that neither Vader nor the Emperor are fit to lead the Empire or to govern in the slightest. We will not continue to serve unworthy leaders. Your ridiculous idiocy will no longer reign on the outer rim.” The message, poorly worded and infinitely unwise, went silent and the image vanished. Vader fumed in total rage for a solid minute before barking for a communications official.

“I want updates on the battle fleet in orbit of Nal Hutta.” He snarled, nearly sending the tiny man reeling backward. “If they are under fire from any hostile star destroyers I want them to withdraw to Naboo and wait.”

“Aye.” He barked a few more orders and proceeded through the oversized doors of the throne room. The silence of the room was a dramatic shift from the noise and chaos outside. Vader sank to his knee while he waited to be acknowledged.

“What has happened, my apprentice?”

“Isard and Miigta have declared the outer rim to be independent of the Empire. I only just received this information.”

“Indeed?” Hidden as the man’s face he couldn’t make out the expression but the sudden press of darkness made his feelings clear. Isard had been loyal but why she had aligned herself with Miigta was not made clear.

“And what do you intend to do about it?”
“I have not yet come to a conclusion, master. The details are still being mined and reported. The agents of the ISB that are stationed among the Mid Rim and Core are denying knowing any part of Isard’s plans.”

“Hmmm.” Vader waited patiently, seething in his own irritation. Tang had briefly discussed the possibility of the Empire splintering and had told him she’d work something out if anyone was stupid enough to test them. “I thought Isard loyal. It seems that the first sign of strife is a signal for the mynocks to release the ship. I am disappointed. I want her head, Lord Vader. Bring me her traitorous cohort.”

“As you wish, my master.”

“Handle this crisis, Lord Vader. I grow weary of being pestered with this.”

“Master, your leadership and wisdom would be a great aid in repairing the damage done by these criminals. Under your leadership the Republic was made great again into this Empire. Now it is threatened and I an unfit to lead.”

“You know your weaknesses well, Lord Vader. You wish for my guidance in this trying time?”

“I beg you for it,” Vader bowed his helmet further.

“No,” The Emperor sighed, “You were once a great leader, my apprentice. With charisma and skill, what have you become except a weak shell or a Sith?”

“Master.” He was unable to speak again as the sudden Force Lightening wrapped around his body. Vader roared, collapsing to the floor with heavy thud. He screamed, his limbs thrashing erratically about. Pain and desperation, self-loathing and misery poured from behind his shields and set the Emperor cackling.

“You were great once!” Palpatine snarled, “A Sith worthy of the title Darth. You were worthy of your name! What have you become? A weakling, a shell!” The lightening abated briefly. Vader panted raggedly as he spasmed again. “You sought your son, a Jedi tool, to be by your side. You chased a fool across the galaxy. I thought you might have returned to your ways, your brilliance and passion but it was all for the sake of a memory. A memory of his mother. The woman you destroyed in your rage!” More lightening, it crackled across his suit and through his muscles. “You cherished it. Not the pain but the love, the light! It made you unworthy! And when Amidala’s son denied you… he was replaced. Replaced by a chit! So desperate you were for the title of Father you stole someone to make it reality. I know that you coveted her at your retreat.” Vader, despite the lightening, felt a spike of panic that the Emperor jumped on. “Yes, apprentice, I know that you kept her close. I know that this…social policy plan of yours is a lie. You use it to justify taking something you should never have. A child.” The lighting stopped. “You murdered you wife. How are you sure that you will not murder this child the moment your temper rises to the surface?”

“Master…” He wasn’t able to speak well but his pleading tone was clear to anyone listening. “Please.”

“You will prove yourself worthy of the Sith, apprentice.” Sidious spat, “You will prove yourself to me by solving this recent crisis.”

“Yes, master.” Vader picked himself off the floor, desperate to leave the abuse behind. Desperate to get word to Tang.

“Bring me the girl, Vader.” The emperor settled himself back into his throne, “And since you have
distanced yourself from Skywalker and his refusal to join you….bring him to me.”

“Master?”

“Bring me Skywalker.”

“You have three months to succeed.”

“Master!”

“I will explain in simple terms.” Vader cringed against the marble floor when the voice cracked about the like a whip. “You will solve this crisis, you will bring me Skywalker. Should you fail you will discover just how replaceable you are, Lord Vader. I do not need you to repair my Empire. Your capture of Skywalker is little more than an allowance. Should you fail…then I will be….displeased”

“As you wish, my master.” His limbs shook as he finally positioned himself into a standing position.

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“Have you seen your medic yet?”

“I have not.”

“Go see them.” Tang was a statue of rage, furious as she traced the pale lines of Vader’s face. “Go, as soon as I’m off.”

“Tang.”

“Three months!” The glass in her hand had already shattered and blood was beginning to drip onto the floor. “I had calculated for a year.”

“Tang.”

“Three months. Three kirffing months!”

“Tang.”

“We’re talking a plan of epic proportions! The likes of which that should be impossible.”

“Tang.” The sadness, weakness and overall lack of emotion in his voice was what caught her attention.

“Vader.”

“I know you are capable, my Captain. You have the brilliance and wisdom that have no peer. You are a singular being of intelligence and honor and integrity. I have every faith that you will depose the emperor.”

“Of course I will,” she scoffed, “The point is trying to get him in three months.”

“You do not need to get him in three months,” Vader replied wearily, his scarred face making something like a smile.

“You know that if you do not have Skywalker in three months he will kill you and take Skywalker for himself.”

“Yes.”
“And we will not deliver Skywalker.”

“No.”

“You want me to plan for your death at the end of three months.”

“Yes.”

Tang blinked a few times and then rubbed her forehead. “It will be difficult but not impossible.”

“So long as my son is nowhere near the reach of the Emperor I care little for how you manage this coup.”

Tang nodded, “As you wish.”

“You are aware, Tang, that he has set you up for death.”

“I know,” she said grimly. “The negotiations we need could take a month at the least and those are just the basics. You cannot change the galaxy in three months, it makes no sense. The practicality is…he has set you up for death.”

“His eyes had been blue since he’d pulled Luke off Hoth. Vader nodded. “I sent Gohan and her crew of crazies to deal with Isard and her idiot lackey. They’ll raise merry hell and send their heads back in neat little boxes. I also sent word to Skywalkd and Organa that no one would notice a prison break on Tattooine. They’re en-route to Jabba’s Palace.”

“It will be heavily guarded.”

“Since you had Nal Hutta blockaded, you’re right. Fortunately they’re taking my advice and should turn out fine. The Rebellion’s staying low. They know not to rock the boat right now and…what about Doora?”

“The Emperor believes that she is a replacement for Luke. He has ordered me to deliver her to him.”

“He honestly believes you’ve replaced Luke?”

“Yes.”

“And what will you do with Doora?”

“As I am commanded, she had proven to be useful in more ways than one.”

“Yes, she has. It would be a pity to lose her to Palpatine but not difficult to work around. She’s not the lynchpin.”


“Jixton is on Nal Hutta at the moment. He assures me that he has a plan if your battle group is fired upon.”

“Do you trust him?”

“No.”

“Then he must have an excellent plan.”

“Lord Vader.”
“Later, Tang. I must see my medic.” The call was cut off and Tang was left standing in the dark, trembling in rage. She loosed scream of fury so animalistic that it sent the clones outside the room scattering.

In Vader’s pod he closed his eyes and sank into the first attempt at mediation since he’d fallen. He reached for Qui-Gon, seeking council and comfort.
The End

Chapter Summary

A brief look at the people talking.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Our work is just beginning.” Tang stormed from her office, blood dripping from her hand. “I want intel updates every hour at the top of the hour. I want all of our sleeper agents mobilized. Get the entire galaxy hopping up and down.” The clone at her side struggled to keep pace as Tang stalked toward the conference room. “I want every news station covering every action of Vader’s. Make sure he gets the update itinerary and make sure the Rebellion knows that if they don’t stay damn near silent I will bomb them to hell and back.”

“What do you want with Gohan and her crew?”

“I want dissident muttering.” Tang barked, “I want the quiet thougths that the emperor is evil to become whispers and so help me we will hold a megaphone to that and broadcast is across the stars. WE have three month to turn public opinion against Palpatine. With our hold on the underworld media it shouldn’t be too hard.”

“And Jixton?”

“Get Jixton back in the Army. I want him to be spreading rumors like crazy. I want the entire Stormtrooper corps to see Vader as their god. The enemy is Palpatine. We can accelerate our plan if we manage public opinion.”

“Yes, Captain.” The aide saluted. “Anything else?”

“Yes,” Tang rubbed her forehead, “Get me a drink, on the rocks. Then bring me the updated census reports and any progress the law writers are making on Imperial Center.”

“Sir, you’re going to be disobeying Vader’s direct orders.” The clone blanched when the venomous expression turned to him.

“Get. To. Work. Three months or we lose the lynchpin in all of our later plans. Everything we work for is gone if he’s executed.”

“Aye.” The clone saluted and fled when Tang slammed her datapad on the table and met Gohan’s too calm expression.

“Scum, I have a job for you.”

Gohan tilted her head back pursing her lips, “I’m listening.”

#$#43
“Well, this isn’t all that comfortable.” Luke glanced at Leia with a sour expression. “Being suspended from the side of Jabba’s palace wasn’t really when I was expecting.”

“Isn’t comfortable?” He stuck his tongue out and began moving to the left as best he could while holding onto a tiny ledge with his fingertips. “That’s the best you’ve got?”

“Well I was going to insult you,” Leia muttered, scanning the wall beneath them, “But that seemed too easy.”

“We could have gone in with Lando or Ahsoka.” Luke pulled on the force, readying himself for a jump, “Let’s go, the guards just rotated.”

“At least we didn’t bring Yoda.” Leia mused, clicking the last detonator into place. “Because I don’t think he’d approve of the explosives.”

“That’s true.”

“It’s good thing you make a habit of disobeying him.”

“He keeps saying that I’m just like Dooku when he trained him and I’m not all that insulted.” Luke and Leia made it another twenty feet and scrambled onto the parapet. “Alright. I’ll see you in the throne room.”

“Two hours.” Leia nodded and the two separated.

TBC…Maybe

Chapter End Notes

So this is the end. If I feel up to it I'll write the second story but who knows. It might be a while. I hope you've enjoyed it and if you've got suggestions or comments then shoot a comment my way. I'm always happy to listen.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](mailto:drop%20by%20the%20archive%20and%20comment) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!