

Chapter 14

As he passed Adriana and Ohann, two gas giants, Luke witnessed the phenomenon which was the basis of ancient local legend. He had heard them repeatedly while growing up; of travelers mistaking Tatooine for a third, smaller sun. Its silicate surface reflected the light of its two suns so intensely it appeared nearly as bright as a third star.

The X-wing fighter raced through the upper fringes of Tatooine's atmosphere, heading toward coordinates Leia had supplied him with. It was the same data her father had entrusted her with, and she in turn had embedded in R2's memory systems as a command control for seeking out Obi Wan Kenobi. A string of data scrolled along the bottom edge of his nav' panel display:
Southwestern edge of the Dune Sea, Alpha-1733-Mu-9033, First Quadrant.

There was enough of the young farmboy left in him to want to go flying into Anchorhead, land his fighter in the sand outside Tosche Station, and stroll in to show his old friends where fate had taken him. Fortunately, there was also just enough of the fledgling Jedi apprentice not to.

He knew if he was to have any chance at the task that had been handed him; he needed to keep a most serious mind, a focused vision. There was much he needed to discover about himself and about the Force. Above all, patience with his own shortcomings and inexperience was needed as he began the journey toward understanding and enlightenment. He had to avenge his father by facing and defeating Vader. He had to become a Jedi.

Slowly, the details of the surface mountains below rose up from the surrounding sands as he neared the coordinates for a humble knight's dwelling on the Southwestern edge of the Dune Sea.

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The wind lifted Solo's hair as he stared silently away into the darkening sky and clouds. Chewbacca stood at the bottom of the *'Falcon's'* boarding ramp behind him as Bria Tharen's father softly wept at the news of his daughter's death.

The sun had disappeared below the Corellian horizon. Its brilliant, soft pink and orange glow had lasted but fleeting moments on the now-grey clouds overhead. Night was fast approaching as Renn Tharen tried to regain his composure a bit, his thoughts racing in a million directions. His daughter was dead . . . his lovely Bria, his little girl.

He looked up suddenly as if remembering something of importance, "Would you do something for me, Han?" Solo dropped his stare from the skies and turned to the old man, "Of course."

"Wait here, I'll be right back" he said, and hurried away into his home. Han noticed the clean smell of the air and the grass beneath his black boots, now fluttering in the slight wind as memories of Corellia blew through him. This place, the small town of Bela Vistal, nestled in the Corellian Mountains, was a far cry from his darker memories of this planet.

Bela Vistal was quiet and serene with incredibly beautiful views in any direction. He thought of a possible far off future; perhaps settling here someday when he grew too old to play the game any longer. He would load up the contents of his various caches from around the galaxy, sell off what he didn't need and find a small quiet place here where no one knew him.

He was roused from his thoughts as Renn returned with something in his hand. Bria's aunt, Yané, gave her this when she was a child." He held out a delicate gold chain with a small pendant

dangling from it. "Bria wore this always and thought of her aunt often. When Bria formed the Red Hand, she left it behind safe with me, planning to once again wear it when her fight was over and reason was returned to the galaxy. Will you please take this to Yané, on Naboo? I know Bria would want her to have it."

Han took the necklace and lifted his eyes to meet Renn's, "I'll make sure I put it in her hand myself." Renn was visibly relieved, new tears falling from the corners of his eyes.

"Where will I find her on Naboo?"

Renn wiped his face with a soft cloth, "The last I heard from her she was residing in one of the royal lake houses. Yané was handmaiden to several of the Naboo Queens over the years, and when she retired from service to the royals, was allowed to continue living in the lake house."

Han nodded his head slightly and reached for the other man's hand. Renn pulled him close, throwing an arm around Han, embracing him and speaking quietly, looking off into the gathering darkness, "Thank you for having the courage to come here and deliver the difficult news to me in person. I know this is hard for you too, son." He released Han and turned away, heading back into his home.

A slight whimpering groan issued from far back in Chewie's throat as Han walked past him into the ship, "Let's get outta here."

As the *'Falcon* rose away from Corellia, Chewbacca's hands moved over the controls, setting a course on the nav computer. He glanced over at Han, who studied the necklace in his hand, running his thumb over the pendant.



"Naboo, huh?" said Solo to himself.

The Wook howled and pulled back on the throttle, propelling their ship into the slipstream of Hyperspace.

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The flickering holoprojector went dim as the recording ended in static. Topolev and Etz glanced over at Holder, who was sitting on the edge of his own bunk now. Rogue turned to 4120, then to me, "Between that recording and the damaged lightsaber hilt we found in the carbon-freezing room, I would have to say . . . welcome to the group, Holder. You are now the newest member of the 104th Moisture Farm Patrol.

Danz nodded in agreement, as Etz sat down on Holder's bunk, "OK, I'm just going to ask, because I know everyone else is thinking it. What was it like being frozen?" 0600 shook his head, as several others shifted on their feet, but all turned to listen to Holder's answer.

"Well, I was conscious when I was frozen." He paused. "I recommend NOT being conscious when you are frozen. Slicer opened the unit and pulled out what looked like a drawer and forced me to lie down in it at blasterpoint. The drawer was made up of a heavy carbonite base plate and carbonite side plates which contained the hibernation circuitry and monitoring panels. He then slid me into the complete blackness of the chamber. I remember feeling a quick blast of smoking, freezing gas sprayed out across my body in the small, dark space. My limbs tightened up and my skin froze immediately. As incredibly as it sounds it kept getting colder exponentially as the process continued on.

I couldn't move, I couldn't scream, I couldn't see. My lungs painfully crystallized and the blood in my veins was transformed from fluid to slush to ice in an instant as was my brain. Thankfully I blacked out at that point. I understand though, that once that happens, liquid carbonite is poured out onto the base plate beneath the freezing subject, filling up all around it and solidifying instantly.

When the fill level is reached just below the face, in my case, the filling stops and a thin layer of the metal is finally sprayed over the superfrozen flesh to seal the carbonite cocoon. Once the seal is made complete, the embedded hibernation systems kick in to keep the contained object or person frozen solid beneath the metal exterior. I remember nothing about the duration of my encasement. From that standpoint, I consider myself lucky. Awareness in that setting for any length of time would surely result in madness.

When I was released, it was just as painful, but in a reversed, different way. Coming out of the cold, the thin sprayed on metal melts and runs off the still-frozen object beneath. Once the thin carbonite covering melts away, your organs and fluids are pushed through a quick-thaw, which burns terribly, like being scorched and stuck with thousands of vibro-blades all at once. Your head is spinning and your stomach feels sick, like you need to vomit. On top of that you are coming out of it completely blind and absolutely at the mercy of those who thaw you or are present when the thaw takes place. It's not something I'd want to go through twice."

Etz finally blinked as Holder's description came to a close.

"But I'm feeling much better now. The seizures and hibernation sickness cramps seem to have stopped, and my memories are beginning to come out of the haze a bit."

Rogue continued listening, then turned to Topolev and Falker, "You both have been in charge of small groups in your previous assignments. I want you to begin working with Holder on a physical rehabilitation program. His muscles will have atrophied and need reconditioning after

such a long encasement.”

He turned to Ddraig and me, “Good work with the `droid. It’ll be nice having one around again.” Ddraig shot me a glance of accomplishment as Rogue and 4120 walked away into the front command center.

Holder stood up from his bunk and exchanged glances with Falker and Topolev, “Okay guys, where do we start?”

Topolev cut his eyes away from Holder, across to Falker, “Let’s take him out back in the courtyard and get him going on some physical activity.” Falker nodded, “We’ll start with walking and some basic exercises and stretching, but by the end of the week I want you running, trooper.”

Holder raised his eyebrows, “Yes sir.”

I watched as they made their way to the back room and the loading dock’s door, throwing it open to the courtyard. As the room cleared out, I pulled the tracking unit from my belt and flipped it on. I was anxious to get back out to the Wastes and explore Kenobi’s home, but it would have to wait for now.

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The mid afternoon light created crisp shadows that fell across the stone floor of “Alpha-1733-Mu-9033, First Quadrant”. Luke sat quietly in the same space he had used to repair Threepio’s detached arm. It was as if he was now re-visiting that past moment as a third party. Closing his eyes, he could hear echoes of Ben’s voice revealing small glimpses into the man his father had been. The brief words painted a faceless picture in his head of a heroic Jedi warrior pilot from the Old Republic.

He wondered about his mother. Kenobi had made no mention of her. Who had she been, and what role had she played in his father’s life? He knew Vader had murdered his father and now Ben as well, but what happened to her? Had the Dark lord come for her as well?

Anger rose within him as he rolled these thoughts over in his mind. Somewhere inside, though, it occurred to him that anger was probably not a trait the Jedi Order would have taught or embraced, and he calmed his rage as his eyes opened. Vader did not begin this life as an evil person, he rationalized. Something or someone shaped who he became and fostered in him the darkness to do such things.

Luke tried silently to forgive Vader for the sins the fallen Jedi had committed against him and his family. The journey to become a Jedi must be a long and arduous one, he thought, because he could not find the forgiveness he searched for within his heart. More discipline and maturity than he currently possessed would be needed for that. He did, however, seek a place in his heart and mind to move past it for the moment, and focus on finding a way to rein in the darkness that had descended upon the galaxy.

As he looked around, he realized everything was as Ben had left it as they hastily fled to Mos Eisley. Given Ben’s age, he assumed there would have been far more possessions and belongings than he saw as he looked around the room. Was that perhaps another Jedi trait, to live with great purpose, possessing very little? Three small statues sat on the low, round table before him, where he and Ben had watched Leia’s urgent, pleading message.

Leaning forward, he picked one of them up, turning it over in his hands. It was deceptively heavy for its size, and appeared to be an artful rendering of an exotic bird. The first birds he had ever seen were in the jungles on Yavin IV. They were like smaller, tamer, feathered versions of the scale-covered Skettoes here on Tatooine. He returned the statue to the table and stood up, walking over to the upright chest from which Obi-Wan had pulled his father's lightsaber. He felt the weight of the weapon on his belt now as he reverently placed his hands on the lid of the chest, pausing slightly, then opening it slowly.

There were several articles of clothing on top. Moving those aside, he uncovered a small set of fine tools wrapped up in a cloth case and tied with a strip of leather. Beside them was a small bag of rough stones. He traced the bottom of the compartment with his hands to make sure there were no more loose articles. When he was sure he had seen everything, he took out the tools and stones and closed the chest.

There must be something here, some information or scrap of flimsy with some type of direction in which he should go. Luke placed the tools and stones on the table beside the statues and made his way toward the rear of Ben's home where he slept. There was a modest bed of sorts, another small table and a chair. Over the back of the chair was draped a poncho similar to the one Luke had worn when he first met the old Jedi. He ran his hands over it as his eyes swept over the room. Several larger tools hung on the wall here, tools used to prepare and work leather. A small pile of leather and half completed projects lay beneath them on the floor.

Try as he might to discover something, nothing seemed to jump out at him as overly unusual or important. He moved back into the small hallway and was headed toward the main living space when he saw something on the floor sticking out from beneath a rug. He knelt down, flipped the rug back out of the way, exposing a narrow trap door. Slipping his finger into the recessed ring, he lifted the hatch out of his way and stepped down the stone steps into a small room which housed a small power furnace and several large water holding tanks. He ran his hands over the solid stone walls looking for some secret hiding compartment, but nothing was there to find. Frustrated, he climbed the steps back into the house and closed the hatch.

He was feeling very discouraged when he felt a slight tingling in his neck and faintly heard a familiar voice whispering to him, "Your eyes can deceive you, don't trust them."

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