

STAR WARS: SWORD OF THE JEDI

PROLOGUE

THE SHIP drifted through space. It did not use engines nor nav-computers, bore no metal or durasteel. It propelled itself from plantlike growths that were bonded to a similarly colored material- though the shell of the vessel truly embodied such. Veins of maroon vines curled about it, constricting and constantly wriggling within the cold expanse, left unprotected but alive despite the elements- or rather, the lack thereof.

Within the ship only two waited. They waited and they watched, traveling across regions long forgotten by the sentients that first charted them. In a way they were the New first Ones, and this realization brought a smile that hid behind onyx armor smelted from vondunn materials. That was not all, however. It was stitched together with obsidian; sarassian ore forming long and thin red lines that married two armors that were truly alien to each other.

The vondunn was alive, still, in its strange way. Before, its wearer had noticed it bore a certain anguish at the cuts and the excisions, but now, tempered by the Kylo, it fell well beyond servitude.

Dark brown eyes looked through a wide visor placed lopsided across the helmet's nose ridges. The back of the helm was a concentric series of spirals, and it continued downwards towards the wearer's neck before fleeing outwards.

Around wide shoulders a cape hung, and now the cape moved forward with its master, listlessly, as if a black ocean.

"Do you feel it, Indüran Snoke?" The masked man inquired. Below and next to the helmed warrior a more diminutive creature crookedly knelt. Its back was torn and twisted, and a robe covered its frail frame. Only the bottom of its chin was visible, though now its chin pointed forward as it spoke.

"Yes, Master. This is where it was for you, wasn't it? It has to be here."

The larger, stronger man's shoulders relaxed, he seemed pleased by this. It had been a long journey, coming here. A twirl of excitement threatened to knot within the man's throat, and he

tempered it, keeping his voice from sounding youthful. He opened his mouth, but remained silent. A smile twisted and contorted, hiding a tongue that became indecisive of its next words. Finally, the being called Kylo lowered his head, visor now illuminated by the sea of purple stars hanging within space, stars not seen by sentients in thousands- if not hundreds of thousands- of years.

“You have done well, Snoke.” Kylo decided on finally. He darted a quick glance to his apprentice, assuring that the being felt appropriately basked by the praise. He had found the creature five years ago- it was cowering within a prison that suddenly left it free. Despite this freedom however, it was enraptured by fear, and in turn fear became its new prison.

Kylo’s smile turned. While Snoke had made much progress, he hated that this fear still ate away at the creature. It wielded power- much more power than he, and it brought him no small displeasure that the creature’s own mental state seemed to be the only thing that hid this fact from it.

But now, if Snoke could see them-

Then that meant it was time. Or rather, that it soon *would* be.

Kylo turned from both the viewport and Snoke.

“Master?”

Kylo heard Indüran begin shuffling behind him.

“No. I want you to meditate here. Think here, as I did. I will leave you to this task.” Kylo said simply.

Snoke nodded dutifully.

“Of course, Master Ren.”

Kylo Ren felt Snoke’s eyes burning into the back of his cloak. He waited, then turned halfway.

Kylo Ren nodded, half in question.

“Will you bring the others here?” Snoke asked.

The smile returned to Kylo then.

Yes, he had learned much from this place. He thought it lost to him, and in many ways it was. It was a physical location just as it was spiritual. Its location dependent on the souls who searched for it, and it only showed itself to those worthy.

Kylo Ren had decided a year ago that he would kill Indüran Snoke if the creature was unable to see it. Though now, Kylo Ren was worried. He had seen it once, but that was nearly thirteen years ago when he was still a child. He told himself that they found this place due to the fact that he had become the Lord of Ren, but what if it was here because of Snoke, and Snoke alone?

That thought brought a dizzying anger to Kylo's mind, and he had to keep from lashing out at the Force and striking the pitiful creature against a viewport behind it. Though Kylo knew that such an action would be due to the creature's power- a power that he borrowed.

Power that this new Lord of Ren borrowed ever since Snoke and he encountered the Jedi observer; The one sat before candles.

Kylo had bested her with the blade, though once disarmed she nearly killed him with the Force. It was only through Indüran's connection with Kylo that he was able to overpower her, and the Observer, a Jedi far more wise than Kylo, went as far to taunt Ren of this obvious fact.

She sensed it too.

He closed his eyes, churning the anger into something more malleable, a purpose that he could derive action from.

She sensed it too.

He would have to be careful- there were many powerful Jedi there. When he was a child, he was told of this. That even the strongest Ren would stand no chance against the most foolish Jedi or boisterous Sith, purely due to the fact the way of Ren has not advanced past its inception, and its sermons are still the same as they were, from when beyond time began.

Though it was because of this that they held the power to dictate the true meaning of the Force. Their connection was unblemished by research or sorcery- it was a pure, almost tenuous touch, that only grew stronger at the last moment of its user's life.

Kylo turned away from Snoke. He realized he hadn't answered it, though that was for the best. Snoke would need to focus its thoughts not on the others, but on survival. Though Kylo had expected Snoke to die immediately upon seeing *them*, it was not unheard of Ren to fall whilst beginning the conversations. And from the lack of protest from the curious, often feeble Snoke, Kylo was sure they had begun.

He turned fully, and saw his apprentice lying on its back. Kylo's uncaring gaze fell upon Snoke's rattling chest, and saw that it still drew breath. Snoke's ruined face was fully visible now, and its eyes were caught within a color that can only be described as black-within-black.

Kylo offered a small prayer to his student, and left the chamber. If Snoke lived, they would have more answers. If it died, then that meant there was still much work to be done before the end.

The end of all things.

CHAPTER ONE: JEDI KNIGHT

BEN SKYWALKER looked down at the tiny life held in his arms. The child, a girl, looked up at him sleepily with wide blue eyes. Finally, her eyelids heaved, flickering once, twice, three times- before she joined Vestara in slumber. The baby had dark hair, with curls that favored the texture of Ben's late mother.

He smiled, though the feeling of happiness was fleeting. It had been a year since Vestara and Ship returned, the year that they learned that their hunt had not yet finished.

Though Vestara's reappearance brought many grim tidings, Ben felt bashful in the fact that despite her actions, he still clearly loved her. That nexus of confusing energy reminded him almost of the one they had encountered years before- and now, Ben shuddered at the experiences his newborn daughter would endure- trials the same as he.

Ben often wondered if he blamed Luke for the world he was born into, and though he bounced internally between blame and understanding, he felt that he truly knew now.

Vestara was in bed, beside Ben. The medical bay held silence, save for the beep of life support systems and the rolling trays of droids. Ben had asked those gathered to give him some time alone with Vestara and his newborn, and though polite, he had to grin stupidly at the feeling of his father nudging around Ben's consciousness with the Force.

Ben assured Luke that all three of them were fine, though Vestara and Auinel-Jade were tired. To tell the truth, so was he- but he did not want to sleep until Vestara had awakened. So instead he laid down, unclothed from the waist up so that Auinel-Jade could feel his heartbeat.

The girl was powerful, that much was clear. It was due to this that the birth was hard for Vestara- out of no malicious intent, their daughter quite literally did not want to leave the womb, and was using all the unconscious powers available to her to keep it that way.

It took Ben, Vestara, Luke, and Jaina all their might to calm her. Jaina was the one to deliver Auinel, and she was the one to ask Vestara her name. Vestara said the name should be of two

parts- like her daughter. She chose Auinel, the name of an ancient Sith of dubious cruelty, though renowned for her ferocity. The description of Auinel- fiery, bold, and prone to an anger of equal parts indignation and righteousness, reminded Ben of his mother- or at least what Luke told him of how she had been before he was born.

Ben had instantly settled on Jade for Auinel's second name. And thus, after what felt like a lifetime but was more akin to a few hours, Ben Skywalker's new family lay together. Ben knew that peace would elude them as life often dictated, but he also knew that right now- here... he was at peace. True peace.

Not an agreement between two military powers, not a stalemate dictated by warrior monks or crazed despots. A peace only achieved between a Father and a Mother, a peace that resulted in a child- a daughter.

My daughter.

"Ben,"

Ben's flagging eyes flared open at the sound of Vestara's voice. It was quiet, but strong. He caught sight of her, and smiled dumbly, her beauty taking up all he saw for the next several seconds. She smiled back, her tendency for giving grim expressions regardless of the happiness behind them continuing into the first hours of her motherhood.

"How are you feeling?"

Vestara laughed quietly.

"How are *you* feeling?" She retorted.

Ben gave her an abashed expression.

"You're the one who just gave *birth*, Vestara."

She scoffed at this, giving him another frowning grin.

"You're seen fleets burning in space, planets awash in liquid flame. Now you have a daughter. So tell me, Ben; how *do* you feel?" She asked again, sternly.

He chuckled, settling Auinel-Jade securely on his chest before scratching the tip of a cold ear. Ginger-brown hair now freely reached the bottom of his earlobes, and a scruffy-but-trim beard hugged the square yet forever boyish contours of his jaw.

"I'm scared. I'm-"

"Cold?" Vestara interrupted.

"Not exactly that. I... with you and Auinel, I feel warm. But the cold is from out there."

Vestara opened her mouth to speak again, but fell silent to allow Ben time to gather his thoughts. He inhaled, deeply, the movement causing Auinel-Jade to stir somewhat.

He lightly patted her naked back, sending peaceful ideations to her through the Force.

"The galaxy. What's waiting out there for her. The things that you said I lived through- you saw something even crueller than that. Felt it. In the end, we both did. That... *cold*."

Ben felt a shiver come from Vestara then. She could only nod, taking Ben's hand mid-pat and joining it with hers to their daughter.

"And it's still out there." Vestara whispered, and though she had been gradually growing stronger and more confident with her speech, just now she sounded quiet-

And afraid.

Ben shuddered at the silence that seemed to gnarl and thrash between them. He had seen the limits of it- the Force. He had seen what it can do- what it did to Jacen, what it did to his family. A family barely healed from the constant traumas set upon them, a family growing despite the horrors that lurked in the shadows, waiting for them.

"None of that matters now." Ben said firmly, and Vestara looked up, meeting his eyes then. He wondered if it was the resolution in his voice, or if she merely wanted to cling to something- anything, other than the dread that Ben felt swimming up within Vestara.

Auinel-Jade... she could feel it too. She began to whimper softly, not yet crying but clearly disturbed. Her little arms and legs curled against Ben's chest, and he could feel her heartbeat quicken.

Ben closed his eyes, stretching out with the Force. He touched both Vestara and Auinel-Jade, calming them. He graced them with peaceful ideations, he promised them a fulfilling sleep. Vestara looked at Ben with a wry smile-

This one bereft of angry, furrowed brows.

"You're getting too good at that." She said softly.

Ben grinned.

"What else is a Jedi good *for*?" He asked.

"It seems... a great many things." Vestara said, parting her lips in anticipation as Ben leaned in to kiss her. After a moment, Vestara separated from him.

"Go speak with your family. I'll keep Auinel-Jade. Swaddle her, all of that. I don't want to be separated from her, but I also don't want her around too many people. Not yet, anyway."

Ben nodded.

He knew Vestara also probably wanted to prepare herself-

When she returned, it was not only the Jedi who didn't trust her. It was Ben's immediate family- Luke, and Jaina. Even uncle Han and Leia had unsavory things to say about her and whatever intents she held, and in a sort of small way, Ben himself still hadn't fully forgiven her.

But he *loved* her. That much he knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt. Her decisions were influenced by a life of violence and in that way, violence became her method of coping. After what they faced, he was not surprised that she abandoned them, that she did what she chose to do.

But things are different now. She had made him a father. Ben knew that the action taken by her, carrying his child until birth and leading their family to the point where they were now, were decisions that... sure, perhaps were made out of a spark of immaturity, or ignorance, or a mixture of the two-

But deep down, Vestara wanted to belong. She wanted a family. And she had chosen Ben to fulfill that goal. The love they shared was real, despite the failures shared between them.

Despite the cold.

Ben sat up, and Vestara mirrored that motion, taking Auinel-Jade from his arms in a graceful flourish. He called a tunic to an open hand- it was black, slightly dipped at the collar, with flared shoulders emblazoned with a Jedi insignia.

He hated to admit it, but in a small way it reminded him of the days he spent with the Galactic Alliance Guard. Before everything had... well, *happened*, he quite liked the time he spent within the Guard. Sometimes, even now, it felt that during those halcyon days... he was truly making a difference.

Ben shut his eyes inadvertently, thoughts striking back to Jacen as they often tended to. He felt Vestara rub his back, then the nape of his neck. Her touch calmed him, as it always did.

Ben sighed, inhaling artificial, repurposed air. He opened his eyes, turning to regard Vestara and his daughter.

This is what it means.

He smiled, dumbly and crookedly, a smile that was equal parts Luke and Mara.

He smiled- and thought, if not for a brief moment, he could *feel* Mom's strength, her resolve. How proud she was, how sad she was. Wishing she could've been there, wishing things had been different.

But overall, she was proud of him. Ben felt that. He looked away from Vestara and Auinel-Jade, and his eyes were drawn to an unremarkable corner within the birthing room. It was here that Ben felt Mom's echo through the Force.

Was she watching them?

Tears welled behind Ben's eyes, but he rose from Vestara's bed and wiped away at them as he slid his tunic over a tired body.

He took a tentative step- his leg had fallen asleep. Vestara chuckled deeply at Ben's swaying gait, and he turned, a play frown on his face.

She gave him another genuine smile then.

It was at that moment that Ben realized the coldness he felt earlier had completely evaporated- he didn't feel it in the Force, he didn't taste it in the air.

I have a daughter.

As Ben made way for the birthing chamber's door, he turned again to regard Vestara and Auinel.

Auinel had already fallen asleep again, and Vestara beamed as she looked down upon her daughter.

Ben cocked his head slightly as he spoke.

"You do know you'll have to talk to them soon. Probably tonight- for real, don't you?"

Vestara scoffed.

“Hurry up and talk to your Dad. Tell him to stop trying to figure out how we’re holding up in here. I can feel it.”

Ben shrugged and smiled at her, before continuing.

He moved for the door, and it hissed as the door vanished into a holding unit above the frame. He stepped underneath, eyes catching sight of his father instantly.

Luke... looked tired. He looked old, even. But there was a certain strength to the brightness of his eyes and the aged wisdom of his features. Ben’s Father sat upon a bench that rested against the far wall of the immediate hallway outside of the maternal birthing chambers.

Lights had immediately flickered on at the movement of Ben’s entrance, and the reality of that implication caused Ben to greet his Father with an incredulous laugh before anything else.

“You’ve been sitting here, completely still?” Ben asked, approaching Luke. He sat beside his Dad, hugging him tightly. Luke returned the embrace, and Ben found himself burying his head into Luke’s chest. Tears threatened his eyes and unlike with Vestara, Ben allowed them to fall.

Luke muttered an almost silent “Oh”, before patting Ben’s back and holding him closer.

“We’ve been through so much, Ben. So much.” Luke said softly.

Ben nodded, silent tears streaming down his cheeks.

It was then Ben pushed away from Luke. He sat up quickly, looking around the hallway. Then he returned his gaze to that of his Father’s.

“Where’s Jaina?” Ben asked.

Luke’s face fell, but only for a moment.

“She had to go. Something... well, she said she didn’t want me bothering you with it. Not now.”

Ben narrowed his eyes.

Is this why he was sitting here, still as stone? Is this why he was trying to see what we could sense in the birthing chamber? See if we could tell something was possibly-

Almost as if Luke could hear Ben’s thoughts, he continued.

“She assured me nothing was wrong. But she has been called to Bastion. She wouldn’t say more- before she left, she received a holo message from there. One of the *Bastion* Jedi.”

Ben could hear the almost hidden annoyance within Luke’s speech. Whenever the Bastion Jedi were mentioned, it became clear that Luke’s mood soured to a degree rarely seen within the mostly well mannered man.

A slow feeling of alarm painted over Ben’s flesh as if a cruel varnish.

“And that’s all they said?”

Luke offered Ben a rueful chuckle.

“That’s all I heard.”

JAINA FEL ran a hand through her hair.

It had been a long two days. She had slept, between those two days, for perhaps three or four hours- and those hours were spent outside a birthing chamber within a medical frigate orbiting Akiva.

After that brief sleep- she was forced to help deliver the newest member of her family. The father of whom she loved. When she saw Ben she saw him not as a cousin, but as a brother. A younger brother- one of the last vestiges of Jacen, one of the last glimmering rays of Anakin.

The mother? A woman she never truly trusted. A woman who turned her blade upon *Jaina*, a woman who, at the end of it all, after facing the true, primordial reality of the Force, decided to betray them *once* more, a decision that Jaina knew stemmed from whatever abusive habits Vestera had clung to from her youth.

As the lambda class shuttle dipped into hyperspace, light tearing as it flew across the craft’s wide viewport, Jaina had no other recourse but to laugh.

It was a bitter laugh, one that embarrassed her. The Imperial escort Jagged demanded to accompany her stiffened. The young man did not turn to look at Jaina, but she could tell how his emotions echoed through the Force that her outburst had troubled him- if not only slightly.

She sighed, leaning backwards.

The Jedi robes she wore felt almost chafing- two days ago, when she received word that Vestara was entering the early stages of delivery, she fled Imperial space and made way for Akiva immediately. She wanted to be there for Ben- aside from Mom and Dad and of course Uncle Luke, Ben was the only other family she had.

Of course she had Allana, and Tenel Ka. But of no fault of Tenel's own, Allana had grown to be distinctly *Hapan*, not Solo. Allana was being groomed as the heir to the Hapes system, and as such, had little time to entertain the Solo and Skywalker sides of her family.

Allana was thirteen now, and Jaina had no disillusion on how it felt to be that age, while also trying to maintain some sort of philosophical spirituality as a Jedi.

Further, the reason for her bitter laugh was not anger directed at Tenel Ko or Allana, but rather the fact that Jaina herself was not doing something entirely dissimilar. She had become a Fel, wife of a man who was the Head of State of the Imperial remnant.

And her days reflected such-

She spent more time upon Bastion than anywhere else. She advised Jagged on Imperial dealings, she manufactured furthering diplomatic ties between the Galactic Alliance and the Imperial remnant.

Sadly the only side of the Alliance that embraced the remnant and, by extension, her- was the military autocracy of the Alliance, itself built upon Imperial factions that were either coerced or voluntarily joined with the Alliance over the years after the Vong crisis.

Otherwise? Politically she was... not *hated*, never *hated*, but distrusted. She knew that many thought trouble followed her, was perhaps even beckoned *by* her. Jagged's staunch rulership, far more benign than the *Empire* while vastly more centralized than the New Republic, was beginning to chafe shoulders amongst the Alliance political elite- senators who were none to happy to see the military structure of their government gleefully cede power and work with Fel.

When they had married, Jaina hoped-

"Master Fel," Jaina's retainer said aloud.

Jaina stiffened, forcing back the desire to roll her eyes back behind their optic stems.

Yes.

I know.

We're exiting hyperspace.

Instead, she nodded forward. The lurch and instant shift in gravity was something she was used to, the retainer didn't need to warn her. He probably didn't even know she had spent most of her time not as a Jedi, but as a pilot.

She sighed, a genuine smile crossing her lips as stars, stars not distorted by the continuum of hyper speed, drifted across the viewports of her shuttle.

Is this how Luke felt with us?

Us.

She still thought of herself as part of them.

As part of Jacen, part of Anakin. And no matter how much time passed, no matter what changed- when it came to the subject it was never just *her*, and it was never just *them*.

Always, it was *us*.

The planet Benetage *zoomed* into sight, as if an apparition rushing towards Jaina in some sort of crazed dream. It was gray, with motes of blue denoting ocean and tiny droplets of green, signifying fertile land. It had, ironically, become one of the more successful worlds in the hands of the Remnant, far away from the troubles that the galaxy faced after the Vong. She had been urged here. To the closest system near Akiva, a place where the party wishing to speak to her knew they could guarantee secrecy.

The one wishing to speak to Jaina held a complicated relationship with her.

Talann Eregis was Jaina's first- well, *only* apprentice. A young girl Jaina had taken on shortly after the end of the Abeloth confrontation and before Luke encouraged Jaina to create her *own* Jedi Academy, one in Imperial space.