

Bound by the Force

May 2001
Celebrating 100 Issues!



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ISSUE #100

MAY 2001

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Deadlines for Issue 100

Submit to General Section	<i>August 30</i>
Submit Galactic Transmissions	<i>August 30</i>
Submit to Division Section	<i>August 30</i>
Submit Division to Editor	<i>September 5</i>
Go to Press	<i>September 15</i>
Mailing	<i>October 1</i>

These dates may change at the discretion of the new newsletter editor.

Cartoons, artwork, jokes, top ten lists, etc., all contributions gratefully accepted. Email is preferred except for artwork. Snail mail originals – they will be mailed back intact. Thanks!



From the Editor

May, 2001

Hello!

It is with some reluctance that I write this; because I've truly enjoyed being newsletter editor for these last six issues. It is always a pleasure to be able to participate in someone else's creativity, and I sincerely thank each and every one of you for that opportunity. I've tried to make ***Bound by the Force*** a publication to be proud of: readable, interesting, and with an attractive layout. I hope that I have succeeded in your eyes. I've done my best.

Forces of the Empire has come a long way since 1980. I believe that we are the oldest unofficial Star Wars Club in continuous existence. Star Wars Fan Clubs were popular while the original three movies were coming out, but fandom's interest in general waned in the long, long wait for Episode One. Now Star Wars fandom is enjoying a resurgence, but we who have "kept the faith" through those long years are still here. That is because we, as a Club, were not afraid to change and to grow. The Club is different now from what it was then, some current members weren't even born when the Club was founded. I believe that says a lot for our tenacity, and our characters. But then, we're all characters, aren't we? I leave you with my hopes that twenty-one years from now will see FoE, in whatever incarnation, still going strong. It is up to each one of us; me, and you, and you, and all the rest of you, to make that happen. You can be proud of being a member of the Oldest Star Wars Fan Club. You can be equally proud of being a member of the single group allowed to perpetrate live action role play at a science fiction convention, all through the general banning of prop weapons at cons. It is your mature behavior as a group that has allowed this to be. Take pride in our group and in your behavior as a group.

May the Force be with you, Always,

Terri

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Announcements

Election Results

For Alliance Division Leader: Dora Furlong
For Editor of Tales From the Cantina: Ginna Wilcoxin
Electronic newsletter available for those that want it: YES
Nominations

For Public Relations: Joe Dorffner
For Club Secretary: Rachel Schmutter

Congratulations to Dora and Ginna, and welcome to the Galactic Council.

Members should vote on the two nominations and forward your votes to
Mandy Hall before the 14th of June.

Book & Movie Character Players

Leia Organa

Lynda Chiarella
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Han Solo

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Luke Skywalker

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The Emperor

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Obi-Wan Kenobi

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Qui Gon Jinn

Debbie Silverberg
5835 64th Street
Sacramento, CA 95824
(not online)

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Effective 01.01.01 Major Serris Surragar is hereby Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and is now reassigned as an Aide to the Director of Combined Operations. Lt. Col. Serris Surragar, Jedi Knight, comes to Combined Operations from Alliance Intelligence where she has served as a scout

WITH ORDER COMES CHAOS

By Season Irwin, Ginna Wilcoxon, Viper, and Bernadette Crumb

Jerella backed away from her dark-side opponent again, limping as the gash in her thigh streamed blood. She held the gaffi stick defensively before her, as she tried to get through the battle rage to touch the man's mind. His crystal gray eyes narrowed as her probe broke through.

Mind tricks are no good against me, Jedi he sent back to her as he advanced, the glaive he held bloodstained and glinting in the doubled sunlight.

If the plan I suggested when we got onto these sands and selected our weapons is going to work, it has to be now she answered, ignoring the shouts and cries of the audience that surrounded them. *You will win this tenth fight and regain your freedom, and I'll be in a position to make my own escape.* She deflected another blow, the impact making her arms ache.

If I kill you, I'll still have my freedom. Why should I go along with you and your idea?

Jerella swallowed hard. *Because of who I am. Look beyond the disguise* While the light part of her decried her action, she showed him a quick vision of herself and Darana, training together. And another of Palpatine. *The emperor wants to get me back... if I die at your hands, he'll hunt you down like a glarehound's prey. If you go with the deception, you will be rewarded.*

He hesitated only a moment or two. *Agreed then. Prepare yourself.* He loomed over her, keeping just out of reach of her weapon, and inflicted two stunningly hard blows; one to her injured leg, making her collapse to the sand with a scream of pain. He used the Force to knock the gaffi stick from her grasp and swung the second time. As Jerella slipped into the trance, willing her body to assume the likeness of death—and willing it to end once she was removed from the arena sands through the death gate—she flung up her left hand automatically to block the descending blade. Her last awareness as the darkness took her was of a hot agony in her arm as the blade sheared through the energy bracelet and deep into the bone and flesh of her wrist.

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"I knew I should have bet on this fight," complained a grating voice close to Jerella's head as she slowly came back to awareness. "She lasted longer than anyone thought she would. I'd have made at least some credits for that." The Jedi halted her rise to complete consciousness, maintaining the feigned death, but allowing her awareness to expand through the Force. She was going to feel a lot of pain when she came fully out of it, she knew, and she didn't dare let the lackeys realize she'd been faking it.

"Well, better luck next time." The second voice was deep and rumbly.

"Here, dump her by the burner and lets go watch the next fight." There was a lumpy surface under her, and the stink of fresh blood.

"Just a sec, let me get the cuffs off. The boss don't want to waste credits by incinerating those." Clammy hands fumbled at her right wrist and, suddenly, the cuff fell away. "Heh, the left one is a loss. Along with her hand too. Blasted Sith cut just about all the way through it."

"Take it off anyway, the components might be _ruids_ly...and hurry up, they're about to begin."

The remains of the damaged cuff joined its mate in a pile on the side of the room, and Jerella felt a meaty hand give her body a rough shove. She rolled, limply, off the top of the pile of bodies, to lay sprawled in a spreading pool of her own blood, hidden from the exterior door through which two sets of footsteps retreated.

She eased herself out of the remains of the trance, keeping a tight control on the nerves that reported pain, and willed the bleeding of her mangled thigh and wrist to slow, then stop. *Another lesson from Darana's tutelage.* When she opened her eyes she nearly retched at the sight of her left hand dangling from a mere strip of muscle and flesh. As quietly as possible, she scrambled to her feet to limp toward an inner door, supporting her hand and wrist tightly against her chest. *No one can see me* She projected an aura of invisibility as she went, and hoped that it would be effective as she moved into the corridors beyond.

Like the incinerator room, they were not Force-damped. With luck, she might find some sort of first aid kit, or at least something with which to bandage her injuries. And then she would concentrate on finding a way to rescue Luke and her new friend Octavia from wherever they were being held in the Force-damped barracks.

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"Don't worry about getting the cuffs off, this next fight's gonna be real short. Come on and we'll get to it later." The attendants dropped the black clad body on the pile and hurried back out to await the next body.

Before Luke was even aware of his surroundings, as he began to come out of his Force-induced coma, he used the Force to shatter the dangerous cuffs that encircled his forearms. It had been a close call, but he was free.



The Jedi looked around at his surroundings. He was in a bloodied pile of corpses. Bodies had been piled up and left to be incinerated later.

Cheers from the crowd could be heard through the heavy door. Luke thought quickly about Octavia, still wearing her cuffs. He needed to find the main controls and disconnect their ability to kill the wearer; then they'd be able to focus on getting them off later, when they were safe.

Obviously, the guards could unlock the bracelets manually. But they'd gone back out to wait for the end of the next fight and subduing them would be too risky. Luke had been able to use the Force already, and his questing probe encountered no areas of Force-damping in the vicinity. He knew that it was safe for him to pass through this area of the complex.

Before he slipped from the incinerator chamber, he looked over the piled bodies, searching for Jerella's. It wasn't there. Sounds from beyond the door leading to the arena urged him to flee the room before he was caught.

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Octavia could feel the hatred coming from the woman called Psylocke. The heat from the sand gave her the feeling that she had been there before... before these so-called games. Before either of them could move, a loud, crashing sound accompanied by screams made her turn. Taking advantage of the situation Octavia dashed away from Psylocke and started toward the door that led back to the holding area. She stopped short, looking down at her bracelets: if she crossed through the doorway she would die. 'Now what?' she thought in desperation.

Suddenly a voice rang out in her mind. *Stay away from the doors until I tell you it's clear.*

Octavia looked around, confused, looking for the source of the voice that warned her, but there was no one there.

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Moving cautiously through the maze of corridors, Luke was able to catch a glimpse of Octavia's fight with Psylocke. So far it looked like she was holding her ground, but he wasn't sure how long she would be able to do so. As he went, he sought for Jerella's Force signature, so like Leia's as to be indistinguishable, but was unsuccessful.

Luke traveled the corridors as quickly as he dared, feeling a terrible urgency to find the power unit controlling the bracelets. It took him less time than he had expected, since he was able to use the Force to guide him.

The door was guarded by a pair of Twi'leks who seemed more intent on the broadcast of the arena's activities than their job. It was easy for Luke to temporarily cloud their minds, allowing him to trigger the lock and slip in through the door.

The console was unattended. Luke examined it, all his old intuition in working with ruids and power devices coming back into play.



As he shifted position, his booted foot came into contact with something hard and unyielding on the floor. It was an unfamiliar tool, but he quickly sensed how to use it to his benefit. Using the Force to guide him to the most sensitive areas of the control, he began to probe the unit, hoping that there would be no alarm circuit. Sparks flew everywhere, making him duck briefly, but it _ruids__ operative.

After several failed attempts, Luke took several long breaths and then pulled the Force about him. He envisioned his gloved mechanical right hand closing around the internal components, crushing the power unit's controls. And the thought was the deed.

Simultaneously, a thunderous crash from outside the chamber made Luke look up, startled. He could see nothing beyond the room he was in, but he knew that something had broken through the stronghold surrounding the arena. His attunement to the Force clarified the situation. It was the Alliance! Just as suddenly, everything was plunged into darkness as the facility's main power source was shorted out by the invasion. He sent to Octavia, part of his mind having remained aware of her situation on the sands, *Stay away from the doors until I tell you it's clear.* Pausing briefly to ensure that the bracelets' controls were truly dead, he continued, *It's safe now! Run through the entrance! Get out of the arena!*

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Jerella was almost ready to admit that she was lost in the maze of corridors when the lights went out. She'd managed to fix a temporary splint and sling for her left arm from the sleeve of her jumpsuit and a strip of loose decorative wall molding she'd pried from the hallway's wall. And she'd managed to keep from being recognized by the denizens of the arena facility—somehow able to mentally persuade them that she belonged there and wasn't to be noticed. But she couldn't find her way back to where she'd come from, and hadn't succeeded at all in locating the prisoner barracks in the extensive complex. And then she'd heard the announcement that Skywalker was fighting in the arena, and she tried to get to a place to see the fight and try to assist him if she could. But she was still lost when the announcement of his loss echoed over the complex's speakers.

Jerella stopped dead and gasped, reaching out for Skywalker's mind—and finding nothing to grasp.

So much for my Force abilities she said bitterly to herself, pushing back the physical pain once again as she briefly rested against a wall. *I can do things that some of the new Jedi Masters haven't even tried, but I can't do the simplest things, like find my way to where I'm needed!*

A Twi'lek passed by and she increased the "I belong here" projection as he glanced curiously at her. For a moment she thought he wasn't going to continue, but he just nodded and walked on around the corner behind her. When he was gone, she pushed herself away from the wall and continued to limp along... Octavia was still alive, and maybe she could still find her.

Several minutes later, fighting against the wave of grief that threatened to overwhelm,



Jerella stumbled to a halt when the lights went out in conjunction with the sound of rending plascrete as something broke through the defenses of the arena. Fighting against the wave of grief that threatened to overwhelm, Jerella stumbled to a halt when the lights went out in conjunction with the sound of rending plascrete as something broke through

the defenses of the arena. Fighting exhaustion and a bit of panic, she extended a mental probe to find out what was happening and heard someone call her name.

Jerella! It's Luke! Where are you?

Before she could answer, as a burst of joy washed away the grief, she was nearly run down as a pair of ysilamiri-laden guards charged through the darkness. She staggered back against the wall once more as the bubble of Force-nothingness passed her by. She reached for the location of Luke's presence, but the disruption had broken her almost-link and now she had no idea of where he could be.

But he was alive, and she'd find him.

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Luke moved quickly to the door. A brief moment's scan showed the guards had abandoned their posts to respond to the current crisis. Luke tried again to sense where Jerella was. Still encountering no trace of his sister's clone, he easily picked up the fact that Octavia was still in the arena. Using the Force to augment his vision in the darkened corridors, he sprinted in that direction. Although he couldn't pinpoint his other student, he sent to her as well. *Jerella! It's Luke! Where are you?*

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Octavia backed up, away from the machines that were moving in the arena as the lights went out.

It's safe now! Run through the entrance! Get out of the arena!

Hearing Luke's voice in her mind, she ran through the doorway. She questioned herself about the voice, how it could possibly be Luke? He was dead! She wondered how she was going to get answers to her questions. Pushing these thoughts away from her mind, she turned her attention to what was going on around her, peering through the darkness, knowing she needed to be able to take this one step at a time.

"Octavia, I'm here!" Luke called out, running up from behind her.

Octavia whirled and stared at Luke. "You're alive...how?!" she yelled over the noise and confusion.

Luke shook his head, stopping in front of her. "I told you not to worry. Come on, that's the Alliance!" He turned and took off down a hallway.

"The Alliance?" Octavia questioned as she started to follow Luke. She abruptly stopped when they came to a cross section of hallway. Her eyes had adjusted to the lack of illumination and she watched him run down the one to their left. But felt a strong pull down the corridor to her right. "Luke!" she yelled.

When he didn't acknowledge her, she went down the corridor; something was there and she needed to find out what it was.

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A tall, lanky figure was moving quickly to exit the arena. Suddenly, she stopped, sensing something...someone. Blocking her presence with use of the Force, she went cautiously in the direction of the person she had sensed. A stone's throw down one of the access corridors she suddenly spied her quarry. Two figures entered a crossing in the corridors, conversing quietly. She could sense that both were Jedi, but her attention was riveted on the stronger of the two. A sly, wicked smile crossed her face.

The stronger one suddenly ran away down the corridor to his left, but the young Force user started in the other direction and hesitated, looking to the right. After she called out his name, she ran down the right hand corridor.

Smiling, the lanky hunter slyly echoed what she had yelled, using the voice of the other woman.

Luke turned, feeling that someone had called his name. He hesitated and noticed someone standing in the gloom of the corridor, backlit by the light coming from the arena. It was a very tall slender figure; ruidsly not Octavia.

Using Octavia's voice again, she called out, "Luke."

The Jedi Master reached out quickly with the Force to identify the person.

She smiled, easily blocking his scan. Frowning slightly, Luke felt her prevent him from identifying her. The only thing he had figured out was that she had a form of the Force about her. It seemed to be neither Dark nor Light. He stood his ground, keeping distance between them, but he was very curious as to who she was.

The mysterious Force user moved closer, mostly so that Luke could more readily see her. The noise of the Alliance storming the arena grew louder. "You'd make a good prize. But with no saber...it's no fun," she said wickedly, watching him back up. Her hand rested on her light saber. Luke backed up a few more steps.

His blue eyes studied her form and coloring. She was very tall, very slender, and definitely not all human. He stopped moving and waited for her to make the next move. There was an unusual and ominous blend of good and evil emanating from her. Thinking quickly about what she had said, he realized that she was a bounty hunter. Running his eyes over her broad expanse of white skin and the brilliant red hair pulled high on the top of her head, he still wondered who she was.

"So, Jedi, want to play?" She ignited her light saber and moved still closer, the blade humming threateningly.

A tense few moments passed between them. Luke, prepared for whatever move she was going to make, took one more step backward, poising himself for action. Then, just as he had relaxed deeply into the Force, the wall beside them burst open with a crash.

Luke tucked and rolled out of harm's way, highly aware of the mysterious person's proximity to him. Alliance personnel charged through the opening, brandishing their weapons and shouting orders.



As his feet hit the floor, he glanced around for his foe...but she was nowhere to be seen. He peered through the choking dust and simply could not locate her. With a burst of energy, he sprinted off in the direction she had come from, but he saw no trace of her. Scanning through the Force as he ran, he could only make out a slight impression of her,

and it was growing fainter every second.

Before the wall had completely fallen, Aurra retreated from the area. No way was she going to deal with the Alliance. She would just have wait for another day to hunt down this Jedi.

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Jerella scanned her surroundings, confused by the sudden presence of dozens of Force auras that had burst into her awareness when the power had died. Somewhere among them, were her friends and she looked for signs of familiarity as tiny, red emergency glows came on to dimly illuminate the corridor. *Luke! Where are you? Octavia?* She hoped her mental voice could be heard over the rest. As she sought mentally, she was unaware of her feet carrying her along through the maze, her speed increasing as she moved, until she was running. *Luke! Answer me!*

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Octavia moved down the corridor, passing doors until she came to one on her right. This was where she was being drawn. Giving into the feeling, Octavia found the control that opened the door. She entered the room and was surprised at all the weapons that were there. They had to have been taken from the combatants that were in the arena. Passing over the blasters and other weapons, Octavia stopped in front of the lightsabers.

She smiled as she found hers, Luke's, and Jerella's, still attached to their belts. She gathered them up and left the room. She expected Luke to be outside in the corridor, and fear gripped her when she discovered he wasn't there. She felt an urgency to find him as if he was in danger. Retracing her steps, Octavia hoped she could find him. She finally found him, in the act of catching his breath.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, just a little winded."

"Here, you might need this," Octavia said handing Luke his saber and belt.

Luke stared at them in disbelief and admiration. Automatically he slipped it on and adjusted it into place. "Thank you! How..?" Luke looked down at Octavia's hand and noticed that Jerella's saber was there as well as her own.

"I can't explain it ... I just felt drawn to them." Octavia strapped her own saber into place. "That's natural isn't it? ... I mean a Jedi and their saber are one, or they're supposed to be aren't they?"

Luke smiled, somewhat bewildered, but happy about the development. "Yes. We'll discuss this later – come on!" Luke turned and ran off in the direction of the chaos. Octavia reached out and took hold of Luke's arm. "Did you find Jerella? I heard her call to us."



"No, but she is somewhere nearby. She should catch up with us in a few minutes, as she seems to be heading where we're headed."

Jerella! Meet us at the main arena entrance! Luke sent out to the other Jedi student. It was the first opportunity he'd had to answer her mental call.

Octavia turned and followed Luke. He apparently knew what he was doing. They passed guards and many others who were running in every direction, trying to find a way out of the place in the darkness and confusion, yet Luke seemed to know exactly where he

was going. She wondered what the next move would be?

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Jerella made her way through the twisting corridors, trying to relink with Luke. She was tiring and her control over the pain of her injuries was beginning to waver when she suddenly heard his voice.

Jerella! Meet us at the main arena entrance!

She grabbed onto the contact and realized to her chagrin that she'd been moving away from the Jedi Master she'd been seeking. She turned around and picked up her pace as best she could against the flow of fleeing arena denizens. The sound of blaster fire around a corner startled her and she stumbled to a halt, just as a trio in Alliance uniforms came barreling around it, knocking her up against the wall.

"Hold it!" The voice was shockingly, joyously familiar, and the orange clad man was suddenly hugging her to the surprise of his companions. "Jerella!"

"Rob?" She stared at him in disbelief. *How?--*

Because I love you. Rob Severn, fellow Jedi student and Alliance pilot, put his arms around her and hugged her as if he'd never let her go. *Come on. We've got a transport to get everyone out of here.* Aloud, he said to his companions, "You go on to see if anyone else is left here. I'll get her to the transport."

"Master Skywalker and Octavia-a new student," she explained as the other soldiers headed down the corridor, "are headed for the main arena entrance. They want me to meet them there."

Rob pressed a kiss on her forehead and turned back the way he'd come, supporting her with his arm. *If only I'd known, I'd have never let you head back to Yavin on that shuttle. I was so scared when I heard the shuttle never arrived. And you're hurt...*

Jerella groaned in frustration as after only three turns they could see the main arena gate before them... She'd been going around in circles. *Nothing a long session in bacta won't cure. I am so glad to see you!*

Rob shielded his eyes from the glare of the sands beyond the gateway. "Master Skywalker!" He was gratified to see Luke's welcoming smile. It faded drastically, however, at the sight of Jerella's wounds.

Octavia turned toward the sound of the voice she heard calling to Luke. A grin spread over her face as she looked at her new-found friend. "Jerella, I'm so glad to see you again," Octavia yelled, moving toward her and the stranger supporting her. "You're hurt! Is there anything I can do to help?"



Jerella just shook her head, exhausted and still in tremendous pain. "Octavia, meet Rob, a dear friend of mine," she gasped.

Octavia smiled curiously at him and nodded a greeting. Rob grinned back.

Luke made his way to Jerella's left side and placed a hand on her shoulder. *That's pretty bad. Let me help.* He was sparing in his energy use, but was able to boost her flagging strength and reduce the renewed pain and bleeding. Aloud, he said to all of them, "Come on," to all of them, "let's get you to the nearest Alliance transport and get off this dust ball."

As Rob accompanied Jerella up the ramp and into the hands of waiting medics, Octavia, seeing Luke slip back to where the rescued captives were assembling, insisted that she was capable of helping too.

Luke and Octavia trotted back to the scene and began assisting the rest of the wounded onto the transport.

“Does this adventure constitute the beginning of my training, Master Skywalker?” asked Octavia suddenly.

Luke looked up quickly to see her wry grin. “Indeed it does, my friend, and you have in turn already taught me several things as well.”

Octavia, surprised by his answer, remained silent for a moment. “Does a Jedi ever stop learning?”

“Not even if she is very, very wise!” Luke smiled.

Octavia echoed his smile. Together they gently hoisted a wounded Alliance member onto the waiting transport.

CHARACTER BIO

Name: Kylie Renoren

Player: Valerie Meachum Kessler

Physical Description:

Age: 30

Race: Human

Height: 5’9”

Weight: 125 lb.

Hair Color: Red

Eye Color: Green

Other: Usually perceived to be several years younger than her actual age

Current Status:

Current Job: Jedi Apprentice

Special Abilities:

-knack for stealth

-Basic First Aid training

Personal Information:

Homeworld: born on Coruscant, raised on Rinlar

Marital Status: Single

Spouse’s name: N/A

Children: None

Father’s Name: Jate Renoren

Race: Human

Homeworld: Alderaan **Background:** former Jedi Knight, miner; deceased



Mother’s Name: Shalla (Varee) Renoren

Race: Human

Homeworld: Coruscant

Background: Healer at Jedi Temple; deceased

Education:

-Primary/secondary school for Blue Star Mine employee dependents, through age 16 (did not graduate)

-Basic training, Rebel Alliance

Force Training:

-taught non-fighting aspects by father through age 16

-Jedi training, 8905-9306, resumed 9905

Master: Luke Skywalker

Light or Dark: Light

Employment History:

- Rebel Alliance general forces, 8609-8905
- Jedi Apprentice, 8905-9306
- Transient status/various menial occupations, 9306-9905
- Jedi Apprentice, 9905 – present

Psychological Description:

IQ: High

Temperament: Focused. Outwardly calm and rational. Passionately dedicated to her Jedi heritage, partly in compensation for deep-rooted survivor guilt. Believes negative emotions should be faced, named, acknowledged and worked past; and that this gives more stable control than denying their existence.

Fears: Threats to the new Jedi order, which she considers her family.

Likes: Sunshine, being alone in a natural environment, children

Dislikes: Cities, snap judgments, being dismissed because she doesn't look her age.

Pet Peeves: Wet socks

Goals in Life: Becoming a full Jedi, learning all she can and contributing to the knowledge of the order

Favorite:

Color: Green

Pastime: Reading

Hobbies: Dance, gardening

Food: Whatever you put in front of her

Drink: Hot chocolate

Personal History:

Kylie Renoren was born in the Jedi Temple on Coruscant at exactly the wrong point in history, a circumstance that continues to dominate her life.

Kylie was the youngest of three children; her father, Jate, retired from active service and became an instructor to pre-apprentice Temple students after the difficult birth of eldest son Bran. A second son, Kres, was born two year later, and Kylie followed three years



after that. By this time, the purges were underway. Jate continued to teach, but had moved his family into hiding—a move that backfired when he returned one day to find their residence destroyed, and 15-month-old Kylie the sole survivor.

Fleeing with the child to the Outer Rim, he eventually settled on Rinlar, where Kylie grew up just another worker's kid in the company town of a small-time mining operation. [If Rinlar were in the movies, they'd shoot it in the hills of Wales in February.] Her father taught her about the spiritual and philosophical aspects of the ways of the Force, believing that it was dangerous for a Force-gifted child to go entirely untrained. He taught her about Jedi traditions as the history they had by now become, and hoped that steering clear of the fighting and related skills of a Jedi would be enough to keep them from coming to the attention of the Empire.

It wasn't. A mine accident forced Jate to reveal his Jedi abilities to save several coworkers; word got to the wrong ears, and not long after that a squad of Stormtroopers arrived to annihilate the Blue Star Mine settlement. Kylie was once again (to her knowledge) the sole survivor; her father put his lightsaber in her hand and bought her escape opportunity with his own life. Chance, or the Force, led her to stow away on an ore transport bound for a Rebel Alliance base, where she signed on to go wherever they could use her.

During her 2 1/2 years in the regular Alliance forces, Kylie's talent for stealth earned

her the nickname “Shadow” and was frequently employed in intelligence-gathering missions, and she was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. Then she came to the attention of Luke Skywalker, and began training under him to become a Jedi. Nearing the completion of her training, she was on a mission at Port Lansing when she was captured by the Sith and taken before the Emperor.

The Emperor used her fears and guilt in an attempt to turn her to the Dark Side. Instead of lashing out, though, Kylie dissociated, retreating to a distant corner of her mind while a 4-year-old version of herself took over. She was rescued by a Rebel strike team, and returned to her normal persona a short time later, with no conscious memory of the period of dissociation. She did her best to convince everyone—particularly Skywalker—that she was completely recovered, but the episode threw crippling doubt on her ability to achieve her goals.

After a few weeks of trying and failing to get back to normal, she simply got on a transport and ran away from everything and everyone she knew. For nearly six years she tried to disappear, and largely succeeded, drifting through a series of menial jobs on nondescript systems. One day, for reasons she can’t adequately explain, she got on a transport to Rinlar and returned to the ruin of her childhood home. There she made her peace with the past, and decided it was time to stop running. She built her own lightsaber, and buried her father’s in the patch of ground that had been her garden. Then she contacted Skywalker and formally requested permission to resume her training.

Currently Kylie is in residence at the Jedi Academy on Dagobah, working with a renewed sense of purpose to earn her knighthood and fulfill her duty to the people of the New Republic.



Imperial Transmissions **By Ginna Wilcoxon**

Aella rubbed her eyes and stared at the ceiling. There had to be something she was missing the main question was what was it? Turning over to face the wall Aella closed her eyes and tried to clear her mind of the transmissions. Imperial in nature, yet there was no Imperial bases in the sector that the signal was coming from. Pulling the covers over her head Aella tried to think of something light and relaxing.

“Aella! Are you asleep?” a voice came from the door.

“Yes, Marilyn I am now go away.” Aella replied.

“It’s all over the complex. The Alliance rescued our people from the Gladiatorial Games that were broadcasted.”

Aella turned over and looked at the woman who seemed to fill the doorway. “How,” Aella paused, “How many did we lose?”

Marilyn’s face dropped. “A few and we’re sure the new settlers that were on the transport were murdered somehow.” Marilyn paused. “The good news is Luke Skywalker is alive.”

“How? We saw the fight and heard his death announced.” Aella questioned rising to a sitting position.

“They had to make a mistake.” Marilyn stated firmly.

Aella shook her head, “No, it had to be more than that. It had to be a Jedi trick of some sort.”

“You sound like you wish he died.”

Aella stood and looked at her friend. "Died? No we need Jedi's and they are a great benefit for the Alliance." Patting Marilyn on the shoulder Aella smiled. "Now, since I'm awake I think I'll go work on my project."

"You spend too much time with computers. You need to get out more."

"Perhaps, but for now...I'll take the company of the computers. Talk to ya later Marilyn." Aella called walking down the corridor that would soon lead her to her office.

Aella Skot entered her office and checked her programs, everything was still in place and they were still working. Quickly checking to make sure that nothing had been detected, Aella sat down to review what information had been gathered while she tried to sleep.

Aella rechecked her findings for the hundredth time. It wasn't much, but it was something and to solve every puzzle you needed that first piece.

Opening the comlink Aella smiled as she contacted the director. "General, can I see you?" Aella asked

A sleep-laden voice came through, "I'll be there in a moment Captain." Branwyn replied.

Aella didn't have long to wait before the Director of Combined Operations appeared.

"You've found something?"

"I believe so. " Aella answered. "Does the name Darana mean anything to you?"



CHARACTER BIO

Name: Mildred Branwyn

Player: Dora Furlong

Physical Description:

Height: 5'9

Hair: Copper

Eyes: Hazel

Age: 48

Weight: 140

Marital Status: Single

Profession: Career Military

Homeworld: Berma

Mother: Deirdre Branwyn

Father: Ranier

Brothers: Kaelin Branwyn
Wesley Branwyn

Sisters: Adair Branwyn

Spouse: None

Children: None

Force: None

Education: Standard Education for Alliance held worlds. She attended the University of New Alderaan. She studied Psychology and Counter Terrorism.

Military History:

Rank: General

Status: Active

Army: Alliance

Branch: Ground Forces

Current Assignment: Director of Combined Operations

Psychological Description:

IQ: High

Temperament: Cool, calculating work-aholic. Branwyn is always weighing the options against the circumstances. She is very dedicated to winning the war against Tyranny.

Likes: Knowledge, Warm Sunny Days, and Work.

Dislikes: Sith, The Empire, Beings motivated by Personal Gain.

Pet Peeves: Disorganization and lack of follow through.

Goals in Life: Put an end to Tyranny and defeat the Empire.

Favorite:

Color: Jade Green

Drink: Water

Pastime: Reading

Food: Frozen Custard

Hobby: Writing Poetry

Special Abilities: Interrogation, Escape Artistry, Cryptography, and Strategy.

Personal History

None of the Branwyn children know their father. Their mother, Deirdre, spoke very little of him and never remarried after his disappearance. Mildred never cared to search him out, unlike her brothers and sisters. Instead of joining her siblings on a quest to find him, she went off to college, then joined the Alliance.

While her siblings became Mercenaries, Branwyn began her career as an operative in Alliance Intelligence. After five years she began, leading teams as Mission Commander



and three years later joined the Alliance Intelligence, Special Response Unit. These teams operate outside of the regular branches of Intelligence Structure. They handle highly classified and critical missions. She eventually worked her way up to command the Special Response Unit, then on to command an Alliance Intelligence Outpost on the rim. She was promoted to Director of Alliance Intelligence and after the Rose Coup was chosen by the Alliance high command to step into the position of Director of Combined Operations.

Very few know what the M. stands for in her name. Everyone refers to her simply as Branwyn. The current whereabouts of Branwyn's family is unknown to her. She has not seen them in almost twenty years. She believes that her mother is most likely deceased. It is possible that she is still alive, as Deirdre was 18 when she had her first child Wesley, Adair was born 2 years later, while Mildred and Kaelin, twins, were born 2 years after Adair.

Walls
by Lisa van Houten

Alliance stronghold –Detention Area – 1800 hours

The gray, featureless metal halls echoed with the sound of footsteps and muted chatter as the shift change for Security personnel was completed. To the casual observer, it was business as usual, but to those in the know, the voices that traveled the halls sounded different tonight, tinged with wariness and excitement, fear and curiosity.

Listen....

“Probably some poor brainwashed loser the Empire found under a rock somewhere.”

‘killed at least a hundred force users, maybe more.’

“low life mercenary scum.”

“tried to bite some guy’s finger off when they dragged her in.”

The voices carried their message through the Detention Area, passed on from one to another until they reached even the most distant corners of the cellblock where the very object of conversation was being held in a triple encoded locked cell, no doubt plotting some horrific fate of those who dared to lock her up.

Listen...

“1440 bottles of jinn on the wall, 1440 bottles of jinn...give the Jedi one more, he throws up on the floor....1439 bottles of jinn on the wall.”

Ok, maybe not.

Takara Dunne, mercenary, ‘droid fixer upper, employee of the Cairnfell Household, and current involuntary resident of cell 1138 was lying face up on a thin mattress that barely qualified as such which covered a hard metal slab. Her arms were folded behind her head to serve as a pillow as she stared up into the almost total darkness that was her cell. She had already learned to shut out most of the pain that her captors had caused from her capture and recent interrogations, but their questions still echoed in her mind.

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What’s your name, Merc?

What are the security protocols for the Cairnfell compound?

What level access do you have?

How many people does the house employ?

What planet were you born on?

If there is a break in the chain of command who do you report to?

And so on, and so on. Takara had simply stared back, smiling.

“1435 bottles of jinn on the wall, 1435 bottles of jinn.. give the jawa one more, it walks into a door, 1434 bottles of jinn on the wall”

The isolation that followed was actually more annoying than the questions, especially since they hadn’t given her any way to keep track of time. Hence the song she was using at the moment. It served two purposes actually, the most obvious being that it annoyed whoever was watching on the surveillance camera. Her real motive, however, was something else. Each stanza was a quarter of a minute long, thus four in a minute and so on, which meant that the last interrogation session ended six hours ago. Using this method, she had been able to predict when the next interrogation would be and get enough rest accordingly despite their best efforts to disturb her otherwise. It was actually proving to be quite fun in a way.

There was a third reason for the song.

It helped her get her mind off replaying the failed rescue mission, but of course there was no way to completely shut it out. So many things had gone wrong so quickly that even now she had a difficult time trying to remember the sequence of events. Her last memory was of being cut off from her people and suddenly surrounded by an Alliance Special Forces Unit as the 2G environment and planetary radiation finally started to slow her down. From then it had only been a matter of time before one of their blasters hit their mark and everything went black for awhile.

“1430 bottles of jinn on the wall, 1430 bottles of jinn.. add some red ale, watch a Drazzi go pale,1429 bottles of jinn on the wall”

General Branywn’s Quarters - 1850 HOURS

“1309 bottles of jinn on the wall, 1309 bottles of jinn.. this is place is a bore, I can’t think anymore, 1309 bottles of jinn on the wall”

“Mute camera six.”



and punched up, by request of Colonel McGee, the latest results from Takara’s interrogation sessions. As she had expected, the mercenary had yet to give her people a single piece of information despite all their efforts to mentally break down their prisoner, including the irregular sleep cycles Takara was now experiencing.

There has to be a way to break through to this one, Branywn thought to herself as another screen started loading an updated casualty report from this latest operation. To her dismay, the number of dead had been steadily climbing since the end of the fighting. *We've paid such a high price for this, and now we've got one of the inner circle people of the Cairnfell Household. I'll be damned if we come away with nothing to show for it but our dead.*

Her thoughts were interrupted by a knock on her door as Colonel Ashley McGee appeared in the doorway, data pad in hand.

Branywn waved her in. "Come in. I take it you have the rest of our mercenary's life story?"

McGee nodded, approached the desk and handed Branywn the data pad. The General punched up various files, scanning them.

"That's the rest of her freelance contract history from the Mercenary Guild. I also just received Dunne's psychological profile from our people in Behavioral based on what we've seen of her so far. I have to say, this would be a hell of a lot simpler if we could just use a Jedi to get into her head and be done with it."

"I agree. Unfortunately, our guest is a Force Null, which means the only thing a Jedi would accomplish is give themselves a massive headache", Branywn countered as she finished reading through the information in front of her. McGee noted that Branywn, instead of being done with it, went back and checked it over once more, a look of curiosity, then hope forming on her face.

"What is it?"

The General indicated the data pad in her hand. "I think I've finally found that chink I mentioned."

She once again studied Takara Dunne on the monitor. The mercenary hadn't moved an inch. "Looks like it's time to talk with our friend first hand and try out my theory."

Branywn got up from her desk and prepared to head down to the cell block.

"General," McGee called out.

"Yes Colonel?"

"If this doesn't work, for whatever reason, we do have another option available to us."

Branywn and McGee looked at each other in mutual understanding. Yes, there was always *that* alternative.

Prison Cell 1138 – 1875 hours

"1249 bottles of jinn on the wall, 1249 bottles of jinn.. these people are crazy, but I'm feeling lazy, 1249 bottles of jinn on the wall"



Without warning the lights suddenly turned on full brightness, causing Takara to shield her eyes and stop singing as the door to her cell opened and three people stepped in. Two of them she recognized as Security. The third was an older woman in her forties wearing the recognizable rank of General on her uniform and a stern, businesslike in her attitude.

Squinting as her eyes continued to adjust, Takara let the two Security people sit her in a chair and secure her to just enough to prevent her from lunging at anyone as Branywn stood and watched from the door not saying a word. Next, a table was brought

in and another chair placed opposite of Takara's. She watched the whole thing in amusement.

"Wow. You've got one of those rank thingies on your uniform. That must make you, what, Head Janitor, or something? Cause if you are, I really have to lodge a complaint about the amount of dust in these rooms. I mean, look at this" she wiped a manacled hand across the table area in front of her and held it up. "We're not exactly talking clean here."

She waited for a response but got none as Security finished setting up and then left the room, banging the door shut with a metallic clang. All she was left with was a penetrating stare coming from the woman who remained behind and hadn't moved from the door. Takara didn't like that look at all, and was getting the impression that she was being regarded as something to be studied and analyzed.

It was something she found hard to ignore, and involuntarily shifted her chair, uncomfortable.

Branywn had watched Takara carefully as Security had set up the room, noting the looks of amusement and then the sarcastic remarks that followed. *This one thinks she has it all figured out how to avoid cooperating. Someone's in for a big surprise.*

After a few long moments of silence, Branywn decided it was time to get down to business and approached the table. Next, she took out her data pad and started going down her facts.

"All right, let's see. Takara Dunne, age 30-"

"Twenty nine", the merc interrupted. "I ain't *that* old yet."

Branywn continued. "Parentage unknown, schooling unknown...well, aren't we a mystery?"

"Hey, what can I say. I'm the mysterious type."

"Actually, that couldn't be further from the truth. You're a paid up member of the Mercenary Guild and for the last three years you've been contracted exclusively to the Cairnfell Household, a prominent house in the Empire's ruling class. You are Force Null, which means that you can resist a Jedi who attempts to use the force against you. You also create, by your very nature, an unnatural gap in the Force which makes it difficult for Jedi Knights to locate you through the Force. You take advantage of this by hunting force users for the Empire and then claiming the reward money. Your primary job in the House is the role of 'droid building, designing, and repair, and you have a very lucrative side business taking outside orders for 'droids, which can involve, on occasion



obtaining black market parts and making illegal modifications. How am I doing so far?"

"Actually, I'm an animal trainer with Frodo's Flying Circus from the planet Arista. I'm afraid the most technical thing I do all day is teach a Baltasaur how to balance on one leg while singing the national anthem, so if you don't mind you can let me out of here and we can forget this ever happened."

"I see." Branywn slowly walked towards the mercenary, then circled around behind her. Takara turned her head each way, trying to predict what was coming. Suddenly Branywn's hand was immobilizing Takara's head, Branywn's face very close to Takara's own. The General whispered a single word into Takara's ear.

"Liar."

After a long moment, Branywn released her and sat down on the table just outside of Takara's reach but still very much in her face.

"You've been a liar your entire life, I think. In fact, I don't think you would

know the truth if it snuck up from behind and bit you. Look at this.”

She shoved the data pad in Takara’s face. It was so close she was steaming up the screen with her breath. “Explain this to me. Explain to me how you can be both a Mercenary, which by their very nature are non-exclusive free lance hired guns, and a full time employee of a prominent Imperial Household where you have been working and living for the last three years.”

“There’s no law against being both.”

Branywn stepped closer to Takara, filling her field of vision. “You’re right, there isn’t. But you know what it looks like to me? It looks like someone who wants to keep a foot on both sides in case one of them should turn bad. So what are you, really? Hmm? Are you a hired gun in it simply for the money, or a full fledged member of the Empire? Because you can’t be both. That would mean that you have loyalties to two different groups, and from what I understand the Cairnfell house doesn’t look on that sort of thing favorably.”

Takara tried to look away, but Branywn wouldn’t let her. “Answer me. Where do your loyalties lay?”

“None of your business.”

“Guess again. Think about it Takara. If you can truthfully say to me here, now, that you are a mercenary that has no personal ties to the Empire, I can have the charges lessened in exchange for your complete cooperation. We have mercenaries who work for the Alliance that can free you from all ties to the Empire. You can be free of all this...if you cooperate.”

The merc shook her head.

“Then say it. You are a soldier of the Empire, and you will gladly take whatever punishment we decide is fit, including death.”

Branywn stepped back to watch the conflict in Takara’s eyes. *C’mon*, Branywn silently wished *you can do this*. She pictured the wealth of information she could get in return for Takara’s cooperation.

Suddenly Takara’s expression changed, as if some inner switch had suddenly been turned on. She looked straight into Branwyn’s own eyes. A smile formed on the mercenaries face, but it never reached her eyes which Branywn noticed actually seemed



to have gotten darker. The General knew from that look what was coming before she even heard the words directed at her.

“Go. To. Hell.”

Branwyn sighed. It was over. There was only course of action left now. She activated her commlink. “Col McGee. Meet me in your office.” She gave Takara one final look, but there was no doubt left in the eyes that stared back, but there *had* been conflict. It might work.

“Going so soon?”

“You’re going to wish you had taken me up on my offer.”

Branwyn stood up and walked to the door, tapping on it. Security opened it and began removing the table and chairs, then released Takara from her restraints. She looked up to give the General one last parting shot, but Branwyn was already gone.

The Invitation Season Irwin, Dora Furlong, Ginna Wilcoxen

Octavia finished her meditation and looked around the ground area. So far her

sleep had been uninterrupted, it was starting to get easier to rest but still make sure her dreams were dreams. So much information about her feelings had been given to an enemy who was dangerous. Octavia shook her head at the thought of how much the Emperor knew about her family, her pain. She pushed the dark thoughts from her mind, what was done was done you couldn't change the past, you could only protect the future as her father had told her.

Master Skywalker had shown her so much in the ways of the force and how to do certain maneuvers. It was strange that she could remember things that her father had taught her when she was younger. In many ways she felt as if she could feel him. Shaking those thoughts out of her head she rose to her feet it was time she made a trip to the place where the records were stored, at least to see what they had found and preserved though she had a feeling it wouldn't be much.

"Octavia." A voice called out. Octavia turned to see one of the other students approach her. "There's a courier here to see you."

"Me?" Octavia questioned "Are you sure?"

The other Jedi student nodded. Octavia nodded and followed her to where the courier was waiting.

"Octavia Syn Jinn?" The man in uniform asked.

"I am she."

"I am instructed to await a reply." He informed Octavia as he handed her the small package.

Octavia noticed the formal envelope it was silver and blue and the flower on it was raised. Octavia ran her hand over it before she began to open it carefully then pulled out a small one that was inside, flipping the card open she began to read.

I cordially invite you to join Victoria Syn and myself for lunch at port Lansing Station on Saturday at 1300 hours at My quarters.



Sincerely yours Tara Alderson Palpatine

"Do you wish to send a reply?" The courier asked.
Octavia nodded then recorded her reply via a holographic crystal.

Respectfully to Tara Alderson Palpatine.

I would be honoured to accept your invitation to meet. Though I am concerned about Victoria Syn and how she came to be with you. I hope she is doing well and that she isn't in any trouble. I am sure there will be many things to discuss pertaining to her future.

*Sincerely
Octavia Syn Jinn*

Octavia bowed as the recording ended. She watched as the courier left then turned to the one student who was still standing next to her. "You seem upset Octavia. Do you think you should have sent such a message?"

"I am concerned." Octavia smiled. "As to the message, it was necessary."

"If it's bad news, you should talk to Master Skywalker or one of the other advanced students."

"If it comes to that I will."

“You have to do what you feel is right.”

~*~

Octavia thought about seeing Jerella and check on her recovery, but decided against it. She needed to come to terms with her emotions and her reason for accepting such an invitation. She didn't know Victoria very well and the time they had spent together at Port Lansing was a strain on them both. Yet Octavia knew that the child had told her the truth, she was her niece, the only thing Octavia needed to do was to figure out how? What type of life did her mother lead after she deserted her?

Turning away from the hall of records Octavia walked deeper into the forest and took in the life she felt around her. Sitting down next to a tall tree Octavia closed her eyes and thought back to her childhood. Opening herself to the force she focused on her father's face his voice, pushing the pain that remembering caused away from her. She remembered his smile and soft-spoken nature, and the insistence that she needed to learn her abilities and to guard her knowledge. Another image came to her mind; it was the same man from her dreams. Yet he was standing in an area like the one she now sat in. People were around him a younger man with a braid stood next to him. There was some resemblance between the image she saw there and her memories of her father. Opening her eyes Octavia noticed the sun had set and there was a slight chill as the night air brought the temperature down. Rising to her feet, she knew she had missed supper but she didn't feel hungry at all. Lucky she wasn't scheduled to train with Master Skywalker today, because she would have been late and that wouldn't have been good at all.



Octavia was on her way to meet with Luke for the days lesson, the hall of records didn't have much information on Qui-Gon Jinn, like Luke had told her when she first asked him many records before the purge were lost and probably never to be reconstructed again. Octavia stopped when she saw the courier approach her. He handed her another envelope it was still decorated elegantly. Slowly Octavia opened the letter and read the contents.

I am pleased you have decided to accept the invitation. You need not be concerned for the welfare of your niece. She is not in trouble or in danger. Quite the opposite in fact, she is doing quite well.

The Force be With You
Tara Alderson Palpatine

"Do you wish to reply?"

Octavia shook her head in negative response and stared at the envelope re-reading the contents. There was an uneasy feeling about all of this. It just didn't make sense to why she was being contacted, and what did a well-known mercenary want with Victoria. What concerned Octavia was the fact that this mercenary was the granddaughter of the Emperor, the same Emperor who was instrumental in the death of her grandfather. Octavia stopped her thoughts and wondered how she knew that fact?

She mentally went over everything that Luke had taught her, light saber practice, fighting bare handed improving her ability to deflect someone's mind probing ever blasters. She smiled at that thought wondering what Captain Roz would say if he knew how much she had changed. Would he consider it good or bad?

Still Octavia could find nothing in those lessons that would have given her that information, even the hall of records didn't give her anymore clues than what she already knew. Qui-Gon was a Jedi who many thought was reckless, yet it was his death that motivated many of the other Jedi to realize they were too complacent. Maybe it the answer lay in the mental exercises Luke had her do and practice. Strengthening her sphere, how to protect her mind while she was fighting someone. Every exercises in fighting reminded Octavia of the arena and the life she took, even knowing it was necessary she knew she would never forget the feeling of causing someone's death. At least she felt somewhat confident that she'd be able to protect someone who didn't have the Force, but she also knew she was still a beginner in many ways.

Octavia hoped she wouldn't be jumping on tables today or tumbling avoiding objects that were thrown at her. Though they were taxing on her stamina she doubted if she would be able to concentrate on those lessons today. Pausing Octavia re-read both transmissions one last time. She wondered if Master Skywalker would understand if she just didn't show up.

'That's being irresponsible.' A voice told her.

Octavia nodded and entered the clearing where Luke sat waiting. "I'm sorry I'm late Master Skywalker."



Luke looked up from where he sat in the grass; Octavia had never been late before. "Anything important happen?"

"Important?" Octavia questioned shrugging her shoulders. "I don't know if it's important, but it is definitely out of the ordinary." She paused. "I received an invitation yesterday."

Her teacher raised an eyebrow. "And who was it from?"

Octavia took in her surroundings listening to the breeze as it moved across the grass. "Tara Alderson Palpatine." Octavia said finally. "IT was joint invitation with Victoria my niece." Her tone became shaky as she thought of Victoria.

Luke studied her carefully. "Octavia, does this upset you?"

"Yes, it upsets me!" Octavia snapped her eyes narrowed. "Sorry Master Skywalker, but I didn't trust Victoria when I first met her, and in some ways thought she was making everything up. Later I came to feel her sincerity and by then she was gone."

"Remember, Octavia, she may be your relative, but you might need to be careful."

Octavia nods. "I understand the need for caution, and I'm uncertain what a mercenary of Tara's standing is doing with a child, Victoria can't be more than 14."

Luke seemed to look right through her for several long moments. He was trying to see something else. "Have a seat," he suddenly invited her, patting the grass.

Octavia sat down calming her emotions, she felt angry just like when the Captain had gotten himself into trouble from his gambling and his cheating. She knew she needed to get them under control.

"Why is it that you feel so deeply upset about them? Do you have premonitions about them? Think carefully." Luke asked.

Octavia took in a breath and reached out through the force and thought of Victoria, and the woman she remembered seeing in the wedding line. Shivering slightly. "Darkness, hatred, anger."

"All right, what does this tell you?"

Octavia opened her eyes not realizing she had closed them. "The Darkside of the Force, Sith."

"Is this the person who has sent you the invitation?" Luke asked, guessing he might be correct.

Octavia nodded. "Yes, it was from her. The courier waited for a reply." Octavia paused. "I told them I would be there."

"Are you aware of exactly what is going on in her life?"

"No, Victoria's life is ... well it's unclear." Octavia looks at Luke, "I can only believe somehow Victoria is being coached in the way of the dark arts."

Luke's expression was grave. "Tara has been adopted into the Palpatine family. She is a very dangerous person now, Octavia. Especially for you and at this time in your training. Being that Victoria is a relative, and you are very short on family ties, Tara may use this fact to try to get in the way of your becoming a Jedi Knight." Luke paused. "Also, Tara is about to be crowned as ruler of her world."

Octavia closed her eyes and let out a sigh. "The Jedi way isn't easy." She states quietly. "Ruler of her world? That would be encouragement alone for Victoria a stability

she's not had." Octavia paused... "I pushed Victoria to this woman. I'm the cause of her possible downfall because I didn't trust her."

"No, it isn't easy, but if what you want to be is clear in your mind, other things will not keep you from your goal. And no, you are not responsible for what someone else does. You still have every opportunity to be a Light influence on her."

Luke paused. "Emotions are fine to feel, Octavia, but you cannot be a Jedi and allow them to rule over your decisions in life."

Octavia nods slowly. "I know Master, and I will keep them in check. I know nothing will prevent me from continuing on this path, it feels right to pursue it."

"Remember: it is fine to have feelings and experience them. Just don't let them get in your way or to rule your actions, unless they drive you toward a noble goal."

"I understand, I think." Octavia let out another sigh.

"You are intent on meeting with Tara, then?"

"Yes." Octavia answers. "I know it is possibly a trap."

Luke shook his head slowly. "Correction: you know it is a trap. Be certain about whether you are ready to face the Dark head-on. I know when I raced off to help my friends in the midst of my own training, I was not ready, and I paid a price for it."

"I ... don't know if I'm ready." Octavia answered slowly. "But I feel like I have to."

"Now is the time to evaluate your feelings about this. Are you being driven to meet them by guilt?"

Octavia lowered her head and thought about the reasons of her acceptance. Was it guilt? Was that the only reason she had accepted the invitation, or was there something more? "I can't fully ... say."

"Think it over. It will make a difference in how you enter into this meeting, and how you end it."

Octavia searched her feelings, and separated the imaginary form what she knew as fact. She searched for her center of peace and could hear her father's advice come to her, as well as something or someone else. "No, not guilt." She answered softly. "I go as a concerned family member."

Luke looked at her with an indefinable expression and then he smiled a tiny bit. "Good. Your reasons are sound."

Octavia looked past Luke, to the temple rising in the background. "I might have given Victoria the wrong impression when we met. I was confused myself in many ways; all of this was new to me. It has been too many years since my father began my training. Then there were the dreams as well as the voices."

Luke nodded his understanding mutely and remained silent.

Octavia focused back to her present surroundings. "I still feel that there's a reason I should go, half to go ... Somehow I feel if I don't it will used to show Victoria that no one cares for her ... no one except Tara."

Watching Octavia think this through, Luke smiled inwardly. "Handled in a careful manner, you can show her you care. But remember you are not to blame for what Victoria does. She walks her own path."

“Everyone has to walk their own path. I can only hope that Victoria makes the right decision.” Octavia looked at Luke. “Besides we all have to do what we feel is right.”

Octavia sounded so much like Obi-Wan Kenobi all of a sudden that Luke could only stare at her. “Now, we need to get to your lessons. You need to become much stronger mentally before this meeting takes place.”

“Yes, I have to be prepared, as well as cautious.”

Luke admired her determination, and was grateful for it at the same time. He knew it would ultimately make the difference when she faced hardship and troublesome situations. And it would serve to keep her steadily going down the path to the Light.

Octavia smiled. “Then where shall we begin Master? More leaping?”

Top 10 Signs That You May Be a Complete Star Wars Addict:

- 1. You watch the entire trilogy at least once a month.**
- 1. You don't need a TV and VCR to watch the movies.**
- 1. You know at least 10 Star Wars website addresses by heart.**
- 1. You quote the trilogy at apropos moments.**
- 1. You draw comparisons to Star Wars in casual conversation.**
- 1. You know the names of all major cast members and what they're doing now.**
- 1. You have a list of major bloopers and inside jokes in your head.**
- 1. You think John Williams is the greatest composer who ever lived.**
- 1. You know more about the major characters' personalities than Lucasfilm does.**
- 1. You know all the words to that Ewok song.**



Greetings, one and all! Welcome to the Imperial Division section of *Bound By The Force*, issue 100. FoE has come a long way since I joined back in 1988, with many changes along the way. The journey has been, for the most part, a pleasant one; in one aspect, it has been a truly miraculous and joyous one, for it was in the club that I met the then-Debbie Hoyt, who would one day do me the great honor of becoming my wife (for almost six years now!). Many friends have come and gone over the years; of the 68 members listed in the club in September of 1989, for example, only 14 of us are still in it today.

In the Imperial Division itself, there have been many changes, both in and out of character. In character, we saw the Emperor “die”, poisoned at his birthday party; we then witnessed his apparent return from the dead. We learned a couple of years later that the Emperor we had been following since then was an impostor, a clone of the real Palpatine. The impostor, known as Lord Onyx, fled with his followers when the real Emperor was discovered and rescued from imprisonment by a band of loyal officers. We watched as the so-called New Republic grew in size and power, granted vast territories by the false Emperor under a peace treaty he had negotiated with the Rebels. We then saw the true Emperor launch a massive offensive which, thanks largely to internal difficulties within the NR, overran not only all of the territory given it by the impostor, but also most of the systems the Rebs had owned previously. We witnessed that most unlikely and amazing of events, the wedding of the Emperor and Princess Azarra Vader, who was revealed to be the daughter of Darth Vader, rather than his niece, as was believed before. And in the next episode of *As The Galaxy Turns...well*, we’re still working on that one.

Out of character, we have had four division leaders, counting yours truly. The title of the Imperial section of BBTF has been changed twice. And the Division Leader is now a member of the Galactic Council, thus doubling his or her chances of succumbing to ulcers, premature aging, and mental breakdown. Plus the fact that the division sections are now sent via e-mail, rather than snail mail (which so often more than lived up to that nickname!). And an even bigger change is looming in the near future, as it is possible that BBTF will soon be going out online, rather than as a printed zine (except, of course, for those of us who prefer being able to kick back, relax, and read our BBTF the old-fashioned way and therefore want to keep getting the printed version).

Having said my piece, I shall now turn you over to the entertainment portion of our program, with a brief stop at the new Imperial Character Creation Guidelines I recently created. They are also to be found in the FoE web page, but Dora Furlong suggested printing them up here to make certain everyone gets to see them; thanks for the idea, Dora! In closing, I would like to say this: I hope and pray that the next 100 issue of *Bound by the Force* will be happier, more productive, and just plain more *fun* than the last 100 were. And the last 100 were a real blast. . .

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU!!!! – James



GUIDELINES FOR CREATING IMPERIAL PERSONAS

1. All new personas must be registered with the Division Leader before being used in roleplay.
1. All personas of new members, whether military, civilian, or Sith, must start out at the bottom rank of the appropriate rank system. No exceptions. Promotions are gained by submitting stories, articles, artwork, etc., to the division section of the club newsletter/zine, ***Bound By The Force***, as well as time in the division.
1. All new personas of members who have been in the club for two years or more will begin at the bottom rank of the appropriate rank system. If the member feels that a higher initial rank is required for roleplay purposes, he/she may consult with the Division Leader for the purpose of obtaining a brevet rank for the new persona.

NOTE: A brevet rank is one where the necessary promotion points have not been earned prior to the granting of the higher rank. Further promotions cannot take place until the member has earned enough points to make the brevet rank permanent.

1. No Force user, under any circumstances, is as powerful as either Darth Vader or the Emperor.
1. No rank system in any book or non-club web site is valid within this division, only that authorized by the Division Leader.
1. A new member may not play a character from either one of the movies or the books. After the first year of membership, any member who wishes to play a book or movie character must obtain the permission of the Galactic Council in order to do so.
1. Questions or requests for assistance in starting and/or developing one's persona may be directed to the Division Leader.

* * *



Video Capture by Terri Ruwe from 'Star Wars: a New Hope'

Destiny's Children

by Courtney L. Kraft

Red...a splash of red in a field of white.

Red velvet over flesh. Engulfing.

Billowing around her.

She turned, red following her motions.

He was already standing there, his red and gold eyes burning into her soul. She could feel his power, even while he was standing still. Clad in black, the strength emulated beneath cloth.

She felt small...insignificant.

Then he spoke to her, his red and black tattooed face not moving. In neither question nor statement he said, "You are my legacy..."

In neither question nor answer, she replied, "You're my grandfather..."

Slowly, his arms opened. "Come to me, child."

She stepped forward until she was only inches away. His arms closed around her, pulling her closer till her head rested against his chest. She felt strange. It was not love she felt, but it was as if a void in her heart was being filled, even if it was only with a few drops of what had been missing for so long. Carefully, she slid her arms around his waist.

Finally, a piece of her heritage. A root. Something.

"Why don't I look like you?" she asked.

"We may not bear great resemblance on the outside, but on the inside, we are very much alike."

"You are the only glimpse of family I have ever seen."

He stroked her back in a soothing rhythm. "And you, child, are the only family I have ever known..." His one hand slid down her back, as the other stroked upward and came to rest on the back of her neck.

He looked down at her. "...And she is a disgrace."

"What?"

She gasped suddenly as his hands clenched tightly around her spine, sending stinging pain through her neck and back. A falling sensation rushed through her body. It was so slow, and the white cyclorama made it impossible for her to tell which direction she was falling.

He was falling with her, the bodies fused into one another, the red of her cape flying around them. Finally, the ground came and sank with their weight. White foam swallowed part of her body while the other half floated.

"You are not worthy of being a Sith," he hissed.

She felt his weight on her, crushing and immobile. The red velvet robe floated upward around them, then started to crumble, floating into the air like embers from a dying fire. His black robes grew around them, smothering. She tried to pull her head away from his chest for air, but the white engulfed her, pulling her down...sinking.

Her arms flailed through the white foam, then pushed against him to loosen the weight. Pieces of red velvet disintegrated against her skin as she struggled, fluttering away into the foam like autumn leaves into mud.

“You are not worthy to be the sovereign of silence.”

Her strangled scream vibrated off his chest as a searing pain stabbed through her lower abdomen and coursed through her entire body. She trembled in pain, unable to move by her own will. The foam pulled her arms down into it, and his body smothered her from above.

Her body wracked from side to side and darkness enveloped her. The weight started to lighten as his body faded away until all she could feel was cloth against her fingertips, but she could still feel the suffocating grip over her mouth.

Slowly, her world started to refocus itself. His clothes transformed into blankets, and the white cyclorama turned into her own bedroom. She could still feel pressing weight on her mouth, the pressing weight of a hand, she realized, trying to keep her from screaming.

Instinctively, she rapped the back of the stifling hand with her knuckles, but it did not jerk away. Instead, it pushed her head harder down against her pillow.

“Psylocke!” a voice hissed.

She looked up, and recognition dawned on her. She hardly had a breath to let out a muffled cry of surprise.

“Promise me you won’t scream.”

Her struggles ceased, and she quickly nodded.

The hand slowly lifted from her mouth. Her eyes regarded the face of the man standing over her, the shock in her eyes overwhelmingly apparent.

“What are you doing here?”

She slowly sat up, her jaw hanging in shock at the sight of the man before her. He was very large. Old too, or at least he looked a lot older than when she had last seen him. His hair was as long and straight as her own, and jet black with silver strands. His skin was a deep golden brown, and starting to show the signs of aging. His steel gray eyes studied her as they had always done in the days when she was growing up.

“I’ve come to stop you.”

Psylocke stared at him, puzzled. “Stop me from what?”

“From becoming the same monster as your father.”

“My father...is this about Darth Maul?”

“Maul is not your father.”

She pulled the blankets back and got out of the bed. She fanned herself as she crossed over to the window and opened it. “Um...you look well.”

“Yes...you too.”

She looked around awkwardly. “Would you like something to drink?”

“No, there’s no time.” The large man looked to his left, and walked toward her. She noticed he was walking with a cane now. He sat down in a chair near the window.

She turned away and sat back down on her bed. “Master Annan, why have you come to see me after all this time? I mean, it’s been what...five, six years now?”

“It has been a while.”

She glanced down at her hands. They were shaking. “This is about my heritage, isn’t it? You knew that I had somehow found out.”

He nodded. “I did, but I’m not sure how much you know.”

“I know that I had a grandfather named Darth Maul.”

Annan frowned, and his steel eyes narrowed at the sound of his name. “I’ve never met him. I’ve only heard the stories. Not much to tell either. He lived in secret from the Jedi for most of his life.”

“All those times...all those times I begged you to tell me something. You wouldn’t even give me the name of my mother! Why now? What is so horrible about knowing about my family?” She gulped, trying to keep face in front of the man who raised her.

Annan glanced down at his cane. “Ever since you were born, I was determined never to tell you about your heritage because I knew it would bring disastrous results...but now...now I think your awareness is the only thing that can prevent disaster.”

Psylocke reached over, and pulled a pillow onto her lap.

He continued. “Your mother...she was the most wonderful woman I have ever known.”

“What-“

“Her name was Larissa. That’s where you get your hair color from...and your eyes.” He paused, sighed, and shook his head. “She loved you so much.”

“What happened to her?”

Annan’s eyes grew dark. His hands clenched his cane tightly and his mouth tightened at the thoughts running through his head. “Your father murdered her.”

Psylocke felt an icy chill form in her stomach. She hugged the pillow to her chest.

“It started shortly after you were born. Your father, Red Lammashata,” he scowled at the sound of the name on his lips, “used to be a good man. I even found respect for him. Then he changed. Evil had corrupted his heart. He had gone to the Dark side.”

“You mean...like the Force?”

“Yes, exactly. I had to convince your mother to leave him while she was still pregnant with you...but she was foolish. She came back to him after you were born. He killed her shortly after.”

He stopped, and pulled out a tan handkerchief from inside his vest. He dabbed at his eyes, then blew his nose. “When you were born, Larissa named me as your godfather. I hid you on Bespin after her death. Then I hunted Red down. It took me several months, but I finally had vengeance.”

“He’s dead too...”

“I wouldn’t rest until I had put that bastard in his grave.”

Psylocke could feel her own shocked tears start to well up in her eyes. “What does this have to do with Darth Maul?”



Annan crumpled the cloth in his hand. "Darth Maul was Red's father. It took us years to find out if he'd had any offspring."

"Us?"

"The Jedi."

"Jedi..." the word slipped from her lips and onto the pillow. "You're a Jedi?"

"Not anymore. That was another life," he paused briefly then returned. "Since Darth Maul was discovered over forty years ago, we've been looking into the threat of his offspring or other Sith trainees. It wasn't until after the clone wars and the extermination of most of the Jedi that we discovered that Maul had in fact copulated with a woman named Majore Lammashtha, your grandmother. I took it onto myself to get to know her and learn as much about her as I could. By the time I found her, Red was nearly a grown man. I had been in hiding for so long. So had my partner."

"Partner?"

"A comrade of mine was helping me in my research. His name was Obi-Wan Kenobi. He was an apprentice to a man named Qui-Gon Jinn..."

Psylocke's eyes lit up at the name. Jinn...

"Darth Maul killed Jinn in battle, but it was Obi-Wan who defeated Maul in the end." He shook his head. "Maul didn't even know he had a child. What he had with Majore was just a one-night stand. Obi-Wan asked me to help him learn more about Maul afterward. Sadly, Obi-Wan was slain ten years ago by Darth Vader. Vader—"

"I know who he is," she said abruptly. "I want to know why you never told me this before."

Annan's frown deepened to a stoic expression. He looked up at her once, then looked away again. "I didn't want you to become like your father. Obi-Wan and I had planned for you to grow up and become a Jedi. We felt it best to keep you hidden from the world so Vader wouldn't come and destroy you as he did the children of all the other Jedi."

She gripped the pillow tightly, her head awl by the irony of the whole situation. "So that's why you tutored me at home, and taught me Kagura, and kept me from having any normal social life..." She gulped. "Is that why you never showed any affection for me either?! Because you wanted me to become a Jedi?!"

"No." He looked up again, this time his eyes full of fire. "No...I could never see you with so little emotion. I saw Red's fire within you...and I still do. You share in his same dark side, Psylocke. You possess the same evil, the same rage as your father Red, and as Maul before him."

"You've hated me? You've always hated me! I didn't even do anything, but you just assumed that I was some evil, horrible monster!"

"Don't—"

"How could you do this to me?! Do you know what kind of loneliness I feel? Do you know how hard it is for me to make friends? You have ruined my chances of ever leading a normal life!"

Annan stood. "How dare you speak to me in that tone of voice!"

"I'm not a child! Stop treating me like one!"



“Don’t you feel it? Don’t you feel it, Psylocke? That rage...that...that evil that hides inside you? That is your heritage. That is your destiny unless you let me help you.”

She jumped up from the bed. “Help me?!”

He slowly walked toward her. “Come with me now, to the Jedi. They can help you. Let us turn you to the Light before it’s too late.”

“Get away from me. I’m tired of having everyone choose my destiny for me.”

“I can’t let you train to be a Sith. It would lead to disastrous—“

“How did you know I was training to be a Sith?” she gasped. Annan didn’t answer. “You’ve been spying on me too. All these years you’ve been spying on me. You know what...if you had just shown me some love...or...or respect, we wouldn’t be here right now.”

He reached out a hand for her. “Psylocke,” he said calmly. “You don’t realize what will happen if you turn to the Dark side. Come with me while there is still a chance to redeem yourself.”

“You’re condemning me for crimes I have yet to commit.”

“I’m not condemning you.” He touched her hand.

She jerked away. “Don’t touch me. You can’t tell me what to do anymore.”

“Listen to me—“

“Don’t tell me what to do! You’re not my father.”

Annan’s hand cracked her across the mouth like a bolt of lightning, sending her careening down onto the bed. She froze there, her hand over her cheek. Annan looked down at her, his eyes wide with fury and contempt.

Psylocke tried to hold her hand still as she started to shake. “Get out...”

“You must—“

“Get out!” she screamed.

Annan stepped back.

“Don’t you ever come near me again.”

He looked down at her for a moment before turning away and slowly leaving the room. Psylocke listened to his heavy footsteps as they moved further down the hall, until she heard the front door click shut.

She clutched her pillow and pulled it tightly to her face as she finally allowed the wracking sobs to overcome her.

* * *

RESURRECTION : Awakening

By Mark Cogan and Dora Furlong

It was dark, there was no sound. It wasn’t sure where it was, only that it couldn’t see, hear, or even feel anything. It couldn’t even find the strength to move. Did it even have a body to move? It couldn’t tell. All it knew was that it was in dark. It was

thinking, trying to remember who it was. Images flowed through its mind. Places, people, somehow they were familiar, but where, who were they...wait...one image, one person...somehow it could FEEL something. This one, female, black hair...her...it remembered...SHE KILLED HIM! Anger flowed, and it could feel that it DID have a body. It could move, but not much. Wherever it was, it was a close space. It was lying on its back, like it was in a box. NO, it was COFFIN! Anger grew, and with it came strength. It had to get out of this place, get back to the outside. It knew what it had to do; it was going to do it NOW.

And with an inaudible scream that resounded throughout the galaxy, a hand burst out from the ground....

* * *

Takara was sitting, feet up on the console, watching the security monitors. The household was pretty much empty, everyone else out doing...something. Only other person around, other than the servants and such, was Tina, and she was keeping to herself right now. Takara sighed, leaned back, and started to close her eyes for a moment. Suddenly, a security alert went off. She sat up, and proceeded to track the source of the alert. A brief scan of the monitors pinpointed the alert. It was on the HOUSEHOLD GROUNDS! Takara sprang to her feet, "Aw, Hell!", as she grabbed for her blaster and bolted out the door.

* * *

Standing next to the grave, he looked down at it, then at himself. His skin was rough to the touch, scaly, brittle. A quick test with his fingers found that the skin was also starting to peel off. "More time to deal with that later, I need to find some things first." He looked over his surroundings. Then turned to face the main structure of the compound. "Yes, there, I remember now. Wait, someone's coming. Have to find another way inside." And he moved toward the side of the building...

* * *

After several minutes, Takara arrived where the sensors alerted her to the disturbance. She found herself beside the now empty gravesite of Arcturus. "I didn't know she buried him here. But the coffin's empty? How? Grave robbers?" She began to scan the area for any trace of those who would desecrate this place. The only thing she found was some dried skin on the ground near the grave, and footprints heading back toward the building. "I've got a bad feeling about this", and she started following the trail...

* * *

Arcturus knew nothing but rage at this point. He was focused on only one thing right now though, getting his equipment (and clothes for that matter), and getting away from this place. He could see the hangar area, and his ship, *Bloodwing*, in the hangar. But first, he needed some items from his room. "Can't go in the front door, I'll just have to MAKE my own way in." And with that, he walked up to the wall of the building. He closed his eyes and concentrated for a few seconds, summoning up the terrible power he was privy to. Slowly, the space around him started to distort, like being viewed through a drop of water. The distortion slowly grew in size, and started to push up against the wall. The wall, however, put up little resistance, and started to tear as if it were made of paper.

Arcturus entered through the newly made hole in the wall, and moved down the corridor. He knew where his room was, just down this hall, and to the left. Inside the building, warning klaxons screamed their high-pitched wail, emergency lights came on, and servants scrambled for cover. One was unfortunate enough to run right into Arcturus. With little more than a thought, he pushed the Chaos through the servant, contorting his body in grotesque ways, before it slumped up against the corridor wall, dead. Arcturus continued down the hall, seemingly oblivious to the carnage.

When he reached the door to his room, he found it locked, and he was not able to open it by normal means. "Hmmp, Not the way I wanted to do this." Again, the wall gave little resistance to the effect of Chaos. Arcturus entered his old room, only to find it empty. "What is this!", he roared, and began to tear the room apart by hand looking for...something. "Gone!?! I must find it." Enraged, he threw furniture about the room. He soon composed himself, "This won't do any good. I have to get out of here quickly." He opened a closet, and found a black Sith Apprentice robe still hanging there. Quickly changing, he discarded his tattered clothes, and made his way out toward the hanger.

* * *

The ship lurched as she entered a steep turn. The control panel warned her that the engine was about to cut out. She increased the throttle and steadied her pitch, smiling to herself as the engine's hum began to even out. Suddenly, startled by the alarms around the household, Tina watched as the shuttle took a nose-dive into the surface of the planet below. 'Great,' she grumbled, 'I was just about to get it too.' Four successful maneuvers in a row and Eric would let her try it for real. She sighed and pulled herself out of the simulator. Since the alarms hadn't stopped blaring, she decided to investigate the disturbance.

Cautiously she made her way out into the hallway from the hangar. 'Odd.' She wondered aloud, 'Where are all the servants?' Blaster in hand, she started to move down the winding corridors. Tina turned a corner to see a figure, down the hall a ways. Not immediately recognizing the it she called out, "Who...who are you?" She could barely make out what it was. Everything around the being was distorted. The dark-robed figure, ignoring the question, walked down the hall toward her.

Tina stared at the figure moving down the hall toward her. "I...I know you." She stated, trying to remember just where it was she had seen him. Then it hit her, "But you...you're dead!" How was it possible? Was this a ghost?

The figure stopped, and regarded her for a moment. There was something about her, buried inside. She was close, so close to losing herself forever in the darkness. Arcturus's lips curled up into a smile, "And you will be too, very soon I am afraid. Unless you come with me."

Tina snorted. The threat was nothing new, she had been hearing it since her unwilling arrival in the Empire. She cared very little whether she lived or died. Not that she was suicidal or reckless, Eric had cured her of that, death was simply an inevitable conclusion so in the end if she died, she died. "What are you talking about?" she replied as casually as possible, but his actions and demeanor sent spikes of unease through her. He was supposed to be dead.

"You know what I mean. I died for what I am, and you will die for what you are as well. This place, it is supposed to represent loyalty and service. But it is a lie." Arcturus moved closer to Tina, and she could start to feel the effects of the Chaos he commanded around her. "I was executed for my loyalty. I was murdered for trying to protect them. They will show you the same 'courtesy' when they no longer find you useful."

Tina tried to resist the force of the Chaos pushing against her. It made her queasy, and put her off balance. The distortion expanded itself to include her. She looked down at the floor; it appeared to ripple under her feet. She had the distinct feeling it was eager to open up and swallow her.

"Come with me, NOW!"

Slowly she looked back up at the man she had briefly known as Arcturus. He was just one more person who thought he knew what was best for her; from Alliance Security and Luke to Anelis, the Emperor, and now *this*. Her obstinate tendencies kicked in. "No." She spat out. "I will not." She gathered her strength, frustration, and the darkness that had been infused into her and attempted to unleash it on her tormentor.

Arcturus merely laughed, the creature before him was enjoying such despair. As he increased the pressure of the Chaos upon her, her struggles mixed in the spicy taste of fear and pain. "You WILL come with me."

Crying out in pain, Tina fell to the floor. She wasn't sure how much longer she could take the effects of...of...whatever it was he was using on her. She tried to call out to Avon, but Arcturus had, somehow, completely and utterly blocked her from using the Force. She wished she could reach out to Eric or Darana, any of the house's other Force users...even Shade, but they were all away on various missions.

Keeping her word to Eric, Tina considered the situation carefully. The tone of his voice informed her he had no intention of killing her, or at least not yet. He was stronger than her. That left her with two options, continue to fight him and lose, weakening herself in the process, or surrender, keep her strength, and look for the first opportunity of escape. Besides, Shade had the tracker in her and once Darana found out

Arcturus was still alive, if the man before her was truly alive, Tina was willing to bet Darana would go after him.

“Very well,” She stated, “I will go with you.”

Arcturus stepped forward, lessened the chaos around his prize, and held out his hand. It was a simple enough action in and of itself, but his demeanor warned Tina that her acceptance would bind her to him in a way she could not comprehend.

Slowly she took his hand and stood. Fear shot through her as he led her back the way she had come.

Takara followed the trail of bodies and damage back out toward the hangar area. Running, she made it out to the tarmac just in time to see *Bloodwing* rising up into the stars....

NOW IT'S PERSONAL

From the Private Ship's Log of Captain Blackthorn

By Geri Kittrell

Well, they've finally done it. Up until this day my work as a privateer has been purely business – I've never taken the seizure of a ship or its cargo personal but now, those good for nothing, lying, cheating, scurvy Rebel bastards have made it very personal. I swear, to any gods who oversee the galaxy, that I will indeed take revenge for all the damage they have caused to me and this ship, the *Morrigan's Rogue*, today!

You see, the day started out just fine – a normal day for myself and my crew. We were enjoying a leisurely sail through the comforting darkness of space, waiting for a Rebel ship to stray into our reach. We knew the sector was one frequented by alliance supply ships and we were ready, so we thought.

My wife Sorcha and I were bored just waiting, so we retired to our cabin for a tumble 'neath the sheets. We'd left orders to call us when a Rebel ship was ready to board. I often leave the crew to their own devices to gain control of our prey and I lead the boarding party. As we concluded our romantic activities, all hell broke loose. We felt something hit the ship several times as we were dressing. We were nearly finished dressing when my cabin took a direct hit – a big one. We were extremely lucky to have been near the door when the hull was breached and were able to exit the cabin nearly clothed. We were, however, still fastening our shirt buttons and lacing our trousers as we stood in the main passageway. The self seal capabilities took effect immediately but the cabin would not be inhabitable until repairs were made and full pressure restored.

Several of my expensive art treasures lay shattered on the deck there was crumpled debris and fire retardant covering everything, including nearly every inch of the deck. I could hear the panicked voices of my crew calling to see if we were still alive. As I yelled to reassure them that we were uninjured, I heard the panic as they scrambled to monitor shields and engines and man our cannons. As we turned to run to the bridge, I noticed amber-colored liquid streaming down the wall from my small wall-mounted liquor cabinet. My worst fears were confirmed as the ship too another jolting hit – the doors fell completely off the cabinet revealing the crushing damage of 120 year old

Corellian Brandy shattered! I'm sure that I would have burned the ears of even the most seasoned sailor with the oaths I swore at that moment as we managed to slam shut and lock the cabin doors.

We were lucky that we'd recently moved our wardrobe to a small storage room that I could access from my office, the main passageway, as well as my cabin. The wardrobe door in my cabin was caved in and the control panel melted – I held out hope that our fine clothes had escaped damage.

As we ran into the bridge area, I watched the viewscreen in horror as even more guns appeared from nowhere on the Rebel freighter we were wanting to seize. We felt a few more jolts as my normally calm engineer ran to my side and yelled, "Cap'n, we can't take much more of this. The shields are weakening fast."

"I've never run from a fight before," I replied calmly and feeling shock. The poor engineer tried to comfort me as he put an arm around my shoulder and continued, "Aye, Cap'n, I know – but we're no match for this – that ship is something straight from hell."

I began yelling orders as I ran to one of the quad cannons; I got in a few good shots but in my heart I knew the day would not be ours, though we were heavily armed and shielded. Sorcha took my hand in hers and I realized what we were up against. "That's not a FREIGHTER, it's a _ruids_ Q-Ship!!" I screamed in terror.

We put up a valiant fight, trading broadside for broadside for as long as we could, roughly about three hours I guess. I had to think of my crew; our shields were down to twenty percent and the engines were struggling. Finally, I had to give the order to retreat while we could. For some reason, we were not pursued as we limped away. We managed to make the jump to lightspeed but it was anyone's guess how long it would last in our damaged condition. It turned out to be a slow lightspeed sail but we finally made it to an Imperial controlled sector.

We soon found an Imperial Star Destroyer in the sector and reluctantly, with a lot of groveling on my part, they agreed to tow us into their docking bay. Little did I know that my troubles were just beginning...

I was not allowed to leave my ship until I could produce the *Letter of Marque* I carry from His Majesty. The ship's main computer was malfunctioning because of all the damage and I was too distraught to remember where I kept all the hard copies – I did remember that there was one somewhere in my cabin but that did us no good. It took one of my crew, who is quite skilled with computers, about six hours of fussing with it to get the blasted thing to print out a hard copy.

The Imperial Security Commander sneered a very big sneer when he read it and called me PIRATE SCUM. He sneered even more contemptuously, if possible, when I asked for directions to their ship's bar so that I could take my crew for some refreshment and relaxation. When he realized that I was not going to 'just go away', he barked sharply, "It's off limits to your kind and for *Imperial Officers* only." I was my usual polite self when dealing with bureaucrats who think themselves more important than they really are, and said "My good sir, I am the captain of a ship, and I have been on an important mission for the Emperor – surely His Majesty wouldn't object to treating my crew to just one round of drinks in your fine establishment."

“YOU PIRATE SCUM,” he interrupted, grabbing me by the front of my shirt, bringing his ugly face up close, “I’ll make it real simple this time, shall I?” He signaled to his men and suddenly I was surrounded by a squad of stormtroopers with blasters at the ready; he turned his attention back to me and yelled, “IMPERIAL officers ONLY!” He released his hold on my shirt and left with his squad of bullies, warning me that I was not to wander about his ship unescorted.

I retreated to the comfort of the main hold of my ship, where Sorcha had already tapped a cask of strong ale for the crew. Oh how those low down, scurvy Rebels are going to pay for this! Imagine the gall of them deceiving ME as they did, them all dressed up as a freighter when they were indeed much more – they can’t even put up an *honest* fight! I’ll wage war on them myself if I must but they are going to pay heavily for this. All the problems I’m having now are their fault. The dishonest cheats! I’ve never dressed my ship up as something she isn’t – I’ve never hidden my identity or deceived my prey about who and what I am. The lying scum deserve to lose the war and I’ll work even harder to see that they do!

20010301

Well, the situation has gone from bad to worse. We are here at an Imperial Repair Port having my poor *Morrigan’s Rogue* tended to by the not-so-loving hands of the mechanics here. They say the repairs will take close to a standard month due to extensive damage. I have offered the assistance of myself and my crew in order to speed things up but was refused and told it was against port regulations. We are not allowed to live aboard the ship while repairs are being made so we’ve had to take lodging at the port inn. Although the rooms are clean and the beds soft, it is not my ship. At least the food and ale is of high quality – the problem is, that the cost goes well beyond it’s worth and I fear it’s going to cost me very deep in the purse by the time we leave here. As if all this wasn’t expensive enough, my dear wife Sorcha has found a few shops selling things she ‘just has to have’ before we leave, although she’s seemingly done well enough without them until now...

We are two weeks into the repairs – the hyperdrive was the easiest thing to fix as it was less damaged than originally thought. The shields, cannons and hull damage will, I think, be our biggest problems; the main drive will need an extensive overhaul as well. I am thinking that it will be years until my cabin is back to the way it was before – I’m sure some of those things I treasured will not be easy to come by again.

I have just returned from a rather nasty argument with the port authorities. They were not going to allow the installation of two new quad mount cannon arrays to replace the two that were destroyed in the battle. I did win out in the end but had to endure a few hours of tense arguing. They spend a great deal of time studying the *Letter of Marque* I carry from His Majesty. It seems that the Letter is worded in such a way that I am covered by a small loophole in the law regarding ship weaponry. Technically speaking, I am in the direct service of His Majesty, the Emperor, and to nay-say the cannons would prevent me from doing his bidding and therefore nay-say him. I thank the stars for this victory.

Well, as it turns out, Sorcha's shopping isn't costing as much as first feared – she has traded some of the less valuable trinkets from my treasure chest in order to pay for some new, very expensive boots for her and myself. She has purchased herself some new shirts and vest and bought me a very handsome new holster. Damn but I hate being portside....I have a strong longing for the starry sea. All this inactivity is indeed putting me in a foul mood! Hmm, maybe just the right mood to go hunting Rebel ships as soon as the repairs are completed.

20010303

It has now been one standard month to the day since repairs were started. The *Morrigan's Rogue* is as pretty a seafaring lady as you'd ever want to sail. She is as good as new in some respects and better than new in others. I am far lighter in the purse for all of it however. The Imperial repair crew had the bloody nerve to charge me full price for the repairs and parts – far more expensive than I could have found them underground...well, they are top of the line so now I have to convince myself the cost was worth it. That little set-to with that flaming Q-ship has cost me a total of 100,000 credits including food and lodging and our bar tab, besides the repairs! I'll have to seize at least three very large, fully loaded Alliance ships for His Majesty just to break even. I'm thinking it will be quite costly to restock my cabin cabinet with the rare, well-aged brandies I favor. I'm sure to be near the end of my days before I find such high quality 120 year old bottles again...damn those Rebs – I'm gonna see that they pay for this if it's the last thing I do.

I did get one one small bargain through one of the shops – saw an antique blaster that made me drool. My ship's weapons master said it was one of the finest ever made. The shop keeper didn't realize what it was worth and sold it to me for a pittance. It feels so good in my hand and so comforting tucked into my belt – I'd have been a fool to pass it up.

As I close this log, the *Morrigan's Rogue* is in the loving embrace of hyperspace. We've left the repair port far behind us as we head for the Northern Rim Territories in search of the big Alliance ships. I'd like to be able to deliver one into his hands when I send Sorcha to Port Lansing to conduct our business and meet with His Majesty. I will be far too busy chasing Rebel scum to attend in person.

* * *

Top Five Imperial Bumper Stickers

1. Support your local stormtrooper – buy Imperial
2. My other vehicle is an AT-AT
3. Palpatine/Vader in 2000 (Like you have a choice)
4. The only way they'll get my Standard-Imperial Blaster Rifle is if they pry it from my cold, dead hands
5. We brake for nobody





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Dear Auntie
A question and answer forum

Dear Auntie: What should I do about my stepmother? I'm certain she married my father for his money... and maybe for his power, since he is a Very Important Person. It is obvious that she does not love him, although he indulges her... it is almost as if she has some sort of spell over him. Or she has somehow substituted an imposter. Anyway, I really need to do something about her; she's making everyone crazy. - Nutso

Dear Nutso: Where do they come from and how do they end up in my mailbag? Seriously, I can see that you have a serious problem. Or step problem. Since your father is so besotted with her, a frontal, direct approach is out. I suggest charm and cunning. Be nice to her. Gain her trust. Try to get access to her affairs. Make sure your father knows about her affairs. If she doesn't have any, make up a few. Embellish a little. Stab her in the back. Of course, if she *has* substituted an imposter, you must take a different approach. You must investigate the situation carefully, and if there has been underhanded foul play, then you must expose them. Both of them. Auntie recommends caution, however. It is obviously in their best interest for you to NOT find this out. So you must work very carefully. For a small remuneration, Auntie can provide you with a truth spell, and an Amulet of Protection. That way you will know the truth, and can safely proclaim it to the Galaxy. Just write to me in care of this magazine, and Auntie will fix you right up.

Royal Daughter Disses Daddy

By Kiran Dullea

A royal feud has erupted in the Imperial Palace on Coruscant. Princess Anelis has come outright and said her father, the Emperor, is a candidate for psychoanalysis, according to Palace sources who prefer to remain anonymous. The princess cites his marriage to Azarra Vader as proof of instability. According to our sources, Palpatine insists that there are good reasons for his behavior; he just has not seen fit to divulge them. Anelis told him that she feared for his sanity, and he responded that he did not tolerate impertinence.

"They got into a regular shouting match," said one source. "Everyone was ducking for cover, because when those two lose their tempers, you usually end up with locally severe thunderstorms, given their Force powers. Fire and ice, y'know." At any rate, the rampaging royals went into total tantrum mode; but we have no official – or unofficial – word on the damages. "Anelis is headstrong," said yet another source, "and the Emperor bluntly told her to mind her own business. It just frosted her... and of course, she frosted all the greenery on her way out. The real question is, will she ever speak to the Emperor again?"

Damaged garden plantings aside, we at the *Inquirer* feel that the real question is not whether she will speak to him again, but how long is she going to allow this nonsense to go on before she takes drastic measures? She does, after all, have the infamous Palpatine temper. If it goes, "duck and cover" might be the only survival method available.



CHARACTER BIO

Name: Tarvi Sitorian

Player: Terri Ruwe

Physical Description:

Age: 40

Height: 5'4"

Hair Color: Chestnut

Other:

Race: Human

Weight: 150

Eye Color: Green

Current Status: Snooping around the galaxy

Current Job: Owner, Editor & Publisher
of the *Galactic Inquirer*

Special Abilities:

-Cryptography

-Hacking Computers & Security
Systems

-Disguise

-Ability to talk her way out of
trouble

-Hand-to-hand for when she can't

-piloting, for really BIG trouble

Personal Information:

Homeworld: Kilea

Marital Status: unattached

Children: N/A

Father's Name: Hirak Sitorian

Homeworld: Kilea

Spouse's name: N/A

Race: Human

Background: Head of one of the
major holonetworks before defecting
to the Rebels

Race: Human

Background: Biological &

Researcher, loyal Imperial citizen

Mother's Name: Ylanova Ristall

Homeworld: Coruscant
Pharmaceuticals

Brothers: Colin Sitorian

Chellan Sitorian

Sisters: Tanith Sitorian

Education: Exclusive, private education until age 16, then worked her way through the Imperial University of Kilea

Force Training: N/A

Master: N/A

Light or Dark: N/A



Military History: N/A
Rank: N/A
Army: N/A
Current Assignment: N/A

Status: N/A
Branch: N/A

Employment History:

Psychological Description:

IQ: High

Temperament: Never seems to be serious, loves to talk. Quick to make a friend but rarely forgives, carries grudges.

Fears: Total Darkness, Small Crawly things, being ill or helpless

Likes: Fuzzy baby animals, art, music, storytelling, writing, making credits and starting fights.

Dislikes: Drunks & dopers, pomposity, the unfairness of life & the system.

Pet Peeves: Being inconsiderate to the handicapped; people taking life too seriously

Goals in Life: to become rich and famous, or at least notorious, through her writing

Favorite:

Color: gold, red

Pastime: Reading

Hobbies: History, reading romance or adventure fiction, writing mystery or adventure holoplays.

Food: chocolate covered strawberries

Drink: Tatooine sunrise

Personal History:

Her father Hirak Sitorian, was the head of one of the major communications networks, while Ylonova Desa Ristall, her mother, was a noted biological & pharmaceuticals research scientist.

Tarvi had a turbulent childhood, as her mother felt she was the favorite child of her father. Thus she became the target for her mother's anger as the marriage slowly disintegrated. Ylonova only subjected Tarvi to verbal and physical abuse in private, while remaining the model parent in public. Tarvi was the only one of the four Sitorian children thus abused, and her siblings managed to convince her that she deserved the treatment Ylonova gave her. At age 16, Tarvi chose to live with her father when her parents divorced, but her mother, not to be outdone, hired some mercenary hoods to kidnap her and took her to Rehalla. Ylonova told Hirak that Tarvi had changed her mind.

Tarvi managed to run away within months, and stowed away on a freighter, *Aquilaris* on a route headed for Coruscant. She was found almost immediately and put to work for her passage. In the round-about trade routes, it took almost two years for them to make Coruscant, during which time Tarvi worked up to a second class

pilot's ticket, since the pilot and owner, Shana Rhee, took a liking to her fast talking.

Once *Aquilaris* made port on Coruscant, at about the time of **A New Hope**, Tarvi contacted her father's company only to find that he had defected to the Alliance. She spent several days tracking him down, and when she did contact him, he brushed her off, saying he had more important things to deal with than errant children, and told her that her sister and two brothers were killed by Imperial Stormtroopers. *He* was going on an Important Mission. (He had been assigned to Dantoine.)

Devastated by the news, and the rejection, Tarvi left on her own, and went in search of her mother to find out what happened to her siblings. Ylonova told her that the other children were killed by Rebel terrorists, as Hiram's way of keeping them from her. Tarvi was completely revolted by this tale, and walked out on both her parents. She worked her way through the Imperial University of Kilea, majoring in journalism.

Throughout her student life, she kept a wary eye on the events of the galaxy: the destruction of Alderaan, the building of the second Death Star; its subsequent destruction and the miraculous survival of both Vader and the Emperor, and the re-establishment of the Jedi in defiance of the Empire, and thinking hard.

She had been interested in computers all her life, & was skilled in hacking computers and security systems, which tended to get her into a lot of real trouble in University. Her outspokenness alienated almost all of her professors. She also developed that habit of looking beyond the surface of things, situations, & people, & noticing those details that other people might miss. Having started her career by working for local gossip rags, she knew that gossip attracts a lot of attention, piques curiosity, so that is what she sold when she went independent. But those gossip sheets contain hidden things that point to the gray areas of life, that are designed to make people think: hey, maybe the Alliance isn't all goodness and light. The majority of the Rebels are, but not all of them; some people are anarchists for anarchy's sake. Maybe the Impies aren't all evil. Maybe there are some people who serve and do so honorably. Her proudest accomplishment was the successful break in to the Imperial BioWarfare Labs (where her mother worked) and the exposé of what went on there, and the rescue of Kerellsen Drew. She attempted to do a similar piece on the Passionist religion, but was captured and brainwashed by Mother Dione's minions. Kerellsen returned the favor, and rescued her from the Passionists.

Because of the controversial nature of what she does, Tarvi lives in a small courier ship which she won in a game of sabaac. She calls it *Serendipity*, and it serves as the mobile office of the *Galactic Inquirer*. She commands the unquestioning loyalty of her staff, who are devoted to her. She also has a number of freelance, undercover reporters and holographers roaming the galaxy, looking for "newsworthy" events and people. She is non-discriminatory, having made fun of Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, Han Solo, Darth Vader, Azarra Vader, the Emperor, the Governor, Catriat Aull, Admiral Metieh and Mon Mothma, Sonya Wells, and just about every other "personality" in the universe.

Rebel Sympathizer Poisons Sith Sisters with newest illegal street drug!

By Sondra Locke

A Rebel sympathizer, who infiltrated the Imperial Academy of Engineers, slipped a near-fatal dose of XTC Spice into the drinks of all five of the Commandant's daughters. Ladies May, Missie, Kay, Dee and Cordia Kahn were rushed to the Academy Medical Center where the finest physicians in the Empire labored desperately to save all their lives.

Commandant Lord Oscar Kahn, a retired Captain in the Imperial Ground Forces, launched an investigation immediately, while his wife, the Lady Jessica Kahn, hovered anxiously at her daughters' bedsides. The young ladies did manage to pull through, but at a terrible physical cost. Due to the ravages of the drug, and the measures necessary to save their lives, the Kahn sisters will likely be out of social circulation for several months.

Lord Kahn's investigation revealed that cadet Nikolas Byerly was the guilty party. Byerly was the cadet commander of the Third Vacuum Engineers squadron, and would have graduated in three months. It was also found that the majority of that squadron were also not only Rebel sympathizers, but users of XTC Spice, the newest dangerous street drug that is refined from Kessel spice.

These revelations have promoted Lord Kahn to initiate newer, stricter security protocols at the Academy of Engineers, and he vowed to find the dealers of the XTC Spice, wherever they might be. He is cooperating fully with the Imperial Drug Enforcement.

Medical Personnel Organize- Reform Galactic Relief?

By Matthew Brady

Medical professionals throughout the galaxy are attempting to organize, mainly so that they might deal with the vast numbers of sick and wounded, as a result of the continual assaults by Rebel Forces. This humanitarian effort, which is fully supported by the Empire, involves nearly all the medical agencies in the galaxy. Vast amounts are being donated by Imperial corporations for this effort.

It is ironic to note that while the law-abiding citizens of the Empire are quite forthcoming in their generosity, and will to alleviate some of the suffering of the people at the various fronts, no similar effort has been made by the Alliance. The Rebels' only answer to this widespread problem is to evacuate entire populations to different worlds. While this does, indeed, remove people from harm, it also necessitates leaving behind most material assets, as well as farm animals and families' beloved pets. It also leaves said assets unattended and unguarded, leaving ripe pickings for thieves and smugglers.

The Imperial Medical Society has forcefully condemned the Rebels for their lack of concern about the innocent victims. "For all their professed humanitarian interests, the Rebels show little concern for those made helpless by their activities." Said Dr. Hickem Young, Head of the IMS.

CHARACTER BIO

Name: Perry Wyte

Player: Mike Arquilla

Physical Description:

Age: 40

Race: Human

Height: 6'2"

Weight: 190

Hair Color: Black

Eye Color: Black

Other:

Current Status: Employed

Current Job: Editor of Imperial News Network

Special Abilities:

Hand-to-hand fighter

Good with Blaster

Can breach security and computer

systems

Cryptology

Disguise and Acting

Personal Information:

Homeworld: Ord Mantell

Marital Status: Widowed

Spouse's name: Mira Lescan

Homeworld: Danneth

Background: Transmission Tech
for Imerial

Telecomm and Transmissions

Mother's Name: Anna Marrin

Race: Human

Homeworld: Aldaraan

Background: Lead Chef at

Imperial Gardens

Restaurant

Education: Standard Primary and Secondary schools. Imperial Ground Forces Academy, specializing in intelligence, security systems, disinformation and hand-to-hand combat. Successfully completed Imperial Leadership School at top of class.

Military History:

Rank: Major

Status: Retired

Army: Imperial Ground Forces

Branch: Intelligence

Current Assignment: None

Employment History:

IGF, L2 Embassy Security, Bespin
IGF, L1 Internal Affairs, Valkyrie Garrison, Byss
IGF, CPT Internal Affairs, Tyvern Shipyards, SDS Base, Tyvern
IGF, MAJ Internal Affairs, Drug Enforcement, Tariff Violations & Immigration, Coruscant
Editor of the Imperial News Network

Psychological Description:**IQ:** High**Temperament:** Loyal Imperial, conscientious in performance of duty, ruthless to enemies of society.**Fears:** the possibility of a Rebel victory,**Likes:** Professionalism, good food, good fiction.**Dislikes:** Boredom, arrogance, overly ambitious people, disloyalty, smuggling**Pet Peeves:** Fools and idiots, sloppiness, ambitious superiors who take credit for their subordinate's work**Goals in Life:** To make the galaxy safe for humanity**Favorite:****Color:** Blue**Pastime:** swimming, reading,

cooking spicy food

Hobbies: swimming, martial arts, cooking**Food:** anything spicy**Drink:** Spiced Ginger Ale**Personal History:**

Perry's early life was uneventful; just a hometown-type of boy trying to do his duty and serve the Empire. He was an excellent student, but no bookworm, and kept in shape by swimming and practicing martial arts. He won an appointment to the Imperial Ground Forces Academy, and excelled there as well. His penchant for deduction led him into intelligence work, and he studied propaganda and disinformation as well. Upon graduation, he married his childhood sweetheart, Mira Lescan. His assignments became more varied as he rose in rank, and Mira gladly moved about the galaxy with him. Until a fateful day when he was investigating a drug smuggling ring based on Windhaven, and a double agent in his own unit tipped off the smugglers. As a means of keeping him from furthering his inquiries, the smugglers wired a bomb into the landspeeder Perry and Mira were using. Unfortunately for them, it was Mira who next used the landspeeder, and was killed. Perry vowed to have his vengeance, and not only hunted them down to the last man, but made sure that all of them were killed trying to escape. He made it his life's goal then to rid the Empire of illegal drugs, and became quite obsessive about it, to the delight of his superiors and Imperial Law Enforcement. This did not keep the service from retiring him after his twenty years; however, and now he serves by being the Editor of the Imperial News Network.



BACKFIRE

K.V. Moffet, Janice Mergenhagen, Debbie Casselbury

"We're being followed."

"Yeah, like that's a surprise." Rikonis Vader-Rividh glared sourly at the viewscreen, watching ISD *Eclipse* recede into the distance as *Chimera In Argent* fled toward a safe hyperspace jump point. "Lose 'em."

"Probably not a good idea, sir." Lt. Rizen Haska, Rikon's self-appointed bodyguard and pilot, punched a control and the stars stretched into the distortion of hyperspace. "Likely just making sure we head directly for Varelttas, with no, ah, unauthorized side trips."

"I suppose," Rikon grumbled. Azarra's despair was eating at his mind, like claws scraping on the back of his neck. She wanted privacy, but after a while he couldn't stand it any longer and returned to *Chimera's* lounge.

Azarra sat slumped on the couch, sobbing hysterically.

"It's not your fault," Rikon offered uncertainly. "Trin's not *dead*."

"What have I--" Azarra choked on the words, took a gasping breath, smeared her hands through the tears running down her cheeks. "One *stupid* mistake and the man I love--" another sob shook her voice, "--my love is in the hands of the man I despise!"

"It's *not* your fault!" Rikon repeated. She wasn't listening. Rikon flung himself down on the other end of the couch, catching his hip on the holotable in the process. "Ow, dammit, what the hell--" He dug into his pocket and extracted Trin's ring. Its big green stone glowed mockingly at his touch, not at all repentant for jabbing him. "*Give it back to her*," Trin's parting words echoed in his head. "*When she's ready*."

Azarra had resumed weeping, softly now, but still not seeing anything outside her own misery. "Stupid rock," Rikon muttered at the ring. "Now look what you've done." Not like it cared. He twisted the ring around a finger, watching the light glinting through the stone's facets like captive stars. Like the blue fire Palpatine would surely inflict on his captive son, just because he *could*.

After a while he realised the weeping had stopped. Azarra was watching the green flash reflecting on the holotable between them, faintly illuminating the ghosts of player figures imprisoned in its surface. "Stupid decision," she whispered.

Rikon laid the ring on the table. Azarra stared at it, barely breathing. "He needs you to keep this," Rikon said. "So he knows you're safe."

"Yes." Azarra reached for the ring, covered it with her palm, then scooped it up and cradled it in her hands. "Yes. I will. I *must*."

She rose and made her way to one of *Chimera's* cabins, determination in her step.



"This wasn't the sort of *training* I had in mind!" Azarra complained for the hundredth time, as she gazed down yet another apparently-endless row of grapevines. That was the Rividh estate: grapevines, sheds, grapevines, pine trees, grapevines, rocks, grapevines, grapevines, and more grapevines. The grapevines went on forever, she was sure of it. And the basket of grapes at her feet was only half full. Rikon wouldn't let her so much as get a drink of water until it was ready to be hauled back to the winery, and then there'd be another to fill, and another, until every bunch of grapes on her assigned row had been picked. After three days of picking grapes, Azarra had nearly decided to swear off wine forever.

It wasn't the work -- it wasn't particularly hard, nor all that unpleasant, and the northern sun was mild. But it was boring. Dull, dull, dull. No wonder Drashak Province was populated entirely by peasants. Everyone with a hint of civilization had long since died of boredom. Desperate for something to think about that didn't involve grapes, Azarra began humming a common folk tune -- softly at first, then with more confidence as a worker in the next row began singing the words. Soon all the workers were singing, and Azarra's voice joined theirs. Her hands went on picking grapes without her.

Azarra had reached the end of her row before she realised Rikon was standing there. "About time," he said, grinning ear to ear.

"I wasn't *that* slow," Azarra objected.

"Come on," Rikon said. "You're done here."

"About time," Azarra retorted as she followed him back to the dormitory building -- one couldn't exactly call the big U-shaped structure a house. "Are you ever going to explain why you put me to work like a common farm labourer?"

"You didn't know how to separate your mind and your body."

"I don't understand. What do you mean by that?"

"Everything your hands did, your mind followed. And every time you stopped to think about something, your hands stopped moving." Rikon ushered her indoors, mock-gallant. "Welcome back to civilization, milady, such as we have of it."

"Don't you ever spend a whole day inside your own head?" Azarra griped, but she couldn't truly be angry with him for overhearing her thoughts. Odd how easily she'd become used to that.

"Of course not. How boring."

"I'm going to stuff grapes in your ears if you don't tell me what this was all about!"

"In a fight," Rikon obliged, "it would get you killed. You have to be able to think and move independently. Otherwise every time your opponent makes a smart remark, you'll come to a halt while you think up a response. Or he'll do something you don't expect, and you'll stop thinking until you get done parrying him, and then his next move will catch you by surprise. Either way, you're dead."

"I see," Azarra said, sobered by this explanation. And true enough, once she'd started singing, she *had* picked an amazing lot of grapes without really noticing the work. "What's *your* excuse?"



"I can't think or move worth a damn regardless," Rikon replied cheerfully. "And I sure as hell can't sing! New lesson tomorrow. Meet me in the library about noon, it should be ready by then."

"Another mystery lesson?" Rikon grinned wickedly, and Azarra laughed. "All

right. Just so long as it doesn't involve grapes!"

"Normally," Rikon started without preamble, "the Sith or Jedi in training builds their own lightsabre. A bit beyond the scope of our current lesson, but--"

"Rikon, I don't have a clue how to construct a lightsabre," Azarra interrupted, "and I suspect neither do you."

"True on both counts. But you won't have to. Markev scrounged up something better."

He walked across the library and selected a plain wooden box from one of the overflowing shelves. "It's not as old as mine," he said, handing Azarra the box, "but I think you'll like it."

The lock snicked open under her fingers -- *how did I know how to do that?* -- and the hinged lid opened as if spring-loaded. Inside, cradled in a bed of dark velvet, lay a lightsabre.

The heavy silver hilt was studded with tiny controls, and its lower half was covered in concentric metal rings. It looked awkward and uncomfortable, but her right hand settled around it as though it were custom-made for her. As her left hand closed below her right, a polished hemisphere of green stone inset into its butt end began glowing softly. "Rikon," Azarra said wonderingly, "is that what I think it is?"

"A fragment of the Iskandaraan High Seat. And it recognises you."

"What is *that* supposed to mean?"

"Starting about three hundred years ago, there were several marriages between the Vader and D'Elenyi families. It means you've got Iskandaari royal blood. I thought you knew that." Rikon took the hilt from her, and the stone glowed a little brighter. "Same as me, though not as much. I've got that line on both sides, you only have it through your--" he grinned and corrected himself, "our father."

"You're the one with the ever-so-fascinating pedigree," Azarra retorted, making him laugh. "And since you're a direct heir to the Iskandaraan throne, shouldn't you be the one to have it?"

"I like the one I have just fine. Besides, this one is weighted different. It throws my balance off, so I really can't use it anyway. But I think it'll work for you." He handed it back to her, and Azarra's fingers curved around the hilt as naturally as if she'd been handling it all her life. "See? The grip fits your hands better, too."

"How do I turn it on?"

"Here," he said, moving her thumb to cover a small inset switch. "It's a deadman switch, it turns itself off if you drop it."

"I suppose that's good," Azarra said doubtfully, and pressed down on the switch.



The blade leaped to life, long as her arm and a deep intense purple -- the Iskandaraan colour of death. Azarra waved it around experimentally. Rikon was right about its balance, it fit her like a living extension of her own arm.

"Let's not set the library on fire," he said mildly.

Azarra started and lifted her thumb away from the switch; the blade vanished. "Oh dear. Let's not indeed. I've never seen one with a purple blade before. And why is it so short? I thought they were longer than that."

"They usually are, but it's set for someone on the small side. Same as mine."

"Can that be changed? It seems that would put one at a disadvantage against a larger opponent."

"Well, yeah, but you might want to keep it this way, because it'll give you an edge when it comes to speed. Or you can change it later, after you get some experience with using it."

"So meanwhile I don't slice my own limbs off," Azarra said, involuntarily glancing down at her half-brother's bad leg.

"That too. That's why we'll use practice blanks. Sting like hell but won't chop off any body parts. Mine's purple too," he continued, grinning at Azarra's pained expression, "but that's because it's set the same length as yours. And mine's variable." Rikon demonstrated with his own lightsabre by changing the blade setting, from a handspan of ultraviolet, through its normal pale lavender, to blue, green, gold, and finally leg-long and red, then reset it to arm-length and shut it down. "Yours is hardcoded to a specific mass and frequency, same as most modern lightsabres, so it'll be purple and feel the same no matter what. Mine is a lot older, the technology was different back then."

"I see." Azarra regarded the hilt thoughtfully for several moments, then carefully replaced it in its velvet-lined case. "Rikon, do you know who built it?"

"Markev wasn't entirely sure. Ziridan had it last."

"Who?"

"My grandmother's younger brother. He likely got it from his mother, and her mother before her, and so on. Someone filed off the maker's mark, so it probably dates to the Interregnum, or maybe a few years earlier. But we think it once belonged to Sollny D'Elenyi."

"*The Sollny D'Elenyi? Good Queen Sollny?*"

"Well, we don't really know for sure. But there's no question the stone is Iskandaaran, and the design is a lot like Trin's," Rikon said, pointing out the concentric rings on the lower hilt, "with that big baffle against energy leakage. Iskandar doesn't produce the cleanest core crystals in the galaxy."

"This 'leakage' isn't dangerous, is it?"

"Nah, just wasteful. The baffle keeps the power cell from running down so quick. Anyway, we figure when the D'Elenyi family went into hiding, they didn't want an artifact this identifiable backtracked to its maker, in case the usurper decided to hunt down and kill off all the loyalists. So they scraped off his mark. After the Restoration it didn't matter anymore."

Please the gods there'll be another Restoration, Azarra prayed silently.



Rikon frowned, but continued, "Sollny had five daughters, and the youngest was our ancestor. She probably got this as a dowry or something."

"How appropriate," Azarra said. "It's perfect. So when do I learn to use it?"

She was starting to be sorry she'd asked. Rikon was *quick*, even with that game leg and his awkward knee brace. Azarra had welts from one end of her body to the other, wherever the practice blank had found its target -- an unmistakable motivation to stay out of the way of the real thing. She spun after Rikon as he went past, inexplicably out of reach. He danced around her and nailed her squarely on the rear end.

That did it. Azarra lost her temper and went after him full tilt, swinging her

lightsabre like a madwoman, and somehow managed to whack him on the side of the head. Rikon yelped, jumped sideways, and landed on his butt in the dirt.

"Oh my god!" Azarra dropped her lightsabre and knelt beside him. "Are you all right?"

Rikon shook his head. "Aaaagh. Very good." Suddenly he grabbed her by the ankle, dumped her onto the ground, and rolled to his feet in the same motion. Azarra abruptly found herself flat on her back, staring at his practice blade an inch from her nose. "You just caught me on my blind side," he said, circling the blade's tip above her face. "But that's good. Take advantage of your opponent's weaknesses. There's no fighting fair when someone is out to kill you. And by the way, you're dead."

"But--" Azarra spluttered.

"I didn't say the lesson was *over*," Rikon told her. "And I'm fine. At least *I'll* be sitting down at dinner tonight." He gingerly rubbed the side of his head, and winced. "But I think tomorrow we'll wear helmets."

"I swear that rock has more talent," Rikon muttered under his breath. "You don't have to make it fly around the room, you know. Just do *something* to it."

Azarra glared at the rock on the library's mantelpiece, but it remained stubbornly inanimate. Such a small thing, half the size of the gem in her ring, a bland oval of rough granite with no mind of its own, yet so full of defiance. Not a wiggle, not a glow, not a hint that it noticed her efforts. The intense concentration was giving her a headache.

"Not like that," Rikon said, exasperated. "You keep pushing on the Force and expecting it to find its own channel. That's the Jedi method, it doesn't work for us. Well, not very easily. You need to *pull*, to *make* it flow instead of waiting for it to happen. Like this."

He touched her palm with a fingertip, and a tingling shock ran up Azarra's arm, an intruding sensation like pale fire along her veins. It felt *good*, and it fed the anger, deep inside where *he* couldn't see it.



Rikon paled and pulled his hand away from hers. "A little too much, I think."

"Rikon, please don't hurt yourself on my account," Azarra said, vaguely alarmed by his expression. "I'll never get it and there's no point in harming yourself!"

"It's not that. It doesn't hurt, it's just that I had to push on the Force to get you to see it, and it's kind of uncomfortable. Like having sand in your brain."

"Oh." Azarra tried to *pull* power the same way by herself, but nothing happened. "I *felt* it, but I still don't see how you *do* it!"

"All right," Rikon said, and grimaced. "This *is* going to hurt. You, not me. It's something I learned from Licari. I understand he learned it from Palpatine."

Before Azarra could protest he gripped her by both shoulders, and a jolt ran through her body, like Palpatine's cold blue fire through her true love's heart. Suddenly angry, Azarra wrenched at the invisible blue fire in her veins, jerked it toward her heart, watched in fascination as the blue glow in her mind's eye turned red around the edges and grew into a violet fireball that swallowed everything it touched.

Rikon's hands had gone rigid on her shoulders, his eyes wide and staring, mouth open as if to scream, but all that emerged was a strangled hiss. In that moment of distraction the fireball fractured and vanished. Rikon jerked away so hard that he flipped

backwards over a chair and landed upsidetown behind it. Azarra stared after him, too shocked to react.

"Gods below," he managed as he dragged himself upright, "what in all the nine hells did you just *do*?"

"Are you--"

"I'm fine, dammit. Do it again." Rikon took her hands. "Slower this time. And don't pull so hard. I want to see what you did."

Tentatively, Azarra complied. The Force flowed more easily this time, the blue of deep water rather than electric fire. Rikon went stiff and made a squeak like a drowning animal. Alarmed anew, Azarra dropped his hands and backed away. The blue glow inside her head faded to purple, then red, and went out. "Rikon, I'm not going to do this if you're going to get hurt!"

"That's totally bizarre," he said, ignoring her protest, then had to take a couple deep breaths before continuing. "Again. Slower. Try to hold the purple this time."

"I didn't exactly *pick* the colour," she objected, intrigued despite herself. She took his hands, by the fingertips just in case, and *pulled* on the Force. The blue glow was dim this time, the violet bright and hot. Suddenly frightened, Azarra jerked her hands back. Rikon whooped in a lungful of air and fell into one of the chairs flanking the fireplace.

"I think," he gasped between ragged breaths, "you could kill someone with that."

"That's enough. I'm not doing any more of this!"

"You have to learn to control it. Otherwise it's too dangerous. When it's blue, that's like normal draw, except it sucked the Force clean out of me. Made me headblind for a few seconds. But when it's purple -- it's like time stops. *Everything* stops. Inside me, I mean."

"What are you saying?"



"I couldn't move, or breathe. I even felt my heart stop. Damnedest thing I've ever seen." Rikon nodded toward the mantelpiece. "Try it on that rock."

At least she couldn't harm a rock. Azarra *pulled* on the Force, trying to direct the flow *through* the rock. Gently at first, then harder as the rock continued to ignore her efforts. "It's stopped working," she said, half-relieved by her failure.

"I don't think so. Try it on me again. Just start it," he insisted when she would have refused. "You don't have to go past the first blue."

Azarra grimaced, but complied -- and was shocked to see the initial hint of blue rapidly transmute into harsh purple. "No! No more of this!"

"If you *don't* learn how to control it," Rikon said when he had his breath back, "someday you're going to kill someone by accident."

"I'll never use it. *Never!*"

"It's *part* of you. You can't unlearn it. And it's a damned good thing we discovered it when we did, so you have a chance to learn some control. Try the rock again."

He had a point. Uncontrolled power was indeed dangerous. No one had told the rock, which still blithely ignored her attempt to destroy it.

"Weird." Rikon eyed the rock, pointed a finger at it, and it flitted across the mantelpiece and fell to the floor. "We'll need to do more tests, but I think it only works on animates. Live stuff, I mean. *Rizen*," he yelled toward the library door, "get in--"

"Sir?" Rizen Haska appeared in the doorway, making both of them jump.

"Your next victim," Rikon said wryly.

"Absolutely not--"

"You can't hurt him. He's a natural Force reflector."

Rizen said, "I am?"

Azarra demanded, "Meaning what?"

"You need to get a look at this talent for yourself, so you can see exactly how it works. Whatever you try to do to Rizen will reflect back on you, so be careful."

Rizen looked baffled, but said, "At your service, my lady."

"Give me your hand, Lieutenant." Rizen extended a hand. Azarra held it lightly between her fingertips for several moments, then gritted her teeth and *pulled*.

A blue void surrounded her mind, shifted toward violet. Her body went stiff, then numb. The sensation was fascinating, and utterly terrifying. Something stung her cheek once, twice, her lungs heaved, and colour returned to the world. She glanced around, surprised to find herself in one of the overstuffed chairs. She didn't remember sitting down.

Rikon touched her brow. "No harm done," he said, looking relieved. "But I don't think we'll do that again."

"A most effective demonstration," Azarra said weakly. "Thank you, lieutenant."

Rizen nodded in response, for once at a loss for words. "Rikon, you're absolutely correct. I *must* learn to control this." The alternative was too hideous to contemplate.

"You will," Rikon assured her. "You've been doing great. Ah, Rizen--"

"Sir?"



"You were on your way here for a reason?"

"Yes sir. We just got a transmission from the capital." Rizen made a sour face.

"We're going to have company. *Eclipse* is in orbit."

Vareltras was a blue and golden-green gem as seen from space. Darevek was clean and modern, with no trace of the poverty that afflicted the darker edges of so many capital cities, a fitting testament to the Vader family's superior governing competence. Yes, Palpatine thought, he'd chosen his bride well, and out of respect for Azarra's family he would honor her homeworld's customs, and prove once and for all that he really did care for her.

His resolve began slipping when he learned that the only legal transport into Drashak Province was an antique airbus that left Darevek at midnight, and that its notion of a first class sleeper cabin meant you got a blanket along with your plank.

Sevranir was a charming foothill village, with a tidy market square surrounded by crafts shops, but apparently its residents never went anywhere else. The local hostler and his single toller had proved its only source of local transport.

The reason no one lives out in this godsforsaken wilderness, Palpatine thought sourly as he glared at the lumpy beast before him, is because they've been driven away by their own backward customs!

"Hundred creds," said the hostler.

Enough of this mindlessness. Palpatine mustered the Dark Side on the local, hoping to end the negotiations. *I'll let you have it for forty credits*, he focused, pointing at the hostler.

"Hundred creds - take it or leave it," the hostler said. "Last time I rented for up to the vineyard, my stock never came back." The hostler spat into the straw underfoot, then pulled a stem from a bale in the haystack and began chewing on it. "Made new policy after that."

So then, it didn't work on these Varelttans. "Fine," Palpatine said, exasperated. "I'll take it." He gestured to one of his four accompanying Red Guards, who handed the hostler a hundred credit chip. The hostler bit down on the chip, winked, grinned, and waved the party toward the stable door.

"Why the hurry?" Palpatine asked.

"Best git goin'," the hostler replied. "Tollers don't move after dark."

So now the Emperor's old bones were being further insulted by the toller's bony back and his brain was being churned by its swaying gait, as they lumbered uphill toward the Rividh vineyard, Red Guards tramping stolidly behind. The dirt track meandered upslope, clearly in no hurry to arrive anywhere. At least the surrounding trees kept the summer sun off his neck.



Toward evening the party passed a stone marker, presumably the boundary of the Rividh estate. Shortly after that the toller took root in the middle of the road and refused to go another step, despite shouts and slaps and a Force prod at the beast's mind, which proved vacant as vacuum. *Very much like the hostler's*, Palpatine thought wryly.

There was no help for it, they'd have to camp on the road, or walk. Palpatine started at the scream of some night-roaming predator, peered into the lowering darkness ahead, and decided waiting for tomorrow's daylight was the better part of valour.

The summer night was mild, but he was not going to sleep on the ground. One night on a plank was sufficient indignity. Palpatine glared at the surrounding wilderness, but the desired feather bed failed to materialize. Conversely his Red Guards seemed perfectly content to sleep standing upright, a position he had no desire to emulate.

Later, feeling resigned, he agonizingly lowered himself to the ground, pressed his back against a rock, and began a mental list of who would pay for this indignity.

At sunrise the toller awoke, and even looked anxious to continue the journey. Not so Palpatine, who stiffly unfolded from his repose, every joint and muscle screaming their displeasure at resuming this undignified trek. A bit of Dark Side meditation and walking restored some flexibility. But there was no use putting it off. The Emperor climbed aboard the toller's bony back, and soon the procession was on its way.

At midmorning the procession arrived at the remains a burned-out estate house, half-hidden in a grove of young trees. *Good thing it's already cinders*, Palpatine fumed to himself as he glared at the empty and neglected farmstead, *or I'd burn it down for them!* Just as he began considering appropriate punishments for the absent Lord Rividh, a tall lean sandy-haired man emerged from the surrounding forest.

"Vineyard," the man announced. "This way." He pointed at the mouth of a narrow foot trail between the trees, then turned and disappeared up the trail. Wondering why he was putting himself through this ordeal, Palpatine turned the toller to follow. After another hour of jolting over a rough mountain ridge, they finally arrived at the Rividh vineyards. Grapevines stretched north from a collection of aging shop and winery buildings. A large wooden affair, apparently a servants' dormitory, was the only habitable-

looking structure in sight. Still, it had to be better than perching atop the toller's knobby spine. Palpatine gratefully dismounted, and the sandy-haired man led the beast away.

A silent servant met them at the door, and showed the Emperor to the library to await Azarra. The Empress took her time arriving, and meanwhile Palpatine had plenty of time to examine the library's clutter. He'd seldom seen so many old bound books in one place. At the far end of the room, two overstuffed chairs flanked a huge stone fireplace. Definitely better than the toller's back.

An hour later, Azarra arrived in a shower of glittering silver and black material with a subtle hint of green.

Exasperated and enraged by his tedious journey, the Emperor snapped, "I always knew Varelttas' outback was a culture far from the city we Coruscanters are used to, but... I suppose my memory has faded, as it's been many, many years since I last visited here -- and you can be sure it will be a very long time before I visit again."



"Majesty, you have looked better," Azarra noted. "I take it your journey was arduous. If you had merely let us know you were coming, we would have returned to Darevek or at the very least, met you in the village."

"It was...inconvenient... at best. But something I needs must endure to see my Empress," he said with a weary smile. "Ahhh, Azarra -- you look stunning. I have missed you. Truly."

Azarra smiled. "Majesty, you are too kind. The facilities here did not allow me to adequately prepare myself for your visit, especially since you arrived unexpectedly."

"It is most unfortunate that your attire doesn't quite fit in these crude surroundings, but I understand this is your brother's lifestyle."

Wishing to change the subject, Azarra asked, "Did my Father accompany you?"

"This trip was not planned, rather a last minute surprise, so I did not wish to bother your father. Have you not seen him? I thought you would have contacted him about your whereabouts. He is on Coruscant, which is where I would have hoped you would be by now...seated beside me as my Empress."

"And so it begins; the reason for this journey," she said. "Since my safety is of the utmost concern to me, Your Majesty, Coruscant is the last place I would want to be. If you couldn't protect me somewhere as insignificant as Port Lansing Station, how could I possibly feel safe in the capital of the galaxy? You know I haven't spoken to my Father since before the ceremony. Communications from Iskandar were jammed, but I'm sure you told him of our meeting aboard the *Eclipse* and my return to Varelttas."

The Emperor gave her a puzzled look. "Does not Rikonis have communication equipment onboard his ship? I assumed you would have contacted your father on your way here. So, you have told him nothing?"

"Most of the journey was spent in deep conversation with Rikon working through the emotional devastation I felt after our meeting on the *Eclipse*," Azarra replied. "I could not contact my Father in that state of mind. I found your badgering of me mentally, as well as physically, draining."

The Emperor merely nodded. "That is understandable, my dear. However, when we parted after our encounter on the *Eclipse*, you seemed as decisive and strong-willed as you had always been in our past dealings. This attracted me, and made me feel you were *worthy* to be My Empress. I admit, I began to grow fond of you. Lately, though, you have been markedly less so."

"I was never poisoned, blockaded, dragged out of bed in the middle of the night,

and betrayed by someone who professed to love me, Your Majesty."

Palpatine pale lips formed a frown. "I won't discuss your poisoning again, Azarra. You know I was not responsible. Skywalker and Daara told Jordan I was innocent. What more do you need? I grow tired of your accusations. If you don't want to be Empress, I need your answer now, for this is the last time I ask you to come back and take your place at my side."

"You told me I would have time to be trained to protect myself. Surely you don't expect that in this short of time I have learned enough to do that in that nest of vipers you call your Court. I thought you wanted me trained. Have you changed your mind?"



"No. I'm not asking you to leave immediately, Azarra -- only when you have finished your business here. But I will not tolerate any more insinuations that I did not try to protect you. I thought I explained my error in that... I am powerful, yes, but I can still make a mistake or two -- as can you. Now you have the opportunity to build new skills to protect yourself from my 'nest of vipers' as you so eloquently put it," he paused as his pale lips lifted in a secret smile...secret because only he knew what gave him glee, "and from *me*, you are thinking as well. Keep in mind, I have powers that neither you nor your father can match, so I expect you will always be looking for new ways to try and guard yourself. Fine, if that suits you. I just came to see how you are doing and to ask if you still have a desire to stay married to me, because -- Imperial law states that we are indeed still married. So...do you want to end it right here, or return to me?"

The Emperor awaited an answer and, when Azarra continued to stare into the fire, he continued, "I wonder what your father will say when you tell him that you are undergoing training in the Force...not with him, but with Rikonis, of all people. Are you progressing well in the training, my dear?"

As the Emperor began to caress the top of his twisted black cane, Azarra noticed that he was wearing the ring she had placed on his finger. "My training is progressing in ways I couldn't have imagined. Contrary to what you all think, Rikon has been an excellent teacher. I wasn't aware that you would have allowed my father the time needed to train me."

"You may or may not be aware that I, too, have an apprentice under my care. An ex-Jedi... Turim. I have found the perfect challenge for him. I'll say it in one word. Trinian." The Emperor held out his hand revealing a tiny holograph mechanism. The image showed Trin fencing with Turim on the ISD *Eclipse*.

"Recognize the one clad in green, do you? Trinian held his own in a fencing duel, to be sure... I'm just not sure who is trying harder to impress me -- Turim or my son. And Turim is dangerous. He's unusual because he is a controlled Sith student... and one who thrives on survival. I hope, for Trinian's sake, that he doesn't take his position as my son for granted. I'm far the stronger one, in the end."

"So, you would put Prince Palpatine in mortal danger for amusement? Is that what I have to look forward to when I return to Coruscant? Certainly, you won't expect me to duel with ex-Jedi for your entertainment?" Azarra asked calmly.

The Emperor's yellow eyes narrowed to slits. "All this time did you imagine that I would change into a completely different person, Azarra? You can expect nothing more than being the Empress. You never wanted me during the time I courted you with passion...when I contacted your father, reminding him of your lineage, a speedy affirmation letter to my proposal was received. I know you have no great love for me,

Azarra - I simply ask that I have your company for life - as my Empress. If you cannot stomach that idea then I will honor your refusal!"

"I do believe that my exact words were that when I felt I could protect myself at your Court, I would return as Empress. As you are so fond of reminding me that there are no romantic illusions in this relationship, I will be *the Empress*, not *your Empress*. If you



will have me return to Coruscant on those terms, I will, when I am ready. Or is there a compelling reason why I must return very soon?"

"Let me remind you - you will be my Empress. There is, and will be, no other Emperor. And I have *invited* you to rule at my side."

Angry now, Azarra snapped, "I suspect I will be subjected to watching endless duels among family members that you find amusing! I didn't find it entertaining at Port Lansing and I can assure you it won't be any different on Coruscant, no matter who is involved. Perhaps you no longer see any value in having my Father by your side."

"I suppose you Vaders know how you feel about such things. I'm sure your father has a mind of his own. He has been a friend to me. I have no desire to hurt you but I have never cushioned or coddled your father during his many years of service to me and I have no intention of treating you any different than he. If you continue acting in this manner, Azarra, I will retract my offer and give you closure, which is fast becoming as attractive to me as it obviously is to you." He began to tug on the ring, having difficulty in getting it to come off.

Before he could succeed in removing it, Azarra retorted, "I have said many times, Your Majesty, that I would return as Empress to Coruscant. How many more times do you need me to say it? As a Vader, I am used to having to say things only once to be believed."

The Emperor slowly leaned against the back of the chair and studied her face with mock amusement. He knew he'd never see true submission there and seemed to find pleasure and pain in that at the same time. "Yes, I suppose you Vaders tend to try and see your own way in things... you've inherited the stubborn streak, to be sure.

"So-- then..." he favored her with a chilling smile, "you have no sense of urgency in seeing your Prince Trinian again? Perhaps you no longer feel compelled to pursue a sordid romance with my son..."

"Majesty, we obviously understand each other, so I would like to resume my training to hasten my return to Coruscant. With your permission, of course."

"Of course... we understand each other. You certainly have my permission... I gave it to you before if you recall, and it still stands. I ask that you contact me when you are ready to depart to Coruscant. And I want you to do it *two* ways -- by the usual transmission...and by using your newfound Force ability, to communicate your intention to come back to me and be My Empress."

Azarra made a cursory bow as she said, "Thank you, Your Majesty. This has been a most illuminating visit." Quickly turning her back on him, Azarra left the room.

I can just imagine what the ride back will be like, Palpatine groaned softly.

A Little Shopping Excursion
by Larry Tetewsky
(with permission of Debbie Casselbury)

For a change, it was quiet in the throne room.

That only made it all the more ominous.



As Palpatine sat upon his throne, apparently lost in thought, he was suddenly distracted by a tremor in the Force. It snapped him out of his reverie, and while the other Imperials and lackeys looked up at him, wondering what might be amiss, the doors to the chamber flew open. The recently returned Empress Azarra strode in, followed by a retinue of Red Guards.

This was, in itself, quite unusual. Azarra rarely deigned to grace the throne room with her presence, except when ordered by Palpatine for some official act of monarchy. She stopped at the base of the throne, waiting to be recognized.

“My Empress, what a delight to see you so unexpectedly,” Palpatine cooed.

“Good morning, Majesty,” Azarra replied. “I trust I’ve chosen an appropriate time to interrupt?”

“I’m never to busy for you...” Palpatine stopped as the Force tremored again, but regained his mastery quickly. “Is there something you desire?”

“Well, in fact there is a small favor I might ask of you,” Azarra began, smiling. “Since my return to Coruscant, matters have conspired to keep both of us virtual prisoners of the Imperial Palace. You’ve had your many official duties to attend, and I’ve been... settling in. True, we’ve been...together, but mostly for those endless lightsabre duels you delight in arranging between officers, Sith, Jedi, household pets, and anyone who suits your fancy, and which you know I find quite...tedious.

“Well, I’ve been doing some exploring, and I’m shocked at how poorly the Empire is prepared to accommodate guests. Your needs are met for all of the amenities, but anyone staying for official business or pleasure must fend for themselves or bring their own.

“I think we need to be better prepared, so I’d like you to accompany me on a little shopping excursion today,” she finished brightly.

Utter silence, as the Force hemorrhaged in Palpatine’s mind. “Why do I have a bad feeling about this?”

* * *

“Tell me again, Azarra,” Palpatine grumbled, “just how you managed to convince me that this was a good idea.” The Emperor was standing in his transport, glaring out of the view port. Azarra sat nearby, eyes closed, as if meditating. “I may have underestimated your Force potential.”

“You’re the one who’s always pushing me for more time together in public,” Azarra replied, opening her eyes, but not looking at him. “Trying to project a kinder, gentler, more enlightened image, to lull the masses into a more malleable following.” Then she swiveled her seat to face him. “If that’s your desire, then there’s no better way to accomplish it than by actually getting out to where the people are.

“Besides, you seem to be under some impression that I shop...carelessly. Impulsively. Maybe I just want to prove something to you.”

The Emperor framed a response, but remained silent. Azarra had never seemed to be interested in...impressing him. Proving herself to him. Perhaps he might be able to turn this willingness to his advantage. After a moment, he merely favored her with a small smile.

* * *

A few hours later, Palpatine finally admitted that he, somehow, had been completely wrong. They moved at a brisk pace through the MegaMall, in part because Azarra did shop quickly, yet thoroughly, but mostly because his entire entourage of guards had been left behind to secure the transport against the possibility of Rebel vandalism. The molding and tail fins were new, and Palpatine wanted them kept that way. Azarra even encouraged him on, saying that they must certainly be safe together in the Mall; after all, who would dare to challenge HIM?

“A master stroke,” Palpatine chided himself. They had quickly patronized 25 of 174 stores, with 300 to go, and already Palpatine was bent nearly over, his gnarled cane quivering to support himself as he Force-carried bags, boxes, and packages in their wake. Azarra showed no signs of flagging. They barely stopped for a quick respite at the Food Court.

As Palpatine levitated the booty again, they set out and rounded a corner, when he froze, unable to move. The banner overhead declared, “BARGAIN WING” in bold, neon holo-lettering. The corridor seemed to stretch to infinity, and beyond...

A scream almost ripped from his throat...

Palpatine bolted upright in his bed, paler than normal. Quickly, he oriented himself. Reality flooded back in to him. As he realized that it hadn't happened-in fact, none of his dream had come to pass, an unbidden memory also surfaced. A line he had heard, but never until now believed. “Many things will you see. The past. The future.”

He did not get back to sleep for a long time.



We know EXACTLY what to
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I LEGION By Dora Furlong with apologies to Simon R. Greene

The rim is cold and dark feeding into unplumbable depths of darkness; the intergalactic void where no stars shine and fewer star destroyers dare go. It's easy to get lost on the rim. The Empire fights the rebellion and hungrily reaches outward, claiming more and more worlds. But not on the rim. It is here that both the Empire and the Alliance stop cold.

It gets dark on the rim. Ships get lost and disappear. Colonized worlds are as self-sufficient as they can be. Away from strict Imperial Law or Alliance Order, crime grows and outlaws seek havens. Star Destroyers drop out of hyperspace occasionally to clean house, but they don't see everything.

Strange and rogue forces are at work on the rim. Ancient and forbidden practices occur and beings turn away from the darkness, the untamable void. But in that void lurks patient and terrible forces, and all it took to set it off was a simple clash between a Star Destroyer and an outer rim planet owned by a rogue Sith called Nathaniel.

The destruction of the planet, Nathaniel's planet, released those terrible and dark forces...the ancient energies symbiotically entwined with the very planet itself. This sentient force howled in despair as it was ripped from its host. The life forces of its children draining away. Instinctively, hungrily it reached out and drank in the vast energies. In the voices of many it spoke.

"I am everything that I was before and more. A gestalt that none, not even a Force user, shall stand against. Their minds shall feed and sustain me. I will take them in and devour them. My enemies will drown in blood and suffering."

A BIT OF STAR WARS TRIVIA from Debbie Silverberg

For those of you who love trivia, I have a good one to consider. George Lucas teaches many lessons of science in the Star Wars movies that were huge box office hits. This was especially evident in the Phantom Menace. The particular science lesson I'm referring took place during the lightsabre duel between Qui Gon Jinn, Obi Wan Kenobi and Darth Maul. Have a moment to consider this....

Have you figured it out? What's so ironic is a blind person, myself, figured it out immediately. The lesson George Lucas is haring with us is the color spectrum. You have Darth Maul with the double edged red lightsabre, red being hot. Obi Wan Kenobi's lightsabre has a blue blade, blue being the opposite end of the color spectrum. Qui Gon Jinn's lightsabre has a green blade, which is a middle color. Yes, it's true, the lesson George Lucas is sharing with us in the range of color in the color spectrum. Did any of you figure that out? Congratulations. I'll close for now. May the Force be with you.

[from Leslie the scientist - essentially correct. The spectrum as I know it, including two



of the non visible 'colors': Infrared (heat), red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, ultraviolet (the wonderful thing that causes either tan or sunburn) Outside on either side of these are rays and waves (example: gamma or radio)]

WISDOM FROM MY CORELLIAN GRANDFATHER

"Never explain - your friends do not need it and your enemies will not believe it anyway."

Gal Comm:

TRANSMISSION TO: anyone

FROM: Olnah Rendar

Olnah Derrineen Rendar here. I'm so sorry I haven't contacted any of y'all for so long. My life's been more mixed up then a wookiee lost in a blizzard on Hoth. First of all, Granny died. Her heart finally gave out. We had a nice funeral for her. I've been missin her like y'all wouldn't believe. Y'all may or may not know she raised my brother and me, and my brother Jared Derrell after our ma and pa died. Workin through the grieving and loss can be so difficult at times. I wonder sometimes if thing will ever be ok again.

But enough of my grievin. I really need y'all's help. I've been having these hideous nightmares where I hear this strange voice sayin, 'We will move against the Jedi.' It ain't Vader. I know that varmit's evil tone. This voice ain't like that at all. It almost sounds like the wind's a blowin. If'in any of y'all have a clue please let me know, so I can make some sort of heads or tails of it.

I also need y'all's help with another problem. Do any of y'all know a young'in named Dash Rendar? From what I understand from my brother and Granny he's a second or third cousin on my pa's side. Granny left him an inheritance when she died. If any of y'all know where this young'in is or can help in any way at all, please let me know. I met this Dash once when he was knee high to a jawa. He probably weren't no more than 3 or 4 years old. If any of y'all can with both of either of these problems, please let me know. I'll sign off for now. Thank y'all in advance.

END TRANSMISSION

TRANSMISSION TO: People in general (through the Force)

FROM: Jedi Master, Qui-Gon Jinn

Greetings friends. I know the annual gathering at Port Lansing will be taking place in a few weeks from now. I am definitely with you in spirit. No doubt the Empire has a few tricks up their sleeve to force the Alliance's hand. Always remember my friends the fight is well worth the efforts, especially when so much is at stake. You are strong and you will succeed. Always remember your focus determines your reality.

Do not be surprised if I drop by with words of encouragement. You will be successful. I sign off now.

May the Force be with you.

END TRANSMISSION



Mercenary Politique

By

Dora Furlong, Armand Banooni, and Courtney Kraft

Tara landed at the rendezvous point early enough for Lon to meet with the Alliance before the actual exchange occurred. Although it had been many years since the Alliance and Empire actually exchanged prisoners, everything went as routine as possible. Lon and Tara, accompanied by Topaz, her bodyguard, met in the central neutral ground to start the exchange. They discussed the plans and who was to be sent out when, then

returned to their own sides.

The process itself went quickly. Most of the returned Imperials were sent to Imperial transports that Tara had waiting. The final three, however, she had other plans for. Michael and Sidra belonged to Darana and would be returned directly to her via a smaller shuttle. Psylocke, on the other hand, the Emperor ordered Tara to return to Coruscant immediately after the exchange. Tara was not going to take chances and decided to take Psylocke back on her own ship. Anything went wrong and she would know why and how.

First, she had to formally conclude the exchange and once more, accompanied by Topaz, went to meet the alliance representative in the neutral ground. "Does the Alliance have anything further?" She inquired formally.

"No the Alliance is pleased. Does the Empire have anything further?"

Tara smiled, "No the Empire is pleased."

Formal requirements out of the way both Lon and Tara relaxed visibly. "What are your plans now Lon?"

"I have no immediate plans...why?" He asked, curious what the merc was up to.

Her response came as a complete surprise to him. "Why don't you come back to Coruscant with us?"

"Us?" He raised an eyebrow.

She laughed, "Well I may have arrived here independently of the imperial ships but I must return Psylocke directly to the Emperor. So she will be traveling on my ship with myself, Topaz, and Victoria."

"I see. Then I think I will decline." He paused, "You see, I'm not in a hurry to meet him."

"Nor would I have you in a hurry to meet him...I was thinking that we could have some further business you and I." She paused, letting him register her words. "However, we have just had a major rush on this job...."

Curious what Tara was up to Lon quirked an eyebrow. Interrupting her, "What kind of business would that be?"

"...we could both use some time to relax.... you could fly back to Coruscant with us then we could discuss the possibilities after we are sufficiently recovered from this." She finished. Once his question registered in her mind, a mischievous smile crept across her face, "The type of business you excel at, Solo."

He was definitely curious, "What is it that you need?"



Tara was impatient, "This is not the time or place to discuss this. Either you are interested or not? I have people to get back to the empire."

For the first time, Lon noticed the lines that had crept into her face. It had indeed been a long 48 hours. Neither of them had slept much of late. He considers it for a moment, "I'm always interested in profitable exchange. I have your assurance you won't have me meeting any imperial authorities?"

Tara laughed wearily, "Actually you shall meet several authorities there. However, you have my assurance that you are under my protection." She knew he hadn't been comfortable at the palace during her first trip there. But he had wanted to come along. She smiled inwardly, 'Yes solo,' she thought, 'you are safer than even you realize and hopefully, you shall never know what I have done to you.'

"You'll forgive me for asking but you realize with my lineage I have to make sure." He bowed slightly "I accept your generous offer."

"Well then, after you Solo", Tara responded, indicating the way to her ship.

Tara saw Lon to her ship. He could have found his own way, since they had arrived together from Coruscant but, Tara preferred to escort him and have Alexander, her assistant, settle the mercenary in once again. She requested that, this time around, he restrict his roamings to the forward lounge area, his quarters, and the cockpit. As he was well aware, with Psylocke joining them, she was going to have a full complement this trip.

She was looking forward to getting back to Coruscant. She laughed quietly to herself. How odd it seemed to once again look forward to returning to Coruscant. The city planet had been her childhood home. Raised there practically from birth. Then when she had to flee in exile...her home had become the family's seat on Shardakour. She considered it more her home than ever now. But Coruscant would be a place to rest and recuperate from the past several days and the lack of sleep.

Due to the lack of sleep she knew she was not as observant and ready as she should be. This was one of those rare times she was glad for her ever present shadow, Topaz. She generally disliked having him at the edge of her privacy, but now it gave her the peace of mind she needed.

Shaking off her thoughts and the weariness, she rounded the corner to the medic's station and found the Commander of the Imperial Garrison. "Commander Krell. How much longer before you will be completely pulled out of here?"

"Your Highness." He addressed her, "We will be gone within the hour."

Tara smiled at him. The whole scenario had truly played out smoothly. "Excellent. And what of Cairnfell and Sidra?"

"They are on the transport you requested awaiting your orders." He reassured her.

"They will accompany my ship back to Coruscant. Tell them to prepare for immediate departure." Tara did not bother to wait for his reply. She headed directly into the medic station and sought out Psylocke Lammashtha's bed.

She found the Imperial sitting comfortably, staring off into space. The girl pays Tara no heed as she picked up her medical chart. Psylocke was calm and lost in her own



thoughts as Tara read the sheets. Multiple abrasions on her arms, malnutrition, unhealthy weight loss, and dehydration. She had read enough. She snapped the chart closed and replaced it. "Well Captain, it seems you are one determined individual."

Psylocke blinked at the interruption in her thoughts, then replied, "Thank you."

Tara nodded formally, "Are you ready to go home?"

Once again Psylocke blinked, then looked at Tara. She knew she'd seen the woman before, but couldn't quite put her finger on it. She glanced at the man standing next to her, then straightens up. "I've been ready to go home for a while now." She glanced around, frowned, then started combing her hair with her fingers; she picked up parts and started braiding it.

Tara tried to appear non-plussed by the woman's immediate oddness, "You can save your grooming for onboard my ship." She stood back and indicated for Psylocke to stand, "Please come with me."

Psylocke's eyes narrowed slightly. She dropped her hands down, then jumped out of her seat. "Lead the way."

Tara smiled wryly and stepped back to make room for Psylocke next to her. Topaz fell into place behind them. Ever vigilant. Psylocke noticed that two Storm Troopers fell into step behind them.

They walked through the heart of the compound, now being dismantled, to the far side. It was best to keep the transports and heavy equipment away from the main 'camp'. Eager to take off, Tara pulled out her comm link, "Voice Auth Green seven four, pre flight check."

A few minutes later the small crew came upon a medium sized ship. Psylocke could tell it was meant for long range travel. As they approached Tara gave the commands, then led them aboard. The two storm troopers fell back and disappeared. Psylocke almost inquired as to where they were going, then caught herself. Instead she quietly followed Tara through the ship and to her quarters.

"This will be your cabin until we arrive on Coruscant."

Psylocke glanced around and nodded to her. "Thank you."

Tara returned the nod and showed her where everything is, "You should find everything you need here to refresh yourself." She paused, glancing up and down Psylocke once, "We appear to be about the same size...I'll have some clothes brought to you...I am certain you wish to be fresh when you meet with the Emperor."

"His Majesty wants to see me so soon?" Psylocke asked in surprise.

Tara simply nodded in response, "I will be sending word upon our arrival. I will turn you directly over to him at that point."

"Oh...of course. Thank you."

Again Tara nodded her acknowledgment, "Now if you will excuse me...I must attend to getting us on our way."

Psylocke nodded, and watched Tara begin to leave, "Please forgive me," Tara remembered, "but I am locking your door. This is for your safety." Psylocke gave her a quizzical look but remained silent; doubting the other woman's words.

True to her word, Psylocke heard the click of the lock as Tara closed the door.



Psylocke examined the room, looking all over to see what was in there. It was small to accommodate the size of the ship, but not uncomfortable. Very pragmatic in design. In the bathroom, she found a hair brush and brushed the hair out of her face. She started to french braid it again. "Grooming..." she muttered softly. She sighed quietly when she had finished and headed back into the main room. "What to do now..."

After take off and jump to hyperspace a knock came to the door and Psy heard the click of the lock. A man's voice called out to her after another soft knock on the door, "Captain Lammashtha, I have brought you some clothes."

Psylocke stood to greet him. "Come in."

A young man she did not recognize entered, carrying several outfits. He stood about 5'6 and appeared to be late teens to early twenties.

"I am Alexander," he introduced himself.

Psylocke remained still, with her arms at her sides and watched him carefully. "Thank you Alexander. You can leave them right there," she stated, indicating a small table near the door.

He laid out the outfits for her where she indicated. "Is there anything else I can get for you?"

"A book would be nice. Preferably Kafka."

Alexander considered her request for a moment, "I'll see what I can do, anything else?"

A grin nearly cracked her stoic expression. "Not right now."

Alexander paused, reacting to the near grin, "Very good then. I will be back

shortly."

Psylocke watched as Alexander left. Wondering how long the aide would try to search for the book. Picking up the outfits, she headed back to the bathroom to change.

Finally Psylocke settled on an outfit and emerged from the bathroom and dropped down on the couch. "Being cooped up in here is like being back on Tattooine!"

After 35 minutes another knock on the door, a click of the lock, then knock again, "Captain Lammashtha."

She stood up at the second knock. "Enter!"

Alexander entered with a data pad in his hand. "It took some doing but I managed to download it from the Imperial Library's central databanks."

Psylocke's face immediately lightened. She walked over to him. "Thank you Alexander! How very kind of you."

Psylocke noticed that by the term 'it' he was referring to probably the most complete works Alexander could get his hands on.

"You're welcome." He smiled "Now if you would like, My Lady has asked me to invite you to join her for a meal in the lounge."

"And I was about to ask you to join me for tea." She smiled at him, then indicated the door, "Shall we?"

Alexander returned her smile, "Perhaps afterward." Surprised by her taking the lead he turned and walked out of the room. He paused outside her door and indicated she should proceed him down the hall to his left.



As she walked beside Alexander, Psy found herself thinking of his kindness in taking the time to look for Kafka.

As the pair came to the end of the hall it opened up into the 'lounge area', Tara was sitting there, the food already spread out. Topaz was sitting behind and to the side of Tara. Both of them, Psylocke noted, were facing the door. Tara smiled openly at Psylocke as they entered, "Ahh I see they worked." Psylocke appeared to Tara, to be in a much better mood than before. Tara turned to her aide, "Thank you Alexander." She dismissed him.

"Yes, I appreciate your generosity." Psylocke replied.

"It's not a problem at all." Tara returned.

Alexander bowed to Psy, "If you will excuse me I must see to my other duties." Psylocke flashed a smile at him and returned the bow. Alexander smiled inwardly, pleased. He then turned to Tara, "My Lady."

"Please have a seat." Tara indicated the booth around the table.

Psylocke stepped up to the booth, and smoothly sat down across from Tara and Topaz.

Tara had served up a plate and both she and Topaz were about to start. Psylocke gracefully placed her napkin in her lap. Tara invited Psy to begin and waited for her before starting to eat. "So have you found everything you need?" Tara inquired.

Psylocke scanned the table and took bits from here and there, collecting a variety of foods. It was nice to have something that didn't resemble gruel or dog food.

"Eat and enjoy; you must regain your health." Tara noted out loud.

"Yes, I have. Alexander has been very kind to me." Psylocke responded to her question.

"Good. I am glad."

Before Psylocke started eating, she glanced up at Tara, and locked eyes with her.

For the first time, she noticed the woman's silver eye color. "Please forgive me if I'm being rude, but you never told me your name."

Tara chuckled briefly, "Forgive my manners, I am Tara Alderson-Palpatine."

"Palpatine?" Psylocke asked reflexively, then tried to cover her surprise by picking up a piece of bread.

Tara continued to meet Psylocke's gaze, "You didn't know?"

"My apologies. I knew I had seen you before, but I couldn't quite remember."

"Most likely at Port Lansing or perhaps at the palace..." Tara allowed her voice to trail off.

"Yes. That's it." Psylocke glanced down at her plate, then took a sip of her tea, trying to cover her embarrassment.

Tara watched her briefly, wondering what the Red Guard trainee was concerned about, then asked with more seriousness than before, "Does it bother you?"

"It only bothered me that I couldn't remember who you were. Actually, it comforts me a bit. At least I know I'll be returning home safely and that I'm not at the hands of some mercenary who would ransom me off."

A wide smile wandered across Tara's face "Are you sure about that?"



"I only say that because I've seen you at Port Lansing. Besides, even if you were a mercenary, I can tell that you're smart enough not to go up against the Emperor." She took a large bite of melon.

Tara laughed openly now, if Psylocke only truly knew the history of how she came to be adopted by Anelis, but no need to point it all out. "My grandfather is well aware of my history...even if others do not remember."

Psylocke smiled, feeling a little more comfortable after breaking the tension. "Are you close?"

Tara was a bit surprised by the question, "Close to him?"

"Yes." She stated more matter-of-factly.

Tara considered the question in all seriousness. "That depends upon how you define close?"

"It's probably none of my business anyway."

Tara shrugged, "I find it refreshing actually. Your frankness is a rarity these days."

"I try to understand His Majesty, but sometimes it's just too difficult."

Tara raised an eyebrow, surprised this woman was opening up to her, trusting her, "Understand in what way?"

"I'm quite tired of diplomacy. Never really got me anywhere." Psylocke's eyes started to drift off. "Well for one, it was to my understanding that to be a full Sith, one must forsake love. This confuses me. Why would he ever fall in love with Azarra if it goes against what a Sith is." She shook slightly then turned back to Tara. "Gah! Please don't tell him I said that!"

Tara nodded "Well I doubt he loves her..... and I will not say anything to him about our conversation."

Psylocke's eyes widen slightly, but she stuffs another piece of bread in her mouth instead of responding.

Tara paused briefly then met Psylocke's eyes, "You have my word on that."

Psylocke let out a breath. Tara ate for a bit, watching Psylocke closely, then finally, "So what do you want Psylocke?"

Psylocke had done the same with Tara, glancing up at her occasionally, and trying not to make eye contact. After her question Psy coughed on her tea. "Excuse me?"

Tara laughed a bit as Psylocke choked on her tea. It was unexpected from such a simple question. Tara wondered why it would elicit such a drastic emotion. Indeed the red Guard trainee had something on her mind. Chuckling Tara handed the woman an extra napkin.

Psylocke accepted it, wiped her mouth, and coughed a few times.

"The question is straight forward," Tara stated, her voice warm and friendly, "What do you want?"

Psylocke stared at her with a puzzled look, as if Tara had asked her a morbid question. "I'd like to know why your friend here hasn't even introduced himself."

Tara glanced at Topaz. He nodded, "It is generally not necessary for me to introduce myself, for the most part it is unnecessary. Since you have asked, I am Topaz, I am Ms. Alderson's protection."



Psylocke grinned slyly. "Pleasure to meet you."

Topaz nodded once more, "Likewise."

Tara listened quietly to the brief exchange, then once it was over smiled and pressed the question once more, "So what is that you want Psylocke?"

Psylocke's eyes narrowed. "Out of life or for desert?"

Tara chuckled, "Why do you avoid the question? You know what I mean. Is it that difficult for you?"

"Yes. To be perfectly frank. It is. And I don't think it's any of your business to be asking such a question of a person you don't even know."

Tara listened very closely to how and what the Captain said and to what she had not said, "Interesting that life is such a difficulty for you...and yes you did invite this question by sharing your innermost concerns and confusion with me...You have also already shared that there is far more on your mind than a union between my grandfather and the Princess Azarra."

Psylocke leaned back. "You're good."

Tara shrugged, "It's not about my being good...it's about what you want."

Psylocke dropped her slyness. "You're only the second person to ever ask me that."

In a softer tone, "And who was the first?"

Psylocke looked away. "Probably no one you know."

Tara shrugged still looking at Psylocke directly, "Don't assume those whom I know and those whom I do not, you might be surprised...try me."

Psylocke cursed internally, pausing for a moment, contemplating what to say to satisfy the woman across from her without giving it away.

"Just...a guy. Friend of mine."

Tara raised an eyebrow at yet another avoidance, "Just...a guy. Friend." Psylocke recognized the underlying sense of question because of *how* she said it.

Psylocke rested her head in one hand and glared at Tara, frustrated. "Can we just drop this, please?"

Tara nodded, "If you shall answer what it is you want."

"I'm not sure what I want." Psylocke could feel the cold tingle of depression crawling up her arms. "No one ever really asks me."

"Why does someone have to ask you? Is your identity, your...desires and wishes wrapped up in someone else?"

"That always seems to be the problem. I'm always associated with other people. It's like I don't have my own identity." Psylocke's response was almost instantaneous.

Tara smiled supportively, "That I can understand...My life is not my own either...but still there must surely be something you have wanted...something you desire to grow to...a goal...you have yet to simply find it."

"I suppose so."

Realizing that she may have to try another tact with the woman Tara offered up another question, "So what did you tell this 'friend' of yours?"

Psylocke suddenly snapped back in her seat, as if coming back to reality. "Can you just drop it, please?"



"Why?" Tara retorted, "You don't want to know yourself? Or do you LIKE being identified by others?"

"It's not that," she said firmly. "I just don't wish to talk to you about it."

Tara relaxed, "And why is that?"

"I just don't! Okay?"

Tara simply watched her.

"I don't even know you."

"What would you like to know?"

Tara continued to watch her closely. Psylocke seemed to ever so slightly shift uncomfortably.

"I want to know why all these questions. Seems that many people are taking an interest in me for one reason or another. I just want to know what your angle is."

Tara laughed freely. It was easy to understand Psylocke's suspicion. "Believe it or not I don't have an angle."

"I don't."

"All right then, what would it take to convince you?"

"I don't want to be convinced. I just want you to lay off already!"

"I see," Tara began, "So you wish to live your life alone...never talking to anyone...not even your 'friend'."

"I didn't say that. I just don't like it when people I don't know go snooping around my life."

Tara shook her head, "But you offered."

Psylocke stood abruptly. "If you'll excuse me, I'd like to return to my quarters now."

Tara could almost feel Topaz's trained reaction behind her. She was sure the body guard was prepared for any reaction from the Captain. She smiled inwardly. She had hit some hot points and was now getting to know Psylocke better than she had hoped. It usually took two or three conversations to reach this point, a point of such strong emotional responses. This was good. Very good. But it was time for her to back down if she did not want to make an enemy of the woman, "Please sit down." Tara stated, calm and friendly, almost apologetic.

"Whatever kind of game are you trying to play with me, just quit it." She refused to sit.

"I am not playing a game." Tara replied, then stood, "I am sorry, please accept my apologies." Tara spread her hands to the side and bowed her head from the shoulders. Her hands remained at her side when she lifted her head back up.

Psylocke, slowly sat back down, keeping her eyes on Tara.

Tara waited for Psylocke to sit, then slowly followed suit. Her every move,

designed to put the other woman at ease. Years of experience brought to bear.

Psylocke sat there quietly without eating.

Tara let her sit there for a bit, then decided to break the ice once more, time to regain the trust, "Please eat. You still need your nutrition and you do have a meeting with the emperor soon."



"I've lost my appetite." The response was flat.

"I'm sorry." Tara reiterated, trying to emphasize her sincerity to Psylocke. But she simply remained sitting there, quiet.

Tara let her sit there, apparently the other woman's issues ran deep. The Emperor would be sure to exploit them. Psylocke was right about him using her. Indeed, Tara thought to herself, I see a very depressed person in front of me whom I have just upset and was more likely than not on the verge of tears. An excellent fighter, she now has a lot to think about before visiting the Emperor.

Tara remained quiet and continued eating. Respecting Psylocke's silence. No need to push the issue, the woman would come out of it on her own.

Psylocke watched her as she continued to eat, glancing once or twice at Topaz.

Tara was savoring the each bite, she noticed Psylocke watching her, "I love strawberries: the texture the taste...such a simple pleasure in life."

"I prefer blueberries myself." She muttered.

"Mmmm yes." Tara considered the berry, "An even simpler taste. Not as sweet."

"I like the occasional sour ones."

"Ahh, yes. Pineapple for that is mine." Tara replied happily, "has almost exquisite sourness, yet still sweet in the end." She paused, then decided to throw in an allusion, although she doubted Psylocke would pick up on it, given her current state of mind. Then again it was hard to say, "A beautiful dichotomy really."

Psylocke nodded, "Even pleasing to the touch."

"Yes it can be." Tara replied, a little more serious, it was amazing how much you could learn about a person, even through a simple conversation about fruit.

Tara rose and went to a cupboard bringing back a plate of chocolate chip cookies. "Now here we go..." She nodded to the plate, "this is the true nectar of the Galaxy." Tara's eyes twinkled a bit.

Psylocke chuckled slightly.

"The chocolate is from a small corner of the rim...I understand they have a special recipe it can be quite addictive" Tara chuckled as she explained the origins of the chocolate. One of her family's perks, when you trade as much as the Alderson's did, one tended to find the small treasures upon occasion.

Psylocke nodded solemnly, staring transfixed at the cookies. "I haven't had chocolate in a long while."

"Well then high time to break the fast"

Psylocke chuckled slightly and shook her head.



Sonya Wells and Cohorts

The Ballad of Biggs Darklighter

Well, let me tell you the story of Biggs Darklighter
On that tragic and fateful flight.
He climbed into his X-wing and he prayed the Force was with him
And Red Squad flew into the fight.

Chorus:

And did he ever return? No, he never returned,
And his fate is still unlearned.
He is lost forever in another dimension,
He's the man who never returned.

Biggs filed his flight plan at the Yavin Base hanger
'Cause he knew he had to fight that day.
He checked with his flight crew and he went to his briefing
And he said, "We'll make the Empire pay."

Red Squadron flew out in a last-ditch effort
To blow the Death Star away.
Biggs covered Luke's rear and he held off Vader
And let Skywalker save the day.

Vader's shot just grazed him as he barreled down the trench
It ripped open a hole in space.
It led to other worlds and he couldn't avoid it
So Biggs ducked out of that place.

Now all through space-time, Biggs flies in his X-wing
Crying, "How long must I roam?
I've been to Oz and Gateway and Pern and Vulcan
But I haven't yet found my home!"

Final Chorus:

And did he ever return? No, he never returned
But his fate we've finally learned.
He may fly forever in another dimension,
Biggs's the man who never returned.

*Music: "The M.T.A." by the Kingston Trio
Terri Ruwe @1992*

Force Users

Oh the Sith, man, have their Force, man,
And they keep it dark as night.
But the Jedi have the Force too,
And they keep it pearly white.

When the Sith all use their Force, man,
Nasty scars are left behind.
Not a mark leaves any Jedi
For their Force is in the mind.

The civilians down at Lansing
Face Force Users without fear
For they know that Sith and Jedi
Are the same after that fourth beer.

And the Embassy of Azarra
Tries to save them and make peace
While the mercs work on both sides,
Double payrolls for the fleece.

Luke Skywalker, Emperor Palpy, and Lord Vader
Most of all,
When they deal with a Force User,
Keep their backs against the wall.

Oh the Sith, man, have their Force, man,
And they keep it dark as night.
But the Jedi have the Force too,
And they keep it pearly white.

*To the tune of "Mack the Knife" by Bobby Darin
Words © 2000 by Terri Ruwe*

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