

THE BRAKKETH TEMPLE

ONE

The T-65B X-wing came out of hyperspace on the edge of a star system with a blue giant at its center. The enormous ball of gas, emanating tremendous amounts of energy every second, blinded its pilot for a moment, before the X-wing's sensors picked up the intensity of the light, and activated the anti-glare shields. Another second passed, before the pilot could make out the star system before her. One blue giant and 6 planets in orbit. Without hesitation, she gave a slight nudge to the X-wing's control column, and the fighter started for the 5th planet.

Two hours later, High Admiral Anahorn Dempsey stood next to her X-wing, on the top of a small mountain, overlooking the forest world below her. In all its richness, the planet was devoid of intelligent life. Perhaps once, long ago, it had existed. However, without obvious signs, and without archeologists to study the planet, no one would ever know. Or perhaps one of the many crawling insects on the forest floor would someday evolve and take possession of this world.

Dempsey didn't care for either. She had a single objective, one reason for being here. One reason for risking her command of the Imperial-II class Star Destroyer *Challenge*, her home in the Emperor's Hammer. Fortunately, she had a Wing Commander she could trust. Elara would do everything she could to make sure no one would know of this little excursion to the Brakketh star system.

No one would find her here either. The Brakketh star system wasn't on any known star maps. Perhaps it once had been, in the immense archives in the Jedi Temple on Coruscant, but those archives were no more. And for all he had done for this Galaxy, the Emperor didn't care much for star charts. Even his fleet of Star Destroyers often found themselves in unknown regions of space if they ventured outside the Core worlds.

Still, this star system should have been explored at some point in history. After all, blue giants are so luminous and so hot that they are extremely unstable. Not exactly the kind of neighborhood you'd want to live in. With their massive emissions of radiation, they would make live on one of their planets extremely unpleasant. Then again, blue giants like this weren't supposed to have a planetary system to begin with. The time it takes a planetary

system to form exceeds the average lifespan of these stars. And the time it would take beyond that the develop life on one of those planets would be thousands of times more than same lifespan. And still - this star had planets orbiting it. And one of these planets had actually developed life. And not just microscopic organisms either. According to probes Dempsey had sent out, the fifth planet had the kind of life on it many planets in the Core would envy. Large oceans of water, and large masses of land, covered in luscious forests.

This planet was her destination.

It had taken Dempsey years to find out where in space it was located, or even learn its name. Well, the name of the star anyway, since none of the planets had actual names. Planets usually didn't get names until there was either an intelligent species who decided they needed to name their planet, or until someone figured out some unnamed rocky world was of strategic importance. This world was neither of those.

TWO

Standing beside her X-wing, Dempsey stood looking around. Her back was turned to the blue giant. Even at this distance, and through the thick atmosphere of the planet, the star's light was unbearably bright. The X-wing's astromech unit, R5-D7, had already warned her about the levels of radiation that reached the planet surface. This was not a place to spend a long vacation. How the flora on this world could thrive was beyond Dempsey's understanding of xenobiology. There probably was a good reason, but that was not why she had traveled to this planet. In the distance, Dempsey thought she could see the reason she had come here. A tall spire, towering above the forest roof. Or maybe she was imagining it. There were a lot of these "spires" towering above the forest roof. They all looked alike, and why she thought this one was different, she wouldn't be able to explain. It was a feeling. But she had learned to trust her feelings.

These spires were actually trees. Where the regular trees on this world grew to an average height of 250 meters, well above the theoretical height any tree could grow according to the scientists of the Old Republic. They had never been to this world. And amongst these giants, spaced vast distances apart, stood other trees, dwarfing the ordinary trees in the forest. R5-D7, had stated the huge trees it had measured were well over 500 meters in height, with

some growing as tall as 600. And not only the height of the trees on this world was exceptional, as with height, came width. The one Dempsey had her mind set on was a prime example. R5-D7 had calculated the tree to have a diameter of 85 meters at ground level, almost the size of a Corellian Corvette.

Dempsey grabbed her rucksack with some supplies out of the X-wing's cargo compartment, and looked at the droid. Its instructions were clear: wait for the pilot to return, and keep an eye out for any signs of trouble. Dempsey always anticipated trouble. It was one of the traits that had kept her alive for so long, before she joined the Emperor's Hammer TIE Corps. Ever since the murder of her mentor, all those years ago. Truth be told, trouble usually found her, even on remote worlds like this. Or maybe especially on remote worlds like this. Worlds that were not within reach of the Empire, New Republic, or whatever local Imperial Warlord had declared his own little Empire after the Battle of Endor. Without order, there was chaos. And where there was chaos, there were pirates. Pirates, bounty hunters, slavers, and all kinds of scum. They thrived on worlds like these. But R5-D7 had found no sign of intelligent life anywhere on the planet, or even in the star system. So for now, she was alone. She turned her back to the X-wing, and started walking.

THREE

It took Dempsey 3 days to reach the spire she had set er mind on. Or tree. or whatever it was. When light broke through the forest canopy for the first time that day as the blue giant in the distance rose towards its azimuth, Dempsey finally reached the base. She put down her rucksack, and looked up, trying to see the top of whatever it was she was looking at. But it was in vain, the top was too far away. It looked strange. usually, trees were a brownish color, with green leaves. It didn't really matter which world you were on, that was one of the universal constants. But not on this planet. The blue giant's starlight was a weird color, and it reflected in all the colors around here. The leaves were more blue than green, until you got really close. And they were huge, the one closest to her was larger than her X-wing.

Dempsey sat down and opened a ration bar. While she ate her breakfast, she pondered her situation. She had found what she had come here for, but she hadn't really come up with an idea on what to do next. She did know she had come to the right place. There was something about this tree. Something unnatural. She could feel it all over her body. She felt

as if she was not alone. Instinctively, her right hand brushed by her side, reassuring her the light saber was still there. There was no one here to use it against, but it gave her some confidence that if worst came to worst, she wouldn't be completely alone.

After breakfast was done, she sat down at the base of the tree, and closed her eyes. She focused her mind, as she had been taught. She envisioned the tree in her mind, and tried to get closer and closer and closer, until she could touch it. Closer, until she felt the bark beneath her hands. An orange glow emanated from the place where she touched the tree, and as she looked up she saw a trail of orange glow reaching beyond her view. But as she looked up, she saw lights of a hundred different colors swirling around the tree. Dancing to a music she couldn't hear. She tried to get closer, to see what these lights were, but every time she reached closer, they danced away from here. The game went on for a while, until she gave up. She looked down, and imagined the trunk of the tree going into the ground, and turning into roots that stretched for miles under the soil of the planet. She wondered if these huge trees were all connected via their roots. As she allowed her mind to dwell on that thought, the orange glow she had seen before suddenly turned a dark shade of blue. Dempsey noticed the change in the corner of her eye and snapped her head towards her hands, still touching the tree. At that moment a bright flash blinded her. The next moment she felt herself being thrown backwards to the ground. She shook her head and opened her eyes. The huge tree stood there as before. For a moment, Dempsey felt disoriented, until she realized this was caused by the darkness around her. The blue giant had disappeared from the sky, only to be replaced by a faint glow. On this planet, it would never truly become night, and one would never be able to gaze at the stars, but night it was.

Dempsey closed her eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. Then she touched her comm link and signaled R5-D7. Astonishment overtook her as he learned from the droid that two days had passed since she had first set eyes on this tree. The experience she had, which had felt like minutes, had taken two days...

FOUR

Dempsey sat for a long time, pondering what she had seen, and what had happened. If anything, she now knew she was in the place she had sat out to find, by now almost a week ago. The tree had tried to distract her, had tried to hide something from her. She wondered exactly what that was. Her connection with the living Force was strong enough to know the tree was more than just a tree. The aura of the Force was imbued in it. That, she concluded,

was what had caused the feelings she felt earlier. And somehow, the Force was trying to shield something from her.

But she wasn't going to let that be. She had not travelled halfway across this sector of space, far beyond the borders of Emperor's Hammer territory, to be thwarted by a tree. But as convinced as she was of this, she still didn't know how this tree had come to be. Was this the word of the Jedi, or of some long lost Sith no one had ever heard of?

Dempsey felt a wave of tiredness come over her. The lack of sleep for the last two days, combined with the exertion of the experience with the tree, had left her body exhausted. She grabbed her rucksack, and lay down, resting her head. Whatever she was facing, it would have to wait until the morning.

FIVE

When she awoke, the light of the blue giant illuminated the tree again, as it had the morning before. Dempsey checked to make sure she hadn't slept through an entire day, and wondered how long exactly a day was on this planet. R5-D7 had said two days had passed, but did he mean the standardized days the Empire had used, based upon Coruscant, or had he meant a day on this planet, based upon its own rotation. She made a mental note to herself to check that with the droid when this was over. For now, she thought, the information was as useless to her as a Bantha would be on Mon Cala.

After a quick breakfast, she stood up, her leg still aching from crashing into the soil the night before. She walked over to the tree, and looked at it. Time for round two.

During the night, her mind had been forming plans. On their first encounter, she had not known what to expect, and the tree had taken advantage of that. Well, or whatever it was that was using the tree to get to her. It had distracted her away from her purpose, and she had allowed it to do so. As a result, she had been exhausted, drained of energy as the tree had leeches it from here for all those hours.

She walked, keeping the tree to her left, and studying the ground. She took in every grain of sand and every blade of grass at the foot of the tree, where it touched the soil. She walked for half an hour in what seemed like a straight line. This really wasn't getting her anywhere.

She sighed, and looked up at the sky. The blue giant was visible through the canopy. She wondered how old the star was. A star of that size couldn't be very old. Her mind drifted back towards her youth, where she had read everything she could about the stars, impatient as she was to venture out there and see them all. She smiled. See them all. That wasn't likely to happen. Still, she had seen many, but she had never been this close to a blue giant. It was more impressive than she had thought as a little girl. Even at the distance she was now, she could see the star was immensely larger than she had thought.

Dempsey closed her eyes and shook her head. Distractions. Again. She sighed. She bowed her head, spread her fingers, and concentrated. Slowly, the blue giant, and all the questions she had, faded from her mind. And in its place, she saw again the enormous tree before her. She spread her arms, and imagine the Force flowing through them, making its way to her fingers. She imagined the tingling feeling as the Force reached her fingertips, unable to continue, but wanting to. Slowly, she stepped forward, towards the tree. One step at a time, she closed the distance, until she felt she could almost touch it. Right above her, she could see the orange glow appearing, the same one she'd seen before. But this time, she ignored it. From the corners of her eyes, she could see the orange glow flickering, dancing around, trying to grab her attention, but she kept staring straight ahead. Not this time. Determined, she took another step. She felt the tree resist as she pressed her body against it. She squinted, grinded her teeth, and with all the mental power she could, she imagined the tree was not there. In her mind, the tree shimmered. And she took another step.

Had you been standing there, looking at what was going on, you would have seen a woman walking into a tree. Not the way you'd expect, not walking into a tree, bumping her head and falling flat on her bottom. No - walking *in* to a tree. Disappearing as if she had actually stepped inside it.

SIX

Dempsey felt strange. The world around her appeared to not have an up or a down, nor a left or a right. There was no sky above her nor ground below her. She was afloat in the middle of a brightly colored emptiness. Not exactly what the inside of a tree should look like. Then again, the whole concept of 'inside a tree' was ridiculous. And yet, that's where she was in her mind. She wondered if it was just her mind, or if her body had joined her. Or was that lying on the ground outside somewhere? On the other hand, separating the mind from

the body was pretty weird in itself. She tried to look around, but there was nothing to see. All the colors of the rainbow were surrounding here, weaving intricate patterns, and then fading them away only to be replaced by others. For a moment, Dempsey didn't know what to do. What was going on here...

In the back of her head, she could hear a low growling. A soft noise, that slowly grew louder. As it did, she realized it wasn't actually growling. It was more. She couldn't quite place it, until suddenly the sound erupted into her ears. A million voices screaming out at her, all at the same time, each trying to be louder than the others in an attempt to be heard. The cacophony was overwhelming, and Dempsey's mind screamed in agony. She closed her eyes, and tried to shut out the sound. She imagined the sound growing dimmer and dimmer. For a moment she believed that was actually what was happening as the screaming seemed to die away for a bit. Then she realized it wasn't that. Instead, the sound was coagulating. Instead of a million voices, there were only a thousand, then a hundred. Slowly, she started to make out familiar sounds. Soon, she could understand a single word in the sea of voices: Sith. Over and over, the word was repeated. As the voices dissipated, the word echoed stronger and stronger in her mind, until it was all she could hear. She put her hands over her ears in an attempt to keep it out, but the sound waves reverberated through the tissue of her hands, and echoed even stronger in her ears. She screamed.

To Dempsey, it seemed like her scream lasted for minutes. How long it had been in reality, she couldn't say. This place was so far from reality, she wondered if the word even held any meaning here. When her throat ached and she heard her voice break, she stopped screaming. As the sound of her own voice died away, so did all the other voices. Slowly the silence enveloped her. She opened her eyes as she realized she couldn't even hear the sound of her heartbeat anymore. The silence felt unnatural. As she looked around, the colors had all disappeared as well, and she was surrounded by a vast black darkness, more terrifying than the darkness of empty space. At least there, you could see the stars to point you in the right direction. Right now, there was absolutely nothing.

Slowly, a glimmer of light appeared in the distance. "Lost, she is," a voice said, and felt silent again. She didn't recognize the voice. It did sound friendly. "She does not belong here," another voice said, breaking the silence. *Not as friendly as the first*, she thought. *Not even close*. "Are you certain?" a third voice echoed.

Dempsey look up at the glimmering light, and thought she could see the shape of three figures before her. The shapes were vague, and one of them resembled a human. Whether or not he was she couldn't tell, as she was looking only at a shadow of light.

"You heard what I did," the second voice said again. "Sith."

"That cannot be," the third voice spoke, "the Sith were destroyed over 500 years ago."

Dempsey closed her eyes, confused. What little she knew of Sith history told her the Sith had been destroyed when they waged war with the Old Republic and lost. The Jedi had won. But that was over a millennium ago, not 500 years. On the other hand, the Emperor and Lord Vader had been Sith too. Or so they had claimed anyway.

"So sure of this are you, Master Bendo?" came the first voice again.

"If they had survived, we would have seen them," the third voice said. Bendo, it appeared his name was. Dempsey made sure to remember the name and see what she could find out. Her first thought was one she couldn't grasp. These voices were speaking of events in the past, but not as distant as she believed them to be. How could that be? She looked at the shimmering shadows again, and noticed that slowly she could start to make out details. She could clearly see now, that one of the three figures was rather short, no more than half a meter, perhaps a little more.

"You can't ignore the Force," the harsher of the voices stated. "The ancient shadows are very clear." She could see the short figure turn its head. It looked like he was green, and his ears appeared to be pointed. Dempsey raced through her mind, but could not remember ever seeing a figure like this before. This was surprising, there were not a lot of species in this galaxy she had never seen a picture of. She may not know all of them by name, but she rarely forgot a face.

"Very clear, you say," the short figure said. "Never before, shadows have been clear. So why now?" The figure turned its head towards Dempsey and stared at her. Dempsey wanted to speak, but no sound would come. "Intriguing, this is," the figure said. "Think upon it, we must." With that, the figure seemed to recede into the darkness. The other two followed, and Dempsey was left alone.

SEVEN

How long she was alone, Dempsey did not know. In the utter darkness, with no reference to anything at all, including the passage of time, it was impossible to tell. In her mind, she kept going over what the three figures had said, or who they could possibly be. *Were they Jedi?* she pondered. Could it be they were the Jedi that had been destroyed by the Emperor when he had declared the Galactic Empire? But the Jedi were long gone. Rumors were aplenty of course. If you believed them, there were dozens of Jedi on every civilized world in the galaxy. But they had all been destroyed. Maybe a handful had escaped, but it wasn't possible

for them to still be alive after all this time. The Great Purge happened almost forty years ago, any Jedi to have escaped would have been old by now. Or dead.

But wasn't that exactly what was happening here? These three figures surely didn't appear to be alive. Dempsey didn't believe in ghosts, but if she had, she probably would have labeled them as such. And as she considered all they had said, she concluded that the figures had spoken as if they had lived centuries ago, long before the Empire was created. When the Jedi were still numerous, and keeping the galaxy under their thumb. Yet if that was the case, what she had seen were exactly what they could not be - ghosts of Jedi that had died hundreds of years before she was born. Her head was aching from the conflicting ideas.

She wondered if both could be true. If, as she had originally thought, this tree was not an ordinary tree, but a temple created by the ancient Jedi Order, could it not be possible that there were Jedi here? Or if there were not, could not the Force be making her think there were? Maybe these three figures were nothing more than figments of her imagination, perpetrated by the living Force. But then, the shapes of the figures and the name Bendo were also of her own making. And as good as she was, her imagination didn't stretch that far. But whatever she did, every avenue she ventured would end up at an impossibility somewhere. And yet, one of them had to be exactly what was going on, which would mean what was happening to her now was impossible.

Unless, she pondered, unless there were things about the Force that she didn't know about that were so incredulous, they could make this happen. She wondered if others might know. But who to ask? The Grand Master would not be appreciative of her inquiries. After all, if he knew what was going on he'd realize she'd become a lot stronger in the Force than he thought she was, and might start considering her a threat. And if he didn't know, he'd absolutely consider her to be a threat, seeing how she could interact with the Force in ways that he couldn't. And there was no one else she could ask. The ancient Jedi were long gone, they might have known. And for certain the Emperor would have known, but he was no more either. No, if she was to find answers, she was going to have to do it herself.

EIGHT

Dempsey wondered again about the passage of time. She felt it might have been hours, or maybe even days, but she felt no fatigue or hunger or thirst. So perhaps it had been only minutes when the three figures shimmered back into existence before her. This time, there

were no shadows of light, no vague forms against the dark. this time, she could see them as clearly as if they had been standing in the bridge of her Star Destroyer with her. She noticed she'd been right. One of the three figures was definitely human. Or a species so closely resembling human that you would never be able to tell the difference until you dissected them, and even then perhaps you wouldn't. The second figure, the short one, was indeed green with pointy ears. Grey hairs covered his squat little head and she noticed his feet were something of a mix between regular human feet and claws. The same could be said for his hands. She didn't recognize the species, but she made a mental image of the figure and stored it in her mind. She was definitely going to have to find out what species he was. The third figure was slightly larger than the humanoid, but nothing was human about him. His skin was blue, with two huge horns sticking out of his head, tail-like protrusions where humans had ears, ending in another two huge horns. This species she did know. She had seen holos of the Emperor giving a speech in the Senate, shortly after the creation of the galactic Empire. One of these aliens had been by his side. She couldn't recall the alien's name, but she did remember he had been one of the Emperor's advisors. All three were wearing brown and grey robes, similar to the ones she had seen worn by Jedi. She had seen a few holo images of Jedi during her travels. Forbidden images in the Empire, but you could never destroy them all. And so some had survived, as had the stories of the Jedi. She was pretty sure these were Jedi.

"Who are you?" the alien asked. "Why have you come to this place? Only a Jedi can penetrate the defenses of this temple, and you, whatever you may be, are *not* a Jedi."

Dempsey looked at the alien. She wondered if this was the one the green figure had referred to as Bendo, or if that was the human. She recalled stories of the Jedi, legends where they were benign, and righteous, and just. Nothing like the monsters the Emperor had made them out to be. Yet if she was to make a decision based on this one, benign wasn't the word that first came to mind. She wondered what the proper response was. The alien had confirmed one thing she had considered. She had actually found, and penetrated, a Jedi temple. So the Emperor and Lord Vader had not found and destroyed all of them. And if that was the case, the vast amount of knowledge that was sure to be within the temple walls would be valuable beyond belief. Not in credits, but in power.

"Speak, you must," the green figure said. "Jedi, you are not, but Sith..." his voice trailed off. Dempsey thought fast. What exactly did the alien mean with the word Sith? As she had learned, the Sith had once been the name of an entire species, but they had disappeared so long ago no one had been able to remember when. They could be referring to Sith, as Lord Vader had been. Had they not referred to him as 'Dark Lord of the Sith'? But power like he and the Emperor had had, she wondered if she could compare. Or did they also include the Sith Order as it existed today?

"I'm unsure what you mean with Sith," she finally said. "But I think if I was one, I would have known." A neutral answer. She confirmed, nor denied it. Let them decide for themselves.

"Hmmm," the green figure said as he pondered her answer.

"Lies and deceit," the blue alien said. "Those are the ways of the Sith."

Dempsey spoke more forcefully now. "I told no lie. I know of only two Sith, and they are both dead." She looked at each in turn, and noticed a frown on the green alien's face. "Two, you say. Disturbing, this is."

"Not really," the human said. "After all, there are only two Sith. A Master, and an Apprentice. With both of them dead..." His voice trailed off.

"Unless the Apprentice took on an apprentice of his own," the blue alien finished his thought. "Betrayal is in their nature, so that would be likely."

The green alien nodded. "Indeed, indeed. Yet, no closer to an answer, this brings us." And again he stared at Dempsey. "Strong in the Force, she is. But it is anger, I sense."

"So a Sith indeed," the blue alien spoke up. "She cannot be here, the danger is too great."

The green alien turned his head and looked at him. "So eager you are," he said. "This is not the way of the Jedi." Dempsey frowned. If these three figures were Jedi, they obviously didn't see eye to eye with each other. She thought the big blue alien might even have just received a reprimand. It was obvious he was the most dangerous to her, and the green one might even be on her side. The human, she couldn't read. He had not expressed himself in such a way that she could place him.

"I sense no danger," the green alien said. "Yet the future, I cannot see. Always in motion she is, the future. But different, this is."

Both figures looked down at the green one, who apparently was their leader. "Different how?"

"Know this, I do not," the green alien said. "Know this, she does," she finished, as he pointed towards her. At this, the other two men looked at her again, and she couldn't help but notice both now had their hands on their hips. *No doubt*, she thought, *on the hilt of their light sabers*. She wondered if that would do them any good. After all, if she was right and these were the shadows of ancient Jedi that had died long ago, would their light sabers be able to hurt her? But then again, nothing of her current experience had seemed possible when she left the *Challenge*. This was not something she was willing to bet her life on. And while she was good with a light saber, she had never fought an actual Jedi, and she didn't look forward to facing off against three of them.

"Confusion, I sense in you," the green alien continued. "You know not what you see. Believe it. And tell me. What is it that you know?"

Dempsey thought for a moment, and decided that her best chance was to speak some of what she had come up with. How much, she didn't yet know. "You are dead," she said. "And have been for quite some time."

NINE

After a while, Dempsey fell silent. She had spoken of her suspicions that the three figures before her were long dead. That they were Jedi of an Order that no longer existed, in a galaxy that had forgotten about them. The three didn't respond at first. She could see them thinking about what she had said. Even the blue alien, the most hostile of them, appeared to think she was telling the truth. She had not told them everything, but that was for them to figure out.

"Disturbing, this is," the green alien said, as he looked at her. "Strange are the ways of the Force." The human nodded. "We know this temple was built on a special location," he said. "The Force potential of this world was beyond anything we have ever encountered."

The green alien nodded. "True this is. But also... unexpected."

The blue alien shook his head. "If this is true, the Sith will win. They will destroy the Jedi. And there is nothing we can do?"

The green alien shook his head. "Nothing. For us, the future this is. For her, the past. Change the past, we cannot."

"So where do we go from here?" Dempsey asked.

The green alien looked intensely at her. "Dangerous, this temple is," he said. "Never must the Sith find it."

Dempsey nodded. "I alone know of this place," she said. "And I see no reason to share its location with others. And as you have hopefully seen, I am not a Sith."

The blue alien frowned as if he did not completely believe her. But he said nothing.

"Leave, you must," the green alien continued. "Return here, you must not."

Dempsey shook her head. "I'm not sure I can do that," she replied. "I've been training myself in the ways of the Force for a long time now. There is no one I can turn to to expand my knowledge. I need to learn more, take in all the knowledge I can. The galaxy is in disarray. Perhaps this knowledge can help me restore some form of balance."

At this point, Dempsey didn't know if she believed herself. True, the galaxy was in disarray, with so many Imperial warlords and smugglers each declaring their own little Empire, but she also knew it was impossible to unite them. Even the newly established Republic would never succeed at that. Not that they would stop trying, but failure was a certainty.

"Meditate on this, you must," the green alien said.

"As we shall meditate upon this," the human followed. "Although in our case, I don't see what good it will do. If you are correct, we don't exist, and we can't influence events that are still to happen for you."

"Influence events, we can," the green alien corrected. "Through this one."

Dempsey wondered exactly what he meant with that. She wondered how far their power stretched. If they were here talking to her from centuries beyond their graves, what else could they do? What else could the Force do? And what could it make her do? A shiver of fear ran down her spine. Perhaps, she was in over her head this time.

The green alien waved his hand, and to Dempsey's left a new light glowed into existence. She looked at it. In its center, she saw a cube-shaped object, a few centimeters on each side. She moved towards it, and looked at it. Each face of the cube was identical. Her mind leapt as she realized what she was looking at. A Jedi holocron. She had heard of these objects, and the wealth of knowledge contained within them. But she had never seen one. The stories of these objects were many, but each one she had followed had ended in disappointment, to such an extent she had almost given up on every finding one. Sometimes she even believed they had all been destroyed. And here, she could almost touch one. Carefully, she reached out, and let the holocron rest on the palm of her hand. As soon as it touched her hand, the light died. She looked at the three Jedi standing before her. Again, it was the green one who spoke.

"Only the future will know," he said, "if you are a Jedi. For access to this holocron, only a Jedi will have." For a few moments, the four figures looked at each other. Then, the three Jedi Masters slowly faded into the darkness, and Dempsey was alone again. She sat down, and stared at the holocron. No one she knew had ever seen one, its value was immeasurable. And yet, that also meant that no one could tell her how to convince the holocron to reveal its secrets. Assuming it ever would. If the Jedi Master was correct, only a true Jedi would be able to open the holocron. And a true Jedi, she was not. She let the holocron roll around in her hands. It was heavier than she had expected. She would need to study the object. Very carefully. She didn't know how to open it, but she also didn't know what might happen if the holocron decided it had had enough of her tinkering. Assuming the holocron had that ability. But with the Force, who knew?

She closed her eyes, and took a deep breath. She opened her eyes again, and found she was looking at the large tree. From the outside this time. The temple had allowed her to leave, just as it had allowed her to enter. A good sign indeed.

TEN

Slowly, the X-wing's repulsors came to life, and with a lot of noise the starfighter slowly lifted off the ground. Dempsey hardly heard the noise, as the fighter's cockpit dimmed most of it. In the luggage compartment behind her, stored safely away in her rucksack, was the Jedi holocron. Dempsey tried not to think about it. There would be time enough for that later.

As the X-wing turned its nose skyward she accelerated, and as the sonic boom thundered across the forest, the blueish sky above her turned black as she broke free of the planet's atmosphere. The blue skies were replaced by a blue glow from the blue giant behind her. R5-D7 emitted a few beeps, and Dempsey confirmed the droid had indeed fed the coordinates into the nav computer. She swerved the X-wing around to take one last look at the planet below, and then pulled the X-wings hyperdrive lever. The stars turned into starlines as the X-wing made the jump into hyperspace, and Dempsey was on her way home.