

ONE

As Dempsey landed on the main landing pad of the Tarentum Castle, she could see a robed figure slowly coming her way. She wondered who would be coming to meet her, as she hadn't even announced her intent to come here. But only for a second. With as many as strong in the force gathered on one planet, someone was bound to have sensed her arrival.

As she set foot on the ground, she bowed her head towards the cloaked figure.

"Greetings, Master," she said. The robed figure stared at her, and then slowly removed the hood.

"It's been too long since you've set foot in the Castle, Anahorn," he said. "It's good to see you again."

Dempsey nodded. "I've missed this place."

As the two of them starting back for the Castle's main hall, the Quaestor of House Cestus continued. "I understand your new job as Tactical Officer is taking up a lot of your time," he said. "So what do we call you now anyway? Guardian, Dempsey, Anahorn, Admiral, Ma'am, Sir?"

Dempsey smiled. "It's all the same to me. I'm not all big on the whole admiral stuff. From time to time I still feel like a pilot. I suppose Dempsey will be fine."

Exar Kit smiled. "As you wish. You will just stick with Master."

Dempsey continued her smile. "I had expected nothing less, Master." Silently, she followed the Quaestor into the Main Hall of the Castle.

To her surprise, inside the Main Hall, several members of the Dark Council were waiting, including the new Grand Master. As she knelt before the Council, the Grand Master spoke to her.

"Welcome, Guardian Dempsey. Please rise." As she stood back up, he continued. "You have attracted a lot of attention to yourself in recent times. Your incredibly rise through the ranks in the TIE Corps cannot be dismissed, and we have noticed your strength in the Force here on Yridia as well. Compared to others of your position, your abilities and prowess with the lightsaber are astounding."

Dempsey looked up at the Grand Master. "Which is understandable, Master," she said. "Compared to others of my position, I have a dozen years of experience they lack. Give them another twelve years, and I am certain their abilities will be far beyond mine at this time."

Darth Vexus, or Czulvang Lah as he was known in the TIE Corps, nodded at her. "You refer to your time with C'baath," he said. "Yes, we have heard of that. As we have heard of your excursions with a lightsaber at your side as if you were a Dark Jedi with any claim to such a weapon."

"It has served me well, Master," Dempsey started. This didn't sound right. She knew that technically, according to the rules of the Brotherhood, she had no right to carry the weapon. She'd never paid much attention to that rule. After she had been initiated into the art of lightsaber combat, she'd continued practising, and her skill had slowly but steadily grown. She knew she was nowhere near good enough to take on a true Jedi, but against other beings, who could not draw upon the Force, it was in her eyes a magnificent weapon.

"It has, and we have noticed. We have also seen how your skill grows whenever you find the time to visit us here and train with the others." The words sounded harsh in her ears. Probably the way they were meant to. And she knew he was right. She wasn't on Yridia enough. "Therefore, we have decided to grant upon you the task of constructing your own lightsaber. Making use of these hand-me-downs is nice, but if you want to truly master the lightsaber, you will need to start by constructing your own. By fine-tuning it to yourself, to the way you want it to be. Only then can you ever become a true Dark Jedi."

For a moment, Dempsey thought she'd heard wrong. But she hadn't. Finally, they were going to let her become a Jedi Knight. "I am honored by your faith in me, Master," was all she could think of to say.

"You are free to do some research in the library here," the Grand Master continued. "Ask questions, and study as you wish. But when you leave Yridia, do not return until you have successfully constructed a lightsaber. You have absolute freedom in the way you want it to be. You can choose whatever materials you see fit, and use them in every way that you can. We will speak again, when you return."

The Grand Master turned, and started to walk away. But after three steps, he stopped, and turned his head. "*If* you return," he said. Then he turned his back and walked out of the Hall. The members of the Dark Council stood from their seats one by one, and followed in his footsteps.

When she was alone again with the Quaestor, she sighed. "That didn't sound too reassuring..."

Exar Kit nodded his head. "You are at a crossroads here, my apprentice," he said. "Either you prove now that you are worthy, or our ways will have to part."

Dempsey stood straight, and with a determined look on her face, looked at her Master. "I have never failed before, I will not begin to do so here. I will return, and I will have my own lightsaber." With that, she briskly turned, and walked out of the Hall. Kit stared at her as she walked away. He was unsure what to think. For the most part, he couldn't help but feel it was too soon for this.

TWO

For the next three days, Dempsey locked herself in the Castle's immense library. Given the way the Sith had been hiding since the times of Darth Bane, she was amazed with the sheer amount of books about them and their order. Most books however, she completely ignored. Instead, she focused on books that had something to do with lightsaber construction, in whatever way possible. She absorbed the information, refusing to make notes and walk out with all the information stored on a datapad. Information about hilts, techniques, crystals, single and double blades, pros and cons, difficulties, advantages and disadvantages. And slowly, she started to reach an idea about what she wanted.

For ten years, she had practised with the lightsaber she had gotten from Thrawn, and the one she had taken from C'baoth. In that time, she had already decided on things she liked and disliked about the two of them. It was nice to see others had come to the same conclusions as she had. And even nicer to see that others even had come to the exact opposite conclusions. It gave her the opportunity to compare her ideas to those of others. Mostly, in the end she stuck to her own ideas.

As she closed another one of the big books, she stood up and looked at the small window in the wall of the library. In the distance, she could see the Yridian star. The sight triggered a feeling she'd usually get when she was out of space for too long. Wherever she was, it was pretty obvious she was born to be in space, whether in the cockpit of a TIE or on the bridge of a Super Star Destroyer, being on a planet, with gravity, just wasn't for her.

She looked around and let out a sigh. Usually, students preparing to build their first lightsaber spent a lot longer than three days here. She didn't really like the idea though. And as she sat on the table, considering her options, she decided that she couldn't stay on Yridia any longer. The time had come to set out into the galaxy to collect the parts on her list. She put the large book that was next back on the shelf, grabbed her robe, and walked out the door.

Well, or tried to at least.

As she opened the large wooden door, she found Exar Kit waiting for her.

"Are you sure you're ready?" he asked.

She stopped, and looked at him. "Not really," she admitted. "But I can't stay here. This is not for me. I need to be out there." She looked up at the sky.

Kit nodded. "I felt as much when you first set foot on Yridia. Yours is a strange presence in the Force. Powerful, yet unfocused. Potent, yet untrained. Rough, but definitely with strong potential. I have yet to determine what it is exactly with you."

"Let me know when you find out, Master," Dempsey said. "All I know is I can't stay here. I've never been comfortable on a planet surface, and I gotta get out of here now. I have a job to do."

"Ah," Kit murmured. "So you have made a decision for your crystal."

Dempsey nodded. "I know where to get one."

"Get one?" Kit frowned. "Have you considered forging yourself one to your specific desires, as is our usual way? These crystals have more potential than naturally grown ones."

"I did," was her response. "But like I said, I can't stand to be planetside long enough for that. And second, who said anything about naturally grown?"

With that, she sidestepped the Consul, and walked out the library.

Exar Kit stood there, and watched her go, considering her words, trying to figure out what she had meant.

When the screeching of the ion engines signalled her departure, and he saw the streak of light through the Yridian sky where her TIE Defender had flown, he was still not sure. But he was intrigued.

THREE

As Dempsey stepped out of the cockpit of her TIE, over two dozen men, the deck crew probable, were standing, hands raised in salute. One man stood with them, but he wasn't one of them, obviously. His uniform was crisp, clean, and he didn't look like a mechanic at all.

"Welcome aboard the Mon Calamari starcruiser *Redemption*, Admiral," the man said. Dempsey returned the salute, and the man lowered his arm to a more comfortable position. "We are honored by your presence. It's not every day the command staff chooses to visit us. Will you be staying long?"

Dempsey stepped up to the man. "I will not stay long, Admiral Gunman," she said. "I'm just here to pick up a package, and then I'll be on my way. I have a busy schedule."

The man nodded. "As you wish, sir." Dempsey could here a slight tone of disappointment in his voice. "And what is it you wish?"

Dempsey looked around the hangar bay, and pointed at one of the B-wings. "One of those should do. And a place to store my Defender while I'm gone."

Gunman definitely looked surprised. "A B-wing? Surely your TIE Defender is far superior than a B-wing..." he started, but Dempsey cut him short.

"Of course it is. But where I'm going, I'd prefer not to be flying a TIE in any shape or form. Please have the B-wing prepped and loaded to go within the hour. I'll be in the dining hall." With that, Dempsey stepped passed the *Redemption's* Commodore, and walked away. Gunman watched her go. He never understood much of what the Command Staff did, and this just showed him one more example of that. Still, they were Command Staff. He pointed to several of the mechanics.

"You two, park that Defender in slot E. The rest of you, get that B-wing ready for launch. Load her up with torpedoes just in case." At that, the men scurried off and started working on the B-wing. Gunman watched them for a second, then walked off, back to the bridge.

Dempsey sat in a corner of the officer's mess hall, eating away at something that should have never been served. She had pondered making the chef eat it, but it would more trouble than it was worth. On her datapad, she had just transmitted a message to the Fleet Commander that she'd be taking a short leave of absence. He probably wouldn't like it, but she couldn't be concerned about that at this time.

On the other side of the mess hall, several people were sitting, pretending to be eating as well. Dempsey's senses however told her they were just staring at her. She didn't mind, nor care. She'd gotten that all her life in the Imperial Navy. Women were a rare sight, and women in power were even more rare. She'd only ever heard of one woman achieving a position of power under Palpatine, but she wasn't in the Imperial Navy either. Fortunately, Thrawn had been above the gender bias, and these days the Empire was so small it couldn't afford not to put women in positions where they might be very useful.

Half an hour later, Dempsey stepped back onto the hangar deck of the Mon Calamari starcruiser. She remembered the days back as a pilot, when the pilots of the *Challenge* had always referred to it as 'Rustbucket'. It was actually far less rusty than she had expected it to be.

As she walked into the light, one of the mechanics stepped up and saluted. "Your B-wing is ready, Admiral!" the young man said.

Dempsey gave him a faint smile and a nod. "Thank you," she said. The she walked over to the fighter, and climbed into the cockpit. She looked around, quickly remembering what all the displays meant and what all the buttons and levers did. She was faintly aware the mechanic was still talking to her, but she couldn't make it out. It couldn't be important anyway. She closed the hatch, and fired up the repulsors. With a hum they came to life,

and lifted the B-wing off the floor. She manoeuvred the fighter to the center of the hangar deck, and punched the comm switch.

"Dempsey to *Redemption* Flight Control. Taking off now. Take good care of my Defender while I'm away." Then she hit the throttle, and the B-wing shot out of the hangar into open space. She flew a circle around the *Redemption*, giving the nav computer enough time to calculate the first leg of the hyperspace jump, and as it beeped to signal the jump had been plotted, she pulled the hyperspace lever. The stars quickly stretched into lines, and the B-wing made the jump to light speed.

FOUR

Several days and several hyperspace jumps later, the B-wing emerged from hyperspace somewhere in the Inner Core systems. In the distance, a red giant lit up space, and in its shadow orbited a rocky boulder barely large enough to be called a planet. Dempsey checked her sensors, and as expected, there was nothing here. She relaxed a bit, and pointed the fighter towards the rock.

A few minutes later, she engaged the fighter's repulsor lifts, and gently touched down on the planet surface. She double checked her vacuum suit, and opened the canopy. As she exited the cockpit, she looked around her. All the marks that she wanted to see were there. No one had been here since she had last set foot here. Good.

She started walking, but as with any planet with low mass, the low gravity made walking a tedious task. It took her over ten minutes to cross a distance that would normally take less than two. But finally, she reached her destination: a cave, hidden among the rocks. She entered the cave, and soon the light of the nearby star that had shone her path disappeared. She activated a light on her helmet, and continued walking further into the cave.

A few minutes later, she finally reached the end of the cave. She sat down on a rock to catch her breath. The trip into the cave had exhausted her. She sat for several moments, closing her eyes and exercising Jedi mind control tricks to calm herself down. Slowly, she sensed her heart rate dropping, and her heavy breathing returned to normal. Convinced she was back to normal, she stood back up, and entered the large cavernous room. As she turned her head, she lit up the entire cavern. It was empty, except for a big metal chest in the center. Dempsey smiled. Here, hidden away in the middle of nowhere, shielded by the radiation from the red giant, was one of the great treasures of the galaxy.

For a moment she hesitated, then she stepped closer. She removed the top panel, and a keypad appeared. Oldfashioned, it used 11 keys for 11 digits in some old forgotten language. Only entering the right sequence of digits would open the chest. Enter the wrong sequence, or mistype even one of the digits, and the chest would not open. And if it was made properly, the ensuing explosion would make sure you would not get a second chance.

This had been Thrawn's gift to her, days before his death. She knew the sequence. She had memorized it, and the map to this asteroid, and destroyed the only copy in existence. She knelt down before the chest, and her gloved fingers slid over the keypad. She closed her eyes, and envisioned the sequence of fifteen digits. One by one, she hit the corresponding keys. For a moment she hesitated before entering the last digit, but there was no way back now anyway. She hit the key, and held her breath.

For a moment, nothing happened. The she heard a soft beep, and she imagined she could hear a mechanism activating. Or maybe she really did hear that.

Of course she didn't hear it. It was only in her mind. In the vacuum of space, no sound could possibly traverse the distance between the mechanism and her ears.

She opened her eyes again, and stepped back. The chest appeared to still be locked, but she could see a small handle in one of the sides, that had not been there before. She grabbed the handle, and carefully used it to open the chest's lid. As the chest opened, the light of her lamp reflected from within, and a yellowish glow emanated from the chest. As she layed eyes on the source of the light, a strange sensation came over her, for a moment her mind went blank, and she sank to the ground unconscious.

FIVE

"His pride will be his downfall. He underestimates us. He underestimates me, and the power of the Chimaera. Such is bad, and he will pay the ultimate price for it."

Dempsey opened her eyes to the sound of that familiar, cold voice. For a fraction of a second she wondered where she was, but this was a place she could not forget, even if she were to try. The bridge of the Imperial class Star Destroyer Chimaera, Grand Admiral Thrawn's flagship. She looked around. Familiar faces were at most of the stations. Gark, the weapons specialist. Lagner, the slicing expert they picked up a few weeks ago to decrypt the latest New Republic codes. And Gilad Pellaeon, Captain of the Chimaera.

Home.

Dempsey followed Thrawn's gaze and stared outside the transparisteel viewport of the warship's bridge. In the distance, she could see a large Mon Calamari starcruiser, the newer MC90 type. Between that ship and the Chimaera, several dozen small blips of lights darted around each other, occasionally fading in small explosions. Imperial TIE Fighters dogfighting Rebel starfighters for superiority, and a free path for their bombers to attack the enemy capital ship. The Battle for Tarmel.

Dempsey raised her arm and pointed into space. "His right flank. There's a weakness in his defenses."

Unnoticeable to her, Thrawn offered a smile. "Correct," he said. "And in a few moments, he will realize that too. Although it will be far too late to save his ship."

Together they focused on the right flank of the defense fighters. Then suddenly a form appeared seemingly out of nowhere as the Lancer class frigate Derdimon jumped out of hyperspace right on top of the enemy fighters. As soon as she could, her twenty turbolaser batteries opened fire, making short work of the Rebel starfighters.

"Launch TIE Bomber squadrons," Thrawn said. Pellaeon nodded, and the comm officer sent a signal to the Chimaera's hangar bays. Moments later, two dozen TIE bombers left the hangar bays like wasps from their nests. In a matter of seconds, they formed up into tight formations, and commenced their bombing run on the Mon Calamari starcruiser. Dempsey squinted her eyes, and she could see the blueish glare of the proton torpedoes being fired. For a second she tried counting, but there were too many to count. Silently, the lethal torpedoes homed in on their target, and after another several seconds, small explosions could be seen as the first volley of torpedoes exploded harmlessly off the starcruiser's heavy shields. But the second volley was right behind them. Most of them also exploded against the shields, but the sheer amount of destructive force was overwhelming to even the most powerful shield generators, and already some of them managed to break through the shields. What little damage they did was insignificant compared to the third volley. One after another, dozens of torpedoes crashed into the cruiser's hull, each explosion ripping a gaping hole and eating away at the ship. Fires raged where the atmosphere vented into open space. Then the cruiser seemed to lose its engines as it started tilting over.

"And thus ends the battle for the day," Thrawn said. He turned his chair and looked straight at Dempsey. "I have something for you. Meet me on deck Seven in one hour." Thrawn stood up, and turned to Pellaeon. "The bridge is yours, Captain," he said. Pellaeon saluted, and Thrawn walked off the bridge.

Pellaeon turned back towards the viewport. "Recall our fighters. Signal the Captain of the Derdimon. Right on time, and right on the spot. Excellent work."

For minutes, Dempsey stood there on the bridge. Deck Seven. Only one area was in use on deck Seven. Thrawn's private chambers. It was rare anyone of the Chimaera's crew set foot on deck Seven. Dempsey wondered what Thrawn had in mind. For a moment, she

considered a potential interest in her body, but quickly rejected that. Thrawn wasn't that kind of man. That was her past talking. And that past was long gone.

She would find out in an hour.

Promptly one hour later, Dempsey exited the turbolift and stepped onto deck Seven. At the end of the hall, the door to Thrawn's private quarters was wide open. She swallowed her anxiety away, and walked forward.

As her foot crossed the threshold and landed on the floor of the room, a gnarling sound made her freeze in her stride. Or perhaps it was the sensation of cold metal touching her throat.

"Let her pass, Rukh," came Thrawn's voice. "She is here by my invitation."

Then you might as well have told him so before I nearly slit my throat,' Dempsey thought to herself. But of course he would not have done so. After all, an entry like this would remind people of the presence of the Noghri bodyguards. One could rarely see them, but they were everywhere Thrawn was. Dempsey didn't know one member in the crew who did not fear the Noghri bodyguards. Except Thrawn himself perhaps.

Dempsey entered the room. Thrawn was standing in the middle, looking at a holographic image. "Dawn of the Night," Thrawn said. "Created by an unknown sculptor from Serenno. It's majestic. The image doesn't really do it justice, don't you think?"

Dempsey thought for a second. "I don't know," she finally replied. "I'd have to see the original to make a good comparison."

Thrawn turned and smiled at her. "Excellent answer. Frankly, the original isn't all that majestic, it is about as big as a decent sized blaster pistol." He waved his hand, and the image disappeared. "Still, even from a holographic image like this, a lot can be learned. About the creator, his species. All the information is there, you just have to learn to find it."

Thrawn walked towards a large seat on the far end of the room, and made a gesture towards another. "Have a seat," he said. "I think it's time to tell you why I have asked you to come here."

Dempsey stepped forward and headed for her seat. "I must admit I have been wondering," she said.

Thrawn sat down and waited until she was seated. "The good Master C'baoth has been a bit careless with his possessions on Wayland. After he came aboard the Chimaera, my troops have been going through the mountain complex, looking for interesting things. Things that appear to have no value, specifically. After all, the less valuable it seems, the more valuable it probably is. Otherwise the Emperor would not have brought it there. One of the items they retrieved was this."

He picked up an old box and handed it to her. "Be very careful with it. The box holds an item which we believe was used centuries ago to record data. It will probably be destroyed when handled roughly."

Dempsey opened the box. A piece of paper was within.

"It is a map," Thrawn continued. "As well as a code. The language used is ancient. Even the most advanced protocol droids could not understand it. Until we recovered a small holocron. It contained a key that provided the necessary information to translate this text. Some of it we were able to decipher. Not much I'm afraid. Fortunately, the map is pretty much undamaged."

Dempsey closed the box and looked up. "But why tell me this?" she wondered.

"Because, as we both know, you possess a talent in the Force. Untrained as you are now, there will come a time in your future, when you will have that power at your disposal, to do with as you please. How you will wield that power I cannot say, but I do know you will one day reach the same prowess as the old Jedi Masters. That map," he pointed towards the box. "That map holds the location of a crystal that can be used as the power crystal in a lightsaber."

Thrawn stood up, walked over to a wall, and waved his hand. On the wall, a projection appeared of the galaxy. As the dots of light came closer and closer, they traveled through the known galaxy. Stars and constellations rushed by, and after a few minutes their journey came to an end. A small yellow star appeared, and behind that lay a small planet.

"This is Metalorn, a small planet in the Outer Rim. Thousands of years ago, the planet was lush with life. It probably still is, but no one knows. The exact location of the planet is unknown. And even if we could find it, we know the outer atmosphere of the planet suffers from the yellow star. While on the surface, temperatures are quite acceptable, the atmospheric temperatures are so high, no known metal or alloy can withstand it. It makes the city at Nkllon look like paradise.

It is unknown how, but some way one of the old Sith Masters retrieved a crystal from Metalorn. He used the crystal in his own lightsaber, and legend has it he was never defeated while wielding it. After his death, the crystal was taken from the lightsaber, and hidden in the vast expanse of the universe. And this map tells you where it is."

Dempsey was silent.

"Why me?"

"Because I have no use for it myself," Thrawn said. "As much as I would like, the Chiss people have never known anyone with Force-sensitivity, and I doubt that will change in the foreseeable future. C'baoth is not an option, and neither is Skywalker. And I do not know any other with sufficient Force powers to be able to use this crystal.

But you are probably wondering what I want in return. That, I can not tell you. But rest assured, that if you accept this, there will come a day in the future, when I expect to be repaid in full."

Dempsey considered her options. She had no idea what Thrawn would want in return, but she could count on it she was not going to like it when the time came. On the other hand, no one ever refused Thrawn anything. If she rejected this gift, who knows what he would do.

"I accept, Admiral," she said. "I will keep this safe, until the time comes that I can use it to my advantage."

Thrawn nodded. "As I expected."

He abruptly turned, and walked away, leaving Dempsey standing there. Obviously her cue to leave.

SIX

Slowly Dempsey opened her eyes. Disoriented, she tried to get up, but quickly realized that had been a bad idea. Her sudden motion and the almost non-existent gravity caused her to rise too fast, and a shot of pain went through her head. She closed her eyes and focused, and the pain quickly subsided. She slowly got up, and turned towards the source of the yellowish light.

In the chest lay a small crystal, no larger than a small egg. The Metalorn crystal, unique in the universe. She didn't know how powerful the crystal was, but fully expected to find out. She could sense the Dark Side all around the crystal. Whoever the Sith was that had retrieved it from the planet Metalorn, it would have had to have been a very powerful one. Perhaps as powerful as Ragnos, or Revan himself.

Dempsey gently let her glove slide over the perfect surface of the crystal. She picked it up. It was heavier than she had expected, and it also appeared to be larger than the crystals she had seen in lightsabers. Then again, that could just be the light. She carefully put the crystal in a small bag hanging off her waist, and closed the chest. Then she turned, and headed back for her starfighter.

As she exited the cave, her helmet's built in solar filter immediately activated. In the time she had spent in the cave, the entrance rock had turned, and the entrance now directly faced the red giant in the distance. For a second Dempsey pondered how long had passed. She quickly made her way back to the B-wing's cockpit. She stored the bag in the luggage compartment, and closed the canopy. With a few flicks of switches, the B-wing came back to life. The cockpit repressurized, and the instrument panel and HUD lit up. When the pressure gage went green, she unlocked her helmet, and took it off. She removed her thick gloves, and replaced them with thinner versions designed for use with the B-wing. Slowly the temperature in the cockpit also rose back to acceptable levels.

After a few minutes, Dempsey fired up the repulsor lifts, and slowly the B-wing lifted off the ground. For a moment, it hovered silently a few feet above the surface, and then Dempsey activated the Slayn & Korpil thrusters, and the B-wing started to accelerate. A few moments later, the B-wing's nav computer indicated it had completed calculating the first leg of the trip back home. Hoping she wouldn't run into any overactive New Republic patrols between here and Imperial space, she pulled the hyperspace lever.

SEVEN

It took a few jumps, but finally Dempsey relaxed a bit. Her nav computer told her the last jump had taken her back into Imperial space. In the distance, a yellow star lit up the nearby area, and she could see the rays of light glistening as they bounced off a large orbital space platform. Pyrath Naval base.

Alarms started ringing throughout her cockpit as the computer picked up TIEs being launched. Whoever was doing the shift at the base wasn't taking any chances. Which was probably a good thing, being a major Imperial base close to Rebel territory. She quickly changed the channel on her comm system and activated.

"Pyrath Naval base, this is Admiral Anahorn Dempsey of the Emperor's Hammer Strike Fleet. Request a location update on the starcruiser *Redemption* and clearance to jump to its location."

For a moment the radio stayed silent. Then a female voice responded. "Unidentified B-wing - shut down your engines and power down all systems except life support while we verify your transmission. Our fighters are ordered to open fire if you do not comply."

Someone was definitely showing off by following to rulebook to the letter. Too bad for her, Dempsey was in a hurry.

"I do not have time for this, Pyrath. I transmitted my authorization code. Verify the code, it takes 2 seconds. You will supply me with the information I requested, and order these TIEs to fall back, or I will have your head on a silver platter at dinner tonight!"

A crackling sound filled the cockpit, and for a moment Dempsey thought the woman on the other end was not smart enough to figure it out. But then the advancing TIE Advanced starfighters pulled a curb and returned to the platform. A datastream scrolled over her computer screen, and a man's voiced broke the silence.

"Your code has been accepted, Sir. Please accept my apologies for the delay, I hope you understand security is of the utmost importance here. I have transmitted the coordinates you requested to your fighter. May the Dark Side be with you." With that, the radio channel closed. Whoever was on the other end obviously didn't want a response from her. Which saved Dempsey the trouble of having to come up with one. She quickly punched the coordinates into the nav computer, and as soon as the computer accepted them and they passed a safety check, she pulled the hyperspace lever. The stars elongated as they turned into lines, Pyrath disappeared from view, and the B-wing jumped back into hyperspace.

EIGHT

After a short stay on the *Redemption*, Dempsey quickly moved on. With the crystal secured, the hardest part of her task was about to begin. The required materials were already collected. It was one of the few tangible possessions she had.

A few hours after departing the *Redemption*, she landed her TIE Defender in the hangar bay of the Victory class Star Destroyer *Sinister*, home of the Tactical Office. She popped the canopy, took off her helmet, and exited the fighter. On the deck, an older man welcomed her back. She nodded, and walked past him. Before doing anything else, she went to her private quarters aboard the Star Destroyer. Once there, she placed the helmet on a table, and walked towards the far wall. The wall bare except for her personal crest. She put her hands on the wall, and they both slowly moved in different directions, until a small barely audible click could be heard, and a previously unseen panel was showing. She placed her hand flat on the panel.

"Dempsey," was all she said. After a second, the panel lines lit up green, the panel retracted into the wall, and slid aside, giving access to a small storage compartment. In the compartment was a small box. Dempsey carefully picked it up and took it out of the wall. She tapped the wall twice, and the panel slid back into position. Dempsey looked at it. She knew it was there, but she could not see it anymore.

She put the box on her desk, and opened it. She pulled the lid back, and gazed upon the items in the box. Although the simple things like electrical wires and such weren't there, the box held most of the things she would need for the task. A custom crafted cylinder lay diagonally in the box. She had crafted this hilt several years back, while hiding away on a remote planet, trying to start a new life. It hadn't worked out quite as she had planned, but she had managed to leave the planet with the cylinder, which at that time was all that was important.

She put the contents of the box onto the desktop, and added some items from a drawer. The box was placed on the floor, and she sat down behind the desk. Then she slowly removed a small sack from her clothing, and took out the crystal, and placed it next to the other items.

For ten minutes, she just stared at the items arranged before her. Then she closed her eyes, and concentrated. After a few minutes, slowly, the darkness she saw through her closed eyes started showing patterns. Flashes of red and blue faded in and out of existence, and she could feel the balls of her eyes moving rapidly against the inside of her eyelids. The she deepened her concentration, shutting out all the emotions she could feel coming from the other people on the ship, until it was just her and the darkness.

To someone who saw her, the sight would have been very strange. Dempsey's head had slumped, and the rapid movement of her eyes was visible. It almost appeared as if she had stopped breathing as well. The only way you could tell she was actually still alive, was because of the movement of her hands and fingers. They were frantically moving all over the materials on the desk, picking up items, putting them together, and moving on. Dozens of tiny parts, too small for human fingers to pick up and handle, seemed to be flying all on their own, finding their way to the exact spot they should be, the Dark Side carefully making small joints that would keep them in their place. Slowly, the number of items on the desk started to decrease visibly, as more and more of them were incorporated into the eight inch long cylinder.

Finally, only the cylinder and the yellow crystal remained.

EIGHT

How long she sat there at the desk, she didn't know. It could have been minutes, it could have been hours, or even days. But when Dempsey finally opened her eyes, she saw only two things lying on the desk before her. She picked up the cylinder, now a nearly constructed lightsaber, and weighed it in her hands. It was heavier than the lightsabers she had used before. But this one had a strange feel to it. She could almost feel the Dark Side flowing through it, even though it was completely inanimate.

She flicked the switch, but nothing happened. She smiled. Of course nothing happened.

She pushed two small, barely visible buttons at opposite ends of the lightsaber, and with the Force flicked the switch again. This time, a small hatch opened, showing the inside of the weapon. She inspected it closely, and smiled again. Everything looked the way she had envisioned it. There was only one thing missing.

She picked up the yellow Metalorn crystal, and slowly inserted it into an opening in the lightsaber's construction. The crystal fit perfectly, and as she pushed it in, three small handles secured it in place. She dropped the Force grip in the activation switch, and released the two buttons. The hatch closed, and became as invisible as the panel on the wall.

Exhausted as she was, Dempsey stood up, and with her right hand picked the lightsaber up off the desk. With the crystal inserted, it had gotten a little heavier.

"This is going to take some getting used to," she whispered to herself.

She clicked her fingers, and a small remote dropped from the ceiling and hovered in front of her. With a flick of her thumb, the new lightsaber came to life. The familiar hissing sound of the extending blade told her this just might work. But unlike any blade she had ever seen before, the lightsaber's blade had an iridescent yellow glow about it.

"Nice," she whispered. She closed her eyes, and focused. In her mind she could see the remote slowly dancing before her. She felt a discharge as the remote launched its attack, and easily parried it. She opened her eyes again, and the darting remote went silent, hovering in its place. She flicked off her lightsaber, and looked at the weapon.

"This is definitely going to take some getting used to."