

*Love (love)*  
*Devotion (devotion)*  
*Feeling (feeling)*  
*Emotion (emotion)*  
*Don't care what people say.*  
*Just follow your own way.*  
*Don't give up, and use the chance*  
*to return to innocence.*  
*That's not the beginning of the end.*  
*That's the return to yourself.*  
*The return to innocence.*  
*It's the return to innocence.*

From the song "Return to Innocence" by Enigma

**50 km west of CSP capital, Elaya,  
Seraph, Caperion System, Date unknown**

"Daesha. Daesha, you need to get up," a voice called out.  
Daesha slowly opened her eyes and sleepily blinked, trying to clear the blariness from her glowing red eyes.  
"Come on, sleepyhead, we need to get you dressed," the voice called again.  
Looking about, Daesha could see a figure standing in front of her.  
Squinting her eyes, Daesha watched as the figure came into focus.  
"Vik'mayu?" Daesha said in a surprised, questioning voice. "Why are you dressed like that?"  
"You don't remember what today is?" Ristaria said, smiling as she looked at Daesha.  
Daesha shook her head, her lekku whipping back and forth.  
"Well, today is the day that your mommy and daddy are getting married, remember?"  
Daesha's eyes shot open wide as she gasped loudly, shot out of her bed, and wildly raced around her room, looking for her clothes.  
"Hang on, you little blue speedster, I've got your dress right here," Ristaria said as she reached over and picked up a frilly pink and white dress from the table beside Daesha's bed.

After a few moments, Ristaria managed to corral the now highly rambunctious Daesha and coaxed her into getting dressed.  
"I don't think your mom or dad would be too happy if their favorite flower girl couldn't be there," Ristaria said as she helped Daesha get her shoes on.  
"Everything okay in here?" A voice asked from the now open doorway.  
"Nope, no problem. Everything is good here," Ristaria said as she looked at her husband with a smile.  
And how about our little flower girl? Are you ready to walk ahead and lead your mommy to your daddy?" Si'Vran asked.

"Yes!" Daesha proudly stated. She then turned her head toward Ristaria and kissed her on the cheek. "Thank you, *Vik'mayu*, for helping me."

"You are welcome, sweetie. Now, we need to get going so we can help your mommy get ready," Ristaria said as she hugged Daesha. Then looking up at Si'vran, "We'll meet you and Jasten at the Sunrider Gardens,"

"Okay, where are we off to again?" Jasten asked as he and Si'vran were in Jasten's speeder racing through the countryside toward the Elaya cityscape.

"The Sunrider Gardens in Tokare City. Don't you remember? We were there with Xendar last night doing some last-minute setup work."

"Yeah, I know where we are going. I'm just nervous, that's all," Jasten admitted. "I've been through missions that would test the mettle of any man alive, but this, this makes those missions look like a training exercise!" He exclaimed in his usual slow drawl.

"It's not every day that a man gives his little girl away in marriage," Si'vran said in an understanding tone. "Though, I have to wonder, how did those two ever meet? For the most part, they are the complete opposite of each other, and it doesn't seem very likely that they would frequent the same social circles."

### **Caelestis City, Ragnath**

#### **Near Border Crossing 17**

##### ***Some time before the present day.***

"Hey, kid, wait up a minute, will ya?" An older security sergeant called out as he ran up to Xendar, who was walking away from the station toward his rented speeder.

Xendar stopped and slowly turned toward the sergeant. "Yes?" He asked in an impassive voice.

"I'm taking the recruits down to The Emperor's Club to celebrate; why don't you join us?"

"I don't drink," Xendar said as he resumed walking toward the speeder. He paused, then turned to regard the sergeant as a look of puzzlement crossed his face. "Why are you celebrating? You and your security team failed the exercise."

"Kid, you just gave me...the new recruits... and this security section, the biggest drubbing we are likely to get in our lives. You didn't act like a regular force user; you were more like an incredibly cunning wild predator. Exploiting our weaknesses and slowly cutting us down. Even the force sensitives we have on our security detail had a hard time figuring out your next move. You just showed Command that we really need to keep on our toes and incorporate some new ideas into our training. So, why don't you join us? It's my way of saying thank you."

Xendar started to say that he wasn't interested, but something in his mind began to insistently tell him to accept the offer.

Stepping inside the club, Xendar followed the people of his group. The sergeant led them to one of the concert halls. He kept going on about how there was some hot new talent playing in one of the rooms and that they would only be there for one night. Sighing as he walked up to the bar, he ordered a non-alcoholic beverage made with spices, milk, and local fruits. *Once I finish this.* Xendar thought to himself, looking at his drink, *I am out of here.*

"Hey kid, over here!" the sergeant shouted from one of the tables.

Xendar sighed again, rolled his eyes, and shook his head as he made his way through the crowds sitting at the other tables, waiting for the main show to begin.

*I don't know why I even agreed to come here! This was a lousy idea.* Xendar thought to himself as he sat in a chair, waiting for the show to begin. That particular thought had crossed his mind for the umpteenth time since he walked into the club. Giving off yet another sigh, he was just about to stand up and take his leave when she appeared.

A lone spotlight lit up the stage, and the silhouette of a woman appeared. A tall woman with red-tinged chocolate-colored skin and platinum blonde hair stood center stage wearing a simple red dress with a single blue flower in her hair. And as the accompanying music started to play, she began to sing. Her mellifluous voice echoed throughout the room. Xendar dropped back into his chair like a lead weight as all thoughts of leaving vanished like smoke in the wind. *She's beautiful!* Xendar thought to himself. Enchanted and mesmerized, Xendar eagerly watched her performance.

She finished her song to thunderous applause. After giving a bow, she turned toward where Xendar was sitting and flashed an amazing smile. Which caused Xendar's heart to skip a beat. Xendar's mind, normally an ice-cold, logical, precise, and ordered machine, had gone completely and utterly erratic and was running wild with several emotions he had never experienced before. But to him, one of the strangest ones was that he secretly hoped that her smile was meant for him.

*Dream on, you idiot!* He thought to himself, trying to get his mind back under control. *She meant that smile for everyone.* At least, that is what he thought until she walked off the stage and headed in his direction.

"Do you mind if I sit here?" She asked as she stood in front of Xendar.

"Uh.. please, go, go right ahead. Can I...Can I get you something?"

"Thank you, no." She said, smiling at him. "I'm Oriyanna Rathelin. And you are?"

"Xendar...Xendar Thendaris," Xendar stammered.

"Agent One to base, Veradun and Eleena are interacting, results are promising, Agent One out," the security sergeant whispered into a hidden comlink as he walked toward the bar.

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"From what I remember, they met at The Emperor's Club. Oriyanna was completing an infiltration requirement for her admission into the Black Nova Spec Ops team by acting as a singer. While Xendar was there due to some kind of an invite from a security team he had trounced," Jasten stated. "Though, some conspiracy theorist I ran into a while back, was trying to tell me that those two were part of some project called the Unified Force Experiment. I guess it was some kind of attempt to create an extremely cohesive two-being fighting team. Supposedly, Xendar and Oriyanna were a part of the Veradun and Eleena project, which was supposed to be the pairing of a strong force user male and a female special operations soldier. I never put much stock in it, but after some events that happened when the two of them started seeing each other. Well, it kind of plays into that theory. But whatever, if someone was playing a game to get those two together, it worked. Those two are getting married today, which some could say proof of that the project was a success."

**Tokare City, Seraph**  
**Near the Sunrider Gardens**  
**Date Unknown**

As Oriyanna walked through the Sunrider gardens, she watched as the morning sun rose in the sky over Tokare City; its tendrils of light and warmth began to make their presence known to all. Moving forward, it gently kissed the flowers and plants of Sunrider Gardens, enticing them to share their beauty and color.

And as the sun climbed up the Galek tree, Oriyanna stopped for a moment, and in a moment of indulgence, leaned against the Galek tree, enjoying the scent of the tree, and the feeling of the warmth from the sunlight as it played across her face.

"So, this is Sunrider Gardens; I can see why you and Xendar would want to get married here," a female voice called out, and a tall, striking, Falleen female with a headful of raven black hair appeared.

Oriyanna smiled, stepped forward, and wrapped the Falleen in a warm, loving embrace.

"Nervous?" The Falleen playfully asked as the two of them stepped away from each other.

"Yeah, I am," Oriyanna said with a timid smile. "I've been through all sorts of high-stress missions, and not once did I ever have it this bad."

"Everyone gets them, Oriyanna. Just before your father and I got married. I was waiting for the ceremony to start. I was shaking so bad you could have put a dead blade in my hand, and you would have sworn I was holding a vibroblade. But after walking down the aisle and as your father took my hand, I knew everything was going to work out just fine. Do you know why?" Deshavara asked.

Oriyanna just shook her head.

"Because he was shaking worse than I was!" Deshavara giggled.

"Dad was an eighteen-year-old human, so I can see why he would be nervous. But Mom, you were a hundred and thirty-six when you two got married; you had been around a lot longer than Dad and had to experience more," Oriyanna stated.

"Sweetie, contrary to how things look now. Before I met your father, I was an incredibly shy and retiring person. Yes, I was flying in fighter squadrons for a long time. But until I met your father, flying was the only thing in my life. Another problem I had to live with was that being a Falleen was not a help; the constant stream of men vying for my attention was nerve-wracking! Most of them were the types that were interested in me not as a person, but because I was a Falleen. Then, I met your father; he was different than the others. And as time passed, he was the first to get me out of my shell. The first to sweep me off my feet and the first and only one I wanted to spend my life and raise our children with. And that part of the dream came true after we were able to adopt you."

Oriyanna smiled at her mother, "I'll bet you gave Dad quite a shock when he found out how old you were,"

"Deshavara started to giggle again, "We both had one! we didn't learn about our age differences until your father's nineteenth birthday, and that happened six months after we had been married."

A loud, insistent beeping from Deshavara's wrist chrono stopped the conversation.  
"Come on," Deshavara said, grabbing her daughter's wrist. "We need to get you ready."

"Oh, you look beautiful! You are going to floor Xendar when he sees you," Deshavara said proudly to Oriyanna, who was standing in front of her, now wearing a wedding dress.  
"Thanks, Mom, and thank you, Ristaria; you don't know how much it means to me to be able to wear my mother's wedding dress."

"You're welcome," Ristaria said with a smile, "You are just a little taller than your mother, so it was an easy fix,"

"Now there's a sight to see," A Lethan Twil'lek named Shi'anna playfully stated as she finished putting on her bridesmaid dress. "Xendar being floored. How do you floor someone who seems almost completely impassive?"

"Oh, it can happen, just because someone may seem to be one way, but in reality, be an entirely different person," a furless Devaronian female named Rella stated,

"Yeah, that's true, but you don't become one of the "Infamous Five" or get a nickname like Nightmare just for being a nice person. Not that I am going to say anything bad about it, but anyone who can make a Principate commander almost soil themselves at the mere mention of their name is okay in my book." Shi'anna said, smiling at Oriyanna

"As my father used to say, "One person's hero, is another person's monster," Rella simply stated.

For some reason, the word, monster triggered a memory in Oriyanna's mind.

## **Repair Room 5**

### **Docking Bay 12**

### **Nesolat Station**

### **Orbiting the planet Arx**

### **During the Attack on Arx**

Oriyanna sat on a container, cleaning and polishing her DC-17m blaster rifle while humming quietly to herself. She had finished cleaning the barrel when she heard a slight noise coming from the prisoner that Xendar had brought in several hours ago. She watched as the Huntress tested her bonds, trying to work her way out of them.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Oriyanna said as she reached over and turned on a small light.

"Who are you, and what do you want with me?" The Huntress snarled.

Oriyanna stopped cleaning and looked at the Huntress. "My name is Oriyanna, and you are a prisoner. Figure it out from there."

Then Oriyanna went back to cleaning her blaster.

"You won't get anything out of me!" The Huntress yelled.

Oriyanna rolled her eyes and sighed. "Did anyone ask you for anything?"

A chime from a holopad cut the sparsely awkward conversation off. Reaching over to a nearby container, Oriyanna switched the holo on. A familiar black-cloaked figure appeared.

"You butcher! Murderer! You killed my sisters!" the Huntress screamed in hysterics.

Xendar turned toward the Huntress and in a whisper-quiet voice, uttered a single word.  
"Enough."

The Huntress scuttled back against the wall, not wanting anything to do with him. Xendar then turned back to Oriyanna. "A few more survivors were found. I brought them in a little while ago. I tried to find you when I came in with them, but Ranith said that you were unavoidably detained."

"Yes, I was. But now, I am on guard duty, watching that prisoner you brought in," Oriyanna stated.

"I see that," Xendar dryly replied.

The Huntress growled at them, only for Xendar to glance at her, causing her to scuttle back further into the dark.

"You need to get some rest, and I have some loose ends to tie up, but I hope to see you when I come back in," Xendar said.

"I'll get some rest in a little while," Oriyanna said. She then stopped, looked at the figure, and smiled.

"I love you," she said as she held up her hand in front of Xendar's figure on the holopad.

"I love you too," Xendar warmly replied as he mirrored her gesture, holding his hand near her hand.

And with a high-pitched whine, the holo went dead.

"You are in love with that devil?! How can you have feelings for that cold-hearted demon?! That monster murdered my sisters!" The Huntress screeched as she shuddered in revulsion.

"So you say. And whether or not that monster and I are in love with each other is really none of your business," Oriyanna stated as she snapped the anti-armor grenade launcher onto her DC-17.

"And one more word out of you, and your last meal is going to be a grenade. Is that clear?"  
The Huntress mutely nodded.

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"Oriyanna, Oriyanna, Oriyanna. Hey, boss, are you still with us?" a female voice stated.

Oriyanna gave a start, "Sorry, Trina, I got caught up in a memory."

Trina Sarawon, a young Miralian woman, looked at her commanding officer.

"Not getting cold feet, are you?" Trina asked.

Oriyanna smiled, "Not for this mission. I have been looking forward to this one for a long time."

"Good to hear that. But, a piece of advice. You really need to keep your head in the game,"

"Now there's an irony, you handing me a piece of advice that I constantly tell you. Don't you have a lock to pick?"

"Sorry, boss, not today. The ladies of the First Scholae Palantinae Advanced Response Team are on a mission to ensure their commanding officer gets her just due. But don't worry; Blaze and I have volunteered for an ultra-vital mission. We have a date tonight with a couple of boys from your dad's Night Wraith team, and we will see what information we can extract from them. Right, Blaze?"

Salanis Ratoolon, an Epicanthix. Who was slipping on her shoes at that moment, smiled brightly as she stood up.

"Yesss, enjoy your last momentsss asssss a ssssingle woman becaussss thossss dayssss are now over!" Cuddles said as she started to make a ssssss ssss noise.

"So, says someone who is the proud mother of six children," Oriyanna playfully fired back.

Cuddles gave Oriyanna the Barbel equivalent of a toothy grin.

"Okay, everyone, it's just about time to start the ceremonies," a voice called out from outside the temporary building.

### **Tokare City, Seraph**

#### **Sunrider Gardens**

#### **Date Unknown**

"Settle down, Ranith; the babies aren't due any time soon; I just sat down wrong," Quista Scrage said, smiling at her husband. Who, since learning that Quista was pregnant, had turned into a nervous wreck, going out of his way to make sure that she had everything that she needed and to make sure that she had no discomfort whatsoever.

"Better get used to it, Quista. Ranith has been that way about things like that since he was a little kid, whether it was a feline about to have kittens or mom being pregnant with me. And I don't think that he is going to change anytime soon."

"I know, Tanisa," Quista said, looking at her sister-in-law. "I couldn't have asked for a more loving and caring husband, Though I would like it if he would relax a little bit."

Quista's eyes went wide for a moment. She then turned toward her husband and sister-in-law.

"The twins, they kicked," she said, smiling widely.

"Looks like you two could have a set of spunky ones when they are born..." Tanisa started to say when a tall figure walked by.

"Is that the groom?" She asked hesitantly.

Both Quista and Ranith looked up and at the person Tanisa was indicating to.

"Yes, that's Xendar," they both said.

"I hope I am reading him wrong, but the impression I get from that guy is a cold and intimidating aura. Things can't end well for someone like that. They either have to almost die or lose something before they change.

### ***No Name Space Station***

#### ***Unknown Region***

#### ***15+ Years before Current Date.***

Balrook Satovor was feeling more than a bit pleased with himself. He and his pirates had managed to snag a fair amount of supplies and prisoners. Most were not worth much, but they would still be able to put a few credits in his pockets after selling them.

Although, one prisoner had given him nothing but problems since his capture. He was some kind of architect. But with a couple of good punches to the face and body, followed up by a pair of stun cuffs seemed to do the trick.

"All right, listen up, all of you. Your life as you know it is over! You belong to me now. Do what I say, when I say it, and you will survive. Defy me, and you end up like him." Pointing to Si'Vran, who was laying in a heap in the middle of the floor.

"If anyone of you has any smart ideas, Don't bother, I will drop you where you stand! So, does anyone have any questions?" Balrook asked in a tone that meant the complete opposite.

"I have one. Why didn't your parents slap each other when you were born?"

Balrook angrily whirled in the direction of the voice.

"Okay smart guy, you just signed your death warrant! Come on out!"

Off to Balrook's left, a murmur passed through the crowd of pirates gathered there. And the crowd parted to reveal what looked to be some kind of kid with a catlike face and eyes.

Balrook could not believe what he was seeing.

"You want to fight me!" Balrook said as he launched into a fit of laughter. "You got guts, runt. I'll give you that."

Then reaching down to his belt, Balrook pulled out his lightsaber. A dull yellow blade sprang to life.

Balrook watched as the kid reached to his belt and pulled out two short-bodied lightsabers but did not ignite them.

"What's the matter, kid? Scared!" Balrook said in a mocking tone. "Can't fight with lightsabers, eh?"

"No. I can't," the kid simply stated as he dropped the lightsabers on the floor.

Balrook started to laugh again. It's your funeral, runt. So long," he said in a gloating voice.

"No, it's yours. It may take some skill to use a lightsaber. But it takes more than that to fight barehanded. How does that make you look in front of your people? Killing an unarmed person while you have a weapon. Who is the coward here?"

A rippling murmur spread through the pirate crowd. Balrook looked around at the others. He realized that the kid had played him well. If he cut him down now, it would be a constant challenge for his place in the chain of command.

"Nice one, runt. Making me put away my lightsaber is going to cost you. I was just going to kill you. But now, I am going to break you. I am going to break you real bad, and then I will think about killing you." Balrook spat out. Then lowering his head, he charged Xendar.

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Xendar dove to one side as Balrook tried to hit him with a massive round house punch. As he stood up, he dropped back into an Echani fighting stance, he was grateful that his father had taught him to fight. Echani was the style of observing your opponent while fighting. And from what Xendar could tell, as the fight progressed, Balrook was a brute. He relied on his considerable size and strength to overpower his enemies. But the most telling thing was, as Xendar concentrated on Balrook, he could feel that Balrook was not as strong as he was in the Force.

Xendar planned his tactics accordingly. He wanted Balrook tired and angry. As the more tired and furious that Balrook became, the more mistakes he would make. But causing Balrook to make those mistakes would prove costly. And while he was able to dodge most of Balrook's strikes, a grazing hit still caused Xendar a massive amount of pain.



With his left eye swollen shut, blood was streaming from his nose and mouth, the ribs on both sides of his body felt like they were burning, and his back and abdomen were likely one solid interconnected bruise. But he could see that Balrook was getting tired. And while Xendar had barely caused a bruise on him, it was very apparent that Balrook was starting to slow down.

Si'Vran's eyes slowly opened. A wave of pain washed over him, as his whole body felt like a very energetic gundark had used him as a door knocker.

"RAHHH! Hold still, you little runt!" Balrook shouted.

Si'Vran slowly turned his head toward the commotion. As his eyes slowly came into focus, he could see a tired and sweat-drenched Balrook trying to hit someone. It took a moment for Si'Vran's brain to register who it was.

"Xendar?!" Si'Vran whispered. He could see the blood all over Xendar's body, and his movements were slow and jerky. Xendar looked to be losing this fight.

Si'Vran struggled to his feet. His mind and body were seemingly immune to the discharges from the stun cuffs that Balrook's people had placed on him. Nothing else seemed to matter but protecting his son. Giving off a yell of defiance, Si'Vran charged Balrook.

Balrook was tired, and this kid was really beginning to get on his nerves. Almost every time he tried to hit this kid; he would miss by the merest of millimeters. The kid would not hold still. It was like trying to punch smoke. Just when you thought that you had hit it, it would move out of the way and wrap itself around you again. He snorted in disgust, as once again, the kid moved out of the way. But that would change.

He watched as the kid came to a screeching halt, his eyes open wide in horror, "Dad! No!" Balrook saw his opening and took it. His right fist slammed into the kid's hands as he brought them up to ward off the blow that Balrook had aimed for his face. Balrook took pleasure in hearing the satisfying pop as he broke the kid's wrists, and the kid went flying backward and hit the ground with a great thud. But Balrook was still disappointed that his blow did not hit with the damage he wanted it to cause.

Then from his right, Balrook caught the sight of a motion, turning toward it, he found himself knocked off his feet. And he could feel blows being rained down on him.

"Enough!" He shouted and pitched forward, throwing the nuisance off him. He saw that it was the annoying architect again.

"I have had enough of you!" Balrook shouted as he let loose a blast of force lightning. Si'Vran tried to yell as the force lightning assaulted him. But he found that he could barely even breathe, let alone scream.

Xendar's eyes slowly opened. Everything seemed different. It was as if he was trying to view his surroundings from a helmet that muffled sounds and had opaque lenses to look through. Trying to get to his feet, he fell back to the ground in pain. Every time he tried to move his hands; his wrists would send a new wave of agonizing pain shooting up his arms. And in his stupor, he wondered why Balrook had stopped hitting him. Looking over, he saw why. As bolt after bolt of force lightning was slamming into Si'Vran. Balrook was blasting his father mercilessly with it.

"Dad," Xendar croaked. Xendar felt his eyes getting heavy as a massive weight of futility and helplessness started to drag him down. But then something happened.

Xendar's eyes snapped open, he could feel a strange sensation wash over him. It was like a raging fire but only with an icy core. The heat of the fury was still there, but it was tempered by an ice-cold indifference. Xendar allowed the strange sensation to course through his body. The pain in his wrists seemed to fade away, his ribs, back and abdomen stopped hurting. And, getting to his feet, his hands clenched into fists. His eyes began to take on a gold hue.

Xendar gave a feral growl as Force lightning started arcing off his arms.

"Balrook!" He shouted as he rushed forward and smashed into Balrook with a force amplified shoulder ram, knocking him off his feet. The lightning from Xendar's arms had leapt off him, and began assaulting Balrook.

"You like to hurt people. How do you like it when you're the one getting hurt!" Xendar shouted as he hammered Balrook with a force amplified kick, Xendar could hear a muffled pop as his boot connected with Balrook's rib cage.

Balrook gave off a roar of pain. He could not believe it. How in the galaxy had this runt transformed from someone who could barely cause even the slightest redness of the skin, into someone that caused a lot of pain and just broke several of his ribs.

*It just wasn't possible!* Balrook thought to himself as he scrambled to his feet. But it was, Balrook's mind traveled back in time to the sparring arena of the Shadow Academy. Where another small statured being named Zukan, had thoroughly bested Balrook in both saber and physical combat, and again with force powers, turning Balrook into a blubbing mess. And it was happening again.

"NOOO!" Balrook shouted as he began to fight in desperation. Only now, Xendar was even harder to hit, and for every attack that Balrook tried to connect with. Xendar seemed to fade away, and retaliate with another devastating strike. Reaching his limits, Balrook tried to throw one last powerful punch. But not this time. Xendar caught his hand and twisted it until a loud crack was heard, and then pulled Balrook's arm down, lashing out with a vicious kick to the armpit. Balrook heard a sickening pop from his shoulder as Xendar's boot impacted, causing his shoulder bone to separate from its socket. While still holding on to Balrook's now dislocated arm, Xendar spun around and with a force amplified strike,

slammed his elbow into Balrook's jaw. The loud crack resounded through Balrook's head. It reminded him of a mirror shattering into small pieces. And each time Xendar struck Balrook, the lightning from Xendar's arms would give their own present of pain to Balrook.

Dropping Balrook's arm, Xendar lashed out with a brutal spin kick, catching Balrook on the other side of his jaw, which sent him crashing to the floor. Xendar walked over to Balrook's fallen form and used his boot to turn him over. He then used the Force to take Balrook's Dissuader-KD 30 from its holster.

"You can't kill me, runt," Balrook said as his words slurred together. "You don't have what it takes."

"You hurt my father, you hurt and killed hundreds of innocent people, your goons were going to hurt my mother. You think that I can't kill you? You are dead wrong," Xendar said in a

deathly quiet voice. Turning to face Balrook, Xendar pointed the gun at Balrook's head, and as Balrook's face filled the sights, Xendar pulled the trigger.

The report of the gun sent a wave of shock throughout the crowd. As a sense of stunned disbelief filled the air.

But before anyone could recover, there was a massive crash, and dozens of black-clad Brotherhood stormtroopers filled the room. And as the troopers were barreling in, a voice bellowed out.

"Nobody move! Put your hands on your heads! Now!"

One pirate thought himself to be faster and a better shot, paid the price for his stupidity as his perforated corpse hit the ground with a heavy thud.

As the commanding officer, Zekris Savrick moved about the room, he and his troops made sure that the pirates had been properly restrained. As he looked about, he saw Xendar standing stock-still in the middle of the room right next to the remains of Balrook Satovor.

"Xendar!" Zek yelled. "You are one amazingly, gutsy kid! Rushing off like that to face Balrook, I figured that you would be dead. But you sure proved me wrong," The officer said as he clapped a hand on Xendar's shoulder. And for Xendar's part, he dropped straight to the floor in a heap. As a blessed veil of unconsciousness swept him away into the warm and wondrous embrace of nothingness.

Xendar slowly opened his eyes, squinting to try and rid himself of the watery images of his sight.

Slowly, things came into focus. Slowly sitting up, Xendar looked to his right. He could see a form asleep in a chair beside his bed.

"Mom?" he quietly said.

Ristaria's eyes snapped open as she thought that she had heard something. Looking over at Xendar, she found him awake and looking at her.

"Si'Vran! He's awake!" She shouted as she shot out of her chair, and with tears of joy spilling down her cheeks, she wrapped Xendar up in one of the fiercest hugs he had received in his life. From the hall, the sound of running feet could be heard as Si'Vran rushed into the room. Seeing his son awake and alive, he also wrapped Xendar up in a fierce hug.

After several moments both Si'Vran and Ristaria released Xendar.

"Are you okay?" Ristaria asked as she brushed a stray hair out of Xendar's eyes.

Xendar looked down at his bandaged body and wrists, then up at his parents. "Are all those people safe?"

"Yes, they are. You saved a lot of lives, Xendar," Ristaria said as she pulled Xendar back into a hug.

"Yeah, and I took a lot of lives to make that happen," he said quietly.

"Xendar, my dad was a soldier, And one of the things he would say about fighting was; *In order to save a life. Sometimes you have to take a life.* Xendar, for a good portion of your life, we have been traveling around the galaxy, trying to help rebuild war-torn worlds. And sometimes, there

are those who just want chaos, pain, and destruction. And we have been in our fair share of ugly fights," Si'Vran stated.

"Like that Weequay mom took out?" Xendar asked.

"Exactly, That Weequay was going to hurt you and the other patients I was trying to save," Ristaria said as she kissed Xendar on the forehead.

"But I don't feel any remorse. All I felt was satisfaction. I enjoyed stalking those pirates, hunting them, and then killing them."

Ristaria looked at Si'Vran for a moment, then back at Xendar. "Xendar, look at me, please," Ristaria gently said. "You and I have a feral side," She told him. "It comes from the Juhani in our blood. They are hunters and fighters. It can be a great advantage, or it can cause no end to so many problems. So one of the greatest challenges for us will be to keep that side under control and not to let it run rampant."

"And that is going to be a tough road to tread. But remember, you can't build a house in one day," Si'Vran stated

"Speaking of time, how long have I been out? Xendar asked.

"Almost a week," Ristaria said. "And about half of that was in a bacta tank."

Xendar's eyes widened. "That long?" He paused for a moment. "Where am I?" He said as he looked about the room.

Before Si'Vran or Ristaria could answer, there was a knock on the wall nearby.

"Do you mind if we come in?" A familiar voice asked.

"Come in, come in. There is plenty of room." Ristaria said with a smile.

"How are you doing Xendar? You gave us quite a scare for a while," Zek said as he came in carrying a small bundle in his arms.

"Zek?" Xendar said incredulously.

"Actually, it's Zekris Savrick. And I believe you know my greatest friend and one of the most important people in my life."

"Telasa?" Xendar said as a white-haired, pale-skinned Sephi woman walked in, and she was also was holding a small bundle in her arms.

Xendar's eyes once again shot open wide.

"Your lightsabers! And that helmet! I'm sorry about..." Telasa held up her hand, stopping Xendar from continuing.

"It's okay, Xendar. Both Trogo and Zek explained what happened with my lightsabers and Trogo explained to Zek about the helmet. And besides, there are two other people who would like to meet you as well." Telasa said as she and Zek put the bundles in Xendar's arms. "Say hello to Ristaria and Xendar." Xendar gave Telasa and Zek a look of shocked perplexion.

"Your mom risked her life to help me deliver my babies. And she took out a security guard who came through the door before Trogo could warn them. She thought that a pirate had snuck in without anyone knowing.

"Well, it worked out in the end," Zek replied. "According to Jarse, getting the paste knocked out of him by a beautiful woman who knows how to fight made it all worthwhile."

"Uh, we are not aboard the station, are we?" Xendar asked hesitantly.

"No, we are aboard an Imperial star destroyer. And don't worry about Bifony. Ten minutes after we left, he was making an announcement about how he saved the station. He's not really a bad

person. But he does tend to be a glory hound. And here, this is for you," Zek said as he stepped out of the room for a moment and came back in holding a container.

"Why don't you pass the kids to your mom and dad," Zek suggested. Xendar passed Ristaria to his mom and Xendar to his dad. Then taking the container, he opened it up. Inside, he found Telasa's lightsabers and Zek's helmet, and at the bottom was Balrook's Dissuader-KD 30.

"Bifony went and had a major fit when he couldn't find that gun. I picked it up because I figured that you deserved it." Zek said.

"Thank you," Xendar quietly said.

"There is one more thing," Telasa stated. "We extended an invitation to you and your parents to join us. There is a special school there that can teach you how to use the Force. And we need more doctors and architects as well. It will take a little while to get there, and if it's okay with you and your parents, I would like to help you learn a little more about the Force."

Xendar looked over at his parents, who gave a nod of approval

"Telasa smiled, "You have just taken your first step into a larger world."

## **Docking Bay 12**

### **Nesolat Station**

#### **Orbiting the planet Arx**

#### **During the Attack on Arx**

It seemed to be a losing battle; the waves of the Collective Hive Marines and partisans flowed through the hole in the wall, and the horde surged forward unabated. They knew the end was near, and the thought whipped them up in a massive fervor.

Oriyanna slammed her elbow into the chest of an onrushing partisan, she heard a slight creak from her plastioid armor as it impacted. Which was then followed up by a very loud crack as the sternum and ribs of the partisan broke from the impact of her strike. Spinning around, she saw another partisan rushing toward her. Seeing that her DC-17 in its current configuration would be a great hinderance, she threw it straight up in the air. The partisan, watched in confusion as she did so. Lunging forward, Oriyanna activated the knuckle plate vibro blades on her hands and drove them deep into the clavicle region at the base of the partisan's neck. Oriyanna quickly brought up her boot and shoved the now nearly decapitated partisan in the chest away from her, the corpse fell to the floor with a wet thud.

Another partisan tried to grab her from behind as she caught her DC-17, and tried to smash it into her face. Oriyanna took a step back and used her new found leverage to throw the partisan over her shoulder. The partisan hit the floor with a loud thud. The shock from the impact caused them to let go of the DC-17m. Oriyanna took a firm hold of the DC-17m and slammed the stock into the partisan's unarmored throat.

"Next time, you karking idiot, you might want to check to see if they are wearing a fully enclosed helmet," Oriyanna fired off contemptuously as she stood up.

Taking aim, she fired a grenade at the hole in the wall that the marines and partisans were pouring through, and grunted in satisfaction as the explosion sent a mass of bodies flying skyward.

"Try that again, Chakaar!" A huge partisan shouted as he barreled toward her. Oriyanna dove to one side as the partisan tried to slice her in two with a huge dual bladed vibro ax. As she did so, she lost her grip on her DC-17m. After dodging another attempt by the partisan to chop her in half, which caused the partisan to make a hole in the floor where she had been previously standing. Slamming one foot down on the haft of the ax, Oriyanna ripped off her helmet and swung it around, catching the partisan in the jaw, an explosion of blood and teeth filled the air. She then brought her helmet high over her head and smashed it into the remains of the partisan's face.

The partisan fell lifelessly to the floor with a heavy thud. Oriyanna then dropped her helmet and ran over and scooped up her DC-17m.

Over her shoulder, Oriyanna heard Ranith yell. "Look!"

Whipping around, Oriyanna felt her heart sink; she could see what she thought was a large ship heading toward the docking bay. Oriyanna loaded the last anti-armor shell into her DC-17m attachment. *This might not take them all, but it will take out some of them!* She thought to herself as she looked back up and sighted the ship in her scope. But to her surprise, it was not a Collective ship. But a flight of Brotherhood ships! At that moment, her earpiece crackled to life. "Raptor Flight, to Docking Bay 12. Do you require assistance?"

"Raptor Flight, this is Lieutenant Rathelin," Oriyanna yelled, "We are taking heavy fire and have sustained massive casualties!"

"Understood, Lieutenant. I think we can even the score a little bit." The pilot then turned their comsettings to broadcast. "Raptor Flight, arm all weapons. Repeat, arm all weapons. We are going in weapons hot. If it looks hostile, vaporize it!" Raptor Flight lead responded.

"Everyone, get down and take cover!" Oriyanna yelled.

The gunship transports came blazing in, their guns spewing pulsating blasts of brightly lit death at the Collective Hive Marines and the Partisans.

As the transports settled on the docking bay landing pad, their guns glowing red hot from the continuous fire they spewed forth.

"Everyone, fall back to the ships!" Oriyanna yelled to other fighters in the docking bay.

Slinging her DC-17m on her shoulder. As it would cause more harm than good at that moment. Oriyanna reached down and pulled out her DC-15s from their holsters and started blasting the Hive Marines and Partisans as she ran for a transport.

As the survivors ran for the transports, some of those who had fought for this moment paid the ultimate price. Others, seeing their comrades fall, turned and began to return fire. In the end, while many did fall. But for their heroic sacrifice, they bought the other survivors the precious seconds needed for them to get aboard the transports.

With the roar of the engines, each transport loudly announced that they were departing this hellscape for safe havens elsewhere.

Oriyanna raced toward the last transport at full speed, and as she was running, Oriyanna yelled into her comline. "Xendar! Where are you? The party is getting too hot! We need to evac now!" "I'm right behind you," his voice came over the comline.

As Oriyanna whipped around on the ramp, she spotted Xendar running at full speed, a lightsaber in one hand deflecting blaster bolts while the other arm, a blood-sodden mess that was protectively holding onto a bundle that had been wrapped up in his armorweave cloak. In the heat and fury of the battle, what either of them had failed to notice was a Hive Marine that had been blown to one side docking bay when the transport ships opened fire as they landed. Having lost most of his weapons, the Hive Marine pulled out two malfunctioning vibroblades and threw them at Xendar. The marine watched in satisfaction as Xendar started up the ramp, his blades sunk deep into Xendar's back with a sickening thunk. Xendar dropped to his knees and slumped face-first into the loading ramp.

Oriyanna spotted the marine, and with a scream of rage and pain, she let loose a withering fusillade of blaster fire from her DC-15 pistols into the unarmored sections of the Hive Marine's body. Her pistols insistently and loudly clicked-giving Oriyanna an audible reminder that they needed to recycle and charge. Holstering them, she unslung her DC-17, still in its anti-armor mode, with her last round chambered. Grabbing the foregrip with her free hand, she sighted the marine's helmet in the scope and took careful aim.

"When Rath Oligard is sent to hell, you can meet him and tell him who sent you there!" She viciously snarled as she pulled the trigger. The last thing that the Marine saw was the anti-armor grenade that smashed into and lodged itself in his helmet's visor just before it exploded.

A loud groan came from the loading ramp as Xendar tried to stand up. Throwing her DC-17m into the ship and trying hard to blink back the tears, Oriyanna ran down the ramp to help Xendar up and into the ship.

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"No, that's not either one of them," Ranith stated as Quista picked up his hand. "He and Oriyanna adopted the little orphan girl that they found on the Nesolat Station, who thinks the galaxy of them. Since I know them a little better than some, I think that both of them would fight to protect those they love to their dying breath."

**Tokare City, Seraph**  
**Sunrider Gardens**  
**Date Unknown**

So...that's the groom, eh. I didn't recognize him without the executioner's garb, the hood, or the glowing blood-red eyes," Lidgy mischievously whispered to Breeza.

"Lidgy!" Breeza said in a quiet, admonishing tone.

"What?" Lidgy said, feigning innocence.

"You know good and well that is not true! Think of all the enjoyable times we have had with him and his family. How many times have we been invited by Xendar, his family, Oriyanna, Uncle Jasten, and Aunt Deshavera to come over for dinner?"

"Okay, okay," Lidgy said in a false petulant tone. Then, quickly changed the subject.

"I meant to ask; this is your cousin's wedding. How is it that you are not the Maid of Honor?" Lidgy asked in a quiet voice.

"Oriyanna asked me, but I declined. I don't like drawing attention to myself. And besides, I would have felt like the odd being out with the other bridesmaids." Breeza stated.

"I know that feeling. Whenever I want to talk to someone from your family, I have to stand on a chair! I know you are supposed to look up to people, but not literally! I'm the only guy that I know that will have a case of chronic neck strain from having to look up all the time!" Lidgy said in a fake, whiney voice.

Breeza smiled. Lidgy was trying to add some levity, to break down some of the seriousness that would come with weddings, and in his usual way, he would make jokes, sometimes about others, but he would mostly make them about himself.

"So, uh, where do you think they'll go on their honeymoon?" Lidgy asked. His lekku twitching as a slight breeze played by.

"That would depend on whether they take Daesha with them or not. If they don't, who knows. If they do, probably The Golden Beaches on Corellia again. We all went there on vacation. Had a good time, though, at times, I had to feel sorry for Oriyanna."

"Oh, why was that?" Lidgy asked, his curiosity piqued.

**Golden Beaches  
Corellia,  
One month after the invasion of Seraph  
and the abrogation of the Republic of the  
Force.**

Daesha loudly squealed as she ran through the surf as it crashed against the shore. It was an amusing sight, a small Twi'lek girl dressed in pink shorts and a white short-sleeved shirt while wearing a large white bucket hat. She was running away from a tall, dark-skinned woman with platinum blonde hair in an electric blue swimsuit.

"Daddy! Mommy is after me!" Daesha squealed happily.

"Run! Daesha, run! Your daddy can't save you from the tickle monster!" Oriyanna playfully shouted in a villain-like voice as she chased after Daesha. As the two of them raced through the shallow water, neither of them noticed a shadowy figure in the water just beneath the surface. Slowly, the shadow drew ever closer to where Daesha and Oriyanna were running.

"Haha, gotcha!" Oriyanna said, reaching down and grabbing Daesha.

"You cannot escape!" Oriyanna said and began to tickle Daesha.

Xendar burst out of the water, startling Oriyanna, which allowed Daesha to break free.

Grabbing Oriyanna, Xendar pulled her back and down into the deeper water with him.

"Xendar!" Oriyanna sputtered in an indignant tone as she broke the surface.

"Daddy got you, Mommy!" Daesha said as she laughed loudly.

A few seconds later, Xendar broke to the surface, a Cheshire-like grin spread across his cat-like face.



"You!" Oriyanna said as she shoved Xendar back under the water. Xendar disappeared for a few seconds before coming back up and grabbing Oriyanna. As he stood up in the water, He picked up Oriyanna and started to carry her to shore.

"Hey, Daesha! Want to come over here and help me tickle your mom?" Xendar said in a sing-song voice. Oriyanna let out a loud squeal as she tried to wiggle out of Xendar's arms. But to no avail, as Xendar had a good hold on her.

"Ah! Xendar! No more!" Oriyanna wheezed between bouts of laughter.

"Why? I've got reinforcements. Daesha, try the bottoms of mommy's feet."

Oriyanna gave a loud squeal and tried to pull her feet under her as Daesha pounced on her legs and started to tickle the bottoms of Oriyanna's feet.

"Is everything okay out here? I was in the house when I heard some shouting and..." Breeza started to say as she spotted Xendar, Oriyanna, and Daesha. Daesha was sitting on Oriyanna's shins, energetically tickling the bottoms of her mother's feet. While Xendar was on his knees, his right arm wrapped around Oriyanna's waist, with the fingers of his left moving at a furious rate across her ribs.

*She's still ticklish?!* Breeza thought incredulously to herself.

"Come on, Aunt Breeza! Help us tickle Mommy!" Daesha happily shouted.

The thought of getting revenge on Oriyanna for all of those ambush ticklings that she meted out when they were kids had crossed her mind. But she thought that perhaps for the best that she did not.

"Uh...no, no thanks. I was coming to ask if anyone wanted to go on a walk. When we were coming back on the train, I heard someone say that there should be a lot of animals running around. I thought that we could take a walk, and go see some of the animals.

Daesha gave a loud gasp of surprise and a loud squeal of joy, then quickly turned to her parents.

"Can we go see! Can we pleeeeeease!" Daesha pleaded, her glowing red eyes growing ever larger.

"I have an idea. If it's okay with your parents. How about you and me take a walk to see those animals and let your mommy and daddy have some time together?"

"Oriyanna tilted her head back on Xendar's shoulder as the two of them looked at each other and then at Daesha.

"Okay," they both said.

"Yaaaaay!" Daesha shouted as she leaped up, grabbing Breeza's hand and pulling her toward a trail.

"Try to keep Daesha away from the dangerous animals. She'll try to bring one home. Knowing how animals like her, they would probably like that idea," Oriyanna shouted.

Xendar and Oriyanna watched as Daesha's and Breeza's forms became small dots on the horizon.

"So what do you want to do now?" Oriyanna asked Xendar.

"Just twenty meters away from us is a rather large beach chair sitting in front of the house, and it should comfortably hold the two of us while we watch the sunset," Xendar said as he reached down to pick up Oriyanna.

"You certainly are a wild one, aren't you?" Oriyanna said playfully as she laid her head on Xendar's shoulder.

"Well, today was an interesting first day," Oriyanna said, curling up against Xendar as they were sharing a beachfront deck chair, in front of the house watching the sunset.

"It was something, I'll agree to that. My parents were acting like a couple of teenage kids, and your father couldn't keep his hands off your mother, not that she seemed to mind."

"Well, after thirty years of marriage, I think that both your parents and mine get to act a little crazy every once in a while," Oriyanna said as she playfully poked Xendar in the ribs.

"And speaking of your parents, here they come," Xendar said as he pointed at two figures contently holding each other, making their way toward Xendar and Oriyanna.

"Someone seems to have had a good time," Xendar said to Jasten and Deshavara as they walked up to where he and Oriyanna were sitting.

"A most enjoyable one," Jasten stated. We did some swimming, some hiking, and we walked along the beach."

"Don't forget about that fight," Deshavara added.

"What fight?" Oriyanna asked.

"And that underwater cave was an experience itself. Though, it could get a little noisy."

"What fight? Oriyanna loudly pressed.

"Oh, just some muscle-bound morons who thought that the universe should acknowledge them as being the most perfect beings in the entirety of existence," Deshavara said nonchalantly.

"Apparently, in their judgment, I was found wanting. That your mother's affections were wasted on me and that they were there to show me the error of my ways," Jasten said in an overly dramatic manner.

"Oh no. Dad, please tell me that you didn't bring *lil' Poppy*."

"Why is it that the blame for things is always placed on me," Jasten said, feigning innocence.

"What if I said that your mom was the one who had it." He said, pointing to Deshavara, who was wearing a skimpy black two-piece swimsuit. For her part, she gave Oriyanna an evil conspiratorial smile.

"Who or what is *lil' Poppy*?" Xendar asked as a bemused smile touched his lips.

"*Lil Poppy* is Dad's pneumatic submachine gun," Oriyanna stated, adding extra emphasis to the word dad.

"It looks like a shortened, heavily modified MK II Paladin blaster rifle. Only this one fires a non-lethal plastiod round. It won't kill you, but will hurt like you would never believe," Oriyanna said to Xendar, she then turned toward her father,

"Dad, what did you do?! Should we be expecting a visit from CorSec tomorrow as well?"

"Calm down, Oriyanna. We won't be getting a visit from anyone. Those muscle-headed idiots would have to report that they got the snot knocked out of them by just two people."

Deshavara stated, she then added in a playful tone, "You know, we should go back tomorrow and see if they would like a rematch,"

"Well, you could even up the odds by leaving *lil' Poppy* at home," Xendar said, trying to sound helpful.

"Oh no, you don't! You're just encouraging them." Oriyanna said as she gave Xendar a flat look.

"Fine, fine," Xendar said, raising his hands in mock surrender.

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"From the way that story sounds, everyone had a good time on Corellia, I will admit that I did not know that your cousin was ticklish." Lidgy whispered to Breeza as they watched Oriyanna and Xendar clasp hands, and began to recite their marriage vows to each other. As they finished, a large cheer swept through the crowd as Xendar lifted Oriyanna's veil and gave her the first kiss of their marriage.

After the ceremonial proceedings had come to a close. Oriyanna and Xendar walked arm and arm down the aisleway as husband and wife toward a waiting speeder. Oriyanna then turned and threw her bouquet into the air. And as it reached the apex of the throw, it separated into smaller bouquets that fell into the crowd.

Lidgy watched in fascination as the smaller bouquets fluttered into the hands of Trina Sarawon, Salanis Ratoolon, and Shi'anna Zaltus. Both Trina and Sarawon looked at the flowers and laughed. While Shi'anna looked over at the human man standing beside her with a happily expectant look.

"Well, I guess all is well that ends well," Lidgy stated. He noticed that Breeza hadn't said a word. Looking over at her, he could see that she was also holding a bouquet in her hands.