

Nilim Alem

Chapter 1: Apprentice

The Nexus of Light
Children of Mortis
39 ABY

Patience.

Tranquility.

Peace.

Those were the qualities that Master Sterion had always tried to teach her. Each day was another lesson in the ways of the Jedi, some old and some more modern, more refined, and adapted in an ever-changing galaxy.

There Nilim sat cross-legged upon her podium, her eyes shut, a tense, pained look upon her features. No matter how many times she closed her eyes, the memories of her younger years flooded to the forefront of her thoughts.

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The chains rattled across the floors.

The screams from those captured alongside her.

The separation from her parents.

The loneliness, and how it tore at her soul. It still pained her heart to remember it all as a small, Twi'Lek girl.

Yet, just as her breaths became deeper, and her heartbeat quickened, thundering in her ears, she remembered how the fear came crashing down around her.

The sound of fighting, and swooshing in the adjacent hallways.

Lights of all colours piercing the darkness.

Then, there was him. He approached her like a guardian angel. The lights of those around him highlighted him in a silhouette so ethereal that Nilim could only stare in awe at the time.

He bent down towards her, his mess of greying hair accentuating his cerulean eyes. He reached a hand through her cage, offering it to her. He asked her a simple question.

"Are you alright?"

The answer to which would change her life forever.

She shook her head. No, she was not alright. She took his hand, the first contact she'd had with another living being for what felt like days.

The older Human smiled, then released her hand and stood to his full, domineering height. She didn't have time to mourn the loss of contact as he retrieved a cylindrical object from his hip, a bright blue blade erupting from it.

It startled her, and she instinctively pushed herself back away from him. He sliced through the cage with his weapon like the bars were made of something soft, rather than the impenetrable fortress that had held her prisoner for so long. The bars collapsed to the ground in front of her, landing in front of her feet.

She knew what he was now. She'd heard the stories and didn't know it was true, but thanked whatever deity was out there that it was. The Jedi withdrew his weapon and offered his hand out to her again, offering a small, yet warm and comforting smile.

"That's better," he said.

She reached out to him, clasping her small hands around his. He lifted her up, pulling her towards his chest. She clung to him as tightly as she could, like if she let go he would turn to ash.

"Sterion!"

Loud voices rang into the hallway as more like him, men and women with glowing weapons, surrounded them.

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That was the first time Nilim met Master Sterion. She was brought to the Nexus of Light shortly afterwards, and was fortunate enough to be determined as Force-sensitive. She was assigned as Sterion's personal apprentice, and had a path set out before her to learn the ways of the Jedi.

It had been twelve years since that fateful day.

Nilim was a grown woman now. She was confident, more self-assured, and though her past haunted her, she used it to teach her humility, and to remember from whence she came. Master Sterion always encouraged her to try and let go. He always said she dwelled too much on what had been, rather than the here and now.

If it kept her humble, did it really matter? Overconfidence was the downfall of greater Jedi than her.

Yet, no matter the number of times she sat upon this column to meditate, *something* still lingered at the back of her mind. She couldn't explain it. It was just a feeling she had, like a bad omen waiting to strike.

Master Sterion had been sent on missions before. He was one of the Harbinger's favourites, and one of the few who met *The Father* in person. Sometimes, but not always, she would accompany him. Real universe experience was good for the soul, her Master had always said.

He'd been gone longer than expected, and the circumstances surrounding his most recent assignment didn't piece together very well. He'd always told her about his missions whenever he was going to be away for a set amount of time. He'd usually give her something to work on for when he eventually returned.

Not this time.

This time he just left, like a puff of smoke in the wind. She didn't like it. Not one bit. It was highly out of character for him, and she found herself worrying about him as each day passed.

War did that to a person's psyche.

She was one of the few that were told to stay behind when war with the Brotherhood became a reality instead of something heard about in hushed whispers. The Nexus of Light needed able-bodied warriors to hold the line in case of a counter-offensive. A counter-offensive that never came.

Many came back after the numerous failed assaults on Brotherhood territories, and many did not. Master Sterion was not among them. Nilim held out hope. He was

unconfirmed, declared MIA, and she held onto the smallest glimmer of hope that the man she inevitably came to view as a father figure would return.

She kept waiting.

And waiting...

And waiting...

"Nilim?"

She was woken by one of her fellow trainees. He was a young Zeltron male with dark hair and near-perfect pink skin.

"Sorry to bother you, Nilim. The *Harbinger* wants to see you."

The Harbinger wanted to see her. Why did she feel a cold, tingling sensation crawl down her back? The Harbinger never took the time to speak to anyone unless it was important, usually only stopping to offer a small smile or a word of encouragement to prospective trainees. The fact he wanted to speak with her personally meant only one thing.

'*Master Sterion...*'

"Well," Nilim Rose from her column, stretching her back. She gave her fellow Lightbringer a warm smile. "I better not keep him waiting."

Chapter 2: The Harbinger

Harbinger's office

Nexus of Light

39 ABY

Why was she so nervous?

This was just the *Harbinger of Light*, after all. Only the most important and powerful man on this side of the galaxy.

You know, no biggie.

She took a deep breath, and knocked on the wooden door. A jubilant, yet strong voice answered.

"Come on in!"

With the invitation given, Nilim opened the door. She entered a brightly lit room, upon which a brilliant wooden desk sat in its centre. Runes and scribing decorated the room, and Nilim found herself fascinated by their aura. She could spend hours here just learning the stories behind them. The man behind the desk drew her eye, and a very handsome man he was with brilliant blonde hair that shone in the light. She inhaled a deep breath, steeling her nerves as she approached J'hon Whetu, *Harbinger of Light*.

"Ah, Nilim! Please take a seat. I hope I wasn't disturbing anything important?"

J'hon spoke with his usual friendly, if somewhat diplomatic tone. He kept his smile and his face, and Nilim took the opportunity to take the seat at the other side of the desk.

"Not at all, *Harbinger*, sir. I was merely -"

"Please. Call me J'hon."

Nilim was taken aback by the sudden casual tone he took with her, but she wasn't about to look a gift bantha in the mouth.

"Thank you, J'hon. I was only in the middle of meditation exercises. That's all," Nilim said, returning his smile.

"Ah, yes. Sterion was always diligent in ensuring all students kept up with their meditation. What is the point of training one's body if the mind could not be honed as well? That's what he always used to say."

'Used to?'

Nilim couldn't stop the thought entering her head, nor the sudden pang of worry that accompanied it.

"Excuse me, sir. I don't mean to sound rude, but have you heard any news regarding my Master?"

The smile on J'hon's face vanished, and the warmth in the room disappeared with it. She felt a shiver crawl down her spine.

"Unfortunately, I do, but it is not good news," J'hon clasped his hands together and placed them on the desk in front of him. "Sterion was sent with our forces to confront Taldryan, and perhaps broker peace if necessary."

Nilim smiled. That sounded like something he'd do.

"Alas, he was killed during his time there. I am terribly sorry, Nilim."

For the second time in her life, her entire world came crashing down around her. She didn't move, didn't react, but simply remained where she was. Her mouth was slightly open, and every part of her body felt numb. She found it harder to breathe and move.

"Obviously, this brings up the question of your training. I can assign you to a new Master and.. "

Nilim wasn't listening. She was too caught up in the maelstrom of emotions building inside her. It was overpowering, overwhelming, and she never noticed the tear trickle down her cheek. Master Sterion was gone, and the ones responsible were Taldryan. She hated the pain, she hated *them* so much that it hurt.

"Nilim? Are you OK?"

She blinked, finally aware again of where she was. She wiped the tear off of her face and cleared her throat.

"Yes, I... I'm sorry, sir..."

"J'hon."

"J'hon... I..."

J'hon raised a hand to stop her. "It's fine. He meant a lot to you, to all of us. This is a perfectly acceptable response. You need time to grieve, and I understand that. How about we revisit this conversation in a couple of days?"

"That... That would be appreciated. Thank you," Nilim swallowed the lump in her throat and gave a small nod.

J'hon gestured for her to leave, and she did so without any hesitation, or any regard for her dignity. Right now, she needed to be alone.

"Nilim? Actually, I have a better idea."

She froze where she stood.

"I will complete your training," J'hon said.

Nilim couldn't believe what she was hearing. The *Harbinger* wanted to train *her*? With his guidance, maybe she could...

"Though before I take you on as my apprentice, I have a couple of demands," J'hon said.

"Of course!" Nilim practically leapt back to the desk.

"Are you prepared to abandon everything you once were?"

The question was odd, but Nilim didn't think twice.

"Yes."

"Are you prepared to do whatever I say, regardless of reason or consequence?"

"I will do what I must," Nilim said.

"Then..." J'hon leaned forward towards her. "What do you know about the Dark Side of the Force?"

Chapter 3: Revenge

Caelus System

Port Kasiya

40 ABY

Hell.

That was how Nilim described the last year of her life. Every day was a brutal decimation of everything she once was, shattered into hundreds of shards. She barely recognised herself when she looked in a mirror. Gone was the timid, gentle little girl. She was replaced with a hardened warrior with a penchant for bending the Force to her bidding.

She *hated* J'hon for that. Her hate made her stronger.

Nilim let her own selfishness, anger, and grief turned her to his teachings as a way to settle the score. Sure, she was more powerful in a year than in the last few, but there was no mistake about it...

J'hon Whetu was no Sterion Wight.

Where Sterion was kind and nurturing, J'hon was cruel and distant.

Where Sterion allowed her to make mistakes, J'hon expected perfection from the start.

Where Sterion gave her hope for the future, J'hon ripped that hope away from her until all that was left was a sociopathic lust for vengeance.

She'd show him. She'd take revenge against Taldryan's Supreme Chancellor, the man responsible for Sterion's death, and then She'd return to the Nexus of Light to kill J'hon personally. She owed him that much for everything he'd done in the last year.

"Alright, ma'am. We've landed just outside of Port Kasiya."

The pilots were young men in their mid-to-late twenties and were Human, completely uninteresting and unimportant.

Nilim rose from her seat and stretched her arms and back after the long journey. She approached the pilots and placed a hand on either of their shoulders.

"Gentlemen! I do appreciate your goodwill in bringing me this far. The *Harbinger* will be most pleased with your work," a sly smirk then appeared on Nilim's face. "Unfortunately, he also said that no-one should know I am here. So, unfortunately, it sucks to be you."

The pilots barely had time to comprehend what she meant when a crimson-bladed lightsaber blade ruptured out of a curved hilt. With two flicks of a wrist, the pilots were dead, having served their final flight.

Nilim gave herself a small nod, and whistled a tune to herself as she walked down the ramp into the crisp, chill Kasiya air. It sent a shiver down her spine, and under the darkness of night, the air was more frigid than normal. Corrupt, yellow eyes gazed into the distance at the looking skyscrapers that made up Port Kasiya. She was resolute as she walked towards her destiny. Revenge would be hers.

Even if it killed her.

Chapter 4: Mortis Intentions

Harbinger's office
Nexus of Light
39 ABY

"I must say, J'hon. I never expected you to be the type. Taking a padawan and corrupting her, twisting her ideologies towards the Dark Side? How very bold of you."

Rose Telsniw, the proclaimed *Seer in the Darkness*, sat in the chair across from J'hon, swirling a glass of liquid in her hand. A wicked smile stretched across her blindfolded face.

"Yes, well," J'hon swallowed the lump in his throat. "She was eager for revenge. I just gave her a push in the right direction."

"Right or wrong remains to be seen," Rose said. "Are you not concerned about her discovering the truth behind Sterion's betrayal? She's attempting to kill his son, after all."

"It doesn't matter," J'hon said. "Either she kills a Consul of the Brotherhood, effectively cutting the head off of a snake, or she dies and one more weakened by Sterion's teachings is eradicated. It's a win-win. Sterion can burn in Hell for his betrayal."

"Quite," Rose said, her smile seeming to stretch further across her face. "*The Father* will be most pleased with your work. I'll have good news to report back to him."

J'hon raised a glass of fine Corellian Whiskey. "Chains Unbound."

"Yes, indeed," Rose raised her glass. "Chains Unbound."

The two glasses clanged against each other amidst the crescendo of Rose's shrill laughter at the events to come. Either way, Nilim died, or Appius would.

It really was a win-win.

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