

Star Wars

Day of the Jedi

The Jaden Korr Chronicles

Childhood

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...

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Day of the Jedi

Ten years after the Battle of Endor, the power of the IMPERIAL REMNANT increases. Though the EMPEROR is long dead, his military continues to spread war, misery, and slavery across the galaxy.

Jedi Master LUKE SKYWALKER has moved to restore the JEDI to their rightful place as peacekeepers of the galaxy at his JEDI ACADEMY on Yavin 4. But the revolts of the dark Jedi JEREC and Luke's renegade student DESANN have undermined his attempts. Luke and the remaining Jedi spread out among the stars in search of others like themselves. The power of their enemies grows.

Meanwhile, far beneath the towering spires of Coruscant, a teenage girl named JADEN KORR feels a hidden power growing within her....

Old Places

Chapter 14 of *Day of the Jedi: Childhood*

by

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Preface to this chapter:

Day of the Jedi is a hexalogy, a series of six novels relating the adventures of Jaden Korr, a young girl from Coruscant's Undercity, who will be recruited into the New Jedi Order by Luke Skywalker and trained in the ways of the Jedi by her master, Kyle Katarn. She is now a teenage girl living in Coruscant's Undercity. A recent dream visitation by a group of murdered padawans from the Old Times has led her to a hidden place, the last remains of the Jedi Temple. This is chapter 14 from *Volume I: Childhood*.

Childhood, Chapter 14: Old Places

Water had gotten into the little room. The latches on the boxes were rusted shut. The devices that had lain open on the shelves were ruined, but lots of things were sealed away in polymer bags or boxes or hard plastoid. I saw weapons sealed up for emergencies. All sorts of them. I sat on the damp old concrete floor. It was so old down here, it wasn't even permacrete. And this place, this room was older than that, very old, kept deep down for emergencies, full of stuff the ghosts thought they'd need when they were alive.

My Jedi ghost came to me then. He rarely appeared to me at home, and only a voice when I was awake. But here he was, standing there frowning at me. And I understood. It was this place. I felt the place flow into me, into my arms, my legs, surging throughout my body. Fatigue and pain fell away from me. I was covered in sludge. My side had been aching, I was pretty sure I had broken several ribs in the fall. I hadn't had a thing to eat in days. It went away. I smiled.

"You've gotten yourself in here. Was it worth it?"

I patted three of the narrow boxes I had pulled down from their shelves. "Yes. I don't know what's in them, but I'm happy I found them."

"Don't forget the little box over there." He gestured at it with his head.

Once he mentioned it, I heard its whisper. The emergency light bars in the ceiling were so old, they were beginning to fail. It was high up in a dark corner. I saw the red twi'lek padawan when I touched it. He had meant to grab more from the library, but he was being chased. The main thing he wanted to hide was already gone, so he grabbed one of the others and ran for the maintenance stairs. He was an adventurous one, disrespectful, prying into places he shouldn't go. He had found the old storeroom months before, when he ran away from his master after an argument. This place was from the old times, hidden away in a far corridor off the sub-basement. He ran down here and hid the box. They caught him on the way back up. But they never found the room. I stuck the box in a pocket.

"I would have preferred you wait and find these later. It would have been less dangerous for you, but I was . . . outvoted."

"This place is from the time of the Old Jedi."

"Yes, it was made during the Sith Wars. Leave the other things for archaeologists. You'll be back here with them at a later time."

"What's an 'archaeologist'?"

"Never mind, my student. Leave now. Hide the entrance. The light side emanations of this place have strengthened you a little, but you need to leave before your strength fails."

— ◇ —

I saw a distant light and squirmed through rusty old pipes until I came to several newer bright white permacrete support columns. A shiny new inspection hatch was on the other side of the hollow

space, a bright brand new light bar right above it. A prettier hatch I have never seen since. It was a way up. I hadn't had anything to eat in days, my energy was spent. If I tried going out the bottom, the way I had come in, I'd die. I tugged at the three narrow metal boxes. There was no room to carry them in the low space, so I dragged them to the hatch, opened it onto an access ladder leading up, pushed them in and closed the hatch. I felt it, a small spark glowing in the dark. "I'll be back," I whispered. Somewhere, a young twi'lek padawan laughed.

The ladder was a chore. I held the heavy boxes stacked in one arm while climbing with the other. The shaft was narrow enough, I could lean my back against the wall while clinging to the ladder with one hand. I rested several times that way. Nice new light bars lit the way up.

— ◇ —

Aelesa was reading an old diplomatic record. It was boring as hell, another assignment from her master, when she *saw* me. "Three goddesses!" She jumped up and ran for help. General Solo had returned from his inspection tour and was wrestling with Jacen in the family quarters. Jaina and Anakin were playing with letter blocks nearby. All were under the watchful eye of Cakhmaim and Meewahl, the personal noghri retainers of the Solo clan. The two noghri sat a little apart, enjoying a game of pazaak, their weapons always loose in their holsters. Cak had just laid down the six card. Aelesa rushed in. "Jaden's near us, right now!"

General Solo looked up at her from the floor, his son fake-biting him on the arm and making Wookiee noises. Jacen stopped. "She means the girl down below, Daddy. The one who used to hurt. We should get Mommy."

Han stood up. "Can't, my boy. She's giving a major speech before the Senate right now."

"I can find her, I know I can," Aelesa said. "She's in the foundations of the Presidential Palace. We're not fifteen minutes away from there."

Cakhmaim and Meewahl listened respectfully. They did not understand these Jeedai matters much, they preferred the company of the father and the children to these other puzzling creatures.

"We should wait for Mommy or Uncle, she's very scared and very powerful. She doesn't trust people. She's getting more powerful all the time. We should wait."

"We won't have another chance like this, sir," Aelesa replied.

Solo huffed. "What's she doing there?" He sighed. "Teenagers. She'll get arrested. She'll get hurt. Teenagers, always with trouble and shouting." He looked down at his children. "Thank the Force you're not teenagers yet. We'd better go find her. Leia will be mad as a rancor if we don't keep Jaden out of prison." He chuckled a little. "I'd like to see Leia's face when she gets back and Jaden's sitting right here with us, having a glass of tea. Is Kassem around?"

"Kassem is supposed to be studying in his room."

"Go get him. We'll try. Meet me at the speeder lot on the roof. Take us five minutes to fly to the palace. Cak, you and Mee watch the kids."

"I want to go with you, Dad," Jacen asked.

Solo shook his head. "Nope. Can you imagine what Mom would say if I did take you along?"

"I want to meet her."

"You will in an hour, when she's safe and sound right here, drinking sweet tea and listening to one of my tall tales. She might be in trouble with the cops and palace security. Mom would break my bones if I took you into that."

Jacen pouted, but that was how it was. Solo and the two apprentices rushed off to meet me.

— ◇ —

I came up into a small room. A protective grate was over the ladder shaft. It was quite a juggling act to hold onto the boxes while pushing the grate open. The little box in my pocket whispered to me. I didn't have time to talk to it just then. I sat on the nice clean gray duracrete floor and rested for a moment. The sludge on my coveralls made ugly streaks on the clean floor.

A long clean hallway stretched into the distance on both sides of me. I closed the door and hobbled away, tiny globs of sludge leaving a trail behind me.

— ◇ —

"Hurry, sir, she's on the move," Aelesa said. "She's hurt. We need to help her." Kassem of the long hair ran behind her. Solo was close behind him. Only his security clearance had gotten them into the palace's sub-basement. A couple security guards trailed behind.

Han turned his head to yell at them. "Don't start anything! I mean it! We're trying to find a friend. You two fierfekks start anything, and I'll have my wookiee friend eat your guts! Keep your hands off those blasters!"

"Yes, sir," they replied.

Aelesa stopped so suddenly, longhaired Kassem ran into her. It was my sludge trail on the floor. The trail had turned a corner.

"We're close." She gasped for air.

Solo was huffing, too.

Kassem leaned down to look at the sludge.

Aelesa knew just then. She felt the sludge burning at my skin. "Don't, Kassem. It's toxic. It's burning her skin." She turned to

General Solo. "She's badly hurt, sir. She won't admit it to herself, but I can sense it."

"There's a medical center in the palace," Solo said. Something from his own past came to his mind just then. He remembered his year living here when Leia was Chancellor. He hated the palace, but like the good hoodlum he once was, he had explored it up one side and down the other. He knew where I was going. "We'll get her there once we've caught up with her."

"I'm sorry sir. She's sensed me. I . . . somehow I made her afraid. I'm sorry. She's deeply frightened now."

"Calm her, Ael," Kassem said.

"I'm trying." Aelesa opened her eyes. "She's very powerful. She has shut me out." She looked at Han. "She thinks I'm an enemy."

Solo sighed. "It's the Undercity, the things that have been done to her." They ran after me.

— ◇ —

I could only hobble so fast. I had damaged my leg again. These clean hallways were a trap. I'd turn a corner only to find more blank doors. I'd turn another corner and find the same. Long hallways leading nowhere. They were getting closer. I had felt one of them in my head a moment ago. There was a friend out there, too, nearby. If I could get to that person before the others got to me, I'd be fine. I had to get out of these hallways. Invisible hands closed around my throat. Those doors that were open led to machinery or shops or other inspection shafts. I could feel them behind me. They wouldn't take me easily. Not this time. I knew all the old commando's tricks now. I could throw things with my mind now. They wouldn't take me. But that friend I felt, that friend was so close. If I could find him, if he could find me, then everything would be all right.

A human turned the corner in front of me. He was wearing coveralls. "Hey! What are you doing here?" He saw the sludge-covered coveralls I was wearing, which were so like his own.

I could see into his mind, open like a door before me. I tugged at his thoughts just a little . . .

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"Mind trick!" Aelesa said, amazed at me. "She can do Mind Trick!"

Solo was huffing away, making his middle-aged body keep up with the girl. "Is she really that powerful?"

"Yes. She's very afraid of me. Why? I would never hurt her."

"It's that place, Aelesa, the Undercity." Thinking about it, he saw me as I really was. Solo held up a hand. "That's it."

"Sir?" Kassem asked.

"This is ridiculous. Have the guards take you back to our speeder. Tell Leia I'll explain when I get back."

"But, sir —" Aelesa started.

Solo's command voice came out. "She's my friend and we're scaring her. We don't chase friends. We don't scare our friends. Do it. Now."

"Yes, sir."

Solo gestured to the guards. He had caught his second wind, he ran down a cross corridor.

— ◇ —

"That's just the boss's way," the maintenance guy told me. "Send you down to retrieve old water-level monitors and not tell you how to get around. The big lifts are over that way. But we have small maintenance lifts over here. They'll take you up to the

palace's delivery landing pads. From there it's easy to find your way back to the offices." He glanced at my sludge-covered coveralls.

"Girl, you're a tough one. I'll ask for you next time we have to replace the sump pumps. Get cleaned up before delivering those to the techs. OK?"

"OK. Thanks, Themm."

"No problem."

He led me around another corner. In the center of the hallway intersection was a small lift column with several narrow lift shafts.

"See ya, Jay." He punched in the security code, then walked off in the direction of his maintenance room.

I stepped into the narrow lift cab. The clear polymer door slid closed behind me. I turned and there he was, running at me, shouting. I pushed myself against the back of the cab. Then I saw who it was. My friend! My friend had found me! I opened the lift door. My friend had found me. I started to cry. "Mr. Solo, you found me. I knew you were here somewhere. I was looking for you. There are people chasing me." I tried to control my sobs, but they just got larger.

He was out of breath. He held up a hand, struggling to catch his breath. "Not anymore. Jaden, what are you doing here?"

He waited until I stopped crying. The fear had gone away. Everything was going to be all right now. Mr. Solo was right, I felt the hunters move further away from me. Relief poured over me. I wiped the tears from my eyes. My new friend was with me. I tried to smile. "I asked first." I reached out my hand. He took it.

"You know, I'm in the military. I'm in and out of these places all the time." He wasn't exactly lying, but he wasn't telling the complete truth. I didn't care. There was no deceit or anger in his mind. I could feel his worry for me. He was my friend. I wanted to hug him, but I was covered in goo. He let go of my hand to gesture at the rusty boxes I held. "What's in the boxes?"

I clutched them a little tighter.

"Jay, they're yours, I'm not going to take them from you."

I knew that. "Sorry." I relaxed a little. I felt only his good will toward me. He was so worried about me. I blushed. "This is a stupid answer, but I don't know." I wiped the last tears from my face with the back of a hand. I shifted the boxes around.

He laughed. "My wife's brother is like that. Don't worry, Jay, I'm used to it. Where'd you find them?"

I didn't lie, but I didn't exactly tell the truth. "I was salvaging way down below."

"You do know we're on the other side of the planet from your part of the Undercity, don't you?" Han realized something just then. "You didn't know where you were going when you set out to find them, did you?"

There was no place to look, so I looked at the floor. "No."

"Your brother doesn't know where you are, does he?"

"No."

"What's this stuff covering you? It smells like industrial waste. There's a clinic just a few levels up. I have medical privileges there. I'll bet I can scrounge a new jumpsuit for you, too. Then we'll get you home."

I just stood there, unable to decide what to do next.

Mr. Solo decided for me. "You're bone tired, Jaden. I can see it in your face. Come on." He grabbed me by the elbow and tugged me into the lift. The lift cab hurled upwards.

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The place was so white, so clean, it hurt my eyes. The medtech took one look at me and promptly shoved me into a cleanser booth. My clothes vanished. I was left with nothing but my gloves, my boots, my tool belt, my ancient datapad, and my boxes. They were

waiting for me on a bench by the cleanser. I didn't even get any clothes, I was wrapped up in a blazingly white sheet by a medical droid and hustled over to an exam bed. Mr. Solo stood guard over my stuff while the droids poked at me.

"Don't be alarmed when people call me by my title. They call me General Solo sometimes. But don't you call me that. Call me Han."

"Yes, sir, Han, sir."

"Now stop that." He smiled when he heard that. "Others have to call me 'General' and 'Sir' so don't be surprised when they do, okay?"

"Ok."

He was worried when he got back from talking to the medtech. His friend Leffen was now with him. "Jaden, you have done favors for me. I want to do you a favor. I want you to go into hospital for a couple days. I've already exchanged messages with your brother. I told him that you were doing repair work for me, that you were hurt. He was very worried about you, he thought you were dead. I want you to come with me to a medical hospital near your downshaft. We won't use your real name or anything, and I'll personally guard your things while they work on you."

"What's this 'work'?"

"To fix you. You fix things. Now you need fixing."

— ◇ —

Lady Leia listened to her apprentices tell the story. "You should have called me, Aelesa. This is much more important than a useless speech in flattery of the Corellian foreign minister."

"Sorry, Master. General Solo gave us permission."

"He isn't a Force user. Aelesa, you could see the fear in her mind. You should never have chased her. She isn't a criminal. She's an ally, a future friend."

"Yes, Master."

"Then my husband told you to leave. Where is he?" Leia could sense her husband. He was safe, and a little sad. She could feel me through her husband. Leia knew that Han was taking care of me.

"We don't know," Kassem replied.

This was a teaching moment for Aelesa and Kassem. "What did you learn from Han today?" Leia asked.

Leia watched her students struggle with the question. Kassem, pushing his long hair behind his shoulders with his hands, was the first to get it. "Be aware of our surroundings. Even if the target has fled, we can learn about her by the surroundings."

"Not quite. The Force cannot be the solution to every problem. What did Han's eyes see?"

"The sludge trail," Aelesa answered.

"What else?"

"She's afraid?"

Leia shook her head. "We already knew that. She was carrying something, wasn't she? She was there for that."

Enlightenment found her students. Kassem explained it. "General Solo knew this from the sludge trail?"

"Yes," Leia replied. "Where was she coming from?"

"Below."

"Han knew this just from his observations. She came for something, something from down there. That's where we have to go now. I'll change into some coveralls, then we'll go."

— ◇ —

The three of them meditated in the little hollow space next to the inspection hatch. Leia opened her eyes. "What do we know about this place?"

They continued to sit. The hollow space in the surrounding rubble wasn't tall enough to stand in. Aelesa was the first to reply.

"It's now the presidential palace. Before that it was the Imperial Residence. Before that it was the Jedi Temple."

Leia asked another question. "Where did she go down here?"

It was Kassem's turn. "We can't see it clearly. It's hiding from us. It's a place strong in the light side."

"Could we find it now?"

It was Aelesa's turn to answer. "No, Master. This place, it has been hidden for a long time. When she found it, it bound itself to her. Only she can find it. Once she brings others to it, it will be accessible."

"What does this tell us about her?"

Kassem's turn. "She travels in the light. This place, though there is no sentience here, it sensed her. It wanted to . . . help her, if that makes any sense."

"She is very powerful," Aelesa said. "I felt her presence when she used Mind Trick. But she has not mastered her fear yet."

"That might be a problem. We know who can help her with that. Concentrate on her activities. How did she get here?" Leia asked.

Kassem answered. "From deep down, from further below. I've been investigating the Undercity as you ordered, Master. There is no Undercity in this section of Coruscant, only narrow caves, pipes, and rubble. The call of this place was so intense to her, she came through darkness to it. Why did we not see this place?"

"It hides from us even now," Leia replied. "The final events of the Old Order occurred over our heads. Hundreds of Jedi were slaughtered in a matter of hours. Then came the dark, the Sith presence. This place partook of the last feelings of the Jedi who visited it. It hid."

"Then how did she know about it? And what did she take from there?" Aelesa asked.

"Someone told her. Someone who is not alive," Leia answered.

She didn't see Han for five days. He called every day to chat with her and the kids, but he didn't come home. She could sense the worry in him. I was much sicker than I thought I was. But he eventually came home. Han crept into their room late at night on the fifth day. She spoke to him from the bed as he undressed. "You let her go home."

"She goes where she wants. I don't think anyone could make her do anything she doesn't want to do."

"I wasn't criticizing. It was the right thing to do. She's not ready to leave that place, not yet. But every day she grows in strength. Jaden is very powerful, stronger, even in the last day or so."

He sat down on the bed. She sat up and put an arm on his shoulder. Han looked over at his wife. "Her scars told us things. These aren't things you want to learn about anyone. She's been shot multiple times with slug throwers. The incompetent medical droid her brother took her to didn't even get all the metal fragments out of her. She's been stabbed. She's been beaten. Someone tried to slit her throat. She has scars from an old knife fight on her forearms. She smashed her left hip joint a while back. If they hadn't fixed it, she would have been a cripple in about a month. She had second-degree chemical burns on most of her body. She had intestinal parasites." He rested his head in his hands. "There are faint lines on her teeth. The doctor told me what they meant. She almost starved to death when she was little. They wanted her to stay longer, but she wouldn't. The bacta tank healed her up just enough to get her home. They gave her bacta infusion packs to inject herself with. She'll probably sell them. That's one tough little girl." Han looked down at his hands. Leia patted his shoulders and waited. "She's been raped, my love." Leia put her arms around him. It was a

moment before he could continue. "Before us, before . . . you know. I saw people like her all the time when I was a kid, when I was a crook. Sick people, dying people, victims, people with no future. I forgot. This life we have now, I forgot."

She laid her head on his shoulder. "I know. My efforts to pave the way for Brother succeeded yesterday. My allies in the Senate and the planetary government were able, finally, to pass the Undercity aid legislation. We got it done, despite efforts in the rules committee to stop it. Our little documentary, the one we secretly funded, it helped a lot. Outrage in the core worlds pushed us over the top. It gave us the votes we needed. Things will get a little better down there." She pulled her husband into the bed. He put an arm around her. They lay silent in the dark for a long time, not moving, both of them in contemplation of the suffering in the galaxy.

"She was in a lightside place, Han, a place of the old Jedi. Her ghosts led her to it. That's cause for hope. After everything done to her, she is still in the Light. Do you know what she took?"

"Rusty boxes and one small wooden box. I didn't look inside. Jay's trust in most people is fragile. Even a tiny thing like that would have chased her away."

"My wise man. That place, it wanted to help her, so I know what the boxes contained."

"What?"

"The components for a precise, elegant weapon, the weapon of a Jedi."