

Star Wars

Day of the Jedi

The Jaden Korr Chronicles

Apprentice

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

Star Wars

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....

Package Delivery Service

Chapter 2 of *Day of the Jedi: Apprentice*

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, who has been 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 Jedi Apprentice. Kyle Katarn's other student, Rosh Penin, has been abducted by the Disciples of Ragnos. Kyle is in a desperate search to save him. Jaden and Kyle's new student Lon are both left under the care of the other masters while Kyle searches for Rosh. *Package Delivery Service* occurs after Jaden's adventure on Zonju V and before the challenges of Nar Kreeta. She is now about seventeen. Lon is fifteen. This is chapter two from *Volume III: Apprentice*.

Apprentice, Chapter Two: Package Delivery Service

"Let me come with you!" I shouted at Master Kyle. Jan was already inside the Raven's Claw, warming up the engines.

"I said no, Jaden!" he shouted back.

"I'm useful, Kyle, please, Master, let me help you!"

"No! If Luke gives you any assignments, take Lon with you."

Lon was just as unhappy about this as I was, only she wasn't complaining. She was sitting on the pavement next to the Pad B hangar, staring moodily at the permacrete.

"Do we have to use that old freighter again? The hyperdrive's so slow, it takes forever to get anywhere."

"Think how you'd feel at sublight, taking years just to get to the nearest star system." He turned to the Raven's Claw. I ran up to him. He turned around.

"I have hope, Master. Rosh is out there. We'd know if he were dead."

He patted me on the shoulder. "The Remie base isn't too secure. I'll be in and out in no time. Remies are very retentive about their records. If this faction's even seen Rosh, it'll be in their records somewhere."

"Don't get caught."

"What has Jan been telling you? I never get caught." With that, he ducked down under the Claw and pulled himself in through the bottom hatch.

I backed away. The Claw jumped into the sky and sped away over the treetops. It was gone from sight in seconds. I walked over to Lon. "I tried. You heard me."

"Master is so stubborn."

"Let's go for a walk in the forest."

"I don't want to right now. I want to take a nap."

I looked down at her looking up at me. I didn't force the issue. "All right, I'll walk back to the temple with you."

— ◇ —

Lon was as good as her word. She laid down on the bunk in her cubicle in the women's dorm and fell asleep. Lon was an orphan, except she didn't have a brother like I did. She grew up in a group home on Corellia, and, well, she was still young. I sat at her desk for a little while, watching over her. The forest beckoned to me. Bitters ran up to me in the old gray stone hallway as I was on my way out. "You're going someplace!"

Someone else might have asked her how she knew. So maybe I wasn't as advanced as the other students, but even I could feel her power. This was her strength, the inner eye of the Jedi was strong in her. The other students thought she overheard things, she didn't. "Thanks for warning me. Do you know where?"

"No." She hugged me. I don't like being hugged, but Bitters paid no mind to that with me or any of the others. Master Kyle called her a "hugger." I sighed and patted her shoulder, squashing my irritation like a bug. "You might not think you'll be okay, but you will be."

This girl was only a few years younger than me, but something very terrible had happened to her. She was a street kid from Blevon. Before Tionne had found her, she had lived alone in the lonely ruins of that mostly dead world. The Empire's path of evil had left people like Lon, me, Bitters, and others scattered like crumbs across the galaxy. She was the oldest of a group of orphan Force-sensitive kids at the academy, too young for a master, too old for foster parents, who were taught by all of us. The old sergeant was the only one who could boss them around. We had become their family. Bitters was old enough to be given a master and start the training, but she refused. Something happened to her when she got here, something to do with the other kids. She went backwards to become a small child again. She craved attention . . . and toys.

"Bring me something?" she begged. "It doesn't have to be expensive. Please? Please?"

I was such a sucker for this. She wasn't really a greedy little kid. She spent days building little robot toys for my niece and nephew back on Coruscant. She sent them regular messages. Kyle explained to me that it was an act, a kind of 'coping behavior' for what had happened before. "All right, all right! One toy."

"Hurray!" She went spiraling away down the hallway. "Zoom!" she said to Master Luke, who was walking toward me.

"Zoom back at you," the Master replied. He was smiling, cheerful for once. "I have a job for you," he said to me. "You already know that, though."

"Yes, Bitters told me. I'll go get Lon."

"No, Jaden. This is a solo mission."

"You'll tell her that? Because I don't want Lon thinking I ditched her."

"Yes."

"Bitters . . ." I started to say. I paused. The Master waited for me to gather my thoughts. "It's frustrating. I feel so inferior to the

rest of you, so blind. I try sometimes to cast my mind forward, but I only hear the life around me. I get lost in it."

"Close your eyes, Jaden. What does the Force tell you about the life around the temple? What does the Living Force tell you?"

The life of the planet wrapped me up in its embrace. Little gizka frogs hopped around mountain pools in anticipation of the rain to come soon from the mountains. Purple-winged butterflies had found a haven in the vines high up on the slanting sides of the temple. I could feel the Jedi around us, from the students in the vast training halls below us to Tionne in the library above us. The Master's voice spoke softly over these sensations. "There are only three Living Force practitioners in the galaxy right now, Kyle, his wife Jan, and you. Who is jealous of whom? My Future Sight can be dimmed or blocked by powerful events or the dark side. The Living Force can never be hidden from you, Jaden. You three are our tripwires. You will always see the Now clearly. We complement each other. You must discuss this with Qui-Gon, the next time he visits your dreams. The Jedi need more of you, not less of you."

I opened my eyes. "Thank you."

"You are young, you need encouragement. If Kyle had come to me all whiny, then I'd worry."

We laughed. He walked down the left corridor, toward the lifts. I followed. "I sent 3PO down to the mess hall for some food for you. You were going into the forest, weren't you?"

"Just for a walk. I'm going to miss mid-day meal?"

"Yes. Kyle trains you well. You always wear your vest, your toolbelt, your blaster pistol, and your lightsaber."

"Most of the time, sir. When I'm in workout clothes or in the library I don't, or after evening meal sometimes."

"Ask Kyle when you should stop carrying a blaster pistol."

"Yes, sir."

He had long ago given up trying to get me to stop calling him "sir." We reached the lifts a moment later. We rode them all the way to the basement hangar.

"This is a matter of the deepest secrecy. The future of a powerful ally depends on your silence."

"Yes, sir." Master Luke always played the deep game. It was in his nature to do so. At least Kyle thought that.

Bekkad was over in a corner with two of the AnkiAs fussing with an X-Wing. We all smiled when we saw each other. "I guess I'm getting out of helping you later this afternoon, Bekk."

Bekkad gestured at the X-Wing: "Class ride this time, Jay."

An R7 unit beeped at me from its place behind the cockpit.

3P0 got off the lift with a nicely wrapped package. "Here you are, Mistress Jaden. Please do take care."

"I will, 3P0."

"Take care, Jay," Ankia Two and Three said, almost in unison.

"Thanks, Two, thanks Three." I climbed up the retractable cockpit ladder before I realized that I didn't know where I was going. I sat my meal in the cockpit, then leaned out. "Where am I going in such a hurry, Master Luke?"

Everyone laughed. "To Valanden, a Mid-Rim world. R7 has the coordinates. Someone will meet you at the spaceport. I expect you back in two or three days."

"Um, won't it take that long just to get there?"

Bekkad laughed at my expense. "This ain't no fekking Headhunter, Jay, with a clunky old Class 3 hyperdrive. This is a fekking X-Wing. Its sweet tweaked drive unit is an unofficial Class .5! You'll be there in a few hours."

With that, R7 fired up the engines. We taxied out of the temple hangar to the pad and then launched to orbit. It handled like a dream. Boom, we went to hyperspace in a flash, with almost no spin-up time, and no spooky clanking from the hyperdrive casing.

The quiet man who didn't give me his name waited while I used the toilet. When I came out of the refresher room, he led me to a speeder limo, with one quick detour to the gift shop. Most of the stuff was for upscale types, though they did have some handcrafted figurines, little tiny toys, for a small amount. I bought Bitters something I thought she'd like. The man didn't say much of anything. He didn't explain until we were in his office, high up in a skyscraper in the middle of the financial district of the city.

"I need you to pick up a package for us."

"Um."

"It requires the utmost in secrecy. My employer once heard someone say: 'Only a Jedi can keep a secret.' He believes this."

"The Master sent me here to help you. I'll help. Will there be trouble?"

"We don't think so. They have a weapons detector at each entrance. I will have to keep your lightsaber and your other weapons. Maybe you shouldn't wear your vest, either."

I took out my lightsaber and laid it on his desk while I took off my vest and my belt. I took off my armorcloth gloves and put them in a pocket in the vest. Then I picked up my lightsaber and handed it to him. "Please keep it safe."

He turned it over in his hands. I had etched patterned grooves in the yellow alloy durasteel case to aid my grip. I had cut symbols from Jedi history above the grip, and near the top, inside a band, the ancient Jedi creed. I wasn't good at microlettering, so they were in two lines.

Emotion, yet peace.

Ignorance, yet knowledge.

Passion, yet serenity.

Chaos, yet harmony.

Death, yet the Force.

"You made this yourself?"

"Yes, all Jedi make their own lightsabers. Most are better than mine. Please give it and my other things to Luke if I don't return." I said it so calmly, so casually, he looked up at me.

"You'll be back. This must remain a private matter. If the police become involved, stay silent. My employer's attorneys will get you out." He picked up a small red datapad from his desk and handed it to me. "This contains the information they want. They are on the seventh floor of the corporate headquarters of a company allied with them. No one else in the building knows what they are up to. It's at 1919 Profit Avenue, Otyria, that's on the southern continent. We have a rental droid aircraft on the roof, it will take you to the city. Land on the roof of the vehicle parking garage next to the building and walk over. It's a major metropolitan area." He handed me a credit chit. "For emergencies. You can rent another vehicle, rent a room, whatever you need. Are your pockets empty? They will search you. It's best if you have nothing but the datapad and the chit."

I nodded. "Luke explained the sensitivity of the matter to me." I emptied the pockets of my blue fatigue pants. There were only a few odd stones and a bit of wire, plus the tiny carved toy wookiee for Bitters. I hesitated. "What if they refuse to give me the 'package'? And what is the 'package'?" I put the tiny datapad and the chit into a pants pocket.

"It would be very bad if they do not comply with the agreement, but I do not think they will. I wouldn't send you if I thought they might."

I smiled. The anxiety he kept hidden was visible to me. "Yet there is that possibility, otherwise, why ask a Jedi to do this?"

"You should go."

I nodded and left.

He tapped a control on his desk. A holodisplay popped up. It was his employer. "Did you hear?"

"Yes. How did she know?"

"She is Jedi, they have a . . . truth-sense. We should have told her. She would have gone anyway."

"We couldn't take the chance she'd say no."

— ◇ —

I traveled in complete luxury. By 'aircraft' they meant an airlimo. It reminded me of the one I helped to dig up on Trash Mountain, except there were no forty-year-old blood stains. The droid pilot knew where I was going, I didn't have to say a word. It had a great holodisplay in the back. I prowled the holonet on it until I found a documentary on starship design. We were over a huge city by the time it was over. There were lots of skyscrapers, lots of highrise buildings. It was puny by Coruscant standards, but nice-looking. Lots of roads led into the city center. We swung around a tall circular building. It was sheathed in black glass. I felt menace and fear inside — also a great deal of boredom and happiness. The menace was focused on one place. Unfortunately, that was the place I was headed. Why can't Jedi go to the boring places just once?

We landed on the drab permacrete cube behind the beautiful black cylinder. There was an enclosed skybridge from the cube to the office building, and, just like the unnamed gentleman said, there was a droid security checkpoint at the other end. The weapons scanner cleared me. I went to a lift inside and took it down to the seventh floor.

They were waiting for me when I left the lift. I guess there weren't too many casual visitors to this part of the building. Four big men in black suits were my escort. They were all armed, I could sense it in their minds. Each one of them had a little dark self-

centered core. These men would do what was needed to satisfy that little greedy seed inside them. They all thought that obeying the man in charge would satisfy that need. They were bigots, too. Nonhumans need not apply here. Rothers would have had an edge in this assignment, her twi'lek heritage would have put them off. They would have been more reckless. Then I saw Luke's wisdom. They saw just a girl in faded crew blues and a knit pullover shirt, some teenage flunky from a delivery service. They did not, could not see the vast multitude hiding inside me. I hadn't thought of myself as that helpless girl in a couple years, not since the night my shadow master came to me, not after he showed me the Force.

The five of us, with me in the center, walked down a shinny black hallway that echoed the exterior of the building. A door slid open for us on the right.

The decor inside was of warmth. Natural colors in shades of brown dominated. The furniture was of wood. I suspected that this was a demonstration of prestige. I ended my march in front of a truly handsome desk, made lovingly out of the glistening heart of an ancient tree. Menace was sitting on the other side.

He had one of those thin beards, hardly more than a vertical stripe under his mouth. His eyes put a value on everyone he saw. "What is . . . this?"

"I have your datapad. I am supposed to take the package and leave."

"This won't do at all." He nodded to someone behind me. "He didn't come himself. This won't do." He drummed his fingers on the fine wood of the desk.

I pulled out the datapad and laid it on the desk. He fiddled with it, spinning it around. "We need to send a message." He stood up.

I glanced behind me. Two of the men were spreading a tarp over the handsome patterned carpet. "What's that for?"

They laughed.

I turned my head back to the man at the desk. He was leveling a small blaster at my head.

The Force exploded around me. Its powerful sound pulsed outward, like the gigantic hands of a god coming together, and everything in the room flew away from me. The walls buckled, the hallway door was sprung out of its frame. The man behind the desk flew back against the wall. The desk crashed into his head. It crushed his skull. Another one, the one in the far corner, had broken his neck. The two buried under the chairs in the corner were unconscious. The other one, the one who had been standing closest to me, he was dead. A huge bloody stain full of brain matter showed where his head had hit the wall.

I jumped into the wreckage, looking for the tiny red datapad. I found it as someone pried the interior door open. A cracked ceiling tile fell to the floor.

It was another big man. "What the fek happened here?"

I glanced at him. Kyle calls it *Force Fist*. It's a highly focused *push*. My mind hit him with it. He sailed back into the other room.

What the package was, I didn't know, but I was drawn by the fear echoing from a young woman's brain. I decided to take a walk. Maybe she knew something about all this. I gestured at the sprung door. It gave out a big ping and flew out of its frame. I stepped out into the big black hallway. More men came running at me from both ends.

This was just about enough to get under my skin, just a little. I raised my hand as they shouted at me. They would have shot already, but I was just a thin teenage girl with empty hands. I closed my eyes.

Atton Rand's holocron had taught me many things. This was one of them. It was called *Force Wave*. I was more advanced in the outer aspects of the Force than many of my fellow students, which meant just about nothing to my master Kyle. Every day I was with

him, it was nothing but meditate, meditate, meditate. Meditate sitting in a shallow pool in the forest. Meditate sitting under a waterfall in the mountains. Meditate in the courtyard of the Massassi Temple. Meditate every single minute. And when he was away, it was worse, because it was meditating with Tionne or Master Luke.

Great pulses of Force energy poured out of me. It slammed them back. Some skidded over the slick black floor into walls. Others went sailing back into each other. They were a moaning, mostly unconscious mass as I walked past them and turned the corner. A couple tried to stand as I walked by. A gesture of my hand and the Force slammed them back down.

Another one popped out of a side door and took a shot at me. *Speed* swept me under his shots and up into him, my open palm to his chin. I shattered his jaw. The blow knocked him back into the office. I stepped inside and closed the door.

The interior offices were a confusing maze of doors, cubicles, desks, and furniture. It had recently been for something else. The people who had worked at these desks had been cleared out for this bunch. A siren started up in the distance. Harsh white light from high-output panels in the ceiling erased most shadows.

Another guy in a black suit stepped through the far door and took a shot at me with a Tandoshan Array Gun.

I jumped away over a cubicle wall. The array gun boomed, and a large part of the cubicle partition was blown to pieces. The array gun fired a small cluster of gas-plasma bolts with each shot. They should have used a CorpSec flechette pistol, that would have got me, because it was fully automatic. The plasma cartridge feed in the trando gun was so unreliable, the trandos had installed a big lever on one side to crank a new cartridge in when the auto feed mechanism failed, which was always. Yet the trandos considered it a prestige weapon. Those trandos had their own opinions about the

strangest things. I did a cartwheel over the other side of the cubicle to land right in front of him. I snatched the gun from his hands.

"What?" I asked.

He tried to reach inside his jacket for a pistol. My mind *pulled* him up in the air by his neck. He twisted and twitched. But I am Jedi. I gently lowered his body to the floor after he was unconscious. He'd have a headache like a booming howler lizard but he'd be alive.

I threw the gun away and walked through another door.

— ◇ —

"Gonna get a map next time," I mumbled to myself. Two doors, three guys, and I was lost in this office maze. I needed to find the girl, quick-like.

I opened another door in a wall of doors along one side of the cubicle maze. Tape was over her mouth and eyes. One of the men inside had her head tilted back, with a long thin knife poised to cut her throat. "Oh, here you are," I said pleasantly. *Speed* was on me again. One quick bound and I was beside the guy with the knife. I plucked it out of his hand. "This," I held the knife up to his eyes. "This is rude." The other one in the room came back to his senses and brought up a blaster carbine. I *pulled* it out of his fingers. It flew into my hand. "Shouldn't you go now?" I asked them. They ran out the door. I threw the toys away. The tape was extra sticky. It was a minute of gentle tugging to get it off her face. She was older than me. I smiled at her. "I'm Jaden. Do you know anything about a package I'm supposed to pick up?"

"No." She started to cry.

"Shush. Shush. Everything's better now." I worked on the cuffs. This would have been much easier with a lightsaber. Finally I gave up and closed my eyes. My mind focused the Force on the plastoid

cuffs binding her to the chair. They popped loose one by one. We could have stayed in the little room, maybe we should have, but I thought it was better for her if we left. We finally found our way out into the black hallway. She was mostly naked, in a skimpy little costume in bright red, like she had been a toy up in somebody's window. There were bruises on her arms and legs. Someone had been rough with her recently.

"You don't like those clothes much, do you?"

"I . . . no I don't. My owners made me wear it."

"Owners?"

"I'm a slave."

"Really? I haven't really met too many slaves so far. Except some jawas, and they weren't really slaves, they were being held captive." I was running off at the mouth. Master Kyle was always telling me to shut up.

Shame rose up in her until I thought it would flow out her ears like bile. I took her by the elbow and helped her over to a bench. It really wasn't for sitting, more decoration, I guess. It was black like the rest of the hallway.

"Um, clothes," I said. Then there was something. I sighed. "Stay right there, I have to deal with something." I got up and walked to the nearest hallway intersection and leaned against the wall nearest the turn. "What?"

The four guys on the other side were waiting to ambush me. These were guys I had fought before. One was the guy with the huge headache.

"Not talking? You know what I am. You know what I am capable of. You did not expect that they would send one of my kind. You are not capable of dealing with me. I spared you before. Look at yourselves. Do you really think a few guns are going to defeat me? I spared you once. I can't do that twice. You'll be dead. I don't want

to do that. Let's call this off. I don't want to kill you, you can't kill me. Why don't you leave?"

My mind poked at their minds. The one I choked, I pushed the memory of that up to the front of his mind. He broke and ran. The other three saw and followed him.

I sighed again. It would have been a tough fight without my lightsaber, one of them had an Imperial Heavy Repeater. It was the one with the under-slung concussion gun. Ouch, a really dangerous weapon. There had to be clothing for her to wear around here. I found a pair of coveralls in an office closet. It was mostly safe here now. We had the floor to ourselves, though I could feel the survivors on the floor below, plotting something.

"Here. Sorry, this is all I could find."

She was so anxious to be rid of the doll's clothes she wore, she stripped and put on the coveralls right there in the hallway. The plotting from below had turned into gloating. We needed to find a place.

"Come on." She followed me to the corner of the floor. A conference room with a beautiful view of the city was the perfect place, just about as far from the central lifts as we could get, plenty of room for me to maneuver. "Sorry, but I think all the exits are locked down. Stay here. I'll be back in a couple minutes. Please don't leave. I may be able to beat what they're sending up, but I can't do that and save you. Stay here."

"Okay." She wrapped herself in her arms and shivered.

"It'll be fine. I'll be right back. Honest!"

I cursed my own pliable nature as I walked toward the lift shafts at the center of the floor. I could have smuggled my lightsaber in here, no problem.

I passed one of the emergency stairs. Like I thought, they were locked down and the doors were made of very solid stuff, durasteel set deep in the permacrete. Given time I could have popped one, but

not in the time I had. I ran toward the lift shafts. I turned the corner, the lifts were in front of me, three on a side. I didn't have long to wait. All six of them pinged. Their glossy black doors opened in unison. Big U-series security droids came marching out, each with a blaster carbine in its hands. SECURITY was stenciled in big yellow letters across the carapace of each one. "Do not move. You will not be harmed," they said in an echo of each other. They began shooting at me. I jumped over them. "Do not move, you will not be harmed." There were twelve, probably the entire building's complement. Fortunately, only two of them had integral shield generators. The spherical shield bubbles around those two shifted and glimmered as the red blaster bolts from the others brushed them. The last one to get off turned to face me as I landed. There was no need of restraint this time. My mind twisted its head off. I jumped and spun as they shot at me. The bunch trundled after me. The headless one stumbled around for a moment before falling down. Kyle showed me a neat trick the day before he left. I jumped to the wall and landed on its vertical surface. The Force pinned me there for a couple seconds, I couldn't hold it longer than that. I still couldn't wall-run like Kyle could. It was long enough for the first one to shamble around the corner. The assassination protocols the men in black had sliced into them had conflicted with their movement software, they were clumsier than they should be. I threw two into the air. They squealed as they fell on the others. But I only knocked out two. The rest began chanting: "Target acquisition mode, target acquisition mode."

I had to move or I was going to fall. I jumped down into them. Three turned at me, their blaster rifles locking on to me. "Target acquired!"

Speed. I ducked. One of them managed to get in the way of the blaster bolts. I *jumped*. Red bolts chased me through the air. I landed and sprinted through a door, into the cubicle maze. "Target

acquisition mode, target acquisition mode," they chanted as they followed me in. The trick was to catch the ones without shields. Two turned a corner among the cubicles. I picked up a desk with my mind and smashed it over their heads.

Their squawks drew the others. Blaster bolts followed me out the side door back into the black hallway. They had split up. Three were coming toward me. I turned onto another branch of the hallway, the other three were there. Each group had a shield active droid in the middle. I jumped and hopped, red bolts arcing around me. I bounced off a wall and rolled into a cross corridor. They were driving me where I didn't want to go, back to the conference room.

Not all Jedi have the same skills. Master Kyle keeps trying to teach me some of his unique abilities. Maybe I'm not always the best student, but I do try very hard to learn from him. He and I are Now, Living Force practitioners, and things are possible for us that aren't for others. Kyle had been teaching me this latest technique for three months. I hadn't mastered it yet, but maybe I was good enough to try. Only trouble was, I had to get them in a bunch. I was out of time. The door to the conference room was in front of me, and one group had just turned the far corner. They started to shoot. *Speed* came on me. I *jumped* to the inner wall. Their guns tracked up at me. I *jumped* to the outer wall. They missed again. I landed behind them and sprinted in a dodging run toward the other end of the hallway. The others turned that corner and began to fire. If I had not been Jedi, if I had not been trained in *speed*, I would have died. Enough of their fundamental programming survived the slice so they couldn't fire on each other. I kept moving as they marched toward me from either end, first on one wall, dodging between the groups, then the other wall. In their attempt to get a target lock on me, they began to stumble into each other. We were in front of the conference room doors. I leapt behind one group. They began to turn. I jumped, leaping over both groups. I spun and twisted my

body to avoid the red blaster bolts they fired. They came together in a confused mess. I jumped again, opposite the door. They began to turn. I jumped to the wall over the door, then dropped to the floor. They began to turn.

The girl inside had heard the noise and opened the door.

The snake inside me was ready. It had slowly been coiling its body, gathering itself for when I called to it. I thrust both hands out toward them. The great snake that was the Force punched itself out through the conduit that was my body. An explosion of noise roared out of me. Thick strands of bioelectricity lashed out from my hands. Pure, brilliant arcs of power cut the air, lashed and entwined the droids in their energies. The splintering strands licked and smashed the flaring shields, caressed the metal carapaces and heads and arms and legs of the machines in front of me. Actuators began to blow out in little pops of fire that took off a droid arm, a head. The shields flared and died. The droids convulsed in the electric fury from my body. I was screaming, my voice unheard in the electric roar that wrapped me in itself. They fell. The power left me as the last one tumbled down.

Then the pain came. My hands hurt so much. I turned them over. They were burned bright red. "ow, ow, ow!" I jumped up and down, the pain driving me crazy. I put them under my arms, that didn't help. My mind began to calm itself a little. "I am the master of my body." I told my aching hands. The pain began to subside a little. I turned around to look at the girl. "Everything's fine now."

"What are you?" she asked, staring at me.

"I am a Jedi." I looked down at my singed hands. "Not a very good one, yet." I looked back up at her. "But I got the job done. All's well." I listened to the Living Force. "The cops are coming. The men in black couldn't hide what was happening here from the rest of the building forever. Someone called the police. The men in black have fled. We'll be arrested for a while, but don't worry, we'll

be out soon." I looked at my burned hands. The Force whispered to me. I stepped into the conference room and looked up. My eyes found a tiny security camera high on a wall. I extended my arm, pointing a burned finger at it. Then I crushed it with my mind.

Someone far away turned away from a display screen. "Now you know why they are so dangerous."

The woman looked at me strangely. "Do we just wait for the police?"

"Why not? Say, do you want to learn meditation from a Jedi?"

She blinked at the suggestion, then thought about it. "Yes, I think so."

— ◇ —

When the police carefully picked their way through the big pile of fractured droids and opened the conference room door, she and I were on top of the conference table, sitting cross-legged, meditating.

"What are you doing?" one of the cops asked.

I opened one eye. "I'm teaching her to meditate." I closed my eye.

The policemen clustered into the conference room to stare at us. They all wore bulky hardshell body armor. "What happened here?" another one asked.

I sighed. I opened my eyes and climbed down from the tabletop. The girl's name was Willa. She climbed down, too. They looked us up and down. A scrawny teenage girl in crew blues and a young woman with enough heartache to sink a ship, wearing janitor's coveralls. There were rectangular rash spots on her face where the tape had been.

"I was here to pick up a package."

"What happened?"

I shrugged.

They asked Willa. "What happened here?"

"I'm with her." She gestured at me with her head. Then she shrugged for good measure.

So they arrested us. We were pestered with questions for an entire day, separately, then together, then separately. They took me to a medical droid for my hands, which were wrapped in thin bacta-infused bandages, like soft white gloves. The police fussed and fumed. Someone had erased the surveillance video for that floor. None of the men in black suits, of the unconscious ones left behind, would talk. I shrugged. "I was there to pick up a package."

The tiny datapad they found on me was encrypted. The credit chit was a cash card with no ID. They asked Willa. She shrugged. They asked me. I shrugged. An attorney came into the room and yelled at the cops. The cops yelled back at him. Then we were out on the curb, the airlimo waiting for us. We flew back north, and Willa cried. Then I taught her more meditation techniques.

"Not everyone is Force-sensitive, but everyone can use the Force in their heads, to think more clearly, to master their fear, to ease their sadness . . . or so says my master. You want to learn a little more?"

She did. It calmed her. She lost her composure when we entered the guy's office. She saw a man standing next to the one who sent me.

"Uncle!" she cried, and jumped into his arms.

"I thought you were dead, I thought you had all died!" Then they started to cry.

While they were busy with that, I found my stuff on a table nearby. I put on my armorcloth vest and checked its pockets. All my little tools and my datapad were still there. I put on my belt. Everything was there, my blaster pistol was still in its holster. The tiny wookiee figure was unbroken. I had a little trouble putting

them in my pockets, the bandages on my hands made me clumsy. I picked up my lightsaber.

The babbled words, the questions, all of it died when I ignited my lightsaber. They all turned to look at me. I held the long gleaming golden blade up to my face, as if inspecting it. Its hum was loud in the new silence of the room. The blade extinguished at my will.

I put out my bandaged palm with my lightsaber resting in it. The saber rose up about twenty centimeters and began to spin like the rotor arm of an old generator. Faster and faster. Everyone in the room stared at it. "Don't lie to a Jedi next time, or we won't come." The saber dropped back into my palm. I put it away and left, every eye in the room on me.