

Star Wars: Shadowbound Chapter 2 - T7, Alfred, Preventive Training, A Vision & The Child

36 BBY, Coruscant,

Kzzzk!

Arenval stepped in, fortifying his strength with the use of the Force so his strikes carried weight. His feet changed from defensive to all-out attack in an instant. His lightsaber struck Master Windu's. His Form V was perfect.

But right at the same time, Master Windu stepped backward, used his lightsaber to deflect Arenval's blade, and counter instantly.

Woosh!

Arenval jumped backwards for a moment and slammed his sword at Master Windu again, and struck downward with Force strength behind it. His grip hardened, and he connected fully. He felt his strength making Master Windu's grip shiver.

"Impressive, Padawan. You have improved."

Bam!

But right then, a kick landed on Arenval's chest, throwing him back.

"But not enough. Too much focus on the blade, while you ignore other physical risks. That is enough for today."

Arenval stayed on the floor of the training room, sprawled on his back like a starfish, his chest moving with his panting breath. He was covered in sweat from head to toe, but he had no complaints. The improvement was noticeable. Finally, he wasn't struck back by Master Windu's saber but an actual limb. That meant he'd actually improved.

Once he felt his breath calm, he pulled himself up and walked to a small room attached to the training room. Inside, still in his clothes, he stepped into a sonic shower. He didn't enjoy it as it felt 'fake'. But it was real, and ultrasonic vibrations removed dirt and grime. It was true for both his body and clothes.

But he still preferred a real shower, once in the morning and once before sleep. There weren't many greedy temptations in the Jedi Temple, but to him, those small shower times were.

Once clean, he left the training room and headed back to his personal quarters. On the way, other Padawans his age mostly kept away, while the older ones ignored him. Only the older Jedi responded to his light bow.

An hour's enough time.

Instead of reaching his quarters' door, he punched in the code on Yoda's door and walked inside. It was empty as usual, and at the moment its one side was filled with mechanical parts, a powered-down droid, and some computer terminals.

The difference between the side of the room he used and the other side with Yoda's sleeping pad and meditation seats was like night and day.

"Time to wake you up, my droid friend."

Arenval walked over to his workbench and grabbed a device that looked like a datapad, but different at the same time. It was a sleek, white device with a ten-inch holographic touch display. Arenval had made it himself after being fed up with the existing datapads.

He got tired of having to use a computer terminal for one thing and a datapad for another. So, he made what he now called a HoloTab, and it came in palm size and the large one he had on the table.

Arenval had noticed that most tech in the galaxy was very basic, retro, and utilitarian. It simply worked, so nobody changed it. Datapads had specific uses. So he made one device that combined all in one place, like the smartphones he knew.

The device he made had a holographic touchscreen, holo-projector, speaker, microphone, and camera. It could also be customized to add scanners, locators, and more based on need. For himself, he had made a basic AI-UI that customized settings according to his use. It also recognised most major spoken languages for hands-free use.

But the best part was that it had a suite of apps that he'd made for himself to feel like home.

As a military man once addicted to social media, he craved entertainment. So he made an application that acted as a search engine for him on Holonet, and allowed him to save media feeds, data channels, and Comlinks into different applications, something that didn't exist until now.

Holonet was not the internet. It wasn't an anytime access network, nor could it ever be. The network spanned a large part of a whole galaxy, and trillions of people were on it. If trillions accessed Holonet like the internet, nothing would work due to congestion. To get new media or files, one had to connect the datapad, or his holotab, to a local network that was connected with Holonet Transceivers or powerful arrays.

Even then, data download wasn't instant. Simple text-based data was fast, taking a minute at best. Media took time, as the transceivers placed you in a queue. His Holo-tab's automated system made doing that easier, as well as sorting that data.

[Did you sleep with Elder Sor-Kam-Hondi behind my back?!... I did! To save you!... Liar!]

"She did?!" Arenval stared at the screen of his Holotab, the latest episode of Wives of Cerea playing as it was downloaded while he was training.

It was a show about women messing around, scheming, and sabotaging each other as wives of influential Cerean men. Since the species suffered a low male-to-female ratio, they had a culture of polygamy, which meant harems and drama.

In fact, it wasn't just that show Arenval watched. It was better to say he was the target demographic of nearly everything related to entertainment on the Holonet. Detective Munn, House of Mont Cala, Beauty of Alderaan(18+), Bantha Rider, and so many more were the Holonet shows Arenval watched.

In fact, they were the reason why he made his holotab, so he could auto-download them as soon as new episodes were released and watch them later.

"Master Yoda's missing the twist," he murmured, eyes on the show, hands working the final droid parts as he sat lazily in the chair, completely unbecoming of a Jedi. But he didn't care at that point; he treated that room like his own, and it wasn't like Yoda didn't watch some episodes with him.

Too bad Yoda had gone to some planet in the Mid Rim. A year had passed since he'd become a Padawan, and such things often happened. Hence, he had Master Windu train him that day. He often trained with different Jedi Masters and Jedi Knights.

Soon, the episode ended, and he stopped himself from starting the latest episode of Detective Munn. Instead, he opened the saved data-feed on droid anatomy from the Old Republic era. It was data he'd found in Jedi Archives, not the Holonet.

"You are extremely old, my friend."

This was different. Arenval could feel his understanding of the droid had increased simply by trying to learn it. He had an inkling of what was happening to him. It wasn't just the droid; it was every piece of technology he tried his hand on. It let him build that holotab, helped him study the lightsaber mechanics in depth. The Force was guiding him.

Finally, he rolled his chair closer to the droid and inserted the repaired logic matrix array, the final piece. It took him so long to fix the droid because finding the right parts was a mess. And finding time to work on them was even harder. He had to modify too many things, to the point that the droid couldn't be called factory-made anymore. It was mostly custom.

One last time, he checked everything. The original power cell was completely dead and chemically degraded. He had replaced it with an entirely new one, which was far better than the original.

At last, he connected the droid to a variable-voltage generator.

"May the Force be with you." He muttered and flicked the switch. He rolled his chair back just in case the thing blew up.

He waited silently. Minutes went by, and nothing changed other than the faint hum of power. He tried to reach into the Force and feel the droid, but still, there was nothing. He'd made all the repairs.

"A dud then?"

He dejectedly leaned back in the chair and shut his eyes to rest. The good thing was that his money wasn't used to repair the droid. He had no money in the first place. The bad thing was that he wasted a year on a dead droid.

"Whir-bzzzt-clack..."

"Hm?" Arenval opened his eyes and noticed light in the droid's photoreceptor. It was blue, very dim, and slowly grew stronger. Its conical head started to shake as well, slowly rotating left and right.

The sounds it made were raspier, highly electronic, much more than modern droids. And it was speaking binary, but not exactly the same as the modern binary. It was more jumbled, harder to understand. But he could understand it alright.

"Bleep-blurp... T7 = Where?"

The lights fully turned bright and blue. The droid's head started moving with life.

"Jedi Temple of Coruscant," Arenval answered, more in shock because he recognized that speech pattern. "Are you called Teeseven?"

The droid beeped and booped.

"Jedi = Smart // T7 = Too old + Powered Down."

Arenval scratched his head, confused why the Force wanted him to have this droid of all. From that unique third-person speech pattern, he already knew what it was and from where. And how fiercely loyal it was to the Jedi, with an unwavering moral compass, hero complex, opinionated, and independent. In short, a headache to him, a Dark Side spawn.

"Welcome back, then. I don't know how old you are, so... right now it's year... 3,621 after the Treaty of Coruscant." Arenval said after glancing at his holotab.

"T7 = 3804 years old // Jedi = T7's savior // T7 + Jedi = Team."

He rubbed his face, wondering what to do. On one hand, the droid was a repository of ancient information, possibly holding coordinates of valuable locations. At the same time, it was too independent and moral.

"I'm a Jedi Padawan, but... I was born with a body aligned to the Dark Side of the Force. Honestly, I'm not sure you'll enjoy working with me. I spent the last year putting you back together, but the Jedi Council will probably value you more than I do. They'll copy your data, decide you're too dangerous, then shut you down again.

"Jedi today aren't like the ones from your era, Teeseven. The Sith have been gone for a thousand years, so most of them know almost nothing about them. Truth is, they barely understand the Dark Side either. Lost a lot of the old knowledge along the way."

T7 whistled for a long time.

"T7 = Curious."

"I'll connect you to the Holonet. You can see things for yourself."

Let's hope you reach the same conclusion as me, buddy.

Arenval watched the veteran droid of the Great Galactic War. A time when the Republic was a militarized superpower, the Jedi were battle-hardened generals, and fought thousands of Sith in the open.

Eventually, T7 made a beeping sound that could be called sadness.

"T7 = Shocked // Republic = Weak // Corporate Greed = Strong // Republic = Need saving."

"A bit late for that, Teeseven. Tell me, what's your read on the Jedi?"

"T7 = Scared // Jedi = Weaker than Republic // Modern Jedi = Monks // Old Republic Jedi = Warriors // Sith = Easy Win // Jedi Council = Sleeping."

Arenval chuckled and patted the droid's head. "Mate, keep talking like that outside, and you're ending up in a trash compactor. Having opinions in this day and age gets you stared down by Master Windu."

T7 wheezed continuously.

"Sith = Never extinct. Only hide // Jedi Order = Useless // T7 + Jedi = Fix the Outer Rim themselves."

"Fix? You're sounding more and more like an aspiring hero now with morally gray choices."

"T7 + Jedi = Hero," T7 whistled excitedly.

Arenval sighed. At least the droid felt the same as him, he reckoned. Funny, even the droid saw the reality of the current Order and Republic that the rest refused to even acknowledge.

"I'm Arenval Tython, Padawan to Grandmaster Yoda. You can call me Aren."

"T7 + Aren = Save Galaxy."

"Aiming high already? Alright, but first I've got a meeting with Master Dooku. Lucky for me, Master Yoda isn't here, or I'd be facing one of his silent little guilt rituals with the sighing and humming. Stay here, get fully charged, and poke around the Holonet if you want."

"T7 = Understood."

Quickly, Arenval donned his dark brown Jedi cloak and left Yoda's room with his holotab in hand. He went to the upper floors and arrived at one of the smaller conference rooms in the Jedi Temple. He didn't have the permission to use it, but Dooku did.

He knocked on the door twice and entered, finding Dooku seated, dressed in a simple but regal attire, fitting his status as a Count now.

"Greetings, Master Dooku."

"I am not your master anymore, Padawan Tython."

Arenval smiled and took a seat opposite the small table. "A teacher is still a teacher, no matter the world around them. You taught me how to conceal my alignment in the Force, and it has saved me from much trouble."

He actively tried to butter Dooku. Aware of the future, he didn't want to lose his connection to this man. As he planned his own independent adventure soon.

"Let us begin. I have little time to spare, as I am to meet with my friend, Master Dyas, shortly," Dooku said, his voice deep and aristocratic, with a subtle friendliness. "This RQ protocol droid is my gift to you for attaining the rank of Padawan. It will help you establish what we discussed. I have notified the manufactories where you may elect to mass-produce your Holotab. The droid will also assist in monitoring production and sales."

"..."

Arenval stared at the humanoid droid nearly as tall as him. It was colored light gray with faint golden highlights.

"Greetings, I am a RQ Protocol Droid, production number L-98BX4. I am available for all your business and administration needs, Master Tython."

The droid spoke; while it was a mechanical sound, it was clear human speech. And it looked expensive.

"Master Dooku... am I allowed to accept this? This... will help me greatly. I should at least offer you a share of my busine—"

"That is unnecessary, Padawan." Dooku raised a hand, silencing him. "It is the duty of the Jedi Order to cultivate talent. Too often, however, they see nothing beyond the Force and their dogma. It is encouraging to see a young man like you concerned with more than meditation and lightsaber training. I hope this endeavor serves you well."

Come on, old man. Don't make yourself so un-hateable.

Arenval kept the plastic smile in place and gave a small nod. "Then I'll make the most of the opportunity."

Dooku's intentions were noble at that moment. But if he had known the future growth trajectory of that insignificant device, things might have concluded differently. Arenval had no idea either; his intention behind taking Master Dooku's suggestion to sell it was to earn some credits independently so he wouldn't struggle too much after gaining freedom.

"You may discuss any further matters with the droid. I am required elsewhere." Dooku rose to his feet. "I do perceive progress. Your skill in concealing the dark presence has improved."

"Thank you, Master. There isn't much to occupy me, so I sharpen what skills I can. I trained in lightsaber combat with Master Windu earlier today. Yesterday, Master Jinn taught me meditation at Master Yoda's suggestion. Before that, Master Shaak Ti taught me group meditation. I'm still unconvinced that groups improve meditation, at least for me."

Dooku just nodded at him.

"Be mindful of your surroundings and learn as much as you can. Farewell now, Padawan Tython. May the Force be with you."

"And with you, Master."

Soon, it was just him and the RQ protocol droid. He looked at the thing, curious. "Are you fresh out of the factory?"

"Indeed, Master Tython. I entered service nineteen days and fifteen hours ago."

"Too green, then. Alright, you're called Alfred from now on. I don't have any big plans, just want some pocket money, so even if we sell ten of these tabs, I'm happy."

"Wonderful, I will make preparations. But first, I have prepared a sales plan, Master Tython. I believe the device requires certain modifications: greater customisability and improved monetisation. Current datapads sell between one hundred and one hundred fifty credits. We should offer this unit between five hundred and one thousand credits. The software should be available for separate purchase or on a subscription basis, particularly those designed for entertainment and trade numbers..."

Arenval listened to Alfred ramble for half an hour. Midway, he started doing meditation, and eventually, he just nodded. "Sure, let's do that."

"Wonderful, Master. You need only register an entity name now. Most privately owned corporations carry the last name of the creator."

Arenval thought for a while, but eventually he chose to go with the simplest thing possible. "Then Tython Tech it is... Seems alright."

"Tython Tech. Simple and impactful, Master. I will proceed to register the name and begin production. The loan from Count Dooku will be sufficient."

"Wait. I have a loan on me?" Arenval straightened in his chair. "I never asked for one. And if this goes wrong, what then? Jedi don't get paid. Also, minor detail, I never signed for it."

"Master Tython, there is no reason to be wary. The loan came with no due date or request for collateral. Hence, there was no need for you to approve it as it is not tied to you."

"So it's like charity?"

"Precisely."

But that didn't mean Arenval felt good about it.

"Alfred, settle the debt once we've made enough to call it profit. I don't like owing people, especially as a Jedi. Hard telling what he'll want later. Anyway, I'm heading out. You can stay in my Padawan quarters, just keep to a corner and spare the space. T7's already a chunky one."

"Understood, Master Tython."

Arenval got up and left the meeting room. He went downstairs, back towards the training room, and saw both Aayla and Orbe leaning by the door. He was a bit jealous of them because they both often left the temple on missions with their Masters.

"Let's go." He said and walked through the door, entering a wide, empty training room. "Remove your cloaks and grab your lightsabers. We'll train differently today. We often spend our time sparring blades, but I want to focus on real-world scenarios."

"My Master and I solved the Mystery of the Lodi on our most recent mission. I can handle anything you're planning, Aren," Aayla declared confidently, arms crossed.

"And I was out tracking pirates who wanted to kidnap Force-sensitive children and sell them for a high price," Orbe said with equal confidence.

Arenval nodded, albeit slightly annoyed because his adventures were limited to watching galactic soap operas on his holotab, fixing droids, and in-house lectures. He craved open grass, trees, and dirt-covered grounds now.

"Good for you two, I guess. Need a pat on the head?" He joked.

"I wouldn't mind."

"..."

Both Arenval and Orbe looked at the blue Twi'lek girl.

"What?" she exclaimed.

Finally, scratching his head, he walked over to three idle Jedi training droids and took away their training lightsabers. Instead, he handed them blasters. They could only be set for low-powered energy blasts or stun. Then finally, he turned on his holotab, pulled a custom wire from its top right corner, and attached it to the droid's slot.

He didn't change too much, just some small parameters that didn't require master access. What he wanted was for them to be as unpredictable as possible and mimic future Battle Droids as well as Clone Troopers.

"Get ready." He ordered and commanded the droids to stand around a circle in the middle of the training floor. They stood in a way their blasters wouldn't hit each other. "Aayla, Orbe, stand in the middle. The droids will try to stun you, and your job is to dodge them or deflect them."

"Stun?" Orbe made a sour face. "Why stun? I'll be knocked out for minutes if I get hit."

"Then don't get hit." Arenval stepped away, turning the droids on. "Three-two-one... Start!"

"Wai—"

Pew!

Pew!

Instantly, Orbe and Aayla had their backs against each other, a tactic they had employed against him during lightsaber training. They worked as a team and deflected all incoming shots.

One minute, then two minutes passed, and a sort of rhythm formed.

Arenval smirked from a distance and tapped on his holotab, increasing the speed of the droids while reducing their predictability. They not only shot at different intervals, but they also started to move, roll around, and work as a team to bring down the two Jedi.

Thud!

"Aayla!" Orbe exclaimed as he felt the air behind him.

Orbe quickly adapted to the situation and tried to deflect, using Form III extensively.

Thud!

But just half a minute later, one of the droids ducked and shot at his foot, and that was it. Orbe fell to the ground with a frown aimed at Arenval.

Arenval knew what was going to happen next. So, he dragged both Aayla and Orbe's bodies to the edge of the room to the staircase seating. He placed them there upright and walked into the middle of the training floor himself.

For some time, he sat down in the middle of the circle cross-legged, meditating. Once he felt Aayla's movement, he got up.

"Before you two get angry. I will show you what's possible."

And then, Arenval took out a black strip of cloth from his pocket and tied it around his eyes.

"Watch me."

#####

Pew!

Woosh!

Orbe's eyes opened with a snap, and he jolted, one hand reaching for his lightsaber. It took a few seconds for him to calm his breath and look at the source of all the noise. It was hypnotizing.

H-How...

He gulped all his annoyance from the stun earlier. Right before him, Arenval was proving that it could be done, and it could be done in ways unimaginable. It looked like a brutal dance, eyes covered, arms and legs moving snappily like the body's muscles had a mind of their own.

Orbe let the Force guide him, to make sense of what he was watching. He could feel Aren's presence, the same predatory presence that scared him to wet his bed years ago. The same thing that made him curious enough to approach him.

But it was controlled now. He didn't fear it anymore. He watched how the Force allowed Aren to sense the stun attacks right before they touched him. The coordination between senses and body was unlike anything he'd seen before. Like a true animal in the wild.

"Orbe... Is Aren using the Dark Side to do this?"

He heard Aayla and looked at her. The young Twi'lek looked smitten as usual. He was aware of the undercurrents in her thoughts but never said anything. But he had to now. She was wrong.

"No, he's just too good at this. He would never use the Dark Side for something like this... Never."

Orbe, without wanting to, fell into a deep recollection of a memory from a few months ago. When he and Master Billaba chased a smuggler to Yavin IV. The planet had Dark Side afflictions, something Master Billaba warned him about.

Over the days of chasing the smugglers, he felt the Dark Side in a way he had never before. Living close to Aren was different; the Dark Side was contained, never harming him or even touching him. But on Yavin IV, it was calling to him. Prodding his mind to give in.

He told Master Billaba what he felt, and she helped him purge those thoughts.

"Master, is this what Arenval feels all the time?" he remembered asking. And her answer, he knew he would never forget.

"No, my Padawan. It's worse, and he does not feel it; he fights it. He has to. Every sleeping and waking moment of his life, he must fight the seduction of the Dark Side. That is what Master Windu understands, that is what Master Yoda knows."

"How did he never turn, Master? What I felt just now... I can't imagine living with it." He had asked.

"That is the reason why he remains a member of the Jedi Order, Orbe. Focus now, smugglers are ahead."

Woosh!

Orbe looked at Aren dodging swiftly, while both his fists clenched on his knees. He looked away, down at his feet, brows creased. That memory from years ago, when Aren had Force Choked Dunras, resurfaced. Not because of fear but because of what he had felt. He had tried to end his friendship with Aren and maintain distance back then.

He felt guilty of doing that now.

Orbe looked up at Arenval again, understanding that his friend only wanted him to be the best version of himself. To not get killed out there.

"Orbe, stop skulking around and bring your Altiri ass here. I've been doing this for ten minutes now, I need to catch my breath."

Orbe coughed, choking on his own breath. "I was having a thoughtful moment, Aren."

"It's called a wet dream, Orbe. Now come here."

"..."

Orbe shook his head, chuckling. This version of Arenval Tython was something only he and Aayla got to see. Calm, carefree, and something of an ass.

He got up, grabbed his lightsaber, and walked over to the stopped droids as Aren removed the blindfold.

"Why are we doing this? I thought lightsaber training mattered more," Orbe asked, since even his Master only ever taught him that.

"Because you're both getting far better at it. Aayla's Ataru isn't nearly as vulnerable to Niman anymore. Your Soresu's becoming a real problem for Ataru too. And because of your proximity with me, a constant Dark Side steam engine, I'm sure Master Billaba will eventually teach you Vaapad. But outside the Temple, how often do you think you'll face someone with a lightsaber?"

"Most enemies will come at you with blasters. Sometimes armies of them. When that day comes, I want you ready to deflect every shot and counter. Staying aware of your surroundings is how you walk away alive."

Orbe saw the seriousness in his friend's flaming yellow eyes. Considering that, he couldn't bring himself to refuse. "Armies? What, you think we're heading into some kind of war?"

There was silence. Normally, Aren would quip back at him. But that didn't happen.

"Vision?" Orbe quickly asked.

"No, something of an observation. Trust me, Orbe. You too, Aayla. You'll thank me for this training later. Now, get ready, we still have the room for two hours."

Orbe dumbly watched Aren walk away towards the seats. He knew his friend was a monster, not in terms of Force alignment but in terms of lightsaber and foundational Jedi teachings.

"Aren, how did you become so good at this? I can't sense all of them," Aayla asked.

Orbe shook his head.

You still don't get it, Aayla? Look at his bored face.

As expected, soon the answer came from the mouth in question.

"Aayla, are you learning the Jedi mind trick? You, Orbe?"

"I'm learning it," Aayla replied.

"I can do it. Want me to make you bark?" Orbe blurted with a smirk. But again, Aren wasn't smiling.

"I'm forbidden from learning it. Can't even get my hands on the reading material. Master Yoda barred me. Since the day I started training, it's been nothing but mastering my senses, telekinesis, and lightsaber techniques. At this point, being mediocre would be impressive in the worst way. And the two of you should try catching up."

Orbe frowned just then. He felt something. "I sense fear in you, Aren."

"Of course, I am."

Aren was in front of him and Aayla in one leap, hands on their shoulders.

"You and Aayla are the only two people in this galaxy I actually care about. Maybe Yoda too, a little, when he's not being judgy and dogmatic. My point is, I need both of you ready for the worst, so nothing catches you off guard. Now, three-two-one... Start!"

Orbe ignited his lightsaber and prepared himself. Though it was somewhat hard to banish some troubled thoughts.

This is unfair. He's proven himself. Why can't he learn it?

Thud!

And he was down in five seconds, cursing under his breath.

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After a long day of training, meditation, and listening to lectures by some random Jedi he met for the first time, he finally indulged in his vice, a real shower. Then, as the night fell, he entered his personal quarters to rest, prepared to watch Bantha Rider.

As expected, T7 and Alfred were there, both combined occupying half of his entire room.

"T7 + Aren = Ready for adventure."

"Hm?" Arenval tiredly removed his boots and cloak, and plopped down on the bed. "No adventures for me, mate. I'm the Padawan prisoner of the Jedi Order."

However, T7 continued to beep.

"Aren = Accepted in Republic Future's Program."

The speed at which he sat up straight left a breeze in the room. He grabbed his holotab from the side and found an actual notification. A whole year after applying, it was there. The invitation read clearly.

[Arenval Tython, we are pleased to inform you that you have been selected for Republic Future's Program after an evaluation based on your recently patented Holotab technology... We hope you will find your time on Brentaal IV educational...]

"Yes! Finally! Thank the Force!"

Arenval jumped, nearly hitting his head against the ceiling. He didn't care if this was some scheme by Dooku or even Palpatine, who likely knew of his Dark Side existence. All he wanted now was to feel the grass and dirt of Brentaal IV.

"It's barely an hour from Coruscant. The High Council shouldn't mind, right? What do you think, Teeseven?"

"High Council = Unwise // Aren = Best."

"Buttering me up? Fine, I'll take you along."

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32 BBY, en route to Coruscant,

"Don't mind me saying this, Aren, but you are wasting your talents."

The consular-class light cruiser was an amazing ship for travelling. It didn't have any armaments, but since this particular ship was used by the Republic on diplomatic missions, it was rather luxuriously furnished.

He was on the main deck, seated by the wood-furnished bar seating. In front of him, on the other side of the bar, was a man in the Republic's engineer corps uniform, pouring him a drink and two more glasses for himself and the third man beside him.

The last four years had been extremely fulfilling in every way imaginable. Some known to all, some hidden. As Brentaal was so close, he was regularly visited by Jedi Masters and Jedi Knights, as well as Yoda, to continue his training. Aayla and Orbe spent their free time with him instead of the temple, training. Though it was Obi-Wan who was his regular sparring partner thanks to Master Jinn's initiative, who was further advised by Master Dooku.

In truth, he rarely found time alone.

He met Masters he didn't even know existed, Knights of species he didn't even know were out there. He studied computer and droid engineering during his time on Brentaal and made a few interesting friends.

"And what would you have me do, Orson? Change these Jedi robes for your Republic engineer's uniform?" Arenval asked, staring at the man merely two years older than him, yet those eyes suggested a rabid fox.

"Hah!" Orson Krennic laughed. "Oh, no, no. You are far too accomplished to be some humble engineer, Aren. In your first year, when you were lost, you managed to build a droid in a cave with nothing but a box of scraps. Tython Tech ought to take the next step. The holotab is impressive, certainly, but it remains a datapad with extra bulbs. You're capable of far more, I know it. Say something to him, Galen."

Aren turned his barstool and looked at Galen Erso. The man was six years older than him, but more shy than anyone else he knew. Humble and kind, it was hard to know how he became Orson's friend.

But Aren preferred it that way, as he was somewhere in the middle of them in terms of personalities.

"Galen? Any wise words for me?"

Smiling, Galen just raised his glass to cheer.

Arenval did the same, toasted the two, and drank it. It was alcohol for sure, but nothing serious. He was eighteen now and didn't need supervision, not that he needed it before.

"But you did..." Galen spoke right then. "You're one of the few who could make sense of my drafts."

Arenval shrugged. "Thank the Force. Still, it was a good design. Better Holonet transceiver, smaller, cheaper to build. Shame I don't have the credits to flood the galaxy with them. Though I could use someone with your talents at Tython Tech. I want to make Holonet a real-time instant service, and my holotab the access point for it."

Galen shook his head quickly. "It was no before, and it will be no tomorrow. I'm grateful you bought the transceiver designs from me. It helped more than you know. But my heart belongs to crystallography. That much is your fault, I think. Kyber was... something remarkable. Still, if you ever need anything, I'll help. No charge."

Arenval smirked and clinked his glass with Galen's. "I'll hold onto that. Who knows, one day I might feel like designing a massive capital ship. I'll let you go wild on it, I promise."

"A capital ship? For what?" Orson asked.

Arenval hummed, rubbing his chin where traces of beard had started to appear. "Who knows. Probably turn it into a flying casino."

"Hah!" Orson chuckled. "I should have recorded that. Would have served nicely in extorting a certain Jedi."

Yeah, you'd like that, wouldn't you?

Arenval maintained the smile. He didn't like the man, nor had any hopes for him. The only man he cared about was Galen, the absolute genius seated beside him. But not yet, the man had a destiny to fulfill first.

"In any case..." Arenval put the glass down and stood up. "I would suggest not joining the Republic's military in any manner right now. These are dangerous times."

"What do you mean by dan—Ah, you mean the blockade of Naboo?" Orson replied, catching his meaning at once. "Don't take them seriously, Aren. The Trade Federation is simply probing the Republic. I heard the Senate will revoke their trade licenses soon enough."

Arenval shook his head, wearing his Jedi cloak again. "Then you heard wrong, my friend. Most think the Trade Federation only toys with the Outer Rim. Truth is, they control nearly half the trade flowing from the Rim to the Core Worlds' foundries. And for one Naboo, the Senate won't risk an economic collapse. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have matters to discuss with Master Plo Koon."

He left the bar area, hearing the two men discuss the Trade Federation before he crossed the door. He entered the lounge area, a completely walled, private place with multiple executive chairs and round tables.

"Young Tython, you drank?"

Arenval nodded with a guilty smile, eyeing the Kel Dor Jedi Master. He liked the man a lot, one of the few High Council members who didn't try to see the dark in him constantly. The man had taught him to fly, after all.

"A little. Helps with social gatherings, Master Koon." He settled into the opposite executive seat. "I wanted to share something with you."

Plo Koon set the mass-market holotab on the table and regarded him. "As with your suggestion that I tour Shili?"

Arenval nodded, smiling as always, never showing the faintest guilt of his heart. He had to do it, using tidbits of information to make as many Jedi Masters as possible think that he was an accurate seer. Master Koon was going to find Ahsoka no matter what; all he did was guiding him into the right direction a little earlier.

It helped build a rapport. He knew he was going to need to soon.

He made sure to appear stiff and confused before speaking. "It's Naboo, Master. I've had it on my mind and... I saw things. Like a dream. Or a memory that forgot who it belonged to."

"You had a vision, Padawan?"

"I believe so, Master Koon. It's about Master Qui-Gon Jinn. There is going to be a duel, but I don't know when. A red-skinned Zabrak with a red lightsaber. Master Jinn will... not make it out alive. Obi-Wan does."

A long silence lingered.

"The vision has come to pass, young Padawan. Master Jinn engaged in such a duel on Tatooine and defeated the attacker," Plo Koon replied.

"Tatooine?" Arenval frowned. "Isn't that a barren dust world? But the duel I saw was on Naboo, Master. Big palace, greenery everywhere, droids marching around."

Plo Koon was silent for a very long time. Enough that Arenval could make the assumption.

Seems the invasion hasn't started yet. I should meet Master Jinn in the temple.

If the Force allowed, the death of Master Qui-Gon Jinn was one thing Arenval wanted to avoid. The man had been nothing but kind to him since the very beginning. Beyond that, he felt the Order needed more Jedi like him. Someone willing to see beyond the fanatical rules.

"I will inform the High Council once we reach the temple, Padawan."

Arenval just nodded to that and remained in his seat. He closed his eyes and tried to meditate a little, calming his nerves as he knew this year was going to be a busy one for him. Much was about to change, for him, for the Order, and the Republic.

I wonder what Palpatine thinks about me.

Nonetheless, he remained patient and waited.

Thirty minutes later, the ship came out of hyperspace and approached Coruscant's gravity well. The High orbit over the ecumenopolis was so choked with traffic that it usually took hours to navigate and land. But his ship didn't need to wait, already colored in the Republic's red, and a Jedi Master was a passenger.

Soon, the ship landed in one of the spaceports nearest to the Jedi Temple. Arenval said goodbye to Orson and Galen, and left with Master Plo Koon. He boarded a shuttle waiting for them there and soon reached the temple itself.

"Take your belongings to your quarters, Padawan. I will go speak with the High Council."

He nodded to Master Koon and grabbed his single bag, behind him T7 and Alfred followed. As he walked, he couldn't help but feel nostalgic. The temple was still home, and a true safe place as well.

Much taller now, and also stronger, he walked at a slow pace, looking for any changes made behind his back. There weren't any; it was all the same. Typical of the Jedi Order. Well, the Grandmaster hadn't changed in hundreds of years either.

Maybe that's the problem.

Eventually, he arrived at the corridor. Not wanting to crowd his room, he opened Yoda's quarters and sent the two droids inside. Then, he opened his room's door and entered...

Woosh!

"Aren!"

From the darkness, before he could turn the lights on, he heard a feminine voice, and then two arms snaked around his neck. From behind, then two legs locked around his waist and... the seduction of the dark side was felt pressed on his back.

"Ah, I'm being haunted by a Force Ghost," Arenval yelped a fake cry, and let himself fall backwards on his sleeping pad.

Thud!

"You're heavy, Aren!"

"Oh? I can hear the Force Ghost?" He played and let the weight of his body press backwards more. "So, the Force gave you my room code too?"

"It was easy to find. It's your birthday in reverse."

"..."

Awkward, he shifted and moved over. He sat down beside Aayla, letting his back lean against the wall. Finally, he looked at her, the same as ever, which was very different. She... had regained confidence, and it showed in her attire. A leathery sleeveless crop top with a deep neck and...

Are those abs? She's training hard.

Her pants were simple, tight brown, with a simple belt and a five-sided loincloth in the front and back. He didn't understand the style choice, but he wasn't one to care. She could roam naked for all he cared, and he'd happily stab his lightsaber into the eyes of anyone with 'those' thoughts.

Might have to stab mine first.

"How did the mission go?" he asked, relaxing.

"Annoying," Aayla grumbled with an accent. She moved closer and settled between his legs while leaning her back against his chest, far too intimate for what their Order permitted. "You were right about my uncle. My master and I went to investigate, and he tried to drug us. But we were ready for it."

Arenval hummed, resting his chin between her lekku; her leather headband didn't come in the way. There was something between them, he knew it, and so did she. But they never talked about it or acted on it. Just being close was enough.

"So you did get drugged?"

Aayla let out a disappointed sigh. "I did, but Master didn't. If not for that, I don't know what would have happened to me."

He squeezed an arm around her midriff in a protective way. His other hand softly caressed her tchin, the right lekku. He did that often whenever they sat like this, and she let him. It was an extremely sensitive organ, nerve-laden and connected to the brain. But that also meant she was sensitive to the faintest of touch.

"I would have come searching for you," he said.

She shook her head into his chest. "They never would've let you."

"Who was going to ask? Orbe probably would've tagged along anyway. 'Can't let your dark-sided ass wander off alone, can I?' he'd say. Then he'd spend the whole journey being the most unhinged one."

"Heh, he's like that often." Aayla laughed, her hand pressing on his arm. "What's your next plan?"

"This!"

Gently, he did what he often did to make her yelp. He took her right lekku, brought its tip near his mouth, and nibbled with just his lips.

"Aaaaah! You are evil! Orbe is right!" She slipped off his lap and turned on her folded knees with a faint blush still on her face. "Seriously, are you going to leave again?"

A real smile touched his lips for once, not that plastic imitation he usually wore. "I warned the High Council about a vision recently. If they're capable of reflecting on it and listening for once, I'll stay. If not, I've no reason to."

Aayla's hazel eyes narrowed. "But they will never let you go."

"I know, and I have my ways. I won't run; they'll let me go on their own. Assuming that day ever comes. Either way, let's stop talking about depressing things. Give me your hand. I got you something."

"Hmm..." Aayla hummed and stared at his face. She dramatically made sure to push both her lekku behind her shoulders, making him cackle. Then, finally, she offered him her right palm.

"A friend of mine on Brentaal gave it to me after I helped him out with a project," Arenval said, resting his closed fist against her palm. "The second I saw it, I wanted to give it to you. Happy Birthday, Aayla."

He released his fist and let it fall flat onto her palm. It was a gem, round with angled edges. It was bright amber, the same color as his own lightsaber. And it was large, half the size of an eye.

"What is this?" Aayla asked, staring at the shimmering gem that somehow shone even in that low light.

"A Corusca gem. Happy seventeenth. Go ahead, try igniting your lightsaber," he said.

Aayla quickly removed her lightsaber from her belt, safely raised it sideways, and ignited it. The blade aimed at the ceiling, filling the small room with light. Immediately, the gem also reacted. Light reflected inside the gem in a way that made it seem like a furnace, so bright and flickering.

For a long moment, Aren as well as Aayla were entranced by it, staring into that light. Then suddenly the lightsaber dulled, and Aayla's arms squeezed around his head. She hugged him like never before.

As she released him, she pecked his cheek, her own face flushed in embarrassment. "Thank you... Aren, I will cherish this. But why did you think of giving it to me?"

He took her hands in his and met her eyes. "Because you were the first initiate dumb enough to walk over to the evil boy in the crèche. I remember it perfectly. I was alone, miserable, sitting on my bed. Then along came a certain blue Twi'lek with one finger up her nose."

"Hey! I don't do that!" She punched his chest.

"You did, back then. It was runny too." He smirked, enjoying the color rising to her face. "You walked up and asked, 'Why are you sad?' I said, 'I have no friends.' And you, with a big toothy grin, said, 'Aren't we all friends?'"

A look of fondness lingered on Aren's face. That memory was of the time before he 'woke' up. Yet that didn't diminish it, because if not for her and Orbe, toddler him would have fallen to the Dark Side.

"Back then, you looked like this little gem to me, Aayla. A cute, nose-poking blue light that helped me ignore the whispers of the Dark Side," he added. His other hand came up and caressed her face. "Then Orbe came along one day, asked if I was going to eat my fruitcake. Before I could answer, he'd already taken it. Then he did it every day and well... the rest is history."

"Pff—"

Aayla wheezed.

"He loved randomly showing up. Just like now." Arenval's face turned towards the door.

Knock! Knock!

Aayla jumped like a Loth-cat, away from him, standing so stiffly that even if they hadn't done anything, someone would have suspected something.

He just waved his hand and let the door slide open. Just as he'd said, Orbe appeared, skin purple, white hair now shoulder-length, height the same as his.

As expected, Orbe looked inside, first at Aayla, and then at Aren, and then made a scrunched face. "You two... again? Eh, I don't care. Aren, Master Billaba wants you at the High Council. Urgently."

Arenval got up from the bed, fixed his robes, and winked at Aayla, still stiff as a statue. "How urgent?"

"Hyperdrive-on-fire urgent," Orbe barked.

To that, Arenval just left without even taking his holotab. He fastwalked since running was incivility and entered the turbolift. On the way, he closed his eyes and took deep breaths, doing moving meditation as Aayla was experimenting with.

Probably about my visio—Wait.

Just as the turbolift reached the top floor of the High Council tower, Arenval felt a presence. Young, powerful, confused, and clouded. He could feel it with ease, a hidden dark undercurrent beneath the innocent lifeform.

The door of the lift opened, and the small lobby appeared, the door of the High Council chamber was closed. But outside, there was Obi-Wan and a boy. Curious, light brown hair and...

Arenval absentmindedly walked, his feet bringing him in front of the young boy. He silently stared at him, and the boy did the same for some reason. He didn't speak, nor hear Obi-Wan talking.

He just looked, searching for what the Force had planned this time. He, Arenval, was real, alive, there. Would that change something?

So it begins.

Note: Make sure to leave your feedback. Any suggestions. Or the names of female characters I can add. Although I've made a big list of them already, I might have missed some.

A/N: I initially planned to time skip from birth to him leaving the Jedi Order in 1-2 chapters. But as I wrote, I felt it was needed to flesh out Arenval's time in the Jedi Order, his closeness with some members, and his two friends. Otherwise, these characters would lack impact later on.

As for Smut, I had to wait until he was 18, which he just turned now. I don't think the next chapter will have smut either, but you will get to know who he's going to be physical with. Next chapter will be mostly action, Arenval's plan, and the appearance of LitRPG elements.

I delayed the LitRPG part slightly to stitch it better into the story. I don't want it to seem like an otherworldly ROB type thing. Also, delaying it meant all that Arenval's current skills were earned by him through hard work and personal determination, rather than just handed over by the system, making his struggle more real.