

Star Wars: Shadowbound



Synopsis

A lab-bred general from 2036 wakes up in the Galaxy Far Far Away in the body of a child, biologically attuned to the Dark Side of the Force. Taken in by Master Yoda and the Jedi Order, he was raised to become a Jedi.

But when old memories awaken, plans change. And when a slave is saved, a certain mysterious power awakens.

There is a way to use the Dark Side without being seduced by it.

There is a way to become the greatest Sith in the history of the Galaxy.

And the path goes through a 'friendly' slave revolution.

Beep!

[Quest Complete - Open Cages]

[Reward - 5,699 X 10 Slave Points]

[Purchase Complete!]

[Force Destruction - 90,000 SP]

Story Tags - Action, Adventure, Dark Side Exploration, Jedi trolling, LitRPG, Comedy, Romance, Anti-Slavery, Business/Inventions, Good MC, Mastering Force, Space Ships

Smut Tags - Romantic Sex, Threesomes, Passionate Sex, Virginity Lost, Banging Enemies, Multisomes, Milfs and more.

Prologue

I was once called John Australia. Some would say it's a unique surname, but it was not.

I was born in the year 2036 to no father or mother. Like millions of others bred in labs to fill the population gaps, I was one of them. And like every lab-bred child born in Australia, I had Australia as my last name.

As they say, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The lab breeding program was initially started as a pilot project to breed intelligent minds to further humanity's grasp on science. Before long, governments loosened their regulations, and things spiraled.

Soldiers were engineered for obedience and strength. Scientists for intellect. Workers for endurance. Before birth, our lives were already assigned.

But there was also an open secret: the rich created custom heirs for themselves. Some even created future spouses for themselves. The underground industry ran entire prostitution services based around women and men raised for the sake of their looks, high sexual appetite, and willingness.

I don't know whether to call myself lucky. I was created with specific values assigned: greater intelligence, greater endurance, and high obedience. I was born to be a military general with specialization in engineering and communications tech. I was just that by twenty-five.

I did as ordered. I ordered others. I made plans as needed, and I fulfilled the objective of my creation. Life was simple: eat, date, fuck, sleep, work, and crippling social media addiction.

My designation was John G-71009. There were too many Johns to count. But at least we had different faces.

Yet, I always felt hollow inside. And I felt that way until the day I died.

Until my last breath, I kept searching for a greater purpose behind my existence.

And somehow... I still am.

Chapter 1 - Delight In Darkness

50 BBY, Coruscant,

"Mm..."

Grandmaster Yoda hummed, eyes closed, sitting inside the meditation chamber. What was a fruitful meditation session moments ago had reshaped itself into something disturbing. His eyes trembled, his head swayed.

He tried to focus on that great disturbance.

But the very next moment, he jolted awake from his meditation. A new presence was felt in the Force. Not distant, but close. Not one that carried light, but darkness. It was fresh, however, and subtle. Yet the Force guided him to this disturbance.

Grandmaster Yoda hoped to deliberate on it. Meditate on it.

Yet the presence was constant, as if calling out to someone. Anyone. It felt innocent, scared, and yearning. And at that moment, Grandmaster Yoda made the decision.

"Master?"

The door to the meditation chamber hissed open. Grandmaster Yoda saw his former Padawan, now Jedi Master, Dooku, standing there. Dooku's face mirrored the same concern he felt in his mind.

"Sense the disturbance, you did?"

"What is this, Master? It is dark and alive, and it speaks."

Grandmaster Yoda shook his head, his own understanding incomplete. "Find out, we must. Come with me, you will."

It took them down, into the underworld of Coruscant. Level after level, they went further down, and finally arrived at level 1313, over three thousand levels below the surface, where sin was the only way of life.

"Close, we are."

Yoda led the way. The scent was intense, of filth, of desperation, of crime, sadness, and darkness. But the presence he felt was distinct. Dark yet pure. He walked towards it, his little steps hasty.

In one of the many poverty-stricken streets on that level, he finally reached a wasteyard.

"Master, are you certain about this? This place is..."

"Feel it too, do you? Calling me, the Force is."

Yoda ignored him and walked into the filth, uncaring if his robes got dirty, or his staff. He was close, he knew it. The dark presence was wailing for attention. And before he knew it, he realized he could hear that wail as well, and... it was an actual wail.

"Baby?"

Grandmaster Yoda believed himself to be wise at that age. While not all-knowing, he believed he knew plenty. Yet in that moment, he found himself clueless at the sight. A little baby of human origins, less than a day old, lay all alone in a heap of filth, covered in reeking sludge, crying.

"Master, his eyes..."

Grandmaster Yoda saw them as well, thrusting his old mind into countless thoughts that only worked to add to his confusion. The mark of a Sith. Bright, flaming yellow eyes. The baby was touched by the Dark Side. No, he was drowning in it. His first thought was that this was the result of a dark experiment.

He had sensed Force-sensitive children before. They would often appear as a bright light to him in the distance. Bright because they were often always children, filled with innocence and life. And now, there was a baby, and all he felt was cold, heavy, a dark shadow looming before him like an eclipsing dark mountain.

Yet he also felt the innocence of a true child.

"Troubling, this is. To the temple, take him we must."

At his decision, Dooku gracefully moved past him, unbothered by the mind-numbing stench. Carefully, the Serennian removed his own elegant cloak and covered the little life in it. The baby was fragile, too fragile, seemingly born moments ago.

"To do such a despicable thing to a child. This is not merely cruelty. It's an abomination."

Yoda, pained by the thought of the child's plight, agreed with his Padawan.

"Evidence of great evil, this is. Find the root, we must."

"I completely agree, Grandmaster."

####

44 BBY, Coruscant,

The younglings of the Wolf Clan were asleep in the Jedi creche. There was no hum of the machines inside or outside.

It was a large hall with sections demarcated for different age groups. Separated by a middle aisle, single-person beds were placed in two columns with tables in between.

That night, in the section marked for four to six-year-olds, a boy turned and twisted in his bed. His feet kicked off the blanket; his sleeping robes turned sweat-drenched. His eyes scrunched, and his dirty blonde hair was a mess.

"N... No..."

His lips whispered while his head whipped. Visions, memories, voices, and emotions coursed through his young mind. Hours went by in that state when he suddenly...

Woosh!

"Holy shit!"

He sat up with a jolt, panting for air. His flaming yellow eyes burned, wide and dry, full of confusion and horror.

"Mm... Aren? Are you okay?"

He looked sideways, and a frown marked his expression for a second. "Just a dream... Go to sleep, Aayla."

With a lazy slump, he sank back in the bed, eyes still open, staring up at the dark, high ceiling.

I was John... I-I'm a Jedi?

That was the night, at age six, Arenval regained the memories of his past life. It returned like a wrecking ball, and it brought along a prophetic vision so profound that comprehending it was no job for a single night. It was filled with a purpose, a future, and a destiny.

Arenval didn't sleep that night. He pondered the vision he had just received. He remembered the future and all the knowledge he possessed of this world, this galaxy far, far away.

Silently, Arenval turned his face and saw the Twi'lek girl sleeping. Aayla Secura, one of his only two friends. Until now, she was just a friend; now she was the future Jedi Master Secura to him.

To the other side was a boy, the same age as him. Orbe Tokasta, an Altiri, a near-human with purple skin and white hair. That name didn't ring a bell to Arenval, and he accepted that.

He stared back at the ceiling and reminisced about the last six years he had spent in the Jedi Temple. He had learned a lot and yet nothing. There were thousands of Jedi in the galaxy, and it

was impossible to know them all. Besides, from what he knew, he'd lived a very private life until now.

The other younglings didn't like him much. What should have been a tightly held secret was somehow openly known. That he was attuned to the Dark Side, that his eyes were the mark of the Dark Side, and that he was found in one of the underworld's sewers.

No wonder they fear me!

Arenval relived all his memories with a new perspective. He was no longer thinking like an innocent child, but a man who had lived and died once. As someone who knew the galaxy, the future, and perhaps even the Force better than most.

Over the years, he had failed to learn most of the Jedi techniques. Grandmaster Yoda had personally mentored him, but he still failed. The light side was like poison to him.

During one of those occasions, without realising, he had unleashed a Dark Side ability, Summon Fear, on three younglings who bullied him by calling him Sith-Shit. The aftermath of that incident was permanent mental trauma to those three younglings, leading to their dismissal from the Jedi Order.

Why am I still here?

Remembering all of that, Arenval questioned why the Jedi even tolerated him. He was a risk for other younglings. If not for Aayla and Orbe befriending him, he would have probably fallen to the Dark Side from loneliness.

Ah...

But then he realised something. What his younger, innocent mind couldn't have noticed, now he comprehended. He remembered how he was never alone, how there was always a Jedi Knight or a Temple Guardian watching over him, how most of the temple was off-limits to him, how he was permanently barred from leaving the temple.

This is... my prison.

#####

42 BBY, Coruscant,

The fear of the Dark Side winning was real. There was an ever-present whisper in his ears, calling for him to take hold of that metaphorical hand and claim all the power he could ever imagine.

In fact, he could tell he had already lost a part of himself. Before, when he hadn't regained his old life's memories, his childish innocence saved him from the Dark Side's lure. As evil was simply evil, without reasoning.

But with a grown man's mind, aware of the deadly future ahead, reasoning often turned into a desire for more power so he could change things. That meant unknowingly considering the lure of that Dark Side.

Thankfully, the life of a Jedi Initiate didn't give him much time to dwell on it. From morning until he fell asleep, he was busy with lessons, lectures, training, and meditation.

As usual, he sat in the meditation chamber, using his third meditation session of the five mandatory sessions of the day. He did that every day, just as all Initiates did.

Meditation was a means of enhancing emotional control over oneself. However, Arenval, ever since he 'woke up,' saw it differently. To him, it was like a means to draw a line in his conscience.

Being biologically attuned to the Dark Side since birth meant he was closer to a Sithspawn than a normal human, yet he was a human. It also meant that emotions weighed heavily on him. His battle was to not surrender to them and let them control him.

It was an impossible task, but he found a workaround.

By fooling himself into feeling content in everything, no matter the experience, the negative emotions could be suppressed. By continuously looking at the positive side, the negative could be shunned. It was a double-edged sword, as it could lead to emotional dissociation, but it often worked.

Gently, Arenval opened his eyes, feeling the dim light filtering through the window's blinds.

Taking a deep breath, he stood up and walked to the window, fully opening the blinds, taking in the view of the ecumenopolis that defied all common sense. Home to three trillion residents, likely more, and also the source of galactic decay. A black hole of resources that swallowed everything and spewed nothing but corruption.

"Not yet."

He pressed a hand on the window, able to faintly feel the darkness emanating from the planet itself. It wasn't like the classical Dark Side, but more akin to negative currents of misery, poverty, violence, greed, and sheer concentration of trillions of minds.

"And then there's that... if it's there at all."

He stared at the floor, wondering if that Sith Shrine was there, deep underneath the temple. He couldn't feel it from there, so high up, with the planet itself clouding his senses. And most of the temple was restricted for him.

Arenval took a deep breath and calmed his thoughts. Then, like a switch flicked, an unnatural smile formed on his face, a sudden shift in his entire personality. As if there was no greater joy in life than being a Jedi Initiate.

He fixed his uniform, unlocked the door, and walked out.

"That one's a record, Aren. Ninety minutes!"

Arenval found his friend Orbe leaning against the wall beside the door. "I prefer this to calming frightened animals."

"And I prefer not seeing you make those poor animals leak in fear," Orbe replied, walking beside him.

"Where is Aayla?"

"Who knows. Last I saw, she was chasing Master Vos."

Arenval gave a quiet hum and nodded. "He's like a father to Aayla. Try not to be too hard on her. She'll find her way past the attachment in time. Unless this is jealousy speaking."

He could feel Orbe staring at him with a slightly annoyed look. He was used to it, and so was Orbe.

"Ugh, your senses. That's right, I'm jealous, because I don't know anything except my species' name. I don't even have someone like Master Vos."

"You have me," Arenval said. "We're alike in a few ways. We both grew up here from infancy, and neither of us knows where we came from. In some ways, that's a blessing. We don't have to carry the weight of attachment."

"Don't you think about your parents?" Orbe asked.

"I do, but then I get busy."

As Arenval walked through the corridor, he didn't fail to notice how other younglings, even those older than him, moved out of his way. Orbe had told him that his Force presence was too much sometimes, almost predatory.

He liked it this way, as it meant less bullying. Of course, bullying wasn't allowed in the Jedi Temple, but amongst younglings, it was often overlooked as children being children.

"I think I should meditate more like you..."

Arenval ignored Orbe's continuous rambling as he opened the large dining hall's door. It was lunchtime, and countless younglings filled the hall. Spoons clattering, words echoing in a mixed noise, the place felt alive and warm.

"Seems Aayla found new friends," He muttered and walked towards their usual table.

Aayla was already there, but there were four other younglings around her, a girl and three boys, and all looked older than him.

"Wait," Orbe called, tugging at his sleeve. "That's Dunras. He failed the Initiate Trials. He'll likely end up in the Service Corps soon. He's trouble, Aren."

Arenval stared into the distance at this Dunras. Another name he didn't know, just like Orbe. It made this life real to him.

If he were still mentally a child, he might have hesitated as Dunras looked fourteen years old. But for an adult mind, he couldn't be bothered by a child's tantrums. He had never lost control since he 'woke up.'

"He seems interested in our dear friend. How can we not introduce ourselves?" Arenval said and walked straight to that table.

He was rather protective of Aayla. She and Orbe were the only Initiates who had willingly reached out to be his friends. At first, things were great, but being his friends made them isolated by other younglings as well. Moreover, Aayla was almost two years younger than him and had self-confidence issues. She needed him and Orbe as much as he needed them.

He reached Aayla's side and sat down on the long bench, giving her shoulder a pat. "Made new friends."

"Aren..." Aayla squealed, her head turning to him, her blue face sullen, her hazel eyes watery. "They aren't my friends."

"Orbe and I are special, I know," he replied, smiling, always finding her accented way of speaking adorable. "But there's room for more."

Arenval looked at the fourteen-year-old Dunras, a dark-haired human, tall for his age. The other three kids seemed around the same age, twelve or thirteen, two humans and one Mirialan.

"So you're the plague of the Jedi Order," Dunras blurted out, pointing his finger at him.

Arenval hummed and rubbed his chin. The insult was more sad than annoying to him. "Plague, you say? Spreads fast, hard to stop, hard to kill. That means I'm hard to beat."

"I was mocking you!" Dunras nearly shouted.

Arenval could feel it, and from the look on Dunras' friends, he reckoned they could as well. The boy was unstable, full of fear and anxiety. Understandable to a degree. As usual, there are bad apples everywhere, and clearly, no Jedi Knight or Master wanted this one.

"Well, in that case, try harder," Arenval said, casually nicking a small piece of bread from Aayla's plate before taking a bite. "Still plain as ever. You'd think we could have a little spice now and then."

"Because we must maintain balance in every part of our life," Aayla muttered, like she was quoting from one of her lessons.

"Don't ignore me! You don't belong here! You... Grandmaster wastes time on you." Dunras burst again, louder this time, clearly emotionally unstable. "You... Sith-Shit!"

Arenval still ignored him and just focused on his friend. "How did it go? He agreed to take you as his Padawan later?"

"He—"

Before Aayla could answer, Dunras interrupted again. He leaned over the table from the shorter edge and stared down at them. "She'll be fine. Out of the Order, I mean. Running after Master Vos like a lost puppy? That's not what Jedi are supposed to do. She'll be gone soon, I can tell."

"Just like you?" Arenval asked back, smiling as always.

"You... Gutter-bor—"

"No! Stop it! Don't say that. Don't fight," Aayla erupted suddenly, real tears in her eyes this time.

Arenval didn't bother looking at Dunras, hoping instructors would soon arrive and drag him away. Instead, he patted Aayla on the back, consoling her. She was clearly sad, something Master Vos must have told her, he reckoned.

"Shut up!" Dunras suddenly bellowed at Aayla at the top of his lungs, losing all control over his mind and tongue. "You will be thrown out, and you'll end up like the rest. A dumb dancing schutta in some backwater cantina—ghk... aghk!"

Dunras failed to finish his words as a sudden chill of terror spread across the hall. He gagged, eyes big and ready to pop out as he clawed at his own neck while his feet seemingly lifted off the ground, leaving him only on his toes.

Someone started to cry in the back, some youngling. Then others began crying, mainly those too young.

"Aagh... No-nnngh!"

Dunras struggled, his entire face turned red and then blue. His crying eyes, popping, stared at Arenval in utter dread.

"That is enough, young one."

Abruptly, it all stopped.

Arenval looked back, an adult hand resting on his arm, which was already resting on Aayla's back. Only his palm was shaped strangely, like he was trying to squeeze something... someone.

Thud!

Dunras fell, unconscious.

Arenval didn't bother and stared at his own right hand, lost in his thoughts. Then he looked up at the man who had stopped him.

"Master Jinn?"

His head turned and looked towards fallen Dunras, who was being checked by an older boy with a Padawan's braid.

"That is me. Come with me, young one."

Arenval gave a small nod and rose from the bench, only to feel two hands lightly tug at either side of his robe. His usual smile returned. "It's probably just a personal lecture from Master Yoda. I'll be back soon."

The two let go, and he walked, following the tall frame of Master Qui-Gon Jinn and his Padawan. But the whole way, he was more focused on staring at his own hand.

#####

Dooku sat in the meditation chamber alone, cloak discarded neatly, legs crossed on the raised platform with ample cushioning to cause the least discomfort for the meditator. His eyes closed, his grey-bearded face didn't show a hint of emotion or thought.

Everything was under precise control as it should be.

Right then, the door to the chamber opened. Dooku sensed the youngling step inside, and the door hissed closed. He could feel it all, that darkness seeped not in coldness but warmth. Yet, there was a difference; unlike the first time he had seen the boy, now there was control, meticulous and subtle, hard enough to notice that even the best of Jedi Masters may miss it.

How did an eight-year-old learn to keep the Dark Side at bay when his body itself craved only darkness? It amused Dooku, and that was why he sat there.

"Surprised? Not finding Master Yoda but me?" Dooku asked, his voice rumbling low as he opened his eyes at last.

Not a hint of confusion.

Dooku saw everything and meticulously assessed it. The expression, the reaction, the presence in the Force that stood out like a predator that had yet to learn hiding.

"Greetings, Master Dooku. I was expecting Master Yoda, seeing as it's usually him. But this is a welcome surprise. A touch more concentration, listening to Master Yoda takes."

Dooku's lips tugged at the corner, almost, just almost. "A sentiment shared by many. Be seated, Arenval Tython."

Full of life. Windu is wrong about him.

"Master, may I ask, how is Dunras?"

"He is..." Dooku studied the boy's flaming eyes, searching for malice. "...expelled from the Jedi Order. He failed every trial set before him, and while the Service Corps might once have accepted him, his actions today proved him unworthy of such."

"I was hoping for an instructor to come and stop him before he went too far."

"That should have been the case. My former Padawan, Qui-Gon, stopped them. He wished to see your command over your emotions. He exceeded his bounds, for which I have reprimanded him. Yet this incident has also revealed the growing control you possess over your situation," Dooku revealed, once again surprised by the boy's lack of annoyance, anger, or hatred. At the mention of Qui-Gon's name, the boy only gave a small nod.

"Am I to be punished for this, Master Dooku?"

"That is the consensus of the High Council. What you did, what you revealed, was far beyond the ordinary. Master Windu intended to oversee your training personally, but it would have resembled an interrogation more than guidance. The Council considers Master Yoda too invested in the matter. Therefore, he has entrusted your continued training to me."

Finally, Dooku saw a fluctuation in that smiling mask. A quiver of the brow that lasted a split moment.

"You do not agree to receive my guidance?" Dooku asked.

"I would be honored, Master Dooku. But I don't know how much I'm able to learn. The Light Side has never come naturally to me, and I would hate to waste your time."

A statesman in a child's body.

Dooku didn't need to read minds to know this was a curated response. That this wasn't the reason why the boy almost frowned. But he chose not to probe more.

"That is true. Which is why my task is to teach you but a single ability. It is called Force Stealth, the art of concealing one's alignment within the Force, or with mastery, one's entire presence.

This concerns others more than it does you, for the incident today has caused considerable fear. Even among your friends."

Dooku waited for a response. Teaching that ability was the best he could do, the best the Council could come up with. It was either that or discarding the boy, which was considered impossible, as letting a Dark Side user of such strength run free was akin to inviting trouble.

But the boy wasn't a Dark Side user. The boy was Dark Side itself. Dooku couldn't imagine how long they would be able to keep the boy sealed. As years go by, there will be nothing to teach, and eventually, all birds seek freedom from their cage.

But I can lessen the burden before I leave.

"Tell me. What did you feel when you used Force Choke on Dunras?" Dooku asked. He wanted to understand this boy's mind. A child only in frame.

"That's what it's called? Well... I felt nothing. Didn't know I was doing it. It just happened on its own. But it felt... natural."

Dooku nodded. He had studied Arenval during the initial days of finding him. He had studied the medical reports and even sought guidance in the Force. The answer he had come up with was that one cannot force a fish out of water and hope it will survive.

Similarly, to Arenval's body, the Dark Side was like water. Light Side was like land. That meant Arenval couldn't be forced into changing his Force affinity. It was a part of his biology just as his heart, lungs, brain, and skin.

"I am told by your instructors that your behavior underwent a drastic change two years ago. What brought this about?" Dooku asked, aware that this may sound like an interrogation.

"I had a vision about myself. I talked with Master Yoda about it, but he refused to listen and told me not to share it as it concerns my future."

Dooku raised a curious brow. And seemingly as if the boy read him, answered.

"It's a thorny path that leads to a flowerbed, Master Dooku."

"And you have chosen to walk it?" Dooku asked.

"What choice have I?"

Perceptive. Conscious. Driven. Wise beyond age.

Dooku made his final assessments and nodded. "You appear to have discovered a means of restraining the darker nature of your Force alignment. Explain it to me."

"It's easy. Find content in discontent, and imagine light in darkness."

"..."

That explains the smile while force-choking.

"Were you angry?"

"No, not at all. Dunras was an ignorant bother at best. I'm used to letting that sort of thing pass by."

"Then why did you choke him?"

"I didn't try to make it happen. It just happened when he degraded Aayla."

Dooku studied Arenval in silence for a long moment; that smile on the boy's face was deeply unsettling. What Arenval was doing was no different than closing his eyes and convincing himself that black was white. It may suffice in the short term, but once those eyes open, whatever little white remains will turn black.

A thorny path indeed.

"Let us begin your training."

#####

37 BBY, Coruscant,

The Crucible docked at the Jedi Temple, and its exit ramp lowered onto the platform. A small group of Jedi Initiates walked down, some with smiles on their faces and a brand new lightsaber at their hip. Others with sad faces.

Arenval waited for all of them to disembark first. They were younger than him, ten years old, most of them. One or two were eleven. He was the only thirteen-year-old because only now had he been permitted by the High Council to make a lightsaber.

It wasn't easy being him. Every small or big matter related to him had to be decided by the twelve monks, most of whom he hadn't even seen in his life. Not that it mattered anymore, he had long gotten used to it.

"Professor Huyang, how old was Master Yoda when he made his first lightsaber?" Arenval asked curiously as he stood beside the ancient architect droid.

"Master Yoda? Hmm, his species ages slower than most. He was certainly not twelve, Initiate Tython."

"Ah, just Aren's fine, Professor."

"And I will continue to use Tython. The name belongs to a world of historical importance to the Order. It may be regarded as a myth now, but Master Yoda must have felt something when he named you, Initiate Tython."

With a chuckle, Arenval fixed his ear-length, dirty blonde hair and stepped forward. "Well, Master Dooku said the alternative was Illum. Honestly, Tython sounds far better."

He finally walked down the ramp, and just as expected, saw his good Altiri friend, Orbe. But the twelve-year-old now had a Padawan's braid. And the way he stood with arms crossed, pride was not lost.

Arenval also folded his arms and stopped in front of him. "Careful now. Master Billaba could take that smug face for emotional imbalance."

"Worry about yourself, Aren. Master Billaba sent me to get you. Looks like the High Council finally wants to see your ugly face."

"One, I'm handsome. Two, at least now I get to meet the ones casting votes on the direction of my life," Arenval said, noticing a Temple Guardian not far away staring at him continuously. A feeling he was used to now.

"Sounds miserable, but forget it. You have the lightsaber now! See any vision in the cave?" Orbe asked excitedly, eyeing the lightsaber at his side. "Black hilt? You're not beating the allegations, my friend."

"Vision? There was one. Some bloke with a black bucket on his head, hated sand with passion." Arenval took his lightsaber from his hip. It was glossy black in color with a few silver rings around both its ends. Very simple design, just a long cylinder.

He walked through the various large halls of the Jedi Temple, and it really was a long walk. Eventually, they entered a turbolift.

"Which color is it?" Orbe asked.

"It's a secret."

"Don't tell me it's purple," Orbe grumbled at his side. "Is it purple?"

"Not purple, but still a secret."

"Who cares if it's not purple?"

"Says the one with boring blue."

Shhh!

Right then, the turbolift's door opened, and a certain blue Twi'lek appeared. "I'm boring?"

"Aayla, are you hearing this? He says blue lightsabers are boring," Orbe complained.

"Oh, really?" Aayla crossed her arms, leaning on one foot as her own lightsaber on her hip clattered. "So my lightsaber is boring?"

Jealousy. Arenval knew it wasn't the right emotion to have, but it was far more tame than all the other emotions the Dark Side whispered to him to surrender to. Aayla, while just eleven, already had her lightsaber and was a Padawan to Master Quinlan Vos. Her Padawan braid made of beads ornately rested between her lekku.

Meanwhile, he was thirteen and was only a year away from being considered too old. He really didn't know what the Jedi Council had in mind for him, and by now his patience had started to thin. He had learned all he could, which was mostly neutral force abilities: Force push and pull, levitation, Force speed and jump, and sensory abilities.

Other younglings learned more, but he was held back by his Force alignment. All he did besides was pour himself into lightsaber training like a maniac, and theoretical study in the archives. But by now, even that had lost its charm.

"Just saying. Far too many blue ones." He said, brushing past his friends as their shoulders bumped. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to survive this Council meeting and prepare for the Initiate trials tomorrow. My one real shot at avoiding rotting away in the Service Corps."

"They will never allow that," Aayla commented. "Master Vos said..."

"That I must never leave this temple?" He finished her words with a wry smile.

"How do you know that?"

"Come on, Aayla. This was the first time in thirteen years I was allowed outside. And I had one Jedi Master, three Knights, and eight temple guards 'protecting' us. I know they mean well, but all I see is their apprehensions pretending to be caution."

"Fear? But they're the Jedi Council," she blurted.

"And we live in a democratic republic," Arenval replied and stepped inside another turbolift, but this time alone. "Not all is as it appears, Aayla. You'll understand when you're my age."

"I am your age," Orbe exclaimed.

"I meant... mentally, Orbe."

"..."

The door slid shut, and the turbolift took him up to the High Council Tower. The view from it was hypnotic, however. So high up, the temple was anything but a sign of modesty. It sat in a prime location where home prices ranged from tens of millions to hundreds of millions.

Wonder how much the temple is worth. Billions? I could have a fleet of Venator-class destroyers at—

His trail of curious thoughts ended as soon as the doors opened. He entered a large hall with sliding doors in front of him, closed and guarded by two temple guards on each side. It wasn't that large since the council chamber occupied most of that tower-top.

"Arenval Tython, you may enter."

Aren is fine, people.

He held back the awkwardness and walked. He liked his first name, but the last name was silly. Being named after a planet was just weird.

The twin doors slid open for him, and he finally saw the Jedi High Council in person. The impeccable, clean marble on the floor, the seats, and the great view from the windows. And finally, he glanced at the faces.

Yoda, Oppo Rancisis, Yaddle, Yarael Poof, and even Depa Billaba seemed to have earned her Council seat. There was Poli Dapatian, Mace Windu, Eeth Koth, Plo Koon, and Sifo-Dyas.

Who are they?

There were two more whose names he knew, but nothing else from his memories. He just gave a simple bow as per the tradition and waited for them to speak. Yet, there was silence for some time.

He matched their gazes without much thought. But he was perceptive; he could sense their emotions as they aligned more with the Dark Side. Wariness, that was what he felt from half the High Council. The other half was simply curious. Only one Yoda seemed relaxed.

"Well it went, I see. Your new lightsaber, show me, Arenval," Yoda spoke.

Arenval grabbed his lightsaber and extended it towards Yoda. Quickly, it levitated out of his hand and snappily landed in Yoda's grip. Right away, the blade hummed to life, its amber glow flickering on Yoda's face and the marble floor.

"Orange, this color is. Long time since seen it, I have, hmm," Yoda mumbled, quickly retracting the blade and sending it flying back to Arenval.

"I was just as surprised, Master," Arenval replied, keeping his words to a minimum. It was best not to overshare with the likes of the High Council. They weren't like Master Dooku or even Qui-Gon.

"What do you plan to do next, Initiate Tython?"

He turned to Master Windu. "I plan to compete in tomorrow's apprentice tournament, Master Windu."

"I have seen you practice, Initiate," Yaddle spoke from her small seat. "You have spent a disproportionate amount of time with training lightsabers compared to your fellow initiates."

"As I have in the library, Master," he briskly responded with a solemn smile. "I've already mastered every Force ability I was permitted to learn."

Arenval knew something was coming. There was no other reason for them to invite him there. So, he prepared himself for it, maintaining that plastic smile, washing away any ideas of hope, desire, dreams from his mind. He instead expected disappointment, and simply deluded it to be the natural order and not something negative.

It wasn't easy.

"We cannot allow you to compete in the tournament, Initiate," Mace Windu declared. "Your skill surpasses the other initiates. This is not a dismissal, but recognition of your ability. You are strong in the Force, but against you, the others would be overwhelmed."

You mean scared.

"I understand." Arenval gave a small nod, expecting disappointment helped. "Am I headed for the Service Corps, then?"

"Not Service Corps," said Yoda, a warmth in his eyes. "Take you as my Padawan, I will."

Oh?

For a moment, Arenval let himself be surprised. Until now, Yoda had only been giving him guidance. It was more in the earlier days, but ever since that Force Choke incident, Yoda's lessons had become rare.

I'll have more jealousy aimed at me.

But at the same time, Arenval wondered if it was even the right choice. Yoda was the Grandmaster, which meant countless responsibilities, facing the Republic's politics, and constantly traveling.

He knew he wouldn't be travelling anywhere, not even outside the temple, let alone another planet. That brought up the question: how often would Yoda even train him? The last time Yoda took a Padawan, Dooku happened.

And Master Dooku's gone.

Was this just another way of ensuring he would remain in the Jedi Temple? Was this because other masters weren't confident in training him? He could be wrong, he knew. But for what it

was, Arenval also knew that Yoda and the current council were shortsighted. Bad choices were the norm.

"Thank you, Master Yoda." Arenval bowed to his new teacher.

I should start preparing for the inevitable.

"Hmm. Go now, you should. Your things, move to the new Padawan quarters," Yoda ordered.

Arenval nodded, bowed, and turned. But midway, he stopped and looked back.

"Master, I had a request." Since he was already there, now seemed the most sensible moment to ask. "I was hoping to be allowed into the temple's storage vault for discarded droids. I'd like to take one apart and repair it myself. Work on my repair skills."

He silently waited for an answer. One by one, the members of the High Council looked at each other; some gave faint nods, and others chose not to react. Finally, Mace Windu looked towards Yoda, who nodded back.

"You may choose one droid, Padawan. Ensure it is inspected before you keep it."

"Understood, Master Windu." Arenval bowed his head again and turned to leave for good this time.

He heard some chatter about Finis Valorum's re-election for the seat of the Supreme Chancellor behind. But then the doors shut behind him, and he was already in the turbolift. Finally alone, he let the plastic smile ease into a neutral expression.

Even a droid needs the High Council's permission.

Arenval didn't really mind their wariness. It made complete sense because he understood what he was. A physical figure of the Dark Side. His very presence likely made the older Jedi nearby feel disturbed. But he saw them, their mistakes, the same ones they would later make with the 'Chosen One'. The High Council lacked a basic understanding of the Dark Side, and for all their preaching of 'we don't deal in absolutes, ' their views on the Force were anything but absolute.

The Jedi Temple was a safe place for him. There was peace and comfort. The least risk of falling to the whispers of the Dark Side. But at the same time, he already knew he would never grow if he remained there forever.

Too sheltered. Too feared. Too restrained. One day, he'd be served to Palpatine or Vader on a silver platter by the failed Jedi Order.

Woosh!

The turbolift's door opened. He walked out of it, and the smile returned.

To reach that flowerbed, I'll have to get out first.

Focused on his thoughts, arms crossed against his chest, he didn't even have to think. His feet moved on their own and took him to another turbolift, which carried him further down. It was calling him, the Force was nudging him to try it.

Until now, he had tried to ignore it, believing it was the call of the Dark Side. But he didn't want to do that anymore. If the Force was telling him to give working on a machine bigger than his datapad a try, then now was the time.

At last, the door opened into the temple's Storage Floor. It sat below ground level, meaning it was lower than the rooftops of nearby buildings. And since it was made for utilitarian ends, it wasn't as elegant as the main temple floor.

It was simple, bare, with many parallel hallways so massive that service vehicles could move there freely to and from storage vaults and the lower service hangars. The hallway he was in was lined with storage rooms of different sizes.

Not to mention, the floor was rarely visited by Jedi, and hence it was manned by temple employees, not the Order members. They were the citizens of the Galactic Republic, just ordinary, good folks.

Arenval walked close to the wall to avoid hitting any service vehicle. He passed by many employees who had datapads in their hands. There were also bipedal droids guarding the hallways, with some drones keeping an eye from somewhere higher.

Eventually, he arrived at one of the large storage rooms marked as 'Old Droids'. He entered through the small sliding door right beside the massive one for cargo. Inside was a small lobby with a metal desk on which was a multi-screened computer terminal. On the other side was a Twi'lek male and a droid.

"Hello there. I've been cleared to take one droid from storage. I'm Arenval Tython, by the way."

The Twi'lek man tapped on the terminal for a moment and smiled back at him. "Greetings, Padawan Tython. I'm Vek Donta. Your requisition order was logged only a minute ago. Please, follow me."

Arenval followed him into the storage. It was bigger than what he was expecting, with countless rows of shelves on which droids, some intact and some only parts, rested. And there, he felt the pull of the Force. It was subtle, gentle, like a faint stream of air in a sealed chamber.

"I'll take you to the section where we keep working droids."

"No, save the effort. Even broken old droids will suffice. I'll repair it," Arenval said quickly, then paused as something tugged at his senses. "What's over there?"

He pointed towards a different row through the walkable gaps.

"Let me check." The Twi'lek man tapped the datapad. "That section is for old droids. And by old, I mean ancient. From before the Ruusan Reformation."

"Take me there."

"But they're really old..."

Arenval didn't wait and let the Force guide him. He walked between rows, moving closer and closer to that feeling. Eventually, he just closed his eyes and felt it. He heard sounds, the whistling of a droid mixed with beeps and boops at a high pitch and quick oscillations. In between were sounds of lightsabers clashing.

His feet took a turn right, and then, more steps later, he stopped, taking the final turn to face the lowest shelf. He opened his eyes and saw a rather bulky astromech droid, slightly over a meter tall. It was unlike any droid he'd seen in thirteen years of living. With a roller wheel on its back, and two arms on the front. The head was conical with a single round sensor on it like an eye. All its paint was chipped, mostly covered in dirt, and likely jammed.

This one? Really?

Arenval closed his eyes again for some time. He felt no tug of the Force anymore, however. He tried to feel the droid, and it wasn't a Force-wielding abomination either. It was just an old piece of junk.

"What model is this droid?" he asked the Twi'lek.

The man glanced over the datapad. "This one is... ah, an antique T7-series astromech. Built by Duwani Mechanical Products. The company's not doing too well these days. This droid line first came out more than three thousand years ago."

"..."

Arenval's eyes widened at that sheer scale of time. He was more surprised by the fact that the manufacturing company was still around after so long. As for the droid, it did look that old now that he knew.

Still a bit reluctant to take such an old droid, he looked around. There were a few more humanoid, militaristic-looking droids as well. But he just couldn't bring himself to ignore what he had just experienced.

"I'll take it. Give it a proper inspection and log it into the system as mine."

The Twi'lek looked at him for a moment like he was the biggest fool in the galaxy.

"Understood. From what I can tell in the records, this droid's been sitting here since before the Ruusan Reformation. Nothing unusual about it. But I doubt it's operational. The memory core is likely dead. I'll log it for now, but if you want to exchange it later, come by anytime."

Arenval nodded and soon moved the T7 droid onto a cart with a repulsorlift. He pushed it out, bidding his farewell to the manager of the storage room. He didn't ask for repair materials yet, as he wanted to make a list first. The droid was in a very rough shape.

Entering the turbolift, he returned to the main floor of the Jedi Temple. From there, he went to the creche and gathered his belongings. Since Aayla and Orbe were already Padawans, he had nobody to say goodbye to and silently left.

Arriving at a different part of the Jedi Temple, he soon found his assigned personal quarters. But at a glance, he realised something, the adjacent room to his room was much bigger, as its door was unusually distant.

He walked over to it before entering his room and saw 'Grandmaster Yoda' written on it.

Smart. He can sense dark fluctuations more easily.

Finally, he turned again and punched in the code and walked into his new humble abode. And it really was humble. It was a tiny rectangular room with a thin sleeping pad, a single window, and a cabinet so small one couldn't store anything but clothes and a lightsaber in it. There was no table, and with his new droid in there, 20 percent of the room became inaccessible.

"Hmm... This won't do."

Arenval stood in the middle of his room, one foot tapping on the floor. There wasn't even enough space to place a table to work on the droid later. There was no space at all.

"Wait!"

Just then, he had an idea and looked to his right at the wall. A big grin appeared on his face. "I doubt Master Yoda even uses his quarters that often. It's probably four times larger too... plenty of space for me."

He nodded to himself, approving his own decision, never realising the concerned short green man sensed a faint disturbance not too far away.

Decision made, he finally walked over to the window and removed the blinds. The sun was setting, and the orange hue shone atop the many rooftops. Then he stretched down and grabbed his datapad from the storage.

He hated it. The device was too old-fashioned and didn't have as many features as he hoped for. But it let him access the Holonet, which was also an underutilized, old-fashioned, text-based network.

He accessed the Republic's official datafeed since there was no such thing as a website. There, he moved from section to section and reached the section called 'Applications'. There, scrolling a bit further, he reached the application form he wanted to submit.

Time to initiate the Temple Escape plan.

He quickly wrote his name, details, address, and the name of his talent. For now, he was shooting in the dark, but he could feel that it was all connected. His strange desire to work on a broken droid and finding this exact droid.

At last, he pressed the submit option. With that, he finally applied to the Republic Future's Program. If selected, he would be allowed to leave Coruscant for educational purposes.

"But how long does it take to get accepted?"