

Eventually, after a long discussion, it was decided that we needed to return to Nirn. Darth Vader was subdued, limbless, and without the Force. A rather significant part of me was nervous that something would happen, but just hanging out in space wasn't really an option. This was why I had invested so much money into the prison island, I needed to use it. Besides, we had already proven that the anti-Force bubbles blocked people from Palpy's sight, so we would be safe.

Technically, I hadn't come even close to imagining that we would be keeping Darth-fucking-Vader on the island, but needs must when the devil drives.

Despite all the existing layers of protection, I still felt nervous about the idea of bringing Vader to Nirn. So, looking for another layer of insurance, I had a brief discussion with the doctors running *Hope's* primary medbay, and they pointed me towards a wearable autoinjector designed for emergencies and for patients who need regular injections but want to retain some control over their lives. It was built into a brace that went over someone's arm, but as we were preparing to head home, I contacted Miru and asked her to redesign it into something to better fit the situation. By the time we arrived at the checkpoint, she was waiting there for us and handed over a redesigned version of the autoinjector. Now it was a remote injector, and we filled it with several different sedation options and secured it to Vader's torso.

By some fluke of the universe, without even knowing who it was for, Miru had designed the device to be strapped basically right where Vader's trademark control box would have been, though this box was slightly smaller and colored white, with an unbroken shell protecting it from being messed with.

"So...That's Darth Vader?" Miru asked as we watched the device being installed by medical droids. "He... without his armor, he looks a lot less impressive."

*"I would have to agree," I responded, once again typing into a datapad. "He looks rather pitiful like this, though I think he would absolutely despise me for saying that."*

"He already despises you," the young Twi'lek pointed out. "I don't think you need to worry about that."

*"Fair," I acknowledged with a shrug. "Are you sure the unit will hold up?"*

"The straps are woven beskar, and the plating is a beskar alloy. Short of someone handing him a beskar knife, he is not breaking the box or cutting the straps."

*"Yeah, tell that to Ahsoka's helmet."*

"I still have no idea how he managed to do that," Miru said, a frown on her face as she looked at me. "There is no way a prosthetic that small could bend beskar that way."

"It had nothing to do with his prosthetic," I explained, shaking my head. "Hell, he probably would have had an easier time doing it if he still had his normal hands. It was his rage,

he was pouring it into the Force, strengthening himself to a ridiculous degree, and likely using it as leverage."

Later, when we arrived on Nirn, I rode the *Quiet Ark* down to the surface, landing on the prison island. I followed alongside Vader as he was carefully brought down to his new home, one of the most secure cells we had made, with thicker walls, reinforced doors, and several added layers of security. In fact, it even had a low-level beskar alloy in most of the reinforcing. It was far from as tough as the alloys we used in our armor, which had significantly higher concentrations, but lining a room with that much beskar would be a ridiculous cost.

Which was why we only had one room set up like that.

Once Vader was locked in his room, hooked up to monitoring equipment, with a medical droid standing outside the room and monitoring his vitals, and all of the added security was hooked up, I headed back to Vercopa. The Jedi needed to be briefed on who we had captured and why I hadn't already killed him.

Unsurprisingly, when they heard who I had captured, they expressed quite a few strong emotions on the topic. All of them knew of Darth Vader, as he had been hunting a good portion of them for quite some time. Those who hadn't experienced his fanatic drive to slaughter every single one of them knew of him from those who had. Thankfully, none of them pushed for anything drastic, as I would have struggled to talk them down while still using a datapad to explain everything.

Especially when I myself was considering some of the drastic things they could have suggested.

For obvious reasons, there were a lot of concerns about our new guest, and I certainly couldn't blame them for being paranoid, not when I eagerly added several of their suggestions to his security. By the time they were satisfied, Vader had several new layers of additional measures preventing his Escape. Altogether, he was locked in a cell, under the island, with no armor, no limbs, a sedation tool strapped to his chest, his access to the Force cut off. The island was evacuated of all non-essential personnel, and the *Quiet Ark* was moved to Z-base. Any airspeeder that went to the island had trackers installed and a specially placed chunk of remotely controlled explosives tucked against some rather important internals. Anyone visiting the island was instructed to never linger on the island. They were told to drop things off and pick things up quickly, then leave immediately when they were done.

On top of all that, I had the rotation of starships in a low Nirn orbit, locked onto the island, observing it constantly and ready to carve it off the map with turbolasers.

Yes, it was overkill, and yes, it was enough to satisfy the Jedi, but I still felt nervous about having him on the island.

Once Vader's prison was set up, I spent most of the several days taking it easy, or, rather, as easy as I could considering the planet's new guest. I slowly healed over time, the constant pain of taking the bactade was annoying, but it pushed my healing up just a smidge. It

was almost not worth the added suffering, but it cut the time down enough that I kept raking it. Several times I was tempted to say fuck it and try healing myself, but Ahsoka helped me stay strong.

Honestly, being mute was worse than the constant burning. It was isolating, continuously annoying, and by the end of the second day, I was ready to pull my hair out. The last two days, when I could technically speak but didn't to help the healing process, were the worst. Luckily, when I was finally healed, the magic-reinforced backlash seemed to fade immediately, so I didn't have to deal with any extended period of time where my throat was still sensitive or weak. I could just fix it back to a hundred percent myself.

Needless to say, further experiments with the Thu'um would be done carefully, and usually with observers nearby, just in case.

On top of recovering, we also had to deal with the results of our heist. Despite everything getting thrown upside down by Vader's ambush, we had managed to at least partially succeed. Racer had emptied Thaan's accounts, netting us just under seven million credits, and our people managed to snag quite a bit of loot before the Imperial forces arrived. They left behind about half of what we could have gotten, but our specialists calculated that we secured around eight to ten million more credits.

It wasn't going to be coming in all at once, as a lot of what we found would need to be sold over time, but with the seven million, plus our own money, we had time to work that out. That meant a total of around fourteen to fifteen million credits had been gathered, despite the ambush.

While it wasn't nearly what we had hoped to get, it was enough to cover the build for now. We would likely need to work hard to fund the rest, but we had bought ourselves time and breathing room.

On top of going over our limited success, I also finally got the chance to experiment with my new ability. Rather than shout things in my backyard, I grabbed an airspeeder with Ahsoka, and we traveled across the forest, eventually finding a small clearing. It was just a few dozen meters wide and looked like an old, dried-up basin, filled with rocks and gravel left behind by moving water. Once we landed, I summoned my grimoire, flipping to the back.

As I had guessed when I first woke up from the ambush, I did in fact receive several new pages, twenty-seven in fact, in my magic book. However, to my surprise, the vast majority of them were empty, blank pages of thick parchment with nothing but numbered corners. Only three had any writing, and one was mostly blank, with only Unrelenting Force and an introduction containing any detail.

As Ahsoka sat in what amounted to a beach chair, enjoying the sun and trying to relax, generally failing to do so, I read through the provided pages, trying to extract every bit of information. Unsurprisingly, the Dragon Shouts worked considerably differently from my normal magic. As the introduction explained, learning new shouts was not done through training, but rather through understanding. I was given the words of a shout, but it was up to me to truly

understand and comprehend what they meant. I needed to fully understand the link between the words and the fabric of reality. Only then would I be able to conjure its effects with the Thu'um.

I was not suddenly the dragonborn, so running around killing dragons, of any kind, wasn't going to suddenly unlock the Thu'um. My method would be closer to the way of the Greybeards than the dragonborn.

On top of that, unlocking new shouts to learn would be done through the same nebulous "when you're ready" concept that had ruled my available levels of magic. I would unlock them over time and experience, but I had no single way to guarantee anything, nor did I have any way to pick which Shout I unlocked.

I lamented the lack of control and the absence of a shortcut to training, but I couldn't bring myself to be that annoyed. The shouts were just way too potent against single combatants to be angry. Just having Unrelenting Force was a massive advantage.

Which is why, when I was done reading, I stepped away from the shade of the speeder, set myself in a more stable stance, and shouted.

"Fus!"

The shout was loud... but that's all it was. No wave of force erupted out from me, no kinetic wave slammed into the basin. I frowned, turning back to Ahsoka, who simply raised an eyebrow.

"Don't give me that look, this is uncharted territory here," I explained. "The description on how this worked wasn't exactly clear-cut."

I turned back to the clearing and closed my eyes, thinking back to the moment that I first used the shout. I let out a long breath as I tried to recall what I was feeling, where my mind was at. I was terrified, of course, almost certain that I was about to die... But something within me refused. I refused to give up and leave Ahsoka on her own, and that feeling had filled me with determination.

Unstoppable, unrelenting determination.

I stirred my emotions, purposely riling myself up, focusing on my utter refusal to submit. I refuse to back down, to surrender, to give up. I shouted again, and again there was nothing. Part of me was unsurprised because, while I had been feeling those things, they had just been on the surface.

I needed to go deeper.

I stood there in the sun, analyzing the shout, what it meant, what it translated into, and how it applied to me. Slowly, over time, I realized that it hadn't been about the refusal to submit, but the drive to push myself back up. I would stand, I would push back, I would meet the challenge head-on. I would never stop, I would-

"FUS!"

The wave of force traveled across the basin, rocks and gravel shifting and scattering under the impact. The words themselves echoed for a moment, despite the fact that we weren't really someplace where you would expect an echo.

"Well... at least it wasn't a fluke?" I said, turning to give Ahsoka a thumbs up, only to find her looking a bit startled.

"What?" I asked

"I... I felt that," she explained. "It wasn't much... but I definitely felt it through the Force."

"What did it feel like?" I asked, tilting my head curiously.

"Like... Like you were pushing yourself into the air," she said with a frown, struggling with her words. "Your feelings flowed out of you, almost like a physical thing... that was bizarre, I've never felt anything like that."

"Well, give me a minute, I'll try again, and you can focus on it."

She nodded, and a few seconds later, I shouted again, and this time she watched carefully. We experimented for a while, and as best as Ahsoka could determine, she could feel the influence my state of mind was having as I used the dragon shout. The feeling grew more intense when I used the full breadth of Unrelenting Force, but it was still subtle. Eventually, we decided that it must be some sort of interaction between the nature of the shouts and what I was thinking about when I used them.

At that point, I had shouted several dozen times and was happy to learn that, as long as I took breaks between each one, my throat was fine. I was also glad to learn that if I *did* push myself too far, I could heal myself slightly without collapsing into a writhing pile of pain and suffering. I still hurt like a bastard, but it was tolerable enough that as long as I wasn't trying to do something complicated, I could heal minor overuse.

I was in absolutely no rush to do so, since it really did suck, but at least it was possible.

After getting [Unrelenting Force](#) down, I moved on to the second shout my grimore was offering, [Whirlwind Sprint](#). Unlike the former's page, which had a longer description and explanation of what it was, Whirlwind Sprint only had the words "Wuld Nah Kest" and their translations "Whirlwind, Fury, Tempest."

The rest was up to me.

According to the grimoire, in order for me to learn the shout, I would need to understand it at its core. The words the shout was made of were definitely a good place to start, but I still couldn't help but frown. For a long time, I sat there, shaded from the sun, absently casting random magic into the gravel around us, trying to break down the deeper meaning of the words, but there was no sudden epiphany or burst of understanding.

Don't get me wrong, I knew what the words meant, as well as their alternative meanings. But, somehow, I knew I wasn't any closer to understanding the true meaning of the dragon's words. Somehow, despite knowing exactly what they meant, their truth eluded me.

Eventually, after a few hours of me sitting around, muttering in the dragon language, not feeling even a spark of the Thu'um, Ahsoka and I returned home, spending the rest of the time together. We both knew we were ignoring the inevitable, that at some point Vader would wake up and we would need to deal with his bullshit, but for now, that was okay.