

Star Wars: Shadowbound Chapter 9 - Yoda Remembers, Beldorion the Splendid, A Big Mistake & A New Teacher

Coruscant, Jedi Temple

"...last seen on Naboo a few days ago. His current whereabouts are unknown." Master Plo Koon summarised the report the council had received.

"The greater concern is whom he has taken in. A Dark Jedi is a serious threat. Komari Vosa will only hasten his descent into the Dark Side."

"Master Windu, why do you speak as though Arenval's fall were inevitable?" Master Shaak-Ti questioned. "The report clearly states that he has helped Komari Vosa find the right path. She no longer leads the cult."

"But she remains a Dark Jedi," Mace Windu replied. "Our understanding of Arenval Tython tells us that his surroundings affect him. We agreed to send Padawan Secura with him to keep him closer to the Light. His actions undermine the Council."

"He's no longer a member of the Jedi Order." Master Plo Koon reminded everyone. "We cannot control him."

Right then, Grandmaster Yoda stirred in his seat, appearing unaffected by all the talk. There was no sadness either, but instead glee. "On Naboo, what Tython did?"

Master Plo Koon read from a standard-issue Jedi Order Holotab. "It says that Tython Tech and the government of Naboo, including the Senator of the Chommell Sector, have signed an agreement to allow experimental communications technologies to operate on trial bases."

"Hm. Told me this once, he did. Bring the galaxy closer, he said it would," Yoda said to nobody, as if lost in old memories.

"A noble dream," Master Poof commented.

"Indeed. Holotabs have proven irreplaceable in the daily lives of beings from every stratum across the galaxy. I hope he finds success once again," Master Plo Koon said.

Yoda silently nodded, agreeing with him.

"That, only time will tell. We have Nightsisters to discuss..."

As Master Windu steered the conversation towards more pressing topics, the council chamber became busy once again. Yoda gave his advice and approvals where needed, and an hour later, finished the meeting.

Grandmaster Yoda offered greetings to his fellow council members and then went to train the younglings. It was an everyday habit he'd gotten used to.

Hours later, finally finished with his day's work, he walked back to his quarters. For a tiny moment, his eyes fell on the adjacent door, where Arenval used to live.

But then, he tapped on the keypad and walked inside his room. It was spacious for his size, complete with all a Jedi could ever need. But he walked towards the addition in his room that stood out.

"Hm, time it is."

He sat down in front of a low table, on a round wooden stool. Then, his hand tapped on the large Holotab screen before him. Moments later, familiar music filled the room, followed by the noise of blasters, speeders, and dialogs.

A familiar Detective Munn was on screen, investigating a crime on some backwards planet. Yoda watched it in silence, entirely focused.

He rarely thought about it. But it was hard for him to believe how much that child had changed him.

An hour later, as the episode's ending credits rolled, Yoda glanced at the empty stool right beside him.

But he didn't dwell on it for too long and moved to his meditation pad.

#####

Meridian Sector, Nam Chorios,

The YT-1000 and Schimitar came out of hyperspace at the same time, close to the Nam Chorios planet. The first noticeable thing in that system was its dim sun. And that meant the planet below was in a constant state of dusk.

Arenval wasn't piloting. He wasn't even in the co-pilot seat as he sat in the captain's quarters with T7, using the shield T7 could produce to train his Dark Side abilities.

Ting!

However, right as the ship came out of hyperspace, a familiar bell chimed. He looked at his droid friend.

"What is it this time?"

T7 projected the red screen in front of him.

[New Minor Quest - House-Hutting!

Description - Even when weakened, a Hutt remains powerful. Especially a Force User Hutt.

Goal - Defeat Beldorion.

Reward - Force Light Ability, Dark Side Inhibitor +0.5%]

"That doesn't seem alright. Teeseven, isn't Force Light a light side ability? I can't even use it," Arenval quickly asked.

T7 whistles. "Technique = Old // T7 = Confused."

"Hm, I'll give it a try. Though I suppose... Aayla can learn it if I can't. Force Light can be rather useful against the Dark Side." Arenval rose, seeing no streaks beyond the viewport. "Seems we've arrived. Let's get to work, buddy. You're coming down with me."

T7 was instantly happy. "T7 + Aren = Hurry!"

Arenval put on his dark cloak, checked his lightsaber, and then added a few thermal detonators, a blaster, and a smoke grenade in his Pocket Space. It was tiny for any real use, but really helpful for hiding weapons.

Walking out of his quarters, he arrived at the lounge where everyone had gathered.

"Shmi, Komari, you'll stay in orbit in case Aayla and I need support. Put on two spacesuits and move to the Schimitar. I'll take this rust bucket down instead," Arenval announced his decision.

"Master, why can't I come?"

"Because the planet has rare crystals that magnify one's connection to the Force. For a Dark Sider like you, it's no different from jumping into the devil's pit. I can resist the Dark Side's whispers. And Aayla is a Jedi. We'll both survive it, but you will not."

Komari's expressions told everything. She wasn't happy with this.

Arenval knew he couldn't risk it. He stepped closer to Komari and rested a hand on her shoulder. "Komari, your training isn't complete yet. Have a little faith in me."

Komari looked down. "I... Forgive me, Master. I doubted you."

"No, asking questions is not wrong. Your duty is to stay vigilant with Shmi and keep an eye on the planet. Aayla, take blasters with you. You can't always leap to the enemy's side and take them down. We're entering a battle, so we use every advantage we have."

"A Jedi with a blaster?" Aayla frowned.

"You're no longer a Jedi of the Order. We don't have dozens of Jedi and Padawans at our backs, so every fight has to be treated like it's do-or-die. Our senses make us natural

sharpshooters, so use them." Arenval stepped aside and took blasters from the armory. "Better to have one and not need it than need one and not have it."

He forced a Blurr-1120 holdout blaster into her hand. Meanwhile, his RSKF-44 heavy blaster was safely tucked in his Pocket Space.

"Aren, how will you know where to land?" Shmi asked, the only one aboard without a connection to the Force. She pointed to the small Holotable displaying Nam Chorios. "The surface is so dark, and parts of it are covered by storms."

"It's simple," Arenval said, "I'll meditate while Aayla flies the ship over the planet's surface. The Hutt we're looking for has fallen to the Dark Side. I can sense it. And I'm certain he's at the planet's capital."

"Understood, I'll prepare the spacesuits." Shmi quickly left for the airlock area.

"Go, Komari."

Finally, the Dark Jedi nodded and reluctantly left.

Moments later, Alfred steered Schmitar as close to YT-1000's airlock as possible. Since Scimitar didn't have a docking bay, the Sith ship had to depressurise and lower its ramp. Since there was no organic life onboard, nothing was affected.

Shmi and Komari made a small jump using a guiding rope to enter Scimitar before the ship closed its ramp and pressurised again. That little exchange showed Arenval more shortcomings of the Sith ship. It was fast and undetectable, but only for quick insertion missions and other tactical missions.

"Let's go, Aayla." Arenval patted her shoulder, urging her toward the cockpit.

Once she began flying, he settled into a passenger seat behind her and closed his eyes to meditate. "Head straight for the capital. Try to stay above the clouds. The planet's Tsil crystals can produce electrical storms without much warning."

Aayla spun her head toward him, her lekku snapping like a whip. "How do you know so much about this world? I never even heard of it at the Temple."

"The Force guides me."

Aayla narrowed her eyes, unconvinced. "Fine, keep your secrets. Alfred, we're heading down."

####

As expected, the city didn't have a spaceport. It could hardly be called a city, as there were only a few buildings spread over less than eight kilometers. The population was likely less than six thousand.

But Arenval felt the Force. As soon as the ship touched down, he could feel a surge in his connection to the Force. But amidst all that increased sensitivity, he felt the Darkness of Beldorion.

But there was more.

"Aren, there are Force sensitives in this city!" Aayla exclaimed.

"It's a cult of Force-sensitives. Let's not mingle with them any more than necessary and deal with this Hutt. Wear your cloak properly, and hide your lekku and face as much as you can."

"Wait, are we going with the slave thing again?" Aayla asked. "You'll try selling me to the Hutt an..."

"No. But if you leave your features uncovered, most will assume that story," Arenval said firmly, pulling up his cloak's hood as well. "Let's go. Someone is likely waiting to greet us at the city entrance."

Arenval put his lightsaber in the Pocket Space as well and lowered the ship's ramp. As the planet's natural scenery came into view, he noticed how dim the sunlight was. It did feel like dusk.

He took a deep breath to calm himself. Even the faintest emotional fluctuations were intensified on that planet. And using the Force on the planet could set off Force storms. It was by no means an easy job.

Walking in front of Aayla, he approached Hweg Shul's borders, the capital of the planet. No guards were standing there, nor was there a controlled entry point. It was all open.

"It's empty."

"It's supposed to be empty, Aayla. The electrical storms make you sick. Fortunately for us, it doesn't seem like the Hutt has a standing army." Arenval turned towards a large building in the city. It stood out, built in the Huttese style.

"They're watching us. I can feel it." Aayla looked left and right. "I think they're underground."

"That's likely the case."

Walking, Arenval eventually reached a tall Huttese building. Its double doors were shut tightly, and nobody was guarding it. But Arenval still knocked, sure that the Hutt must have already sensed him in the Force.

"Aayla, cut i—"

Right as he prepared to force his way in, one of the twin gates started to swing open. It opened only slightly as a man stepped out. A human in ragtag clothes, a chain around his neck, but it didn't seem high-tech.

"My Master, Baldorion the Splendid, welcomes fellow Jedi to Nam Chorios."

Arenval just nodded. It seemed Beldorion had mistaken them and hoped to fool them by acting friendly.

"Take us to your Master," Arenval said, and walked inside.

The place had regular Hutt-style architecture. The walls were high, dry, and made of mud. There wasn't much show of affluence, however, considering how barren the planet was with barely any people.

The entire way, Arenval kept his senses sharp, sensing every living being around him. He felt the servants, the slaves, all of them. They were humans. But then, as they approached two grand doors with Huttese language engraved on them, he felt multiple beings.

One large, fairly strong in the Force. The other one, very weak but present in the Force. The others were non-Force-sensitive.

"This way. My Master awaits you."

The slave pushed the door open and shrank back, meekly looking down with fear. The man didn't walk inside that chamber.

Arenval strolled inside, eyeing everything with caution. It was a large, round chamber with a high ceiling. The center of it was an open area, and one end had a large throne-like platform where the behemoth of a Hutt was seated. He was extremely muscular and large, skin mud-brown, and eyes red like rubies. Around the Hutt, three naked human women sat, reclined sideways or straight; each had their necks chained to the ground.

Beside him, below the platform was another creature, however. Not human, but a humanoid. It wore loose, draping clothes, and was mostly bald, without even eyebrows.

"Greetings, Beldorion the Splendid," Arenval said first, earning an amused look from the Hutt. "For a Jedi stranded on this world for centuries, you look remarkably splendidly strong."

"The Force keeps me strong," Beldorion spoke in Basic, fluent and without an accent, though his voice remained thick and bassy. "Why have you come to my world, Jedi?"

"For you, of course. Vacation is over. Do you not want to leave this desolate, backward planet and return to the wider galaxy?"

The Hutt laughed. "Why would I? I am strong here, ruler of a world and thousands. The Force speaks to me here. Your Jedi Temple was never my home. Beyond Master Thon and Yoda, I

knew no friend. Doubted and feared when I had done nothing to deserve it. Now, at least, I have become what they must fear."

"Likewise," Arenval replied, to the Hutt's surprise. "It seems we are alike. I, too, was feared by the Order from the day I was born. Doubted, watched constantly. I spent my entire life confined to the Temple. The High Council made every decision for me. Grandmaster Yoda took me in, or I would never have survived."

"Who are you?" Beldorion questioned.

"I'm Arenval Tython. I was born with an affinity for the Dark Side, while the Light remains a challenge. I was once a Jedi, but I left the Order."

Arenval had pondered why the only recently known Hutt Jedi fell to the Dark Side so easily. For one to fall, there needed to be doubts, fears, and darkness within oneself. So, he had wondered what such darkness could Beldorion have. In the end, he came to the conclusion that it was similar to his own.

Hutts were feared throughout the galaxy, seen as vile criminals. Every child knows what a Hutt is and what they do. No matter what, the prejudice against Hutts forms in every mind. Rightfully so, he'd say. But that meant the likes of Beldorion also got mistreated.

And on Nam Chorios, that darkness culminated in this.

Beldorion was silent for a while, eyeing him and Aayla one at a time.

"So you have come to recruit me?" asked the Hutt.

Arenval nodded with a shrug.

"Hah!" Beldorion laughed. "None who enter the chamber of Beldorion the Splendid leave alive or free! Dark Side or not, you will die, human. The Twi'lek... will make a fine addition to my collection."

Arenval sighed. He expected this much from a Hutt that lived unchallenged and power-drunk for centuries. The Tsil on the planet increased sensitivity, and that included Beldorion's dark desires.

At least he remembers Yoda and this Thon.

"Unfortunate, but hardly unexpected." Arenval raised his right hand, fingers curling into a claw-like grip, as though he held someone's throat. His target wasn't the Hutt. "You must be Dzyn, the Droch. Tell me, have you informed Beldorion that you drain his life-energy? And the other drochs as well?"

"What did you say?!" Beldorion boomed.

"He lies, Beldorion the Splendid! Oh, Beldorion the Ruby Eyes, he lies—ughk...nkkgh!"

"Plague," Arenval muttered. His flaming eyes burned while his hand tightened, Force Choking the Dzym. "I know of your secret plot to spread the plague across the galaxy."

Boom!

Right then, the loud sound of thunder came from outside. Arenval's use of the Force had stirred a Force Storm. But he didn't stop and squeezed the life out of Dzym. The thing was an ancient parasite that had drained enough life energy to grow into a humanoid form.

Snap!

At last, the neck snapped, and Arenval let the dead body fall to the ground. He wasted no time and summoned his lightsaber, igniting it.

"You want it or not, Beldorion, you're coming with me!" Arenval declared, taking a fighting stance. "Surrender or get knocked out. The choice is yours."

Bzzzz!

"Haha! It has been too long since I was last made to ignite my lightsaber." Beldorion raised his purple blade high; both his arms were thick and muscular. "Your skull will make a fine cup."

"Stay back and support me." He ordered Aayla. "Study the pattern. Hutts don't fight as we do."

Boom!

A Force storm thundered outside. With that, Arenval and Beldorion both moved. Arenval only knew that this Hutt knew Form VII, also called ferocity form. It was aggressive and required immense focus. One had to allow the excitement and passion of the battle to control their actions.

However, Arenval knew the weaknesses of the ferocity form, as well as the fact that Beldarion didn't have total control. The Tsil had only heightened the Force sensitivity, making it easier. But it was a double-edged sword.

He couldn't afford to be swayed by the Dark Side, as the effects would multiply. He tried to focus and empty his thoughts. Normally, he allowed his body to feel the thrill of the battle. But this time, he had to ignore everything.

"Haaaaa!"

Woah!

Arenval jumped back in surprise as Beldorion rolled sideways off the platform and rushed towards him. He'd seen Hutts before, but Beldorion's speed shocked him. The loud thuds the giant body produced revealed the pure strength behind that weight.

Arenval chose not to use the Form V he was best at. Although it relied on powerful strikes, he already knew he couldn't overpower this Hutt. So, he went with Aayla's acrobatic form. He jumped around, letting Beldorion roll around.

"You are weak, Jedi!" Beldorion roared.

Arenval landed on the ground and rushed right behind Beldorion. He meant to strike the tail with his lightsaber.

No!

Before his amber lightsaber could connect, the very tail of the Hutt smashed into him like a whip, sending him flying into the nearest wall. He slammed into it and fell, coughing, feeling a few cracks in his lower ribs.

Definitely broken.

He chose not to let the pain change him. It was all fake, the pain, the rage; there was no anger. He fooled his mind like a master and got up, prepared to fight. But at the same time, he began wielding Crush Opposition. Form VII's weakness was Force powers.

Hutts were naturally immune to Jedi mind tricks. But Crush Opposition was far more than a mere mind trick. And on that planet, it was amplified.

"Aayla! Get back!" He shouted, not wanting her to fall under the effect.

"I heard your bones break," Beldorion taunted. "You may submit; I shall allow you to serve me."

Arenval's jaw tightened, and he focused Crush Opposition on the Hutt. He imagined himself as a magnet that sucked away all joy, all willpower, and all the confidence of those around him.

"One thing I despise the most is slavery, Beldorion."

"Then let me liberate your puny life from your body, weak meat!"

Beldorion rose high on his tail and curled himself, turning into a wheel as he rolled towards Arenval. The earth underneath them shook by that rolling weight.

But Arenval didn't move away from where he stood. He held the lightsaber with both hands, waiting for the Hutt to reach him. He focused internally, keeping his mind empty, and using Crush Opposition around him.

Initially, Beldorion was out of his range. But the moment the rolling Hutt entered it, the speed visibly decreased. The closer the Hutt got to him, the slower he rolled.

By the time Beldorion was in arm's reach, Arenval jumped high in the air, somersaulting to the other side. The Hutt failed to stop himself and crashed into the same wall that Arenval had hit moments ago.

"Aaaargh... What... have you done to me?" Beldorion raged, shaking his thick head. "Get... out of my mind!"

It was shocking, and a testament to the Hutt biology's resilience. If Arenval had struck anyone else with Crush Opposition with that much intensity, their mind would have been broken. But Beldorion could still speak and understand what was happening.

"Aayla!"

At Arenval's command, the blue Twi'lek took out a thermal detonator from her utility pocket and threw it at Beldorion. The Hutt tried to use telekinesis to stop it, but centuries of Dzym feeding off his energy made him weak.

Arenval used telekinesis as well and pushed that thermal detonator at the Hutt.

Boom!

The grenade exploded right underneath Beldorion's face, knocking the giant body back into the wall once again.

Arenval was on his way already, rushing forward with his lightsaber, still using Crush Opposition to keep Beldorion from rising quickly, or even reacting in time.

Boom!

"I will not die here, Jedi!"

Beldorion suddenly roared and aimed one arm towards the ceiling. A thunderbolt struck from the sky right then and tore through the roof, collapsing it entirely.

Debris crashed down; rain and dust everywhere. Arenval avoided getting hit, still rushing towards the massive Hutt.

"I'm not here to kill you, Beldorion!" Arenval jumped on top of the knocked-over Hutt's chest and swung at the hilt of the purple lightsaber. He didn't want to ruin it and used his lightsaber's non-lethal mode to hit the hand.

Kzzzt!

The purple lightsaber got knocked away from Beldorion's grip.

"No!" Beldorion tried to surge up again, summoning the Force Storm above.

Boom!

Thunder struck the ground, scorching it.

"You cannot defeat Beldorion the Splendid!"

The Hutt rolled over to the side. Arenval lost balance and tried to jump back.

Bam!

But right then, the Hutt landed a tail strike on him once more. It was a lesson learned; Arenval's first time fighting a Hutt. He fell away once more, but the impact wasn't hard, and he landed on his feet in the middle of the large chamber filled with debris.

The sky was dark; lightning flashed time and time again. But there was something more, a whisper in the air itself. The planet's Tsil crystals were doing something; Arenval could feel it.

"Aaaaaaaa!" Beldorion screamed, lost in fury, eyes burning red. The Hutt didn't even take the lightsaber, and just launched himself at Arenval.

"Aren!" Aayla jumped in front of him.

Arenval quickly stopped using Crush Opposition, but he didn't know if he did it in time.

"Get back, Aayla!" Arenval grabbed her shoulder and pulled her behind him. But Beldorion was right in front of his face.

For that tiny moment, he had no choice. He used the Force as it flowed through his body. He let the Dark Side claim its victory over his mind, and punched his left hand towards Beldorion in an attempt to stop that hulking form.

He tried to push the Hutt away using pure telekinesis. However, he failed to take into account the planet's increased Force sensitivity. His telekinesis took a different shape.

Ugh! What's this?

Arenval felt his hand burning and noticed burns appear in real time. At the same time, he felt an invisible, focused blast of Dark Side energy launch out of his palm. It struck Beldorion right as the massive Hutt's fist was launched at him.

"Gaaaaah!"

Arenval had never imagined a Hutt could make a face like that. The slug-body received an invisible impact on its midsection and got pushed away into the air like it weighed nothing,

dozens of feet off the ground. The Dark Side energy knocked the air out of the Hutt, making him gasp and curl his body. It knocked him into the wall once more.

Ting!

Arenval heard a chime. But T7 was too far away for him to read what it was.

"You... dare..." Beldorion, despite a bleeding wound on his chest, wasn't knocked out. The Hutt raised a hand towards him. "Jedi!"

Arenval didn't notice that. He stared at his own burned hand, trying to remember what Dark Side ability he'd just used without realising. And worse, his mind was a mess now. He quickly tried to meditate and run his mind through the usual self-fooling course.

It's not real. There is no pain. I feel nothing.

Click!

"Hah! Die, Jedi!"

All of a sudden, a click came from right underneath his and Aayla's feet. He frowned, but too late to react. A trapdoor opened, and his body started to fall. He caught Aayla's arm just in time and pulled her against his chest.

The last thing he saw before plunging into that dark hole, however, was T7 sneaking behind Beldorion and slapping multiple detonators on him.

We're not here to kill him, T7!

Bam!

It didn't take long before he felt his back knock against an uneven wall as he continued to fall down that hole. It was already dark up there, and in that hole it was even darker.

He kept his eyes shut, trying to sense the ground in order to use the Force right on time to lessen the impact. However, three seconds passed; the depth started to worry him. But he erased all those thoughts.

Five seconds passed.

He sensed the ground at last and snappily bent his knees and used the Force. He kept Aayla against his chest, worried as she was suspiciously silent the entire time.

"Damn it... Hutts and their trapdoors," Arenvall muttered and ignited his lightsaber right away to take a look at the surroundings. "Aayla?"

"Aren?"

He focused on her. She was standing right beside him, but hadn't ignited her lightsaber. He brought his burning blade closer to see her face and noticed a strange haze in her eyes, as if she was unfocused.

No! She was too close!

"Aayla, snap out of it." He shook her by the shoulder.

"Aren..." She muttered again, so softly, as she used to years ago when they were young.

Ting!

Ting!

Again, he began hearing chimes.

Shhh!

And sure enough, he glanced up and saw T7 flying down straight towards him using thrusters. On the way, it made whistling noises, calling for him with worry. It took a few seconds before the droid was finally in front of him, blasting light from its head.

"Hutt = Defeated // T7 = Blasted Hutt."

"How many detonators did you use?"

"Detonators = Five."

"Is he even alive now, Teeseven?"

T7 whistled for a few seconds, as if calculating.

"T7 = Not sure."

Arenval just sighed and hoped the Hutt lived through the droid's fury. Then he finally looked at the red screens hovering above T7's head.

[New Ability Learned - Force Choke, Force Blast]

[Ability Log - Updated]

Force Blast? Makes sense.

[Minor Quest Completed - House-Hutting!]

Description - Even when weakened, a Hutt remains powerful. Especially a Force User Hutt.

Goal - Defeat Beldorion.

Reward - Force Light Ability, Dark Side Inhibitor +0.5%]

Reading that, he took a calming breath. But there was more.

**[Freed Slaves - 682
Slavepoints Earned - 34,100]**

What?!

Arenval had to do a double-take of the screen. He knew Beldorion had slaves, but didn't expect that many. Moreover, it seemed the SSS-Assistant gave him 50 slavepoints per slave freed, instead of the 100 he got from saving Shmi and Princess Arawynne.

Ting!

**[Hidden Minor Quest Completed - Pest Control
Description - A parasite has grown and carries great ambitions.
Goal - Stop Dzym before it's too late.
Reward - Dark Side Inhibitor +0.1%, Tutaminis]**

"Danger = Approaching!"

Arenval regained his focus at T7's warning and raised his lightsaber high to illuminate the surroundings. T7 tried to illuminate a path ahead at the same time. But something was approaching them; the sound felt like something was crawling all around them.

"Approaching = Insects"

He quickly wrapped an arm around Aayla's back since she wasn't moving or reacting to anything. He prepared to face whatever was approaching them from up ahead in that tunnel. Since T7 said insects, he had an idea.

"Teeseven, brighten it as much as you can."

Drochs were parasitic insects. They burrowed under the skin and drank life energies. Worst, they were impossible to detect using any methods. The only thing that held them back was Tsil crystals and natural light interacting. But deep down there, none of that was present, making it the perfect breeding ground for drochs.

"Teeseven, use a flamethrower on them."

Arenval was unsure how he could stop them. He didn't know if a lightsaber's light would hold them back.

Soon, at the edge of the darkness where the light from his lightsaber and T7 didn't reach, he noticed countless drochs. They were piled one atop the other, moving like a unified horde that made his skin crawl. And more and more kept coming, gathering at the edge of the light until they fully blocked the cave from ceiling to ground.

But the drochs hadn't stopped. They had only slowed down. Inch by inch, they gained ground. But after a certain point, they just stopped.

"That's the limit." Arenval relaxed a little and looked up from where he'd fallen. Climbing the entire way was possible, but with Aayla in that state, he couldn't move. And he was certain the moment he stopped using the lightsaber, the drochs would attack.

"Teeseven, can you check Aayla's vitals? See what's wrong wi—"

Before he could finish, he felt a great disturbance in the Force, and it came from right beneath him. Along with it came a voice that didn't have a sound but carried images and emotions that he faintly sensed at first. He knew what it was and closed his eyes, trying to use the Force to listen.

The ability itself was called Force-listening.

He emptied his thoughts first, erasing any trace of worry or emotion that the Force could influence. Then, he specifically focused on the ground under him.

"She is... lost..." A combination of images and emotions whispered to him as he imagined them into a voice. It didn't sound human. It wasn't human.

"Lost?"

"You caused... it."

Arenval felt a burning sensation in his chest. He tried his best to ignore it. "How do I heal her?"

"Requires... a Jedi."

He felt his hold on his lightsaber's hilt tighten, trying to keep the helplessness at bay.

"Can you help? I know who you are, the Tsil."

"We can help... We will not."

"Why? If you want something in return, tell me?"

"Freedom... of this world."

Feeling his connection with the voice strong enough, Arenval opened his eyes and glanced at Aayla's face. He didn't know what horror she imagined when his Crush Opposition struck her. She was still a Padawan, after all, and lacked proper training.

Shouldn't have brought her along.

She had fared well, hadn't fallen to the Dark Side the entire time, and even supported him from the side. But it was his own Dark Side ability that caused this.

I barely ever train her.

Chestburn, anger, and frustration arose from within him. He tried to suppress them once more, but it proved harder than usual.

"I have freed you from Beldorion already."

"The drochs remain."

"How am I supposed to wipe out a parasite infestation that has spread across an entire planet?" he questioned back.

"You can... by joining us... in the Force."

Arenval took a deep breath. To him, using the Force on that planet was no different from willingly opening a mortal wound in air filled with disease. Even the faintest of uncontrolled emotional fluctuation would lead to great damage. And if he were to join with the Tsil, the sentient crystals who were responsible for that heightened sensitivity, he didn't know if he'd even recover from his dark fall.

"We know what you are, Arenval Tython. We know what you seek."

"You do? What's that?"

"Control... We can teach."

That was true indeed. His life's goal was to learn how to control his gifts. The Dark Side was immensely powerful, and if he could control it without any setbacks... he reckoned he could save countless.

"Teach me!" He accepted.

"Follow the light."

Right in front of his eyes, in that cave infested with drochs, countless Tsil crystals started to appear from the ground. They dug out too fast and shined so bright the parasites shrieked backwards into the dark cave.

Arenval began walking, following the path the crystals illuminated.

He let T7 wave his lightsaber in its little mechanical arm while he picked Aayla up in both arms. He hated looking at her, her eyes constantly open, not even blinking, just looking lost and hazy.

I should teach you better. Yeah, I have the perfect new holocron for you.

There were regrets. For once, he allowed himself to feel them.

He didn't want to forget this lesson.