**Arc 2 Chapter 12**

Returning to the base after hitting the convoy, the attitude of most of the rebels was positive. Dampened a little, but Jorel could see smiles as he helped unload the boxes into the loading bay of the hidden swamp base. That good mood lasted until they started *opening* the boxes.

“Wait, why is this full of gloves?” one of the rebels, a human woman, asked.

“What?” Stelog demanded, the rebel cell leader striding over and seeing the contents. *“Dank Farrik!”* he swore, shaking his head. “I’ll have to pass this up the line. Show’s Lonlen was right, at least.”

“Um, what?” the woman asked, confused, as the others gathered. “So what, it’s gloves. Armor’s armor, right?”

The man shook his head, as Jorel could *feel* the man’s frustration in the Force. “Look at them,” he said, picking one up and showing it to the others. “Anyone tell me what’s wrong with this?”

It was Hisku who responded, “The armor’s on the inside, Sir. It’s protective gear, not armor.”

Stelog nodded. “Good eye, recruit. Harmit, crack open that crate,” he directed one of his lieutenants, who nodded, taking a prybar to the box. The other man grunted, reaching in and bringing out something that looked like an oversized blaster pistol. “Thought so,” Stelog Waleye frowned. “It’s Blastech, and an E-5 at that.”

“So, they *aren’t* blaster rifles?” Jorel asked, confused. “That all was for nothing?”

“Calm down boy,” Stelog warned. “We got supplies, and we *can* use these. And if the other side’s getting armed with *these*, we’re doing better than I thought. Show of hands, how many of you have seen one of these before?”

From the fifty or so people gathered, less than a dozen indicated they had.

The rebel leader nodded to the man holding the over-large pistol, who tossed the weapon over to Waleye. “This Baktoid piece of junk is a product of the Techno Union. It’s mass produced, cheap as a Sriluurian hooker, and does the job, but only just. Like most rifles it takes the standardized cartridge, and fires five hundred shots. It’s decently powered, but that’s the one and only good thing about them. Orlmat,” he called, tossing first the glove to another of the resistance veterans, then the another glove, then the blaster. “Show them yours, then use that piece of bantha poodu.”

The dark-skinned man caught them, carrying them over to the ad hoc firing range set up in a cleared space at the edge of the loading bay. Putting the gloves and blaster down, he unslung the rifle that he wore over his shoulder. “Merr-Song Model G8,” he instructed, holding up the sleek rifle. “Good. Not great. Dependable.”

Turning, the man let loose a dozen shots in rapid order, hitting his target with all but three, then moved to hold the rifle by the barrel, giving everyone a significant look. The man then re-shouldered the weapon and let loose close to another hundred shots, utterly destroying the slab of metal that was one of the targets. Looking back at the assembled rebbles, he once more grabbed the barrel.

Then he re-slung the weapon over his shoulder, put on the gloves, and picked up the E-5, slapping a spare cartridge in it. Aiming it was obviously more awkward, the weapon lacking a butt to press against his shoulder, and, of the dozen shots he fired, *only* one hit the second target he was aiming for. The man then pressed the barrel to his exposed forearm. “Is hot. Uncomfortable. But manageable,” he instructed. Orlmat fired as many shots as he had before, a little more than a dozen of the near hundred bolts hitting his target, several hitting *other* targets in the process. A faint hissing sound could be heard, which stopped when the man took his gloved hand off the barrel.

The resistance fighter waved the gloved limb, obviously cooling it off, then pulled a cigarra out of his pocket, pressing one tip to the barrel. The paper cylinder *instantly* caught fire, and the man blew it out, before taking a long drag off the narcotic. “Don’t drop the gun now.”

Which, if everything was fine, was a. . . *bit* of a problem, but if you’d fired that many shots, things were *already* bad, and it would be all to easy to accidentally touch yourself with the searing hot barrel while running, or if a blast took you off your feet, or. . . “Why?” Jorel felt himself asking. “Why would *anyone* build something like that?”

“Because they’re not meant for human hands,” Stelog said. “Or Twi’lek, or *anything* that’s alive. They make these things by the score, so that the battle droids they *also* build can have somethin’ to use. Then they make more, and sell ‘em off to idiots for cheap.”

“Does that mean we’re fightin’ droids?” Tul’gopo asked, the green-skinned Twi’lek frowning.

Xatra, the Zabrak Lieutenant from the Flock, snorted, “Droids wouldn’t need gloves.”

Waleye nodded to her statement, unholstering his blaster. “If I could, I’d outfit everyone with Concordian Crescent gear,” he said, waving the sleek-looking pistol. “But we work with what we got. Least, until we claim somethin’ better.” He put the gun away. “But these boxes ain’t goin’ anywhere. Everyone wash up, get some food, and we’ll put it all away after.”

<SWPP>

They hadn’t gone on another mission the next day, or the day after, most of the time spent familiarizing everyone with their new weapons, and how to minimize the dangers. If they had access to a fabrication center, they could’ve manufactured some barrel shrouds to help, according to Waleye, but the resistance was still in its ‘recruit people and gather supplies’ stage. If they’d taken a factory, they wouldn’t have been able to hold it for long enough to make anything useful.

The cell Jorel was in heard reports of attacks by other rebel groups on the local holonet, and of the government pushing back, even one report of the Flock being deployed to secure a town. Jorel and Hisku had shared worried looks at that, not knowing what they should do if they ran into their own people. “Don’t worry,” Xatra had said, startling both of them. “Those Republic toadies are on the other side of the planet. We won’t be seein’ them anytime soon.”

Several more days passed, and nerves started to build, which meant the members of the resistance started to prod at each other, to relieve the boredom, if nothing else. “You said you were in the circus?” Urni, the orange skinned Twi’lek girl, asked. She’d started to gravitate towards Hisku and him, after their ‘initiation’, and, lacking any reason to say no, they’d gone along with it.

“Yeah,” he smiled easily. “I was an acrobat.”

“Can you show me?” she requested, several of the others waiting nearby, before the rifle training started, perking up at the question.

“I, um, sure?” he replied, looking at the blaster rifle in his hands doubtfully, before using the strap they’d all had to make for their weapons to secure it to himself, pulling it tight and looping it so it was flush against his back.

Stretching, he let the Force flow through him, strengthening his body even more than it normally did, but, at the same time, he had to limit how much it helped. A few experimental standing jumps let him adjust the flow, only making himself *twice* as strong as he should be, less than he could even when he’d first been a Padawan, but it should be enough.

In an instant, he turned and took off towards the metal targets, sending himself rolling forward and springing up from a handstand to rise up the four feet, landing feet first on the top of the metal post that was the target, twisting to leap from post to post, spinning and flipping as he did so.

He could hear the others cheering and clapping as he put on his performance, and couldn’t help but grin as he danced across them, back and forth, getting ready for the last one, which was just a *little* further away. All it’d take was a *smidge* more power, and he reflexively reached for it, before a vague warning in the Force reminded him of *why he was here.*

Dropping the technique back to where he’d been holding it, he followed the faint suggestion in the back of his mind and jumped anyways, *knowing* he wasn’t going to make it. He let his grin fall halfway there, reaching a hand out and, as he hit the ground, used that gloved hand to catch himself on the target right before he ran into it, pushing off and turning it into a hand-stand, grinning once more to the crowd as he moved to keep himself up by one hand, pushing off to land on the other side, bowing to the audience theatrically.

It was only then that Jorel noticed that Waleye had arrived, and was watching him. *Oh,* he thought, realizing why the Force had warned him now. “Enough gawking, it’s time to see if you all can hit the broadside of a shaak,” the man ordered, walking up to them all, waving Jorel over. “Nice recovery,” the resistance leader told the Padawan. “Just make sure you can do that in the field.”

“Will do,” the Jedi nodded, “But, this isn’t the field. Um. Sir.” He knew he sounded a little whiny, but that was what he *wanted*. After all, *Jedi* didn’t whine.

“Train like you want to fight,” the older man rebuked, and the younger man nodded. “Now get back to turning big pieces of metal into small ones.”

“Yes, sir,” Jorel replied, with a vague salute, the leader chuckling and waving him away.

*Dodged that bolt,* the Padawan couldn’t help but think, moving into position, and giving it his best attempt to feel out the inconsistencies with his weapon, to try to hit his target. The one he was using pulled up and to the left, but not *consistently*, though he *was* getting a handle on it.

The next day, they hit another convoy, with Hisku, Urni, and he as drivers once again, thankfully not needing to get involved in the actual fighting, and then it was back to waiting. For several days.

He was quite surprised when Hisku, during the couple hour long break between training and dinner, grabbed him by the shirt and dragged him to their room, several of the others laughing and letting out wolf whistles as she did so.

He went along with it, making sure to lock the door behind them. “What’s up?” he asked, but she waved her hand, in the ‘Use the Force’ gesture, so, sitting on their bed, he did so, setting up the sound baffles. “We’re clear,” he finally told her, and, despite his best efforts to respect her mental privacy, her frustration was clearly perceptible in the Force.

“How do you *do* it?” she asked, annoyed, and at his confused look explained. “Do *nothing.* For *days.*”

He opened his mouth to counter that, on the *Dove*, all they *did* was ‘hurry up and wait’, except. . . that wasn’t really true, was it? Oh, when they were in *combat* everyone waited, on edge, but never for more than a few dozen minutes at a time. And the people here *weren’t* on edge, they were relaxing, feeling safe in the secret base.

Except. . . Hisku *wasn’t,* was she? *No, no that wasn’t the issue,* Jorel thought. She no longer felt like she had to do everything, like she was alone, and reacted more naturalistically to things instead of being at combat ready the entire time. But, on the *Dove*, they had *always* been doing *something*. Learning, working, practicing, fixing things, and while there was small bits of downtime here and there, it was never more than an hour. They *had* been given a day off, once per week, but they had only been given a *single* day off.

Here, they had *hours* each day to waste, lounge about, and not do anything. Some people took care of their gear, but almost no one did to the standardized level of the *Flock.* Hisku *had* been keeping her gear, and his, to that standard, but no one else, not even Xatra, was doing so. At least not openly. It helped sell her cover of being a bit cold and retentive, though, to be honest, Jorel wondered if that was really a ‘cover’, or just how she was.

Even then, that still left *hours* each day, where she had *nothing to do*. And, apparently, it was driving her crazy.

“Simple,” he smiled, “I’m not.” Pressing a hand to the bed sheet, he lifted it, a half second later the sheet rising as well, held up on two points of telekinetic force pressed together. After training with Er’izma for months, he no longer needed to move something to practice his telekinesis. It made it *easier,* but he could still do it invisibly.

More than that, he’d been trying to improve his Force Sense, but he was fairly certain he was doing something *wrong,* as he kept getting a faint sense of *other*, where nothing existed. He wished he could ask his Master, but lacking that he’d just learned to seem relaxed, sipping his drink, while reading the Presences in the room. Xatra had given him a warning look at first, and he’d made sure to move a bit more to look a bit less ‘meditative’, and, less like a Jedi.

“Well I can’t do *that,*” the sergeant informed him crossly, “And make sure that no one sees you!”

“You didn’t see it, and you’re around me the most,” he pointed out, refraining from *also* reminding her that she *could* in fact, ‘do that’. He considered the issue. What could she do, and what *would* she do were two different issues. Though. . . “You could meditate,” he offered, and fully expected the annoyed glare she sent him.

“I *told* you I wasn’t using the Force,” she reminded him, folding her arms.

Jorel shrugged. “Who said anything about using the Force?” he asked, quickly continuing, “A lot of people meditate. Religious orders that don’t have *any* Force talented individuals meditate. It’s not about connecting to the Force, though being in a meditative state *can* help.” He smiled, “You weren’t exactly meditative when *you* used it on Dell, after all.”

From her scowl, that had been the *wrong* thing to say.

“Right. Anyway, it’ll help you settle down, so you’re ready to move when it’s time to move,” he suggested, appealing to her mission-mindedness, and bit back his sigh of relief when, after considering that, she nodded once, sharply. “Now, in the Order, they’d have you sit and try and ‘feel the Force flow through you, as it flows through all things’,” he said, imitating the instructions that he’d heard *hundreds* of times before, “But not only is that boring, I don’t think that’s what you want.”

“You’d be right, Jorel,” she stated, and he could practically hear the word ‘Padawan’ that wasn’t being said. “Then what do you suggest?”

“Moving meditation,” the Padawan put forward. “Now, every day we already do basic physical training-”

The Chiss woman snorted, “What these people do *isn’t* PT.”

“But now we do the same thing, but we try and be *mindful* of it,” Jorel continued. “And as for the substandard PT. Well, if these people had the discipline *you’re* used to, *Sergeant,* we wouldn’t be needed,” he pointed out, his partner nodding. “So, we disappear for an hour a day, and end up tired, but relaxed. It’ll only help cement our cover.”

Hisku groaned, burying her face in her hands for a moment. “Of *course* it will. Is *everyone* in this base a pervert.”

Jorrel opened his hands, “Well, what *else* are they gonna do all day?”

At the girl’s groan of irritation, he got her started, working through basic exercises while directing her attention *inwards,* focusing on the muscles and how they worked, and, through the attention being paid to them, helping them function better. After some grumbling about ‘that’s not how muscles work’, she continued, given something to concentrate on for once, and something she could put her all into.

It was only working with her that Jorel realized that Hisku’biatha’pusi, the highly trained soldier, had needed to hold back in their daily practice, not seeming *too* good to try to avoid attention. The others from the *Flock* had been doing the same thing, but they’d been doing so without issue, or at least without *visible* issue. And now he’d given her something that she *didn’t* need to hold back on, able to focus on fully, the way she normally did *everything*, *every* day they’d been partnered together. He honestly wasn’t sure if she *could* do something halfway.

And, from a certain point of view, she *was* correct.

This *wasn’t* the way that muscles worked.

This was the way that *Force Control* worked.

The technique was the one that Jorel rarely dropped completely nowadays, where the Force permeated his form and enhanced it. He kept it at a low level, only a fifty percent increase or so above natural ability, but in doing so Er’izma had said that there were *other* benefits, though the man had refused to say what they were, only that they were worth it.

Technically Jorel was doing this completely backwards, but, talking with his master, there was nothing saying that you *couldn’t* do it this way. The centuries old man had mentioned other Force-using traditions out there in the Galaxy, though most gave the Core a wide berth, and how *they* often operated. It had actually been Force Control that the Jedi master had used as the example of how *others* approached things backwards, technique first, without a grounding in the Force that every Jedi sought.

Without a base understanding of the Force, it’d be *much* harder to refine the technique, but, in that way, lacking the base understanding also lowered the danger. ‘Like running instead of driving a speeder’, Er’izma had said. ‘It will be slower, but if you run into a wall as fast as you can? That will hurt, because you’ve broken your nose. Drive a speeder into a wall as fast as you can? You won’t feel anything. Because you’re dead.’

Focusing on his partner, he walked her through the exercises, and could, at the *edges* of his perception, feel the faintest stirrings of the Force around the girl. Less than one would get from a six-year-old Initiate, but it was *something*.

“And that’s an hour,” he told her, and offered her a hand, which she took, pulling her up off the ground where she’d been doing sit-ups. “How do you feel?”

Hisku frowned, blue brows knitting, before she turned red, pupil-less eyes his way, full of accusation. “I feel. . . *good*. Better than I should. *What did you do?*” she demanded, taking a step back.

He just smiled, “Absolutely nothing. That was *all* you. If you want me to heal you, I can,” he offered, holding up a hand, bright blue droplets of healing Force forming. She shook her head, and he let it fade. “This was *all* you, Sergeant, I didn’t use the Force at all,” he repeated. “Well, more than the normal ways I do all the time,” he added, as she looked at him disbelievingly.

A chime sounded throughout the base, and he started to move for the door, dropping the sound baffle he’d worked to keep around them, the technique easier to hold each time he tried. “And that’s dinner. Same time tomorrow?”

<SWPP>

It’d been a few more days before their next mission, and Jorel could practically *feel* the difference the moving meditations were having on his partner, as she finally calmed down fully. He wasn’t the only one, getting a few knowing glances when the pair of them had left their room the third day, both of them sweaty, but satisfied.

However, soon enough everyone was called back up for a meeting.

Stelog Waleye stood in front of them once more, the projection showing a bird’s eye view of a building complex. “Alright, we’ve got supplies, and received some more from elsewhere. Now it’s time to press forward. This is the nearest Pengalan Military base, and we’ll be hitting it *tonight*.”

The man’s statement sent the entire room muttering. They’d been hitting convoys, and had apparently been doing so since before Jorel and the other new recruits had arrived. This? This was new.

“We’re not here to wipe this place off the map, we’re here to hit their armory, and take *everything* that isn’t nailed down,” the cell leader stated, going over the specifics of the location, the teams, and what they’d do in detail.

They had the uniforms, and a stolen speeder-truck to try and bluff past the guards, but if that went badly, they were going to *fight* their way in, putting the missile tubes they’d grabbed in the last shipment to good use. Thankfully, most of the base’s heavy ordinance was under lock and key, to prevent it from being stolen by corrupt soldiers with sticky fingers. Those same locks would prevent it from being retrieved in time to be used against the rebels. *If* they were fast enough.

The Jedi assumed that he’d be a driver once more, until Waleye brought up the ‘secondary infiltration team’.

“Jorel, that’ll be you,” the scarred man said. “Who would you like to take with?”

The Padawan blinked, “Wait, *me?* Why?”

The display blinked, showing a wall crowded in by trees, and topped with wire. However, the branches had grown up over the wall, and while they were trimmed back, Jorel could see they hadn’t been trimmed *enough*. The image changed to a second door, in the back of the base, but with no control panel in sight. “There’s a second way in, but it’s set up so that it can only be opened from inside, and we didn’t have anyone that could do it,” Stelog outlined. “Now we do. You get in, let in the other,s hit the power generators in the back, and blackout the base. You’ll only have three seconds to open the doors before the sensors will trip, so we *all* can’t go that way. Who’s going with you?”

“Hisku,” he responded immediately, getting a few laughs, and he looked around the room. He *wanted* to grab the other members of the Flock present, but he didn’t need the Force to tell him *not* to do that. Instead he focused on the mission parameters. He was *very* thankful that part of his training with Er’izma detailed tactics. Mind you, most of them were *space* tactics, but after they’d taken that pirate-bait ‘freighter’, Jorel had started asking about indoor tactics as well, and Er’izma had been happy to explain *everything* that went into this.

“Who else here is good with a knife or a blade, and is quiet?” the Padawan finally asked. “If we’re going in the back, even if you start shooting in front, it’d be best if they didn’t know we were there.” That, and keeping quiet meant he would have another reason *not* to pull his saber, unless things got *really* bad.

Those assembled glanced around, half a dozen raising their hands.

“Put your hand down, Terry,” Stelog commanded. “You’re not that quiet.”

The blond man put his hand down with a shrug.

“You three,” Jorel said, pointing to a woman, Devaronian if the two black circles on her head were any indication, and two men, most likely human. He didn’t know why he picked them, only. . . it felt right to do so. They also all had a stronger Presence in the Force. Nothing on Hisku or those of the Flock, but the woman’s Presence was almost as strong as Waleye’s, maybe a little stronger. Not *Force Adept* strong, the weakest Initiate at the Temple had more of a Presence, even if the youngling’s identity in the Force was always ill-defined, but they still had more than the others.

“A five-man team,” Stelog mused, rubbing his chin. “Any of you able to disable a TR-32 power generator?”

Beside Jorel, Hisku raised her hand. At the man’s raised eyebrows, she asked, “Do you want it fried or fixable, sir?”

The man laughed, “Well aren’t you two just *full* of surprises? Fried, girl. The infrastructure alone means they’re not gonna abandon it, and more repair convoys mean more supplies for us. Fine. Kiri, Sham, Cen, you’re with the kid. Listen to him.”

One of the two men frowned, the other just seemed amused, while the woman gave Jorel a measuring look. While the men had come with Jorel’s group, the Devaronian had been with Waleye when they’d all arrived, “You sure about that?” the woman asked Stelog skeptically

“Don’t let him get you killed,” the leader agreed, and Jorel could’ve *sworn* he felt the Force shift, just a little, but it wasn’t in response to *him*. “But give it a shot.”

Waleye looked Jorel dead in the eye. “Call it a feeling.”