

## Chapter 8

Ocal was in a daze and was trying to wrap his mind around what just happened. As he was trying to figure it out he blindly followed the small and attractive human Jedi up the cargo ramp to his ship. Everything had happened so fast in the last 30 seconds that he had yet to catch up to the reality of the events that were unfolding before his eyes. But Ocal was a man of action and he could not just follow blindly, doing nothing. He quickly decided it was time to get back in control of the situation and the events that were going on around him. Ocal stopped halfway up the ramp and tried to remember the name of the Jedi, but realizing he could not remember even what letter her name began with. So he simply called out to her back.

“Excuse me... um... Female Jedi.”

Emi-gon casually called back over her shoulder as she continued to walk up the ramp.

“The name is Master Vaus, you may call me Emi-gon if you are not comfortable with formal Jedi titles.” She did not even slow down as she talked.

“I have no problem with Jedi titles, but what I do have a problem with...” Ocal stammered as he quickly started walking again to try and keep up “... is you walking onto MY ship as if you own it!”

Emi-gon again did not slow down or miss a stride as she continued into the cargo hold of the cruiser and began to look around.

“Oh, I realize the ship is yours and I think it will work just fine. Is it capable of handling a rapid descent into .95 Atmo?”

Without realizing it, Ocal fell right into the conversation and answered immediately

“Yes, we have done many rapid descents into as much as 1.1 Atmo... “

Ocal then caught himself and changed his tone of voice to one of much more authority with an edge of agitation to it.

“Now wait, what do you mean my ship will do fine? What exactly are you talking about?”

Emi-gon continued as if she did not even hear his question and she further examined the cargo area, talking out loud to herself, and to anyone else who might be listening.

“Yes, the cargo hold should be plenty big to house all 18.... hum, I wonder how many large energy plasma bolts the outer hull could sustain...” and she began walking toward the exterior walls looking up and down at the structure.

Ocal wasn't quite sure if he really just heard what he thought he just heard the distracted Jedi say.

“Um, excuse me, ah... Emi-gaus... or, whatever your name is”

Again Emi-Gon casually called over her shoulder “Emi-gon”

“Right, Emigon, now um, I'm not sure how to break the news to you, but this is MY ship,” he laid a heavy emphasis on the word my, “ and we just arrived today and we are not heading back into space for at least a week,” his voice began to elevate in volume and pitch as he continued “ and we are especially not going to be heading anywhere that might test the structural integrity of my outer hull by the use of heavy plasma bolts!”

Ocal's voice had raised to a level that was just short of yelling and it had carried through the corridors of the ship alerting Quinto to the fact that something may be wrong. Quinto was located up in the cockpit logging the docking manifest when he heard the commotion. He quietly stopped what he was doing and began to make his way from the cockpit and through the crew quarters, where he noticed he needed to do some cleaning up for his night away from the ship. He then moved toward the cargo hold through the long primary corridor that went through the center of the ship. He was careful to peek around the corner that lead to the hold area to try and see what the disturbance was. He had already drawn his blaster from its holster and was holding it close to his body and had it ready for use.

Emi-gon was still wandering around the interior of the hold area continuing with her inspection while casually continuing the conversation with Ocal. She was seemingly unaware of Quinto watching over the proceedings from around the corner of the corridor.

"Yes captain, I realize that you have just arrived" she now turned and walked up to Ocal and for the first time talked and addressed him directly while looking at his eyes. One of those eyes was his original eye, the other was a cybernetic enhanced eye "but the Republic has need of your ship, and if you are willing, we also have need for you and your crew, though we can provide a pilot if needed."

The penetrating stare from the deep brown eyes of this small, but obviously confident Jedi, caught Ocal a bit off guard. Though the stare was disarming and intense, it was not enough to draw his attention away from the biggest love of his life.... his ship! Republic need or not, no one was

going to take his ship!

“Look’it here Emi-golle”

“Emi-gon” she quietly corrected.

“Right, Emigon, I understand that you and your ‘Republic’ are at war. I also understand you may have some needs for this war. But this ship is my ship, and NO ONE is going to take MY... SHIP... !!!“

Ocal had moved ever so slightly to his right during the verbal confrontation, which caused Emi-gon to turn slightly to her left in order to maintain eye contact. This was exactly what Ocal wanted because it caused Emi-gon to turn her back fully to Quinto, allowing him to expertly approach the Jedi from behind. The sneaking Quinto was both unobserved and unheard, as was expected. Based out of necessity, he had become an expert at silent movement over the years working with Ocal.

Ocal respected the Jedi Knights and their order. But his passion for his livelihood insured that no entity, even the Jedi Order, was going to take his ship away from him. On top of that, the aloof manner that this particular Jedi treated him and his ship was not to his liking and it was time to take control of the situation, whether she was a Jedi or not. He continued the conversation to insure that he held her attention on him, allowing Quinto to approach within striking distance.

“I have helped the Republic on many occasions, in fact, this run that we just returned from was a vitally important supply run for your own Republic Fleet.” Ocal was now even pointing his index finger at the Jedi as he forcefully spoke.

Quinto now had crossed half the distance from the

entrance of the corridor to Emi-gon and had the laser pistol pointed at the back of her head. Ocal realized he just needed to keep her attention for another few seconds....

“...I think both me and my crew have done enough for the Republic for the time being....”

At that moment everything exploded into a flurry of motion.

Emi-gon’s small body exploded and changed instantly from a state of motionless unconcern, to a blur of movement in a split second. It started with her pivoting on her left foot 180 degrees while at the same time dropping into a semi-crouched position. While performing this graceful, yet exceeding fast, pirouette her right hand dropped with practiced precision to her belt and grabbed hold of, unhooked, and ignited the blue blade of her lightsaber in one fluid motion. She continued the fluid circular movement, her robes spreading out around her from centrifugal force of the spin. She brought the lightsaber blade up from a low right hand position, performing a slashing cut to the upper left across her body and slicing the body of Quinto’s laser pistol into two pieces causing a shower of sparks to spray down from what was left of the blaster.

This all happened before Quinto had the time to process the command to pull the trigger of his precious blaster that was now a pile of scrap parts.

The move was sudden and lightning fast, but Ocal was not an amateur when it came to a fight and the presumed sneak attack from his first mate was only a ruse. Ocal was fully expecting and planning on the sudden explosion of movement from the Jedi and as soon as

Emi-gon began her attack, Ocal began his.

The years of travelling the galaxy from one end to the other, had exposed Ocal and his partner Quinto to all forms of attacks from all types of species in all types of environments and conditions. They were also not inexperienced when dealing with Force users and Ocal knew that this small Jedi would be no different than the others he had encountered. Him and Quinto would subdue her quickly and then escort her right off of HIS ship with little more than a bruised head and a burst ego. He doubted an embarrassed Jedi would press any charges or cause any further problems for him and his ship and crew.

Ocal knew that his overhead strike with the stun-club, which he had slid into his hand from the hidden pocket of his sleeve, was plenty powerful enough to knock the small Jedi unconscious for a good 30 minutes. Unfortunately, he was about midway through his downward swing when he suddenly realized his overconfidence in handling this small female Jedi might have been a mistake... a deadly one.

Emi-gon was not a rookie Padawan. It was common for younger combatants to assume that once a threat, such as Quinto's laser pistol, was eliminated, they were out of danger. Instead, Emi-gon continued her cutting stroke around and in a classic move of an Ataru master, continued her flowing circular movement, stepping with her right foot to the opposite side of Quinto. They were now standing side by side and she firmly brought her left elbow crashing into the abdomen of Quinto. The powerful blow, further aided by the Force, sent Quinto flying and then sliding across the floor 10 meters from where he was.

The continuous circular movement took Emi-gon right out of the striking path of Ocal with his stun club. The years Emi-gon spent in combat had brought her in tune with the Force which she allowed to guide her actions and warn her of attacks and dangers. But those years in combat also brought her the common sense knowledge of avoiding deception and to never assume the threat was eliminated until it truly was eliminated. The power and force of Ocal's downward strike, combined with the surprise of the target not being where he expected it, caused Ocal to fall clumsily forward. His momentum carried him and the small electrically enhanced club, nearly to the floor. Ocal knew he had made a mistake and it was too late to recover. He knew this was especially true against a foe with the obvious agility of this Jedi he now faced.

Ocal relented to the fact that he had just made the second mistake of the day. Unlike the clerical mistake on his documentation, the ramifications of this one would be far more drastic.

Emi-gon smoothly continued the circular flow of the lightsaber cut and brought the lightsaber blade quickly down on the exposed neck of Ocal.

Ocal heard, but did not see, the lightsaber strike coming down impossibly fast and he fully expected everything to go black and quiet. Everything seemed to slow down as it often does in life threatening combat and he found himself wondering what was on the other side of death. Ocal was still looking down at the floor of his ship with a humming sound very close to his ear, and he even noticed the smell of burnt hair from the back of his neck where they blade of the lightsaber was held just a millimeter from the

skin. It was at this moment that he heard the calm and unphased voice of Emi-gon.

“Captain, shall we start this meeting over, or would you prefer that your next of kin be notified of the stupidity of your attack on a Jedi Master?”

A humbled Ocal answered “Um... well, when you put it that way, I would prefer the former.”

“Good, can we sit and talk then? Oh, and your companion might be a little sore in the morning, but he’ll live.”

With that statement of fact, the ship became as quiet as a gundar tunnel after the lightsaber was deactivated and shot down. Emi-gon pointed to the hallway leading out of the cargo hold.

“By all means, lead the way Captain... it is your ship after all.”

. . .

The three of them, Quinto included, were sitting around the table in the crew lounge discussing the plan that Emi-gon had put together for the rescue of the stranded SCU-11 team. After they had come to grips with what had happened in the cargo hold, the discussions has gone relatively smooth and Emi-gon was now talking calmly to Ocal,

“Captain, I am not here to commandeer your vessel against your will, but the Senate has granted the Jedi the power to do so if needed. But I will be honest with you, this mission does not have the blessing of the Jedi Council nor

the military leaders that control operations in the outer rim territories. I am operating outside of the council on this.”

Ocal was shaking his head “Why do you need us or any other ship? You do not even know if the soldiers are in danger.”

Emi-gon nodded her head in understanding but continued.

“The future is seldom clear. One thing is for certain though, the Force is guiding my actions and I feel a certain cloud of uncertainty as it pertains to the Master Jedi who leads these men. Master Jarek has done much for the freedom and security of the Republic for the past several decades and we owe it to him. As well as to the men and women that are fighting with him for the freedom of all citizens of this Republic. They are willing to give everything they have, including their lives, for that freedom. What I am asking you in return is nothing more than being a shuttle driver to pick these heroes up...”

Ocal was looking down at his hands that were clasped on top of the table they were sitting at.

“All the while testing our Hull strength with plasma energy...” it was Quinto who commented with a wince of pain that erupted from what was sure to be a fractured rib that he was holding with his left arm.

Emi-gon ignored the jibe and with a look of genuine concern on her face asked Quinto.

“Are you sure you do not want me to help remove the pain and speed up the healing of your injury?”

“Um, no thanks... I think you have done enough ... she-dragon” The last reference to the Krayt Dragon was said under his breath and caused Ocal to have to stifle a laugh.

Again ignoring the jibe, Emi-gon continued, turning to face Ocal.

“Trust me, I have no intention of putting you or your ship in any more danger than necessary, but I will not lie to you and tell you that there is no danger at all.”

Ocal stated flatly, “There is no way I can risk putting my entire livelihood at risk on an unsanctioned rescue mission. What would I do if my ship is damaged or destroyed? This ship is our way of life, our means of survival.”

Emi-gon quickly replied “The Republic will cover...”

Ocal lifted his head quickly to look at her and forcefully interrupted.

“You cannot tell me the Republic will cover the costs of my ship. You yourself said this crusade of yours did not have the support of either the Jedi or the Military leaders. Do you honestly think they would cover the cost of repairs when they do not even have enough credits to pay for needed equipment for soldiers? This war is sucking the Republic dry and you know that better than I.”

There was silence as this point sunk home in Emi-gon’s mind and it was her turn to stare blankly at the table in front of her. Finally she meekly made the statement “The Republic may not... but I will.”

Quinto glanced at Ocal with raised eyebrows, and Ocal was sure he had the same question as his friend Quinto did.

“You will cover it? A member of the Jedi Order that admonishes that all of their members do not crave, seek, or have material items that might stimulate passion and therefore lead to the dark side? So you want us to believe

that you have the means of repairing or replacing my ship if needed?”

Emi-gon kept her eyes focused on the small spot on the table in front of her and quietly answered. “Yes... while the Jedi may not have the need for material things for ourselves, it does not mean we do not have the means of procuring funds from supporters and allies to the Senate and the Jedi order, or to me personally.”

Ocal was still not convinced. “There is no way I am going to jeopardize my ship on the word of a rogue Jedi! You can try and commandeer my ship and see how far you get with the proper authorities.” Ocal began to get up, signaling that the meeting was over.

Emi-gon again quietly said “I will pay you double the going rate for the trip, and cover the cost of any repairs”

Like all good entrepreneurs in the Galaxy, the word “double” caught his attention and Ocal slowly sat back down and looked at her quizzically.

“Okay, let us say that you did have the funds, when would you want to leave?”

“Tomorrow”

“Tomorrow?” Ocal said, still with a questioning look on his face. Emi-gon looked up and directly into Ocal’s eyes with that same penetrating stare.

“Yes Captain. Time is of the essence. We must get moving as soon as possible and there is just no time to spare.”

“50% is due up front, standard policy. Who will be coming with you?”

“50% is no problem”, Emi-gon replied, though she did not know how she would come up with the money on

such short notice, but she was leaving it up to the Force to guide her. "...and I will be the only passenger."

This statement caused Quinto to cringe at the thought of spending time on the same ship as the *She Dragon*.

Ocal thought it over for just a second, "Fine then, we'll see you tomorrow" and with that, the deal was done, and Quinto was sure he was doomed to suffer.