

# Jabba's final Days

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*Famous events through the eye's of Malait'kla It'kla.*

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## 1 - Mala's freedom

It was another normal day for Malait'kla, she was getting dressed in her private quarters which had gotten larger over the last few years since she won the Tera Kasi tournament for Jabba. She had become his prized possession. His obsession with her even became amplified when she saved his life against a would-be assassin she was entertaining as one of his guests.

The most recent event that was secretly terrifying her was the death of her best friend and mentor, Oola. Jabba had been abusing her as of late and when she protested to his latest abuses he fed her to his pet. Oola had been dancing for Jabba almost as long as Mala had been. Mala secretly felt that the other twi'lek, however unfortunate her demise was, had just gotten too old. Jabba had an obsession with young beautiful women, and Oola was just turning thirty-five. Mala was happy she was still young and in her prime.

Three days ago, Mala had turned twenty-eight. For the most part she hid her age from Jabba. He thinks she's still in her early twenties. The force may be part of the deception. She didn't know.

She finished tucking the dress in on her bikini. She had modified her metal bikini that Jabba had given her to hold both of her lightsabers. The funniest thing about being a jedi in hiding is that not anyone can know that the decorative cylinders engraved into her bikini bottom are weapons. Especially Jedi weapons. Otherwise, the Empire's bounty on the force sensitive then affects her.

Due to her recent winnings in the tournaments Jabba had been putting her in, she had been given more and more freedoms. Jabba has really started about 3 years ago letting her roam around Tatooine. Of course, she didn't go far. She took a speeder and went straight to Obi-wan's house. He had been visiting her since she was about eleven, giving her gifts of holocrons and telling her stories. Teaching her to touch her special power as he called it. Jabba had been clueless as to why old Ben Kenobi loved private dance sessions with her. And Master Kenobi paid well each time to satisfy Jabba.

Two years ago, she felt Ben die in the force. Another lost close friend. A list that had been getting rather short as of late. She built the lightsabers three years ago. And Ben trained her again how to use them, but it was almost like a natural art for her. She remembered all her lessons at the Jedi Temple on Coruscant when she was little. And with a blade, she was extremely good.

Mala shook her head. *I need to quit reminiscing in the past before I'm late and Jabba feeds me to his pet too.*

Mala pulled her bikini harness tighter to hold her chest in place and made her way to the main audience chamber. Looking up she saw the new shiny droid that Jabba had acquired from some Skyhopper, or Nightwalker, or whatever, that claims he's a jedi too. Mala shook her head and glanced to Jabba's new prized possession, a large block of carbonite with Han Solo in it.

As Mala started to sit down among the other dancers, Miko and Mara, a sudden bustle brought her

attention to the main entrance to the audience chamber, a bossk dragging a wookiee came forcing their way down the stairs. As the bossk started speaking, Mala began to fade into another vision...

A woman, human, and beautiful, in a metal bikini similar to the one Mala was wearing was using the chain that she was attached to, to choke the life out of Jabba. There was a lot of commotion and a big fight going on outside. No one noticed Jabba being killed....

Mala shook her head again only to see the bossk holding a thermal detonator. She gasped.

Jabba only let out a hardy laugh. "You are the sort of scum I like," Jabba told the bossk in Huttese. Of course that new shiny golden droid with a fresh dent on its chestplate translated it.

Mala didn't pay much attention to the bustle of activity that accompanied the transfer of credits to the bossk's bank accounts and the transfer of the wookiee to Jabba's prison cells. "The mighty Chewbacca," Jabba had called the wookiee. *Doesn't look so mighty in those cuffs,* Mala secretly laughed.

Mala did her sley-sue routine for the bossk and then the other dancers danced for him. Mala excused herself and began to try to figure out her vision. A beautiful woman...

*Who could it be?*

Mala must have fretted over this for hours wondering what the force had showed her. Then there was a large commotion in the main audience chambers. Mala had almost thought they had went to sleep because it was so quiet there. Apparently not...

When Malait'kla entered the audience chamber, Lando and Boba were holding the new prisoner. It was bossk. But he was a she.

*That face! Mala was stunned. It's the woman from the vision. But what should I do? Should I tell Jabba like I have so many times before? Or should I let him get what he should for killing Oola?*

Frustration hit Mala again. Oola's death had hit her harder than she had thought I would have. Oola was like a mother to her. Anger hit her eyes and she glared at that fat slug with a look of death. Her blue skin twisting over her eyes in anger.

*I hope it does happen. I would be there to watch. But I have another idea...*

Mala went back to her room to think about the upcoming events. Boba came to get her when she stayed to long.

"Jabba requests your presence," Boba told her appearing in her doorway.

Mala looked up into that T-shaped visor and wondered how many had seen that visor just before they died. "I'll be there immediately, mister Fett," Mala told the bounty hunter.

As he walked away his weapons clinked against his armor and Mala wondered how on earth he could possibly sneak up on someone making all that noise. Mala knew better. She was quieter. Stealth was

her secret weapon.

She slipped into the main audience chamber. This time, Jabba really was sleeping. Why she was supposed to be there, she wasn't sure. That beautiful lady was resting on Jabba's platform. She was wearing a red and gold metal bikini like the one from Mala's vision and a look of pure hatred. Her eyes met Mala's, and she could feel the anger flowing from the woman.

*I wonder if she knows that she is force sensitive,* Mala wondered.

Bib Fortuna made his way to Jabba's ear followed by a man swallowed by a black robe. Mala could definitely feel the force from him. This had to be the infamous, Nightwalker.... *Was that his name?*

Jabba awoke with a snort and began to cuss in Huttese. "You fool. I told you not to let him in here!" Jabba screamed.

"You have served your master well," Nightwalker said.

"I have served my master well," Bib repeated.

"You should be rewarded," Nightwalker continued waving his hand

"I should be rewarded," Bib repeated.

"You fool! He's using a Jedi mind trick on you!" Jabba screamed thrashing about and knocking Bib from his pallet.

"You will release Han Solo to me," Nightwalker told Jabba.

Jabba laughed heartily, "Fool Jedi, mind tricks only work on the weak minded."

"Then I have no choice—"

"Master Skywalker! You're standing on the—" the golden droid screamed.

*Skywalker! That's his name!* moved with a quickness she hadn't seen in a while. He pulled a blaster free from the holster of a nearby bounty hunter. Boba drew down on the jedi but he had already fallen into the rancor pit. A gamorrean fell in also before the trap door closed.

Mala couldn't get close enough to the grate to see the fight down below. But judging by the moaning and booing of some of the onlookers, it wasn't going well. Normally the underfed rancor ate his meal pretty quickly, but it didn't look like it was going that way this time.

Mala felt the giant beast die in the force. She knew this was about to get difficult.

Guards dragged a bound Skywalker back in front of Jabba. Malakai was crying somewhere in the distance. Other guards brought in the big hairy wookie and... Han Solo?

Mala quickly glanced to the now empty carbonite block. *When did that happen?*

"This is your last chance Jabba," Skywalker said.

Jabba's laugh was loud and hearty. *Yeah laugh it up, big boy. I got a feeling he isn't lying.*

"Luke! Luke! Is that you?"

"Yes, Han," Skywalker replied.

"I can't see anything. Where's Leia?"

"I'm here," the woman that is going to kill Jabba said.

"So how're we doing?" Han asked Skywalker.

"The usual." Came the calm reply.

"That bad, huh?"

The room fell silent as Jabba began to speak in Huttese.

"Now you just wait a minute, Jabba, I was going to pay you back. I have the money." Han told the Hutt.

Jabba told him it was too late for that. The shiny droid translated.

"Hey Goldenrod, you tell that slimy, blood sucking, slug that he'll get what is coming to him!"

*That's an understatement,* Mala thought as Jabba laughed again and began explaining to "goldenrod" about their death in the Sarlacc pit.

"The mighty Jabba the Hutt would like to tell you that he's feeling generous and is going to subject you to a quick death in the Sarlacc pit," the golden droid explained.

"That doesn't sound so bad." Han muttered.

"Here you'll be digested in the sarlacc's belly over the next thousand years. Where you will discover a new meaning of pain and suffering," the droid continued.

"On second thought," Han stated, never finishing the statement.

Mala left the room. She knew if she was around any longer she'd be selected to go on the sail barge ride with the doomed Hutt. She had other plans and she needed to stretch before then intense fight that would soon follow.

Mala had just finished stretching when Weelo came running in front of her room screaming. A blaster shot hit him square in the back and spilled him in her doorway.

*It has started. The struggle for Jabba's fortune.*

*I'm not concerned about taking his money for my own. I just want to survive. I will kill Anikan and I will get out of here alive. If I'm the only one left alive... she paused... welcome to Jabba's world.*

Mala tugged the lightsabers free of her bikini bottom and stepped into the corridor. Reema was standing there shooting anyone that appeared in the corridor. The blaster swung in her direction and Reema pulled the firing stud. Mala pressed the activation studs on both of her lightsabers. The purple and silver blades sprang to life from the bottom of her hands. She held both blades inverted and swept the purple one in her right hand across her body to return the blaster bolt back at Reema. His mouth went wide as the blaster bolt caught him in the throat. Blood splattered over the wall behind him as the energy left a nice round hole where his voice box should have been. Reema collapsed against the far wall and slid down it.

Mala continued up the stairs to where the blaster fire and screaming was getting more intense. She held each blade down by her hips with her thumbs turned inward and blades angled level with the floor. A gamorrean met her at the top of the stairs with his battle axe, but the fat pig-like alien cut up nicely and was left on the floor in several bloody pieces.

Mala began the dance of death. Vapaad. Mace Windu had touched into it when she was little and some of his personal holocrons had been given to her by Ben Kenobi. She couldn't do Vapaad exactly but she could do what she called the dance of death. The silver and purple blades danced wonderfully around her. Arms and heads fell to the ground around her as many tried to attack her with vibroknives or force pikes.

Veba tried to attack her with his vibrosword. Mala didn't miss a beat, the blade fell away in two pieces and with a twirl and a leap she split the weequay down his spine opening his inards to the air.

The air was thick with the smell of smoldering flesh and the floor was covered in an inch of blood. There was blood on the walls but in the end stood Bib Fortuna and Malait'kla.

Bib had a modified corellian blaster that fired a bolt so small it burned only a little hole through its target the size of the nail on Mala's pinkie.

"You are a Jedi." Bib told her.

"No. I'm just the dog that's gonna kill you to get out of here alive." Mala replied.

Bib hesitated, looking from the small blaster to the blue-skinned twi'lek dancer holding a pair of lightsabers. Bib knew better than to shoot her but he done it anyway.

Pressing the firing stud, a green bolt formed at the tip of the muzzle. Mala was already in the air a meter

from the ground as the bolt materialized underneath her. She pulled her legs in and performed a somersault and landed behind Bib.

Bib's head split open between his braintails. Pink gooey liquid spilled from the open wound along with three drops of dark black blood. Bib fell forward and collapsed to the blood-covered floor. Adding more of his black liquid to the multicolored bloods already there.

Mala left the front door of the palace leaving the door wide open and looked out at the bright twin suns still high in the sky in this Tatooine afternoon. She began the long trek in the fine sands. But she knew where she was headed. The swoop that Ben had hidden for her... and then to Anchorhead.....

.....to be continued.....

## 2 - Living with flashbacks

She must have seen that plume of smoke for miles and she couldn't help but investigating it. It was several kilometers going toward the sarlacc pit but when she arrived she already smelled the stink of burned flesh and sarlacc vomit. The smell was atrocious and she could hardly bare the scent.

Nightwalker had done a number on Jabba's forces just as he had said he would. Boba Fett's jetpack laid off to one side, coated in a large amount of acid. Pitting and scoring had probably already eaten away at all the good components. There were pieces of the sail barge littering the desert for almost a half of kilometer but from what she could see was a large sail mast and the front end of the barge were the largest pieces. The crew compartments and countless other compartments were all in shreds. Including Jabba's fat platform. She recognized only one small piece of it.

Looking out over the desert she could only reminisce of her past experiences with the rebels. She was a standing commander still if she was to return which she was debating very heavily.

(Several years ago. On Dantooine, preexisting SWG)

"Captain... wake up." came the deep male voice of her squadron commander. She was the CO to blue squadron and had been since her arrival on Dantooine. She proved a damn good pilot and her previous rank as a Lieutenant in the Clone Wars still stood in the Alliance. Although she was too young to have actually been a Commander, and she didn't want to tell them how a Lieutenant meant a Jedi Apprentice whereas a Commander was a Jedi Padawan.

"Yeah, yeah, Jenko. I'm up." Mala replied through the cracked door. "And I'm not nude either. Come on in..." she added. The night before had been exhausting. They had just retreated again from battle with the Empire when a series of Star Destroyers dropped out of hyperspace right atop the freighter they'd been guarding. Mark up another loss to the Empire and another two pilots who will never see the end of the war...

Commander Jenko of Blue squadron. Lead Squadron in Blue Group. It was actually three squadrons of fighters, two of headhunters and one of Incom T-65 X-wing fighters. Jenko was a human male. Age was ranging close to his forties which was probably midlife for a human male from Chandrilla. His blue and orange R-2 unit was called Chandrofan just for the fun of it. Hers was Squealer since he always started screaming in droid language when the battle began. Purple and white R-5 unit.

"Mala," Jenko began. "Time to do patrol duty again. Two flights rotation."

"How long have I been asleep?" she asked.

"I covered the debrief for you about using your flight to cover the TIEs while we scrambled. That alone was worth a medal. You may have lost two pilots but you thwarted the Empire's attack on us and all three squadrons were able to escape. You earned it. Jenko replied.

"Cut the shoot Jenko... how long have I slept?" Mala replied

"A standard Dant day..."

"Twenty-five hours?!!!" Mala yelled in surprise.

"Yes, Captain."

"Alright I'll get prepped." She said reaching over to grab her helmet. Her flightsuit was still on and her lifesupport monitor was strewn over the corner of the bed. She zipped the front of the flight suit back up to her neck and pulled the plate and monitor on. She pulled the boots on her feet and then tucked the helmet under her arm. It was a cold day for Dantooine so she pulled her flight jacket over her shoulder



and started toward the small flight deck.

Since they'd based on Dantooine, they had four fighters run a patrol every minute of every day. Rotating through four fighter groups. Although it was Blue Groups, Blue Squadron's turn it was Two Flight's rotation time. So Mala would have to run her eight hour patrol above Dantooine. She'd picked up two green pilots fresh from some outer rim system. Jet and Biggs, she thought they were named. She moved Cerie up to Six and paired the two kids together hoping that they'd cover enough for her. She thought about tagging them in space running them through drills to pass the time. After all they had eight flipping hours...

As she ran through the flight mission details, the kids looked bored so she uploaded some training to the mission and hoped for the best. After that they ran through flight checks and launched.

(Present time... During Episode VI after Jabba's death)

Mala had already jumped back on her swoop. The steering vane was bent and she knew it. Obi-wan had had to wedge it in a rock formation to get it hidden well enough to look natural. She was surprised it still flew since the swoop had been there for almost 3 years. He hid it in preparing for Jabba's demise. He knew Mala would survive it. But he couldn't give much detail on the account. Surprising that Nightwalker was the other one on Tatooine that ol' Ben was looking after. The hills were beginning to look much the same as she went over one dune then the next. She knew Anchorhead was in the general direction she was headed and she still had a ship there... she hoped...

(Dantooine Space - Past)

"Blue Five this is Seven," Biggs said cockily. "Come on, we've ran this drill enough... how about some low laser duels?"

Mala pondered that inside her helmet for a while before dialing down her lasers and setting her shields to the right program. She keyed the comm and replied, "One round, seven... then I want you and Eight to swing out to the mining cluster again and light up a few more ice asteroids."

Seven's voice whooped over the comm as the young Tatooine native changed his settings as well. Six and Eight were doing the same as her and Six cruised out with S-foils in cruise position to get a kilo on the young pair. "No missiles. Other than that... anything goes." she added.

Each fighter was loaded with a standard package of six proton torpedoes, three in the launcher pairs and were equipped to fire linked or singly. The torps were good for evening the odds when outnumbered by TIEs and she knew that they had no paint missiles loaded. So missiles would be bad in this duel. She and Cerie turned in perfect unison and she double clicked her comm to signal the exercise had begun. She tucked her fighter in behind Cerie's and evened her shields out as Six set hers forward. Both S-foils on the fighters opened in unison. It was a quick tag and as the two rookies jumped Cerie and put her out of commission, Mala slung out from behind her X-wing and lit up Eight with a pair of Quad linked lasers. His fighter shut down and now she was just after Biggs. She throttle hopped and rolled lazily as he started a corkscrew to try to pick her up on visual. But she never lost sight of him.

Another dive and she was on his tail dialing up her throttle to match his speed. He jinked and juked but she switched to single fire and filled the space around him guiding him closer to the planet. He juked and dove through her line of fire and her computer registered a few good hits so she inverted and dove on him tagging his damaged fighter with a quad burst.

"Damn, Five..." Biggs groaned as he went through a restart.

Mala smiled and brought her fighter around resetting her fighter settings for livefire. Then squealer started screaming.

"shoot... got contacts. Shut down IFF and wait." Mala ordered scanning the HUD. Four TIE scouts had dropped from hyperspace just inside their patrol vector. She knew they were scanning for Rebel activity and hoped that her fighters had shut down IFF in time. She cruised running vector jets and life support only, getting a good look from three clicks out at the four TIEs.

"Squealer... on my mark run a frequency jam. Then send a radio transmission to General Dodonna on what we see. We'll tag and bag these four and hope that the jam caught their alert to Rebel Activity here...." She told her droid. Squealer twirped in acknowledgement.

"Two Flight," she said over squadron channel. "Form up."

The fighters tightened on her and she could almost smell the fear through the vacuum of space. "Those are Squints... expect slower speeds for shields and hyperdrives." A squint was a rebel slang term for a TIE Interceptor but she knew that these had to have been modded for long-term travel.

As the range scrolled down to two clicks, she gave the order. "Squealer, Mark now... Two flight S-foils in attack position. Tag and bag. Pick your targets and go."

Dialing the throttle up to full the TIEs turned to engage. She was getting funny readings herself but she swore it was the shields on the TIEs, throwing her targeting computer off. She picked the middle fighter and locked on switching over to missiles. She linked one and fired as the HUD dropped below a half-click.

Switching all shields forward she linked two lasers and started spraying the squint she had targeted with the missile to cover its approach. The shields weren't all that strong and the proton torpedo plowed right through them before detonating, filling the Octagon Cockpit full of shrapnel and fiery heat and light. The engines ripped free of the housing as the wings tore themselves apart from the shrapnel and sudden change in momentum. Then the ion engines exploded filling the whole area with bright white light and very small debris. She dove through the center of the collapsing fireball and inverted. Cerie stuck to her tail but only partially took out the one fighter she had picked.

Seven and Eight had double teamed their first TIE and Seven actually got the linked kill shot that reduced it to nothing more than a hollow TIE with no engines. The odds were now in her favor but she didn't let up on the second squint. Cerie led this time and the pilot juked and jinked in and out of her line of fire. Mala added single shots over her shoulder and started to guide the Squint back to Cerie's lasers. Two dual bursts and the Engine exploded, shredding the rest of the squint...

And then there was one...

Biggs had throttle hopped it and was chasing it with all four of his lasers cycling single fire mode. The shields kept his shots from seriously penetrating the TIE but it would soon cross the hyperspace threshold. Jet had not turned as sharply as Biggs had and was just now coming around. About a half click behind the fighter and Biggs. He locked his missile on the TIE and started a long dive. Biggs began guiding the squint down toward the missile as Jet fired...

The torps impact wasn't loud or brilliant but it stripped the shields and Biggs again ate it up with lasers. A dual shot then a quad shot and there was nothing left but an expanding cloud of Ion gas.

"Nice work, Two Flight. Let's report in..." Mala said over the comm...

### 3 - Dantooine escape/Tatooine Escape

(Tatooine- Present day during Episode 6)

The town had been far more run down than she remembered. Stormtroopers were crawling all over the place and it took a lot of work to convince the first set she had legitimate business in Anchorhead. She finally made her way on foot to Tachi Station. The sand spread around her feet with each step as her toes sunk into the hot desert sand.

The station's atmosphere was mellow with an old Max Rebo song wavering from the corner. She'd heard that song many of times and danced to it herself but now was not the time to reminisce about the past. Now was the present and the future and she had to find out about her ship, if she even had one.

The bartender stood at a small station in the corner and she made her way up to him.

"Can I get you something?" the small blonde human asked her.

"Information?" she replied calmly.

"Lady, this ain't no databank. But I'll tell you what I can." the human laughed back to her.

"I'm looking for a ship." she began.

"Just any ship? or a transport. Mos Eisley is the place to be." the human countered.

"No. I'm looking for one that belonged to me." Mala continued calmly.

"What's the ship's name?" the human asked after a minute raising an eyebrow with interest.

"Thief s Jewel. It was a modified blast boat." she told him.

"You talking about that GAT-12j that was parked over there for the longest time. Hell that ship had more dust on it that Tatooine itself!" the human let out a hearty laugh. "Last I heard, imps confiscated it and impounded the thing on Mos Eisley. Couldn't tell you which docking bay but its there. If that's your ship Hun, you're gonna be severely disappointed when you see it again."

Mala slowly nodded and reached into a pouch around her waist. She produced several small credits and handed them to the man. He took them and gave her a weird look as she left.

As she walked away her bare feet burned with the hot sand but she couldn't help but think back to that fight more than three years prior. Her efforts on Dantooine saved the alliance but the cost to her, was grave. She mounted her swoop as the stormtroopers nearby began bustling again with activity. She gunned up the engine and goosed the throttle aiming the front vanes toward Mos Eisley and then sped away. The last thing she heard was "Hey! You!"

(Dantooine - past time before Episode 4)

"Copy that base, my flight will hold here." Mala reported in over her comm link tugging at her helmet as a droid chirped crazily behind her.

"Blue Leader is launching now with the rest of the squadron, Blue Five, stand by. Alpha base, out." came the last transmission to her X-wing fighter.

She brought her X-wing into a holding pattern just above the Ionosphere of the planet and turned out toward a shallow circle. She was being flanked by three other X-wings, Blue Six, Seven, and Eight. It took a total of eight long time parts for the other eight fighters to come into view and after three minutes they had formed up with her four.

"Blue five, this is Lead, private channel please." chirped over her comm.

She pressed the appropriate switches and replied, "private channel go ahead."

"What the hell happened up her, Mal? The whole base is in a frenzy." Jenko's voice slightly distorted asked her.

"Imp scouts hit this sector, we were spotted. Dispatched them but I'm not sure if they got a hypercomm message off. If they did, we'll have company real soon." Mala replied into her helmet's comm unit.

"Dammit, Mal! That means..." Jenko exclaimed.

"I know lead... I know. Time to move the base out." Mala said gravely.

"Well tighten up. This may get interesting." Jenko told her and then switched back to squadron frequency. "Guys, listen up. We may have a lot of company real soon. Let's take care of this and do a switch. Two flight recharge from your pods and hold them as long as you can. If a lot of imps show up dump your spare fuel pods and we'll dog them up here. The rest of blue group may launch to help but as far as I know, don't expect it. We have to hold the imperials back long enough for them to launch. The rest will be up to us."

Mala groaned but didn't key her comm. She knew this was going to end badly. She just hoped for a sparse lucky chance that they got the squints before the hypercomm message was sent out.

(Tatooine Present)

The twin suns were further in the east as Mala reached her destination. She barely recognized the house just outside of Eislingrade. A sandstorm had shifted the sand probably sometime in the past year and the sand level was clear over the door. If she could use telekinesis well she would have just moved the sand with the force but as that wasn't the case, she reached into the pouch on the swoop and pulled a small entrenching tool and a pair of hydrospanners from it. Cursing and sweating already she began her labor.

The suns had almost set by the time she cleared the doorway. She used the hydrospanner to pry some of the grit away from a hidden access panel and placed her palm against a small readout. The readout was powered by a battery so she was almost certain that it would still be working, even if nothing else in the house worked. Surely enough, she was rewarded by the door sliding open with a heavy groan spilling the last couple of inches of sand inside the house.

The inside was dark and she flicked another panel inside the door but there was no response. She had no power in her house. That meant the generator had been damaged. That was no surprise since the rebel base nearby had long since been destroyed and the generator out front still stood but looked badly beaten. She walked over to it and used the hydrospanner to pry off the access panel. Being a pilot, she'd acquired her own knowledge of mechanics and technology. It only took several more minutes and a little bit more of purple and orange stretching across the sky before her house lit up.

She walked back to the house leaving the generator open and whining as its gears groaned. The inside of her house was as she had left it, which surprised her. She would have thought curious Jawas would have broken into it by now and cleaned the place out. Her droid detector still worked and her protocol droids remains still stood tall even covered in millions of cobwebs.

The first hallway passage was almost completely blocked by the workings of busy gava bugs. The small 10 legged insects native to Tatooine used webs like most offworld spiders to catch prey and Mala suspected she had an infestation. She ignited her purple saber and sliced through the webs clearing a walking path into the house. As she entered the main room, her holonet terminal was chirping with a message. That didn't surprise her since she probably had millions of messages on it. She gave a sidelong glance at her weapons displays and several of her clothes displays. As she went back into the

room disguised as her party room, a small whirring and beeping drew her attention to the rear of the room.

Several laser beams shot across the floor in a weaved network causing her to freeze in her tracks.

"Squealer...." Mala said with a wavering in her voice. "Override protocol three tango alpha."

An astromech chirp answered her and the lasers shut off as a jumping purple and white R5 unit rounded the corner. It left off a series of chirps and whistles happy to see its owner again. Mala kneeled and hugged the droid.

"Good to see you too, Squealer." Mala said as she gave it a long embrace. Several of its gears grinded as she let it go and it caused her to smile. "We gotta get you an oil vat. Give ya a good dip, but I don't have the time right now."

As Mala turned the droid let out a long groan but followed loyally behind its master. Mala grabbed one of her field packs from the upstairs closet and returned to remove a few of her weapons from the wall. She checked each charge and was satisfied with a T-21 sniper rifle and the DL-44. She removed a few small detonators from a hidden drawer in her party room and then grabbed a filled oil can from the kitchen and poured it inside Squealers dome, hoping the oil would help the droid move better. It was a quick fix to the desperate need of an oil bath but it was all she could do.

She finally returned to the main living room with her satchel over her shoulder and a long black robe in her hands. She keyed the transmit unit and plugged in the old codes for the Dual Suns Comm bunker hoping they still worked. She was rewarded with a small Emblem of Kaiser s organization followed by the face of a radian she didn't know.

"What do you want?" the radian said in Huttese.

"Speak basic, @\$\$. I hate that language," Mala replied in basic.

"Fine... have itttt your way." the rodian shot back at her.

"I wanna speak to the Emir," Mala said plainly.

"Yea, you and everyone else, bantttttha poodoo. Whattttt makes you so speci-al?" the rodian cockily.

"How about if you don't let me speak to Kazer Kal'racken. I'm gonna come down there and personally castrate you," Mala replied igniting her lightsaber with an erupting snaphiss so that the holo recorder could transmit the light to the Rodian.

"Errrr... Kazer said he no wanna be disttttturbed." came the weak reply.

"Then disturb him... now." Mala shot back plainly, hitting the activation stud on the lightsaber and shutting it off.

The emblem came back after a few moments and finally the head of her favorite Twi'lek appeared on the screen.

"What in the frack do you think you're doing threatening a brigand? If I ever find out..." Kazer paused and squinted into the recorder. His braintails twitching in anger. "Holy hell. Mala?"

"In the flesh," Mala replied calmly.

"You threatened a brigand, Mala," Kazer returned.

Mala smiled and nodded, "only way I could think of getting your attention. I figured your pawn would run and tell."

"Well, I personally thought you were dead, how have you been?" Kazer said nodding to her.

"I've been fair. Jabba treats his Tera Kasi fighters better than he does his dancers," Mala said sarcastically. "Speaking of which you owe me."

"I owe you." Kazer almost exclaimed. He snorted out a laugh and then cocked his head at the holorecorder. "I don't owe anyone shoot. But since you've mentioned it. What do you want?"

"My ship back. I need a set of credentials that will give me access as an Imperial hacker. Maybe a freelance one hired by the Empire. There's supposed to be another slicer coming in tomorrow and if I can beat him tonight, I can steal my ship away," Mala explained.

Kazer almost laughed again. "Fake ID and credentials before morning. Yea... not gonna happen."  
"Then I'll need backup. That place is crawling with Imps and I'm not excited about shooting my way in."  
Mala countered.

Kazer shook his head and smiled with a sleek grin. "You still got the gonads girl. I'll respect that. I think I may have someone in the area. Be in the cantina in an hour. You know the one." Kazer's picture flickered and the transmission died.

"Well, that went better than expected..." Mala muttered pulling the black robe over her head and heading to the droid. Squealer followed her warily and as she shut the lights out and strapped him to the swoop he groaned again before shutting down. She hit the latch and the door slammed shut. Then she mounted the swoop and rode off in the direction of Eisley again....

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(Dantooine Orbit - Past before Episode IV)

"Incoming!" the comm chirped, opening Mala's eyes real fast. Before she could glance at her scanner herself the second report came up.

"Two Ess Dees and a Dread... we're screwed!" that was nine.

"Blue Squadron, this is leader tighten up." Jenko's voice ordered.

Mala was thinking fast tallying up the TIEs that would bring down if all of those ships opened up with their full package. Two wings and two squadrons, splitting that up between the Squints, Dupes, and Eyeballs would have been a chore. Three hundred and fourteen fighters of mottled assortment to tie up one squadron of X-wings. They were screwed.

"S-foils in attack position," Mala ordered over her now keyed comm unit, flipping her own switch to split the wings. "Quick recharge and then dump the fuel pods. We'll need some strategy for this."

She was right. Strategy would be needed but strength in numbers had the odds against them. She knew Jenko was already frantically calling back to the rebel base on the planetside desperately begging for every reinforcement possible. Her scanners lit up and another pair of ships dropped from hyperspace. Tentel Six and Hard Charge. Both were small corellian corvettes.

'Are they out of their minds?' she thought as she guided her X-wing to attack position. 'Those corvettes will be swallowed alive. And we can't even get close to the Dreadnaught.'

Then more friendlies dropped out of hyperspace. Nothing real heavy but three squadrons of Y-wings and a squadron of Z-95 Headhunters looked real nice considering the odds.

"Oh my god! Bombers! Against all those-"

Nine didn't get to finish, "Cut the chatter!" Mala ordered, still adding a strategy to the numbers. This evened the odds but still stacked against them. If it were a hand of sabacc, she'd have folded.

"Rebel base reporting. Blue squadrons three and four are launching we have ten minutes. She's launching the evacuation ships now." that was Jenko's voice again.

The scanners were filling up with red dots. Her HUD was materializing as many targets as were produced by the pair of Victory class Star Destroyers.

"Any suggestions....? Anyone?" Jenko's voice was wavering at this point. The situation was grim and they all knew it. Piloting by the seat of their pants couldn't even save them now.

'Personally, I say cut our losses and jump to hyperspace... but then we'll loose General Dodonna and we don't wanna do that.' Mala thought to herself before keying the comm.

"Split bombers. Some of those are duped right? They should have ions?" Jenko's response came back positive. "Shock the Eyeballs, give 'em chatter. They didn't launch full load but we're still looking at a

wing. Punch a squadron of bombers through and give the Ess Dee with the full payload a full package of shock and strafe. Maybe with a central targeting we can blow through the hanger and cripple its TIEs and even our odds. We still got a wing airborne. Let the vettes play with the Dread, steer clear. Slants on Squints and ninefives on the bombers." Mala spit out in a long chain. It was a desperate ploy to try to blow a hole in the Star Destroyer that still had TIE Fighters on it, but it was worth a shot. Ordering the X-wings on the three squadrons of TIE Interceptors was suicide but it was all they had. "Lock and load." Jenko repeated the order over general frequency and then switched back to squadron. "Switch all shields to forward deflector screens. Throttle to full, pick your targets and go. We'll slash attack first." Mala nodded strapping the breather to her helmet over her face. She turned a dial on the left and punched shields forward. Squealer was already chirping and buzzing with target locks so she throttled down on one of the Interceptors and switched over the Proton torpedoes. One was enough so she pressed the trigger when the rangefinder went down and the HUD went red.

A blue and silver streak followed the pink glowy warhead. She rolled and throttle hopped switching to single fire on her lasers and cycled with a spray of random energy. The warhead traveled the distance from her to the Squint and rewarded her with her first kill of the day with a large cloud of expanding ion gas. She pulled a tight roll and stomped the throttle dial up to full.

Her shields glowed with a few hits but her jinking was enough to keep them all glances. Once she was through she dialed shields back equal and pulled through a loop as the squadrons started to break up. A bright explosion off her rear brought her attention behind her and it turned out her wingmate was gone. 'Did six eject?' was her first thought as she dove back into the furball. Lasers flashed around her cockpit. Most were green which gave her an advantage. She flew on instinct and linked her lasers to quad burst. She only pulled the trigger when it felt right and each time was rewarded with an explosion of gaseous clouds and little pieces of TIE fighters and Interceptors....

The imperials secured Dantooine space that day. Her strategy worked but the cost of life was grave. Her own squadron suffered seven losses. The most important of those losses to her was her best friend Jenko, her commander and her comrade, and her long time wingmate, Cerie. The corvettes had been killed and the dreadnaught was bagged by a pair of Y-wings running a solo strafe. One got a lucky missile in and the dread went nova. The Star Destroyer attack she ordered went better than expected. Her squadron of Y-wings made it through the fighter shield and delivered a full payload on the center of the ship. A fiery hole ripped from one side to the other and out the hangar bay before those Y-wings finished dropping the first load of proton bombs. All three headhunter squadrons were lost but a few pilots were able to be grabbed up by a passing shuttle before it launched to hyperspace. General Dodonna made it safely from Dantooine but many rebels lost their lives for him. Maybe the next base would prove to be worth the hiding. She heard the rendezvous was in the Yavin system. This war was taking its tally in lives and the Rebels she fought for were wondering now if it was worth the fight at all.....

(Tatooine - Present day during Epi VI)

Mala parked the swoop near the bank and powered it down. Her droid was still strapped over the back end and she knew a pair of passing Jawas would love to have both the swoop and the droid but she through a blanket over it and hoped as she pulled the cloak tighter in the winds picking up over Tatooine. The twin suns were now over the horizon and the sand was being strewn about by the nightly winds. She made it inside the cantina and heard a familiar jingle from the local band there. She couldn't remember the race or the band's name but she went with the tune and shrugged it off. She remembered Wuher perfectly well though. It was him she walked up to first.

Before pulling back the hood or ordering her drink she scanned the cantina. Most of the locals were there and added imperial security ever since that one cantina incident everyone bragged about some

Jedi taking off that poor guy's arm. There in the dark corner both were two welcome and very familiar faces. The first was none other than the famous Booster Terrik's daughter. She knew of Booster from his exploits earlier on Tatooine and his Spice trade to the inner rim. She kinda remembered a Corsec putting him on Kessel a few years back, leaving a young sixteen year old Mirax to fend for herself. Now at eighteen she was doing well, running shipping ops for Kazer Kal'racken if Mala remembered right. She couldn't remember if Mirax ever recovered the Pulsar Skate from the imperial impound but she hoped she had.

The other sitting across from the young woman known as Mirax was a zabrak male. His hair was dyed a bright pink and one of his arms was gauntleted in a chitinous bone-like armor. Both wore a simple brown shirt and a low holster, Mirax with her father's DL-44 and Madak Stary, the zabrak across from her wore a different pistol that Mala didn't recognize. Each wore a pair of black pants but Mirax had a jacket slung over the booth next to her. The dim light added shadows to Madak's facial tattoos and the horns on his dome added to the shadows as he gulped down the last bit of brown liquor from a dusty cantina glass with a hearty laugh.

Mala looked up at Wuher and nodded her head to the pair. "Give me another round of what they're drinking and then add a lominale to it." Wuher nodded as she handed a few credits across the bar, "Set all three on their table, I'll be there shortly."

Mala looked back over at the stormtroopers as they motioned for a sweep around the area apparently looking for something, and watched the three white armored figures move through the cantina and exit out the back door as Wuher went about setting the drinks as the table. When the armored figures were completely gone, Mala got up from the bar and made her way to her lominale.



## 4 - My ship back

(Yavin V, Great Massassi Temple operating as the makeshift Rebel Base, Pre Episode IV)

Mala had never been to the Yavin system but the gas giant she had seen upon dropping out of hyperspace put her in awe already. She descended down with the remainder of her squadron on the moon's nightside to the coordinates she'd been given. As her fighter broke the plane to the ionosphere light glimmered in a thousand different directions. Mala almost panicked before she realized what it was. The ionosphere had frozen over and her fighter had plated through the ice sheets breaking them into tiny fragments. Her engine light then refracted from all the fragments as her shields burned them up. Good thing I ordered shields up for the descend... Mala thought to herself as she guided the battered X-wing fighter toward the beacon on her nav computer.

The jungle canopy below came into view with a beautiful array of fauna stretching for miles. Some treetops were growing flowers from the tops adding a lighter shade to the sketch dark green of the jungle night. The moonlight glinted from the canopy and reflected back at her showing the amount of dew atop the trees. As she neared the beacon a grand stone temple came into view.

A Corellian corvette was parked in the hangar bay as she made her squadron's way over it to the fighter hanger. She began the landing sequence on her fighter and for the first time, noticed that she'd lost an entire blaster. She thought back to the battle and in the mass confusion of getting her shields back up she remembered taking a good hit on her left side and commenting, "There went something I might have needed." Squealer, her purple and white R5 unit had gotten the shields up just in time for her to loop on the tail of the TIE interceptor that had taken prey to her. In the confusion, she'd blasted him on the rounded loop and dove, for two more 'Eyeballs' as she called them were picking her up.

A droid's chirp brought her back to reality and she reached forward and shut the fighter down before she pulled her helmet and took a long breath of her fighter's recycled air before opening the hatch. The dense and wet air hit her like a good slap. She released her first breath and greedily sucked in another of the wetter, heavier air.

Looking to her left, she could already see General Dodonna making his way over to her fighter. His blonde hair was beginning to streak with grey but he kept his composure and even through the last defeat his wrinkles still numbered the same as they had on Dantooine.

"Captain," Jan Dodonna began as Mala began to descend the stairs from her fighter. "You performed excellently. Your strategy saved us from defeat."

"With all respect, General," Mala countered with a grim expression. "If I did so well, why do I feel like I've failed?"

"Loss does that, Captain," the General replied. "Your squadron loss six? Was it?"

"Seven." Mala uttered in response.

"Seven, including a sound and competent leader and excellent pilot, Commander Jenko," Mala grimaced at the name as Jan, unnoticing, continued to speak. "Unfortunately, this leaves Blue Squadron Leaderless. Therefore, I'm giving you the rank of Commander and the first pick of new candidates from the 'vette."

Mala looked over at the Corellian blockade runner and nodded. "I'll need seven then."

"Nine." Dodonna countered. "We're taking those two and reiterating Red Squadron with them. They're good pilots and their kill counts were phenomenal."

Mala looked over at the two new kids in her flight. She shook her head then nodded. "Nine then."

"Train them up, Commander. We're counting on you. The big battle hasn't been fought yet." Dodonna finished, summoning Jet and Biggs away from her formation. That left her standing with Blue Nine, a human male from Agamar. He was a rich kid and a good pilot. After all, his fighter showed the least amount of plasma scoring. And Blue Three, a human female from Coruscant. She was level headed and battle worthy but lacked leadership experience. Mala knew what her choices were.

"Three, you're now Blue Five. Nine, considering you was a flight leader; you'll retain your number and move up to XO. I'm giving you a promotion to Lieutenant," Mala said looking over at the male. His black hair matted in the wet air. His name, she knew, was Gibson. She'd always called him Gibs. The female nodded at her new number. Her name was Corsail. Her brown hair shook as she nodded, cut to the ears, it was matted with moisture too. "Go pick nine new recruits from the 'vette. I'll set up quarters and spacing."

"We'll need a new squadron name," Gibs cut in.

"We'll worry about that later. For now we need a mechanic and some parts and some fighters," Mala replied. "I know we'll never be the Blue Squadron that was under Jenko, but we can make our own name and reputation. With a lot of time in the sims, we can train up the newbies. Then it's on to doing missions." Mala paused to judge the reactions. "Red Squadron will be the Rebellion's new glory squad. But don't let them fool you for a minute. They took two of us, but not the best. The best blues are still standing here."

"Roger," Corsail acknowledged.

"Now pick the new recruits and get rested up. I'll find out where our rooms are and then get us a supply tech and a mechanic." Mala finished. She turned on her heel and headed deeper into the giant stone temple.

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(Tatooine - Present)

"Well, if it isn't Madak Stary," Mala stated as she slid into the booth next to Mirax scooting her over.

"Only the best bounty hunter in the galaxy, considering."

Mirax raised an eyebrow at the newcomer. Of course she recognized her old friend, Mala, but the cockiness of the rutian twi'lek was not quite as she remembered.

Madak smiled. It was almost as if Mala could see his ego swelling at her battery of compliments. "And then there's Mirax. I've been away awhile, but even I've heard of your exploits in the smuggling field. Seems like daddy's little girl is making her own waves in the galaxy. I'm impressed."

Mala's mouth could always sweet talk Madak. His ego made his weakness but she never mistake that most of the time her own words were true. With Boba Fett's death at the hands of Han Solo, Madak was now probably the best bounty hunter, uncontested by any other. Mirax had always been more of a problem for her to read. She was a female and that was a start but as much that Mala knew of her, Mala didn't know as much personally. Her own comment about Mirax's father may have angered her but it wasn't the intent.

Mala could only hope that the gleefulness of her mood was displayed in her words and evened the mood on both of them as Mala was relieved to see two of her old friends. Taking a long draw from the lominale, she swallowed and continued.

"As much as I'd love a question and answer session, I hate to say that this isn't a pleasure outing," Mala stated.

"We figured that much," Mirax replied. "What's up, Mala?"

Apparently, Madak too had seen through her words, "What do you need? would be the more

appropriate question." Madak stated from across the table.

Mala smiled, "I guess neither of us had ever been much for small talk, so I'll get right to the point. Imps got my ship and I want it back."

Madak almost laughed but Mirax's face stayed even displaying little emotion. "Couldn't you do that alone?"

This time it was Mala's turn to smile. "I may carry a saber, but don't let it fool you. I can't use the force all that well. If you'll remember correctly, the Jedi were wiped out and there was no one left to train me. Besides, being with Jabba doesn't exactly allow you to access holocrons for knowledge of the force, ya know?"

Both brigands nodded. Madak spoke first before Mala could continue. "So what's the plan?"

Mala froze. She obviously forgot to think that far ahead. She looked from Mirax and then back to Madak. As her violet eyes turned back to Mirax she dumbfoundedly replied, "I was hoping you two could help with that one."

Mirax finally spoke, "Well, there's two problems with all this. First, and most apparent is the ground troops. If you haven't noticed, the Empire dropped a small bunker by the starport and they keep at least eight stormtroopers at your ship at all times."

"Four for me and four for Mirax," Madak muttered counting on his fingers. "What will Mala do, Mir?"

Mala smiled as Mirax cut her eyes at the zabrak. Then the Corellian youth continued with wisdom far beyond her current age, "As much as I wouldn't mind blasting in there. No sooner than the first shot is fired that whole starport will be crawling with stormies from the nearby bunker. And even if you were to get into space. There's two squadrons of TIE fighters hangared up at Bestine, two klicks from here. Those'll be scrambling as well. Not to mention the Star Destroyer in space."

Mala lowered her head. Getting her ship back didn't seem as easy as she had hoped it would. Now it was looking as if she'd be stuck on Tatooine for a while until she could acquire transport.

"Is there any good news to this?" Mala finally asked after a long silence.

Mirax raised her glass to her lips and swallowed a bit of the brandy inside draining the tumbler and setting the glass down. "Madak," Mirax stated, "Wanna share with Mala what Kazer knows?"

Madak shrugged and then opened his mouth to speak, "Well, the Star Destroyer has been running some of its command section to Eisley. If you look around the cantina, you can see the imperials drinking on leave. There's not much else to do on this sand heap for them anyway. Word is, the Captain's down here, so lesser intelligence is up there."

Mala nodded as Madak continued. "They've been ferried down by a Lambda. It's still parked down in the starport, not that I can think that will help us. It means the Stormtroopers are running tighter security down by the Starport. That adds eight more in the vicinity of your eight guarding your Skipray. The only plus is that the stormies are on double shifts. That means one of the two groups is fresh and the other has already ran their eight hour rotation and are pulling eight more."

Mala's brow narrowed, her brain was working and her braintails began to twitch as she thought.

"Furthermore, we're armed and have the element of surprise." Madak concluded.

"That doesn't stop the TIEs at Bestine," Mirax added. "So if we do get you to your ship, you're on your own from there."

"Two squadrons are a lot, even for a blastboat. But what I don't have in weapons, I have in maneuverability and speed. I might be able to run it. The Star Destroyer presents a problem though. That's a full wing of TIEs and I seriously doubt even the Lieutenant up there will just "let" me go." Mala replied still thinking.

Mala paused and looked at Madak. "How many stormtroopers are at the bunker?"

"Two shifts sleeping one on duty, about twenty-four. That's forty in all stationed in Eisley." Madak replied immediately before cutting his eyes at Mala, "You aren't thinking about hitting the bunker first are you?"

"Thought had crossed my mind but I rejected it. If you're looking at that few then two out of three of the stormies will be on double shifts. Three places to cover and only five units to cover." Mala's eyes narrowed. "That brings us back to the shuttle."

"Excuse me, but you realize that waving your lightsaber around automatically makes you the target. And don't you remember that you just said you can't use the force all that well?" Mirax cut in.

"What did you just say?" Mala asked.

"You can't use the force all that well?" Madak asked.

"No, the other part," Mala replied.

"The fact that waving your lightsaber around at night makes every white-armor-clad, swinging dick point their gun at you and spray." Mirax clarified.

"Hmm." Mala thought again. She ran her finger around the edge of her lominale mug and then plucked it from the table and took a sip. As she set the mug on the table, she raised her eyes to Madak. "You got explosives."

"Two thermal detonators, but I don't see what good those will do," Madak replied.

"Well there are enough of us to be in two places at once, but with thermal detonators. Why?" Mala stated with a smile growing on her face. "Mirax, how well can you stay hidden in the dark?"

"You know I can always get inside unwanted places," Mirax shot back with a grin.

"Alright, here's the plan. Set one detonator for about ten minutes delay. Mirax will take the detonator down and plant it on the fuel pod of the Lambda. That will give us the boom. Then we line up and wait for it before we hit the stormtroopers at the Jewel." Mala smiled again. "Mirax's tactical genius just gave me an idea."

"What's that?" Madak asked.

"Well, if they see a lightsaber they'll be shooting at it. That leaves you two to pick them off quickly while not having to worry about being fired upon." Mala replied.

"We're forgetting about your lack of jediness, Mala," Mirax interjected.

"I may not have practiced remotes in ages. I still have my skills. Besides, I may not be able to reflect blaster bolts back; I should be able to deflect all of them from hitting me if I give myself enough distance. You two could take out two before I even have to ignite my blade. I'm sure the explosion will chatter the comm enough that if we're fast, I could be on my ship and launched before they realized what happened. That should lessen the TIE engagement until I'm in space. Then all I have to do is pull the hyperspace lever." Mala extended her hands palms up and smiled. "Who's up for a bit of fun tonight?" Madak and Mirax both smiled. "Ain't exactly brigand style, but we're in?" Madak answered.

Mirax looked back and forth between the zabrak and the twi'lek. "Only one question. Where do we go once she's on the ship? Stormies will be everywhere."

"Terra Nova's in the hangar, so we can duck there until things calm down." Madak answered immediately. "Also, gives Mala a bit of air cover if needed."

"Nah, once I'm in the Jewel, it's all on me. I don't want a registered brigand vessel involved or the punishment will ring on Kazer's head. That's the last thing I want." Mala countered.

"So then we just hide?" Mirax asked.

"Preferably, so it doesn't get traced back to Kazer, yes," Mala answered. "We ready?"

Madak pulled a detonator and rolled it across the table to Mirax. "Your ball, sweetie," Madak added with a wink.

"Oh, the gentlemen!" Mirax added sarcastically catching the detonator.

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Madak and Mala hunkered down near an old power conduit near the starport. Just within sight was the troop of eight stormtroopers that were guarding Mala's Skipray Blastboat, Thief's Jewel. Madak had been trying to entertain Mala with stories from the past and now he was on another.

"Anyway, this weequay walks up to Enyl and tells her, 'You sold me some bad spice'." Madak explains in a lowered voice with a big smile on his face. "Enyl sucker punches this guy in the stomach and takes off running between his legs. I have never seen anyone move so fast before; he pulls a blaster and starts randomly shooting toward the door. Hell, I would have shot him but I was too busy laughing my @\$\$ off..."

Mala kept her face straight under the constraints of the circumstances, steadily watching one of the stormtroopers systematically clean his weapon from the sand and grit of the previous day's sandstorm. In the distance, muffled explosions littered the landscape. Mala could only guess the direction had been from that of the dune sea. She only wondered what the bombers could have been trying to kill out there in the desert.

"Did you not think that was funny, Mal?" Madak asked.

"Sorry, I wasn't paying attention... oh look! Here comes Mirax." Mala replied nodding her head toward the approaching shadow.

A few moments of silence passed for Mirax to scamper the last bit of distance toward the crouched pair of old comrades.

"Well, Mala, I got good news, bad news, and worse news... which do you want first?" Mirax began in a hushed voice.

"Worse news..." Mala and Madak muttered simultaneously.

"To know the worse you have to hear the bad..." Mirax replied. "The imperial hacker just landed nearby in a hangar at the end of the docks."

"I wondered what ship that was," Mala stated recalling the ship landing moments prior to Madak's story.

"Worse news is I recognize that ship anywhere. It's the Jade Shadow." Mirax continued.

Mala gave Mirax a dumbfounded look causing her to continue. "You know, the Emperor's Hand?"

Mala shook her head slowly, raising her eyebrows and continuing the dumbfounded expression giving Mirax a clue to elaborate. "Okay, look. Kazer's been keeping tab on the Empire's movements. Seems they have a new assassin the Emperor has been using called the Hand. She's some lightsaber wielding red head with darkside powers like Metalface Vader. Girl's got serious skills. That makes this a bad situation. She's been missing for some time now but her landing here means she's been nearby or she's back from whatever mission Palp's old @\$\$ had her on."

Mala nodded slowly. "And the good news is...."

"Not even finished with the worse. Every swinging white clad asshole is up here to meet her in some kinda imperial greeting. Even the captain of the Star Destroyer up there. We'd wondered why he was down here... that now explains it." Mirax said quickly in a whisper.

"The good news, Mir..." Madak said. "She wants the good news."

"Oh... bomb is in place... it'll blow in about..." Mirax glanced at her chronometer, "Oh! Now."

An explosion rocked the starport with its fiery brightness cutting into the silent Tatooinian night. The stormtroopers were all now standing, even the one with his disassembled carbine. Their helmets betrayed their alertness to the sudden interruption of the calmness. Now was the time for the storm. Mala pulled her lightsabers with either hand from the small of her back and looked toward the one stormtrooper that had been assembling his E-11 as he pulled a pistol from his belt. "I'd say now's the time to start killing stormies, don't you think?"

Both her silver and her purple blade ignited simultaneously in a snap-hiss of energy. The stormtroopers immediately leveled their weapons and started pouring red blaster fire into the small alleyway. Mala began to twirl and dance. With each twist, she snatched a blaster bolt from the air and redirected it

toward the ground or the wall. A few went back toward the hangar but none struck anything valuable. It was eight successive blasterbolts from either side of her that downed the troopers. The one that had been assembling his carbine was the last to fall as he'd drawn a smaller scout pistol.

Mala quickly covered the distance to the dead stormtroopers as Madak and Mirax took up positions in the other direction. A red lightsaber blade was only three hundred meters from them and a full quarry of stormtroopers and officers behind that.

"Oh this just gets better and better," Madak sighed to Mirax.

"Oh? And I thought you loved this sort of thing." Mirax shot back.

"I do, that's why I said that," Madak said with a grin. His pistol started up with the firing but he couldn't get a shot close. A red lightsaber was repeating Mala's trick.

"Not good!" Mala exclaimed. She looked up and then left. "Madak, your last detonator!" Mala yelled disengaging her purple lightsaber in her right hand. She dropped it to the ground as Madak ducked for cover and fished in his pouch for the last detonator. Mala pulled her own pistol and fired three shots into the overhead conduit, causing it to start spraying some sort of liquid into the alley. Madak timed his throw perfectly and she backflipped to holster her pistol before catching the detonator and arming it in midair and tossing it with the momentum of her landing.

"Oh blast!" Madak exclaimed as he and Mirax came out of cover faster than Mala could blink. The explosion pushed their diving bodies and Mala's standing one to the ground. The entire alley was covered with flames from burning starship fuel.

Mala slowly stood and picked up her lightsaber before walking over to the dead stormtrooper corpses littering the hangar bay floor. One of them reached for his pistol and with his last bit of strength tried to level it at Mala. Mala stabbed down with her silver blade into the black neck garter beneath the stormtrooper's helmet. There was a sizzling sound and then his body fell limp.

"Hey, Madak, wasn't that one of your four?" Mirax asked pulling herself to her feet with a cocky grin. Madak didn't answer. He only leveled his pistol at the remaining stormtrooper corpses and littered them with an unrelenting hail of blaster fire until his small crude pistol clicked. As he discarded the power cell and replaced it, he looked over at Mirax and sneered. "I'm not sure of that. But I am sure none of the rest of them will be moving again. Ever."

Mala looked back as more blaster fire began to rain through the thick flames. Her silver blade whipped through the air in a half arc picking up two bolts and sending them higher into the air as she exclaimed over her shoulder, "Time to go, Madak!"

Madak looked at Mirax as Squealer, Mala's droid, emerged from the shadows near the flames with Mala's swoop pack tucked in one of its pinchers and began toward the Skipray's ramp. Mala hit a hidden switch on the hull to lower the ramp and then ducked inside as the droid passed Madak and Mirax.

"What? No 'thank you'?" Mirax asked Madak.

Madak shrugged, "I kinda liked the idea of getting the hell out of here. Those flames won't hold forever."

"Riiiiiiiiight. This way," Mirax told Madak as Mala closed the boarding ramp, the droid safely onboard and beeping and whistling about the scanner and hacker equipment in the cargo bay. Mala didn't see Madak and Mirax disappear but by the time she was in the cockpit, both the bounty hunter and the smuggler's daughter were gone.

Behind her, Squealer rolled into his position, dropped the swoop pack, and plugged in. His treads hitting the right spots on the small sensory paneling in front of the terminal caused Mala's console to light up. She pulled a small scanner to her face and slowly spoke the code. "Jewel access, unlock all systems. Identification Malait'kla. Password, Seven Seven Wraith Two One Brigand." A flash of red hit her in the eyes and then there was a beep.

The entire ship whirred and panels began lighting up all over the Skipray blastboat's small modified cockpit. Before her a blinking terminal ran a startup check and passed all systems to the green

operational status from the black disabled status. Mala reached forward and pulled a lever, kicking in the hovercoils to bring the ship off the ground as sand began to blow wildly around the hangar. She pressed another button and sealed the cockpit from the rest of the ship just in case. A hail of blaster fire angled up and slammed into the bottom of her ship causing no damage to her skipray but a little to her pride. As she strapped herself in, she switched the coils over to the primary engines and listened to the sound of the Sarylcorp ViX multi-flux reactor moan as her tweaked engines roared to life pushing the twenty five meter craft much faster than your normal GAT-12j would be rated for. Hers was definitely modified. The two capital ship grade Mendarn Arms Dar-2 Ion cannons on the stabilizers had been replaced with four Seinar Systems capital ship grade ion cannons Mark V's, a lesser drain and equal hitting ion cannon that allowed her to pack just a little bit more of a straight punch than a normal blastboat could at just a tad bit slower firing rate. The Mendarn Arms Dar-2 medium ion cannon on the nose had been replaced by a twin mounted set of laser cannons stolen from a TIE fighter. This allowed laser only to kill fighters faster with one shot instead of having to shock them and then move on. It also gave her the ability like TIEs to litter the field with laser fire before kicking in the punch of her ion cannons to really slow a larger ship down. Along the side of the nose she'd had mounted and wired a pair of Incom Laser cannons equivalent to those of an X-wing. That was where her real power against starfighters lied. She kept the twin turret-mounted Senko Systems 5000x2 "Tru-Lok" laser cannons on the dorsal surface but gave her droid control over them. She also upgraded his programming to be able to seek and destroy incoming targets to protect himself the ship. These discouraged TIEs from lining up on straight runs from her rear and instead flying head to head against her arsenal in the front of the Skipray. Last but not least she had the concussion missile launcher on the port side replaced with a matching proton torpedo launcher like the one on the starboard side. Each bay held ten missiles and fired in succession. Giving her the edge she needed against larger targets.

Mala flipped a switch and rotated the Skipray's wings vertical as she passed through the upper atmosphere of Tatooine. She could already make out blips on her HUD that told her TIEs were on her tail long before Squealer began what earned him his name. His panic shriek was only drowned by the "Tru-Lok" laser cannons he controlled as Mala angled her deflectors and pushed more shield power to her rear.

One explosion littered the atmosphere behind her as Squealer whooped for joy continuing to give the TIEs a lot of red laser energy to deal with. Green laser energy flashed against Mala's shields and soon she was through to open space as the starfield spread out before her.

The TIEs behind her were the least of her worries. She was more concerned about the long dagger-like triangle filling the screen as she pushed the engines more and evened out the shields. The Star Destroyer held its fire so Mala switched over computers and plugged in as quickly as she could the hyperspace routes from her Naritav Elite Navigational Computer. It beeped and whirred and then displayed her coordinates as a new force rocked her ship with turbulence. Squealer was shrilling in a pitch that almost hurt Mala's ears.

Tractor beam! Mala thought reaching for the torpedo controls. Tractor beam this!

She depressed the trigger and launched a pair of proton torpedoes in front of her ship temporarily stealing the tractor beam's lock to them. She gunned the thrusters and banked sending her clear of the Star Destroyers tractor beam but into the field of its turbolasers. The gunners there began opening up in waves and at her current speed she'd be slammed by a full impact when she met that wall of green energy. The Terajoules would immediately shred her vessel. Of that, she was sure.

She had to think of another way to make it through the wall of energy, unless...

Mala skimmed the surface of the Star Destroyer letting the surface guns try to rotate to follow. The green energy trailing her ship's engine tail but nothing connecting with her shields.

"Squealer! Dump contents of cargo bay on my mark!" Mala said reaching for the throttle control. She

fluttered her speed and the gunners mistimed their mark allowing her ship to pass with only major shield damage. "Mark!"

She could feel the ship depressurize as the vacuum sucked out all the scanning and hacking equipment in her cargo bay to open space. She pushed a button and released one of the five Adamite mines from her hold and simultaneously pushed another button to detonate it as she pushed the blue striped lever forward stretching the white stars into white streaks of light. The white streaks leveled out to blue wormhole of hyperspace and she fell back into her chair and sighed, wiping the sweat from her brow.

"Well done, Squealer." Mala told the purple and white R2 unit over her shoulder. Squealer beeped and chirped a question back to her.

"Well, I think the explosion should have been enough to have been my reactor. The debris should convince them that I was destroyed by the turbolasers." Another chirp and chime from Squealer.

"Well, I doubt anyone could tell it was hacking equipment. That mine would have made it unrecognizable."

Squealer let out a long moan. "Yea? Well, I didn't hear any of your ideas, Squeals"

The droid beeped twice and then fell silent.

After a moment, Mala replied, "Yea, I miss you too, old friend."



## 5 - Deathstar Past

(Great Massassi Temple- Pre Episode IV and leading up into...)

Her fighter squadron had taken heavy losses in the past two months. It wasn't her leadership skills but the Rebel Alliance had been tasking her with increasingly difficult and almost suicidal missions. Gibbs was still alive and flying and so was Jenneth Corsair, who was now Mala's wingmate. But after the last fight. Mala's X-wing was in disrepair and the Rebel Alliance was running short on ships. As she talked to Dodonna in the hangar he told her.

"Mala, I don't have the ships to keep this up. The Death Star attack is coming up and I've just received word that the plans are enroute." Dodonna informed her with a weary look upon his face.

"General, I have four pilots looking for ships," Mala replied as quickly as she could.

"I can spare two Y-wings and iterate you into Gold Squadron," Dodonna replied.

"You mean flying deuce?"

"You got it, Commander. I now dub you as Gold Nine." Dodonna told her as an YT-1300 began its landing sequence in the hangar. Large crews of rebels were filing over to help unload the contents.

"If you'll excuse me, I think these are the plans." Dodonna said turning his graying blonde hair toward the wind kicked up by the hovercoils on the landing jets of the large Corellian freighter.

Mala turned to Corsair and sighed. "You're with me then, Jenneth. Tell Gibbs to grab up that other rookie. We'll figure something out."

"If we make it," Jenneth replied.

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Dodonna stood before a large electronic wall display. Leia and several other senators were to one side of the giant readout. The low-ceilinged room is filled with starpilots, navigators, and a sprinkling of R2-type robots. Everyone is listening intently to what Dodonna is saying. A pair of smugglers, one human and one wookiee, were near the back listening as well; Mala didn't recognize them. She shrugged figuring those were probably the pilots of that freighter Mala had watched land earlier.

General Dodonna continued his briefing, "The battle station is heavily shielded and carries firepower greater than half the star fleet. Its defenses are designed around a direct large-scale assault. A small one-man fighter should be able to penetrate the outer defense."

Gold Leader, a rough looking man in his early thirties, stood and addressed Dodonna.

Gold leader asks with doubt in his voice, "Pardon me for asking, sir, but what good are snubfighters going to be against that?"

General Dodonna's reply was direct and to the point, "Well, the Empire doesn't consider a small one-man fighter to be any threat, or they'd have a tighter defense. An analysis of the plans provided by Princess Leia has demonstrated a weakness in the battle station."

General Dodonna waited until the beeping and whistling died down as well as the murmurs before continuing, "The approach will not be easy. You are required to maneuver straight down this trench and skim the surface to this point. The target area is only two meters wide. It's a small thermal exhaust port, right below the main port. The shaft leads directly to the reactor system. A precise hit will start a chain reaction which should destroy the station."

A murmur of disbelief runs through the room.

Again Dodonna clarifies, "Only a precise hit will set up a chain reaction. The shaft is ray-shielded, so you'll have to use proton torpedoes."

Wedge Antilles, a young hotshot of about sixteen is sitting next to another young pilot of about eighteen. This one had rode in with the plans and as Mala looked at him. She could see an aura around him. One of destiny. In his eyes she watched a pair of torpedoes enter the hole and the explosion after. She watched a lightsaber flare in his hand. Yoda standing beside him. And ultimately him standing off against the man she feared the most, Darth Vader. The murderer of all her friends and the Jedi order altogether. She missed wedge's comment but came back to reality to the young blonde speaking, "It's not impossible. I used to bull's-eye womp rats in my T-sixteen back home. They're not much bigger than two meters."

General Dodonna gave the order, "Man your ships! And may the Force be with you!"

Mala stood up and leaned over to Jenneth. "That's the ticket right there. Only he can blow that thing."

Corsair looked at Mala funny, "How do you know?"

"Good guess..."

Mala remained silent as Jenneth and she made their way to their new Gold Y-wing. It was slower than a hutt was ugly but it had a rear mounted ion cannon that could give TIE fighters a good shock if they got in the way. Mala knew the shields were stronger than an X-wing's but she was gonna miss the speed. At least Squealer was tucked in the back comfortably.

Over the loudspeaker she could hear plainly, "All flight troopers, man your stations. All flight troops, man your stations."

Jenneth and Mala climbed into the cockpit and pulled their helmets on. Mala's was modified to fit her braintails and she was one of few twi'lek's in the Rebel Alliance. All final preparations are made for the approaching battle. The hangar is buzzing with the last minute activity as the pilots and crewmen alike make their final adjustments. The hum of activity is occasionally trespassed by the distorted voice of the loudspeaker issuing commands. Coupling hoses are disconnected from the ships as they are fueled.

Cockpit

shields roll smoothly into place over each pilot. A signalman, holding red guiding lights, directs the ship as Mala carefully picks the Y-wing up and starts to throttle the engines following the rest of her squadron out.

As she gets to the exit, she feels a familiar presence. One she'd not felt since she danced at Jabba's palace. In fact, the man that had bought her freedom the first time. She shook her head to clear her thoughts and wondered where in the hell she got that feeling from as she concentrated on guiding the slow snubfighter into space.

As they made their way from the planet's surface and around the gas giant it wasn't long before someone spoke up and started to give commands.

"All wings report in."

"Red Ten standing by."

"Red Seven standing by."

"Red Three standing by." That was Biggs, distorted, Mala recognized her old squadmember.

"Red Six standing by." And Porkins, another ex-Blue Squadron member.

"Red Nine standing by."

"Red Two standing by." Wedge Antilles of course.

"Red Eleven standing by."

"Red Five standing by." That voice sent chills up Mala's spine.

Mala double checked her comms and keyed up to her own squadron, "Gold Nine, Standing by."

On her fleet channel, "Lock S-foils in attack position."

The command wasn't meant for the Y-wings. As the Death Star began to appear the group of X-wing

fighters moved in formation toward it, unfolding the wings and locking them in the "X" position that gave them their name.

"We're passing through their magnetic field." That was Red Leader, "Hold tight!"

Mala adjusted her controls and began to concentrate on the approaching Death Star. The ship around her begins to be buffeted slightly by static from the magnetic field.

Over her headset again Red Leader ordered, "Switch your deflectors on. Double front!"

The fighters, now X-shaped darts, move in formation. The Death Star now appears to be a small moon growing rapidly in size as the Rebel fighters approach. Complex patterns on the metallic surface begin to become visible. A large dish antenna is built into the surface on one side.

Wedge's voice broke Mala's concentration, "Look at the size of that thing!"

Red leader's reply "Cut the chatter, Red Two." There was a pause and then, "Accelerate to attack speed. This is it, boys!"

As the fighters move closer to the Death Star, the awesome size of the gargantuan Imperial fortress is revealed. Half of the deadly space station is in shadow and this area sparkles with thousands of small lights running in thin lines and occasionally grouped in large clusters; somewhat like a city at night as seen from a weather satellite.

"Red Leader, this is Gold Leader."

"I copy, Gold Leader."

"We're starting for the target shaft now."

"We're in position. I'm going to cut across the axis and try and draw their fire."

Two squads of Rebel fighters peel off. The X-wings dive towards the Death Star surface. A thousand lights glow across the dark grey expanse of the huge station. Laserbolts streak through the star-filled night. The Rebel X-wing fighters move in toward the Imperial base, as the Death Star aims its massive laser guns at the Rebel forces and fires

Mala holds her breath as the green turbolaser fire angles in at her ship and the others around her.

Wedge's voice in her ear, "Heavy fire, boss! Twenty-degrees."

Red leader was back with the response, "I see it. Stay low."

"This is Red Five; I'm going in!" Starshine kid, Mala holds her breath again.

One X-wing peels toward the Death Star. Laserbolts streak from its weapons, creating a huge fireball explosion on the dim surface.

Biggs voice again, "Luke, pull up!"

The X-wing emerged accompanied by Biggs concerned voice, "Are you all right?"

Luke replies, "I got a little cooked, but I'm okay."

His name is Luke. Well that's a start. Mala inverted her Y-wing and pulled back on the controls. Her wingmate was whooping and hollering as her Ion cannon lit up in Mala's ear against the surface of the Death Star. Mala maintained her wits and her wingman; Gibson followed her all the way in.

Mala breaks off from the main group now, helping Red Squadron with the Laser towers. Her own squadron was pretty much providing cover for Gold Leader on his attack run. She had a bad feeling about that but kept her voice silent.

Red Leader again, "Luke, let me know when you're going in."

"I'm on my way in now..." that was Luke again.

"Watch yourself! There's a lot of fire coming from the right side of that deflection tower." Again, Red Leader.

"I'm on it."

One of the control officers from the Rebel base keyed up, "Squad leaders, we've picked up a new group of signals. Enemy fighters coming your way."

Mala switched her channel to Squadron. "Three Flight, on me."

Gold Leader met her order, "Can you handle them Gold Nine?"

Mala shot back quickly, "Probably not, but I can slow them down."

"The X-wings will be there as well," Gold Leader shot back to her. "Good luck."

Mala switched back over to the fleet channel and evened out her shields. Jenneth was screaming for some real action and Mala was kinda glad, she'd never had to fly with her before. Of course, this was probably the worst time to learn that though.

"Biggs! You've picked one up...watch it!" That was Red Leader.

"I can't see it! Where is he?!" Biggs had to be freaking out. He'd been tailed before but this was hectic. Mala shunted her shields as she, herself, had picked up a tail. She jinked and juked but the bulky Y-wing didn't maneuver like an X-wing so it left her taking a strafe from the TIE fighter. Until Jenneth bashed it with the Ion cannon.

The TIE continued a straight line as Mala began a long loop around. It careened into the Death Star's surface and exploded. Mala picked one up in her sights and squeezed her trigger letting twin red bolts scream out to it. She impacted the wing with the first shot and the other three missed wide. The TIE grew lazier but still flew.

"He's on me tight! I can't shake him! I can't shake him!" boomed in her headset as Biggs was frantically trying to evade the Tie he'd picked up.

"Hang on, Biggs. I'm coming." Looks like Luke was there.

After a few seconds of Mala dueling with her damaged TIE fighter she witnessed an explosion as she created another. "Got him!" Luke confirmed in her ear.

Mala switched back over to Squadron channel.

Gold Leader was giving a new set of orders. "Gold Two, Gold Five, on my wing."

She switched back over to Fleet frequency. "Red Leader, this is Gold Leader. I'm beginning my attack run."

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Mala leveled out her fire and opened up a payload on the surface of the Death Star. A tower began to glow then burst under her laser fire as she looped around toward her Y-wings, Gibson close on her tail. His wingmate was busy shocking TIEs that came in behind him. Jenneth was helping him.

"I copy Gold Leader. Move into position." That was Red Leader's reply.

Now was the drama part. Anxiety filled her as she listened to comm chatter intently.

"The exhaust port is... Slight hesitation from her squad leader, "Marked and locked in."

"Switch power to front deflector screens."

After a while Gold leader asked, "How many guns do you think, Gold Five?"

"I'd say about twenty guns. Some on the surface, some on the towers." came Five's response. She didn't know him.

"Switching to targeting computer," Gold Leader again.

"Computer locked. Getting a signal." That was Gold Two. She didn't know him well either.

"The guns! They've stopped!" Gold Two again.

"Stabilize your rear deflectors. Watch for enemy fighters." That was Five.

"They're coming in!" Gold leader exclaimed into the mike. "Three marks at Two Ten."

Mala glanced for visual. She could barely make out three TIEs dropping into the trench. She was out of range to be any help as she was now forming up with the rest of her squadron. Gibson still was hot on her tail complaining about his right engine in her Squadron Channel. Suddenly an explosion lit the trench. That was Gold Two.

"We're too close!" Gold Leader shouted.

"Stay on target." That was Gold Five in a monotone voice.

"I can't maneuver!"

"Stay on target."

"Loosen up!"

"Stay on target."

Another explosion, this one coupled with a scream. Mala knew that Gold leader was dead.

"Gold Five to Red Leader, lost Tiree. Lost Dutch."

"I copy, Gold Five."

"They came from behind..." Mala could see his Y-wing now and a different looking TIE fighter firing from behind. His right engine peeled off and his craft dove into the Death Star with a bright explosion.

WHAT!! I'm in charge of Gold Squadron now! I didn't want this!" Mala thought. She kept her emotions hidden as she looped around waiting for Red Leader to give an order. She was counting her pilots. Her and Gibs. Two more. That was it!

"Red Group, this is Red Leader. Rendezvous at mark six point one."

"This is Red Two. Flying toward you."

"Red Three, standing by."

General Dodonna's voice rang in Mala's ear, "Red Leader, this is Base One. Keep half your group out of range for the next run."

Red Leader replied, "Copy, Base One. Luke, take Red Two and Three. Hold up here and wait for my signal...to start your run."

"This is it!" Red Leader said as Mala watched his X-wing start to head for the trench. From her perspective she watched four more TIEs coming in. She didn't wanna give them a chance so she cut toward them. Her three fighters stuck with her.

"We should be able to see it by now." Red Ten?

Mala was already engaged with her four. An explosion rang behind her. Gold Three?

"Keep your eyes open for those fighters!" Red Leader... she thought.

"There's too much interference!" Red Ten?

Mala dove again and strafed the surface before looping up to see another explosion. She locked in on a TIE and fired watching it expand to join the Y-wing that it had taken with it. Gold Twelve?

"Red Five, can you see them from where you are?" Red Ten?

"No sign of any...wait!" That was Luke.

"Coming in point three five." Luke informed his squad leader.

"I see them." Red Ten?

Mala inverted again and began a lazy roll. Three TIEs to two Y-wings. Jenneth scored a hit. Another shocked. That's Two on Two... well was...

Another explosion. This time it was Gibson. "NO!" Mala checked her comm. She was in squadron. She signed. Just her and Jenneth now. The last two of Blue Squadron and now the last two of Gold Squadron. She rolled over and lined up a shot. Her lasers only glanced the TIE but Jenneth struck home with the ion cannon. She was getting good.

"I'm in range."

"Target's coming up!"

"Just hold them off for a few seconds." Red Leader.

There was a scream and another friendly blip dropped off as Mala swung around for the last TIE fighter.

"You'd better let her loose." Red Ten. Who died? Red Twelve?

"Almost there." Red Leader's reply

"I can't hold them!" Ten was getting panicky.

Red Ten screamed into the mike and there was another explosion and another Rebel loss. Mala concentrated on her TIE, he was better than the rest. But Jenneth was much better. A well placed shock and then Mala's blast ended the TIE in a ball of fire. Mala dove through the explosion. But she found herself way too far from the trench now to help out Red Leader. He was naked. And she was alone.

"It's away!" Red Leader announced.

"It's a hit?" That was probably Red Nine.

"Negative. Just impacted on the surface." That was Red Leader's grim reply and probably his last words.

"Red Leader, we're right above you. Turn to point..." That was Luke. "...oh-five; we'll cover for you."

"Stay there..." Red Leader replied. "...I just lost my starboard engine."

Mala could only barely see the X-wing burning from her perspective.

"Get set to make your attack run." Red Leader told the Starshine kid before his fighter peeled off to the surface under intense laser fire from the weird looking TIE fighter. Red Leader exploded and Mala inverted her ship and headed back toward Red Nine. He was engaged with a TIE but she couldn't get there in time either. He exploded and Mala exhausted revenge by taking out the TIE with a quick pair of laser blasts.

Mala looped around and pushed her ship to all it had. She hated Y-wings because of the lack in speed and she could already see Luke's X-wing diving in the trench. "Biggs, Wedge, let's close it up. We're going in. We're going in full throttle."

"Right with you, boss." Definitely Wedge.

"Luke, at that speed will you be able to pull out in time?"

"It'll be just like Beggar's Canyon back home."

"We'll stay back far enough to cover you."

"My scope shows the tower, but I can't see the exhaust port! Are you sure the computer can hit it?" That was Wedge again.

"Watch yourself! Increase speed full throttle!" Luke was getting into this.

"What about the tower?" Wedge asked.

"You worry about those fighters! I'll worry about the tower!" Luke shot back at him over the comm.

"Artoo...that, that stabilizer's broken loose again! See if you can't lock it down!" Great! When did Starshine lose a stabilizer...?

Mala was in agony. Her fighter still wasn't fast enough. They were a click out and if Starshine missed, she was the last one alive. It'd be on her... if there was time.

"I'm hit! I can't stay with you." Wedge... oh my god!

"Get clear, Wedge. You can't do any more good back there!"

"Sorry!" Mala watched an X-wing peel from the trench. Her targeting computer said he was about 800m and closing.

"Hurry, Luke, they're coming in much faster this time. I can't hold them!" Biggs. Another ex Blue Squadron... come on Biggs!

"Artoo, try and increase the power!" That was Luke.

"Hurry up, Luke!" Biggs again. He must be in trouble. 700 meters. COME ON!

"Wait! Wait!" There was an explosion.

Oh no! That was Biggs. Starshine is all alone... we need a miracle. Then she felt it. The force. Was that the old hermit again?

"His computer's off. Luke, you switched off your targeting computer. What's wrong?" Base command asked in her ear.

"Nothing. I'm all right."

Still need a miracle. I'm only 500 m out. I can't help Luke, shoot faster!

"I've lost Artoo!" Damn... The TIEs are on him. 300 m!

A YT-1300 dropped out of hyperspace on top of the trench. It read neutral and Mala was extremely confused but there was a lot of laser fire pouring from its belly turret.

"Yahoo!!!!" some male screamed in her ear accompanied by a wookiee's roar. It was the smugglers from back at the briefing.

"You're all clear, kid! Now let's blow this thing and go home!" I need his name! That's a miracle right there! 200m!

Mala pulled back on her stick and held her breath. Please go in! Please go in! Please go in!

She was able to form up with Red Two whose X-wing was limping about as fast as her Y-wing could fly normally. Luke's X-wing swooped in from behind with the Yt-1300 on his tail. The death star exploded raining space with large debris and one hell of a fire cloud.

"Great shot kid! That was one in a million!" Must be the smuggler.

It was a long journey back to Yavin, but at least Mala was alive to tell about it.

"Damn, Mal, you were right about Luke. He was the ticket to the death star." Jenneth muttered into Mala's ear from behind her.

"Lucky guess..." Mala replied.

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(Present day - open space near the Hapan Cluster - During Episode VI)

Mala closed the panel and cursed, drawing back her finger. Squealer beeped at her mockingly.

"I told you I could fix the power flux, Squeals. Now where are we?" Mala asked her purple and white R5 unit.

Squealer turned around and plugged into a nearby console. He beeped and whistled as she came over wiping off her hands and looked at the galactic map he'd brought up on the screen. "That's the Hapan Cluster, there" she said pointing. "If we set course through here, we can drop out in the Corellian system. Besides, I need to stop there anyway. I have no Intel on where the rest of the Rebel Alliance is." Squealer let out a flurry of beeps and whistles. Mala looked down at the droid. "Yes, I know Corellia is predominantly imperial. It always has been."

Squealer made a few more beeps so Mala replied. "Well, first let me change the transponder codes on this ship. I know there isn't many like it, but at least with a changed IFF code we should be able to get in and out without too much of a problem."

Squealer let out a flurried moan, "Well, yes that Mara person is after me. But maybe I lost her back on Tat."

Mala turned around and opened up another panel and pulled out one of the several chips inside and made her way to the cockpit. Squealer followed close behind her and plugged into his terminal as she knelt under her console and pulled a similar chip, replacing it with the one in her hand.

"Alright, Squealer. Set course for Corellia and I'll take the Lucky Break to hyperspace." The droid chirped and soon the navicomputer was ready for the jump. She pushed the lever forward and the stars disappeared into long lines.

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## 6 - Lucky Break with the Lucky Break

As she dropped out of hyperspace the prime jewel of the Corellian five star system filled her viewport. She rotated the GAT-12j to put the planet "below" her more relative to her own perspective than actuality.

"Incoming vessel, transmit transponder and landing clearance. Proceed on course toward beacon thirteen thirty-seven." her comm chirped at her.

"Corellian landing authority, this is *Lucky Break*," she responded evenly. "Landing clearance beta two. Code-" she paused, scanning both her records and all the data she drained from Jabba. Selecting one of his codes for his personal ship she spilled the numbers "1A357H 259 Zulu."

There was a long pause on the other end of the line before the response lit up her board, "Proceed to docking platform C-net 45A. Prepare for escort."

*Escort? Now that's not normal...* Mala thought lining up her approach.

It took several long minutes before four Z-95s came and shadowed her down to the hanger. She specifically recognized Corsec markings on one and instantly her hopes dropped. Apparently the landing code she gave must have been flagged as one of Jabba's already. So much for a lucky break...

Mala landed the ship smoothly and shut it down but left Squealer in place. She knew he could fly the ship all by himself if things went poorly in the hangar. It would be bad news for her if that had to happen though.

As Mala came down the ramp, nervously checking to ensure both her lightsabers were carefully tucked up into the small of her back under her jacket. Four security personel flanked one civilian worker with a datapad. Each of the corsec guards had carbines drawn but relaxed in their grip.

"State your name for the records please," the black clad civilian ordered.

"Mala," she replied coolly. "Mala It Kla."

"Is this your vessel?" came the second question.

"Yes," Mala responded trying to keep the irritation out of her voice. "What's the problem?"

"The code you gave was suspicious and flagged for further questioning by our archives. However, a further scan of your vessel by the beacon showed a larger weapon payload than your transponder advertises. Corsec flagged your vessel for containment and investigation." The officer explained.

Mala weighed her odds, she could have cut them all down and scrambled back to her ship in time but two tractor beams and four ion cannons situated around the top wall of the hangar bay would have kept



her from going anywhere. She signed and surrendered to a bad break.

"What seems to be the problem with my codes?" She tried with a curious sweet persuasion to her voice.

"Unknown at this time," the officer stated calmly. "Please come with us."

Mala kept her chin up and walked briskly into the open formation of the armed guards. She noticed they kept their guns in the general direction of her but with not as much authority or threat as a stormtrooper would have.

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Two hours later and fifteen million questions later, half of which Mala played ignorant, she sat in a small seven by seven room plain in imperial grey and alone.

Squealer had kicked on her security after she had disembarked and now the scanning team was beginning to get highly frustrated that they could not get on board her ship and scan for smuggled items that they suspected her of carrying. Try as she might, Mala's innocent act didn't seem to be going over too well...

The door slid open and another Rutian Twi'lek strode into the room. This one bore a series of tattoos down his lekku some of them turning into scaring and his right lekku seemed to be missing about five centimeters of braintail as it ended in a nub. His face was covered by a red dull helmet that matched his flowing black and red robes and armored gloves. He wore no weapons that Mala could easily discern but her heart sunk. This twi'lek was of the Imperial Office of Criminal Investigation.

And that special district of Imperial Guards were renowned for partaking in the cleanup of executive order 66 and the purge of many jedi knights that went into hiding. If they suspected she was a jedi, she was in deep trouble.

As her hands slowly crept up her back to her hidden lightsabers they hadn't found on their scans of her, thank the force, her mind slowly contemplated a plan of attack. Fighting her way out now seemed her only option but the imperial guard didn't move, or even flinch.

Finally his voice, gravelly and augmented by a hiss of compressed air cut through the silence, "Malait'kla?"

The voice rang in the back of her head and she tried to recognize it but failed.

"They misspelled your name on the report," The guard continued. "Mala Kla is not correct for a twi'lek so I came to check myself." The guard paused and brushed his scared braintail over his shoulder giving away part of the fact that the braintail had no nerve endings which made it worthless weight from the back of the rutian twi'lek's head.

"I gave my name in basic officer," Mala defended.

"You don't recognize me do you?"

Mala bit her tongue, she felt as though she should but could not place the answer.

The IOCI guard reached up and unplugged the holocam and then started to undo the pressure seals on his mask. The top came away in one section revealing a gross set of acidic scarring and disfigurement. The lower part of the mask revealed showed an internal compressing system that rebuffed air to a particular density so that it could be processed by what Mala assumed was acidic damage to the twi'lek's lungs.

Not just any twi'lek however. As the features not completely distorted lined up she recognized his gaze first. Her brother.

"Emrysit'kla," Mala began half worried but trying to keep her worry from her voice.

"Where have you been sister?" His voice resounded with hisses and clicks artificial as his armor was working to help him breath.

"Jabba," Mala answered calmly.

"I paid for your release six years ago, Mala," her brother continued hurt. "You never came to Naboo to my office like I asked in my release forms."

It was Mala's turn to be shocked. Jabba had never said that her brother had paid for her to be sold to him. Her brother continued, "I was told Jabba fed you to his rancor the very day my credits went through."

"Emrys, I never knew. Jabba had been using me to fight in the fights for him. He died," Mala told the truth to that point then started to lie, "I took one of his ships and some of his account information and fled Tatooine."

Emrysit'kla dogged his helmet back in place and the apparatus hissed as it resealed around his head. Then he continued, "Don't worry sister. I'll clear you of this misunderstanding. Then I'll have to ask that you leave Coronet and head toward Rori, in the Naboo system. I'll give you a new set of landing codes because I think the ones you took from Jabba were a bit outdated."

Mala smiled softly and nodded as he continued, "I'd love to see you more but I've just completed a mission here and I'll have to head back to the headquarters outside Narmle to file my reports. Please say you'll join me."

"I will as soon as I can, Emrys. You know that," Mala replied softly and with much emotion in her voice. "I have a few things I have to do first."

"Then I'll give you a set of imperial codes that will not only allow you to access a holonet anywhere and call my office directly but it will allow you to land on any planet without them doing the second scan of your vessel." Emrys shook his head. "When you come to Narmle, I'll clear some of the stuff off of your ship so it doesn't scream smuggler or pirate when you enter a system."

Mala chuckled and lied, "Thanks brother, I'll swing by as soon as possible to let you do that."

"Now you stay out of trouble, while I go get things cleared up with Corsec..."

Emrys spun on a military heel and left her alone in the lonely grey room that seemed to get smaller with his presence. Mala wiped away a tear, hating herself for having to lie to the only family she had left. She silently longed to catch up and hear how he had hurt himself and lost part of his braintail and scared his face. But the other part of her, the part that faced reality knew, that it was only a matter of time before her brother figured out that she was a jedi and had to execute her as well. And sabacc hand hold true, that he never found out about her involvement with the rebellion....