

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Prologue: With Friends Like These...

He was so engrossed in his work he didn't hear the door open.

"So," said a voice next to him, startling him into a yelp. Draco Black grinned at him. "What's so interesting?"

"None of your business." Ron Weasley covered his parchment protectively with one hand.

"Why not?" said Harry Potter from his other side. "If it's interesting to you, it ought to be interesting to us."

"This isn't. Go away."

"Didn't your mum ever teach you to share?" asked Draco, moving closer to see past Ron's arm. Ron leaned forward to shove him away and realized his mistake too late.

"Oi!"

"Got it!" Harry waved the parchment aloft triumphantly. "Let's see here..." He unrolled the scroll a little ways. "Return of the Aurors," he read aloud. "Chapter 1. Dursley the Hutt..."

"Dursley the *what?*"

"You look at it." Harry made to toss the parchment over Ron's head, then passed it laterally as Ron leaped up to try and intercept.

Draco snagged it and spun out of range. "And this is the Gryffindor Keeper," he said over his shoulder. "Let me see here. Sure enough. Dursley the Hutt." He looked at Ron. "We should never have shown you *Star Wars*, should we?"

"Wait a second," said Harry, frowning. "Return of the Aurors... is this what I think it is?"

"Lay off, both of you." Ron stood up and removed the parchment from Draco's hands. "It's not done yet."

"Are you going to show it to us when it is?" asked Draco.

"No."

"Then let us see it now," said Harry.

"No."

The brothers exchanged a look. "Ron," said Harry, looking hard at his best friend. "If you don't let us see that, do you know what's going to happen?"

"No, but I know what's going to happen if I do let you see it."

"What?"

"You'll laugh at me."

"We won't laugh at you," said Draco. "We'll laugh near you, but not at you."

"Trust me, you'll laugh at me."

"We trust you," said Harry. "You're of age now, as of last month. That's old enough to take a joke on yourself, isn't it?"

"Harry, please. You don't want to see this."

"Yes, I do."

Ron scowled at him, then thrust the parchment at Draco. "Here," he said. "You read it."

Draco began to skim down through the story. "Let's see," he said. "Dursley the Hutt and his palace on Quidditchine." He shook his head. "Gifted with names, you're not."

"Shut up," Ron muttered.

"Oh, I take it back," said Draco, reading down farther. "This is rather a good one. Ron Solo."

Harry snorted. "Ron Solo?"

"Yes, Ron Solo and his ship, the *Millennium Hawk*. But he's not flying her these days. He's frozen in carbonite in Dursley's palace."

Harry nodded. "Makes sense. Go on."

"Hmm." Draco frowned, moving down the scroll. "Oh, here come the two droids. N-3LO and M2-B2."

"Perfect," said Harry. "One worrywart and one small and feisty."

"And they have a message from the Auror Knight..." Draco stopped and read something again, then looked at Ron with surprise. "Thanks, I suppose."

"You're welcome."

"What?" demanded Harry.

"They've brought Dursley the Hutt a message from Auror Knight Drake Skywalker."

"Cool," said Harry. "For once I don't have to be the hero."

Ron edged his chair away from Harry a bit.

"All right, the droids are wandering around the palace – they see someone in disguise, someone they think might be Luna Calrissian..." Draco raised his eyebrows.

"There aren't a lot of girls in those movies," said Ron. "I had to get creative."

"I like it," said Draco, returning to his reading. "So they see Luna Calrissian, and oh, here comes the bounty hunter with the Wookiee..."

"Chewbacca," said Harry, grinning. "What poor slob gets to be him?"

Draco frowned. "Ron, your handwriting's terrible, I can't make this name out."

"Doesn't matter anyway," said Ron dismissively. "Go on."

"All right. Bounty hunter makes threats, Dursley laughs at him, bounty hunter comes back that night and gets Ron Solo out of carbonite... oh, here we are, the touching romantic scene. 'Who are you?' says Ron Solo. The bounty hunter pulls off the helmet, brown hair cascades forth like a spring of living water..."

Harry fell off his chair laughing. "*A spring of living water?*" he choked out after a moment spent in helpless spasms.

All that could be seen of Ron was his forehead, which was hard to tell from his hair because they were about the same color at the moment. "You see why I didn't want you reading it?" he grumbled.

"It's the beautiful Princess Neenie," announced Draco, recovering his breath from his own laughing fit. "And you know what she says to Ron Solo, as her hair cascades about her."

"*Cascades* is pretty good too," said Harry, sitting up on the floor.

"She says, 'Someone who loves you.'" Draco did a near-perfect imitation of Hermione's voice, sending Harry into convulsions again. He used the time to read back through the parts he'd already finished. "You should have made Hermione the droid instead of Neville," he commented. "She fits that part better."

"I'm not kissing Neville," said Ron, looking outraged. "And I'm not kissing a droid, either. Hermione makes a perfectly good Princess."

"If you say so," said Draco, returning to his reading. "All right. Dursley catches them on the way out, makes Neenie his slave and... oh, I see."

"What?" asked Harry.

"Harry, do you remember what Princess Leia wore in Jabba the Hutt's palace?"

"Not a hell of a lot," said Harry. Then understanding dawned on his face. "*Oh.*"

"Now I see why you did this," said Draco, brandishing the parchment. "You just wanted an excuse to imagine Hermione in a metal bikini."

Harry shook his head. "There's just something about that phrase," he said, shuddering. "'Hermione in a metal bikini.' There's something *wrong* about that."

"Are you trying to say she wouldn't look good in one?" snapped Ron.

Harry and Draco looked at each other and burst out laughing again. "No," Draco gasped out after a few moments. "Just imagining what she'd do if you suggested she wear one."

"That's why this was supposed to be *secret*," said Ron pointedly.

"Keep going," said Harry, getting his breath back. "This is good."

There isn't much more," said Draco, unrolling the scroll. "Looks like you've only got a part of it finished. Ron Solo gets thrown into the same cell as his Wookiee best friend... here, this is better, I think I can read his name now..." He frowned.

"What?" asked Harry.

"On second thought, I'd better not read it."

"Come on, Draco, I want to know."

"No, you don't. Trust me."

"Yes I do! Let me see it!"

"Bad idea, Harry."

"How would you know? Give it here!"

Draco shook his head. Harry pulled his wand out. "You know I can get it with this," he said. "But I don't want to get in trouble if I don't have to. Will you *please* let me see it?"

Draco looked at Ron apologetically and handed the parchment over. Harry unrolled it to the place he wanted and ran his finger along the lines of ink. "Ron Solo stumbled into the dank cell," he read aloud. "He heard a muffled roar from somewhere nearby, but it didn't sound like an animal. It sounded more like a friend."

"Hairy?" he called out. "Hairypantser, is that you?"

Very slowly, Harry lowered the parchment. "Hairypantser?" he said quietly.

"See why I didn't want to show you?" Ron was on his feet, backing towards the door. "I told you you wouldn't like it, you wouldn't listen, it's your own fault..."

"First you fantasize about my sister in a metal bikini," said Harry, advancing on his friend. "Then you let *him* be the hero." He jerked his thumb towards Draco.

"Hey, you said you liked it," protested Draco.

"And now *Hairypantser* the Wookiee?"

"He's Han Solo's best mate," said Ron weakly, his back against the door. "I thought it made sense..."

"Yes, it makes sense," said Harry, staring at him. "It makes too much sense. If I'm Hairypantser, maybe I should start living up to the name..."

Ron wrenched the door open and ran for his life, as best he could with his jeans around his ankles.

"It really is rather funny, you know," Draco remarked.

Harry whipped around and glared. "You want some?"

"No thank you, I like my clothing where it is."

Harry snorted. "*Hairypantser*," he repeated harshly, coming to sit down at the desk. "Wait a second. Where's Ginny? We never got to her."

Draco unrolled the scroll all the way, looking down its length, and stopped. "I think I see another reason Ron didn't want to show this to anyone," he said.

"What?"

"He was going to make Ginny an Ewok."

Harry's eyes widened. "He did not."

"Yes, he did. Look." Draco handed Harry the scroll. "Right there. Ginevra, chieftainess of the Ewok village."

Green eyes met gray. The same idea lurked in both of them.

"I bet Ginny would like to hear a story," said Draco, standing up. "And I bet she'd just *adore* her part in it."

"And maybe she'll help us find something to do to the author." Harry rolled up the scroll and likewise stood. "D'you think we can really freeze him in carbonite?"

"We'll find something like that. Get the twins to help us."

"Perfect."

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 1: Who Needs Enemies?

“Pleeeeeease?”

Danger shook her head. “Sixteen and a half is too old to be whining like that, and the answer is still no.”

“But it’s not hurting anything! It’s just for fun! He really deserves it, and we’d only do it once.”

“That’s what you say now. What happens the next time someone plays a prank on you, and you want to get back at them? Are you telling me this wouldn’t tempt you at all?”

“Mothers,” Draco muttered under his breath.

“Besides, don’t you realize that you don’t really have to be having this conversation with me at all?”

“What?”

“We meant what we said over the summer, fox, after everything happened. You’re in charge of your own decisions now. You have to decide whether or not it would really be right for you to play a prank on Ron that he has no way of foreseeing, no way of stopping, and no way of returning in kind.”

Draco winced. “You fight dirty.”

“I tell the truth. It’s much the same thing.” Danger stood up. “On the other hand, if you could find a way around some of my objections, some way to make this more fair, let’s say I wouldn’t mind seeing it. It’s up to you now.”

Draco rolled his eyes at Danger’s back. *Up to me now. What a great way to make me feel guilty.*

On the other hand, she is right. It would be wrong for me to just yank Ron into something he’s got no way out of. But if I give him the option, get in or stay out, and make it really tempting for him to get in...

He smiled slowly. *That ought to work. Now I just have to get everybody else on board.*

Harry’s going to be the hardest to convince...

xXxXx

“No,” said Harry flatly. “I’m not doing it.”

“Oh, come on. Everyone else is.”

“No.”

“Not even for a chance to bang the twins’ heads together?”

“The twins? How do they get into this?”

“They volunteered to be our bad guys. Because they’re all supposed to look and act alike, remember?”

“You can’t tell the difference anyway, with all that stuff they wear.”

“Yeah, but the twins want to be part of this. And because they’re the bad guys, you get to knock them down a lot.”

Harry hesitated. Draco could sense he was wavering. He decided to play his trump card. “We figured out a bit with Ginny at the end you might like.”

“Tell.”

Draco leaned over and whispered into his brother’s ear. After a few moments, Harry pulled away and stared. “Ginny agreed to this?”

“Ginny thinks it’s a great idea. Personally, I think she just wants to see Ron stuck up on the wall.”

“But she agreed to this new part?”

“She thought of it.”

“Hunh.” Harry thought it over. “Well... all right. As long as I get a different name.”

Draco grinned. “Knew I could count on you, Harry.”

“When will it be?”

"Night after tomorrow. So start practicing your roars."

Harry responded with a throaty groan.

xXxXx

Remus stepped into the plushly-appointed movie theatre and looked around. It was a small place, with seats for about twenty. Three of them were currently occupied.

"There you are," said Danger without turning around. "Popcorn?"

"Yes, please." Remus took a seat beside her and reached into the box she was holding. "What's this going to be?"

"It's called *Return of the Aurors*. Part revenge on Ron, part fun outing. Harry thought it up, Draco and Neenie did the engineering, and everybody else pitched in."

"Light revenge," said Aletha from the row behind them. "They're not all that mad, but they thought Ron deserved a little payback."

Remus shook his head. "Why am I always the last to know about everything?"

"Because you've always got your head in some magical theory journal?" suggested Sirius as the lights began to dim.

xXxXx

Ron set his magazine aside and flicked off his bedside lamp.

I hate my life. Nobody will look at me properly any more since I wrote that stupid story. Everyone keeps snickering like I have dirt on my face, but no one will tell me what's going on. I keep checking everything for pranks, but nothing's happened yet.

I hope they're not going to do anything while I'm asleep...

A sudden blare of trumpets made him jump. He was standing in the back of a small, dark room, with large gold letters scrolling across a screen in front of him. They proclaimed:

SCAR WARS: Episode VI

Return of the Aurors

Ron stared as more text scrolled onto the screen, to the accompaniment of music he knew well.

You, Ron Weasley, have been chosen to participate in this episode of Scar Wars. If you choose to participate, you will take the part of Ron Solo. You will remain in character throughout the episode. Prompting will be provided if necessary. Significant deviation will not be tolerated. If you choose not to participate, you will never again have this opportunity. Choose now. Yes or no?

"Er, can I have a second to think about it?"

Very well. The first portion doesn't need you anyway. Have a seat.

Ron dropped into a chair and began to watch. The camera panned down to the surface of a desert planet, where two small metallic beings were walking and rolling along towards a large, imposing palace.

"Of course I'm worried," said Neville's voice from the taller, golden, walking robot. "And you should be, too. Luna Calrissian and poor Hairywolf never returned from this awful place."

Ron snickered. *I see they renamed my Wookiee.*

The shorter, rolling robot, whose paint job was significantly darker than it was in the movies, whistled a tentative comment.

"Don't be so sure. If I told you half the things I've heard about this Dursley the Hutt, you'd probably short-circuit."

The two droids timidly approached the entrance to the palace. "Emtoo, are you sure this is the right place?" N-3LO asked his companion. "I'd better knock, I suppose." He tapped quietly on the door with his metal hand, then stepped away. "There doesn't seem to be anyone there. Let's go back and tell Master Drake."

A small hatch opened in the middle of the door. Out popped a spidery mechanical arm with a large electronic eyeball on the end. "Tee chuta hhat yudd!" said a gravelly voice.

"Goodness gracious me!" exclaimed Threelo. He pointed first to Emtoo, then to himself as he spoke. "Emtoo Beetowha bo Enthreelowha ey toota odd mischka Dursley du Hutt."

The eye zipped back into the door with a deep, throaty laugh. Emtoo beeped indignantly.

"I don't think they're going to let us in, Emtoo. We'd better go." Threelo turned away from the door –

Just as a metallic screech revealed that it was beginning to open.

The droids stared into the endless black cavity beyond the door. After a moment, M2-B2 whistled and started forward.

"Emtoo, wait," Threelo blithered, looking around. "Oh, dear! Emtoo!" He hurried after the other droid. "Emtoo, I really don't think we should rush into all this."

The door began to lower behind him. Emtoo was already halfway down the corridor. With a final despairing glance at the outside world, Threelo rushed off after his friend. "Oh, Emtoo! Emtoo, wait for me!"

Two green, piglike Gamorrean guards, identical in every way, stepped out of the shadows. One grunted a command, and Emtoo beeped nervously.

"Just you deliver Master Drake's message and get us out of here," Threelo lectured. "Oh, my! Oh!" He had just noticed the new silhouette bearing down on them. "Oh no."

"Die wanna wanga," intoned the new arrival, an alien creature with two large tentacles where his hair should have been. A subtitle flashed on the screen below him – *Ory Goila, Twi'lek minion of Dursley the Hutt*.

"Oh, my," said Threelo again. "Die wanna wauaga. We -- we bring a message to your master, Dursley the Hutt."

Emtoo beeped several times.

"And a gift," Threelo added, then did a double-take. "Gift, what gift?"

Ory shook his head. "Nee Dursley no badda. Me chaade su goodie." He approached Emtoo with his hand out, but Emtoo scooted backwards several feet, squealing in protest.

"She says that our instructions are to give it only to Dursley himself," said Threelo faintly. "I'm terribly sorry," he added quickly. "I'm afraid she's ever so stubborn about these sort of things."

"Nudd chaa," said Ory finally, and waved the droids to follow him.

"Emtoo, I have a bad feeling about this," said Threelo as he followed the Twi'lek.

The scene changed to show Dursley's throne room. The repulsive overgrown slug reclined on his couch, a beautiful female Twi'lek chained to his side. Her tentacles had a distinctly red look to them. Ron frowned. *Is that...*

Ginny looked out of the screen and winked at him. "Bit part," she mouthed, then returned her attention to the throne room, where N-3LO and M2-B2 had just arrived with Ory Goila.

"Good morning," said Threelo, bowing politely.

"Bo shuda!" bellowed Dursley, making everyone jump.

"The message, Emtoo, the message," Threelo hissed, nudging her with his foot. Emtoo whistled derisively and projected a beam of light from her domed head, which grew into a ten-foot hologram of Drake Skywalker, dressed in his dark robe, his hands spread peacefully.

"Greetings, Exalted One," said the hologram. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Drake Skywalker, Auror Knight and friend to Captain Solo. I know that you are powerful, mighty Dursley, and that your anger with Solo must be equally powerful. I seek an audience with Your Greatness to bargain for Solo's life."

The crowd of alien creatures in the throne room laughed unpleasantly.

"With your wisdom," the hologram continued, "I'm sure that we can work out an arrangement which will be mutually beneficial and enable us to avoid any unpleasant confrontation. As a token of my goodwill, I present to you a gift: these two droids."

Threelo jumped and stared at the hologram. "What did he say?"

"Both are hardworking and will serve you well," Drake finished.

"This can't be!" Threelo protested. "Emtoo, you're playing the wrong message."

Drake's hologram disappeared as the crowd laughed again. Ory leaned over Dursley and muttered in his ear. Then the crowd quieted as Dursley began to speak in Huttese, his words translated by subtitles below his gross form.

"There will be no bargain," the Hutt crime lord said.

"We're doomed," Threelo predicted.

"I will not give up my favorite decoration. I like Captain Solo where he is." Dursley pointed. Threelo, Emtoo, and everyone in the throne room looked. So did Ron. Then he gulped.

The figure on the wall had his own face.

"Emtoo, look!" cried Threelo. "Captain Solo. And he's still frozen in carbonite." The droid's eyes flickered out of the screen, towards Ron, as the scene changed.

Ron slumped in his chair as the droids trudged fearfully down a dark, slimy hall. *All right, I get it. Everyone else is in, and having fun. Why not me?*

But he still wasn't sure.

"Ah, good," said a raspy-voiced droid to Threelo. "New acquisitions."

Ron stared at the droid. *Is it my imagination, or does that one sound a little like Percy?*

"You are a protocol droid, are you not?" the other droid continued.

"I am En-Threelo, human-cy..."

"Yes or no will do," the other cut him off.

Definitely Percy.

"Oh," said Threelo, flustered. "Well, yes."

"How many languages do you speak?"

Threelo preened. "I am fluent in over six million forms of communication, and can readily..."

"Splendid!" the other droid cut in again. "We have been without an interpreter since our master got angry with our last protocol droid and disintegrated him."

"Disintegrated?" said Threelo faintly.

"Guard!" the other droid called, ignoring this. "This protocol droid might be useful. Fit him with a restraining bolt and take him back to His Excellency's main audience chamber."

"Emtoo, don't leave me!" Threelo called hysterically as a green Gamorrean shoved him out the door.

Emtoo wailed as the door closed, then turned and made a rude noise at the other droid.

"You're a feisty little one," the droid said to her, "but you'll soon learn some respect. I have need for you on the master's Sail Barge. And I think you'll fit in nicely."

The scene changed again, back to Dursley's throne room. Music filled the air as Ginna, the Twi'lek dancer, showed off her paces.

Dursley laughed and pulled on the chain around the Twi'lek's throat. "Da eitha!" he roared at her, pulling her closer to him.

Ginna resisted, shaking her head and yanking on her chain. "Na Chuba negatorie Na!" she cried out. "Na! Natoota..."

Twi'lek and Hutt fought an obscene tug-of-war for a few moments, but Dursley was stronger. "Boscka!" he shouted, and pushed a button. With a scream, Ginna fell through a trap door that opened below her feet.

Dursley's couch rolled forward, the obese Hutt laughing as roars and screams sounded from below. The crowd in the throne room hurried to the grates in the floor to watch the fun. Suddenly, from somewhere nearby, a gunshot rang out.

Ron sat up straighter. *Here we go.*

Ory and the two Gamorreans hurried into the room, with Boushh the Ubese bounty hunter behind them. Beside the small masked alien, on a leash, walked...

"Oh, no! Hairywolf!" Threelo whispered to himself.

Boushh said something in his strange, electronically mangled voice. "I have come for the bounty on this Wookiee," the subtitle translated.

"At last, we have the mighty Hairywolf," Dursley boomed in Huttese. He let out a long, disgusting laugh and beckoned Threelo closer as Hairy gave a throaty whine.

"Oh, uh, yes, uh, I am here, Your Worshipfulness. Uh... yes!" babbled the nervous droid. He listened to Dursley's speech, then turned to Boushh. "The illustrious Dursley bids you welcome and will gladly pay you the reward of twenty-five thousand."

Boushh spoke again, and Threelo turned to the Hutt. "Fifty thousand," he said in a businesslike manner. "No less."

Dursley roared and knocked Threelo flying. Boushh fingered his gun as the droid struggled back to his feet, to the accompaniment of Dursley's roars. "But what, what did I say?" Threelo begged the Hutt. Dursley snarled at him in Huttese, and the droid turned quickly back to Boushh. "The

mighty Dursley asks why he must pay fifty thousand.”

Boushh said a few words and held up a silvery ball with two little red lights blinking on it.

Threelo recoiled in fear. “Because he’s holding a thermal detonator!”

The crowd in the throne room gasped and ducked for cover. Dursley stared at the bounty hunter for a moment, then began to laugh deep in his chest. “This bounty hunter is my kind of scum,” he rumbled in Huttese. “Fearless and inventive.”

The Hutt kept talking, but the subtitles cut out. It was up to Threelo to translate. “Dursley offers the sum of thirty-five. And I do suggest you take it.”

A very tense moment hung in the air. Then Boushh lowered the silver ball. “Zeebuss,” he said.

“He agrees!” cried Threelo thankfully.

The throne room erupted in cheers, and the music began again. Hairywolf growled as Boushh handed his leash to a Gamorrean guard, and howled aloud as he passed a guard in a half-mask. The guard lowered the mask to watch Hairy go by, revealing the features of one Luna Calrissian.

“That’s still the weirdest casting here,” Ron said aloud as he watched Hairy fight the guards all the way into a small, slimy cell. “Almost weirder than that one.”

Hairy looked at the screen and roared. *What are you complaining about?* a subtitle printed. *You wrote the damn thing.*

Ron shut up as the scene cut back to Dursley’s throne room. It was the dead of night. A small figure slipped in through the door, knocking into the wind chimes and quickly silencing them with one hand. It was Boushh, the bounty hunter.

Silently, the Ubese crept over to the wall on which hung Captain Ron Solo, frozen in his carbonite tomb.

Gold letters flashed in the lower corner of the screen, drawing Ron’s eyes to them. *Last call, Weasley. In or out?*

“I’ve got a bad feeling about this,” Ron muttered, then raised his voice. “I’m in.”

Gray mist emerged from the screen and swirled around him. Ron felt himself lifted from the floor. His clothes writhed around him, binding him tightly –

No, he was held in something far tighter and less forgiving than cloth –

His lips formed a word, almost without his conscious thought –

“Neenie.”

He was falling, falling forward, into darkness.

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 2: Dursley's Palace

Thud.

Ow.

Ron Solo tried to push himself up off the floor, but his arms wouldn't take his weight.

Whatever I drank last night, it wasn't worth this.

Someone's hands closed around his and helped him turn over. "Just relax for a moment," an electronic voice buzzed near his ear. "You're free of the carbonite."

The carbonite... I remember now... how long was I frozen? He moaned aloud, trying to remember how to speak.

"You have hibernation sickness," the voice went on.

Good, I'd hate to feel like this if I was well. Ron managed to get his hand up near his face, or he thought he had. "I can't see," he croaked.

"Your eyesight will return in time," the other assured him.

"Where am I?" He was sure of the answer, but needed to know anyway.

"Dursley's palace."

No surprise. Ron reached out to find the speaker, and touched an Ubese breather helmet. *He must be from the Alliance, nobody else would have come after me here.* "Who are you?"

The helmet moved under his hand. "Someone who loves you," murmured a new voice, one he knew, even half-dead and blind.

"Neenie!"

Ron felt her come into his arms, but only for a moment. "I gotta get you out of here," she said, pulling away, helping him stand up.

A deep, nasty chuckle rolled through the room.

"What's that?" Ron asked, turning his head to try to find the source of the sound.

Another chuckle followed the first.

Ron's heart sank. "I know that laugh," he said.

The *shunk* of a curtain being pulled aside, and sudden heat on his face, which he thought must correspond to light. The jabber of alien laughter, and centermost in it, Dursley the Hutt.

"Hey, Dursley," Ron said, clinging to Neenie. "Look, Dursley, I was just on my way to pay you back, but I got a little sidetracked. It's not my fault." *If I can just keep him talking, maybe she can get away...*

"It's too late for that, Solo," the Hutt rumbled in his own language. "You may have been a good smuggler, but now you're bantha fodder."

"Look," Ron tried once more.

"Take him away!" Dursley roared.

Strong hands fastened around Ron's arms, yanking him away from Neenie. "Dursley, I'll pay you triple," he shouted. "You're throwing away a fortune here! Don't be a fool!"

Dursley just laughed again. "Bring her to me," he commanded.

Neenie... no...

Ron tried to fight, but nothing worked the way it should, and by the time the guards manhandled him through a door and slammed it shut behind him, he was grateful just to be standing.

Then something growled.

Great. Getting eaten is one of the very few ways this day could get worse.

Another growl followed the first, and suddenly made sense – they weren't just growls, they were words, words in one of the other languages he'd learned to understand knocking around the galaxy for all these years... and in a voice he knew, as well...

"Hairy?" he called out, praying he was right. "Hairy, is that you?"

An excited roar, and something large and furry slammed into him. Ron stumbled backwards, still upright only because Hairy's arms were around him. "Wait," he got out. "I can't see, pal. What's going on?"

Hairy started explaining, loudly and at length. Ron had to stop him partway through. "Drake? Drake's crazy. He can't even take care of himself, much less rescue anybody."

Hairy insisted that on the contrary, Drake both could and was.

"An... Auror Knight?" Ron groaned. "I'm out of it a little while, everybody gets delusions of grandeur."

Hairy compared Ron's current condition to a couple of unflattering things, then pulled his friend close and started grooming him with one big paw.

"I'm all right, pal." Ron wondered just how much worse things would have to get for him to stop lying. "I'm all right."

He shut his eyes – not that it made any real difference, but it was what he was used to doing when he slept – and fell into a strange, uneasy dream.

xXxXx

He stood in the main entranceway to Dursley's palace, a passage he'd walked many times. The big main door was rising. Beyond it stood a figure, silhouetted against the bright Quidditchine sunlight. Ron squinted.

Drake?

That's funny. Why's he wearing a robe? Looks like what old Dunobi used to wear. He snorted. Must be in keeping with his new personality. Auror Knight, indeed.

Drake entered the palace, his face serene. A pair of identical Gamorreans growled at him, barring his way with crossed halberds, but Drake raised his hand to each of them in turn, and they stepped back, looking confused.

How'd he do that?

Ory Goila, the Twi'lek majordomo, appeared at the other end of the tunnel and hurried up to Drake. "I must speak with Dursley," Drake said to him.

Ory shook his head.

"You will take me to Dursley now," said Drake calmly, looking into the Twi'lek's strange eyes.

Ory's eyes glazed slightly. "I will take you to Dursley now," he repeated in his own language.

Drake smiled as Ory turned to lead him to Dursley's throne room. "You serve your master well," he said. "And you will be rewarded."

Ron followed them, confusion warring with sudden hope.

Maybe the new title Drake was claiming wasn't so ridiculous after all.

xXxXx

That slimy, bug-eating, spice-stealing, slug...

If Ron had been physically present in the throne room, he wasn't sure even his weakness would have stopped him from trying to throttle Dursley. Princess Neenie, now chained to Dursley by a necklace-like collar, wore just enough to preserve her modesty. She looked damned good in it, Ron had to admit.

But I don't want her showing it off to the whole world. And she doesn't either. She hates this, I can see it. Hang on, love, we'll get out of this.

Somehow

"At last!" cried another familiar voice, and Ron looked up in surprise. Threelo the droid peered out from behind Dursley's bulk. "Master Drake's come to rescue me!"

I wouldn't bet on it, Goldie. Then Ron recalled what Drake had done in the hallway. Well, maybe I wouldn't bet against it either. But I still have a bad feeling about this...

Ory had just finished telling Dursley who had come to see him. "I told you not to admit him," growled the Hutt.

"I must be allowed to speak," said Drake to Ory.

"He must be allowed to speak," Ory repeated in Huttese.

Dursley bellowed and clobbered Ory, shoving him away. "You fool!" the Hutt roared in his own language. "He's using an old Auror mind trick."

Drake fixed his eyes on the Hutt. "You will bring Captain Solo and the Wookiee to me," he commanded.

Dursley sneered, one of the few expressions the large, slimy face could manage. “Your mind powers will not work on me, boy.”

“Nevertheless, I’m taking Captain Solo and his friends.” Drake had to be upset that his plan hadn’t worked, but Ron could see no signs of it. “You can either profit by this, or be destroyed. It’s your choice. But I warn you not to underestimate my powers.”

Dursley howled with laughter. Threelo poked his head out again. “Master Drake,” he babbled, “you’re standing on...”

“There will be no bargain, young Auror,” Dursley rumbled before the droid could finish. “I will enjoy watching you die.”

Drake’s hand snapped up and caught a blaster – which had flown, by itself, from the holster of the nearest guard.

All right, that’s useful, Ron admitted. Now listen to the droid and get off the damned –

“Boscka!” Dursley bellowed, and the grate dropped from Drake’s feet, spilling into the pit both the young Auror Knight and the hapless guard who’d been trying to get his blaster back.

Ron swore.

“See the Auror, see the Auror!” Dursley shouted, laughing, as his dais rolled forward to cover the new hole in the floor. Neenie tried to pull away, but a guard put a hand on her shoulder –

Luna! Ron stared as he recognized the woman. Great big reunion here, isn’t it?

Roars and screams from below pulled his attention. *Neenie’s all right – sort of – for the moment. Drake’s where the action is.*

He hurried towards the grate still in place before Dursley’s dais, hoping to get a view around everyone’s heads –

And suddenly he was *in* the pit, facing Dursley’s favorite large, hairy, and far-too-many-legged pet, which was in the process of swallowing the guard who’d fallen into the pit with Drake.

Come on, Drake, fight the damn thing. Hell of a way to end a rescue attempt, getting eaten by a rancomantula.

Drake seemed to think so himself. As the rancomantula grabbed for him, he dashed away and snatched up a long, straight arm bone.

Don’t hit it, that’ll just make it mad...

But Drake didn’t try to hit it. In fact, he let it pick him up, barely fighting at all –

What’s he doing?

At the last second, the Auror wedged the long bone into the rancomantula’s mandibles, and fell to the ground as it bellowed in pain.

Oh. I guess that works.

Drake squeezed himself into a crevice as the rancomantula flailed around the cave, smashing into another wall and causing a minor avalanche. Ron watched his eyes move around, then suddenly light up as they lit on something. Following his friend’s line of sight, he felt his first real hope since Drake had fallen into this place. *That’s the way, Drake! That’s thinking!*

Drake had spotted the door control that led to the rancomantula’s holding cave.

But the beast wasn’t finished with him yet. A hairy hand reached into the crevice, trying to get a grip on Drake. Drake fumbled a rock up and smashed it down on a long furry finger, dashing past the rancomantula as it howled once again. He slammed his hand onto the door panel, the door shot upwards, he darted through –

And was stopped by heavy bars only a few meters from where he’d started.

Ron swore again, cursing the situation, the rancomantula, and Drake’s stupidity as the Auror Knight wasted time furiously shaking the bars. *Leave those alone, kid, they’re not going to move! Find something you can kill this thing with!*

Drake spun back to confront the rancomantula, now pain-maddened and readier than ever for the kill. Ron flattened himself against the wall, though he suspected that, not really being there, he didn’t count. The rancomantula stuck its head through the doorway.

Nice try, Drake. Shame it had to end this way.

Drake was fumbling on the floor, picking up a skull from one of the rancomantula’s earlier kills – he hefted it, then threw it –

It impacted squarely on the twin of the door control he’d used a moment before.

The door fell with a crash, crushing the rancomantula beneath it.

Ron stared, his mouth hanging open, as Drake sagged against the bars, panting.

Did he –

He did.

I don't believe it.

He's either the luckiest or the smartest little bastard going.

A thankful sigh from above, followed quickly by a pained gasp, reminded him of the other people around he cared about. A thought brought him back to the main level of the throne room, where Dursley, his usually puce skin reddening in anger, was roaring at his guards. "Bring me Solo and the Wookiee," he commanded, dragging Neenie back towards him by her chain. "They will all suffer for this outrage."

Aw, great. At least I got to watch the thing happen that I get to suffer for.

Ron felt a pull from the direction of his body. Hairy must be trying to wake him up.

Might as well not give him too much trouble about it.

One thought stayed with him as he fell through light into darkness.

Hey, if we gotta suffer, at least we're suffering together.

xXxXx

"Ron!"

"Drake!" Ron turned his head towards his friend out of reflex, even though he still couldn't see a damned thing.

"Are you all right?"

"Fine. Together again, huh?"

"Wouldn't miss it."

"How're we doing?" Ron disregarded Hairy's muttered answer to this, as it was both unhelpful and quite obscene.

"The same as always." As usual, Drake sounded far too cheerful.

"That bad, huh? Where's Neenie?"

"I'm here," said a testy voice, followed by a small vocalized shudder of disgust. Ron clenched his teeth over what he knew must be happening. *Just let me get my hands on your rubbery hide, Dursley...*

Dursley bellowed something Ron couldn't follow, but Threelo's prissy voice translated. The golden droid sounded distinctly worried.

Of course, he always sounds like that.

"Oh dear. His High Exaltedness, the great Dursley the Hutt, has decreed that you are to be terminated immediately."

On second thought, maybe this time he's got reason.

"Good," Ron said aloud. "I hate long waits."

"You will therefore be taken to the Dune Sea and cast into the pit of Carkoon, the nesting place of the all-powerful Sarlacc."

"Doesn't sound so bad," Ron said nonchalantly to Drake and Hairy.

"In his belly, you will find a new definition of pain and suffering, as you are slowly digested over a thousand years."

Definitely reason. "On second thought, let's pass on that, huh?" Ron said.

Hairy agreed emphatically.

"You should have bargained, Dursley," Drake said confidently. "This was the last mistake you'll ever make."

Dursley cackled evilly, and hands turned Ron roughly and shoved him hard to start him walking.

I am going to get the twins when this is over, vowed the small part of Ron Solo that was still Ron Weasley.

xXxXx

"I think my eyes are getting better," Ron said, blinking as he stared out over the desert of Quidditchine. "Instead of a big dark blur, I see a big light blur."

Drake chuckled beside him. "There's nothing to see," he said. "I used to live here, you know."

"You're going to die here, you know. Convenient."

"Just stick close to Hairy and Luna," said Drake, again with his new confidence in his voice. "I've taken care of everything."

"Oh," said Ron. "Great."

His mind wandered, and he seemed to fly beside the skiff they rode on, up to Dursley's huge sail barge, where Neenie stared out a window at them. *Sorry about this, Princess*, he wanted to tell her. *This was never where I meant us to end up...*

Suddenly, Neenie disappeared.

What – where'd she go?

He was inside the sail barge. Dursley had pulled Neenie's chain tight, and was holding her close to him, caressing her with his slimy hands. "Soon you will learn to appreciate me," he told the struggling princess.

Ron forced himself to turn away, knowing he could do nothing. Several feet away, a small crash coincided with a droid's whistle of surprise and annoyance.

Might as well go see what that is.

"Emtoo! What are you doing here?" Threelo demanded of his counterpart.

Emtoo beeped at him.

"Well, I can see you're serving drinks, but this place is dangerous. They're going to execute Master Drake and, if we're not careful, us too!"

Emtoo whistled a singsong response.

"Hmm. I wish I had your confidence," Threelo said worriedly, turning to look out a window.

A hand shook Ron's arm, and he roused. He was back in his body, on the skiff. It had stopped.

Guess this is it.

"Victims of the almighty Sarlacc," Threelo's voice echoed over an amplifier system. "His Excellency hopes that you will die honorably. But should any of you wish to beg for mercy, the great Dursley the Hutt will now listen to your pleas."

Ron blinked several times, and was suddenly able to distinguish the sail barge from the surrounding desert. "Threelo," he shouted back, finding a golden smudge high up which ought to be the protocol droid, "you tell that slimy piece of..." He edited for Neenie's sake. "...worm-ridden filth he'll get no such pleasure from us. Right?"

Hairy howled in agreement.

"Dursley!" Drake called. "This is your last chance. Free us, or die."

Under Dursley's wild laughter, light footsteps caught Ron's ear. Luna's, he guessed – he knew she was one of the guards on the skiff with them, but there were at least three others, and not even Drake Skywalker, Auror Knight, could deal with them without a weapon...

"Move him into position," Dursley ordered in Huttese.

Ron kept his eyes on the upper deck of the sail barge, and suddenly spotted a little dark blot near Threelo. *Is that Emtoo-Betoo? What's she doing?*

"Put him in," the Hutt crime lord shouted.

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 3: The Sarlacc

Drake Skywalker looked down. Below the plank on which he stood gaped a huge, fanged mouth, with tentacles reaching out of it – the Sarlacc.

Not interested, thanks.

He lifted his head, raised two fingers to his temple, and jauntily saluted Dursley the Hutt, Princess Neenie, Threelo the droid, and – most important of all, but not yet noticed by anyone else, he hoped – little Emtoo-Betoo, on whom everything depended.

Ah, she'll come through. She always does.

A guard jabbed at him with a spear. Drake jumped from the plank –

He heard a distinctive *whoof*, like an air-gun firing –

Dontmissdontmissdontmiss –

He twisted in midair, caught the end of the plank, and used the rebound to vault himself upwards –

Let's hear it for dreams, letting us do things we'd break our necks doing in real life.

He curled into a ball, flipped twice, and landed on his feet just in time to hold out a nonchalant palm for the lightsaber Emtoo had shot into the air.

Oh, I'm good.

The green blade flared. The guard who had prodded Drake off the plank now fell himself, screaming, into the mouth of the Sarlacc. Luna was struggling with another guard at the back of the skiff – Drake allowed himself one instant of worry for her as he engaged the rest of the guards.

Nah, she'll be fine. She's good at this.

He gave himself over to the sheer joy of fighting. His only regret was that the remaining guards didn't last nearly long enough. Only a few seconds later, he was untying large furry wrists. "Easy, Hairy," he coaxed, and the Wookiee relaxed. Drake finished with him and moved quickly to Ron.

A blast from the huge deck gun on the sail barge shook the skiff. Drake staggered, but remained upright. Then a scream from below nearly stopped his heart.

Luna!

But before he could do anything about her, an armored figure appeared on the side of the skiff, laser gun coming to bear.

Eat light, Boba Nott.

Drake hacked the bounty hunter's gun in half and lost his balance for a second as the sail barge fired again. "Hairy, you okay?" he heard Ron shout. "Where is he?"

Hairy howled, half answering Ron's question, half in pain.

"I'm okay, pal," Ron answered.

Good, they're fine. Drake straightened. *Now to take care of – ah!* While he'd been distracted, Boba Nott had fired a metallic cable from his sleeve, wrapping around Drake and pinning his arms to his sides.

Left my wrists free, though. Stupid. Drake quickly severed the cable with his lightsaber and dodged another blast from the deck gun. This one left Boba Nott unconscious. *Serve you right.*

"Drake!" screamed Luna from under the skiff.

Deviation, thought the distant Draco Black. *I'm the only one she shouldn't be calling.*

But he couldn't find it in him to be upset about it, not really. *Especially since I can't – look out!*

The other skiff, loaded with guards, was closing on them fast. Drake leapt over the rail and surrendered once more to the fighter's rush.

xXxXx

"Ron! Hairy?" shouted a female voice from somewhere below them.

"Luna!" Ron's eyes might not be functioning well, but he could see there were only a few figures left on the skiff, and Luna wasn't one of them. *She must have been knocked off, I'll have to help her, but I need something to fight with first.*

Hairy barked another direction, and Ron felt obediently forward a little – a little more –

There! The spear felt crude under his hand, he wished he had his blaster, but it was something to smack an enemy with –

Hairy howled desperately, a dire warning.

“Boba Nott? Boba Nott!” Ron turned frantically around. “Where?”

Behind him, he heard a thump, the rushing sound of a rocket pack, and a scream, dying away in the distance.

Hairy informed him that he’d just knocked the bounty hunter overboard into the Sarlacc’s mouth.

Ron grinned to himself. *Serves him right for collecting on me, the little son of a snitch.*

xXxXx

On the sail barge, Neenie’s composure snapped.

I have had enough.

She leapt onto the dais and looped her chain deftly around Dursley’s enormous neck. Before he could recover from his surprise, she had dived off the other side and was using her own weight to pull the chain tighter... tighter... tighter...

Dursley yowled and tried feebly to get his hands under the chain, but Neenie would not be denied. *You held me, you choked me, you petted me... this is nothing less than you deserve, you disgusting slimy animal.*

Dursley’s tail flailed, his eyes bulged, his tongue flopped out, then he went still. Neenie gave one last heave to make certain.

There. That’s done.

Then she realized the one flaw in her plan.

I am now chained to approximately one ton of dead slug.

xXxXx

“Luna, grab it!” Ron yelled, lowering the spear towards the blurred figure of the girl lying on the sand below.

“Lower it!” shouted Luna.

“I’m trying!” There were several other things Ron wanted to say, several of them profane, but he restrained himself.

The skiff rocked wildly as a major blast caught it. Ron lost his balance and fell, but his foot snagged on the deck railing. “Grab me, Hairy!” he shouted. “I’m slipping!”

He blinked furiously as he felt Hairy’s large hands close around his legs. Luna wasn’t where she had been – she was lower down, closer to the Sarlacc’s mouth –

He extended the spear again. “Grab it!” he shouted. “Luna! Grab it!” The spear moved without his moving it. “Almost! You almost got it!”

The skiff rocked again, and the other touch on the spear disappeared. “Hold it!” Luna called.

Ron caught his breath as Hairy steadied him. “Gently now,” he said in an almost conversational tone, lowering the spear once more. “All... all right.” Luna’s hand was around the spear. “Now easy, easy. Hold me, Hairy.”

A sudden scream from Luna told him something had gone wrong, and a pull against the spear told him what it must be – one of the Sarlacc’s tentacles had her, it was trying to drag her in. “Hairy!” Ron called, freeing one hand to reach up behind himself. “Hairy, give me the gun.” He felt its butt in his hand and brought it down to bear. “Don’t move, Luna.”

“No, wait, I thought you were blind!” Luna protested with a definite note of hysteria in her voice.

“It’s all right. Trust me. Don’t move.”

Luna sucked in air. “All right,” she answered, still sounding dubious. “A little higher – just a little higher...”

Ron readjusted the gun, squinting furiously – he could see the difference between the material of Luna’s trouser leg and the tentacle that held her – at least he hoped he could –

His finger tightened around the trigger, and an animal squeal from below told him his aim had been good. “Hairy, pull us up!” he shouted. “Come on!” He felt himself begin to rise. “Okay...” The pull stopped. “Up, Hairy, up!”

Hairy snarled something that even sounded rude in Wookiee.

xXxXx

Inside the sail barge, Neenie pulled her chain tight, and Emtoo fired a tiny laser gun into it, severing a link. A screech from nearby made them both look up. Threelo was busily tying Dursley's pet monkey-lizard, Salacious Crabbe, to a high beam.

Emtoo let out a long series of beeps and whistles, which Neenie knew meant "Wasn't I supposed to do that?"

"Sorry," Threelo apologized, hurrying over to them. "But I can't let it chew my eye out even for consistency's sake. I'm not quite that much of a wimp."

Neenie grinned at him before falling back into character. "Come on. We gotta get out of here quick."

On deck, Drake was demolishing guards left and right. "Get the gun!" he shouted when he saw Neenie. "Point it at the deck!"

Neenie jumped onto the gun platform and started it swiveling. *Oops, wrong way.* She flipped the switch, and the gun turned the other direction, pointing back at the deck of the sail barge.

"Emtoo, where are we going?" she heard Threelo say behind her. "I couldn't possibly juump!" The last word went up wildly, followed by an excited beep-whistle from Emtoo, as the two droids abandoned ship.

Drake leapt to the gun platform beside her. "Come on," he said, looping an arm around her waist with the hand that wasn't holding one of the rigging ropes from the sail barge's mast.

Ah-ha, Neenie said silently. **Right rope.**

Wrong movie. Drake pushed off, kicking over the trigger on the gun as he did. **Have I mentioned you look fabulous in that outfit?**

Shut up.

No, really you do. Makes me think of a little rhyme...

xXxXx

Thud.

"OW!"

Ron turned in confusion. As he recalled, Drake and Neenie's entrance was supposed to be graceful, done with flair. This... well, Neenie halfway over the railing and Drake sprawled on the deck clutching his jaw had something, but Ron didn't think it was flair.

"Princess Leia did *not* clobber Luke Skywalker with his own lightsaber!" Drake yelled, hauling himself to a sitting position as Hairy let go of Luna and turned to give Neenie a hand.

"Princess Leia never had cause like I did," Neenie snapped. "Let's go. And don't forget the droids."

"We're on our way," said Luna, going to the tiller.

"First she hits me, now she steals my lines," Drake grumbled, rubbing his chin. "I didn't think it was that bad."

"What did you say?" Ron asked as Neenie went to handle the electromagnet.

"What, you want me to get clobbered again?"

"Maybe. But mostly I want to know."

Drake looked around suspiciously, then leaned in close. "I said, 'Neenie, Neenie, metal bikini, how does your garden...'"

"How does her garden what?"

"That's where she hit me."

"*Serves you right,*" said Hairy from behind them, making them both jump.

"Oh, yeah?" Drake pulled himself upright. "Well, how about 'Hairy, Hairy, quite contrary'? You like that better? Huh?"

Hairy roared an answer. Ron burst out laughing.

"Didn't get that," said Drake, sounding puzzled.

Ron caught his breath enough to translate. "He said, 'You should be grateful I'm not actually who I look like.'"

"Why?"

"Wizards don't pull people's arms off when they're annoyed," Ron answered. "Wookiees are known to do that."

Drake sighed. "I think I need a new strategy, Emtoo," he said to the little droid, who had just come aboard and was currently venting sand out of all her compartments. "Let the Wookiee win."

Emtoo whistled in her *Told you so* pattern.

xXxXx

"Oh, crossing movies!" Danger held up her fist, thumb down. "Five points from Gryffindor!"

"Come on, love, it's the same series at least," Remus coaxed. "And they're not going to be able to stay entirely true to the original. Or do you really want to see how that would come out?"

"Well, I suppose it'd be interesting..."

"If entirely impossible," Aletha put in. "I need a quick break. Anyone else?"

"Five minute breather," Sirius called to the seven people on the screen.

"Aww!" Ginny protested from somewhere offstage. "You're never going to get to my part!"

"Really want to get furry, do you, Ginny?" Draco asked.

The skiff suddenly sprouted an eighth person, and then it was down to six, as two of them were over the side and wrestling in the sand. Remus chuckled, and Danger shut the curtains across the screen with a gesture.

"How are they going to handle the end?" Sirius asked, draping himself over the back of a seat. "Do you know?"

Remus shook his head. "Not a clue."

"All we know is, it's going to be fun," Danger finished.

"With these eight involved," said Aletha with an indulgent smile towards the hidden screen, "I think almost anything would be."

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 4: Diagogah

The lights flashed overhead. Remus looked up. "Time?" he asked the curtained screen.

"Time," Harry's voice answered. "We're all set back here."

"You know, it strikes me there are some bit parts in this," Sirius said quietly as the Pack-parents made their way back to their seats in the darkening theatre. "They could make them just the same as the movie, but that's no fun..."

Danger laughed. "You want to get into it, don't you, mangy mutt?"

"What's wrong with that? It looks like fun!"

"Nothing's wrong with that," said Aletha, chuckling. "It's just that you're a little old to be playacting..."

"You're never too old to have fun," Sirius said. "But of course, this all depends on one important question."

"What's that?" Remus asked.

Sirius looked at Danger. "Can you sneak us in?"

xXxXx

"I'll meet you back at the Fleet," Drake said into the comlink in his X-wing.

"Hurry," Neenie's voice crackled back. "The Alliance should be assembled by now."

"I will."

"Hey, Drake, thanks," Ron broke in. "Thanks for coming after me. Now I owe you one."

Drake grinned but didn't answer. *That's the way I like it, hothead.* His fingers danced over their controls, locking in his course.

Behind him, Emtoo beeped. Her translated message appeared on his computer screen.

"That's right, Emtoo," Drake said, pulling on a glove over his artificial hand. *Weird how it feels heavy, but at the same time, normal...* "We're going to the Diagogah system. I have a promise to keep... to an old friend."

Idly he wondered what Yoda would look like...

What you make him look like, moron. You're running this. With Neenie to help, of course, but a lot of it is you, and that scene's going to be all you. You could make him ten feet tall and bright red if you wanted.

The image was amusing, but he preferred the classic Yoda, personally.

The computer beeped, signaling that its computations were done. Drake pulled a lever to send the X-wing into hyperspace and sat back. *Time for the in-flight movie...*

The Imperial March began to play, and four squads of TIE fighters flew past on his viewscreen, escorting an Imperial shuttle towards the half-finished Death Star.

Not my first choice, but it's what comes next.

The scene changed to the interior of the Death Star, where Darth Malius in his black armor and the nervous-looking commander of the Death Star were just entering the shuttle bay. The Emperor's shuttle landed gently on the deck in the only clear space left by the thousands of troops drawn up at attention. A ramp hissed out, red-robed guards emerged to scan the area for potential threats, and finally, the Emperor himself walked slowly from the shuttle.

Well, that's different. Drake sat up straighter. The Emperor in the movies had been old, bent, and wrinkled. This Emperor was erect and smooth-skinned, with no visible signs of age on his face. As in the movie, he wore a hooded black robe, but this robe looked as if it were made of silk. Malius and the commander both knelt.

"Rise, my friend," said the Emperor in a smooth voice.

Malius rose to walk beside his master. "The Death Star will be completed on schedule," he promised in his mechanically booming voice.

The Emperor nodded as they passed the rows of troops. "You have done well, Lord Malius. And now I sense you wish to continue your search for young Skywalker."

"Yes, my Master," Malius admitted.

"Patience, my friend," said the Emperor idly. "In time, he will seek you out. And when he does, you must bring him before me. He has grown strong. Only together can we turn him to the dark side of the Force."

Malius inclined his helmeted head. "As you wish."

Drake snickered. *Wrong movie again.*

"Everything is proceeding as I have foreseen," said the Emperor, and turned his head as though seeking the source of some passing breeze. His red eyes met Drake's, and he began to laugh.

Drake jerked back. His screen went instantly black, then cleared to show the familiar starlines of hyperspace.

"That never happened," he muttered. "Never happened."

Just then, the alarm went off that meant they were almost to their destination, and coming out of hyperspace and landing took Drake's full attention.

After he'd parked the X-wing and extracted Emtoo, he set off for the house of the Jedi Master—

Mistress, whispered a voice.

What?

Jedi Mistress Gerta.

"You *have* to be kidding," Drake said, stopping in his tracks.

The scene blurred around him, and he was sitting inside the small mud hut. The creature which moved slowly across the floor nearby was the size and general shape he'd been expecting, but there the resemblance stopped. This creature had brown skin, not green, and there were curves under that Jedi robe that had never been there before.

"Hmm," said the creature in a voice he knew. "That face you make. Look I so old to young eyes?" There was a smile lurking on the oddly-shaped lips, a very familiar smile...

"No," Drake said, belatedly remembering his cue. "Of course not."

"I do, yes, I do!" the Jedi Mistress chortled. "Sick have I become. Old and weak." One hand came up to point a gnarled finger at him. "When nine hundred years old you reach, look as good you will not, hmm?" She chuckled at her own wit. "Soon will I rest. Yes, forever sleep. Earned it, I have." She hoisted herself onto her bed, panting a little with the effort.

You had better not mean that when this is over. "Mistress Gerta, you can't die," Drake said, putting a little of his true feeling into the line.

Gerta swung her feet onto the bed, then looked up at him and smiled. "Strong am I with the Force, but not that strong. Twilight is upon me, and soon night must fall. That is the way of things. The way of the Force."

"But I need your help," Drake coaxed. "I've come back to complete the training."

Gerta shook her head. "No more training do you require," she said, her eyes betraying the true feelings behind the scripted words. "Already know you that which you need."

Drake closed his eyes and opened them again. "Then I am an Auror," he said quietly.

"Ohhh." Gerta shook a finger at him. "Not yet. One thing remains. Malius. You must confront Malius. Then, only then, an Auror will you be. And confront him you will." She lay back on the pillow with a sigh.

"Mistress..." Drake wanted nothing more than to let this question die, but he had to know the truth. "Is Darth Malius my father?"

"Mmm." Gerta sighed again. "Rest I need." She turned on her side, away from him. "Yes, rest."

"Gerta, I must know."

A long pause.

"Your father he is."

Drake winced, feeling both the character's fresh pain at a supposed lie confirmed and his own ever-renewed pain at a detested truth reexposed.

"Told you, did he?" Gerta asked.

"Yes."

Gerta turned over again to look at him. "Unexpected this is," she said. "And unfortunate."

"Unfortunate that I know the truth?" Drake snapped.

No.” Gerta said. “Unfortunate that you need to face him...that incomplete was your training.” A momentary image of a snow-filled forest. “Not ready for the burden were you.”

“Well, I’m sorry,” Drake said sarcastically.

Gerta ignored the tone. “Remember, an Auror’s strength flows from the Force,” she murmured. “But beware. Anger, fear, aggression. The dark side are they.” Her small brown hand reached out to him, and Drake took it, accepting the small deviation for the sake of the comfort. “Once you start down the dark path, forever will it influence your destiny.”

I refuse to say ‘dominate,’ added a silent voice, since I don’t happen to believe it. One action will not taint your entire life. If you do have to do something terrible, you’ll never forget it—I hope—but it won’t ruin everything you’ve ever done.

Thanks. Better finish, though.

“Drake...” Gerta whispered. “Do not underestimate the power of the Emperor, or suffer your father’s fate, you will.”

Have you considered he’s probably thrilled by his fate?

If you make me laugh in the middle of this speech, I’ll hurt you. “Drake, when gone am I, the last of the Aurors will you be. Drake, the Force runs strong in your family...pass along what you have learned...” Gerta’s voice was breathy and cracking, but still audible. “Drake...there is...another...Sky...walker...”

Her hand went limp in his, her eyes fell shut.

She’s still alive, Drake reminded himself. *This is only a game, a play.* Laying her hand gently on her chest, he watched the small brown body disappear into the air.

But it still hurts.

He stood up and went outside to the X-wing and Emtoo, who beeped at him and rolled up next to him, pressing her metal body against his legs. He knelt and put his arms around her. “I can’t do it, Emtoo,” he said. “I can’t go on alone.”

“Gerta will always be with you,” said a familiar voice.

Drake turned to see a shining form approaching. “Albu-Wan!” he said, half in welcome, half accusingly. “Why didn’t you tell me? You said Malius betrayed and murdered my father.”

“Your father was seduced by the dark side of the Force,” old Brian Dunobi answered, seating himself on a convenient log. “He ceased to be Lucas Skywalker and became Darth Malius. When that happened, the good man who was your father was destroyed. So what I have told you was true...from a certain point of view.”

Drake snorted. “A certain point of view,” he repeated derisively.

“Drake, you’re going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view,” said Dunobi gently. “I don’t blame you for being angry. If I was wrong in what I did, it certainly wouldn’t have been for the first time. You see, what happened to your father was my fault.”

Interested in spite of himself, Drake turned to look back at Dunobi. Emtoo’s wheels whirred as she too drew nearer, to offer the comfort of her presence to Drake, but also to hear the story.

“Lucas was a good friend,” Dunobi began. “When I first knew him, he was already a great pilot. But I was amazed how strongly the Force was with him. I took it upon myself to train him as an Auror. I thought that I could instruct him just as well as Gerta. I was wrong. My pride has had terrible consequences for the galaxy.”

Ego-boosting much? Drake thought “out loud.”

Oh, be quiet, his Pack-mother shot back. **It wasn’t worth the Muppet costume.**

“Is there still good in him?” Drake asked. He knew the script called for a statement, a declaration, but he wasn’t sure enough to make one.

“I thought he could be turned back to the light side,” Dunobi said. “It couldn’t be done. He is more machine now than man. Twisted and evil.”

So true. “I can’t do it, Brian,” Drake said.

Dunobi’s eyes twinkled. “You...cannot escape your destiny,” he said, putting a delicate spin on the words to make it clear he wasn’t sure he believed what he was saying.

Wait a second—that’s awfully advanced stuff for just a dream-figure to be doing...

Ten points to the boy with the robot under his arm, said Danger’s voice. **Move along, now, time’s a-wasting...**

“I tried to stop him once,” Drake said truthfully, moderating his tone now that he knew he was talking to a real person. “I couldn’t do it.”

“Malius humbled you when first you met him, Drake, but that experience was part of your training.” Dunobi’s tone was as polite as ever it was in real

life. "It taught you, among other things, the value of patience. Had you not been so impatient to defeat Malius then, you could have finished your training here with Gerta. You would have been prepared."

"But I had to help my friends!"

"And did you help them?" Dunobi asked delicately. "It was they who had to save you. You achieved little by rushing back prematurely, I fear."

"I found out Darth Malius was my father," said Drake, and let the words and the tone say what he couldn't. *I found out I have some of him in me. I found out we think alike about some things. I found out I can be like him if I'm not careful.*

"To be an Auror, Drake, you must confront and then go beyond the dark side," Dunobi reminded him, "the side your father couldn't get past. Impatience is the easiest door for you, like your father. Only, your father was seduced by what he found on the other side of the door, and you have held firm." His smile was quietly proud. "You're no longer so reckless now, Drake. You are strong and patient. And now, you must face Darth Malius again."

"I can't kill my own father!" The cry came straight from the heart of Draco Black.

Dunobi did not move. "Then the Emperor has already won."

"Gerta spoke of another," Drake said, snatching at even the flimsiest of hopes.

"The other she spoke of is your twin sister."

"But—I have no sister!" *And even if I did, I'm not going to load this onto her.*

Dunobi shook his head. "To protect you both from the Emperor, you were hidden from your father when you were born. The Emperor knew, as I did, if Lucas were to have any offspring, they would be a threat to him. That is the reason why your sister remains safely anonymous."

Dunobi hadn't named her, but anonymous his sister could never now be to Drake. He had held her in his arms, breathed the same breath she breathed. "Neenie," he said with certainty. "Neenie's my sister."

"Your insight serves you well," said Dunobi with a trace of sadness. "Bury your feelings deep down, Drake. They do you credit, but they could be made to serve the Emperor."

"I will never serve him," Drake said, knowing he was deviating but not caring. "But I won't kill my father, either."

"You may not have a choice," Dunobi said solemnly. "If it is to be him or you, I know which I would prefer."

Emtoo beeped emphatically in agreement.

"I know." Drake looked away. "But I don't want to think about it."

"Your mind is your own." Dunobi rose. "Unless you happen to be in contact with your sister. Hurry back, Drake. They will need you."

"I know." Drake listened to the old man walking away, felt the pull of the story to move on, but he needed to stay where he was for a moment.

I mean it. I don't want to kill my father. I don't want to kill anyone, but especially not my father. I know what he's done, and what he'd do if he got the chance, and maybe he deserves to die—all right, not maybe, he does deserve to die—but I don't want to be the one to do it.

But the way his own story was trending made that seem more and more likely.

And if it does come down to him or me...

He shook off his thoughts and stood up. "Come on, Emtoo," he said. "We've got a moon to run around on, and a whole bunch of cute little furballs to hug."

Somewhere offstage, Ginny humphed loudly.

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 5: Approach

Sirius scowled at his reflection in the mirror.

"What's wrong?" Remus asked from across the room.

"I'm a fish."

"You wanted to be part of it," Aletha pointed out, adjusting her white gown.

"I'm a FISH!"

Remus traded looks with Aletha. "I'll switch if you want," he said.

Sirius perked up, which looked distinctly odd on a tentacled face. "Really?"

"Yes."

"Hmmm..." Sirius tilted his head to one side. "Fish or cool guy who blows things up... what a hard decision."

Remus tapped Danger's mind to let her know she was needed. "The fish gets to blow things up too."

"Not by himself."

"Point." Sirius brightened as Danger, back in her proper form, stepped into their small dressing room. "Ah-ha, just the person we need to see! Moony and I are swapping roles."

"So I heard." Danger raised her hands, pointed one at each man, and closed them, then swiftly crossed her fists. Remus shivered as his "costume" was yanked off him and Sirius' put on.

Strange. I'd always wondered what it would be like to see out the sides of my head...wait, no, I haven't actually.

He felt Danger helping him, nudging the Mon Calamari's eyes a little forward so that he could see like a human. **Thanks.**

You're welcome. Shall we go surprise the cubs?

We?

I'm here. I might as well take another speaking role.

If you want to. Remus chuckled deep in his throat. **This is actually quite a lot of fun.**

You sound surprised...

xXxXx

"Well, look at you," Ron said, grinning at Luna. "A general, huh?"

"Oh, well, someone must have told them about my maneuver at the Battle of Taashill," Luna said, stroking her new insignia.

Ron shook his head. "Don't look at me, lady. I just said you were a fair pilot. I didn't know they were lookin' for somebody to *lead* this crazy attack."

Luna smiled. "I'm surprised they didn't ask you to do it," she said.

"Well, who says they didn't. But I ain't crazy." Ron ignored Neenie's snort beside him. "You're the respectable one, remember?"

The room fell silent. Luna made a small noise of appreciation and seated herself. Ron looked up to see a tall, serene, dark-skinned woman in white preparing to address the room.

Well, that's different.

"The Emperor has made a critical error," said Mon Letha, "and the time for our attack has come." She activated a small projector beside her, bringing to life a projection of the moon Hogwor, the Death Star orbiting it, and the deflector shield around it. "The data brought to us by the Bothan spies pinpoints the exact location of the Emperor's new battle station. We also know that the weapon systems of this Death Star are not yet operational. With the Imperial Fleet spread throughout the galaxy in a vain effort to engage us, it is relatively unprotected. But most important of all, we've learned that the Emperor himself is personally overseeing the final stages of the construction of this Death Star."

The room erupted into talk, and Hairy barked in amazement. Ron looked from Neenie to Luna, seeing the same surprise and opportunism on both women's faces, and even on the metal face of Threelo beyond Neenie. He agreed with it wholeheartedly. *We'd be stupid to let this pass.*

Mon Letha's serenity flickered for a moment, tempered by sorrow. "Many Bothans died," she said softly, "to bring us this information."

Doubly stupid, in that case.

"Admiral Lupar, please." Mon Letha stepped back, and the Mon Calamari admiral took the floor.

"You can see here the Death Star orbiting the forest moon of Hogwor," he began, pointing out the important areas of the projection.

"Is that who I think it is?" Ron asked out of the corner of his mouth as Lupar explained the energy shield which protected the Death Star, and how it could be knocked out by removing the generator station on the moon.

"Yep." Neenie was grinning. "They all wanted to play too."

"Once the shield is down," Lupar was saying, "our cruisers will create a perimeter, while the fighters fly into the superstructure and attempt to knock out the main reactor. General Calrissian has volunteered to lead the fighter attack."

Ron looked over at Luna. "Good luck," he said.

Luna inclined her head in thanks.

"You're gonna need it," Ron added under his breath.

Neenie shoved his arm affectionately. "She's very brave, I think," she said.

"General Dadine," Admiral Lupar handed off the floor.

The female general shook back her short, bushy hair. "We have stolen a small Imperial shuttle," she said. "Disguised as a cargo ship, and using a secret Imperial code, a strike team will land on the moon and deactivate the shield generator."

"Sounds dangerous," said Threelo worriedly. "No wonder *she's* telling us about it."

"I wonder who they found to pull that off?" Neenie said, in a tone that suggested she was losing her battle with laughter.

General Dadine shot Neenie a look. "General Solo, is your strike team assembled?" she said loudly.

Neenie stopped laughing and stared at Ron, her surprise changing into admiration. Ron felt his face starting to heat up. "Uh, my team's ready," he said quickly. "I don't have a command crew for the shuttle."

"*Oh yeah?*" said Hairy in Wookiee.

"Well, it's gonna be rough, pal," Ron reminded him. "I didn't want to speak for you."

"*Try and keep me away.*"

Ron looked back at General Dadine. "That's one," he said.

"Er, *General*," Neenie said, half-teasing with her use of his title. "Count me in."

"I'm with you, too!" called a voice from the back of the room. Rebels parted, and there stood Drake, Emtoo by his side.

Neenie was on her feet in a second, and hugged Drake happily as soon as he was in reach. He seemed to be holding on a little longer than he had before, Ron noted...

Hairy snickered and made an improper comment in Wookiee. Ron returned it by way of hand signals.

Drake pulled away enough to look into Neenie's eyes. She looked back, puzzled. "What is it?"

"Ask me again sometime," Drake said, letting her go and hugging Luna instead. Ron sighed and joined the line to greet his friend.

Behind Ron, Emtoo beeped happily at Threelo.

"'Exciting' is hardly the word I would use," said the taller droid fussily.

xXxXx

Hairy settled into the copilot's seat and moaned a protest. It was too short, too narrow, and too low, but it was going to have to do. Trying to put it out of his mind, he started investigating the controls.

Out the front viewscreen, he could see Ron arguing with Luna, pointing at the *Millennium Hawk*. Their conversation played in his mind as he flipped switches and waited for their telltales to light green.

"Look, I want you to take her," Ron said. "I mean it. Take her. You need all the help you can get. She's the fastest ship in the fleet."

"All right," Luna said. "But I know what she means to you. I'll take good care of her. She won't get a scratch. All right?"

Right." Ron turned to enter the shuttle, then turned back. "I got your promise, now. Not a scratch."

Luna laughed. "Would you get going, you pirate?"

Ron saluted her, and she returned it. "Good luck," she said, not as a wish but as a promise.

"You, too," Ron said, and started up the ramp.

Hairy brought his mind back to the cockpit. Drake, behind him, had obviously been working to some purpose, as Hairy could hear engines lighting. He turned his attention to the piloting controls again. *All right, this is thrust, this is roll, that must be yaw..*

"You got her warmed?" Ron asked as he came in.

"Yeah, she's coming up," Drake answered.

"*I hate this seat,*" Hairy said in a long grumbling groan.

"Yeah, I don't think the Empire had Wookiees in mind when they designed her, Hairy," Ron agreed, taking the other pilot's chair.

Drake flicked his fingers at the seat, and Hairy sighed in relief as he felt it mold to his body. "*Thanks,*" he barked, slapping the switches for startup of the main engines.

Neenie entered the cabin and sat down beside Drake, then leaned forward to follow Ron's line of sight towards the *Millennium Hawk*. "Hey, are you awake?" she asked softly.

"Yeah." Ron didn't turn to acknowledge her, but his eyes flicked her way for a moment before returning to his ship. "I just got a funny feeling. Like I'm not going to see her again."

Hairy rolled his eyes, but let them rest longingly on the *Hawk* as well. *What would it be like if this was real? he wondered. If we were space explorers, moving from planet to planet, living by our wits and fighting the evil Empire...*

"Come on, General, let's move," Neenie said.

"Right." Ron shook off his daze. "Hairy, let's see what this pile of junk can do."

Hairy started the main thrusters to lift them off the floor of the docking bay. *Really, though, we are,* he mused. *We have to move from place to place so we don't get tracked down, we're fighting an evil person and his followers, and he's pretty well entrenched by this point. Might as well be the Empire.*

"Ready, everybody?" Ron asked.

"All set," said Drake.

"Here we go again," said Threelo in an inappropriately chipper voice.

Emtoo whistled her agreement.

"All right, hang on," said Ron, and spun the shuttle end for end in preparation for launch.

xXxXx

Drake let his eyes drift shut as the shuttle traveled through hyperspace, even though he was pretty sure what he'd see.

The spacious throne room on the Death Star held only a few people, Imperial functionaries and the like. The Emperor's throne was turned away from them, facing the windows which looked out on the vast Empire he ruled. Darth Malius was approaching the chair cautiously.

So his place isn't quite as secure as he likes to make us think it is. Good to know

Malius remained upright until the Emperor was facing him completely, then bowed. "What is thy bidding, my Master?" he asked.

"Send the fleet to the far side of Hogwor. There it will stay until called for."

"What of the Rebel fleet massing near Surrust?"

"It is of no concern." The Emperor smiled. "Soon the Rebellion will be crushed and young Skywalker will be one of us." His eyes moved away from Malius' helmet-shielded face and met Drake's, and his smile widened slightly. "Your work here is finished, my friend," he said without looking away from Drake. "Go out to the command ship and await my orders."

"Yes, my Master."

Drake pulled out of the dream with a gasp. They had already left hyperspace and were cruising towards the forest moon.

"You all right?" Neenie asked quietly.

Fine." Drake breathed deeply, trying to feel the Force, to let it calm his racing heart. The Emperor wasn't going to win. He knew that already.

But do you? his doubts whispered. *You've changed things. You plan to change more. Are you really willing to bet your life, and everyone else's here, that your father— your father, not Luke Skywalker's—will suddenly turn good?*

Drake shook his head and concentrated on the Force, sending it flowing through him, in and out, giving him all the power he could ever need. As from a great distance, he heard Ron's voice. "...doesn't work, we're gonna need to get outta here pretty quick, Hairy."

Hairy's agreement was fairly profane. *He likes being able to say what he wants without anyone else understanding him*, Drake thought, starting to smile. *Except, of course, that we all can.*

Emtoo beeped querulously. "I am certainly not translating that for you," said Threelo primly. "It would short out half your circuits, and Mon Letha would never forgive me."

Well, almost all. Drake opened his eyes and caught Neenie smiling at him, and he had to smile back. *There. Better.*

"We have you on our screen now," said a voice garbled by comlink. "Please identify."

"Shuttle Nontritetrum, requesting deactivation of the deflector shield," Ron said glibly.

"Shuttle Nontritetrum, transmit the clearance code for shield passage."

"Transmission commencing," said Ron, and flipped a switch. The warble of a high-speed transmission began.

"Now we find out if that code is worth the price we paid for it," Neenie muttered.

"It'll work," said Ron with confidence. "It'll work."

I hate it when you say that, Harry whined.

Drake looked out the viewscreen at the passing Imperial traffic—TIEs, mid-sized cruisers, Star Destroyers, and one enormous Super Star Destroyer. Still open to the Force, he absorbed the feelings and thoughts of those on board them—

And pulled back abruptly as he encountered an all-too-familiar presence. "Malius's on that ship," he said, his eyes on the Super Star Destroyer.

"Now don't get jittery, Drake. There are a lot of command ships." But Ron too was eyeing the ship nervously. "Keep your distance, though, Hairy. But don't look like you're trying to keep your distance."

Howthe hell do I do that? Hairy demanded with some justice.

"I don't know! Fly casual!"

"I'm endangering the mission," Drake muttered, realizing Malius must feel his presence just as he, Drake, felt the older man's. "I shouldn't have come."

"It's your imagination, kid," Ron said firmly. "Come on. Let's keep a little optimism here."

I'd prefer certainty, myself, Hairy barked, edging the shuttle a little farther from the Super Star Destroyer.

As Drake closed his eyes, he felt a hand close around his, and another set of eyes besides his own watched Darth Malius slowly turn, then stride with ringing steps down the row of controllers to the one who had spoken with Ron. "Where is that shuttle going?" Malius demanded.

"Shuttle Nontritetrum, what is your cargo and destination?" the controller asked.

Drake blinked. *That's not—*

Why, yes, it is, Neenie said brightly. How nice of you to notice.

Mentally, Drake rolled his eyes.

"Parts and technical crew for the forest moon," Ron's voice answered through the comlink.

"Do they have a code clearance?" Malius asked.

"It's an older code, sir, but it checks out. I was about to clear them."

Malius turned to look at where Drake felt himself to be standing. Quickly, he moved to shield Neenie, praying that the man would only sense the one presence he expected.

"Shall I hold them, sir?" the controller asked.

"No," Malius said, turning back. "Leave them to me. I will deal with them myself."

"As you wish, my lord."

Drake dived for his body as Malius came towards him, feeling Neenie do the same. **I wish they'd stop saying that**, he grumbled, opening his eyes.

It doesn't hurt you, and it's not as if they did it on purpose. Get over it. Neenie's hand withdrew.

Ron's hands were poised above the flight controls. "They're not going for it, Hairy..."

"Shuttle Nontritetrum," the controller's voice crackled over the comlink, "deactivation of the shield will commence immediately. Follow your present course."

Everyone let out a breath at once in the cabin, even Drake, though the knot of worry in his stomach didn't leave. *They're letting us get there. They're going to find us and stop us on the moon itself. And then he'll come for me...*

"*What were you saying?*" Hairy inquired.

"Okay, I told you it was going to work!" Ron said cheerily. "No problem!"

Drake thought the shuttle might have shifted a little from the weight of everyone rolling their eyes at once.

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 6: Separated

“So things are going smoothly,” General Dadine said to Mon Letha as they watched the Rebel fleet prepare to set out.

“Yes, everything’s going smoothly.” Mon Letha nodded to a pilot as he hurried past. “Perhaps a bit too smoothly.”

General Dadine turned as she half-caught movement behind her. “General Calrissian, a moment of your time?”

“Of course, General Dadine.” Luna approached the two women, her cloak flowing behind her.

“Any... word of our travelers?” Dadine moved her hands alongside her eyes.

“They’re still all right,” Luna answered, her eyes shifting until she seemed to stare through the hull of the ship. “Would you care to see for yourself?”

“Can you do that?” Mon Letha asked.

“I can. So could the General, if she wants to.”

“That’s true, what am I thinking of?” Dadine smacked herself on her forehead. “Getting too into my role.”

“It’s seductive,” Mon Letha said musingly, “this feeling that the ending is known and everything will be all right. That your course is charted and safe.” She smiled. “It could get suffocating very easily, but it makes a nice change.”

“And things will change,” Luna said. “A lot of things will change.”

“Is that your common sense talking, or something else?” General Dadine asked.

“A little of both. Shall I let you see them now?”

“Wait another moment,” Mon Letha said, picking up a datapad from the console next to her. “I’ll link it through to Commander Nigilles, so he can watch as well.”

“And Admiral Lumar is on his way.” Dadine grinned as the Mon Calamari made his way across the flight deck, the pilots saluting as he passed. “I think I’ll start calling him that at home.”

“And see how long you live?” inquired Mon Letha dryly as Luna hid a smile.

“Something like that. General Calrissian, if you would do the honors?”

Luna faced the bulkhead beside her, which was simple unornamented metal. Raising her hands with palms outwards and fingers extended, she slid them apart. A section of the bulkhead turned first transparent, to show the lines of hyperspace outside, then green with the trees of the forest moon of Hogwor, with the Imperial shuttle the strike team had flown sitting abandoned in the woods.

The vantage point changed to show a long line of camouflage-dressed Rebels moving quietly through the woods. The watchers leaned forward as one as the leaders of the line came into view.

xXxXx

“Oh, I told you it was dangerous out here,” said Threelo worriedly, peering forward at the hill where Hairywolf and Princess Neenie had just dropped to their knees, signaling everyone else to do the same.

Emtoo beeped quietly and rolled back and forth on her wheels.

“Can you really?” Threelo looked at his little counterpart with fascination. “I never knew that... how, exactly?”

Emtoo’s dome popped open, and out shot a small projector, the same one she’d used to display Princess Neenie’s repeated plea for help—

Would have used, Neville reminded himself. *We never did A New Hope. And this isn’t real. We’re playing parts.*

But as he turned his attention to the image Emtoo was projecting of Ron Solo and Master Drake joining Princess Neenie and Hairywolf at the top of the hill, the personality of the fussy android N-3LO wrapped around him again without his noticing.

xXxXx

“Shall we try and go around?” Neenie asked doubtfully, staring down at the two Imperial stormtroopers in their white armor.

“It’ll take time,” said Ron. “This whole party’ll be for nothing if they see us.” His tone made it clear he didn’t see why they couldn’t use more direct methods.

Neenie waved to the strike team to tell them to stay put, then started down the hill cautiously, Hairy, Ron, and Drake behind her.

Hairy and I'll take care of this," Ron said when they reached the edge of the clearing where the stormtroopers were talking. "You stay here."

"Quietly," Drake cautioned, catching Ron's sleeve as he went past. "There might be more of them out there."

Ron grinned. "Hey...it's me."

Drake and Neenie split an exasperated look between them and touched wrists. **My point exactly**, said two voices at once.

They watched Ron sneak up on one of the troopers—Hairy, a forest creature by nature, had vanished in the trees, with only the occasional gleam of sunlight on fur to betray his location—another two seconds and they'd be in the clear—

A sharp snap as a twig broke under Ron's boot. The first trooper whirled, combat reflexes shoving Ron into a tree. "Go for help!" he shouted to his friend. "Go!"

The second trooper snatched up one of the broomsticks leaning against a nearby tree and shot off through the forest. Hairy stood up and picked him off with a bolt from his bowcaster. Ron and the first trooper, meanwhile, seemed to have forgotten about their weapons, as they were busily punching at each other.

"Great," Drake said, standing up. "Come on."

Neenie, blaster in her hand, followed him towards the fight, then stopped and turned. "Over there!" she shouted. "Two more of them!"

The scouts, good Imperial troopers, straddled their brooms and kicked off rather than stopping to help their friend.

"I see them—" Drake turned to see Neenie running for the other broomstick. "Wait, Neenie!"

Neenie whirled the broom like a staff, leapt aboard it, and pushed off. Drake caught hold of the twigs and pulled himself on just in time. Ron flipped his opponent into a tree and looked up to see his friends disappearing in the distance. "Hey, wait!" he yelled after them.

Hairy sniggered.

Ron glowered. "Shut up, furball."

xXxXx

Neenie wove the broom in and out of the trees with more dexterity than she ever showed—

Where?

Not now, Drake's mental voice snapped at her. **Move closer!**

Back seat flyer, Neenie grouched, leaning farther forward. **We're double-loaded here, you know.**

All right, let's fix that. Get along the one that just scraped his twigs on the tree.

Neenie swooped the broom to one side and brought it up alongside one of the troopers. Before he could react, Drake was on the broom with him—

And then the trooper wasn't on the broom anymore.

"There," Drake shouted, swinging his leg over the handle. "Happy?"

"Very. Let's get him."

They both leaned forward and shot off after the remaining scout.

xXxXx

Commander Sirius Nigilles frowned at the tiny moving images on the screen of his datapad. "Why are they riding broomsticks?" he wondered aloud.

"Administrative decision," said Mon Letha's voice from the audio hookup. "I wasn't involved."

"I wasn't asking you."

"I don't know either," said General Dadine. "You'll have to ask them, when they get back."

"If they get back." The commander swore as the two tiny Rebels shot past two more Imperial scouts, likewise mounted on broomsticks. "That's not good..."

xXxXx

Drake's broom shuddered. He glanced over his shoulder and cursed under his breath—more scouts behind them, one of which had just shot him in the twigs. "Keep on that one!" he shouted. "I'll take these two!"

Neenie gave him a curt nod.

Drake hauled back on his broom's handle. Neenie, then his pursuers, whizzed past him like blaster bolts. Pulling his own blaster from his pocket—*not strictly regulation for the role, but necessary*—he threw himself forward on the handle and opened fire on the two scouts ahead.

This is probably not Auror-like of me, but... die ! Die! Die!

He grinned as the twigs of one broom ahead caught fire and the broomstick swerved into a tree.

One down, one to go.

xXxXx

Neenie whipped her broom in and out of the trees.

Can't beat him on speed alone... what if I surprise him?

She climbed steeply, looping up and around, her blaster ready in her hand. *Almost there... wait for it... now!* Opening fire, she scored a glancing hit on the handle of the trooper's broom, making it glow orange. *Another one like that and I've got him...*

The trooper pulled a blaster of his own and fired back. Neenie dodged the first shot, but the second caught her twigs on fire. She dived and leaped clear of the broom just as it smashed against a tree and burst into flames.

That could have gone better.

The trooper, still flying at full speed, laughed aloud. Then he turned to see a very large tree directly in his path.

His fiery crash was larger than Neenie's had been.

Though it could have gone worse as well.

Neenie flopped down in the grass with a sigh.

Being lost and alone on an enemy moon is hardly good, though.

A vague thought or memory niggled at her, seeming to say that if she wanted companionship, all she had to do was wait...

She snorted. *So now I think I can see the future. What's next? I learn to use the Force like Drake? Not likely.*

xXxXx

Drake sideswiped the last remaining trooper, who slammed him back.

You want to fight dirty? I'll show you fighting dirty!

Drake went to haul his broom upwards for a diving attack—

And couldn't.

Forceballs—our twigs! They're jammed together!

He yanked at his broom's handle, but its twigs remained firmly entwined with the trooper's.

And here comes a BIG FREAKING TREE—

Drake dived off to one side, turned his fall into a shoulder roll, and came up with his lightsaber in his hands. Picking off blaster bolts, he stared down the trooper, who had decided to challenge him head-on. *That's right, bring it here...*

At the last possible second, Drake jumped, assisting his legs with the Force. He cleared the trooper easily, turned as he came down—

And slashed off the entire twig end of the broom.

The broom's handle did two barrel rolls before screwing itself into a nearby snag. The trooper flew a little farther without it before slamming his head against a stump and collapsing limply to the ground.

Drake sagged. *Phew*

Don't think I want to do that again.

xXxXx

Hairy claw-combed some of his fur, growling anxiously to himself. Ron paced back and forth, trying not to feel the eyes of the strike team on him. Drake and Neenie were celebrities—the last, or first, of the Auror Knights and the princess from the ruined world of Maraudaar—no one would ever

forgive him if they got hurt or captured or killed on a mission he was leading, and never mind that he'd never forgive himself...

Emtoo, her scanner out, beeped in excitement. "General Solo, somebody's coming!" Threelo translated.

Ron had his blaster out before the first word had left Threelo's metal lips. Hairy's bowcaster and the weapons of the rest of the team were up and poised not a second later.

The person who stepped out of the bushes noticed the twenty-odd blasters pointed at him, but shrugged as if he were too tired to care.

"Drake!" Ron said thankfully.

Pulling off his helmet, Drake sank to a convenient rock and leaned back against a tree trunk, eyes closed.

Ron looked the way his friend had come, but no more sounds were audible. "Where's Neenie?" he demanded.

Drake's eyes shot open. "What, she didn't come back?"

"I thought she was with you!"

"We got separated." Drake heaved himself back to his feet. "We'd better go look for her."

Ron nodded, then turned to Colonel Boot, his second-in-command on the strike team. "Take the squad ahead. We'll meet at the shield generator at 0300."

"Come on, Emtoo, we'll need your scanners," said Drake, patting the little droid's head.

"Don't worry, Master Drake, we know what to do," said Threelo importantly. "And you thought it was pretty here," he said in an undertone to Emtoo. "Ugh!"

The two groups moved off in different directions.

xXxXx

Neenie awakened. Something was poking her. Words half-formed in her mind... *Drake, cut it out... Hairy, don't...*

But Drake was too old to play silly games like poking her while she slept, and besides, he still thought of her as a princess somewhere deep inside. He'd never do that. And Hairy—if Hairy poked her, she'd probably have a broken rib...

Something's not right here.

The poking resumed, and her thoughts vanished as she opened her eyes.

A small, reddish-brown-furred creature with a spear jumped back, holding it out defensively in front of—

Why do I want to say herself?

Slowly, the point of the spear came around, until it was resting against Neenie's skin. "Cut it out!" she said angrily, pushing the spear away and standing up. The creature scuttled back again, staring at her.

Ewok, Neenie remembered from the briefing. *One of the many indigenous species of Hogwor, one of the reasons it was declared a Sanctuary in the first place. Sentient, but primitive.* "I'm not gonna hurt you," she said gently.

"Chikka wabo ee gooah," said the Ewok, sounding unconvinced.

Neenie shrugged and sat down on a fallen log, wincing as she discovered a new bruise with every movement. "Well, looks like I'm stuck here," she said, looking around at the wreckage of broomsticks around her. "Trouble is, I don't know where here is." She glanced over at the Ewok, still watching her warily. "Well, maybe you can help me." She patted the log beside her. "Come on, sit down."

The Ewok growled, holding up her spear.

"I promise I won't hurt you," Neenie said impatiently. "Now come here. Look." She placed a hand against her chest. "Neenie. I'm Neenie. Now you say it. Neenie." She drew out the sounds. "Neee-neee."

"Neeee?" said the Ewok questioningly.

"Yes. Neenie. Now you." Neenie repeated her motion. "Neenie." She extended her hand slowly toward the Ewok, keeping her palm open and unthreatening. "You?"

The Ewok advanced towards Neenie's open hand, reached out her own, and touched it lightly with just the tips of her furred fingers. "Chinna," she said, bringing her hand back against her own chest, then stretching it out again. "Neee-nee."

"Yes. That's right." Neenie reached into her pocket and pulled out a ration bar. "You want something to eat?"

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 7: Reunited

Neenie held out a piece of ration bar to Chinna. "That's right," she coaxed as the Ewok moved closer, "come on."

"Seezyu ga vootha," said Chinna, clambering up on the log and taking the ration bar from Neenie's hand. Neenie took a bite herself, then pulled off her helmet.

"Gah!" Chinna scooted back, eyes wide, her spear out in front of her. "Datse cari elma elma atsa!"

Neenie hid a smile. "Look, it's a hat," she said, holding it out so Chinna could see it. "It's not gonna hurt you. You're a jittery little thing, aren't you?"

"Zoh udju beef anith incoo eachu," Chinna said, sidling distrustfully up to the helmet. Then her ears perked. "Too innis cummins," she whispered, her head turning towards the undergrowth in front of them. "Hie towmo..."

"What is it?" Neenie asked.

A blaster bolt sizzled past them and hit the log.

That would be what. Neenie tumbled backwards off the log, pulling her own blaster as she went. Chinna had disappeared completely. Another shot came from the same direction. Neenie squinted, trying to make something out. *Who's shooting—*

A slight noise behind her made her turn her head carefully. A stormtrooper had his blaster pointed straight at her head. "Freeze!" he barked.

She froze, hands where he could see them.

"Come on, get up," the trooper said, prodding her with his gun, his other hand out. She gave him her blaster as another trooper appeared out of the woods. "Go get your ride," her captor ordered, "and take her back to base."

The second trooper snapped off a salute. "Yes, sir!"

Movement near her feet made Neenie look down. Chinna was crouched under the log, her spear at the ready. "Cotcha!" she cried, stabbing the stormtrooper's shin with it.

The trooper looked down. "What the—"

Neenie snatched up the nearest thick branch and slammed it across the back of his head, diving after his blaster as it fell from his nerveless hand. The other trooper, already mounted on his broom, kicked off from the ground. Neenie caught him with a quick shot over the tree trunk, then swore under her breath as he collided with the other broomstick, setting it on fire.

I could have gotten back to the others that way...at least I'm still alive, and free.

Chinna slid out from under the log. "Eura koods tafvae ter," she said in awe, looking at the downed trooper.

"Thanks," Neenie said, motioning Chinna closer. "Come on, let's get out of here." *Where there's two troopers, there will be more, especially when they don't report in...*

Chinna grabbed Neenie's hand. "Gumoo itmi, yub yub," she said. "Yub yub!"

Neenie hid another smile as she was led off into the underbrush.

I think she's having too much fun with that line.

xXxXx

Darth Malius approached the Emperor aboard the Death Star.

"I told you to stay on the command ship," the Emperor said, a bit of heat penetrating his usually cold voice.

"A small Rebel force has penetrated the shield and landed on Hogwor," Darth Malius reported.

"Yes, I know," the Emperor said calmly.

Darth Malius took a deeper breath than usual. "My son is with them."

"Are you sure?"

"I have felt him, my Master."

"Strange, that I have not." The Emperor steepled his fingers. "I wonder if your feelings on this matter are clear, Lord Malius."

Malius raised his helmeted head. "They are clear, my Master."

"Then you must go to the Sanctuary Moon and wait for them."

Malius took a step back, surprised. "*He will come to me ?*"

"I have foreseen it," the Emperor said with a small measure of satisfaction in his tone. "His compassion for..." He paused, looking thoughtful. "...for his friends will be his undoing. He will come to you, and then you will bring him before me."

Malius bowed. "As you wish."

xXxXx

"Drake! Drake!"

Drake scooped up the padded helmet he'd last seen on Neenie's head and hurried towards Ron's voice. Hairy, Threelo, and Emtoo were all standing around something with Ron—

A charred and destroyed broom. All too familiar a sight near here.

"Oh, Master Drake," said Threelo worriedly as he caught sight of what Drake was holding.

"There's two more wrecked broomsticks back there," Drake said, pointing. "And I found this." He tossed the helmet to Ron.

"I'm afraid," Threelo said, fidgeting nervously, "that Emtoo's sensors can find no trace of Princess Neenie."

"I hope she's all right," Ron said, running his hand along the inside of the helmet.

Hairy sniffed the air and growled. *Time to be an idiot*, Drake translated. He grinned and winked at Hairy, who barked at him, then started off in the direction of the smell.

"What, Hairy?" Ron said, turning to watch his friend go. "What? Hairy!" He followed at a half-run to keep up with Hairy's longer striders, Drake and the two droids behind him, Emtoo whistling nervously as she rolled.

Hairy hurried up to a stake in the ground with a tiny, shining golden bird tethered to it. Drake stared uncomprehendingly for a moment, then realized that of course, Wookiees ate tiny birds like this.

There's something odd about that, though.

He filed it for future thought.

"I don't get it," Ron said, staring at the bird, which flapped its wings desperately trying to get away. "It's just a little bird, Hairy."

Hairy reached for the bird.

"Hairy, wait, don't!" Drake shouted as he suddenly saw what this was going to do—

Too late. Hairy snapped the tether that held the bird to the stake, and a thick net of vines shot up from the four corners of the clearing and engulfed them all, dangling them several feet above the ground. Hairy dropped the bird, and it whizzed away, making him moan.

"Nice work," Ron said, shoving a Wookiee paw out of his mouth. "Great, Hairy, great! Always thinking with your stomach!"

Hairy's response was untranslatable but rude.

"Will you take it easy?" Drake said, squirming to see if he could get an arm free. "Let's just figure out a way to get out of this thing. Ron, can you reach my lightsaber?"

"Yeah, sure." Ron started maneuvering towards Drake.

Emtoo, in the bottom of the net, extended her little buzz-saw and began to cut through the ropes. "Emtoo, I'm not sure that's such a good idea," said Threelo nervously. "It's a very long droooo—"

The ropes snapped. The five plummeted to the ground.

Oof. Drake sat up groggily, aware of a number of small warmth in the Force around him. A small pointed thing intruded itself upon his vision.

What is...

He traced it to its source and found a teddy-bear-like creature holding it steadily pointed at him. And another beside that—and another—

They're all around us.

And they're cute.

"Hey!" Ron said angrily, pushing one of the tiny spears away from his face. "Point that thing someplace else."

The creatures—Ewoks, Drake remembered now from his briefing—jabbered among themselves briefly. Then the one who'd been threatening Ron resumed his posture.

"Hey—" Ron went for his blaster.

"Ron, don't," Drake said quickly. "It'll be all right."

Ron gave him a dubious look but let go of his pistol, which was quickly snatched up by an Ewok. Another took Drake's own blaster and his lightsaber.

"Hairy, give them your crossbow," Drake directed. Hairy howled unhappily but let go of the weapon. The Ewok holding it hefted it as if to see how heavy it was, then chittered quietly to herself for a moment and stroked Hairy's shoulder calmly before hurrying away. Hairy watched her go, sudden speculation in his eyes.

"Oh, my head," moaned Threelo, sitting up.

A gasp went up from all the Ewoks, and the chattering talk broke out again. Threelo looked around and spoke a short phrase in what sounded like the same language, but in his prissy droid voice. The closest Ewok to the droid dropped his spear and bowed profoundly, lowering his furry body to the ground. The movement spread until Threelo was the center of waves of bowing, chanting Ewoks.

"Do you understand anything they're saying?" Drake asked.

"Oh, yes, Master Drake!" Threelo said happily. "Remember that I am fluent in over six million forms of communication."

"What are you telling them?" Ron demanded.

"Hello, I think. I could be mistaken. They're using a very primitive dialect. But—" A flutter of awe entered the golden droid's tone. "—I do believe they think I am some sort of god!"

Emtoo gave the series of ascending beeps that was her laughter, and Hairy agreed with a sound like gargling with gravel.

"Well, why don't you use your divine influence," Ron said with a tone that suggested he was holding to sanity by a very slim margin, "and get us out of this?"

Threelo drew himself up proudly. "I beg your pardon, General Solo, but that just wouldn't be proper."

"Proper?" Ron swelled visibly.

"It's against my programming to impersonate a deity."

"Why, you—" Ron started to get up, his hand raised.

Ewoks barked in alarm, and Ron was surrounded in an instant by a circle of spears. He held up his hands in surrender, smiling ingratiatingly. "My mistake," he said. "He's an old friend of mine."

xXxXx

Far away, aboard a Rebel starship, five people groaned.

"They're dead," Commander Nigilles predicted over his comlink. "Individually and collectively, they are dead."

"Not yet," said Admiral Lupar in his curiously echoing voice. "Where there's life, there's hope."

"Spare me the platitudes, Admiral, please. How do you think they'll get out of this one?"

"They are resourceful. We wouldn't have sent them on this mission if they weren't."

"Resourceful doesn't mean they can work miracles."

"Just watch," said General Calrissian, her voice dreamily content. "You'll see."

"I sure will." Sirius took a drink of his caf and returned his attention to the screen. The procession of Ewoks, with Threelo carried on his throne and the other four adventurers tied to poles, had just reached the Ewok village. "Here we go..."

xXxXx

"What did he say?" Ron demanded of Threelo, nodding towards the small gray Ewok dressed in formal regalia, who'd been chattering with a larger reddish one. He couldn't be sure, but he thought the red one had taken Hairy's crossbow out in the forest..

"I'm rather embarrassed, General Solo," said Threelo, ducking his head, "but it appears that you are to be the main course at a banquet in my honor."

Ron snarled. *This is not the way I wanted my day to go.*

A drum started beating, and all the Ewoks turned to look in a certain direction. Ron craned his neck around and felt his heart stop. Hair loose and lovely, dressed in tanned hides, apparently perfectly all right—

“Neenie!” he shouted at the same moment as Drake.

Neenie hurried towards them, but was blocked by several ranks of Ewok spears.

“Your Royal Highness!” Threelo said as Hairy howled a greeting and Emtoo whistlebeeped.

“But these are my friends,” Neenie told the Ewoks blocking her. She looked over at the golden droid on his throne. “Threelo, tell them they must be set free.”

Threelo spoke a few words to the gray and red Ewoks, who chattered back at him for a moment. Then the red one turned and waved at the other Ewoks, who started to pile wood underneath Ron.

“Somehow,” Ron said through gritted teeth, “I got the feeling that didn’t help us very much.” He sucked in a breath as he noticed a lighted torch being passed through the crowd. *This is about to get very hot..*

“Threelo,” Drake spoke up. “Tell them that if they don’t do as you wish, you’ll become angry and use your magic.”

“But Master Drake, what magic?” the droid said worriedly. “I couldn’t possibly—”

“Just tell them,” Drake cut him off.

Threelo jabbered a few words at the Ewoks. The gray one stepped forward, skepticism plain on his face. Ron risked a glance back at Drake—the kid had his eyes shut and seemed to be concentrating hard on something.

“You see, Master Drake, they didn’t believe me,” wailed Threelo. “Just as I said they wouldn’t..”

Ron whipped his head back around as Threelo’s voice changed pitch. “What-what-what’s happening! Oh! Oh, dear! Ooohhhh!”

The crude wooden throne, with Threelo still on it, was hovering above the dais, rotating in place. Ewoks screamed and fled in terror.

“Put me down!” Threelo cried from atop the throne. “He-e-elp! Master Drake! Emtoo! Somebody, somebody, help!”

Ron grinned to himself and wondered if anyone else had noticed that the quavers in Threelo’s voice sounded much more like someone trying not to laugh than someone in mortal terror.

“Master Drake—Emtoo, Emtoo, quickly! Do something, somebody! Oh! Ooohhhh!”

The big red Ewok—whose body was rather more curvaceous than Ron had first noticed—shouted orders at some of the others, and they ran towards Ron and the others. Ron tensed, but all they did was cut his feet free, then his hands. He sucked in a breath with the pain of returning circulation, but who cared about that when Neenie was waiting right there?

He ran to her and kissed her, vaguely hearing an “Ooooh” from the watching Ewoks. Drake was there a moment later, his arms around both of them.

Behind them, a vengeful droid squeal made Ron turn to look. Emtoo, welding arc extended, was chasing down an Ewok, screeching angrily. Neenie followed his line of sight and laughed, as did Drake a second later.

Hairy was surrounded by a group of Ewoks, including the red-furred chieftainess, as Ron realized she must be. The Wookiee reached down and scooped her up, setting her on his shoulder, and she snuggled down there and rapped his head lightly with one furry paw.

Threelo’s throne settled lightly onto the dais again, the droid looking distinctly frazzled. “Thanks, Threelo,” Drake said, grinning.

“I—” Threelo would have been panting if he’d had to breathe. “I never knew I had it in me.”

xXxXx

Laughter and cheers rang through the flight deck of the Rebel starship, causing several pilots to turn and see what the top brass were all so happy about.

“They’ll have the shield down by the time we get there,” said Mon Letha in satisfaction, nodding. “I think we’ve seen all we need to. Thirty minutes to the rendezvous point—we should be getting ready.”

“I’m on my way up now,” said Commander Nigilles’ voice over the comlink.

“I should be on the bridge,” said Admiral Lupar.

“I’ll go with you,” General Dadine said, squeezing the Mon Calamari’s hand. “Tactical support.”

“And I need to get the *Hawk* ready.” General Calrissian saluted the other officers, and had her salute returned. “May the Force be with us.”

“No kidding,” said Commander Nigilles. “We’re gonna need it.”

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 8: Doubt

At one end of the great hall, Threelo held forth with the story of the great adventures he'd had with Captain Solo, Princess Neenie, Master Drake, Hairywolf, and Emtoo, the Ewoks listening in fascination. At the other, Emtoo herself had her scanner out and was passing it across Hairy and the Ewok chieftainess Chinna. This was made easier by the fact that Chinna was sitting in Hairy's lap.

Emtoo beeped, sounding worried.

"We understand you're not a medical droid," Drake said soothingly, patting the little droid on her domed head. "We just need field results."

"Close enough for government work's fine by me," Ron added.

After a moment, Emtoo whistled triumphantly and projected an image into the air above her head.

"Well, that looks pretty conclusive," Neenie said, leaning in. "Over 95% probability."

Hairy grumbled. "*Probability of what?*"

"Probability that Wookiees and Ewoks are related, you walking carpet," Neenie said, looking up and grinning at the huge furry creature. "Though she's an awful lot cuter than you are."

Chinna laughed squeakily and patted Hairy's shoulder, or as close to it as she could reach from his lap.

Emtoo pulled in her scanner and started towards the other end of the hut, beeping loudly at a portion of Threelo's narrative. "Yes, Emtoo, I was just getting to that," the golden droid said prissily.

Chinna snapped her fingers peremptorily, and Hairy stood up, lifting her easily with one big paw and starting towards Threelo's end of the room as well. The three humans, left to themselves, shared a moment's quiet chuckle, then followed their friends.

Drake lingered behind the others for a moment, so they wouldn't see his shiver.

Malius . I knew he'd come. Now he's here.

He didn't notice Neenie's sympathetic shiver, or her glance over her shoulder to confirm it had come from him.

xXxXx

Chinna was speaking to her fellow Ewoks from her perch on Hairy's shoulder. "What's going on?" Ron asked as drums began to sound.

"I don't know," Neenie said, frowning.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Threelo, looking up. "We are now part of the tribe!"

A small mob of Ewoks slammed into Ron's legs. "Just what I always wanted," he grunted, recovering his balance only with Neenie's help.

Hairy moaned. Chinna smacked his ear.

"Yeah, well, short help is better than no help at all, Hairy," Ron said, laughing. "Thank you, okay," he said to the Ewoks taking possession of his feet.

"Chieftainess Chinna says her best scouts are going to show us the shortest way to the field generator," Threelo proclaimed proudly.

"Good," Ron said. "How far is it?"

Threelo looked at him in puzzlement.

"Ask her," Ron said impatiently, pointing at the reddish Ewok.

Threelo opened his metal mouth—

Ron grabbed Threelo's shoulder, pulling him back. "We need some fresh supplies, too."

Threelo turned to the chieftainess—

Ron grabbed Threelo's shoulder again. "And try and get our weapons back."

Threelo looked from Ron to Chinna, totally bewildered.

"And hurry up, will ya?" said Ron, scowling at Threelo. "I haven't got all day."

Neenie and Drake, he noticed peripherally, seemed to have vanished.

Outside, Drake stared up at the Death Star. Part of his mind insisted it was the greatest threat to his life and his friends', another part told him Malius and the Emperor were more dangerous than the Death Star would ever be, and yet another part ridiculed both threats and insisted his real life lay elsewhere than this, and he had no idea which part he should pay more attention to...

"Drake, what's wrong?"

Neenie's voice shattered the competing mindsets. Drake turned to look at her. The sister he'd been born with but never known until a year ago—or was it that they'd been born far apart to different families, but had grown as close as born twins over years together?

"Neenie, do you remember your mother?" he asked both incarnations of the woman beside him. "Your real mother?"

"Just a little bit." Neenie came to lean on the railing beside him. "She died when I was very young."

"What do you remember?"

"Just images, really. Feelings."

"Tell me." Drake silenced the babbling voice saying Neenie would have been too young to remember anything, that none of this made sense, that it was all a silly joke, a play...

"She was very beautiful," Neenie said slowly. "Kind, but...sad." Her eyes met his. "Why are you asking me all this?"

Because I don't even have that much. "I have no memory of my mother," Drake said, looking away. "I never knew her."

"Drake, tell me," Neenie said in a quiet, insistent voice. "What's troubling you?"

"Malius is here. Now, on this moon."

He heard her quick intake of breath. "How do you know?"

"I felt his presence. He's come for me." Some cowardly part of Drake wished he was lying. He pushed it aside. "He can feel when I'm near. That's why I have to go." He turned to look at Neenie. "As long as I stay, I'm endangering the group and our mission here." A deep breath. "I have to face him."

"Why?"

Don't tell her, babbled his fears, don't tell her, she'll never understand, she'll be afraid, she won't know what to do...

"He's my father," Drake said quietly, and accepted the truth within the words in a way he never had before.

"Your father?" Neenie was only questioning, not rejecting. Only surprised, not frightened.

"There's more." This would be the easier part. This truth he did not fear, had never feared, except for what it meant to someone he cared about. "It won't be easy for you to hear, but you must. If I don't make it back, you're the only hope for the Alliance."

"Drake, don't talk that way," Neenie said, shaking her head. "You have a power I don't understand and could never have."

"You're wrong, Neenie," said Drake flatly, to hide the pain it cost him to say. You have that power too. In time you'll learn to use it as I have." He looked at her again, willing her to see truth in his eyes. "The Force is strong in my family. My father has it...I have it...and...my sister has it."

He laid his hand, palm up, on the railing, and after a long moment, Neenie laid hers on top of his, never looking away from his eyes.

"Yes," Drake said, feeling her hand close around his. "It's you, Neenie."

"I know." Neenie tightened her grip. "Somehow, I've always known."

Drake looked away from her, towards the looming darkness of Malius. "Then you know why I have to face him."

"No!" Neenie pulled his attention back to her, and he could see both awarenesses in her eyes: one, the orphaned Princess of Maradaar and leader of the Rebel Alliance; the other, the dreamweaver whose power intertwined with his own kept this world alive around them. "Drake, run away, far away—if he can feel your presence, then *leave* this place." She pressed his hand again. "I wish I could go with you."

"No, you don't," Drake said, a quiet denial. "You've always been strong."

"But why must you confront him?" The demand was more the weaver than the Princess.

"Because..." Drake faltered. The words laid out for him refused to be spoken. "Because I must believe there is good in him," he said finally. "I must believe that he won't turn me over to the Emperor. That I can save him. That I can turn him back to the good side. I have to try."

"No, you don't!" Neenie snatched the opportunity Drake had given her by changing his lines that little bit and ran with it. "Drake, just because he's your father doesn't mean you're exactly alike! Just because he chose the dark side—and you know he chose, he chose freely, he was not tricked or forced into it—doesn't mean that you will choose that path as well! Don't destroy yourself trying to prove the impossible!"

Drake hesitated. For that one moment, he was tempted.

You can't. It would destroy the story. Both stories.

Your path is laid out. Deviation will not be tolerated.

"I have to try," he repeated.

Brother and sister held each other for one long moment. Then Drake stepped away and started towards the walkway that would take him out of the Ewok village.

He did not look back.

xXxXx

Ron stepped outside and caught sight of Neenie, standing in the moonlight (*or maybe that ought to be planetlight, since we're on a moon already*), watching a human-sized figure disappear into the darkness.

Drake. Had to be him.

"Hey, what's goin' on?" he asked.

"Nothing," Neenie said, quickly, the catch in her voice that meant she'd been crying. "I—just want to be alone for a little while."

"Nothing?" *You know I hate it when you tell me it's nothing and it's obviously not nothing, Your Worship.* "Come on, tell me. What's goin' on?"

"I..." Neenie shook her head. "I can't tell you."

"Could you tell Drake?" Ron snapped, pointing in the direction his friend had gone. "Is that who you could tell?"

Neenie shuddered. "I..."

Ron growled under his breath and started to walk away. Then he stopped.

I promised myself, if I ever got out of the damned carbonite, I wouldn't be such an idiot. Time to live up to that.

He walked back to the woman he loved. "I'm sorry," he said.

"Hold me," Neenie whispered, her eyes glistening in the light.

Ron pulled her into his arms and held her.

xXxXx

"This is a Rebel that surrendered to us," said the pudgy commander of the landing pad to Darth Malius, indicating the boy standing between two stormtroopers with his hands bound before him. "Although he denies it, I believe there may be more of them, and I request permission to conduct a further search of the area. He was armed—" The commander held up a lightsaber. "Only with this."

Malius looked searchingly for a moment at Drake, then took the lightsaber from the man's hand. "Good work, Commander," he said. "Leave us. Conduct your search and bring his companions to me."

"Yes, my Lord." The commander saluted and withdrew.

Malius looked at his son, standing unafraid in his presence, and felt an odd mixture of pride and anger. Pride in the boy's uprightness, and anger that such a pose should make him proud. His only pride should be in his son's usefulness to his Master. "The Emperor has been expecting you," he said to defuse the feelings.

"I know, father," the boy said calmly.

"So you have accepted the truth."

Drake's eyes did not move from Malius' masked face. "I've accepted the truth that you were once Lucas Skywalker, my father."

Malius would have laughed, had the role called for it. "That name no longer has any meaning for me."

"I'm not surprised," Drake said quietly. "I would like to believe that your true self is still good. That the Emperor couldn't drive it from you fully, and that it was why you couldn't destroy me. And why you won't bring me before him now."

"You say you would like to believe that," Malius said, feeling no great surprise at the ease in which he could respond in character to this deviation. "What do you believe?"

"I don't know yet what I believe," Drake answered. "I'm still deciding."

"I see you have constructed a new lightsaber," Malius said rather than respond to this, igniting the blade. "Your skills are complete. Indeed, you are powerful." He shut the blade down. "As the Emperor has foreseen."

Drake took a step closer. "Come with me."

Malius looked away. "Albu-wan once thought as you do." His voice was unexpectedly rough. He strove for calm, for the surety of the way he had embraced as a young man. "You don't know the power of the dark side. I must obey my master." *For therein lies my glory and my strength.*

"I will not turn," Drake said, his voice like a hushed trumpet call. "And you'll be forced to kill me."

I would rather that than see you one more day in the hands of my enemies. "If that is your destiny."

"Search your feelings, father," Drake pleaded, but Malius could hear that the boy expected nothing to come of his words. "You can't do this. I feel the conflict within you. Let go of your hate."

"It is too late for me, son." Malius hesitated a moment, then added a line to his pre-chosen words. "Nor would I wish it otherwise." Drake inhaled sharply, but Malius was not done. "The Emperor will show you the true nature of the Force. He is your master now."

The boy's head came up, and Malius had the uncanny sensation of twin storm clouds sending bolts of lightning into his own eyes.

"Then," said Drake Skywalker, "my father is truly dead."

xXxXx

The small contingent of Rebels, larger now by an equal number of Ewoks, peered over the top of a hill at an armored bunker with a large flat paved surface in front of it, bulwarked by towers.

"The main entrance to the control bunker's on the other side of that landing platform," Neenie said in a worried murmur. "This isn't gonna be easy."

"Hey, don't worry," Ron said confidently. "Hairy and I got into a lot of places more heavily guarded than this."

Garlee, one of Chinna's Ewok guards, was chattering with Threelo, pointing at the bunker, then off to one side of it.

"What's he saying?" Neenie asked.

Threelo looked up. "He says there's a secret entrance on the other side of that ridge!"

xXxXx

At Surrust, Luna Calrissian maneuvered the *Millennium Hawk* into position at the head of the squadrons. Grien Prunb, her small alien co-pilot, flipped on the com.

"Admiral, we're in position," Luna reported. "All fighters accounted for."

"Proceed with the countdown," Admiral Lupar's voice echoed through the comlink. "All groups assume attack coordinates."

Grien snapped off the com and looked oddly at Luna. "Don't worry," Luna said with confidence. "My friends are down there. They'll have that shield down on time." She stared out the viewscreen, wishing she could see that far. "Or this'll be the shortest offensive of all time," she said softly.

Grien mumbled a comment in his own language and twisted the knob that told the computer to finish its hyperspace calculations, turning the com back on with his other hand.

"All craft, prepare to jump to hyperspace on my mark," Lupar's voice rang out.

"All right," Luna said at Grien's nod. "Stand by."

She pulled the lever, and the *Millennium Hawk* shot forward into hyperspace, first of the Rebel fleet to do so.

They were on their way to Hogwor to destroy a Death Star and defeat an Empire, once and for all.

They hoped.

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 9: Deviation

Garlee the Ewok chittered quietly to his chieftainess Chinna, then to Ron Solo, and pointed at the small door to the bunker below and the four armored stormtroopers talking amongst themselves.

"Back door, huh?" Ron said, peering down through the underbrush. "Good idea. It's only a few guards. This shouldn't be too much trouble."

"Well, it only takes one to sound the alarm," said Neenie pragmatically.

Ron grinned at her with the air of complete confidence he knew she hated. "Then we'll do it real quiet-like."

"Oh!" Threelo suddenly burst out. "Oh, my! Oh, Princess Neenie!"

"Quiet!" Neenie hissed at him.

Threelo lowered his voice, but the worry in his tone didn't change. "I'm afraid our furry companion has gone and done something rather rash."

Ron followed Threelo's pointing finger with his eyes and suppressed a curse.

"Oh, no," Neenie said, watching Garlee scampering down the slope towards the stormtroopers.

The little Ewok grabbed one of the brooms resting against a nearby tree, straddled it, and howled in excitement as he was borne aloft. Hairy barked in distress as the stormtroopers pointed and shouted.

"There goes our surprise attack," Ron said, letting a frustrated sigh fill in for the swearwords in his mind.

Garlee shot away through the trees, and—

I don't believe this.

"Get him!" "Over there!" "Hurry!" Three of the stormtroopers grabbed the remaining brooms and shot off in pursuit of him. The fourth took a few steps after them, then looked back at the door and sighed before returning to his post.

Ron grinned at Neenie, and for once, she was grinning back. "Not bad for a little furball. There's only one left." He flexed his arms. "You stay here. We'll take care of this."

Neenie rolled her eyes at his attitude, but didn't comment. Ron waved at Hairy, and they set off down the hill, Ron keeping an eye out for twigs.

He had to suppress a snicker as he heard Threelo's lofty declaration. "I have decided that we shall stay here."

Reaching around the guard, tapping him on the opposite shoulder, and leading him into the arms of the strike team was as easy as losing at sabacc.

But I knew it'd work that way... just like I know Garlee grabbed a vine and swung his way off that broom...

Ron shook his head as he tapped the opening sequence into the bunker door. *Imagining things again, Solo. Pay attention to your mission.*

There's people depending on you.

xXxXx

Drake breathed deeply as he stepped into the cavernous room. The presence of the Emperor loomed before him, though he couldn't see the man...

Can I even call him a man, though? He's gone so far to the Dark. Farther than even... Darth Malius. It was still hard to think of him as "father", though he'd acknowledged the relationship aloud, and Malius walked at his side now. *Are either of them still men?*

He shook the thoughts from his head and concentrated on the calm, the peace that filled an Auror even at the hardest of times. It would keep him strong through this time of trial.

And I know Malius, at least, is still a man within. He will show that manhood at the end.

Or will he? muttered a small, traitorous voice. *Role-playing only goes so far. And we've gone a bit beyond that already. Especially with who you know is waiting in that chair...*

"Welcome, young Skywalker," said that silken voice. "I have been expecting you."

Drake lifted his chin as the Emperor turned to look at him. *Don't even try it. I will not bow to you.*

"You no longer need those," the Emperor said, flicking a finger at the binders on Drake's wrists. They flew free and clattered against the floor. Drake felt a sudden temptation to leap forward and throttle the Emperor, kill him now while he was still distracted—

No. No Dark here. I am an Auror, a warrior of the Light.

“Guards, leave us,” the Emperor ordered, then turned his attention back to Drake. “I’m looking forward to completing your training. In time, you will call me Master.”

“You’re gravely mistaken,” Drake said without heat, without (he prayed) feeling of any kind. “You won’t convert me as you did my father.”

The Emperor rose to his feet and walked towards them, or rather glided. No steps were visible, no pauses or rising and falling of shoulders and arms. Drake suppressed a shudder as the Emperor’s noseless, snakelike face became visible.

This could get very bad.

“Oh, no, my young Auror,” said the Emperor, infusing the last word with sardonic amusement and doubt. “You will find that it is you who are mistaken.” He leaned forward, his red eyes locked on Drake’s grey. “About a great... many... things.”

Drake stiffened as images shot through his mind. His comrades, friends, family, the same yet different—names, appearances, subtly changed, different lives, but the same people—

Their real selves. The thought came from a distance. *This isn’t real. You’re playing at it.*

Except now it’s not just a game anymore. Now we have a real enemy here.

The Emperor smiled, and Drake felt his heart contract.

Correction. This can no longer get bad. It already is that way. And getting worse by the second.

“His lightsaber,” said Malius, holding it out to the Emperor.

“Ah, yes.” The Emperor accepted the lightsaber and weighed it in one hand. “An Auror’s weapon. Much like your father’s.” His smile widened. “By now you must know your father can never be turned from the Dark side. So will it be with you.”

“You’re wrong,” Drake said, following the script half-numbly as cold fear wormed deeper into his chest. “Soon I’ll be dead, and you with me.”

Dying is actually one of the better ways this night could end up.

The Emperor laughed, a high-pitched sound that managed to keep from being either a cackle or shrill. “Perhaps you refer to the imminent attack of your Rebel fleet.”

Of course he knows. He knows it all. Drake didn’t bother to look up.

“Yes, I assure you,” the Emperor went on, smug gloating filling his voice, “we are quite safe from your friends here.” Another laugh. “Safer by far than our originals were.”

Wait—he doesn’t know quite everything...

Drake did look up now. “Your overconfidence is your weakness,” he said, driving all the meaning he could into the line, and simultaneously reaching into the back of his mind. **Neenie?**

“Your faith in your friends is yours,” the Emperor retorted, staring at Drake.

Drake kept his eyes away. **Neenie? Please answer...**

A startled burst of cream behind his eyelids. **What—how—are you using the Force?**

You could say that. We’ve got problems.

Like what? We’re in the bunker, we’re about to start rigging it up...

“It is pointless to resist, my son,” Malius said quietly beside him.

“Everything that has transpired,” added the Emperor, “has done so according to my plan. Your friends up there on the Sanctuary Moon are walking into a trap. As is your Rebel fleet!”

Neenie’s sense in Drake’s head stiffened, as Drake was sure the real Neenie had on Hogwor. **Oh. Those kinds of problems.**

“It was I who allowed the Alliance to know the location of the shield generator,” the Emperor went on, gesturing with Drake’s unlit lightsaber. “It is quite safe from your pitiful little band. An entire legion of my best troops awaits them.”

Got it. We’ll modify the plan as needed.

Wait, Drake protested. **What about deviation?**

Neenie snorted. **I think having our real-life enemy invade the story counts as significant deviation already. Not to mention this**

particular conversation...

Drake glanced at Malius out the corner of his eye. **I'm more worried about the way the story seems to snap back to its original lines.**

We'll win in that case, won't we? Neenie shot him a hug-feeling. **Hang on. We'll blow the bunker and be up to help you as soon as we can.**

The Emperor turned to look out the window, stroking the lightsaber with his free hand. "Oh, I'm afraid the deflector shield will be quite operational when your friends arrive..."

Drake swallowed surreptitiously. **One thing.**

What?

Hurry.

xXxXx

"All right, break off," Ron ordered some of the strike team as soon as Neenie had panted out her message. "Side passages, rooms, any cover you can find. After they take us, you take them. Clear?"

"Crystal, sir," replied Boot, saluting him.

Ron shook his head as Boot peeled off to enter the side passage as ordered. "Can't get used to that," he muttered to Neenie.

"You'd better." Neenie punched him lightly on the arm. "Come on. We have bait to be."

They slammed into the generator room, making as much noise as they would have if their whole team was there. "All right, up!" Ron ordered, waving his blaster at the startled techs. "Move!"

The techs edged to the side of the room, staring wide-eyed at the Rebels in their camouflage gear.

"Come on, quickly!" Ron snapped the fingers of his free hand. "Quickly, Hairy."

Hairy fumbled with the bag he was carrying. *Don't yell at me*, he snarled. *I've got big fingers.*

"Ron, hurry!" Neenie was looking at one of the screens. "The fleet will be here any minute!"

"Charges!" Ron shouted. "Come on, come on!"

Now to pretend I don't know what's coming, and be ready for it anyway...

He slipped one of the explosives into his sleeve before slapping another one on the ceiling.

xXxXx

Stormtroopers rushed into the bunker from the outside.

"Oh my," Threelo said mildly. "They'll be captured."

Emtoo let out an electronic snicker and started rolling away with Chinna.

"Wait, come back," said Threelo in a bored tone, keeping pace with them easily. "Emtoo, stay with me."

Emtoo blew a raspberry at Threelo.

xXxXx

Ron jumped as a force of Imperials burst into the room. *I knew they were coming, why'd they scare me?*

"Freeze, you Rebel scum!" snapped out their commander, pointing his blaster at Ron.

...right. They've got guns.

But we have bombs. And something better, too...

Boot stepped into the room and poked the commander in the back of the head with his laser rifle. "You freeze," he said.

Ron couldn't help but grin. *Perfect.*

"You won't get away with this," the commander blustered as the hidden Rebels collected their guns and returned their comrades'. "We're not alone. We have a lot more outside!"

Harry howled with a Wookiee laugh. *What a coincidence*, he said. *So do we.*

"Let's blow this place," Ron said, catching the blaster Boot tossed him. "And then get upstairs. A friend needs our help."

xXxXx

No sooner had the *Millennium Hawk* reverted to realspace than Luna triggered her com. "All wings, report in," she said as snubfighter icons dotted her screen.

"Red Leader standing by," reported Sirius' voice.

"Gray Leader standing by," said another familiar voice, which made her blink. *General Dadine? Well, I suppose she wanted to get into the action.*

"Green Leader standing by," said a third voice she knew, a voice she'd last heard coming from the serene leader of the Rebellion, a woman who would certainly never be found in the cockpit of a fighter.

I think people are having too much fun with part-hopping. But I can't blame them for wanting to be in at the kill. Besides, I never thought there were enough female parts in this movie.

"Lock S-foils in attack positions," Sirius ordered. "Leaving out the stupidity of having moving parts on spaceships," he added in an undertone.

"Less chatter, Red Leader," Luna admonished.

"Yes, General."

"May the Force be with us," said Admiral Lupar's voice over the com.

Grien chittered at Luna and pointed at one of the screens.

Luna shook her head. "We've got to be able to get some kind of reading on that shield, up or down."

Grien chittered again, more urgently.

"Well, how could they be jamming us if they don't know if we're coming...?" Luna trailed off, blinked, and *looked* at the Death Star, then slammed her hand onto the com button again. "Break off the attack! The shield is still up!"

"I get no reading," Sirius' voice said doubtfully. "Are you sure?"

"Pull up!" Luna shouted, following her own advice. "All craft, pull up!"

xXxXx

Admiral Lupar grabbed the armrest of his chair as the *Home One* shuddered violently, the inertial compensators almost overloaded by the sudden maneuvering. "Take evasive action!" he ordered. "Green Group, stick close to holding sector DV-4!"

"Admiral!" shouted a tech from nearby, the red markings on his head showing up more clearly in his agitation. "We have enemy ships in sector 24!"

Time to state the obvious. Lupar keyed his com. "It's a trap!"

xXxXx

"Fighters coming in," Luna called, swinging the *Hawk* to avoid the TIEs zooming all around.

"There's too many of them!" cried a panicked voice, young and female. Grien chittered worriedly at the sound of it.

"Accelerate to attack speed," Luna instructed, keeping her own voice calm. "Draw their fire away from the cruisers."

"Copy, Gold Leader," Sirius' voice rang out, just as calm and twice as confident. His X-wing wove in and around the *Hawk*, and after a moment, the Y-wing which had sent out the panic call followed him. Grien relaxed slightly.

Luna sideslipped to avoid laser fire and glanced at the Death Star. Something about it was pulling her attention...

xXxXx

"Come, boy, see for yourself," the Emperor taunted, beckoning Drake to the window. "From here, you will witness the final destruction of the Alliance, and the end of your insignificant Rebellion."

Drake shuddered, glancing from the flashes outside to his lightsaber, sitting so temptingly beside the Emperor. *It would be so easy... just finish it here and now... we don't have to worry about deviation now..*

"You want this, don't you?" The Emperor smiled, touching the lightsaber. "The hate is swelling in you now." He removed his hand. "Take your Aurore weapon. Use it." Arms spread wide, he offered his chest to Drake. "I am unarmed. Strike me down with it." A death's-head grin spread over his face. "Give in to your anger."

Drake took a deliberate step back, reining himself in. *Can't do it. Not here. Not now. It won't work. Two of them to one of me...*

The Emperor nodded slowly, his smile changing to one of satisfaction. "With each passing moment, you make yourself more my servant," he proclaimed.

"No!" The shout was spontaneous, from both Drake and Draco, and broke the half-trance he'd fallen into. *Get a grip. You need help, and you know how to get it. Look out that window, and call...*

"It is unavoidable," the Emperor was saying. "It is your destiny..."

Drake turned to look out the window again, tuning him out. **Luna**, he called silently.

Draco—? What?

We have a big problem, love. Some serious deviation is needed. Drake found his link to Neenie and pulled the current status of the strike team from her mind, sliding it across to Luna. **Think you can land and pick up a few passengers when the shield goes down?**

Luna's mind whirled through all the new information, and Drake felt her warm chuckle reverberate across the link. **Oh, I think so. Just hold on. We'll be there as soon as we can.**

I know you will. Drake broke the link and turned back to the Emperor, painting an expression of mingled defiance and fear on his face.

"You," the Emperor declared as Darth Malius' breathing grew harsher, "like your father, are now mine!"

Drake kept his face straight with an effort worthy of a true Auror Knight.

For you, like your original, are now screwed.

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 10: Decision

The *Millennium Hawk* settled to the ground of Hogwor beside the crater formerly known as the bunker housing the deflector shield mechanism. Luna slapped the control for the ramp as familiar figures came running out of the woods nearby. As usual, Ron was in the lead, Neenie and Hairy covering to either side, though the small red furry creature clinging to Hairy's shoulder was new. Threelo and Emtoo followed them closely.

Grien chittered at Luna from the copilot's chair. "Yes, I do think Ron will want to fly it," Luna replied absently, her mind urging her friends to hurry. Drake was alone on the Death Star, trapped with the Emperor and his father, both of whom wished him nothing but ill...

"Close it up, Luna!" Ron's voice echoed from the passage. "Let's fly this thing!"

Luna shoved the ramp switch to "close" and hopped out of the pilot's seat as Ron barrelled into the cockpit. "Didn't dent her too badly, I see," he grumbled, dropping into the chair as if it had grown around him. "I guess I'll let you off this time. Hairy! Get in here, we've got a crazy Auror to save!"

Hairy roared firm agreement from the doorway and took the chair Grien vacated for him. Emtoo-Betoo rolled forward, beeping in excitement, and Grien hurried over to her, chattering away at great speed. Luna followed them partway down the corridor, but turned off short of the lounge where they were headed, stopping at the ladders which led to the *Hawk*'s two main guns. The only question was, which was already occupied...

"Dorsal gun ready?" shouted Ron from the cockpit.

"Ready!" Neenie's voice bounced back from above.

"Ventral gun ready?"

"Hold on," Luna called back, and clambered quickly down the ladder, strapping herself into the seat at the bottom and taking hold of the gun's steering handles. "Ventral gun ready, General Solo!"

"Don't call me that," Ron grumbled. "Here we go—everybody hold on!"

The *Millennium Hawk* leapt up from the ground and shot skyward, towards the battle in space for the life of the Rebellion, towards the Death Star where Drake waited.

xXxXx

"As you can see, my young apprentice," murmured the Emperor, waving a hand towards the window where the Rebel fleet fought desperately against the far greater numbers of Imperial ships, "your friends have failed. Now..." He turned away, as did Malius. "Witness the firepower of this fully armed and operational battle station!"

Drake reached out with his mind. Neenie was occupied—manning one of the guns on the *Hawk*, he realized with a rush of hope—maybe they would still arrive in time—

Drake? Luna's voice broke into his thoughts. **What is it?**

Drake threw his ears open to her as the Emperor leaned over a com panel. "You may fire when ready, Commander."

No worries. Luna's warm smile caressed him. **I'll take care of it.**

Through her ears, Drake heard the click of a com switch, then her crisp and clear battle voice. "Home One, this is Gold Leader. The Death Star is preparing to fire. I repeat, the Death Star is operational!"

"All craft prepare to retreat!" Admiral Lupar ordered.

"We won't get another chance at this, Admiral," Luna disagreed.

"We have no choice, General Calrissian. Our cruisers won't be able to repel firepower of that magnitude."

"Well, you won't need to repel it for long," Ron's voice broke in. "Check your sensors."

"General Solo!" Lupar's voice exuded satisfaction. "Well done, you and your team! All units, the shield is down. Commence attack on the Death Star's main reactor!"

"We're on our way," Ron and Luna chorused, and Neenie laughed, the sound lifting Drake's heart even as he broke the connection.

Not much longer. They're on their way. All I have to do is hold on.

Drake sneaked a glance over his shoulder. Malius stood impassive at the Emperor's side.

As long as they don't notice the shield's down...

xXxXx

In the lounge of the *Millennium Hawk*, Grien held Chinna gently in his arms while Emtoo extended her welding arc and her complink like hands.

“Are you sure this is wise?” Threelo asked, looking back and forth between the tableau and the corridor to the cockpit nervously. “We don’t have permission to do it. We’re not even sure it will work.”

Stop worrying so much, Emtoo beeped. *Rubbish bin costume or not, I know what I can do.*

“Well, all right. If you say so.” Threelo bustled over and laid his gold hands on Emtoo’s scratched and dented dome. “Here, take my power as well. If this is to work at all, it will have to work the first time.”

“Itid vetta ook!” Chinna said indignantly. “Idun twan betoo ickliff ite!”

Emtoo silenced everyone with a long whistle, then wiggled her two appendages at Chinna, who obediently grasped them. Grien released his grasp and stepped back. *<Better you than me,>* he said in his native tongue. *<I like this size.>*

Chinna blew a raspberry at him. Then Emtoo began to let her power flow, and the Ewok’s little body convulsed.

Grien shoved the door to the lounge closed just in time, as Chinna screamed, shaking uncontrollably, her fur standing straight out on end. Emtoo was emitting a series of low tones, rocking back and forth on her wheels—Threelo was muttering “Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear me” under his breath, but his hands remained rock-steady on Emtoo’s dome—Grien stared wide-eyed at the spectacle before him, his jowls twitching faster and faster—

“Here goes nothing!” shouted Ron over the com, and the *Hawk* shuddered violently as it plunged into the depths of the Death Star.

xXxXx

The enormous green laser lanced out and caught a Rebel cruiser which had been damaged by Imperial fighters, leaving her too slow to move with the rest of the fleet. She vanished in a blinding flash and a silent scream of violent deaths that buffeted Drake’s Force senses, rocking him back on his heels.

“Your fleet has lost,” the Emperor taunted. “And your friends on the Hogwor moon will not survive. There is no escape, my young apprentice. The Alliance will die... as will your friends.”

Drake gritted his teeth against his fury. *I am not your apprentice and I never will be...*

“Good,” the Emperor said softly. “I can feel your anger.” He stepped away from the com panel, spreading his hands. “I am defenseless. Take your weapon!” One hand waved to the lightsaber, sitting so temptingly on the armrest of the empty throne. “Strike me down with all your hatred, and your journey towards the dark side will be complete...”

Drake snarled as his restraint finally snapped. His hand shot out, his lightsaber snapped into it and ignited, and he sliced the gleaming green blade towards the Emperor—

Only to find Malius’s red blade in the way.

The lightsabers hissed and spit sparks as they collided. Drake angled his blade and pushed, and Malius staggered backwards down the stairs, off balance. Drake started forward, ready to destroy this monstrosity once and for all—father or no father, Malius deserved to die for all that he’d done, all that he wanted to do—

“Good,” the Emperor said, a hissing laugh winding itself around his words. “Use your aggressive feelings, boy! Let the hate flow through you!”

No. Drake forced his feet to stillness. *No. Not like this. I may yet have to kill him, but not like this.*

He set his breathing into an Auror pattern for calm and peace of mind, shut off his lightsaber, and looked straight at Malius, projecting serenity and wistfulness. *We could have done so much together, Father. We could have been so great. If only you had made different choices...*

“Albu-Wan has taught you well,” said Malius, a hint of grudging respect in his mechanical tone.

“I will not fight you, Father,” Drake said. *Not unless I have to. Not unless you leave me no other choice.*

Malius mounted the stairs once more. “You are unwise to lower your defenses,” he said, and the red lightsaber blade shot forth from the hilt. Drake leaped up and back, spinning in one of the astounding flips he wished he could reproduce—

Where?

The thought, mildly annoying, was quickly banished by the necessity of finding proper footing on the catwalk above. Malius mirrored his movements below, his expressionless mask turned upwards.

More in reflex than in hope, Drake stretched out a mental hand to Malius, and blinked in surprise at what he found. “Your thoughts betray you, Father,” he said. “I feel the good in you. The conflict.” *Even if most of it is that you don’t want to kill me because you still hope I’ll see the error of my ways, you still don’t want me dead. That counts for something.*

“There is no conflict,” Malius contradicted flatly.

"You couldn't bring yourself to kill me before," Drake reminded him. "I don't believe you'll destroy me now."

"You underestimate the power of the dark side." Malius hefted his lightsaber, pointing it at Drake. "If you will not fight, then you will meet your destiny!"

He flung the red-bladed saber upwards. Drake ducked as it sheared through the catwalk and its supports, then dived off the edge and took refuge under the Emperor's throne platform. Malius' steps sounded along the floor, coming closer and closer, mingled with the Emperor's laughter.

"Good," the Emperor purred. "Good..."

xXxXx

Hairywolf kept an eye on the engine panels, ready to shunt power around any portion should it fail—they'd been able to put in three full redundant circuits in the last rebuild, so even if they took several direct hits to the engine compartment, the *Hawk* should be able to keep flying...

Huge, delicate paws covered his eyes. "Kessoo!" chirped a voice which, though still higher than his own, was an order of magnitude lower than it had been only minutes before.

Oh they did not. Hairy wrenched around in his seat to stare.

Chinna smiled cheekily down at him, at least four times as tall and three as broad as she had been when she boarded the *Hawk*. "Ehboom ady migro!" she said happily. "Iconfi twithee oonau!"

Oh yes they did.

Hairy debated for a moment, then patted his chair's armrest. Chinna seated herself and grinned down at him. "Ulige?" she inquired.

Hairy nodded dumbly. Out the corner of his eye, he could see Ron grinning, and barked a coarse phrase at him.

"I'm watchin' it, I'm watchin' it." Ron's hands flew across the controls. "You'd think I'd never done this before."

Hairy refrained from pointing out that Ron hadn't and returned his attention to the engine panels, though he kept sneaking side glances at Chinna.

She looks good in fur. And really good nowthat she's my size.

I wonder if we can wander off somewhere together after we beat the Emperor?

The *Hawk* streaked onward down the tunnel, two X-wings and a Y-wing trailing behind.

xXxXx

"Remind me again how we got swapped into this?" the former General Dadine said, peering through her gunnery scope in the rear seat of the Y-wing.

"You wanted to be in at the kill, and you didn't want to fly," answered the former Admiral Lupar. "Or do I have that wrong?"

"You have that right. I prefer to shoot." Danger suited action to word, tightening her finger on the trigger and scoring grazing hits on two of the three TIE fighters which had followed them into the shaft. "Do we know where we're going?"

"Neenie and Luna are both aboard the *Hawk*." Remus rolled the stick to avoid a bit of debris, then pulled energy from his front lasers into his engines to send them over the redlines. "If they can't find Drake, nobody can."

Ahead of them, one of the X-wings looped the loop in the tight confines of the shaft and fired three shots while its head was facing backwards. The TIE Danger hadn't hit exploded, hulled precisely by one shot. The other X-wing fired off a torpedo, and the TIEs' wild maneuvering to try to avoid it made them easy prey for Danger's gunnery.

"All eyeballs down," Remus called into the com. "I repeat, all eyeballs down, we have a clear run. Good shooting, Red One, nice decoy, Red Two!"

"Why, thanks," Aletha's voice came back. "Your gunner isn't so bad herself, Gold Three."

"Your piloting's nothing to write home about, of course," Sirius put in.

A Wookiee howl nearly shorted out the circuits.

"Hairy says you're all great, now less chatter," Ron translated. "I happen to agree. Now listen up. In about thirty seconds, we're peeling off to find Drake and get him out. You three lock onto the strongest power source up ahead—that should be the main generator. Hit it with everything you've got, then get out of there. We'll see you back at base."

"Copy, Gold Leader," Remus answered, and heard Sirius and Aletha acknowledging as well.

Hold on, Drake. Help is on the way. I wish we could help you ourselves, but if anyone can do it, it's the crewon the Hawk...

xXxXx

"You cannot hide forever, Drake," Malius said with deadly calm, his footfalls punctuating his words in measured beats.

Drake reached for calm, but it eluded him. "I will not fight you," he reiterated, praying circumstance wouldn't make a liar of him.

"Give yourself to the dark side," Malius urged. "It is the only way you can save your friends."

He's lying. He has to be lying. There are ways I can save them without becoming like him...

Malius stopped, taking a few of his rasping, mechanical breaths. "Yes," he said slowly. "Your thoughts betray you."

I love them, and they love me, Drake thought as strongly as he dared. They don't want me to become dark. Maybe your way would give me the power to keep them safe from physical harm, but I'd lose them and they'd lose me...

"Your feelings for them are strong. Especially for..." Malius stopped.

Before he could help it, Drake finished the sentence in his mind. *Best friend, other half, twin...*

"Sister!" The triumph in Malius' voice could not be disguised by the mechanical overtones. "So, you have a twin sister! Your feelings have now betrayed her, too."

No. No. Drake's breath was coming slower; the chill film of ice was beginning to mask and clear his vision at the same time. You can't have her. I won't let you touch her.

"Albu-Wan was wise to hide her from me," Malius mused. "Now his failure is complete. If you will not turn to the dark side, perhaps she will..."

Drake rolled out from under the platform, came to his feet in front of his father, and ignited his lightsaber.

"Never," he said with terrible calm, and swung the green blade with all his might.

Malius countered, but had to step back to keep his balance, and Drake's next strike was just as hard. Step by step, blow by blow, Drake forced his father onto the Emperor's viewing platform. Hundreds of meters below their feet, the power generator hummed in solitary splendor, emitting the multicolored waves of energy which kept the enormous Death Star running smoothly.

A good place to die. Or to kill.

Another strike. Another. Malius lost his balance and fell to his knees, and Drake slashed his lightsaber through his father's right wrist. Metal buzzed, machinery sparked, and Malius' red-bladed sword fell uselessly over the edge of the platform, followed by the mechanical hand which had held it.

Absently, Drake tightened his own artificial hand's grip on his lightsaber as he lowered its point to Malius' throat. *This is it. After today, you will never be able to frighten or hurt me or anyone I love, ever again... I will finally have my revenge for all the things you've done to me, to my family, to everyone I care about...*

"Good!" hissed the Emperor from the edge of the pit, his lipless face stretched in a grin. "Your hate has made you powerful. Now, fulfill your destiny and take your father's place at my side!"

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 11: Destiny

Ron sent the *Hawk* shooting up the shaft towards the spot Neenie and Luna had highlighted on the Death Star's schematic as Drake's current location. It was a tight fit, but Hairy's hands were steady on the controls beside his own, and with a savvy pilot and two droids monitoring the ship's systems from the lounge, the *Hawk* had never flown better. Chinna watched in fascination, apparently memorizing everything on the control panel.

"Something's happening," Neenie said from the dorsal gunner's turret as a tiny dot near the top of the shaft grew larger. "Can't we go any faster?"

"Working on it, Princess." Ron nodded to Hairy, who snapped three or four switches, then moaned aloud. "Great," Ron translated half to himself. "We're gonna throw the engines out of alignment for weeks with this..."

"Were they ever in alignment?" Luna inquired.

"You stay out of this. Punch it, Hairy."

Chinna's hand beat Hairy's to the button.

The *Hawk* leapt forward as if stung.

"Guns!" Ron called as the dot he'd seen before resolved itself rapidly into a platform of metal mesh. "Clear that!"

"Will do, General," said Luna, and three bolts of red streaked out from below the cockpit to strike the platform dead center. Ron thought he'd seen a darker blot on it just before it vaporized, but couldn't be sure.

The *Hawk* shot clear of the shaft, striking the remains of the platform with tiny thumps and pings. Ron pulled back hard on the yoke, bringing his ship to a hover, and stared out at the scene below.

Two men faced one another beside the pit the *Hawk* had just come from. The one on his feet with his face to the *Hawk* wore a dark hooded robe, the one kneeling before him gleaming black armor, and a sudden panic seized Ron. Had that been Drake on the platform? Had they killed the person they'd come to save?

Feet clattered behind him, and Grien, Threelo, and Emtoo burst into the cockpit. "General Solo," Threelo said worriedly, "might I point out we're on a rather tight schedule? If we're going to save Master Drake before the Death Star explodes, we'd best do it quickly."

<That'd work better if we knew where he was,> Grien pointed out. <All I see is the Emperor and what's his name, Darth Malius...>

"That's not Malius," Neenie interrupted sharply.

"Not Malius?" Ron said doubtfully. "Are you sure about that, Your Worship?"

The Emperor's head came up, and red eyes fixed on Ron's through the cockpit's viewport. "Has no one taught you how rude it is to question a lady?" he asked, his voice as loud as though he stood in the cockpit with them. "Rise, my friend. Show yourself to those who doubt."

The figure kneeling at the Emperor's feet rose smoothly and turned around to face the *Hawk*.

"No," Neenie whispered. "No."

"My friends," said Drake, smiling up at them from beneath Malius' helmet (he wore no mask). "Welcome. Please, have a seat." He spread his arms, hands palm down, and lowered them, and the *Hawk* descended to the deck, its engines shutting off automatically. "Come and join us. We should talk."

"I think I'll stay here, thanks," said Ron distrustfully. "Drake, what the hell—"

"But I insist." Drake lifted one hand. A ball of blue-white energy collected in it, then at a flick of his fingers shot forward. Hairy yanked Chinna backwards just in time as the bolt shattered the viewport and impacted squarely on Grien's chest.

The little alien yelped once and disappeared, only a wisp of smoke marking the place where he had stood. Emtoo let loose a mechanical scream.

"Now," said Drake, pulling all eyes back to him. "If you would be so kind as to join us." His hand came up again, glowing faintly. "Or should I demonstrate once again that I can make you?"

"We're coming out," Neenie said, her voice trembling. "Just... don't kill anyone else. We're coming."

"Thought this was my ship," Ron muttered. "Come on, everyone, let's go."

Emtoo was still shivering as she rolled down the corridor towards the ramp. Threelo, walking beside her, had both hands against her dome and was absently patting her, making a *tink-tink-tink* noise which would have driven Ron insane under any other circumstances. Under these, he thought he could ignore it.

Neenie had her best "royalty-under-fire" look in place as she stepped off the ladder, and Luna emerged from her turret wearing a distant frown, as

though she were trying to catch a disquieting thought. Behind him, Ron could hear the rumble of Hairy growling low in his throat and the soft, half-understandable murmurs of Chinna trying to calm him.

What's to be calm about? One of my best friends just turned his coat. And if we're not out of here in... Ron checked his wrist chrono. ...five minutes at best, we're all going to die. At least we'll all go up together, and take them with us...

"Drake Skywalker, what do you think you're doing?" Neenie demanded as she stepped off the ramp onto the Death Star's decking, which flexed ever so slightly under her weight. "Have you lost your mind?"

"No, Neenie." Drake made a beckoning motion with his right hand, and an unlit lightsaber soared from the depths of the shaft beside them to land in his palm. "I've found my destiny. This is where I belong. Where my father belonged." His thumb depressed a button, and the glowing red blade hummed to life. "And where my sister belongs."

"Sister?" Ron repeated, at a loss. "What..." His eyes fell on Neenie's stricken face, and all at once he knew. "Now wait just one damn minute here!"

"Guards," the Emperor called aloud. "Attend us."

The doors on the opposite column whooshed open, and a team of six red-armored guardsmen marched out.

"Keep these rabble under control," the Emperor ordered, waving a hand at Ron, Luna, Hairy, Chinna, Threelo, and Emtoo. "Let them keep their weapons for the time being. But if any of them make a move to use those weapons, kill them."

"Yes, sir," said the first guard in line crisply, and waved his fellows into a circle around the Rebels.

"You don't belong here," Neenie was saying to Drake, her face anguished. "You're not evil, you're good. This isn't what you want. If you've made a mistake, let us help you fix it! It doesn't have to be this way!"

"You underestimate the power of the dark side," Drake said, studying the red lightsaber in his hand. "How easy, how right it feels. It's the same mistake I made." His eyes came back to Neenie, and he smiled, a thin and cold smile utterly unlike his usual carefree grin. "If you can call it a mistake, since it's led me here. To where I always ought to have been."

"You see, little Princess, he is mine," said the Emperor, stepping forward and laying a hand on Drake's shoulder. "He could not deny his blood, and neither can you. The same power runs in your veins. I can feel it in you now. Your fury, your hatred... embrace them, and become what you were always meant to be!"

Behind Ron, Hairy rumbled two sentences in his lowest tones. Ron nodded his head slowly and began to slide a hand along his side.

"Halt!" one guard ordered, poking him with a blaster rifle. "Leave your hands where we can see them!"

"I'm scratching," Ron said irritably. "Got an itch. Ease up, will you?"

"Yes..." breathed the Emperor, still watching Neenie. The Princess' eyes were shut, her breath coming in short gasps. "Very good. You feel it now. The purest power in the universe, the dark side of the Force... let it fill you, let it make you strong, and then come and stand at my left as your twin stands at my right!"

Chinna twitched her head to one side, as though trying to shoo away a bug. Threelo shuffled towards the edge of their little group, and Emtoo followed, rocking slightly on her wheels. Luna licked her lips, all her attention apparently on the drama unfolding in front of the *Hawk*, her fingers interlaced in front of her.

Neenie's eyes opened, a strange light filling them. She looked at the Emperor and spoke one word.

"Never."

Her hand flew up in a pose the mirror of Drake's, and a second lightsaber arced upwards from the pit into her grasp. The green blade erupted, and she brought it up to the high guard position.

"I'll never turn to the dark side," she repeated. "You've failed, Your Highness. I am an Auror." Her eyes flickered to Drake, then back again. "Like my brother before me."

The Emperor's red eyes narrowed in rage. "So be it," he said. "Auror."

He held out his hand peremptorily. Drake laid the lightsaber in it, then backed away a few paces.

"NOW!" Ron shouted, and jumped for the nearest guard, just as the Emperor whirled and drove the lightsaber—

into the deck beneath his feet.

The Death Star trembled. Neenie staggered but kept her balance, as did Drake. The Emperor's hands were tight around the lightsaber's hilt, his face white with fury, his thin lips moving in silent words—

The guard writhed under Ron's hands, trying to fight free. Ron jabbed a hand into the pressure point at the man's shoulder and snatched the blaster rifle from suddenly lax hands. Setting the switch to stun, he pumped one blue round into the guard, then spun and shot the guard who was staggering away from Threelo, clutching his head. Emtoo was just retracting her little welding arc with a smug air as her opponent collapsed,

watching uncontrollably—Hairy and Chinna were pounding fists over the bloodied bodies of their foes—

Where's Luna got to?

Another stun blast went off behind the *Hawk*, and Luna reappeared around the side of the ship, straightening her gold blouse. Ron decided not to ask. Instead, he flipped the rifle back to kill and came forward, aiming it at the Emperor.

"Time to give it up, *Your Highness*," he said, as sarcastically as he ever had to Neenie. He could hear the others fanning out behind him, Hairy and Luna on his left, Chinna and the droids on his right. "We've got you outnumbered and outgunned, and your Death Star's about to blow. You want to stay here and keep fighting with the floor, that's your option, but if you ask real nice we might take you along. You and your new little friend." He glared at Drake, who returned his look serenely.

"So typical," said the Emperor without looking up. "You think this is about guns. About ships. You completely fail to understand."

Ron freed a hand from the rifle to wave Chinna and the droids towards the ship. "You plan to explain?" he asked. "We don't have long, but I'd love to listen."

"You are right about one thing." The Emperor looked up at last, his eyes alight with glee. "You do not have long. In fact, you have no more time at all."

The Death Star trembled again, this time more noticeably. Alarms started to go off in the distance.

"And with what I have done here," the Emperor continued, patting the lightsaber's hilt, "it will be far more satisfying to experience your deaths as the Force protects me. Now, Princess." He rose to his feet, looking at Neenie, whose pose had not altered—she could have been a statue of some famous Auror Knight of old. "If you will not be turned..." His hands came up to chest level. "You will be destroyed."

Blue lightning flew from his fingertips. Neenie deflected the bolts with her lightsaber, but Ron could see the strain in her face as she fought to hold the sword level. He raised the rifle—

"Ron, don't!" Neenie screamed. "He'll only kill you too! Get to the *Hawk*, get ready to fly, save the others!"

Ron gritted his teeth. He could hear engines beginning to whine; Chinna and Emtoo must have started the ship. Hairy was leaning forward onto his toes, growling at the Emperor as if ready to wrestle him, and Luna was still looking fixedly at Drake, who was—

Quickly, Ron snapped his eyes away from Drake. "I love you," he mouthed to Neenie.

"I know," Neenie whispered back.

Ron spun and ran for the *Hawk*, his feet ringing solidly on deck and ramp. Down the hall, into the cockpit, into his chair—engines, repulsorlifts, lasers, shields—

A stronger bolt than before knocked Neenie onto the deck, her lightsaber spinning away. "Drake, please!" she screamed. "Help me!"

The Emperor laughed aloud. "Now, little Princess," he taunted, "you will die."

His hands came up again for the final strike—

And Drake seized him from behind, twisting his arms away from Neenie.

The Emperor snarled and sent his lightning lashing over Drake, but Drake only held him all the tighter, though his face twisted in agony. "Hairy!" he shouted. "Catch!"

A shove sent the Emperor reeling across the deck into the arms of a very angry Wookiee. Luna dashed to Drake's side and bent over him where he knelt, gasping. Neenie had pushed herself back upright, she was running towards the *Hawk*—Threelo and Chinna had a sheet of metal in place over the shattered viewport while Emtoo welded it hastily into place—the telltales reported engines almost hot enough to fly, fifteen more seconds and they'd be on their way—

One great Wookiee hand closed around the Emperor's neck and held him out over the shaft, and Hairy roared his triumph. The Emperor's thin fingers clawed at Hairy's huge ones but could not dislodge them. Ron could see the panic starting to build in the white face under the hood and grinned to himself.

This is what you get for messing with Rebels...

Luna pulled Drake to his feet. Together, they staggered towards the ramp and safety.

The Emperor's face twisted ferociously as he saw them, and he snapped a hand down to point. Hairy snatched the wrist and yanked, but it was already too late.

One bolt of lightning surged across the room towards Drake and Luna.

"Watch out!" Ron shouted, or thought he shouted. The world seemed to have gone into slow motion. As in a bad dream, he saw Luna's head whip around, saw her shove Drake ahead of her towards the *Hawk*, saw her back arch and her face convulse as the lightning caught her full in the chest.

With a furious bellow, Hairy flung the two pieces of the Emperor into the pit, charging across the deck to catch Luna before she could fall. He

scooped Drake off the deck with his other hand and lumbered up the ramp, and Ron had the *Hawk* in the air before the door had closed behind them.

"Everybody hang on," he said grimly, brought up the shields, and aimed the *Hawk* at the great viewports behind the Emperor's throne. "Guns?"

"Dorsal gun ready," said Neenie's half-choked voice.

"Fire," Ron ordered.

Six precisely placed blasts shattered the windows, and Ron gunned the engines as the escaping air hurled the *Millennium Hawk* into space. Behind them, the Death Star shuddered again, explosions marching across its surface.

We did it. Ron leaned back in his chair, getting a full breath for the first time in what felt like an hour. We did it. Emperor's dead, Death Star's on its way out, as long as we can get Luna to a bacta tank in time we'll all be fine...

So why do I still have a bad feeling about this?

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 12: Reality

“Woo-hoo!” caroled Sirius Nigilles as his X-wing shot clear of the Death Star, flames licking at its shields. “We made it, guys!”

Silence on the com.

He spun the X-wing end for end. “Guys?”

The silence continued. No other ships emerged from the shaft.

Sirius tapped his com screen twice. “Artie,” he said to the red-and-white R3-D2 astromech seated behind him. “Status report on my buddies.”

Status of YT-1300 freighter Millennium Hawk unknown, the droid printed on the screen. Both other starfighters destroyed while escaping.

“Destroyed?” Sirius repeated numbly. “Are you—no. That can’t be right. You saw it wrong, Artie, your camera’s acting up again—”

Negative. My camera and the ship’s scanners agree. X-wing designated Red Two and Y-wing Gold Three were destroyed. No survivors, human or droid.

“They’re gone?” Sirius breathed. “And I didn’t even notice?”

The controlled explosions of X-wing Red Two and Y-wing Gold Three propelled us to the surface faster than we could have gone under our own power, Artie printed dispassionately. Scanners indicate that an explosion of destructive force occurred in a time and space this vessel would have occupied, if not for that extra propulsion.

Sirius closed his eyes, fighting tears. “They saved my life,” he whispered, thinking of the warm smile Red Two always greeted him with, the sardonic tone with which she could pull him out of his most despondent moods, and the shy glances the pilot and gunner of Gold Three had begun to exchange over the last few weeks, the gentle teasing the squadrons had inflicted on them for finally noticing each other after all this time. “They saved my life with theirs, and I never even got a chance to say thank you...”

Artie beeped at him through the com panel until he opened his eyes again. *Sensors indicate large explosions soon to occur in this area. We should attempt to locate the Millennium Hawk and return to the fleet.*

“Right.” Sirius drew one long breath, then kicked in the throttle and started around the perimeter of the Death Star, keeping a wary distance from the unpredictably erupting surface. Between checking the scanners for possible explosions and signs of the *Hawk*, keeping the X-wing on an even course, and dealing with the occasional suicidal TIE pilot, he was able to keep his emotions at bay for the moment.

Just until I’m back with the fleet, he told himself over and over. Just until I’m sure it won’t happen to me too.

I have to get myself home safe.

I’m the only one left now.

xXxXx

Neenie dropped the last few steps from the ladder with a grimace as she jarred her injured arm. A few steps took her into the *Hawk*’s lounge, where she stopped dead. A black-armored man cradled a woman in his arms, his glossy helmet bent low over her dark blond hair, the sobs shaking his shoulders audible even from here.

That looks so strange...

Banishing the thought, she hurried across the lounge and dropped to her knees beside them. “Drake,” she said softly.

“Nenie?” Drake looked up from Luna, whose chest rose and fell with painful slowness. His gray eyes were bloodshot and filled with tears. “Nenie, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, please forgive me, I didn’t mean to—”

“Just tell me what happened,” Neenie said, rearranging her legs so that she was sitting on one hip. “And take this thing off. Please.” She rapped a knuckle against the helmet.

Drake winced. “I can’t. It’s stuck.”

“Oh, for—” Neenie got both hands under the helmet’s edges and yanked. Drake inhaled sharply, but the helmet came free. Neenie spun it across the room, not bothering to see where it came to rest. “Now. Explain.”

I never really turned, Drake blurted silently, his eyes begging her to believe him. **I didn’t, I swear I didn’t, you know I’d never do that—**

What did you do to Griem, then? Neenie demanded.

I sent him home. He’s alive, he’s fine, he’s home and safe. I had to do something to convince the Emperor I was really on his side—

was hoping I could get close enough to him to kill him myself, but then all showed up and I had to improvise—

Neenie stared at her twin, unsure if she wanted more to hug him or shake him. She finally settled for screaming into his mind. **Why didn't you tell me?**

Drake looked back down. "I couldn't," he said out loud, a tear dropping from the end of his nose and joining its brothers on Luna's blouse. "I did the same thing to Malius I did to Grien, pretended to kill him and actually sent him home, except I left his body where it was. Then I took the armor and claimed I wanted to be dark now, but the Emperor wanted to make sure. He was in my mind, trying to see if I was tricking him or not. He's strong, so strong—the only way I could fool him was by putting everything I had into blocking, and with that kind of shielding up, I couldn't have heard you no matter what you did. I'm sorry you got hurt."

"I'm sorry I stole your lines. We're even." Neenie laughed a little, shakily. "How is she?"

"Bad." Drake caressed the line of Luna's jaw tenderly. "It was meant to kill, and she took it head-on. I was able to deflect a bit of it away, that's the only reason she's still alive—that and her stubbornness—"

Neenie blinked once, twice, as memories and thoughts her own and yet not her own began to return to her. "Aren't we making a big fuss over nothing?" she said, starting to smile in relief. "I mean, it's terrible that she's been so badly hurt, but this isn't really real for us..." She faltered—her own arm where the lightning had got through her guard hurt as much as it ever had, and the bloodstain on her sleeve was still there. "Is it?"

"That's what I'm afraid of," Drake said, his gaze still on Luna's face. "I know the Emperor was trying to do something using Malius' lightsaber as a focus. Something with the Force. I just don't know if he managed it."

"What was he trying?" Neenie asked, though a tightening in her chest told her she might not like the answer.

"He was trying..." Drake stopped, rapped a knuckle twice against the floor, producing a hollow sound, then shut his eyes as if in pain. **No. He wasn't trying. He did it. He did it. And I helped him...**

What did he do? Neenie asked, as gently as she could manage.

The floors are solid, Neenie. Falling hurts, getting hit by lightning hurts even more, and we can't fix things like we should. Drake bent protectively over Luna. **That only sounds like one thing to me, and I don't like it at all...**

xXxXx

Remus groaned, and then wished he hadn't. He had a headache big enough for two heads.

Of course, it's just possible...

Experimentally, he closed his connection with Danger.

The pain subsided. Slightly.

Whatever Sirius slipped in our drinks last night, I'm going to make him drink some of it straight. And then hit him over the head with a Beater's bat.

He took three deep breaths, nerving himself up, and opened one eye.

Bedroom ceiling, night. Looks normal enough.

A few careful movements located Danger in her usual curl next to him, still asleep. Sirius and Aletha's scents drifted in from their bedroom down the hall, the cubs' from their two rooms along the way. Nothing seemed out of place.

But something is still the matter. Something's happened that shouldn't have...

A sharp, metallic odor invaded Hermione's scent, and Remus was on his feet and in the girls' room with his wand in his hand before he realized he was moving. His Kitten was twitching uneasily in her sleep, her eyes moving quickly back and forth under closed lids. Remus pulled back the duvet gently and found the source of the odor—a deep, angry burn mark which had split and bled a bit at one side.

And howshe's been burned when she's been lying here asleep all night...

Trouble, a groggy voice muttered. **Trouble in dreamland.**

And where have you been? Remus asked mock-indignantly, concealing his relief.

Recovering. I pulled us out just in time.

Just in time for what?

For keeping us alive. Danger's sense changed abruptly—Remus had a feeling she'd discovered her headache. **Oooooohhhhhh...**

Don't do that aloud, you'll only make it worse. Now what is this about living?

What do you remember of what we were doing last night?

Nothing at the moment. Should I?

Probably. For this to make sense, probably. The bedsprings squeaked in the other room. **I'm getting up. We have to check on Sirius.**

Why? Remus hurried, as quickly as he could for his pounding head, back to his bedroom to support Danger as she wobbled on her feet.

I didn't get him out with us. Danger leaned against Remus' proffered shoulder. **Thank you, love.** Several deep breaths of her own, and she took his hand and started down the hall. **He was too deeply into his character, too much focused on what he was doing—he was actually fighting me off, throwing me out of his head as a distraction—he won't have died, I'm sure, he was far enough ahead that he must have got out, but he was probably caught in what was happening...**

Remus pushed Sirius and Aletha's bedroom door open. **I thought you might want to know that you're not making any sense.**

I will be. As soon as you remember where we were. Danger touched Sirius' cheek, then his neck, and sighed with relief. **He's alive. Check Letha for me?**

About to. Remus went to his sister's side and shook her shoulder very gently. "Letha," he murmured, kneeling by her side rather than bend over. "Letha." A small and evil impulse came to him, and he acted on it. "You're late for your shift."

"Shift? What?" Aletha came awake with a start, then gasped. "Oh, dear God, my head..."

"Lie still for a moment and take deep breaths." Remus kept his hand on her shoulder. "You're not on call tonight, I just needed to wake you quickly."

Aletha growled lightly in the back of her throat. "*Brothers.*"

"Yes, you have so many other ones to compare me to," Remus said lightly. "I'm sure I'm the best of the lot by far."

"In your dreams." Aletha inhaled and exhaled fully once or twice. "You're right, that is a little better. Speaking of dreams, what happened to that one we were sharing? The one the cubs started to tease Ron, and everyone else got involved in for fun?"

"Of course, that's what it was. 'Scar Wars'. I couldn't remember, and my so very loving wife wouldn't tell me." Remus lifted his head to give Danger a *look*, which she returned in kind. "I have no idea, really. The last thing I remember is..."

He had to think about it for a moment. "We'd moved between roles several times. I ended up flying a Y-wing, with Danger as rear gunner. You were in an X-wing ahead of us, and Sirius was leading. We'd just blown up the Death Star's power generator, and we were on our way out... did you pull us because we were going to get caught, love?"

"No, though we were. I pulled us because..." Danger rubbed at her forehead. "There was a different kind of wave coming up behind us," she said. "I don't know whether it was moving faster than the explosions, or whether it just started sooner. It was something I'd never seen before in a dream. And when I tried to touch it, change it or make it go around us, I couldn't."

"You couldn't?" Aletha accepted Remus' hand to help her upright. "I thought you could manipulate anything in a dream, as long as it wasn't being dreamed by someone who hated you and wanted to stop you. And Draco and Neenie were hosting this—I don't think they count."

"Nor do I. Which means one of two things. Either someone who does hate me invaded the dream, or..." Danger stroked a finger down Sirius' cheek again. "Or whatever that wave was, it wasn't a dream thing."

Remus and Aletha met each other's eyes. Aletha asked the question. "How could it be not a dream thing if it was in a dream?"

"I don't know." Danger looked up at them. "But I think we need to find out. Go back in with me?"

"Of course," Remus said, pointing his wand at a section of floor and thinking a Softening Charm. Aletha simply lay down again beside Sirius, draping an arm over him.

Once Danger was curled up against him, Remus pointed his wand straight up and whispered the incantation for an area-effect sleepiness spell. Within a few moments, he was trotting down the aisle of the cinema where they had started the night watching "Scar Wars: Return of the Aurors". Danger was already running her hand up and down the screen, while Aletha sat in the center of the front row staring up at the image.

Remus followed his sister's gaze and swallowed. The camera was tracking Sirius in his X-wing, his face set in lines of pain. As he watched, Sirius' eyes dropped to a central panel in his cockpit—the IFF screen, Remus recalled, which would show him any other ships in the area and identify them Friend or Foe—and his lips tightened as though he were holding back a sob.

Which he probably is. If he's that far into the role, he has to think we're all dead.

Suddenly, Sirius' com crackled to life. "*Red Leader, Red Leader, this is Millennium Hawk. Come in.*"

Sirius slammed his hand onto the com switch, his face alight with hope. "Red Leader acknowledging! Ron, is that you?"

"Nobody else! Sirius, you son of the Sith, how'd you get out of there alive?"

Sirius sucked air through his teeth, and Aletha hissed in sympathy. “Red Two and Gold Three went down,” he answered quietly. “I was so focused I never even noticed it. Artie says they boosted me out, though. I wouldn’t have made it without them...”

He does think we’re dead, then. Wonderful.

Danger turned away from the screen. “I was right,” she said, her eyes half-shut. “I didn’t want to be, but I was right.”

“Right how?” Remus asked, but Aletha cut him off, waving urgently. Ron was speaking again over Sirius’ com.

“...alive—we got Drake out all right, but Luna took a hard hit. We’ve got to get her to the medics as fast as we can. Cover us? There’s just enough crazy TIEs out here...”

“No problem,” Sirius said with the first smile they’d seen from him. “I was going that way anyway.”

“Now talk,” said Aletha to Danger as the scene switched to the purposefully chaotic interior of a Rebel ship. “What were you right about that you didn’t want to be?”

“The magic I pulled us out in front of.” Danger waved at the screen. “It was definitely done by someone who hates me, and it wasn’t a dream thing. At least, its end result wasn’t.”

“What do you mean?” Remus and Aletha asked in unison.

“Here.” Danger held up the hand which had touched the screen. “Sniff.”

Remus leaned forward, then recoiled. The rank, musty odor on his love’s fingers was horribly distinctive. “Voldemort,” he said.

“Exactly. He got into this somehow—probably as the Emperor, that would appeal to him—and he brought along his own magic.” Danger shook her head, almost admiringly. “I don’t know how he pulled it off, but he did...”

“What?” Aletha asked, biting off the T sharply.

“He found some kind of... I don’t know... pocket dimension, I want to say? Whatever it is, it’s rich in magic, and there’s nothing there. Absolutely nothing.” Danger grimaced. “Or there *was* nothing there, until tonight.”

“What are you saying, Danger?” Remus asked with all the calm he could muster.

“I’m saying that what we are watching here is no longer a dream.” Danger turned to look up at the screen, which now showed a close-up of Draco bending over a half-conscious Luna. “It is another reality. Connected to ours, to the point where anything that happens to the people there is reproduced on the bodies they’ve left here, but separate and distinct. And I don’t know if we can get there, or even if we can contact them.” She swallowed. “This may be the only way we’ll see Sirius or the cubs ever again.”

Silence fell over the tiny cinema. Luna’s husky voice was clearly audible.

“Stay with me?”

“Forever,” Draco whispered back.

“Promise?”

“Word of an Auror.” Draco laid a hand over his heart. “Where you go, there go I.”

Luna smiled, squeezed Draco’s other hand gently, and closed her eyes.

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 13: Bond

"She's going to be fine, Auror Skywalker," the Mon Calamari medic said, twitching her barbels in the closest thing the species had to a human smile. "She's far more stable than I would have assumed, given the severity of her injuries, and already beginning to respond to the bacta. Perhaps as little as two or three standard days tank time, and then a few weeks of rehabilitation, and I doubt you'd ever know she'd been injured."

Drake let out the breath he hadn't known he'd been holding. One worry, out of thousands, lifted from his shoulders. He hadn't killed Luna with his stupidity. She might look dead, floating in the viscous pinkish bacta with her face obscured by a breather and her body covered only in the minimum for modesty, but she would be free and laughing again soon enough.

Now I just have to worry about what I have done.

Vaguely he registered the others' reactions, Threelo's chirpy "Oh, I *am* glad!" and Emtoo's gleeful whistle, Neenie's shaky laugh and Ron's one-sided grin. Hairy and Chinna's two-part harmony roar and the medic's startled jump got his attention, and the ensuing laughter brought him fully out of his gloomy thoughts.

Whatever I did or didn't do, we won this war. We destroyed something evil, and we're all alive. There's a lot still to do, but this is a time for celebration.

The door shooshed open. Sirius stood beyond, a reasonable facsimile of his usual grin on his face. "Anyone up for a victory party?" he asked. "There's a load of pilots taking a shuttle down to Hogwor to celebrate with the Ewoks. Little furballs seem to think they won the war all by themselves. No offense meant," he added quickly to Chinna, who showed him her teeth but made no other comment.

"You all go," Drake said. "I'm staying here."

"Oh, no, you don't." Ron stepped around Drake and folded his arms. "You can't not show up to your own party."

"You lot fight it out," said Sirius, shaking his head. "I'm going to get a good seat. See you if you decide to come." He disappeared down the corridor.

"It's not my party," Drake objected. "Hairy was the one who killed the Emperor. Neenie fought him off. You got everyone to attack the guards so we could get away, Sirius blew up the Death Star... there are better people to celebrate than me. And some of them can't come."

He waved a hand at the bacta tank. Movement from within caught his eye.

Luna, her eyes open over the breather mask, deliberately pointed her finger at him, then flicked her hand towards the door.

"You want me to go?" Drake asked doubtfully, approaching the tank. "But I promised I'd stay..."

Luna's eyes showed him the smile he was sure covered the rest of her face, and one hand flattened against the inside of the tank. Drake laid his own hand against the outside and smiled up at her. "Well... if you say so."

One firm nod, and Luna closed her eyes again.

"Well, now that *that's* settled," Neenie said, coming forward and taking Drake by the arm. "You can use the shuttle ride down to explain what you said in the lounge on the *Hawk*. Something about a separate reality?"

"Yes." Drake sighed as the weight of their position, and the fact that it was his fault, came down on him again. "Yes. When Voldemort, the Emperor, whoever he was in the end, when he put that lightsaber through the floor, it was a trigger on a prepared spell he'd brought with him. I think all he intended to do was reproduce the effects on our dream bodies in reality, so that we'd die there the same way we did here. But what he did was something a little bigger." He stamped his foot on the hard floor. "This isn't a dream anymore."

"You mean he turned this world real?" Ron exclaimed. "But that's—"

"Crazy?" Drake shrugged his shoulders. "No one ever said he was sane. Just clever and very, very powerful."

"My word," said Threelo, his voice sounding more worried than a droid's vocal processors could usually manage. "What does that mean about our chances of going home again?"

"Honestly, I don't know." Drake sighed. "I'd guess they'd still be able to see us—they know where we are and what we'll be doing—but even getting in contact would be major magic now, let alone transferring anything over. Unless we hear differently in the next couple hours, I think we have to assume we're here for good." He turned to look back at the motley group. "And we're on our own. No more script. No more plan."

"I don't know," Neenie said, frowning. "I thought I saw Star Wars books the last time Danger and I went shopping at the Muggle store..."

"Yes, well, they won't do us much good if we can't get at them, now will they?" grumbled Ron.

Good question, said Hairy in a more thoughtful roar than usual. Will what happens in those books still happen to us if we don't know how they're supposed to go?

Ajjus twon tout vis firsoot," Chinna said with a scowl. "Antoo tol clykap ersunug enn!"

Drake tuned out the ensuing arguments, conducted simultaneously in Basic, Wookiee, Ewok, and droid. His mind was too busy laying out the facts for him.

We may all be alive, but we're trapped here. Forever. Strange bodies, strange names, strange lives...

His hand went to the hilt of the lightsaber at his belt. *Though if I had to choose someone to be forever, this wouldn't be a bad choice. I mean, he's the first of a new line of Jedi—Aurors, I guess, here—and he's going to help establish the New Republic. And Luna's is pretty good, at least as she's played it. She wouldn't do well as the original.*

The thought was good for a brief mental laugh.

Ron and Neenie have decent parts too... no, actually, now that I think about it, these parts fit them just about perfectly. Drake glanced back over his shoulder at them, Ron backing up Neenie's argument as Hairy howled into her face. *The cultured intelligent diplomat and the crazy ex-smuggler scoundrel, and they're crazy about each other...*

But what about Harry and Ginny, and Neville and Meghan? The fate he'd unwittingly condemned them to squeezed Draco's heart. It was funny for Harry and Ginny to be non-humans for a one-night dream, but how will they handle it for the rest of their lives? Neville and Meghan... can they stay themselves, or even human, being droids? Will they have to watch us all get old and die while they stay exactly the same?

They rounded the final corner into the shuttle bay.

And last but certainly not least, Padfoot.

Sirius sat by himself in a corner of the troop shuttle, occasionally smiling at a joke someone tossed off, but more often staring into the back of the seat in front of him, his expression fixed and dull.

He thinks the people he cares about most in the world are dead. And I can't tell him they're not, because he's so into his character he'd think I'm crazy and because they might as well be. They're in another world, we can't get there, and they can't get here...

Drake stepped aboard the shuttle and took a seat in the row in front of Sirius.

I'd do anything to fix this mess.

Anything.

He hoped the Force, or the Founders, or *somebody*, was listening.

xXxXx

Danger continued to run her hand up and down the movie screen, now showing the shuttle in flight. The stench of Voldemort was fading rapidly from the newly created world, leaving behind a copper-iron smell coupled with green leaves and clean sweat.

I should have a report on the worst injured of our travelers any minute. Remus and Aletha, after hearing Draco's description of Voldemort's spell, had departed immediately to check on the other dream travelers. Based on what they'd seen, one house went to the top of the list to investigate. *A good thing Gerald keeps us up to date on all his security charms...*

On cue, Remus' soft curse reached her mental ears.

I don't like the sound of that, Danger sent, watching the shuttle glide down for a landing where the bunker once had been.

You shouldn't. We're at the Landing Zone and it's not good.

Define 'not good'.

Remus sent her a visual image. Aletha knelt by Luna's bedside. The girl lay on her back, burn marks vivid across her arms even in the moonlight, her eyes half-open and her chest still. As Danger watched, Aletha reached down and drew the sheet up and over Luna's face.

But that doesn't make any sense! Danger protested. **She's alive in that world, I saw her a few moments ago—they would have called Drake on his comlink if she'd taken that sudden a turn for the worse—**

I know. But I can't deny what I'm seeing.

"This doesn't make any sense," Aletha murmured, the frustration and confusion in her voice poor masks for her grief and fear. "Remus, ask Danger for a time check? How long has it been since we saw Luna talking to Draco?"

Danger ran the movie back in her mind. **About fifteen minutes,** she said, Remus echoing her aloud. **It could be twenty, but no longer than that.**

"That's what I thought." Aletha tapped her wand twice on Luna's sheeted form. "As far as I can tell, she died at that exact moment. Except that you told me she's been awake and communicating with them since then... wait." She twisted her wand through a complicated pattern, frowning in

concentration. "Could it be... she'd be the one to know it if any of them would..."

"To know what?" Remus asked, his calm tone masking an urgent need for some way, any way, to bring his cubs home again.

"I think she did this on purpose." Aletha looked up from her spellcasting, her face intent. "She realized what had happened—that the world around her had become real, that she had two bodies, both of them badly injured—and she decided to cut her losses and focus on the body that was in the same world as her soul, to make sure both bodies didn't die on her. That's why she was in better shape than the medic expected, because she had the energy from her other body to help heal the one she has now."

Remus had been piecing it together as Aletha spoke. "That choice may have saved her life, but it came at a price," he said quietly. "Even if we're able to bring the others home, she can't come."

"She'd be a ghost now," Aletha agreed. "Or she'd die. Unless we could get physical access between the worlds, and I don't think we can. They're just too different. The structure of the magic, the basic assumptions... no. It would be a life's work trying to figure out how to do that, and we don't have a lifetime to spare..."

A sound as of a polite knock jarred Danger from her contact with Remus. *Who—what—*

"It is I," called the voice of Albus Dumbledore. "May I enter?"

"Of course." Danger willed a door to form in front of the Headmaster, and a moment later Dumbledore stepped into the back of the cinema, still wearing the sand-colored robe he'd donned to take the role of Albu-Wan Dunobi.

"We must hurry," he said, his tone only half-teasing as he hurried down the aisle to meet her near the screen. "Our cue is coming up."

"Cue? What—" Danger stopped, realizing exactly what he meant. "But I don't know if we can—my access was blocked when it went real—"

"I believe this world retains enough ties to its roots that it will grant us entrance at the proper time," Dumbledore said, watching the action on the screen, where Ewoks were piling brush into a bonfire pile and hooting excitedly. "As well, you may find it a bit more flexible at the moment than it was when you first attempted to reenter it."

Danger laid her hand on the screen once more, this time thinking hard of entering the scene, walking towards that bonfire, smelling the smoke and the evening air of Hogwor...

Her hand slid through the screen. Quickly, she yanked it back.

"Do you actually know everything?" she asked irritably, sending a thread of magic towards her husband and sister, who had checked on the other dream travelers (all fine except for mild brushburns on Harry's hands and some good-sized bruises on the Weasley twins) and were returning to dream-state as swiftly as possible.

"No, I merely try to stay as well informed as possible on the situation at hand." Dumbledore nodded to Remus and Aletha as they reappeared in the cinema. "For instance, I spoke with Severus a few moments ago, and he had some news I believe you will all enjoy hearing. But it should wait until you all can hear it. Which, if I recall the film correctly, should not be long."

"Shouldn't you be getting dressed, love?" Remus said delicately as Chinna tossed a torch into the brushpile and the crowd of Ewoks and Rebels cheered.

"Getting—oh you have to be kidding me."

"It would make it more likely that you'll get in there and out again in one piece," Aletha put in. "Since it fits the original better."

Danger glared. "Traitor."

"That assumes I was ever on your side in the first place."

"Fine." Danger waved her hands down her own body and shrank into her brown-skinned Auror Mistress Gerta body. "Happy now, you are?"

"Ecstatic," Aletha said blandly.

"It is time," Dumbledore warned, and Danger flicked her finger to create herself a flight of steps she could climb to step into the dream world through the screen.

Her body peeled away as she passed. She was a spirit, translucent and rendered in washed-out color. Fleeting, she wondered if the counterpart to the third person who should be there would make an appearance, but banished the thought as she saw Drake standing alone watching the fire and the dancing.

"Going to tell me what's happening, you are?" she hissed at Dumbledore.

"In a moment." Dumbledore closed his eyes, and Albu-Wan Dunobi opened them. He stepped forward, catching Drake's attention. "Do not speak yet," he warned the young man. "There is little time. We are here because of Luna."

Of course! Danger felt her mind shifting, falling into the wise and careful thought patterns of Gerta, an Auror Mistress of nearly seven hundred years' standing. "Injured in both worlds, she was," she said, coming to stand beside Dunobi. "Choose to remain in this world only, she did. Created thus a

bond between the two worlds was.”

“Does that mean...” Drake’s eyes flickered, and Gerta could feel him assessing the new information. “Is she...”

“She is alive, here,” Dunobi said, placing emphasis on the final word. “But her body in the world from whence we came is dead. She cannot return there. Nor can any of you, at the current strength of the bond between the worlds. Our passage has stressed it already; the only reason it was possible is that, in this world, we are both dead. The transfer of a soul from one living body to another...” He shook his head. “The bond would snap and the soul would be lost.”

“How can we make it stronger?” Drake asked without a moment’s hesitation.

Gerta reached out with the Force to touch the bond, and knew the answer. “Another sacrifice, it requires,” she said calmly, though her heart cried out in protest. “Another to make the same choice, to remain here for all time and allow the body left behind to die, it would take.”

“But everyone else could go home again.” Drake might have been asking for clarification of a technical point in class.

“Yes,” Dunobi confirmed. “The bond would be strong enough for their passages one-way. The worlds would remain linked enough that you could watch one another in dreams and visions, but there could not be a permanent portal for passage back and forth unless twice again that amount were willing to remain.”

“Never mind that.” Drake waved away the annoying additional point. “How do I do... whatever has to be done?”

“Sure, are you?” Gerta asked, and dropped the mask within her mind. **Drake, Draco, think about this, please—this is your life, you can’t just throw it away—**

Luna’s stuck here no matter what, Draco shot back. I’m not leaving her. I promised. Besides... He grinned, the expression at once Luke Skywalker’s and Draco Black’s. **Like I was thinking earlier, if I have to be somebody else for the rest of my life, at least I’m somebody with a lightsaber.**

Danger laughed aloud. “Proud of you, we are,” she said aloud, dropping back into Gerta’s role. “But miss you, we will. And watching, we will be.”

“Me too. To both.” Drake blew her a kiss. **Take care of Neenie for me?**

Always.

The first of the new generation of Auror Knights straightened his shoulders. “Tell me what to do,” he said. “I’m ready.”

whydoyouneedtoknow
FanficAuthors.net

Return of the Aurors

Chapter 14: Portal

Sirius stood by the fire, watching Chinna teach Hairy an Ewok dance on its other side, a crowd of Ewoks milling about their legs and laughing squeakily. Threelo was shuffling through the steps as best he could, and Emtoo spun gracefully on her wheels as the Ewoks bowed to her. Ron and Neenie were sitting about a quarter of the way around the fire from him, talking in low voices. He hadn't seen where Drake was, but no doubt there were special important Auror things that required doing. The other pilots who had come down on the shuttle were either watching the Ewoks, Wookiee, and droids dance or passing around a bottle and toasting each other.

I should go get some of that. Dull the pain.

Oddly, though, the pain seemed to be easing even as he thought about it. He felt reassured, as though someone had just whispered in his ear that everything was all right, that it wasn't what he thought it was, that his friends were right around the corner and he'd see them again soon...

Neenie jumped to her feet. "Drake!" she called out, her voice carrying over the chanting and music. "Drake, what are you doing?"

"Fixing something," answered Drake's voice from a short ways off. Sirius turned to see his friend leaning against a railing, looking relaxed and casual.

No, wait. That's not relaxed and casual. That's 'I'm holding onto this bar because I'll fall over if I let it go'. What just happened to him?

Sirius started towards Drake, hearing other footsteps following behind him. As he got closer, he started to see a pair of light-colored shapes hanging in the air—an old man and a small alien creature, both in hooded robes—but there seemed to be a third beside them, less defined and harder to see—

The alien's form expanded, shifted, and a messy-haired woman stood there instead. Sirius stopped dead, causing Threelo to run into him from behind.

I knowher, that's Gold Three's gunner—

No, she's not, she's General Dadine—

That's no general, that's my sister—

His conflicting mental images suddenly coalesced, and a flood of information deluged him. He squeezed his eyes shut, gave it a few moments to sort itself out, and allowed a great sigh of relief to escape him as one thing came clear.

They're alive. They never died inside the Death Star, they just jumped clear of the dream before their ships blewup—I must have been so lost in my character they couldn't pull me out, but I'm out now—

"How stupid should I be feeling?" he asked conversationally.

"Not too stupid at all," Danger answered in the same tones. "It's a good story. I nearly got lost in it a few times myself."

"Probably not quite to the extent I did." Sirius opened his eyes and examined the area between Dumbledore and Danger. It resembled a silver archway with a veil covering its opening, if archways could float in midair. "That's our way home?"

"The way home for most of you, yes," Dumbledore amended. "Draco and Luna will be remaining here."

"**WHAT?**" Sirius spun to face Drake—*no, Draco, and he's not my friend, he's my son and I'm not about to let him do that!* "Are you out of your mind?"

The silence after this question was profound. Belatedly, Sirius realized he hadn't been the only one asking it.

I think that was everybody, actually.

"No," Draco said, shaking his head. "Not out of my mind. Out of my body."

He released the railing and staggered. Hairy pushed Ron aside to catch Draco, grumbling something under his breath about stupid brothers.

"This I *have* to hear," said Neenie, crossing her arms.

"It's the only way you can all go home," Draco said simply, letting Hairy support him. "Luna decided to stay here because if she'd left herself divided between two bodies that badly hurt, both of them would have died. When she did, it opened the way home a little bit. My staying will open it more, enough that you can all get back."

Emtoo screeched. "Oh my," Threelo said. "Emtoo wishes to know if you couldn't have asked for volunteers before simply deciding it would be you who'd stay, Master Drake?" His voice shifted subtly. "I'd like to know myself."

Draco shrugged. "I'm staying because it's my fault we're all stuck here. Because I promised Luna I would. And because it should be fun." He got his feet squarely under him, squeezed Hairy's hand in thanks, and grinned at them all. "How often do chances like this come along?"

Ron and Neenie exchanged glances.

"Tell your friends the remainder of the bargain, Draco," Dumbledore said. "This portal we have established may not last indefinitely."

"Oh. Right." Draco glanced at Hairy again, but the Wookiee face gave nothing away. "After you lot go home... you can't come back. You can watch, but there won't be any way in."

"Unless..." Danger prompted.

"What, you're going to make me say it all?"

"Completeness is important," said Danger sanctimoniously.

"Fine." Draco sighed. "Unless two more of you decided to stay here. Live here. That would be enough magic, enough souls, for the worlds to be connected by a permanent portal. People could come and go in dreams as long as there was a living body for them to borrow here, or some kind of magical substitute at home, but that wouldn't last much beyond a day..."

"Hold up," said Ron, raising a hand. "Are you saying all it would need for us to be able to come and go anytime we want is two more people to stick around here? Give up what we had at home, keep these..." He gestured to his body. "And then we'd have basically an open door?"

Draco nodded reluctantly. "I guess so. But I don't want anyone else to suffer for my mistake..."

Hairy and Chinna burst out laughing at the same moment.

Are you kidding? Hairy roared. *Him? Suffer? He was over there three minutes ago telling Neenie how cool he thinks this is!*

"Tshil yksit tu," Chinna added, pointing to Neenie, who blushed as all eyes turned to her. "Tshia lwai snoosh iwusap rinsiss."

Neenie got the blush under control. "Besides," she said, coming forward to take Draco's hand. "We're sort of important if the story's going to continue from here. And I'm not leaving you behind." This last was spoken in a tone of such quiet intensity that Sirius nearly recoiled from it.

"If you're sure..." Draco faltered.

Sirius snorted. "Have you ever known your sister to change her mind?" he asked. "About *anything*?"

"Come to think... no."

"There's your answer." Sirius held out his arms, and Neenie ran to him for a hug. "We'll miss you, Princess," he murmured into her hair. "But we'll be back for visits. Maybe bring a few friends."

An idea teased at the back of his mind. He caught it and tucked it away for further examination later, as his attention at the moment was taken up by expanding his hug to include Drake. "You," he said mock-scoldingly, "have been strange from the moment we brought you home. Can't you even *die* normally?"

Drake cocked his head to one side and considered this. "No," he said finally.

"Well, at least now we know that." Sirius tightened his arms around both of them and glanced over at Danger. Her face was accepting, even serene, with only a trace of sadness around her eyes. *What's with you?* he signed, freeing one hand to do it. *I'd have thought you'd be more upset.*

They'll be back for visits, and we can see them anytime we like, Danger signed in response. *And Remus and I have been talking. We may be due for an extended vacation...*

Sirius grinned. The idea in the back of his mind was starting to take better shape.

"Houkum wigetuex playndist oomum?" Chinna was demanding of Ron. "Yoon osh iwoan tliekit!"

Ron spread his hands. "Just lucky, I guess?"

Chinna growled at him.

Sirius let Drake and Neenie go; the latter hurried over to Hairy to hug him tightly, while the former squeezed Threelo's hand, then grinned at Emtoo and levitated her off the ground, making her shriek.

"Really, Master Drake, I must insist you put my counterpart down immediately," Threelo said in his prissiest tones.

"Oh?" Drake lifted Emtoo a little higher, eliciting a rising series of beeps. "What're you going to do about it if I don't?"

Threelo lifted his nonexistent nose. "I shall be forced to summon my minions in her defence."

"You have minions?" Drake chuckled. "This I have to see."

Emtoo flipped upside down. Her wheels spun wildly as she screamed in indignation.

"Minions!" called Threelo sharply. "Goma dumia!"

The music stopped with a discordant clang as every Ewok in earshot converged on Threelo.

"Oh," Drake said. "*Those* minions." He looked around. "Hairy, catch!"

Hairy yelped and flung his arms around Emtoo as she came flying at him, still upside down and still screaming. Drake took off running, a horde of Ewoks in hot pursuit. The little group near the path, as well as the rest of the Rebel pilots, fell about laughing.

"Ah yes," Dumbledore said, chuckling as he watched Drake dodging Ewok charges. "The news I wished to tell you all. It regards Lord Voldemort, and in a smaller capacity Lucius Malfoy. Who I believe has joined us, if only for a short time."

Everyone turned to follow Dumbledore's line of sight.

A silver-white Malfoy glared at them all.

Ron laughed. "Guess Luna really did shoot him up, then," he said.

"Not exactly," said Dumbledore. "At the time Luna's marksmanship disposed of the body of Darth Malius, your dream was still a dream, and Lucius had been returned to his own body in our world at an earlier moment in any case. However, he was concerned for his master, and therefore sought out Lord Voldemort's bedchamber. He arrived there just in time to see the results of angering a Wookiee come to pass on his master's recumbent body." Dumbledore inclined his head towards Hairy. "Severus informs me the shock appears to have brought on a fatal heart attack."

The laughter from the small group redoubled in strength.

Are you telling me he's dead? Hairy growled in gleeful shock. *Actually dead, this time?*

"Doan vorketuh ork ruk sez," Chinna warned. "Owman idui ahlfef toofid?"

"Severus was good enough to destroy a certain snake Inferius with Fiendfyre before he reported to me," Dumbledore said mildly. "I believe it is entirely possible there are none left."

Hairy threw back his head and roared. Chinna and Neenie shrieked in unison. "Yes!" Ron shouted, pumping his fist to the sky. "YES!" Threelo clapped his metal hands, while Emtoo and Sirius did a dance of joy together, and Danger merely closed her eyes and sighed in bliss.

Drake came limping up, an Ewok still clinging to his leg. "What're you all so happy about?" he asked.

This just set everyone off again. By the time Drake had been brought up to date, Danger and Dumbledore were starting to look nervous.

"We need to get this portal solidified now," Danger warned. "If we lose it, I don't think we could get it back again from this side."

"Where do we sign?" Ron asked, twirling his blaster around one finger.

"You've been waiting all your life to be able to do that, haven't you?" Neenie said with a sigh.

"Pretty much." Ron grinned at her. "Got a problem with it, Your Worship?"

"We'll discuss it later." Neenie came forward at Dumbledore's wave and laid a hand against one of the white pillars of the arch. Ron placed his hand on the other, holstering his blaster first, and Dumbledore and Danger both began to chant softly.

Emtoo pressed close to Sirius, making the little croon that Sirius recognized as both pure droid and his daughter in awe. "We'll be home soon, sweetheart," he whispered, patting her domed head. "Mama Letha's waiting for us there, and Moony."

A questioning whistle.

"Oh, I'm sure we'll come back to visit. Probably every few days. And I thought of something... remind me to bring it up when we get home."

Emtoo beeped twice, then rolled forward as Neenie and Ron took their hands away from the portal. Both were white-faced and shaking, and Hairy and Chinna rushed forward to support them.

"Is that it?" Neenie asked, leaning gratefully against Chinna. "Did we do it?"

"We did it," Danger confirmed with a smile. "Our worlds are now linked. Anywhere you or Drake want to set up one of these, just outline it with your lightsaber and say '*lanua apparere!*' Concentrating with the Force, obviously."

"Obviously," Drake agreed with only a hint of sarcasm.

"Stop that." Danger made a face at him. "'*lanua disapparere*' and a slash across will dissolve one. And any time you need amusement and want to watch us for a little while, that's outlining a box and '*Fenestrum apparere*'."

"Any time?" Neenie asked, her eyebrows lifted.

Danger sighed deeply. "I hadn't realized until this very moment what a blessing this will be," she remarked to Dumbledore. "A full quarter of the smart-arsery in my house is about to vanish overnight."

"Never fear, I am sure those who are left will take up the slack admirably," Dumbledore assured her. "Now, I should return home. There will be much that needs my attention. I bid you good night."

"Good night," everyone called as Dumbledore stepped through the portal and vanished.

"I don't know about anyone else, but I need to get back for a while," Sirius said. "Make sure for myself that Letha's not dead. That scared me a lot."

"I don't much care for the disembodied look," Danger said. "Anyone else coming?"

We will, said Hairy in a rumbling roar, Chinna snuggled under his arm. *We need to discuss a few things.*

"I believe we should be leaving as well," said Threelo, indicating himself and Emtoo. "Metal can be so... confining."

The fleshly members of the party sniggered.

Emtoo beeped huffily and rolled into the portal. Threelo, Hairy, and Chinna followed in quick succession. Danger winked at Sirius and drifted across the threshold.

Sirius took one last look around Hogwor... *though not my last forever, if the others like my idea...* then started to step forward.

"Padfoot, wait a second?" Neenie called from behind him.

Sirius half-turned. His foot snagged on something, and he tripped, falling backwards into the portal between worlds.

Oh, now that's graceful.

He braced himself for a hard landing, but instead two pairs of arms cushioned his fall. He looked up into Remus' and Harry's faces. "Thanks," he panted, getting his feet under him and standing up.

On the screen, Ron and Drake were snickering. Neenie gave them both a glare, then turned to face the portal. "Never mind, Padfoot," she said. "I'll ask you the next time I see you."

"Works for me," Sirius called aloud, and heard a faint echo of his voice drift from the other side of the portal a moment later.

That could get creepy.

Drake ignited his lightsaber. "*lanua disappearere*," he said carefully, slashing the green blade across the silver doorway, making it vanish. "Now, who's up for some fun?"

Sirius chuckled and turned away from the screen. *They'll be fine.*

"Dadfoot!" shrieked a deliriously happy voice.

Sirius braced himself, but all Meghan did was run up to him at full speed, stop dead just before she cannoned into him, hug him delicately, and run away again giggling.

"So it's true, then," Harry said, watching Meghan go. "You never get to understand girls. Any girls."

"Sad but true." Sirius sighed dramatically. "We understand only as much as they want us to."

"I'd debate that," said a much-missed voice from behind him. "You understand far less than I want you to, about almost every subject under the sun."

Sirius turned around and let his wife know how much he'd hated thinking she was dead.

"About that, however," Aletha said when she could breathe again, "I will admit you know quite a lot."

"Thank you." Sirius looked around the little cinema and decided there'd never be a better time. "Everyone, can I get your attention for a second?"

Neville and Ginny looked up from their discussion, Meghan from her dance, and Remus and Danger from their examination of Harry's hands.

"Brace yourselves, people..." Sirius waited for the obligatory grasping of objects and tensing of muscles. "I've had an idea."

"Do tell," said Aletha, seating herself in the front row.

"Well, as we all heard, the war's over, or going to be soon enough. Won't be so much call for Aurors anymore. So I think I need a new line of work, and I was hoping I could convince you lot to help me with it." Sirius looked up at the screen, where Drake was teaching the Ewoks how to do a conga line. "What do you think of starting a dream world tour guide service?"

THE END

(for now)