

Falling Upwards

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/25154182) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/25154182>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	Gen
Fandoms:	Star Wars - All Media Types , Star Wars Prequel Trilogy
Relationships:	Jango Fett & Anakin Skywalker , Obi-Wan Kenobi & Anakin Skywalker
Characters:	Anakin Skywalker , Obi-Wan Kenobi , Jango Fett
Additional Tags:	Mandalorian Culture , mental manipulation , Implied/Referenced Brainwashing , Cultural Manipulation , Tatooine Slave Culture , Stockholm Syndrome , Inspired by Integration Universe , Kidnapping , Alternate Universe , AU of an AU , Backstory
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Integrating AUs
Collections:	Integration: The Collection
Stats:	Published: 2020-07-08 Updated: 2020-08-06 Words: 12,660 Chapters: 4/?

Falling Upwards

by [steampunkunicorn](#)

Summary

Prequel to my fic Living Sideways, telling how Anakin became Mando'ade

Notes

Okay, so I wasn't planning on writing more. But I kept having inspiration. So, I wrote a couple chapters. I have an outline and a reasonable idea of how long this'll be. I can do it. As such, I decided to post it, see what you guys think. I'm also doing this in a different way than Setting Life Straight, a wonderful story that was inspired by Living Sideways. There may be some similarities, but I do not want to steal from them nor tell the exact same story. I try to give credit where it is due whenever possible, so I may borrow an element or two, but will let you guys know.

Anyway, enjoy!

The Mission

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Anakin was excited.

“Finally, we actually get to see some action!” He ran out of the cockpit, ready to move after a long ship ride.

“Patience, Padawan.” Obi-Wan chided him, though with a wry smile. “You know all missions are important.”

Anakin immediately halted, not wanting to jeopardise being left on the ship (last time wasn’t his fault, but he had to be careful, anyway.) “Yes, Master.”

“Now, help me oversee the supplies. We have to make sure everything gets delivered to the troops before we get to our mission.”

Never let it be said that his Jedi teacher didn’t know how to simultaneously take the excitement out of their mission and make him impatient, all while teasing Anakin. Sighing, Anakin went to the cargo hold to help double-check the manifest.

Once everything was accounted for, they were on their way. At least they were going to meet General Arvor and his troops. Anakin had never seen actual soldiers before, outside of his trip to Coruscant from Tatooine. Tatooine was controlled by the Hutts, so most fighting over it was done far away from his former owner and mostly done by third parties for various specific goals. If not for Jedi Master Qui-Gon following the Living Force to find him, he might have still been there. He hoped the soldiers had good stories.

They arrived after a fifteen-minute ride. The General greeted them warmly, relief in his features.

“You must be the Jedi.”

“Obi-Wan Kenobi.” His Jedi Master confirmed. “And this is my Padawan, Anakin.”

Anakin gave a respectful nod before looking around. Technically, he could get away with it, as Obi-Wan had instructed him to learn as much as he could about the base. It looked similar to what the classes on warfare had discussed, with a standard layout. But it was all still interesting. Anakin noted the colours on the tents, individualising them, the flags, and marking the base as a defense outpost.

“The datachips, especially, will reduce casualties tenfold.” The General was saying. Anakin remembered a small box that Obi-Wan insisted on carrying himself. If it was that important of information, Anakin could see why Obi-Wan had been so fussy about it.

“I am happy to hear that.” His Jedi Master said cheerfully (or, at least, as cheerful as he lets himself be.) “It will certainly make our part in this mission go more smoothly.”

Perhaps noticing Anakin’s fidgeting, he was shooed away to explore while the General and Obi-Wan continued their discussion. They would get Anakin up to speed when needed. Not that he would be doing that much. This was his first mission outside of peaceful diplomacy and negotiations within the Republic planets. As such, he would be kept with the refugees they were moving to a safer planet.

Until that part happened, Anakin could badger and explore to his heart’s content.

Hours later, Obi-Wan tracked down his wayward Padawan. Anakin had been having bursts of energy that had been driving Obi-Wan up the wall recently and no amount of meditation worked with his young charge. So, Obi-Wan had tried directing that energy away from whining and towards situational awareness. He had more success than disappointment with it, but sometimes letting the boy go off on his own was a necessity.

Still, Obi-Wan was proud of how well Anakin had conducted himself so far. He had matured much in the four years of training and Obi-Wan could only imagine how much more Anakin would improve in the years to come.

“There you are, Padawan.” He greeted the boy, who was happily eating with a group of soldiers, no doubt interested in their lives. Anakin had always had a way with people from all levels and was interested in them in a way he had seldom seen elsewhere. Anakin popped up from his seat and, waving to the men he had no doubt charmed guilelessly, walked over to him.

“Sorry, Master. I was learning about how the standard day goes here, what kind of training the soldiers go through, the defenses...” Anakin was quite happy as he babbled on to Obi-Wan's patient ears. He had to keep a careful balance of tuning out and listening. It always hurt his heart that the Jedi were forced into war. They were peacekeepers, not soldiers, but sometimes that line felt blurred. This mission was a good example of that.

“And Ferrs said that he’s going to show me a few moves before we go tomorrow!” Anakin finished.

“It is wise to learn different points of view. Different styles of fighting are one way to do so.” Obi-Wan stated neutrally. He wanted nothing more than to hide Anakin far from the dangers of war, but this was the safest mission he could arrange now that his Padawan was old enough. The constant war between the Republic, Siths, and the Mandalorians had forever altered how the Jedi were raised. He couldn’t help but wonder how a world without it would be.

Master Qui-Gon always scolded him to live in the present, not in a fantasy.

Sighing, Obi-Wan lightly touched Anakin’s back, leading him to their temporary quarters.

The next day, Anakin woke before his Jedi Master, energised for the day. He dressed quickly and, leaving a note, left the shared quarters. The sun was starting to rise fully into the sky and the base was already bustling. He diverted to the meal tent, wanting a full stomach before sparring. The tent, obviously flush with the new supplies they delivered, had delicious scents wafting through the doors as he entered. He got into the rapidly expanding line and quickly got some delicious eggs, toast, and cheese.

Leaving the tent, he found Arnes and Ferrs sitting together. He quickly joined them, excited for the spar. They chatted more about what the soldiers had seen on their campaigns, what he had seen on his missions, and the comparisons between their General and his Jedi Master. They were kind, patiently listening to his complaining of boredom and then joking about the boredom they faced in between work. From their stories, it seemed that war, like their missions, had a lot of “hurry up and wait” involved.

They finished their meals and went to another tent, this one dedicated to sparring matches. There were several cordoned areas, some of which were already occupied. Ferrs directed him to an empty one and told him to stretch.

The two watched him, no doubt wanting to have an idea of how hard to go on him. He was still just a Padawan, after all. He gave them the same curtesy as they stretched. They were in their undershirts and standard uniform pants and combat boots. All that was needed was to slip on their armor and they would be ready to deal with the worst. The men were well-muscled in a way that made Obi-Wan look slim, but were also able to stretch as far as the human body would allow without the Force.

After stretching, Arnes and Ferrs debated who would go first. Eventually, it was agreed that they would show Anakin a few moves on each other before they would move on to him. They went through a few moves, demonstrating what to do each time. Anakin copied what they did quickly, only needing a few corrections. After a half-hour of such practice, they decided to test Anakin against Arnes.

The idea of going easy on Anakin was quickly discarded, as he was able to counter their easier moves without issue. Arnes adjusted easily and moved onto a more medium level of difficulty. Here, Anakin’s advantage disappeared. They managed to come to a draw.

“Not bad, kid.” Ferrs stated as he handed a towel to them. “If you ever get tired being a Jedi, you’d make a good soldier.”

Anakin was both happy and filled with shame. On one hand, he was far beyond any ability he could have imagined on Tatooine. The idea of fighting in any situation had been discouraged for slaves, after all. And he had advanced fairly well in skill from his time in the Temple. On the other, he was supposed to become a Jedi, not a soldier. Jedi were peacekeepers that fought when diplomacy and compromise was not an option. Still, he was gracious, thanking them for teaching him and claiming the need to check on his Jedi Master.

Finding him having morning tea and a small morning meal, Anakin sat and they discussed the plans concerning the removal and relocation of the refugees.

“And we’re down a pilot, unfortunately. The man has apparently come down with a local virus. He’s gotten treatment, but has to wait it out.” Obi-Wan gave Anakin a look, clearly waiting.

Anakin, knowing where the conversation was going, rose to the bait. “I’ll be happy to pilot a ship.”

“I thought you would. You’ll be piloting the rear guard.” Anakin couldn’t help but be excited at the news. There wouldn’t be any refugees on the ship, so he could get a little fancy without Obi-Wan scolding him and the rear guard was an important position, ensuring that everyone made it safely.

“Thank you!” Anakin couldn’t help but smile. His Jedi Master was truly wonderful sometimes.

A pulse of contentment came through their bond. “Just make sure not to tax the poor ship too much. It’ll be one of the older models and might not handle every maneuver you’ll be tempted to perform in between doing our jobs.” His tone was dry, despite the teasing nature in the bond. “Now, we have an hour until we head out and you are behind on your meditation.”

“But Master!”

“Meditation, my young Padawan.”

And so, they meditated.

Obi-Wan wasn’t kidding about the ship being older. It was only a year or two away from decommissioning to Anakin’s eyes. Either that or a total refit, if the pilot was attached to it. It would be expensive, though, given the state of the hull.

Still, provided the engine was decent, he could do a few tricks. He’d have to get a look while the few supplies were put on.

After being let on, he traverses the layout, noting that the inside was at least nicer than the outside. While not shiny and new, the ship could probably last another three years, provided the hull didn’t take too much damage. Finally reaching the engine room, he found it to be about equal to the rest of the inside. If he had time, he would probably offer to do a few upgrades after they were done. The owner probably wouldn’t mind and Obi-Wan would want to stay a few days to ensure everyone was settled.

Suddenly, his comm rang.

“Anakin, we’ve just received a report that enemy ships have been spotted in this sector, so our timetable’s been moved up. We’re heading out in the next five minutes.” Obi-Wan's voice came through, no doubt too busy for visual.

“Alright. I’m headed to the cockpit and ready to go when you are.” Anakin began moving swiftly, knowing how fast they would need to move. Obi-Wan hated dealing with excitement on missions and this could potentially lead to some. He would complain about it later.

“Maybe I should join you.” His Jedi Master sounded worried.

“I’ll be fine. Besides, it’ll take longer and you know I’m the better pilot.” He wheedled, knowing that he wouldn’t get to do any fun tricks if Obi-Wan was with him.

“If you’re sure...”

“I am, we don’t want to risk it with enemy ships.” He knew that would clench the decision. Obi-Wan would want to get out of there soon and was willing to listen to logic.

“Fine. Are you ready?” Success!

“In the cockpit, ship is ready...” Anakin quickly ran through the flight check, thankful for standardised nav controls. As he trailed off, the ship was lifted into the air, ready to follow the others.

“Then we’re heading out.”

“See you on the other side.” With that, Anakin closed the comm. He carefully watched, making sure his ship was the last to leave. Things were going boringly perfect. At least Obi-Wan couldn’t joke about him causing grey hairs this time.

So, of course that was the moment things went wrong. At first, Anakin only noticed the ships on his periphery, but they were moving in quickly. He moved to get a better look and, if needed, distract enough to get the other ships more time.

As he pulled away, he sent a message, letting the remaining ships know to hurry. He was able to get a good look and recognised the new ships as being in far better shape than his own before the first weapon discharged. It was easy enough to avoid and he began evasive maneuvers.

His ship didn’t have much in the way of weapons, much to his frustration, but he managed to get a few shots in whenever it looked like the enemy ships were getting a bit too close to the still exiting refugee ships. Fortunately, he was able to keep all eyes on him.

Unfortunately, he managed to keep all weapons focused on him.

He had to pull out the fancy flying that Obi-Wan liked to chide him for in order to avoid some of the shots. He sighed as he just barely avoided a hit to the engine. He swan-dived and turned in order to check on the refugee ships. The last one was entering hyperspace. Now all he had to do was enter hyperspace, himself.

Having set the coordinates, he was about to enter hyperspace when he was pulled into a tractor beam.

“Come on.” He growled. Since he wasn’t getting away, he had to be careful. “Okay, this is just like training back at the temple. Think back to class. Your ship is being boarded by the enemy, you’re alone, and you need to not get caught.” There were a few ways to go about it.

He could face them head on, but he was only a Padawan, no back-up. A quick way to die, the teacher would say. He could play predator and prey, lead them on a merry chase, letting them think they were the predator until he sneak-attacked. Again, Padawan, no back-up.

Sighing, he looked up, hoping to think of a better plan. As it was, he had already set the computers to wipe. He had the coordinates memorised and could plot out the trip manually. He just needed to get a ship that wasn’t being tracked into the enemy. That meant stealing an enemy ship. Which meant that he needed to sneak out. And the ship was a model popular with smugglers.

He reached out with the Force, hoping to get a nudge in the right direction. The Force obliged, and he opened a nearby fake wall, the seam nearly invisible. There wasn’t much room, but his youth came in handy and he was able to side-crawl through the ship. At thirteen, he had begun having growth spurts, but had not yet filled out in equal measure. This not only gave him breathing room, but allowed him to move pretty far and more quietly as he heard the ship be boarded.

He froze at the sounds of the enemy. He vaguely recognised the language. They were Mandalorian.

Just kriffing great...

It was definitely a good thing he hadn’t faced them head on. Although it definitely made the chances of getting a ship out from under them a lot harder. He’d heard stories. Unless the Jedi that faced the Mandos managed to retreat or kill them, they usually didn’t come back. He could have sworn at that. Why did he insist he would be fine on his own?

He moved slowly and quietly, being careful of making sound. Suddenly, a feeling that could only be a hint from the Force struck him. He quietly jumped, catching onto a shelf and lying on it just as the wall opened. He held his breath as they looked around, trying to will the Force to have them ignore him. The Force seemed to be on his side as they didn’t look up.

He held his breath as he waited for them to leave. Their armour prevented them from exploring too much, as the bulk from it was too wide for the warriors to travel like he did. Still, it seemed like they were letting others know. No doubt he wouldn’t get far with this route anymore. Which meant that he would have to risk traveling the main ship soon.

Finally, they left, though without closing the wall. And the shelf he was on was on the side he had just walked past.

Kriff.

He waited a few minutes, wanting to be sure they had gone. Hearing no sounds for that time, he leapt down, hoping to move quickly.

Which is why he upset to find himself wrenched out of the wall and dragged by two Mandos down the hall. One of them said something that sounded like swearing.

He was eventually let go of in front of a blue and silver coloured armoured Mando. Figuring he had nothing to lose at this point, he focused on the Force, activated his lightsaber, and attacked.

He had the advantage of a small surprise and managed to steal one of their blasters, which they seemed hesitant to use. He had seen them fired, but had not done so himself. So, he kept that as a backup. He focused on redirecting their few shots, which were set to stun, he noted. Whether that was due to underestimating him or their morals concerning the young, he wasn't sure, but it gave him a security that he had the advantage, using the lethal force of a lightsaber.

Growing up on Tatooine taught him to be used to death. Slaves often died at the whims of the Tato and he had lost many friends for very simple reasons, lacking food or infections from punishment, that sort of thing. His own mother had been taken away due to illness and Watto not wanting to pay the expense for medicine.

Whether that meant he was able to take a life was to be tested. He lunged, trying to get strikes in. But whatever their armour was made out of wasn't affected by his lightsaber.

They tried to grab him; one was pulling out a hypo. He pulled back, deciding to minimise risk by instead focusing on redirecting the blaster shots they were forced to make, not being able to get close to him. Suddenly, he was thankful the Jedi trained the Padawans to use their sabers in various situations, one-handed, blinded, upside-down, etc. As such, he redirected the shots with his dominant hand and held the blaster in his other. He shot, unsure which setting it was on.

The shot went wide. Just kriffing great.

He had to shoot again, redirecting had only worked twice. It seemed whatever their armour was made out of also prevented blaster shots from harming them, but Anakin had gotten the two who first grabbed him with the stun blast to weak points in their armour. However, there was still the white and blue armour.

So, he focused the Force onto the shot. It aimed true, going straight for the man.

The relief he felt was the last thing he knew before the room went dark.

Obi-Wan watched with a small thread anxiety. Being in the first ship, he knew that if anything happened to their end destination, he needed to be able to coordinate and take action. Fortunately, the planet was ready to receive them, with land cleared for a new settlement and no enemy in sight.

Which brought the anxiety back to the forefront. After all, they had to speed up their schedule. While they weren't sure how far away the ships were, he had to assume that, until

they were told otherwise, the ships were not close.

He watched and confirmed each ship arrived safely and with the report of no issue. This continued for about an hour.

Two-thirds of the ships arrived with the same report. It was going smoothly. Given his and Anakin's usual luck, he was worried. There should have been some small issue by now. If there wasn't, there would be a big issue.

His fears were confirmed with a new report. The newest ship had received a message to hurry due to a concern about an approaching ship. Obi-Wan wanted to curse. He had no doubt it was one of enemy ships from the report. But he couldn't do anything. He had to wait to ensure everyone arrived. The more ships that arrived, the less chance of people getting hurt. Anakin was the better pilot. There was a reason Obi-Wan let him be the rear-guard. He could keep the ships distracted and on him and Obi-Wan will strangle his Padawan for putting himself in such danger. He knew he should have protested stronger about the Senate mandate concerning the acceptable age of Jedi on higher risk missions.

More ships came, the reports mentioning the message, the rear guard ensuring they had time, and arriving safely. He felt a sliver of hope grow as they were receiving the last few ships. The last in line before Anakin's arrived with the same message. Obi-Wan held his breath, waiting.

Five minutes passed. Obi-Wan was sure Anakin wanted to get a few shots in.

Fifteen minutes passed. He was planning on making Anakin study up on statistics concerning risky maneuvers and write an essay on why they should be employed only as a last resort.

A half-hour passed. The refugees touched down on planet and he arranged with the captain to return to the original planet.

He waited as they took off. The ride through hyperspace wasn't long, as they only moved from the edge of Republic space to the next sector, creating for a buffer and allowing the defense base greater control.

They arrived to empty space. Perhaps Anakin had to abandon ship and used an escape pod down to the base. He messaged the base, wanting an update.

He went cold as he heard "The enemy ships shot a few blasts our way, but were repelled. We haven't heard anything from the Centurion, though. We believe it to be captured."

Whether is next action was performing foolish hope or needing to confirm his suspicion's, only Obi-Wan knew. He tugged on the mental bond. It took everything he had not to cry as he felt no response.

So, couple things:

I wanted to show hints of how being at constant war with the Sith and Mandalorian Empires would affect the Republic. I figured by now they had a mostly smoothed out system, with Generals that weren't set up for failure like the Jedi were. In doing so, the Jedi were able to maintain the peacekeeper vibe by focusing on more diplomatic missions, while also still aiding the military. I was thinking of them acting as an individual branch of the military, sent in for undercover work, info collecting, etc. So, that would cause for the Jedi to be taught some theory on warfare and how to deal with those kinds of missions.

I stated in Living Sideways that Anakin and Obi-Wan got separated on a slightly more risky missions. Like the military, I imagine the Jedi had a system in place for training Padawans depending on age, experience, and so on (which can lead to conflicts with the Senate when their goals aren't completely aligned.) I had also kept the exact mission vague, but stated that it had to do with getting Anakin more used to the dangerous missions. I figured a relief mission near the border was a reasonable mission.

Anakin's backstory is also different in this as a result of a different political situation, and, as a result, has not met Padme. This will affect the series later, as I do intend to pair them together. We will get hints to the differences as the story goes. I also intend to include some of my worldbuilding from my series Tian and Garto. If you have any further questions, let me know in the comments!

During and After

Chapter Summary

We fill in some gaps and Anakin wakes up.

Chapter Notes

Hope this chapter's as good as the first. Up until now, all of my stories have been either one shots or only the first chapter. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Jango Fett was not a happy man.

This had become increasingly so in the months since his buir retired and he took up the mantle of Mand'alor. The job, while prepared for, was still quite stressful.

He had decided to take out some new recruits in order to intelligence gather. It was expected to be tedious and boring, but relatively low stress. There was a new defense post being built on a planet that was located near the border of the Republic and Mandalorian space. They were to go in, find out the size, resources, planet type, and basic defenses. Something that, if they were careful, would allow them in and out without alerting the enemy to their presence.

So of course, they are greeted by a ship. It wasn't military class, but it was no doubt ready to alert the planet's defense base.

"We need that ship taken out immediately." He ordered. There were other ships, but they were out of range. They would have to move closer in order to message the base. And they would be taken down before then. They needed to. *"Try to move closer. We need to reduce risk."*

He cursed the bad intelligence they received. They should have known of any major movement of ships, even civilian ones.

As it was, he was also ready to curse out the main ship they were dealing with. The ship, while nothing impressive, was able to outmaneuver their blasts. In doing so, it was also blocking them from getting to the other ships. Which were growing smaller in number, he noted as another one entered hyperspace. At least they weren't going to alert anyone, at least before they'd be gone.

And so went a merry chase. Whoever the pilot was, he had already decided they would be a good fit for his people. Provided they weren't shot out of the stars. He was thankful the ship wasn't in better condition or else they might not have had a chance. The pilot was quite skilled.

After over an hour, they finally caught the ship in a tractor beam.

They boarded the ship, prepared for anything. They fanned out, Jango heading to the cockpit. He had no doubt the pilot and anyone else would be found. While the group was new to action, they were well-trained, the first ones his buir had personally trained after Jango had become Mand'alor.

So, he focused on gathering what information he could. By the time he sat down at the cockpit, he cursed. Whoever the pilot was, they were not only good at flying. They were also intelligent, having made sure to wipe the computers of any usable information. He called a nearby recruit over to take the astromech back to the ship. While it was probably wiped as well, any slicer worth their trade could retrieve at least some information, sometimes even restore a wipe. And Ruusaan was one of the best in the Empire, despite her age.

He doubled back, checking in with the various teams of two. There was no luck. It seemed the pilot, whoever they were, was likely the only person on the ship.

"Alor, there's a seam in the wall. I think this might be a smuggler's ship." Suki stated.

"That might be why we haven't found the pilot yet."

"It seems like a hidden hallway. Small, though. If they have been using it to hide, they'd have to be on the skinnier side." Suki's new recruit stated, no doubt doing the exploring. Suki always had fun teaching through experience. "We can't explore without removing our beskar."

"We can't risk it without knowing what the pilot is capable of." Suki argued.

"Stand guard wait in case you hear or see any movement." Jango cut off the argument that no doubt was forming.

"Yes, Alor."

"Yes, Alor."

Five minutes passed, reports of a few crates, mostly marked relief aid were found. No doubt to allow the base to take charge of the planet and reduce accidental deaths in the future. One of the few intelligent practices the Republic did. Then again, it might have been more that the Sith Empire simply didn't care, apathy instead of idiocy.

"Found them." Suki reported. "Ran across the door. Osik! They're adiik."

"Bring them to the ship. I'll meet you on the way." Jango ordered. Osik. If they had downed the ship, he would have condemned the recruits to become demalgolka'e. Harming an adiik,

no matter the circumstances beyond incapacitating them to prevent danger, went against the code and Resol'nare.

The adiik was most definitely surprising. He hadn't been sure what to expect, but this wasn't it. They were on the shorter side, though having some muscle that the jetii robes were unable to hide. The adiik seemed wary, but calm about the situation, surrendering without issue.

Of course, that was the moment they began to fight. The jetii'ka activated their weapon and attacked. Given how sudden the movement was, as well as not wanting to truly hurt them, there was a slight hesitation that allowed the jetii'ka to steal away one of the poor recruit's blasters. Jango, knowing how dangerous a jetii'kad could be, made himself the main target as they began to lunge. His beskar'gam could withstand the attack.

"Close in, try to grab them." He heard Suki tell her recruit.

The jetii'ka quickly realised this too, as they did not continue to use the jetii'kad directly for much longer. Instead, they used it to deflect the blasters, moving away from the attempted grabs. They pulled the stolen blaster back out, ready to use. The adiik was proving themselves intelligent for battle and would have several options for aliit when the time came for them to become a Mando'ad.

Suki was hit with a deflected stun bolt and fell. Her recruit, guarding her, was hit shortly after. If it was not so irritating, Jango would have admired the jetii'ka's actions. He slowed his blaster bolts, contemplating going for a grab, the sedative hypo Suki had pulled out was still close. If he could wrestle the jetii'ka towards it, the situation would be contained.

A shot went to the wall. The adiik had clearly never fired a blaster before. That made the situation far more worrisome. A person untrained with a weapon could easily hurt themselves.

Jango saw Akkus arrive. He signaled ze to take them down. They were aiming again and he didn't want to think of where the shot could have ended up. Ze connected the hypo to the adiik, but not before the blaster was shot. The shot hit his chest plate, mostly absorbed by the beskar. But he still let out a grunt at the impact.

"Get them to the ship." He ordered zem. He then switched to the main com. "Finish up and return to the ship. We have the pilot."

Akkus's recruit was called over, having arrived just as the jetii'ka was sedated. He and the Togruta girl checked over the stunned two. Fortunately, there were no visible injuries, but he commed for a stretcher. Once ensured, he headed back to his own ship, ready to return to Manda'yaim.

He recalled all of the other ships, one of whom managed to begin a skirmish with the base and were showing their inexperience. He would have to arrange a better ratio of experienced and inexperienced members in the future.

Anakin woke suddenly, a headache behind his eyes and a thickness on his tongue. He sat up, not remembering where he was or how he got there. Whispers of stories he'd heard from the slaves on Tatooine about missing time entered his mind. He reached for his Padawan braid, still intact.

He relaxed a fraction. He wasn't on Tatooine, having imagined becoming a Jedi like he feared those first few months. He looked around, trying to figure out where he was, since he knew where he wasn't. It looked similar to the Healing Hall in the Jedi Temple, with a row of beds, curtains to potentially section off areas for privacy, and a sterile feeling surrounding the room. It was a different colour and the lighting was a few degrees brighter and he didn't recognise anyone.

"Good, you're awake." A voice stated. He turned to find a human male in a nearby chair. "Welcome back to the living." The man was a touch sarcastic. It reminded him a little of Obi-Wan. He wasn't sure if that was a comfort or not. "How are you feeling?"

"How do you expect me to feel?" Anakin was still fairly sure he hadn't been returned to slavery, but he was still unsure who had captured him (if Obi-Wan wasn't there for him to wake up to, he knew he was likely captured.)

"I expect that you might still be feeling the sedative. Here." The man offered Anakin a cup. Reluctantly, he took it. Glancing at the contents, he saw it was water. He put the cup on a nearby table.

"Could I have some milk, instead?" Time to see if he was a prisoner and possible slave or if he had somehow been rescued. If the man demanded he drink the water or refuse to let him drink at all, he was a prisoner. If he got the milk or offered another substitute, he was a guest.

After a moment, the man nodded and tapped at a tablet. A few minutes later, a droid brought his requested drink. Relaxing a fraction, he accepted and drank.

The man continued to watch, acting casual. Anakin focused on the cup, emptied too quickly. Finally, he looked up. "Where am I?"

"You are in Keldabe, your new home." The words were said in a soothing tone that made Anakin want to scream.

"My home is with my Jedi Master." He spoke angrily. He should be calm, he knew, but the man acted like it was to be accepted without choice. That he could simply be ordered to give up his old life... "We are based in the Temple on Coruscant. I'm sure they would be happy to compensate you for my return. I'm sure Master Obi-Wan is worried and I don't want to fall behind on my studies." He hadn't convincingly used the tooka eyes trick in years, but he hoped he could convince someone that hadn't seen him use it before.

"If they would be so worried, why were you alone on a ship?" The man looked angry at that. Anakin went cold.

"You were one of the schuttas that tried to go after the refugees!" The man looked a little shocked, no doubt over his choice of language. While he didn't know what it meant, he knew

it was a bad word, used for the worst people. “You attacked my ship! Why should I tell you anything?” Had they been trying to trick him? Make him think he was a guest and trick him into revealing important information?

“We didn’t go after the refugees, though.” The man calmly pointed out, making Anakin grind his teeth in annoyance. “And we thought you might have alerted the base, which would have ended with lives lost. We were just trying to capture your ship to prevent that.” The man seemed to not be lying, but it wasn’t the whole truth. Obi-Wan’s dealing with politicians and certain points of view came to mind.

“Yeah, and I’ve got a planet to sell you.” He rolled his eyes at the story. The man chuckled at him.

“We were on a scouting mission. It was for information gathering. That is the truth. Now, how about you tell me your truth.” The man’s eyes narrowed. “What were you doing by yourself on that ship?”

Anakin thought for a minute. The computers had been wiped and he let slip about the refugees. He could tell the man without giving anything away.

“The refugee ships were down a pilot. I was the best pilot available. I volunteered to be rear-guard. Since we weren’t expecting any trouble, my Master agreed. When your ships were spotted, I insisted on him going ahead, so as to not waste time and risk capture.” Anakin shrugged at that.

The man, however, seemed clearly unhappy and sounded like he was cursing under his breath. After finishing, he looked at Anakin. “Well, you won’t be put in the same risk here. You will join the Foundlings until we have found a buir for you.”

Anakin jumped out of the bed at that, only slightly shaky as he encouraged the Force to burn through what little remained in his system “What? But I just told you. I am a Jedi. I have been for years. I don’t plan to stop being one. My family are other Jedi. I am no foundling.”

“You are to become Mandalorian.” The man said decisively. “You are in the heart of the Mandalorian Empire, not the Republic, jetii’ka. There aren’t any jetii that currently serve the Empire. And I cannot return you to people that would allow an ad, a child to be put at risk.” The man tried to pat his shoulder consolingly, but Anakin wrenched away from him. “By our laws, we must do all we can to protect children. And, as such, it is for your protection as a child that you will stay here. Unless you have any other familial claim?”

Anakin deflated and sat back on the bed. “My mom died when I was nine and Obi-Wan has raised me since.”

“And I’m sure he has been a good buir.” Anakin tried to protest that. From the conversation, he could guess what the word meant and Obi-Wan couldn’t be a parent, not as a Jedi. The man continued, “But why did he allow for you to be at risk in the first place?”

Anakin puffed up at that, angry at the thought that this stranger would accuse his Jedi Master of anything wrong. “I’m old enough for moderate level risk missions, by the Jedi Temple

rules. This was my first and Obi-Wan did everything he had to, to keep me safe!” The glass of water slammed into the wall at that. Anakin whipped his head around to see it. He had lost control. Obi-Wan would be disappointed.

Anakin moved into a meditation pose. He had trouble with meditation, but he could at least spend the time identifying his emotions and calm himself before anything else broke. He studiously ignored the man, who tried to reassure him, patting his hair.

He didn’t move. He didn’t say a word. It was only after he heard him leave that he allowed his tears to fall.

“Shall I comm Jaster to inform him of his bu’ad, Alor’ika?” Akkus greeted him, a teasing smile on zer face.

“Considering I have not adopted the adiik, that would be a waste of time.” He answered.

Ze frowned at him.

“Why haven’t you? I saw the way you looked at them. It was the same look Jaster had for you and your vod when he first met you.”

He sighed. He wanted that adiik, yes, but he didn’t want to pressure them. If he offered his vow and was rejected, Jango didn’t know how he would handle it. To be fair, he wasn’t sure how he would handle it if he wasn’t rejected. They were like a storm, much like he had been around that age (and may still be, depending on who is asked, of course.) Jaster had been a wonderful buir to him, but he had spent so much of that time angry and he ended up hurting his buir. He couldn’t do that to an ad.

“I want to make sure they have the best situation for them. What can I even do for a jetii’ka?” He snorted.

“Love them, raise them, give them what Jaster gave you.” Ze answered. “But, if you insist, I’ll arrange for a few prospective buir’e with experience with Force sensitivity to meet them.” Ze stated, tapping on a datapad. “What is their name, anyway?”

Jango frowned. He had managed to botch the first meeting and forgot to introduce himself or get the jetii’ka’s name and pronouns. Something must have shown on his face, because ze sighed.

“I’ll ask the baar’ur after their medical examination, which has no doubt started.” Arruk moved towards the door, stopping just before entering. “Just...promise to think on it? Or perhaps Jaster wouldn’t mind giving you a vod’ika?” Ze returned to teasing.

Jango shot zem a look as ze left. He shook his head and went to find Effao. He left her in charge during this last mission and needed to be brought up to date.

Chapter End Notes

In this universe, we love Jaster and refuse to have him die simply for Jango to take on the title. As such, he retired to go teach the next generation. In my comment replies, I joked about Jango wanting to adopt Anakin from the moment he saw him fight. That much is still true, but this is a Jedi kid and he has a temper. Jango wants to be cautious about it. Maybe offer himself as a parent when Anakin is a little more accepting? Jango is still new to his role as leader and a bit more unsure of himself and I wanted that to translate to other areas. Once he has a bit more experience under his belt, he'd offer adoption without hesitation, in my mind.

And poor Anakin is just wanting to get home to Obi-Wan.

Since part of this chapter was from Jango's point of view, here's some translations:

Mand'alor-leader/ruler of the Mandalorians (Alor is a shortened version)

buir-parent (plural form-buir'e)

beskar/beskar'gam-Mandalorian armour (named after the type of metal used in it, which can withstand lightsaber and blaster hits)

osik-dung (impolite)

adiik-child aged 3-13

jetii-Jedi

jetii'ka-padawan (literally, little Jedi)

Resol'nare-six actions, tenants of Mando life

demalgolka'e-war criminals/real life monsters, named after infamous scientist that performed experiments on children, conjure up a feeling of hate and dread

jetii'kad-lightsaber (literally Jedi's sword)

Mando'ad-Mandalorian (literally child of Mandalore)

aliit-clan/family

ad-child

Manda'yaim-the planet Mandalore

bu'ad-grandchild

vod-sibling

vod'ika-little sibling

Informed Dealings

Chapter Summary

Anakin gets a check-up and makes a deal

Chapter Notes

I've got one more chapter already written after this one, but I still have my outline. I also found that I love writing sassy teenage!Anakin. He is a grumpy, sassy kitten and I adore it. Hope you guys enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Anakin sat through the examination, thankful the doctor waited until he had finished his crying. The doctor, a togruta woman with a friendly face greeted him.

“Hello, young one. I am Baar’ur Daila, she/her/hers. And I’m going to check your health today.” She looked at him, waiting.

Feeling awkward, with the tear tracks drying on his face, he fidgeted with his hands. “I’m Anakin Skywalker, Jedi Padawan.” He looked at her, daring for her to contradict him.

Instead, she smiled. “And what are your pronouns?”

“Oh, um, he/him/his.” He answered.

She nodded at him. “Very good. Now, we’re just going to do a routine scan. I’m sure you’ll want out of here so you can explore. So, we better get to work.” As he tried to protest the idea of wanting anything to do with his situation, she ignored him and began performing a standard medical exam. She looked at the results, frowning slightly.

She looked at him more critically, almost pitying. Anakin immediately wanted to get away from that look.

“You seem to be within a healthy range for your age and height. But there are a few worrisome results.”

Anakin sighed, knowing from experience just what she was seeing.

“I was enslaved until the age of nine. That’s why it indicates an effect on my potential growth and why I have a scar. They had to cut me open to remove my tracker because it doubled as

an explosive to prevent slaves from running away.” He was proud of his calmness as he spoke.

“And where were you enslaved? The jetii serve the Republic and the Republic outlaws slavery.” It seemed the doctor was well-informed about him. Sighing again, he doubted he would get out of talking about his past.

“I was born in Hutt space. I primarily lived on Tatooine until I was freed. I have primarily lived on Coruscant since then.” He looked her directly in the eye. “As a free person.”

“I am glad to hear it.” She smiled at him. “Are there any allergies we should be aware of, or any potential triggers?”

“No allergies. As for triggers...” He scrunched his face up in thought. “Lacking choice is a pretty big one. So maybe you should arrange for me to go home.”

“Well, since there is nothing wrong with you,” the doctor waved someone over, “someone will escort you to the other Foundlings. There’s Mx. Wral, I’m sure ze won’t mind.”

The person, presumably Mx. Wral, who looked to be a Theelin, came over, seemingly projecting friendliness. The doctor performed the introductions and asked zem to escort him. Wondering if it was worth the fight, he glared at both of them. Once it was clear he wasn’t moving, the Theelin sat down on the nearby chair.

“I’m not going.” He finally said.

“Yes, you made that pretty clear already.” Ze was still smiling. “I will admit to being surprised. I have a child close to your age and Sioth absolutely refuses to stay in Medical if there is literally any other option.”

“That isn’t what I meant.” He could feel himself pouting. By Tian, he could have sworn he stopped that by now. Perhaps whatever knocked him out earlier was still affecting him?

“Then what did you mean?” There was a tone that reminded him sharply of his mom. He could feel himself tearing up again. He tried to stop, he had already wasted water earlier. Warm arms surrounded him and he was suddenly nine years old again, begging his mom not to die and leave him all alone. He was pretty sure he didn’t say that out loud, but he could feel the arms tighten around him.

“There now.” He had finally calmed. “Who is it you’re missing?” He looked up at zem. Though the Theelin looked nothing like her, zer face could have been a copy of his mom’s.

“My mom. She’d know how to deal with all of this.” He answered honestly, feeling like it was the right thing.

“Where is she?” Ze asked him.

“Buried in the sands of Tatooine for four years now.” He buried his head into zer shoulder. Ze smoothed his hair.

“Well, I am sorry for that. But, if I know anything, I’m sure she wouldn’t want you neglecting yourself.” As if to agree, his stomach let out a sound. “How about we go get something to eat? I hear that uj’alayi is being served for dessert today. And maybe afterwards, we can introduce you to some others your age?”

After everything that day, the idea of eating sounded really good, even if he had to meet more people. So, he nodded and got off the bed. Slipping his hand onto zer arm, he walked away from the healers.

Jango finished placing food on his tray, ready to return to his office. Work was never done after all. But then he spotted Akkus with the jetii’ka. And ze spotted him looking at them. Ze waved him over. He cheerfully walked over, hoping the adiik would get a better impression of him over a meal.

“Su’cuy” He greeted.

“Su’cuy, Alor.” Akkus greeted before turning to the adiik. “Anakin, you’ve met our leader, Jango Fett, the Mand’alor.” They nodded cautiously, giving him a wary glance.

“Hello.” They whispered, focusing on the meal.

“He just got done with is examination and was found perfectly healthy.” Akkus informed him. Jango smiled, as it also gave him the right pronouns. He focused on Anakin.

“I am glad to hear that. A healthy child is always good news.” He said, diplomatically. Anakin stubbornly kept focus on his plate. “And of course, it will allow us to find you the right buir without issue.” He looked up and glared at Jango at that.

“And what if I don’t find the right one? Are you going to keep me there against my will? Will you enslave me like the Hutts did?” Shock ran through Jango. The jetii’ka was a former slave? Obviously, they had gone about dealing with the adiik all wrong. A new plan formed in his mind. There were a few options from the Integration program, where former slaves that had been free for a few years, but required an intense program. An inkling of an idea formed in his mind. He knew how to at least arrange it. Jango got up and walked around the table, kneeling to face him.

“A child chooses their new parents. When my buir’e died, I was allowed to choose. The willing buir makes the vow, but the child can choose to reject it and it will not be ignored. We will introduce you to anyone that is willing, though we will make sure to look for those that have dealt with feeling the Force, if you wish.” He held Anakin’s hand in his, loose and gentle.

“I thought you didn’t have any Jedi here?” Anakin was interested and was trying to show he wasn’t. Perfect.

“We don’t. Most of those with the Force here are untrained.” He admitted. “But they might be able to understand you better than others.”

Anakin's eyes widened. "Untrained? Don't you know how dangerous that is?" He pulled his hand away and got up, clearly needing to wrap his mind around the issue. "They can hurt others and themselves! How has no one died? I nearly died as a kid. If it hadn't been for my mom..." He had wide eyes and they were focused on Jango. Jango could feel the storm surround them. No doubt he may have even drowned in it if he let it.

"There have been deaths, mostly children." Jango could only give the truth. It was far more useful at that moment than any lie could be. "We haven't found a teacher for it in some time. Without a teacher, we do the best we can."

"But you claim to protect children! How can you do so when you let them die?"

"We do the best we can. We know very little about the Force. As I said, we will introduce you to those that experience it. Perhaps you could talk with them? Maybe help them if you can? At least give advice for some of the more common causes of death." Jango had to admit, he hadn't planned the last part, but his instinct told him it was the right thing to say. He knew the idea of being around other Force sensitives could help. And gaining someone that not only knew how to control the dangers, but also understood on a realistic level would be a boon. The reminder of the worst possible situation would bring Anakin to the point Jango wanted him.

"Of course. I don't want anyone to die." His eyes were wider than before. Any larger and they would have taken over his face completely.

"Then how about we make a deal?" Anakin looked curious. "You stay around to show some of those in danger how to protect themselves. If you still want to leave afterwards, I will escort you to Republic space, myself." He was going to do everything to convince the child to stay for every second he could, but he would keep his word if needed, even if it wasn't likely. A former slave will always be more accepting if there was a choice first.

"And I won't be adopted?" He asked after a minute.

"Not if you don't want to. And not by anyone you don't want to be." Jango promised.

"Fine." The child finally agreed.

Jango smiled, returned to his meal, and ignored Akkus's knowing glance.

"I'm here to teach the Force. Why do I need to do my own lessons? Especially since they have nothing to do with my teaching?" Anakin was confused. A lot of the material he was given looked interesting. And he did love learning. After Obi-Wan taught him how to read Basic and showed him where the library was, he had spent so much time there, learning whatever he could. And, as long as he made sure to go to his classes and meal times, nobody got angry at him for wanting to learn everything.

"You are here to teach the Force, that is true. But how are you going to approach it?" The tutor that he was told would oversee his learning asked. "The Mando'ade were not taught the

same way jetii are. I was told you came to them late. Did you have trouble understanding concepts that everyone else understood or took for granted?"

Anakin thought back, considering her words. He had spent the first year constantly playing catch-up in order to learn with anyone even close to his own age. And there were times when Obi-Wan, who had tried to be so patient and answer all questions, had trouble understanding his thought process or confused by a leap of logic.

And, from what he saw, Mandalorians seemed to think even more differently than he did.

"That makes sense." He admitted. His tutor, Mx. Fertuia smiled.

"Then, how about we spend the next few days giving you a good background of what your students will know? That way, you'll have to spend less time on teaching them, yourself." Ze pointed back to the datapad.

"Alright. Can we start with something easy? Like machines?" He had been in the advance classes back at the Temple. The fact that he got to learn far beyond what he could have imagined back at Watto's junkyard was one of the best aspects of his free life.

Ze chuckled. "First, we need to see what your education level is. The only one we have an expectation on is language, as most that come here from other systems tend to start at the basic level. I can guess that you have a high knowledge of machinery, though."

Anakin nodded. "I worked at a junkyard back when I was a slave." There was no change in zer face. Still focused and warm without pity.

"So, you have a lot of hands-on experience." Ze nodded at that. "Good, we'll add some time in our mechanical workshops for you, if you'd like. We encourage people, especially ones coming here from elsewhere, to be productive and offer several ways to do it. I'll show you where the workshops are after our lesson today, since you don't have anything listed for your schedule until your lateday meal." Mx. Fertuia was checking zer own datapad as ze spoke.

"Thank you." Anakin was genuinely happy at the idea and knew a little gratitude could go a long way. "You seem like a good teacher." Perhaps he was laying it on a little thick, but both Watto and the Jedi Masters liked to hear heartfelt-sounding compliments.

"Thank you. I specialise in teaching those that weren't born Mando. I hope it will allow me to help you best." Ze smiled at him again. He decided he liked zer smile. It wasn't fake.

"Alright. So, what language is this test in?" He focused on his datapad.

"Which are you most comfortable with?"

After thinking for a moment, he decided on Basic. While he was more eloquent in Huttese, he could read better in Basic, simply from it being more common in the Republic.

"Let me set it for Basic, then." Ze tapped on his datapad, pulling up the test.

Feeling like he did when he had taken a similar test at the Jedi Temple, he read the first question.

Mx. Fertuaia smiled as ze dropped Anakin off at the workshops, allowing for one of the less busy workers to give a reasonably thorough tour. Ze had no doubt the boy would prove his skills there quickly. Ze had been worried when zer Alor told zem of the unique circumstances surrounding zer newest student, but Anakin had quickly charmed zem.

He was clearly a passionate, stubborn adiik, who had a unique background compared to most children they received. Ze had taught former slave children on postings on more recently acquired planets. That was part of the reason ze had been chosen. But Anakin had then been educated in the Republic, by one of the most insular, secretive groups in that system. As such, ze was unsure which techniques would work and which would be recognised and resisted.

It certainly didn't help that Anakin was a Force user who could potentially read minds. While ze were fairly well-traveled, ze still felt underprepared and undereducated on integrating a Force user. But, the techniques worked today and they were able to perform an evaluation and begin language lessons. Anakin proved to be a quick study and would know doubt speak competent Mando'a by the end of their time together.

Ze returned to zer room, ready to create the personalised, intensive coursework that the Mand'alor requested. It was clear Alor had a deep interest in the adiik, from the terms of zer approach to the arrangement with Anakin. Perhaps there would be an announcement of the Mand'alor adopting soon. Whether that would be happening, however, depended on zem doing zer job competently.

Mx. Fertuaia had a lot to do and certain results would only help.

Jango sat with Anakin, listening to his chatter about what he had learned over the day. In less than a week, it had become a nightly custom that he had come to enjoy.

"And the astromech droid kept telling them what was wrong, but they don't speak binary. So, they finally decided to bring the droid in and when everything got explained, they just said 'Why didn't the droid say anything about it?' That poor droid." The boy shook his head in sympathy. Jango found his viewpoint to be interesting.

"I'm sure, An'ika." He ruffled the boy's hair. "But there are people like that everywhere, with all sorts."

"Yeah, but they should at least try to understand and not blame the one trying to tell them." Anakin was pouting.

"Well, sometimes people have trouble with communicating and they don't want to admit it. You'll be getting your own practice in soon." Jango reminded him.

“That’s right! How many am I teaching, anyway?” He put a large bite of meat in his mouth as he asked.

“We’ve arranged for six Force users to learn from you. Most are about your age, though one is much younger.” Jango mentioned, thinking of the trouble Trox Wuzlon had been having.

“Shouldn’t they all be close to the same age? To make my teaching the basics easier?” The adiiik frowned in a way that would be adorable on a slightly younger face. But, at this age, would be seen as needing to be serious.

“Normally, yes. But the younger student is in need of instruction that cannot wait without risking his life. It seems he is able to lift items with your Force, but tends to break the items and has risked injuring those around him.” Jango made sure to look into the boy’s eyes, showing his worry.

“If I were my Jedi Master, Obi-Wan,” Anakin began and Jango tried to hide how the name made him want to grind his teeth. Whenever he spent time with An’ika, he would always find a way to bring up the man he was adamant could never be his buir, the perfect jetii, surpassing even the Head of their Order with his talents. Jango could only hope that Anakin’s integration would lead to less discussion of the supposedly perfect jetii.

He would have to arrange for the boy to meet some of his greater citizens. Perhaps if the boy met some of the better Mando’ade, he would focus his attentions away from the jetii.

“And so, I’ll have to see him lift something with the Force to see what to do.” Anakin finished, bringing Jango out of his thoughts.

“That seems reasonable. Afterwards, how about we do some weapons training?” He could arrange for a few Mando’ade to bond with Anakin, showing their ability to teach and parent. Yes, that would work. “I recall that you haven’t used a blaster before the circumstances that led to your stay with us. We wouldn’t want you to be captured by anyone that would harm you, after all.” Anakin frowned at that, but he didn’t immediately object. “Since you don’t wish to join an aliit, it is our duty to ensure that you are capably able to defend yourself before we part ways.”

After a minute, Anakin slowly nodded.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so we have some forward plot momentum! Also, we have some of jealous and possessive Jango peeking through (aka, the best kind of Jango.) And poor Anakin, he doesn't realise nuance at all. If he did, he'd certainly be more wary of sharing info and making deals. Between his age, his history, and most of the kindness he's gotten since arriving, he really doesn't have a clue. But I love my oblivious human disaster child. Tian, who he refers to, is one of the twin suns of Tatooine. The doctor and tutor are my OCs, created solely for this fic. And Jango, while still pretty new to his position of

power and slightly unsure, was raised to lead and deal with people. So, he definitely knows how to get what he wants when he isn't panicking over whether he's doing the right thing.

Now, on to the translations:

Baar'ur-Healer

Jetii-Jedi

Jetii'ka-Padawan (lit. Little Jedi)

Uj'alayi-Uj cake (dense, very sweet flat cake made of ground nuts, syrup, pureed dried fruit and spice)

Adiik-Child age 3-13

Su'cuy-Hello

Mand'alor/Alor-Sole leader of the Mandalorians

Buir-Parent (pl. Buir'e)

Mando'ade-Children of Mandalore

An'ika-Nickname, like Rosita is a nickname for Rosie (lit. little Anankin)

Teaching Experiences

Chapter Summary

Anakin starts teaching and his past as a slave affects him more than he knows.

Chapter Notes

So, even though I had the chapter already written, I needed to rewrite it. I meant to finish my rewrite like, a week and a half ago. In other news, depression sucks. I've been functional, but not at all able to write. Fortunately, I had it mostly rewritten beforehand. I finally was able to finish and am able to post.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Anakin was nervous. Being surrounded by Force users his age had always been hard. But untrained Force users his age was hard in a very different way. When he had first caught up enough to be in classes with his age mates, they still had an air of being more knowledgeable. They understood things that went unsaid. It had felt like he was deaf and colourblind and was only just realising it when with them. Well, except for Aayla, but she was the exception and actually explained things. And that was only because she tried to understand him a little.

The untrained Force users were in his old position and he was suddenly the one that knew everything. He didn't want to screw up or make them feel the way he had.

"Su'cuy everyone!" He greeted the group. They were loosely collected into a large circle, with two of them being a head taller than him. "Um, I'm Anakin, he/him/his, and I'll be showing you how to use the Force." Feeling any confidence in himself disappear, it took everything not to hide away from their gazes.

"I'm Trox!" The youngest member piped up from behind the tallest of the group.

"That's Trox Wuzlon, he/him/his. I'm Kylin Jorna, she/her." A dark-haired girl his height stated, smiling at Anakin.

The rest of the group introduced themselves, the air feeling more relaxed. Anakin sat on one of the mats that were stacked nearby. The others followed his lead. Maybe this wouldn't be too bad.

"So," he began after everyone was settled, "how much do you guys know about the Force? I only started learning a few years ago." He figured being honest was the best way to get

honesty. That was what Obi-Wan liked to say, anyway.

A few of them looked at each other, which made Anakin worry a little.

“It’s some kind of magic, isn’t it? You can use it to read minds and fling stuff around.” Trox piped up. Around him, the others nodded, agreeing with the Youngling.

Anakin had to take a deep breath. It seemed that they had some preconceptions that needed to be addressed before they could begin learning.

“The Force isn’t magic, even if it feels like that at times.” Anakin began. “The Force is all around us and Force users are able to access it and feel it.” He was getting confused looks. Okay, maybe he could borrow Aayla words? “Think about speaking. We hear the words, we see the mouths form, we interpret, think, and respond based on what is said around us. Non-sentient species may know that speaking happens, but they can’t do much beyond that. They don’t know what is being said. They can’t interpret the meaning of what is being said. They just hear noise instead of words. The Force is the words.”

He was getting looks of confused understanding. He was at least heading in the right direction. Maybe this would work out, after all.

Anakin looked at the mirror, not quite sure what was wrong with what he saw. He had dressed normally, wearing the outer robe of one of his Padawan outfits. Since he only had the two on the last mission, he couldn’t always wear them since they did laundry once a week. So, he had compromised by wearing a part of the outfit each day with the supplemental clothes he had been offered.

Perhaps it was the colour combination?

Anakin had always been fond of wearing colours, and had been allowed to wear sedate colours for his underlayers as a Padawan. The Mandalorians used much brighter colours in their clothing. So, he had experimented. He had liked the shade of blue the oddly cut shirt contained when he picked it, but it didn’t look quite right with his outer robe.

Perhaps he should wear a different shirt? But, it might have the same issue. Maybe wear the tunic layer and use a Mandalorian jacket? He checked the clock. There wouldn’t be enough time.

After a minute, he shrugged. Just because it felt a little off didn’t mean anything. He was probably looking at it under a weird light. Mind made up, he grabbed his bag and headed to earlymeal (which he was, funnily enough, almost late for. But, one of his favourite things since becoming freed was the option to sleep in if he wanted. And he did so on occasion.)

Anakin smiled as his blaster shot hit the target center. It hadn’t taken him long to learn how to shoot without the aid of the Force, only a couple weeks. But his instructors insisted he

practice every day before learning other weapons.

While he had his katas to practice (he had been returned his lightsaber when he and Jango made their agreement,) his tutor insisted on him spending an equal amount of time physically learning new subjects aside from zer lessons. And Jango had insisted on him getting to know the sentients that the man had learned to fight beside. They all seemed to like Anakin, and each favoured a different weapon. When Anakin so much as hinted at admiration, the offer to instruct was washed over him.

When he was first being offered instruction, he had been wary. Jango had assured him that he would be able to leave eventually and, if he was to stay, it would be his choice. But sometimes it felt like they were trying to encourage him into staying. So, he hesitated and decided to meditate on the subject. He wondered through the possibilities, the pros and cons of learning or refusing. Then, some of Obi-Wan's last words to him on their mission came to him. His Jedi Master mentioned learning cultures through fighting styles. And there was a difference between learning something and being made a part of it. His Jedi instructors always emphasised that. They had to balance knowing customs and culture with being impartial. And the Mando'ade entwined fighting with their culture. And so, Anakin agreed to let himself be taught. Blasters were the first after Jango had shared the story of how Anakin had been found. While embarrassed, he had since lost his anger about the situation. He truly had been unprepared and a series of logical decisions that happened to be unlucky led to him being there in the first place.

The next time he would be in a similar situation, he would win. Especially against anyone wearing Beskar'gam.

He had also learned throwing knives and hand to hand. His familiarity with the latter had earned him a few respectful nods, even if he felt like a gigantic bruise after every session. He was apparently almost equal to most children his age raised Mando'ade. The Jedi insisted on them being able to defend themselves in the case of losing their lightsabers, so he was fairly well instructed in non-weaponed fighting. And the few moves he had learned from the soldiers on that mission had prevented him from being completely predictable in his style, and were able to flow with the styles he had already been taught. Of course, Mandalorian fighting styles were more varied, but some were quite similar to what he already knew. But the most challenging was when he went against a quick, blunt style of fighting, one of the oldest kinds still taught to Mandos. It also was the hardest to adapt to, for him.

The knives were fun and he could make them go really far, which had surprised everyone when he had insisted he hadn't used the Force. He had never been that familiar with knives. What few slaves were allowed access to for work were heavily monitored and quite blunt. And the Jedi saw them as a tool for soldiers. Anakin almost refused, but Obi-Wan's words came back to him and he agreed. The Mando'ade were insistent on showing him how to care for and keep knives sharp. It reminded Anakin of the care and maintenance in certain droids. He found that he was becoming quite fond of knives and wondered if he could keep one when he left.

The instructors also made sure to spend plenty of time with him at meals. It seemed like they alternated, providing fun stories of their younger days, usually embarrassing their leader,

despite the man joining Anakin for most mid- and latemeals.

Jango was definitely different than his first few impressions. If he had been told about the incident with a Wookiee and some nerfs when he first met Jango, he wouldn't have believed it. When he was told about it, though, he only laughed.

However, during the latemeal almost two months into his temporary stay, had one of Jango's staff instead of his instructors. Effao, shining in the Force with her pregnancy, was mostly cheerful, though still rather work-focused. Anakin idly wondered if she was aware how strong her child was going to be in the Force. His own mother knew, as she liked to tell him about the visions she saw of him before and when she was pregnant with him. He might bring it up to her later. The child should at least be prepared for if Effao didn't already know. And he wasn't going to be there long enough to teach her child.

"And then the representative tried to claim that I had no idea what I was talking about! Nevermind that I was in charge at the time." She complained. Jango frowned.

"Do I need to remind the representatives that you have my complete trust? And that they are given their power by the will of their leader?" The man's voice held no hint of anger. If Anakin hadn't felt just how much was roiling under the man's skin, he would have never guessed. Jango was quite good at keeping his emotions hidden to all but Force users. Though, Anakin thought about offering to teach him how to hide it there. Jango's emotions were quite strong.

"Since when do I need my battles fought for me, Alor? I cut him down to size in two sentences." Effao then took a drink.

"Never underestimate a good advisor, An'ika." Jango said. Hearing the nickname made him want to blush. But, it wasn't like Jango knew that he was basically calling Anakin "little heart" in their combined native languages.

"Never." He agreed. He knew a lot of people that weren't nearly as smart as Jango or Effao. The only person he could think of that would be smarter was his own Jedi Master.

Kylin had been fidgety during class. Specifically, she was having trouble with meditation. He had taught the class every type of sitting meditation he knew from the Temple. But none of them allowed her to come even close to accessing the Force like they were supposed to. Some of the others in the class were having trouble, but they could at least access the Force.

Anakin decided to talk with her, asking her to stay behind as the others left.

She looked at him, curious, but with a slight undercurrent of worry. Anakin took a second to center himself. He wasn't used to feeling unshielded Force sensitives. Their emotions could easily give him a headache.

"I've noticed you've been having trouble with meditation." He stated, figuring it best to be blunt.

Kylin scowled at him, the worry increasing, surrounding him. “Just because I have trouble doesn’t mean I can’t learn.” She practically growled.

Anakin wasn’t sure if it was the headiness of her emotions or if it was the idea that she would consider him thinking that, but he was thrown for a loop. “I know you can. I just wanted to know if there was anything that we could do? You’re here because you lose yourself in the Force sometimes. When do you feel it most?”

The worry calmed. It was still there, but it was an undercurrent again. She looked thoughtful. “Usually when I’m dancing. Buir took me out of dance classes a few years ago because of how bad it was getting. I try to keep from dancing, but I have a neurodivergence and it makes it hard to channel my attention without something like dancing to do it.”

Anakin thought about her statement. He had heard of certain moving meditations, but they were glossed over in his lessons, meant to be taught after the still meditations were mastered. Perhaps he could create one for her?

“Show me your favourite dance?” He asked, deciding to see how it affected her.

The worry returned, but it felt different. It had a tinge of something Anakin couldn’t immediately recognise. But, Kylin agreed, stripping off her jacket and shoes. She walked to the meditation area, moving the mats. Once they were cleared, she began her dance. Anakin watched as she moved gracefully, going from position to position, as if working through exercises in a class. After a few minutes, he felt her begin to connect to the Force.

He watched each movement, observing how they flowed. After a few minutes, he joined her. He wasn’t able to connect as easily as she had, but he managed. He latched a connection on to her, preventing her from going too far into the Force. It wasn’t even close to a bond, but it would help him anchor her. (Oh, how he ached at the thought of his bonds. Obi-Wan’s connection was gossamer-thin. How his Jetii Master must be feeling, possibly only able to feel him in deep meditation.) They moved together, easing her connection, sending contentment and ease through to her.

Eventually, he showed her how to ease out of it. She was resistant to leaving the meditative state. He could see how that had caused trouble without training. Being stuck in meditation wasn’t usually life endangering, but it could still be troublesome. Anakin nudged her mentally, trying to get her to come out of it on her own.

After a minute, Kylin came out of it. She quickly moved to put her shoes back on. “Yeah, so I’m gonna go now.”

Anakin followed, “But don’t you see? You accessed the Force. You did a good moving meditation. You just need to make it more focused.”

Kylin stopped midstep. There was overwhelming fear. “And what if I can’t? Do I just risk dying just to access your stupid Force? Just to understand what it is saying to me?”

“We are luminous beings stuck in crude matter.” He quoted one of the sayings he had been told. “What it means is that we are energy combined with earth. The energy needs to be

released in doses. Too much and you die. Too little and it affects your health. Accessing the Force through meditation is a way to find that balance and release the right amount safely. You just need to do it through dancing. When you dance, you are at your best self. You can find that balance then.”

“And you can help with this?”

“Parts of it. This was my first time doing a moving meditation.” He admitted. Her fear was receding and her curiosity was back. “But some things remain the same. I’ll look into it. I have some texts on my datapad.” That was true. The datapad he had brought on the mission, despite having no access to the Holonet, had several texts he was supposed to read but hadn’t yet. A couple had less traditional meditation on them for his cultures class. With that, they parted. He checked the time. He had missed the beginning of weapons’ training, but there was still over an hour until latemeal. He could get away with missing a session. In the meantime, he could at least get started on researching.

Jango was worried when Anakin didn’t show for latemeal. It had become one of Jango’s favourite parts of the day. When he found out Anakin hadn’t been at weapons’ training that day, he grew worried. So, he collected a tray with his jetii’ka’s favourites and walked towards the guest wing. On his way, he imagined what could have prevented An’ika from his routine.

Knocking carefully on the door, he relaxed as he heard a fairly healthy voice invite him in. Anakin sat on a mat in the middle of the room, the furniture pushed back. As Jango sat down, he noticed various pieces of flimsi, written with various words and symbols, strewn about. Anakin was holding a datapad in his hand. Jango cocked his head. It wasn’t a Mandalorian datapad.

“Su’cuy, Alor.” Anakin greeted him without lifting his eyes. “What are you doing here?”

“Su’cuy An’ika. I brought you food.” He placed the tray down.

“But it isn’t time for latemeal.” Anakin opened his eyes at that. Glancing at a nearby clock, they widened. “Or perhaps it is.” A blush covered his cheeks, making him look much younger.

“It is. And I was curious about what kept you away.” Anakin blushed further. “Was it a jetii thing?” Jango made sure to keep his voice curious, no trace of any negative emotion. No frustration at not understanding, no jealousy that it kept Anakin away from their meal, and definitely no bitterness about Anakin most likely thinking about his perfect jetii buir.

“Sort of. I was reading up on moving meditations. I don’t know much about them, but they might be better suited for those I’m teaching. And I don’t want them hurt because of me not knowing how to do them.” Jango ruffled Anakins hair at that.

Perhaps the boy was coming along further than he thought. He had noticed the ad liked to be of use. Perhaps it was a remnant of his time as a slave, but he seemed happiest when

demonstrating valuable skills. ("Earning their keep" he remembered. He would have to discuss Anakin with a therapist that specialises in former slaves. They were, unfortunately, lacking in ones that dealt with jetii, or else Jango would have consulted one already.)

"Well, we don't want you to overdo it. You need to keep up your strength in researching. And to do that, you'll need rest and food." He pushed the tray towards Anakin, who smiled sheepishly, but did begin eating.

They passed the meal comfortably.

Chapter End Notes

I adore the idea of Aayla and Anakin bonding. So, I like to imagine a friendship forming after Quin and Obi get together after Obi starts taking care of Anakin. Quin takes one look at the kid and decides he needs friends, so he sends Aayla to get to know the kid. Aayla then declares him her new best friend. She helped him with a lot of his confusion that he was afraid to ask the adults about.

The reference to Anakin's name comes from my other fic series Tian and Garto, specifically concerning the slave language. In my worldbuilding, the word for heart is Anak/Ank. I liked the idea of Shmi naming him "my heart."

I also thought that Anakin would be easier to integrate than Obi-Wan due to his being raised a slave. He was always taught to survive. Make himself indispensable--especially to an enemy--blend in to avoid being sacrificed, and connect to who you can because nothing is permanent. Such a mindset isn't easy to shake, even with the four years he's spent with the Jedi. He is also just a kid, who has to training to resist mental coercion. So, unlike Obi-Wan's two years, I think Anakin will only take 6 months to a year.

Worldbuilding bits specific to this universe includes the meditation discussion. I think that moving meditation is mostly used by Jedi Knights and Masters on missions, so isn't a high priority for crechelings. Anakin, coming in later, hasn't mastered the crecheling meditations. Since their missions were on the less risky side, Anakin would have likely been taught the theory, but not the actual practice of moving meditation. He's still doing a bit of catch up in comparison to other Jedi Padawans his age. Unlike the original Integration, Anakin is not going to be able to help figure out every possible issue the Force sensitive kids as easily. This will become more prevalent later, but I wanted to show an example here.

Given the age of most of the kids in Integration, Anakin wouldn't be teaching them, aside from Trox (who isn't a temperamental preteen, but a cute kid with a temper.) Kylin is my oc and I had so much fun creating a background for her. Sioth is one of the kids, but I couldn't find a way to work his name in organically. He'll get a mention later.

Mando'a Translation Time:

Su'cuy-Hi

Beskar'gam-Mandalorian Armour

Mando'ade-Mandalorians (Lit. Children of Mandalore)

Mand'Alor/Alor-Sole Leader of the Mandos

An'ika-Diminutive of Anakin

Buir-Parent

Jetii-Jedi

Jetii'ka-Padwan (lit. Little Jedi)

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