

[Back To Index](#)

This story was written just for fun and is not an attempt to make money or infringe on any copyrights or trademarks. Only the original ideas contained within the works on this nonprofit web site are the property of their authors, and please do not copy or link these stories to any other website or archive or print without permission of the author.

Reach Out With The Force

by [Alison Glover](#)

"Stretch out with your feelings."

Obi-Wan Kenobi to Luke Skywalker

Note: This version is somewhat different from the original which appeared in *Wookiee Rendezvous*, having been revised to take account of the events of *The Phantom Menace*. I wrote the original (in Feb '99) knowing that my opinion of Kenobi would change once I saw him played by Ewan McGregor - so this version is a little more sympathetic to him. Also, the final scene of this story was one where, once I knew about Qui-Gon, I had to have Obi-Wan think about him.

If you strike me down, I will become more powerful than you can possibly imagine, Kenobi had said.

And then wondered why he'd said it, since, despite Yoda's assurances that a properly-prepared Jedi could continue after the demise of his body, he hadn't really believed it himself. To gain a little more time for Luke to escape, mainly. Maybe as a wry reminder to himself of the cock-sure young man he'd been when he first met Anakin. Perhaps just to see if it prompted a reaction from Vader.

He'd thought this confrontation would like his first with Vader. When he'd sensed that Anakin wasn't dead – at least not quite – he'd naively assumed that his former student would want rescued from Palpatine.

He hadn't.

Ben had barely escaped from his misguided mission with own life.

So this time, he had expected to once again be met with the Dark Side of Anakin's passionate nature; with black, chaotic emotion, with hate and anger which he could easily deflect back onto their source. Instead, it had been as if Vader was more a droid than a man, his only feeling a faint disappointment that his old master was now an impotent irrelevance, but that it was appropriate that they meet again, so that Vader could tidy up the few remaining loose ends of his past.

It had been a novel, if hardly pleasant, experience, watching, from a viewpoint a few inches off the Death Star's deck, as Vader's black boots trampled Ben's faded brown robe. Vader had seemed surprised to find the robe empty. Perhaps he hadn't believed Yoda either. Maybe that was why he'd clung to the semblance of life Palpatine had offered him as Vader. Now, he'd presumably intended to tie Kenobi's spirit and soul irrevocably to his flesh, so that he would have truly died.

But there, at least, Vader had not succeeded. Kenobi's will lived on.

Unfortunately without the benefit of being powerful beyond imagination.

Perhaps this incorporeal helplessness was some novel form of purgatory, which he no doubt thoroughly deserved....

But it was futile to brood on that, or on the mistakes of the past. He (what was left of him) must concentrate on the future, on returning it to a surer, safer path, on finding a way to rectify so many past mistakes...

And for that, he needed the boy. Sometimes, it felt as if that was all that was remained of him, just will-power and that last driving necessity; *Bring Luke to Dagobah, to Yoda.*

It was not what he had hoped for, but there were no other options, now.

If Luke did come to Dagobah, he'd find some way to dispel Yoda's doubts about helping the boy.

Only that wasn't working out as planned either. Above the Death Star, Luke had heard Ben, listened to him.

Now, it seemed, he could - or would - not.

After all those years on Tatooine, watching, waiting, guarding, it was second nature to be aware of Luke, to sense the boy's aura, bright against the increasingly dark fabric of the Force. Luke was alive and well, growing stronger in the Force, learning to use it without formal instruction.

Which made him all the more vulnerable. He had to come to Dagobah. Nowhere else he would be safe, shielded, while he trained. So, from the damp mists of Dagobah, Kenobi reached out with Force, across the light-years, to where Luke was.....

..... in a bar. With Solo, the Corellian pilot. The one whose fast ship Ben had been so ill-informed not to have heard of. The pilot who out-ran Imperial cruisers and made record-breaking runs to Kessel, apparently unhindered by the knowledge that a parsec was 4.2 light-years, not a unit of time.

Solo, his co-pilot Chewbacca, Luke and a dark-haired young man, who was about the same age and height as Luke, were sitting in a booth, leaning over the table, heads conspiratorially close together. Solo and the Wookiee both had mischievous glints in their eyes.

"No, kid," Solo was saying, draping an arm over Luke's shoulder. "You're looking at this the wrong way. You instinctively using the Force when you play pocketball isn't cheating. Any more than that Gran over there using all three of its eyes to triangulate its shots is. It's simply playing to the best of your abilities."

Kenobi would have thought that his mental cry of indignation at that blatant misuse of Luke's talents would have alerted any remotely empathic being within.... within a parsec. But Luke didn't react to it, just grinned at his friends and said, "Maybe."

"Come on, Luke," Solo continued. "You know how badly those spare parts are needed. I'd just forgotten about that last little fine I have to pay here before I can get my export license back. Think how bad you'd feel if Chewie and I were caught doing something illegal to get that cargo off-planet."

"Well, I would be upset if anything happened to Chewie," Luke was agreeing. The Wookiee smiled toothily at his partner and sniggered.

Solo didn't say anything to that, but his eyes met Luke's. Kenobi felt a flutter of alarm. There was obviously a bond forming there, to a much greater extent than he would have been expected. Such things were usually only possible between two Force-users. But then, Corellians were notorious for having good luck and intuition, and what were those but manifestations of the Force?

(And don't to be so quick to judge, Ben. Yoda never approved of your friendship with Bail Organa, even though the Clone Wars might have dragged on for years if the Jedi general and the Alderaani senator hadn't worked so effectively together.

Anakin didn't approve of it either, of course... but Anakin never wanted anyone in his life to have any close relationship other than with him...)

"You and Wedge are just perfect as a pair of naive little country boys turned soldier, here for a bit of shore-leave," Solo was saying. "It'll be easy to get people betting on you two losing."

"I think I'm mortally insulted," the young man who must be Wedge said, although to judge by his cheerful grin, he was more amused than offended.

All Kenobi himself felt, with every remnant of his being, was frustration. The average bar-patron might not be Force-sensitive, but keen pocket-ball players would notice if the balls behaved oddly, even if they didn't know why. Ben had spent enough time in dives like this to know how vehement – and sometimes violent - altercations about scoring could be, especially when there was money riding on a game. It was no help remembering that he'd done similar things himself, when he'd had to. Luke shouldn't risk arrest, and subsequent detection by the Imperials, for something so trivial.

Patience, he reminded himself, *is a Jedi virtue*.

But one that had been easier to maintain when he had been a Jedi, not an impotent wraith.

He had to reach the boy....

..... the boy he'd waited for so long, all those exiled years in the desert, continually thwarted by suspicious, over-protective Owen.

When he'd escaped with Luke to Tatooine, after his failed attempt to rescue the man he'd hoped would still be Anakin, he'd been in no state to look after himself, let alone a small child. Recovery had taken much, much longer than he'd expected. By that time, Luke had bonded with Beru and Owen, and was happy. So Ben hadn't planned to take him away from them; he'd just assumed he would have access to train the boy, to start early enough to avoid the unlearning that Anakin had found so hard. He'd been so sure that this time, without Yoda and Kai-Adi-Mundi's continual interference, things would work out differently from the way they had with Anakin.

He'd gone to Owen, to tell him that he was well again, and that it was time to start training Luke.

But where once there had been friendship, all he had sensed from Owen was sorrow, and continuing doubts about Ben's sanity. Owen had shaken his head. "Physically you've recovered, yes. But mentally and emotionally? I'm sorry, Ben. I'm not sure you have. And until I am sure, I'm not letting you near Luke."

After everything else, Ben had been surprised that he'd still had the capacity to be hurt by that.

And gentle Beru had been no better, when approached without Owen's knowledge, adamant in her convictions about what was best for the boy, that he should have a childhood unburdened with knowledge of his ancestry and potential.

So Ben had gone back to the desert, to the peace and solitude. Bail Organa would have been happy to have him back on Alderaan, but his wife was not. And Ben had given his word to Luke's mother that he would watch over the boy.

Besides, Tatooine was far out on the Rim, distant enough that he didn't have to hear the mental cries of the oppressed, from the worlds where the Emperor's grip was tightening...

...All those years of exile, at times isolated for weeks, cut off from all outside contact by storm-driven sand that disrupted communications and made travel impossible. Sometimes it had felt as if the sandstorms would cut through all his rationalisations to his very soul, just as they would have abraded his flesh to the bone, if he'd been stupid enough to venture out in them.

He had been so close, before that ill-fated duel with Vader. He'd been well aware that Luke wanted to trust him. Well aware that he was the last link the boy had to the childhood home he'd so precipitously left behind, and that Luke needed someone to replace the foster-parents he'd lost. Kenobi ignored the whisper in the back of his mind that said, *You didn't need Force-given powers of foretelling to know what would happen to Owen and Beru once the Imperials knew about the droids. You could have made more effort to warn them, found some way for them to escape. Given the boy a real choice.*

When he had persuaded Luke not to call his Uncle from Ben's home, it seemed simply a prudent precaution; the Imperials' search plans would have included monitoring comms traffic. Besides, there had been no time for the argument that would have ensued when Owen heard Luke was going even to Anchorhead with Ben.

And it was only to save Luke the pain that he'd shielded him from the long moments of his foster-parents' dying.

But it did work out very conveniently for you, didn't it, Ben?

He thrust such thoughts away.

Since reaching Luke was proving to be so hard, he would try again when the boy had fewer distractions, less people around him.

Like now, perhaps...

...Kenobi became aware of Luke's surroundings. A squadron of T-65 X-wings, in a hangar on a larger space-ship. Automatically, he classified it ; a Defiant-class cruiser. The last of those had been built decades ago. This ship must be seventy years old by now, and was showing it. But she was well-maintained, and, Kenobi saw, had been up-graded; a magnetic shield had been installed, so the blast doors and airlocks could be left open, and the hangar look out into space. Ben approved of the modification. This way, the hangar be much less claustrophobic to work in. Four HY-750 turbo-lasers, captured from the Imperials, perhaps, were mounted beside the shield generators. There were few people around. The place had that quiet late-shift feel to it, something ships always still had, even though night was an irrelevant concept in space.

Luke, balanced on the wing of one of the fighters, was hauling cables out of its innards. From the deflector projector maintenance hatch, if Kenobi remembered correctly. As Luke did so, a somewhat older man came up to the ship. He was dark-complexioned and bearded, and over his jumpsuit was wearing a faded jerkin with an Incom Corporation Service Department logo.

Ben was pleased about that; properly trained technicians and ground-crew would make a big difference to the Rebellion.

"Hi, Luke! What're you doing?" the man was asking.

Luke grinned. "Hi, Loophole. What does it look like? I'm straightening the cables so the electrons will flow faster."

Loophole (presumably that was a nickname) grinned back. "You still haven't found that intermittent glitch in the deflector controls yet, then?"

"No. That's what I hate about intermittent faults. When you look for them, they're never there."

An R2 astromech droid appeared from the other side of the x-wing, beeping with what sounded like intense irritation.

"I know, R2," Luke said to it, with obvious affection, "It's frustrating, all right."

Kenobi stared at the droid. It was the same one that Luke had been chasing over the Jundland wastes. He was oddly happy that it was still functioning, although it hadn't recognised him. Its memories must have wiped long ago.

If Luke was frustrated, he was keeping his temper. Ben was pleased about that too; for all that youthful enthusiasm, Luke seemed to be rather better-balanced that his father had proved to be.

"Want me to have a look?" The technician didn't wait for a reply, just hauled himself up onto the wing, and stuck his head inside the open panel. Luke moved out of his way, and leaned against the x-wing hull, brushing his hair out of his eyes, and streaking both it and his face with grease in the process.

Luke! Luke! Once, Kenobi had thought nothing of sending Krayt dragon calls echoing through Tatooine's barren canyons. Now he couldn't even move air molecules to produce an audible sound.

Luke frowned, and glanced around. He'd heard him! *Luke, you must listen* -

But then the technician stuck his head back out, and said, "I may have found the problem."

"What was it?" Luke prompted.

"Sheer incompetence," Loophole announced, perfectly straight-faced.

"Oh?"

"Yes. Yours." The man managed to keep his expression serious for another moment, until, under the wing, the R2 unit beeped in amusement, and he grinned.

Ben tried again. *Luke!*

But it was too late. Luke and the technician were hauling another side-panel off the x-wing, deep in discussion about a recent up-grade to the ship's hyper-drive, how that might affect its cooling system, and whether thermal expansion of the mounting brackets, and abrasion of the cables' protective sheath due to the increased vibration, could result in the intermittent short-circuit in the deflector circuit. Another salutary reminder, this time of Kenobi's current status in the scheme of things.

Humility was also a Jedi virtue, but Ben did not, he decided, enjoy being of less importance to Luke than a bunch of frayed cables.

Perhaps the Emperor or Vader were making it harder for him to communicate with Luke. From just after Vader had struck him down, Kenobi had a confused memory of the Sith Lord striding towards Luke, before the closing blast doors had cut him off. Just how had Luke stood there in a hail of blaster fire and not been shot? The Imperials had needed to keep only the Princess and either Solo or his co-pilot alive to follow them to the Rebel base, and those storm-troopers had plenty of their fellows to avenge. Had Luke even then been sub-consciously deflecting their blaster bolts? Or could Vader have recognised him, and, for some

reason, have been protecting him? But there wasn't that much physical resemblance between them, and Vader hadn't even known Luke existed.

And there was nothing left of Anakin, who would have cared that he had a son.

Perhaps the problem was simply that Luke himself had changed.

Yoda did not, Kenobi thought with irritation, understand, did not see that although mere months and years were insignificant to him, they made a great deal of difference to a twenty-year old human. That Luke was always day-dreaming, his thoughts leaping off into imagined adventures and fantasy futures, may have been true of the child or the adolescent growing up in that remote backwater (and what an ironic expression that was, for a planet as devoid of moisture as Tatooine).

But a combat pilot who does not pay attention to what he is doing is a dead pilot.

No, Luke had no opportunity to daydream now. Time and time again, Kenobi tried to reach him, sought for a way to attract his attention. But in vain.

It was a good sign, Kenobi told himself, that whatever Luke was doing, he immersed himself in so totally. The boy probably did have the inner strength and discipline necessary to become a Jedi Knight.

But only if Kenobi could reach him, impart the message that Luke had to come to Dagobah, and train with Master Yoda. Otherwise, he did not want to think about what Luke could become.

He caught glimpses of that too, though....

....a dark alleyway, in some port city, that looked as if it had been run down for decades, but with old neglect now compounded by recent blast damage. The whole power-grid was down; Kenobi could feel that many people still lived there, but hardly any buildings showed lights, and in the alley, the only illumination was from two small moons, and the occasional flare of thrusters as a ship took off.

Solo was on the ground, cursing and trying to simultaneously nurse both his ribs and his right hand, while grabbing for his dropped blaster with his left.

A tall, cloaked, shadowy figure kicked the blaster out of his reach and stamped a clawed foot down on his hand, hard. "You're getting careless in your old age, Solo," it said, speaking Standard with a hissing accent. A reptilian snout was just visible, protruding from the voluminous folds of its cloak.

So was the muzzle of the pulse rifle and flame-thrower combination it was aiming at Solo.

"Oh, shit," muttered the Corellian, which Ben agreed was an accurate, if hardly articulate, description of his situation, evidently deciding (correctly, in Ben's opinion) that running was not a viable option. "Listen, Zzynx, let's not get hasty here..." He'd slid his left hand inside his shirt, presumably reaching for another weapon. "It wasn't me that killed your brother. I didn't know it *was* your brother. I mean, I knew it was an egg, but they'd told me it was a fossilised one....."

"I wasn't intending to be hasty." One clawed finger snapped the rifle's selector from automatic fire to single shot, and then charged the flame-thrower.

"Drop the gun," said a quiet voice. Another cloaked figure had emerged from the shadows behind Solo.

Nobody moved. Solo muttered, in Corellian, "Hell, kid, this isn't a holo-drama. Why don't you just shoot him?"

A lightsaber blade ignited; Solo blinked at the sudden brightness in the dark alley. Luke went on, just as quietly, ignoring Solo's comments and still addressing his assailant. "You will drop it, you know. One way or another. It's entirely up to you whether or not your hands are still attached to your arms when you do so."

And who gave him that idea, Ben? But it was more the tone of Luke's voice that worried Kenobi. He sounded so sure of himself.

What it was that worried the reptilian, Kenobi couldn't tell, because he couldn't see Luke's face, just that he'd pushed his hood back, the moonlight glinting in his fair hair. But when Luke stepped forward, raising the lightsaber, the reptilian's stance went from one of assurance to something that looked very like complete panic. He took one hand off the gun to clutch at his throat, stepped back and dropped the weapon.

Then he turned and ran. In the dim light, he disappeared after a few paces, although his voice lingered a little longer. He seemed to be chanting something.

Kenobi had to admit that he was surprised by that. Still, there was no need to look quite as incredulous as Solo did - though the Corellian's completely disbelieving expression was rather amusing. Not that Solo's surprise was slowing him down any when it came to retrieving his blaster, although he cursed and muttered when he tried to grip the weapon with his left hand, now bleeding from his assailant's claws.

Luke gave Solo a hand up, grabbing him by the arm, not by either of his injured hands. "Come on, let's get out of here."

"Ow!" announced the Corellian, straightening carefully, one arm across his chest. "Okay, okay.... I'm getting out of here... I also think I'm getting too old for this."

Tell me about it, Ben thought wryly. Believe me, it only gets more difficult when you're not just old but also deceased.

Solo winced again and grinned at Luke. "Thanks, kid."

"That's okay - it was my turn to rescue you."

There was a quiet growl as Chewbacca appeared out of the darkness, neatly scooping up the reptilian's fallen weapon and going to support his partner. Solo was still looking puzzled. "Kid, I still don't see why Zzynx found you so convincing when you told him to drop the gun. And what was all that avenging angel stuff?"

Now it was Luke's turn to be confused. Kenobi was relieved by that. Anakin would have been pleased at having intimidated Solo's assailant. "What avenging angel stuff?" Luke wanted to know.

"Didn't you hear what he was saying?" Solo asked, as the three of them made their way out of the alley.

"Yes," said Luke. "I heard it. I just didn't understand most of it. That's one of the problems of being brought up on Tatooine; the schools don't offer enough language courses. What was he saying?"

"That's just it. He wasn't exactly saying. He was more praying. Praying to his family gods to save him from a..... well, avenging angel is about the only way to translate it into Standard."

Anakin would have been delighted at such a comparison, but Luke just asked, "How can I look like an angel to a Saurian? Wouldn't his sort of angels have scales?" Yes, Luke's attitude to what he had done was reassuring, but Kenobi still had a nagging premonition that the boy's friendship with Solo was going to cause problems.

Solo must have decided against any explanations of comparative mythology. He was saying, "Using your lightsaber's a bit of a give-away, isn't it? The port's bound to still be crawling with Imperial spies."

"Oh," said Luke, grinning at the Wookiee, "so I was supposed to ignore what Chewie told me about Zzynx coming from a big family, and how if I killed him we'd have all two-hundred and seventy of his siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces swearing a blood-feud and coming after us? Aren't you popular enough already?"

"Speak for yourself," Solo countered, as they reached the entrance to a docking bay. "You're just lucky there are so many different Imperials after you that they waste time killing each other."

So many Imperials? Killing each other? Vader's underlings and the Emperor's getting in each other's way? Perhaps Vader and Palpatine were no longer in complete agreement about everything. For a moment, Ben almost allowed himself to hope.

But no. All that could have been done had been done. There was no way, now, to turn Vader away from his evil master.

And all the more urgency to bring Luke to safety on Dagobah. Untrained, the boy could never be a match for either of them.

Very well. If communication was this difficult, Kenobi should reserve his limited resources for the times he'd be most likely to succeed.

Ah, this was perfect. Even when humans spent most of their lives in the artificial environments of ships and space-stations, some things didn't change. The in-between times, dawn and dusk, and the intermediate state between waking and sleeping, were when they were most aware of the non-physical.

This place was strong in the Force, although it was not familiar. A circle of ancient, weather-worn stones on a hill-top, half-covered by ivy and honeysuckle, intricate carvings almost obliterated by time and weather. The stone ring was surrounded by a wood, and the tree tops were blowing in a wind that Kenobi could faintly feel. The stiff, cool breeze was refreshing, after the continual clinging humidity of Dagobah. There were so few places, now, where he could assume even an illusion of corporeality, let alone feel the breeze. Above the standing stones the sky was lowering and grey, the scudding clouds obscuring the summits of the surrounding higher hills as the twilight deepened.

Yes, the Force was strong here. Kenobi could smell the trees, catch the scents of pine and cedar and honeysuckle.

Luke had been wandering among the stones, touching them curiously, brushing back the foliage from them, fingers tracing the ancient curves and spirals. Kenobi watched him, alarmed. There were other religions and spiritual traditions in the galaxy than those of the Jedi.

Meddling with some of them had been another cause of Anakin's downfall.

But then Luke sat down on the short, springy grass, back against one of stones. He looked as if he was trying to stay alert, but his eyes were closing anyway.

Kenobi could feel how exhausted he was. He looked a lot older, too, than the boy who'd left Tatooine. Kenobi had seen that look, of having had to grow up abruptly, of having seen too many of war's harsh realities, of being too tired to go on but having to do so anyway, on far too many young faces, since he'd been young himself.

As his com-link beeped, Luke's head jerked up; he must have almost been asleep. "Yeah?"

"Luke, it's me, Wedge. I'm at the med-centre. Briant and Neal didn't make it."

"Hell."

"I know. But what else could we have done?" The tone of Wedge's voice sounded close to breaking.

Ex-General Kenobi was all too familiar with such tones, and with the soul-searching when comrades and sub-ordinates died, with the lingering doubts that there must have been some choice to make, some other orders to give, that would have made events turn out better.

"There wasn't anything else we could have done," Luke said, Ben thought to reassure himself as much as Wedge. "Not and bring anyone back alive."

Luke stuffed the com-link back in his uniform jacket pocket, and slumped back against the stone, arms resting on his knees. "Oh, hell," he said again, and leaned his head on his arms.

Ben wished that he could make himself properly solid, so that he could put an arm round Luke's shoulders.

_ I'm sorry, Luke. At the end of the Clone Wars, we all hoped that your generation would be spared this. _

Luke raised his head and peered around, confused. "Great," he muttered. "I'm so tired I'm hearing things."

_ Luke, listen to me. You must go to... _

Luke frowned, and shook his head. "Ben? But it's been so long. I must be imagining this."

No, Luke. It really is me...

But then a physical voice was calling to Luke, and he leapt up.

"Luke!" The voice was female, with an accent that almost made two syllables of Luke's name. A lilting accent, which reminded him of Qui-Gon's...

If only I'd reached him. If only he'd lived..... Anakin would have been different, more resilient, if Qui-Gon had trained him....

But there was no point in rehearsing, yet again, what might have been if Ben had run faster, all those years ago on Naboo.

He hauled his attention back to the present. A woman was running up the hill. She was dressed as Luke was, in Alliance fatigues. Out on the Rim, society had always been much less structured than in the Core Worlds, but it was still something of a surprise to see a woman in a combat uniform. A complex scanner panel was strapped to her left wrist, and sundry other items of equipment hung on her belt as well as her blaster. She seemed perfectly accustomed to the weight of them. There was a field dressing on her upper left arm, and a partly-healed radiation burn on her forehead, half-hidden by her untidy hair. Kenobi thought she was rather older than Luke, though the fatigue lines on her face and dark shadows under her eyes made it hard to accurately tell her age.

"Alyn! Where have you been?" Luke demanded.

Her expression was almost comical. "*You've* been worried about *me*?" It seemed that she was the one used to doing the worrying.

"You're late," Luke said. "So yes, I was worried."

She touched his face. "I'm sorry. But do you have to stare at me exactly like you do at R2 when he's got his program parameters in a do-loop? I'm not going to get lost on my own home-world, Luke. I just had trouble getting away; there's a war on, in case you haven't noticed."

He put his arms around her. "I was hoping we could forget about that for a while."

She brushed his hair out of his eyes, played with the ends of it. She had long, elegant fingers, Kenobi noticed, but broken fingernails, mostly cut off short. When she smiled at Luke, the tiredness vanished from her face, and she was almost pretty. "You really do need some shore leave, don't you?"

Kenobi realised that she was referring to the colour of Luke's hair. Now that he looked, it was no longer the sun-bleached blond it had been on Tatooine.

So how long has it been? Kenobi thought anxiously. *How many months? Or is it years, by now?* It was so easy to lose track on timeless, unchanging Dagobah, where Yoda thought in terms of decades and centuries.

Luke and the woman were disappearing into the woods, arms around each other's waists. He should not be surprised, Kenobi told himself. Luke wasn't a child. If anything, Kenobi should be pleased at the possibility of the blood-line, with its erratic but sometimes so potent Force sensitivity, continuing, should something happen to Luke.

But it was all the more reason to get Luke to Dagobah quickly. A Jedi could not afford the luxury of such attachments to the non-Force sensitive.

And then, finally, there was a time when Luke's thoughts were drifting. He was in a featureless room, sitting beside Wedge, half-listening to a droning voice. Wedge was fidgeting; Kenobi was pleased that although Luke obviously felt like doing the same, he was sitting still. The voice droned on. A familiar voice.... Dodonna. The old fool still hadn't retired, then. Kenobi thrust away a sudden flash of jealousy and frustration. This should have been his role, general and military adviser to the Alliance, as he had been to Bail Organa.

(And would Alderaan have been destroyed, Ben, if you'd been there in person to advise Bail? To remind him just what the Emperor and Vader and Tarkin were, and how little they cared for logical tactics?)

Luke's eyes locked with someone else's across the table, and he raised an eyebrow and grinned slightly. With a mixture of guilt and relief, Ben gazed at Princess Leia. She was so like her mother.

She gave a quick smile back at Luke before her face resumed its expression of composed interest.

Luke! Listen to me! You must go to the Dagobah system. You must find the Jedi Master Yoda...

But then that idiot Dodonna said something else, and Luke's attention was gone again. He and Wedge were on their feet, shouting at Dodonna.

"How many times do we have to say this? This is not the Clone Wars we're fighting. The technology and the tactics are different now."

"You can't send fighters up against an installation like that unsupported. Haven't you heard this one, General - we're not stupid, we're not expendable and we're not going."

And then everyone else was joining in, and although the Princess was calling for calm and order, it didn't look like either was going to be restored any time soon.

It was not just when people were half-asleep, of course, that they were closer to the dimension in which Kenobi now existed.

Anxiously, he watched. For once, he did not attempt to reach Luke. The boy had enough to do keep conscious, and to keep his x-wing flying, compensating for a damaged engine, having no choice but to trust the Force, because half his computer systems were down, and all his sensors and targeting scanners.

This boy was their only hope. If Luke got back to the ship safely, Kenobi had to reach him, get him out of this war before he became another of its casualty statistics.

He could see the x-wing's read-outs only too clearly; torpedo bays empty, life-support failing, fuel almost exhausted, just enough for one last jump. And sub-light engines dead. The green light on the nav-comp flickered and was replaced by an urgently blinking red one.

Luke swore, and thumped the unit. That might not have been a text-book Jedi reaction, but under the circumstances, Ben couldn't blame him. He could feel how cold Luke was. There was a damaged panel in the x-wing's canopy, and with no power to spare for heating, the cockpit temperature was inevitably heading for equilibrium with the few degrees above absolute zero outside. The panel was patched, but to judge by the life-support readings, it wasn't air-tight either. Most pilots liked the T-65's because the cockpit was pressurised, unlike TIE fighters where the occupant required breathing apparatus, but that was a vulnerability as well as a convenience.

The red nav-comp warning light continued blinking, and was then joined by another one, this time on the proximity detector.

Luke, you're about to have company....

Luke stared at the nav-comp read-outs. Kenobi could feel him drawing on the Force. He adjusted some of them, took a deep breath, and hit the hyperdrive.

If Ben had had breath, he'd have held it, as he waited to see where Luke would re-enter normal space. With no sub-light engines, he wasn't going to have many options when he did.

So Ben was as relieved as Luke was, when the first thing he saw when he dropped out of hyperspace was the reassuring bulk of the Defiant-class cruiser. And at least the short range com system was still working; it was also an intense relief to hear a professional-sounding female voice.

"Roger, Red Five. We have you on visual. Confirm that you are within tractor range. So just sit tight, Luke and we'll bring you in." Kenobi wondered if Solo would admit that making a jump that exact counted as pretty good piloting. Probably he'd say it was luck.

Ben didn't believe in luck. Although most Jedi philosophers had strongly disapproved of such anthropomorphising, sometimes it almost felt like the Force was fond of Luke, and wanted to keep him alive.

Luke was talking urgently "I've got about five minutes of air left, so copy this for General Reeikan."

The woman snapped off a series of orders, "Get a medical team down to hangar two. Re-route auxiliary power to the aft tractor beams.... and clear me some space in that hangar. I won't have time for a neat landing. Luke, get the landing gear down," as another voice said,

"Go ahead, Red Five. We're recording."

"The intelligence reports were wrong. Not only is the Imperial base completed, it's protected by an orbital weapons platform and the system is full of sensor drones. The surveillance data is all in my R2 unit, but I've got too much damage here to down-load it. So here's a summary...."

It seemed to Kenobi that everything was happening in slow motion, except for Luke's voice, urgently describing the Imperial defences, and the read-out on the x-wing life-support, counting down minutes and then seconds of air. Part of him wanted to tell Luke to stop talking, to conserve his remaining air, while the rest of him recognised that if the x-wing was this badly damaged, Luke's droid might not be functioning too well either, and it was prudent to assume that the data it contained might be corrupted.

There were ways for a Jedi to slow down the body's need for oxygen. Luke would have been well-versed in such techniques by now, if Kenobi rather than Owen had had charge of him. But there was no point in dwelling on might-have-beens; instead, Kenobi called mentally for Yoda. He himself had no power to move the x-wing. But Yoda had, and propelling it faster towards the hangar might well make the difference between Luke living or dying.

"Luke? Come on, Luke, talk to me!" That was Wedge, who was staring worriedly down at Luke. There was an urgent howl from Chewbacca, loud enough to.... loud enough to wake the dead, Kenobi thought wryly.

But Luke wasn't dead, not quite. After a moment, his eyes fluttered open, and he squinted up at the faces hovering anxiously over him. He murmured something that sounded almost like, "Ben?"

Yes! Luke, listen to me. Go to Dagobah, to Yoda...

But Luke was trying to sit up, was croaking hoarsely, "Reeikan.... you have to tell Reeikan..."

"It's okay, Luke," Wedge said. "We got that. R2's in better shape than you are, right now. We can get the details from him."

As Luke leaned back against Chewbacca, Ben tried again. *Luke!*

This time Luke's reply was clear, if disbelieving. "Ben??"

But then a medic, doubtless entirely well-meaning but with a terrible sense of timing, was pressing a hypo to Luke's arm. Once, controlling the actions of the less Force-sensitive had been easy, moving massive boulders trivial. Now Ben couldn't even slow the medic's movements down, or deflect the hypo. He could only watch helplessly as Luke's eyes closed again, and he surrendered to blissful oblivion.

At least the boy was still alive. There was still hope.

And Yoda was not entirely disinterested in Luke, after all.

The hangar again. It was now so familiar to Kenobi that being back there almost felt like coming home. He recognised many of the people, too, although he'd never found out most of their names.

Solo was talking to a group of commandos. Intrigued, Kenobi let his awareness pause there, taking in Solo's attitude, and that of the soldiers to him.

Luke wasn't the only one who'd grown up since the Mos Eisley cantina.

In a corner of the hangar, a group of people were huddled together, talking quietly. At first Kenobi couldn't hear what they were saying, but if this ship had been his command, he'd have a bad feeling about this. Until now, he'd never seen anything but high morale in any of his glimpses of the Alliance forces. He wondered what had happened here to make these people so disaffected.

Some of them glanced up as an access panel opened in the massive blast doors that sealed the hangar off from the rest of the ship. They visibly relaxed when they saw who it was.

"Hey, Luke!" one of them called. "Got a minute?"

"Commander Skywalker, you mean," a blonde girl amended, grinning at Luke as he strode up to them.

Someone else was smiling broadly at Luke, too. The woman he'd seen Luke with before pulled herself out from underneath a laser cannon power supply and went to stand beside him. Very close beside him. He didn't say anything, just smiled back and brushed her hand.

The first speaker, a big, solidly-built young man, was eyeing Luke calculatingly. "You said once that you helped your uncle and aunt extend your home, back on Tatooine, didn't you?"

"Hi, Dokril, Anders. Yes. I helped Biggs' family build their house, too. Why?"

"Great." Dokril tapped rapidly on his data pad, smiling to himself. "Right then... 'experience of construction in extreme environments'...."

"What exactly are you volunteering me for now?" Luke demanded, grinning himself. He seemed to be completely recovered from the reconnaissance mission that could so easily have been his last.

"What'd you think?" Dokril asked the others. "Should I tell him? Does he have a real Need to Know?"

"How about I order you to tell me?" Luke suggested.

"That's fair enough. You can always shoot him later if it turns out you shouldn't have." That voice was familiar. It was Loophole, the x-wing technician. He, Dokril and the blonde girl, Anders, all had Eoran accents, and Eorans were notoriously even worse than Corellians when it came to submitting to any authority they didn't respect.

Anders answered Luke's question. "You know that rumour that's been going round about setting up another base? And that the scientific types - " she nodded at a couple of the group "- want somewhere remote to test the new weapons they've been designing? Well, Survey has found a likely planet. Uninhabited, but it has an abandoned observatory - "

"Which was set up to study the unusually high level of meteor activity in the system," another woman interrupted. She was short and muscular, wearing Alliance fatigue trousers but also sporting a t-shirt emblazoned with 'Weyland-Naylor Asteroid Mining Division'. "That conveniently gives us a cave complex we can adapt to a weapons lab, and lots of meteors for target practice."

"And lots of room for expansion for the troop barracks. Rumour has it that Reeikan wants to start training troops for a ground assault on the Imperial sector base on Gedan. So when they get the new combat suits and equipment, he wants to try them out in a more benign climate first," Loophole added.

"But," said Dokril, "unfortunately Commander Gairich is going to be in and out of bacta tanks for at least a month before she recovers from her injuries. So that idiot Dodonna is threatening to put his moron friend Donsay in charge of the advance party that's going in first to set up the base."

"And since you lot are going to *be* the advance party, you aren't too happy about that?" Luke suggested.

"No. We could solve the problem by shooting Donsay, but that would be a waste of precious ammunition." Dokril put an arm round Luke's shoulders and grinned slyly. "So what we need is an alternative mission leader for the advance party. Someone practical, who's in the powers-that-be's good books, has the common sense to let us get on with our jobs - "

"Which we are more that competent to do without some career military officer standing over us," muttered the asteroid miner.

"And who isn't scared of doing some hard work himself," finished Dokril.

"So what's with the 'construction in extreme environments' bit?" asked Luke. "If I'm going to spend time planet-side, I'd prefer one with more water than Tatooine."

"Oh, Hoth has more water than Tatooine. Lots more. It's just that it's all frozen solid."

"Some people," Anders said, pretending to shiver, "have a different definition of 'more benign climate' to mine."

"Wimp," announced the asteroid miner, good-naturedly. "It's got a breathable atmosphere, and close to standard gravity, so what're you complaining about? Water snow and ice aren't an extreme environment. If it was methane or ammonia ice, now...."

Kenobi let his attention drift back to the sodden trees, creepers and mosses of Dagobah. No, sufficient moisture alone did not guarantee a pleasant environment.

Commander Skywalker.... that shouldn't have been unexpected, but it was still a concern. The more responsibilities Luke had with the Alliance, the harder it would be to persuade him to give them up. But he had to. There would be time enough for dual roles when Luke was older, but if he was to make up for all the years that Owen had wasted, training as a Jedi would have to become a full-time occupation.

Kenobi sat, brooding, on a muddy rock by one of Dagobah's depressingly similar swamps. Yoda kept telling him that there was beauty here, if Ben would just take the time to appreciate it.

He did not think that it was appropriate that he waste that time. The Imperial counter-attacks were becoming increasingly effective, the Alliance's stand against Palpatine's tyranny more and more precarious. Not having the powers he once had should have been an advantage, because he could no longer directly sense all those death-cries, as he had from Alderaan.

But it didn't help. He knew what was happening out there, was aware of how many lives were being wasted on both sides, and his imagination heard the screams and cries anyway.

Yoda, confident in the Force and in his own visions of the long-term future, was prepared to wait. Kenobi was not. To both Yoda and the Force, perhaps, a few additional years of conflict and suffering might be insignificant in the overall arc of galactic history. But not to Kenobi.... not when he knew that there was a way to end this war in months, not years. For all the years of discipline, it was hard to feel anything but frustration at being isolated here, impotent, when he could feel the currents on the Force drawing together in anticipation of powerful conflicts.

If Vader or the Emperor should reach Luke first.....

The boy was still so young, so naive. He was strong, Ben could feel that, but would that help him see through the lies that Vader or Palpatine would tell him?

For an instant, an image formed, of a battered and bruised Luke staring in absolute horror at Vader and screaming, "No!"

And then it was gone, because it still only a potential future, and the shout of "No!" from Luke that had propelled Kenobi to his feet was now.

Physically, Luke was only whispering. It was mentally and emotionally that his denial was loud enough to echo all the way to Dagobah, even though he wasn't consciously trying to reach Ben....

..... a transport of some sort, cramped and crowded, lines of the injured lying in make-shift beds on the decks. A sight that Ben had hoped never to see again. The sounds were all too familiar as well; whimpers and moans, sobs and curses, or just grim, stoical silences. It didn't matter that Ben wasn't corporeal enough to really sense this. His memory had no difficulty in supplying the appropriate smells of stale sweat, blood and charred flesh. Many of the wounded were in civilian clothes.

Be realistic, Ben. After Alderaan, did you expect Palpatine and Vader to discriminate?

And not all combatants wear uniforms, he reminded himself. The man Luke was kneeling beside didn't.

A worn-looking woman with a medic's insignia got up, hanging a scanner back on her belt. "There's nothing I can do for Solo, Luke. If we could keep him alive until we rendezvous with the medical frigate, it'd be no problem. They have the facilities and equipment to deal with this. But we don't. I'm sorry." She rested her hand on Luke's shoulder for a moment before she turned away, the implication clear that she should concentrate on those who had some chance of living.

Solo had no obvious injuries that Kenobi could see. But he was lying unnaturally still, and seemed to hardly be breathing. It occurred to Ben that in all the glimpses he'd had of Solo, the man had always been moving.

"What happened to him?" someone asked quietly.

"The Imperials were using some sort of EM dampening field. That's why we have so many injuries from projectile weapons to deal with. Solo got too close to it trying to de-activate it," the medic said briefly, already examining another patient.

"But - oh. I see. The body's chemical reactions are basically electrical, aren't they?"

"Yes. So's the way neurons fire. So his entire metabolism is shutting down, and I have no way to stop it."

Over Solo's still form, Luke and Chewbacca looked at each other. The Wookiee whimpered.

"No," said Luke again. "No. I'm not going to let you die."

This was the first time Kenobi had seen any real resemblance between Luke and his father. Not in Luke's features, but the stubborn and determined expression that said he wasn't going to let minor details like the normal workings of reality stand in his way.

And again, if Luke had been trained properly, perhaps he could have done something for his friend. Healing was one of the rarer Jedi talents, one it seemed that Vader had lost, since he had to rely on prosthetics to keep him breathing. But then Anakin hadn't had much patience for skill he couldn't immediately master, and using the Force to heal required finesse and long practice.

Luke, of course, didn't know that. So Kenobi shouldn't have been surprised that he tried anyway. There was nothing subtle about what Luke was doing at all. He just reached out, completely intuitively, and it was as if he had seized very fabric of the Force and pulled, drawing energy from wherever he could find it.

Beside Kenobi, there was an exclamation from Yoda. The Jedi Master had nearly over-balanced, as if the muddy surface of Dagobah had been physically jerked out from under his clawed feet.

Kenobi very much doubted that Luke understood the bio-chemistry of what he was trying to do either. But that didn't matter - after all, children didn't need to do calculus in their heads to catch a ball. Kenobi waited, his thoughts a complex mix of emotions.

If Luke, un-trained and alone, can do this, couldn't you have kept Qui-Gon alive?

He knew there was no point posing that question, but it asked itself anyway. What had happened to Solo was not the same as being run through by a lightsaber. If love and will-power strong connection to the Force had been enough to let Qui-Gon live, Ben could have saved him, and the galaxy wouldn't be in this mess...

Maybe when this was all over, when Vader and Palpatine were defeated, the fact that he hadn't been able to save his master would finally stop hurting so much.

Yoda had his back very firmly to Ben, as he always did when Ben thought about Qui-Gon. Whether Yoda could sense Ben's resentment – *suited you, didn't it, no longer having Qui-Gon to challenge your decisions?* – he didn't know, and frankly didn't care.

At least Yoda wasn't interfering with what Luke was doing. Perhaps it helped that Luke didn't think he was alone. One of Luke's hands was resting on Solo's chest, over his heart. The other was enveloped in one of Chewbacca's big paws.

And they weren't the only ones who didn't want Solo to die. The Corellian really must have changed since Mos Eisley, because although it was hard now for Ben to sense the feelings of the non-Force-sensitive, he was dimly aware of some of the people around them, willing Luke to succeed.

Luke shouldn't have been able to use that either, but somehow he did.

Solo coughed and opened his eyes, blinking at Luke and Chewbacca. "I feel terrible," he muttered, very faintly. He blinked again, obviously having trouble focussing. "Why do you look so fuzzy, Chewie?"

I always look fuzzy, announced the Wookiee. He coughed too, as if he had a lump in his throat, and added, **You're just jealous because most of you is bald.** A large paw ruffled Solo's hair.

Solo tried to sit up, obviously decided that was too difficult, but managed to raise one hand. He seemed pleased with himself at having done that. Then, as he

touched Luke's face, and found tears running down it, he looked puzzled. "Wouldn't Uncle Owen say this was a waste of moisture?"

Luke just shook his head. "No."

No... Ben echoed, thoughts once again in the past, hearing the pleading voice of his younger self. The remembered touch of Qui-Gon's hand on his wet face felt far more real than the damp air of Dagobah...

Leave it, Ben. Reliving it won't change anything.

Concentrate on the now (and so what if he heard those words in Qui-Gon's lilting voice). If Vader and the Emperor had not been aware of Luke before, they would be now. They couldn't have missed that great a disturbance in the Force

It was too hard now, to see the future with any clarity. But Kenobi was optimistic that on Hoth he would finally reach Luke. There would be fewer people around him, and fewer distractions away from the fighting. Surely there would be plant and animal life on Hoth, which would engender sufficient strength in the Force, without adding the confusion of sentience.

But, after all his other failures, there was a nagging worry. The closest he'd come to reaching Luke was when the boy had been badly hurt and barely conscious. At this rate, the only time he could be sure of communicating his message would be when Luke was hardly connected to the physical world at all. And for that to be the case, the boy would have to be three-quarters dead.

But if that was the only way it could be, that would have to do. There was no other option. Luke had to go to Dagobah, whatever it took to get him there.

end

[Back To Index](#)