
CHAPTER 1

Rey sat cross-legged, eyes closed. She didn't remember rising off the ground, but she was vaguely aware that somehow she'd ended up floating. Pebbles and small boulders hovered around her, like a field of asteroids orbiting their sun. The Force flowed through her, buoyed her, connected her to everything. The lush rain forest moon of Ajan Kloss was teeming with life. She could feel every tree and fern, every reptile and insect. A few strides away in a hidden den, a small furry creature groomed its litter of four kits.

"That's it, Rey," came Leia's voice, deep and soothing as always. "Very good. Your connection becomes stronger every day. Can you feel it?"

"Yes."

"Now reach out. If your mind is ready, you'll be able to hear those who have come before."

Rey inhaled through her nose and sent her awareness into the void. Peace and calm were key, Leia always said. She reached, she searched, she felt the

breeze on her cheeks, she smelled loamy soil, damp from the recent rain.

“Be with me, be with me, be with me,” she murmured. But she heard . . . nothing except wind in the trees and chirruping insects.

“Rey?”

She didn’t want to admit that she was failing, so instead she said, “Why did *you* stop training with Luke?” Her words came out too harsh, almost like a challenge.

Leia took it in stride. “Another life called to me.”

Eyes still closed, Rey asked, “How did you know?”

“A feeling. Visions. Of serving the galaxy in different ways.”

“But how did you know those visions were true?” Rey pressed.

“I knew.” She heard the smile in Leia’s voice.

Rey didn’t understand how Leia could be so sure. Of anything.

“I treasured each moment I spent with my brother,” Leia added. “The things he taught me . . . I use them every day. Once you touch the Force, it’s part of you always. Over the years, I continued to learn, to grow. There were times on the Senate floor when the meditations I’d practiced with Luke were the only thing that kept me from causing a galactic incident.”

Rey frowned. Leia didn’t need patience. She could have made anyone do anything she wanted, with the power of the Force. Surely she’d been tempted?

“Was Luke angry? When you quit?” She hoped Leia noticed that she could talk *and* float at the same time now. That was progress, right?

Leia paused to consider. “He was disappointed. But he understood. I think he held out hope that I’d return to it someday.”

Rey almost laughed. “He should have known better.” Once Leia made a decision, it was for keeps.

“I gave him my lightsaber to convince him otherwise. Told him to pass it on to a promising student someday.” But Leia’s voice had grown tight. Rey sensed she was holding something back.

“Where’s your lightsaber now?”

“No idea. Now stop trying to distract me,” Leia said. “Reach out.”

Rey refocused and emptied her mind of worries, just as Leia had taught her. She cast out her awareness. Opened herself to anything the Force might want to tell her. Tentatively, she called for him: *Master Skywalker?*

Nothing, nothing, and more nothing.

“Master Leia, I don’t hear anyone.”

“Let go of all thought. Let go of fear. Reach out. Invite the Jedi of the past to be with you.”

“Be with me . . . be with me . . .” She waited all of a second, maybe two. “They’re not with me.” Rey made a noise of exasperation, then flipped herself neatly to land on the ground. Rocks toppled around her.

“Rey,” Leia said. The general could put so much into a single word: chastisement, acceptance, amuse-

ment, fondness. Maybe that's why she'd become such a powerful leader. "Be patient."

"I'm starting to think it's impossible. To hear the voices of the Jedi who came before," Rey said, striding toward Leia.

Her Master always managed to look neat and tidy, no matter how muddy their makeshift base got. Her hair was pulled back into a circlet of braids, and she wore a quilted vest over a brown tunic. Alderaanian jewelry always dangled from her earlobes, wrapped her wrists and fingers. Her eyes were bright and knowing, as always, but Rey had noticed that her movements had slowed recently, as though her bones ached.

Leia's face held a hint of a smile. "Nothing's impossible."

Rey grabbed her blast helmet and leapt to her feet. "Nothing's impossible . . ." she echoed, trying to believe it. "I'm going to run the training course. That I can do." Rey *needed* to run. Or maybe hit something.

Leia handed her Luke's lightsaber. Rey took it reverently. Then she dashed into the jungle, BB-8 rolling after her.

Leia watched Rey sprint away, a hint of a smile on her lips. Training the girl always filled her with pride, but also misgiving. Rey was both a wonderful and an exasperating student. Frustrated with anything she didn't pick up quickly, completely unaware how fast she did pick things up.

She wasn't one to judge, though. Leia had exas-

perated Luke just as much. Besides, there was something about growing old that made her connection with the Force even stronger. When the body began to fail, the mind reached out, unencumbered by physical ability. The truth was, Leia couldn't run through the jungle if she wanted to. Peace and calm came easily because her body craved them.

Then again, perhaps Leia had never been young. By the time she'd reached the age Rey was now, she was leading a rebellion.

Rey could be a great leader someday, and she would be, if Leia had anything to do with it. The girl had darkness inside her, just like Ben. But Leia would not make the same mistakes she had with her son. She would not give in to fear—neither of the darkness rising within her pupil nor of her own questionable qualifications as a teacher. Most important, she would never send Rey away.

Leia turned and began walking back toward the base. She reached out a hand and let her fingers trail through the ferns and broad-leafed creepers that lined her path. Ajan Kloss held so many good memories. Years ago, she'd trained here with Luke, who had declared it "Nice Dagobah." He'd claimed it was as wet, warm, green, and overflowing with life as the planet where he'd trained with Yoda—except it didn't smell bad.

She stepped into a clearing. To her right, a large tree with a massive trunk reached for sunlight, spreading a canopy of branches that shaded the clearing, keeping anything else from growing except ground creeping ferns and low, sparse grass. Leia

had trained right here, in this very spot. She reached out and touched the tree trunk reverently. A large bole of bark had formed around an old wound. It was almost sealed shut.

Leia had been the one to damage the tree. She'd swung for Luke with her lightsaber and missed, slashing into the tree trunk instead. This tree had been healing itself for more than two decades.

Oh, Luke, I hope I'm doing this right, she thought. Leia was no Jedi Master, but she had learned from the best. And not just from Luke; over the years she'd occasionally heard the voice of Obi-Wan Kenobi through the Force, and even more rarely, that of Yoda. Some days it had felt as though she'd learned from the Force itself. She was first and foremost a politician and a general, but she had accepted her Jedi legacy and embraced it as best she could.

And maybe that's exactly what Rey needed: training in the Force *not* from a formal Master, but rather someone grounded in the everyday minutiae of life and survival. Obi-Wan had failed to keep Vader from the dark side. Luke had failed the same way with Ben. She could not fail Rey.

Insects sang as she walked. Birds warbled overhead, and tiny amphibians trilled their mating calls. Odd how such a raucous place could be so peaceful. The noise was so loud, so ever-present, and so soothing, it was almost as perfect as silence.

Many years ago, not long after the Battle of Endor, she'd discovered the meditative power of sound. She and Luke had stolen away for some

training, and somehow she'd ended up standing on her hands while Luke slung good-natured taunts her way. Even with help from the Force, her shoulders had started to burn, her arms wobble. They'd already spent the last hour sparring with their lightsabers, and her body was exhausted.

"You know," Luke had said, his voice smug, "when I did this on Dagobah, Yoda was sitting on my feet."

He said that a lot back then. *When I did this on Dagobah . . .* It was obnoxious and completely unhelpful. So Leia reminded him, "You're being obnoxious and completely unhelpful."

"I also did it one-handed," he added.

He was trying to provoke her, to teach her a lesson about anger and impatience, and all that nonsense. Luke had forgotten that his student was a superb strategist who'd already benefited from a royal education. Leia would not be provoked.

Instead, she considered. She reached out to the Force, let it flow through her like blood in her veins. A tiny insect began rubbing its mandibles together, whistling a sweet, high song.

Some instinct guided her, and Leia focused on the sound. It was beautiful, pure, ethereal—completely untethered to the worries of leadership and teaching, failure and learning.

With focus, and with *delight*, Leia raised herself off the ground. She floated upside down, feet pointed to the sky. After a moment, she lifted her arms and held them parallel to the ground.

But she *was* just a student, new to the ways of

the Force, and when she came back to herself, fully realized what she'd done, she whipped her hands back down lest she fall.

She did it just in time. Her form collapsed, and she found herself kneeling in mud. No matter. She'd do better next time.

Leia looked up to find Luke staring at her, mouth open.

"Did you ever do *that* with Yoda?" she couldn't resist asking.

He shook his head wordlessly.

"I can do better," she insisted. "Float longer."

Luke found his voice. "You're going to make me a better teacher," he said.

Not the response she'd expected. "What do you mean?"

He reached down, helped her up. "Your footwork is terrible," he said. "Don't get me wrong, your lightsaber craft is coming along, but . . . you do other things. Naturally." His face turned apologetic. "What I mean is, you're exceptional. Just . . . different."

Then he had smiled, with that wide farm-boy grin that had stayed with him all the way up until the night of Ben's betrayal.

Leia shook off the memory with effort. Memories were coming fast and vivid these days.

She was glad for this one, though. It would be the key to training Rey. Leia and Rey were different, the last remnants of a dead Order, and together, they would carve a *new* path.

Thick green foliage whipped past Rey as she ran, the flag in her hand flashing red with each pump of her arms. She bounded over tangled ferns, dodged hanging vines. Sweat soaked her collar, and her thighs burned with effort.

Even so, running through the jungle was not harder than running ankle-deep in desert sand. She could do this all day.

Rey had already taken out the first two training remotes and captured the flags they guarded. She had leapt a massive gorge, fought blindly over a ravine while balanced on a tightrope made of vines, traversed a thin ridge high above the jungle canopy. Now the course had her doubling back, where she encountered BB-8. He warbled at her.

“One to go,” she said. “C’mon!”

The final remote eluded her because it was faster. Trickier. More droid than remote. She’d told Leia she wanted a challenge today, and Leia had delivered.

BB-8 sped after her, beeping complaints every time he had to dodge a tree root. Rey hid a smile. She was continually impressed by how well the little droid kept up with her, whether they were running the sands of Jakku, the rocky trails of Takodana, or the jungles of Ajan Kloss. His maneuverability made him the perfect training companion.

He bleated a warning.

“I see it, Beebee-Ate.” She slid to a halt.

The spherical remote had stopped and now hov-

ered midair as if waiting for her, or maybe taunting her. It was different from the other two she'd taken out, a wicked red shell surrounding shining metal firing ports. It hummed dark and low; she felt that hum deep in her chest.

Rey unhooked Luke's reforged lightsaber from her utility belt. Ignited it. Bluish light glowed against the leaves around her as she stared the remote down. She was going to *destroy* this thing.

Suddenly a blast shot out from one of the ports. Stinging pain exploded in her upper arm. Rey resisted the urge to clutch her arm or even grunt in pain. She deserved it, after all. She hadn't been ready. *Determination is not the same as readiness*, Leia would say.

Well, she wasn't one to make the same mistake twice. The next time it fired, she whipped up her lightsaber to deflect the blast and sent it flying into the trees.

She didn't even have a chance to congratulate herself before another blast hit her in the chest. *Of course* multiple ports meant multiple blasts. She had to *focus*.

She breathed deep through her nose. Reached out to the Force.

The training remote started to buzz around her, flashing angry red as it slung stinging darts in a dizzying array, but she let instinct take over and whirled her lightsaber with equally dizzying speed, deflecting every single attack.

Connecting to the Force came easily these days. So easily it was like breathing. But the peace, the

calm that Leia was always going on about eluded her. So even though she could counter the remote's every move, she couldn't find her opening for attack. *Patience*, she imagined Leia saying. *Wait for your moment . . .*

The remote was behind her, then in front of her, then high above her head, darting through the air like a buzzing fly, and if she could just smash it . . .

The remote sped away and she tore after it. It stopped again, fired a few bolts to goad her. Teeth gritted, she swung her lightsaber. The remote dodged, and her blade missed, slicing through a tree trunk; sparks and leaves and bark splinters rained down as the tree toppled, smashing jungle foliage on its way down.

She leapt over the downed trunk after the remote. Swung again. The remote swooped around as if anticipating the arc of her blade, barely evading when the lightsaber slid through another tree as if it were made of butter.

A roiling dark cloud of frustration grew inside her.

She hardly realized what she was doing as raw instinct took over. Rey threw her lightsaber, winging it like a propeller through the air at the red remote. It dodged, and the lightsaber sliced through yet another tree. The remote screamed as it dived for her head, but this time she was ready.

She reached with the Force for a downed branch. It flew into her hand. She anticipated the exact angle of attack, and she whipped up the branch and thrust

it into the remote, spearing it against a nearby tree trunk.

Her lightsaber returned to her hand with a satisfying smack.

The crushed red remote twitched and sparked against the tree.

She glared at it as triumph filled her. Maybe patience was overrated—

Whispers filled her ears. No, her very mind. She whirled, seeking their source even as the realization dawned: It was happening again.

The jungle around her faded. All went deathly silent as sweltering darkness closed in, threatening to smother her. An image sprang to mind, and she flinched away, though there was no avoiding the horrible sight: Kylo Ren, black-clad and ferocious, his crackling red lightsaber slicing mercilessly through robed figures. She heard their screams, smelled their blood, watched as they tried in vain to flee or beg for their lives. Nothing slowed him. He was a juggernaut of destruction, monstrous and unstoppable.

Relief flooded her like a wave when the vision shifted, but it quickly changed to utter desolation as she saw herself, wind-whipped and alone, standing in a forsaken landscape of endlessly fractured ground. The hair on her arms stood on end, for the air crackled with electricity. Before her, a massive monolith jutted upward, scraping the sky. It was black and shimmery, casting a huge shadow.

The monolith shifted. Became a giant face of stone, cloaked in evil . . .

No, not a stone at all. A form of something, part

human, part machine, with tubes stretching away from it like tentacles, all filled with a strange liquid. Was this creature alive? Or was it—

Flashes of Luke's face. Then Kylo's. Han Solo, his hand against Kylo's cheek. A young woman in a hood. A freighter flying away from Jakku . . .

Finally, a burning voice in her head, as clear and unbearable as a desert sun: "*Exegol*."

She whispered the word back, her voice shaking: "Exegol . . . ?"

And suddenly she was standing before yet another giant stone structure, this one shaped like a huge claw, its thick, bent fingers grasping ever upward. Her legs twitched as if to flee, even as something about it beckoned to her, invited her. She found herself wanting to approach the massive claw-thing, wanting to know what it would feel like to run her fingers along its rough black surface.

The black claw-thing was a throne; she could see it now.

She took a step forward, but something beeped at her, and she hesitated. The beeping continued, grew more insistent. Clarity hit her like a quarter-staff to the jaw. Of course she couldn't touch that throne. It belonged to darkness and evil. She had already chosen a different path, hadn't she?

More beeping. Something appeared on the throne. A familiar figure. Rey blinked in shock and dismay.

Quick as it appeared, the vision evaporated like morning mist, and she was left gasping in the jungle. Rey was so relieved to sense the life and light and

humid green around her that it took her a moment to come fully back to herself, to trace the sound of beeping to a felled tree, and beneath it a very indignant BB-8.

Rey dashed over to him, pushed some branches away. "I'm so sorry!" she said.

He babbled at her while she extricated him from the fallen trunk—it took a little help from the Force to free him completely.

One of the orange discs that protected his modular tool bay had popped off, exposing a dark channel to his motive system.

She'd hurt her friend. Poe was going to be livid with her, but not more livid than she was with herself.

The little droid warbled at her.

"Yes, Beebee-Ate, it happened to me again."

He whirred at her, part question, part empathy.

"No, I still don't know what the Force was trying to show me, but this time was . . . worse." So much worse. Unspeakably worse. She stared off into the trees. Some of the flashes had been memories. Hers, and . . . Kylo Ren's? "Let's get back."

Maybe she should tell Leia what had happened. Or maybe not. The general had enough things to worry about, and Rey needed Leia to believe in her, to trust her. What would the general say if she knew how Rey's frustration and anger were triggering visions of death and dark power?

She just needed more training. More time meditating in the Force, more time seeking the peace Leia was trying to teach her. She could do it. She *had* to.

If only she could hear voices through the Force, like Leia could. Surely Luke could provide some guidance. As Rey and BB-8 neared the camp, she decided to try again. *Nothing's impossible*, Leia had said.

"Master Luke," she said. "I'm afraid." Rey glanced around, making sure only BB-8 was there to observe her speaking to no one. Rey reached out to the Force and said, "Before *I* felt it, you saw it. I'm drawn to the dark side. Or maybe it's drawn to me. I don't know. Whatever it is, it's stronger now, and I can't push it away, hard as I try . . . I don't understand it."

BB-8 beeped.

"Shh, don't interrupt. Master Luke? I think you can hear me, I need your—"

BB-8 beeped again, more insistently.

They had reached the edge of camp. "Seriously, you're being annoying, go over there," Rey said, indicating a large flight case.

He did as asked, but he warbled his indignation.

"It *is* how it works," Rey countered. "There are Force spirits; Luke wrote about them in the Jedi texts. They come when you need them the most."

The droid remained loudly skeptical.

Rey ignored him. "Master Luke," she tried again. "I have visions of things that frighten me. I don't want to lose this . . . Leia is how I dreamed a mother would be . . . and my friends . . . I don't want to let them down."

There it was. Her greatest fear. That these people she'd come to care for so much would be disap-

pointed in her. Maybe even hurt by her. She'd been alone for so long . . . she couldn't bear the thought of losing any of them.

"But no one here understands . . . except Kylo Ren. If the son of Han and Leia can be turned, can't any of us?"

A twig cracked, and Rey looked up. Snap Wexley and Rose Tico were walking toward her, questions writ all over their faces.

"How much of that did you hear?" Rey said.

"Of what?" Snap said, failing to look innocent.

"Nothing," Rey mumbled.

Rose's expression softened with empathy. The commander of the Engineering Corps had a disarming quality about her. Whenever she spoke to Rey, it was all Rey could do to keep from spilling all her fears and worries to her friend. "You okay?" Rose asked.

"Yes, of course, I was just doing . . ."

"Jedi stuff," Rose finished for her.

"Yeah."

Thankfully, Rose chose not to press her. She said, "The general asked for you."

Rey took a deep breath. It was decision time. Should she tell Leia about her dark vision or keep it to herself?

CHAPTER 2

General Armitage Hux watched—from a safe distance—as Supreme Leader Kylo Ren and a squad of stormtroopers cut a swath of blood and destruction through the pathetic Mustafarian colonists. They battled through the gloomy woods of Corvax Fen, one of the few patches on this hellscape of a lava planet that was cool enough to support native growth, if you could call this “growth.” Barren trees grew out of a noxious marsh, and the air was hazy with mist. The barbarian colonists were failing to put up a decent fight; their archaic halberds and broadswords were no match for the technical superiority of a good blaster, or even, Hux had to admit, a lightsaber.

Ren was a blunt instrument, a mindless dog, whose current obsession was putting all the First Order’s plans behind schedule. The general was half tempted to wade into the fight himself to hurry things along—just so they could leave this awful planet. Or at least he would be half tempted if his

skills were not better used elsewhere. Best if Ren did all the dirty work; Hux was too valuable to risk.

“He’s almost beautiful to watch,” mused Allegiant General Pryde, standing tall beside him. The older man had arrogant blue eyes and a high hairline that seemed immune to perspiration, even in a hell-climate like this. “Don’t you think?”

Hux refused to gratify that with a response, because true beauty came from discipline, from *order*. So it was almost against his will that he found himself mesmerized as Ren met a barbarian’s charge head-on, cloak flowing, mist swirling around him. The glow of his lightsaber occasionally snagged on his cheek scar, making it appear as though a crack of glowing lava slashed his face. It was like something out of a dream, or maybe a nightmare, as the Supreme Leader plunged his fiery crossguard into his attacker’s abdomen, lifted him from the ground, and sent him toppling onto his back. Kylo Ren did not spare his fallen foe a single glance, simply rushed forward into the woods seeking his next kill.

But there was no one left. Corpses littered the ground, barely more than lumps of shadow in the gloom. The air smelled of ozone and scorched vegetation. All was eerily silent as Ren looked around, catching his breath. Even from a distance, Hux could sense his disappointment that the killing was over, that no outlet for his rage remained.

Kylo Ren gathered himself and strode away into the woods, shoulders set with determination, lightsaber still ablaze. The mysterious object he had

come for—dragged all of them across the galaxy for—was nearly within his grasp.

“He’s gone mad,” General Hux said, and the contempt in his voice was obvious even to his own ears. “Flames of rebellion burn across the galaxy, and Ren chases a *ghost*.”

“No,” Allegiant General Pryde responded, softly but firmly. “*Someone* was behind that transmission. And Leader Ren will answer to no one.”

Hux narrowed his eyes. Ren would definitely answer to someone, someday. He just didn’t realize it yet.

Kylo Ren showed mercy to nothing and no one, but he had a grudging appreciation for things that struggled to survive. Even though the nearest lava flow was many clicks away, it seemed as though the air ought to be too hot, too chemical, for life to truly thrive here. As they’d landed, Hux had proclaimed the planet a “desolate hellscape,” and Kylo hadn’t bothered to correct him. The truth was, Mustafar was teeming with life—all connected through the Force. Like those hapless cultists he’d just killed, who’d been obsessed with protecting Vader’s legacy. Or this forest of twisted iron trees they endeavored to cultivate. Or even the extremophile organisms that swarmed the lava flows. All fragile but determined, mutilated but indomitable.

It was no wonder his grandfather has chosen this place for a home.

Kylo strode through the trees, lightsaber still ignited. Malevolence lay ahead, along with a darkness

that had nothing to do with the planet's day–night cycle. But that's not why he kept his weapon ready. He refused to put it away because for the briefest moment, as he was hacking away at Mustafarians, he had sensed *her*. Watching him. Now his guard was up, and it would stay up until he got what he came for.

By silent mutual agreement, the stormtroopers who'd accompanied him had declined to follow him through the woods, which suited him fine. He preferred to be alone for this.

A few more steps and the ground became soggy. The mist thickened. A small splash indicated that his presence had been noticed. Finally, the trees broke open onto a small lake with brackish water, bordered on all sides by forest and large black lumps like boulders, jutting out of the ground at odd angles. No, not boulders, he noted upon closer look, but rather fallen remnants of Darth Vader's castle.

An oily film slicked across the lake's still surface. But as Kylo approached, the water bubbled up in the center, sending tiny waves to lap at his boots.

A giant emerged, a hairless creature sheening with wetness, bits of lake detritus clinging to its pasty skin. Its eyes were squeezed shut, but it could still see after a fashion, because draped over its massive bald head and across one shoulder was a second creature with long spidery tentacles. The two were locked in symbiosis. Kylo sensed the giant's pain, as though it were a slave to the spidery being that clung to it. Yet neither could it survive alone.

The spider creature spoke. "I am the Eye of Webbish Bog. I know what you seek."

"You will give it to me," Kylo said.

The Eye cocked its head, making an eerie squealing noise. It took a moment for Kylo to realize the creature was laughing at him. "No need for that," the Eye said. "Do you really think my lord would have left it in the guardianship of one who could be swayed by a trick of the Force?"

No, he supposed not.

"You've been seeking it for a while, yes? I must warn you, our fiery planet burns away deception. If you proceed down this path, you will encounter your true self."

Kylo was growing impatient. He glared in silence.

"Fine," the creature said, as though disappointed that Kylo would not indulge him in ceremony. "In accordance with Lord Vader's wishes, you have defeated my protectors and earned it. His wayfinder."

The blind giant beneath the Eye raised its enormous hand from the water and pointed toward a small island in the lake. On it was a stone structure, like an altar.

Kylo turned off his lightsaber and hooked it to his belt. He waded into the shallow lake, soaking his boots and cloak. The water was warm, and the ground beneath the water a sludge that sucked at his feet. He ignored it all, reaching for a pyramidal object. It fit satisfyingly in his hand, heavy and hot, and he stared at it a moment, lost in its red glow. The sides were etched glass framed in deep-gray

resin. The crimson light within seemed to pulse faintly. Ren had come a long way for this, and yet he hesitated, eyeing the pyramid with distrust.

“It will guide you through the Unknown Regions,” the Eye said. “To the hidden world of Exegol. To *him*.”

Whoever *he* was. The transmission purporting to be from Palpatine had reached the far corners of the galaxy. Kylo had it memorized:

*At last the work of generations is complete.
The great error is corrected. They day of
victory is at hand. The day of revenge. The
day of the Sith.*

He wasn't sure what to believe about it, but it was a fair guess that Kylo wasn't the only one seeking answers. Others would follow the same path and come to Mustafar sooner or later, looking for this exact object.

So surely his grandfather would have made it harder than this? Those cultists were too easy to kill. This creature too easy to convince. Then again, he was Vader's heir. The object belonged to him.

Now that he had it up close, the etchings in the glass clarified into patterns. Star charts. Alignment markers. Something stirred deep within him, suggesting ancient knowledge and power, and he felt a rush of triumph. It had all been worth it—diverting ships, sending out spies, tracing old records, enduring the smug disapproval of that idiot Hux—all to find this.