

# ONCE YOU'RE A JEDI, YOU'RE A JEDI ALL THE WAY

by holly black and  
cecil castellucci

## I. KLINGON

I awake tangled up in scratchy sheets with my head pounding and the taste of cheap alcohol and Tabasco still in my mouth. The spirit gum I used to attach my nose ridge and eyebrows sticks to the sheets as I roll over. Immediately, a wave of nausea makes me regret moving and I try to lie as still as I can until it passes.

The thing about advancing in the Klingon ranks is that you have to be badass. So when Kadi and D'ghor decided last night that we had to make blood wine with Everclear instead of tequila, and twice as much Tabasco as the recipe called for, I had to drink it or be a wimp.

I open my eyes and reason with myself that if I can crawl into the hotel bathroom, I can get some ibuprofen from my bag and stop my head from hurting quite so much. Also, water. Water would definitely help.

Pushing off the sheets, I realize that I'm still wearing my uniform and that my bra is still on. My pants and boots are missing.

“Arizhel?” someone says from the other side of the bed as I stagger toward a door I hope isn’t a closet. The voice has an accent that might be Irish. I don’t know anyone Irish.

I also don’t know this room. It must be in the same hotel, but none of my stuff is here and there is only one single big bed instead of the two doubles that Kadi, D’ghor, and Noggra were sharing with me. The only thing that’s familiar is my *bat’leH* leaning against the wall, the curved blade gleaming in the little bit of sun sneaking through the drawn shades. The glare hurts my eyes.

In the bathroom, I turn the lock and go over the night before. I think back on how we sang rousing battle songs in our hotel room, accompanied by swigs of that horrible blood wine. Then we rode the escalator, raising our weapons in the air with a single shout, to the party that was happening on the main floor. A party seething with costumed people for us to growl at: Peacekeepers, Cobra Command, Stormtroopers, Browncoats.

I splash water on my face and chew up a couple of aspirins. Whoever is in the bedroom is really tidy; his toiletries are still in a little bag. There’s even aftershave. I don’t see any pots of makeup or prosthetics, so I figure he’s not a Klingon.

Maybe he’s a member of Starfleet. There were a couple of cute guys with really proper costumes and phasers that glowed a little bit when they were fired. I remember arm-wrestling a cadet, but I can’t believe I would have gone back to his room. For one thing, I won way too easily. For another, he had a Vulcan girlfriend who was watching us both like she wanted to have some kind of pon-farr excuse to kick my ass.

I remember hoping she was going to try.

Maybe it was that guy. I groan and rub my face.

I pull off the braided wig that’s twisted around anyway, peel off my ridge and bald cap, and wash off as much of the makeup and adhesive as I can without cold cream or Bond-Off. Blinking at my own face in the mirror, I realize how different I look. Tame. Like I used to be.

## 2

“Are you okay?” comes a voice from beyond the door. He definitely has an accent.

“Yeah,” I yell.

“I ordered coffees and some food,” he says. “Grease will fix us right up.”

I’ve never ordered room service. Only rich people order room service.

“Uh, thanks.” I fill a water glass from the sink and guzzle it. I feel better, like the aspirin is kicking in, and I take a deep breath.

I wish I had my pants, but I pull down my pleather tunic as low as it can go and walk out of the bathroom.

There, sitting on the bed, is a thin guy with blond hair and a cute, lopsided smile. He’s still wearing his uniform, too. His *Jedi uniform*.

I know I look completely stupid, but I just stand there in the doorway. The buzzer on the door rings, but I’m still staring. Tall riding boots, outer tunic, tabard, obi. *Jedi*.

No. I couldn’t have. Not with an Ewok-cuddling, Force-feeling, Padawan-braid-wearing, lightsaber-rammed-up-his-ass Jedi.

He gets up and I fumble around in the covers until I discover my pants. Pulling them up and shoving my feet into my boots, I turn around as he opens the door. He signs something and comes back with the tray of dishes in metal domes.

“I feel totally thrashed,” he says as though we haven’t committed a terrible crime. As though we haven’t totally betrayed the stupid uniforms we’re standing around in. Everyone knows that trekkers and whatever starwarsians call themselves aren’t supposed to have anything to do with one another.

He pours coffee into two cups and asks me how I take it.

“Black,” I say.

He smirks. “I should have guessed that, shouldn’t I?”

“And you take your *raktajino* with milk and sugar.”

“Ouch,” he says, but he’s laughing. Maybe at what I said,

maybe at the Klingon word. I want to know how we met, but I don't want him to know that I don't remember. I don't even know his name.

It turns out he does take his coffee with milk and sugar. "Makes it more like tea," he says.

I eat some toast with raspberry jelly and a sausage. After that and three cups of coffee, I start to feel a lot better. I feel good enough to realize that the room service receipt has his name on it. Leaning over, I take a quick glance. There it is. Thomas.

He sees me looking. "Thomas," I say.

"I told you it was my real name. Unlike *Arizhel*."

At least he didn't seem to realize that I don't remember him at all.

"So," I say, "are you here at the con with a lot of other..." I hesitate on the word, "...Jedi?"

"Yeah, yeah," he says, holding up his hands in a gesture of surrender. "I already know what you think about *Star Wars*."

"Oh, you mean that it's lame that *Star Wars* worships monarchical, secretive, and monastic systems and tries to tell you that anger is evil?"

"It's pretty funny that a tough, angry girl like you is all about a goody-goody idealistic show like *Star Trek*."

"It's pretty funny that you find that kind of girl attractive." I can't help smiling. I take another sausage.

"Oh, come on!" he says. "Like your attraction to me is any less screwed up?"

"I'm a Klingon," I say. "Of course I'm attracted to my enemy."

## II. JEDI

A Jedi is never supposed to give over to his passions; he is always supposed to be in control. But last night, at some point between

Coke Pluses, Master Sven must have spiked mine with a little bit of rum. My being such a lightweight might be a contributing factor in the mess I find myself in this morning.

I know that most of my Order don't go for anything outside of the *Star Wars* universe. It's all *Star Wars* all the time with them. Which is cool. I get it.

There is something about the Jedi in *Star Wars* that feels more right to me than any other made-up alien life code. It's the Force, really. I have this thing inside of me that is light and wants to do good, but I struggle with my own dark side. I try to keep it in balance, but it's hard. I like the idea of there being something larger than yourself that guides you. The Jedi code.

I am not adverse to liking a bit of this and that from other universes, though. Heck, I like *Star Trek*. I even own all the original series on DVD. And this Klingon girl, Arizhel, whose real name I still don't know, isn't like any girl I've met before.

"Careful there, you might break something," I say.

I'm watching her wolf down some breakfast and I'm trying to act all cool and all that in front of her, because she's witty.

"You are in more danger of being broken," she says. "I am a Klingon. I could break you with a roar."

And funny. God, she's funny. That's what I liked about her at the party last night, the way she made me laugh when she came over to my Master and me.

"So you're a Jedi Knight," she said, brandishing her scary sword. I lifted my lightsaber and parried with her.

"Apprentice," I said. "An honorable start, for a human," she said.

"I've mastered many levels since I've started my training," I said.

"Have you done battle?" she asked.

"Well, we do fight exhibitions," I said.

"So you are a dancer," she said. "No wonder you wear a skirt."

“It’s a tunic,” I said.

And then I blushed and felt embarrassed. I was worried that she wouldn’t think much of a Jedi Apprentice.

Master Sven just handed me another Coke Plus with rum and left me alone with her. He told me he’d find another place to crash, and I took that as encouragement that I was doing well.

“Every dog has his day,” Master Sven said.

I make sure my clip-on braid is in place while she pushes the button to call the elevator. I am wearing my Jedi uniform and she is wearing her Klingon costume, but not her ridges or wig piece, nor her makeup. She’s very different from what I remember about last night.

I’m watching her out of the corner of my eye as we enter the hotel elevator.

First off, she’s Asian. And not dark and orange. She’s tried washing off most of her makeup but it’s still a little streaky. Still, she’s pretty. She also looks soft, almost shy for someone who seems so commanding. She’s got a great body. Really curvy and she’s an inch or two smaller than me, but I notice that she walks with a swagger that makes her seem taller. Her walk makes me want to get a little attitude in my step.

It makes the idea of turning to the dark side a little bit sexier.

I can’t believe I just thought that. Annakin went to the dark side for love and look what happened to him. I don’t care how cool this girl is. I’m not about to let that happen to me.

I’m a Jedi.

To become a Jedi requires a serious mind and a deep commitment, and here I am, feeling kind of giddy standing next to a Klingon.

She turns to face me.

“I didn’t hurt you or anything, right?” she asks. “Klingon mating rituals can be violent. It’s not unknown for there to be bruises, or broken bones.”

## 6

“Oh, no!” I say. “We Jedi are tough. I just used the Force.”

“Oh, yeah,” she says. “Good.”

“Yep.”

“So, you know, I hope you don’t take this the wrong way, but when we get downstairs, I’m going to pretend that we don’t know each other,” she says.

“Right,” I say. “Of course.”

But secretly I’m crushed because I thought maybe I could ask her to meet me for lunch between the Lightsaber Demonstration I’m attending and the Darth Maul signing I’m going to later.

“Good,” she says. “’Cause you know...”

“Yeah,” I say. “I mean, we were. Whew!”

I make a little hand gesture that is supposed to mean “drunk” but probably looks more like “I’m a loser.”

“And no matter what you’ve heard about Klingons,” she says, “it doesn’t mean anything. We don’t have to mate for life.”

“Good to know,” I say, and now I am just embarrassed. I don’t know how to tell her that we didn’t even mate at all. I wanted to. Oh, God, I wanted to. She is so hot. And we’d been talking at the con mixer all night and we had everything in common. Well, except for the whole Jedi / Klingon thing. And then I invited her back to my room, and I have never done something like that before! It was like the best night of my whole life! And Master Sven even gave me the thumbs-up. And then there was a hot girl in my room! And she wanted me. I could tell—she sniffed me! I was all set to lose my virginity. I even had a condom ready. But sleeping with drunk Klingon girls, even if they’re ravishing you, seems wrong.

So does defying the Jedi code.

Jedi are monastic. Celibate.

We’re quiet for a few seconds and I think our awkward conversation is over. And I’m glad, because I feel a little sad. So far, this was the best time I’ve ever had at a convention. And I think I liked talking to her last night way more than I did to my own Jedi Council.

So, I'm kind of looking down at my feet 'cause I don't want her to see that it kind of meant something to me. Not mate-for-life something. But maybe get-her-real-name something.

And that's when she does it again. Just like she did last night. She sniffs my arm, and pushes me into the corner of the elevator and growls. And then she kisses me and I feel weak in the knees. I give in to the dark side. I grab her. I kiss her right back.

She pushes me away right before the elevator door opens and she walks out of the elevator and away from me.

I still don't know her name.

And I only have twenty minutes to get to the convention center for the Jedi Lightsaber Demonstration.

"Hey! Thomas!" Master Sven waves me over to where he's sitting onstage before the demonstration. He's cleaning his lightsaber and he's smiling big, like he thinks he knows how it all went down.

"Thanks, Master Sven, for finding a place to crash last night," I say.

I don't want to tell him that I didn't score, so I just let him keep smiling.

"No sweat, my little Padawan," he says. "Besides, I had no idea the Battlestar people could party so hard! I ended up crashing with five Boomers last night!"

"We're about to start," one of the other Jedi, Padawan Pete, snaps. "Could you guys focus?"

"Careful, Master Sven," I say. "Don't defy the Council again."

"I will do what I must," he says.

The music begins and we start our choreographed lightsaber routine. Master Sven is the star of the show. That's why no matter how much of a rebel and sort of code-breaking Jedi he is, our Council won't ever kick him out.

I'm just learning my lightsaber technique, so I just have one little fight. But I do well enough that people clap.

When we're done, it's always the same. The people swarm us and want to take our pictures.

While we're posing, Padawan Pete starts laying into me.

"I heard you guys were mixing a little too hard last night," he says. He's got a green lightsaber that won't stay on, so he keeps shaking it. "We have an image to maintain and it's a Jedi image."

"Leave me alone, Pete," I say. He is really bugging me.

"Figures with a Master like Sven that you would get funny ideas," Master Doug says.

"Give me a break, Doug," Master Sven says. "All Thomas did was meet a girl."

"She was a Klingon," Padawan Pete says.

"When was the last time you hooked up with a girl, Pete?" Master Sven asks.

"That's not the point," Padawan Pete says.

But my anger is rising and I can't take it anymore.

"Okay," I say. "That's it. I challenge you."

"What?" Padawan Pete says. "You can't challenge me."

"Right here, right now. Lightsaber fight."

"You are totally going dark side," Padawan Pete says.

"Trust your feelings, Thomas," Master Sven says.

"What kind of Master are you for encouraging your Padawan like that, Sven?" Master Doug asks.

"Better than you," I say, which is exactly what gets Padawan Pete to whip his cape up and pull out his lightsaber to fight me.

A ring of people form around us and I start to use my lightsaber technique to wipe that smugness off Padawan Pete's face.

And just as I am getting into my rhythm, I see a bunch of Klingons walk by. Including Arizhel, in full makeup again. She stops. She looks at me. I smile at her, wanting to say hello, and I get sliced right in the stomach.

"Gotcha!" Padawan Pete says just as she's stopped for a second and is watching me fight.

I've been killed. There is nothing I can do.  
By the rules of the lightsaber fight, I have to fall.

### III. KLINGON

My plan is to go back to the room and sleep for pretty much the rest of the day, but when I get there, Kadi, D'ghor, and Noggra are dressed up and waiting around for me. Noggra smooshes my cheek against her leather breastplate in a bruising hug.

"Oh, honey," she says. "I feel so guilty for losing track of you." She gives Kadi and D'ghor a frown, more severe because she's got her ridges on. "And those two should never have let you drink so much."

"I'm fine," I say, even though I know I look like a hot mess.

"You're underage."

I hate when Noggra gets like this. She's D'ghor's mother, but she's been a Klingon for her entire adult life. She basically raised him Klingon. Most of the time she just acts like our *toth*, but sometimes she forgets and acts like a mom.

"Where were you last night?" Kadi asks. "We called your cell, but it turned out that you'd left it here."

"I need a shower," I say.

"Was it that cadet guy?" D'ghor asks. "I'm going to kick his ass."

"My honor is mine to defend," I say, and growl to show how serious I am. "I'm a warrior and I can take care of myself."

"Let her be," Noggra says, and I nearly flop down on the bed with relief because there's no way I can explain where I actually was. I'm the youngest Klingon in our group, so I'm always struggling to be tough enough. I figure that if I match the others swig for swig, blow for blow, they'll forget how young I am.

Unless I do something really dumb, like, say, spend the night with a Jedi.

Under the hot spray, though, I can't help thinking about Thomas. About his soft and lilting voice and the fierce way he kissed. When we were in the elevator, he kissed me so hard he bit my lip. Of course, hot girls in *Star Wars* are always princesses and queens with elaborate looping hair, so maybe he figured he didn't have to be so careful with a girl like me.

I used to be a good girl. Everyone expected me to be quiet and studious and I was good at fulfilling expectations. Chung Ae, perfect lab partner. Princess.

But inside, I knew I was a Klingon. I could feel the growl in the back of my throat when I spoke, itching for me to give it a voice. Honoring my parents and grandparents was a big deal in my house, but Klingons allowed for a different kind of honor. One that didn't make you small and quiet. One that venerated you for belching the loudest, louder even than your brothers. When I met D'ghor in debate club, it was only a matter of time before I was attending a dipping party and having a life cast made so I could sculpt my first ridge.

It doesn't take me that long to get cleaned up and ready. Kadi comes in and helps me blend my base and disguise the edges of the latex. Then we're back on the floor, stomping in our big black boots, frowning and growling and prowling.

"Hey, look." D'ghor smirks and gestures with his beard.

I turn and there he is. Thomas is holding a lightsaber and he's swinging it in an elegant arc. He might be a Jedi, but he's beautiful. A warrior.

Our eyes meet and at that moment, a plastic saber slams into his chest. He turns his head toward the blow and, stunned and furious, he looks at me again right before he falls on his knees.

"Ha!" D'ghor says, lifting up his *bat'leH*. "You call that fighting? Those are oversized cocktail picks you're swinging."

I groan. I know he's just looking for an excuse to do some chest pounding, but the Jedi are staring at me like they're waiting for

something. All I do is get really hot in the face and hope no one can see me blushing under a ton of orange base.

Kadi rests one of her hands on her metal-studded hip. “Cocktail picks being swung around by a bunch of toothpicks.”

“Let’s go,” I say, and Noggra gives me a weird look because normally I would have been egging them on.

One of the older Jedi pulls Thomas to his feet. He’s younger than Noggra, but not really young, with the top part of his hair pulled back into a ponytail. After Thomas gets up, the Jedi puts both his hands on his shoulders and gives him a shove in my direction. I scowl at them both.

“That’s your girlfriend?” says another Jedi, the one that beat Thomas. “Talk about beer goggles.”

For a moment, everything stops. D’ghor’s laugh dies and I feel cold all over. Frozen. Then Noggra gives a horrible roar and grabs that skinny Jedi Apprentice by the throat. She might be in her forties, but she pushes him against the wall of the escalator and bares her teeth against his throat.

#### IV. JEDI

As the Klingons and the Jedi rush toward each other, the spectators start clapping. They must think it’s part of our show. But as the hits begin to actually land and people begin to get hurt, they kind of look confused and start getting out of the way of danger. They make a kaleidoscope of colors as they run. Brown shirts and people of all sizes wearing flowing capes, alien masks, and spandex.

“Go! Go! Go!” Jedi yell all around me as they let out their battle cry and we rush forward to meet the enemy.

What I really want to do is find Arizhel.

The Klingons seem to have multiplied, but really it’s that other

*Star Trek* people have joined in. Non-Jedi *Star Wars* people have joined our side as well. I fly past a Queen Amidala, her dress ripped, her makeup smudged, grappling with an Original Series Chekov. Even Emperor Palpatine is kicking some Vulcan ass. It is now a full-on *Star Trek* vs. *Star Wars* battle. It is as though we have been moving toward this moment for years and now it is finally on.

No one looks scared. Everyone looks happy.

“Watch your back!” Master Sven says as he pushes a Jean-Luc Picard away from me. Master Sven then starts parrying blows from a Jadazia Dax. I can tell he is fighting and flirting at the same time. I hear him try to get her cell phone number.

In the distance, over by the elevators, and near the coffee cart, I see Arizhel. I make a beeline for her, dodging swings and weaving in and out of the crowded arena. On my left, I see Padawan Pete.

“This is your fault,” he cries.

He comes after me again.

“Brother!” I say, trying to fight the dark feelings that are rising inside of me. Or maybe more like my Irish temper. “Let us not fight each other when we are at battle.”

But he keeps coming at me. He’s got a mean look in his eye. He’s already killed me once today and this time he is going down.

I use a three-move combination of my own design, one that I haven’t even shown the Council yet, and when I finish, Padawan Pete is on the floor, his nose bloodied. I can’t say that I am sorry.

“I’m reporting you to the Jedi Council and getting your ass kicked out.”

I hear his voice trailing me, but I’ve moved on. I am doing my best to fend off attacks from every imaginable kind of character from the *Star Trek* universe. At this point, his threats don’t slow me down.

I have an anger inside of me. I have turned to the dark side. And I don’t mind at all.

To my right, Master Doug is putting on a show. He is trying out his best lightsaber moves, trying to outdo anything he's ever seen Master Sven do by ending each basic stance with a flourish. It doesn't look effective, but it looks good.

Someone grabs my tunic and spins me around.

I put my lightsaber up, ready to hit my mark.

It is Arizhel.

"Thomas," she says. Her makeup is running a little bit from being sweaty from the fight. She looks like she wants to say more, but she leans over and puts her hands on her thighs to steady herself.

When she looks up, she smiles.

Then she punches me in the face.

"Ow!" I say. "Why'd you do that?"

"It is my way," she says.

I see stars. My face really hurts. I bet I get a black eye. "I feel... This whole thing is silly."

"This is not the time to talk of our feelings," she says. "This is the time to fight."

She scrambles out of my reach and shoves me up against a pillar. I hear the roar of Klingons near me.

"Fight me," she growls.

And then I get it. I think maybe what she is really saying is *please help me save face in front of my friends; they're watching.*

She does like me.

I shove her, hard, but not too hard. I shove her to show her that I like her.

I want to tell her how I feel, but I know she likes action and not words, and besides, I see something out of the corner of my eye, but I ignore it. I'm too into fighting her. It's as though we are really in the moment, as if we are really together. Every time a blow connects, I feel a thrill.

But after a few minutes I can't ignore what I'm seeing. I stop fighting.

“What are you doing?” she asks. “The battle is not over.”

“Stormtroopers,” I say.

The 501st Legion of Stormtroopers arrives and within minutes they have all of us, the Jedi and the Klingons, surrounded, separated, and under control.

“Surrender your weapons,” the stormtrooper who has us says. His voice sounds just like in the movies. He must have a microphone under his helmet.

“There is no glory in surrender,” Arizhel says.

“Yeah, besides, some of those Jedi deserve to get kicked out of the con just for being dicks,” I say.

“You guys can choose. If you don’t settle down, I’m going to have to escort you out of the convention area,” the stormtrooper says.

“Lead on,” I say.

Arizhel takes my hand.

The stormtrooper talks into his little walkie-talkies and ejects us from the building. Others are already outside, among them Master Sven, Master Doug, Padawan Pete, and Arizhel’s friends. They are all too busy yelling and trying to blame each other for not being able to get back into the convention to notice that we are there and that we’re still holding hands.

“Battle always makes me hungry,” I say. “Want to go get something to eat?”

“With you?”

I nod.

We head away from our arguing friends and leave the convention center and head toward a coffee shop.

I realize as we sit down at an empty table with our cheeseburger special and bowl of chili that I still don’t know her real name.

“I have something to tell you,” I say.

A little kid walks by our table and Arizhel growls at her because

she's staring. The kid starts crying and her mom whisks her away, muttering "freaks" under her breath.

"About last night," I say.

"Look, I have something to say, too."

She looks so good to me. Like a moonset on Naboo. Like the colors on an X-wing fighter. Like a costume that Queen Amidala would wear.

"Nothing happened between us last night," I say.

"I don't remember anything about last night," Arizhel says.

"Really?" we both say at the same time.

Tell me your name, I think.

"So, just so you know," she says. "My name is Chung Ae. It's nice to meet you, Thomas."

Damn!

That Jedi Mind Trick does work.