

Can One Displaced Hero Save a Galaxy?

(138-140)

Novus Peregrine

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Chapter 138: Debates and Changes

- Clone Wars Day 10: Coruscant – Chancellor's Office –

Bail Organa nursed his third cup of caf this morning with a grimace. Not at the taste, it was his favorite premium roast from home, but at the fact he needed it to function at all right now. He'd never been one to rely on the stimulant any more than absolutely necessary, generally limiting himself to a single cup to help wake up and get his brain in gear in the morning. At this point, unfortunately, he was fairly certain his doctor was going to have strong words with him over the intake of the substance he'd been indulging in over the last 10 days.

In a way, yesterday had been the absolute worst since the first. Something made painfully ironic because they *were* finally getting some vague semblance of control over the situation. In fact, it was specifically that increasing control, over both the local and general Republic problems, that had caused the day before to be so exhausting. It had been the ability to properly come to grips with their situation at last, or at least *start* to, that had resulted in the meeting of the combined leadership. Such as it was, at least. That meeting, in turn, had attempted to wrangle their collective way out of emergency mode and hammer out the foundation of a way forward. They *had* made progress. A lot of it, in fact. But in a lot of very painful ways the progress they'd made had only highlighted the *vast* mountain of intimidating work still ahead of them.

Just as a single example, they *had* managed to hammer out a rough 'Higher Command' structure for the new military. A handful of Jedi, all of those the Order could spare with any relevant experience, a handful of the Judicial Forces who'd at least held Sector Commands, three experienced Planetary Security Force Admirals from different navies, two Clones from an early batch that had never been chipped, and a pair of advisors from the League of Free Stars. That and support staff for the group was nearly all they'd managed to agree on after hours of debate. But it *was* a start.

Bail had invested the new 'High Command of the Republic Armed Forces' with as much authority as he could manage from his interim position, then set them loose. As dire as the military situation was, he *had* to delegate, as there were still other major fires to deal with. The recovery efforts here on Coruscant were one, the weakened and rather panicked Senate was another, and the horrifically complex task of trying to unravel just how *utterly karked* the rest of the government apparatus was made up a third. That last one was slowing down the others, as even with the help of Jedi Investigators, they were still trying to discover just how much of Palpatine's influence remained.

Republic Intelligence had been practically gutted, and the courts weren't much better, both having been major focuses of the bastard's 'anti-corruption' campaign. A campaign that had covered up the former Chancellor replacing many of the *previously* corrupt officials with *new* corrupt officials loyal to him. They were practically going to have to rebuild Republic Intelligence, in particular, from scratch. Which, of course, could only properly happen once Bail was confirmed as the new Chancellor...though at least there was some good news on that. In the form of the meeting he was about to have.

Setting down his caf as his secretary sent his new meeting through, Bail forced a smile for Padmé Amadila. She had long been a close ally, and what she was here for now was...somewhat painful. Even if it was going to virtually guarantee him the Chancellorship for real, instead of just the interim position. Not that he was sure he *wanted it*, so much as he wasn't confiden in any of the other possible front runners not screwing things up worse.

"Good morning, Padmé. I'm afraid I don't have much time for pleasantries. So let's get right down to the unpleasantness, instead. You said you've gotten the agreements from over two thirds of your former bloc to at least temporarily join with mine. Please give me the highlights?"

As Padmé began to speak, Bail lamented that she'd already confirmed she was going to need to withdraw from the Senate. At least she'd gotten on top of the situation fast enough that most her supporters were going to join his faction, which should secure him at large enough power base to do what needed to be done. Even if it promised to be anything but stable...

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- Clone Wars Day 11: Onderon -

Mina Bonteri paced in agitation.

She'd been a fool. An idiotic, short-sighted idiot that had let herself be blinkered and scammed by a gifted orator. She'd known it the instant she'd reconciled the fact that the holofeed from the Senate had been *real*. She had been one of the few Senators *not* at the meeting, having specifically chosen a moment when everyone else would be looking *elsewhere* to make...certain arrangements. Ones she'd intended to use to force the King's hand so they could declare for the Confederacy.

Now she knew she'd been had.

Onderon was one of the few places in the galaxy that *vividly* understood the dangers of the Dark Side of the Force. Dxun, the thrice-accursed moon of their own planet, was so heavy with the Dark Side that they'd been under siege since time immemorial by creatures infused with it. Though technically a moon, Dxun was nearly a sister planet in reality, actually coming close enough to Onderon that their *atmosphere's connected* during the summer months. Something that led vicious drexls, tainted by the moon, to *invade* yearly.

Their planet *remembered* the Sith. They had, in fact, been *ruled* by a Sith in the past. Freedon Naad had been the first *King* of the planet, for kriff's sake! There had been a constant parade of Sith and Dark Jedi assholes over the centuries that came and caused trouble because of

Nadd and Dxun, making Onderon one of the very few worlds that had *never* forgotten the dangers. They *knew* the Sith were bad news. *She* knew the Sith were bad news.

Yet, she'd already set gears in motion. Now, she desperately tried to figure out how to *stop* them, before they drug her world into the path of the trouble rampaging through the galaxy...

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- Clone Wars Day 12: Coruscant – Jedi High Council Chambers –

“What are we going to do about Midoriya?”

The terse question was asked by Agen Kolar. The Zabrak Jedi Master was blunt and, unfortunately, one of the remaining staunch traditionalists on the High Council. With Masters Oppo Rancisis and Eeth Koth off acting as part of the new Republic High Command, those of the Council who were in a position to gather right now thankfully leaned neutral or progress. Yet even some of those who were nominally progressive, such as Ki-Adi-Mundi, looked like that was a *reasonable* question. Whereas Mace knew it very much was not. Thankfully, Master Gallia, present only via holocomm as she was still on Brighthome, cut him off at the knees before Mace had too.

“Do? What are you expecting to *do*? Sovereign Midoriya is the head of the third largest interstellar power in the galaxy. One the Republic desperately needs as an ally right now. The only thing to *do* is to figure out the best way to be friendly with him.”

Master Kolar was visibly discontented with that response, and Mace winced at the tone in his voice as he spoke up again.

“Nerf shit. He’s an incredibly dangerous, incredibly powerful Force user who is outside the control of the Jedi Order. One who caused this entire war to ignite in the first place.”

That comment earned Kolar glares from multiple sources. There *had* been some Jedi, Senators, and Media Shills pushing that narrative, claiming that the Sovereign was responsible for the chaotic situation due to outing Palpatine. The angle was pure nonsense, though, and most people knew it. It had been *Padawan Barriss* that truly outed the Chancellor when she’d thrown that Force Light, and even she shouldn’t be blamed for any of the bad.

While it was true that taking Palpatine quietly might have been better...that was only a *might*. A *might* that was very much in doubt. The truth was that any other way of outing the Sith might well have led to revolts against the Jedi Order for attempting to arrest the Supreme Chancellor of the Republic. They hadn’t had any sort of *proof* to use against the man, after all. In reality, they hadn’t even *suspected* him. If the Sovereign had kept silent, they might have struggled for *years* to get enough evidence to properly pin the man down in a way that he couldn’t have squirmed out of. The open reveal, *broadcast* as it had been to the Republic as a whole, and the violence Palpatine had committed, might legitimately have been the *least* damaging way to out him.

“Ours to manage, he is not. Not ours alone, is the Force. Powerful he is. Dark he is not.”

Mace breathed a sigh of relief as Yoda put his opinion forward firmly. Then he groaned as Master Mundi leaned forward to say his own piece, already able to guess he would complicate things.

“While I fully understand Master Gallia and Master Yoda’s points, I also point out there are still three concerns that we should discuss. One, of course, is the man’s raw power. I doubt any save Master Yoda could have come close to replicating his feat of holding up the Senate Dome, even if it put him in a coma afterward. That is...concerning. Even more concerning is that he *is* the leader of a major military power, just like Dooku is. Power corrupts and he has a great deal of multiple kinds of power, a poor position for a Force Sensitive. Thirdly, of course, is his academy on Ossus, which-“

In a very uncharacteristic display for the Grand Master, Yoda actually cut his former student off.

“No. Not his, is Ossus Academy. By Master Ood Bnar, it was founded. Legitimacy is has, more even than we.”

Even Mace blinked at that, processing what Yoda had just said. That detail had *not* been in the information provided to them previously. This time, it was Mace himself that spoke.

“Wait. Ood Bnar, as in the Neti Jedi Master from the Exar-Kun period?”

Yoda nodded, causing more than a few expressions of shock to form.

“Survived, Master Bnar did. In hibernation, he was. Awoken by Master Fay and Izuku Midoriya, he was.”

There was stunned silence in the Council chamber before, in a display unfitting for the High Council, all hell broke loose. Though at least, Mace reflected, this had distracted everyone from any delusion that they were in a position to dictate literally *anything* to the head of the League of Free Stars...

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- Clone Wars Day 13: Raxus Secundus-

Darth Sidious stewed. His rage had petered out, to a degree. Never entirely, he swore it would never be banked entirely until *Izuku Midoriya* was dead and he’d broken that insipid little girl that had thrown Force Light at him so thoroughly she’d beg for death. Not that he would grant it, of course. No, that little bitch was going to be kept sane as his personal torture project until she died of *old age*, then he’d ***bind her soul in eternal screaming torment for GOOD MEASURE!***

Catching himself, Sidious pulled back on his rage *again*. He needed to keep it under control so that the physical signs faded. Contacts had done for the holocalls he’d been making to insure his rapidly increasing hold on the CIS political leaders continued to grow. To the vast majority of the worlds in the Outer Rim, Sith and Jedi might as well be the same thing. Pitching the already-much-hated in the Rim Jedi as violent lunatics who had tried to assassinate him, due to discovering he was aiding the CIS, was laughably easy.

After all, he controlled the CIS media to an extent that he never could have in the Core.

Add in the occasional Force Dominate on the particularly problematic moralizers, and it hadn't been hard to take his new position as the head of the Separatist Parliament. That had always been a fallback option built into their plans, the position intentionally left open by his and his apprentice's meddling, just in case. Now, between his control of the media, political skills, and the Force, he had taken over the position quite easily. He was, as of the day before, the Separatist Congress Leader, having displaced the interim head of Bec Lawise. A fool who was, himself, one of Sidious's pawns.

The takeover had been pathetically simple.

Which didn't change the fact that he'd needed to activate the contingency at all *utterly galling*. Centuries of preparation and plotting, the creation of the Veil of the Dark Side, the careful positioning to take the Republic over from the inside. All of it *gone* in a flash because of a pair of *non-entities* like that upstart from Tythe and a Jedi **Padawan**. Even his *contingencies* had been half-defeated because that *upstart* proved to be *far* more powerful than any Jedi. Not even Yoda could have prevented the Senate Dome collapse, and Palpatine had *no idea* why his sources hadn't discovered the backups the Jedi had to preserve their own precious temple.

The Republic was still doomed. He had his fingers in far too deeply, and the fools had taken in the Clones to use as their military. With the advantage that the CIS had, and his own efforts to cripple the Republic from inside with the many tools he still had access to, the Republic would fall. He would *still* become the Immortal Emperor of the Galaxy. He had **foreseen it**.

As Darth Sidious continued to stew in his rage, attempting to regain enough control for the signs of Dark Side corruption to fade from his yellowed eyes, he did his best to ignore the whisper in the back of his mind. After all, he hadn't foreseen what had happened, either. Even if he'd planned for the worst. How could he know for sure that his visions of the far future, where he would be Emperor were as true as he had once believed?

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- Clone Wars Day 14: Coruscant Orbit -

Izuku sighed in relief as the *Miruko* broke orbit. The fleet flagship of the had been sent to retrieve him, with an escort of two Paladin's, almost as soon as he properly woke from his coma. Doing so had been *something* of a risk, both given that the ship was a strategic asset *and* moving such a powerful warship through Republic space could have driven someone on edge from the new war to do something foolish. That hadn't stopped Rana Lin from sending the ship anyway, firmly telling him he needed to get back and deal with the League's mounting disasters, not the Republic's.

He'd delayed, rightfully, for a few days despite that.

Agreements had needed to be hammered out with the Republic, if they didn't want this to turn into a three-way war. Something that would have, frankly, benefitted only the Sith. Not to

mention that they'd needed to figure out how many former Senators, such as Padmé, were effectively returning *with him*, as their worlds or sectors were now effectively part of the League, not the Republic. His being present on the capital and having some *serious* bargaining chips to work with had smoothed sorting some of that out, even if no one in the Republic was *at all* happy with the concessions they'd given.

Still, they hadn't had much choice. After all, one of those concessions was the fact that *Sovereign of Tythe* **and** both of the escort Paladin's that had come with the *Miruko* were *staying here*. It would take *years*, even if it had been peacetime, to fully rebuild the hypercomm relays of Coruscant. Which meant that the capital planet *needed* those Paladins to establish a relay with the rest of the galaxy. Even three of them wouldn't *fully* reestablish communications for the planet, but it would provide *enough*.

There had legitimately been talk in the first days after the attack of at least temporarily moving the Republic's capital elsewhere, somewhere with a working hypernet relay. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on who you asked, even a quick and dirty feasibility study had proven it just flat out wasn't possible. Too many of the mechanisms that made the government work *at all*, even if poorly, were embedded on Coruscant. There were still some discussions that *military* High Command might be moved to Anaxes or Corellia. That was something that was still being debated, however.

For now, the three Paladins acting as relays would allow Coruscant to at least run the core functions of the Republic, as well as keep news and such flowing for the general public. With three of them in place, rather than just *Sovereign of Tythe*, they could even manage to handle most of the economic traffic as well. Though individual citizens were still largely without access to the holonet and such would be the case indefinitely. Even if the League had been willing to spare more Paladins, or even a *Miruko*-class, the truth was the Quantum Comm network itself was straining just with what they were relaying already. It was being rapidly expanded by stealing some time from the IES units away from military needs, but expanding it enough to cover for *trillions* of individual connections would be a bit much.

Shaking off thoughts of the strong-arming he'd done to get agreements about systems willingly joining the League force through, Izuku turned to Padmé. While *he* was relieved, he could tell that *she* was nearly depressed. Sabé didn't seem to share that depression, clearly not having been nearly so attached to the idea of the Republic as Padmé had been. But Padmé herself...

"You know you'll still be able to do a lot of good for the galaxy, love. Besides, Chancellor Organa seems like he's got a good head on his shoulders, and you helped solidify his hold on the Senate on your way out."

Padmé stirred, offering him a wan smile at that, though it didn't entirely reach her eyes.

"I know, I know. Come to that, the League even offers something closer to my ideals in a lot of ways than the Republic ever has, with the exception of you being a non-democratic head. But..."

Aayla had sensed their mutual lover's distress even more clearly than he had, and closed in behind Padmé, pulling her into a hug.

“But you still wish you could be there, helping them through this crisis? You know Izuku isn’t wrong. You can still help even the Republic itself from the outside, by advocating all sorts of things to the League. A lot of League worlds aren’t going to be eager to get involved in this war. They are still recovering from the Crusade, and the Republic had never been a friend to most of them anyway.”

Padmé had relaxed a little into Aayla’s embrace. Though Izuku knew much of the reason for that was Aayla sending gentle waves of soothing reassurance to her in the Force, rather than bowing to the logic.

“I know...I really do know, I promise. There are a lot of former Republic worlds that will be needing to adjust to the League. Something I’m uniquely suited to help them with. Not just Naboo, but the entire Abrion Sector and others. Yet, I still feel as if I’m a bit of a traitor, running out on Bail in particular, and the Republic as a whole.”

There wasn’t much either of them could say to that. Feelings were feelings, and logic didn’t always have the power to change them. If it did, the Jedi wouldn’t fear feelings and attachments half so much. So, instead of trying to pointlessly reassure her again, Izuku slid into the hug, Aayla making room for him happily. They would spend what time they could comforting their lover, before the chaos of the galaxy sucked them back in...

Chapter 139: Probing

- Clone Wars Day 15: Foless -

Newly minted Commadore Gilad Pellaeon had never expected to be leading a task force of mixed *Republic Navy* and his own homeworld’s defense fleet. Corellia, despite being a founding member of the Republic, had always been a bit insular compared to the other founders, rarely bothering to stick its proverbial oar in the water of greater Republic politics outside the sector it dominated. After all, when your home star system had *five* habitable worlds and three native species, there just wasn’t a lot of *reason* to expand.

Corellia had never had the massive overpopulation issues of the rest of the Core, hadn’t gotten into the colonization game in a big way as a result, and had thus lacked much interest in greater Republic politics. Oh certainly, they’d slowly stretched their influence to dominate the Corellian Sector, and their incredibly long history as explorers meant Corellians were *everywhere* in the galaxy. Yet, for the most part, they’d lacked the same push for *expansion* that drove many Core World powers to play galactic politics.

It was actually why Gilad himself might be Corellian, but he’d been largely *raised* on Coruscant, his family having become more invested in the Republic and moved to the center of its power while he was young. While he hated the capital itself, Gilad had become enamored with the idea of military service and hired a slicer to get him into Raithal Acadmey at fifteen, years before he could have applied legally. He’d never been found out and had graduated near the top of his class. He’d served with distinction and risen to the rank of Captain...but hadn’t gotten farther as he

admittedly had a taste for women that the Admiralty disliked. His habits of hopping from bed to bed, including into and out of the beds of a few of their daughters, had stalled any farther advancement.

The new High Command didn't give a damn about that.

No, they only cared that Gilad Pellaeon was one of the rare few officers who had serious experience commanding at least small taskforces for anti-pirate operations. His delayed promotions meant, in point of fact, that he was perhaps the Judicial Captain with the *most* practical combat experience in the entire former Judicial Forces. Which is how he'd found himself slapped with a quick promotion and put in charge of a mixed force defending the Foless System. The fact he was Corellian himself had eased the *mixed* nature of the command structure, but the whole edifice was still shaky on anything more than a local level and he knew it.

Thankfully, despite his promotion, he only had to worry about aforementioned local level.

He'd been tasked to defend Foless with everything they could give him, and that was it. At least for now.

Foless was a major trade hub, the world resting right at the intersection of the Corellian Trade Spine and the Shipwright's Trace. Unfortunately, despite the loss of an entire fleet at Thyferra, the CIS pocket in the southwestern section of the galaxy had rallied and surged up the Corellian Trade Spine from Mechis III. A number of minor worlds had been taken in rapid succession, culminating in Bestine IV being overrun before anyone could get sufficient fleet assets into the area to try and stop the new surge. There, they'd stopped long enough to use Bestine IV's growing ship repair facilities to rearm, resupply, and make repairs...which had given the Republic long enough to rally a force here to Foless.

It was a good choice of location, to be honest. Foless itself, being right on the edge of the Inner Rim and a major trading hub, had long had a sizable anti-piracy self-defense fleet. One that they'd quietly been upgrading in the lead up to the war, though not to the extreme extent that planets like Corellia and Alderaan had managed. The locals *did* have quite a few *Defender IIs*, purchased from Tythe, and a solid squadron of twenty upgraded Munifex light cruisers that they'd snagged when the Trade Federation's private defense fleet was forced to publicly downsize. Add in some solid fighter wings and some homegrown gunships, and they were actually able to contribute meaningfully to his forces. Though they would have been run over easily by the CIS fleet without reinforcements, of course.

As to the form of those reinforcements, he had been sent with four of the few Dreadnaught Heavy Cruisers the Judicial Forces had still possessed, plus a small flotilla of Consular-class light cruisers. That had been all that could be drawn from the limited pool of former Judicial Forces, but his *far* more important strength had been provided by the newly revealed GAR and practically fresh-out-of-the-docks Corellian Naval forces. From the GAR he had sixteen Acclimators, twelve Venators, and a single Maelstrom-class Battlecruiser that he was using as his flagship. A very solid picket force...if they weren't facing down a CIS fleet that had fifty Battleship-conversion Lucrehulks as its core element.

Thankfully, the Corellian contingent made up for at least some of the gap, as his homeworld was finally committing some of its new construction, instead of just restored and upgraded mothball ships.

Corellia hadn't had time to reinvent the wheel, so they hadn't tried. Instead, CEC had dug deep into old designs from the High Republic Era and rapidly upgraded them to modern standards, then started building them on every free slip they could lay hands on in the sprawling Corellia System. Which, as the home of the *single oldest shipbuilding megacorp in the galaxy*, was a lot of building slips. Even if they'd had to reactivate and repair a lot of them in a hurry.

The result was the resurrection and improvement of three designs. The Emissary-class Heavy Cruiser, the Pacifier-class cruiser, and the Longbeam-class corvette. The Emissary-class was a solid 1,400 meter ship, with the new iteration having stripped out the frills from an era of peace and been upgraded to an armament that *absolutely* deserved its listing as a Heavy Cruiser. The Pacifier-class, which had once carried a dozen Longbeams in addition to fighters, had been redesigned into a potent cruiser-carrier.

As for what it *carried*, CEC had somehow acquired majority control of Koensayr Manufacturing and poured credits and talent down their throat until they produced two new designs. The BTL-series Y-Wing fighter-bomber and the IE-440 Nighthawk interceptor. Both had apparently been in the design phase already, though the Nighthawk had been originally intended as a multi-role fighter that had been hastily modified. However they'd done it, CEC and Koensayr were pumping both fighters out in huge numbers...and Corellia had *always* had an overabundance of pilots. It was practically a cultural touchstone, in point of fact.

Which explained why the overhauled Pacifier II design carried *thirty* squadrons (360) of *Nighthawks* and another *twelve* squadrons (144) of Y-wings. With a total of 504 fighters/bombers, the Pacifier officially outstripped even the GAR Venators in fighter compliment, all while being a bit smaller and slightly better armed than the Venators were. Given that he had *fourteen* Pacifiers, plus his Venators and the local fighter wings, he might well be the only Republic fleet commander who might legitimately have *superiority* in starfighter numbers over the CIS fleet.

Given that he *didn't* have enough of the Emissary IIs, numbering only a dozen, to help him truly go toe-to-toe with the CIS heavies, he hoped he did. He'd leaned into that unusual advantage for this war in planning his doctrine. Now, as the CIS fleet crashed into the system he was defending at the edge of the hyper limit, he braced himself. It was time to see if the rough plan he, the local defense commander, and his Corellian counterpart had put together survived contact with the enemy...

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- Clone Wars Day 17: Ord Mantell-

"Now."

Master Even Piell's single eye practically glowed as he ordered the trap he'd set sprung. Three dozen bomber squadrons and several missile frigates popped up out of the thick comet cloud at the edge of the system moments after he gave the order, ambushing the CIS probing

attack that had tried a hit and run on the system. It wasn't even *close* to the first such probing attack, the CIS commander for this area of space clearly looking for weaknesses he could exploit.

This time, Master Piell wasn't letting the bastard have his scout force back intact.

He'd had enough time to analyze the way his opponent was running the probes. Combined with a little bit of Force guidance, he'd managed to use that analysis to pre-position the strike force that was now screaming down on the quartet of Munificent-class ships. Ships that had already pulled in their fighter cover in anticipation of jumping out of the system. Ord Mantell had a uniquely thick outer comet shroud, so much so that it regularly hosted the Blockade Runners Derby. Now, it had allowed his small force to hide, giving the enemy virtually no warning before the fighters and frigates were already in range and pumping out missiles and torpedoes as fast as they could.

He watched grimly as the trap did its job, destroying two of the Munificents outright and rendering a third unable to jump to hyperspace. It surrendered, even as the last enemy ship managed to jump out. Unfortunate, that one had gotten away, as it would make pulling the same trick harder in the future. Still, at least they'd bloodied the bastard's nose this time. Maybe he'd think twice about sending another probe at all.

Of course, that *did* risk the commander finally finding wherever he'd misplaced his balls to and attacking in earnest. Something which Piell didn't know if they could handle, given the reinforcements the enemy fleet had gotten outnumbered their own. Still, even if they managed to take the system from him, he'd make damn well sure they bled more than they could afford for it...

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- Clone Wars Day 18: Thisspias -

Anakin juke, dodging fire inside the cloud of vultures that had gotten snarled up with him and his fellow Blades. Thankfully, despite the danger, that was *exactly* what they'd wanted. When he'd first noticed that the vulture swarms being used for probing attacks on Lantillies had a statistically unlikely focus on the Blades in any skirmish, over all other targets, he'd brought it to the attention of the mix of higher-ups operating as the ad-hoc local command. To his pleasant surprise, the group had managed to hammer out this mission as a result of confirming that observation.

Sure, escort missions sucked, but he'd take it if it meant actually striking back at the CIS in *any* way at all right now.

Zeroing another vulture, he was clear of the furball just long enough to glance at the scopes, confirming that the armed freighters that were the whole point of this operation were successfully making it through. They were, bringing a tight smile to his face despite the fact that he'd lost a few of his pilots already. The Thisspiasians were a *warrior* culture, and while they hadn't had enough of a fleet to hold off the CIS, they *were* causing the droid army that the Confederacy had landed nine sorts of hell on the ground. With those freighters all loaded to the brim with supplies the Thisspiasians could use to *really* make the droid army pay, they could ensure the likelihood of a local victory on the ground, even if they couldn't take the system back properly.

Of course, the entire operation had been made possible only by the fact the Blade fighters having been foolishly designated with *extremely* high priority by the CIS droids, allowing his wing to pull the entire swarm out of orbit. With the CIS having only left a few cruisers and a large vulture swarm to protect the planet's orbitals, under a tactical droid that wouldn't change the targeting of the vultures on the fly? With the vultures tied up, and the cruisers on the *wrong side of the planet* for a quick interception, the freighters were getting in nearly unmolested.

It was a small thing, maybe. But this raid constituted the very first *offensive* operation that anyone within the Republic had attempted, at least so far as Anakin knew. Pleased that it was working out, Anakin returned to the dogfight, determined to cost the CIS some more of its vultures before he pulled his people out...

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- Clone Wars Day 19: Tythe Central -

"Rana, you've done amazing, so don't take this as a criticism...but this is a hell of a fucking mess."

First Admiral of the Fleet Admiral Rana Lin snorted at that.

"That's putting it a bit lightly, isn't it boss? I'd have shoehorned a few more expletives in there, if I were you. In fact, between you, me, and the bulkhead? I already have."

It was Izuku's turn to snort at his top military commander's dry delivery. Yet, even as he did so, he was still staring into the galactic holo that mapped their various theaters of operation. The worst mess, since it hadn't *stopped* being an active combat zone since the fifth day of the war, was the ongoing fighting over the Dac system. While the fighting on the planet itself had pretty much ended, the Gungans and Zavra being too much for the Quarren insurgents to handle, the void warfare was still ongoing in fits and starts.

The CIS *very clearly* wanted the massive shipyards the system held, as it was the only point where they'd doubled down...then doubled down again. Izuku couldn't exactly blame them, really. The Mon Calamari Orbital Shipyards were both large and, just as important, among the most sophisticated in the known galaxy. It was easy to lose sight of that fact due to their relatively slow rate of production for the size of the yards, but the truth was that every single ship they built was essentially bespoke artwork. Building *battlecruisers* which you could say that about at any rate above 'utterly glacial' was only possible because of just how advanced the yards themselves were. The truth was that it was the *design* work that caused the slowdown in shipbuilding, not the facilities.

Something which, pointedly, had changed in the year and a half leading up to the war.

Despite their love of art, Mon Calamari were brutally pragmatic as a people, and they most certainly *hadn't* ignored the warning the Jedi had given them. Not only had they quietly shifted work on all the ships Alderaan wanted from being relief ships to war ships...but they'd also quietly put aside their normal tendencies to start producing *copies*.

It went massively against the grain for them to make more than one of the same ship without tweaking the design. Indeed, even now they *were* still tweaking ship internal fittings and other minor details as a compromise between pragmatism and culture. Yet they *had* landed on the side of pragmatism and began building duplicate warships. In doing so, they'd proven that their actual production rate for large-scale warships was second only to the League of Free Stars. Not even Kuat could match them in speed-per-ship, even if Kuat had far more total building slips to work with.

The result was that the initial CIS had run face-first into a fleet of over *ninety* battlecruisers, and nearly twice that number of heavy cruisers, plus orbital defenses. Every single one of those ships was superior to anything of comparable tonnage the Confederacy had, though they'd been out massed by enough that they'd still have fallen if the League hadn't answered their calls for aid. With support from the League, including eight *Miruko*-class, the initial CIS incursion had been pushed back. Yet, unlike everywhere else the CIS had been turned back from so far, which were only seeing probing attacks at most...Dac had come under assault twice more.

"What happened in the third Dac assault, Rana? That's a *lot* of damaged Volitions and their support frigates, but very few outright destroyed."

Rana scowled and brought up a holo of the battle with a few quick taps. Izuku watched in surprise as just *two* CIS ships appeared before any others. Specifically, a pair of Subjugators. He began to understand when both ships *immediately* charged their Megalon cannons and fired as fast as they could, the waves from the super weapons hitting two thirds of the defending fleet. Everything smaller than a battlecruiser that was hit went dead, with the telltale arcing lightning of ion damage sparking over their hulls. His eyes narrowed as the Volitions and the Mon Calamari heavy cruisers only went down with the *second* pulse. The Mirukos, Paladins, and Mon Calamari MC80a Battlecruisers didn't go down at all, and immediately started pounding the pair of Star Dreadnaughts.

"The multi-layer shields *do* work as a defense then?"

While it had previously been *theorized* that the same multi-layered shield defense that provided the only real protection against the Null Torpedo/Graviton Beam combination would also protect against the overwhelming Megalon weapon...no one had known for sure. Rana paused the replay and answered.

"Yes. But a certain level of raw power is required by the shields. To Volitions *almost* made it through. In fact, if you look at the edge of the waves, several are still functional, having lost shields but not been rendered helpless. The Mon Cals went heavily into overkill with shield redundancy on the MC80as and pulled through, if just barely."

Rana restarted the replay and Izuku watched as a CIS fleet dropped in less than two minutes later...only to find that one of the Subjugators was an air-bleeding wreck and the second was in dire straits. The two Star Dreadnaughts had been forced to come in alone and unsupported, since their super weapons *very much didn't discriminate*. The survival of the Paladins and Mirukos had meant they'd been ripped into from outside their own effective range with anything *but* the super weapons. Which, given that both Subjugator had suffered heavy shield damage for their

sister ship's weapon themselves, had quickly doomed one and would have doomed the other without the new fleet dropping in.

The CIS commander had clearly made a snap decision, probably the *wrong* one in Izuku's opinion, to close ranks around the surviving Subjugator and protect it as they fled the system. If he'd been in that commander's shoes, he'd have pushed on and possibly taken the planet, given how many of the defenders *had* been disabled. But they'd clearly prioritized the recovery of their weapon, possibly on standing orders. Their best information said that the CIS had started the war with less than a dozen Subjugators, and now they'd already lost two. Hopefully, that would make them reluctant to deploy them again in the future.

"Thankfully, Dac has enough repair slips to handle the fleet, since the damage to most of the Volitions wasn't actually that bad. I took the liberty of sending another pair of Mirukos and eight Paladins to reinforce, just in case they try something daring while repairs are underway. The Dac front is by far our largest current commitment, and losing those ships while they are in the yard would be a disaster."

Izuku pursed his lips but nodded. Having almost ten percent of their total number of Mirukos tied down to defense of a single system was...not ideal. Yet it also wouldn't last. Rana had possessed the good sense to order Plus Stations deployed to Dac. They'd built up a stockpile of the powerful, modular stations in the run up to the war. Now, a full dozen of them were being added to Dac's defenses. In another week, they would start coming online and make the system *far* harder to take. Enough so that they could likely pull back half of the Mirukos, at least. He made a note to talk to logistics about getting at Ultra Station or two built at Dac as well.

The even larger, nastier defensive Ultra installations *weren't* modular. Unlike the Plus stations, which were designed to be brought into a system in pieces and assembled, Ultra Stations *had* to be built in place. Even within League Space, only a handful of critical star systems such as Tythe and Evocar had Ultra Stations. Yet, Dac was proving to be enough of a target that building one or two of them there might well be on the table. If for no other reason than to free up their limited mobile assets.

Shaking that thought off, even as he put a mental pin in it to bring up to logistics later, Izuku took back control of the holo display. Exiting the Dac recording and zooming back out to the overall galaxy, he left his eyes move away from the League's own defenses. There had been a number of probes of other League worlds, but Dac was their only major ongoing battle at the moment. Oddly, that seemed to be relatively true in Republic space as well.

"Only probes against Lantillies, Ord Mantell, and Kidriff 5? I know the CIS opened a new battlespace at Foless, but that's only the assets from their southwestern pocket. They can't be using *everything* they have free up to galactic north against us at Dac. So why aren't they committing their reserves? We know they have them, even without stripping defenses or halting the absorption of their gained space."

Rana grimaced, gesturing for control, and Izuku passed it over to her. She highlighted an area of space around Togoria, which included Kashyyyk, Umbra, Zeltros and Onderon.

“If you want my best guess based on what ship movements we *have* seen, boss? I’m guessing they are still looking for softer places to stab deeper into the Republic, instead of committing to the slugging matches required to punch through the systems they were halted at. There are a bunch of smaller hyperlanes in this area you could move a fleet through, and Togoria is firmly on the Separatists’ side. Given that we know there were also some issues between the King and Senator on Onderon...”

Izuku scowled as he examined the zoomed in region of space. Only a complete fool would try to take Zeltros itself, given what had happened to every other group in history that had ever tried. But if you took the rest of the systems in that area you could force the Zeltros self defense force to pull back to the planet itself and simply bypass through the outer system without risking anything. Commenor had a solid defense force, but it was flanked on two sides by Neimoidia and Cato Neimoidia. Both of which were *supposedly* loyal, but absolutely no one believed it. They were both Trade Federation worlds through and through, after all.

Worse, Neimoidia was only a galactic stone’s throw away from *Kuat*.

That world, despite its incredible defenses, *had* to be one of the absolute most critical targets for the CIS. One that they *would* throw thousands of ships at if they could carve a path to it, just for the chance to *damage* the Kuat Shipyards. Yes, he could unfortunately see it. The question was what to *do* about it. They *did* have some influence in the area, being friendly with both Kashyyyk and Onderon’s king. The League even had a decent sized fleet already in the area, at Randon. That world had jumped to join the League, and its strategic position holding the junction of *four* separate hyperlanes had resulted in Admiral Lin sending a proper fleet to defend it. Not a picket force like in many other cases, but a proper defense fleet anchored by a pair of Mirukos and a dozen Paladins.

Izuku highlighted it, bit his lip, and nodded after a moment.

“I think we need to quietly reinforce the fleet you sent to Randon, then equally quietly let the Wookiees know we’re willing to come to their aid. There is a risk the CIS will shoot down the Lesser Lantillies, instead of trying for the Trelle Trade Route. But there are fewer major planets along the Trelle, and we *know* Trandosha is friendly with the Confederacy. Add in a fair bet that they’ll want the Umbaran technology if they can get it...”

Rana nodded firmly.

“It makes sense. Though, they have enough ships they might just try for both. Particularly if Onderon somehow flips.”

Izuku grimaced but shrugged.

“True, but we can’t be everywhere, and despite being friendly with Onderon...it’s too far into the Republic right now. We can’t offer them support without looking like we’re trying to invade ourselves, where Kashyyyk is nearly on top of our new borders. We alert the Republic, do what we can, and hope for the best.”

His top Admiral sighed, but nodded agreement...then changed the subject.

“With that out of the way, boss. We *need* to discuss what to do about Geonosis. We can’t just let it stew, given it will get harder and harder to deal with the longer we wait.”

Ugh. He already knew what he was intending to do there, but he also already knew that Rana was *not* going to be happy with his decision. Gearing himself up for a verbal sparring match with her, he started to outline the plan...

Chapter 140: Deep Breath In

- Clone Wars Day 19: Tythe Central -

-Lemon Starts Here-

Izuku moaned as his fist tightened in Sabé’s hair, even as his half-open eyes tracked Padmé’s body as it ground into the pole Aayla had insisted they add to their private quarters years ago. With just the two of them present, it was very easy to embrace the apparent ‘twins’ fantasy playing out in front of him. With some of the best biosculpt in the galaxy keeping them exactly matched, down to the tiniest details, only his familiarity with their Force presences and personalities assured him of which was which. He had to admit that it added a certain extra charge to encounters where it was just the three of them, as it was tonight.

In truth, he hadn’t expected this *at all*.

Not with how stressed out, exhausted, and busy everyone had been.

Apparently, that hadn’t been an acceptable answer to Sabé, who he was almost certain was the driving force behind him having found both girls waiting for him in the bedroom. They’d been wearing nothing but a set of metal collars, chain leashes that fastened them to the stripper pole, and skimpy loincloths held up with finer gold chains. No tops, showing that at some point very recently they’d duplicated the nipple piercings Aayla had gotten. Identical sets for both of them, of course.

He’d been half-stunned at the sight when they’d sauntered up to him and each taken him by an arm, pulling him deeper into the bedroom. From there, they’d slowly stripped his own clothes while taking turns making out with him, before Sabé had teasingly commanded their mutual lover to ‘show him what you’ve been learning just for him.’ Which, as it happened, turned out to be an *impressively* good pole dancing routine. Not quite as good as the ones Aayla semi-regularly performed, claiming it was ‘good exercise,’ but very good for something she couldn’t have been practicing for longer than a few months.

The only reason he’d been able to tear his eyes away at all was that Sabé had tugged him to a seat on the nearby couch and promptly knelt between his legs. Even now, as he gently guided her with the hand fisted in her hair, she was giving him a slow-but-*thorough* blowjob. She’d started with little kisses and gentle nibbles, move on to sucking his balls gently while simultaneously working his shaft with one hand, then moved on from that to properly deep throating him with obviously-practiced ease.

Padmé had lost her loincloth by now, leaving her in just the collar that leashed her to the pole, and her show was slowly starting to become more about the most creative ways she could *masturbate* with that pole, rather than a dance. The sight, combined with what Sabé was doing to him, was finally too much, and cum boiled out of Izuku's balls, Sabé deliberately swallowing only the first two pumps before capturing the rest in her mouth. Smirking around her mouthful, she rolled to her feet and swayed over to Padmé...and kissed her deeply, sharing his load. The sight was more than enough to prevent Izuku from flagging even a little, as well as encouraging him to surge to his feet.

Neither of the pseudo-twins did more than giggle as he casually snapped their chains, threw one of them over each shoulder, and carried them to the bed. They might have *started* this, but was certainly going to be the one to *end* it. Something which he didn't think they had any protests about as he positioned Sabé pussy on top of her mistress's face and sunk his throbbing cock into Padmé's in turn...

-Lemon Ends Here-

... ..

It was the morning after Sabé and Padmé's unexpected ambush, and the best night of sleep he'd had since waking up in a hospital on Coruscant, that the three of them were sitting around a breakfast table. They'd had a bit more fun in the shower, cleaning up after the mess Izuku had made of both of them last night, and even now the girls were in nothing but short bathrobes. Which, along with the good food prepared by a personal droid, was *almost* enough of a pleasant distraction to make up for the return of an unpleasant reality in the form of the discussion Sabé reluctantly started.

"So, now that we've made sure you aren't burning yourself out with stress and too little sleep, are you *sure* about your plans, Izu? I know Rana is...unhappy, to say the least."

Izuku sighed, but it was a weary sigh instead of the frustrated and stressed one it would have been the day before. It was Sabé who'd noticed how on edge he'd been, something not aided by the fact that all three of his 'bonded' were now running around elsewhere. Shaak Ti had stayed back on Coruscant, feeling called to help put together the relief team that was, by now, likely on Kamino. She and a few Jedi she'd handpicked, ones Izuku suspected she'd had ulterior motives for picking, were heading the team that would start taking over from Celeste and Kina Ha.

That team *also* included representatives of the Chancellor's Office, the League, and several independent planets. The Clones didn't have a *clue* how to run a government and weren't even sure they *wanted* to. So the 'relief' group was going to be responsible for trying to create some sort of system beyond just the GAR military structure on the planet. Exactly what sort of system, who the planet would answer to, and a dozen other things were completely up in the air for the moment. Just like so many other things amidst a galaxy set on fire.

Meanwhile, Aayla had gone ahead of him to Geonosis, where Zavra was also heading using her personal ship. The two of them were going to start working on the details of the plan Izuku had put in place. The one that Sabé had just brought up. Admiral Lin was *displeased* that Izuku himself was planning to take over the Geonosis campaign. He'd won the argument on *why*, since the

primary reason he was doing so was the fact they were planning to deploy Force Sensitive combat units that had been training on Ossus for the first time.

But she certainly hadn't been pleased.

Understandably so, since Izuku was the closest thing to a single point of failure for the entire League. He *wasn't* a single point of failure any longer, at least in theory. The time since the Hutt Crusade had allowed them to start properly hammering things like lines of succession out. Yet the reality remained that it was Izuku's popularity and leadership, his status as the 'man who'd finally taken down the Hutts,' that was currently keeping the League so stable. It *might* survive and pull through if he died at this point, but there would be a lot of jockeying for positions and power plays.

Meaning he *really* shouldn't be on the front lines.

"I'm sure. Despite what the First Admiral thinks, I *am* smart enough to know I don't have any business being down on the ground. Yet the fight to *get* down there is going to be rough, based on estimates of what they have in the way of anti-orbital weapons and fighters. My Battle Meditation abilities will mean a lot less casualties in getting the army down on the ground in the first place. Not to mention I'll be better able to support the Champions once they start infiltrating."

The Champion Initiative had been started almost the day Ossus Academy took in its first batch of Force Sensitives. Many of those who'd been 'awakened' during the events surrounding Tisht were soldiers at heart, and many more Force Sensitives of all ages that had been found scattered through Hutt space were martially inclined as well. Some of the original set had gone on to form the Sovereign's Guard...but more had attended Ossus with a focus on the more combative aspects of Force usage. They'd been trained not just by Jedi, but Iron Knights, Matukai, Guardians of the Whills, Dathomir Witches, and even a Disciple of Twilight that Master Fay had found *somewhere* and somehow convinced to join the Academy.

The aim had been to, for all intents and purposes, create 'Champions of the Force.' Ones that could act either at an individual or squad level. Strictly speaking, they weren't a part of the League, Izuku having taken a hands-off approach more akin to how the Jedi *used* to work during the early days of the Republic. Given that they *were* dedicated to the protection of sentient life and the *majority* of them had come from League Space, it wasn't too much of a shock that they'd volunteered en masse to help the League against the current threats. Geonosis would be their very first major deployment, seeing a full two dozen eight-man squads being inserted onto the world in a commando role against critical targets.

Technically, Aayla and Zavra, both of whom had spent time at the Academy getting to know the Champions and their methods, would be the ones working with them directly. Yet, having Izuku be their primary command and control just *made sense*. Both because he would be in charge of the battlespace overall, and because Aayla and Zavra could speak with him in a way that couldn't be intercepted.

"Are you sure the political situation can hold together without you? The Council of Free Worlds is still new, and all the former Republic words being added to the League in a rush are going

to strain the systems you have in place. For that matter, a great many worlds who are on the fence are going to want to speak to *you*, directly, as the head of the League.”

Padmé’s question was pointed and made Izuku grimace. She wasn’t exactly *wrong*, after all. Even now there was a small flood of worlds still joining up with the League, as their local rulers saw which way the winds were blowing. Despite several wins that had stopped the CIS advance, including a recent success at Foless, the CIS was *dominating* on the battlefield for the moment. I *large* number of Republic worlds were steadily falling, with each new defeat causing more panic in the remaining Republic worlds.

For those worlds close to League, the fact *it* hadn’t lost yet, in fact managing to smash or repel every major CIS fleet it had engaged so far, made running to the League for protection seem like an increasingly good move. Still, there was a point that she wasn’t considering. An important one that majorly differentiated the League’s situation from the Republic’s.

“It should be fine, at least in the short term. Remember, the League’s economy barely stuttered while the Republic’s is crashing hard. Even the Confederacy’s planets are suffering some downturn, where the League’s boom economy is still going strong. That, as much as safety, is luring in worlds, and will let the *trained diplomats* handle the influx. I’m *supposed* to be the last resort for recruiting worlds, not the first.”

Padmé twitched as she processed that. Izuku could practically *feel* her incredulity. Not from his latter assertion, but from the fact she knew the bit about the economy was *true*. She had, entirely expectedly, immediately dived into the process of trying to help Naboo and other worlds from the Chommell sector transition into the League successfully. Something which, according to the LIS and political briefings he read daily, was already making her a shoe in for the Council Seat either Naboo or the sector as a whole would someday gain. Not that such surprised him at all. She’d been an extremely well-regarded voice for their worlds within the Republic Senate, after all.

The result of her diving in, though, was that she was at least somewhat well-versed in how well the League was handling the war. Namely, that it had *barely been disrupted at all*. They’d *already* been producing war material on a ‘war-footing,’ yet had also still been massively improving civilian quality of life for everyone in former Hutt Space simultaneously. In part, that had easy, due to just how *poor* that quality of life had been in the first place. It didn’t take a lot of progress to massively improve on ‘downtrodden slave,’ after all. The *other* factor, however, was just how much wealth they’d taken from the Hutts. Despite needing to be careful about how they’d used it, they’d still been able to both build massive infrastructure improvements *and* race forward with expansion of the military.

“I supposed that *would* buy you time. The more important worlds are going to try insisting you get involved anyway, though. More to the point, the *Republic* is going to expect you to be involved. Particularly in leading talks over the issue of Kamino. The world is all but completely enfolded by League Space now.”

Izuku grimaced. *That* was entirely true. Admiral Lin had moved quickly to make sure Rishi was secured, after learning how important it was as the location of the *only* known hyperlane to

Kamino. That meant that the components of the GAR moving to and from the world were doing so through League controlled space, at the League's sufferance. Still...

"They aren't going to make an issue out of that just yet. The people Organa put in charge of the military situation aren't stupid, and are going to realize that the League guarding the gate is freeing them from needing to do so. They'll want something formal worked out *eventually*, but they have enough problems elsewhere not to go looking for another. Doubly so if the reason I'm not directly available is because I'm dealing with the threat Geonosis represents."

Frowning, but slowly nodding as well, Padmé took a bite of the remaining breakfast they'd been nibbling at while they spoke. After a few moments to chew over both the food and the argument, she acknowledged his point.

"You're most likely right. You know you won't be able to stay out of it forever though, correct?"

Glumly, Izuku nodded. While he wasn't eager to lead tens of thousands to possible death. It was still better than *politics*. A thought Sabé seemed to read on his face, as she snorted and interjected her own comment.

"Don't worry, Izzy. I'll make sure Padmé is too *distracted* to plot how to drown you in political poodoo."

Salaciously leaning against Padmé, Sabé managed to capture the other girl's earlobe with her lips and suckle before she could react. The moan the action drew out of a now-blushing Padmé interrupted the line of conversation nicely. Maybe they could fit one more round of fun in before duty called...

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