

I know how to sell a story to a male audience, ergo, I am not Disney. Nor do I have Fuck You money, ergo, not JKR.

All characters involved in anything adult are 18+.

Also... there is no Disney Canon. There is only Legends. That is all.

Happy May the Force! I had hoped to get this out to ya'll by the end of April, but that did not happen. The vagaries of fate had the start of the week extra busy in RL, but I got Friday and Saturday entirely free to work on this. Now, it's been a while, so if you all see someone talked about who should be dead, or some other immersion-breaking lore mistake, tell me, and I will correct it as soon as I can. It isn't the full chapter, and I will be posting a vote on that later tonight.

This has not been put through the Grammarly Grinder, but I might be able to do so tonight before I post it over on fanfic.

For now, I hope you all enjoy as the fucking of the Sith's Great Plan continues.

Magic27: Unveiling

Even if he had not also something stirring within the Veil however subtly, some danger coming ever closer to himself and the Sith as a whole, Dominus would still have acted instantly upon the emergency call from Sidious cutting off. The look of panic and fury on Sidious's face as he demanded that Dominus do so would have pushed him on. *Anger I am used to seeing there. I have never seen fear or even panic, not even after the creation of the GDL and my first attempt at rebellion, both of which hurt the Republic's ability to keep up its end of this farce.*

Dominus honestly did not think war going on between the three polities was real, to a certain extent. He didn't care about the thousands dying per day or the true, underlying reasons behind the GDL or even the CIS. To his mind, since the Order of Two had created the CIS and led the Republic, it was more a game than a war. With all the dead on either side simply fuel for the Dark Side, fuel for the Sith's real war against the Jedi. Only the GDL's participation marred that perception in his mind.

One of the things that I have always at least partially respected in Sidious is that he has always been able to control himself regardless of the numerous setbacks our original plans have received. To see fear of all things in that face, no matter the fact that it is still a Dark Side emotion, is worrisome in the extreme.

In any other circumstances, Dominus would have struck. While he had been trained as a Jedi Master first, Dominus had long been hoping to find a chink in Sidious's armor in order to supplant him, as a true Sith would. And yet, in this instance, he could not. If the Jedi had somehow discovered the existence of the pillars, if they were somehow close to destroying the Veil, that meant that second biggest advantage the Sith had over the Jedi would disappear with it. That was something that Dominus could not allow.

But Vjun... there aren't actually that many units in the area that I can send quickly. Ordering his strategic and logistics droids to pull up the data of the Niuri sector. It was not a very important zone of the Outer Rim, with far more planets at subsistence level than not. Systems like the Divac or Gala systems provided some small amounts of food or raw resources to the greater war effort, but that was all. Vjun had been the only planet in the sector that had risen to what in the Mid Rim would have been called solvency.

Only the fact that many of the systems in the sector fell on the Salin corridor meant it mattered at all. If not for that hyperspace trade route, which ran along a large portion of the CIS controlled Outer Rim, it might well have not even felt the impact of the war.

With the aide of the strategic command and control droids, dominus was able to discover a flotilla of anti-pirate ships currently moving along that area of the Corridor. It was not a large force, but Dominus hoped that it would be enough: a single Lucrehulk, a division of Munificent class, and twelve divisions of gunboats, many of which would turn around and be replaced as the flotilla moved through various systems.

Moreover, the Lucrehulk in question, *Winning Deal*, was not one of the ones that had been fully retrofitted to survive in a battle line. It lacked the multiple wings of vulture fighters that those retrofitted designs held and the additional weaponry which the pre-war Lucrehulks could not get away with showing. But that would only make it better for this operation, because instead it held a mixture of vultures and Multi-Troop Transports loaded with B1 battle droids. *I could wish that one of my apprentices was nearby to take command, but with no prior warning, the Geonosian in charge of this flotilla already will have to do.*

Calling and giving Commodore Pindal his new orders took but a moment. Normally, Dominus would have preferred to give verbal orders to any of his tools, to see their faces and reach through the Force to their minds, to mold them as he needed. But at the moment, his self-control was so frayed, Dominus doubted he could put on his normal public mask of a determined, firm but benevolent grandfather type. *Not that the Geonosian would understand one way or the other, but he would be able to discern my facial expression.*

After that, Dominus leaned back, ordering the various screens in his meditation center/personal command center to be shut down, the droids to remove themselves to the *Malevolence's* normal command center. Once the door closed behind his droid aides, Dominus sat in the darkness, meditating to regain the self-control he had lost after seeing his so-called master's panic and fear.

This took Dominus far too long, something he chaffed at once he came back to the here and now. Nonetheless, the meditation had done him some good, and he settled back down, reaching out to the Veil. He could not control it, of course. Sidious still sat at the center of the Sith construct, drawing in the power, feeling the ebb and flow of the greater Force through it. Yet Dominus could still use it to a certain degree, and he could... prepare. He could wait.

No doubt Sidious will also have recovered by this point. But, despite how quickly I reacted, Pindal and his force might still fail to arrive in time. In that case, I might... Need to prepare myself both for the worst, and to take advantage of it.

Scene break

Pindal was a warrior caste Geonosian, as were many of the Geonosians who made their contribution to the CIS Navy. Drones and still more warriors served in their various armies as simple soldiers. Only a few warriors had ever made the jump to even the lowest flag rank beyond captain. Only aristocrat caste, and even then, only a few of them, had ever been given the rank of admiral. Despite Poggle the Lesser, a drone himself, having risen to command the Geonosis hives, the Geonosians were a heavily caste-segregated society.

Pindal was a typical warrior, his wings flowing down his back like a cloak, no clothing on his carapace-encased body, and standing around six feet tall with two large, sharp spikes rising from his shoulders for another two feet over his head. They could be used as battering rams and had during Pindal's time in the arena where he won the right to join the CIS navy rather than the army. His mandibles, of which he had two pairs were also sharp. The outer two were barely mobile, and when they moved it was for emphasis. His smaller pair of mandibles were the main means with which he spoke, both his people's language and Galactic Common.

While he was a proud member of a caste-based hive society whose greatest source of entertainment were gladiatorial arenas and who did not care at all about individual lives, there was nothing wrong with Pindel's mind. As he sat in his command chair, Pindel contemplated the mission he had been given waiting for his ship to come out of hyperspace. They would be doing so well beyond the normal hyperspace limit, well beyond

the mines that kept the vagabond and thieves away, so that they could not spread the... the plague from the planet of Vjun.

Even a Geonisian who had faced violence and the threat of death from the moment he became a young adult at eight years old had to try hard to keep his wings from fluttering at the thought of Vjun. The videos of what had happened on the blighted world when... whatever it was happened could still be found on the Hypercom, and it made for horrible viewing. The transformation that had swept across the planet, turning sentients to feral beasts was horrible. Beyond the loss of life, though, it was the waste of it, the lack of order and thought, that bother Pindal.

Vjun would make for a good planet for any kind of weapons lab, I suppose, although I have to wonder if putting such a laboratory here was actually all that cost-effective. After all, you would have to be able to find a place where the local creatures could not reach, then build the laboratory there, then bring in people and food and so forth. I wonder if my people were involved in that project? We could have done the building easily, although keeping drones and warriors from challenging the locals would have been somewhat difficult.

Still, whatever is here, Master C'baoth was clear: someone has discovered the lab, and they must be stopped. I also cannot simply destroy the laboratory. I will need to send down my infantry. Pity I do not have any drones with me. I will need to rely on B1 battle droids alone.

Dominus wasn't a master of Sith Engineering. Even as Sidious helped Dominus reach true mastery in Force Domination and the ability to drain the will and Force away from other users, he had made certain there were holes in Dominus's knowledge. Sith Engineering, the strange construction-based use of the Force that straddled the real world and the Force in a way that few Jedi could ever comprehend, was one of the biggest such holes. He had no idea whether the Veil's pylon would be able to survive an orbital bombardment. But it was better to the side of caution. It would not do to stop the Jedi from destroying the pylon only for the Forces he ordered there to destroy it themselves.

The instant *Winning Deal* came out of hyperspace, Vultures roared out of the hanger bay. Flashing forward. "Get me a sensor reading. Sweep for mines," Pindal ordered, his mandibles clacking harshly. "Keep the vultures sweeping forward. Gunboats to our flanks."

The vultures quickly began to push ahead of the five capital ships, while the gunboats created a globe around them, shielding them from any other mines. At first, this wasn't necessary, but as they followed the vultures forward and they began to fire on the mines, the gunboats too were forced into action. The mines were incredibly hard to find with just the onboard sensors of the

vultures, and more than a few exploded, shredding dozens of Vultures and more than a few gunboats.

Pindal did not care. Of every race that manned the CIS ships, droid-based combat had come easiest to the Geonosians. Swarm tactics and not caring about your losses was how they went to war.

His vultures and gunboats paid a heavy price for blasting a route through the mines. The mine field was respectively dense and deep, since no one, not even the Jedi, were clear about how the infection on Vjun had begun, and had no desire to see it spread. Several mines got through the defensive fire, and four of them got close enough to the capital ships to attack, slamming into their shields like so many torpedoes. A Munificent reeled, its shields nearly knocked out in one quadrant, but it survived, and the ships were soon in orbit, where they began to instantly scan the environment below.

"All surviving vultures to descend to the lower atmosphere. Spread them out in flights from our orbital position," Pindal ordered. The fleet was currently in orbit over one of the planet's poles. "Sensors, start sweeping the planet."

His flotilla did not have enough vultures to simply canvas the entire planet, even if you added in the gunboats. Which were markedly unwieldy in atmosphere.

Within an hour of their arrival, Pindal had decided that the Jedi weren't here in enough strength to bother his flotilla, and spread out his capital ships. Even so, sifting through the signals coming from generator stations that had collapsed, the billions of eroding batteries of hover cars scattered around the hundreds of ferrocrete-built cities, took some time. The low-level flyovers that he ordered helped but also showed the devastation of this planet as well as the creatures its inhabitants had become.

Despite himself, Pindal flinched a bit at the sight of them, shaking his head as his talons shifted together into a guarding motion, an ancient symbol his people used to ward against evil befalling the hive. *Whatever happened here was pure evil, truly. The Force is an enigmatic, and oftentimes callous thing.*

The true source of the plague that had struck Vjun was largely unknown to the galaxy at large, but a superstition had begun to grow among races who were already leery of the Jedi and the Force in general that it had something to do with that unseen, unknowable energy source. *Even as venal and corrupt as the Republic is, I cannot imagine that it was the Jedi who created such a thing. At least, not on purpose. That actually lends more credence to the idea that there are still Sith out there, even if the push to believe that Master C'baoth is one is patently false.*

“Sir!” One of his bridge crew, the only really living sentient beings on the ship, called out to Pindal. “I think I have an anomaly.”

An orbital view of a port city on the planet below, the old type of port city, the sort that catered to watercraft rather than landing areas for spaceborne ones, appeared. Pindal had been working among other sentients long enough to know other races liked such cities, though he had never seen the appeal. Or indeed the need for oceans.

Unlike in the colder or more austere areas of the globe where nature had not taken as heavy a toll, this entire city was dead in terms of energy, overgrown with green, adding further to the ferrocrete in it’s effort to foil their scanners. However, despite that, a tiny energy reading could be seen. Normally, given all of the interference elsewhere, the other false leads, the vulture flights had been running down, the sensor operator wouldn’t have called the captain over.

However, this drone had proven his worth by taking it a step further. He had downloaded a copy of a map of the planet back when it was inhabited and specifically zoomed in on the cities they were examining. The power source was reading from what should be the site of a small park, nowhere near one of the city’s various power generators, even if they still had power to them.

“... It could be someone’s car crashed there during the disaster. But send a group of vultures down,” Pindal decided.

Soon, a flight of vultures flew down into the atmosphere to join their fellows, heading towards that specific city. Twenty minutes later, they were low enough to send a video recording up to the capital ship. The image showed a collapsed apartment building, one that had fallen sideways, and had wedged itself between two of its fellows during the disaster that had befallen Vjun. However, underneath it, almost completely hidden was what looked like the exhausts of a small freighter.

“You have served the hives well. I will put in a good word for you to fight in the arenas,” Pindal said formerly, pressing his talons into the smaller drone’s shoulder before turning to the rest of his bridge crew. “Order the B1s to power up. Launch the MTTs. Recall the vultures from elsewhere. I want at least three squadrons to provide aerial cover. All other vultures are to return to the capital ships and be ready for redeployment. The Munificents are to join us as we take up position above that city.”

Scene break

“Well, this is not what I expected,” Mak said, rubbing his face tiredly. *Kriff, but I can’t remember a time I’ve been this mentally and physically exhausted, not even the Trials took it out of me as much as being on this Dark Side cursed planet.*

Kass nodded, her own body drooping in tiredness, her long ponytail in particular having lost its luster over the past few days even while her eyes alight with victory. Being on this planet was taking a toll on both of them well beyond what their physical exertions should have allowed for. The need to keep out the weight of the Dark Side here, where the entire planet had been plunged into it, a roiling miasma of fear anger and raw grief such that it created a permanent back drop in the Force, empowering the Veil further, had been immensely difficult.

Mak would normally liken the Veil's effect on the Force to crude oil on water. It blocked anyone from attempting to drink from it without difficulty, and every time you supped from the water, some of the oil got into you. The oil would sicken the individual, would blind them to the cleansing touch of the water. Here on Vjun, it was like the oil was so deep only by stretching to your utmost could you touch the water underneath with a tiny finger.

Yet the pair had succeeded at last in the quest the Force had sent them here to accomplish. For in front of them, in a bunker of some kind built under an apartment complex was the thing the Force had tried to direct them towards. A thing of Sith engineering the anchor of the Veil of the Dark Side they were here to destroy.

"You're right, I never thought it would be hidden like this," Kass shook her head, a finger reaching up to rub over one of her small horns in worry. "From all we were taught about the Sith, the fact that arrogance was such a part of the Sith mind set, I would've assumed it was some grandiose pillar of stone sitting in lone majesty somewhere in the mountains. Or, when we first came to the city, situated on top of a building somewhere. The better to connect to the Unifying Force or whatever they would say to one another to explain away their arrogance."

"Perhaps that is part of the problem that has been facing the Jedi order since the New Sith Wars. Whatever Sith survived that war were not arrogant, they were rather coldly calculating, and far more prone to hiding then grandiose gestures," Max answered, his tone starting out almost joking, before becoming more serious. "The Sith were able to hide themselves for so long that the Jedi stopped looking, and only then began to work against the Order and the Republic."

Kass nodded, but did not take her eyes away from the Sith pillar. Despite the fact that it was very much a monolith, a thing of steel and stone, to her Force senses it felt more like a monster, one that was constantly trying to reach out and grab her.

It rose from the corner of the room, filling at least half of the room with its bulk. The pillar rose from the ground of the bunker to the ceiling, connected to both by tendrils of metal. The pillar seemed to be made of steel and stone, but the elements had been merged in

some fashion that just looked subtly wrong, almost corrupted. In some strange, horrible way, the pillar looked almost alive, not quite.

If looked at from the right angle, it seemed to give out some kind of reddish light. At others, it pulled at the light of their glowsticks. Indeed, Kass could tell that the glowsticks weren't giving off nearly as much light as they should. As she glanced their way for a brief second, Kass saw them dim further, as if even a physical light was an affront this thing, made to snuff out the Light Side of the Force, could not allow in its presence.

Yet this thing had not been grown, it had been made. Made for a specific purpose. Every inch of the pillars contorted lines had been crafted in a specific manner, she could feel it. Each curve and line of the pillar was made to follow some, some Dark Side version of mathematics that made even hyperspace calculations and advanced quantum mechanics seem quaint by comparison.

This thing repulsed Kass and Mak to a degree that they had not been prepared for, so much so that they had to force themselves down the hidden stairwell, a final defense perhaps against discovery. Fear had gripped both of them in a way neither had ever dealt with before, trying to push them away. It had failed, but had further drained both of them, and even now, Kass could feel the pull of the Dark Side, the Veil trying to worm its way into her mind almost like a living being.

It was with relief that Kass pulled her attention away from the pylon once more as Mak spoke up again. "So, how do we blow it up?"

In answer, Kass lit up her lightsaber, adding to the light of their glowsticks, which had already begun to fade entirely. Lightsaber in hand she stalked forward even as Mak made to raise a hand to stop her. Yet Kass was no fool. Instead of striking directly at the pylon, Kass stopped several feet away and hurled her lightsaber forward, guiding it forward with the Force to slash at the outer edge of the pillar. Only to do nothing. Rock or metal, the ignored the plasma blade.

Yet this attack did garner a response. As if the pillar had been waiting for it, the tendrils of Dark Side trying to force their way into the pair's mind redoubled their efforts. For just a moment, Kass saw a vision saw real and sudden that it nearly overrode what she was really seeing. In that vision, her attempt had ended in sudden tragedy, her lightsaber bouncing off and then flying over her head to slice her lover in half, as if the very Force had decreed he would die for her temerity.

For a moment, it was all Kass could do to keep the despair and self-loathing this image engendered in her from overwhelming her mind. "It, its not real!" she nearly groaned out between cleansed teeth. "I do not, I will not let this vision blind me to reality!"

With a wrench, Kass turned her eyes away from the pillar, only to realize that Mak too had been dealing with a vision-based mental assault. In his vision, instead of being a accident, Mak saw Kass suddenly seem to turn to the Dark Side, love turned to loathing, resolution into anger, as she turned away from the pillar, her eyes the feral yellow of a Sith who had lost himself to the Dark Side. Yet like Kass, Mak had been trained in Occlumency as well as the typical Jedi mental defenses.

He shuddered, his eyes wide and unseeing for a second before he pushed through the vision with a shake of his head, coming back to the real present with scowl. For a moment, the two lovers looked at one another, letting their joy in one another, their relief in the fact those visions had not been real becoming another buffer against the Dark Side within their minds.

The Dark Side recoiled for a moment, as if it could not comprehend or stand to be in the same place as the feelings of love and tenderness the pair were feeling after overcoming that mental attack. This let Kass reach out with the Force to deactivate her lightsaber and pull it back to her hand.

“Well, so much for the easy solution,” Kass stated dryly, using humor as yet another buffer against what had just happened even as her voice trembled.

“Wel, that’s why we brought along demolition charges among the rest of our supplies. Combined, we have enough thermal detonators to destroy several hab buildings,” her lover reminded her with faint smirk, putting an arm around her shoulders as she returned to his side.

But Kass shook her head. “I know, but I don’t think it will be enough. I think we need to take some of our proton torpedoes out of our star fighters, rig them up to explode as well.”

Mak thought about it, then shrugged. Using those on a planet against a unshielded target would be like cracking a egg with a multi-ton hammer, but after what had just happened, Mak felt they could make allowances for a bit of overreaction. “There is no kill like overkill. As long as we can be a safe distance away, I don’t have a problem with that. You’re going to need to be the one to do the rigging, though. I was never good at hotwiring or anything similar. First though, let’s get some food. And prepare for a response.”

Kass looked at him, and Mak shrugged. “We know, vaguely, that the Veil’s been giving the Sith a major leg up on the Jedi in sensing through the Force. Who’s to say they haven’t become aware of us, by now?”

That made far too much sense to Kass, who nodded grimly.

Hours later, Mak's prediction came true. On the pair's trip from their landing sight with the second of two proton torpedoes, Mak and Kass both stiffened, staring directly above them, the Force attempting to send them a warning through the power of the Dark Side clouding their senses. It came almost too late, as vulture fighters appeared in the air over the city, diving down to near road level quickly.

Luckily, the two Jedi had just reached the entrance into the apartment complex that was built on top of the bunker holding the Veil's anchor. They were able to duck inside, tossing the proton torpedoes they had been carefully holding in midair with twin Force Grips ahead of them.

"Oh, I am so glad that those things are protected against jostling like that," Kass winced as she crouched down in the entryway, staring up towards where the vultures were flying.

"True, or else we would've blown ourselves up with the first at the Dark Side's second illusionary assault an hour ago," Mak agreed, prop crouching down across from her, trying to ignore the clatter of the proton torpedo as it bounced off a few of the walls in the entryway to the apartment building. He then became serious, sticking his head out to get a better look at the vultures, or rather, staring beyond them for a few moments. "I am very much afraid that the Sith have come in force, love."

Kass nodded, and the pair watched as two of the vultures began to fire into the rearmost areas of their freighter. This was quickly followed by the engines of the freighter going critical, destroying not only the freighter, but their two starfighters within. "Well... That's not good."

The two Jedi exchanged a glance, a very telling one. Many Jedi could sense their death coming at them through the Force, and now, both Kass and Mak were getting that faint stirring of premonition, despite being surrounded by the miasma of the Dark Side. Yet it remained to be seen how they died, and neither of them were willing to go out without completing their purpose here. With no words spoken between them, the two lovers knew what they had to do.

Some might've called that fatalism. It wasn't. If they had retreated, possibly hidden themselves away to sneak onboard whatever troop transport was coming, the two might have gotten away eventually. Yet the Veil would still be in place, and the CIS would, under C'baath's orders, be able to easily reinforce this planet. It would be months, if not years before the Republic could put together a fleet to attack such an out of the way planet.

To the two lovers, their own lives were but a small price to pay for removing the Veil of the Dark Side from the galaxy.

As they watched, droid troop transports started to come down into view and as it touched down by the ruins of their freighter, the two of them looked at one another again, communicating with eyes and expression in a way that only lovers could. Then Kass sighed and stood up, heading over to the proton torpedo. She lifted it up with the Force before, glancing over her shoulder. "It will take me at least forty minutes or more to rig the proton torpedoes we've gathered to explode."

Proton torpedoes were not supposed to be used like this. They were supposed to be armed, and then either proximity or contact detonated. Rigging them to explode on a timer was somewhat feasible and had been their initial plan thanks to the five thermal detonators Kass had brought that hadn't been diverted to creating some traps for the Sith if they showed up. But it wasn't going to be easy to reverse the work already done, add in the second proton torpedo, and then rig it all to explode instantly or, if worse came to worse, if the IED was disturbed in some fashion.

Mak nodded, standing up as well, that nod a promise that he would give her that much time at the very least. Once more, they looked at one another, and then Mak moved forward, kissing Kass on the lips one last time, before turning away, raising his hands to the Entryway, where slowly, rubble began to pile up, leaving only a small area at the top where you could, with difficulty roll through.

As Mak began to do so, he called Force Cloak to him, making him disappear to normal senses. *If nothing else, the need to hide from the local creatures has helped us both perfect their stealth to an incredible degree.*

At first, Mak didn't do anything to the B1 battle droids as they landed and began to spread out. Partially, because he didn't want to challenge the heavy defensive envelope of the four transport ships that had touched down in various places near the burning wreckage of their freighter.

Secondly, because he didn't need to. The landing area was already under attack.

While Kass and Mak had been able to hide themselves from the feral creatures that had once been the civilized inhabitants of Vjun, the droids didn't even bother trying. Almost instantly upon their landing, hundreds of the local creatures raced out of hiding places around the landing area and attacked, followed by thousands more. Most of them were gunned down by the transport ships, but a few got through to attack the droids before they could organize themselves. For the death of several thousand local creatures, only three of the droids were destroyed.

Then, the droids began pressing out in every direction, creating a search pattern. Only to find there were more of the monsters. Even as the droids pressed on through the city and into buildings, more of the creatures attacked.

Seeing the droids hadn't been informed of where specifically they had to go, Mak pulled back, keeping them under observation, letting the locals continue do his work for him. The Dark Side twisted denizens of Vjun were more than willing to toss themselves into battle with the droids, the desiccated, feral monsters seeing the droids only as intruders, as threats that had to be attacked instantly.

The droids gunned them down as they went, the B1 battle droids working in unison, each squad moving in lockstep, each company well coordinated. Yet even so, an urban environment was deadly, and droids began to go down. One droid here, another four there, a group of ten that Mak watched entered a building, did not return. Instead, several dozen of the locals burst out from windows and the door frame towards where another group of droids were walking down the streets in the open, only to be gunned down before they could close the distance.

However, Mak and Kass had moved their freighter closer to the beacon when they decided they needed to use the proton torpedoes to destroy it, making it easier for the pair of them to use the Force to shift the proton torpedoes the rest of the way. Thus, within around ten minutes, the droids were pushing along the road leading to the apartment complex built on top of the underground bunker.

Mak retreated ahead of them and was waiting for them when they reached the road outside of the apartment building across from one of their prepared traps.

The first the droids knew of their real enemy was the wall of a ten-story tall office building collapsing as explosives laid around one side exploded. The resultant collapse, caught a dozen B1 battle droids underneath it, and more were crushed inside the actual building.

This ripped the hole out of the formation of the platoon that had been moving in this direction, and then Mak leapt down from his hiding place in a third story window of another building to land in among the battle droids. His lightsaber flashed, as well as the Force push, sending droids flying even as he sliced others in half or into even smaller pieces.

"Warning, warning! Enemy engaged, enemy engaged. Enemy is a Jedi!" One of the B1 droids shouted, sending off the report via its radio even as it and its fellows at the head of the small platoon tried to bring Mak under fire. However, he rolled into cover, then pulled Force Stealth around him, launching a Force Push forward to make some noise across the way. Several of the droids turned in that direction, leaving only two to continue firing at his hiding place.

Mak leapt up over it, blocking their blaster bolts with his lightsaber and deflecting them into their fellows, before charging forward. He needed to block several more blaster bolts before he was in among them, his lightsaber flashing, downing the last of the droids on the road.

He stood there for a brief second, then jumped away, a Force Jump propelling him up to another hiding area even as vultures screamed down. They hovered directly over the street where he had first appeared as more droids pushed in, covering them.

Using the Force, Mak directed one of his thermal detonators from his belt up into the air directly behind the vulture furthest back from it's fellows.

A droid that had been scanning the upper story windows for threats spotted the floating object and shouting out a warning. "Vulture ten-five-two, bogey on your six!"

The warning came too late, and the thermal detonator slapped into the vulture's shields, detonating on impact. Those shields fell, and Mak raised a disruptor rifle. The heavier disruptor bolts would burn through it's canister of gas quickly, but the gun hit as hard as the vulture's own onboard weapon or a crew-served blaster.

The disruptor bolts peppered the cockpit area, if indeed it could be called that, of the vulture, destroying the head of the droid pilot. The vulture began to list badly to one side, its frontmost guns smashing into the shielding of another vulture, causing its shield to appear, before it crashed into a building, raining debris down on the droids below.

"The Jedi is in that building!" The shout came, and three squads of B1 troopers charged into the building entryway.

I've never gotten used to how the less of them there are, the more B1s rely on verbal orders rather than radio-sent droid cant, Mak mused, ignoring them for now. The vantage point he had was just too good, letting him be almost even with the remaining three vultures. ERven as they tried to flip on their axis to come back at him, Mak hurled most of his remaining thermal detonators out, vulture.

Much like their armor, vulture shielding wasn't really up to the level of any manned starfighter, and even handheld thermal detonators like this could take them down. Two more of the vultures outright exploded, hit by one-two-three punches from his thermal detonators, while the third was able to zoom forward enough to dodge the follow-on punches after the initial one had removed it shielding.

However, Mak still had his rifle. Three shots was enough to puncture through the armor of the enemy starfighter. Its engines exploded, sending the front half of the vulture cartwheeling forward to slam into another building.

Blaster fire began to fly up towards Mak's current position, pinning him in place for second, but he had his lightsaber. *Blast it all, they are reacting far faster now than they were the last time I tangled with B1s.* Swiftly, Mak cut his way out of the room he had initially been in into a bathroom of some kind, then through it to another office, then another.

As he went, the droids that had entered the building he was currently hiding in ascended the stairs, racing towards his former position, but also spreading out. By this point, the droid army of the Confederacy had begun to learn how incredibly mobile Jedi could be while inside buildings, their lightsabers allowing them to literally cut their way through anything.

That was why there was a group of droids on the floor below, who instantly reported to their fellows when Mak eventually began to cut his way downwards rather than across. "The Jedi has descended! Moving to engage."

Once more, Mak was forced to protect himself from blaster fire, having come down into a hallway that linked directly to the stairwell rather than another room. He did so with his lightsaber in one hand, raising his blaster with the other, and as two of the droids went down from returned fire, opened fire with his own blaster, cutting down several more. Although the disruptor had more of a kick than most blasters, as in, it had some at all, Mak was strong enough to keep it on target, the Force guiding his aim.

Knowing he would be overwhelmed if the droids brought up more of their troops to encircle him, Mak killed the last droid in sight, then turned, and smashed his way out of a window, leaping across to another building with a Force Jump.

Down below, a dozen more droids opened fire having already surrounded the building. Still, thanks to his speed, Mak was able to get into and through another window in a nearby building before they could range on him.

However, as he rolled to a stop, Mak heard the droids getting more organized. "The Jedi always travel in at least groups of two, more often four. Spread out and find the laboratory that we are here to defense. Check all frequencies as you go, see if you can find any internal network to link to."

This told Mak not only that the droids would keep looking for Kass, but the cover story that the commander of the accompanying ship or ships had been told. *Not that it really matters at the moment,* Mak reflected, as he raced in the direction of the building housing the underground bunker. *Its just another sign that much of the Sith's current power relies on secrecy and hiding their true identities.*

To reach the building above the bunker, Mak had to cut through a corner of the building he was currently in and leap out into the open again to reach it and this time, the droids below were ready. Worse, they had been joined by several more squads, and all of the droids with a line of sight on him opened up fire immediately.

This forced Mak to use his Force Shield again, and by the time he landed in a window directly below the one he had actually been aiming for and rolled out of sight, he was gasping from the effort of keeping it up under the sustained impacts.

But he shook it off, racing deeper into the building, gaining the stairwell and heading downwards. He arrived in the entryway into the apartment complex just as the first few droids pushed their way through the pile of rubble that he had created there after Kassshad left him.

Without hesitation, Mak opened fire with his repeating blaster, downing several of the droids before he started to run out of gas. Tossing the blaster aside, he charged forwards, gaining the entryway just as the droids finish pushing enough rubble away to try and squeeze through.

Two more droids died to his lightsaber, followed by a third, before a shouted order pulled them back. “Don’t find a Jedi in a small, enclosed space! Expand the entryway. Other squads, start to climb up the side of the building.” While B1s were not very flexible, they were strong, and could dig their fingers into ferrocrete. Many would undoubtedly fall, but some wouldn’t.

Thankfully for the droids, that wasn’t their only line of attack, however.

Mak retreated, watching as the side of the building came apart under explosive fire, the entryway enlarging in both directions. *They must have called in another vulture flight*, he mused. Then he was too busy dodging and using his lightsaber to deflect blaster fire to do more, as, even before the debris began to settle, the droids marched forwards into the building, firing as they came in a battle line. Several of them fell, either losing their footing among the rubble, or smashed from on high by the still falling debris as a goodly portion of one side of the building simply began to slide downward.

This caused Mak to chuckle ruefully, using humor again to overcome the feeling of the Dark Side, its exultation that soon he would die. “Shoddy construction. I think this is the first time in my life I’m glad that someone decided to cut corners like that.”

Around the target building, other droids were still being attacked by the locals, as the noise of combat and violence pulled them in from all around the city. Indeed, a significant portion of the droids had already been pulled down by the locals, more in fact than Mak had

destroyed. However, unlike Mak, the locals had no response whatsoever to the vultures, and more and more of the vultures were coming down to provide overhead cover fire, slaughtering whole gangs or even hordes of the locals as they charged out of their hiding places around the city.

Despite his momentary spurt of humor, the incoming fire drove Mak back, forcing him to rely on his Force Shield again rather than letting him call on an element-based attack as he had hoped. His attempt to use a Bombardment hit, exploding several of the droids and bringing down still more rubble, but the next instant his shield nearly fell. *Blast it, being on this planet's drained me too much for me to keep this up.*

Soon, the fire was just coming in far too fast and from far too many blasters for him to deflect with the lightsaber and his Force Shield quickly began to fade once more.

He retreated down into the secret stairway, then still further down as the droids advanced. Even as they did, he could hear calls going out, other droids spreading out around the area trying to find the other Jedi he was working with. *Unfortunately, it's just me and Kass, not a full team of four,* Mak lamented, blocking still more fire as his force shield began to collapse. *No one else saw this vision, and we never even thought of calling in more help, lest the nature of our search get out to the Sith. Now it seems as if that was simply one bad choice among many worse ones.*

Luckily for Mak, the stairwell leading down into the bunker the Sith had created was a spiral staircase. Soon he was around the curve enough to protect himself from the incoming fire. Mak waited there, gasping for air, centering himself within the Force as best he could with the background miasma of this planet getting in the way.

Soon, the clanking steps of the droids came down the steps, coming around the curve. Mak's lightsaber flickered on, and he lashed out, cutting diagonally across at waist height. Even if the droids had attempted to duck, they wouldn't have been able to duck far enough, and he sliced the first two in half. A force push grabbed at their bits, slamming them up and into the next group, and Mak charged around the corner, slicing those in turn. A cutting technique followed carving through eight or more droids in turn as they had bunched up in the stairwell and its entrance.

For several moments, Mak was able to hold the stairwell, cutting down the droids as they came down into it in pairs of two, but eventually, the droids again wised up. Most of them retreated upwards, well away from where Mak could use his lightsaber effectively, with only two of them going forward. As Mak engaged them, it was the turn of the droids behind them to use some thermal detonators, which they rolled down the stairwell.

Only a glance down saved him, the Force not able to warn him of the threat any longer, such was the miasma of the Dark Side around them. A hasty Force Shield appeared covering him from head to toe, but even so, the effort of keeping that shield up in front of the explosion took it out of Mak, and then there was another. Then a third, a fourth.

His force shield finally shattered, and Mak fell back, practically exhausted, finding his footing only when the stairwell ended in the room containing the pylon.

Throughout this, Kass had been listening with half an ear as the sounds of combat came closer and closer, moving down the spiral stairwell. Yet she hadn't let it slow her work. Their lives were already forfeit, and Kass would be damned to the Void if she let their lives be lost in vain. Even as the droids followed up, racing around the final curve and began to open fire on Mak, she didn't look up. Even as she felt her lover get hit in several places by blaster bolts, Kass only flinched. She did not turn away what she was doing, until the last wire was soldered into place, the timer they had initially rigged set up, blinking forty seconds on its pad.

With that, finally Kass whirled, her lightsaber slamming into her palm with almost punishing force as she launched herself forward, a Force Push crashing into the droids in the stairwell, slamming them into one another and beyond, hurling them upwards and out as she gained the doorway leading up into the stairs, followed by a Bombardment technique that turned the entire group of droids into scrap.

Once the immediate threat was dealt with, Kass knelt next to Mak, looking him over, trying to keep the Dark Side from invading her mind again with the knowledge his wounds were her fault, that she didn't love him, that they would die and no one would mourn them. *Enough!* Kass cried out in her mind. *I know, we know what we signed up for. We embrace death, to strike at the Sith.*

Kass could see that Mak's legs had both been perforated by blaster bolts. His right arm fell useless, but he had been able to protect his main body with his lightsaber in his other hand. Now, he looked up at her, his gaze remarkably clear of pain, using a Jedi technique to deaden it for the moment. "D, did you finish?"

"I did, love. We did it." Kass answered.

"G, good," Mak murmured. He smiled at her, and his Zabrak lover answered it with a smile of her own. Kass leaned down, kissing him even as the sound of more droids coming down the stairwell reached her. She quickly pulled away, and then, both she and Mak closed their eyes, centering themselves in the Force.

Then there was light, and nothing.

Scene break

At first, the explosion, as seen from orbit, wasn't all that big. While the pair of Jedi had used a pair of proton torpedoes at the center of their makeshift explosive device to destroy the Veil's anchor, that explosion was contained, relatively, anyway by the depth of the bunker, and the rubble of the city above. From that initial explosion, all that could be seen was the whole city shivering, practically heaving as the ground.

However, it had succeeded in its goal. With that first blast, the anchor of the Veil ceased to exist.

For just a brief second as the first explosion started to fade on the sensors of Pindal's ships, it was as if the entire universe had taken a breath, only to then exhale with all the power of a cyclone. The explosion that followed was truly enormous, expanding upwards in a blast that reached the fleet in orbit, searing two of the munificent class ships that had been in slightly lower orbit than the others to ash, while the other ships reeled away, the blast radius having buffeted them as if they were but toys.

The very planet cracked, the crust shattering, the cracks rapidly expanding. Within seconds, the entire continent transformed into so much slag and magma. Soon, that tectonic activity spread. As the dazed watchers in orbit stared on, continents shivered and cracked from one end to another, mountains fell, and oceans began boiling away.

"Helm, retreat!" Pindal ordered, panicking, as he watched the destruction spread and grow further. His ships, even his own Lucrehulk, pulled back as quickly as they could. "Sensors, tell me you're recording this!"

The devastation of Vjun went on, the Dark Side energies released into the natural world and from the controlled constraints of the Veil tearing at everything around where the anchor had once stood. In no more than five minutes, even as the ships kept on pulling back, one of the sensor operators shouted, "Sensors indicate critical mass reaction in the planet. It's going to blow!"

"Short distance hyperspace jump, two lightyears away, now!" Pindal roared desperately.

Instantly the viewscreen was replaced by the sight of the lights of hyperspace, before just as abruptly, the ship fell back out of hyperspace several dozen lightyears away from the planet. The engines of the capitals ships all began to fail, not designed for use this far within a gravity well without prior calculation, but they remained intact.

"Get me readings from the planet. Send out our remaining vultures, I want visuals on what's happening," Pindal ordered, calmer now that his ships, and thus his position were not in any further danger.

The same drone as before at the sensor station quickly organized such a move, and within moments, telemetry from a group of vultures was being sent back to them. The image they were seeing appeared on the main screen, and Pindal and his bridge crew watched as Vjun exploded, erasing of the final remnants of the civilization that had once been there, long destroyed in its own madness. Several of the vultures were close enough to be caught in the destruction, but others rode out the shockwave, continuing to record until the explosion began to fade away.

Staring at the destruction Pindal shook his head from side to side. Even a Geonosian like himself, who cared little for the lives of others, had to shivered a little at the thought of that kind of weapon being used on his own home planet, wondering aloud, “What was the CIS researching here!?”

A thought, however fleeting occurred to Pindal then. That perhaps some weapons were just too powerful to see the light of day. That perhaps the Jedi had done the universe of favor to keep such weapons out of the hands of butchers like Grievous or those like him. *Even myself and other Geonosians might be tempted to use such a weapon. And if we used it against our enemies, would they not try to use it on us in turn? No, even I could not countenance that level of escalation.*

Eventually however, Pindal came back to himself, and made ready to report to Master C’bauth the failure of his mission. *I doubt Master C’bauth is going to enjoy my report...*

Scene break

Pindal had no way of knowing that the explosion he had just seen in the real world was but a pale shadow of what was occurring within the Force. Indeed, only about a tenth of the energy released as the anchor died expended itself in the physical plane. If it hadn’t the whole star system would have been swept clean of anything with more than two atoms to rub together, including it’s sun. But the Veil of the Dark Side’s anchors had been intended to contain the same vast energies they gathered and helped to shape, and so, in the material universe, only Vjun was destroyed in the anchor’s demise.

On the immaterial plane, however, the result was far, far worse.

The Veil cracked. Without one of its anchors, the remaining anchors could not hold the Veil in place against the regular movements of the Force, and the wild surging tide of the Dark Side generated by the war. While the power of the Dark Side was still gaining strength, there was no uniform Veil in the way of the Jedi any longer.

To many jedi, it was as if someone had been trying to occlude their eyes and senses by an ever-deepening black fog. But now, that fog had suddenly begun to dissipate, coming

undone rapidly. The galaxy over, the present and the future, long clouded or hidden entirely to the majority of the Jedi, became clearer.

It was not as if the Jedi's connection to the Force suddenly became more profound, suddenly made them more powerful. No, it was as if some measure of their concentration, which had always been forced to defend themselves against the Veil, was now free to aid the rest of their mind in drawing in the Force. Or perhaps, as others put it, as if a long-held weight of the mind had disappeared. Jedi who had been stooped, weighed down now strode forward, their minds and willpower no longer constrained.

In another universe, the Veil's anchors would eventually just give way. The tide of Dark Side forces would eventually overcome their physical frames slowly, releasing the universe over a span of years from its effects after Sith practically succeeded in their aims to rule the galaxy over a mountain of Jedi corpses.

In this one, the destruction of the anchor released that power all at once, and the Unifying Force itself quivered and quaked.

For the Sith or Dark Jedi so caught unawares, the effects of the Veil cracking ranged from bad to deadly. Several of the Prophets of the Dark Side who had been meditating at the time died screaming as the Dark Side forces within roiled like a living thing, tearing them out of reality in horrific ways. Dark Jedi serving the CIS who were simply calling on the Force in combat fell unconscious. One of them, Artel Darc, even died, and another Trenox, was turned into a gibbering lunatic for a time.

Asajj Ventress, Darth Charon, found the Dark Side nearly attacking her in turn as she prepared to spar with the nikto Boc, the leader of the Morgukai army the CIS were in the process of building. Luckily, she had just begun to call on the technique after a brief break, and instantly cut the connection, yet even so, she nearly fell comatose to the ground and had to be helped to her room, bleeding from her eyes and mouth.

On Dathomir, hundreds of witches had also been effected, the Force, for a brief moment, to riotous for them to connect to. At the same time, thousands of Nightsisters fell. Many lost their ability to use the Force or just died outright.

The most spectacular such example was Talzin, Matriarch of the united clans of Nightsisters. Her head exploded with the backwash as she too, had been meditating at the wrong time.

Her newest tool, Savage Oppress, survived, although his mind did not. He had been using the Dark Side to power his training at the time and now paid for it. He was instead turned into a vegetable like so many others.

And as for Dominus and Sidious...

It was certainly a good thing that when the Veil of the Dark Side collapsed, it was deep into night on Coruscant. Trying to keep his normal Chancellor persona intact in front of someone would have been impossible even for Sidious in the hours leading up to the Veil's destruction. Even better, Sidious was so paranoid he made professional paranoiacs look like well-adjusted, outgoing people. Instantly upon hanging up with Dominus, he had retreated to the Sith temple many, many kilometers below even the lowest current known level of the ecumenopolis that was Coruscant. There, not even Yoda or anyone else would be able to feel Sidious's use of the Dark Side or indeed anything that happened here.

This was an extremely good move on Sidious's part because between one minute and the next, as the Veil shattered, all Sidious felt was **pain** for several seconds. More pain than he had endured even during his training as a Sith, so much pain that Sidious screamed aloud, thrashing in his throne to the point that a few of the temple's cleaning droids attempted to run to his aid, before being blasted back as a wave of Dark Side energies flowed out from him.

Sidious had lost control of his Force powers, even to the extent of letting down his Force Stealth. If any Jedi had been anywhere nearby, they would've been able to sense him easily, a scar on the Force, a void of Dark Side energy. Thankfully, down here, where the original surface of the planet lay, buried under literal hundreds of levels of ferrocrete and other building material, there was no one so close. Even if there had been, the beasts living in the buried rubble would deal with them without Sidious needing to be involved at all.

The pain could have been born. Even as it flowed through his mind, Sidious fell back into old, well-trained mental exercises, shunting the pain aside, lowering the impact to his brain and body to the point that he only bled a little from the nose and only broken his finger on his throne by the time he had his pain-filled paroxysms under control. Even the loss of control wasn't deadly, thanks to Sidious's fears on that score already removing himself from anywhere near where the Jedi could sense him.

But, even as that pain faded, even as he began to regain some measure of control, visions carrying disturbing thoughts and fears came to him in a way that they had never done before. Sidious was no stranger to visions of course, but these he did not control, these he did not use the Dark Side to seek. Instead, they came to him, and they were not visions of the future. Rather, they were images from his past, brought up from memory, as the Dark Side seemed to rebel against him along with the rest of the Force for the first time, taking advantage of his weakness.

Suddenly, practically every decision he'd made since Harry Potter appeared on the scene was laid bare and proven to be a mistake. Every decision, every time he had tried to reinforce or adjust the Grand Plan, refusing to see that it had already lost its very foundation.

The youngling's escaping. The future of the Jedi assured, hidden away from any attempt to claim, or kill them.

The Order shifting away from being at the beck and call of the Senate. It's involvement with the GDL, which he had used as propaganda, refusing to accept that it had removed far too many Jedi from where he could follow their actions. The Jedi Council refusing to take overall command of the war effort, refusing to dispatch all of their Jedi to the front lines. Which meant that many Jedi would not be in the target box for the final move of the Great Plan.

The way the Jedi, Amidala and Potter had been able to get positive media. The efforts to turn the public against the Jedi being slowed down. Only in the Core World Sectors did The Great Plan's timeline for that continue on pace, and even then not everywhere. Indeed, even there it was mostly because of the existing anti-alien sentiment that was so entrenched on hundreds of planets there.

All the things Sidious had missed, hidden somehow because he did not realize the importance of Potter and the impact he had on the Order was brought to his attention again. And again, and again, the Dark Side nearly whipping Sidious's mind with his failures.

He tried to push through those visions from his past, tried to grasp at the Veil, tried to keep it together, but he couldn't. The mathematical formulas that the Order of Two had eventually been able to create were exact. With even one anchor missing, the Veil of the Dark Side could not sustain itself. It would have to be replaced, and Sidious had never learned the Sith Engineering that Darth Tenebrous had refined into the anchors of the Veil, and which he and Plagueis had built.

Worse, the Unifying Force was suddenly freed from the Dark Side, roiling and broiling with possibilities. Each time he reached for the Dark Side, he could feel it. Sidious could feel that the future was no longer his to control, and he hated it. Hated it, and feared it.

With those visions came knowledge, an understanding that was worse than the pain that had gone before it: that the Great Plan should have been discarded. It should have been modified, changed completely once Sidious realized that the Jedi were no longer complacent, no longer easy targets. Dominus should have been sacrificed, and Sidious should have started to plan not just for his own future, but for the future of the Order of Two.

The Sith should have retreated into the shadows, hidden, waited and bided their time still more.

Instead, Sidious had been so firm in his belief that he was the Chosen One, the Darth who would take their revenge that the very idea of retreating, of letting it to someone else had never even occurred to him.

Out of that swirling morass of thoughts and horrible realizations came the voices of Sith he had heard from the holocrons hidden in this very temple, including his own master, the man he had set up to be slain by Dooku.

*“You have failed! Failed to plan for the worst, failed to plan for the future of the Order of Two! Are you now going to turn back, returned to the ways of the Old Sith Order? The ways which have **never** succeeded before? How foolish have you become, apprentice!”* Plagueis hissed.

At that hated what word, Sidious howled, releasing a blast of sonic power that further finished destroying the nearby droids and began to impact the walls all around him, causing them to shiver and quake despite being backed up by solid ferrocrete and stone, crushed to a new hardness by how many millions of tons of building material crushed down on top of it.

As that scream faded, Sidious roared aloud, his voice still carrying some of that power within it. “No! There cannot be a retreat! We have done too much to weaken the Jedi, too much to draw power to my public position, to weaken the Republic itself! The Jedi will never be as complacent as...”

“But they are not complacent,” another voice intoned from out of the Dark Side, which was still being fueled by the ongoing war. Despite the Veil of the Dark Side being gone, the Living Force and the Light Side were certainly not shifting into the transcendent position.

This voice sounded almost insect-like, and Sidious instantly understood that this was the master Tenebrous, the one who had been the one to make the final leap into creating the Veil’s anchors. *“They have not been complacent for years, far longer than you ever anticipated. They made moves you did not calculate. Moves that you have failed to compensate for appropriately in your plans. And now the Veil is gone, and one of my anchors, my greatest achievements, destroyed!”*

“It does not matter! I am the Chosen One of the Dark Side. I am stronger than you all!” Sidious shrieked aloud once more. “I will recover from this. I will become the Emperor of the galaxy, and rule forever.”

“Is that fear in your voice? Is that arrogance as you plan for your own future and not the Sith as a whole?” This voice also Sidious knew. Darth Bane, the creator of the Order of Two, his voice dismissive even as it rumbled with fell power. *“You are in danger of falling to the same hubris that has doomed the Sith time and time again.”*

“No! The clones are in place, the latest batches have the modified control chips. I know precisely where every Jedi within the Republic is, I can have them all! **All!** I simply need to find out where the younglings have been spirited too, and even there, Dominus is driving for Corellia even as the Veil collapses. Yes, the Jedi are fighting. But they cannot escape the trap they do not see! The GDL and the younglings will both not survive Dominus’s campaign!”

With those words, Sidious once more wrapped himself in power, regaining full control of himself and his battered mind, letting only a smidgen of his self still connected to the greater Force beyond, as he began to try and recover some measure of control, healing the damage done to his brain and body with difficulty. The Dark Side did not lend itself to healing of any sort.

He could feel that Dominus had begun to pull power from the greater Dark Side into himself, but Sidious was willing to let that slide for now. He needed to do much the same, and Sidious also needed to think hard about what the destruction of the Veil would mean going forward.

The Jedi will be stronger, obviously, more able to see winces into the future. But the swirling eddies of the Unifying Force would not give them primacy over Sidious himself. *It will come down to which side is better capable of discerning the future, of planning for their enemies actions.*

As he realized that, Sidious smile through blood clenched teeth, a rictus thing like a maddened predator seeing that he still had a chance to down his prey. A smile that froze on his face as his master’s voice again reached him.

Sidious knew that it really was not his master’s voice. The Sith did not become one with the Force like the Jedi. They lacked the selflessness needed to become part of a greater whole. Even still, they could leave faint shadows, echoes of their personalities behind, mostly imbuing them into objects, or going further, tying their very spirits into those objects as a whole.

But this voice was none of that. It was simply Sidious’s own tortured mind, using the memory of his master’s voice to goad him in his moment of weakness. *“Oh, yes and that is something you have been doing so well of late my apprentice. You truly should have had*

Harry Potter killed regardless of the cost when he first came to your attention. Your attempts were lackluster and foolish. And now it is too late."

While inwardly agreeing, as he somehow knew that this, the destruction of the Veil of the Dark Side's anchor on Vjun, could be traced back to Potter, Sidious still banished that voice, those thoughts from his mind, scowling as he concentrated once more on the here and now. *I will find out how and I will make a point of diverting more effort to kill Potter, to drag the GDL through the mud. But I must recover from this, damn it!*

My control of the Senate is practically absolute. The Peace Party is, although it might not know it, marginalized, and seeded with several of my own agents now. Padme's leadership of it is still an issue, and she has proven remarkably hard to kill. Yet none of the other senators have anywhere near the same amount of influence, and with her not on Coruscant, I have been able to slip in several more emergency powers acts. Splitting them up and hiding them among other bills was the way to go. But I must do more to prepare for the war to come against the GDL. Perhaps I should think of ways to bring the confederacies war to a halt faster than the Grand Plan suggested, somehow fracture the Jedi further? Regardless of that, more anti-GDL propaganda is a must going forward.

Thankfully, I was able to influence who took over on Kamino after young Anakin and Windu were rotated back to the front. Darrus Jeht is not the type to look into the control chip. That aspect of the plan is still going forward, albeit a little ahead of schedule. The clones will turn on their Jedi generals when given the proper order, though. That is all that matters. Even with the Veil gone, the nature of the chip will keep the Jedi from seeing that threat coming thanks to its entirely mechanical nature until the clones begin to attack. Even better, the Jedi have begun to treat the clones as people, which will actually make the betrayal all the more devastating.

The problem, as it has been since this war began, is the Jedi with in the GDL, and those acting independently of the war. I must do something about those Jedi, or have the high command push for more Jedi to be involved on the front lines. How to justify that shift is going to be difficult, but a shift in the CIS's combat doctrine should do the trick. As for the ones acting independently... the bounty hunters guild will be a start. But there needs to be more done there... Hmm...

More and more, Sidious's thoughts were returning to what they had been. Yes, the loss of the Veil was a tremendous blow. Just like the younglings being spirited away. But the younglings, he was convinced, were being hidden in Corellia, even if none of his or Dominus's agents there had been able to verify it. The GDL's Specters were annoyingly efficient at finding enemy agents, and none more so than in Corellia where the GDL's own

government was coming together. *And wasn't that an amazing tool for anti-GDL propaganda?* He thought, using that moment to push himself away from his earlier uncertainties even further.

Yet those uncertainties lingered. And as dawn began to crest over Coruscant and Sidious knew the time had come for him to return to his normal persona, he decided suddenly to do a few more things. First, he sent out a series of coded instructions to his second apprentice. *Boc's Morgukai army will be very useful indeed, and must be turned to my hand directly rather than Dominus.*

Then, he sent another coded message, which, eventually, would reach Wayland. One of the many bolt holes of the Sith Order of Two, unlike Byss, which Sidious had begun to build as his throne world and refuge, Wayland had become the primary training and cloning center for the various Maul clones Sidious had used leading up to the war. Sidious had also made the decision to use it as the training center for a group of force sensitives and ex-Jedi that Charon had turned to the Dark Side prior to the start of the war.

Valin Draco, a, at the time old for the rank, padawan who had given into his anger once Charon had killed his master on an old assignment. Only his rage and seeming instinctual use of Sith Lightning, which he had become something of a master with since, had saved him. His intelligence and drive marked him out among the others, and he had become a true master of Juyo in the years since. Sidious had even pondered making him his first Grand Inquisitor after the war, when the final vestiges of the Jedi would need to be hunted down.

Ameesa Darys was another padawan, although she had followed her master, Jerec, into the Dark Side rather than falling into it. Reported 'dead' during a space battle right at the start of the war she but had made her way to Wayland. Even with Jerec dead, Sidious knew he could call on her. The woman's combat abilities were barely acceptable, but she could actually work well with others, a rarity among Dark Side users, and her research skills were second to none. Indeed, Sidious knew the girl had begun to research Sith Alchemy.

Like Ameesa, Boc Aseca's inclusion in the followers of the Dark Side on Wayland had to do with Jerec. A white-skinned Twi'lek, he had been a Force Sensitive born into slavery, falling to the Dark Side after being mistreated by his master in various ways. Jerec had 'rescued' him soon after being turned to Sidious's service. Ameesa was something of Boc's minder, whereas he was her defender, having slowly mastered a dual lightsaber form based on the Dark Side. His abilities with other techniques was negligible, but in combat he was a bestial opponent.

Cronal is another one who's direct combat abilities were not all that good, but his mastery of esoteric knowledge and Battle Meditation could be useful, especially with the Veil destroyed. The youngest of the group, Cronal had been trained at first by the Sorcerers of Rhand, before Plagueis and Sidious had slaughtered or merged the survivors into the Prophets of the Dark Side. Unlike the majority of them, who had been transferred to Biss, Cronal and two other Sorcerers, more combat capable but mentally deficient, had been sent to better educate Valin Draco and the other former Jedi in the Dark Side on Wayland shortly after the last Maul clone had been slain by Potter. Cronal is a nihilist of the first order, and will be useful if I decide to truly go scorched earth. I do hope he lived through the Veil's destruction. As it should be midafternoon none of them should have been meditating, but it will... honestly be amusing to if that was the case.

Shaking off his own somewhat nihilist thought on that score, Plagueis continued to plot. *Yes, bring them here to Coruscant in a few months, if need be. Until then, let them loose in the Republic as a unit to slay Consular Jedi busy there and perhaps even in the GDL. Then, if I have to, they will be closer and able to provide for my own escape should the worst happen.*

That thought annoyed Sidious, but he was clear-eyed enough now to understand that the Jedi might eventually discover him with the Veil no longer helping his Force Stealth. *I will have to rely more on the Ysalamiri, blast it!*

Shaking that thought off, he continued to think along those lines for a bit even as he changed clothing and made his way from the hidden temple, up, up, **up** to the hidden elevator that would deposit him on the surface, from where he would make his way to his office.

In the past, it has been the sheer size of the Republic more than the Jedi that has stopped any Sith from being able to openly conquer the galaxy. But even if the worst should happen and the Jedi become aware of my own presence, the clones will still take a horrible toll. The Inner Core will follow me, I have welded their senators and planetary governments to my person, and I can then add the Confederacy to my forces. The GDL alone will not be able to stand against that, even if I am unable to perform as full a purge of the Jedi Order as the Grand Plan called for. Perhaps a longer campaign against the Jedi would serve better. It would let me push hard on the propaganda side out in the open, and such violence would feed the Dark Side as the war is now.

Yet even as Sidious reached his personal throne room and then made his way up the ladder to the Chancellor's office, even as his mask fell firmly into place once more, Sidious never realized. He never acknowledged the flaw.

Never realized that in making these plans, he had already accepted the fact that the Grand Plan, the plan that he and the rule of tool to head created for so long, was in danger of failing. And that, for all the speed with which he began to put these plans in place, they spoke of fear. A fear that he truly was not the Chosen One as he thought himself.

Scene break

Dominus felt it too as he had in fact been meditating for this moment, but unlike Sidious, he was not the one directly connected to the Veil of the Dark Side and threw it to the Unifying Force. Rather, he simply rode the Veil as he would the Force in general. Thus, he did not feel the intense agony that Sidious did, nor the bottomless well of self-doubt and fear that rocked Sidious. And unlike every other Dark Side user who had been meditating at the time, Dominus was not only ready, but he also had the mental fortitude to get through the pain.

Once he got through the pain, the shock of the Veil dissipating, Dominus began to grab as much power from the Veil as he could, soaking in the Dark Side energies created by the war in a way that he had only been able to do tangentially before with Sidious being the one to control the Veil itself. He could feel the power filling him within seconds and in his sanctum, he sighed in near ecstasy as those powers flowed through his body. And as he did, through the tumult of the Veil shattering, Dominus felt the passing of two souls gleaming with the Force.

Them! He thought, sudden realization and fury filling him. He knew, Dominus just knew that these two souls about to join the Unifying Force were the ones responsible for the destruction of the Veil.

With a snarl, Dominus reached out through the Force, his mental projection almost like an all-encompassing hand of darkness reaching for these two souls, hoping to gather them in, to drain them away before they could join the Unifying Force. And yet, as he did, his attempt was repulsed. The souls blazed not with just the Force, but the Light Side of the Force.

Dominus's mind reeled with fresh, even more intense pain as for the first time in his existence, he came in contact with the mental version of Force Light. Those souls scalded his grip, sending his mind reeling back.

By the time Dominus recovered, they were gone, joined with the Unifying Force, and Dominus snarled in the confines of his meditation center. "Dark Side take their souls!"

Yet despite his fury, Dominus recovered after a few seconds. Pulling in still more power from the Dark Side, he began to once more delight in the energies now filling him in a way that Sidious would never have allowed him to. *I will become stronger from this, Sidious.*

Stronger than you would ever have allowed me. We are still allied against the Jedi, but I wonder in the years to come, which of us will become the greater? Which of us will become the Emperor of the galaxy as you envisioned...

It was still pulling in such energies when a call came through. That it did so at all was a measure of the importance of the message, and Dominus only took a brief moment to wish that it had been delivered in person so he could kill the messenger before answering the call. "Yes?" He asked brusquely, taking a certain delight in the fact that only his own logistics and strategy droid generals and aides could call him like this, thus removing the need to appear in his normal firm, but kind grandfatherly persona.

"Master, we are coming out of hyperspace. The dreadnought divisions we are scheduled to meet have already sent messages to us indicating their readiness to leave on your command."

"Good. I will be within the command center shortly."

True to his words, Dominus walked through the hatch leading into the public command center within moments. Gone was any vestiges of the Dark Side from his face. Even his eyes, which had been noticeably yellow when he looked into the refresher a moment ago, had returned to their normal color. His Jedi robes were firmly on his body, rather than the black he had been wearing, and he once more seemed the grim, determined, moral individual that the vast majority of the Confederacy believed him to be.

"Signal to the commanders of the dreadnoughts. I wish to speak to them," Dominus said politely to one of his men. "It is always good to get to know the individuals one will be going into battle after all."

These conversations went on for several hours as Dominus met with the commanders of the other dreadnoughts first individually, then in groups. This became a large conference call as Dominus opened the communications network to the Grand fleet pushing into the Corellia Sector that he would soon be commanding once he and these reinforcements reached it.

Throughout those discussions, even as he spoke and seemed to get to know his officers, Dominus was reaching out through the Dark Side, not just to the people he was currently talking to, but through them, the rest of their commands. Those who were actually living sentients, anyway.

By the time the last logistics support vessels arrived, the Grand Fleet's living command cadre would be molded into a perfect tool for his hand. And with the rest of the grand fleet made up of droids, they would act on his command in a way that no other fleet could ever

match. Corellia, and the younglings hidden there. Wherever they are, I will find them, even if I have to destroy Centerpoint Station itself. And without Corellia, the GDL will start to fall apart. It will be me, Dominus who ends the GDL as an entity, and who truly takes the next step forward in the Grand Plan!

Scene break

While the cracking of the Veil ranged from painful to catastrophic for those who used the Dark Side, the impact to the Jedi and other Force users wasn't nearly as bad. Many weaker Jedi unlucky enough to be meditating at the time fell unconscious, their brains unable to deal with the backlash. Yet unlike the Dark Side users, all of them would recover, waking to a universe very much changed from that which they had felt going to sleep.

Other, stronger minds felt the change and were able to ride it out. Without having been meditating at the time, many the galaxy over were able to reach out and feel the quakes going through the Unifying Force, the lack of the Veil after the initial shattering, which were like the small follow on shocks after a 9.0 earthquake. Then, even as those aftershocks showed no signs of abating, several thousand Jedi the galaxy over began to take advantage of that lack as, for the first time in many of their lives, the Force spoke to them without the lens of the Veil in the way.

For most, the changes this made were small and personal. Battle Precognition suddenly heightened to a far better level, or the ability to follow a suspect in a crime made easier through the Force. For others, however, time and place meant that, even such small things, could make for big changes to the future that the Sith had spent literal centuries attempting to create.

OOOOOOO

Jedi Knight Bultar Swan paused, blinking for a few moments as she stared around the wide thoroughfare she had been walking through for a moment. At first, she wasn't certain what had changed, the new, strange feeling almost hidden under her own mixed emotions and thoughts about being 'home' in Kuat. Of course, she wasn't actually on the planet, but that wasn't unusual. The vast majority of Kuati citizens rarely set foot on the planet unless they were there for vacation. The original ten Core World families who had financed and run the slowship which had colonized Kuat had been very clear that they wanted everything industrial to happen in orbit, in order to keep the planet itself pristine, shifting most of their population up there too when they eventually could.

And say what you want about the Ten and their hegemony, in that at least they succeeded, the young woman thought, reaching up a hand to run her fingers through her hair. Bultar wore it down to the top of her shoulders and had never bothered do anything with it beyond

that, making her stand out a bit among the local women. Most Kuati women either wore their hair cropped short to their head, or in long, ornate ponytails.

Shaking her head, Bultar continued on her walk, making certain her lightsaber was hidden within her cloak. *It isn't as if Kuat has ever been her home, really. But somehow the vagaries of the Order and the Force keep me coming back.*

Bultar had been found to be Force Sensitive when she was five or so, and her family had willingly given her up to the Jedi Order. Whether or not that was because they thought it would gain them some manner of prestige or an honest belief that as a Force user she could be better educated by the Jedi, Bultar didn't know, and did not care to speculate. The Order was her home, her family.

Yet she could not deny that being here, seeing Kuat in a room viewport, did not call out to her on some genetic level. Further, for one reason or another, Bultar had moved in and out of Kuat during her training as a padawan and then for her first few missions as a Jedi Knight somewhat frequently. To the point that she had become something of an expert on the star system, its politics and the social structure, which, to outsiders, often seemed labyrinthine.

Yet at present, Bultar was not here on any kind of mission. Rather, she and her team of Jedi, led by Master Brasoll Cael had been ordered off the front lines for rest and recuperation. They had been involved in a particularly ugly, grueling campaign against the Confederacy on a swamp world in the Mid Rim recently, and it had not gone well for the Republic, even if the four Jedi had survived.

In this case 'survived' did not mean that they all came out unscathed. Two of her fellow knights were injured in the battle, and worse Knight Empatojayos Brand was apparently allergic to bacta, something Bultar had not known prior to working with the man. That meant he would need to be fitted for cybernetic replacements to his leg, and his time at the frontline's would probably be over for the next year or so as he got used to them. Similarly, Jesso Tran, a Bothan, had been wounded in the final push of the separatists, and would need to get used to her new vat-grown eye for a while. Bultar had gotten out of the battle with a mild concussion that Master Cael had been able to heal relatively quickly, while he had lost a few fingers to a blaster bolt that ricocheted from behind him.

Jesso had invited Bultar down to the planet earlier that day, but Bultar had waved that off, feeling a little restless for some reason. Thus, she found herself here, simply walking through a portion of the construction yard. It was as if the Force was trying to tell her something, but Bultar couldn't quite figure out what, it was simply making her more and more restless.

Master Giiett would be chuckling at me, reminding me of how often I tried to walk off my problems instead of meditating, Bultar admitted, a faint smile coming to her face as she recalled her old Master. She had ascended to Knighthood a little over ten years ago, yet still his voice sometimes came back to her. *But at least here I'm not liable to stumble into a drug deal like I did on our first mission together.*

As the thought of her Master's jolly chuckle floated through her mind, a feeling that had been there for her entire time as a Jedi started to disappear. As that feeling hit her, Bultar froze mid step, nearly stumbling, before looking around quickly for a place to sit. *Okay, now I need to meditate.*

Glancing down the thoroughfare, Bultar found a small café that catered to the low scale workers that made this area their home. The people here were the common folk, the colonists that came after the colony was already established or brought in specifically after the Ten had begun to build the shipyards in orbit which would eventually make Kuat a galaxy-scale power. They were well off, and there was no real 'poor' class in Kuat as most worlds would understand the term, but that was simply because if a person or family could not support themselves, they were forced to leave. That, and the fact there was always work to be found for decent wages in the shipyards somewhere.

Pulling up her cloak, Bultar also pulled her Force Cloak over herself for a second. While her ability without did not make her disappear as it was said Master Tholme or his padawan could, it did keep people from paying her any particular attention. *It would not do for the public to see a Jedi be out of sorts after all* she mused to herself, settling into a chair, before pulling her legs up underneath her, as she began to meditate.

The moment she did, the Force began to fill her senses. Even as she began to send her presence out into the Force, a few things that she would not have otherwise noticed about two of the patrons in the café tried to clamor for her attention. Both of them were men, and they looked somewhat mismatched, especially in this sector of the construction yard. Both were dressed in the normal Kuat Drive Yards work suit, while one of the men's forearms was marked by the bands that showed he was a senior shipyard inspector.

This meant that he inspected the shipyards themselves rather than the ships they were building. Such men, normally low-ranking members of the Ten, were trained to look for issues with efficiency and dealing with any problems in terms of morale or personality clashes that was slowing work down. For this area, it was slightly high level rank, hence the observation that the two men were mismatched. At the man's feet was a bag that displayed the logo of a Kuati fast food restaurant.

The man the senior shipyard inspector was speaking to also wore the normal work suit, expect his boots very much did not fit that mold. Kaut was a very controlled society, especially here in the shipyards. If someone was off duty, they left their equipment behind or paid a fine, and it was actually a quite large one. Here, however, this man was wearing a set of boots with magnetized bottoms to them, the kind that you would use if you were working in zero G rather than sitting at a café, although the rest of his outfit didn't match for some reason. The tabs on his wrist said he was a computer tech, not a Zero-G worker of any kind.

Furthermore, while the man was human, his features did not quite match the Kuati norm. They were a little too swarthy, his eyes far too deep-set. This man was very much not a native, although his planet of origin was unknown to Bultar. He was the kind of man that even a low-ranking member of the Ten, like the inspector, would never meet for a social interaction like this.

Shaking those odd observations off, Bultar sank herself into the Force, meditating for a moment to figure out what had changed. It didn't take long for her to realize what that was, and a bright, wide smile appeared on her face as she realized what was missing. *The Veil is gone! I've heard rumors from other Jedi that there are places in the galaxy where it doesn't exist, but I know for certain Kuat isn't one of them. Amazing!*

Because it wasn't, Bultar became aware of the Force nudging her again, and she looked up in time for the two men who she had noted so many incongruities about before stand up. If she had not been watching, Bultar would not have realized that the nondescript bag underneath the table had transferred hands. The inspector had slyly kicked it over to the other man, who had picked it up as they both stood up. Now as they exited the café, they were walking in different directions.

Frowning, Bultar watched them go for moment, reaching out with the Force deliberately towards them now, wondering what was going on, why these two were important, and which of them she should follow as they split up. On that point, the Force was silent however, leaving it up to her to decide. Despite Bultar's ability to sense the Force no longer being limited by the Veil, that did not mean it would help her make every decision.

Thinking quickly, Bultar stood up, and, still with her Force Cloak around her, pulled out a communicator, dialing in a number. Soon, she got the representative of Kuat security systems that she and the other Jedi within the system had been told to liaise with. Or rather, the representative she had chosen for them, after realizing the first man wasn't competent or connected enough to be of any worth, a subtle test the Kuati always gave Jedi who operated in their system.

If the Jedi failed, their task became far, far harder and any respect given them went down precipitously. Such was a sign of the insular nature of the Ten. “What can I help you with, Knight Swan?”

Bultar quickly rattled off where she was as she exited the shop, pausing momentarily, reaching out with the Force again to pick up the trail of the man with the magnetic boots and the package. *If that is not something dangerous, I will eat my lightsaber.* “If you could have your security cameras trail a man with senior shipyard inspector ranks on his forearms? He just left my location heading sunward. He spoke with a strangely unusual individual. I will trail the individual in question, but I do not wish to lose either one of them.”

The other and went silent after a simple “Wait one.”

By the time the KSS rep spoke up again, Bultar was moving through the crowd, unseen by any thanks to her Force Cloak, trailing after the man with the bag, keeping him in her line of sight with some difficulty. Bultar was now certain that the man had some training in how to throw off a trail, as he had nearly lost her twice, even though Bultar doubted that he knew he was in fact being trailed in the first place.

“Our security cameras are good, Knight Swan, but if you hadn’t mentioned the tabs we wouldn’t have been able to discover the man. I...” The representative paused, his voice trailing off before seemed to speak to someone else rather than Bultar. “You’re sure? Run it again.”

Bultar remained silent as she followed her own quarry, and soon, the representative spoke up once more. “Master Jedi, that is a representative of house Depon, the, um, the heir in point of fact. Why is he down there slumming with the common workers? And why in the world did he have a fake mustache and scar?” the man muttered, showing the habitual disdain for the common man the members of the Ten showed occasionally.

“That I do not know. I would simply like for you to follow him please.”

The representative hesitated. While he himself was also part of one of the Ten Houses, he needed to be to get such a cushy position as this, but that didn’t mean that he was high enough in rank to avoid the social and political fallout if it came out that he had been using Kuat security systems resources to spy on the air of another house. Indeed, House Depon might have him fired from his position easily. “Master Jedi, I, that would be a gross invasion of privacy. Unless you think he is doing something truly illegal...”

“He passed a mysterious bag to the man I am currently trailing. I do not know what’s in it, but the man’s making his way to one of the local yards at present,” Bultar said. “If that is

not enough, you may blame me. Tell your superiors if they complain that I ordered you to keep surveillance going. Something is going on here.”

The man was almost pitifully happy for that shield, and instantly obeyed. He tracked the man through the next few sectors, and then to a personal hover car, which took him even further away from the meeting sight, heading towards House Depon territory.

Meanwhile, Bultar followed her own target, thinking about what she knew of the current power structure. House Depon was one of the less important families, if the term could be used for a member of the Ten. It had been almost eclipsed by the fame and connections House Andrim had won itself from it's role in arming the clone armies. Depon's matriarch was old, and prone to health issues. *I don't know anything about her heir. But there was a rumor last time I was here that he was in charge of KSS's exterior espionage division.*
Hmm...

Around twenty minutes passed as she trailed the man. He ducked into an alleyway, where she watched him switch out his outfit to match the boots. Instead of the computer tech outfit he'd worn, the new outfit had the various connecting strips and marks for a welder who was expected to work in Zero-G. *Ahh, the mystery of the boots is solved.*

Watching as he clocked in to join a work team, and then, with the package still beside him, retrieved an EVA suit. None of the others nearby seemed to care about the package at his feet, not even noticing as the man slowly reached inside. Once he had his EVA suit on, he began surreptitiously pull out items that he placed in pouches around the EVA suit. *I can't see what they are, drat it. Still, I have to think they could be some kind of IED. Now, where is he going to emplace them?*

When the man turned and headed for the airlock that would carry him and the rest of the work gang outside, Bultar used the Force to unlock the door to a crew locker, pulling out the EVA suit within and quickly slipping it on, clamping her lightsaber to the outside of it. It wasn't exactly comfortable without all the connections between her own clothing and the suit and it took her a few seconds to connect the communicator of the suit to the one she had already been using. But soon, she was already out and trailing after the others, still keeping people from noticing her with the Force.

For more than two hour, she watched as the man worked on what looked like a large luxury yacht. Even in times of war, Kuat Drive Yards had enough dockyard space to keep on meeting some of its civilian contracts. This one though, when she asked, was going to be registered right here in Kuat, to the Kuat of Kuat himself. It was to to be used as a communal gathering point for the Ten houses, replacing the existing yacht as its shields and armor

weren't all that very good. In a time of war, with assassinations and so forth more likely, it had been deemed recently that this was not a state of affairs could be allowed to continue.

When the representative for Kuat security systems realized that after looking up the yard number, he had disappeared. "Keep an eye on that man, Master Jedi. I'll be sending a team of forensic specialists out to meet you. Do you think you can take him down now?"

"Radio the work team leader, and I will do so," Bultar agreed. *The stunning technique is so nice in situations like this.* Before the man even realized anything was going on, a reddish beam hit him in the back, and he slumped forwards, held upright by his magnetized boots, even as the rest of his body swayed dramatically in the zero G environment.

This obviously caught the attention of the other workers, who all turned, raising makeshift weapons, before being shouted back down by their team leader. "The timing of that could've been better, Master Jedi," the man drawled, before moving over to the unconscious man. "Will you require help to get them back inside?"

Bultar answered in the negative. With a jerk of the Force, the man's boots were pulled off the yacht's hull, and he began to float behind her as she turned, thanking the team leader for his politeness before heading back the way she came to the interior hatch.

Hours later, Master Cael and Bultar stood in the observation room of an interrogation chamber, while one of the locals questioned the man, dumping ten thermal detonators he had been installing around the yacht and the dockyard it was being constructed in. "Tell us who ordered this, or it will go very poorly for you. When it comes to threats to the Ten, there are very few laws that pertain to the rights of the accused on our books..."

"Is that actually true?" The older Jedi Master asked Bultar, a faint sneer on his face. "Why am I not surprised Kuat doesn't care about the freedom of its people?"

"Yes, it is, just one of the many little idiosyncrasies in Kuat. Besides, those explosives were big enough to do the one thing that no one in Kuati is ever going to be happy about. They would've damaged the shipyards. The shipyard rings are the next best thing to sacrosanct here. It would be like someone trying to damage Centerpoint Station," Bultar teased the Corellian, before asking, "Do you think you can handle the interrogation?"

"Be serious. With the Force no longer clouded by the Veil, discerning truth from fiction will be simple enough. If they can get him to talk at all, I'll know the truth," the older man stated. His smile, the same smile Bultar knew she was wearing, faded for a moment. "Just remember, whatever this is about, I'll be leaving within the hour to head back to Corellia. I might have been helping the Republic side of things, but I'm still a Green Jedi, and a recall order has gone out for all of us not on the front lines."

Bultar frowned a little with that, being of two minds about the Green Jedi in general, and the idea of divided loyalties more so. But she still nodded. So long as the Republic and the Galactic Defense League were allied, she saw no problem with the Jedi crossing borders like that. “Of course. Just leave me a copy of whatever you discover. I need to get to my own, far more polite interrogation.”

With that, Bultar left, and soon, she was nearly halfway around the world from where that interrogation was ongoing, taking part in another conversation. The word of the man she captured would not be enough to arrest the honor of the heir of one of the Ten Houses. The man needed to incriminate himself, even with the evidence of the two meeting that Bultar had. Even if they could trace the explosive devices the man had been using straight back to the heir in question. Such was the power of nepotism here in Kuat. Regardless, Bultar was on the case, and would not be leaving anytime soon until she nailed the man and whoever had helped him come up with the scheme.

In another galaxy, this would be but one of several small assassinations and attacks, moves that would be blamed on the Confederacy, that Chancellor Palpatine would have used to place his own puppets in command of Kuat and its massive, and thus massively important, shipyards. It would further undermine the more patriotic elements of Kuat, as well as those who accepted and respected the Jedi in general, leaving in their place people who were far more centrist in their opinions, and far more easily swayed.

Thanks to the shattering of the Veil, this little plot would not succeed, creating reverberations to not only the original grand plan, but to Sidious’s latest changes to those plans. Ripples that Sidious himself would not be aware of for quite some time. All because Sidious had, even after recovering from his fury and wrath, forgotten a very simple thing.

He had sent out orders, made plans, and had largely reacted as best he could to the loss of the Veil, but Sidious had neglected to order the Sith temple’s central computer to bring online a new tactical and strategic droid to help him keep abreast of things. And because of that, no such robot was available to follow up on little plans like this. It was an oversight that would not occur to him for another twenty-four hours.

In other areas, the threat wasn’t to Sidious’s plans. Rather, of a more general nature to the future that any Sith would have hoped to see.

Scene break

The CIS blockade of Rendili was a thing of give and take. Both sides had minefields and large fleets. The CIS’s longer lines of supply were constantly under harassment, weakening their various positions throughout the sector, although they had too many capital ships for the Rendili Fleet, which lacked the dreadnaughts needed to match the Confederacy, to truly

break the blockade. The fixed defenses of Rendili were too much for the CIS to overcome without horrendous losses, and the shipyards could easily repair even the worst damages quickly, however, and the Rendili defenders could run the blockade regularly.

Thus, the CIS occasionally tried to push the blockade deeper into the system. This would force the defenders out to meet them fleet to fleet before retreating. These clashes were brutal, but rarely lasted long as the Rendili defense fleet would retreat, but the CIS would have been forced to use so many of their ships in that one clash that more zones around the system were freed, letting the Rendili defenders in and out.

Another attempt by the CIS to change this status quo was going on as the Veil shattered.

Sitting in her observation chair aboard the flagship of the Rendili defense fleet, Shaak reeled, her eyes widening as the Force shivered, quaked and changed. The Veil, the patina of Dark Side energies that had so effectively reduced to the Jedi's ability to use the Force to see the future or even the present disappeared to her senses, like gas carried off by an eddy of wind.

Shaak rode that wind, almost completely disconnected from her physical body, acting like a leaf on the wind almost. She used the Force, yet was not part of it, not searching out anything, simply going with the flow in a way that she had learned from discussing meditation with Master Fay and Harry Potter. However, even as the initial reverberations of the Veil shattered, and the Force became clearer to her than it had ever been in her life, that did not mean that the Unifying Force settled down into a new permanent pattern. Rather, it was entirely in flux, Shaak realized.

However... the present wasn't so much and Shaak Ti also realized that. Moreover, with the Force becoming so much clearer to her, she could discern a pattern in the attacking forces. *Indeed, I can sense the overriding plan with this assault. The CIS means to try and mousetrap us.*

"Admiral," Shaak Ti stated, getting the admiral's attention for a moment.

Admiral Azar Leneli, commander of the Rendili Defense Fleet looked over at her, relieved to realize that whatever strange fugue had gripped the togrotan Jedi had passed. "What is it? Is there some danger that you were experiencing through the Force?" By this time, Azar, like the rest of his flag bridge was aware of the Jedi's ability to discern patterns in things, but that didn't mean that any of them really had any greater understanding of how that sort of insight worked.

"Yes and no. There is going to be an attempt to divert our attention to the right lower and upper flanks of the battlefield. When we move to address that, a new force will jump in

from hyperspace on our left flank. Do not fall for the feint,” Shaak said, closing her eyes momentarily at the even as she spoke, reaching out to the Force to make certain the the feeling was accurate.

Fighting the Confederacy was quite difficult when it came to predicting the future like that, because robots and other mechanical devices didn’t truly have as big a force presence as living creatures. But with the Veil no longer blocking her senses she could still feel the minds of the commanding officers on the capital ships that were about to jump out of hyperspace. *They must have been planning this attack for weeks in order to get the jump this accurate.*

“I sense four ships, large ones. And one mind in particular on those ships feels particularly important in the Force. In fact, I think that that is the real commander of this push. A new Commodore that’s recently been added to the local Confederacy forces, perhaps? Or they have gone through a change of command? When they are engaged, we should do our utmost to remove such a hard charging individual from the Confederacy ranks.”

While Shaak didn’t seem at all happy about talking about the destruction of living sentients, the admiral was all for it and happy for the warning, relaying orders quickly. Soon, four of the new Confederacy dreadnoughts, of which there were already ten scattered across the battlefield pushing forward with the Munificent classes while the Lucrehulks held back, appeared.

As they did, his own reserves, jumped them the moment they appeared rather than continuing vectoring towards the embattled flanks. Those flanks were in danger of being turned, but the four dreadnoughts were caught badly out of position and with no other vessel near enough hto support them. They had come in from hyperspace at an angle that should’ve allowed them to get behind a portion of his left battle line, where their own broadsides could blast the poorly defended aft of his cruisers.

Yet they now were swarmed by smaller vessels. First, the Rendili-made bombers raced in. While the GDL hadn’t yet built such in large enough quantities to be used everywhere, on the defensive like this, in Rendili itself, the locals had enough shipyard space to build whole **wings** of them quickly, and had. Now, those bombers released their proton torpedoes while their heavier shields allowed them to survive long enough to turn away before the dreadnoughts launched their combat air patrol. The lack of a hyperspace capable starfighter hurt these dreadnoughts, and two of them reeled, their shields already battered even before the heavy cruisers that made up most of Rendili’s fleet and Arrows poured in.

Twice more Master Shaak raised her voice to give suggestions, but when the first of the newly arrived dreadnoughts exploded, most of the fight seemed to go out of the

Confederacy's invading fleet. Leaving behind the vultures and gunboats, the rest of the Confederacy forces began to pull back, retreating into hyperspace.

The battle had gone remarkably well for the Rendili forces. Normally in a clash this far out from the fixed defenses of Rendili itself, they would've been forced to retreat eventually lest they take severe losses to their ship component. But the bombers had proven remarkably effective admittedly against targets without a CAP and had easily turned the tide thanks to Shaak Ti's warning.

The admiral thanked her, and Shaak shook her head, chuckling quietly. The noise and the bright smile that accompanied it caused the admiral, a married man, to flush a little, while several of his nearby officers gaped. That smile seems to pair away a significant portion of Master Shaak's normal Jedi aloofness, making all of them realize she was actually quite an attractive example of her race. "You are very welcome. But if you do not mind, I am going to retreat to my quarters to meditate for a time. The nature of the Force itself has changed. The future is in flux to a degree that I have never seen before."

The admiral frowned a little. "That, that doesn't sound good Master Ti."

"I suppose it would not come if you do not understand the context. For a very long time, the Jedi's ability to see the future, indeed, to even see the present, has been diminished by the Dark Side. Now, that presence has been broken, although, as I said, the Force itself seems to be entirely in flux. Nothing is certain except our own footing at the moment, while predicting the future will be even tougher, in a way, as it will be up to individual Jedi to understand what they are seeing, rather than to actually see anything in the first place."

"That still sounds awfully difficult," the admiral opined, blinking as he tried to make sense of all of this superstitious mumbo-jumbo.

"Oh it will be. Undoubtedly. But for my part, I think it's quite exhilarating!" Shaak laughed again, louder this time, shaking her head from side to side as she stood up, heading to her quarters.

For a moment, the flag officers watched her go, faint flushes on many of their faces. Seeing a Jedi as a woman wasn't something most of them had ever done before, but with that laugh and smile it had hit home like a hammer between the eyes.

Azar, however shook his head, and called them back to order quickly. Moments later, one of his ECM specialists walked over to them. "Sir, we think we've figured out who was in command of that force, and who is on the dreadnoughts that Master Shaak will was so clear needed to be destroyed."

“Oh? You’re going to tell me it was a commander of some repute aren’t you? The Confederacy’s blockade has recently been far more ably led,” the admiral guessed.

“Yes, sir. He was recently appointed to the post, Admiral Whorm Loathsom. He was an up-and-coming officer recently appointed the rank, but he had been part of several victories against the Republic before this.”

“Well now, isn’t that nice,” the admiral smirked. “And you’re certain we got him?”

“Yes, sir. The ship he was on exploded before their escape pods could launch. If he was really on that ship, he’s dead now.”

“Send that information to GDL high command, then to the Republic High Command with our compliments,” the admiral ordered before musing aloud, “I wonder if the Force can allow our Jedi allies to headhunt like that in the future. It’s a viable tactic in war after all,”

Shaak was already in her quarters by this point, a smile still on her face as she meditated on the future. The far future, rather than the now. The Unifying Force was still in flux, and reaching to it rather than the Living Force, the now rather than the future, was much more difficult. And yet, like other Jedi the galaxy over, she found that she could still do so to a great degree that had previously been blocked to her entirely.

For a time, she got the impression of traveling. It was clear that she was being called away, something that surprised Shaak, as before this, whatever faint touch of the future she’d been able to glean had told her to stay right where she was. But now, that had changed. Shaak saw herself traveling, meeting with other Force users, and they were not all Jedi.

Shaak saw herself standing on a planet she recognized from her history texts as Dathomir, addressing a host of women her own age or younger. Then she was on Dorin, the Kel Dor homeworld speaking to a Baran Do Sage, listening to him intently, as if she was a padawan again. This was replaced by a far less welcome image of an argument with a member of the Brotherhood of the Beatific Countenance, the sight of which caused Shaak to twitch just a little bit. The Jedi did not worship the Force and tended to somewhat dislike religious organizations that professed to do so, especially ones that were so very arrogant about it as the Brotherhood of the Beatific Countenance at times were. *Oh dear.*

This was followed by a far more welcome set of images, of her dueling another person with a smile on her face, someone who was fighting back against Shaak’s lightsaber with just his forearms and fists, although they were covered in gauntlets. He seemed to be keeping up with her Battle Precognition, and Shaak realized with a start that this was another image of someone who followed the Force in a different way than the Jedi Order. *Matukai, I believe.*

This was instantly followed by an image of an entirely different sort of meeting, with her sitting in meditation pose across from several others of various ages, all of them wearing the robes of the Bardotta. This sect of Force users was one that the Jedi Order had a much better relationship with than the Matukai, although she knew that there were still elements of friction. The Bardotta were pacifists of the highest order, who emphasized creating harmony with the Force nature and living sentients wherever they went.

That would have been fine on it's own, but the Bardotta disdained the idea of the Jedi taking in younglings so young, and in fact taking them from their families at all. Even if the Jedi order always got permission to do so, the Bardotta believed that the Order was wrong to do so, and that training in the Force should rather start after puberty, when the mind and personality of the trainees were fully formed. Needless to say, that wasn't exactly a popular opinion among the Jedi, and worse, that was, in part, why they were such a small sect. Although there had been times when one Sage of the Bardotta joined the Order or vice versa.

At the moment however, a quixotic thought occurred to Master Shaak. *I wonder if Master Fay ever became one of them? Or, knowing how old she is, and that the Bardotta have only been around six or seven hundred years, I wonder if she actually started that sect and never realized it? That would be quite funny, if so.*

Several other images followed, but the general gist was clear. The Force was urging her to travel, to meet with other various force using sects. In part, this was to help hunt down the Sith. But that was not the whole, the whole did not become clear until the final image. An image of a web, of interconnected filaments creating a whole. Then an image of herself, accompanied by a young Zabrak woman of padawan age. They were standing in front of several other, even younger students, on a planet she did not recognize. Nearby, two other trainers waited, each of them dressed in a different fashion, but clearly representing the sects she had met.

Whatever the Force wanted her for in the present, it was very clear. In the future, Master Shaak was to be a teacher. "All part of a whole, but not an overly organized one like the Order. Rather, more like a loosely organized federation, sharing knowledge and resources?"

Shaak Ti wasn't certain if that was the best analogy to what she was feeling, but it was close. Regardless, smiled, then began to laugh, feeling younger and better than she had in years. "Well... I find that quite grand!"

Scene break

At other times, the Jedi almost seemed innocuous. At first, anyway.

Obi-Wan Kenobi frowned, staring to one side down a hallway in the prison he and his team had assaulted. Set deep into the planet Sarkhai's largest mountain range, it had been made to hold anyone the local droid general felt had valuable information. Considering that the Mid-Rim planet, a Republic world, was well known for its scientists and military hardware, that was a large list.

They had already freed all the prisoners Republic Intelligence said were here, but for some reason, the Force was now telling him that there was still more to discover. *And with the Veil gone and how the Force has been helping us more than I can ever remember it doing all day, I am inclined to follow this feeling.* "Master Lotto, Kristen, continue on with our targets. Master Sorrell, how are things looking outside?"

"We're still clear. The local rebellion is still giving the Confederacy forces a hard time of it. These forests are not doing nice things to the droid forces," The master marksman answered easily, telling something that Obi-Wan and the others, who had arrived here several weeks ago had already learned. If the CIS had expected a planet of loggers and researchers to be easy prey, the numerous divisions of droids they'd been forced to bring in since their occupation had Doesn't look like the prison got out any warnings. I've been watching the regular prisoners steam past me for the last five minutes,"

"Good. I might be a bit longer." With that, Obi-Wan, wondering once more why he had somehow become the leader of his little team, headed down the hallway. Soon, he was in an area of the prison that was almost entirely empty, a VIP area of some kind, where the prisoners were, ostensibly, better treated. Considering the corpses in the rooms he was passing through, however, that treatment seemed to come to an abrupt end more often than not.

At this point, even as the Force drove him forward, automated defenses a large profusion of them, reacted to his presence. "Drat. I thought we had disabled all the fixed defenses in here with that little virus Kristen created..." Obi-Wan mused as his lightsaber came up in a defensive position. Then two more guns popped up behind him. "Ah.. That is a little more serious."

For the next few moments, he grunted and twisted, lightsaber flashing as he was forced to defend himself from three directions at once, ahead, behind and directly above. Luckily, the guns above him were in lightsaber range, and died within seconds. The other two however were quite hard to deal with thanks to their rate of fire and how they were traversing from side to side and up and down, filling the hallway with blaster bolts.

However, eventually Obi-Wan's mastery of Soresu came through. One of the guns fell silent behind him, and then a hasty Force Grab pulled the remaining gun's barrel up behind him,

letting Obi-Wan concentrate on the two firing from further along the hall. He was able to deflect a few bolts back at both within seconds. Turning, Obi-Wan walked back to the still intact gun and destroyed it with a downward sweep of his lightsaber.

“E, excuse me, is someone there?” a querulous voice intoned, turning Obi-Wan back around in the direction the Force had been calling him toward. “I heard so much blaster fire...”

“Yes, there is someone here. My name is Obi-Wan Kenobi, Jedi Knight,” Obi-Wan said, moving forward again. “Keep talking so I can locate your cell, please.”

The man did so, his voice thick with relief. “A Jedi, oh praise be! I, I had about given up hope. I, I wasn’t going to give them anything, nothing about my discovery. I, but the, the electro-torture, it was... g, getting bad. But I refused, I gave them nothing. Nothing, not my secret, not the information they were actually demanding, no, but, but there, hah, there was nothing to tell them!”

Obi-Wan soon found himself standing in front of another jail door, whereupon he stated, “Back away from the the door, please.” The voice did so, and once he felt the sentient on the other side was clear, Obi-Wan cut the door out of its frame, tossing it aside with a brush of the Force.

Inside, Obi-Wan saw a somewhat nice room, if you discounted the torture equipment next to the bed, the smell, and the lack of windows. There was a desk, even a computer, along with a bookshelf, if one somewhat denuded of books.

In the center of this largess, an elderly Twi’lek stood. He had pale orange skin, sunken eyes, and burn marks on his fingers, palms, and even his lekku, a sight that had Obi-Wan wincing, knowing how badly that would have hurt. The elderly man also stooped badly, but his clothing at least was clean, and he stared back at Obi-Wan with delight and relief. “I, I thank you, Master Jedi. I, my name is Atreb’doole. Thank you for the rescue. Dare I ask if it comes with a way off-world?”

“Indeed it does. Come, we need to hurry. One of my team members is rigging this place to blow, and, well, let us just say that I have concerns about her enjoyment of such things,” Obi-Wan answered, moving forward to lend his shoulder to the old man.

“Th, thank you,” Atreb’doole stated. “I, I never, I feared I would never be able to see my family again. But I would never give up my research or that of the team I was a part of, never!”

Obi-Wan let the man talk as he helped him through the empty prison, full of deactivated droids and cannons alike. Once the prison had lost communications with the ships in

orbit, Kristen's virus had overridden the local datanet, shutting everything down. As he walked, he listened intently, wondering why the Force had sent him to this man. *I am all for saving a life, but he wasn't in the records of this place, or the information Republic Intelligence had of this place.*

The team Atreb'doole was on, though, had been. A weapons thinktank that had been attempting to build a new type of energy weapon, they had been supposed dead or turned. Apparently, given how Atreb'doole whispered the names of most of the dead in the jail cells they passed, that was all too accurate.

"All, all this, all this because they thought we had figured out how to create quantum beams, I, I don't know if that is sad or horrific," Atreb'doole nearly whimpered. "I, I knew that our lab chief should never have falsified that report! The droids, they'd gained access to our company's computers, found that report. And believed it over our words..."

"Such is the way of droids, at times. I am sorry for your loss, sir," Obi-Wan stated.

"I... thank you. But, you, you don't understand. I... our teams research never went anywhere. But you see, mine did!" Atreb'doole whispered, his voice dropping so low that even half-carrying the man along, Obi-Wan had difficulty hearing him. "I, I must tell you, when we are safe. It could be revolutionary!"

"Very well, old one, but for now, conserve your strength," Obi-Wan suggested.

Soon, Obi-Wan, his charge, and his team were aboard a small, extremely fast freighter zooming up out of the atmosphere. The CIS invasion force lacked enough capital ships to have them everywhere, but they did come under heavy assault from Vulures almost as soon as they rose into the air.

However Master Sowell was not just a expert marksman. He was also expert at using the Force to navigate hyperspace jumps. Even when inside a gravity well. The moment they reached space, he hit the jump button, and they were gone, reappearing in the outer edge of the system.

The CIS fleet in orbit over Sarkhai sent a dozen gunboats and two frigates out after them along with a wing of Vulures. But by the time they arrived, the jail had exploded, and the ship's engines had recovered enough to jump them out of the system.

Hours later, Obi-Wan found himself sitting in a chair across from the bed Atreb'doole lay out in, a IV sunk into his arm, and burn cream covering his body, making him look almost sickly given the pale green of the cream on his orange body. Yet the look of sheer relief Atreb'doole had worn when his lekku had been slathered with the cream was telling.

At the moment, however, Obi-Wan had no mind to pay to the elderly twi'lek's odd appearance. "I'm sorry, could you run that by me again. I'm not a scientist, I'm afraid."

Moments later, he had retrieved Kristen, who after listening to Atreb'doole looked as if she was having an epiphany. "I, you wouldn't happen to remember the mathematics of that, would you? This... this could be an amazing breakthrough!"

"So you're saying this Quantum Entanglement communication system could be viable?" Obi-Wan asked.

"Viable!? If it works, if he's got the match right and we can finally create entangled particles, then it will change the galaxy!" Kristen nearly shouted. "We, we have to tell the Order about this!"

Scene break

To those who had known them, who had called Mak and Kass friends, there was more to feel in the moments after Vjun's destruction. As the Veil collapsed, Harry, Aayla, Samantha, and several of their other friends and teachers, including Master Yoda, felt it. They felt the passage of Mak and Kass, felt them passing on into the Force even as the Force itself became clearer to the Jedi the galaxy over.

Harry, Padme, and the others had been just about to take a shuttle over to the Tyrant's Bane. The ships repairs were about as complete as they could be made here in the Polith system, and Padme was due on Tanaab for the conference there soon. It had been postponed due to the locals knowing what happened here, but Padme wasn't willing to let them postpone it indefinitely just to wait upon her arrival.

Watching her friends stumble, Padme hastily raised a hand, grabbing Samantha's shoulder, then Aayla's, while Harry was too far away for her to grab and she didn't have a third hand. Thankfully, he had been talking about spices to Mala, who instantly wrapped a powerful, if furry, arm around him.

Looking behind her quickly to ask for help from Anakin and Ahsoka, he saw both of them had also stumbled, as had Alice. However, unlike Zule, and Aayla, whose faces she could see currently, both of the other Force users looked... excited? Zule and Aayla certainly did not. Indeed, both of them looked badly shaken, sadness etching their features. "Everyone, what's wrong? Is there some danger you're all feeling to the Force coming our way?" *Although that wouldn't explain Ahsoka and Anakin's expressions. Even though they both seem to enjoy combat, that doesn't seem to be in character.*

"No..." Aayla said, her voice echoing the sadness and growing grief that Padme could see in her and Zule's eyes for a brief moment before Aayla closed her eyes, raising her hands to

her chest and bowing her head for a brief moment. When her eyes opened, there was still sadness there, but it wasn't nearly as powerful as it had been a moment ago. Instead, replaced with something like grim pride. "Mak and Kass did it. They found what they were seeking, and destroyed it."

"The Veil, the miasma of the Dark Side that's always been there as far back as I remember, its gone!" Anakin exclaimed in a whisper, while Ahsoka nodded.

"I can feel it too. It's like, like if you're used to drinking dirty water most of the time, only to finally get a drink of clear water. Um, it, it the Force still doesn't feel as warm or as nice as it does in um... you know," Ahsoka stated, looking around them for a moment, unwilling to mention the Ruusan sector here, let alone Master Fay. "But it's way better than it was even a few minutes ago. I..." Ahsoka fell silent, glancing at Harry and Aayla, her face shifting as Anakin also realize why the others were so shaken.

Padme was no idiot. She instantly realized that whatever Mak and Kass had done had cost them their lives, and she sighed, following Aayla's gesture as Harry finally turned showing the same sadness as Aayla and Zule had done. "May the Force accept them as its own."

Of the group who called Mak and Kass friends, Harry seemed to be dealing with it best. He hadn't spent years with them in the temple like Zule and Aayla. In their shared mindscape, Harry helped soothe Aayla, helping her deal with her grief and sorrow. Zule, on the other hand, lacked that instant help, and even as she called on her Jedi training to help deal with her sudden grief, Padme could tell it was costing her.

Glancing around them, Padme moved around Aayla before pulling Samantha into a sideways hug. They were not exactly in a public area, this hanger bay having been turned over to the military and government after the civilians had been moved back up off Thyferra, but there were still soldiers around. Most were from the 501st with a few scattered locals working on some of the shuttles and starfighters around the bay.

And there's also Anakin to consider. As much as he has accepted my and Zule's relationship, I certainly don't want to hint that there's more going on than that.

Anakin was due to leave with the 501st soon after the Tyrant's Bane did. First, he would escort the recently arrived Master Tiin to Fondor. From there, he would go on to the temple with the two holocrons they discovered among Master Jerrec's things to the temple. At which point, Anakin and the 501st, who would be taking command of a new fleet of ships being built in Fondor's shipyards, would be rotated back out to the front lines, although where they would be precisely going had not yet been determined.

"I am sorry for your loss, I did not know them nearly as well as you all did, but even so I will mourn their passage," Padme said, hugging her public girlfriend for a moment, as Samantha did the same back.

After a few moments, Zule gathered herself once more, releasing her grief into the Force and not letting it fester, instead celebrating the memories she had with her friend, as Harry and Aayla were doing in their shared mental realm. "They are one with the Force, and they did succeed," the half-Falleen stated firmly, although she did not remove her arm from around Padme's waist. "The Veil is shattered, like a thin plane of dark glass being removed from our site! I..." She looked over at the other Jedi, her face firming. "We need to take advantage of this I think."

"I feel as if there'll be thousands of other Jedi are doing much the same, but yes," Harry agreed soberly. "The Veil may reform, although I doubt that whoever set it up will be able to drain as much power from the Dark Side as they were before. Yet the war is still a source of Dark Side energies. Best to meditate and see what we can get out of it now."

"I feel as if you Jedi all need to sit down and discuss the use of metaphors. Keep to a handful between the whole lot of you, please. Otherwise you lose the rest of us all too easily," Padme drawled, hoping to further lighten the mood.

It worked, as Harry rolled his eyes and Zule chuckled even as they all turned back, heading over to the shuttle. "Oh please. Asking a Jedi to not use metaphors when describing the Force is like asking a politician to be brief when making a speech."

"Or a bureaucrat not make paperwork for the sake of it," Aayla quipped while Padme huffed, trying to look affronted at Harry's words and failing.

"Oh, god, tell me about it!" Anakin groaned.

"You think you've got it bad? I've been the one doing a lot of the paperwork for the parts and supplies the Bane's freaking eaten since repairs began!" Ahsoka exclaimed, waving her arms wildly. "I can't believe you and the other Knights foisted it off on me, Master Secura."

At this point it had become pretty common knowledge that Ahsoka was learning from both Aayla and Harry. Thus her using the term master wasn't as sardonic as it would have appeared otherwise.

Looking at the Jedi, Padme realized that all of her friends were feeling far more upbeat despite the passage of Mak and Kass than they had been in days. *But of course, why wouldn't they be?* She thought, half wonderingly and half in amusement as she put together what she had learned from Harry and Aayla about the Veil's effects up to this point. *The future is now open to them again. In a way that the Jedi order has not seen in decades.*

"I think I'll retreat to my own quarters and meditate as well," Anakin stated after the chuckles faded. He held out her hand before bowing grandly over Padme's, then raising it in farewell to the other Jedi. "Be well you all, and may the Force be with you."

Harry nodded back, taking in the young man for a moment, answering in the rote response, before adding, "And always be leery of shadows, Anakin."

To that, Anakin could only nod again, before turning around, and making his way back out of the landing area.

Soon, Harry and the others reached the small shuttle that would take them over to the Bane, although Padme didn't like the semi-morose air that had come back to her lovers. *That just won't do. I know they should be left alone to deal with their grief, but I want to cheer them up a bit before we get to the Bane. And I've been meaning to tell Sabe, Chewie and Mala about our relationship anyway.*

Padme volunteered to pilot them, and then promptly demanded Harry sit down in the pilot's chair. Bemused, Harry did so, only to oof as Padme sat down in his lap, kissing him thoroughly.

"Kriff... but that's hot," Zule muttered, with Aayla nodding agreement, her eyes closed as she shared the sensations of kissing Padme with Harry's lips for a moment.

"UGH..." Ahsoka rolled her eyes. She had known for a while that something had been going on between her masters and Padme, and right now, she was simply relieved that she was no longer getting even a shadow of the arousal and desire her master was feeling towards the Nabooan senator.

Her eyes and that of Sabe's widened however as Padme pulled back from Harry only to reach up to Zule, who was standing closer than Aayla, the Rutian Twi'lek having sat down in the copilot's chair. An instant later, both togrutan and former body double gasped as Zule let herself be pulled into a kiss. "What in the Force!? Master!?"]

"Padme!?" Sabe shouted at the same time. "Harry and Aayla I get, but when did... well, okay, I've seen Zule tease and flirt with you but... really!?"

"Heh, um, really," Harry answered, having somewhat of a front row seat to the sight of Zule and Padme kissing. They didn't last long, but it was still quite sexy looking. *"Well, if she wanted to take my mind off Mak and Kass, she succeeded in my case. You, love?"*

"Hmmm... a bit. I'm going to miss them, Harry. I know they succeeded in whatever they set out to do, but..." Aayla hesitated, but Harry, of course, knew what she was thinking.

“The Force did not point us in the same direction,” Harry pointed out. “If we had gone with them, would the Tyrant’s Bane been able to intervene here in Thyferra? I’m not being fatalistic love, but I think the visions we saw when we all meditated together, we all saw different ones for a reason. Something we’ll need to remember going forward.”

He reached up a hand, squeezing it as, in their mental realm, his avatar pulled Aayla’s into a hug, kissing her gently. *“We will remember Mak and Kass, Aayla. But we can’t let ourselves wallow in grief at their passing. They wouldn’t want that, and we have too much to do. Okay? Remember the good times with them, and set aside our grief and self-anger at not being there for them.”*

As that cut to the quick of Aayla’s emotions, she could only nod, and, as they returned their attention fully to the physical world, she shook her head with a wry smile, repeating Harry’s earlier mental ones about Padme’s actions, adding, “Or were you trying to shock Sabe and Ahsoka into comas?”

“Oh, I think after the life we’ve led, it would take a lot for that to happen, Aayla,” Padme said as she pulled away from Zule, looking Zule in the eyes even as she addressed Aayla and the others. “Yet you’re right, I did want to take your minds off your losses for a moment. I’ve learned about the dangers you Jedi face if you reach out to the Force with too many negative emotions filling your minds.”

Padme sighed faintly. “I’ve lost friends. I’ve lost peers and mentors I deeply respected. But I can’t let their losses cloud how I see the universe, the issues facing the Republic in this war and beyond. I can’t let their deaths cause me to become jaded, and neither can you all allow Mak and Kass’s deaths to do the same to your connection to the Force. Am I right?”

“Huh... you sound like a Jedi, Padme. Although don’t expect me to call you master anytime soon. I’ve already got one too many of those,” Ahsoka quipped.

“Hah, just for that, padawan, I think I might enlist our former queen here as your tutor in politics. As for what you just said, Padme,” Harry smiled at the slightly younger woman in his lap. “You’re spot on. But you must realize we will be meditating the moment we get back to the Tyrant’s Bane, right? You’ll be on your own for a bit.”

“Well, me, Chewie, Mala and Zule,” Padme chuckled. “Oh, the other Jedi and people aboard your ship. Don’t worry about me.”

Thoroughly pulled from her grief, Zule smiled, and then sat down on Aayla’s lap. *I will need to deal with Kass and Mak’s passing more soon, but right now isn’t the time for it.* “Well, in that case, and since my mind’s been thoroughly taken off serious stuff for a moment, why don’t you pilot us over, Padme?”

“UGH, really master? I’ve heard about being a bad influence, but this is something else,” Ahsoka mock-whined. “Seriously though, how did this happen?”

Chuckling, Harry explained the quartet’s relationship, to which Ahsoka had to admit, as Sabe had, that it seemed kind of inevitable that Zule would join the already established trio. The distance that had separated Padme from her other lovers was simply that irritating to deal with, and hearing that Zule had sort of fallen for Harry and Aayla before even meeting Padme and falling for her in turn made sense. She questioned how the rest of the Order would react, and how it would work in the future though.

To which Harry simply replied, “The Order has several thousand bigger things to deal with than our quartet, Ahsoka. So long as we are discreet, it shouldn’t matter. As for the future, we will take it as it comes. Living in the now is more important.”

Moments later, the shuttle landed in the Bane’s hanger bay. From there, Harry and Zule escorted Padme and her group to their rooms. Luckily all of them had been on the Bane before, so there was no need to explain the vast difference between the outside and the inside dimensions of the ship. Meanwhile, Ahsoka and Aayla headed to the bridge, where they ordered the ship to start moving to the hyperspace limit.

As they went, Harry and Zule saw a few other Jedi scattered throughout the ship meditating on the Force. The smiles on their faces told the story all too easily, and Zule, once more feeling the loss of their friends, smiled wanly at the sight. “Whatever else, the Veil is gone. I suppose for a funeral pyre, that would take some beating.”

Harry nodded, but then gestured to the ground. “Come on. The others have the right idea, we should strike while the iron is hot. We will have time enough over the next few days to talk further about Mak and Kass, but the Sith might be able to try and block our future sight again.”

With Padme ensconced in her room with Sabe going over some notes and Chewie and Mala exploring the hydronics section, Harry and Zule joined Aayla and Ahsoka on the bridge. There, as the ship moved slowly through real space, the group dropped into meditation poses. The Tyrant’s Bane’s realspace engine had taken several hits, and the parts to replace it needed to come in from elsewhere, Polith not having the space or the parts for dreadnaught-sized vessels. It would take them a few hours to get to the nominal hyperspace limit where they would jump with the Jedi making the calculations. Given how the Republic and CIS had mined their portions of the Rimma Trade route, that was actually the safest option, even if the Republic would let them through. The Sith were still out there, after all, and mines were such finicky things.

Despite quickly acting on the urge to meditate, however, all three Jedi were, at first, unable to see anything specific from the future. Rather, they found themselves lost in memories of their two friends. The times they had when part of clan Saa on the training frigate, the jokes and disasters, the laughter and the hard training they'd all endured. The time aboard the *Tyrant's Bane*, when the friends rejoined one another once more after years apart. How happy Mak had been that he and Kass had been allowed to take the Old Oath rather than the New Oath to the Order, and had openly established the relationship. A time when Aayla and Kass had gone shopping, only for Mak to surprise Kass with a small promise ring. The times they had laughed at a few of Harry's missteps with Lily's teachings, and a time Zule and Aayla had gotten into a fierce rivalry once both of them started Jar'kai training, egged on by Kass and the others in a way that had gotten all of the girls in to trouble.

It was as if, by becoming one with the Force in such a profound manner, that the two Jedi had been allowed to leave an impression on the Force as a whole, which had searched out their friends. Now, as those fond memories faded, each of them felt a hand on their shoulder. Which of the two lovers it had been, only Zule could tell as Kass's spirit sought her out specifically.

For Harry and Aayla, Kass and Mak both spoke as one, their voices overlapping with one another. "Be not sad for us. Rejoice in our lives and go on with your own," those voices said. "The Sith are hidden even now, even from us who are one with the Force. But they can be found, and perhaps, the Order saved. Live well for us, trust in one another and in the Force, and live well!"

With that, the touch on their shoulders faded, and even as tears began to run down Zule and Aayla's face, all three of them found themselves facing different visions. Visions of the future, clearer and brighter than even the visions that the three of them had seen when they meditated in the light of Harry and Aayla's Force Constructs.

At first, Aayla was the one who was faced with perhaps the least concentrated kind of visions. She saw vast armadas moving, and then a chess set floating in the center of space, with two shadowy figures on either side before it became a threeway battle as Harry appeared to one side of the existing board. Something about that vision was profoundly **wrong**, profoundly **damning** in some strange way, but she could not quite grasp its meaning. She then saw the center of the Republic, a swirl of Dark Side energy surrounding it coming out from the Core Worlds as if demanding to point out that this, this was the center of the Dark Side, the center of the Sith. This was where they were hiding.

There was another source of Dark Side energy, one which did not just use the Dark Side but created it, and this one was far more precise. A ship, of the same class as the

dreadnoughts that the *Tyrant's Bane* had dealt with here in the Polith system, a Subjugator class dreadnaught. A little bigger perhaps, but no different beyond that. Yet within, within was one of the two Sith, and Aayla instantly understood that this was Master Dominus, the man who had been Jorus C'baoth.

At the same time those strange visions came to Aayla, she could feel them, the two Sith, their reactions to the Veil. Their shock, their fear, their boundless, bottomless hatred for the Jedi. One of them tried to feel for her in turn, but her mind, protected by the methods that she had learned from master Lily and her connection to Harry, blocked it out. She could feel the wrath, the rage at the that one mind, and annoying fear that had begun to eat at it.

"I know you," that distant enemy seemed to roar through the Dark Side. *"You will fall. The Jedi will fall, and the Light will DIE!"*

Aayla did not bother replying, simply brushing aside that distant voice, pushing aside its power within the Force in a way that she would never have been able to do if the Veil was still in place, even with the Force Light constructs. Never before when they had meditated had she so clearly felt a fell presence directly contesting their vision. But now, that voice was muted and she could feel the fear within it. Instead, she simply opened herself to the Force as a whole and finally got a specific vision. A moon covered by city structures orbiting a mud-colored planet of enormous size. The vision dove down, then down some more, into the shadows before fading away, leaving Aayla with a feeling of something that must be discovered, an urgency, a race? She wasn't certain, but felt that was accurate.

At the same time, Aayla could feel that Harry was seeing other things. A mask shattering, the face underneath a shadow so pitch black that it sucked in the light. Anakin fighting something, a choice made, then another, then another until the darkness began to grow or fade, depending on his choices. Arguments in conference halls, the sensation coming to him then that while the Sith might have started the war, now that it had begun, there were far, far too many reasons to just keep going, a whirlpool that even without the Sith pushing them, trying to orchestrate things to their best advantage, could still pull the Order down. Padme then appeared in front of him resplendent in a austere dress as she addressed a faceless mass of people, followed by the image of a middle-aged, but extremely fit alien man of a race Harry hadn't met before with blue skin a shade darker than Aayla's. His ruby red eyes were piercingly intelligent, and Harry got the impression this man was IMPORTANT, that he needed to be found and convinced to join their side.

Only then did Harry's vision start to show fade to more general images. An attack to come on them soon centered not just on them, but on an erstwhile ally, the tiara of office the woman wore marking her out as the princess of Hapes, Ta'a Chume. Another attack on

them that was designed to draw in Padme. And then, the ship that Aayla had seen, Dominus in his position as head of the fleet attacking Corellia, a battle of epic proportions.

Zule, the newest member of the quartet, had seen a little more images than the others to start with, as Kass's spirit had sought her out. Delight filled that presence as it felt the growing, accepted connection between herself Harry, Aayla and Padme. Kass of all their friends had realized that Zule had feelings for Aayla when they were all in the temple, and then that those feelings had grown to include Harry soon after he and Master Fay began to interact with the rest of the Order. Images of the future, the very near future if Zule had anything to say about it, of the four of them all making love, of a few... experiments, that Zule suddenly decided she quite liked.

Ethereal laughter burst through her mind, and Zule rolled her mental eyes even as tears began to run from her real eyes at the knowledge she would never hear Kass laugh again. *"I love you too sister, Kass. But those feelings are not exactly important right now are there darling?"*

Again laughter reverberated through her mind, before Kass's voice whispered the same message that she and Kaz had whispered earlier to all of them. "Live well, Zule Xiss."

With that, the more personal images faded away from Zule's mind, and the Unifying Force rode in. Unlike Ahsoka however, she did not see any images of a future that could never be. Her own future had been changed from that timeline before she hit puberty. Instead, she saw herself defending something, or someone? It wasn't clear, all that was clear was that she was grimacing as she did, and through the vision Zule could feel her own determination to stand where she was, to defend the doorway behind her with everything in her body, lightsaber and force powers alike. Then came an image of a young boy on a strange planet, one that gave her feeling of age and decay, of junk as far as the eye could see. Finally, a battle in the halls of the Senate itself, herself and several other Jedi standing there, a feeling of delight and victory accompanying her even as the enemy closed in, with no chance of victory apparent.

For her part, while she had eagerly begun to mediate alongside her master, Ahsoka still lacked the touch with the Force that the older Jedi Knights held. She saw a few images, but what she saw first were images of a future that she somehow knew would **never** be. She saw someone trying to betray her, only to fail. She saw her turning her back on the temple, but the image shattered. She saw an unhappy life for herself in solitude, before it too shattered. Instead, the memory of her first meeting with Harry coming to her, as if that moment had on its own destroyed that unhappy future before it could claim Ahsoka.

As those visions of what would never be faded, Ahsoka saw other images. A blue-skinned alien girl whose race Aayla never seen before, forging a path through vines, only to be cut down from behind, the blow stopped by her own lightsaber. A great space battle, with Ahsoka herself leading a group of starfighters in an attack run as someone began to jabber into her ear, fear coming through that voice in a way that no Jedi could ever allow themselves. Pain, Ahsoka herself shackled to something, a wall? A rock? She couldn't tell. Pain accompanied that image, as if whoever put her there was attempting to torture her, only Ahsoka to grin through it, as light arrived, banishing the darkness.

More and more these images came to them confusing, but profound, along with a feeling of openness, of joy and sudden change, as the Unifying Force seemed to exult in being freed of the weight of the Veil of the Dark Side. The future was badly in flux, no longer tethered by anything, and they, like the other Jedi could make of it what they wished.

By the time the *Bane* reached the hyperspace limit, Padme had come to find her friends, finding all four of the Jedi, and several others, more than willing to stop meditating. The images hammering their heads were too much to sift through, battering their minds. Ahsoka had already succumbed, and was leaning against her master's shoulder, her eyes closed in actual sleep. Despite the fact that it was actually only around two in the afternoon, and she had been bouncing with energy before they had begun to meditate, she was thoroughly exhausted.

"Are you three all right?" Padme asked solicitously, placing her palm on Aayla and Zule's foreheads to check as if she thought they might be coming down with a fever. Considering how tired and sweaty they all looked even after that short a time, she felt that her concerns were warranted.

"W, we're all right. Just... There was a lot to take in," Harry said, slurring his words a little bit even as he pushed himself to his feet, settling Ahsoka against the console behind her. He swayed there for a second, before his sense of balance righted itself, then he pulled Aayla to her feet, and picked up the now snoozing Ahsoka in his arms. "Let's get this one to her quarters, and then we'll be back."

When they returned to the bridge, they found Padme ensconced with Sabe at a communications console, calling some of the locals that she had been working with over the past few days, giving her last farewells and a few final instructions. The handoff of power to the representative set out by the Republic Senate with Master Tiin had occurred late last night, but there were still a few people that hadn't quite yet understood that Padme had removed herself from the authority that the Senator had taken upon herself during and immediately after the battle against Grievous and his forces.

Meanwhile, Harry and Aayla reached out to Anakin. They found him looking wan and withdrawn, yet his eyes were clear as he gazed into the pickup towards them. “Harry, Aayla. Good luck. Even with the Veil shattered, using the Force when it is in such flux is going to be interesting going forward. Worse, the Sith are still hidden damn it. I tried to get an image of it, but beyond Coreward, I got nothing.”

“That, and they will have also felt the destruction of their Veil. A wounded animal is the most dangerous sort, because they will lash out without thought,” Aayla agreed.

“Did you see anything that you feel might pertain to us? I admit that I saw you in a vision facing a choice, and then another, before the darkness fled. I don’t know what kind of choice that was,” Harry said, before smiling. “But getting to know you, I’m certain you will make the right choice, Anakin.”

Anakin smiled wryly. “I think if I did not, I might find Master Windu waiting for me in the Force, and I really don’t think I want to hear his lectures for all eternity. As for visions... Not really, nothing that would pertain to you all. I think I saw a vision of myself and the 501st fighting on a series of moon bases, which did not look at all pleasant.”

To that, Harry winced, nodding his head commiseratingly. Fighting through moon bases like that was a horrible mix of city fighting, tunnel fighting, and space station fighting, the worst of all three rolled into one against a prepared enemy. The blandly named Luna Base here in Polith haven’t had time to really prepare itself, or been all that well organized, else it would never have been able to fall so easily to infantry assault.

“Beyond that, blasters,” Anakin went on bluntly. “Blasters bolts in the Order’s back.”

“We didn’t get any impressionable of a threat like that,” Aayla hummed. “Our visions were more about the morass of the war pulling us down rather than a direct treasonous assault.”

“Perhaps love, but remember, we think that the Sith are still hiding somewhere within the Republic itself. We’ve known that for a while. I think the vision might just be trying to warn you about that, Anakin,” Harry advised. “Perhaps be extremely careful who you trust outside the order?”

“Perhaps, or it could be a vision of what may be. I’m not certain. I’m going to be talking to a few of my officers. Not right away, I need to settle into single command of the 501st, get all the remaining officers used to just taking orders for me rather than me and Master Windu. But eventually I might want their opinions on that one.”

*Because I distinctly got the impression of a **lot** of numbers involved in that blaster fight,* Anakin thought to himself in his room aboard Warm Welcome, running his hand through his hairs. “Regardless, that was all I had to share, I think. Again Harry, Aayla. And Zule if she

can hear me, may the Force be with you. And I hope that when next we meet, if this war is not over, at least our true enemy will have revealed himself.”

To that, the others could only nod, before cutting the connection. They looked at one another for a moment, communing between themselves as they had since dropping Ahsoka off, bringing each other up to speed on the visions that each of them had seen, neither having been able to concentrate on both the visions they’d been facing and the ones their lover saw as well.

Eventually though, Harry shook his head and turned to the helmsman. “Ladies and gentlemen, if you would prepare for a Force Gestalt, please? We have a quarter of a galaxy to cross, and we don’t want to take too much time doing it.”

Scene break

And of course, there were the Jedi within the temple itself. Here, the same fact that had allowed Sidious to retreat to the Sith Temple to wait word on the defense of the tether and then deal with the fallout meant that many of the Jedi within the temple were asleep, that being it was nighttime in the Senate district. The hundred or so Jedi within the temple were there to meditate, rest or research between assignments, and most took the opportunity to catch up on their sleep with both hands. Those few that were awake became aware of the shift in the Force quickly, and instantly began to rouse others or tentatively meditate, wary of the aftershocks. Those assigned to the Command Center were also aware of it, and as soon as they could, called the temple, requesting answers.

Yoda and Master Rancisis, thanks in part to their species, and thanks in part to being rather old, slept only fitfully. Both of them woke up as the Veil shattered, and by the time it started to settle down, the pair were in the Council Chamber along with several others, all of them staring at one another in delight.

Only Yoda was close enough to Kass and Mak to have also felt their passage into the Force. As the other Jedi chattered around him, Yoda sat on his pillow, sadness filling him. *Hoped, wrong I was, when see them again, I would not. Yet, right I was. Two lights, gone from the universe they are. Yet take with them, the Veil they did.*

“Master Yoda?” Rancisis asked, frowning. “You seem more troubled than—”

“Troubled by the Veil’s disappearance I am not,” Yoda said, holding up a hand to interrupt the Thisspiasian. “Aware of the cost, I am. Remembering the two who did this, I am. Mak Lotor, Kass Todd, with the Force they are.”

Only a few of the Jedi in the temple presently had met any of Clan Saa, but they joined Rancisis in bowing their heads for a moment in sadness at their passing for a moment,

letting their grief out into the Force. Soon after, all of them began to meditate, trying to get an understanding of how the Force had changed.

Only the oldest, Yoda, the absent Yaddle and Master Saa, were old enough to remember a time when the Force felt so clean. It wasn't clean as the Force was within Master Fay's bubble in the Ruusan Sector. The Dark Side was still there, whorls and eddies of it blocking their sight in areas, still strong thanks to the ongoing war, and with that, the future was still a chaotic, disjointed mess to many save a few who saw images as Shaak Ti, Harry and the others did. Interpreting those visions was still hard, but much easier than getting a vision at all had been previously.

Better, the Jedi's ability to see in the now, in the Living Force, was far better. Even those like Yoda, who espoused more to the Unifying Force could see far more clearly.

Within the hour, Master Rancisis and a few of the other Jedi left for the Republic Command Center. Since the war didn't exactly stop during the night, they would find it still bustling, and other Jedi there already, but Rancisis would instantly start to take charge there in a way that the Jedi had been reluctant to do before. Not of the overall war effort, but of various small fronts here and there where the Force called out to the Jedi.

With the advice of the Jedi on Coruscant adding to the abilities of the Jedi closer to the front lines, what had been stalemates turned to victories. What might well become horrific losses became stalemates, or controlled retreats. Losses began to fall as the Jedi, now able to better feel the Force, were able to anticipate the moves of even the droid generals they were facing.

As Rancisis handled the war effort and the day-to-day running of the Order to great effect, Yoda continued to meditate throughout the day, not on the Force as a whole or the war in general. No, he meditated on the Sith, trying to push further, further into the Force to the point the remaining Dark Side eddies could not block his sight. In this, he failed, yet even so, he did come to a revelation.

As evening once more fell over the senatorial district, he sent out a few requests.

Over the next few days, four Jedi were pulled from their duties. Two were pulled from the front lines, one from the operations going on behind the front lines on CIS-conquered planets, while the last, most senior of the four was pulled from an ongoing investigation in the Core Worlds trying to hunt down the last remnants of the Black Sun. None of them were exactly happy about it, but when the Grand Master of the Order requested that you be reassigned, you were reassigned.

Even Jon Antilles, a recluse among the Jedi who had only recently come out of the shadows to join the GDL's espionage apparatus, had obeyed. "I felt the Force urge me in this direction as if my old Master had smacked my head, as she so often did when I was her padawan," He confessed to Obi-Wan.

"The Dark Woman? I confess I never had the pleasure of meeting her," Obi-Wan stated, gratefully leaning back against the nice, solid tree behind him as he sat on the nice, solid grass of one of the gardens within the temple. "But I heard she was a harsh mistress."

"Oh, yes. So much so I doubt anyone who met her would ever say it was a pleasure," Jon answered, snorting at the younger man's words. "I had heard you had a diplomat's heart, Obi-Wan, despite Master Jinn being your teacher. He was always an odd one, but I liked him well enough."

"So were you also pulled from the front line, Knight Kenobi?" The youngest of the quartet summoned to the temple by Master Yoda asked respectfully, Gillian Hess was a Coruscanti native, but not from the upper reaches. Rather, she had been born in one of the lower levels, and it was only chance that had brought her to the attention of the Jedi, not the typical medical checks that tested for Force sensitivity. She was a short, spry thing only a few years older than Harry Potter, who had mastered the skills and abilities Clan Saa had introduced to the Order far easier than she had conquered her shadow-side accent.

"I confess, I was... becoming somewhat drained of it all. I could feel myself becoming more callous, more overwhelmed," Gillian finished, running a hand through midnight black hair that she kept in a series of long braids.

"I understand, although I wouldn't call what my team and I were doing as the front lines. Rather, we were behind enemy lines," Obi-Wan replied. "I have learned a great deal of the Sentinel's methodology in that time let me tell you. Still, I understand what you are saying."

"There is a weight to being in combat that long, to pushing your Battle Precognition so much against enemies that radiate so lightly in the Force. And then there is the weight of being so close to so much simple violence and death," Jon agreed, reaching out a gentle hand to Gillian's shoulder. "I understand your concerns, there, Gillian. Luckily, I think the Republic might soon adopt the rotation the GDL practice, so hopefully, whatever we were all called in for will not send us back to the war."

"Or perhaps we are here to prosecute the real war. The war against the Sith," the last person there stated.

The others all looked at Master Sinube, a Cosian, smiled at them all, leaning on his strange-looking cane. It had a handle of wood which split in two to better fit the hand while turning

into a spiral that wrapped around the metal portion of the cane. That metal version in turn was connected to a circular foot for better stability. But if the aged master needed it or not was a question.

The Cosians were a species of reptilians, far shorter and less warlike than Trandoshans or Barabels. They had long, dexterous fingers, and expressions that, even when cheerful, looked almost lugubrious to most humans, as their chins, hair, and even beaked mouths seemed to droop. Tera's eyes added to the effect thanks to how deep set they were, but there was a certain air of amusement about him at present.

"Ruin my fun, you have, old friend. Find a way to repay this, I will," Yoda's voice intoned from the entryway into the garden.

"Hah! Old? To you, Master Yoda, I am but a young sapling," Tera chuckled.

"Hrhrhrhm, tell that to your aching bones, you do?" Yoda inquired politely, while the others all smiled at the byplay. All the Jedi the galaxy over had found themselves in far better humor than they had previously been, far more likely to smile at such moments. "If method works, it does, try it myself, I will."

As Tera ruefully raised his staff to acknowledge the strike, Yoda directed the odd quartet to follow him. "Come. Talk in the council room, we must."

"Master Yoda, did you see my report on the twi'lek scientist I rescued? The one who wasn't on the list of prisoners we were supposed to free?" Obi-Wan asked as they walked.

"Saw it, I did. Understand the math Knight Kristen passed along, I did not. Still, implications of the discovery, tremendous they are," Yoda hummed. "Sent him and the rest of your team, we did, to the GDL. More resources, Yaddle has, to follow up on that research."

"And far less spies," Jon interjected, not knowing what the pair were talking about, but knowing the other reason why anything secret or which the Order might wish to take advantage of would be sent to the GDL. "I saw Master Drallig conducting the weekly security check."

Yoda nodded, but only stated blandly, "Lose more cleaning droids, that way, we do."

To that none of the four had anything to say. Instead, they followed Yoda up the stairs to the top of the temple where the Council Room sat in silence. Gillian and Obi-Wan looked at one another, then the other Jedi, wondering why they had been brought together. *We are certainly an odd group, but perhaps infiltration? Certainly myself and Master Sinube could*

handle investigation work as well, but Master Antilles is best known for infiltration. I confess I have no idea what Gillian's specialty is, although I know she's a Guardian.

Soon Master Yoda was staring up at them from his cushion as the four stood in front of him. "Called you here for a single purpose I did, which Tera, spoiled he did."

"We're going to go after the Sith? Where and how?" Gillian asked excitedly.

"And just us? No offense to Knight Kenobi or young Gillian, but while I am a decent duelist, it isn't my specialty," Master Antilles pointed out.

"Sith you will be hunting, but not fighting," Yoda said firmly, before staring at them in turn. "Experts on Ecumenopoli and Coruscant in particular you all could be called. Yet in your files here, that is not. Accurate this is?"

"Well... I mean, I was born here. Um, I never took many missions here after I became a padawan though," Gillian pulled at her braids again, frowning. "Although, I wouldn't call Coruscant an ecumenopolis, Master. I would call it THE ecumenopolis. Others just grow over time and slowly replace what was there before. Here on Coruscant, when it comes time to put up a new city over the old it's a way more aggressive process."

"I doubt I could be called an expert, either," Obi-Wan stated. "I might have slipped out of the temple when I was younger and made friends in the lower habs, but that hardly makes me an expert."

"Yet move, you could through the locals without attracting attention," Yoda shot back, looking at them both while Antilles frowned pensively.

Master Sinube chuckled quietly, the sound a chattering clack of his beak rather than something from the throat as it was for humans. "I wouldn't say I'm an expert on the entirety of this benighted world, only the criminal underbelly. And even then, there is always a lot to learn. As for it being in my records... no I do not think so. My classification as Investigator would be and my missions, but rarely did I look into the criminals of our beloved capital planet on actual missions. You are still assuming the Sith have access to our files?"

"Truth, you speak. Attempted to secure the archives we have, but know, we do not, if simply copied as much as they could, over time the Sith did."

For a moment, Yoda fell silent, staring down at his hands, looking aged in a way that none of the three had ever seen from him before. It was as if all of a sudden all of his nine hundred plus years was crashing down on top of the ancient Grand Master. And yet, when he spoke, his voice was firm as he made their job official. "Sith, hiding here on Coruscant

they are. Certain of this, I am. Beneath the greatest light, the greatest shadow can there be.”

Gillian flinched as did Obi-Wan, while Jon and Tera both frowned, saying nothing. From Jon, Yoda thought that was a sign of diplomacy the man wasn’t known for. Like the other Lost Jedi, Jon Antilles had despaired of the Senate and the Jedi’s connection to it. Before leaving the Order he had long tried to convince the High Council to shift entirely away from Coruscant. Now, though, he could only shake his head, as he too had never thought the Sith would be so brazen as to hide right under the Order’s nose.

Although, it might make some sense, Jon Mused. If they have perfected Force Stealth, than what better place is there? And perhaps, the sheer number of Jedi that have made the Temple their home also blinded individual Jedi to their presence.

Occurred to us, it had not before,” Yoda admitted, really meaning it hadn’t occurred to him more than anything. Even though they had investigated the Senate, it hadn’t really occurred to Yoda to look elsewhere on the planet. “Assumed we did, the Sith Master, part of the Republic somewhere. Assumed at first, perhaps a senator. From this investigation, nothing was gleaned. Yet now, certain I am. Widen the search away from the Senate, we must. Here on this planet they **are**.”

For a moment, the four Jedi facing him frowned thoughtfully, then Obi-Wan spoke up. “Master, I am not going to gainsay your words. The moment you said that, it felt right to me, and after the past few days, I’m not going to question that feeling. Yet even on a normal planet searching out a Force user who does not want to be found, someone who we know can hide their Force presence is incredibly difficult. On a planet like this?”

“There’s so much volume, so many shadow side areas. So much darkness...” Gillian nearly whispered. “Oh zugging kriff, this is gonna be a right five-stim time, ain’t it?”

Not commenting on Gillian slipping into the patois of her childhood, Sinube chuckled. “And yet, it is still a finite area in compared to the galaxy as a whole, young ones. “And if the Sith are indeed still reaching out from here, still manipulating events, there will be signs.”

“Not in the Hypercom,” Jon warned. “Not that we’ll be able to find, anyway. The damn thing’s a morass of signals, overhead, hidden messages and piggyback signals.”

“I was not talking about the Hypercom, Jon. Rather, I was thinking about droid parts that are sent to one place, yet do not arrive. Whispers within the criminal element, perhaps even ancient records of construction droids and so forth disappearing. It will take a while, and require both a lot of footwork and a lot of research. But it can be done,” Sinube stated firmly.

“Done it can be. Done it must be. Your task now, this is. Find the Sith, a possibility, find their hiding place, more likely. Yet off the books this must be. The Sith, too often shown they have an ability to predict our actions. In our communication network they still are even now. Disappear you must all do,” Yoda advised.

“Hide from everyone, Jedi and official alike. Never show ourselves until we find the Sith?” Jon murmured with a smirk. “Sounds like my kind of mission.”

“Hiding my Force presence under Force Stealth is going to be annoying, but at least I can blend in if we need to speak to any of the locals,” Gillian said, not looking forward to this but understanding why she had been chosen for this mission. “Although we’ll all need disguises. My mastery of Force Cloak is not the best, and I know you said your’s wasn’t that good either, Obi-Wan.”

Sinube indicated the same could be said for him, while Jon Antilles simply smirked.

“That I will have to leave to you and Master Sinube,” Obi-Wan answered Gillian before looking back at Master Yoda. “I take it we should trust only face-to-face communication?”

“Yes. Only within the Council room even then. Found we have several listening devices within our cleaning droids. Others, there might be still. Go. Find the Sith you must, before this war, evolve once more it can,” Yoda said cryptically.

The three Jedi looked at him, then at one another, bowed, and left the room, already talking quietly about plans going forward. Behind them, Yoda watched them go, then slowly sank into the Force once more. This time he was not searching for the Sith. Rather he was simply pondering the future, and what a Sith like this one they were hunting, once cornered, might be capable of.

Scene break

Perhaps even worse for Sidious personally, was that the cracking of the Veil blinded him even more to the movements of Komari Vosa and Quinlan Vos. The pair of expert infiltrators had been incredibly hard to keep track of even after he became aware they were acting against his interests in the Core Worlds. But Sidious should have become aware of them the day following the Veil’s destruction, because that day they were meeting with a member of the Jedi Council, all of whom Sidious had made a point of tracking via spies and the Force for over a decade.

Yet he didn’t.

Komari and Quinlan both smiled as the kel dor Jedi Master, Plo Koon held up his hand in greeting. “Master Vos. Master Tholme has taught you well, I see. I had no hint of either your or Knight Vosa’s presence until I actually saw you.”

Quinlan blinked, realizing suddenly that yes, he was indeed a Master, since Aayla had become a Knight under his tutelage, while Komari had never taken on a padawan. This revelation didn’t seem to bother her, though, as she smiled widely. Much like he, and, judging by the mask movements, Plo was doing too. It was awfully hard to not be upbeat right now. *It’ll fade. The Veil wasn’t the only thing making the Order’s life difficult, far from it. But kriff, it is amazing to be free of it’s touch!*

Indeed, even though he hadn’t been able to meet with Aayla and Harry, Quinlan was having trouble feeling anything less than optimistic. That had, after all, always been a longshot, and he and Komari had at least been able to pass on the information they’d gathered about the Sith’s clandestine activities. In turn, the quartet of GDL-aligned Jedi they had met had been able to give them access to GDL resources, although getting them to the away point was still going to take a few weeks, as deep into Republic space as they were.

“Well, Master Koon, if that’s the case, then hopefully the enemy won’t be aware of what we’re doing either,” Komari said.

“Hmm... I had hoped it was something of the sort when Miss Aldrete asked me to come aboard to give my opinion on engineer’s latest yacht design,” Plo intoned, his voice carrying a hint of amusement. “I notice a distinct lack of yachts here.”

“Heh. Please, come with us. We’ll tell you everything. Alya isn’t actually here. We’re due to meet her in ten days with the last of our freighter converts we’re going to use on this mission in the Empress Teta system.”

“Sounds intriguing.” Plo Koon fell silent then, and remained so as they walked through the Aldrete Consortium’s private space station in Vulpter. Situated in the Deep Core, this system was well known for being a test bed for small to mid-size ship construction projects, and had a lot of private space stations scattered around the system. The Aldrete family’s space station was one of the oldest, as Alderaan had been the source of the slowship that had somehow found the planet millennia ago.

Two hours later, he leaned back, smiling faintly. “I see now why the refurbishment of my wing of starfighters has gone so slowly. You wanted us to join you?”

“Yes. Alya’s freighters can bring in some space-based combat potential, and we were able to convince the GDL to loan us two squadrons of bombers that she found pilots for. She’s even supplying us with around four companies of infantry, and the GDL is providing another

company of ground troops. They are quite impressive, really. But we will need starfighters and point assault troops.”

“Which means Jedi,” Plo nodded. “Very well. I will agree to it. So long as Alya’s agents can keep on coming up with reasons to stop my wing from deploying elsewhere, anyway.”

Quinlan smiled. *It’s all coming together now.*

End Chapter

I had hoped to show Tenaab stuff in, then a war scene. The war scene would be the start of the CIS’s push into Corellia directly commanded by Dominus. But the end of the Tenaab scene would have been even more important. Sad Vimesenthusiast noises.

I will try to either Grammarly or get out the last scene for this chapter tonight. At the same time, I will be posting a poll asking you all if you want to see the next chapter of this fic right away, or if you want me to finish ATP this month as my second HP fic for May (yes, this chapter still counts in my head for April). It will be a NUMBERS ONLY poll, not a weighted poll, although... if anyone knows any good, non-slash HP/SW fics not on fanfic.net, I will give you ten more votes for your choice.