

Princess Leia stared at me for a moment, her face filled with a few conflicting emotions, one of them disbelief.

"I suppose what they say is true," She eventually said, shaking her head. "The best leaders are those who don't want to lead."

My brow wrinkled as I looked at her in confusion, not quite understanding what she meant. Although, in general, I did agree with her statement. A sure-fire way to find the worst fit to rule was to find out who was the absolute most desperate to do so. I heard a scoff from beside me, turning to find Ahsoka shaking her head a bit.

"Deacon, you are a fantastic leader," Ahsoka pointed out. "And, shockingly, despite hating it with a passion, you're also not a bad politician."

"I... maybe out of necessity and instinct," I responded with a frown. "But I still don't have any idea of how the complex systems work."

"By what you are saying, the complex system isn't working," Princess Leia pointed out, a hint of annoyance leaking into her voice. "If you're going to absolutely run roughshod over everything I have worked for, everything my parents worked for, then you could at least offer an opinion."

I opened my mouth to counter her suggestion, only to stop and let out a long breath.

"First, not everything you worked for is pointless," I countered, fixing the younger woman with a look. "The Rebellion is currently the galaxy's greatest hope of change. Sure, you might have been focused on the wrong point on the horizon, but your immediate goals were sound."

"And?"

"And... The Moff system isn't broken because the concept is non-functional, it's broken because an insane, sadistic, narcissistic despot is picking the Moffs," I finally said, leaning back in my chair, resisting the urge to cross my arms. "Planets with a certain population level should vote in governors. The governors rotate through the Moff position for their sector. The sectors are large enough that the number of Moffs remains low, but not so large that the Moffs have issues keeping what's best for each planet straight. The Moffs convene to vote on galactic laws, while governors and the people enact planetary laws, which address issues affecting specific species or planets. Like stealing water being a specific crime on Tatooine, but not here on Nirn."

"That... It's hard to imagine the Moff system past the cruel military leaders currently running it, but..."

Leia trailed off for a moment, her mind dancing around the idea. Eventually, she nodded, focusing back on me.

"It is at least an interesting idea. Thank you," the Alderaanian princess said, letting out another long breath. "I came here desperate for answers, I shouldn't be surprised that they might not be what I wanted."

"This was never going to be easy," I added, wincing for a moment before continuing. "But it's important to build something stable now that you know better. Use my idea, discard it, expand on it, or modify it wherever you see fit. Because let me tell you, this... this is step one. There are a lot of threats out there, and a demilitarized, barely functioning senate is not equipped to handle them."

"You... know of things that will happen?" Leia asked, her eyes going wide.

"I know of other threats in this galaxy," I responded, not denying her, simply pushing her in a different direction. "More problems you cannot solve with negotiation and peaceful discussions."

She frowned, scanning my face before eventually nodding in understanding.

"While it was not the words I hoped to hear, I thank you for meeting with me on such short notice," Princess Leia eventually said. "I know you must be busy."

"I'm happy to make time for friends," I commented with a smile. "I wish I had easier words to say. Do you know what you're going to do now?"

"I don't," She admitted, shaking her head ruefully. "I am at a complete loss as to what I should do next."

"Stay a few more days," I suggested, catching a raised eyebrow. "Think it through, do some soul searching, maybe meditate with some Jedi. Maybe some inspiration will find you and-."

"What about you?" She asked, cutting me off. "You obviously disagree with the final goal of the Rebellion, but you also clearly think we can win. What do you plan on doing about it?"

"My plan is to do my best to push for change," I admitted with a frown. "I don't think I will manage to change everything overnight, but I was hoping to at least make some things better than before, better than before the Clone Wars. With enough influence and enough power, I might be able to keep the corruption and decay from festering."

"And if you can't change anything?" She asked, a challenge in her voice.

"Then maybe offering the galaxy an alternative would be better," I responded with a casual shrug that understated the seriousness of my statement. "Not violently, not by force. But mark my words. If the Senate restarts, just as it was before, there will be people looking for alternatives. You'll have a whole second civil war on your hands, all before you can barely start to heal from the first."

That was perhaps a bit of an exaggeration, though it ultimately depended on how much Disney canon influenced this galaxy. In legends, there was never really time for an Outer Rim civil war, as new threats constantly kept popping up to keep everyone's mind off of it. However, in the Disney canon, from what I knew of it, the First Order was an inevitable consequence of a Republic being willfully ignorant of what its people truly needed. Yes, it was another plot by Palpy, but again, he was just taking advantage of what already existed.

Something in my answer must have satisfied Leia, as she let her questions drop, and our conversation turned a bit less directed. We talked about what the end of the Clone Wars was like, what sort of issues the Senate had during and before the conflict, and just how Palpy managed to convince everyone that they should give him complete control over basically everything.

"Palpy's goal was always to have the galaxy handed to him," I explained. "That's why he went through all that trouble. In reality, if he really wanted to, he could have taken over the moment the clones were delivered and integrated, since he had direct control over what was put into their inhibitor chips. But he didn't just want control. He wanted superiority. He wanted to watch the Jedi fall, and the galaxy submit willingly."

"And they played right into his hands," she responded, shaking her head. "How could they not see it coming?"

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions," I said with a shrug. "I can't pretend to know. I do know that the final call was made by [Jar Jar Binks](#), an innocent if not annoying [Gungan](#) from Naboo. He was good friends with your mother, Luke, and was directly involved with the Blockade of Naboo, which many saw as the first real step of the Republic's downfall."

Eventually, the topic shifted to lighter conversations, and we ultimately left Luke's new ship to one of the few seated restaurants that had opened in Vercopa. Leia even managed to drag Han with us. On top of that, Miru joined us shortly after we arrived, and while it never quite shifted to a party atmosphere, everything was light enough that we enjoyed the conversation.

Once we were done eating, Leia agreed to stay for another day, if for no other reason than to give Han and Chewie enough time to finish installing the repairs they had started. I saw Luke, Miru, and Han sharing a few pointed looks, which made me think the Ex-smuggler was exaggerating how long it would take to get airborne again, but I wasn't about to call them out.

We went our separate ways after our meal, leaving Ahsoka and I to finally return home for the first time in nearly two weeks. I sat down in my office to review some of the messages left for me, which included updates on the activities of the other groups and how the new ships for each of them had been integrated.

Vercopa and the Skyforged was growing rapidly, and I could not be more proud of everyone's hard work.

The next few days were pretty standard for the busy days after returning from long missions. I visited new facilities, toured our new defenses, and spent nearly half a day shaking

hands with new civilians and members of Skyforged, casting my truth-telling spell, the long-since-modified version of the pacify spell.

I also spent some time with the Jedi, trying to determine where other Jedi groups might be hidden away. My own list of possible survivors was unfortunately drying out. I knew the Iron Knights existed out there somewhere, and they were undoubtedly on the list of people to find, especially now that I had taken on Yoda's final request, but they were safe where they were, so we needed to focus on groups that could be under greater threat.

I had already sent the 4th group out to investigate an off-the-books location that one of the Jedi masters remembered. It was designed for undercover work, meaning that on the surface, it looked like a smuggler's stash, but in reality, it was a safe house. Although it was unlikely that anyone was staying there, it was known to a few dozen Jedi, meaning they could have passed through for resupply and left notes.

There were several spots like these across the galaxy, and unless they immediately stumbled upon something worth following through on, the 4th Group would be investigating all of them.

About four days after we had returned home from our raid of the secret storage facility, and two days after Luke, Leia, Han, and Chewie had all left, Ahsoka and I were peacefully sleeping when the door alarm for our home started going off frantically. It took me a minute or two to make myself presentable, but when I arrived at the front door and opened it, I saw Master Amescoll standing there, looking harried and agitated.

"Amescoll, what's wrong?" I asked, stepping aside so he could come in, the Jedi quickly stepping out of the late-night darkness.

"I received... a vision. Or perhaps a message," he responded, wringing his hands. In the light of my home, I could tell he was pale, a sheen of sweat on his brow. "I'm afraid it was not pleasant."

"What was it, Amescoll?" Ahsoka asked, guiding the older human male to the living room and sitting him on the couch. "What did you see?"

"I believe... I believe it was an old friend reaching out to me. Jedi Master [Jaro Tapal](#). He died during Order 66, but... he sounded desperate. His Padawan... I believe his padawan survived the purge."

"I assume he is in danger, then?"

"Yes, very much so. I believe [Padawan Kestis](#) is walking into an Imperial trap, one meant for us," He explained, shaking his head in sorrow. "I... I'm not sure, the details allude me now that I am awake, but I believe Padawan Kestis has been helping Jedi survivors and new Force sensitives evade the Empire. He is responding to something... what I do not know, but if we don't find him first, they will capture him."

"Dammit, okay. If it's a trap meant for us, then they need to be sending out signals," I guessed, Ahsoka nodding in agreement. "I'll call Sheora, get her looking through their rumors. Maybe something they put to the side as an obvious trap. Are there any other details you can give us?"

"...There is more at stake than just a single brave Padawan," Amescoll said, closing his eyes to focus on the memory. "I do not know where or how, but Padawan Kestis has saved a number of Jedi and Force Sensitives. Their location is... murky, perhaps they travel through deep space? Either way, if Padawan Kestis is captured, he will struggle heroically... but before the Emperor, he will eventually break. The safe haven he has created, wherever that may be, will be lost, destroyed at his own corrupted hand."

"Okay, we still have time to stop that from happening," I pointed out, the older Jedi nodding. "The Force wouldn't have given you this message unless there was still time. We need to get Sheora looking, and you need to focus on remembering every bit that you can. Any details you could recall could be the difference between a successful mission, and a failure."

Amescoll nodded, and together we left our home, quickly hopping into a shuttle and blasting for *Boxi's Fury*. By the time we arrived, our intelligence department had been scrambled, and Sheora was waiting for us.

"With how often you guys force your own missions to happen, I'm starting to wonder if you even need us," Sheora joked, scanning through the swath of information she had at her disposal, eventually stopping at one and opening it up on her holoprojector. "Here it is, seems like you beat our own researchers by minutes. News of something mysterious happening on a Mid Rim Imperial planet. A ship was shot down as it tried to escape Imperial forces, stranding the singular occupant on the planet. So far, no reports of capture, but there have been reports of a laser sword, as well as the use of the Force."

"That's the trap," I said, both Amescoll and Ahsoka nodding in agreement. "Which means our padawan is likely just getting this news as well. What do we know about the planet?"

"Relatively quiet, several cities, resort world for the most part," the Ex Rebel Intelligence agent responded. "There's an Imperial presence, a small standing defence fleet, but nothing we can't handle. Nothing we couldn't handle a few months ago either."

"If the trap was meant for us, we were either meant to show up, 'rescue' someone and bring them back here," I guessed, running my hand through my hair. "Or, we would jump in, and the cavalry would show up to lock us in. But catching Kestis would have been a serious prize as well."

"I'd say. Cal Kestis has a serious track record," Sheora said. "I recognize the name. He was working with a Rebel cell at one point, but he hasn't been heard from in a while. Pretty sure we thought he was dead."

"Well, he is about to be if he tries to help and they realize who he is," I said, shaking my head. "So we can't go in heavy... is there any reason we can't leave heavy? Show up, dive in, grab who we want, and then have the fleet jump in to catch us?"

"This is starting to feel familiar," Sheora said, shaking her head. "A lot like what happened with us."

"Which is probably on purpose. Amescoll, do you have anything to add?"

"Just who I saw capturing Kestis," Amescoll said with a frown. "She didn't seem dark, not like an Inquisitor. But she was Force sensitive, I could at least feel that."