

Can One Displaced Hero Save a Galaxy?

(Chapters 146 & 147)

Novus Peregrine

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Chapter 146: Political Hydra

What Izuku had badly wanted to do, now that Geonosis was just a cleanup operation, was head straight to Randon. Kashyyyk, he felt and others agreed, was almost certainly going to be the place that felt the next major thrust from the CIS. Or, at least, the next major thrust that the League of Free Stars would be in any position to intercept in some fashion. Uytter would technically need to 'fall' first but, at least according to League Intelligence, that world was heavily leaning towards the CIS politically. Most likely, the only reason it hadn't already switched sides was that it had been *told not to*. An opinion shared by the Republic's new Military High Command, who were cutting that world out of the loop as much as possible and had sent it only a light picket force to act as a tripwire.

From Uytter, the CIS would have the option to either charge down the Randon Run to hit Kashyyyk, or else take the Lesser Lantillian Route. Either would culminate in access to Zeltros, and from there a shot straight into the Core Worlds via Commenor. The fact that this would link them to both Neimodia and Cato Neimodia, as well as get them distressingly close to linking up with CIS South if they could take Quellor and pincer Exodeen between them, didn't help. Any way you looked at it, the attack vector looked too good for the CIS to pass up on. Doubly so since none of the existing Republic fleets was in position to help.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the section of the Randon Run between Uytter and Kashyyyk was fairly desolate. There were no major worlds that would serve as stumbling blocks for the CIS, whereas their other option of the Lesser Lantillian had several worlds that might do the job of anchoring another Republic fleet large enough to at least *attempt* to fight back. Worlds that included Onderon, whose King had purchased or traded for a number of League-built warships. Nothing bigger than a frigate, but enough to be a respectable picket force all on its own, and the orbital support and logistics to help anchor that local fleet could help support far more.

Frankly, the *only* reason anyone could see that the CIS might decide to take that path instead of going through Kashyyyk was that hitting Zeltros from Kashyyyk would mean having to deal with Umbara. Umbara was, at it happened, one of the very rare worlds within the Republic who might well be able to match even the League's tech base. Which would make it a less-than-ideal target for the CIS to challenge in the first place, but also potentially one with a lot of rewards if they took it without glassing the world entirely. On balance, Izuku personally figured it was going to be Kashyyyk anyway, even if only because Trandosha would serve as a ready-made ally for more ground troops and the CIS would want the Umbaran tech.

The League's actual analysts couldn't agree one way or the other, though.

Either way, what he *wanted* to do hadn't been the *practical* thing to do. He *had* sent Aayla and Zavra off to link up with the League representatives on the Wookiee homeworld. Both of them were known to the Wookiees, having worked alongside them in during the Hutt Crusade and earned their respect in doing so. The Wookiees, at least, also knew how close he was to both of them, so sending them to Kashyyyk would be a strong signal of solidarity and reassurance. The pair could also use the downtime, with the Wookiees home being a strong ambient Force Nexus which, despite how dangerous the Shadowlands were, was honestly very neutral in the Force. Combined with how welcoming the Wookiees themselves always were to allies, it would help Aayla in particular bounce back from any backlash from the wholesale slaughter that had been Geonosis.

Zavra, of course, didn't really need that. The Wookiees, however, *really* liked her. For all that they were, in many ways, gentle giants, the Wookiees were still *primal* in a way most species were not. For that reason, their hunters/warriors at least *really* clicked with Zavra's...Zavraness. The fact that the species happened to have a solid knack for tech and Zavra was a slightly mad inventor, in addition to her warrior half, only meant that a wider selection of the Wookiee population clicked with her. Aayla could handle the diplomatic side, while Zavra just *existed* and brought morale and mood up in the process of that existing.

Izuku, unfortunately, wasn't nearly so lucky as to go party with the Wookiees. Honestly, he'd have even taken *politics* with the Wookiees over his actual fate, since they were pretty forthright and blunt with their version of such things. Instead, he'd been forced at not-quite-blaster point to return to *Tythe* for politics involving the League as a whole. Now, he was faced with a very annoyed and harried Azatha Vy, the Twi'lek woman who was the Grand Chairman of the Council of Free Worlds. She and Admiral Lin had been keeping a lid on the League, with help from a few other key individuals, but she hadn't yet run out of steam fifteen minutes into her lecture on *him* running out to 'play with his battleships.'

"-and don't get me *started* on that fool move you apparently pulled with taking a group of *MECHS* out into active combat! You are the lynchpin for the entire League! Not some droid or soldier we can throw away in a glorious charge! If you'd gotten your fool ass *killed*, do you know what a *kriffing nightmare* it would have been to try and replace you? You are *THE* Sovereign of the League. You don't even have an heir! Seriously, as often as you bang Aayla, you could have done with knocking one out before this, you know! At least *then* we could try and keep it hereditary, even if I know that's not what you want!"

Izuku groaned, trying hard to actually listen rather than tuning the woman out. She always seemed to know when he did that. *Normally*, the fact that she was so casual with him was a good thing. Having first gotten to know him when he was only the Master of Tythe, a planet with barely any population when she'd become its Governor, she'd never developed the reverence for his position others had. Which, again, *normally* meant it was easier to work with her. Unfortunately, she also knew he wouldn't just Force Choke a Bitch if she ranted at him for what she considered legitimate reasons.

It wasn't like she was exactly *wrong*, either.

Unfortunately, Aayla and he had long ago discussed that very topic and Aayla just flat out wasn't interested in having kids. She'd been raised Jedi and, more specific to her, she'd put a

lifetime into carving her body into its physical peak. The idea of what pregnancy would do to that peak was appalling enough to her that the Jedi dogma had found purchase in that one specific place, and she had zero desire to have children as a result. Zavra flat out wasn't capable of it after all her modifications and Dark Side channeling, Shaak Ti was both still an *active* Jedi and genetically incompatible anyway. Sabé had admitted she was more into women than men, with Izuku being an exception, rather than a rule, and was a bit off put by the idea.

Despite technically having a harem of women, only *Padmé* had expressed any interest in having children with him, and until recently that had been politically untenable. For that matter, it still kinda was. Too quick a turn around into an open relationship with her, right after she left the Republic Senate, would bring into question every deal she'd ever brokered between them and the League. In a few years? At that point they could openly go for it. Padmé was only twenty-five, so it wasn't like they were in any rush from a biological standpoint. Which, of course, didn't solve the whole 'lack of an heir' thing Vy was complaining about. Even if, as she'd said, he *didn't want leadership to pass down like that anyway*.

Finally sensing that the Chairman was properly winding down, having *mostly* been using him as a vent for her frustrations with the galaxy at large, Izuku finally cut her off.

"Enough, Vy. You aren't telling me a single thing I didn't know. I made the correct choices to deal with the situation, and you're mostly frustrated, *understandably* frustrated, that all the nexu herding has landed in your lap so far."

The Chairman's mouth snapped shut and, for a moment, she swelled up as if she was going to launch into another rant. A few long seconds later, she simply sagged instead, her head coming down to smack the table of the conference room they were meeting in. She groaned into it, but gave a half-muffled acknowledgement of his point...while also giving him the middle finger with one hand.

"Yes, kriff it. It really *was* reckless, mind you, and you can't keep doing that. But you're right that I'm mostly just pissed at trying to get all our nutjobs to pull in the same direction. I can't *believe* that Councilman Ohnaka, of all people, is a relative voice of *sanity* in the chaos."

Izuku snorted. Ohnaka had moved on from being president of Sriluur to its representative in the Council, and he was still just as colorful a character as ever. That said, he was also a legitimately talented, if *very* unorthodox leader for his people. Underneath all the...*color*...was someone with a shrewd mind and a distinct pragmatism that the majority of politicians lacked. He was a *dealmaker*, and one who saw the *payoff* of big gambles while still being able to manage the risks of taking them.

To Hondo, the current galactic chaos screamed 'opportunity,' and he was heading the bloc of the Council that supported the expansion of the League. Despite that expansion putting them in direct conflict with the CIS, and *potential* conflict with the Republic as worlds left it for the League. Other, more conservative, political blocs within the League wanted to fort up and let the CIS and Republic smash each other silly. Those groups saw the expansion to bring in more worlds as an unwarranted risk they wanted nothing to do with. Not when they were already doing just fine growing internally.

Thankfully, Izuku still had firm control over the final position the League took, which had prevented those conservative blocs from accomplishing much. Yet Chairman Vy still had to try and placate them so that they wouldn't get actively *disruptive* on an internal level. While Izuku could control the *League's* final position, the freedom they gave their individual worlds meant they didn't exactly have to get behind his position and push. So long as they paid their due into the greater League economy, *how* they did so was up to individual worlds. Meaning they had to be appeased if he wanted to, for example, convince them to recruit more soldiers or build more munitions factories.

"Well, now that you've got it out of your system, how about you give me your take on the pulse of the Council. I've read the reports, of course, but you've had a firsthand look at everything, including how our...new members...are taking to the League."

Vy grumbled but pulled herself up from her position face-down on the table. Glowering at the amused smirk she caught on Admiral Lin's face, the Twi'lek woman sighed and started a much more useful stream of conversation.

"Starting with the last thing first, the new worlds we've brought on board have honestly been one of the *smallest* issues. At least on the political side. Amidala has been Force-sent on that side of things, as she is incredibly well-regarded by the region of space most of our new converts have come from. Despite not being a Council representative *officially* yet, she's gotten the newbies organized, crossing their t's and dotting their i's for fast-tracked addition to the Council. Something that is keeping them happy on the politics side, as many of them had feared long waits before getting proper representation. Some of them *will* have long waits, but they'll also have a highly specific set of criteria they need to work toward, with full assurance they'll get their due once they tic the boxes correctly."

Izuku nodded at that. It was how the League had been set up from the start, and something that was distinctly *different* from how the Republic did things. Instead of having highly specific requirements and criteria, joining the Republic these days meant you needed to bribe, borrow, and browbeat. It was a matter of favors traded and politicking to somehow convince the 'mighty powers of the Core' that your world in particular would benefit them, so they should let you in. A process that could take anywhere from decades to *centuries*, unless you had something truly spectacular to offer.

The League, instead, had extremely specific criteria outlined in its constitution for when and how you got representation. Some were for protection of a world's population, like stiff anti-slavery laws and minimum education standards. Others were for degree of contribution you gave toward the League in the form of economic or military input. All were explicitly defined and possible to check off the list one or more at a time, in order to get your votes.

Rana had made a disgruntled noise even as he nodded at Vy's statements, causing him to switch his gaze to her as a result, waving for her to say whatever it was. Though from the look on Vy's face, she already knew and both sympathized...and was glad whatever it was wasn't *her* problem.

“They might be fine on the political side, happy even. On the military side every single one of them is screaming for ships or stations to protect them, even if their world isn’t anywhere near a line of advance. I’ve had to disperse far more of our lighter ships as pickets than I’d like just to shut them up. Both so they stop bothering me, and so they don’t escalate to Vy.”

Vy nodded confirmation at that, her emotions telling Izuku she was grateful to the First Admiral for doing that. Izuku grimaced at the reality of the situation, but wasn’t particularly surprised. Those worlds had come to the League primarily for *protection* in the first place, after all. Unfortunately, despite having a lot of ships compared to their size, the League *wasn’t* the CIS or Republic. They didn’t have the raw numbers to establish serious fleets over every world. Not even over every *important* world. They *had* to take a nodal defense stance, though they could thankfully do so far better than either other power due to the Jump Gate Network that was still slowly expanding. Speaking of...

“Have the Jump Gates for Dac, Jabiiim, Randon, and Naboo come online? Those will make it a lot easier to shuffle our assets in a hurry. At least for anything smaller than a Paladin.”

Sadly, Mei still hadn’t overcome the bottleneck on portal size enough to get Paladins and Mirukos through the Jump Gates. Though she claimed she was making progress, and that if her efforts worked it would be relatively easy to refit the currently-in-use Gates to a new standard. Still, even the ability to move large numbers of Volitions around was a big deal, as the CIS fleet that had tried to hit Ossus could have attested...if any of them had survived.

“The Dac Gate is online, but the others are still works in progress. None of the other systems had the right local manpower in bulk to help speed the process up. Randon and Naboo will come online next, since both did have *some* people they could throw at it. With Randon, in particular, it was more a security issue that kept us from using who they had for anything more than basics. Naboo it was mostly the initial distance we had to move all the parts.”

Izuku nodded. That all made sense. Where with Dac it would have been easy to draw from the Mon Calamari military’s Engineering Corps to help speed the process, in Randon most of those with related experience would have been civilians. Ones whose loyalty could be bought more easily and thus couldn’t be trusted with *any* sensitive information about the Gates. No one was delusional enough to believe any side of the conflict was *unaware* of the Jump Gate Network at this point, but that didn’t mean anyone but the League had a clue how they worked. Hopefully, at least. Naboo of course, was simply at the very edge of the League’s new space, down a shakily controlled hyperlane. In truth Enarc was technically in the better position as a nodal fleet base, but it *had* been a Trade Federation regional headquarters until entirely too recently.

“Right, good to know. But back to you, Vy.”

The Chairman nodded and took up where she’d left off.

“Right, focusing on our worlds that already have representation then, things are a bit more mixed but solidly positive overall. The fact that the economic boom hasn’t even slowed, despite the war, is largely keeping everyone happy. As, for that matter, is the fact we’ve been able to report *victories*. That said, the cost of the Geonosis campaign isn’t going to sit well with *anyone*, not even those most in favor of interfering in the war. For now, the fact that the victory was lopsided in our

favor is enough, but I'll warn you outright that there is no appetite to spend lives on that scale again. Not for what most are seeing as a war where the Republic is *rightfully* getting its asshole kicked in. Remember, *none* of our voting worlds, even the ones that are Ex-Republic, have a lot of sympathy to spare for them."

Izuku winced at that. Both at the reminder of the toll Geonosis had taken, and at the fact that sympathy for the Republic was...lacking. Virtually all League worlds that already had places on the Council had reasons to dislike the Republic. Fortunately, they *also* had reasons to dislike groups like the Trade Federation and Techno Union. That just meant that, at best, most of the worlds were neutral though. Getting them to want to stick their proverbial oar in to help either side wasn't going to be the easiest sell, in all too many cases.

"Will interfering at Kashyyyk cause additional issues?"

Surprisingly, both Vy and Rana shook their heads in the negative on that, both effectively instantly. It was Vy that explained, and the explanation made sense.

"Not in the least. The Wookiees made an outside impact during several campaigns during the Crusade, despite their relatively small numbers. Better yet, they did so without actually being a part of the League, standing little to gain from their participation as a result. The League worlds, particularly the ones where the Wookiees took direct part in ground battles, remember that. In the case of Kashyyyk specifically, both the public *and* political leadership are of the same mind. They are allies. Staunch and stalwart ones that are worth protecting. In fact, if you're right about the CIS attacking them next, it will do a lot to turn opinions on the war against the CIS."

Rana spoke up next, adding onto the bigger picture.

"Part of the reason that the people aren't more pissed off about Geonosis and the losses there is because of Naboo. Like Kashyyyk, the Naboo are seen as a core ally, in large part because of how heavy involvement of the Gungans in our military was at the start of the Crusade. The CIS attacking Naboo *pissed people off*. Enough so that even the price paid on Geonosis was worth it, since it could be pitched as making the CIS *hurt* for daring to attack Naboo."

Vy nodded and cut in.

"That said, there's only so much stomach for that. Supporting allies is one thing, and removing a threat in our backyard was also understandable. If you're hoping for the populace to get onboard with taking the war to the CIS on a larger scale, though? That's going to be a tough sell, unless they can be convinced it's for a cause they can get behind. Admittedly, there *have* been some reports of possible slaver links with the CIS and captured worlds. If the Confederacy is stupid enough to dip into that, it could be enough, maybe. But *just* being led by a Sith won't be enough. Most people don't know much about the Sith...or think about them in connection with *Zavra* of all people, not the boogeymen of ancient wars."

Izuku snorted, unable to help himself. The idea of the Sith learning that the general population thought of *Zavra* as a repetitive of the 'Sith' might actually make them die of apoplexy. The sheer *outrage* of their very own Manic Pixie Dream Sith being the icon for Sith kind might just

have a decent chance of doing them in. Shaking the thought off, he focused down on the topic at hand.

“Alright. There’s only so long I’m willing to delay heading to Randon. But we need to prune back the political hydra that is the various power blocs doing their own things at least a little bit while I’m here. Who among the conservative groups could be convinced to toe the party line, if it’s *me* doing the asking and I bring my best persuasion skills to the table. At least for now?”

Vy hummed, emotions actually *approving* at his line of thought. Clearly, she agreed with his own thought that his influence would *matter* to some people. The surprise she felt as well, indicating that she’d probably expected him not to play that card, was also understandable. He’d so far done his best to slowly pull *away* from using his influence like that, rather than actively employing it. As much as he might not care about the Republic, though, Izuku *was* more aware than Vy just how dangerous the *Sith* could be.

“If we take that approach, there are certainly a few key leaders that I think you can sway to your side. The representatives of Ilos and Ilos Minor would be a good place to start, I think...”

The discussion would go on for hours, and Izuku would be run ragged over the next few days in making good on the names and means of influence Vy had provided. In the end, as he was able to shift the general support for the war effort more in favor of intervention, he would consider it worth it. At least in the long run...

... ..

“Boss, I know you don’t want to hear this, but I’m pretty sure the Senate was a rancid pool of liquid nerf shit someone dried out, polished, and tried to claim was pure aurodium.”

The dry comment was so completely out of character for Cordé, by far the quietest of her handmaidens, that the rest of said handmaidens and Padmé herself all blinked. Then, Ertaé and Sabé started to snicker, Dormé’s mouth twitching as she tried hard not to join them. Dismayed, Padmé looked visibly *pained* that she couldn’t quite disagree. Dormé, by far the most controlled of the group in casual settings, managed to get a half-censorious reply out...in a tight voice that still sounded like she was trying not to laugh.

“Perhaps not the most *decorous* was to put it, Cordé. I do have to admit, however, that the politicians of the League of Free Stars are considerably less...fraught to work with.”

Sabé got over her own giggles with a final snort at that comment.

“You mean they actually function as representatives of their worlds, instead of just their own and their backer’s bank accounts? Or perhaps that they are legitimately capable of reasoned arguments instead of histrionics? Ah, maybe you mean that they can genuinely get something done without *months* of debate when they have to?”

Even Padmé’s lips couldn’t help but struggle between a smile and a frown at Sabé’s sardonic additions. Finally, she sighed and admitted what they all knew was true.

“Yes, I supposed it *is* obvious, seeing another large-scale democratic government functioning properly, just how bad the Republic Senate had gotten. Though it *is* getting better,

under Bail, and we should keep in mind that the League is still *far* smaller than the Republic. Even when the new influx of worlds are sorted out, there will be less than nine thousand star systems under their aegis. At least, if we're sticking to those that can reach at least Tier 1 voting status in population or output anytime soon."

Which was, admittedly, a *tripling* of the League's previous size, even if you counted their systems which *hadn't* hit Tier 1 status yet. Nor was it likely to end there, as quite a few systems were still negotiating with the League. Of course, the very fact that the League had *already created* rules to manage that sort of growth, before it ever happened, was another telling point regarding how well-structured the respective governments were.

Unlike the horrific mishmash of the Republic, where some individual *worlds* had Senators, while other *entire sectors* had to share a single voice, the League of Free Stars had created a robust representation methodology. They had anticipated from the start that enough systems would eventually reach Tier 1 status that having *every* Councilor from *every* world as part of the Council of Free Stars would recreate the same problems the Republic had. Too many voices, all shouting loudly at cross purposes, and getting nowhere.

Their response had been to create 'Sub-Councils' called Star Assemblies. Instead of being region-based, each Star Assembly represented a preset number of votes, filling up to its quota as new worlds hit new tiers, even splitting at need to keep the number of votes even between Assemblies. Those Star Assemblies voted among themselves for which of their Councilors took part in the primary Council of Free Stars. That person would then speak for the Star Assembly but, notably, had to cast their votes the way each world had designated.

It was far from a perfect system, of course. There *wasn't* such a thing as a perfect system, so far as any of them knew. But it at least represented a far more even-handed distribution of voting power than the Republic Senate had. In the Senate, a world like Alderaan which represented less than 10 billion people total, colonies included, had the same voting power as the *entire Chommell Sector* that held easily ten times that number of people. Admittedly, that wasn't quite as disproportionate as it seemed, since Alderaan's economic power was greater than her entire home sector as well. But that economic power hadn't really been tied to their vote.

Honestly, it wasn't even really the Republic's fault, as it had been built on foundations created for a *much* smaller polity when it was far younger. But it *was* at fault for not having taken the chance to fix the issue in the multiple instances it had been nearly broken and reformed from ashes. The Ruusaan Reformation would have been a perfect time to do so, for example. But the Core Worlds hadn't exactly *wanted* to lose influence, and they had been the primary driving force behind the restructure at the time.

Cutting off the well-worn path of analyzing the differences between the Republic and League, *again*, Padmé tried to get her minions back on track to relevant subjects.

"At least it means we're able to make coherent progress. I take it your comment means your meeting with one of Ohnaka's aides went well?"

Cordé snorted.

“Aide? Aide nothing! I ended up talking to Hondo himself! Which I *absolutely* wasn’t ready for, by the way! Despite that, and despite him flirting outrageously and offering me Ryll-spiced rum, I got everything you wanted from the aide...except it’s all *official* and from the Councilman himself, instead of just testing the waters.”

The entire group blinked at that, taking in the half-hysterical tone Cordé had said it in. She was...well, Cordé was supposed to be primarily an aide and secretary, even if she was well beyond that in competence at this point. She still very much *wasn’t* a trained negotiator and equally wasn’t supposed to end up in that position. The only reason she would have agree is if Ohnaka literally just...agreed to everything. With no more than minor stipulations she knew no one would care about. Rubbing her forehead, Padmé tried not to groan as she marshalled her thoughts.

“Alright. Tell us *exactly* what was agreed upon. My talks with Orn Free Taa were far more....normal sounding. Though still more straightforward than they would have been while we were both still Senators. Removed from the Senate, he’s actually less...slimy? Though I suppose he’s been increasingly less so the last few years overall, as Ryloth improved.”

Cordé, who had suddenly gained a mildly alcoholic drink via Sabé, quickly began to run through her unexpectedly productive meeting. By the time she finished, revealing that the agreement wasn’t *just* with Ohnaka but an entire voting bloc, they all had to agree that the League worked *very differently* than the Republic. They also all had drinks of their own in hand as they tried to adjust their plans to the new paradigm. Up until now, they had mostly been working to integrate the Republic worlds into the League. Ohnaka had been their first foray into attempting to make connections to actually *influence* the bigger picture.

If they were going to succeed at doing that, they obviously needed to reassess just how the League functioned in more detail...

... ..

Admiral Rana Lin tapped her way through reports with pursed lips. Unlike most of what she dealt with throughout her entirely-too-busy days, this particular set of reports wasn’t from the regular branches of the military. Instead, it was a set of reports that, normally, the big boss was the primary person to handle. He was even more swamped at the moment than she was, though, given that there was a bit of a lull in the various combat fronts at the moment but politics didn’t exactly *stop*.

Thus the boss hadn’t exactly had time to go through this particular set of files since...at least before the battle of Geonosis? Possibly not since the war started, actually. He’d been a bit busy juggling too many jobs on one hand, and possibly too many lovers on the other. Though she wasn’t going to judge on the latter, so long as his leadership didn’t falter because of it, and it certainly hadn’t so far. If anything, seducing Amidala had only strengthen the League, and the others had all contributed as well. As evidenced by a number of these files bearing Zavra and Mei’s names.

Frankly, looking over the files had made her aware of just *why* their Sovereign normally did this himself, with Rana being one of the only others in the entire League with sufficient clearance to see the reports. The contents of their various research and development efforts were...disturbing.

Shockingly, only *half* of the horrifying weapons of mass destruction were the result of one Mei Hatsume's genius. The *other* half was apparently sourced from a long-term archeology team out in Wild Space and the Unknown Regions that she hadn't even known existed until she cracked these files open an hour ago.

Apparently, there had been a *lot* of super weapons floating around during Zavra's original era.

For better or worse, the chaotic Sith woman had possessed a decent idea where to go looking for quite a few of them. Most had been destroyed, certainly, but that didn't mean the research data to *remake* them had been entirely lost. One location in particular, a massive ancient construction that made even Centerpoint Station look *small*, apparently had an alarming number of such things. Though *retrieving* them had apparently been rather fraught with danger as, somehow, this 'lokath' place was *still* operational. Despite being at least 7,000 years old. Some intelligence called SCORPIO had been in control of the fortress still, and it wasn't the most...stable...artificial intelligence that she'd ever heard of.

The vast majority of the designs that had been either recovered or created from scratch by my-middle-name-is-War-Crimes Hatsume had been labeled as 'too dangerous' and sealed away. Something which, despite the ongoing war, Rana had to admit she agreed with. At least, she did after reading basic descriptions of some of them. Almost all of those so-sealed weapons had been planet destroyers or, in a few cases, weapons capable of *destabilizing stars*. That was, frankly, a level of escalation that the galaxy didn't need and was far better off without.

Yet, there were a handful of weapons that *hadn't* been 'sealed,' and carefully screened teams had been allowed to build prototypes of those few. Given *why* she was looking into the files, having grown *concerned* about the level of force the CIS was putting together for the possible push on Kashyyyk that her Sovereign intended to throw himself in front of again? Well, a few of the more promising prototypes might be justified as a 'just in case' measure. The trouble was picking one that would give them an edge if things went badly, without escalating beyond all reason.

Slowly filtering her way through the options, she finally selected one that she thought represented a fair balance. This 'Omnicanon' wouldn't be as effective against the layered shields everyone was using these days as it had back during its last large-scale usage. But if the engineers were right about how effective it *would* be, it had the potential to be exactly the sort of balance-tipper she was looking for. Carefully and quietly, she issued orders that would see the prototype in the hands of a trustworthy captain who could have it in the right place at the right time, should things start looking too grim...

... ..

"Izu!"

Izuku smiled as he caught the pink-haired missile that was Mei. He hadn't had nearly enough time to spend with his oldest friend and lover recently, even if Mei was remarkably low-maintenance in a lot of ways. At least, she was so as long as she had a minder to keep her from losing track of reality in favor of 'baby making.' That did not, however, make it at all *fair* to her that she ended up spending less time with him than Aayla or Zavra did. Sure, he called her regularly, and

either he or Aayla kept the box with her portal on hand for ‘distant fun’ times. But that was no replacement for properly *spending time* with her.

Despite the chaos, despite the fact that he had a thousand things he ought to do on the military or political side of the League right now, Izuku had absolutely refused to pass through the Tythe system again without stopping to spend some time with her properly. Of course, this was *Mei*, so it was a little bit predicable that the next thing out of her mouth was related to a military project anyway, albeit one already used rather than anything new.

“You used the Lancer Supreme Babies! Finally! Tell me how they did! I want to know *everything*! I need to make a better version, after all!”

Chuckling and mentally promising he’d get her to at least eat a meal with him later, Izuku nevertheless started with the sort of breakdown he knew Mei most enjoyed getting on how one of her ‘babies’ performed. Not just the good, but any issues that could be improved. She wouldn’t be able to focus on anything more casual until she worked it out of her system, anyway. Better to just indulge her for as long as he could, before making her eat something and seeing where things went from there...

Chapter 147: Organized Mob

He was *almost* afraid to think it even to himself, but Bail Organa was *tentatively* hopeful that they may have turned the corner on the worst of the current disasters. Not on the war as a whole, of course. That was still...going. Not as terribly as it *could* be, the Jedi and several worlds they’d alerted, including his own, had come out swinging. They’d given the CIS enough of a black eye in the process to prevent total disaster, at minimum. Though they were, at best, holding steady. Something that had come at the cost of losing huge chunks of the Republic outright, tens of thousands of worlds still being slowly absorbed by the Confederacy.

All of it still wouldn’t have been enough without the League of Free Stars.

His feelings on the League pulling wins of their own against the CIS as well were a bit more mixed. Yes, they’d likely hurt the CIS more to this point than the Republic had yet managed, but that had come at the cost of whole additional sectors of Republic worlds going over to the League itself. That was, frankly, only tolerable because it reduced the number of worlds the strained Republic had to hold, and it was still going to have unpleasant long-term consequences. Given the figures he’d seen from Geonosis, he couldn’t even claim the League wasn’t paying their dues for the tradeoff.

His own military high command had admitted openly that the Republic attempting to take out that *critical* node of CIS manufacturing, instead of the League, would have resulted in far more casualties. Possibly more than the Republic could afford, even with the Clone army. Nor did that account for the other ways in which the League was proving at least a tentative ally. The comms relay through their own esoteric network, the advisors to help the Republic hammer something like a cohesive military into shape. The painful truth was they were *leaning* on the League for the

moment. Which made it a little hard to protest them taking systems that were switching allegiance to the League entirely of their own volition.

No, the war as a whole was still in flux, with more bad news than good.

Yet, the *other* problems were, he thought, turning a corner. Recovery efforts on Coruscant were legitimately going well. The Coruscant hypercomm relays might be kriffed to the point of being utterly unrepairable, but the power generators and other sabotaged systems had been another matter. Rapid response and lots of material brought in from out-system had quickly gotten power, disrupted water systems, and other services restored more-or-less to normal. Likewise, while the final death toll was...ugly...it hadn't been even a *fraction* as bad as it could have been.

Even better, and in a way *far* more unbelievable, the *political* reaction had been legitimately downright *manageable*. The direct, personal danger that thousands of senators had been placed in had brought home the reality of the situation in a way nothing else would have, and gotten the senate *moving* in a way Bail had never seen or heard of before. Oh, it wasn't moving in *lockstep*. It wasn't pulling all in the same direction. That would have been *far* too much to ask for.

But it was *moving*.

The normally *glacial* speeds at which the Senate operated were, for the time being at least, being thrown aside in favor of rapid action. The actions weren't always *useful*, and he was having a hell of a time keeping the proverbial ship pointed in a vaguely useful direction, but the break in the usual logjam had achieved several key and critical things he could only have dreamed of before. Approved Senate Investigations to clear out traitors and moles, the full approval of the Grand Republic Military High Command to take control of the direction of the war without direct Senate oversight muddling the waters. Spending measures to ensure fleets of new ships were in rapid production and recruitment was being pushed hard.

All things that should have taken *months*, but that the current atmosphere had allowed to happen far more rapidly. That movement was admittedly slowing down now, which was both good and bad. But whatever happened next, his successful use of the initial panic as a driving force had, at least, given them a *chance* to clean up the clusterfuck and piece the galaxy back together into *something* that resembled functionality. Far more functionality than, he had to admit, they'd had before the war kicked off.

It wasn't going to be easy, and he wasn't at all sure what the Republic was going to look like when the wild ride was over. Yet he was, at least, feeling hopeful that there might *be* a Republic at the end of the line. Which was a hell of an improvement over the concerns he'd had when he'd reluctantly stepped up to lead. What was it that Sovereign Midoriya had said, in that speech right before he left?

'Do not go quietly into that good night?'

That was it, or something close to it. Whatever happened, Bail Organa was now certain that democracy wasn't going to die quietly, smothered in its sleep, as the Sith had wanted. No, it would rage and flail, fight tooth and nail. If the Sith wished to rule the galaxy, they would have to pry its fate out of the hands of the sleeping giant that was now stirring for the first time in a thousand

years. A giant that no one, not the Mandalorians, not the Sith, and not the Hutts, had managed to overcome in its 20,000-year history.

Taking a deep breath and hoping he wasn't just whistling in the dark with that inner declaration, Bail picked up the next task in his endless queue of disasters to solve or advert. Wait, the Ailon Nova Guard had *how many troops*? And they were willing to aid the Republic?! The price they were demanding wasn't a small thing, but this could still be a *major* help. Quickly delving into the details, he was soon lost in learning about a warrior culture he'd barely even heard of before, and just *why* they had over two hundred million able bodied and full equipped soldiers already on hand...

... ..

Despite the situation, Mace Windu had to admit being in the field again, instead of trying to reign in various maverick Jedi or ride herd on the Jedi High Council, was something of a relief. Of course, the only reason he'd been tapped for leading this particular mission was the grim reality that they still didn't have all that many Jedi with serious wartime experience. Even he, despite having been involved in more minor affairs like the Stark Hyperspace War or the unmitigated clusterfuck that had been the Yinchori uprising, didn't *really* have the experience to lead at scale.

Thankfully, he had other assets to tap, and had done so without hesitation when the current opportunity had landed in front of them. Chief among those were a number of Knights and Masters who had taken part in the Hutt Crusade then returned to the fold afterward. While none of them had held fleet command, the League of Free Stars having a proper, professional officer corps for that, many of them *had* been involved in the command loop. Acting as strategic aid for fleets via things like Force-assisted navigation had been one critical use for all Force users capable of it during the Crusade. A fact which had led many of the Jedi who had gotten involved to pick up a certain level of tactical understanding by osmosis and observation.

He still wasn't *confident* that they were going to pull off the ambush they were preparing for. That, however, was more a function of not being sure the attack they were aiming to disrupt would even happen. If it did happen, they were farther unsure what the CIS could put into the system, and if they'd brought enough firepower to deal with it, even with the element of surprise. Still, they *needed* more wins, ones that could whittle away the CIS numbers and buy time for the Republic to get its industry fully committed to the war effort.

As he did his best to ignore the way the Dark Side pulsed as they waited in the shadow of Dxun, he hoped that Mina Bonteri's change of heart, and the fact that she'd hidden it from the CIS, would do the job. Hopefully, the easy win the CIS expected here based on her reports would turn into anything but when they actually arrived...

... ..

Anakin watched with anticipation as Jedi Master Saesee Tinn, head of the entire Jedi Starfighter Corps, drew everyone's attention by flicking on a holomap of the space controlled by CIS North. While there were a great many icons and shadings of different kinds, the most prominent were a pulsing set of circles in what otherwise seemed to be empty systems or dark

space. As soon as the Iktotchi Jedi Master recognized that he had all of their attention, he began to speak.

“Thanks to pre-war efforts by Jedi Master Tholme, we have numerous locations of hidden resupply stations that CIS capital ships have stopped over at. While we cannot be certain, the secrecy needs of such facilities most likely means that they are heavily automated and, at least potentially, vulnerable to raids. Right now our information is limited. We know that a specific class of their capital ships, which shall remain classified for security purposes, has stopped at each location multiple times. Long enough to suspect supply stops, but with too little attached information to be certain of that fact. They could, after all, just as easily be fleet rally locations.”

Several people, including Anakin, nodded at that remark. The Jedi were using empty systems like that for similar purposes, gathering fleet assets in them before jumping out on one mission or another. Only an idiot jumped straight from a hidden facility, such as their Space City construction yards, into a battle via straight line. It was too likely to lead an enemy right back to your base. Which was a terrible idea unless that base was a Core World or similar hard target which was already known to your enemy anyway.

“It is in light of this lack of information and our need to know more that all of you have been gathered. Every Jedi here is one with a higher-than-usual gift for instinctive navigation that will allow you to approach these systems from unusual angles. Depending on the target you are assigned, you may be attached to a freighter, or just use a Blade, but in either case the goal is the same across the board.”

The Jedi Master swept his gaze over all of them, making sure they were with him so far.

“Recon. We *need* relatively soft targets that can disrupt the Confederate war machine. If these are rally points? We can possibly arrange an ambush by superior forces. If they are supply stations? That’s even better, as we can stage spoiling raids on their logistics. The Republic *needs* more time to get our industrial capacity fully online. For that, we need the CIS to be distracted. We need them to be hobbled and forced to take their time securing their rear areas. Your missions are the first, critical step to achieving that, making every result you bring back of the utmost importance.”

Anakin straightened at the force of certainty the Jedi Master gave off at that statement. While he’d love to help strike back more directly, he recognized the truth of what Master Tiin was saying. If they could identify critical targets, it could lead to doing far more damage than just blowing away a few more Vulture droids. He knew his own connection to the Force gave him an unusually good grasp of Force-assisted navigation. So this was something *meaningful* and *important* he could do for the war effort. He absorbed everything the briefing covered with laser-focused intent.

He *would* make a difference to the war, and this was a good step forward in *how* he could do that...

... ..

“The monster and his Grand Fleet are ready for deployment, then. Good, good. The Republic had been given too long to get back on balance, even if the time taken to secure our new holdings was justified.”

Count Dooku nodded to his Master’s hologram, then voiced his only remaining question regarding the upcoming offensives.

“The General has enough forces for the multi-pronged offensive, as planned. Which should he be deployed upon personally? Onderon will fold easily, due to Bonteri being in our employ. Kashyyyk may be another matter, however. The world itself is no threat, despite developing a modest self-defense force. Yet the League fleet building at Randon is virtually certain to attempt interference.”

Darth Sidious’s expression, what was visible of it, twisted into a snarl at the mention of the League. Foolish, in Dooku’s mind, but predictable. Which is exactly why he’d mentioned it. The League might be a potent force, but they were too small to be a direct threat. They literally *couldn’t* spread out far enough to take control of much more of the galaxy than they currently held. Even if he suspected they had the *money*, they simply lacked the manpower to properly take and hold much more territory. Yet, Sidious was obsessed with them, to the point he’d thrown away multiple fleets attempting to punish them for outing him. All the better for Dooku’s own plans that the fool keep some of his focus on the League and its Sovereign. Which is why he made sure to bring them up semi-frequently.

“Grievous is still untested and is a tool of *fear*. The greater number of worlds on the Lesser Lantillies will serve better to introduce him. You will pull Admiral Tann from her efforts to pacify worlds and have her handle Kashyyyk. Have her take several Acolytes with her to help disrupt the League’s use of Force sensitives. Give her the bulk of the Fleet gathered and make it clear she is to crush the League’s response.”

Dooku frowned internally, even as he kept his outward expression neutral. Sev’rance Tann was by far the most promising of his Dark Acolytes, as well as one of their better fleet commanders. Yet, she was no match for Sovereign Midoriya if he commanded the Randon Fleet personally. Admittedly, to the best of their knowledge he was currently tied down with politics on Tythe. So if they struck quickly enough it might not matter. It was still a risk, even if they would be giving Admiral Tann enough numbers to make up for the expected League interference.

Still, despite the fact that Dooku would have chosen to send the more ruthless Grievous toward Kashyyyk, hoping his dirtier tactics would at least make the fight extremely bloody even if he lost, this might work out better. Yes, losing Tann would be irritating, and whatever Sidious thought, the League had a good enough record to consider the possibility of a loss despite unequal numbers. Yet Grievous was...not pleased with the idea of fighting the League. He was after *Jedi* and the *Republic*. The League of Free Stars had launched a massive humanitarian campaign to relieve the monster’s homeworld, and the CIS handlers hadn’t taken that into account when reprogramming him. The cyborg got *annoyed* at the idea of fighting the League rather than the Republic as a result.

Well, no matter. So long as at least one of the two prongs of the assault worked, it was really only a matter of degree of losses.

“Very well, Master. I will reassign Tann immediately, though getting her into position will take the better part of a week.”

Sidious nodded, his expression smoothing again with the matter of the League not directly in front of him any longer.

“Good. Now, there are a few annoyances among the Confederacy Parliament that will need to go. They were useful tools when we intended them to lose, but are liabilities now. You will arrange plausible accidents for them, using your remaining acolytes. Frame the Jedi if you can.”

Dooku accepted the list of names readily enough. Most of them he would make the proper arrangements for. One or two, however, would be more useful to create issues for his Master down the line. He would arrange for those few attempts to fail. In a way that couldn't be blamed upon himself, of course...

... ..

Shaak Ti had not intended to take another Padawan. Most likely, not ever, or so she'd thought. In truth, even finishing Asajj's training had been an unexpected diversion. After the deaths of *both* of her previous Padawans, neither of which had lasted long after achieving their Knighthood, she had felt herself unsuited for training another. Asajj had been an exception. One she'd made only due to the fact Ky Narec had mostly trained her already. All she'd truly needed was a soothing hand after her true Master's death and a tiny bit of polishing on the non-combative bits of being a Jedi. Things Shaak Ti had felt herself up to the task of handling.

She had *not* expected for Master Plo Koon of all people to pull her aside and ask a favor.

Shaak greatly respected Master Koon, the Kel Dor being among the most level headed and *properly* balanced Jedi she'd ever met. A voice of grounded reason and unending compassion on a High Council that all too often forgot the value of both. Which meant that, when he had approached her and asked her to go see an initiate in one of the new hidden temples, explaining that he felt said initiate would do better with *her* teachings than his own? Well, Shaak Ti hadn't been able to say 'no.' Particularly as it had become obvious that he was *aware* of the small but growing reform movement she'd spawned within the Jedi Order regarding certain topics.

Thankfully, that awareness hadn't been used as blackmail, or she'd have lost all respect for him.

No, instead, it had turned out that he *approved* of the changes of mindset she was promoting. As, apparently, did Adi Gallia, and the two had been subtly redirecting attention away from her efforts. Something which honestly explained how it had been able to grow to include nearly seventy Jedi at this point. She'd honestly been expected to be called before the High Council and forced to either explain herself...or outright exiled...long before she'd reached such numbers.

With that knowledge, she also had to considered seriously that Plo Koon might be *right* about the initiate in question. Something which, combined with her respect for him, had seen her

agree to make the trip to the Tython System. Which, as it turned out, was now being used to house the oldest Jedi Initiates, the ones most ready to become Padawans. It was a move she had to admit made perfect sense, as Tython was *not* a tame place. Using it as a sort of finishing school for both dealing with the extremes of Light and Dark in the Force and getting genuine, *for real*, life-threatening combat experience...it made sense.

Perhaps if the galaxy had been truly at peace it would not have, but with the Jedi having been fully aware of the war coming, it made an *extraordinary* amount of sense. It ensured that new Padawans would have fully taken aboard the increased push for combat capability, at least if they intended to walk the path of Knighthood instead of going into one of the Service Corps. It was, in a way, unnervingly similar to Shaak Ti's own reasons for having trained her first two Padawans almost entirely on Shili. Doing so was something she now regretted in part, but only in part. Mostly as she feared not exposing them to wider ranges of environments may have led to their doom. She still maintained, however, that it *had* given them sharper combat instincts and brought them a closer connection to the Living Force.

While finishing Asaji's training and seeing the gaps Ky Narec had been forced by circumstances to leave in her skills, she had idly considered that, if she was going to do it again, she would have mixed things up a bit. She still felt that using a planet like Shili, Felucia, or Tython could teach valuable lessons. But she also recognized that it left out bits of skillset that might have helped her former Padawans handle the galaxy at large better. It seemed that the leadership of the Order as a whole had come to some similar conclusions, in the way they were using Tython, which was gratifying in a way.

None of which had helped her make her decision when she'd finally spent time with Ahsoka Tano.

At fifteen, Ahsoka was old enough that she might well have washed out of the Knight track even as little as a two or three years ago. With revisions made at the very top of the Jedi Order, acknowledging the need to expand the Jedi Order again and revising certain policies to reflect that fact, she had been in no danger of that. Now, so long as her instructors believed she was fit for the Path of Knighthood, she would not have been moved off it...and there was little question that the young Togruta woman was exactly so suited.

Genuinely gifted with a lightsaber, and just *combat* in general, a moderately strong connection to the Force in general, and a notable gift for Force Sensing. She was, in truth, the very model of a Jedi Guardian when it came to skills. Which would have begged the question to most of *why the kriff hadn't she been picked already?* Shaak Ti, unfortunately, had picked out the reason almost instantly...and been *very annoyed* once she did.

Ahsoka Tano was a natural extrovert, with a lot of personality, and she wore her heart on her sleeve.

She was, simply put, too *emotional* for the Traditionalists of the Jedi Order.

Which, fortunately or unfortunately, meant that Plo Koon had been *right* about Shaak Ti being a better suited teacher for her than almost any other Jedi. While Shaak actually *wasn't* a Guardian, a lot of people tended to forget that fact due to how well regarded her combat skills

were. Combine that with being able to help her with the needs of a growing Togruta who hadn't been in touch with her roots, and the new approach she'd been spreading through the Order? An approach which championed the Shan family's currently-somewhat-heretical views on emotions and attachments not being the root of all evil for Force Users?

Ahsoka might as well have had a glowing neon sign over her head labeled 'Shaak Ti's New Minion.'

The fact she was a *little bit* chaotic, very snarky, and would likely take pride in that Minion label only made it *more* true. Shaak Ti was, after all, very much compatible with that sort of chaos. Not so much in an 'add to it' sort of way, as a 'reign it in without being a killjoy' sort of way. Something she shared in common with Izuku, as they both worked together to be the stabilizing anchor for Aayla, Zavra, and *Mei's* chaos. Padmé and Sabé were sort of over to one side in that equation, as agents of *both* chaos and order simultaneously, who somehow mostly leveled each other out.

Mostly.

"Enough. Come, sit with me Ahsoka."

The spar, which had been going on for a good half hour as an increasingly-frustrated Ahsoka gave her *everything* to try and win against Shaak, ended abruptly. To the younger Togrutan's credit, she controlled that frustration well, not letting it demand she keep going, despite Shaak Ti actively egging her on a bit to test that same control. The teenager sat across from her, looking anxious, and Shaak made her decision, releasing the fear of being a poor teacher that still lingered in her mind into the Force.

"I'm sure you have a suspicious why I'm here, Ahsoka. So I will just come right out and say it. If you wish it, I will accept you as my Padawan."

The response was *immediate*, with anxiety exploding into joy. Truly, a girl that wore her heart on her sleeve. Though one that could do better with a bit of shielding in the Force, perhaps.

"YES! Yes, yes, yes yes! Please!"

Chuckling at the younger Togruta's excitement, Shaak Ti didn't act to repress that explosion of joy as many Jedi would have. Instead, she merely smiled a bit indulgently.

"Well then, Padawan. We have a lot of work to do, and there are things you need to know. I am not exactly a traditional Jedi and, currently, I work as much with the League of Free Stars as I do with the Republic. This means your education might be...different...than you are expecting. But I believe it will suit you well."

As Ahsoka eagerly nodded and Shaak Ti felt a fledgling Padawan Bond begin to form between them, she sighed internally. At least *this time*, if she made any missteps, she was confident that her lovers would help spot and correct them. Even better, if Ahsoka proved to have as much chaotic energy as she suspected, she could always hand her over to Zavra for a bit to burn it off. She'd just need to make sure that they did so on a *CIS planet* no one cared about.

After all, if they got along the way Shaak Ti thought they would, the chances of whatever planet they were unleashed on *not* somehow burning down were...low. Perhaps it was a sign that the chaos had infected Shaak Ti a bit too, that she didn't consider that an inherently bad thing. At least so long as she could make sure it was aimed properly.

"Now, young Padawan. The first thing we are going to be talking about is that outfit. Tube tops are *not* suitable for fighting battles in. But I think you'll like the armor a friend in the League introduced me too..."

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