

## **Can One Displaced Hero Save a Galaxy?**

### **Chapters 136 & 137**

Novus Peregrine

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#### **Interlude: Title Crawl**

**\*Cue Classic Star Wars Intro Music\***

#### **The Clone Wars Begin**

A Galaxy in turmoil!

With the revelation that Supreme Chancellor Palpatine was Darth Sidious all along broadcast far and wide, the galaxy has erupted into war. While the Capital reels, Darth Sidious' ally Count Dooku launches a full assault on Republic worlds. Yet, the Count is not the only one who springs into action. With the plot revealed, the League of Free Worlds, the Jedi Order, and numerous Individual worlds do their best to stem the tide. Fleets clash, battlelines are drawn, and worlds throw their lot in with anyone who can protect them. Meanwhile, on the world of Kamino, Darth Sidious' own plans are subverted in a way he never could have expected...

#### **Chapter 136: The Clone Wars Have Begun**

##### **- Day 1: Thyferra System -**

Jedi Master Rahm Kota had been watching the live feed of the Senate session, expecting there might be trouble he needed to take into consideration, when Supreme Chancellor Palpatine had been outed as their Sith Mastermind. He'd seen the Force Lighting, gaped right along with everyone else at the series of events that had so rapidly cut the feed off. To his credit, however,

he'd *acted* nearly the instant the feed had cut, getting his fleet to ready status as quickly as possible.

More importantly, he'd been in a position to act *decisively*.

Having very much expected the war to kick off soon, Rahm had been placed in charge of one 'Fleet Element' of the Jedi Order. He had, after due and careful consideration, chosen to quietly maneuver and hide his fleet not far from the world of Thyferra. The Confederacy of Independent Systems had a strong presence just a few jumps farther down the Rimma Trade Route. Most alarmingly, they had a somewhat major shipyard present at Yag'Dhul and a *massive* ability to produce droids via the Techno Union's control of Mechis III.

That planet was an entire *world* converted to massive-scale droid production. Currently, it produced all manner of droids for sale throughout the galaxy, much of the manufacturing there was leased out to Republic corporations such as Industrial Automation. Yet Rahm had possessed no doubt at all that the Techno Union, who actually owned the planet, both already were secretly producing battle droids there...and would start producing *far more* of them once a war kicked off. If the entire planet was converted to battle droid production, it would near-certainly become one of the greatest threats in the entire CIS. Which, of course, meant it was *very well* defended.

Unfortunately, that meant the enemy had both ships and troops in quick striking range of *by far* the largest producer of bacta in the galaxy. Thyferra wasn't the *only* place that produced it of course. That would have been insane and foolish for the miracle drug that had been the staple of advanced medicine for four thousand years. It was, however, the *primary* location that bacta was made. Despite numerous attempts of varying seriousness over those same four thousand years, something like *ninety percent* of all bacta was still produced on Thyferra, where the plants required to produce it were native and abundant. In point of fact, the *next* largest supplier of bacta to the galaxy was actually the Jedi Order, with one of their more carefully guarded agriworlds focusing on its production.

That little detail aside, Rahm had taken a good, hard look at the galaxy and tried to think like his enemies. Many targets the galaxy over had jumped out at him. Shipyards and large scale weapons manufacturing plants were obvious targets. Yet they were also generally *hard* targets. Major shipyards, in particular, nearly always had their own massive defense fleets that wouldn't be easily overrun. Scanning the galaxy for weak points near Separatist strong points, his thoughts had finally settled on Thyferra.

The CIS used *droid armies*.

Those armies wouldn't *need* bacta...and the Republic's *absolutely would*. Only the truly insane would burn the world out, *everywhere* needed bacta even just for day-to-day injuries. But *capturing* it? Oh yes, preventing the Republic from having ready access to bacta would be *crippling*. Potentially enough so to, entirely on its own, force the Republic to eventually come to the negotiating table if the CIS could take and hold the system. It was simply *that critical* of a resource.

So Rahm had taken his fleet he'd been assigned, making use of Jedi to navigate outside the normal hyperlanes, and parked them near the Thyferra system. The core of his force consisted of Fifty of the heavily upgraded Katana-class Dreadnaughts and twenty brand new Hammerhead

frigates. The latter of which Antar 4 and Space City had begun to produce in the last year. In those, the Jedi Order had quietly taken queues *and* observational data from Jedi returning who had been involved in the Hutt Crusade. They'd used what those Jedi had been able to tell them to create their own version of the 'frigate' Hammerheads that the League of Free Stars fielded. Less advanced, certainly, but still a very solid ship. A ship they were making as fast as possible to supplement the Katannas, now rebranded Katanna IIs with their considerable upgrades.

He also had decent number of support ships, including a large number of refit Consular-class 'cruisers,' which he'd immediately renamed to the *corvettes* they properly were. He even had eight of the ES-24c carriers that they'd managed to buy quietly from the Ryloth Yards. He had no doubt the League's intelligence service had some idea where those had ended up, but that had been far less concerning than lacking a carrier when the CIS had such a heavy fighter presence with their Vultures. Sure, the refit of the Katanna-class to the Katanna II had included bays for three starfighter squadrons...but he'd seen the numbers on the Lucrehulk-class battleship refits that the League had discovered.

*A single one* of those mammoth ships carried 1,500 Vultures.

Even if their own new design, the *Blade-class* interceptor that the Space City team had come up with, was able to take them on at the predicted 4-to-1 odds...he still needed more fighters than his capital ships could provide. Stuffing a full 400 Z-95s they'd managed to source into those ES-24Cs meant Rahm could call on just shy of 2,700 fighters total, with his capital ships having been fully supplied with the new *Blades*...barely. He knew they *wouldn't* have parity in fighters against any major CIS fleet, and more than half of their pilots barely passed the minimum skill thresholds they'd set. But they would have enough fighters to at least screen their own capital ships against Vulture swarms. Which is the best he could hope for.

Now, as he was passed word that he'd been *right* to send the fleet to full alert status and scout the Thyferra system actively, he only hoped it would be enough. Calling on the Jedi throughout the fleet, he'd sent IFF information ahead of them through their scouts in system, and prepared to help with the jump. With luck, they could pin the CIS fleet between his own and Thyferra's defenses and cut this particular thrust of the war off before it gained traction...

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### **Day 3: Naboo**

Admiral Sail'ada's forced himself to remain calm and in control as his fleet exited hyperspace far closer to the orbitals of Naboo than should have been possible. He'd gotten used to such things during the Hutt Crusade, with Jedi or other Force-wielders helping make such impossibly precise jumps deep into gravity-wells almost routine. If a still somewhat *terrifying* routine for most experienced spacers.

They'd been lucky enough to be able to grab a group of veteran Iron Knights to do the job this time. He'd taken the risk of stopping to pick them up from a research project, despite knowing time might be of the essence. He hated that they didn't have as good of intelligence as he'd gotten used to during the Crusade, but Naboo *did* at least have Quantum Comms, one of the few planets outside League space that did. Which meant he'd at least knew what he was wading into,

something that had him barking orders as they came out *within firing range* of not just the extended-range Particle Beam Cannons, but within the closer-range of the Silencer-Xs that the three Miruko-class Star Dreadnaughts he'd been allowed to bring were equipped with.

“Open fire with all batteries! Mirukos, bring down that Subjugator! Paladins, Volitions, hammer the Lucrehulks!”

It was completely ridiculous that the CIS had deployed one of their Subjugator class *here*, of all places, supported by thirty Lucrehulks. Its utterly bullshit Mega Ion-cannon was the reason why he'd risked coming in right on top of the fleet, knowing if the super-weapon managed to fire they might be in trouble. Admittedly, their own shields were far better at handling ion weapons than anything the Republic had. Given what the Naboo had reported the output as being, however, he hadn't wanted to risk it. Instead, he'd decided that decapitating the massive ship with an Alpha Strike was the best plan.

It was one that worked, too.

Even as he watched, twelve Particle Beams and six Silencer batteries, plus a *lot* of more traditional weapons, tore into the massive cruiser from the Star Dreadnaughts that anchored his fleet. At nearly the same instant, heavy ion cannon emplacements down on the planet, which had remained quiet while power was diverted to a Planetary Defense Shield that had been holding off bombardment, opened fire from below. Since he'd brought his ships in from 'above', upside down to the CIS fleet to bring as much firepower to bear at once as possible, the massive battleship was hammered from both sides simultaneously.

Its shields simply couldn't take that sort of abrupt and focused punishment, falling quickly under the barrage. Moments later, for the first time since they'd been developed, the new and improved version of the ancient Silencer they'd recovered proved why it had been a *superweapon* when it was first built. While the Republic had eventually developed shields that could counter the original Silencer, the Silencer-X had been upgraded heavily. Worse, *no* practical ship armor had ever had the power to stand up to the mega-laser that the Silencer was at its core. With *six* of them firing into the Subjugator, combined with the plethora of *other* fire hitting it, the incredibly powerful battleship started to *come apart* almost immediately.

The ship was big enough, and tough enough, that it still didn't die instantly. It managed to fire back...but the Mega-Ion Cannon that was its own superweapon had been slagged by the initial volleys. By the time the ship *exploded* in a way that said 'multiple near-simultaneous reactor failures,' the massive and dangerous ship hadn't even managed to drop any of his Miruko's down below ninety percent shield strength. Suppressing the urge to cackle something about ultimate power, Admiral Sail'ada commanded a shift of targets. The Paladins and Volitions had been dueling with the Lucrehulks, outnumbered but not outgunned. Now that he could start turning the Mirukos guns on those ships...

A quick glance, showing him that the two Veto-class Interdictor cruisers he'd brought along had managed to power up their gravity well projectors, caused him to smile viciously. No matter what else was happening elsewhere in the galaxy, *this* CIS fleet wasn't getting away. Not a single

ship. They could surrender, or die. Given that his Sovereign remained unconscious from his efforts to save the Republic Senate from a Sith plot, he was *disinclined* to grant these pricks any mercy.

He would honor surrenders and treat prisoners of war as his Sovereign would demand. But he wouldn't shed a single tear if none of these kriffing bastards managed to get out the words of a surrender before they were all so much space dust...

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#### **Day 4: Tythe Central War Room**

First Admiral of the Fleet Rana Lin had never imagined in her worst nightmares the sort of clusterfuck that had unrolled over the last four days. Oh, she'd *known* a galactic-scale war was coming, of course. All of the senior staff had seen the intelligence reports that indicated massive buildups on both the CIS and Republic sides of the proverbial fence. Their own building and training programs had only *increased* in tempo since the end of the Hutt Crusade in response, leaving the League of Free Stars with, unquestionably, the third most powerful fleet in the galaxy.

It should have been more than enough to see to their own borders while the Republic and CIS fought it out.

Unfortunately, that was *before* the kriffing *Supreme Chancellor of the Republic* had proven to be a bloody *Sith*, and done a runner while temporarily crippling any response from the Republic's capital. He very obviously and blatantly had a connection to the Separatist movement as well, as they'd come out swinging just *hours* after the karking bastard had escaped the Senate floor. With absolutely no central coordination forthcoming, the CIS Navy, much larger than *anyone* had anticipated, was running wild. They were ramming their fleets down the Hydian Way, Perlemian Trade Route, Celanon Spur, and Entralla Route like a Gamorean rutting the newest Hutt slave girl.

In fact, so far, the only *good* news for the Republic was that the bloody *Jedi* had somehow acquired a decently size fleet. They'd dropped enough of it on Thyferra that, combined with that wealthy planet's own considerable defense fleet, they'd managed to stop the Confederacy's attempt to do the same to the Rimma Trade Route cold. There *were* signs that the Republic was getting its shit back together quickly enough that they *might* be able to stop some of the other advances, but by the time they did so the CIS was going to control far more of the galaxy than anyone had expected.

If not for Rana herself and the incredibly broad discretion she'd been given by Sovereign Midoriya before he left, it would be even worse.

*Numerous* desperate calls for aid and offers of switching sides to the League had come in as the CIS rampaged, and Rana had possessed the Emergency Powers to respond to the most critical of those. Some weren't actually under threat just yet and only required a small deployment of fleet assets to 'claim' under their protection. Others had come under *direct* assault and had required major fleet interventions.

Specifically, Enarc, Naboo, Jabiim and Dac had all required major commitments of force.

Naboo had been the largest surprise, in a way. Both in that its newest Queen had run to *them* for aid, and that it had come under serious assault at all. Presumably the latter was due to it being Palpatine's homeworld, a location where his family residence was already being raided to find out anything they could about the kriffing bastard's schemes. Given that Naboo was a major trade partner, whose ex-pats (both human and Gungan) had a major presence in the League's military, and Rana was *privately* sure that her ultimate boss was banging at *least* that one handmaiden and *possibly* the Senator/Ambassador?

Well, sending help for *that* particular world and folding it into the League had been a no brainer. Doubly so as securing it and Enarc together would, hopefully, secure the worlds between there and here in time. Which would shield Tythe itself to the Galactic West.

Jabiim and the Mon Calamari homeworld had been more firmly strategic decisions. The first was where the vast majority of the younger or not-kriffing-evil Hutts had been sent. Some Jedi Master named Fay had convinced a bunch of Hutts born in *Republic* space to move there and partner with the local government. Their wealth had brought in Planetary Weather Control systems that had *finally* allowed the world to dig itself out of the *literal* mud.

Doing so had been worth it for the Hutts as well, as Jabiim had quickly proven to be *stupidly* rich in a number of critical metals needed for warship construction. Something that *everyone in the galaxy* wanted right now. Knowing both of those things, Rana had acted to protect the planet. Both to prevent the CIS from gaining access to what Hutt wealth hadn't been absorbed by the League, and to protect the strategic resource that it was as a source of those rare metals. Her own reinforcements had just *barely* arrived in time to fend off a significant fleet of CIS assets, and the resulting fight had technically been the first conflict between the League and CIS. Without the Jump Gates, she couldn't have pulled it off. With the Gates cutting reaction time it had worked out...barely.

Dac, similarly, had mostly been about keeping a strategic asset out of the CIS hands and putting it firmly into their own. The Mon Calamari shipyards were *impressive*, even by League standards. While their design philosophy meant they were slower than most yards, Mon Calamari built ships were *extremely* high quality. To the point that one of the only ship classes the League of Free Stars used that *wasn't* built within the League was its medical ships, which they still ordered from the Dac shipyards. Having the world fold into the League would be a major boon...even if the fighting there *still* wasn't over. The CIS had committed a *much* larger fleet, backed by large numbers of local insurgents from the Quarren people.

Rana herself had committed a painful number of their Miruko and Paladin-class ships on behalf of the League. Combined with the fact the Mon Cal had apparently been tipped off by *someone* that something nasty was coming, and built according? Their combined forces were successfully holding off the CIS for now, but it was an active battle space, unlike the other three systems. The Confederacy was clearly far more deeply committed to gaining those yards than it had been the resources of Jabiim.

Rubbing her eyes and sending prayers to the Force, along with any half-reasonable deities she could think of, for the Sovereign to get his ass back here *soon* to take over this mess, Rana sipped at her ninth cup of caf today. She'd had less than four total hours of sleep since the fecal

matter hit the rotary air impeller, and she was very much afraid things were going to get worse before they got better...

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### - Day 5: Taris System -

Admiral Trench gave a terrifying smile of satisfaction as his fleet sliced through the Tarisan System Defense Fleet, despite a valiant effort on the local's part. As a somewhat wealthy ecumenopolis, and one that had a *rough* history with war, the Defense Forces here were by far the strongest he'd run into so far. By now, everyone in the galaxy that wasn't living under a rock knew about the fiasco in the Senate. Truly, Admiral Trench had to admire the sheer guts of the Sith he now knew were backing the Confederacy.

To have infiltrated the Republic at the highest level *before* the war? All with the idea of using the very Chancellorship to subtly cripple their enemy from within, so that they could be fully conquered? It was an inspired maneuver, and one that Trench could see the value of having attempted. It certainly explained why Count Dooku, or Darth Tyranus as the man had now admitted himself to be in private and to his highest officers, had been so confident in their victory. They had, according to the Count, seen the corruption and studied their history. Only by crippling the Republic from within could they guarantee a clean victory in war, and so they had positioned themselves to make that happen.

It was truly a pity that the brilliant maneuver hadn't quite worked out.

Still, what *was* happening, and what they *had* accomplished, was giving them change enough. Despite some measure of order being restored to the Republic at this point, for the past several days the vast hidden fleets of the Confederacy had been able to run wild, taking control of an almost unbelievable amount of territory. His fleet had been one of several pre-positioned near the recently reinforced Ord systems that were either within or near to CIS controlled space. Ord Cestus had fallen incredibly swiftly, not only taken by surprise...but with a considerable number of the high command apparently loyal to the Sith, not the Republic.

From there, Trench had been charged with working his way down the Hydian Way, one of the galaxy's five Great Hyperlanes. Already, a dozen worlds lay behind him, their orbital defenses shattered and Lucrehulks filled with armies of battle droids busy fighting on the surface. A half dozen more were hiding behind planetary shield generators, under siege from portions of his fleet. He had enough ships to leave a dozen Lucrehulks and their support ships behind at each to maintain blockades and still press on. In truth, he and the other admirals had been shocked just *how many* ships the CIS actually had. The previous numbers had been faked, a still larger buildup hidden behind already impressive numbers.

As he watched the last orbital defense station above Taris die to concentrated fire, he knew that this world would be another that would require a siege force to be left behind. With their past, it was no surprise that the planet had a robust planetary shield, one that would take time and serious effort to bring down. Better to starve this particular planet out. As an ecumenopolis it couldn't feed itself for more than a few months, at best, and he still had more than enough ships for

the effort. Designating a dozen more Lucrehulks to the task, he began issuing orders that would see the remaining *two hundred* of the same class moving on to the next system...

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### - Day 6: Kamino System -

Celeste Morne was *very* unhappy that Kina Ha had somehow maneuvered her into giving a *speech*. A speech to an *army of clones that had been intended to destroy the Jedi*. Of course, she *did* understand why it had to be her. Despite being even more critical to the success of the seven-day rebellion they'd led to overthrow Kamino with those very same clones...Kina Ha was a Kaminoan. The fact that she was *also* a Jedi was just about the only reason the now no-longer-biochipped clones still respected her. Meaning that *Celeste*, who was also a Jedi but obviously human, was a *far more* palatable 'leader' for the tens of millions of clones she was about to address.

The last two weeks had been one hell of a rollercoaster to end up here. Within just a few days of their first meeting, Kina Ha and Celeste had fairly easily broken into Tipoca City and infiltrated into the deep archives regarding the Grand Army of the Republic. The Force had led them to the information they needed, though Celeste wasn't sure *she'd* have been able to navigate through the Veil of the Darkside the way Kina Ha had pulled off, the ancient Jedi barely seeming to notice its effects.

The information they'd discovered had revealed critical details...such as the *biochips* that the natives had created *just for this project*. Able to avoid detection by anything short of a dangerous Level 5 brain scan, the biochips had been loaded with commands that, if activated, would suppress the Clones' free will and force them to obey the given order.

If they *hadn't* already known the Clones were a Sith plot of some sort, the orders might have seemed...paranoid and hideously unethical, yet not *completely* insane. *With* that information, however, it had been obvious that several of the orders which were marked as 'contingencies,' were specifically aimed to wipe out the Jedi Order. The fact that the list of orders *also* included several things that would allow the Supreme Chancellor of the Republic, or in specific situations a few others, to remove rogue elements was also beyond suspicious. One even included triggering a total orbital bombardment of Republic worlds to 'keep it out of enemy hands.' To say that Celeste and Kina Ha had been convinced they needed to do something, and *quickly* given how the Force had urged Celeste to Kamino, was a bit of an understatement.

Thankfully, the vast majority of Kina Ha's species were complete and total dicks.

Normally, that wouldn't exactly be something to be glad about. In their case, however, it had meant that the Clones *hated* the 'Long-Necks.' Their treatment had been *abysmal* under the Kaminoans and, with the backing of a pair of *Jedi* who they were programmed to revere obey in the first place...well, it hadn't been that hard to create a rebellion. The Clones had the numbers and the training, Kina Ha and Celeste had the override codes for the biochips, and all of them had been fresh out of empathy for the Kaminoans.

So, now Kamino was being run by the Clones. Yet, elsewhere while they had rebelled, the war they'd been commissioned and trained for had begun. For better or worse, the Clones still saw themselves as the Grand Army of the Republic...and they'd been rescued from oppression by two of the very Jedi that they'd conditioned to follow. Which only reinforced their insistence that they were still going to do their part. At least so long as they actually got *paid* for it. Something which Celeste knew the Republic wasn't exactly in a position to refuse.

All of which meant that now *she of all people* had to give a speech. She was absolutely *not qualified for this*. Still, needs must when the Sith drive, and she was still just as dedicated to wiping that particular blight on the galaxy out as she had been when first recruited as a Shadow by the Jedi Covenant. So, bracing herself to fake it as best she could, she stepped up to the podium on the massive landing field. A landing field where ships called from Kuat and Rothana had arrived in response to signals originally intended to be sent by the Kaminoans. There were tens of thousands of troops on this one massive landing field, ready to embark on assault ships. Millions upon millions more were listening and watching from all over the planet. Doing her best to channel Sovereign Midoriya and Padmé Amidala, the two most charismatic speakers she personally knew, she pitched her voice to the microphones and spoke.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, soldiers of the Grand Army of the Republic. While recent days have shown you that not all was as it seemed, and that traitors at the highest level of the Republic attempted to corrupt your purpose, you have proven greater than their lies! You have struck down the traitors, freeing yourself from the yolk of their control before they could turn you on the very Republic you were decanted to defend! Go now, serve as you were taught. Make use of the skills the traitors thought would serve their own ends. Know you will be cheered galaxy wide as the Heroes who saved the People of the Republic from the darkest days! And May the Force Be With You, always.”

It wasn't exactly the grandest speech ever given, but it seemed to be enough for the Clones, as they cheered wildly and began to chant. Then, with an almost unnerving synchrony, officers roared commands and the Battalions shifted to marched. Sharp and precise, they filed into the Acclimators that had arrived to pick them up. Celeste had done her part, but she kriffing well hoped someone more qualified for this mess than her came to relieve her soon...

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### **- Day 7: Lantillies -**

Anakin spun his Blade-J through a roll that forced the pair of Vultures on his tail to overshoot, snapping a shot from the dual laser cannons of his interceptor, disintegrating one of the Vultures as it passed. Even as he did so, he tracked the firing arc of his underslung ion canon to follow the second, firing a slower but more potent burst from it that clipped the droid ship, frying its systems. The swivel mount of the ion canon was a feature exclusive to the Blade-J, the Jedi-only model of the new fighter he'd helped design and test. Regular pilots just hadn't been able to multitask to the degree needed to use the swivel system in high-speed dogfights. Instead, the standard *Blade* had the same weapon in a fixed position, rigged to fire in tandem with the lasers instead of being mounted on the swivel that gave the Jedi variant a 45-degree firing arc with theirs.

Having been separated from his wingman, Master Tiin, he took the moment free of enemy fighters to take in the battle space. It overall engagement was, so far as he could tell, now firmly in their favor. Enough so that the Confederate Fleet was clearly pulling back, attempting to make an organized withdrawal. They were going to get away, unfortunately, but not without having been badly mauled. More importantly, the combined force they'd managed to put together here had stopped their rapid advancement down the Perlemian Trade Route cold.

The battle that was just winding down had been massive.

Too large, Anakin had to quietly admit to himself, for him to keep more than the tactical level fighter battle that was now wrapping up in his head. Eight Providence-class Dreadnaughts, over a hundred and eighty Lucrehulk Battleships, backed by even larger numbers of Munificent-class frigates and Recusant light destroyers. All, of course, with an utterly disgustingly huge swarm of Vultures. That had been the CIS Fleet that had slammed into Lantillies, and solidly half of it was going to get away despite the best efforts of the combined defenders.

Of course, given they'd technically been outmatched, being able to phrase it that way was a spectacular result.

Lantillies had been chosen as the place to halt the advance for a number of critical reasons. The single biggest was the fact that it was a *major* player in galactic shipbuilding. Not on the sort of ludicrous scale that Kuat or Corellia were, but still home to a major set of shipyards. The Lantillies Corporation, in particular, produced an extremely good system defense cruiser, and the overall system was wealthy enough to have still larger vessels purchased from Kuat in its System Defense Force. Including a quartet of Mandator IIs and double that numbers of the original Mandator design. *All* of which had very obviously been modified heavily to no longer comply with the Ruusan Reformations.

Not that anyone was going to complain about that, given the circumstances and the fact those dozen ships had been key to winning this battle...even if five of them had been destroyed outright and three more were floating without hulks without power.

By itself, the Lantillies System Defense Force wouldn't have been enough to stop the CIS fleet, but it hadn't been alone. The largest single chunk of reinforcements had come from the Jedi Order. Space City, where they had been done so many of the refits for the Katanna IIs, and were now building more Katana IIs, Hammerhead Frigates, and mass producing the new Blade starfighters, was located nearby. It had, in fact, been the Perlemian Route's rise to being one of the Five Great Hyperlanes that had killed off usage of Space City over the millennia.

The result was that the Jedi Order had been able to reinforce Lantillies with a fleet of seventy Katana IIs, thirty Hammerhead Frigates, and over 7,000 starfighters. With the Katana IIs having been heavily upgraded, three of them could realistically engage a Lucrehulk, and the Hammerheads were honestly head and shoulders above the Munificents. Added to the local mobile defense forces and defense stations around the shipyards and they'd stood a *chance*, at least. Though things had looked grim until an eleventh-hour reinforcement fleet arrived from *Alderaan* and *Corellia* of all places.

Alderaanian-built Thranta-class Cruisers and their War Frigate escorts are no joke, and they'd come in a *support* role for a type of Mon Calamari built ship that Anakin estimated to be somewhere in the Battlecruiser range. Tough and well-armed, the Alderaanians had only brought a dozen of them, but they'd made a serious impact. As had the *far* more hodgepodge ships that Corellia had brought to the party. Literally hundreds of Gozanti, CR-90, CR-70, and Consular-class refits. Along with more purpose-built military ships like DP20 and Vanguard-class gunships, and Purgill-class cruisers. All supporting, of all things, a half dozen ancient Centurion-class Battlecruisers and three Invincible-class Dreadnaughts. All obviously hastily upgraded as much as possible.

The totality of the firepower those *very* unexpected reinforcements had added to the battle had turned the tide. Not easily, and from what Anakin had seen it had been *hell* to try and mesh it all together on the fly. Particularly as the Corellian and Alderanian forces had arrived *after* the battle had started. Still, that very fact had put them into position to flank the CIS Fleet as well, and someone had clearly managed to take command well enough to make the bizarre mix of fleet elements *work*. Though it looked like the defenders had taken nearly as much of a pounding as the fleeing fleet...and the shipyards had taken at least *some* damage.

Shaking his head, Anakin made contact with a trio of regular Blades that were currently clear of the battle. He'd slot in as their fourth and they could all go hunting through the remaining Vultures. It might be shifting to a cleanup operation now, but the CIS had left behind a *lot* of Vultures to continue harassment and attempts to damage the shipyards. The more of them they hunted down quickly, the better it would be for everyone...

## **Chapter 137: Firebreak**

### **- Near Midnight of Day 1: Coruscant System -**

Aayla was grim faced as she stood in the makeshift command center currently trying to create some measure of order out of pure madness. She wanted, desperately, to be with Izuku at the hospital that was seeing to the survivors of the Senate Dome collapse. Yet, the entire planet was hovering on the brink of chaos, and what was happening throughout the rest of the Republic wasn't any better. She would have to trust the Sovereign's Guard to keep him safe, as he was at least *stable* and showed no sign of waking anytime soon.

Unfortunately for both the planet and the Republic, Palpatine's contingency had been horrifyingly thorough. The sabotage that had brought down the Senate Dome and heavily damaged the Jedi Temple had *not* been limited to just those two locations. Planetary Defense Command, five critical nodes of the planet's power grid, the primary planetary shield generators, *all* of the emergency service depots near both the Senate Dome and Jedi Temple, and perhaps more critically...the primary and backup Hypercomm Relays.

All of those had been hit by Palpatine's contingencies. Not all at once, but in a sequence to cause as much chaos and panic as possible...while also neatly crippling any attempt to stop the former Supreme Chancellor from fleeing the planet. Nor had the chaos stopped there, given that hundreds of orders had spat out of the Chancellor's office during the chaos, causing more

emergency shutdowns and delaying responses to the various disasters. A few outright *assassination* orders had even gone out, some of which had succeeded. Which didn't even *begin* to cover the follow on damage still being caused by rioting and panic.

There were no two ways about it, Coruscant was currently crippled.

It had taken the entire day to even *begin* to get the emergency situation under control, and to be perfectly blunt 'under control' was a horrific overstatement at this point. The survival of the *majority* of both the Jedi in the Temple and the Senators from the Dome were the only things that had staved off an outright complete collapse of order. With virtually the entire planet-side defense command leadership, and several of the highest ranking Coruscant Security Force officers dead...it had been left to the Jedi and a few prominent senators to take control.

The legality of that was...dubious, at best.

The Jedi Order at least, were technically part of the Judicial Forces, so *that* part was legal. Enough Jedi had been on planet and survived the destruction of the Temple to take command of the CSF and kludge proper teams together to start solving problems. The Temple itself was being stabilized with additional support systems, with Skyhooks having been commandeered to create support platforms for emergency modifications. The results were going to be *interesting*, since a good chunk of the Jedi Temple might well become a floating fortress instead of its previous more grounded existence, but it at least wasn't going to collapse into the city like the Senate Dome had. Well, not any more of it than the portions that already had during the initial sabotage, at least.

Clean up around both the Dome and those fallen bits of the Temple hadn't even started. The areas had been evacuated and contained, but it would likely be weeks before they could even begin contemplating repairs. Instead, the focus for the other teams and legions of recruited engineers from every walk of life had been getting the planetary power grid properly back online. For the moment, emergency power was keeping the city going, but rolling blackouts were still occurring as repair and construction teams struggled to put the grid back into proper order.

The primary planetary shield generators were just *gone*. Thankfully, the Capital was one of the very few worlds in the entire galaxy that had *secondary* planetary shields, and *they* hadn't suffered sabotage. Once the power grid was back in working order, they could at least get *a* planetary shield up, even if it would be less potent than the primary had been. Which, given what word they had from the rest of the galaxy, was probably rather important. What with how the CIS had launched major offensives down the Celanon Spur, Entralla Route, Hydian Way, Perlimian Trade Route, and Rimma Trade Routes.

Information they only had at all because of Aayla, and the reason why she was included in this ad-hoc war council.

The Coruscant Hypecomm relay *and* its backup were just flat out *gone*. Totally destroyed. The two most powerful Hypercomm relays in the entire galaxy, worth *quintillions* of credits *each*. Utterly and completely destroyed with no chance of recovery, just as a single component of Pal...no, of *Darth Sidious's* contingency planning. In virtually any other scenario, it would have meant Coruscant was cut off from the galaxy entirely, reliant on relay ships to get messages out or receive word of how the Republic fared.

Except that the *Sovereign of Tythe* was in orbit.

Izuku hadn't wanted to make *too* big of a splash, which meant they'd chosen to leave the *Miruko* back at Tythe. Bringing a full-blown Star Dreadnaught, very possibly one of the single most powerful such vessels in existence, would have been a bit *overly aggressive* of a move. At the same time, they'd needed to make a *statement* with their arrival, one that said they were equals rather than supplicants. Thus, the *Sovereign of Tythe*, known to be Izuku's personal flagship during the Crusade and effectively named after him, had been their ride. The Paladin-class was still a battleship of immense power, but not enough to completely overawe, given that the Coruscant Defense Fleet had multiple Mandators in it....one of which had unfortunately fled with Palpatine aboard.

The critical point at the moment, however, wasn't the fact that *Sovereign of Tythe* was a powerful warship. Rather, the important thing was that *Paladins in general* had originally been designed as fleet flagships. That meant that all of them, and the *Sovereign of Tythe* in particular given it had been Izuku's personal ship during the Crusade, were equipped with an extremely large bank of Quantum Comms. Thousands of high-bandwidth channels, intended not just for local command and control, but to link an entire fleet back to the greater network. While individual ships *could* connect, doing so as a single block was better for fleet organization and security, thus standard fleet practice was to link back to the Quantum Network *through* a flagship when possible.

Which meant that *Sovereign of Tythe* had enough bandwidth to connect critical communications from the Capital to League Space, and in turn connect to the Hypercomm relays there.

It wasn't a full replacement for the communication lost, of course. Even if multiple *Miruko*-class ships had been in orbit, the sheer *ridiculous* bandwidth of communication that normally came out of Coruscant would have been impossible to support. For that matter, even splitting that traffic between the half dozen Hypercomm Relay stations within League Space would likely have over-strained those smaller relays. Certainly, despite its explosive growth since being created, the Quantum Comm network itself wouldn't have been able to take the strain.

Thankfully, it *was* enough bandwidth to reconnect *critical* communications channels.

While the average citizen was still cut off from the Hypercomm, major services like the news, critical banking functions, and the surviving government apparatus were all being temporarily routed through *Sovereign of Tythe*. That meant that they *weren't* fully cut off the way Darth Sidious had intended them to be. With that being true, a handful of the more competent Senate leaders such as Bail Organa and Garm Bel Iblis, along with Grandmaster Yoda and others of the High Council, were attempting to wrangle the wild beast that was the Republic in crisis mode. Something that was made all the more difficult by the fact that *this part wasn't* legal.

Strictly speaking, control of the Republic should have passed to Mas Amedda as the Vice Chair, and only *after* a full Senate vote formally found Supreme Chancellor Palpatine unfit for his duties. The problem with that, of course, was that the Senate *wasn't* really *functional* at the moment, and the entire Chancellor's office had either fled or been arrested, including Mas Amedda. The laws-as-currently-written had *not* considered the insane possibility that the Supreme

Chancellor of the Republic would turn out to be a traitorous Sith terrorist, who'd crippled the government in the process of escaping the planet.

That possibility hadn't been accounted for by the law framers. Imagine that.

Clearly an oversight on their part.

The result of all of this was that Aayla, who desperately wanted to be with Izuku, was instead stuck in a war council. With the League's Sovereign down, she was the single most senior member of the League of Free Stars on the planet. It was Aayla who had authorized the use of *Sovereign of Tythe* to reroute communications. It was Aayla and Esa Rostino who were, both feeling very out of their depth, shaping League policy regarding the war that was now in full swing.

Aayla had never so badly wished to be back on the *Wandering Fate* with Izuku, traveling the galaxy with her worst worry trying to find a way to escape a slaver's chastity belt...

... ..

## - Day 2: Coruscant -

Grand Master Yoda was feeling every single year of his near nine centuries of life. Only the Force was sustaining him, and only the fact that Veil of the Darkside had been badly eroded by Darth Sidious's flight was allowing him and the other Masters to keep ahead of the various disasters, both on the planet and off it. Locally to the planet, things were still a mess and likely would be for weeks, at minimum, though at least the loss of life had been *far* less than their Sith opponent had obviously intended. Yet the casualties were bad enough as they were.

So far, just on the planet of Coruscant itself, they'd lost 73 Jedi. The bulk of those had been lost to the initial partial collapse of the Jedi Temple, but a number of others had died valiantly trying to restore order to the chaos. Thankfully, *none* of the dead had been younglings and few had been among the initiates. With so many clans having been moved off to the new, hidden temples, none of those remaining had been within the parts of their home that had collapsed. A blessing of the Force that had more than a few traditionalists who'd been against the changes abruptly changing their tunes.

Moving down the list of importance, at least to Yoda's mind, were the leadership losses. Aside from the officers of the CSF and Judicial Forces lost, at current count, 237 Senators had died in the Dome collapse. There were also another 328 such that were badly enough injured to be rendered out of action for the time being. Considering it had been one of the fullest sessions in decades, with over 8,000 senators in attendance, the number that had *survived* was honestly impressive. Something which was owed entirely to the actions of Sovereign Midoriya, the various Jedi present, and some of the more courageous Senators. Thanks to their combined efforts, the Republic still had a majority government surviving and beginning to pull together.

Yet, getting any sort of useful structure or decisions out of them would likely take days yet.

Meanwhile, the civilian casualties were still being counted, but had already passed 70,000. The Senate Dome alone had housed thousands of workers, though many had managed to escape as the Sovereign held the Dome up in feat of the Force Yoda wasn't entirely confident even he could

have duplicated. Thousands more had died due to the damages the collapse of the Dome had caused lower levels, as well as the damage falling sections of the Temple had caused. Yet more had died to the various forms of sabotage, the riots and panic that they were still trying to get under control, and due to loses of power or emergency services.

In truth, it was already being predicted that the death might climb as high as a few million, if they ever got a full count at all. He hoped yet that such was a pessimistically high estimate, but the sheer population density of Coruscant meant it very well might not be. Something that was doubly true if you counted the deaths of those managing the Hypercomm Relay stations, and ‘a few million’ didn’t even *begin* to cover the countless deaths occurring galaxy wide as the Confederacy and Sith pressed their attacks. Already, dozens of worlds had fallen or surrendered, Yoda had felt the deaths of still more Jedi across the galaxy, and the situation was still getting *worse*.

Yet there *were* bright spots to be seen, even among the disasters.

Already word had gotten back to them that Rahm Kota’s fleet had helped stop an attack on Thyferra cold, and those they had warned of the Sith machinations had proven they’d made preparations of their own. Alderaan, Corellia, and a dozen other worlds were throwing together ad-hoc fleets which, in conjunction with the reborn Army of the Light, were preparing to throw themselves into the fire. There was at least some hope on the horizon that the Sith advance could be halted, and a fighting chance could be found.

Yoda, for all his exhaustion, could feel the Force beating in more than just pain. Right alongside the pain was a thrumming beat of *triumph*, as if the very chains of fate had somehow been slipped and an impossible chance been provided to them. It was that feeling, along with the weakening of the Veil, that Yoda clung to fiercely as he continued to help manage the crisis to the best of his considerable ability...

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### - Day 3: Coruscant -

Padmé Amidala felt utterly adrift as she stared with half-unseeing eyes at the reports coming in from Naboo. She’d been pulled away from crisis management yesterday, when emergency alerts from Naboo had come in reporting a CIS fleet of immense power sieging her home. She’d been forced to watch, helpless for a second time in her life, as her planet was put under blockade. A ghost of her past had seemed to grip at her heart as she watched *Lucrehulks* loom threateningly over her home once more.

Yet, for all that the threat had echoes of the past in it, there had been major differences too.

Naboo was no longer lightly defended. Her, her successor, and their chosen candidate to succeed said successor, had all taken steps to prevent it from being so easy a second time. The Gungans had taken *even farther* steps, including some it was obvious no one had been aware of, given that they’d produced *multiple battlecruisers* out of the oceans when the enemy fleet had arrived. Even so, the defense forces had been horrifically outmatched, to the point that they hadn’t even *tried* to engage the enemy fleet directly. Instead, they’d made use of an initiative that had begun under Padme herself, and secretly continued ever since.

They'd activated planetary shields no one had known they had.

The entire project had been incredibly secretive, and the bulk of the work done by the *Gungans*, not the humans of Naboo. With the help of *very* interested parties within the League of Free Stars, the Gungans had invested heavily in advancing their understanding of shield technology. Their own unique shields had been of *great* interest to the League, and the League had helped them make the design leap from 'theater' scale shields that could cover a city or battlefield, to a true planetary shield design. When the Gungans had brought it to Padmé, she'd realized the chance they'd given her, and quietly diverted some of the massive uptick of revenue from booming trade toward helping *build* the generators and power plants needed.

It was a work that had continued unabated under her successor, and which had now been *activated* by her successor's successor. Queen Neeyutnee had instantly assessed the threat and, in conjunction with Boss Rugar Nass, chosen to activate those hidden shields and hold the defense fleet in tight to the planet, under the shield's protection. Something that had proven to be the correct call when even the enemy Subjugator's superweapon had proven unable to breach the shield. Apparently, according to a wide-eyed Eirtaé, the unique form of shield the Gungans had come up with used already-ionized plasma. Meaning that the Mega-Ion Cannon hadn't just been *ineffective*, but had actually *added power* to the planetary shield. Something that had stymied the CIS fleet.

Said fleet had reverted to a more standard bombardment which *would* have brought the shield down sooner or later. Despite the defense fleet and the ground ion-cannons that had been installed by her and her successor doing their best to fire back through the shield and hamper the enemy fleet, Naboo's fall *should* have been inevitable...

If, that is, Queen Neeyutnee hadn't flipped the script entirely and switched Naboo's allegiance to the League of Free Stars in exchange for protection.

Objectively, it had been the right call. Possibly the *only* right call available to the current Queen. A powerful fleet had screamed down the Enarc Run from Tythe and hammered the CIS fleet into so much scrap metal, capturing only those ships that had been smart enough to realize they were doomed after their Subjugator flagship was so adroitly destroyed. Objectively, a correct choice that had saved Naboo.

*Subjectively*, it had rendered Padmé's every thought a scrambled mess she was still desperately trying to sort out.

Relief that her home had survived almost unscathed. Horror that Naboo was no longer a Republic world after all she'd done to try and fix the Republic. Elation regarding what it *might* mean for her ability to be open with her relationship with Izuku. Dismay at the likely fracturing of the power base she'd put together to attempt to steer the galaxy toward a brighter future. So many emotions, many of them conflicting, that she'd found herself paralyzed trying to process it all and find direction among a galaxy suddenly gone mad. Slowly, ever so slowly, she made progress. Sorting out pieces of the mess in her head one at a time.

Technically, since Padmé was the Senator for the entire Chommell sector, not just Naboo, her position as Senator was currently untouched. Yet, she could read a galaxy map as well as

anyone. She knew full well that the Chommell sector as a whole was now smashed directly between the League of Free Stars and the core of Confederacy systems bunched around the galactic southwest. Enarc had already gotten aid of its own by flipping colors to the League, and the part of her that was still calculating politics and angles knew that most of the worlds in the region which were not yet overrun would do the same. The Republic couldn't help them now, they would know it, and the League was a *far* more palatable option for most of them than the CIS. Doubly so now, after Palpatine's very public and violent exit.

Whether or not the League actually had enough strength to *hold* all the worlds that came to them for help was something Padmé didn't know. If they did, however, it was likely that nearly her entire sector would apply for membership in exchange for protection. Meaning, most likely, she was about to become a Representative of the Council of Free Worlds instead of the Republic Senate. Assuming, of course, that she didn't get pushed out of that position as being too closely aligned with the Republic.

The most likely result of that would be the political bloc she'd collected within the Senate breaking up and flowing quietly into the other Senate factions.

That thought was, finally, enough to get her brain fully working again. Grimacing and realizing she might only have a matter of *days* to use her remaining influence to help the galactic situation, she spoke to her handmaidens with a crisp, commanding voice.

"Alright girls, up and moving! Our influence is going to fall through our fingers like water in no more than a few days. Time to burn favors and try to reorganize the bloc so they can hold together without us. Or, barring that, that they can join the best of the remaining factions as a unit. Dormé, I need break downs of which factions have even *survived*, and which ones are likely to hold together. Cordé, work with Sabé to figure out who both owes us favors and is still likely to honor them, and how we can collect on them. Eirtaé, you and I are getting as high up the chain with the ad-hoc war council as we can, before they decide we need to be cut out. We need as accurate a picture of how karked the galaxy is as we can get! Move it, move it, move it!"

Her handmaidens, shaken out of the same stupor she had been caught in, now scrambled to obey, jolted loose by their mistress. Whatever came next, they would tackle it together, and do whatever good they could still manage...

... ..

#### **- Day 4: Raxus Secundus -**

Darth Tyranus, having just finished updating his Master on the state of the war so far, settled in to stare at a map of the galaxy with an expression of deep contemplation on his face. Sidious, he knew, was utterly enraged about having been driven from his secret throne. Yes, contingencies had existed for the possibility. Already, those contingencies were hard at work, painting Sheev Palaptine as the greatest ally of the Separatist movement. Their 'man on the inside,' who had fooled the entire Republic, preventing them from acting while the Confederacy was in its infancy.

It would take a little time, but the narrative would hold, and Palpatine would step into the major role of running the newly formed Separatist Senate just as he had the Republic Senate. Who better for the position, after all, than a man who had held the same job for their enemies...while secretly helping the Confederacy be born? There was more than enough genuine, provable truth to the idea that Palpatine had helped *create* the Confederacy. Including the backing of the various major powers within it who had known who he was in some fashion, such as Nute Gunray. It had been a fully fleshed out 'Plan B' from the very start. One which would see them to take a more traditional route toward conquering the greatly weakened Republic. Darth Tyrannus to handle military affairs, and his Master to slowly take the reigns of the 'civilian' government.

Yet, it had never been more than a backup plan, and Sidious was utterly furious that he'd been forced to activate it.

Darth Tyrannus saw things differently. More accurately Count Dooku, who still self-identified by that name more than his Darth title, considered what was *actually* happening to be *by far* the superior result. He had sought out the Sith out of disillusionment with the Jedi and Republic. He had believed, *still* believed, that the Sith were a required foil. A threat to break the stagnancy and corruption of the Republic. A cleansing fire to burn away the dross and leave only refined metal.

It had happened before, after all.

Numerous times throughout the Republic's history, the Sith had served that role. They rose up, attacked a decadent and foolish Republic, and forced the Republic and Jedi both to unite and rise to the occasion, shaking off their latest round of corruption in the process. It was a cycle of renewal for the galaxy, of sorts, or so Dooku had come to believe. In truth, his greatest concern when he'd finally learned the details of the Grand Plan had been that it might actually *succeed*, leaving the Sith in charge of the galaxy. By that time, however, he had fallen far enough to accept the possibility. To take the view that 'if the Jedi and Republic are no longer strong enough to survive, then they must be replaced with something better.'

Now, as he contemplated the results they'd actually gotten, a slow smile spread across his face. The Senate? Stricken hard enough to shake even the most corrupt to their cores. The Jedi Order? Given a harsh wake up call, yet already responding in ways that made him almost proud of his former fellows. The reveal that they had rebuilt the Army of Light to some extent was particularly telling, speaking of them having shaken off their complacency somewhat even before the war started, to a degree the old him would never have believed possible. The Republic as a whole? Split not just into two, but *three*, as many sought shelter with the League of Free Stars.

He was helping light the galaxy on fire, and was now completely confident that what came out of the other side would be the stronger for it. It was *his* vision, not Sidious's, that had been the more accurate. Even if he was only now being reminded of what that vision had been before Sidious had twisted it to his own viewpoint. He'd imagined a galaxy refined, rather than brought to heel, and there was every indication it was he who had predicted how things would go more clear-sightedly, not his Master.

There was a deep satisfaction in that.

Dooku would play his part to perfection. He would become the villain the galaxy needed to unite against. Should the galaxy succeed? Then he would die knowing he had fixed what was broken, even if the cost was truly terrible. Of course, that meant it was also time to start taking steps to be rid of Sidious when the time came. He was no longer required, even if he was still the stronger between the two of them. The one in control of the now somewhat weakened Veil. That could easily change, however, and Dooku had more room to plan while his Master reestablished himself than ever before.

It was past time to embrace the best traditions of the Sith and plot to properly usurp his Master...

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### - Day 5: Hyperspace -

Raymus Antilles had been content in life, not too long ago, being the captain of a mere corvette. Of course, the reason for that state of affairs having been true was that the 'mere' corvette in question had been the *Sundered Heart*, Senator Organa's personal ship. Despite having gone from commanding a cruiser in the Royal Navy to captaining the much smaller corvette, the posting had been a massive prestige boost. One which had indicated just how deeply trusted he was by the ruling house of his homeworld. He'd been pleased with that posting and had developed a close working relationship with the Senator since it had first begun.

Which is probably how he now found himself screaming through Hyperspace in command of the largest warship Alderaan had fielded since the New Sith wars.

Technically, there were twelve of them, cruisers that the Mon Calamari referred to as the MC80a. A combat variant of the medical and evacuation cruisers that had originally been designed at the request of, and for sale to, the Shattered Shackles mercenary unit. A mercenary unit had specialized in anti-slaver operations...and which had eventually turned out to be effectively a training command for what would become the League of Free Stars' navy.

It was no accident that Rana Lin, once the Commadore of the Shattered Shackles Fleet, was now the 'First Fleet Admiral' of the entire League Navy.

The League had continued to order increasing amounts of the Dac-built medical ships, and his own rulers and other interested parties throughout the Republic had ordered quite a number of the amazingly well-built craft for their own relief efforts. Yet, though the ships *had* been armed with point defense and possessed *incredibly* good shielding, they hadn't been warships. Not, that was, until something or someone tipped Senator Organa and Queen Breha off that the war everyone had feared was *inevitable*, rather than just possible.

Whatever had alerted them, the husband and wife pair had acted decisively.

The Mon Calamari government had been quietly contacted and somehow convinced to convert the MC80 design into a proper warship, both for their own use and for sale to Alderaan. Now, the Alderaan Defense Force had just shy of forty of the 1,200-meter-long cruisers, armed heavily enough that they officially fell into the Battlecruiser classification in the League's system. A system which Alderaan had quietly adopted to organize its own fleets, in acknowledgement that

the League of Free Stars was now *the* definitive authority on modern naval standards. After all, no one else had fought a war on the scale of the Hutt Crusade for a thousand years.

Well, not until now, anyway.

Of course, when *Admiral* Raymus Antilles had been, as one of the most trusted and senior Captains in the entire Defense Force, promoted and given a fleet command...he'd been given more than just a standard MC80 for his personal flagship. Not that there really was such a thing as a 'standard' MC80. The only genuinely sort-of-annoying thing about the Mon Calamari shipbuilding practices was their habit of treating every single ship as a *work of art*. There was no arguing with the incredible quality of the *result*, but it did mean that every single ship had unique design choices and quirks. A few more guns, a few different guns, different hangar arrangements, more or less lavish or spartan accommodations, the list of variances went on. To the point even someone completely familiar with one MC80 might well get lost within the hull of a sister ship just trying to reach the bridge from their quarters.

His flagship, named *Home One* by Bail Organa himself, was the most radical divergence of all those so far delivered.

She was a solid 200 meters longer than any of her sister ships, measurably more heavily armed, and carried nearly twice the fighter compliment of the other MC80As. Where the average MC80a carried 6 fighter squadrons, *Home One* carried twelve. A design choice Raymus himself heartily approved of. The sheer, ridiculous number of droid fighters that Lucrehulks could put into space meant he wanted as many fighters for his own screen as he could get. There was only so much that the superior *quality* of their fighters could do to make up for the sheer quantity disparity.

At least Naboo had been willing to sell them the N-3 design that the League had used to great effect before phasing them out for the Hero. Frankly, Raymus would have been even happier to get his hands on the Hero itself, but the League didn't sell it to non-affiliated worlds. It should be fine, though. The N-3 was already a *far* better space superiority fighter than anything the CIS was supposed to have. Which is precisely why they were now using them exclusively, save colony worlds that still have older fighters to flesh out numbers. There had initially been some talk about acquiring the H-7 design as well...but the truth was that what they *really needed* was a fighter that could screen them from Vultures, not a bomber that could make runs on capital ships. So they'd settled for stuffing every N-3 they could into their hangars.

Now, he only hoped that such had been the right choice as he raced through hyperspace, hoping to make it on time to defend the star system what currently passed for high-command were hoping to make one of the firebreaks against the CIS. Lantillies was a good choice, in his opinion. Particularly with the reinforcements the Jedi had apparently already dropped into the system. Those crazy bastards having somehow built a fleet of their own while no one was looking was a surprise for sure, but hardly an unpleasant one given the circumstances. Corellia was sending aid too, a mismatched fleet of ships frantically brought out of mothballs and updated. They weren't throwing their own new construction into the fire just yet, which he could understand. Even the old-ships-made-new they were providing would be a powerful additional asset he'd be glad was with them.

Taken altogether, it might just be enough...to stop a single offensive out of *three* that were still actively stabbing into the Republic.

Though, at least the good word was that another such offensive had been stopped cold at Thyferra already, and that the League had stepped in to protect against a handful more thrusts at critical systems. The combined victories nicely proved to the troops that the situation wasn't *entirely* hopeless yet. It was his job and the job of his counterparts to shift the balance farther, to keep that little bit of morale lift alive. If they could just staunch the bleeding and buy the galaxy a little time to scramble back to their collective feet, the Republic might yet survive this catastrophe...

... ..

### - Day 6: Dac -

As Zavra idly used the Force to aid her movement underwater, she swept the Darksaber she'd brought along through one of the Quarren zealots as he tried to make a passing run on her with his underwater-scooter-thingy. She much preferred her Double Saber, it being the weapon her first Mistress had specialized in and taught to her. She'd known from her few, limited experiences with underwater combat that they were a poor choice in such environments though. Hence digging out the silly emo-saber that she'd taken from that big-headed Mando dude.

Ah well, at least she was getting some serious action again!

Inventing with Mei was super fun, in more than one way! But she'd always found her true thrills on the battlefield, doing his Mistress's bidding. The Hutt Crusade had been a great way to get that rush again, and one she didn't even need to feel slightly bad about, like she sometimes had with the Empress's targets! Even aside from the rush of combat itself, many of the 'combat' implants had ~fun~ side effects that left her practically moaning. Not quite literally, since her Mistress had force her to learn to focus through it, but getting a nice jolt to her pleasure centers whenever she needed to use some of her boost 'ware was always amazing.

Something that she was having to do a fair bit more underwater than usual, to keep up with everyone else on the battlefield! Sure, she had implants that let her breath underwater, but she wasn't natively aquatic like the Quarren, Mon Calamari, or Gungans that were doing most of the fighting here under Dac's oceans. So the occasional use of her reflex-boosters, subdermal target scramblers, and synaptic accelerator were called for in this case. They allowed her to keep up, despite the other combatants all being *built* for underwater fights in a way she wasn't. The fact that all of those implants had been specifically designed with *fun* side effects was only a bonus, really!

Even as she shifted through the water to target one of the larger submersibles that their enemy were using, she used the Force to shape her profile so she sliced through the pressure of the deep more readily and speedily. Doing so allowed her to more cleanly weave around the poisoned needles it was firing, instead of plasma bolts which wouldn't hold together well underwater. Reaching the sub, she stabbed into a previously-identified weak point, cutting through it in such a way that she knew she'd damage the energy regulator inside. She pushed off, jetting back away from the vehicle as it overloaded and fried all the Quarrens hanging off it with enough electricity to stop their hearts and flash-fry their skin.

Coming out of the maneuver into a hover in the water that let her take in the battle with her low-light vision enhanced eyes, Zavra had to admit that she was seriously impressed by the Gungans in this fight. While the Mon Cals clearly *did* know how to fight in the water, their hardware had been designed more for policing than serious warfare. Since the 'Free Dac' movement, which had gathered all these racist Quarrens into an army, had clearly equipped their own people with a more militaristic mindset, the Mon Cals would have been in trouble on their own.

Unfortunately for these 'Free Dac' nutbars, the *Gungans* had *extremely good* underwater military hardware. Up to an including underwater 'tanks' whose assault cannons she *badly* wanted to study. *Somehow*, they were firing energy bolts underwater that weren't being karked up by the water itself. She was sure it, like most of their other interesting innovations, had something to do with Naboo's usual plasma. But the heck if she understood how that was translating to working underwater energy cannons that weren't suffering the usual problems with energy shell breakdown through water!

Shaking her head, she grinned wildly and snagged a passing waver, the rapid movement platforms the Mon Cals favored. She let its rider carry her closer to where the fighting was heaviest, before letting go and igniting her stolen blade again. This fight really was an interesting challenge! She was glad she'd hopped in *Acina's Fist* and brought herself along for the fight! Sure, neither the locals nor the League's few underwater specialist corps had known what to do with her other than point her at the heaviest fighting...but that was just where Zavra thrived anyway!

Now, just how should she deal with the next group of prey? Would Force Lightning work properly underwater? Well, she didn't know, but finding out could be fun! At worse, she'd shock herself too, and that would be just liked old times with Mistress Acina, really...

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### - Day 7: Coruscant -

Shaak Ti struggled not to rush forward, to crash into the tight hug Aayla had Izuku in. She *wanted* to, *badly*, but she hadn't exactly made her relationship with them public just yet. Not because she really cared what anyone thought of it on a personal level, but simply because it would complicate her efforts to get some of the stick-in-the-mud Jedi to loosen up a bit. Her efforts, along with the teachings of the Shan-family Holocrons, had gained a bit of traction within the Order's ranks, and she didn't want to risk that progress by having people suddenly questioning her motives.

She genuinely thought that the Shan family's views represented a healthier approach to...everything, really. They had found a balance that the modern Jedi Order just didn't possess. Well, not most it anyway. There were uncomfortable parallels with the Green Jedi of Corellia, she supposed. Yet the Green had their own flaws. With them, their patriotism overrode fairness to all at times, resulting in a different set of issues entirely. The Shan family holocrons contained a viewpoint that included the good things the Green Jedi had retained from the pre-Ruusan Jedi Order, without the fault lines created by being more loyal to a world than to a belief.

Yet, despite feeling that was true to her bones. Despite knowing that it could ruin her efforts. She still wanted badly to join that open embrace. An emotion that she recognized as the

very reason such attachments truly *could* be dangerous. At least, they could become so if one allowed the attachment to come before your beliefs. That self-reminder soothed the stirring of irritation within her. The moment it did, she abruptly recognized the tug of the Veil on her thoughts, something that had become easier to notice with it thinning a bit for reasons they didn't fully understand just yet. Frowning, she mentally firmed herself in the Force and willed a mental version of Force Light into existence. The Veil retreated...and with it a subtle cloud on her mind she hadn't even recognized was present.

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Sheepishly, she reached out with the Force, instead of physically, and was immediately pulled into a *mental* hug of reassurance instead of a physical one. A moment later, she *gasped*, unable to stop herself as a connection...no, a *bond*, snapped into place between herself and both of her lovers.

No, she realized a moment later, *three* of her lovers. Though the one that must be Zavra felt far distant, not just in location, but in connection. Something that made complete sense to her as she fell into the depths of the bond, basking in the feeling of Izuku and Aayla's surprise and welcome. Shaak simply wasn't as close to the Sith woman, having spent too little time with her, to establish the same depth of bond she could now feel herself practically swimming in.

Is *this* what Aayla and Izuku had been feeling all the time between them? It was no wonder they hated being separated! It would be akin to having a piece of your very being ripped away! Light dread at that idea was met with firm amusement from the pair, reminding her that she could feel *Zavra*, despite the fact she was deep in the Outer Rim and barely connected to her compared to them. Whatever this new change meant for all of them, it was unlikely distance was going to matter very much.

She blushed, unable to suppress it, when the clear thought came from Aayla that Shaak probably wouldn't even need to be 'ultra horny' before reaching out to communicate interstellar distances through the bond. That was probably for the best, all things considered, even if the sensations Aayla had sent *with* the thought felt...intriguing. Abruptly realizing her *body* was responding to that thought, she forced herself to pull partially away from the bond and cough to gather the other two's attention.

"If you two are quite done, we should probably let the medical droids finish their check, and then update Sovereign Midoriya on what has occurred since he lost consciousness."

Force, hopefully no one had seen or felt her brief loss of control. It wasn't quite as obvious as having gone over and hugging the pair would have been, but if any other Jedi had been too nearby they might have noticed something. Thankfully, the vast majority of Jedi were still very distracted trying to either get the Capital under control or launching on missions intended to help efforts aimed at getting the *rest* of the galaxy into some sort of functioning order.

Aayla grinned over her shoulder at her, reached up to pull Izuku down for a long kiss which she sent the feeling of back to Shaak Ti via the new bond, and then let go. Well, mostly. She still had one of Izuku's hands in her own.

"Yes. We should let the pokers and prodders have their pokey and prody way, so we can explain just how utterly fucked the galaxy is and get about fixing it!"

Shaak Ti snorted at the bizarre mix of gallows humor and positivity in that statement. It was obvious that, even after days of grime-faced hard work, having Izuku back was enough to spike Aayla back into a hopeful mode. Which, she reflected, was *exactly* why she thought it so important to teach the Jedi Order that not all connections and attachments had to be bad ones. While they *could* lead to bad ends, just as often it was the connections between people that brought hope of something better, provided a light to burn back the darkness. Throwing away the latter in fear of the former was an action of the Dark Side, not the Light. It was something she was determined to teach the Jedi Order, at least as many of them as she could get to listen.

By the time she was done with that, hopefully this war business would be over and she could take a nice long vacation with these two and the others. Preferably somewhere where clothing was very optional. Izuku's reaction to her 'outfit' on Rishi had really been quite enjoyable...

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#### **- Day 8: Coruscant – War Room -**

"So, that's roughly the current situation in the galaxy. The unexpected assistance of this 'Grand Army of the Republic' stopped the combined push down the Celanon Spur and Entralla Route where they meet at Ord Mantell. While the Coalition of defense forces led by Kuat, Anaxes, Shili, Dorin and the Jedi managed to halt the advance down the Hydian Way at Kidriff 5. That's all major CIS assaults at least *temporarily* stalled. Though once they digest all the territory they took and bring more ships forward, we might not be able to hold."

There were grim nods all around at that. There were *far* more CIS ships than anyone had expected, even with the penetration groups like the Jedi and LIS had managed into the preparations the Separatists had been making. There were only two reasons they'd managed to halt the major thrusts so far. The first was that the *Republic* had possessed more groups preparing for the war than anyone had realized as well. A lot of those had come just in the last year and a half, from planets or groups carefully warned by the Jedi Order. Like Alderaan and Corellia, the Shili and Dorin fleets that had fought at Kidriff 5 were from that same pool of groups that had been warned and began frantic but quiet preparations.

The second, more concerning cause was simple math. The CIS had decided to peel off large numbers of ships to siege and secure those systems within the territory they'd gained. Admiral Yularen, who was the senior most Judicial Forces officer they'd been able to draft, had given the general overview. As he'd just stated at the end of it, much of their ability to fight back had been because the Confederacy was choosing to 'digest' its gains. On its own, the Republic was still significantly outnumbered, despite the GAR appearing from virtually out of thin air and the various fleets that individual planets had been quietly preparing sallying forward valiantly.

Now, after Yularen's summary, the two dozen beings that had come together in this room mulled over the information. Bail Prestor Organa, newly appointed Interim Supreme Chancellor in a shockingly quick move by the surviving Senate, a speed brought on mostly by sheer desperation, was the first to speak.

"I think, in trying to sort this unholy mess out, we have three primary questions that need answering before anything else."

Everyone looked at him, many of them with expressions of disbelief that said 'only three?' better than any words could have. Undaunted, he kept speaking.

"The first and most critical is coming up with a sane and practical way to weld all of the disparate fleets and navies into a centralized whole. Right now, everything is working on an emergency, ad-hoc basis with desperate alliances between local commanders running individual defenses. That's *not* sustainable. From everything I've been able to learn about war since starting to study the subject in the earnest these last few years, the one great truism is that *logistics* is what wins wars, not guns. We're going to need a way to bring this mess all under a single umbrella so we can handle supplies and organize *what* reinforcements we even have and where they are most needed."

There were several nods from around the war room at that, the firmest such coming from those with any level of military background or experience. Of which there were sadly few present. It wasn't exactly a skillset that had been in high demand in recent centuries. Not stopping to elaborate on or debate the point, the Interim Chancellor went on.

"The second point is somewhat related to the first. We need to figure out what to do with this Grand Army of the Republic. It's obvious, from the reports that Jedi Masters Celeste Morne and Kina Ha sent in, that they were originally both a sort of slave army to prop the Republic up through a Separatist offense and a *trap*. We *believe* that trap to have been disarmed, but can't be absolutely certain. The Military Creation Act that was passed in loose, incomplete form at the same time I gained my current position gives me the authority to fold them in as the unifying core of the new military. But there are inevitable risks to that which need to be considered."

The response this time was grimaces. No one was exactly complaining about a fleet of *thousands* of Venators and Acclimators having crashed in out of nowhere to help save the day. Nor about the *400 million* well-trained ground troops already ready, with roughly another 300 million still in the process of being trained up. At the same time, the fact that they *knew*, or at least strongly suspected, that the Sith had originally intended them as a trap? That made using them as the critical core elements of a new military...potentially risky.

This time, someone spoke up before Chancellor Organa could continue. That person being Master Koth, the closest thing the Jedi High Council had to a proper military expert and present along with Grandmaster Yoda and Shaak Ti as representatives of the Jedi Order.

"On that particular subject, the High Council has also already decided that the Jedi Order will *not* be taking command of this GAR as the Clones believed would be happening. Our limited military-trained Jedi are already stretched thin handling the recreated Army of Light. I and a few others will be available to become part of any High-Com, to help Jedi Forces integrate and work

with the new military, but we just don't have the trained manpower to command more forces like that. Which isn't even mentioning the issue that we were seemingly the main target for the Clones to eliminate."

There were a *lot* of unhappy looks around the table at that statement, a statement that was firmly confirmed by a nod and few words by Grandmaster Yoda. The Republic had leaned *heavily* on the Jedi as troubleshooters for the last thousand years. For that matter, it had been the Jedi, far more than anyone else, who had managed to restore some semblance of order so quickly. The idea they weren't going to swoop in to *keep* fixing things wasn't a concept many in the room enjoyed. Still, Bail Organa only nodded stoically and continued onto his third point...while looking at Izuku, Aayla, and Esa Rotsino, who were there representing the League of Free Stars.

"The third and final thing is a need to know where the League of Free Stars stands on all of this. We of the Republic certainly appreciate the help you've been here on Coruscant, lending the *Sovereign of Tythe's* ability to keep communications open. However, I also can't help but notice that the League has gobbled up quite a lot of new space of its own."

There were outright discontent *grumbles* about that fact that instantly started up around portions of the table. Izuku, however, was utterly unmoved by those grumbles.

"As of right now, we have only folded in worlds which have *asked* to join the League. While we have secured hyperlanes, we are sieging no Republic systems and committing no violence to encourage worlds to join."

The grumbles turned to grimaces as that statement, as everyone in the room knew that to be true. Which didn't mean the loss of some of those worlds didn't *sting*.

"That being said, I can state unequivocally that the League of Free Stars acknowledges the Sith, in particular, as a threat. We are willing to work together to see that threat ended. Beyond that, as regards the CIS as a whole, the League is less certain. Many of the issues that caused its formation were legitimate in our eyes."

That got *glares* from about half the room, but they didn't phase Izuku in the slightest.

"Joint operations *may* be on the table, and the League may be willing to allow ships to move through or resupply in our space. Furthermore, there are certain *specific* CIS worlds that we are willing and able to act immediately against. We have, for example, blockaded Geonosis for the time being, based on evidence collected before the war began. I trust no one has an issue with *that*, or with the League possibly dealing with that world if they will not see reason?"

Even those that had glared shook their heads at that. They'd all seen the numbers now and were aware that Geonosis was one of the *largest* of the hidden battle droid manufacturing facilities they currently knew the location of. What little was coming out of Mechis III said that state of affairs was going to change quickly as Republic-controlled leases on the planet had been seized and were being rapidly converted to produce battle droids. For now, however, Geonosis being cut off was removing a major strategic CIS asset from the board.

Bail nodded slowly, sighed, and spoke again.

“I suppose that will have to do for a starting point, at least. I also hope that the League may be willing to lend its expertise to the first point I brought up? There is little question that the League Military has the greatest current experience in structuring a new galactic-scale military.”

Several men and women around the table perked up at that, even some of those that had been glaring at Izuku looking hopeful. Suppressing a grimace of his own, Izuku sighed and nodded back.

“That much, I believe I can agree to staying for. As well as to calling a few experts from Tythe to help with what will inevitably be an ongoing process for some time. That said, I *will* have to return to the League soon myself, gentlebeings. So I suggest we get down to at least hashing out how you’ll manage High-Com and what to do with the GAR units. For starters, as much as it *is* a risk, I don’t think you have any real choice but to lean on those units initially to form your new military’s core. They are the only ones with enough standardization in equipment and tactics to work from. Furthermore...”

The meeting, which had started just after dawn on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the war, wouldn’t end until nearly midnight. Though it would, at least, finally get the ball rolling on more than just emergency responses to the situation...

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