

OPERATION: Restoration
Warlord Raiju Kang

Chapter One

Jedi Praxeum, Kiast
Outer Rim Territories
40 ABY

The holding cell was extremely primitive in its design. Constructed in the basement, iron fencing courted off a corner to create the cage, while cold and damp bled through the stone walls of the larger room that primarily served as a storage cellar. A simple, wooden bench lining one side of the cell was all the luxury offered to keep the occupant from lying on the ground while he waited on business in the Praxeum above.

“For all the whining they do about killing criminals,” The Nautolan thought to himself, *“You’d think the Jedi would have a more humane jail.”*

A sigh escaped from the creature’s lips as he adjusted himself on the bench. Laying with his back flat against the board, with one arm tucked under his head as a pillow, the Nautolan stared at the ceiling above as he attempted to distract himself once again. He had already counted how many stones were visible, how many different patterns he could imagine in the rocks, and even guessed what was in each container that lay in the storage on the other side of the basement...

It had been two weeks since the war had arrived here, and with it crystalized asteroids and creatures of all manner had descended upon the planet. Before that event, the Nautolan had already spent a week in this cell waiting to be heard by the Council. Yet, it now seems like they had forgotten that in the midst of that calamity, the High Councillor himself had come down here to unleash a Sith Warlord upon their enemies. Or maybe they were embarrassed by the fact they needed him...

It was at that moment that the creature’s thoughts were interrupted by the sound of footsteps descending into the basement. Pulling himself up off the bench, the Nautolan made his way to the jail door and leaned as casually as he could against the rust-covered bars. His full attention was given to his potential guest. Unfortunately, the boy who came down the steps looked rather displeased to see the Nautolan waiting.

“No!” The boy proclaimed while directing a finger toward the Sith. He was quick to hurry to the other side of the basement and begin looking for something in storage. “Don’t start Raiju, I don’t have time for you today.”

“Oh, come on, Alaric.” Raiju Kang attempted in his softest tone. “Take some time off and tell me what’s going on up there.”

“I said ‘no’!” Alaric didn’t even bother to look over at the Nautolan as he continued. “While we wasted time yesterday, another group of journeymen got the assignment to the Foothold outpost. I won’t let you distract me from my duties again.”

Raiju didn’t need to be force sensitive to feel the anger behind the words Alaris spat. It was a tempting opportunity that Raiju could use for more than just escaping the boredom of his cell, but the Nautolan had larger aspirations. Instead, he merely watched as Alaric reorganized the storage containers before freeing the sole green chest in the basement.

Immediately, Raiju’s eyes narrowed.

“Okay, Alaric. I hear you, just satisfy a simple curiosity I have -”

“No, Raiju.”

“Call it a bet with myself -”

“I said ‘no’, Raiju.” Alaric statedly firmly as he retreated from the storage room with the green chest in tow.

“Just tell me,” Raiju shouted over the fading footsteps. “What’s in the box?!”

The sound of a door slamming was all that answered the Sith. And with it came a familiar sense of frustration. The Jedi were slow to deliver on promises, and as patient as Raiju could be for a Sith; this was getting ridiculous. As the frustration boiled, the Nautolan return to his bench in a seated position. As he stretched out his fingers in front of him, working his other options over in his mind, tiny blue sparks leapt from tip to tip.

* * *

“Wake up.”

The words had little impact as the creature’s snoring continued. Yet, there wasn’t a set pattern to the breathing. Annoyance took hold of the man standing outside of the iron bars and he made it know by lashing a foot out at the iron bar closest to Raiju’s head.

A ringing echoed through the basement, adding to the eeriness that night had given the setting. The snoring ceased and the Nautolan’s big black eyes slowly opened it’s four sets of lids with an added touch from Raiju as he stretched out over the bench. When finally their eyes met, Raiju bolted upright and threw off the facade.

“Rhys! Did the Council send you?” Raiju was on his feet immediately and moving to the other side of the iron fencing where the door stood.

“Yes, but they didn’t send me to summon you.” The words had a disappointing taste, causing Rhys Pwyll to shake them from his mouth. Taking a step away from the jail cell, Rhys was quickly joined in the centre of the basement as the Nautolan opened the jail gate with a brief wave of his hand.

“Don’t tell me that you’re to be my executioner...” A cheeky smile crossed Raiju’s lips. “I’ve never known Odan-Urr to be so harsh, though, I suppose war could have that effect.”

“Odan-Urr doesn’t butcher people, Raiju!” Coming from the top of the stairs, a man with a shaved head trotted down after the words and came to a stop at the last step. In his hands he carried a bundle, which he proceeded to hurl at the Nautolan’s chest. “I’ve told your crazed ass that before.”

“They weren’t people that I killed, Xolarin.” A snort came from the Nautolan. He had caught the bundle and felt the items inside shift while he tucked it under his arm, letting it come to rest on his hip. “They were soldiers, sent to this planet to murder you and your friends. I stopped them from flanking and overwhelming the Praxeum’s defenses.”

“It wasn’t what you did, Raiju. It was how you did it...” Rhys’ words lacked the passion that Xolarin and Raiju had, instead they contained simple disappointment. This was plainly visible in the man’s positioning, seated away from the pair on one of the storage containers and bent forward with hands on his knees. The man’s head shook as a heavy sigh came before he continued.

“You enjoyed the battle, were energized with each person you slayed, and displayed a bloodlust that scares even me. It’s because of this that the Council denied your request and it demanding you leave the system immediately.”

“Denied my request?” Raiju could hear all of his hearts sped their beating. “They haven’t even heard my request yet, Rhys! When I came here I was immediately matched to this farce of a prison and I politely waited to be heard for over three weeks. Let’s not forget during that time, Revak came down here to beg for my help during the invasion - and now he is backing out of our deal?”

“The High Councillor was overruled on this matter.” Xolarin stated with a hint of delight. A glare was shot from Raiju towards the man before the Nautolan turned back to Rhys in disbelief. Rhys paused before giving a nod and then waving Xolarin away.

“That’s enough Xolarin, I’ve got this from here.” The bald man had a moment of hesitation, but when he made his escape he was swift up the stairs. Raiju had paid him no attention and continued at Rhys.

“Overruled, Rhys? If he has no control over his council, then what precisely makes him ‘High’? A pipe?!”

To his credit, Rhys didn’t take the bait to share council politics.

“Revak is still willing to offer you sanctuary here, as agreed before. With conditions -”

“Then it’s not what was agreed upon before, Rhys.” A raised hand from Rhys was enough to halt further protests from the Nautolan.

“To stay here, you’ll need to stop this foolish mission and focus on dedicating yourself to becoming a Jedi.”

“HA!” The cackle echoed off the stone walls before the room was filled with silence. Seething with his displeasure, Raiju began pacing while shaking his head. He paused to fire off questions before resuming his steps. “Well that’s certainly not happening, is it? I thought the Jedi were sworn to root out evil? Not a single one of you is willing to go against the Dark Council?”

“Their time will come, Raiju. But we can’t afford this war right now, certainly not after this attack from the Children. And not in the means you are proposing.”

“Then this is it, my friend.” Raiju ceased his pace and tore open the bundle. Quickly, he snapped the weapons it contained onto his belt and swung over his shoulders the cloak they were contained within. “This is where our shared story ends.”

“Not quite.” Rhys said as he hauled himself onto his feet. “I’ll escort you out of the system and see you on your way. The only question is; where are you headed now? It’s not like you have many places you can go...”

“Oh, there’s still one place.” A large toothy smile filled the Nautolan’s face. “It’s just going to cost me.”

Chapter Two

Canto Bight, Cantonica
Outer Rim Territories
Five Weeks Later

Between the sounds of the serving droids whizzing by, the vibrite music, and the loud and slurred speech of the patrons; the hotel bar was filled with a familiar chorus. The clink of credit chips being slapped on the bar counter and the excited prattling of at least a dozen different languages; all gathered together to create a nostalgic ambiance for the Nautolan in the center of the room. This was the best place to spend your hard earned credits after a pay day; or earn some more - like the fiend Raiju Kang planned to do.

The bar floor was jam-packed. The sabacc tables in the pit were like little islands, around which flowed streams of jocund humanoids of every colour and shape. Each being here had their own story, their own thread connecting them to the Galaxy. But all that melted away on the sabacc table, where all that mattered was the crisp rat-a-tat of riffled cards. Seated at one of these sabacc tables, the Nautolan remained concentrated on his cards while he ignored the serving droids pushing their blue drinks. Yet, his focus on the rotating value of his cards was briefly broken when a new contender climbed into the seat on the right side of him and their large brim hat smacked his shoulders announcing the creature’s arrival.

Before Raiju could address the issue, the table's dealing droid paused its current process and fixed its glowing, golden eyes on the creature. Buzzing with an annoyance in its tone, it stared deeply into the googles of the Kel Dor and pointed at the hat.

"All clients must adhere to the casino's dress code, Sir. This includes wearing suitable headwear."

"This isn't some simple headwear, droid." The words felt forced through the creature's Antiox mask, as if they came from gritted teeth behind the device.

"Sir, remove the -"

"Enough droid!" Raiju slammed his credits onto the table, raising the current pot, before looking passed the droid to the fathier race beginning on large screens on the far wall. "Let him keep whatever charms he has, he's going to need them. I need to hear how this races goes."

"Player has raised five thousand." The droid called out to the rest of the table, moving on from the Kel Dor. The Trandoshan on Raiju's left was quick to let out a hiss at the sight of the raise and tossed his cards at the droid before moving from his seat.

Immediately the seat was filled by a familiar man with a mess of dark hair and a cybernetic arm.

"I heard you were quite interested in the fathier races." The Kel Dor coughed to the Nautolan's right.

"This is Canto Bight, friend." Raiju shot a look of annoyance at the Kel Dor. "It's like THE thing people come here to bet on."

"Perhaps..." The Kel Dor started, flicking his wide brim up before leaning in to the table to look past the Nautolan to the man with the cybernetic clawed hand. "But MY friend here says you were asking some interesting questions about the Galaxy's End."

"Well, of course!" Raiju laughed as the final player at the table folded and the dealing droid slid the winnings to the Nautolan. Pointing towards the race Raiju's hand then twitched, a close up on the screens caught the moment as one of the fathiers stumbled and then fell out of the lead. "I always wondered how the galaxy's story would finish, I'm guessing in her case it will be with a whine followed by a heavy thud."

"Perhaps that's how your story ends too..." The words were growled from behind the Nautolan, causing Raiju to cast a look over his shoulder to a monster of a creature that stood behind the trio. While Raiju had never met a Dashade before, he was certain that's part of what this creature was. As calmly as he could manage, Raiju motioned to the droid he was cashing out and began sweeping his credits into his pockets.

"Good." The Kel Dor hummed. "It's best you come with us now."

“Listen fellas, I’m flattered that you all have taken an interest in me but the gimp and leather fetish was never my scene...” Raiju began, but a heavy hand on his shoulder made their point clear.

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The viewport showed how futile resistance would be.

Long ago had Canto Bight disappeared into the tan terrain of the desert planet of Cantonica that surrounded the city, and in time, Cantonica too faded into the void of space. Once enough distance was created between the vessel and the planet, they had made the jump to lightspeed. When their vessel exited lightspeed, Raiju could plainly see the fleet of ships they sped towards. Yet, his hearts had barely quicken at the sight of the Providence-Class Dreadnought they had docked with.

“*Their fortunes have clearly bettered.*” Raiju thought to himself as he was marched through the hallways of the *Goliath*. The trio in step behind the Nautolan had little to say as they made the journey, besides simple commands to direct the Nautolan to a meeting room off adjacent to the command centre. Black flags with a tan sigil lined the final hall to a room that contained a long haired man speaking to a holo of a striking woman whose presence unnerved the trio surrounding Raiju.

“Dread Lord!” The Kel Dor snapped as all three came to a halt and saluted the holo image. Immediately following this, the Kel Dor’s foot lashed out into the back of the Nautolan’s leg, dropping Raiju to a kneed position in front of the holo. A playful smile passed on the woman’s lips as she nodded to the Kol Dor.

“Thank you, TuQ’uan.” The woman started before her imaged turned towards the Nautolan. “I appreciate you returning this fiend to us. However, that’s no way to treat the former Quaestor of House Satal Keto.”

“And Proconsul of Plagueis.” Raiju added through gritted teeth as he took to his feet again. An anger sturred in the Nautolan as he shot a look of disgust at the widening eyes of TuQ’uan.

“Quite a list of titles you’ve held here over the years, Raiju”. The long haired man started, walking between the Nautolan and causing the trio to take several steps back. “Quaestor of Kirleta, founder and twice Quaestor of House Satal Keto, Rollmaster, and, briefly, Proconsul. Yet, why is it that you never returned here when things didn’t work out in Tarentum?”

A hiss came from the holo, though Raiju wasn’t sure if it was the woman or poor connection that caused it.

“Because I had more important people to serve,” Raiju flashed a grin at the holo before continuing. “Mostly myself.”

“Indeed.” The woman started, throwing a glance at the long haired man. “I informed Qormus of your attempted coup in Tarentum, I could respect your gambit to declare yourself Sith King - if only it had worked. Instead, it seems you’ve been wallowing away in casinos since your failure.”

“Not accurate, Selika.” The Nautolan’s words had a tone of familiarity between him and the Dread Lord. “I’ve merely been acquiring funding for my next venture.”

“Oh?”

“Don’t be coy, Selika. We both know that you desire more than what Aliso has to offer and you’re wanting a cut into my action. Especially now that you need new prospects to replace what the Children’s attack has destroyed.”

“Perhaps, Kang. But why the hell would I risk angering your former apprentices?” Selika’s words couldn’t be more true, as both now stood on the Dark Council while Raiju hadn’t even made it into the elder ranks yet. As with Odan-Urr, the Nautolan didn’t have the solo clout to go against both the Grand Master and his Voice.

“Because if Plagueis helps me ends their lives, I will pledge fealty to the clan.” Raiju offered shyly.

A chorus of laughter filled the room as the four other beings and the holo all dismissed the Nautolan’s idea. Qormus was the first to offer his thoughts.

“It’s been a long time since you were in Plagueis, Raiju. Otherwise, you’d know that not every soul is equal to another. Especially when we are talking about two Dark Councillors”

“Ah, but that’s just it!” Raiju startled Qormus back a step as the Nautolan jumped uncomfortably close to the man’s face. “We agree that my thinking is sounded and now we are just haggling over a price. How many souls will Plagueis’ protection cost me?”

An uncomfortable exchange was made between Qormus and the Dread Lord, but finally, a smile crept across the Dread Lord’s face.

“Two thousand.”

What conscience remained in the Nautolan screamed at the thought of enslaving two thousand people. However, it wasn’t like the Nautolan had many other choices in the current political climate. A salty gulp preceded the Nautolan continuing.

“Agreed.”