If Yoda Can Meddle, So Can I

by AuntieEm30

Summary

A series of exploratory one-shots, starting with a variation of the Crechemaster!Anakin AU, by way of a mental health professional the Council clearly needs. If Yoda could push Obi-Wan at Qui-Gon against any sane person's judgement, one person can nudge Anakin toward a less aggressive Knight Job, maybe making the galaxy a less Sith-y place in the process.

Notes
This is a series of not-really-connected one-shots. Found the Crechemaster! Anakin AU via tumblr, then AO3, then wanted to write a beginning for it myself. Others will be various possible points of helpful intervention by people who actually care about Padawans' / Knights' / Masters' healthy and well-being. OC is my shameless mouthpiece / knee-jerk reaction avatar for this fandom. Several fandoms, actually. Same general purpose, different names and faces - maybe she's really a Time Lord, who knows. Her mind-healer advantage (aka how she knows stuff others might not know) is being able to Force-sense strong emotions / sensations in close and long-range, similar to Troi from Star Trek.

Not all chapters will be in prose, because I struggle with description and think primarily in dialogue. Let me know if it's too weird. Some will allude to stuff in Jedi Apprentice series, which I gleaned plot stuff about from summaries and other people's discussions online, since they're not really in circulation in local libraries anymore. So expect vagueness / not total accuracy if you've read those.

First chapter takes place roughly 3-6 months after battle of Geonosis in AotC, post Marriage, in some random Council meeting where they're trying to figure out what to do with Anakin after he gets injured to the point of medical grounding for a while (can still walk, bend, etc, but no heavy exercise / missions. The person who's name you don't recognize is the OC. Sorry if that's too obvious, this is my first time posting anything, so actually looking for constructive feedback.

- Inspired by The Time the Jedi Council Got It Right by skywalker-disaster (Sasquatch_Lover)
- Inspired by tumblr post by Respainey
Pushed Off the Tracks to the Dark Side

Trento turned an inquisitive glance to Masters Yoda and Windu. At this point, they both knew what it meant. Yoda just huffed silently to himself. “Take the floor, you may, Master Magd.” She nodded, and only a few could see the glint of cunning in her grateful look.

“Anakin.” He turned and took a few steps to answer her directly. “I have a question for you, and I want you to take some time and meditate on it before you answer. Alright?” He nodded.

“Of course, Master.” Step one, commence.

“You’re skills are impressive, your force use well beyond that of your age group, and your piloting skills are to be commended. But there is still much to learn in the ways of the Force, and I think you still have much more potential to actualize. How would you feel about a new kind of challenge?”

He seemed thrown off guard, but attentive to the idea of gaining even more skills.

“I’m interested, Master.” Good. The only easy part was over.

“Alright. It wouldn’t be long-term to start with, but how would you feel about training to be a crèche Master?”

The stunned silence wasn’t coming from only Anakin. Multiple Masters were exchanging incredulous looks. Clearly some of them were concluding that she had finally lost her balance. Ha. Meanwhile, she could feel Plo barely holding in his rising glee beside her.

The young knight blinked rapidly, clearly not convinced he’d heard right. “A… a crèche Master?”

His tone was merely confused, not incensed. So far, so not-disastrous.

“That’s correct, Skywalker. Master Norren is looking for a new knight or two to phase into his position since he’s going to be teaching seminars again. It may seem like quite a change of pace and environment, but with your energy you’d be able to keep up quite well. And if you can build the patience to wrangle younglings, you might just become the most well-rounded, formidable knight in the Order in a few years.”

He was silently processing, still clearly in a low state of shock. He opened his mouth, but she held up a soft hand.

“Like I said, give it some thought before you answer. Even with this dreadful business with the clones, there’s no rush to pin down an assignment. If you have questions, Master Norren and I are happy to go into more detail outside of session.” That seemed to help him catch up. He bowed. “Of course, Master. I will consider it.”

Trento made no rush to return to the Healing Halls after the session was concluded. She knew she wouldn’t have to wait long to see the first results of her proposition, and she wasn’t disappointed. Skywalker caught up to her within five minutes of her leaving the Council chamber.

“Master Magd. Do you have a moment?” She smiled.

“I knew that round of ‘thinking’ wouldn’t take long, Skywalker. What do you want to know?” She resumed walking to help him work through his thoughts, and he fell into step a pace behind her.

“Master, why did you suggest me to become a crèche Master?”

Ah, the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

“Let me respond to your question with one of my own, Skywalker. How did you feel when I recommended it to you? You seem unsettled. Do you find the suggestion of such a position insulting to someone with your talents?” He was quick to shake his head, but his fluster remained.

“Of course not, Master Magd, it’s just… uh…” She took pity.

“It doesn’t sound like the adventurous life you associate with being a Jedi Knight?” He offered a slightly relieved smile.

“You could say that, Master.” She nodded in understanding.

“Well, it’s true that you wouldn’t be battling space pirates or overseeing treaties between warring planets, or saving the day in any other exploits that bring the Jedi their reputation in the galaxy. But
people forget that without all of the other support and training duties being seen to in the Temple or in other stations, the field Knights couldn’t function as they do. And in a way, creche Masters are still paramount in all of those adventurous missions, by getting the younglings raised to the point of completing them. You’d be shaping the next generations of Knights, if you decided to stay with it. In an indirect way, you’d be responsible for more peace in the galaxy than any one Knight could be on their own.” She counted it as a small victory when she saw the small smile on his face at that. Time to wade into the more sensitive territory.

“Beyond that, I think the creche would be a very good fit for you, once you settled into it. Especially taking your background into account.”

That gave Anakin pause, as she anticipated it would. Whereas he had been nervous but open before, he was now uncommonly still and watchful.

“What… What part of my background do you mean, Master Magd?” She could hear the additions being a slave? being surrounded by kids who are afraid of their futures? as clearly as if he’d spoken them aloud. She faced him head on, and with her expression made sure he realized she’d heard the unspoken questions.

“The security and memory of being loved unconditionally. The serenity that can be found in returning that love.” The breath that he let out was the mark of his being the most vulnerable she’d seen him in a long time. She began slow strides again to help him recover.

“When Master Qui-Gon first presented you to the Council, many Masters were hesitant to admit you because they could sense fear and anger in you. I would be lying if I said I didn’t sense it also, even after this time. But I also saw something else, something the others might not have been paying attention to. I saw where your fear and anger came from. I saw your tremendous capacity for love. For compassion, and for all the restrictions placed on us and the strictness of the Jedi way of life, I’ve always believed that compassion is the foundation of the Jedi Code. We must not seek to eradicate all emotion within us, because without empathy, there is no compassion. We’d be no better than powerful droids. Beneath the defensiveness about your life as a slave, and your desire to prove yourself, I saw that compassion in you then, and I still see it now.”

He began to look less wary, and more open. The Force hummed in budding excitement, in rightness.

“Some younglings, as they grow into awareness, begin to struggle with the idea of their families being so willing to give them up to strangers- even respected strangers. It damages their growth toward serenity, because they wonder if they meant so little to their own parents that they could let them go without a fight. But you know why they could do it. You remember.”

Anakin nodded slowly, and blinked rapidly.

“Yes. I remember. It’s to give them a chance at a better life. To let them fulfill their potential. To let them become peacekeepers for many, instead of few.”

“Exactly. And you’d be just the right person to help lonely, fearful younglings gain that perspective. You’d have the perfect place to let all your compassion flow unimpeded, when it’s still desperately needed, and if you can channel your physical energy into patience and fortitude, I think you could be very happy there. It’s a vast responsibility, even shared with other Masters. But if you stick with it, it would come with opportunities to take the younglings on educational ventures outside of the Temple, and to intermittently teach older students necessary skills on the side. Of course, you’d have to meditate quite a lot to develop your patience and stabilize that temper of yours so the crechelings can trust you, but I think you could definitely rise to it. And…” she lowered her voice casually, cooly keeping her gaze focused away, “there may be… others, who might be only too delighted at the prospect of you raising the next generation of peacekeepers, away from battlefields. Based closer to home.” She finally cut her gaze back to him, to ensure he got the idea. His sputtering confirmed that he did.

“M-Master… what… how do you…” She shook her head.

“No. I look like an idiot, Skywalker? Your talents in the Jedi arts are many and impressive, but subtlety is not one of them.”

His pale face gave away his mounting terror. Case in point. Moron, she thought amusedly.

“Relax, Anakin. If I were going to out you, don’t you think I’d have done it by now?”
He nodded as he let out a breath, color returning to his face. “Of course, Master. I apologize.” She put a hand on his shoulder. “No need to worry, Anakin. I can see how important it is to you. As long as your stance in the Light side of the Force is never truly shaken by it, and your commitment to the mission of the Jedi is not broken, I see no reason to block the flow of love in you. Others apparently agree. Your secret, as much as it can be called a secret, is safe.” His relief was palpable in the Force, and visible in his expression. “Thank you, Master Magd. Thank you so much. Truly. And… you’ve given me a lot to think about. Being a… creche Master wasn’t what I had in mind when I asked to be trained as a Jedi, that’s true, and a big part of me still thinks about being a Knight in the field, but… maybe it could be the right job for me. I thought when you first asked that it would mean hiding from the fight, not doing my part to save the people who need it. That maybe you thought I should just be kept in the Temple, away from where my - my fear and anger could become stronger. But I guess there are younglings who come to us already needing some protecting. Some saving.” And there it was. The light of his revelation burst into the Force, warm and cautiously excited, and she could not be happier to be in the place where she was, doing the work she was. “I couldn’t have said it better myself, Anakin. All younglings need love and compassion when they start out, to become strong and just Jedi. And it needs to be renewed over time as they get older, honestly, to maintain their Light. There are even some Master’s who don’t see that. Do you know anything about Master Qui-Gon’s old teacher, Master Dooku?” He shook his head. “Well, he was a very… straight-laced, authoritarian master. Absolute obedience, and discipline, little to no familiarity or affection. Can you just imagine what your first years at the Temple would have been like, with a master like him?” Dooku’s mixed expression of horror and indignation gave her the answer. She chuckled. “Dooku was strong in the Force, but no so much with compassion. It took Qui-Gon many years of being Obi-Wan’s Master for him to be the man he was when you met him. We need fewer Jedi like Masters Dooku and more like you and your Master. Think on my suggestion. Like I said, you’d start out learning from Master Norren, on a trial basis of about six months. You’d also be collaborating with my team a bit for new crecheling’s health screenings and so on. If you try it and discover it’s not where you should be, you can always switch to a guardian in the field.” Yeah, like that would happen. She could feel the pull of his interest gaining strength by the minute. Under the recklessness and temper and always striving to be stronger, he was secretly a big mushy protective carer inside, and no one could convince her otherwise. He bowed and departed with a promise to think on it more, but she knew, in her gut, that he was all but decided on it. The Force seemed to lighten her step, flowing like a warm wind at her back, and she felt certain that many things had changed for the much better.

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When Kenobi unintentionally caught up with her himself less than an hour later, it was while he was standing in line for his food in the dining hall, focused dazedly on nothing. It seemed her suggestion in session was what distracted him, for when he caught sight of her it appeared to bring him out of his stupor, and he took his tray over to her table when he’d collected his meal. He sat down without his typical grace, and made no move to begin eating. “Creche Master. Creche Master, why didn’t I think of that?” She didn’t bother to conceal her scoff, but did keep her tone reasonably gentle. “Because Qui-Gon used his last moments to tell you to train Anakin because he believed he would bring balance to the Force. And since the Sith had just re-emerged, everyone, including you, interpreted that to mean that Anakin is supposed to defeat the Sith in battle definitively. Apparently
they don’t teach that anything can be changed by something other than martial force anymore.”
He had the grace to look thoughtful. “We’ve gone on diplomatic missions, though. We’ve had a few
mission where we never had to use our lightsabers once. Truly!”
She patted his arm, and motioned him to actually eat his neglected food.
“I know that, Obi-Wan. And I know you’ve been a good Master to him. Taught him to be versatile.”
He wasn’t reassured, though.
“Not as good as I should have been. Not as good as Master Qui-Gon would have been.” She
scowled.
“You stop that right now. You’re a Jedi Master in your own right and it’s time to acknowledge that
your Master Qui-Gon wasn’t always in the right.”
His look of affront would have been amusing, if not for how serious she knew the topic really was.
“Don’t look at me like that. I freely admit that he was a good man, most of the time. I’m always for
keeping the Council on their toes, you know. But he had holes in his teaching methods to you. And
he sometimes lost sight of the consequences of his actions and words. Do you really mean to claim
that there weren’t situations he could have handled better?”
Obi-Wan opened his mouth to jump to his old master’s defense, but then hesitated. His silence spoke
for itself. But he still tried.
“No Master is perfect.”
“That’s very true. But some Masters just have individual mistakes. He had a pattern. And for
someone so devoted to living in the moment, to the point of neglecting to see that you kripping got fed
regularly (don’t bother denying it, I know), he had an honestly disturbing change of heart in his last
days when he suddenly started seeing everything through the lens of some prophesy. I’m sure he felt
compelled to follow the will of the Force as it spoke to him. But there were other ways of going
about it than what he did. I could feel how it hurt you. I could tell he didn’t give any warning.”
Obi-Wan kept his gaze on his tray. “He said he meant it about me being ready for the trials, though.
Later, when we were back on Naboo.” The quiet vulnerability in his voice made him seem much
younger than he was. No surprise there.
Past and Present, Meet my Verbal Fist

Chapter Summary

Script-ish format for a confrontation between JA-era Qui-Gon and (OC) Mind Healer Trento Magd during the Melida/Daan mess while Obi-Wan is helping the Young by himself and Master Numbskull Jinn is back at the Temple. It's admittedly one-sided.

Chapter Notes

This was inspired by a variety of tumblr posts I (binge) read after Rogue One pulled me back into the fandom. Yay?

Open to constructive feedback; non-beta read.

[following Council discussion about Obi-Wan during Melida/Daan in “Jedi Apprentice” series; Trento has invited herself to the Council meeting following the Force’s guidance. She interrupts Qui-Gon’s dumb self-pity griping / blaming about Obi-Wan]

Trento:
Shut up. You, Qui-Gon Jinn, you shut the kriff up. No one told you to bring Tahl back immediately. Yoda suggested it, half expecting you to ignore it like you do most of the time. And you can be damn sure no one ordered you to leave your thirteen-year-old apprentice in a war zone.

Qui-Gon:
He chose-

Trento:
Yeah, he chose to help people, you know, that thing we’re supposed to do as Jedi?!! You gave him the ultimatum, Jinn. No one made you do that.

Qui-Gon:
I was just supposed to accept his defiance? His betrayal?

Trento:
You were supposed to be able to tell the difference between past and present, Jinn! You were supposed to be able to differentiate between two separate Padawans! You were supposed to actually teach the boy things about being a Jedi, besides how to work around or just flat out ignore orders! How many missions have you gone on now that involved that? Just who do you think he learned that defiance for the greater good from? Who put so much emphasis on just following the will of the Force as they heard it? WHO taught him that, Jinn?

You, by your own admission, were the one who was looking for betrayal, who refused to develop a training bond properly or any trust. I offered you help after Xanatos. You refused. “Oh no, I’m not going to talk to a professional about this massive betrayal I’ve just suffered. I’m not going to accept any mind healing after I had to emergency sever a training bond; I’m just going to suffer in silence and just push it down and ‘meditate’ inefficiently and hope it doesn’t lash out to hurt others!” I’ve got
news f you Jinn - surprise, surprise, it didn’t work! To a supremely ridiculous degree did it not work. And MORE news, he’s the apprentice flying blind, and you’re the Master. The teacher, so maybe you could start acting like it! You’re not going to accomplish anything by assuming you know what you’re doing when you clearly don’t know jack. You’re the one who’s going to get people killed, Jinn, and the victim might just be Obi-Wan! We’re going to Melida/Daan, we’re going to help your apprentice, we’re going to allow him to come back with us if he still somehow wishes to, we’re going to set him up with a mind healer, and you’re going to keep your sith-damned mouth closed until you learn how to behave like a Jedi Master. Or hell, leave ‘Jedi Master’ alone and just focus on ‘responsible adult’ for the time being. (She comms her co-worker in the Halls of Healing) Hoft-Tam! I’m going into the field on emergency; you’re in charge until I get back! I’ll show you how to edit the appointment rosters when I come to get my mission pack. (She proceeds to haul Qui-Gon by the robes to the Halls.)
Chapter Summary

A different time Trento could have intervened, namely early into Master EpicFail Jinn's mentorship to Obi-Wan. I might possibly be excessive with the name calling. He is excessive with the obliviousness.

Chapter Notes

Want to reiterate that this work is non-linear at best and plotless and unconnected at worst, mostly because the conflicts from cannon that I'm responding to couldn't exist if someone intervened in all these instances.

This is pretty much a fandom-fueled writing exercise heap based on my reactions to the stupid based on mostly second-hand information. Huzzah.

For this chapter, if someone could let me know if I'm too heavy on the exposition, that'd be fabulous!

“Hmm, that sounds pretty stupid. You might want to re-think that.” Said the Jedi reading data pads while casually sprawled on her back on his apartment floor.

“Excuse me?” Qui Gon Jinn was already not amused.

“I know your hearing is still perfectly intact, Jinn. And I don’t know how I could put it more clearly.” Too true.

Jedi Master Trento Magd was a healer a few years younger than Qui Gon, was a mostly-respected and established Department Head, and so far was beating his track record of successfully training Padawans to Knighthood by one. He had to force himself to not credit that success strictly to the different types of obstacles in her line of specialty in the Order from his, for he knew she too had served her time on trying missions in the field. They had a sort of bemused ongoing friendly friction between them, largely in part to her having a more abrasive and slightly rebellious personality similar to his, while remaining cooperative and “team-oriented” enough to earn a seat on the Council.

This was something that had often made him slightly wary of her, as he sensed that she too was well-versed in the Living Force, but did not give it foremost ideological loyalty as he did. He felt that adhering to the Living Force and abiding by the strictest restrictions of the Code were not always mutually inclusive, and yet she often seemed walk within them both, and maintain the Council’s acceptance, despite her own eccentricities. He could perceive deeper reserves of serenity in her than some Knights ever achieved, and yet her speech patterns were often far more brusque and unpolished than any other knight he knew, and she often darted about with the exuberant energy and disregard for decorum of a young Padawan. Not to mention her abrupt observances and open facial expressions in Council meetings were widely known, and while Mace put up a front of tested patience with them in session, he also seemed oddly amused by them.
Regarding their similarities and differences, she preferred to sum up that she shared a large amount of
his healthy rebellion, plus a balanced perspective, with none of his “vague Yoda-impersonating
riddle-talk,” and little to none of his brooding.

He could only envy her that particular good fortune, as much as such an emotion could be tolerated
in a Jedi. He was certain she knew it too, despite her not ever truly rubbing it in his face. Still.

“What exactly about my teaching tactic seems so ill-conceived?” He settled himself on the couch and
picked up his tea, preparing for a verbal volley. He was not left waiting.

“By the Force, Jinn. There’s this thing called individuality I know you’ve heard of. Even among
Initiates. Have you not already established that young Obi-wan is nothing like Xanatos?”

For as patience-testing as it could often be, Qui Gon found Trento’s insistence on speaking plainly,
to the point of painful bluntness, to other knights and council members oddly stabilizing now. For as
often as it had pained him to hear his former apprentice’s name spoken, he knew she only ever did it
with a mind of helping him heal from that pain… in her fashion.

“That is accurate. I know now that Xanatos would never have done the things Obi-wan did, and
offered to do freely.” He spoke this more quietly that his certainty might have preferred.

“Precisely. They’re different, as are all Padawans. They have different weaknesses and strengths. His
anger came from pride and greed and entitlement. Obi-wan’s, when it does still surface, comes from
fear of failure and self-doubt. So why would you assume that the teaching style, the nature of your
mastership, that exacerbated one student’s pre-existing flaws would inherently cause the same
problems in a completely different student? Because I know you think his failure was almost
completely your doing, Jinn, and you have to know by now that there was only so much you could
have done to stop it. But I digress.”

He sighed. It was a debate that he personally thought he would never agree with her on. But he
followed her lead in returning to the present topic.

“You’re saying I shouldn’t be mindful of my mistakes?” She, predictably, heaved a sigh, and set her
pad aside as she sat up to face him.

“I’m not saying you shouldn’t evaluate and revise your methods, Qui Gon. We should always be
aiming to improve our tutelage to our apprentices.” He noted the use of his familiar name. While he
knew she always spoke honestly, it was rare for her to incorporate gentleness in her sincerity to her
peers.

“But if you only ever allow yourself to do with your Padawan now the complete opposite of what
you did with him, then you’ll always keep letting him grip your life in his fist, as surely as if you’d
changed nothing at all and repeated the whole sith-damned nightmare step for step. The opposite
kind of disaster is no less of one. Permissiveness and blindness and excuses allowed Xanatos’ pride
and greed and spite to grow. Cold distance and impersonal ceremony and unfair levels of discipline
will allow Obi-wan’s bare minimum sense of self as a Jedi and a sentient being to whither and die.
He may succeed in his training, and even become a strong and reliable knight, but it will all be
covering a crippling loneliness and sense of worthlessness.

“He would be a successful knight for a precious few years, well-respected but without allowing
himself friends, the wrong kind of quiet with no spark in his eyes and no jokes in his voice. And then
jump on an ion grenade or in front of a blaster bolt to spare a single little unknown person from
danger, never even wondering if the grenade could be deactivated or the bolt deflected instead. And
he’d just be one more pyre surrounded by sedate grief but no memories, allowed to fade from every
space in the Temple beyond his entry in the Room of Records. That’s the kind of knight he would be.”

Let it be said that the serene, stoic Qui Gon Jinn trembled, struck to the bone with a biting chill no volume of blankets or hot tea could diminish. A chill felt by no one currently in the temple except him. He knew it was his alone to bear, to combat. And he, one last time, tried to take refuge again in the doubt and denial that led him so far astray with the last young boy he’d couldn’t help but love.

“How?” His voice, reduced to a rasp, betrayed the quaking of his body and his spirit. “How can you know so much of Obi-wan? How can you draw these conclusions about my Padawan? He was never a patient of yours.” But deep down, he knew where Trento gained her renowned if unsettling insights: Her specialty was healing of the mind.

“But how many times has he been to the healing wing itself?” This was the quietest she’d spoken all evening, and it was because he was all too aware of the answer.

“Once he’s being treated for the injury of the week and under whatever painkillers my colleagues see fit, his shields go down. I can feel his doubts through space, walls, and my own office door. Every time.”
Others Notice the Shady Shadiness

Chapter Summary

In which other Responsible Adult Jedi take note of the weird in regards to Initiate Kenobi's rushed push to the Agri-Corps. 'Cause EVERYONE being totally put off by a bit of fear and anger in a young but bright teenage boy is just too convenient.

Originally inspired by Qui-Gon's even harsher rejection of Obi-Wan in "Tano and Kenobi" by FireflyFish.

Chapter Notes

Update: Permission granted! The first paragraphs are borrowed from FireflyFish's fic "Tano and Kenobi," Chapter 9. Instead of the two Masters there in that fic, it's these two for mine. There'll be an * where my original writing starts the divergence, since there's no Ahsoka in mine right now. That scene made me mad, so I had to shuffle in other Jedi being actual responsible people.

I cut out a couple lines to make sense in this version, and maintain 3rd person POV.

I made up the name of Adi's apprentice; If they didn't have actual roles or multiple lines in the movies, I know next to nothing about them; didn't see Clone Wars.

Still open to constructive feedback; not beta-read.

“I have chosen to be flattered that I am on your list, even if you have placed me at the bottom.”

“‘List’, master?” Obi-Wan looked up at the master's face, horrified to see the harsh edges hidden behind his kind words. “There was no list, Master Jinn. I thought that… with you not having a padawan…”

“You are mistaken, Obi-Wan,” Qui-Gon said, his body language saying nothing polite. “You did not think, for if you had thought, you would have realized the foolishness of your actions, no?

“Have I not made it abundantly clear that I will never take another padawan?” Qui-Gon sniffed, taking a long sip of his tea.

Obi-Wan swallowed and nodded, blinking furiously to keep the tears at bay.

“This kind of behavior is beneath a Jedi, Initiate Kenobi,” Qui-Gon finished with a sigh, turning away from the boy. “Jedi do not grovel for scraps. Nor do they go begging for a foolish reprieve from their destiny. A true Jedi accepts what he cannot change and embraces the will of the Force. Perhaps that is something you should meditate on in your next position. Learning to accept the will of the Living Force and not seeking to defy its teachings.”

* All Jedi in the surrounding area couldn't help but watch as the young Initiate backed away, glassy-
eyed and appearing on the brink of fainting, before he turned and dashed from the dining hall.

The two other Jedi at Qui-Gon’s table, as odd as it was to see in the Order, gaped at the long-haired Master. Their appall was palpable in the Force, and temporarily robbed them of speech. Plo Koon was the first to recover.

“Was that necessary?”

Qui-Gon held firmly to his security in his position, in the rightness of his criticism. “There was nothing untrue in what I said.”

Adi Gallia scoffed across the table. “I suppose not, from a very limited point of view.”

Plo sternly but calmly jumped back in. “There was also no compassion in your words, Master Jinn. Is that not also one of our core values? And I’d think that needless insults and callousness is more ill-befitting of a grown and experienced Jedi than begging is of a frightened young boy.”

“Maybe you should 'meditate' on that, and make better use of the life you’re so determined to spend alone,” Adi finished, with even more honest scathing in her voice that Qui-Gon’s rejection had contained. They both gathered their trays and stood smoothly from their seats, leaving the table. He didn’t look to see if they took their trays to the depository, or if they joined another table of more amiable Jedi to finish their meal.

Adi and Plo strode down the Temple halls after they left the dining hall, both still troubled by what they had witnessed.

“It’s such a shame about Kenobi,” Adi murmured. “Yes, he has difficulty controlling his emotions, but so did many Knights. They learn to manage them eventually, even if it’s a bit later in their apprenticeships. The boy does have true potential. I can’t understand why he hasn’t been taken on yet. I would seriously consider asking him myself if I didn’t already have Slivka.”

“I’ve heard three other Masters say the same thing,” Plo replied thoughtfully. He kept his hands folded sedately in the sleeves of his robe. “I’ve also heard that three other Knights were considering asking him, but that someone actually discouraged them. Suggested they might not be the right Masters for him.”

“Who discouraged them?” Adi asked.

“They wouldn’t say… but who would virtually any Knight or Master listen to when actually discouraged from taking a specific Initiate as a Padawan?”

She pondered. “I could just be grasping at straws, but I’d say… maybe the same person who vetoed the suggestion for the Reassignment Council to have stronger ties with the rest of the Temple, and greater communication with the Initiate classes?”

Plo frowned. “That’s a distinct possibility. And young Kenobi looked far too terrified of aging out. I could feel the dread and the shame radiating from him even as he was approaching Jinn. If he had truly been deemed unfit for a Jedi’s life before now, and that’s what kept him from being offered an Apprenticeship, he would have been put in contact with the Reassignment counselors. If he’s this close to aging out properly, he would’ve have been given more guidance and reassurance about it.”

Adi nodded.

“It’s almost as if… as if someone doesn’t want him properly prepared for the Service Corps.”
Plo sighed. “I should pass these observations onto the Healing Halls.” His companion shook her head.

“She might just have a psychotic break herself, if she can’t get her hands on Master Yoda after this. She’s been itching to go on the warpath about his interference in her department for almost a year.”

“Indeed. One can only hope she doesn’t go overboard.”

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“MASTER YODA!”

The rising Council members recognized the livid tone and the voice it belonged to by now, and unanimously chose to not block its owner. She’d proven already that her temper, infamously uncommon for a Jedi, was, while disconcerting, all bark and no bite. Besides, it wasn’t like she could really hurt the Grandmaster. She was a healer. So some simply exited around her as she barreled into the open Council chamber, and others lingered in morbid fascination to see the latest rant. Plo Koon, her closest friend outside of the Healing Halls, followed her in for silent moral support. He was unclear on exactly who would need it, though.

“You authorized Kenobi to be pushed to Bandomeer FOUR weeks early?!”

“Authorized it, I did. Necessary for him to make the next step quickly, it was.”

“Oh really? And what was so NECESSARY about all his Reassignment Counseling sessions mysteriously getting cancelled? What was necessary about THREE capable and knowledgable Knights being actively discouraged from asking Kenobi to be their apprentice? Since it seems there are still some Jedi who aren’t afraid of some anger and fear in a young teenager. And while we’re at it, what was so necessary about all our proposals for more open communication between the Reassignment Council and the creche getting their discussions and voting put off for the last six months? Any particular reason you’re not letting us do our JOB, Master?”

“For Kenobi to go to Bandomeer now, the will of the Force, it is.”

“Pardon my saying so, Master, but if the Force was so insistent about Kenobi going to Bandomeer tomorrow, it could have just as easily lined up a situation where he could go on a more appropriate basis, you know, as a Padawan to a MASTER he could have had for months by now? Or it could have allowed him to be assigned to the Agri-Corps like he is now, with the APPROVAL of the Reassignment Council, WITH having received the appropriate counseling and preparation? You know I serve the Force as much as the next Jedi, but are you really saying we can’t do that and still see to the health and wellbeing of our people?”

“Work in mysterious ways, the Force does.”

She actually snorted on her own breath in indignation.

“Yes, the Force of your ridiculous shady schemes,” she huffed as she pivoted and swept out of the Council chamber without waiting for dismissal, muttering unintelligibly to herself all the way.

The diminutive green Master was too secure in his smug glee to be bothered about the disrespect. Younglings around to pick up a bad example, there were not, anyway.
Exploration on Meditation

Chapter Summary

The sort-of requested continuation of Chapter 1, the Crechemaster!Anakin AU. Even less plot than normal; a pithy philosophical look at the Force, to help Anakin transition from battles to looking after Smol Things.

Chapter Notes

This was directly inspired by the tumblr post linked in the Whole Work notes in Chapter 1. My brain pinged against the visual metaphor of the Force as an ocean, and just took off from there. This is the bloated result.

Still open to constructive feedback.

“Good morning, Master Magd,” Anakin Skywalker greeted, appearing behind her in the medical store room. The healer manning the desk must have pointed him this way.

“Good morning to you, Knight Skywalker. How can I help you, if you don’t mind my multitasking. I’m afraid I’ve put off the mundane necessities for too long,” she replied, holding up the data pad for her medical supply inventory. He shook his head with a small sympathetic smile.

“Well, when you recommended me for the creche Master training position, you mentioned that I would need to meditate a lot to develop patience and control my anger. I… meditation has never been my strong suit, as you could probably tell. I was wondering if…” He took a deep breath.

“If I could get your perspective on how to improve.” She lowered her data pad and turned to face him directly.

“I’m honored you’d seek me out for advice,” she said, sincerity ringing through her words. “Of course I’d be happy to help you develop your meditation. But I’d have thought you’d be more comfortable asking Master Obi-Wan than me.”

“Oh he’s great!” Anakin was quick to assure. “Of course I’m more comfortable talking to him about almost anything than anyone, and I did talk to him about it. But he… well, he promised he’d help, but I think we both kind of got the sense that… I mean, he was a great Master! The best I could ask for. He taught me everything I know.” Here she finally rescued him.

“But you both thought it odd that you would still struggle with it, after all the years he taught you?” He nodded, visibly relieved.

“Yes, I’d say that’s it.” She raised a hand to his shoulder.

“It’s alright, Anakin. I’m not about to jump down your throat for wondering whether your old Master’s teaching methods when it comes to meditation would suddenly be beneficial after all these years. And that’s not to criticize his ability at all. His mental and emotional control is renowned in the
Order, after all. Some people just learn more efficiently in different ways, and if a certain way is the only way you know, then it’s the only way you have to teach. Obi-Wan probably made himself learn in the way his Master taught him, even if he could have learned more easily through another method. Having lived here almost his entire life, he wouldn’t immediately think the traditional instruction, if taught correctly, would be ineffective for anyone if they just tried. And your Master was always very hard on himself. He would probably think that your having a noticeable room for improvement represents some kind of failure on his part.”

He sighed, anxiety creasing his forehead. “I thought that might be the case. I wouldn’t want him to be hurt to know I asked someone else.” She looked him firmly in the eye.

“I highly doubt he would be truly hurt to know. This is part of the reason my team and I are here, you know. He’s aware of that. I think with just a bit of reflection, he’d be proud that you showed the initiative.”

He nodded, but still seemed unsure.

Time to do her work, then.

“Come with me, Anakin.” And he did.

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“It’s been my experience that the simplest path to learning which meditation techniques work for you is to determine how you perceive the Force itself.” She had led him not to one of the meditation gardens or the Room of a Thousand Fountains, but the star map room, only activating the projection to give them enough light to see by.

“How do you mean?” Anakin asked.

“Well, what is considered the purpose of a Jedi’s meditation?”

“To clear our minds, gain insight, help us release our emotions to the Force.”

“Absolutely. And to release our emotions into the Force, we first have to connect to it. But we also connect to the Force in combat, which is where your strength lies. How do you tap into the Force’s power so easily in battle? What makes it different from connecting for meditation?”

He thought a moment. “Well, I suppose in battle I think of it as a weapon, or a shield, or another pair of eyes… I think of it as an ally I can direct.” She hummed in understanding.

“So you personify it, perceive it with animate qualities. That’s helpful in a fight. And that is very you; you’re a very active, animate person. But it’s not so helpful when trying to clear your mind and manage your emotions, I’m guessing?”

He shook his head.

“Well, that’s a good way to begin. I’m going to start by myself, and then after a minute or two, I want you to seek out my place in the Force. Try to… keep your awareness next to mine. Your goal to start with will be to open your mind to my meditation itself, to experience my memories as I relive them.”

She sat cross-legged on the floor, indicating him to mirror her. He sat and nodded to show he understood, before she closed her eyes.
After the designated time, he closed his as well, breathing deeply, trying to let all his thoughts and emotions seep out of him so he could focus on her presence. In moments, he’d found what he was looking for - a bubbling, rolling pocket of alternating wonder, anxiousness, fondness, adrenaline. He drew as close to it as he could, reaching out to make contact, conscious of keeping his shields down. Just a little closer… she said she’d be happy to help him, help the younglings trust him, put Padme’s mind just a little more at ease…

And just like that, he was gently swept into a dizzying realm of color, sound, sensations.

He mentally shook his head a moment, trying to gain stability, reminding himself that he was not in danger, that this new place was her meditation, her memories, and it was okay. His surroundings solidified, slowed down, and become clear. He was standing waist deep in green waters that pulled and pushed at him, testing his stance on the malleable, temporary sand beneath his bare feet, as he gazed out at a never-still horizon.

“This is how I perceive the Force,” Master Magd’s voice sounded in his mind, even though he could not see her. Of course. If these were her thoughts and memories, she usually wouldn’t be seeing herself. He’d be experiencing them in her place with her. Weird. Even more so was how his surroundings seemed to shift and transform around him, mid-swell of a wave, transporting him to someplace new.

“To me, the Force is like the water - it can create many impacts and effects. Its can be gentle and life-giving…” He watched jewel-bright vegetation pass slowly by as he sailed down a serene river… “Or it can be ruthless and destructive.” He watched, horrified, from a high ridge as an incoming tidal wave of slate gray liquid raged through a coastal village, dissolving homes and sweeping down over the heads of those who refused to be evacuated. He then, mercifully, floated away from the chaos and between environments with her consciousness.

“You, a desert-dweller, only think of water’s vitalness. Having lived so long with such limited access to it, you craved an abundance of it and its benefits, considered it in terms of how more of it could improve your life.” Anakin felt the truth of her words resonate through his being. He could remember the thirst as if it was yesterday, remember how he’d resented how much of the precious liquid had gone to the Hutts and the slavers.

“I, having spent much time on more temperate or aquatic worlds, can see more of the water’s effects. I could see how a flooded river could ruin lives, even end them. I’ve seen how exposure to water that was not meant to be experienced or felt for as long could damage some things.” Here, he was suddenly surrounded by deep, intense blue, gazing upon the rotted and calcified ruin of sea-faring vessel, lying useless on an ocean bed. “I know how people can drown in it, or be overwhelmed by its sheer power.” He was still surrounded, but not protected. He was terrified; it was dragging him down, shoving him this way and that, stabbing its chill past his skin, in his eyes and nose and mouth, into his bones, pulling him away from the light, from the air-

“The same is true of the Force.” At last, the blissful, safe haze between memories again; he could breath- “Many Jedi see it as a simple binary absolute: Light and Dark. I see it as an ocean, made up of that which is absolutely necessary to life, but containing different depths; shallow, warm, and gentle waters…” he saw beautiful plants and animals existing serenely in the loveliest blue-green underwater gardens, full of rays of light- “…and deep, cold expanses of darkness that can crush you if go too deep or are under for too long.” He jerked back from creatures, more monstrous and alien than any aliens he’d ever encountered, baring their razor teeth and bulbous glowing protuberances as they charged out from shadows so dense they seemed solid. And then, calm haze once more.

“It’s not truly benign, or malicious: it simply is, indiscriminately. Fighting directly against its current
will only exhaust you at best and kill you at worst- "trying, gasping, with all his might to hold against
the pounding power of frothing rapids- "but if you allow it to guide you on its path, you can make
amazing discoveries." He floated easily on his back, cool waters cradling him, carrying him lazily
along toward birdsong and sharing and family. “And we learn ways of harnessing the power of both,
for better or worse.” A planet crisscrossed with a network of rivers, nearly all of them passing
through massive stone power plants, pushing their turbines, creating light and learning and safety for
its people… and weapons, and technology, and war for control of those rivers, those plants.

And finally, he sat beside the water, on a grassy bank under ancient, winding trees, seeing the light
reflect off of its slightly rippling surface out of the corner of his eye. Watching the gentle creatures
graze nearby, feeling the earth beneath him and the warmth of the sun on his shoulders, listening to
the wind. Not needing to touch, not needing to harness, not needing to control- because it was
always there, was always a part of the grassy bank, part of the trees, part of him. It would sustain his
life if he drank, but could also blot it out if he jumped, and submerged, and did not resurface. And he
wasn’t thirsty, so right now he didn’t need to drink. Because even if the river dried, or shifted, or
became polluted, sooner or later, the water would always be there.

And so would his emotions. But more importantly, so would the Force.

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Anakin Skywalker opened his eyes, not remembering having separated his consciousness from
Trento’s, or resurfaced from the shared meditation. Feeling… quiet, in his heart, as he had not in
years. Maybe ever. And yet, he felt full to bursting with comforting warmth. As if the suns of
Tatooine were shining down on him again, but without the awful thirst of his memory. The thirst
could always come back, it would always be waiting. But now, he thought he knew where he could
safely drink. When he needed to.

Across from him, Trento Magd opened her eyes as well. She re-oriented herself, and caught his gaze
questioningly. He smiled to her, listening, and relieved, and hopeful, and maybe even happy.

All in a good day’s work.
Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil

Chapter Summary

Yet another hypothetical point of intervention in the Giant Mess that is Yoda's Grand, Great-Grand, and Great-Great Grand-Padawans... The big and ugly council meeting in TPM, we all know the one.

Chapter title quote was borrowed from the film "Dangerous Beauty."

Chapter Notes

Includes questioning Qui-Gon on his motives, gentle manipulation, and another spin on meditation. As always, open to feedback.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“He is headstrong, and he has much to learn about the Living Force, but he is capable. There is little more he can learn from me.”

Silence prevailed in the Council chamber for an uncomfortable moment following this pronouncement.

Trento was leaning to one side of her chair, her head resting on her hand, one finger at her temple in the near-universal (for humanoids) posture of unimpressed bafflement. “By the Force.”

Qui-Gon stilled, but seemed to choose to err on the side of playing innocent. “Indeed.”

There followed a odd chorus of quietly expelled breath around the Council chamber. Everyone knew that her tone conveyed shock at his behavior, not awe at the magnitude of his discovery. Master Windu cleared his throat.

“Master Magd. I think this calls for your expertise. Take point, please.” And for once, there was no shade of strained patience in his voice. If he, Magd and Yoda himself hadn’t been so visibly, keenly disappointed in what they heard, the other Councilors would have been almost excited to see what kind of verbal lashing she would unleash on the recurring thorn in the Council’s side. Now, some were concerned it might be on the path of going too far for the Jedi. There was certainly an unusual deliberateness in the way Trento straightened in her seat, placing her hands on the armrests while she let her gaze towards the Korun Master amplify the meaning of her words.

“Gladly, Master Windu.” But she smoothed her expression, before motioning the small blond boy to step forward. “Anakin. You’ve lived your whole life on Tatooine, right?” He nodded.

“Yes, Ma’am.” She smiled warmly.

“So it must be pretty cold here on Coruscant to you, huh?” He repeated his previous response.
“Well I hate to tell you, but it’s about to get even colder in here. I know you’re strong, and brave. But it’s ok to also be worried, and confused, right now. I’m going to be level with you here, Anakin. The conversation that’s about to happen in this room is not going to be pleasant, and you shouldn’t have to hear it on top of everything else.” She paused, considering, before continuing. “I’m not going to lie and say it has nothing to do with you. But it’s not your fault, there’s nothing you can do about it right now, and I don’t want you to worry about it. Okay?”

He seemed to process this for a moment, before standing taller, grateful to be spoken to levelly while still being treated with warmth, something that he’d seen lacking with the Jedi besides Qui-Gon. “Yes, Ma’am.” She put a hand on his shoulder.

“Good man. I want you to head outside and see my Padawan, she’s right at the door; she wears a green armband like mine. Go with her for now.” He nodded, and she let her hand fall softly off his shoulder as he turned. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes briefly, clearly communicating with her apprentice across their bond to give her the heads-up about her impromptu youngling-sitting assignment as Anakin left the Council chamber, briefly glancing uncertainly at Qui-Gon on the way out.

After a moment of tense silence, Trento looked to Obi-Wan. “Padawan Kenobi.” He quickly strode the short distance to face her. “To be honest, I really think you shouldn’t have to hear this either. But unlike some, I respect your experiences, insight, and most importantly your autonomy. So speaking for this Council, I’m giving you the choice. Do you wish to be present for this? Or perhaps a better question: do you feel ready to hear all of this?”

She could appreciate that he took the few seconds to genuinely think on it, knowing she meant more than what she was saying out loud, before straightening with a centering breath. “I will stay, Master.” She nodded in respect for his decision.

“As you wish.” The softness of her expression fell away into a sharp focus as she turned to Obi-Wan’s Master. “Qui-Gon Jinn. What exactly in the seven Sith hells is going through your head right now?”

The long-haired Master cleared his throat. “Can you be more specific?”

At that her face seemed to take on a subtly savage glee. “Absolutely. Exactly where do you get the idea to force your student of twelve years into their trials in order to take on another? Another who has undergone no initial training, by the way? What is your reasoning? I am very interested.” For all that many of her fellow Councilors had often disagreed with her manner, many of them nodded in agreement now.

“I have already said. Obi-Wan is well-prepared for his trials, and finding Anakin was the will of the Force. I am certain he is the Chosen One.”

She nodded and hummed, but with no true solidarity. “The incredibly vaguely outlined Chosen One for the Jedi, Master Jinn, or for you?” He squinted at her, his head tilted, trying to determine her meaning. “I’ll ask in a different way. When you brought Anakin Skywalker before this Council, did you do it with the pre-existing intention of training him yourself?”

He swallowed.

“If necessary.” She leaned forward, intent.

“But if another agreed to do it? To train him?”
He nodded. “I would be satisfied.”

Her coolness shifted into more neutral professional questioning. “So your claim on him was a last resort?”

Qui-Gon felt Obi-Wan’s intense gaze on him. “Yes.”

Trento took a deep breath. “So you have not been casting your awareness farther around you to uncover your next apprentice?”

Here Qui-Gon looked genuinely insulted for the first time. His brows furrowed as he replied “Of course not.” But she kept her eyes fixed on him, not letting up.

“There is no ‘of course’ here and now, Jinn. You forfeited that certainty a long time ago, and from what I can tell, never put in the effort to gain it back.”

He pulled a deep breath of his own, trying to maintain a facade of aloofness.

“I had no intention of training another apprentice after Obi-Wan.”

“And now you conveniently claim he is ready to face the trials, and of course he is quick to to defend your claim and protect your dignity. But we will know.” And she turned back to the apprentice.

“Obi-Wan. Has your Master spoken to you about scheduling your trials prior to this day?” He swallowed, feeling his Master’s stillness beside him.

“No, Master.”

“And has Master Jinn given any previous indication he feels you’re ready for your trials?” He hesitated, torn. “The truth, please, Kenobi.” Her tone was soft, compassionate even, but brooked no disobedience. He braced himself.

“No, Master Magd. The last we spoke regarding my progress, he- assessed- that I still have much to learn.”

Trento sighed, leaning back in her chair after leaning forward intently for the conversation thus far. “Don’t we all,” she said heavily. She turned back to Qui-Gon. “Well, Master Jinn? Any explanation for this conveniently-timed change of heart?”

Qui-Gon glared at her with visible hurt. He could tell she suspected the reason for the dissonance between his words and his actions; was she really going to make him say it? In front of the whole Council? But of course she knew. Why else would she cut her gaze to Obi-Wan, drawing his own eyes to his Padawan’s tense face as the young man tried to maintain a serene facade?

Now that he looked properly, for what felt like the first time in years, he could sense over a decade’s worth of self-doubts and questions rear their heads at once in Obi-Wan’s mind, no matter how well he shielded. And seeing them was like a direct punch to the diaphragm. He’d thought… but that was the whole problem, wasn’t it? What Qui-Gon thought obviously wasn’t what he conveyed. Not when it mattered. And now it was too late to spare his pride about the whole thing, too late to tell Obi-Wan how proud he was of him in private. It would feel like placation. He could not convince anyone here without perjuring himself - one way or another.

“I want to believe that you’re acting for the right reasons, Qui-Gon. You know I pay attention to the living Force as well, but no one else quite… experiences it the way you do. And you must acknowledge that you’ve mistaken your own compulsions for the will of the Force before.”
The rest of the Council almost seemed to hold its breath as Qui-Gon swallowed. Tell the truth and shame the devil, isn’t that how the phrase went?

“I do acknowledge it.” In retrospect, the memory of how ardently, harshly, and repeatedly he’d pushed the young Initiate Obi-Wan away, even when the Force was clearly bringing them together over and over, brought a deep churning shame to his gut.

He tried to ignore Obi-Wan’s sharp intake of breath next to him at his confession.

“That is good. It’s also good that you wish this boy to have the chance to fulfill his potential as a Jedi.” Here she seemed to weigh her words with just a bit more care. “But he is already free, and for a Force sensitive child of his age to be trained without the necessary fundamental skills does pose inherent risk - to the Order, to civilians and to himself. He could be tutored in the Force enough to lessen the risk, get an education and he could remain unrestricted by the Code to make his way in the galaxy with his skills, once an adult. He could live his life allowed to retain his attachments shame-free.

“Forget the Prophecy. You always live for the present anyway. Forget any possibility of a supposed Chosen One. Disclose the WHOLE truth, as much as you can grasp of it, and tell us why you think he must be trained as a Jedi. What the Force showed you. And why you are suddenly now pushing your Padawan into his Trials to accommodate it.” She paused again, softening her voice while somehow steeling it as well.

“His… experiences in this Temple can not ALL be… attributed to you, it’s true. But he deserves to know. As loyal as he is to you, he deserves to know.”

Qui-Gon couldn’t help but agree. And yet, for his prowess at the negotiation table, he couldn’t begin to find the words. But Trento’s next words threw him.

“Better yet… show us.” He looked up, eyes widening, as murmurs began to circulate through the chamber. Yoda finally spoke again.

“A group meditation, you propose, Master Magd? To share Master Qui-Gon’s insights?” She nodded.

“Yes, Master. So that we can all be… on the same page.”

So, that was to be his task and his punishment for all the years of putting his interpretation of the Living Force above all other concerns. Not only would the entire Council have his firsthand experience of the Dark Force user, which could only be beneficial, but they would all also see how he had put off scheduling Obi-Wan’s trials, for almost a year. Out of the threat of selfish loneliness, of the loss of a bright but angry boy who had somehow become his bright, strong, selfless son. Even after the horrible outcome of his time with Xanatos, he’d still clearly not learned. Because they would see, hear and feel for themselves his gradual, initially-grudging, healing, damning attachment.

Despite the fact that none of this had been verbalized, Yoda was apparently in total agreement. “Hm, meditate together we will, to untangle this business… the business of the Dark attacker, the boy, the Padawan. Lead us I will, to begin. Then receive and disseminate the memories you will, Master Magd. Clear a path forward for all these concerns we should, to engage the Darkness again with conviction and serenity.”

Many Masters were visibly uneasy, Mace Windu among them. Jedi did not usually meditate in groups larger than two, or sometimes three, and the entire Council in terms of its current members had never done it at all. Many thought it was too powerful and too intimate with so many participants
to be done safely, at least on a regular basis. Mace had only group-meditated with a whole Council once in his life. But there was no telling how often Yoda had taken part in it, and no one was going to oppose the Grand Master of the Order on it.

“Come. Reach out together we shall, and find a center among us,” Yoda murmured lowly, reaching out to his sides. Mace and Ki-Adi-Mundi each took one of his clawed hands, and Mace and the Masters on the far side of the room Force manipulated their chairs closer to each other, closing the circle. Each Master joined hands with the Masters beside them, Trento taking Plo’s and Adi Gallia’s. Qui-Gon knelt to center himself, and with a look of encouragement from the healer, Obi-Wan knelt at his side a moment later. Yoda closed his luminous eyes, and all others followed suit, letting their trusted Grand Master guide their concentration into the circle they formed, into the purpose in the Force they all shared. Shields fell away, and Force signatures joined as closely as the hands that acted for them. Individual personalities remained, but smoothed out to form one massive presence in the Force.

After a few minutes of this passed, and the shared consciousness of the circle was stable and their thoughts still, Trento slowly pulled her hands, and those of her neighbors, forward, her eyes still calmly closed. She offered her fellow Masters’ hands to the two men kneeling in concentration before their chairs. Master and apprentice each accepted a hand of a Council Master at her side, but her hands remained open. Even with their eyes closed, they could sense what she was waiting for. The circle had to be completed, and the apprentice deserved to see the truth from his Master.

With one last calming breath, Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan both placed their remaining hand in the mind healer’s. She gasped in a breath and her eyes flew open, as her mind was flooded with color and sound and desert heat and clashing lightsabers and laughs and regret, and fear, and simple, cautious love… She let the memories and emotions and sensations rush in, letting them flow through her before she prepared to weave them into their proper order, and direct them out into the circle… like a point of entry funneling water into a life-giving network of channels in barren land.

Chapter End Notes

For anyone who's interested, I promise I will try to continue the CrecheMaster! Anakin AU, but this is literally the last chapter that I have written or even thought up right now, so please bear with me. The beginning was what commandeered my brain, so the beginning was what got written.
“Deep breaths, and remember your meditation. It’s overwhelming at first, but you’ll be fine. Remember, you were their age once too,” Trento reassured the young Knight as they approached the Creche wing. His first day of training for his new post. Force help him.

“Yeah, but I grew up on a miserable sand heap in the Outer Rim with other slaves and maybe a few traders’ kids as playmates. I didn’t even know I had the Force when I was their age,” Anakin muttered back. The mind healer waved his protests off.

“Psh, not important. The important thing to remember is that even though they’re young Jedi, first they’re just little kids. They try for the calm and the serenity, but there’s only so much this stage of cognitive development can support for most of them. There’ll be some petty disagreements, some tears, etc. You’re not particularly put off by bodily messes on your robes, right?”

He stared. “Isn’t it a bit late to be asking that now? To be telling me any of this?” He would never admit that his voice rose a bit in alarm the more he spoke.

She gave him a look that fondly pinned him with the label of ‘amateur.’

“Skywalker, you’ll quickly learn in this type of work that even a tiny bit of warning is better than none at all. Now stop dawdling, and get in there.”

He nodded, trying to stamp down his sudden anxiety, before approaching the entrance to the younglings’ creche. He looked back one more time over his shoulder. Master Magd, obviously insane lizard woman not even trying to pass herself off as a stoic and unreadable Jedi (he should have questioned her sanity when she suggested him, of all people, for this job, honestly), shot him a wide (manic) grin and a thumbs up.

“I’ve got faith in you, Skywalker. Just remember you can’t lightsaber your way out of problems in there. But you got this!”
He swallowed, and pushed onward.

Anakin had thought that, given his experiences in more… er, improvised tactics in a number of situations that required aggressive action, he was well acquainted with the idea of chaos, and could handle it. And, well, his experience in the field wasn’t invalid, and he did have a grasp on certain kinds of chaos.

Not this kind, though.

This, really, was an insidious chaos, at first a quiet, sneaky chaos that was trying to suggest that it was perfectly calm and controlled. Master Norren greeted him with the kind of optimism borne of seeing that a recruit hadn’t lost their nerve and requested reassignment before their shift on the first day, so really Anakin was already better suited to this than at least one other Jedi (or so he told himself). Master Norren led him to what he pointed out as the Ewok Clan day room.

“Why is it called the Ewok Clan?” he’d naively asked, his brows furrowing slightly in unimpressed curiosity.

“You’ll see,” Master Norren had replied, in what Anakin thought was a most un-Jedi-like ominous tone.

“You know, Master,” he began as they reached the door, “you never really described what this would be like; you talked about the kind of work I’d be doing and my shift schedule, but you never actually said what the younglings would be like or how this would be arranged.” Here, the graying human male folded his hands in his robe sleeves, but the serene effect was somewhat lost as he shifted his weight.

“Well, Skywalker… we, ah… we find it’s more effective for new knights here to see that information for themselves by observing the younglings, rather than us describing it. Learning by application, you know.”

Anakin really didn’t, but didn’t think it would be smart to admit that. True, he was deeply apprehensive about accepting this position and unsure about what the results of it would be. But as nervous as he was, he’d seen how many members of the Council had looked absolutely certain this assignment would end in total disaster, and, well, he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t here at least partly to prove to Council he could do it.

That attitude would prove to be quite fortifying later.

At first, he really wasn’t sure what Master Norren’s hedging and hinting was for. He’d entered the day room to face twenty younglings, mostly human or humanoid with a few other species standing out here and there. The room quietly hummed with their collective Force signatures, vibrating against each other’s and not nearly as sedate as their presences would become in their adulthoods. They stood in vague semi-circular ranks around the front area where the Creche Master would reign and Anakin would observe. Wide, curious eyes took in his dark tunics and robe, gloved (mechanical) hand, and hair almost done awkwardly growing out of the Padawan cut.

They certainly didn’t look like small monsters aiming to kill him, and while Anakin hadn’t gotten on well with many of his peers as a very young Padawan, it had also been quite a few years since he’d been in the Creche with young initiates. From the (tall) vantage point of age and experience, the little ones, with their crisp little tunics and tiny boots… well, he wasn’t ready to admit out loud that they were adorable, not on his first day, but they really were.
Master Norren addressed the initiates and introduced him, set him up with a small corner table and a data pad to take any notes he deemed necessary, and with a promise to start gradually involving him more as the day went on, began the morning’s lessons.

And as he became more involved, Anakin began to remember his own Creche classes more clearly, and began to see, with growing alarm, how this particular clan earned its name.

The concentrated mass of untempered different Force signatures that had started as a quiet hum gradually intensified to a somewhat discordant background roar in Anakin’s mind as they went through their lessons, practiced their elementary Force use, tried to keep up with or outpace each other, grew tense with need to use the ‘fresher, became distracted by tell-tale hunger, and more. It grew steadily until it was a dull pounding in his temples.

In the small break after the conclusion of the day’s lesson on Jedi ethics and responsibility (and didn’t some of those lessons still deeply rub Anakin the wrong way), the initiates started asking him question after question about his own experiences thus far: they started innocently and flatteringly enough (“Did you fight pirates? Bounty hunters?”), but quickly became more stupefying (“Is your arm metal because you’re a cyborg?” “Was it bitten off by a rancor? Do you think you’ll have to fight one some day?”) to finally just plain insulting (“Master Yoda says you’re from Tatooine. Do they eat only bugs there?” “You don’t think you could ever beat Master Windu at the lightsaber do you?”). Granted, some of the audacity lost its edge because some questions would be voiced with a childish lisp, so ‘bugs’ might get spoken as ‘bugth,’ and one little girl’s home world accent made ‘Master Windu’ come out as ‘Madder Vindoot.’ That was the only thing that made him consider forgiving such a silly question.

When Norren set them to practicing their Force lifting and moving independently with his and Anakin’s supervision, each group given an arrangement of foam or synth-wood blocks, pad styluses, and feathers, a group insisted on him demonstrating the skill for them, with seemingly any object they could find in the room. Apparently impressed and emboldened, this led to a particularly precocious (and devious) little Bith Force pulling Anakin’s data pad off the table and into his hand, to prompt Anakin to show them how he would use the Force to retrieve a taken object. Not wanting to pull it too hard out of the child’s hand and risk pulling the whole initiate off his feet, he chose to reclaim it by pursuit instead. This prompted the suddenly delighted younglings to get a real demonstration out of Anakin by creating a sort of impromptu obstacle course for him to Force leap through to reach the slippery little Bith, built partially from classroom materials but more often out of their own bodies. This led to much more hesitation and awkward pauses and re-balancing for him than normal, and of course his gracious caution and care were repaid with smothered giggles and hastily smoothed faces that still had smiles curling defiantly on the sides. Eventually he Force-pulled the whole child to him, over the stunned heads of the others, and hooked an arm around him while he plucked the pad out of the little gremlin’s hand. Suddenly concerned he went too far, he looked over to his supervisor only to see an oddly unsurprised but very resigned expression on Master Norren’s face.

When it was time to break for mid-day meal, Anakin actually thought he was in for a brief respite.

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Obi-wan was looking over all the information he’d been given about his assignment leading the 212th division of the GAR in quiet dismay and budding alarm when his door chime sounded.

“It’s open,” he called, glad for the distraction and slightly shamed by his relief. The door slid open, and Anakin entered, looking quite disheveled and not entirely mentally present.

“Ah. How was your first day?” He would refuse to admit, to his dying day, a tone of fond
vindictiveness in his voice. He kept his best sabbac-face firmly in place.

Anakin, with tiny hand- and claw-prints of synthetic paint on the bottom of his tunic and what appeared to be a variety of jam in his hair, took an unexpectedly controlled breath.

“If we really want to defeat the Separatists, Master, perhaps instead of going army-to-army with clones against droids, we should find a way to ambush the leaders with our younglings. We’d secure a surrender in less than six months.”

Obi-wan fought to keep his face smooth and his voice sympathetic. “I see. Difficult to control, are they? Frustrating? Mischievous?” Anakin threw himself into a slump on Obi-wan’s couch.

“That’s putting it mildly, Master.” His physical and mental exhaustion radiated plainly in the Force. Obi-wan shook his head.

“Ah, well. It’s bound to be challenging at first. Although, if you truly don’t like it, I suppose there’s still time to request a reassignment.”

Anakin suddenly sat up straight.

“Reassignment? Oh, no Obi-wan. This is about endurance and conviction! You know how I feel about a challenge. Those angel-faced little goblins are going to see they can’t scare me off that easily! No, they might be tiny Jedi learning about serenity and the Force, but they’re cunning, and take absolute delight in anarchy; the other Creche Masters just don’t want to admit it! You know, I’ve been worried this whole time that I wasn’t the right person for working with younglings. But now I think I might be JUST the right person for the Ewok Clan. They’ll be the best Jedi ever, if we don’t annihilate each other in the process. Can I use your ‘fresher? I left a spare set of robes here. Thanks!”

And he was off, exhaustion forgotten in the new rush of drive, leaving a speechless Obi-wan at the table.

Dear Force. This would either be a wonder to watch unfold, or a nightmare. Either way stood about equal chance.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo Sorry for the extreme wait between updates, for anyone paying attention. Life, school, prep for moving, etc. Also, I realized that until now I’ve never actually physically identified or described Trento. Originally she was human, but then I thought that was boring since there’s so many other human-appearing main characters. I picture a Madame Vastra type, you know from Doctor Who, only with reddish-purple skin / scales instead of green. maybe some hair, maybe head-spines, don't know. So there's that.

Really don't know how much the story will continue from me after this.
Plumes of Smoke

Chapter Summary

Follow-up to chapter 6. A reflection in the wake of the group meditation, and some personal concessions made.

Chapter Notes

I'm trying to label these more comprehensively. This is attached to the Chapter 6, not to the Crechemaster! Anakin AU. That's continuing next chapter. I'm sorry it's so convoluted (face palm).

Usually, Mace strode. Either briskly and with purpose, or sedately, with the unshakable calm of a Master. But either way, his steps were always steady. Deliberate. As balanced as his breath, as he kept his mind.

Usually. Not now.

Now, he set no destination. He gave his feet no direction, and they took no purpose. Now, he wandered through the halls of the Temple with all the certainty of the faintest plume of smoke. His mind would be reeling from all the information he’d just processed - that they all had - if it could work up enough momentum for it. Instead, his thoughts felt like that same smoke… No one fact or insight stayed in place long enough to grasp, to analyze, to release. For him it was like being back in the early days of his apprenticeship, before his Master had taught him to manage his visions, to see past the shatter points without ignoring them. Or, if that were not possible, to shield himself from the most intense of them.

Force. The three of them in that Council chamber were so packed with shatter points together that when he lowered his shields for the group meditation, it felt like he was looking at a thunderhead suspended in the second before unleashing a volley of innumerable bolts of lightning, except that the bolts would be felt throughout the galaxy. And that was even after Skywalker had left the room.

Jinn, Kenobi, Skywalker. To extrapolate the effects they’d had on each other, would have on each other, on anyone around them…

Where to begin.

Mace was self-aware enough - at least now - to recognize that he had always upheld the necessary order dictated by the Code, but perhaps had not always taken the opportunity to actualize the deeper, simpler, and more raw purpose of a Jedi. He saw now that he’d not always demonstrated the compassion that had been prioritized by the Jedi of old, especially not in the series of debacles that made up Kenobi’s late years of Initiatehood and early apprenticeship. In demanding adherence to the Code in all situations he personally encountered without exploring the context, he may have inadvertently conveyed to Kenobi that the harsher side of the Code was all he deserved. (He could feel the whisper of consequence that could spring from that belief, still, like a breath of chilling air on
the back of his neck.) He supposed he’d quietly and unconsciously believed that if he, Mace Windu, who struggled even more with prescience and fought daily to tame his own darkness even as a boy, if he could demonstrate at least surface level control of his emotions, then Kenobi should have been able to as well.

He’d done the boy a disservice.

They all had. But of course, even now he might not see that. Struggling in the wake left behind by the Council’s meditation, Kenobi would likely be focusing on the now very definite threat of the dark Force user on Tatooine, on the demanding yet vague directive bellowed out by the Force into Qui-Gon’s mind (even now Mace could feel the echo in his skull TRAIN HIM TRAIN HIM TRAIN HIM), but also on what his Master had revealed for him, personally. He’d be processing that his Master had been telling himself, for months, that Obi-Wan wasn’t ready to be a Knight, yes, partially because he still had some skills to bolster and life lessons to learn (Magd was right, didn’t they all), but mostly because he didn’t want to let him go.

Didn’t want the Padawan, who he’d struggled so hard against at first, who he’d pushed away and judged unfairly (and hadn’t the Council let him?) to leave the nest. To leave his side.

It was generally agreed upon throughout the Order that the bond between Master and Padawan was the closest they would collectively come to having an accepted exception to the rule against attachment. The massive degree of trust and commitment they relied upon usually demanded it. Virtually every Knight and Master knew that, even if they never gave it voice. Most were aware, and were able to stay relatively balanced on that thin line.

But of course Qui-Gon, being Qui-Gon, had to find some massive and consequential difficulty with regards to attachment. Repeatedly.

Mace was beginning to wonder if it was even possible to mitigate the issue at this point.

Ah. Speak of the son of a bantha.

There they were, the mismatched mentor and student. They stood off to the side of the wide entrance to the Temple hangar, letting the stream of aircraft arrivals and departures drown out their conversation to all but the close or carefully listening passerby. Jinn had both his hands on Kenobi’s shoulders in a rare moment of undivided focus, and even rarer openness. His shields seemed to be completely down, and Kenobi seemed to be struggling with this show of care after all this time.

"- don’t understand. Why didn’t you say-? Why’d you let me believe-"

"I know, I- I don’t know why- I’m so sorry… I’ve always-"

Mace quickly changed course, and regained his brisk pace. This conversation was not meant for him. He would meditate, and prioritize, and have his own amends to make later. In his fashion.

Perhaps, he mused, he and the others had not been so masterful at keeping the darkness away as they thought. A tower may be felled by a bolt of lightning (blanketing his vision, screaming in his ears, in his body, unnatural lightning) but such a fall is easier if the tower is not carefully maintained, and the decay inside is allowed to spread beneath thin, repetitive layers of polish. Perhaps, in his indifference for the individual in favor of order and discipline for the whole, he had allowed his own darkness a small, quiet, and creeping victory. They were all servants of the greater Force, true. They always would be. But the Force must have chosen such very different children for a reason.

It had been too long since any sort of true trial for him, it seemed. Maybe for the others. Perhaps it
was time to prove his own light, and be tested again.
Chapter Summary

Anakin's choices direct the development of his power, and how things go ahead. Ch 4 of Crechmaster! Anakin AU.

This whole karking thing involved way more exploration of meditation that I expected, tbh. Sorry.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So, Anakin. How’s the Creche treating you?” He side-eyed the reptilian Master, picking up on the slightly-too-innocent tone.

“It’s treating me a bit more… enthusiastically than I think you chose to warn me about, Master Magd.”

She smirked. “I admit that. Don’t pretend like you aren’t enjoying it deep down, though. Your Force signature is quite… ah, kark it. You’re practically glowing, Skywalker. It’s almost alarming.”

He ducked his head, somewhat bashfully. “Except you set me up for it. Pad- er, Senator Amidala said I’ve been seeming more positive too. You know, in our… correspondences.” She coughed lightly to cover what was probably a laugh. Better to offer the facade of plausible deniability anyway, in case. “I guess now you want to claim some credit?”

She shook her head as they both moved through the line in the mess hall, Anakin occasionally looking over his shoulder at his charges already seated under Norren’s supervision. “Not really. Just doing my job. Happy to do it though, of course. And happy to actually have the freedom to do it so fully, at last.”

He added a nubian pear to his tray. “They’re going to let the Reassignment Council work more openly with the initiate clans?”

“Hm, and thank the Force too. With this blasted war getting into gear, we’re going to need more of everyone, not just Jedi Guardians and Counselors. Agri-Corps, Med-Corps, the works. And that will be easier if the initiates who get phased out aren’t terrified and feeling like total failures.” He wondered at the distinct layer of bitterness to her voice at the end.

She sighed as they moved from the line to the tables. “I do admit we are still deeply short on field Knights, though. I think we’ve convinced them to raise the maximum initiate age, just to give more Knights the chance to come back from the battles to take on Padawans while they recover. I admit two more years really is the most they can give us, but they’ve all but promised they’d do it.”

Anakin wasn’t sure why, but he felt a sudden and profound sense of relief to hear that.

Trento shook her scaled head, obviously releasing her apprehension. “How’s the meditation coming?”
Anakin took his turn to sigh. “It’s still much better than it used to be, Master. But I don’t know. It’s much more effective, but it… itches. Like something still doesn’t quite fit.”

“You’re not going to become an expert overnight, Anakin. It’s not just the younglings you should be patient with. And meditating really effectively is something even Masters still have to keep figuring out for themselves a lot. What’s your approach to it?”

He took a slightly forceful stab at his bantha-meat hash with his fork. “I’ve mostly been building on what you showed me, Master Magd. The visualization.”

She stared at him in silence a moment, then huffed a low laugh. “Skywalker, my friend. You’re not meant to copy my visualization. I just showed you that so you got a sense of how to make it more personal, and therefore more aligned with your identity and your perceptions. The easiest way to meditate is to connect to the Force in a way that makes sense to you. Use what you know. I’ve been in a lot more aquatic environments than you. I know water. What are you really familiar with?”

He couldn’t help the face he made, even if it made him feel like one of the initiates he was teaching.

“Sand.”

She let out a most undignified snort.

“Yeah, I can tell from your face you really don’t want to be perceiving the Force as omni-present sand.” She hunched over a bit, trying to contain her laughter. “Think outside the box. You know, you don’t even have to sit still to meditate if you don’t want. You could try doing other things, repetitive things to help center yourself. Experiment.”

He nodded, and then was temporarily distracted as a small Twi’lek approached him, holding out an initiate-grade molecular scanner.

“Knight Skywalker, Torbacca sat on my scanner by accident. Can you show me how to fix it?” He looked at her incredulously.

“Shel-hom, why did you even bring your scanner to the mess hall?” She looked at him like he was somewhat dense.

“I wanted to practice with it on my food.” He sighed good-naturedly.

“Alright, but we’re almost done here. Bring it to me at the break when you come back from lightsaber training. I’ll show you then.” He sent her back to a seat with a smile and a pat on her shoulder.

Later, as he was using the Force to carefully pull back the dented plating, and showing her how to replace the broken data chip, he was also reaching in with his senses, feeling the energy of the circuits, the tiny flow of the electric currents. After all the practice he’d gotten on Tatooine and the resourcefulness he’d had to develop, machinery and electricity came as easily as breathing to him. The reminder of him helping his mother with repairs, even as it brought him a swell of his recent grief, gave him a comforting sense of warmth.

Huh. There was something.

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Anakin simply couldn’t wrap his head around it. He thought he’d never been more baffled in his life - including his first week of galactic politics class years ago.
Of course, he knew he was a slow learner in some areas, but this… this was so abrupt he couldn’t make heads or tails of it.

Chancellor Palpatine felt off.

Not like in an ill health way, or an in-danger way, just… off.

Granted, it had actually been some time since he’d seen the man last… despite the oddly numerous comm messages the Chancellor had sent his way (which he’d often taken an embarrassingly long time to return, but he was busy. Obviously it was the Chancellor, but Crechelings took a lot of work too…). It had probably been well over a year at this point since they’d met face to face, about ten months since he’d begun working in the Creche (he was an established Creche Knight now, and would tell anyone who hadn’t already heard). So it had been quite some time, but no one could change that much that quickly, could they?

He tried to pin down what exactly it was he was sensing. Something about the Chancellor didn’t fit with his surroundings - he couldn’t believe he was thinking this - but practically on an ionic level. His body wasn’t electrically balanced properly.

Anakin had spent the last several months of his free time (of which there was precious little, between all his Creche duties, any additional duties or training, and any time he could scrap together with Padme) experimenting and developing his meditation method. Something in him had seized on the concept of the Force manifesting as ever-present electrical currents around and through him and all others. In a way, it was perfectly accurate - all living beings were sustained by electrochemical currents and pathways throughout their bodies. The very planets they walked on created electrical fields as they spun, and of course, his mechanical projects.

That was a huge part of his method. He would sink deep into the Force while he tinkered, assembling or repairing droids, disassembling and cleaning his lightsaber, other odd things. He’d let himself feel the electrical power in his hands, as he would move and direct the circuits. His old Master would often find him mid-mechanical meditation when he sought him out to catch up on his rare chances to be back in the Temple (often grumbling that Anakin “never meditated that much with me” under his breath, not being truly upset by it). Anakin was aware enough to see the irony in him finding a sense of calm and guidance in such an unstable concept. Though, on his more intense days, in both good ways and bad, it manifested itself in his mind less as electricity and more as fire. Just lately, the two visualizations had been overlapping somewhat.

In the past few months, he’d been using the visualizations to help him manage his emotions outside of meditation, even on the job (he’d gained a lot of motivation to do it as his first performance review in the Creche had come up, which he’d miraculously managed to pass). He’d employed it often enough, when a fellow Knight would pretentiously challenge his ideas for teaching methods, when the younglings were being a bit too knowingly naughty, when a few Council members would continue to watch him as he led his students about, clearly still expecting him to fail.

Needless to say, he’d gotten in his fair share of practice.

So when the Chancellor cut into his confused pondering, he only experienced a few moments of shock.

“‘I must say I’m surprised, my dear boy, that the Council didn’t see the advantage you’d clearly be commanding a unit of the army. It baffles me that they’d let such a talent as yours go to waste.’”

Waste. What?
Yes, they younglings sometimes made him want to tear his hair out, but they were not a WASTE. And he was absolutely not wasted on them. They learned from him, and he refused to believe otherwise!

A spark of the old fire, the old anger bubbled up from his gut, hotter than any he’d felt lately. But no, Master Windu was still here, was who Palpatine had originally come here to talk to, he couldn’t let Windu see his anger, couldn’t let him think he was failing his younglings-

He was the source of his anger. He was the positive charge. The Chancellor was the negative charge (a vibrating, deeply negative charge). His anger was the current. His work was the resistance. The Temple was his ground. The Temple could absorb his anger and never falter or grow foul with it.

And just like that, he was calm again. Maybe suspicious, maybe unsettled, but not angry. His anger wouldn’t help him here. He took a slow breath.

“I can assure you, Chancellor, that the Creche work is every bit as important as the work our generals do on the field of play. I’m helping the younglings on their way to becoming Knights, so they can bring all of their talent to the front. Though I’m hoping they don’t have to. I agreed to the assignment, and have no regrets about it.”

“Ah.” Palpatine stilled, seeming to take an oddly long time to respond to his words. And when he did, it carried an odd chill.

“I’m glad to know your work is so fulfilling, Anakin. Indeed I do see your duties are important.” He offered his hand to Anakin, which he took (he would swear he felt a buildup of static electricity in the Chancellor’s very cells), before making his farewells to Master Windu and taking his leave of the Temple.

He shook his head to put aside his thoughts for later. It was then that he noticed Master Windu staring at him intently.

Kriff. He pulled in a breath.

“I apologize, Master. I know I lost control for a moment there. I wasn’t meaning to give a bad impression to the Chancellor.”

“That wasn’t what I was going to say, Skywalker.”

“I- Oh? Uh…”

“I was thinking that’d I’d never seen you regain your balance so quickly.”

“… What?”

“When you first were brought to us, I admit I couldn’t conceive of you gaining such complete control of your strong emotions that fast. Now you’re clearly a strong Knight. You’ve come a long way.”

And he turned to go calmly, as if he hadn’t just given Anakin his first actual compliment from the stern Korun Master in… ever.

But the day’s shocks weren’t quite over, as Windu paused and turned back.

“You take your work seriously. You push yourself for their sake. We do appreciate that.”
And he was gone, taking with him a large portion of Anakin’s grasp on reality.

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Looking back at that exchange, Anakin hadn’t realized then the ways he would have to push himself later.

Now.

Now, when they needed him more than ever.

It had started fine, if a tad apprehensively. The Council had been reluctant to clear him to take the Ewok Clan on an educational trip. And he could certainly understand that; they were in a war after all. But they were kids, and they needed to learn, and they deserved a chance to learn hands-on with some excitement now and then.

In retrospect, perhaps he could get behind the Council’s caution a bit more.

After everything he’d heard about the clone troopers from Obi-Wan and others, how brave they where and how skilled, he thought it would be a good idea to fly the Clan out to Kamino to see some of their training, see how they learned differently from the Jedi initiates and Padawans. That in and of itself had gone fine.

Except that it was in the middle of winter on Kamino. Which would also have been fine.

Except that the Separatists had been given sensitive information and decided to pop in and get an idea of the planet that had been supplying their enemy’s army. And when they saw an obviously non-Kaminoan vessel, decided it would be a great idea to attack the Jedi.

And the old adrenalin had come rushing back in, this time augmented by his heightened sense of machinery and electricity, and somehow an even greater sense of the lives counting on him. He’d gotten in enough good hits for the Separatist ship to get the clue it would be smart to beat a hasty exit and limb back to whatever backwater dungheap it’d come from. Unfortunately, he’d also taken hits. Enough hits to require an emergency landing on one of the tiny, uninhabited natural islands. Where they had promptly lost power.

And now he sat in the silent and dim pilot’s seat, fighting to control his breathing, to tell himself that the Force hadn’t abandoned him, that his anger wouldn’t help (but how DARE they HOW DARE THEY), that he could control his emotions, that he could still work in chaos in the field. He could do this. He could keep his Clan safe and get them home. He pictured re-wiring an old droid, and centered himself.

“Everybody unbuckle. Grab all of the emergency blankets from your packs, and meet me in the center of the shuttle. Form a pod.” As all the initiates moved to carry out his command, he retrieved the emergency beacon, he continued to breath and center himself, telling himself he could do what he was about to do. It was at least a dozen standard degrees below freezing outside. Most of the initiates would freeze to death in a few short hours without power. They ship had no power, so he’d have to create it. He couldn’t convert enough power from the Force to repair and re-start the ship - even with his skill, it would simply take too much time that they didn’t have, and even then it might not be enough.

But he could do something else.

He pushed open the hatch just far enough to attach the beacon to the hull, giving its signal a bit of extra strength with the Force before pulling the hatch closed again. He knew there were units out...
here, other Jedi in the sector, or kriff, the Kaminoans would be aware of their crash soon if they weren’t already; they could send a rescue team. He just had to hold off the cold long enough for them to get here.

He turned back to his Clan. “Let me into the middle.”

And they parted for him. Quickly, he arranged them in circular ranks around him and sat, and then had them literally stack themselves, drawing them as close to him as he could, so that there were children on his lap, on his shoulders, hugging him from behind. And larger younglings around him did the same, and held smaller ones on their laps and in their arms, so they all could press as close to him as possible. He then had them lay all their emergency blankets on the outer edges, forming an overlapping skin over the small mound of younglings, with virtually only his own head protruding from the top in the center. And they all looked to him.

Needing him. Believing in him to keep them alive.

So he did.

“Alright, little ones. Focus with me now.”

And he reached within.

The images of ions and electrons and fire had been overlapping for over a year now. And now, he finally knew what they were meant for. He only barely touched on this a few times, to comfort a small initiate who, like him, was born on a warmer planet, and even growing up from infancy on Coruscant, felt its chill. He would hold the child close to him (hoping the Masters wouldn’t see) and breath deep, remembering the warmth of Tatooine (ignoring the memory of the sand), and more importantly the warmth his mother’s love had given him. Even if the memory of what happened to her still hurt, and his actions afterward now shamed him, he could remember her love, and pass on her warmth.

Now, it wasn’t one initiate he was comforting, and it wasn’t just her warmth he remembered. He thought of the comfort and ecstasy of Padme’s embrace, her fire tempered by reason and cunning. He thought of Qui-Gon, showing faith in him in those frightening days when no other Jedi would. He thought of Obi-Wan’s quietly growing fondness, the subtle pride that it took him too long to see, the simple concern for his safety and wellbeing, the just wanting what was best for Anakin, the just doing his best for him even when he was struggling with his own grief and loneliness and fear.

‘For you,’ he thought.

He closed his eyes, ignored the sweat from the dogfight that was now cooling to thin frost on his forehead, and focused. He saw the currents in his body, and the currents connecting him to his younglings. He called to the Force, and directed it in. Called it to reach into his cells, his atoms, to stir movement of the electrons like they’d never stirred before, vibrating, jumping from nucleus to nucleus, kicking up heat and pushing along the currents outward. He called the Force in to fill him with its radiant, sustaining warmth, the gentle and steady flame of a guiding hearth, and funnel it out to spread among the children who needed him.

The Force was the charge, and he was the conductor, transforming the electricity in his body into heat, and pushing the heat out. It didn’t matter if he needed to maintain this for ten minutes or ten hours or ten days.

He would keep the freezing wrath outside at bay, and keep his younglings warm.
When he became aware of anything other than the little Force signatures huddled around him (there, they were all still there) and what was happening inside him, it was gradual. His vision slowly morphed back to normal, with shapes and depth and color. He felt bodily movement around him, not just in the Force. He heard a voice speaking to him, distorted, like through several thick layers of fabric, slowly becoming more distinct.

“-akin. Anakin! Focus on me! You have to let go now. Stop forcing it, let it all go back to normal. Anakin! Listen to me! You’re about to boil yourself! You’ve done it, they’re all safe, you can stop! Anakin LET GO!”

Two hands gripped the sides of his face, the words piercing his skull from mere inches away. He focused on those wide, fearful gray eyes, the coolness of those hands, that disheveled ginger hair. He pulled in a breath, and everything inside him fell back into its proper place.

Leaving his head feel like it had been spun in a centrifuge.

“Hello, Obi-Wan,” he murmured. “What are you doing here? Did you get yourself injured again?”

His Master let out a laugh that might have been a sob, still tightly gripping his head.

“No, Padawan. You should see yourself.” He felt his mouth spread into an easy grin.

“Me? I’m fine,” he said, before promptly losing consciousness.

Mace kept to the back of the room, letting Obi-Wan take his place at his old Padawan’s side. He didn’t even make any comment when he would reach over and gently brush the hair out of Sky-out of Anakin’s face. How could he?

The healers said he should suffer no lasting damage from that massive, frankly astounding use of Force power. He’d just need a few days to recover. Which Mace could completely understand.

When he and Kenobi had touched down on that Force-forsaken little speck (with some stabilizing use of the Force itself), already in their emergency winter gear, pried open the shuttle hatch and climbed in, he’d been dreading the worst. It had taken them three hours just to reach Kamino at maximum speed, and he calculated that it had already taken at least an hour for the beacon signal to reach them. The sith-damned Kaminoans reported it was too dangerous to send out a rescue team in the developing storm. Given the complete lack of power on the shuttle and the temperature of the air and water thrashing against the hull outside, he’d anticipated that the cold would be fatal for most of those initiates in less than two hours. He knew Skywalker would do all he could, but…

What he’d expected was absolutely not what he saw.

No, what he saw was a pack of very alive little youngling huddled around the Knight under their shared emergency blankets, and the very air around Skywalker distorted, rippling, like the air around the surface of Coruscant halfway through a hot day. He saw Skywalker honest-to-Force bioluminescent with yellowish-orange hue, for all kriffing appearances. His skin blotchy, shining with sweat, and starting to develop winding, branched red marks. And also rather unresponsive, for the entire time it took the two Masters to herd the initiates from the dead shuttle to the functioning one. By that time Kenobi was starting to visibly panic, and Mace honestly couldn’t blame him.

Mace would freely admit that at seeing something before him he’d certainly never seen before, he
was genuinely frightened for Anakin for the first time. In his days as a Padawan, he’d been so brash, so confident, and his conviction that nothing could keep him down for long was honestly a bit contagious, for all that it came with a certain irritation at his arrogance. But he’d worked so hard after taking Trento up on her (at the time completely radical) suggesting to join the ranks of the Creche. And somehow, he’d calmed so much, and his sincerity had gradually made itself apparent. And whatever grim effects on the body his eyes saw, whatever shock or even fear he may have felt at the time, Mace never for one second believed that the power Anakin used in that shuttle was dark. That it was anything other than compassionate, self-giving light. And at long last, he was fully prepared to extend a (belated) hand to the young man not only in trust, but in friendship.

***********************

After hearing and reading both versions of Mace’s and Obi-Wan’s reports, hearing what happened informally from the Ewok Clan initiates, and meditating on what he had pulled off, no one on the Council gave a dissenting vote.

“Rise, Anakin Skywalker - Jedi Master.”

Chapter End Notes

I know I said earlier that Anakin would probably develop a an earth-based Force visualization, but my brain started taking a different direction. Especially considering the mechanical / electrical oddity he would have become otherwise, his prowess with repairs, etc.

Someone let me know if Anakin is a bit too mushy or Space-Jesus-y here, please.

Also if I'm demonstrating a fundamental misunderstanding of how electricity works, you know.
**Revelations - Part 1**

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 of Crechemaster! Anakin AU. A master's ceremony, a long overdue conversation, and a new path forward.

Chapter Notes

I'm playing very fast and loose with timeline stuff here. Everything from EU material I got from Star Wars wiki, and I've never seen a full episode of clone wars, and it's fiction of fiction, so not adhering completely to cannon is basically the point. Yay.

It is laaaaate and this is definitely not beta-read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Rise, Anakin Skywalker - Jedi Master.”

Anakin couldn’t help but smile as he let out a shaking breath, standing. And little though he could believe it, Mace Windu returned a bit of that smile as he lowered and deactivated his violet saber. For the first time, Anakin was happy to offer the traditional bow, and even more so to have it returned.

Around him, other sabers deactivated and returned to belts, as the solemn mood of the Council chamber lifted and the others began to move to offer more congenial congratulations.

The one that mattered most was first.

“Anakin,” Obi-Wan smiled, a suspiciously wet gleam to his eyes. “Truly I can’t tell you how pro-“ He was cut off as the new Master couldn't hold back the tight hug he grabbed his old mentor in any longer. The other Masters either looked on happily, or the more conservative ones pretended not to see. Anakin didn’t really care, because he felt stunned arms relax, and rise to hold him in return.

“I owe it all to you, Master,” he insisted, releasing him. Obi-Wan shook his head with a small smile.

“We both know that’s not true, old friend.” Anakin wondered at that. “You wouldn’t be here without your own hard work and dedication. And an deeply alarming amount of courage.” They both chuckled at that, before Obi-Wan stepped aside to let the next Master greet their newest addition.

**************************

“Come with me, there’s someone I want you to meet.”

“Oh?” the red-haired general replied with a raised eyebrow.

“Yeah, I’ve got a really good feeling about it.”

“Speaking of good feelings… or possibly not…” Obi-Wan paused in their walk down the hall,
seeming to struggle with a decision before scanning their surroundings for other Jedi. Anakin turned back to him, letting his face show his concern.

“What is?" His old Master took a breath.

“How did Padme feel about your turning yourself into an emergency radiator?”

Anakin stared.

Two and a half years ago, he might have sputtered had gone red in the face from embarrassment. Now he just released his stunned breath and looked down a moment.

“How long have you known?” Obi-Wan let out a low chuckle.

“How long has it been since you two were hugging three feet away from me? That day was memorable for quite a few reasons.”

Anakin shook his head. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

And was swiftly pinned with ‘the look.’ Oh.

“Fair enough,” he muttered. “I just… I didn’t want to disappoint you- er, again. It’s against the Code, and... I guess I just thought that you would see it as a betrayal, of the Jedi way, and by extension, of you. I couldn’t bear that.” Even in his apprehension, he felt on odd weight lifted from his chest. Whatever the backlash, it was in the air between them. He hadn’t realized how the secret had been affecting him.

Obi-Wan shook his head, aghast. “Anakin… Do you- You don’t know how many times I considered leaving the Order. Or the time I actually did it.”

Anakin would admit later that his jaw did in fact drop.

“What?”

**************************

“You thought I wouldn’t understand… Anakin, I’ve fallen in love many times. Either with a person, or with a cause. Sometimes both.”

The new Master looked down at the tea his mentor had pressed on him once they’d reached his quarters. “I- I feel awful for saying I’d never pictured that, but…”

Obi-Wan smiled ruefully. “But I know how you’d get that impression. There’s a great deal about my own apprenticeship that I’ve tried to keep buried. I never wanted you to feel- but I guess that’s why you’ve never seen me be truly open with people. The people I truly care about, more than others… well, they have a tendency to… well, you understand. With your mother… Anakin, I’m so sorry I didn’t-“ Anakin silenced him with a hand on his shoulder.

“Oh, Obi-Wan. I- I’ve accepted it. I still regret what happened to her. But we both understand what went wrong now. Now we’re talking about you.”

“Well… Between my own experiences, my Master’s experiences, and HIS Master’s, I’ve noticed a pattern over the years of many kinds of love being simply doomed.

“Master Dooku, when he was still one of us, he had a Padawan who became infatuated with him. Komari. From what I could glean, neither he nor the Council knew how to address it. Their approach
ended in disaster, and she disappeared. Later they found out that she had Fallen. Then just after he captured me on Geonosis, I found out that he’d killed her.

“There was a girl, a Jedi a few years younger than me. We went on a good number of missions together with our Masters. We bickered frequently at first, but soon realized we truly cared for each other. But by that point I’d already seen…

“You know what happened to Qui-Gon, of course. And he was like a father to me, in spite of our difficulties. But when he loved too much… A fellow Jedi, Tahl.” His voice started to waver. “A mission went wrong, completely, horribly wrong, and she was killed. Just after they’d pledged themselves to each other.” Anakin closed his eyes in sympathetic grief, for more than one person. “And it almost destroyed him. He nearly Fell, from his rage and grief. He eventually recovered, but… things were never the same.

“Another mission, one we were on for nearly a year, a protection detail. I grew to love another young woman during that mission. Heh, the two of us experienced a bit of friction too. She was a living spark, full of drive and principles. She was also a young Duchess of Mandalore, and the target of assassination attempts.”

Anakin’s eyebrows rose. He guessed his Master really had lived on the edge his whole life, and was just very good at covering it.

“We didn’t address it openly. We both had our own lives, and belonged in different worlds. Oh, but how I wanted… I would have…” He trailed off, and seemed to regain a bit of his telltale dry humor for a moment. “I suppose, given what I’ve seen since then, just for her benefit I should hope to never cross paths with her again. She was one of the lucky ones; she’s still alive and well, the last I heard.”

One of the lucky ones? Anakin really did not like where this was going…

“And of course, I guess you could say what really started this awareness for me… It was one of our early missions together. Melida / Daan. It was civil war. But worse, it had spilled over to the Young. Children, teenagers my age, trying to stop the fighting one way or another. They needed help desperately. Needed me in a way the Jedi never had needed me. I… I felt a sense of belonging with them I’d never known. There was a girl, Cerasi. A wonderful, brilliant girl. She believed peace was possible.

“But things were going badly, and we needed to leave. He needed to leave, and I wanted to stay and fight. My master gave me a choice, to stay and help, or go with him and remain a Jedi.”

Anakin could only stare, in uncomprehending horror. By this point, it was as if Obi-Wan wasn’t fully aware he was speaking aloud to anyone.

“I- I betrayed him. I betrayed the chance he’d given me. I stayed.”

The younger man sucked in a slow breath. In the small space of clarity in his mind not filling with protective anger (it wasn’t like he could do anything dangerous with it, so might as well accept it just for a short while), he thought to himself, ‘this explains so much.’

“But things got even worse. The fighting got even more intense, and she was killed.”

Anakin bowed his head. Force…

Now it was like his old Master was so deep into his recollection, he couldn’t stop, and had to force himself through it to the end.
“I knew I was in far over my head. I messaged the Council for assistance. They sent Qui-Gon.”

Karking… Ouch.

“We made ourselves focus on the mission, and eventually we worked out what was going on, and ended the war. I knew that what I had stayed for… it had no place for me anymore. I knew I had to be a Jedi, to help more people. I returned to the Temple with him, and the Council put me on probation for a year for my defiance. For some time he refused to take me back. He had every right to refuse. It wasn’t until an attack on the Temple, from an old enemy of ours and an old classmate of mine, that we had to work together again, and decided we were better as a team. He accepted me as his Padawan again.”

Anakin let out a long breath, grounding out his more tumultuous emotions with it. He shook his head.

“That’s… that’s so much. That’s more than I ever imagined a child raised in the Temple would ever have to handle. I do wish I’d known. We could have understood each other better.”

His Master pulled himself upright, gathering his discipline and morale with a smile. “We can now.”

But something still was missing.

“But what happened with the first girl you mentioned? The fellow apprentice? You’re smart, and a good Jedi. The best. You could have made it work. What happened?”

Obi-Wan deflated. “By that time, I’d started to get a sense of what happens to people a Jedi lets themselves love. We both agreed to be Jedi first and foremost, and not let our feelings get in the way.”

“Well, who was she? Where is she now?” Obi-Wan looked down.

“She was Siri Tachi,” he said quietly.

Kriffing hell.

Where was that chocolate ration he always kept stocked on his belt? His Master needed it. He needed a lot besides that, honestly, but Anakin didn’t think getting stinking drunk would truly help either of them in the long run. Sadly.

*************************

“So tell me about this person you want me to meet.” The young Master could tell he was trying for a lighter focus after the emotionally exhausting conversation they’d had.

“Well, she wasn’t in my Clan, obviously, but six months ago I noticed her when we were going in to use the salle that the Eagle Clan was about to finish with, and she’s really something, Obi-Wan—”

He glanced over to see his mentor giving him an unexpectedly stunned look, shaking his head.

“Anakin… no. No! This blasted war is escalating, I can’t be training a new apprentice! It’s dangerous out there! And you know, I’m honestly still recovering from your apprenticeship…”

“Very funny, Master. But won’t you at least meet her? Watch her spar? There’s no harm in just observing at least. There’s not that many other Masters without Padawans at the Temple, and she’s already fourteen. It would be a great reason to get the Council to put you back on more negotiation
missions! I’m just worried…” He sighed. “I really think she deserves a chance.”

It wasn’t intentional, but after a moment he realized he might have stumbled onto very influential words. Mentally flipping back through the recollection, he could have punched himself.

“Oh, Obi-Wan, not like… I didn’t mean to-“ Obi-Wan put a calming hand to his shoulder.

“I know you didn’t, Anakin, relax. It’s in the past.” Anakin wasn’t sure how true that really was, but he said nothing.

His old Master, thankfully, took a few moments to honestly think on it, before shaking his head in a different manner.

“All right. Just observing, for now.” The younger man let his shoulders relax from where they had tensed up.

“Thank you, Master. It means a lot, and I do think you’d really like her.”

“Of course. But we’ll have to see what the Force has to say on the matter.” He paused, face growing serious again.

“You know, Anakin, since you’re a Master now, there’s something you should really consider.”

“What’s that?” His mentor smiled.

“Growing a beard. It’s a tradition for the lineage.”

The ‘just observing’ didn’t last long.

They caught the Eagle Clan in saber training. The pair of Jedi quietly entered and took seats on the benches along the wall, not immediately noticing the Kel Dor seated on the far end, convalescing under healer orders after a particularly nasty Separatist confrontation. He was trying to be grateful he had lost as few of his pack as he had during the skirmish.

He wasn’t succeeding very well.

One of the only things that made the grief a bit easier to release while he healed was spending time with younglings, initiates. One bright spark in particular he was already familiar with.

He could remember clearly those seemingly few and short years ago when he had found the little Togruta and brought her back to the Temple to fulfill her Force potential. He had a soft spot for all their younglings, but he couldn’t deny that the trusting touch of her hand to his and the open curiosity in her wide young eyes had left a deep, warm impression on his heart. The impression must have been at least somewhat mutual, for she frequently sought him out for advice or just to catch up (which was sadly less frequent these past months, as he’d been out on more back-to-back missions with his pack). She’d come to visit him before he’d been released from the Healing Halls, briefly before she’d had to dash off to another class, and insisted that they find time to talk again before he got pulled back to the field. And he was glad, especially to see how far she had come, her forms progressing so well.

And yet, he knew she was still waiting to be chosen.

Perhaps… yes, it could be time-
“Skyguy!”

Ah, newly-minted Master Skywalker, the reckless and angry young Knight turned beloved and far more stable Crechemaster. Whose success in that endeavor apparently only he and Trento had foreseen. He couldn’t see why the other Councilors had been convinced it was a fool’s errand. He thought it was a perfectly obvious posting for the young man, and was deeply impressed to hear of his feat on the shuttle, and was proud to take part in the ceremony granting him his new rank, since he was in-Temple.

And with him, there was-

Oh.

Oh. Oh, he saw it clearly now.

Skywalker was obviously introducing little Ahsoka to his former Master, and with good reason. The Force practically danced around the small group, the pathways between them practically illuminated with rightness. Of course. Just lately he’d been admiring Skywalker’s instincts on these things, since Crechemasters were not permitted Padawans of their own while in their post.

He allowed himself the smallest of sighs, before bolstering his happiness for Ahsoka at having finally found her Master, and quickly weaving together a happiness for Kenobi as well. He’d earned something splendid. He pushed himself to his feet. He’d been wrong, the thread he felt connecting him to the young Togruta was simply his own sentiment, and he needed to meditate on the beginnings of attachment. And give the new team time to get to know each other; best congratulate them later-

“Master Plo!”

**************************

When Anakin had pointed out the Togruta bearing the two sabers in the reverse Jar’Kai grip, Obi-Wan would admit only to himself that his first thought had been:

Kriff.

Seven sith hells. No wonder Anakin had said he “had a good feeling about it.” Anakin’s “good feelings” during his apprenticeship usually meant chaos and near-heart palpitations and massive headaches for Obi-Wan.

If Anakin had somehow managed to not be the death of him, Ahsoka just might pull it off.

And yet…

He simply couldn’t turn away. As much as his mind was insisting he couldn’t handle another deeply talented but DEEPLY reckless Padawan, especially not in a war, the Force was pulsing between them, chanting that the hour was at hand, and she was looking up at him with wide, awed eyes and saying was so excited to FINALLY meet her Skyguy’s Master, and wouldn’t he please show her some of his saber techniques some time?

Yes. Time to resign himself to being completely white-haired in probably less than one more whole apprenticeship, and greet it with a smile.

But-
Wait. Something was missing. It was like an elaborate dish was missing a key ingredient, or a pyramid without one of its sides.

Then she let out a delighted cry, and he looked along the bench, and felt the heaviness in the Kel Dor’s presence, which immediately lifted a great deal at the girl’s call, and he saw the thread of the Force connecting them, and-

Well. That made sense. It certainly complicated matters, but it made sense. The only question…

“Do you see what I see?” He’d muttered to his first apprentice.

“I’m seeing it,” he replied.

“I see.” He stroked his beard. “And obviously there’s still the rule about only one apprentice per Master, but there’s no-?”

“There isn’t,” Anakin jumped in, looking immensely proud of himself. “I looked it up.”

Well, it may make arranging missions a tad more difficult, but the 501st would really be needing their own Commander soon (dear Force help him, giving a fourteen-year-old Padawan a crash course on military leadership), and two Masters meant twice as much knowledge gained, in his book, and split time would mean better mental health for all of them. And oh, to see that girl’s face when she was finally offered a place at a Master’s side, to know she was chosen…

A win all around.

Chapter End Notes

Y’all are getting so many updates so fast because I finally have motivation, and because we’re winding down. There’s probably two more hearty chapters for this AU, maaayyybe three.

There may be some add-ons for the one shots in here, or maybe not.
Revelations, Part 2

Chapter Summary

Bigger things start to be uncovered in the Crechemaster! Anakin AU (ch. 6)

Chapter Notes

Try not to be too pissed at me for the end of the chapter. The next one's coming soon, I promise.

This chapter I actually address how I have the Clans work, sort of.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It wasn’t until Master Fisto approached him to confirm that the applicable initiates knew which classrooms to go to at the start of the next training cycle that he realized:

They were leaving.

His Ewok Clan was finally phasing up into the Bear Clan, he realized, aghast. They came to him as three and four-year olds, and they were now six or seven.

His younglings would have to leave him.

Kark, he thought sadly.

A few had advanced early, but the bulk of the Clan had completed their elementary training and would be transitioning to intermediate level classes together at the start of the next cycle. He’d been with his Ewok Clan for three years now - herding them to and from classrooms and salles and the mess hall, offering comfort and reassurance after the odd nightmare during his intermittent night watches, diffusing small fights and rivalries, teaching basic Force use and fundamentals of meditation (oh, the look on Yoda’s face when he saw THAT teaching application) and just recently, the Shi Cho form. And they had learned so much, and challenged him, and shown him extraordinary insights, and made him bend more than one pad stylus in tested patience, and laugh until he cried, and watch in awe of their displays of compassion, and force himself to address their occasional bouts of insensitivity as calmly and effectively as he could. And they had trusted him with their learning, their safety, their hearts, their fears and their lives.

And he loved them all.

What would he do now?

He sighed. Objectively, he knew what he would do. He’d entrust them to the Bear Clan Masters, and send them off to grow as Jedi and as people, and accept the upcoming batch of younglings to become the new Ewok Clan. Of course, he’d still see his first younglings around the Temple, gaining new skills and eventually getting taken on as Padawans or choosing to enter one of the Corps. And
maybe he’d get to teach them more advanced classes in the future.

But they wouldn’t be his Clan anymore.

He sighed again.

********************************************************************************

He rushed home to give Padme the news he’d received on his comm as he left the Temple.

“Angel! Obi-Wan messaged me this afternoon. He, Ahsoka, and Master Plo made it back to Coruscant safely with the Chancellor; they were able to capture Count Dooku!”

She smiled, standing to hug him. “Yes, I saw on the news, and we all got the message that the Chancellor had returned to the Senate. I just can’t believe any of Dooku’s people were able to capture him! I mean, with the amount of security he has… what will he do next? What will he try for next? A man like him has no principles. I wouldn’t be surprised—"

Anakin sat down slowly on the couch, looking closely at her. His wife seemed uncharacteristically distressed about the this latest affront to the Chancellor’s safety. Honestly, attempts against him were a semi-regular occurrence these days. True, she was a good-hearted person who would worry over any innocent person in peril, especially her old Naboo Senate mentor, but her ire now seemed oddly… personal.

She sat down beside him, giving herself a little shake. “At least everyone’s home safe now. How was the creche?”

“Oh. Right.”

And he told her.

As he was speaking about his original crechelings moving on, she was even more sympathetic than he’d anticipated. And yet, her Force presence was… excited. Worried. Nervous.

That was an odd combination. And now she was looking down, conflicted. He took her hand.

“Love? Is something wrong?” She sighed, finding the words she wanted.

“Well, I suppose… the Chancellor getting kidnapped by Count Dooku, and just now your younglings advancing in their training… time passes so quickly. If this awful war doesn’t stop soon, those children you taught may have to fight themselves someday.” He nodded sadly.

“I know. Every Jedi is expected to be willing to lay down their life for innocent people, but this… this is different. They’re growing up knowing the kind of fate that could very well already be waiting for them.”

He looked up, and was stunned. There were visible tears in Padme’s eyes.

Nothing.

Made.

His fierce, unstoppable angel.

Cry.
He was now really damn worried.

“Darling? What it is? You’re-” He put his flesh hand gently on her shoulder. “-Trembling.” She turned to face him directly.

“Ani,” she whispered, “something wonderful has happened.”

***************************

“Skyguy! Have you be- Oof!”

The Togruta teen didn’t finish her question because the Creche Master had seized her up in a fierce bear hug, spinning her around in the air.

“‘Soka! So glad you’re back safe. Hey, you’ve gotten bigger! You need nutrients. Not those awful rations. Come by the Creche later!” He put her down reluctantly.

“Master Skywalker-“ The Kel Dor was wrapped briefly in Anakin’s arms next, though thankfully not lifted.

“-Good Morning. Are you doing quite well, Master Skywalker?” asked the bemused voice through the breathing mask. The young Master released him, stepping back.

“Ah, Master Plo. Never better! I’m glad you’re back safe, too. And I’m glad you’re one of ‘Soka’s Masters. Good man.” He tapped a friendly finger to Master Koon’s chest. “Good Jedi! Showing her the ropes. Keeping her safe.”

“Skyyyyyyguuuuy?” He did not seem to hear.

“Obi-Wan!” He all but tackled the shorter man with the force of his hug.

“Oh, Obi-Wan! You’ll never guess what’s happened,” he whispered fiercely. His old Master stilled for a moment, then huffed a short, nervous laugh, patting his student’s back.

“Actually Anakin, I think I can.”

“Skywalker?”

Processing the voice, Anakin hastily released the red-haired Councilor and stepped back.

“Master Windu?” He folded his hands in his sleeves, trying to smooth his face and his emotions.

“What are you-“ The Korun Master froze, his brow furrowed. Then, as much as he would let himself, he sagged a bit with a sigh.

“Skywalker, you’re very skilled, and the Clan thrives under you. You can efficiently teach Force use, meditation, saber techniques, and Force help us, probably aviation. But you will never, EVER teach mental shielding, because you are still horrendously bad at it.”

Anakin, skilled and respected Creche Master that he was, swallowed nervously.

“I know.” The Master of the Order rubbed a hand over his forehead.

“Report to the Council chamber at 0900 standard tomorrow.”

He bowed hid head, resigned. “Yes, Master.”
And after the senior Master had swept away, leaving the other four silent in the hall, Anakin turned to his mentor.

“Well, Obi-Wan, I karked things up a bit, didn’t I?” His old Master laid a bolstering hand on his shoulder.

“A bit, my old Padawan.”

He stood before the Council the next day. As much as a part of him wanted to, he did not ask Obi-Wan to stand with him.

He was an adult. He was a Master, a husband, and soon to be a father (the thought still made his chest ache happily, even now). He had made his choices, and now he had to face them.

“Well, Skywalker. Have you anything to say for yourself?” Ki Adi Mundi asked.

He breathed steadily, reminding himself of what truly mattered. He’d been thinking and meditating on how he would face the Council most of the night, for once not tinkering at all. His heart quiet, but sure.

“I did break the Code,” he began softly. “I allowed myself to develop and maintain an attachment. I lived in defiance of the Jedi way. And I do feel shame for having lied to you all. If you feel it’s fitting to expel me from the Order, I understand.” He paused, and took a deep breath. “But at the time, that attachment was the only thing that was making any sense in my life. It was someone I could trust completely, and be myself whole-heartedly with. Someone who challenged me in a way that didn’t make me feel resented or feared or a disappointment. I am grateful to the Jedi for giving me a chance, especially you Obi-Wan-” He looked over to his old Master, and received a warm smile in return.

“But if we are not meant to love, then I am truly not meant to be a Jedi. Because I cannot regret my attachment, and I will not cut myself off from them. My wife, Senator Amidala, is an attachment. Our unborn child is an attachment. And I know your views on that, Master-“ Here he looked to directly address Yoda.

“But I don’t believe it will lead me to the Dark side. I know-” He had to take another deep breath. “I know I will not live forever. I wouldn’t want to. And I-” His voice began to waver. “I know I won’t have them forever. Our child will have to leave us and live their own life someday. I know they won’t live forever. None of us can. All I can do is make the most of every day together we have, and help the galaxy the best way I know how. Those two things don’t have to be mutually exclusive.

“If you do choose to expel me, all I would ask is time to say goodbye the the initiates properly. If you don’t feel it would be too poor of an influence.”

Mace was proud to say he kept his face impassive for the entirety of Skywalker’s speech, giving nothing away. And of course, he’d noted the slight pointed remark at the end.

That man. Honestly.

The truth was, Skywalker would probably never realize how many Knights and Masters had slowly grown into a mindset that would likely be sympathetic to his circumstances. The Order they had been before Geonosis (after all of the battles, he still dreamt of that day - except they absolutely were not dreams) was not built for war. Individual conflicts, skirmishes, yes, they dealt with those. But also
peaceful negotiations, and discovery, and honest-to-Force relief missions. Not widespread, galactic war. They were meant to bring ends to wars with planets’ and nations’ requests. Not continuously fight in them.

He was tired. They all were; the bone-deep fatigue, in all senses, spreading throughout the Order like illness. Maybe in a way it was, chipping away at their defenses.

So very tired.

To the point where they would accept any form of comfort they could get and still be able to face themselves the next day. Where many were starting to seriously consider indulging in some form of connection, even attachment, if it meant they could bear to get up and fight again and not let their men down. Meditation only did so much.

So yes, he understood more than he would like to. He was accustomed to restrictions, he appreciated them, because they provided structure. Clear guidelines to live within. He had absolutely agreed to the need for them without question, once.

Was he disappointed Skywalker had tried to keep up the deception for so long? Yes, of course. No one appreciated being lied to, even by omission. But he did good work, and his younglings grew steady and full of light and skilled, so his unique viewpoint can’t be inherently harmful.

And he was so kriffing tired of fighting against allowing the Order what it now seemed to need.

“Hmpf.” Yoda fixed his eyes on the young Master. “Many times, I heard, in your words, state the benefits of this attachment to you, you did. Selfless, a Jedi swears to be. The purpose of our rule on attachment, it is. Believe yourself to be selfless, you do? A life of sacrifice, as is required of a Jedi, led, have you?”

“I would sacrifice myself for an innocent in a heartbeat, Master. You know that. I do what I can to see that she’s happy. She wouldn’t stay with me if the relationship were one-sided. And I think I’ve put my own desires behind what was best for my Clan when necessary over the years.”

Depa, surprisingly, jumped in. “There can be those we value more than ourselves, Master Skywalker. Easily. Compared to them, sacrificing our own life is not so hard. Putting them second to the greater cause is much harder. What then?”

He remained steady. “Those lives do not belong to me and therefore are not mine to give.”

Ki fixed him with a pointed look. “That is a very particular point of view, Skywalker. One that may not withstand certain circumstances experienced in a Jedi’s life.”

“And mine is a very particular function within the Order,” Anakin returned calmly. “One that doesn’t usually meet with those kinds of circumstances.”

Yoda huffed again, but did not comment. None of the others did either. They all knew each others’ opinions on the matter, and frankly, he was tired of dragging it out.

“You should know damn well we functionally can’t expel you at this point, Skywalker, as much as some may want to. You’ve taken over so many Creche duties it would be more difficult to replace you by now than censure you. We’re deeply thin on Knights or Masters in the Temple. The Creche even outside of the Ewok Clan would dissolve into chaos in the time it would take to pull a Knight from the field and refresh them on the responsibilities. And there’s no point in grounding you, since you’re nearly always in the Temple anyway. There’s not even any point in taking your rank as Master; the younglings trust and admire you either way. And it doesn’t change what you have
accomplished or your dedication to the work.

“Expect a great deal of very menial duties heading your way for the foreseeable future, Skywalker. In addition to your regular ones. I know there’s a standard week before the next training cycle starts. I hear the Healing Halls need a temporary cleaner while the service droids are being repaired. Bedpans included.”

Anakin bowed in acquiescence, using all of his control to keep a straight face. He knew he was meant to be repentant, and in a way he was. But all of the worst punishments he could have been given were the ones they couldn’t give, because he had made himself vital to them. That was probably one of the best victories he could experience. He would be allowed to stay with his younglings, and with his family. And were he more resentful and less focused on the future, the janitorial tasks could have brought back very unpleasant memories of his childhood. But honestly, it couldn’t possibly kill his happiness.

And cleaning up worse messes than usual? He’d just consider it practice for what was waiting for him. And he was quite alright with that.

“I understand, Masters.” Windu gave him a wry look.

“Good. Now take yourself and the trouble you bring out of here. And tell the Senator congratulations.”

******************************************************************************

“Obi-Wan!” He caught up to his former Master later, during the break after his Shi-Cho class. He positively beamed at him. “I suppose I have you to thank for the bedpans?” The Councilor shook his head.

“Oh, Anakin, honestly. The things you get away with,” he griped good-naturedly, before pulling him into a proper hug.

******************************************************************************

“Commander!”

“Sir?”

“Uh…” he took a deep breath. “Can I have a word? Alone?” Cody gave only the shortest pause, while Anakin ignored the startled look Obi-Wan gave him and the question he passed through the echo of their old bond.

“Of course, Sir. General, if I may-?” Obi-Wan excused him with a gesture, clearly befuddled. Anakin led the clone Commander down the hall from the hangar, his mind going roughly 1000 rpm’s. What he sensed… it stuck out, like the bright poisonous skin of a Dagoban marsh newt. It didn’t belong, and it was dangerous. And very artificial.

Obi-Wan had been introducing him to his second-in-command of the 212th Battalion (about time) when they’d swung by the Temple to pick up Ahsoka after her rotation with Master Plo. His old Master had been teasingly reminding Cody that he didn’t need to salute Anakin (he was’t a General) when he felt it - SAW it, the cluster of microscopic circuits standing out in his senses so clearly, almost like an overlay on his vision.

Even if the man before him was a clone, he was still organic. And he had something very inorganic in his head, and it filled Anakin with an indecipherable dread.
He motioned Cody into an empty droid-training room.

“Sir? Is there a problem?” Anakin fought to keep his expression mostly clear, not wanting to give too much away. He knew Obi-Wan trusted this man with his life, but…

“I’m concerned there is, Commander.” Cody stood even straighter, alarmed.

“A… a problem with me, Sir? That you didn’t want to discuss in front of the General?” He nodded, glad he didn’t have to take time approaching it indirectly.

“I think so. Commander Cody, are you—” He paused as he felt the Commander become suddenly uncomfortable, but not in a way that seemed to fit the current problem; something not time-critical that he could work out later. “Are you aware of any implants in your body? Possibly in your head?”

The way that Cody stiffened, eyes widening somewhat, along with his blatant shock and confusion in the Force gave him his answer. He wasn’t sure what that answer would mean down the road, but he had to find out. Quickly. Whatever that foreign, hidden bundle of circuitry was, it was in the mind of a powerful soldier who worked very closely with Obi-Wan. With Ahsoka. Not to mention oversaw the largest battalion in the army.

“Commander Cody, I know it’s a lot to ask given that we just met,” he began seriously, “but will you trust me? Completely?”

The clone did not have to hesitate. He looked just as anxious for answers as Anakin felt.

“Of course, Sir.”

Anakin nodded, and slowly reached two fingers to touch the Commander’s forehead.

“Then go to sleep.”

****************************

Once Anakin had commed his old Master to meet him in the training room, and Obi-Wan had shown up, there was obviously some alarm and confusion to cut through first.

“Anakin, what did you do to my Commander?!”

“It was an emergency, I swear! Better to overdo it on the precaution than be sorry later!”

To which Obi-Wan had muttered something that sounded suspiciously like “Who are you, and what have you done with my reckless Padawan?” But he knelt beside the prone clone regardless.

Then Anakin focused, and opened the pathway of their old training bond, and showed him what he had seen. The Councilor sat back after the connection was broken, brushing a hand over his beard in a rare show of nerves.

“Oh dear,” he murmured. The blond Jedi nodded emphatically.

“I never thought I’d hear myself say it, but we’ve got to tell the Council about this. A previously unmentioned implant in the Commander’s mind definitely brooks investigation. Not only does he have a right to know, be he just has so much responsibility. Anything that could affect his mental state like this is our sphere.”

Obi-Wan fixed him with a look.
“Anakin, I’m on the Council.”

“Oh. Right. Let’s get to it, then.”

After coming Master Windu to meet them in an isolated room in the Healing Halls, Obi-Wan and Anakin took the unconscious Cody there together, one arm over each of their shoulders. Anakin offered to do it by himself for speed’s sake, but Obi-Wan vetoed that.

“Can you imagine the rumors that would spread if the most prominent Commander of the GAR was seen flung over your shoulder like some drunk or security risk? At least this way it looks like he just fell ill while he happened to be with us.”

Later they realized that more information, however vague, spreading around the Temple might have been a bit helpful.

Vokara Che set them up in a private room in the back of the wing with no windows, where Mace was already waiting for them. They laid Cody down on the bed, and standing back, Anakin said nervously, “I think we should restrain him.” Obi-Wan looked a bit alarmed and just slightly insulted at that, but Mace nodded.

“A wise precaution.”

They secured his hands and feet to the bed, and added a strong band across his chest and shoulders for good measure. Then Anakin sat down in the chair by the clone’s head, breathed, and focused.

There, just as clearly as before. The smallest bundle of circuits, a microchip not even as large as his fingernail and almost flimsy-thin. Complete with some sort of signal receptor. A network of code, implanted deep in the folds of the gray matter itself.

Kaminoan.

He pushed his senses further, reaching.

A series of commands pre-programed. One - the complete irradiation of all individuality, all personality, all personal likes and hopes and fears. What the hell?

Another - Absolute and unquestioning obedience. Blind. Not the trust, discipline, and loyalty of a sentient soldier, but the electrical compulsion of a freshly-wiped and programmed droid. The utter lack of freedom of-

Of a slave.

Worse.

Sweet Force…

And another. Was that-?

He reached deeper with the skill he’d been honing for the last two years, feeling for the electrons while filled with horror. He carefully moved just a few…

And all hell broke loose in Commander Cody’s mind.

“Kill the Jedi.”
“Cody?!”

“Kill the Jedi. Kill the traitors.” The clone thrashed and struggled on the bed, and Obi-Wan looked more alarmed and... hurt than Anakin had seen him in a very long time.

“Traitors?!”

“Good soldiers follow orders. Good soldiers follow orders!”

“Cody!” Mace had his yet-unactivated lightsaber in one hand, and the other on the red-haired Master’s shoulder. Vokara was quickly putting together a strong sedative and preparing to inject it into Cody's thigh. Anakin, meanwhile, was aiding the restraints with Force use, trying to frantically interpret what he’d seen.

“He doesn’t mean it!”

“He doesn’t mean it!”

The same words were shouted together by two voices. All the Masters in the room looked to Anakin, then to the doorway.

“Master Magd?”

“Hello, Skywalker. It’s been too long. I felt it too, over in our department. A huge kriffing shift in his Force presence, thoughts, and emotions. All completely forced and fabricated. What’s the situation?”

Aside from Cody’s manic struggling and continued repetitions of “Kill the Jedi. Kill the traitors!”, the room was quiet for several long moments, all of them uncharacteristically at a loss for words. Finally Anakin took it upon himself to speak for the group.

“The situation is: we could all be in very deep bantha shit.”

None of the senior Masters felt it at all necessary to correct his word choice.

Chapter End Notes

Guys. Friends. People. I've made a huge mistake.
In the beginning I said this was set after the end of AotC, as shown in cannon. But that would have included Ani's slaughter of the Sand People. Hell, I mention it in at least two later chapters. I just didn't process that it included murdering innocent sand kids. No sane and competent person who recommend or accept a post looking after young kids if they knew someone did that. So I am officially pretending for this AU that there were no kids in that settlement (Idk, it was like a scout / strike team village or something) and he killed / maimed adults who'd been involved but not kids - I know, I know, so much better (face palm). Because I cannot handle that kind of cognitive dissonance, even in my fanfic. Hell, rather than him being injured in some random way, it's him grounded for mandatory mind-healing and re-adjusting to his prosthetic arm. Jeeze, that would have made more sense.

Ugh. This is what happens when I write without an outline or plan. Fail.
“It can’t just be him.”

This was the first thing uttered after all in the little group in the medical room were on the same page. Cody had been heavily sedated and stripped of his armor, and all Jedi present were sitting or leaning in solemn shock. Mace steepled his fingers together, frowning.

“It can’t be just him. It can’t be only Commander Cody who has the chip. It doesn’t make sense—” he glanced uncomfortably at Obi-Wan, “—from any perspective, for one clone to have that order pre-programmed. If only one Jedi were suddenly killed by their clone second-in-command, it would draw suspicion to the clones. Start an investigation against them. Why would someone using them like this arrange for that to happen?”

“And he was speaking in the plural sense. ‘Kill the traitors.’ More than one,” Trento added.

“And Ahsoka’s only with me roughly half the time,” Obi-Wan replied quietly, even more stoic and restrained than usual. “Plo even less than that.” He had taken over the chair at Cody’s side, over the silent protest of Anakin, who now leaned against the wall restlessly. He wondered what that said about his mentor, after this jarring discovery.

“So, we’re looking at probable intended full-scale slaughter and discrediting of the Jedi Order,” Mace concluded flatly. “By the very clones we fight beside.” For the first time since Anakin had met him all those years ago, the Master of the Order looked completely blindsided, and more than a little out of his depth.

Anakin could certainly relate.

“And whoever planned this would have to intend to communicate the order to all the clone units simultaneously,” Vokara threw in grimly, “so that no one Jedi could notice the death or disappearance of their brethren, and start an investigation. Spread a warning to the others.”

“Over a million clone troopers pre-programmed to lose their free will,” Anakin whispered. “Ready to
shoot down all Jedi at a moment’s notice. And they don’t even realize it, if Cody indicates the default.”

They all knew what the only worse circumstance would be. Even if they couldn’t bear to voice it.

“We have to warn the others,” Obi-Wan said firmly. Mace frowned.

“How? Our communications could be under surveillance already. Any message we send could get intercepted and tip off whoever’s behind this. By trying to warn the Order, we could very well end up triggering the command!”

“Setting it off early is only a functional concern if we know when it’s meant to be enacted - which we don’t,” Trento countered.

“I don’t like relying on the assumption that we’re in anything other than time-critical mode right now,” he replied darkly.

Anakin lifted his head. “But if that’s the case, then how long have we been time-critical without knowing it?” he realized.

Vokara caught his meaning.

“The clones have a conscious, retainable memory reaching back virtually to the time of their births,” she said, raising a thoughtful finger.

“And Cody didn’t remember his being implanted,” Anakin replied, thoughts gaining momentum.

Mace picked up the thread. “Which means they would have been born with the chips already in place.”

“Which means someone on Kamino, someone with access to ALL clones, is at least partially responsible,” Trento added.

“Which means we have somewhere to start.” Anakin nodded, grateful for anything they could work with.

“It also means that the clones could have theoretically been ready to receive and carry out the order this whole time. Since the battalions were first assigned to their Jedi.”

That gave the group a chilled pause.

“They’re missing something they need,” Obi-Wan finally spoke up again. “They’re waiting… waiting for something to change.”

Anakin nodded slowly, baffled.

“But what?”

**************************

Sheev Palpatine, also secretly known as Darth Sideous, was not pleased. Not at all.

Oh, the war was progressing splendidly, the people’s frustration rising, the Generals tiring, slowly getting sloppy. That was all going according to plan.

No, what wasn’t going according to plan was the most delicate, defining, irresistible, jewel-in-the-crown layer.
That part hadn’t progressed in years - if anything, quite the opposite. The Force powerhouse that had single-handedly destroyed the Trade Federation control ship at nine years old and devastated a Tusken scout settlement at nineteen was somehow simply refusing to Fall to the Dark side.

He’d known he might have made a misjudgment when he’d laid down the comment about how Skywalker would be wasted anywhere other than the battlefield. He’d miscalculated how much the young Knight was already entrenched in that group of wretched Jedi spawn. In fact, he’d felt a twinge of suspicion from young Skywalker, and knew he had to retreat in his efforts somewhat. Which was frustrating, given that he could barely get a few moments of conversation with the man every red moon since his Knighting; he was always seemingly taking on new responsibilities and doing more things to teach the bratlings that kept him busy. What conversations he had scrapped up with the man were not at all encouraging. He’d sensed increased calm and stability, patience, and contentment, of all stupefying things. Even worse, was Skywalker’s relations with the Jedi Council and his fellow Knights appeared to be smoothing out, complete with greater trust in his mentor, Kenobi.

The exact bloody opposite of what Sideous wanted.

Honestly. He was starting to wonder if the odd chance of gaining the passionate young man as an (admittedly ridiculously powerful) apprentice was even worth the continued effort, if he couldn’t get close enough to really manipulate him. He could eradicate the Jedi and end the Republic without him, he just needed to be more thorough, more careful. And maybe keep his eyes open for easier targets, if he decided he truly did want a real apprentice - not like that disappointment Dooku, rotting in a Jedi prison, brooding on his life choices.

Pathetic.

But then… then he saw one last solid hand to play with Skywalker, just in case. He’d noticed his young former protege, Senator Amidala around - he couldn’t NOT notice her, the way she vocally carried on about ridiculous things like democracy and representation and due process - and she conveniently happened to be Skywalker’s treasured beloved. And he happened to conveniently notice an interesting spark of change in her Force presence.

And he happened to conveniently notice an interesting spark of change in her Force presence.

Well, there was something. The question was, what stood a better chance of tipping the young Jedi’s balance? Fear, or grief? He’d heard reports of the effects on the man’s grief - it had been strong, so deliciously strong, but not quite enough. Then again, Amidala had evidently been there to help him cling tenuously to the Light. If all three of those lives were snuffed out, that would surely be enough. Then again, hardly any game was won by playing your hand too early, and there would be no point in plunging Skywalker into grief if he was still firmly rooted in his alliances to the Jedi and they managed to help him withstand it somehow. The Senator was in excellent health, and she was being more careful with it these days, not to mention she’d have some truly excellent health care (one of Naboo’s specialties). And if she were to suddenly drop, or even noticeably deteriorate, it might raise some aggravating questions. Or hells, he’d been playing the long game for years now, what was a few more if the little Force sparks turned out to match our exceed their father’s power? It bore considering.

It would certainly be no more difficult to start smaller, and escalate if necessary. No, just attach a small wavelength of Dark emotion signals to her presence, without her even noticing. Let them do their work.

He couldn’t let himself give too much time to it, though. Everything else was fast approaching the point of being as ready as it would ever be. And, he decided, he’d still keep a sharp eye for alternates, even if none of them seemed particularly promising. The Tano girl was young and
malleable, and quite talented, but still secure in her admiration for the greater Order and her two masters. And frankly, she was too brightly obnoxious. The experienced Kel Dor? Forget it. The furthest that one could fall was a gloomy Gray. Windu? … As if. The Korun was admirably powerful, and already practically a quarter of the way there on a daily basis. But he was stubborn, and sooo sanctimonious. He’d be driven to kill the man in a week if they actually worked together. Hells, even if he were to Fall, he’d be wielding a red saber while STILL droning about how whatever slaughter he’d been assigned didn’t align with TRADITION.

There was one, however, who’s Force backlog was virtually misery dumped on top of agony, to the point where Sideous didn’t quite understand why he hadn’t just given in and Fallen already. Suppose all the other Jedi were killed, including his old Padawan if necessary; make him suffer through the sudden severing of an apprentice bond… It was a long shot, and not a priority. Just something for the small back burner of Galactic conquest…

**************************

“So what’s the next step from here?” Anakin asked.

“We can’t leave the others at the mercy of chance, with clone soldiers that could get the order any moment,” Vokara insisted. “We have to find a way to warn them. Circumvent the usual communication channels if necessary.”

“Of course. But we also have to figure who arranged for the chips, how they would deliver the order, and how to counter-act it, if not prevent it,” Mace reminded.

“You’re all skipping a step,” Trento pointed out from her seat on the floor. They all looked to the reptilian Master. “You’re forgetting that we already have a clone with the chip in his head right here with us. He can’t stay sedated in here indefinitely. It’s too dangerous.” Anakin stood straighter, darting a brief glance at his old Master.

“You’re not seriously suggesting what I think you are?”

She fixed him with her own version of The Look.

“What do you take me for, Skywalker? Of course not. No, first we make sure the chip’s commands are safely severed from Cody’s own neural pathways.”

Vokara perked up. “Then we surgically extract it.”

Anakin caught on. “Then we hack it! Mine it for as much intel as we can.” Mace nodded, looking cautiously hopeful for the first time in hours. But he immediately grew solemn again.

“But all of that will take time, time we don’t know we have. How can we tell the others what’s happened?” Vokara suddenly went still, then lifted her head, focused on something none of her fellows could see.

“We don’t tell them.”

Obi-Wan’s head whipped around.

“Excuse me?” he said lowly, a deep furrow in his brow. She held up her hands, warding off their anger.

“We don’t tell them what the danger actually is - not through the comms. They could be intercepted, like you said. And we can’t recall all the Jedi back to Coruscant at once to be briefed in person with
no explanation - that would be suspicious. It could tip our real enemy off. No, we make it seem completely normal. We can’t let them think anything’s changed.

“We send a message out to all the Jedi - stagger it, send it to only a few teams at a time. We say that the Med Corps mobile teams found some sort of medical crisis… a lethal virus in a system they may have to pass through or planet they may have to strike down on, that everyone needs a vaccine for. Or that we’ve found an outbreak in a place they’ve just come from. Have them come back to Medical for it immediately, so they don’t put anyone else at risk. Then we bring them in to a warded off area where the surveillance recordings are down, and tell them then. Tell them everything we know. And if we can, bring the clones back under the guise of being checked for that same virus. We get them secure, sedate them, and disable the chips. One battalion at a time.”

Silence reigned in the small healing room for several moments.

“And people used to say my plans were mad,” Anakin mused softly. Obi-Wan gave a cynical scoff.

“You never used to have a plan, Padawan. That’s the difference.”

Mace processed the proposal carefully. “It still poses great risk. There’s an incalculable number of factors to coordinate and ways it could go wrong. And it still leaves so many Jedi at risk in the interim, before they’re recalled and briefed. But…” he sighed. “Right now, it seems like the most prudent plan we have.”

The others nodded, fearful but determined. He stood, steeling himself.

“Right. First, we get the Commander ready to have the chip removed. Skywalker, Magd, that’s your task.”


“You found the chip in the first place, Skywalker. And you were the one to trigger it; you’ve developed a particular skill for manipulating electric energy. I know neurochemistry and brain anatomy. We’ll have to link our knowledge together in the Force to disconnect the chip’s influence from Cody’s mind - memory, emotions, and impulse control most importantly. Then we have to be able to map out exactly where that chip is and how it’s secured, so it can be safely extracted.” He nodded. Mace turned to Vokara.

“Che, in the meantime you’ll be putting the pieces of your plan into place. Brief your other Healers and Padawans in the Halls about what’s going to happen, as cautiously as possible. Scramble and security-lock any messages you send me about what you’ll require. Then once Magd and Skywalker have the information you need, prepare a surgical method and get that sith-damned chip out of that poor man’s head.”

“On it,” she replied, before quickly exiting the room and closing the door behind her. Finally Mace turned to the last person in their group.

“Obi-Wan, you’ll have to let your Padawan and Master Koon know about this, discreetly. I’ll do the same with Master Yoda and all the other Council members, and any other Jedi still in the Temple. Then we have to begin a preliminary investigation of Kamino.” Obi-Wan stood.

“I can get that started.”

Looking at his Master, Anakin was suddenly swept into a rush of memory.

There was once, eight months ago, when he had been bringing the Clan back from saber training, when they passed one of the sheltered balconies overlooking the hangar, and Anakin seized it as an
impromptu lesson. There were two junior Padawans getting in aircraft maintenance practice on a freighter a civilian pilot had brought in for an upcoming Outer-Rim mission. The Padawans had the craft energized for routine lights and emissions tests, when the pilot (drunk? careless?), unaware, had decided to give his craft a wash. With actual water.

Anakin had Force opened an emergency exit and leapt down from the balcony without thinking, grabbing a child under each arm and running, while the water seeped into the engine and electronics, catching a spark. When they were a safe distance, he’d turned to see the craft becoming engulfed in flames, burning green and blue from the sparked wiring, as other Jedi and pilots hurried to contain the destruction.

That was one of the only recent times Anakin had felt himself get truly angry.

And looking at his Master’s eyes now, he could see those same blue-green flames.

************************************************


Padme (beloved, wonderful Padme) crying in agony, her face tear-streaked. Weakening. Something going wrong. A baby’s cry - normally joyous, now a warning full of dread. His angel’s head falling limply to the side. Quiet. Still. Her Force presence growing dim…

Eyes open. His own ragged breaths, grasping frantically for air. The darkened apartment.

Padme asleep beside him.

Alive.

He put his head in his hands.

What was this? Was it the same as his visions of him mother? (Force, not again…) Was it different? Could he stand to take the risk?

What COULD he even do? He knew he said he’d be prepared to let go when necessary, but hells, not this soon, not like this- it wasn’t fair; he couldn’t do it-

He sat up. Here, now, in this moment, he wasn’t fixing anything. He didn’t know what he could fix, and right now he definitely couldn’t do it on his own.

He pulled on a robe, and padded silently out of the bedroom, and powered-up the comm terminal.

“Obi-Wan, I think I might have a new problem. And I’m afraid.”

************************************************

“Not that I mind, by why do you want me to come with you to the Temple today? I thought guests had to be cleared first.”

“So we can get you checked over by the Healers. Just in case.”

“Oh. Did… did you have a vision? A nightmare? Like… like the ones you had of your mother?” He sighed, leaning against the arm of the couch.

“Yes. I don’t know if they’re accurate, but- I just want to check, as much as we can.” She frowned in motherly concern, a hand over her stomach, then her face became serene again ran a soothing hand
down his arm.

“What is it you Jedi say? ‘The future is always in motion.’ Same now. If something is there to find, we’ll handle it. Nothing’s going to hurt our family. I won’t allow it.”

He smiled softly. “I know. Anyone or anything meaning ill against us would be smart to fear you.”

**************************

“Come with me, dear.” Vokara motioned Padme to follow her into a examination room. She looked back to Anakin. “It’s alright. She’ll be in good hands.” He blanched.

“You mean I’m not allowed in?” Obi-Wan rested a hand on his shoulder.

“It’s not a question of being allowed, old friend. It’s just you’ve got your own… check-up to get to.”

What?

Oh. Kark.

“Alright. Comm me when you know anything. Please.” She nodded, before entering the room and closing the door behind her. Anakin drew back his shoulders, bracing himself.

“Let’s get this over with.”

To his surprise, however, his old Master didn’t take him to discuss his vision with Master Yoda (and subsequently have it dismissed as an example of emotion that could lead to the Dark side, and of why they’ve ruled against attachments for hundreds of years). Instead, he led him to the star map room, and then he understood.

“Master, you never… you didn’t mind, did you? You weren’t upset that I-?” The Councilor looked back at him steadily, with a warm, if slightly sad look to his face.

“No, Anakin, I wasn’t upset at you. Or at her. Eventually I even stopped focusing on the possibility of it being something I’d done wrong. She helped me through a rough patch too, you know. It was simply that you were different. Not in a bad way, just different. And you saw that she was different too, and yet had managed to succeed as a Jedi. That must have been reassuring to you.” the younger man nodded, relieved on at least that count.

“It was. But you know…” He put his hands on the red-haired man’s shoulders this time, now offering comfort in return for that which he’d received. “… No matter how many other people I may need or get help from, you’ll always be my Master. You’ll always be the person I think of when I’m asking myself, ‘what would they do?’”

Obi-Wan smiled. “I know. Now come on, let’s get this vision of yours sorted out. We’ve got a Senator and a child to see protected.” He palmed the sensor to open the door.

“Welcome, gentlemen. I hoped you skipped the caf today. I know I did. Anyone being extra jittery is the last thing we need for this.”

And they sat on the floor together, preparing to sink their minds into the Force.

Chapter End Notes
Am I giving anyone else tonal whiplash with this, or just myself?
...It's Chess.

Chapter Summary

Ch. 8 of Crechemaster! Anakin AU. More information gets uncovered, and tactics get chosen.

Chapter Notes

Pay mind that in this AU, Maul properly died when he was supposed to (TPM). Sorry, Maul fans.

This is sadly kiind-of filler (as if my other chapters are just bursting with plot -d'oh)

More stuff actually happens soon.

Now the title quotes from this chapter and the last put together make sense (i hope). It's from episode 1 of Sherlock.

While Healer Che was occupied with the sudden examination of Senator Amidala requested by the young (and scandalous!) Master Skywalker, Masters Allie and Hoft-Tam were sequestered, chipping away at the beginnings of the massive medical, tactical, and technological feat she’d set for the Jedi of the Halls of Healing.

“I don’t normally consider myself a pessimist,” Hoft-Tam muttered lowly, “it’s not very Jedi. But this might just be verging on impossible.” The Tholothian Master placed a steadying hand on his shoulder.

“We mustn’t allow ourselves to think like that. We can work this out if we break it up.”

“Of course. But Force, we’re talking about not only briefing ALL the Knights and Masters and Padawans either commanding or working with clone units, but also finding a way to incapacitate and operate on over a million clones. And bringing all those troopers here will seem suspicious no matter what guise it’s under, we can be sure.”

She nodded in somber contemplation. “Obviously the clones we bring here would be best handled all at once, some sort of mass-sedation delivery in a confined area,” she murmured. “Knight Solmec would be our best choice to arrange for that, from their chemical engineering collaborations with the Corps.” Hoft-Tam nodded.

“And Knight Slevka and Padawan Jaimor would be best for taking lead on the communications issue. They always submit the best reports and the’ve been on the mobile teams; they can draft the messages as convincingly as possible.”

“And what if…” she trailed off.

“What?” pressed her companion. She put a pondering hand to her chin.
“Speaking of the Corps… It would take even more work, and more messages, and many, many more people, but what if we could split the labor and raise the credibility of the cover at the same time?”

Anakin had spent so much time meditating in the last three years, he mused, that it was a wonder he wasn’t sick of it by now. Then again, he’d been sick of it to start with, and with new insight it had slowly grown on him. He was grateful for that, as the three Master’s began examining Anakin’s vision /dream together. Trento had him center himself and recall exactly what he saw, from beginning to end, as the two others linked their minds to his and observed, more objectively than he could.

‘During Padme’s labor… assuming this is a warning, it wants you to have time to act, showing you this early…’ Obi-Wan muttered mentally.

‘That’s good, isn’t it?’ Anakin asked.

‘Maybe… maybe not,’ Trento replied, her Force presence tense and vigilant. ‘It’s only good if it is the Force warning you, and not an external source.’

‘External?’

They all continued watching the dream, repeating it, combing through it for any clues. The mind healer was paying particular attention to the contextual feelings that shaded it, beyond what Anakin had seen and heard with his physical senses.

‘Yes… it’s terribly vague… just physical pain and a dimming Force signature? That could very well be temporary, Anakin (her mental voice took on a carefully soothing tone). Those are common enough in natural human births…’

‘But it could be not temporary? It could be worse?’ he insisted. He could hardly stand to hear Padme’s cries and feel her agony.

‘Yes, it COULD be - but this whole vision is low on information but high on intensity - like it doesn’t want you to be informed, just afraid.’ He took a moment to ponder that.

‘You’re saying my vision is sentient? That it knows it own purpose?’ He tried not to express his incredulity - which was difficult when their very minds were linked.

‘Or that it’s not a true Force vision,’ his Master murmured, his presence growing darker with suspicion.

‘We have to look deeper, gentlemen. Push beneath the physical manifestations shown; try to find the source. Whatever it is, it was shown to you for a reason. We have to find that reason.’ It was as if she had linked hands with both of them in the Force, and was drawing them further into the swells, where it pulled harder and colder, while Obi-Wan reinforced the long, winding link keeping them anchored to their bodies in the physical world.

Here, beyond the realm of normal vision, normal hearing and smell and touch and taste, they could feel more. They felt the Force in motion around them and within them; Anakin ‘saw’ the currents of protons and electrons easier than ever before, like luminous paths of ionized gas before him. All three of them were dense networks of those paths; events and choices that resonated within them, touching and leading away from their signatures as they had their lives, old and new, a thousand different frequencies, lighter and darker, stable and less so.
‘There,’ Trento whispered. ‘Look.’ And he turned his perception onto himself.

A pathway that was not like the others - not vibrant, multi-textural strands like those within Trento, like multiple spiderwebs intersected, nor Obi-Wan’s mix of vivid, light-reflecting wisps of cloud and jagged scar-like marks (like those left behind after broken bones heal).

No.

This was like an oil slick, reaching into him and leading away, deeper into the moving, pulling expanse around him.

‘You have to reach along it - find it’s source,’ Obi-Wan whispered.

‘Don’t be afraid,’ his older Master reassured. ‘We won’t let you drown. We won’t let you get lost.’

And he knew it was true. So he trusted them, and pushed forward.

Deeper. Colder. The greater tissue of his surroundings growing more frantic in its movement, more unstable. Greater and greater pressure, with an ever-increasing sense of danger. Of course he was not in actual water (It was so much more complex than that - was it frigid gas? Air made tangible? Metal made fluid?), so there was no true lack of oxygen, but the sense of greater strain on his breathing remained.

Still, he followed the acidic, smothering black trail. The farther he went, the faster the electrons vibrated, the more energy he felt pushing against his skin, the more impressions he received.

*Be afraid*, it whispered.

*Be jealous, be dependent. Hold tight to everything that is yours. She is yours, keep her with you always... No matter what. No matter the cost. Take what is yours. Take the power that is your due. Become more powerful than the Jedi. Defy death. Keep her always. Defeat death. Take your power.*

He saw himself kneeling before a hooded figure, his own eyes sunken and yellow. He saw Force lightning split his field of vision, like a thousand sparking faults in a slab of dark crystal. He heard screams, breathed smoke in, felt the heat of flames. Smelt blood. Saw countless sparks of life get blotted out by ones that were suddenly more machine than soul, their marks of identity buried under gleaming helmets - helmets he had seen before.

Felt ten thousand deaths roar through every cell in his body.

*But she will live,* whispered the dark. *You will keep her. That’s all that matters.*

But it was lying. Nothing could defeat death forever.

*I can,* it crooned. *We can. Come to me. Let me show you.*

Who could show him? Who in the galaxy could possibly have that kind of knowledge?

*Not a Jedi.*

He reached out just a little more, a little deeper into a crackling surge of energy. He had to know, otherwise all this fear and pain and terrifying doubt would be pointless.

He felt a lightsaber in his hand, felt it hum unnaturally, dissonantly. He felt a thousand times more electrons and circuits in his body than there should be. Unnatural ones. His breath was too rigid, too forced. His vision tinged red. His movements hindered, his flesh melted - his soul atrophied.
And she was dead anyway. After everything, she was dead. They all were. Everything he’d loved, dead. Or dead to him, at least.

He felt the echo of a name for the unnatural crackle of power reverberate through his being - Sideous.

He ignited the lightsaber, and saw its ruby-red blade.

*Kill the Jedi. Hunt the Jedi.*

And just when he felt his breath seize, his veins about to freeze over and his reality implode, he felt ropes of living light burst into being around him, cocooning him, and yank him up. He rushed back through the currents, the swells of energy battering against him, trying to pull him back. He got closer to the surface, but no less disoriented. Everything was flying past too fast, too much, he couldn’t breath-

And then he was slammed back into his body, his consciousness. Gasping, shaking like a leaf, his tunics drenched in icy sweat. His vision blurry, his ears ringing and throat raw, he could only croak out one word.

“Sith.”

***************************

When Anakin had ventured deeper into the Force mostly on his own to follow that grim trail, Obi-Wan and Trento had still received echoes of what he was perceiving. They were, however, able to maintain enough distance to be able to pull him back to the surface when he was about to go too far.

And thank goodness for that bit of distance. Otherwise, Obi-Wan might have been pulled into that dark void himself - due to his own shock, and fear, but most of all… anger.

He’d already had an all-but-cemented generalized blueprint of what that murky trail had led Anakin to by the time the younger man’s awareness re-entered the physical world. He just needed the confirmation-

“Sith.”

And there it was.

Looking back later, maybe he should have been surprised by how ready he was to hear it. How easily he accepted it.

His old Padawan may have looked deeply alarmed by the string of profanities that left the Councilor’s mouth after the revelation and the intensity with which they were uttered, shaking his head and blinking rapidly as if he’d misheard. But Anakin should have known.

Had he forgotten how their time together had started? After the first trip to Naboo, after Tatooine, after that Council meeting when he’d still worn his own braid. That braid had been the symbolic noose around the neck of a Sith who had killed the person he’d loved most in all the galaxy. And as he’d told Anakin, he’d loved many.

And now, the Sith were trying to do it again.

And even worse, this time they intended not to kill Anakin’s body, but his soul, and lure him into
taking part in the extermination of the Jedi Order. Of the rest of Obi-Wan’s family.

Well, Obi-Wan had failed once. He’d failed more than that, honestly, against other enemies. He’d lost others too. But he’d studied, and learned, and pushed himself, and he was more experienced now.

And he hadn’t earned the name “Sith slayer” for nothing.

He’d failed Anakin before. And now all of the Jedi and Padme, Anakin’s beloved wife, his future child, and his very sprint were being threatened. By the Sith.

He wouldn’t fail his family again.

He was done with losing people. He was done with failure.

***************************

After they’d all re-surfaced from the deep Force investigation of Anakin’s vision, and again come to grips with a terrible, terrifying discovery, they all roused themselves to do what they needed - what they could do - for now. The two senior Masters pulled Anakin to his feet, and they left the star map room.

Obi-Wan said something about needing to find more information using what they’d seen, and strode down the hallway with an unexpected energy. Anakin and Trento moved in the opposite direction to return to the Halls. After what he’d seen and how far into the Force he’d pushed himself, he was still trembling, and often placing a hand to the wall to balance himself. And to be honest, Trento wasn’t fairing the best either, having provided the bulk of the mental energy to coordinate the three-person plunge. Between them, the going was somewhat slow. They made the trip in silence.

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“So, did you find anything?”

Vokara fixed the young Master Skywalker with an evaluating look, taking in the clammy ashen face, haunted eyes, and minor tremors. However, being familiar with his stubborn refusal of medical attention except in the direst of circumstances, she didn’t comment.

“Nothing. I ran every scan and test I could, plus a Force sweep, and nothing. Good blood pressure, good hormone balance, good development, good tissue stability. Even lower-than-average nausea! So far it’s a picture-perfect pregnancy from all sides.”

Anakin let himself sag with a relieved sigh. Then the healer spoke again.

“I mean, I did notice that odd wavelength of energy attached to her presence, but it was certainly nothing physical. It wasn’t even really connected to her, more like riding along on her. A good round of general Force healing knocked it loose. Did you and the others find out what that was?”

He stared at her for an oddly long moment.

Then he straightened himself again, visibly resigned.

“Are we being monitored?”

“No,” she shook her head. “I conveniently put all the recorders in this wing in for software upgrades after the last time we were all here. The West wing’s recorders will go down when we put the plan
“Good. Because we did find out what that was. It was a falsified vision of Padme’s death during childbirth sent to me by the Sith. They were aiming to scare me into pursuing any solution to save her, and to not trust the Jedi to help because of the Code’s views on attachment. They were hoping I’d be so desperate to save her that I’d give my allegiance to the Sith, probably the Master, in the hopes they’d have the knowledge I’d need to do it, and that in swearing my loyalty, I’d fall to the Dark side and help enable that inhibitor chip order to kill all of the Jedi. Which the Sith are also responsible for.”

“What?!” Padme yelped from the bed.

“Seriously?!” Vokara agreed. He nodded.

“Hells,” she breathed out. She shook her head, trying to process all of it. She inhaled deeply, appearing to cling to what she did best for her own sanity’s sake. “Well, we’ll keep her monitored with regular checks of course, but I don’t think we have anything physical to worry about,” she concluded to both of them. “You’re perfectly fine, Padme. The babies are, too.” They sighed again in unison.

Then Anakin lifted his head.

“Wait. What?”

**************************

Obi-Wan had absolutely been telling the truth when he’d told the others he needed to go get more information based on what they’d seen in the vision. He’d just omitted the details.

He had to go more personal, now. He’d done his digging on the net, in the message logs, in the background and financial checks, in the archives in preparation for his in-person investigation of Kamino. It hadn’t been enough. Now he needed more, and he had no qualms about where to get it.

He approached the solid durasteel doors, and lowered his hood. The guard waved him through, closing the door behind him as he checked in with another guard at the security desk, to whom he submitted his lightsaber. Yet another led him down a narrow hallway to another, smaller door.

He knew once he crossed the threshold, he’d be largely blocked off from the Force, and unarmed.

He didn’t care.

It wasn’t like it’d be the first time. So he stepped in and paid no mind to the door closing and locking behind him. The way he senses suddenly seemed to dim.

“Good afternoon, Grandmaster. We’re going to have a nice little chat.”
The Quickening

Chapter Summary

Ch. 9 of Crechemaster! Anakin AU. Obi-Wan applies pressure to Dooku, and the Home Team begins its counter-strike.

Chapter Notes

Apologies in advance if this is more jumpy and erratic than usual. Apparently I don't do transitions.

Also, this fic is starting to commandeer its own plot away from my complete control, and I'm not sure if I should be concerned or not. It might have taken me hostage until I finish it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Master Kenobi. You know, you really shouldn’t be calling me that.”

Obi-Wan sat at the plain table. “And why is that? I know you’ve had your back fully turned on the Order as a whole for some time. But it wasn’t so long ago that you still would have been willing to cooperate with your lineage. You urged me to join you. You wished for Qui-Gon to be there to help you.” The Count sneered from his seat on the minimalist cot.

“And yet, neither of those are within the realm of possibility, are they, young Obi-Wan?”

“You make your own choices, Yan. I know where I stand. That doesn’t prevent you from cooperating with me.”

The aging former Jedi somehow managed to look down his nose at him, even in his drab prison clothing and with a Force-suppressing collar around his neck.

“And I suppose after the silence I’ve kept, through several interrogations, you expect me to suddenly reveal my secrets just because my Grandpadawan asks nicely. I wouldn’t have expected you to still be so naive.”

“No,” the Negotiator replied mildly, “because I’m not asking nicely.” The Dark Force user smiled cruelly.

“Your attempts at intimidation are as amusing as they are pathetic.”

Obi-Wan leaned back slightly in his chair. “To be honest, intimidation has never been my style,” he said lightly.

Too lightly.

“Tell me, how long have you been our guest now?”
The captured Count chose not to dignify that query with a reply. Obi-Wan knew he wouldn’t.

"Indeed. And yet you’re still here. No Dark Master expending any effort to free you. I really do think that if your Master cared at all, you’d be far away from here by now. It appears, Grandmaster, that you’ve been quite thoroughly discarded."

Dooku remained stonily silent.

"You know, I knew what it felt like to be discarded once,” the younger man said pensively. “More than once, if we’re being honest. But, funnily enough, do you know what I never did in those times? I never turned to killing Jedi or endangering innocent lives for gain.” His voice slowly grew harder and more pointed.

“I never tried to kill a Padawan learner or cut off his arm. I never threw in my lot with those who’d invaded peaceful worlds.” He now leaned forward over his folded hands, head tilted to the side.

“Do you know what else I never did, no matter how frustrated or alone or rejected I felt? I never gave my allegiance to a Sith lord. Especially one who’d unquestionably had a hand in the death of my Padawan.”

That finally got a snarl out of the white-haired prisoner.

“The Jedi Order is flawed beyond repair! It needed to be purged of the rot that was allowed to infect it! If Qui-Gon had lived he would have seen that!”

The younger man stared at him silently for a moment following his outburst, gobsmacked.

“Did you know your apprentice at all?” he whispered. “His devotion was to the Living Force, not to the Code. He cared about life. But somehow he managed to function in both roles, without turning to fratricide.” He shook his head. “I can only imagine how he’d feel knowing you’d gone to the Sith, especially after the pain he went through with Xanatos! I mean, the sense of betrayal…”

“He was a fool to not heed any warnings about that boy,” the Count hissed.

“I suppose he may have been a fool on multiple occasions, given that he never suspected you would turn,” Obi-Wan shot back bitterly. “But no matter. You obviously have your own priorities, ones that have nothing to do with avenging your Padawan.”

Yan slowly looked up, his shock plain on his face.

“Revenge is not the Jedi way.”

Obi-Wan looked right back.

“Quite frankly, that’s not my concern at this point. I feel the time coming where changes could be made within the Order. That rot you spoke of? Maybe it is there. And it could be well on its way to being rooted out - but in the proper way. And the Council knows we have a higher priority right now.

“The facts of the matter are simple. I know your Master, Darth Sideous, aims to turn Anakin to the Dark side. To replace you with him as an apprentice. To use him to bring about the destruction of the Jedi Order. I will not allow that to happen. I will hunt down and kill the Sith Master myself if necessary. And I will employ all of my abilities against any who attempt to hinder me in this. And if you ever cared about Qui-Gon at all, you would be helping me break the power of the ones who killed him. They-” He took a deep breath. Even now, after all these years, it was difficult to let
himself think of that day.

“They burned a hole through him. And even in his last moments, when he was in horrible pain, he was still trying to do what he thought was best for the galaxy. In the time since then, I’ve been convinced that whatever mistakes or poor choices he may have made in his life, that request he made of me was not one of them. And if you want to honor his legacy, you’ll help me prevent the boy he believed in from being used for the Dark. For all our sakes.”

The former Jedi remained still and silent for several long minutes. He had let himself slide out of his typical rigid posture, so that even with his great stature, his presence was oddly diminished.

Eventually, he gave a short huff of a bitter laugh.

“I suppose we’re never too old to feel small against the disappointment of those important to us.”

Obi-Wan pushed down the surge of hope within him.

“You’re not wrong.” The Count tapped his fingers against the thin mattress beneath him in thought.

“I suppose there’s nothing I can look forward to from this besides the satisfaction of avenging my apprentice?” The Councilor quirked an eyebrow.

“Or beginning to atone for the damage you’ve done to the Order? Besides those?” The Count frowned at him.

“What are you expecting? You can’t be trusted with your Force abilities or your material assets on Serreno. The best I can offer is a supervised, restricted life of honest labor… perhaps on one of the isolated Agri-Corps outposts.”

Dooku looked as though he’d bitten into a lemon, and Obi-Wan took a perverse pleasure in seeing it.

Finally, there came a sigh.

“My Master’s plans, what I last knew of them, relied on two components: The growing ineffectiveness of the Senate, and the prolonged nature of the war, frustrating the citizens and making the Jedi generals fatigued and distracted. The last I knew, his campaign involved taking the Utapau System for the Separatists. There’s a chance Grevious could be hidden there shortly. And when you inevitably follow my financial trail to Kamino, this is where you’re going to go…”

That night, as Obi-Wan was sending a coded message to Master Windu regarding the information he’d received, Anakin and Trento were resting up for their task for the next day.

They met again in Commander Cody’s small room, and both sat at his side, Anakin to his left and Trento to his right. They breathed, centering themselves, and then the reptilian Master offered her hand to the human, hovering over the unconscious clone’s chest and shoulders. He pressed his flesh palm to her scaled one, their fingers lightly wrapped around each other’s wrists.

“Now you get to become an instant expert in brain anatomy and neurochemistry, and I in electrical atomic physics,” she summarized wryly, “and we make the Commander’s mind his own again.” He nodded.

“Let’s get started.”
And they immersed themselves again in the Force.

****************************

“So Dooku still insists that the Sith lord is in the Senate?” Anakin asked later, after Obi-Wan and Master Windu joined him in the medical room and Trento had gone back to hear the progress from Hoft-Tam.

“Yes, and at this point I’m more inclined to believe him,” Obi-Wan replied. His old apprentice gave him an appraising look.

“Why? Did you grill him that hard?” The senior Master shook his head.

“I’m not sure exactly what you mean by that, but I suppose I did use an effective tactic. Beyond that, we can’t afford to ignore any tips right now - even vague ones.”

“I can understand why he wouldn’t give up the name. The man does still have a sense of self-preservation, as much as I don’t like it,” Windu mused. “But without it, how can we know quickly who the Sith is? It’s a great number of people to closely investigate individually.”

Anakin suddenly stood straighter, much as Vokara had a few days before.

“Maybe we don’t have to investigate them individually.” Obi-Wan gave his signature worried frown.

“You have a plan.” It was stated, not asked.

“And you’re not going to like it,” the younger man replied in kind.

“What are you thinking of, Skywalker?” The addressee took a steadying breath.

“Master Drallig is taking over the Shii-Cho class again for a while,” he began. “That leaves me with a decent chunk of time.”

“And?”

“And the Sith wants me nearer, presumably to the Senate, so they can influence me.” His old Master sighed.

“Anakin…”

“Let’s make it look like they’re getting what they want,” he pressed on. “I go to the Senate in my free block. I take a recorder, and say that it’s playing live for the younglings. Real-world observation for a beginner’s political science class.”

Anakin would never, ever have believed that he’d actually heard the snort leaving the Korun Master, if the man hadn’t immediately raised a hand to cover his mouth and nose.

The others stared.

“I apologize, Skywalker,” he said as if nothing had happened. “It’s just… you, teaching any form of political science…”

Anakin would have been insulted, if it weren’t true. The Master of the Order sobered further.

“Your theory is that if you make your presence known in the Senate under a plausible purpose, the one who approaches you more than the others, who tries to get close to you, is the Sith Master.”
“Exactly. And even if they don’t reveal themselves right away, we can still keep a closer eye on the Senate itself. Maybe even foster better relations between them and the Jedi. Less war-oriented relations.”

Both the other Masters frowned, but not in a ‘you’re insane’ way. More like an ‘it’s a decent plan, but worryingly risky’ way. Which, fair enough.

Mace was the first to accept the role of skeptic. “Anakin, are you certain this is a game you feel comfortable playing? It’s you he’s targeting.”

“Yes, it’s me they want. That means I’m the Jedi with the best chance of getting them to reveal themselves. If I can expose them, I should take the risk.”

“Even if it brings more attention from the Sith onto Padme?” Obi-Wan asked softly. Mace looked at him oddly.

Anakin swallowed. “I’ll discuss it with her tonight. But I think I know what she’d say. I think she’d want me to expose the Sith. They already know about her connection to me anyway, to send me that vision. If they succeed in their plans, both Padme and the babies could be in even more danger.”

The others considered that quietly. Then with a reluctant nod from Obi-Wan, Mace spoke.

“Prepare an audience request, then. We’ll be ready to send it first thing tomorrow.”

“Everything went smoothly,” Vokara assured the other Masters two days later, after the Commander’s surgery. “Skywalker, your and Magd’s information was spot-on. We got the chip out and he’s doing quite well with a bacta patch under that bandage, and once he wakes up there should be no ill effects.” Obi-Wan released a breath of visible relief.

“Thank you, Master Che. Truly. I can’t express my gratitude enough.” She put a hand on his shoulder.

“There’s no need to thank me, Obi-Wan. He’s an innocent man who didn’t deserve that, and leaving that damn device in his head would put us all at risk. Just doing my work.”

She passed a small container holding the (cleaned) chip to Anakin, who quickly stowed it within his robes, and the three reveled in this needed victory for a moment. Then, in true medical fashion, Vokara had to ruin it.

“You know, it’s a good thing the chip was so close the the superior edge of the frontal lobe,” she mused. “We were able to do with just one wide laser incision on his skull. Minimal disruption to the brain itself. If it was far enough inferior, we would have had to play it safe with the gray matter by going in through the eye socket.”

Anakin would never admit that he violently flinched in horror and disgust.

“Gyah!”

“Yeeees,” Ahsoka hissed in a sort of savage, gleeful anticipation when Plo brought her to Obi-Wan’s quarters. Anakin held out the container holding the chip. “Let me at it. I’ve been itching to dig up just how those Sith bastards are going to try to kill us.”
“Language, Padawan,” Obi-Wan muttered distractedly. But he too was more focused on the chip, with good reason. He took his seat beside the Togruta to oversee her splice job. She’d been insistent that she at least help with the work, having taken great personal offense to not only the secret attack planned against the Jedi, but that enacted against the Commander’s free will, and that of his brothers. None of the Masters begrudged her that offense, especially given the skill she’d be bringing to the task.

Anakin hung back with Plo, looking over their shoulders at the screen, while the Togruta teen loaded the chip into the computer dock. “Did you run the self-destruct sensor test first?”

“Hey. No backseat coaching, Master Skyguy. And yes, I did.”

“Be polite, Ahsoka. He’s just offering another set of eyes.”

Ashoka frowned at Anakin’s twitch.

“Sure thing, Master.”

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If Anakin had thought that working in the Creche and managing the friction and occasional conflicts between children would leave him well prepared for navigating the Senate… he was very wrong.

Senators were officially worse than toddlers.

(Except for his Senator, of course, and maybe two or three of her Senate friends.)

Also, if he thought that taking a recorder would make his job easier, he was sadly mistaken about that too, for the most part. Knowing they were being recorded (for children, at that) made many Senators stumble over themselves when Anakin would spontaneously interview them on their role and how the Senate worked. The others would puff themselves up importantly. Only a few responded to the new “PR teacher Jedi” (as he’d been unofficially dubbed behind his back) with good grace and humor.

He had a feeling this would be a brand new test of patience and endurance.

******************************************************

Darth Sideous was… uncertain. Frustrated, but also delighted. He would never admit to being confused, but he didn’t know what to make of massive progress in one arena, and a substantial setback in another.

First of all, Anakin Skywalker had FINALLY gotten in touch with him, asking for a meeting. Excellent! The signals he placed on Senator Amidala worked perfectly then, and Skywalker obviously didn’t trust his fellow Jedi as much as he’d thought for the young Master to be coming to him for a confidante rather than one of them.

So he was caught rather off-guard when the younger man had shown up for their meeting and mentioned nothing about the dreadful nightmare / vision he would have had at all. Not once. Instead, he’d come with a proposal for a project - another method of teaching those brats of his, of all things, to show them first hand (if remotely) of the workings of the Senate they would one day serve (as far as Skywalker knew).
He only sensed a slight level of internal concern or distress for what he’d have seen, but Skywalker did not once allude to it.

What was going on?

Still, Skywalker close was Skywalker close, and he’d have much less difficulty influencing him this way. He could still very well gain a powerful apprentice, the most powerful yet. So he’d had little choice but to approve the project.

Of course on the opposite side of the credit, there was the issue of the war. First, the matter of Dooku. While the heir of Serreno was never meant to be endgame as far Sideous’ intended apprentice went, his current situation was in no way beneficial. He was an admittedly useful asset, especially when it came to managing the Separatists, and he was unable to fulfill that purpose while rotting alive in that ridiculous prison.

Not to mention, pawns not-yet dead could decide to talk if they felt they had nothing to gain from silence. That was one of the weaknesses of the Sith, he mused. Loyalty was not in fact their strong suit (himself being a prime example, he thought with a smirk). Of course, he wouldn’t have needed to worry himself over loose lips if he had been able to dispose of Dooku when he would have preferred. If Skywalker had become a General on the battlefield and paired with Kenobi to rescue him, and not been attached at the hip to those Jedi bratlings, that would have been the ideal time.

He’d tried to nudge Kenobi into offing the ancient snob for him, just to see where it got him, but of course the Negotiator had to be too noble and practical for that. What a waste of buried and repressed passion.

Then, there was the issue of the war itself.

Aside from minor battles to be fought by smaller companies, it was now in danger of all but grinding to a halt.

An outbreak of what reports said was Jorgian Fever had suddenly sprung up on Dramin 2 - one of the most central planets in the Republic, and highly important to the greater campaign. Why? It was one of the foremost spacecraft repair and refueling ports; virtually all the battalions had to touch down there at one point or another. The units that had departed just before the virus was discovered - both the 212th AND the 104th - had been immediately recalled planet side to be screened, before they could unknowingly carry it throughout the Republic and beyond. Once they arrived, Dramin 2’s government placed it under quarantine, with the only exceptions being a small number of Jedi Med Corps mobile teams, who brought treatment the Temple healers had developed with the information provided by the scientists on the planet. He’d questioned whether such extreme measures were necessary, but apparently the effects were quite vicious, and they’d reported that it was fatal in at least the young, old or immuno-compromised.

And meanwhile, all the units who hadn’t recently been to the planet, but inevitably would have to visit in the future, were being recalled in turns to Coruscant to receive vaccinations for the virus at the Temple, whose healers were restricting access to only vaccinated Jedi and incoming troops.

He couldn’t pinpoint why that made him uneasy, but it did. He’d thought the clones were supposed to have super-human health for peak battlefield performance. He may have to get in touch with the Kaminoans and find whether there’d been an oversight. And apply correction (and punishment) if there had been.

Needless to say, he was quite disgruntled on the war side of things. Between the clones being screened and vaccinated, and the planet being off-limits for however long it took to completely clear
the virus out, he could be looking at a month or more lost. He would lose the breakneck pace of engagements he'd been building to, which would give the Jedi generals time to rest and rejuvenate - which, from increased alertness, could possibly dull his element of surprise.

Still, he had Skywalker in his sights now. It would be short work to turn him at this close range, and through him he could land a blitz attack on the Temple that would more than make up the difference. And goodness! Just as payback for all the setbacks it'd caused him, as savage poetic balance, once Skywalker was primed, ready, and his, he’d have him begin the attack on the Temple with the Creche.

It couldn’t be long now.

Chapter End Notes

If Obi-Wan's interview with Dooku wasn't as intense or badass as you were expecting, I'm sorry! But have faith, he's still got more of a personal journey to go on.

Also if some sections were a bit weird or unnecessary.

I made up the planet, its importance, and the illness.

On a completely unrelated note, titling stuff is much harder than I initially thought.

I don't know how many more chapters of this there are left. I've given up estimating. It depends on how much I can make myself "show" rather than "tell."
Anakin was trying to be patient, he really was. He’d only just started this project recently, to be honest. It was just that the politicians were so kripping tiring to interact with. Either they swanned about in their opulent finery insistent on not ending the war until the Separatists surrendered, completely oblivious the people living on scraps because all their resources were being funneled into the war effort, or they were entirely unsupportive of the war, which by itself would be alright, but they were also dismissive and down-looking toward the clone soldiers and their Jedi generals and commanders. And because he was a Jedi, they associated him with the fighting and the clones, and responded to him thusly.

“I don’t need to waste my time explaining simple things to your young, Jedi. They’ll grow up to be just as pointless either way.”

Anakin held his breath, internally flipping through his extensive and colorful Huttese vocabulary and telling himself that using the Force to smack the senator’s head against the wall was both frivolous use and unethical, in which time said waste of air had moved on to their Important Business.

“Thank you for your time, Senator,” Anakin called after them, somewhat gratified by the venomous glare over the shoulder he received in return.

This was shaping up to be a painfully tedious investigation.

Toward the end of his allotted time in the Senate, a familiar face caught up to him.

“Anakin, my boy!” The crechemaster’s eye twitched a tiny bit. He honestly was getting just slightly tired of being addressed as such (the Council had already considered him worthy of being a Jedi Master, and he was going to have kids of his own soon!), but he let it go. The elder man probably had no children or grandchildren of his own and regretted it, and looked on Anakin as a surrogate grandson of sorts.

“Good afternoon, Chancellor. How are you?” The Senate leader smiled warmly.
“Oh, I’m just as well as can be expected, Anakin; the state of the Republic seems unlikely to improve soon. But how are you, my good man?” Anakin smiled lightly in return.

“I’m doing well, Chancellor.” (I’m putting up with all kinds of entitled sleemos to draw out a Sith Lord who wants to use my sort-of secret wife to scare me into falling to the Dark side and slaughter all Jedi. I’m just grand.) “Thank you for asking.”

“Of course, young Master Jedi. But tell me truthfully - what was it that made you so invested in this project as to come out here with us? I know well how you feel about politics,” he lowered his voice with a conspiratorial smirk. The younger man allowed himself a small chuckle, relaxing slightly.

“That is true, Chancellor. But it really is about how much more comprehensive the concepts can be for the younglings this way. They already show improved understanding in the topic! And to be honest, I’m learning things too. My Master and I took plenty of diplomatic missions when I was an apprentice, of course, but those were mostly small incidents, small parts of the greater picture. I get to see how it all comes together here.” In more ways than one, hopefully. “That’s worth putting up with some… less pleasant representatives.” It had better be worth it.

“Of course.” The elder man paused, somewhat awkwardly, almost as if he was waiting for Anakin to say more. But Anakin certainly couldn’t share any more, not even with the Chancellor.

“Well, I hope it proves fruitful for your instruction. You should, of course, feel free to come to me if you need anything.”

“Certainly, Sir. I will.”

*************************

The last time Obi-Wan had been to Kamino (outside of a severe, obvious, and time-critical emergency), he had been unprepared, uninformed, and all but blind-sided by what he’d discovered. The last time, he’d been pursuing a bounty hunter arranging for the death of a senator and an old ally. Last time, the mission had quickly become personal for Anakin.

This time things were different.

This time, it was personal for him.

Taun Wei greeted him at the entrance by the landing platform just as before. “Greetings, Master Kenobi,” she chimed in her soothing and even voice. “We received your message, but it was somewhat vague. Did the Jedi Council wish you to conduct another inspection of our clones?”

“Yes, in a manner of speaking,” he reassured smoothly. “We’re just concerned about this terrible Jeorgian Fever business, and the clones’ susceptibility. We were hoping it would be possible for me to watch the beginning of the cloning process, so as to see if there’s any weaknesses in their immune systems we can correct.” The Kaminoan motioned him to walk with her.

“I believe that would be quite easy to arrange, Master Kenobi. We of course concerned by this outbreak as well, and how the clones were affected. I’m afraid the next batch will not be started until tomorrow at 0800. You are more than welcome to stay the night. A room can be prepared for you.”

“That would be very kind of you,” Obi-Wan replied with a disarming Negotiator smile.

*************************
Several hours later, in the middle of the Kaminoan night cycle, Obi-Wan silently exited the guest quarters he’d been settled in. He reached his senses into the Force to adjust his path to avoid others when possible.

He had a solid understanding of the network of passageways he was navigating thanks to the schematics Dooku had provided, along with a specific set of door and computer terminal access codes.

Nighttime in the facilities on Kamino was both similar to and different from night in the Jedi Temple. They both were dimmer and more quiet than in the daytime hours, with only a handful of personnel drifting about for duties that required continuous manning. On Kamino, though, the lack of the background roar of the clones’ training and movements throughout the facilities allowed a lone wanderer to hear the torrents of rain beating down outside. The passageways were illuminated with low-intensity blue beacons for safety, giving his surroundings an ethereal and dream-like atmosphere. Instead of soothing him, though, it made him more anxious. That gentle peaceful atmosphere felt like a blatant lie.

Left, left, right, down the stairs, center, right, left, up, using the barest Force suggestions to nudge the odd Kaminoan along faster or to a different route. The Jedi and their troops had been in unnecessary danger for far too long already, he wasn’t going to wait for the information he needed to save them any longer than he absolutely had to.

There.

The door he needed finally stood in a dead-end hallway directly across from the hall where he was cloaking himself in shadow. A quick sweep of the Force told him where the nearest security cam was situated and what its range was. With a swift manipulation he created a brief electrical surge, causing the input to distort and crackle just long enough for him to dart across.

He pressed himself into the intended alcove, heart starting to beat faster, and quickly tapped in the passcode. If Dooku had deceived him by giving him the wrong code on purpose, Obi-Wan thought bitterly, manual labor would be the least of the Count’s problems regardless of what he’d previously said.

Fortunately, the former Jedi had apparently been honest in this at least. The door slid open, and he slipped inside.

This room was even darker than the passageway outside, but not very small. He could make out the outline of what turned out to be a wide desk. An office, then. Either one Dooku kept here, or someone in charge of the clones’ design and development.

He swiftly pulled out the rounded chair and sat, powering up the terminal, the passcode prompt popping up. Moment of truth - there was still a great chance Dooku was sabotaging his quest for answers. But there was no point in wondering.

Entering the code and requesting access, he held his breath. He released it a moment later when it was accepted - maybe Dooku truly was having second thoughts about his alliances after all.

Pulling up the messages sent and received from this terminal, he readied himself for a long and detailed slog, trying to narrow down the history by date - the directive to develop or at least include the chips would be quite early - before the war officially started. In a separate command, he searched under the ‘design’ category. While he was browsing that list of files, the message search showed it was complete. He switched back to that window, and scrolled down to the earliest results, opening them one at a time. They were all encrypted of course, but an uploaded decryption program he’d
been prepared with took care of that. This did appear to be Lama Su’s office and terminal - the Kaminoan Prime Minister, and in charge of the army’s cloning process. So whatever Dooku knew about the clones, he did as well.

There was something. There was a few messages near the beginning marked ‘financial.’ Opening one, he saw what was essentially a transaction record, to the Kaminoans from Dooku. That wasn’t unexpected, for him to have been financing the operation for some time (though his persuasion must have been more effective than he thought, for the Count to be willing to work against his own investment). Closing that and opening another, he saw another record for a transfer to Kamino for volume of credits that had him just about choking on his breath. Then again, he thought cynically, given how many thousands of clones were constantly being created (and killed), he supposed to a complete sociopath it made sense.

And the transfer was from… Hego Damask.

Hego Damask. Where did he know that name from?

******************************

“Senator Organa! Would you like to say hello to the Bear Clan younglings?”

The dark-haired Alderaanian senator smiled warmly. “I’d be delighted, Master Skywalker!” And the odd thing was, Anakin could tell he meant it. He held his holo-cam up to for the senator to look into.

“When you’re ready then, Senator.” Bail beamed even brighter.

“Good Morning young Jedi! I’m Bail Organa, and I represent the planet Alderaan. It’s a beautiful place, and I hope many of you get the chance to come visit us when you’re older!”

Anakin smiled as Bail launched into a brief explanation of how Alderaan’s government fit into the greater Republic. Meanwhile, the Chancellor and his entourage and guards had approached the pair.

“Anakin, my boy-“ But the young Master quietly held up a finger on his free hand in a ‘one moment’ gesture, while bowing his head respectfully and trying not to jostle the cam.

“- and I hope that we will soon be able to resolve this war and resume peaceful relations with the rest of the galaxy, so that you bright younglings don’t have to become Generals yourselves, and can experience the wonders of the galaxy in the peaceful kinds of missions your Masters use to have!”

Since both teacher and senator were facing each other, neither saw Sheev Palpatine’s scowl.

And it was gone by the time Anakin turned the cam to face the Chancellor’s party.

******************************

While Anakin’s project was partially honest, and the younglings did in fact watch (most of) what he recorded for educational purposes, they were not the first to see the footage. It was first reviewed by several Council members and Anakin and combed for any relevant information regarding the crisis the Order faced. So far it wasn’t turning up any clear leads. No senators or aids or other officials were approaching him more than any other, and most demonstrated roughly the same levels of typical politician sliminess. Meanwhile, Plo had the brilliant idea to track down what Senate records they could to see who all had entered in the last years, who advanced uncommonly fast, who had left suddenly, who completely disappeared from the public eye, and so on. A couple extremely advanced senior archivist Padawans who’d been sworn to absolutely secrecy had been tasked to compile the information into a new separate database.
They looked over the footage he’d captured that day, the people he’d talked to in their day-to-day duties since there was no official session, including Senator Organa’s interview. When the Alderaanian representative had finished and taken his leave, Anakin had caught some moments with Chancellor Palpatine, who’d introduced his companions and generally gave out more of his typical comments about faith in the Jedi and hope for the war ending soon. Though to be honest, seeing it in holo form made it seem more like he didn’t really believe what he was saying as much as he suggested.

But then, Anakin supposed he could understand that. Not being on the battlefield himself, he realized he was rather removed from the horrific reality of the war, but he’d seen Obi-Wan, Plo Koon, and Ahsoka come back from enough hard battles to know it was easy to lose hope.

He just wished with all his heart that they could find a way to end it soon, without the Jedi being exterminated and their troopers reduced to mindless automatons.

****************************

By the time Obi-Wan returned to his quarters in the cloning center, it was only a few short hours until the beginning of the day cycle. He used the Force to sweep for recording devices in his room (again), and once he was satisfied he was truly alone he pulled out his personal communicator and entered his code for Master Windu, hoping the man was still at the Temple and not virtually unreachable in the field.

The Korun Master looked deeply fatigued, but still stood straighter and made himself more alert when he answered.

“Obi-Wan. How goes your… inspection?”

“Still in progress, but I do have some information. From what I can tell, that… vulnerability was part of the original requested specifications, like we thought. I found financial records as well. Count Dooku was making payments for sometime, but not initially. It seems Master Syfo Dias mediated a payment to Kamino from someone called Hego Damask. I recognize the name, but I honestly couldn’t say from where. Is there anyone who could check the Archives for me?”

Mace suddenly was unexpectedly still.

“Repeat that name?”

“Hego Damask,” Obi-Wan replied, tension tightening his gut. “If Dooku was in league with… our problem, his financial predecessor most like was as well.” Meanwhile, Mace was looking thoughtful and uneasy.

‘Give me a moment,” he said. He disappeared from the holo projection’s range for a few moments, before he returned with a data pad. He scrolled though the information on display, brows furrowed.

“I know that name too. I just saw it… Padawan Kem’ke just added more names to that new database today… hold on…” He kept scrolling, then paused.

“There. Hego Damask. A high-ranking banking executive from Muunilinst. Died right at the end of the Naboo crisis - heart attack, according to the records. That would put him in the right time frame to provide initial funding for the army. Senate associations…” He trailed off, looking at the data pad like it was showing him a horrific vision.

“Mace?” Obi-Wan pressed, concern spiking.
“Sweet Force help us.” That set his heart racing.

“What is it?” Mace finally looked up, stricken.

“You’re not going to believe this…”

*************************

When Taun Wei came to collect him two hours later, Obi-Wan was still employing every tactic he knew to keep his emotions hidden under durasteel shields, fighting to give no indication that anything had changed. He kept his breathing quietly controlled and his smile easy.

Just a little longer, then he could put an end to this sacrilegious game.

He would protect his family - the Jedi and the vode- and the greater galaxy by any tactic necessary. And he had an idea. One risky idea.

Meeting Lama Su again, he was led to a room he hadn’t been in on his last tour of the facility. This room was smaller than many others that were used to develop the clones, but still sizable. It was, if possible, even more sterile and controlled than the rest of the facility. This was also honestly the largest concentration of Kaminoans he’d seen together thus far, because there were dozens upon dozens of them, each stationed at their own small laboratory table, upon which a number of scientific and medical tools rested with a cylindrical tank of pale blue liquid.

“You wanted to observe the beginnings of our cloning procedure, to know where there might be an immunity flaw making the soldiers susceptible to the fever, Master Jedi,” the Prime Minister began, “This is where we initiate a new batch.”

He gave commentary as the Kaminoan scientists injected copies of Jango Fett’s DNA into “blank” egg cells and deposited them into the artificial amniotic fluid, before being electrically stimulated to begin multiplication. Obi-Wan took notes on a data pad, and Su moved on to show him a holographic diagram of the modifications to the genome they used, which the Jedi Master requested and was granted a copy of for the Temple healers’ study. He then followed the Prime Minister into a different room, where more cloning scientists were preparing to work on a batch of one hundred clone embryos that were in a somewhat later stage of development, being monitored.

It couldn’t be long now.

Finally, he was led into another, larger room where the tanks had doubled in size and the clones inside were clearly almost ready to be decanted. Two dozen Kaminoan cloners were preparing surgical instruments and approaching the clone tanks.

“And what happens at this stage, Prime Minister?”

“Oh, final checks before they are extracted, last injection of nutrients and growth hormones… If you’ll follow me—“

“They appear to be preparing for some kind of surgery. What is the procedure for?” Obi-Wan cut in, not moving from his spot.

“I’m afraid that’s classified, Master Kenobi.” The Negotiator smiled smoothly.

“I’m afraid I must insist. Your clones are ineffective if they are able to be infected with and spread this disease. We must have all information we can if we are to find a solution. I’m sure you understand. The Jedi Council are quite capable of discretion. What is the procedure for?”
For all that Kaminoans were difficult to read in terms of facial expressiveness, Obi-Wan could sense irritation and anxiousness coming from his host, and when he answered, his voice was slightly pinched.

"Very well. The procedure is to implant an aggression-inhibitor chip. It is part of the modifications to Fett’s template to make the clones more obedient to you, their generals. I assure you it is quite beneficial.”

Obi-Wan forced himself to keep breathing normally.

“Indeed. Beneficial.” He centered himself.

“I think I have all the information I need, Prime Minister Su.” He pulled the Force to him, and guided it out, until he could feel the strands connecting him to every Kaminoan in the room, and temporarily excluded Lama Su.

“You will not implant the inhibitor chips.”

The long-limbed scientists froze in their places.

He reached deeper.

“You will collect all the inhibitor chips already manufactured and bring them to me. You will tell no one you are doing this.”

Three Kaminoans broke off from the group and exited the way he and Lama Su had come. He held out his hand, pressing deeper into their detached, pragmatic minds.

“You do not know of any inhibitor chips.”

“We do not know of any inhibitor chips.”

“You agreed to stop producing clones until the issue of the Jeorgian Fever is resolved.”

“We will produce no additional clones until the Fever is resolved.”

He turned to Prime Minister Su, feeling the Force filling him, saturating him.

“You will tell your Senate superior and sponsor of none of the changes being made today.”

“I… I will tell him of no changes being made.”

He pushed deeper, seizing the foreign mind with his own. He knew, he knew about the chips and what they were meant for… he didn’t deserve gentleness…

“You will forget my presence here.”

“I- I do not know of any Jedi here.”

Obi-Wan did another careful sweep of the Kaminoan’s mind, before nodding in satisfaction, watching Lama Su amble off looking somewhat mentally absent. The three cloning scientists who’d left previously returned at that moment, carrying-

Dear Force.

Carrying two massive storage crates, which upon opening were full the the brim with minuscule bio-
chip containers. They must have had enough ready for at least five hundred thousand more clones…

“You will load these onto my ship with no detours or interferences.”

And they did. He took a deep breath, readying himself for the journey ahead.

One more stop at the security office to wipe the recording holos of his presence here, and a few more strong Force memory wipes, and he could be off this Force-forsaken planet and on his way to helping defeat the Sith.

He had more work to do, and a Supreme Chancellor to help unseat. Or preferably kill.

Chapter End Notes

Ah, wookiepedia, you're becoming one of my new best resources. This is the life I have given myself to, apparently.

This chapter kicked my ass and I don't know why, and I feel like my brain is starting to drain out through my ears. Joy.

Let me know if there's stuff in here that doesn't make sense, please. Feedback welcome as always.
Moving into Position

Chapter Summary

Ch. 11 of Crechemaster! Anakin AU. The Sith Master ups the ante a bit, three more major players are introduced, and they weave a stronger web of defense.

Chapter Notes

The new person you see in this chapter I said a few chapters back hadn't been interacted with in years... yeah, pretend that discussion was before most of said person's stuff in seasons 1-3 of Clone Wars, 'cause that's where I'm at.

Beta read only by myself (does that count?), feedback welcome as usual.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Anakin felt his extremities start to go numb and his vision start to tunnel, he was surprised. When Padme’s phantom screams of pain started to accompany those sensations, he was alarmed and quite a bit freaked. Mostly because he’d only had prophetic dreams of his mother before, never full on waking visions. He’d had no idea what they were like. Then again, these weren’t genuine visions, so who knew how they’d really present themselves? It was a trick, but he’d freely admit it was a damn effective one. He didn’t like to think what he’d be doing with these kriffing visions if he didn’t know they were planted by the Sith.

When the onslaught - same as before, only now he saw Obi-Wan as well, telling Padme to save her strength and not give up (something he’d certainly do if he were in such a situation, but here it was obviously added to get him to question his Master’s loyalty and intentions) - passed, he was leaning against the wall of a Senate hallway near the exit, his heart rate elevated. He shook his head, trying to re-orient himself.

He was getting closer. The Sith was here in the Senate, he had to be, and Anakin was getting closer to drawing him out.

“Anakin?” He spun, nearly unbalancing himself.

“Chancellor Palpatine.” The older man approached him.

“Are you quite alright, young Anakin? You look pale.” The Jedi shook his head.

“I’m alright, Chancellor.” He decided in the moment that a touch of honesty couldn’t hurt. It was the Chancellor, after all. “Just some… unpleasant input from the Force. It happens now and then. We learn to… deal with it.” The senior man looked uncertain for a moment, before putting a sympathetic hand on his shoulder. Anakin thought he could again feel that strange electrical unbalance in the man.

“I do hope it’s nothing terribly serious.” Anakin shook his head.
“It… it could be, to be honest,” he admitted, “but the situation is being monitored and I think it will be resolved soon.” Gods, how he hoped it would.

The politician peered at him closely for a moment, not unlike Healer Che had looked at him when she was trying to determine if he was lying about how much physical pain he was in after a particularly rough mission back in his Padawan days. Then he nodded.

“Well, I’m sure with your talent and skills you’ll have it sorted soon. And you know my door is always open if you need to talk. I remember you saying about having some trouble talking to your fellow Jedi when you were a boy.”

“Yes, we didn’t exactly always know how to communicate back then,” Anakin agreed. “I think we’ve all gotten better over the years, though. But I’ll keep your offer in mind. It’s very kind of you.”

“Think nothing of it, my boy.”

The Jedi’s eye twitched just a bit again.

****************************

By the time Obi-Wan was nearly back to Coruscant, he was still quietly fuming and his mind was still racing. Palpatine, PALPATINE was the Sith Master. There was no other plausible conclusion, the information just didn’t add up to anything else. Dooku had quite literally been telling the absolute truth when he’d said the Senate was under the control of a Sith.

Their job had just become infinitely more complicated.

And Anakin… Anakin, who had looked up to (that manipulative monster) Palpatine, who considered him a friend… how would he respond to this?

(Palpatine, who’d been watching Anakin’s career ‘with great interest…’ How close had he tried to get? The Sith had been trying to groom HIS former Padawan to the Dark side, and oh, how Obi-Wan would make him regret it…)

But first, they had to figure out how to remove a Supreme Chancellor from office without causing the entire Senate to implode into chaos, taking the Order with it.

If only hyperspace could pass by faster because he willed it.

****************************

Rex hadn’t been sure what to think when he’d gotten the message to report to the Jedi Temple. He along with his entire 501st Legion had already been brought to the Healers, briefed (via speaker from beyond an observation window and well-reinforced door, just in case even hearing about the implanted order would be enough to set it off, and wasn’t THAT a doozy of a dump of mind-blowingly unpleasant information), had given their understanding and swift consent to surgery, been put under air-released anesthetic, and had their ‘inhibitor’ chips removed. The incision had been fully healed for a few weeks, leaving the smallest scar that his hair disguised quickly enough. He couldn’t quite shake a certain degree of anxiousness and paranoid tension since then, though. The same for most of his men.

He had even been there right along with General Kenobi when Cody had woken up from the more severe sedation he’d been put under- and what a nightmare for Cody that had been, poor man, remembering the order being activated in his head and the mindless drive to kill Jedi - to kill his own
General and friend - but not remembering what had come after. The Marshal Commander had been shaky and full of remorse that the General made clear was unwarranted, saying that Cody’s behavior had not been in his control. Cody had seemed to have difficulty accepting that sort of emotional mercy, and whenever Rex and the 501st worked missions with the 212th after Cody was released back to duty, he’d seen his vod still function and direct troops flawlessly, but often try to maintain a certain distance from Kenobi, as if he were still afraid of hurting the Jedi. And the Jedi clearly noticed, with visible chagrin. Rex wished his vod would get a clue.

So the entire 212th and 501st were taken care of in terms of that damn sabotage, which meant that this summons was surely for new information gained. He could only hope it would mean a rapidly approaching end to this damn charade of business as usual, and the ousting of whatever soulless bastard was behind the whole back-stabbing setup in the first place.

He’d caught a mass public transport from the barracks to the Temple, which made a few stops on the way (which was incidentally how he ran into Cody, who’d received the same message and then had to leave the Ghost Company under the joint supervision of Boil and Waxer to finish their patrols). When the transport stopped in the Senate District, he particularly noticed two people board. Both were human. One was a quietly dignified man of above-average height with dark hair and a skin tone similar to the vode’s own, and the other was a statuesque blonde woman of sharp but elegant features and pale skin. He wondered why they were bothering with mass transit when they were obviously well-off Senate / planetary leader types, but it wasn’t his business, so he and his brother paid them no mind.

That was, until they began overhearing the newcomers’ conversation.

“I do hope Padme will go on leave soon,” the woman was saying. “She’s clearly showing now, and some of the others are beginning to speculate.”

“You mean gossip,” her companion replied with a knowing smile.

“That goes without saying,” she retorted primly. “But more importantly, the stress has to be weighing on her soon if it’s not already. Especially considering the state of the Republic right now. I’m glad she’s confiding in us; it seems like she could use someone to talk to.”

“Besides Dorme?” The lady nodded, thoughtful.

“She’s a lovely and kind young woman, of course. But last I saw, she did not give the impression of having experience with these things.”

“And do you have experience?” the gentleman asked in a tone both curious and teasing, which was met with an only-somewhat scathing glare.

“Oh course not. My sister does, though. So you could say I have second-hand experience.” Her friend pondered that.

“It’s not as if she’s isolated, though. She has… she has the father, of course, and her uncle Ono, and our friend Obi-Wan.”

That caught the brothers’ more active attention. Chancing a glance over, Rex noticed that the lady looked to be reminded of fond memories by the General’s mention.

“Still, I quite agree though,” the man continued. “We should see if she’d be willing to visit one of us before she goes home. Get some fresh air and a break from this madness we seem unable to hold off.”
“If it’s fresh air she wants, she may have to go with you, Senator,” the lady sighed wistfully. “There’s no knowing how long it will take for Mandalore to regain its ecological vitality, not to mention it’s social stability.”

That made Rex sit up straighter. The lady was of Mandalore, the home planet of their template - the closest thing any of the clones had to a biological father - Jango Fett. He thought her accent, as polished and high-class as it was, held an element of familiarity. Actually, it wasn’t terribly dissimilar from General Kenobi’s.

He vaguely wondered if one had influenced the other.

The soldiers half-listened to the pair over the swift remainder of their journey, as they discussed politics and the war with a surprising amount of insight. Rex was glad to hear them briefly discuss the clone soldiers with compassion and respect.

Before long, the gentleman - a Senator, by the lady’s words - stood to disembark just a few stops away from the Temple. His companion did not, however. He lowered his voice.

“Aren’t you coming, Duchess?”

Rex felt his eyebrows rise, and he exchanged a look with Cody.

THE Duchess of Mandalore, then. The pacifist. He wasn’t sure whether to be exasperated or impressed.

“Tell her I’ll be along in a short while, if you wouldn’t mind,” the Duchess replied. “I have a visit I’d like to see if I can make first.” The Senator smiled reassuringly.

“Of course.”

Call it instinct, but somehow Rex wasn’t surprised when the Duchess of Mandalore disembarked with them at the Jedi Temple. He was even less surprised to see Cody showing some of that tension again.

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“General Kenobi!”

Obi-Wan would have nearly groaned in frustration - he’d literally just gotten off his ship, and arranged for the crates to be taken inside to the Healing Halls; couldn’t he have one minute to breathe before duty took over again?

He would have, except he recognized the voice, and froze, and then pivoted.

“Duchess Kryze?”

His ears were not in fact deceiving him, for there the Duchess was, approaching him with her usual grace and apparent inability to look anything less than lovely. For all that a part of him was happy to see her again, the rest of him just felt a substantial increase in anxiety.

“You seem disproportionately surprised to see me, Master Jedi,” she teased lightly.

“I am rather disproportionately surprised to see you not only on Coruscant, but at the door of the Jedi Temple, your Grace,” he returned, kissing the hand she’d offered to shake with the ease of habit. She smirked at him knowingly.
"Is it so unexpected for me to want to check in on an old friend? You can’t expect me to not have heard about this dreadful Jeorgian Fever business. I know the army has been in the thick of efforts to contain it and prevent further spread. I’ve also heard of people seeing less of you since it broke out. You can’t blame a person for being concerned. I had business on-planet, so I made use of the opportunity."

"And now you see, I’m quite alive, and all in one piece at that,” he returned with a strained smile.

"Just barely, extrapolating from your past exploits,” she retorted. He shook his head.

“I do appreciate your concern, Satine - I truly do,” he insisted. “But our side of things is much more complicated than you know, and the work is waiting impatiently even now. Things on Coruscant especially could get much more dangerous soon, and you’d fare better to be far away when that happens. In fact…” He struggled with himself for a moment.

“In fact, the farther away you stay from any Jedi, the safer you might be for the time being.” She frowned.

“You know it’s not in my nature to leave people in danger for my own safety, Obi-Wan. You know how loathe I am to do that more than anyone. And I especially won’t abandon you to greater troubles without any explanation.”

He nodded, resigned, and lowered his voice.

“We’re working to undo a massive conspiracy against the Jedi Order that we’ve uncovered - a lethal one. If it gets enacted, we’re all targets for immediate execution.”

She couldn’t quite hold back her gasp of dismay.

“What?!” He nodded and placed a hand on her elbow, drawing her into the shadows cast by the Temple.

“That’s why you’d be better off far away from any Jedi, myself especially,” he hissed. “I think we’re close to beating it before it can even be attempted, we just need a little more time. In the meantime we have to act as though nothing is out of the ordinary, so as not to show our hand.” She drew her shoulders back.

“I understand your intent, of course. But there must be something I can do to help. I’ll go mad with worry otherwise.” He smiled sadly.

“There is the Duchess Satine, always determined to aid others.” He pondered for a moment.

“Actually…”

She leaned forward, expectant. “Yes?”

He took a deep breath, hating himself a little for even thinking it, but knowing what many innocent lives weighed against one, and knowing she would know as well. “If you plan to be on Coruscant or in the Core system for a while… the information suggests that not even the younglings would be spared.”

Her eyes widened, and she employed a particularly colorful and vicious Mandalorian phrase.

“My thoughts exactly,” he replied darkly. “If this attack is attempted, we will need to evacuate the younglings and the sick and injured if at all possible. If there were someone, a non-Jedi, who was willing and able to smuggle them off-planet…” She nodded.
“Say no more, Obi-Wan. Bail and I were thinking of persuading Padme to leave Coruscant for some relaxation, but I could just as easily stay here to keep her company while she prepares for the birth, if she’s amendable to it. I could get a ship here in minutes, and get out of the system again just as quickly if I claim an emergency on Mandalore that requires my presence. Just let me know the procedure.”

He nodded, tension coiling in his gut. “Satine, you know if you are seen anywhere near the Temple at such a time, you would immediately become a target yourself.” She held firm.

“And the lives I might be saving would be worth it.” He sighed.

“Alright. I’ll let you when we can meet again to go over it. Satine, thank you. You don’t know what this means…” She put a comforting hand to his shoulder.

“I think I have a very good idea, dear one. We must all do what we can. What we must.”

“Look after yourself, your Grace.” She kissed his cheek.

“You make sure to do the same, old friend.”

And then she was gone.

And when he ran into Commander Cody and Captain Rex on their way to the brief just the shortest moment later, he was surprised by the new mix of anxiety and tension and almost resignation he felt in the Force. And he’d admit to himself to feeling a new anxiety within him in response to it.

But he had to catch his absent former apprentice before he could confront any of it.

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When Anakin returned to the Temple after his rounds at the Senate building, he expected to submit his recordings of his interactions to the Council for review, let them know of the vision he’d been sent, finish grading the evaluations he’d started yesterday, and get home to Padme (with any luck, he might actually beat her home for once and concoct some sort of nice surprise).

What he did not expect was to suddenly feel two hands closing firmly around his upper arm before yanking him off his path into the shadow behind a support pillar.

“Hey! What the- Obi-Wan?! What in Force’s name is the matter with you?”

His old Master pinned him in place with his gaze and got right to the point.

“It’s the Chancellor.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The Sith lord, the one who’s behind everything. It’s Chancellor Palpatine.”

It was quite suddenly so very silent in their pocket of the Temple that Anakin vaguely thought he could maybe hear the water running in the Hall of a Thousand Fountains from here.

“What.”

His mentor nodded grimly, his brow furrowed in concerned empathy.

“No. No, it- ah, no.”
“There’s no way it could be anyone else,” Obi-Wan pressed. “All the information we’ve discovered points to him. It all makes sense now.”

The younger man dragged in a deep breath through his nose, before raising his mech hand to the column for support. The Councilor put a hand to his shoulder.

“Do you need to sit down?”

Bizarrely, that made Anakin snort and succumb to wave after wave of laughter. Breathless, slightly manic laughter seizing him and forcing itself out. This only made Obi-Wan more concerned.

“I know- just try to breathe- I know you’ve considered him a friend-“

But Anakin shook his head, still leaning on the column, his forehead now resting against his forearm.

“Well, I guess not now! I mean, Sith lords haven’t gained themselves a reputation for being reliable friends,” he said, still giggling every few words. “And you’re exactly right, it does make sense. I just…”

It was just, kark, how was this his life? This was not what he had in mind when he’d wholeheartedly agreed with Qui-Gon Jinn’s offer to be trained as a Jedi.

Finally, his laughter left him, and he straightened with a sigh.

“Let’s go talk with the others.”

In short order, he and Obi-Wan were sequestered once again with Mace, Plo, the lead Healers and the others who’d been brought into the fold of their plan in Halls of Healing. They and the other Council members had already been informed of the identity of their foe, so when Anakin and Obi-Wan arrived and the room was once again secured against unwanted listeners, they immediately began discussing options.

“We should take action now,” Captain Rex insisted firmly, obviously more pissed off than shaken at the name behind the conspiracy, before seeming to realize he’d spoken thus to the Jedi Generals.

“Begging pardon, but from what you’ve said, this man has by the Senate regulations been in position too long under emergency powers. If he is a Sith, and complete takeover is his endgame, we can assume he won’t give up those powers even if the war were to end. We should take him out before he establishes absolute control, while we still can.”

“But we haven’t operated on all of the clone battalions yet! If the order goes out, some will still receive it,” Vokara reminded them.

“And if we show our hand, we either have to make sure none of the troopers still have chips to receive the command, or we have to do it in such a way that he has not even a second of opportunity to give the order,” Mace added. “I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to make assumptions about our chances of being able to use the element of surprise on a Sith Master.”

Plo turned to the Healers and medical officers. “How many more units have yet to have their chips removed?” Kix answered.

“Just the 327th, and the 41st, General.”


“If we keep up the current rate, we can have them both taken care of in about two weeks,” Vokara
“Two weeks suddenly seems rather long,” Mace muttered.

“But it would be worth it if we can have every unit of clone troopers out from under Sith control,” Anakin spoke up, sighing. Obi-Wan turned quickly to face him.

“You’re suggesting waiting. You want to stay in your current situation?”

“I want all of us to survive, honestly,” he replied, unable to keep some snark from his voice. “He planted another vision for me today right before I left. Right when he was close by. He’s still tentative, trying to get a feel of my mental state. If it’s just another couple weeks until we have the entire army free of his control, I think it’d be best for me to… keep up the con, as it were. And start playing along. If I get him confident, if I can get him to completely reveal his scheme on recording, we might be able to get a bloodless impeachment in the bag.”

Everyone was quiet for a moment, and Anakin could tell his old Master was worried. Finally, Mace spoke up.

“If you feel secure enough to do so, go ahead and keep him occupied, Skywalker. We trust you.”

It was then that Plo received a communication. Pulling it out and activating it, he brought Commander Wolfe’s image up in his palm. “Report, Commander.”

“General, you said to comm you the moment we saw. He’s here, Sir. General Grievous has just arrived in the Utapau system.”

Chapter End Notes

Note 1, none of your favorite clones are dead in this AU! Because I am the god of this AU and I say so (unless they died in like their very first episode, like poor Heavy :( )

Note 2, Padme totally introduced her BFF Satine to her Senate Bro Bail so they call all bitch about Republic corruption together.

Note 3, I read someone somewhere say it was odd that Obi-Wan's accent is accepted as "Coruscanti" even though hardly any other characters on Coruscant have the same one. My head cannon is that he picked up Satine's during his and QG's year-long mission on Mandalore, (QG didn't because he was older, more experienced, and more established in his language patterns), and any differences between their final accents are accounted for by all the time he spent away afterward. Cause honorary Mandalorian Obi-Wan is my jam.
The Curtain Rises

Chapter Summary

Ch.12 of Crechemaster!Anakin AU. I swear this is the last chapter before the real action starts.

Chapter Notes

the * marks where I start mixing original dialogue from RotS in with my dialogue / prose, cause if it's not broke and it works for your purpose, don't fix it I say.

Un-beta-ed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

An outsider looking in might have chuckled at the way everyone in the room let out deep sighs almost simultaneously. But those involved had rarely felt less like laughing.

“I’ll take Ahsoka and join the wolfpack at Utapau,” Plo finally said.

“You two shouldn’t go alone,” Mace replied. Obi-Wan was quick to jump in.

“I’ll go with you.” He paused. “But you should go on ahead and I’ll catch up; I have a new contingency plan to put in place first.” The Korun Master turned to him, eyebrows raised.

“Oh?”

“Yes. I ran into Duchess Kryze before I spoke to Anakin. She’s been a trustworthy friend for years, and when I confided only the vaguest perspective of the danger to her, she offered assistance. She agreed to help evacuate the Creche and the Healing Halls if an attack were launched on the Temple.”

Mace seemed uneasy at the prospect of trusting non-Jedi with their dilemma, but nodded. “Very well. Share the necessary steps with her before you join the others to confront Grievous.” His fellow Councilor bowed, and exited the room, Cody and Helix going with him. The Master of the Order turned to the others.

“Any other developments?”

Plo nodded. “Ahsoka and I have determined how the order would be transmitted to activate the chips. They are activated through auditory signal, so the order would likely be given in a spoken communicator message to the highest ranking clone in a unit, and passed down verbally.”

“Hopefully we’ll be able to remove the chips from the remaining troopers before that happens.” Then Trento spoke up.

“In case we can’t, though, Master Windu, some of the others and I have been working on our own contingency plan. It’s tested and ready for use. With your permission, I’d like to send teammates
along with the new units we made to Master Unduli’s and Knight Secura’s positions, and leave some here in case of attack on the Temple.” He nodded.

“Permission granted.” The mind Healer turned to Kix.

“Come by our office before you return to your company,” she said. “You’ll want to pick up plenty of protective gear.”

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“Obi-Wan!”

“Hello again, Duchess. I realize it’s been barely any time since we last spoke, but an emergency has reared its head.”

“Oh dear. So the time to discuss procedure has come already, then.”

“Precisely. Where are you, so I can deliver the information?”

“At Padme’s apartment, with her and Bail.”

“Very well. If she allows it, I’ll stop by before I leave.”

“I’ll ask her, but I’m sure she’ll welcome you.”

“Alright.” He sighed. “I’ll see you soon, then.”

“Safe flight, Obi-Wan.” He nodded, and cut the connection.

“It’s a good thing I didn’t bother unpacking,” he muttered to himself.

As quickly as air traffic allowed, the Negotiator was landing at the apartment of Senator Padme Amidala. He was glad Satine was in the presence of such well-known and trusted friends; he very much did not need to be worrying about questionable listeners on top of everything else. He kissed cheeks with the ladies and held onto his handshake with Bail a moment before letting go, accepting the man’s reassuring hand on his shoulder.

Such open greetings with three people at once made his thoughts pause for a moment. It was funny, he thought. Sometimes the pressures and demands of his role in the Order and the army made it easy to forget how many true friends he had. His three companions here, Anakin of course, his closer troopers (but wasn’t that its own danger - being friends with those he had to send or lead into battle), Plo and Ahsoka and Mace, his old childhood friends Bant, Garen, Reeft, even Quinlan, Dex… his more ambiguous “friends” like Hondo… Qui-Gon was gone, Tahl and Cerasi and Siri and so many of his men were gone, but so many still remained.

He really wasn’t as alone as he’d often thought, and it was comforting to realize.

“What’s happened, Master Kenobi?” Senator Organa asked, the others looking equally concerned.

“I’m about to follow Master Koon and our Padawan to catch General Grievous; he’s been sighted,” he replied. Satine’s brows furrowed with worry, but she kept her determined bearing.

“I see. Then, what do I need to do should the worst happen?”

He hesitated, glancing at the other two. “If the worst does happen, you two would be safer having plausible deniability to fall back on.” They both looked flat-out offended.
“Obi-Wan, if you really think I’m not going to help you and the other Jedi any way I can, you do not know me at all, my friend,” Bail returned.

“And the Sith Master is trying to use my husband’s love and concern over my wellbeing to turn him to the Dark side,” Padme retorted sharply. “As if that weren’t insulting enough, I can glean that he’s also trying to seize total galactic power for himself and intends to crush democracy in addition to slaughtering all the Jedi. I very much intend to do whatever I can to show him what happens when he tries to do that.”

The Jedi sighed ruefully. “I had a feeling you’d both say something like that.” He drew his shoulders back. “And I can quite relate. Very well.” He pulled out a mobile holo-emitter, displaying a three-dimensional blueprint of the Temple.

“In the event of an attack, the bulk of an evacuation would not be through any of the main exits,” he explained. “The Creche, the Healing Halls, and the Archives all have emergency exits that lead down into the lower levels.” He pointed to the exit points. “From there they follow these routes to these designated meeting places half a kilometer away from the Temple, each of which is aircraft-accessible. If at all possible, each of the evacuations would be led by a designated Master, while another stays behind with a Knight to hold off any attacking hostiles. If the leading Master is injured or killed, the responsibility of leading the evacuation falls to the next highest ranking person in the group, which could possibly be a Padawan.

“Now, The 212th Battalion will be coming with me. For the time being, the 501st Legion will remain on Coruscant, and they have all been cleared of Sith influence. I want each of you to have this comm number on hand,” he showed it to them on his own comm. “If you do see or hear anything suspicious, I want you to call it and it will put you in touch with Captain Rex. He and his men will back you up.”

He continued the brief as quickly as he could, before released a deep breath. “That should be everything you would need. And now I must leave to join the others. If we can finally defeat Grievous, we might be able to end this war.”

Provided a Sith lord didn’t instigate something even worse.

He was turning to go when Satine called out to him. “Wait, Obi-Wan.”

“What is it?” She darted to where she’d left her luggage, bringing a medium-sized crate back with her.

“I brought this for you, as a token of my gratitude for when you assisted us with Death Watch. As a reminder that you’d always have safe harbor with us if you need it, after all you’ve done for us. For me. Oh, don’t open it now, open it when you have a moment. But I just wanted you to have it. Now, it seems rather timely.”

He took it from her, nodding his understanding. “Thank you, my friend.”

“May the Force be with you, Obi-Wan.” The others nodded in agreement, and he swallowed.

“Watch out for each other.”

And in moments, he was in the air, on his way to help his fellow Master and his Padawan defeat the cyborg bane of their last three years.

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Anakin pulled on his glove over his mechanical hand, trying not to focus on how uncomfortable he felt about this.

He’d never liked missions relying on deceit and playacting, and after more than three years of the bizarre honesty of children, that had only become more true. But he’d committed himself to drawing the Sith lord - Palpatine - into the open in order to help defeat him, for everyone’s sake, and he couldn’t falter now.

Padme stepped up to him, placing a hand on his shoulder. “Today is the day, then?”

He nodded. “Today I start pretending to Fall. I don’t know how long I can draw it out to give the others time to clear the rest of the troops, but yes. Today it starts.”

She pondered for a moment. “I think now might be the right time for me to start working from home. My absence could give the impression of some kind of health problem. Make it more plausible.” He sighed in relief, gratitude filling him for her insight and understanding.

“That’s a good idea. Thank you.” And they both knew his gratitude was for more than the tactical advantage of her absence - that there was a primitive part of his being that he couldn’t shut off that would be vastly relieved to know she wasn’t in the same building as the Sith, no matter how well he knew she could handle herself. And she was accepting that part of him and working forward with it.

He could do this, he realized. Yes, he was the one Palpatine was targeting as an apprentice, he was the one on the front line of a battle that few even knew existed. But Trento had given him some tips on using his fabricated worries and frustrations to mask his real ones, and he wasn’t alone.

As frightening and difficult and confusing as his life had been at times, he realized now that he’d never really been alone.

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The young Jedi Master had carefully charted his next steps. He’d taken his usual spot and recorded the Senate session as before, but he did not seek out representatives to interview as normal. He’d taken his time leaving when the session ended, and slowly made his way to the route that he knew by now the Chancellor took to his expansive suite. He kept his steps heavy and unmotivated, his face pinched with a mentally-absent sort of tension. If he’d timed it correctly…

There. He could feel the Chancellor’s - the Sith’s - presence drawing closer just around the bend, and took a deep breath, eyes trained on the floor with a heaviness he really didn’t need to fake. Almost there…

“Anakin?” Showtime.

“Oh. Good afternoon, Chancellor.” He kept his voice subdued, almost lethargic.

“Are you alright, my boy?” Anakin could have laughed at the irony, if the situation wasn’t so serious.

“I. I’m ok, Sir.” He’d carefully considered it the night before, how ‘available’ he’d make himself at first, how willing to show worry, fatigue, or need for guidance he should be. Too receptive would be suspicious and frankly out-of-character for him; putting up too much of a tough front would be counter-productive. And the balance appeared to work like a charm.

“Hm,” was all the older man said at first, before dismissing his entourage with warm farewells. He gestured Anakin to walk with him, putting a generically paternal arm around his shoulders - the Jedi
was proud of himself for not flinching.

“I’d like to think I know you better than that by now, son,” he began warmly, and Anakin fought to keep his skin from crawling. “It’s clear something is bothering you. We can talk about it in my office if you like.”

He made himself pause a few beats before sighing in defeat. “I think that would help, to be honest.” He thought Obi-Wan would be particularly proud of that wording.

In no time, Anakin was alone with the Supreme Chancellor, and employing his years of practice in staying calm. The last time he’d faced a Sith, he’d lost an arm and nearly gotten both himself and his Master killed - and that was facing an apprentice who used to be a Jedi. But, he reminded himself, he was here today to talk, not to fight. If nothing went wrong, which he expected it would.

“So why don’t you tell me what’s troubling you, my boy,” the scheming politician prompted as he sat on his sleek office sofa and motioned the Jedi to follow. Anakin took a steadying breath; now the real balancing act began. If he exposed all the intended pressure points at once, Palpatine could play into his hands before the others were ready. But he couldn’t just make things up pell-mell, either. Too petty a complaint wouldn’t be convincing; too personal a fear would be too much to start with. He had to work with the anxieties and irritations the Sith was looking to exploit.

“I - I’m frustrated, Sir.”

“By what?”

“By the Council,” he replied, as he’d discussed with Obi-Wan and the others. “I’ve been trying to get changes made to the material I’m allowed to teach the Initiates, but they keep rejecting my proposals. The Code needs updating, especially in regards to the younglings, but they can’t conceive of ever teaching anything different from what they’ve taught for generations. It’s not suited for Initiates who could become Padawans in wartime. They won’t even let me add in some new concepts on a trial basis.”

The older man nodded sagely. “Ah. Well, you’ve always been unique, Anakin. You came from a more challenging background than most Jedi can understand. That gives you fresh insight. Perhaps they don’t trust your influence. They know you’re more powerful than they are; maybe they’re afraid of it.”

The sobering thing (among many) was that Anakin knew there was a time when he would have believed that. And Force, had this guy always been so overt with the flattery?

“Maybe,” he muttered.

“Is there anything about their decisions lately that make you uncomfortable?” the Chancellor asked, an expression of concern painted on his face. Here was something he could work with.

“I’m concerned about what their current brand of training will mean for the futures of the Padawans,” he replied, with a guilty infusion of honesty. “With the children being sent to the battlefield virtually as soon as their apprenticed, given authority that has very real consequences while they’re still learning so much, I’m worried over how they’ll cope with the changes after the war is over.”

Palpatine ‘hmn’ed. Ah, there was where he could get a hook in.

“What do you think will happen, Sir, after the war does end?” The older man put up a small, wry smile.
“Simple men like me can’t see the future like you Jedi can, my boy,” he replied. “It’s hard to imagine what a peaceful galaxy would be like for any of us now. I imagine there will be confusion and even some fear, that it wouldn’t really be over, people waiting for a surprise attack.

“But I will tell you this: if there came a time when the war ended, and you could spare some more time away from those younglings of yours, I personally would feel better with a wise, passionate and strong young man like you providing the insight we’d need to move forward. In a more official capacity, I think?”

Huh. That was… not what he was expecting.

Half-speed ahead, he thought.

“Do you mean that, Chancellor?”

“Of course, Anakin! As you said, many Jedi may have trouble adjusting to a peaceful Republic. They may not feel comfortable about losing the authority they wield in the military. I feel you would make just the right connection between the Jedi and the Senate, and be able to help things transition smoothly.”

Ah, there it was. ‘Transition into a peaceful Republic,’ conveniently with Jedi losing some (all) of their authority in the process (along with their lives). It made him feel dirty to be propositioned to be part of it.

“Why don’t you join me in my box at the opera tomorrow night, and we can discuss it?”

Force help him.

“I’d be honored, Sir.”

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The next night, after he’d struggled through a day of teaching after another damn nightmare of Padme dying (this one so intense he’d had to run to the fresher before he vomited, and then couldn’t stop himself from crying, fists in his hair, muttering to himself over and over how it was’t real, wasn’t assured), Anakin made his way to the opera house. He had to jog a bit while he was inside, to reach Palpatine’s box just as the show was about to start. He took a moment to breathe deeply and calm himself (and check that the audio pickup he wore between the layers of his tunics was recording, and not detectable) before he entered, finding the box empty save for the one he was locked in this dangerous game of deception and traps with.

“Good evening, Chancellor.”

“Ah! Anakin, just on time. Please, sit.” And like a good, obedient prospective apprentice, he did.

*“The information has been passed on to the Jedi Council already, of course, but I wanted to be the one to tell you personally the good news. Our clone intelligence units have located General Grievous. He’s hiding, in the Utapau System.”

“At last!” He’d wondered how soon he’d be hearing about that - whether Palpatine would actually get that information from the clone units, or from already knowing where Grievous would be from working with him. He wouldn’t put it past a Sith, at this point. “They’ll be able to capture that monster, and bring an end to this war.”

His would-be mentor smiled. “Indeed. I must say Anakin, I know how you value your work, but I
still find it a loss that you could not keep up with some battlefield experience. I have no doubt that you would be by far the best Knight for this assignment, if you had.”

He knew by now not to refute that sort of claim, but to follow where it led.

“Thank you, Chancellor.”

They watched the gleaming, rippling spectacle for a few moments, before the politician spoke again.

“Anakin, I think you’re aware by now that I’m not able to rely on the Jedi Council. If they haven’t included you in their plot, they soon will.”

Anakin felt his heartbeat speed up, and forced himself to not show it outwardly or in the Force. “I’m not sure I understand.”

“I’m sure you can sense what I’ve begun to suspect. You must know there’s a reason they won’t allow you to teach anything new or against their Code. The Jedi Council want control of the Republic.”

Wow. He could have laughed at the sheer inaccurate madness of the claim if he wasn’t so nervous. If Obi-Wan, Master Tiin, Healer Hoft-Tam, and maybe even Master Windu were any indication of a pattern at this point, he’d guess that the Council would be happy to retreat to one of the abandoned secondary Temples and leave the Senate to its own devices by now, for all times it had abandoned basic sentient decency or refused to help them help itself. That was, if they weren’t all convinced that the ordinary people of the Republic would need someone to protect them from the fallout of whatever would happen in the coming days. Having seen the “democratic” process in action for himself lately, he couldn’t fault either sentiment.

“They’re planning to betray me.” Oh, the sweet hypocrisy.

“I don’t think—”

“Anakin.” And he couldn’t help but admit it, the man knew how to speak effectively - soothingly. It was disturbing.

“Search your feelings.”

The Jedi went completely still in his seat, waiting with baited breath. This was it…

“You know, don’t you?” Oh, what an unintentionally loaded question. And he spoke so softly, almost as if he was trying to coax a small, wary animal into his hand. He chewed on how to answer for a moment.

“I know they don’t trust you.”

“Hm. Or the Senate. Or the Republic, or democracy, for that matter.” At this point, Anakin couldn’t even spare the energy to be surprised or insulted. But he had to keep the conversation going, to get as much information out of it as possible.

“I… I have to admit I’m starting to question their intentions.” That sounded reasonably doubtful, suspicious.

“Have they asked you to do something that made you feel dishonest?”

Oh, there was something. Thanks, Sith lord, for giving him more material.
“No, they haven’t asked me to do anything… but now that you mention it, I’ve been wondering why they were so willing to approve my Senate project. They hadn’t allowed me to do much hands-on work for the Initiates before now.”

“Ah. So I’m guessing, they considered it an opportunity to have you unintentionally spy on me.”

Well, you’re not wrong, Anakin thought - aside from the part about me doing it unintentionally. You really missed the ball on that.

From there Palpatine drew him into a discussion about power and people’s desire to retain it once they had it, how that power is used, and how the Jedi and the Sith were really so similar in so many ways… which Anakin personally considered enough evidence to at least warrant official investigation of the Chancellor, if there would be a point in it - if he likely didn’t have the entire judicial sector in his pocket. Seriously? ‘Knowing’ so much about the philosophy of both the the Jedi AND the Sith? Sounded excessive for a simple politician.

Then the man handed him even more evidence.

“Did you ever hear the tragedy of Darth Plagueis the Wise?”

What.

The supposedly non-Force-Sensitive Supreme Chancellor of the Republic was about to share Sith lore with him? What the kark?

“No.”

“I thought not. It’s not a story the Jedi would tell you.”

Seriously, was he THAT secure in his power that he was freely telling this to a Jedi? That… was a deeply alarming thought.

The now virtually confirmed Sith continued his tale of Plagueis.

“… He had such knowledge of the Dark side, he could even keep the ones he cared about from dying.”

And even though he knew to watch for it, even though he was prepared and knew, KNEW it was a lure, Anakin still felt the words like whiplashes across his heart. And worse, he had to let his betrayer see their effect.

“He could actually… save people from death?”

“The Dark side of the Force is a pathway to many abilities some consider to be unnatural.”

You don’t say, Anakin thought faintly, hiding the words but letting his anxiousness and fear and need to know leak out into the Force, as the man (was he even that?) beside him continued his tale. He summarized how Plagueis the Wise feared the loss of his power, taught his apprentice everything he knew, and subsequently was killed in his sleep by said apprentice. Anakin considered that knowledge and the disclosure of it to be as good as a confession.

And as the Chancellor divulged the story, still speaking so softly and warmly, Anakin couldn’t help the tiny part of him, deep down, that wondered if it really was possible, even after what he’d told the Council those months ago. The small, selfish part of him that wanted that comfort, that security.
But no. Padme wouldn’t want that, and he wouldn’t want to face the person he’d have to become in the pursuit of it. His future children, if they shared even a fraction of their mother’s honor, would be ashamed of him for trying to obtain such “unnatural” abilities from the Dark side, especially if it would hurt others in the process. And he remembered what he’d seen when he, Trento, and Obi-Wan had traced that first vision, the suffocating darkness that had tried to consume him. He remembered what the mind Healer had shown him about the effects of delving too deep into the Force in pursuit of knowledge, how it warped and ate away at you. If he were to let himself be drawn in by these seductive promises of control over life and death, he’d have endless blood on his hands, and he’d lose everything he valued - and that had finally started to include his own self.

Still, if the Sith was going to inflict this misery and fear on him, then by the Force he’d put it to good use.

“Is it possible to learn this power?”

His false friend turned his head to look at him directly, and very intently.

“Not from a Jedi.”

Chapter End Notes

Why can't I give Padme substantial lines? Whhyyyyy?
When Obi-Wan was back in hyperspace, he felt oddly much calmer than during his last trip.

Anakin was warned. They all were. He had allies to help him if the Chancellor pushed his agenda. Cody was back at his side (if rather formal and proximity-shy), and all his and Plo’s and Ahsoka’s men had control of their own minds. They were basically as prepared as they could be, and that was what mattered.

He’d be joining his Padawan and his co-Master soon, and they’d neutralize Grievous. It was time; it was past time. One less piece of the puzzle to worry about.

He’d exited hyperspace before he knew it, separated from the rings, and entered Utapau’s atmosphere. He’d messaged Plo prior, and they’d agreed he should touch down first, while they waited on one of the moons to see if the droid-hybrid took the bait.

It turned out, he didn’t need for Grievous to take the bait and find him. Tion Medon, the administrator on Utapau, helpfully if quietly informed him of Grievous setting up base on the upper levels with a massive battalion of droids.

Well. It was quite nice when locals cooperated with Jedi / Clone efforts to keep them from getting killed or annexed.

He sent R4 with his fighter back into space as a ruse, ordering the droid to message Plo and Ahsoka with the development, and retreated back into the shadows to climb, wait, and gather more information. Before long…

(Hey, Master.)

Obi-Wan vaguely thought it was odd. In most of his previous encounters with the droid general
(whom Ahsoka referred to as ‘the demented overgrown weed-whacker with too much attitude’), it had been - well, he hesitated to say fun. It would be odd indeed to think so, going against someone with not only more lightsabers, but more moving limbs than you. But you try to get what you can out of the daily grind of war, and their encounters were fueled by exasperating / taunting banter as much as saber combat. They both seemed to mildly enjoy winding each other up.

Not this time, though, Obi-Wan could already tell. Now, he was just tired of the whole damn thing - Grievous, the Separatists, the war, all of it. He just wanted it to be over. He wanted the Jedi and the Republic safe and free, and Grievous was a very real threat to it. And for all that the droid monstrosity often came across as somewhat inefficient against the Jedi as a whole, he was still highly dangerous.

It was with that in mind that he mentally imparted once more to Ahsoka the importance of sticking to the coordinated effort, and not rushing ahead for the glory of defeating an enemy alone. It was a mark of how far she’d come that she nodded seriously, with nary an eye roll or huff of impatience. He was proud, in the sad way of knowing she was starting to truly grow up.

Pulling away from that thought, he focused on the present, and clarified the strategy with his companions.

(Let’s go.)

Spaced out as they’d silently planned, the three Jedi dropped the droid poppers into the battalion ranks from above, before Obi-Wan leapt down to take point.

“Hello there.” He made sure to express with his voice just how very through with his enemy he was.

Grievous snarled, and coughed, and snarked before pulling out all four sabers and advancing, and Obi-Wan began his steady game of defense.

Blocking, parrying, deflecting, dodging. Stepping or leaping over deactivated droids lying in piles and ducking machinery. Again and again. Same old, same old. He felt oddly calm, in that heart-pounding, hyper-focused way.

When Grievous had backed Obi-Wan into a corner (not knowing his enemy had planned it), the next part of the strategy was ready. The two hidden Jedi dropped down to flank him, each severing a mechanical arm as one.

The droid hybrid roared, and raised the two remaining arms to strike down Obi-Wan. In those short seconds, however, the red-haired Master had called one of Grievous’ dropped, stolen sabers to him. As Grievous brought the remaining blades down, Obi-Wan vaulted over his opponent, blocking and cutting off both remaining arms at once, before landing on the other side.

“Now!”

He, his fellow Master, and their Padawan each pulled with the Force, grasping the metal plating covering the droid general’s torso, each wrenching off a piece as the others held him in place. Enraged and laid bare, he lunged at Obi-Wan, apparently intending to crush him with his brute weight.

What he instead did was impale himself on Obi-Wan’s saber.

The great hulking metal being gasped as his bulk pushed Obi-Wan back several paces, knees braced and body trembling against the impact. He wheezed and jerked, glaring with his artificial eyes, before he crashed to the ground. The whirring gears inside winding down and going silent.
With the quiet and stillness from the disabled droids, it somehow left Obi-Wan’s ears ringing a little, and he stared, dumbfounded.

Ahsoka approached, and placed an anchoring hand on his elbow.

“That was shorter than I expected.”

********************

When he received the message from Obi-Wan that Grievous was dead (and he, Master Plo, and Ahsoka were all very much alive and well), Anakin felt a great rush of relief, followed swiftly by a heady thrill of dread. Yes, the mechanical nightmare would no longer being kidnapping, torturing, and killing Jedi or enslaving and slaughtering civilians. Both good things. But with the face of the Separatist military gone, would the war end, or would the Sith finally seize total control of the Senate and usher in something even worse than the war?

The Force was vibrating, pulsing, telling him they were about to find out.

Mace and the other Council members had also received the message, and he ran into the Korun Master while he happened to be going to find him. With Master Yoda on Kashyyk, Mace was even more in charge at the Temple than usual.

“What do we do, Master Windu?” He frowned and considered moment before responding.

“If the war is about to be over, he has no reason to retain his emergency powers. Asking one of the few senators we trust to motion for him to give them up at next session isn’t likely to succeed. But depending on the manner in which he refuses… I won’t order you to do it. But if we can get him to reveal himself on record, and if we managed to show it to the entire Senate…”

“You know I’m willing to see it through to his removal,” Anakin replied. “But if the Senate sees a recorded confession, they’ll know we were spying on him, even if it’s justified. It could garner sympathy for his perspective on the Jedi.” The senior Master frowned.

“If they consider us traitors for spying on the Chancellor in the name of protecting ourselves from slaughter and preventing the rise of a likely dictator… I personally can live with the Order’s official ties with the Republic being altered or substantially reduced. At least until things settle down and the Senate realizes and accepts what’s been happening. I can’t speak for everyone, but I know there are several others who would agree.”

“I think I could live with that too. I’m just worried about scared or angry senators trying to take their limited sense of ‘justice’ into their own hands.”

Mace contemplated that danger for a moment. “That’s a good point. But then again, with almost the entirety of the army out from under forced obedience to the Chancellor, the most the Senate could muster would be their own individual security units. Maybe some of the Coruscant Guards. Anyone he personally has on his side by their choice.”

Anakin nodded, letting out a deep breath in a rush. “I’ll be on the lookout for that backlash, then.” He paused a moment, doing his best to push his worry and tension out of him where it could be neutralized in the Force.

“Well… this is probably it. If I go now, someone will need to cover my meditation class.”

“I’ll make sure it’s taken care of.” The younger man nodded.
“And… And if the younglings happen to see any of it… could you just make sure they know-?”

“They’ll know none of it is real on your side. They’ll know your heart is true and in the Light. I’ll assure them personally.”

He nodded again, too grateful for words. Mace then hesitated, before putting a hand on Anakin’s shoulder.

“Be careful, Anakin. May the Force be with you.”

And as Anakin returned the words, he took comfort from the fact that he could feel how much Mace Windu meant them.

The brash Padawan turned Crechemaster was barely holding back from fidgeting, employing every trick Obi-Wan, Trento, and even Mace had taught him over the past weeks to hide his thoughts and true intent. He felt he was completely justified in being nervous, however, considering what he was about to do. Also considering how he’d made himself not stop at the apartment to see Padme before coming to the Senate building. Oh, how he’d wanted to; he felt she deserved to know that it was tipping-point time (he’d left her a message just to warn her, but it certainly didn’t feel like enough). Moreover, he wanted to see her before he did this, but he objectively knew that the more worried he was the more credible his emotions would be to the Sith lord.

He sensed that awful unbalance more and more clearly as he approached the Chancellor’s office, forcing his body to unclench a handful of degrees.

Chances were, this was it - point of no return.

“And... Something wrong?” He made himself smile slightly.

“Quite the opposite, Chancellor. I have good news.”

The pale man in front of him seemed to freeze for the shortest second, calculating, before he reflected Anakin’s expression, and waved off his entourage.

“You’ve piqued my interest. Come tell me about it in my office,” he lured, resting a hand on the Jedi’s shoulder again.

He felt like he was being drawn into a cage with a rancor.

When the door closed, Palpatine turned to him expectantly. “So what’s this good news, my young friend?”

“I volunteered to tell you in person, Sir - we’ve received word from Obi-Wan. He, Master Koon, and Padawan Tano have engaged General Grievous. They should have him defeated shortly.” He’d discussed with Master Windu how much he should divulge to Palpatine - they both thought telling him that they were already successful would spook him and make him change his plans - possibly to something they wouldn’t know how to counter.

The Chancellor put on an expression of hopeful skepticism. “Well, I’m sure between the three of them they’ll be victorious.” Anakin nodded, doing his damnedest to conceal his pride in his Force signature.

“I know they will.”
His opponent seemed to briefly analyze that before making a move.

“Forgive me for saying so, Anakin, but you seem to have more faith in your fellow Jedi than they seem to have in you.”

Here we go, Anakin thought. “How so, Chancellor?” The Sith put on a patented look of sympathetic knowing.

“Don’t you wonder why they haven’t offered you a place on the Council?”

Because I’m damn busy, that’s why, and they know I don’t have the time to sit in meetings, he thought. But he made his emotions and face stay still.

“…I wish I knew.” He mentally sifted through the emotional traps he knew the older man was trying to lay for him. “More and more I get the feeling… I’m being kept cut off from the council, and their decisions.” He paused to create more anticipatory tension (as if he wasn’t feeling plenty of his own). “If they won’t let me make the changes to the curriculum I feel are necessary… then there must be things about the Force they’re not telling me.” He felt that was the best bait to tempt the Sith into revealing himself, but it was also ironically true, to a degree. It hadn’t been the Council as a whole or his own teachers as a child who taught him how to view and access the Force differently. It was Trento and later Obi-Wan. The difference was that the Council as a body either didn’t know about the unorthodox teachings or didn’t think it necessary to stop them.

The Chancellor nodded in understanding. “They don’t trust you, Anakin. That’s why they accepted you in a role far removed from the war. They see your power; they know it’s too strong for them to control.”

There was a tiny, buried part of Anakin that was hissing ‘come on, get to the point, get it over with already.’ He told it to shut up before they got caught.

“Let me show you the intricacies and hidden depths of the Force.”

Now they were getting somewhere, and it was reflected in his increasing heart rate.

“How do you know the ways of the Force?” he asked, trying to make it sound like this was his first time hearing about it.

“My Master taught me everything about the Force - even the nature of the Dark side.”

Finally.

“You know the Dark side?” He made sure his face was set in an alarmed and questioning frown. Palpatine - Sidious - kept his body very still as he replied, fixing him with a piercing, persuading, reassuring look.

“Anakin, if one is to understand the Great Mystery one must study all its aspects, not just dogmatic, narrow view of the Jedi. If you wish to become the complete and wise leader I know you can be, if you wish to save people in an even greater capacity, you must embrace… a larger view of the Force.”

They began to circle each other with tension. Sidious was developing more momentum, and Anakin was telling himself to keep breathing as he kept a vigilant, defensive scowl. His feed was recording everything and relaying it to the others back at the Temple, he just had to keep the disguised monster talking.
“Be careful of the Jedi, Anakin. Only through me can you achieve a power greater than any Jedi! Learn to use the power of the Dark side, and you will be able to save your wife from certain death.”

And Anakin, even as the words felt like a punch to the chest, felt a thrill of victory ignited in him. It was as good as perjuring himself as to having planted the visions and caused the danger, since Anakin had never divulged them to his false confidant. He put nearly everything he had into keeping the twisted satisfaction tamped down.

“What did you say?” (Please, repeat it, for clarity.) His enemy adopted a pleading, placating manner.

“Use my knowledge, I beg you!” Finally, he couldn’t take any more.

“You’re the Sith lord,” he ground out, drawing his lightsaber and igniting it.

The backstabbing eel - TRAITOR - didn’t even deny it, only pressing for him to listen, stop being a pawn of the Council, etc. He kept laying on the temptation - of power, of living a more meaningful life than most Jedi, of significance. He was so confident in his abilities to persuade that he ended up with his back to Anakin, the younger man’s blade raised between them, point just a few inches away from the Sith’s head.

“Are you going to kill me?”

How the hells did he sound so calm? He was lightyears more calm than Anakin felt he could ever be again.

“I’d certainly like to.” That was the simplest, easiest truth he’d told Supreme Chancellor Palpatine in weeks.

“I know you would. I can feel your anger,” the Sith breathed out, and Anakin fought to maintain that anger to mask his revulsion. “It gives you focus, makes you stronger.”

You wish, Anakin thought savagely. Reminding himself of his goal, he made himself deactivate his blade.

“I should turn you over to the Jedi Council.”

“Oh course you should,” Sidious replied smoothly. “But you don’t know their intentions.”

The Jedi morphed his face into uncertainty. “Intentions?” The Sith nodded sagely.

“I told you, Anakin. The Jedi want control of the Republic. If the destroy Grievous, they’ll think the war to be over, and they’ll try to seize the Senate next. They’re relentless, they won’t stop until the galaxy is under their control, and they’ll wage civil war without end until they get it.

“You’ve met the Senators, Anakin - spent time with them. You know they’d be helpless to defend themselves against the Jedi. We must protect them.”

Anakin, meanwhile, sensed a small part of his mind pondering furiously if there was some parallel dimension somewhere where any of this made even the slightest bit of rational sense, because he was so lost as to be rendered speechless. This couldn’t be real, any of it.

“You know what must be done, don’t you Anakin?” the Sith asked softly, as the younger man was desperately trying to keep up and maintain the facade.

“…The Senators must be protected. All of them.”
“Yes. You know what this means. If the Jedi aim to seize control of the Republic, they defy everything we stand for. They are the enemy, Anakin. They’ve just been hiding it, but they always have been. It’s why they don’t accept anyone who might deviate from their Code, why they have never trusted you. They knew you have the power to defeat them.”

Anakin suddenly realized that he’d been wrong. The tipping point hadn’t been when he’d approached Palpatine - the moment was now, and he felt it like a boulder on his chest, crushing the air from the lungs.

“You must protect us, Anakin. You must protect Padme. Become my apprentice, and learn to use the power of the Dark side. If we destroy the threat of the Jedi, we can bring peace to the galaxy.”

***************************

Deep within the Jedi Temple, Mace Windu and a small handful of other Jedi listened to the recorder’s audio pickup intently, each feeling a growing sense of dread, both in the Force and in themselves.

It was like watching an air train wreck. And knowing that only part of the train was out of control didn’t really help matters.

With a chill of understanding crawling up his spine, Mace realized the corner Anakin had been backed into. By now, the Chancellor likely would not let him leave to bring his discovery to the Council in person; he knew too much. The younger Jedi essentially had precious few options at this point: He could pretend to raise the alarm regarding the presence of a Sith (since in reality he already WAS raising the alarm), and likely be killed in the process. Or he could attempt to subdue and arrest the Sith himself, and likely be killed in the process. He knew how skilled young Skywalker was, but with no combat experience in so long, and such brief experience to begin with…

Or, he could keep playing along, try to lead the Chancellor or his forces into a more literal trap, and hope for the best.

He knew Anakin would make the self-sacrifice if necessary, but he also knew that they would need everyone they could get if it came down to full-on battle against a Sith and all its available allies.

“…Fulfill your destiny, Anakin. Go to the Jedi Temple. Catch them off guard, and wipe them out. Every last Jedi is a threat to the Republic and must be destroyed. Do this for me - for the Senate - and you will have proven your loyalty. You will be the harbinger of peace for all the galaxy.”

They could hear Anakin’s tense, conflicted breathing.

“And… you swear to help me save Padme’s life?”

“Yes. I swear.”

“Then… yes. You’re right. We must protect the Republic.”

“Kriff,” Mace groaned.

***************************

“What about the other Jedi spread throughout the galaxy?” Anakin asked.

“They’re betrayal will be dealt with,” Sidious replied darkly. Not as specific as he would have hoped for, the Jedi thought grimly. He’d wanted the Sith to openly claim responsibility for the chips, but he
supposed hostile takeover of the Republic into a dictatorship, murder of entire group of people, and enslavement of another sentient people would have to be enough.

“Who will come with me to the Temple?” he wondered. Sidious couldn’t really be expecting him to murder all remaining residents of the Temple on his own.

“Take the 501st Battalion,” the Chancellor rumbled, and if Anakin hadn’t learned so much control from his senior Masters he could have wept with relief - all the 501st were clean. They wouldn’t obey Sidious’ orders. His relief, however, was short-lived.

“I will send reinforcements behind you if necessary - an elite force loyal to the Senate, and a number of battle droids that were salvaged from the Separatist armies after skirmishes and re-programed to serve the Republic.”

Damn. He didn’t know how many ‘a number’ was, but he very much did not want to underestimate.


In all his years as a Jedi, he never thought he’d be tasked to fake leading a murderous assault on the Jedi Temple.

Kriff.

***************************

On Utapau, the combined efforts of Obi-Wan, Plo, Ahsoka, and all their troops made relatively short work of Grievous’ remaining droid army presence. Between their joint efficiency and the resistance they had inspired several locals to, the battle was virtually over and they were cleaning up as much as they could of the aftermath before Obi-Wan could say “interplanetary relations.” Getting an intense pressing nudge from the Force that time was of the essence, they were all boarded on their ships and underway hours if not days before Obi-Wan and the 212th might have been alone.

They were just about to make the jump to hyperspace when it happened.

Cody’s communicator pinged - with a frequency none of them had ever used before.

The Marshal Commander went stiff as a board, the blood draining from his face, and Obi-Wan could feel the onset of his trembling in the Force. He put a hand on his Commander’s shoulder.

“You can do this,” he whispered. “Just like we discussed. You’re not alone - so many of your brothers are here. I’m with you.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Cody whispered back. They both knew he hadn’t quite been able to let go of his fear that his mind could still be influenced somehow. But the communicator kept insistently sounding, not to be waited out, so the clone soldier pulled in a deep breath, drawing back his shoulders. He put on his bucket to hide his face as the Jedi retreated into the shadows and out of sight. When Cody was satisfied that the General was hidden, he accepted the transmission.

A robed and hooded figure appeared in the blue hologram in his palm.


***************************
Obi-Wan could sense the way Cody had seemed to freeze solid, fighting to keep his betrayed rage hidden in his body and his thoughts, even if he wasn’t sure Palpatine - Sidious - could.

He was prouder than he could say when he saw Cody nod, and reply in a deceptively calm voice…

“It will be done, my Lord.”

The blue image of the Chancellor - the Sith - had barely flickered out of being when Cody had begun clenching the communicator in his fist, nearly crushing it. Obi-Wan reached out and took it from him.

“Well done,” he murmured. But his calm only lasted until Cody looked up at him - his eyes storming with hurt, anger and betrayal.

“That’s it, I guess. He really proved it.” His voice was thick with emotion. “He… if he’s a Sith, then I guess I’d expect him to hate Jedi, for whatever hells-given reason they make up for themselves. And us… he just told me we’re nothing to him. To the Senate. Nothing - tools. flesh droids. Cannon fodder. He really proved it.”

Obi-Wan, feeling a tide of emotion rising in himself, put his hands on his Commander’s shoulders, almost close enough for his fingers to brush the sides of Cody’s neck.

“Well done,” he murmured. But his calm only lasted until Cody looked up at him - his eyes storming with hurt, anger and betrayal.

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Obi-Wan, feeling a tide of emotion rising in himself, put his hands on his Commander’s shoulders, almost close enough for his fingers to brush the sides of Cody’s neck.

“No to the Senate. Not to the Republic. Not to US. Just to him, and those who side with him. You and every one of your brothers are more than he could ever be. Never forget that.”

Cody nodded, still looking at his feet.

Cody was such a strong, steady man. Easily one of if not the best soldier in the Army. Responsible, and there for his kin in a way even some Jedi couldn’t claim to be. Confident in his abilities without being cocky.

Nothing should be able to make him feel so terribly about himself.

No sentient thing should have the power to murder an entire culture of people, either. Nothing should have the power or the inclination to wipe out the free will and individuality of an entire culture of people.

No one should have the ability to seize totalitarian control of a galaxy.

No one should think they can have that much power over other lives.

“Help me make him regret thinking he could do this to you. To us.”

Chapter End Notes

I know my way of showing thoughts / mental communication is all over the place, because I'm too lazy to reformat the whole damn thing in rich text mode just for the sake of being able to italicize a handful of lines. If anyone knows an easier way, please clue me in.
Meanwhile on Felucia, Master Aayla Secura and Commander Bly were leading the 327th Star Corps in scouting the jungle for hidden Separatist forces when Bly received a transmission - a transmission from a new frequency. She saw him hang back a moment to answer it, and as she passed him and felt his presence behind her, she felt a sudden dense spike of danger in the Force.

After hearing the indiscernible murmurs (not using her abilities to eavesdrop) a few moments, she suddenly she heard his blaster rifle snap up behind her - what did he see? She looked up at the ridge-

Three humanoids leapt from the trees - all bearing large cylindrical canisters on their backs attached to cone-shaped hoses, and all wearing some sort of gas masks. The leader raised the hose he wielded at the troopers.

“Sorry about this, boys - but eat sedative.”

Then the air was thick with opaque gray fog - she quickly drew her omni-breather and pressed it to her mouth - as the soldiers behind her cough and gasped, even through their helmets. Even as they kept trying to aim their blasters at… at her?

Why would they aim at her?

She spun back to face the newcomers, raising her saber. She couldn’t speak through the omni-breather, but the intent was clear.

“Peace, Master Secura,” the leader intoned through his mask. “You’re among friends. At least…” He looked over her shoulders as the last of her men dropped their blasters from limp fingers and slumped to the ground, unconscious.

“At least now you are.” She cautiously stepped closer through the thinning fog.

An additional thing the three had in common was that they all wore forest green jumpsuits sporting patches depicting the Jedi Order emblem. Peering at their faces, she finally felt at liberty to breathe a
sigh of relief.

“I think you’d better start explaining, Master Hoft-Tam.”

****************************

Across the galaxy, Jedi Generals and Commanders were receiving messages of Grievous’ defeat, and to be on-guard, and to stand by for further updates. Less than two hours later, clone Commanders and Captains across the galaxy were receiving messages containing an order they would not follow, and struggling to come to terms with the emotional fallout. Less than an hour after that, all Jedi and clones were receiving new messages…

****************************

Anakin sat with the 501st soldiers in the military transport, and not a word was spoken between any of them. They were all straining to come to grips with what was happening.

The only way he’d been able to keep some semblance of Jedi emotional control and not start yelling incoherently was to mentally break down this… ‘development’ into its simplest parts. Sidious had ordered him to take the 501st with him to the Temple (for the mass murder), so Anakin had gone to the barracks and gathered the troops, not briefing them on what was actually happening until they were under way.

To take a company of clone soldiers to the Temple now, under this context, made him want to beat himself into blissful unconsciousness against the transport hull.

It didn’t even matter that it was a ruse, that none of them would genuinely be killing any Jedi. He was still disgusted with what he’d said, what he promised, what he was doing. It didn’t matter that he didn’t mean any of it. He was still terrified to the point of feeling physically sick, and felt more unclean than after the worst sandstorms and the foulest missions (and the messiest younglings).

But he couldn’t stop. He couldn’t give up the act yet. He couldn’t have attacked the Chancellor - Sidious - when he’d revealed himself. He was one Master against a Sith lord - one Master who hadn’t seen combat in years. He’d kept up on his saber training, of course, as much as possible, but this was different. And he had no idea if he could take on the equivalent of an entire assault team.

All he could do was take the clones (the de-chipped, FREE clones) with him to the Temple, warn everyone he could find, and set up a line of defense for when Sidious would inevitable send his reinforcements when he realized Jedi weren’t dying.

The entire company was so tense with anxiety over what was to come that when Rex’s communicator pinged again, he and the nearest clones (plus Anakin) all jumped nearly out of their skin, but his hand was steady when he drew the device and activated it.

“Captain Rex here,” he greeted, his tone betraying none of his nerves.

“Captain,” a female voice replied in polished tones - ones he recognized. “This is Duchess Satine Kryze. I was given this frequency by General Kenobi, and told to contact you in the case of any suspicious or worrying activity. I am now seeing a large military vehicle approaching the Jedi Temple. Can you tell me what is happening please?”

Anakin released a shaky huff of a laugh. “Good old Obi-Wan. I’ll take it please, Rex.” The Captain passed the communicator over without a word of dissent.

“Duchess, this is Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan’s former Padawan,” he greeted. “I’m assuming Obi-
Wan gave you some idea of the knowledge we’ve been having to sit on for the past few months regarding a threat against the Jedi Order.”

“You assume correctly.”

“Well then, whatever arrangement you made between the two of you, its time has come. The vehicle you see is full of clone soldiers, who the- Chancellor believes are accompanying me to the Temple - to the exterminate the Jedi there. What we will actually be doing is setting up a defense for the reinforcements he will later send.”

“… I see. Thank you, Master Skywalker. I will inform the others,” the Duchess replied with remarkable poise.

“Others?” Anakin questioned in surprise, but she had already hung up.

“Politicians,” Rex huffed with a shake of his head.

In the Temple, Padawan Jura Kem’ke was fighting to maintain her budding Jedi serenity as she sat beside her Master at the computer terminal, Master Windu standing at her shoulder. Suffice it to say what they witnessed left her deeply shaken, but the Master of the Order gave them all reassurances that Master Skywalker was simply acting a part to obtain the information they were now backing up, and she trusted that.

Still… troopers coming to the Temple, under the pretense of-

“Done,” Master Cheun said, pulling the portable data drive from its port and holding it up to Master Windu. “Everything is on this.” The Korun Master pressed it back into her hand.

“Get this to the Senate. Get it to Mon Mothma, to Bail Organa, anyone who’s been sympathetic or at least open-minded to the Jedi in the interviews. If we’re attacked, the Senate has to know the truth.”

Jura saw her Master hesitate, obviously loathe to abandon the Temple and its inhabitants, but she squared her shoulders and took the drive, bowing low to Master Windu.

“May the Force be with you.”

“And with you,” he replied somberly. “Go with speed.” She nodded, stowing the drive deep in a pocket within her robes.

“Let’s go, Padawan.”

And Jura followed, wondering how different the Temple would be when they returned - If they returned.

When Anakin and the 501st arrived at the Temple, he was suddenly calm again. Yes, they were on borrowed time before Sidious sent his reinforcements, but directing the troopers where to set up lines and sentries gave him something to do, action to take rather than sitting and waiting, and working with Master Windu and the other Jedi still at the Temple was familiar and the slightest bit comforting. And the soldiers…

“What can we do to make it look like we’re actually attacking?” a clone soldier named Jesse asked.
“I don’t know - maybe we could find something that’s safe to catch on fire, and put it out on the stairs so it can be seen from the Senate,” another answered. “Fire where it shouldn’t be always makes people think chaos and mayhem. Fake a lot of yelling.”

Anakin couldn’t help but smile a little at that. He might not know the military, but something about this was almost familiar.

Just as he was corralling a few Jedi to take part in staged “battles” with clones (who would deliberately miss by several meters for light and sound effect), the evacuation efforts were sped along by an unexpected arrival.

The troopers raised their blasters in genuine alarm when a familiar cruiser suddenly descended from the air lanes, hovering over a landing pad. The hatch opened and the ramp lowered, down which two people ran, jumping the last few feet to the ground. They both held up their hands as the troopers drew near.

“Senator Organa?” Anakin asked incredulously.

“Master Skywalker!” the dark-haired man greeted in relief. “We’re here to help. You did tell the Duchess it was time for the plan to be enacted.” Wondering exactly what plan, the Jedi looked over at the other newcomer.

“Duchess Kryze, I’m guessing?” She maintained her regal bearing, even wearing plain and utilitarian clothes with her hands still raised.

“Master Skywalker,” she returned. “Delighted to meet you in person. Obi-Wan’s told me so much about you.”

He vaguely wondered if that was good or bad, but decided he could find out later. He directed the troopers to “march” them inside at gunpoint out of direct sight from the outside. The soldiers then split off to “execute” them, firing at blank walls and garbage receptacles. “Die, traitor scum,” one shouted, in the most unconvincing tone imaginable.

“What did you have in mind?” He asked over the noise.

They explained about the assistance they promised Obi-Wan to give in evacuating the Creche and the Healing Halls, assuring that they could have their own transports on-hand in nearby space to transfer the evacuees to and split them up for security’s sake if necessary. He nodded in relief.

“Palpatine probably has security units stationed on the ground not far from the Temple - they could be on their way now,” he muttered, ignoring their gobsmacked faces at the name. “If each of you leads one group down through the lower level passages, that leaves more of us to cover you retreats. But pickup at the rendezvous points here on planet…?” Bail shook himself out of his shock, and smiled.

“I believe you know our ride.”

Anakin reached out his senses to the cruiser, to its cockpit, and sighed in loving exasperation to see Padme in the pilot’s seat, her rounded cheeks hiding a jaw set in determination.

He should have know impending motherhood wouldn’t hold her back from helping defend his brothers and sisters, and all the little younglings. He sent along a wave of affection, of be safe, of I love you. Not being a Jedi, she couldn’t return the message in kind, but he could sense her fierce, warm love rise in acknowledgement, before she pulled the cruiser up again and flew off to the first of the secret pickup zones. Bail and Satine split up to their decided groups, Bail to the Creche and the
Duchess to the Halls.

As she set off, a clone trooper stopped her. “Ma’am, excuse me, but do you not have anything to arm yourself with?” She held up her electron disruptor.

“I do my best to avoid lethal use of force, Trooper-?”

“Captain Rex, Ma’am. We spoke briefly over comm. And honestly? You’re going to defend ill and injured and otherwise incapacitated Jedi with that thing?” He shook his head, pulling out one of his blaster pistols and holding it out to her, grip forward. “Take it, please. Just to have it in case. But…” He trailed off, slightly embarrassed. “Try to give it back later. When it’s over. Ma’am.”

She sighed, tucking the pistol into a pouch on her belt. “If the Captain insists. You’ll certainly be getting it back, Captain Rex. You have my word.” She nodded to him, in a businesslike but grateful manner. “Good luck to you.” He smirked, not unkindly.

“I do my best to avoid relying on luck.”

She smiled in understanding, and then she was dashing off, pale golden hair gleaming in the moonlight streaming through the vast windows. He shook his head, before going to continue directing his brothers.

“Politicians,” he muttered.

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Anakin was absolutely certain of the moment when Sidious realized he’d waited too long while sensing no death whatsoever from the Temple. He was certain, because he felt a writhing, oily spike of anger and impatience in the Force, and mere minutes afterward, the reinforcements started coming. Fives and Echo reported what they saw of the oncoming horde from their views at the front windows. The Creche evacuation still wasn’t finished.

And “a number” of droids was a massive understatement. Palpatine might as well have put up a billboard saying “I’ve stolen an entire double-legion of the enemy army for my own purposes.” Fives and Echo reported others alongside the droids: the Chancellor’s own Red Guards, and a frankly alarming number of Coruscant Security Guards.

With so many Jedi out in the field, there were many Jedi Guardians and Consulars left in the Temple who would have the most combat skills to fight off the attack. There was Master Windu and one other Council member, but it would be down to Healers and Crechemasters to defend their charges.

Master Norren, kind, elderly, wouldn’t-hurt-a-fly Master Norren insisted on staying, ordering the on-duty Knight to go with Bail, the adolescent Jedi training for the position, and the younglings as their defense. Anakin tried to convince him to go with them, but the seasoned Master merely drew his lightsaber and said the younglings would need someone young and powerful to protect them - here was were he belonged.

It would be down to them.

Bizarrely, he was reminded of early in his teaching days, when he was just gearing up to take Master Norren’s role and become the observed instead of the observer.

“Anakin,” Norren had said very seriously when he’d pulled the young Knight aside, “I know how
advanced you are in Djem-Sho by now; Master Drallig’s last eval was very impressed. But I highly recommend asking your former Master to help you build up on Soresu.” Anakin had been baffled at the time.

“Why, Master?” The seasoned Crechemaster looked grim.

“Because there’s a chance you’d need it for a duty I pray you’ll never have to fulfill.”

And he’d done so, and learned and trained, because of course with Anakin’s luck, he’d need it.

Force, he needed it now.

He planted himself at the entrance to the Creche with Norren at his side, his heart hammering a war beat nearly loud enough to drown out the children methodically climbing down into the passage. He drew his saber and held it at the ready before him, breathing deeply, centering himself.

Not a moment too soon, because the first wave of battle droids and human, murderous guards were flanking the clone troopers and rounding the corner of the hall leading to him.

But, he realized, they didn’t matter.

It didn’t matter that they’d just accepted an order to kill all Jedi, without considering their sentience or the innocence of their targets. It didn’t matter that they invaded his home.

He had a purpose, and they were in direct opposition to it. He knew what he had to do, so he did it.

He hadn’t set foot on a battlefield since Geonosis, but somehow he felt ready. He wondered, distantly, if this is what Qui-Gon saw for him, all those years ago. He’d do Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, Ahsoka, Plo, Mace, Trento, Padme and all the others proud - or die trying, and drag as many enemies with him as he could along the way.

He kept breathing. He let the Force fill him like a pillar of radiant flame. As he drew his saber back to meet the first of the droids’ blaster fire, he felt as powerful as the corona of a sun.

And any who dared to try to pass him to hurt his younglings would burn.

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Master Cheun and Padawan Kem’ke arrived at the Senate building, reaching out with their senses even as they leapt from their transport and rushed inside. Cheun could tell neither Organa nor Amidala were in the building, but… there.

Mon Mothma, and not three hundred meters from their position.

The serene red-haired woman received quite a shock when they both ran up to her and insisted they needed to speak to her immediately, but when they told her they’d discovered what (or, more precisely, WHO) had been prolonging the war and the the death toll it exacted, she made her attention clear. They produced the data drive, and told her that as many Senators needed to hear its contents as possible.

She thought for a moment, then a tentative smile spread slowly on her face.

“I definitely think I can help you, my friends.”

**************************
Anakin, as focused as he was and working as hard as he was, could also feel the exact moment Sidious realized NO Jedi were dying throughout the galaxy, and that…

That he’d been outed.

He Force pushed a wave of droids back, and focused -

Radiating from the Senate building, he could feel the shock, bewilderment, and indignation of hundreds of Senators, rapidly building into anger.

But overpowering their anger… a rage, massive, black and boiling, that seemed to fly toward the Temple like a blast wave of toxic ashen storm clouds.

He was on his way, and he was coming for Anakin.

He was about to bear the brunt of a Sith Master’s rage, in addition to defending himself and Norren (poor man had taken a bolt to both legs and gone down) from the onslaught of the droids and guards.

Force help him.

At least the younglings were all out, now. That was all he could realistically ask for.

Fortunately, reinforcements of his own were nearly there, he could feel it. Anakin could sense the presences of Windu and a few others drawing rapidly closer in the Force from elsewhere in the Temple, and he would have more brothers and sisters to fight at his side soon.

The problem was that it might not be soon enough - he could hear the pounding of steps of more droid reinforcements just a few hundred meters down the hall from him… he could FEEL Sidious approaching in his private transport- he might not be able to hold all of them off- they were almost here-

The vast window across from him suddenly shattered in an explosion of glass and thin bars of metal. As the gleaming, winking shards fell to the floor in a din, he could see a ship - no, two ships hovering just beyond, their hatches open. Many of the droids turned at the interruption, to face the two Jedi leaping through the empty window frame, more clone troopers behind them, and…

Wait. Was that third person in front… was that Obi-Wan, in red Mandalorian armor?

…It was. What in all the Force?
Chapter Summary

Whew, second-to-last chapter of this space oddity (references!); a little epilogue to follow this one that's pretty much already written. As always, un-betaed and open to constructive feedback.

Sorry about the wait, and any badness, so I'm just gonna get on with it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Anakin had only about thirty seconds to experience the relief of having Obi-Wan, Plo, Ahsoka, and all their soldiers there before they all were hit by something like a blast of frigid wind in the Force, a dense weight pressing down on them all. The knot in his stomach returned, as swift as breath.

“SKYWALKER!”

The enraged bellow rattled his eardrums with unnatural power.

He spun to face the scarlet-robed intruder, fighting to ignore the bone-deep chill of dread that had beset him.

“Darth Sidious,” he greeted grimly. The Sith lord snarled.

“You made a very foolish choice in deceiving me, boy.” That, at least, gave Anakin a sort of mental foothold to regain himself.

“I was only following your brilliant example, Supreme Chancellor,” he returned dryly. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that for once Obi-Wan seemed - implausibly - too angry to summon his usual snark to add. He was quivering with apprehension, and something else.

“You glib attitude won’t save you, Jedi. You ruined what I’ve been building for years, and used my own plans against me. You are the disloyal mutt that needs to be put down.”

“I’m not betting on anything in particular saving me right now, so I’m glad we’re being honest. I wouldn’t have had to deceive you if you hadn’t decided to murder all of us in a ridiculous bid to take over the galaxy. And who knows - maybe I really am a mutt. They’re known for being hardy.”

But reasoning it seemed would have no effect on the Sith, and Sidious had clearly had enough talking. His formerly (falsely) kind face twisted grotesquely with hatred, he drew a lightsaber from within his voluminous robes, a ruby beam of burning light erupting from his fist.

“Kark,” Anakin muttered, raising his own blade again.

He knew as soon as the beam of his saber first clashed with Sidious,’ the other’s pounding down on his with a Force-enhanced brute strength that left his wrists and shoulders jolting with strain, he knew the new arrivals wouldn’t be able to help him as much as he initially thought, because the Sith had somehow brought MORE reinforcements of his own (kriff, did he own the entire Coruscant Police
Corps?) who immediately engaged Obi-Wan and his companions.

It certainly didn’t stop Obi-Wan from trying to reach his side, however.

Sidious rained blow after blow on him, leaving him reaching into the Force constantly just to keep up of attempt to anticipate his movements. He twisted and coiled and writhed, thrusting his blade from every direction, hissing and snarling and crouching like the most unnatural hybrid of beasts. All the while Anakin could feel the Dark side his enemy commanded pounding down against him like a gale of poisonous gas, and the air virtually sparked from that same unbalance he’d felt so often before in the Sith’s presence.

As hard as Anakin fought, he was somehow able to perceive a measure of what was happening around him (not so much from his own skill as the Force allowing him an extra set of eyes). With that measure of awareness, he was quite certain that Obi-Wan didn’t have it.

While Ahsoka and Plo definitely fought like a well-oiled machine, cutting down droids and incapacitating the guards with elegant efficiency, his old Master was throwing himself into the fight in a way Anakin had never seen before. He seemed to be aware enough only to tell friend from foe.

His lightsaber moved so fast it was just a blur of light through the air - normal enough for the Negotiator. But what wasn’t normal was his form, his style. Normally, Obi-Wan used Soresu with bits of Ataru or another form thrown in as needed, focusing on defense. Now, he was using both almost equally, but in a way Anakin had never seen. Now, he was on the attack in a completely out-of-character way, like a red guided missile disguised as a human, cutting down droid after droid without end, seamlessly jumping from one Red Guard to the next, kriiffing vaulting over his fellow Jedi to snuff out an enemy about to attack their backs, while also never letting an invader get the jump on Ahsoka (who was damn impressive on her own). He never once gave a single hint of slowing or tiring. He left that small measure of Anakin left over from just not dying under the Sith’s blade in absolute awe.

Anakin would swear that in these moments, Obi-Wan was driven not by conscious thought, but by nothing except pure, raw purpose, and sustained by nothing but the Force.

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He could feel the Dark energy building around him, aimed at him, pressing down and thinning the air. He distantly wondered if Sidious would just combust him with his will alone -

But not quite, because he miscalculated a block by what felt like a hair’s width, and the crimson beam of light came down close enough to heat the metal in his right hand, severing the hilt of his lightsaber in two in a burst of sparks.

Sensing more than seeing the furious red blade swinging back around toward his head, he obeyed the first instinct to surface, and shoved the Sith back thirty feet (parting several pairs of combatants) with a Force push, so hard he didn’t stop until he hit the far wall. Exploiting the precious microseconds before he could re-orient himself, Obi-Wan, eyes blazing and hair matted with sweat, yanked the lightsaber from Sidious’ hand from across the room, swinging his blade neatly to destroy the incoming hilt mid-air. Plo and Ahsoka immediately closed ranks in front of him to mitigate any retaliation.

But Sidious, it seemed, was now past the point of punishing any one Jedi.

“I hope those brats of yours, and the esteem of your fellow Jedi filth, and the bed of your mewling
idealistic whore and her spawn were worth it, Skywalker. I’ll hunt them down, and I’ll make you watch all of them die as slowly and painfully as possible, and let you keep begging for death before I grant you that mercy.”

Anakin felt the buildup seconds before he witnessed it burst forth - a spiderweb of jagged unnatural light, welling up within the Sith and shooting outward in a spread, at all of the Temple’s defenders except Anakin.

Some Jedi were able to raise their lightsabers and protect themselves from the Force lightning - others weren’t so fast, and the clones didn’t even have the option.

An agonized, dissonant chorus of screams split the air and the Force.

Anakin stood rooted in place, horror freezing his insides as he watched his brothers and sisters, their loyal soldiers, writhe and shriek in unspeakable torment, unable to wrap his mind around it.

After everything - after all they had done and all that work and dedication - he would still be forced to stand and watch them all be tortured to death?

(No,) the Force whispered in his mind, the faintest touch of a cool, clean wind.

(Breathe. Breathe, and remember.) And with nothing to lose but everything, EVERYTHING to win, he did.

He reached in, pulling the air into his lungs and letting it go (the creed of the Jedi, to be able to let go), and let the Force wrap its arms around him, and realized.

He had exactly what he needed.

Everything he’d learned had been training him for this.

He could have laughed. He remembered all his tinkering and mechanical meditation, and his bizarre ability in that shuttle, and could swear he felt his mother’s warm smile in him.

He had exactly what he needed, and he was always good at improvising.

He reached within, more than ever before, and began moving the electrons faster than he’d ever done previously, acting faster than he could think. Letting the Force fill him, build his energy.

He raised his arms in front of him, toward the Sith, the unstable charge. He let the Force ground him, and pulled.

Every arc of lightning pouring into other Jedi and clones now suddenly diverted and flew at him, and he closed his eyes, braced his arms, and let them all in.

Maybe it was just the Force going easy on him, but it wasn’t what he expected.

Every inch of his skin was buzzing, like any jolt from metal on a cold dry day amplified by an unspeakable degree. Combined with the jittery feeling inside from having waaaay too much caff. Times a million.

He couldn’t say it truly hurt, but maybe that was just his pain receptors pushed past the brink of
functioning.

It tingled. A lot.

He couldn't say at all how long it lasted (he was honestly in some strange place outside the realm of anything as beautifully simple as thinking), before suddenly the onslaught ceased, leaving him reeling as his atoms readjusted themselves back into their normal configurations.

He thought faintly, once he was again capable of it, that his robes might be smoking.

Across the wide room and the sea of Jedi, clones, droids and Guards, Sidious stared at him, arms hanging loosely at his sides, dumbfounded.

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The official Archived report of the events of that night would simply outline that, grasping that Force lightning apparently didn’t work on Anakin the way it was supposed to, the way it worked on others, the would-be Emperor changed tactics, to one that would prove ultimately unfavorable to him.

The more accurate truth of what happened was that the Sith-Chancellor went completely berserk.

He didn’t Force jump at Anakin so much as twist himself unnaturally through the air at him. Anakin, still reacquainting himself with the concept of having limbs and an organic body, barely had the time to see it, let alone dodge. A seething crimson mass plowed him off his feet onto his back, a clammy and searing hot pale hand wrapped around his throat.

Around them, chaos broke out again in a havoc of baster fire and saber blades sizzling - possibly even some basic fisticuffs.

Sidious wasn’t seeming to speak actual sentences for the most part, just a jumbled mass of enraged snarling intermixed with the occasional snippets like “brats,” “ungrateful,” “freak” or “fool.” Meanwhile, Anakin was struggling to pull the Sith’s hands away and suffocating while all his allies were all being held at bay.

As black dots were appearing in his vision and his lungs were burning in earnest, he heard a call from somewhere near, and yet not quite near enough.

“ANAKIN!” And he felt a surge of the Force drawing his attention.

Obi-Wan’s lightsaber was sailing from his hand across the room toward Anakin.

(Thank you, brother), he thought, and held out his hand.

The Force pulled the saber hilt into his palm with sure and true aim, and a pure white blade of energy skewered Darth Sidious, entering at the bottom of a ribcage and exiting at the neck, burning through the Sith lord’s rotted heart on the way.

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The problem, Anakin realized, with killing a Sith lord who happened to be straddling you and trying to strangle you was in fact two fold: One being that when you are too distracted to use additional Force energy, the blood and bile that the aforementioned Sith chokes on and coughs up falls onto your face. The other being the heavy and repulsive mass that slams onto you when said Sith loses muscle control and properly dies. Both of these unpleasantries distracted Anakin from whatever else was happening around him for several moments.
By the time he’d shoved Sidious off of him and had rolled to his feet, wiping the blood off his face with his still smokey sleeve and determined to spend at least an hour in the shower as soon as kriffing possible, his ears and eyes were actually processing input again.

“Obi-Wan!” The cry was not his own, but when he turned and saw the cause, he repeated it.

The armored Councilor was down, having neglected his guard when he sent his saber to Anakin, and a Red Guard stood over him, energy staff raised high to deliver the killing blow.

“NO!”

Anakin summoned a Force push to throw the Guard into the far wall, but that didn’t hit him before the several blaster bolts to the head and chest.

He spun again as the Guard fell, so fast he nearly made himself dizzy. Ah. He wasn’t really surprised, because there was Commander Cody, blaster still tucked tightly to his shoulder and ferocious coals of rage burning in his dark eyes. Always ready to defend his General.

While several other Jedi, Clones, and Corps members were finishing with their opponents, Anakin and Cody with Mace rushed over to the still form of Obi-Wan. Cody shot the Red Guard one more time for safety (none of the Jedi commented), before kneeling at the Negotiator’s side and setting his blaster down.

“Obi-Wan! General! Obi-Wan!”

Mace, robes bloody and torn, knelt at Obi-Wan’s other side, putting two fingers to his neck as Anakin knelt at his shoulder, heart pounding and throat too clogged for words.

“He’s alive, but unconscious,” the Korun Master breathed out, painfully relieved. More clones, mainly 212th, had incapacitated their foes and came to huddle around their felled General, their worry apparent as Plo and Ahsoka anxiously joined them.

“Make a hole,” Healer Che’s authoritative voice suddenly cut through the confused mass, and the troopers parted as she carried a med kit to Obi-Wan’s unresponsive body, taking Mace’s place as he stood aside. Master Magd limped up behind her and stood at the ready at her back, her yellow lightsaber still ignited but trembling, eyes darting and looking still very much ready for a fight, despite her injured leg and a painful-looking scorch mark on her shoulder. Anakin wasn’t surprised that they had both chosen to stay.

Vokara briefly held out her hands over Obi-Wan’s body and focused, determining the Negotiator’s state, before pulling off a section of his armor, opening the kit and preparing an injection.

Merely moments after receiving the drug, Obi-Wan’s eyes flew open and he gasped his way into the land of the aware, eyes flying in every direction and chest heaving from adrenaline.

Vokara had barely begun telling him to take it easy before Cody’s dropped blaster was flying into his hand, aiming over the heads of the clones kneeling at his feet end, and effectively halting a particularly stupid droid, the last one functioning, who had decided to try to get a few more hits in when the Jedi and clones had their backs turned. The droid had barely fallen in a sparking heap of metal when Obi-Wan’s arm fell back down to the floor, letting go of the blaster, with a clunk of armor. Cody let out an unsteady chuckle.

“There’s no keeping you down, General.” The red-armored Jedi fixed him with a particular look.

“Only when there’s anyone who needs me to keep going,” he rasped. The humor fell from the
Commander’s face, and his hand rose to smooth back Obi-Wan’s hair.

“Then you’ll never get to stay down,” he murmured thickly.

“I know,” the prone Jedi replied quietly. Cody’s palm had migrated down to his cheek, and he turned his head into its touch.

This seemed to be the breaking point for Cody, who shuddered with the emotional upheaval of the last several minutes, before leaning down to press his own cheek to Obi-Wan’s forehead, a few tears escaping.

“Cyare,” he whispered.

Anakin, his arm having come up around Ahsoka’s shoulder, felt his Master’s stunned gratitude and returned love, and still feeling rather punch-drunk from scrambling his atoms’ electrons, couldn’t help but laugh with delight.

Obi-Wan happily rested in the glowing care of those who surrounded him, and silently adding to the warm approval they were directing to Anakin, for a moment as the gathered finally started to follow the Crechemaster’s example and begin to come down out of crisis mentality. But it only lasted a few seconds before his eyes opened again, and darted anxiously to Master Windu at his side.

Mace huffed bemusedly.

“You know what? I don’t even mind. At this moment, I don’t have the capacity to mind. This night, and knowing that there’s more to deal with ahead of us… the future’s always in motion. I don’t begrudge anyone a bit of happiness. Not even a Jedi. I can’t anymore. We’re all going to need time and freedom to bounce back. Force help me, I think… I think I want to eat horribly unhealthy food, and drink alcohol. Just today. And sleep.”

His words cut away the final weights of tension in the group, and chuckles and smiled abounded. “I think we can help you with that, Master Windu,” Ahsoka piped up, keeping a reassuring point of contact with her hand resting on her Master’s ankle. Trento spoke up, finally emerging from her own trance of crisis readiness.

“I personally can’t wait to see Master Yoda’s face when he realizes this all went down here without him,” she mused detachedly.

Anakin, his hand finding his Master’s and giving it an affectionate squeeze, felt it returned wholeheartedly, and laughed again.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, the "rare pair" I'm trash for (one of them) isn't really all that rare, just in comparison to ones of mammoth popularity like Obikin or QuiObi. Whatever. I feel like I'm trash anyway because I barely know how to het pair at all.

On anther note, I felt awful writing Sidious' line about Padme, but somehow I don't think "tart" would be extreme enough for him.
Daybreak came over Coruscant with a hush that only seemed to last as short as the briefest breath, before the global city came alive with even more ruckus than usual. Citizens traded rapid rumors from beneath stoops and reporters practically shoved each other out of the way to catch transports, and there seemed far fewer City Guards around to keep things orderly, but for once the criminal population seemed to be holding its breath from the underground to see how the vague changes they’d been hearing from the surface would affect the future. People were spreading hushed reports of chaos both in the government and at the Jedi Temple, talk of a new emergency Chancellor being voted on, Senators resigning or stepping forward to speak passionately, injured Knights and clone soldiers alike being carted off the the Healing Halls, prisons being flooded with new inmates, smoke drifting off in cool breezes and shattered glass and droid parts being swept away.

It was with pleasant (if slightly suspicious) surprise that Dexter Jettster went to the front of his diner not too long after opening to find a quite haggard-looking Obi-Wan Kenobi, one of his closest Jedi friends.

“Obi-Wan!” he cried, wrapping the Councilor is a exuberant hug. “Glad to see you made it. Didn’t expect you to grace my humble establishment so soon, though. What a wild night! First all the commotion everyone could hear from the Temple, no one who supposedly ‘saw everything’ had a consensus on what in all Sith hells was happening. Then it’s like lightning struck the whole damn place—“ He didn’t quite process the shudder that passed over Obi-Wan’s expression - “-you could see it for miles… Then, couple hours later, word starts spreading from the Senate District, of all places, ‘bout some undercover work your old Padawan had done, and how the Chancellor was really a Sith lord all these damn years! Murderin’ and cheatin’ and lyin’ his way to the top, tryin’ to take over the whole damn galaxy, and your old boy Anakin smoked ‘im out, and that you all were in a huge crazy battle, and how you disarmed that creepy bastard yourself! And your boy killed him ‘cause he’d gone off his rocker and tried to set up all your men to kill you all, drop of a hat with no reason? But apparently you all caught it and totally trashed his plans? I mean… was last night a ‘too wild to make up’ night, or what?”

His friend seemed to sway on his feet a bit, in the wake of Dex’s admittedly massive barrage of a greeting. Then he collected himself.

“That is a rather accurate summary of what happened, old friend. It’s been complicated, and immensely exhausting.” Dex enthusiastically waved him in.
“Well, come on in a take a load off, then! We’ve just fired up the back. Anything you want, Obi-Wan, on the house. I insist!” The auburn-haired Jedi smiled ruefully.

“That’s terribly kind of you to offer, Dex, but not at all practical. There’s quite a lot of us, you see.” As if on cue, a hodgepodge of Jedi, clone troopers, and what he swore were a few fancy Senate people he’d seen on the news a few times filed in behind his friend, clumping together awkwardly inside the diner. All amassed, they totaled to fifteen.

“Ah,” he said. “Maybe just drinks on the house, then.”

“I will be your friend forever for that,” Trento replied roughly.

“Isn’t it a bit early for alcohol?” Commander Ponds asked. Mace had invited him so as to have “someone sane with him” while most of the rest of the Council were still returning to Coruscant, and likely in reference to the group that included Anakin and Padme, Bail and Satine, the “ridiculous” triad that was Obi-Wan, Ahsoka, and Plo (not to mention their clone Commanders and Captain), and “those two” (Trento and Vokara). Hearing the uncommonly candid references to his respected peers, Ponds had to privately wonder if General Windu had pre-gamed this peculiar, post-battle brunch.

“After last night, I don’t have a concept of ‘too early for alcohol,’” Vokara grumbled blearily.

Dex was glad to push several small tables together to add to his largest corner booth. Soon enough, everyone was situated with various beverages and patiently waiting for greasy, delicious food.

“Master Yoda just got back from Kashyyyk this morning, and since he’s apparently equipped with boundless energy, he offered to substitute for me for the day,” Anakin replied when Ahsoka asked about his Creche duties. “Said he missed teaching. I wonder how they’ll be for him,” he mused with a detached sort of glee. “Either they’ll be completely conked out from evacuating and coming back so fast, or they’ll be bouncing off the walls.” He was riding that zone of ‘so tired you’re buzzed,’ and thus had no energy to spare to give a thought about putting an arm around Padme’s shoulders and drawing her in close to his side (the others were happy to let the esteemed Senator have an end seat to accommodate her swollen middle).

“Urgh, this song,” Ahsoka groaned in the direction of the crackling old radio speaker. “It’s so lame. At least twenty years old.”

“Are you implying that anything older than twenty years is lame, Padawan mine?” Plo teased. She met the older Jedi’s gaze head on.

“Of course not, Master. The classics never go out of style,” she replied glibly, from where she was sandwiched between the Kel Dor and her human Master. He chuckled warmly through his mask.

“Classics, we are, my friend. That’s an interesting way of looking at it. You could make a negotiator out of her yet.”

“Not if she keeps trying to match your aviation skills. Or she’ll have to learn from someone else. There’s only so much spinning and hairpin turns and ‘innovative’ use of thrusters this ‘classic’ negotiator can tolerate,” Obi-Wan replied wryly, trying to act like he wasn’t holding his Commander’s hand under the table on his other side. The smirk his Padawan gave him was entirely too knowing.

“How are Master Norren and the others, Vokara?” Mace asked from the other side of the tables, sitting awkwardly between Ponds and Trento, who looked like she was trying to decide what to get
him to drink next.

“All either slathered in bacta, in healing trances, or both,” she replied. “The Force was with us, to a truly awe-inspiring degree. No fatalities, and everyone should be healed within the week.” She looked down at her hands, suddenly very quiet. “No fatalities,” she murmured, perplexed as if she didn’t believe it. Trento put an arm around her shoulders in silent solidarity, and the rest of the group gave a moment of quiet acknowledgement of how very close they came to total disaster.

After several somber moments, they seemed to collectively let out a breath of relief. Bail then spoke up.

“There’s one thing I don’t understand,” he began (“Just one?” Trento muttered). “How on earth did you remove the control chips from nearly all the troopers in such short time?” Mace took the initiative to give the initial reply.

“We stopped deceiving ourselves about knowing everything about what the Force - what the Sith - were doing,” he said pensively. “We collaborated with each other and with the outside world on a scale that hadn’t been done in centuries, if ever in the age of the Republic. We listened to each other, and to the Force.”

The civilians in the group shared a confused look. Trento patted his arm.

“I think he’s starting to crash. What he means is that we gave massive trust to and utilized the Service Corps branches, the ones that Initiates spent decades being wrongly terrified of being assigned to,” she began, with a pointed look at the Korun Master. “That huge Georgian Fever outbreak? That was all a front.” She nodded sagely at Bail and Satine’s expressions of shock.

“Yeah. We got in touch with any MedCorps, ExploreCorps, and TechCorps member we could find, and anyone from the AgriCorps who could help. They got in touch with any of their civilian colleagues they felt they could trust, made discrete contact with the local government, and set up a base. They got volunteers to accept a vaccine for the fever that would present their symptoms safely, to raise media alarm, putting the whole planet under quarantine to limit access to it outside of Jedi and the scientists and medical professionals working with them. We brought in the whole Army, in smaller chunks, to have their chips removed under the guise of being screened and vaccinated. The same thing with the battalions we recalled to the Temple Halls. We briefed all the Knights and Masters in the field only once they reached the secure spaces we set up, to keep risk of communication leaks as low as possible. And as a backup plan, we designed and produced portable sedative tanks to deploy on any unit of troopers who hadn’t had the procedure yet. In fact, Hoft-Tam messaged me just this morning before you brought the patients back, Duchess. He’s on his way back with Master Secura; said it worked like a charm.”

The two civilians stared at her and her Healer cohort.

“What?”

Bail shook his head, inordinately impressed. “I’ll never underestimate the Jedi’s determination and resourcefulness in rising to impossible challenges, is all.”

“Which reminds me,” Duchess Satine interjected suddenly. She withdrew a blaster pistol, and passed it grip first to Rex. He accepted it gratefully.

“Much thanks, Ma’am-“ He took a closer look at it. “It was fully charged last night. It’s lost some charge now.” He raised an inquiring eyebrow. She gave him a steady look in return.
“I do my best to avoid relying on luck… especially when there are innocent lives counting on me.”

He nodded in understanding. “I guess for a pacifist politician, you’re not so bad.”

She smirked warmly.

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(One Week Later)

“Hey, Boss?” Trento gave the image on her communicator her full attention.

“Talk to me, Retimkin.”

“Well, you know how you sent us here to get a sense of how many clones were in a holding pattern after Master Kenobi ordered production halted?”

“… Yeah.”

“Well, when he did that, it seems he didn’t take into account that they still had some in development. And he ordered the growth acceleration removed.”

“Huh.”

“Yeah. And he had a lot on his plate, so he might have forgotten about that. So now there’s about one hundred clones in early fetal stage, another hundred in the equivalent of beginning of third trimester development, and another hundred clones in infancy. And since Lama Su and everyone who was helping him make decisions and carry out the deception are karking cold-hearted bottom-feeders, Mon Mothma put it to a vote and the Senate ordered Kamino to relinquish legal custody and rights to all clones. To the body that ‘ordered’ the Army in the first place.”

“… Right. So we’ve got responsibility for over three hundred clones in either pre-birth or infancy status, who are going to age at a normal human speed, in addition to being responsible for securing the legal status of every living clone in the GAR, is what you’re saying?”

“Yeeeeeah.”

“Got it.”

“We are going to be swimming in paperwork for the next decade.”

“I’m worried that that’s not even an exaggeration.”

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“Heeeyyy, Master Kenobi.” The reptilian Healer swooped up to the red-haired Councilor so swiftly Obi-Wan wondered if she’d grown wings.

“Master Magd?”

“You know the call you made on Kamino, regarding new clone production?”

“…Yes?” the Negotiator sounded deeply concerned by the tone the mind Healer took.

“And then how you kind of left things hanging? Perfectly understandable, by the way, but the fact of the matter…”
“Yes.” He now knew what she was leading up to, and was resigned to his fate. It seemed the matter of the Council informally deciding if he needed a “sabbatical” would have to wait. (Anakin had asked him after the fact about his lightsaber blade changing from blue to white, and he hadn’t known how to answer. Mace had quietly reassured him that they knew he’d had a bigger purpose than emotionally adhering to the Code at the time, and they’d understand if he needed time off-duty to decompress, but they would support him if he wanted his future to go in a new direction. Or maybe they could begin discussions about whether it was time for the Order itself to have the freedom to go in a new direction. He still didn’t know what he felt in response to that.)

“Yeah. You break it, you bought it. Congratulations, Master Kenobi. You get to take the lead on resolving the legal status and source of wellbeing for all the adult and baby clones.”

“I very much dislike you right now.”

“Excuse me, don’t think I’m getting off easy, mister. As part of the Reassignment Council, I drew the short straw for scrounging together an emergency Legal Corps to help you pull it off. And I’m coordinating adjustment counseling for the Army. All. Of. It.”

“Never mind. You are a bastion of integrity and fortitude.”

“And don’t you forget it, Kenobi.”

In the end, Obi-Wan’s team was astonishingly efficient in convincing the Senate to make each clone a Republic citizen with full rights therein. They also secured clearance for clones to take shelter in several Neutral systems.

The much bigger issue ended up being the matter of where they would all go.

The entire Army’s worth of men was a LOT to ask one planet to accept, not to mention all the (developmentally) underage clones. Eventually, it was decided that they would count as their own represented body in the eyes of the Senate, since virtually no other Republic citizens (aside from the Kaminoans themselves) understood their particular circumstances and legal needs. However, they felt it was better to spread themselves out and establish small communities in different accepting systems. But the difficulty with that was that it didn’t seem to fair to saddle fledging communities of brand-new citizens not used to organizing themselves outside of a military context with the raising of all the dependent children on their own.

Obi-Wan’s method of securing the children good homes ended up being a mess of contacting trusted friends and allies and asking THEM to contact their trusted friends and allies, and working from there.

That was how he found himself with a mixed gaggle of Republic and Neutral adults gathered in the training salles in the Temple (where they had the most available open space) to discuss options and meet the clone children. In a way, he observed wryly, it was partially a mini-reunion of that terrifying, insane night when reality seemed to tilt and he’d been honestly expecting to die. Anakin was there, along with Padme (and their criminally adorable newborns - gods, Obi-Wan could already feel the stress in his future, and already wouldn’t trade it for anything); Bail had gone back to Alderaan, and when he returned to Coruscant for this meeting Breha had joined him.

Satine was there, with Rex and many of the 501st, with a few handfuls from other battalions - she’d already assured them that they and any of their brothers would have a place on Mandalore if they wanted it. And considering it was a tie to Fett and his heritage, and thus something familiar, several
of them had taken her up on her offer. Rex in particular seemed keen on staying close and becoming involved in the Court Guards’ training, to make sure they were “worth their armor,” which Satine seemed bemused by, but accepted happily regardless.

A number of clones who had not committed themselves to Mandalore were present as well; the volume of them who’d turned up surprised Obi-Wan a bit. Waxer and Boil’s presence absolutely did not. The former General saw the same blatantly warm yearning on Waxer’s face looking at the young clones that he saw on Bail and Breha’s faces, and only slightly more guarded longing on Boil’s.

Jango Fett’s desire for a child to raise had clearly been passed down to at least some of his legacy.

The trick would be seeing that none of his friends took on more young charges than they could handle, he thought to himself, only showing a hint of his smile. But Cody picked up on even that small hint, at his side.

Padme had discussed the situation with the current Queen of Naboo, who had agreed to take on legal responsibility for the clones in the still fetal stage since Naboo had some of the best medical technology and facilities, agreeing that the matter could be discussed again when those clones were nearing maturity. A small company of clones accepted residency on Naboo as well, to act as their younger siblings’ guides and anchors to their genetic family.

Perhaps the most radical option, and frankly unexpected considering where the idea originated, was the Council’s proposal to offer the clone infants sanctuary in the Temple’s own Creche, and give each of them the same choice to join any of the Corps branches when old enough, or stay on in the Temple as medical, Creche, or Archival staff, or even instructors, that all Jedi children had. The theory behind it being that non-Force sensitive sentients could learn to do anything a Jedi could, except use the Force. It was debated whether that inherent distinction from Jedi children while living in the same place would foster resentment and isolation and friction, but they all agreed to keep it as a possible option if the the clones ran out of places to go.

Obi-Wan was heartened by the open-mindedness and inspiration of the idea, regardless.

He thought it could be a hint of what the future could be like, not only for the Jedi, but for the Republic, for the galaxy at large. And it suddenly looked to be a bright future indeed. He was determined to meet it, in whatever capacity he could do his most good. After years of fighting, of blood and grief and fear and doubt, he was ready to start a new chapter.

Looking over at Anakin and his family - the newest branch of his family - he caught his former Padawan’s eye, and pulled up an echo of their old bond. Through it, he poured all of the pride and love he felt for the younger man that he’d been unable to truly express when the vulnerable, raw supernova of power and emotion from Tatooine had been a boy. How he’d seen how Anakin had grown over the last years, matured, pushed himself, and brought such dedication and warmth and innovation to his role, how he’d inspired Obi-Wan to be a better Master, a better Jedi, a better man. Which, if you asked around, already seemed like a high standard to break.

And seeing the love and pride and gratitude returned (through suspiciously bright eyes), and feeling the brilliant spark of his Padawan (not that much longer, he knew with bittersweet certainty, the remaining years will go so quickly) on his one side, and his Commander - his warm, steady Cody - on the other, and seeing all the people willing to take in these scared, wary, weary soldiers and innocent children and give them freedom to become whoever and whatever they wished, he couldn’t help but feel achingly, brilliantly happy; for perhaps the first time in his life, happy without reservation or shame. When his time came, he would join the Force and see everyone who’d gone before him again, and until then, he had the future, and it would be amazing.
Anakin would be just fine.

They all would.

Chapter End Notes

So, I included a thing I thought would be interesting, inspired by Ahsoka's white sabers after she leaves the Order. I don't envision this Obi-Wan leaving, but I wanting it to symbolize his "embracing a larger view of the Force," at least for a time. I'm given to understand that any Jedi who leaves the Order is required to relinquish their lightsaber, so the white ones Ahsoka has in Rebels are new ones she made, where the crystals were always white (is this accurate?) But I head cannon that sabers change color automatically based on a person's position in the Force; i.e. Anakin's saber would have turned red on its own when he kept doing his dark deeds eventually. IDK.

Also, there's two subtle / obscure and entirely thematically irrelevant nods to the 90's music in this chapter (one is really embedded and kind of spread out). Comment if you find them!

Any additional material I come up with for the 'verse will go into the Interludes post.

Thanks for sticking with me, anyone who reads this. It's been wild.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!