

Pro Bowl VI

Alliances

Chapter 3

Casino Vaults

Canto Casino

Cantonica System — Corporate Sector

40 ABY

The main vault complex of Canto Bight's biggest casino had been commandeered as a command center for the disparate Brotherhood forces that had been forced to work together in defending themselves. The structure, buried below the casino itself, had proven highly resilient to the attacks launched against it. It had obviously been designed to defend the riches within, with reinforced duracrete and thick blast doors throughout. The only problem, of course, is that it was almost as good at keeping things inside as it was keeping them out. If the Consuls were not careful, the vault would become a tomb.

The lights flickered and the walls shivered again in response to artillery fire from outside the city, dust and duracrete powder raining down on the occupants. The fire was getting closer and was seemingly falling near them with greater frequency. The forces of the Clans within the city had been holding their own, but it was obvious that they could not hold out forever.

"My reinforcements are so close," DarkHawk spat, shaking his head. "If it weren't for this kriffing jamming!"

"As you've said," Appius grumbled from under his helmet. "And if wishes were banthas, beggars would ride."

"Now, now, gentlebeings," Revak said from where he stood at the command console that had been erected. "Snapping at one another does nothing to improve our situation."

"The Jedi's answer to everything," Korvis scoffed. "Tranquility."

"It serves us well," Revak replied. "You should try it sometime."

"It is not the way," Appius retorted.

Before the irritated Consuls could escalate their argument further, a

commotion at the other end of the room attracted their attention. Kamjin strode into the room with several soldiers in tow, and what looked like a prisoner between them. The man wore Plagueis armor, and his arms were locked behind his back by a set of very large stuncuffs. A shock collar was locked around his neck and four catch poles were attached around its circumference, each held by one of the guards. But, the most striking thing about him was his face.

His combat helmet had been removed, and he was obviously human. It was the crystals that protruded from his skin at regular intervals, especially along his brows, that spoke to exactly what he was.

"An Ascendant Trooper!" DarkHawk exclaimed, springing from his seat.

"Indeed," Kamjin confirmed. "There had been some scattered reports from some of the members of my delegation involved in the fighting, but nothing had been confirmed. I wanted to see for myself, and so I found *this*."

Kamjin triggered the shock collar, driving the Mortis soldier to his knees. "It seems that the forces attacking us are not who they seem to be."

"What are you saying? That Plagueis is in league with the Children?" Korvis wondered, his electronic voice filled with contempt. "I could see it, the Sith are only loyal to their own power."

"I'll try not to take that personally," Kamjin said with a practiced smile, "but I think this is something else. I do not think that Plaugeis, or the Council, is behind this attack at all. I think it is, instead, the Children alone."

"Of course you would think that, Lap'lamiz," Appius shot back. "It's not exactly a secret that you and the *Mindwalker* there are thick as thieves. What's your angle here?"

"I don't believe that he has one," Revak offered. "Think about it calmly for a moment, without the context of the rivalries between us. Where is the rest of the Plagueis fleet? Their army? The *Ascendancy* is nowhere to be seen. It is not as if Master Roh is bringing her entire might against us. And why the clumsy assault? She has twice worked her way to the Dread Throne and sat on the Dark Council."

"She would have just shot us in our backs when we arrived," Korvis growled, "or just poisoned the caf. The former head of the Shroud Syndicate would have done something more devious."

"Don't tell me you're buying this," Appius said with exasperation.

"Let's just say that I'm open to other perspectives that fit the facts at hand," Korvis said cautiously.

DarkHawk cleared his throat. "I may have something else to add," the Sadowan said with some reticence. "Our intelligence assets on Aliso have reported that Plagueis lost many of its ships during the recent assault by the Children."

"And? We all took losses," Appius said, but it was obvious his resolve was starting to waver.

DarkHawk seemed reluctant to speak, obviously not wanting to reveal how deeply his intelligence service had penetrated the Plagueis operations. Or to imply how far his eyes and ears had burrowed into the other Clan's business.

"Out with it, man," Kamjin demanded.

"Most of the ships they lost were listed as missing, presumed destroyed," DarkHawk explained. "Not destroyed, no wreckage or crew recovered."

"Someone has been planning this for some time," Revak observed. "I think the evidence that fits all the facts is that this is, in fact, an assault by the Children."

Even clad in his armor, it was obvious from the slight slump to his shoulders that Appius had resigned himself to the truth. "All right. But," he said, raising his finger, "if she so much as twitches I'm going to blow her right into orbit."

"Then we're all in agreement then." Kamjin said, seeing the nods from his fellow Consuls. "I think she might be useful, as well."

"At least she can do something productive," Korvis said coldly as Kamjin signaled to the guards in the next room. Whether or not Selika was responsible for the current situation, there was still bad blood between the Ascendant Clan and Clan Vizsla.

The guards Kamjin had directed to bring Selika before them returned with Selika in tow, the Dread Lord having been locked in with the credit chips in one of the side storage rooms off the main vault chamber.

"Ah, my dear, it seems like we have all been the victims of a bit of a charade," Kamjin said, gesturing the guards away.

"As I said," Selika replied calmly, "I was not behind this attack."

"We're willing to believe you," Appius said, "for now."

"So, the Council then? The fear of the unified clans?" Selika inquired.

"No," DarkHawk said with a chuckle, gesturing to where the Ascendant was still weakly kneeling.

Selika's head cocked to the side in a moment of confusion, but that seemed to pass quickly. "Of course, the Children. Apparently my communications channels are not as secure as I would have thought."

"The days of the Imperial Holonet are, sadly, long gone," Kamjin said wistfully. "But, communications are also our current problem. We have not been able to locate the source of the planetary jamming that is preventing us making the call to the cavalry."

"And you think this gentleman might know where they are hiding," Selika said, looking at the prisoner with a cruel smile. "And you'd like me to 'ask' him where it might be?"

"If you would be so kind," Kamjin said, gesturing to the enemy. "Just try to leave enough that he can still walk out, no sense in having to carry him."

Selika raised her hand and placed it near the trooper's face, with perhaps a centimeter of space between palm and cheek. The man's entire body tensed and a short snort escaped his mouth, followed shortly by a trickle of blood running out from his nose.

Zord's Spa and Bathhouse

Canto Bight

Cantonica System — Corporate Sector

The opulent bathhouse had not escaped the fighting that had engulfed Canto Bight. It had instead found itself right at the center of the chaos, acting as a strongpoint for the Clan forces. The heavy stone the building had been built out of did better to provide cover and shelter than the less substantial structures that filled the city. So, it had become a natural defensive position for Thran Occasus-Palpatine once he had joined the fighting.

The Proconsul of Scholae had thought that this excursion had been an excellent chance for him to expand the influence of Scholae amongst the other Clans, and his own of course. Some gambling, general revelry, a few trips to the gaming tables, the last not without incident as they had lost and then regained a

fortune that had not really been theirs to lose in the first place, but nothing that was supposed to escalate beyond perhaps a few too many drinks and a night in the drunk tank. And then soldiers had been everywhere, along with a Consul demanding he go do something about it.

"Thran, there you are," Kamjin's voice called from the entryway.

Speak of the devil, Thran thought to himself.

"Yes," Thran replied, turning to face the leader of Scholae Palatinae. Whatever other response he had planned seemed to vanish as he saw the three black armored soldiers that accompanied Kamjin.

"We were able to gain some information as to where the enemy has set up camp to transmit that jamming signal," Kamjin explained, gesturing to encompass the three soldiers with him. "I'd like you to go along with these gentlebeings and do something about it."

"Death troopers, better than the mixed bag I've got here," Thran said, inclining his head to indicate the group of inexperienced guards and Canto Bight police officers that he had been commanding. "Where'd you scrounge those up?"

"Our hostess was more than willing to lend them to you for this task," Kamjin said.

"Selika? I thought she was rotting away in a cell somewhere for being the one who started this little party." Thran wondered, then held up a hand before his Consul could interject. "No, wait. I don't want to know. Where is this place?"

"They've tapped into the main communications systems via a primary, hardline access terminal and are using it to blanket all frequencies in the system," Kamjin outlined.

"And where?" Thran asked more pointedly.

"Once we shut it down, we'll be able to send a distress signal," Kamjin went on.

"Where, Kam!"

Canto Bight boathouse

Canto Bight

Cantonica System — Corporate Sector

The Canto Bight boathouse was the last place anyone would have thought of as the on-planet citadel of the Mortis forces in Canto Bight. Take over a casino, one of the criminal dens in the worker's quarters, maybe even the police headquarters? No, they had taken over the boathouse filled with pleasure yachts of the rich and powerful. It did make some sense, because of course the rich and powerful would want their direct lines to the comm channels sent out to their yachts. One could not miss out on a trade or investment opportunity just because of a boat party. The Children were all throughout the place, like unchecked Gizka.

Thran watched again as the three death troopers, led by Colonel DT-6430, moved systematically through the building killing anything they found as they went. The commands and responses that Thran was able to hear through the earpiece they had provided him, allowing him to understand them through their vocal scramblers, were short and business-like. No color, just brutal efficiency. When they found a nut that was too tough to crack, he would step in with his saber as needed. They were near their objective now.

"There," Thran ordered, pointing towards one of the doors.

The scrambled response of the death Trooper followed, and the three soldiers breached the door. Thran followed behind into the large, covered boat dock that housed the megayachts as the troopers picked off the enemy with surgical precision. It was obvious that the enemy was engaging in a fighting retreat, farther back into the building.

"And there she is, there she is," Thran said to himself.

Thran looked across the tens of meters to the other side of the boat dock and spotted the sophisticated communications terminal that had been wired into the planet's communications grid. It was a massive piece of equipment, explaining why the enemy had been unable to break it down and take it with them as they went.

"Captain, your detonator. Set it to minimum yield," Thran shouted to make himself heard.

The junior officer amongst the three jogged over, pulling the thermal detonator from his belt and making the necessary adjustments as he came. Handing the weapon to Thran, he raised his weapon and fired over Thran's shoulder. The yelp and the sound of a blaster bolt burning through flesh said that the man's shot had found its mark. The trooper moved past Thran to continue his work without giving the Proconsul even a second look.

"Efficient," Thran said with admiration.

Setting the explosive to detonate on impact, Thran locked it in a telekinetic grip and pushed it towards its target. Thran wasn't exactly skilled with grenades, and he wanted to make sure this one got to where it was needed. The thermal detonator sailed quickly across the room, and the second it slammed into the communications equipment the boat house was filled with a momentary flash as bright as a sun. The explosion reverberated through the cavernous space, and as it faded the sound of repulsor engines rose to replace it. A massive yacht, the aurebesh letters *Undisputed Victor* emblazoned across its stern, sailed out of its dock. The Mortis soldiers on board exchanging shots with the death troopers as the craft slammed through the closed boat house doors and made for open water and the open air beyond. Grinning, Thran thumbed on his commlink.

"*Palpatine*," he spoke, signaling the flagship in orbit, "this is Proconsul Occasus."

"Sir!," the voice of the ship's communications officer betrayed surprise. "We'd been cut off, thought you might be dead."

"Not yet, Lieutenant. I have a priority fire mission for you planetside, at the following coordinates," Thran said, rattling off the figures from his performance datapad.

"Yes sir," the officer answered. "Batteries firing now!"

Suddenly the sky was filled with emerald torrents falling from orbit, the glow arriving before the thunderclap as the turbolaser fire superheated the air as it went. The pleasure craft, not designed to resist firepower of that magnitude, dissolved into a fireball.

A shriek filled the air as the yacht vaporized, Thran spinning around to see a group of what had been well dressed denizens of Canto Bight. They were bound, hands chained to tie downs and their clothing and faces covered with grease and grime that said they had been there for some time.

"My yacht! My *Undisputed Victor*!" wailed an Ungrila male. "What have you done?"

"Bill me!" Thran yelled back at him.

Bridge

**Victory-class star destroyer *Vigilant*
Cantonica System — Corporate Sector**

"Commander! The jamming field just dropped!" reported the comm officer from the crew pit.

"What?" the ship's commander whirled, staring in disbelief.

"Monitoring hypercomm traffic from the planet, sir," the officer went on. "Looks like it's on CNS channels, but encrypted."

"We've still got time," the commander reasoned. "The closest of the Clans is still hours away at best."

"We have ships reverting to realspace in our port quarter!" the sensor officer called out in alarm. "Seven more ships centered around an Impstar deuce. IFF says it's the *Perdition*, the Naga Sadowan flagship. Sir..."

"What is it, petty officer?" the commander demanded.

"They've got a CC-7700 with them. She's powering up her gravity wells."

The commander's mind spun, trying to figure out how things had gone wrong. The enemy fleet, such as it was, had held its own better than anticipated, but they were making real progress on the ground. It was still possible for this to go their way. He just needed to call in more Shadowseeker ships.

"Get me the flagship," he ordered his comm officer.

The holodisplay at the bridge rear sprang to life, showing the hooded face of the commander of the trio of Shadowseeker ships. "Ah, commander. I was just about to call you. It seems like your plan has failed. We will be withdrawing."

"But we can still win!" yelled the *Vigilant's* commander.

"I do not think so," the Shadowseeker commander said matter of factly.

"No! You have to at least help us break through. We're too deep in the gravity well to get out of here before that enemy drag ship powers up and we're stuck here!" the commander spat back, desperation clearly evident in his voice.

The signal from the Shadowseeker flagship cut off without so much as a response. The commander whirled around from the comm center to the tactical display, watching as the Star Destroyers and the interdictor flickered and vanished as they jumped away to hyperspace. The cones of gravitational energy were starting to solidify on the display and almost seemed to be mirrored in the grip he seemed to

feel closing around his neck.

"Sir! We have additional ships reverting from hyperspace! At least six more capital ships squawking Taldryan Navy IFFs along with smaller craft.," the executive officer reported. "They look like troop ships and attack vessels with mercenary IFFs. What are your orders?"

The commander was at a loss, his thought process locked up in the face of impending, unavoidable defeat.

"Your orders, sir? SIR!"

Corusca Conference Center
Canto Casino
Cantonica System — Corporate Sector
3 days after the attack

"This is a dark day," Korvis said from his seat at the conference table. "Not just for Clan Vizsla, but for the Brotherhood itself."

"He's right," Appius followed. "While we were victorious, it came at a cost. And we have already paid a heavy price in the assaults by the Children of Mortis on our homeworlds."

"So, what will you do?" Revak inquired, a calmness layered over his curiosity.

"We will do what must be done," Korvis said, slamming his gauntleted fist on the tabletop. "Pull our forces back, fortify our homeworlds, and prepare for a fight to the death."

"Maybe there's a better way," Selika said, offering a datapad to the assembled consuls from where she stood before the conference table.

"The Canto Bight Accords," DarkHawk said, looking over the pact that Selika had been pitching to the other five Consuls since their arrival.

"A treaty between us, Plagueis most of all, is dead," Appius said, resignation evident in his voice.

"But we can bring it to life," Kamjin said. "What happened here shows that we can work towards a common purpose when confronted with a threat. Or at the very least promise not to engage in conflicts between ourselves when faced with such an existential threat to our existence. Once it's dealt with, we can always get back to our

old rivalries."

"Together, the Children of Mortis fear us," Kamjin went on. "The fact that they worked as hard as they did to try to make this summit a disaster, either by eliminating us or poisoning the well of possible cooperation. They need us to be divided. But if we work together?"

"We could stand against the Children," DarkHawk said, "And if we do..."

"We might have a chance." Selika finished.

The words seemed to hang over the Consuls for a few beats, each lost in thought, before the High Councilor of Odan-Urr broke the silence.

"Still, I cannot in good conscience go back to our high council with a pledge to work with *slavers*," Revak observed.

"Agreed," Korvis echoed with a growl.

"That is why, amongst other reasons," Selika went on, "Plagueis is prepared to end state sponsored slavery in our territory."

"What?" DarkHawk said, his eyes widening.

"And your soldiers?" Appius inquired.

"All of it," Selika answered. "It is part of the document before you, Paragraph 1290, subsection D3. All state sponsored slavery in territory controlled by Clan Plagueis will be eliminated in a phased roll out."

"It's here," Revak said, reviewing the document before him.

"So, what say you?" Selika queried.

Revak thought for a moment before he spoke. "Odan-Urr would be willing, under those conditions, to enter into a non-aggression pact. This acknowledges the step forward Plagueis is taking by eliminating slavery. However," he said, holding up a hand by way of signaling an exception, "what Plagueis does with the current slaves it holds and how those sentients are taken care of after the decree will, of course, determine how we would handle future arrangement or cooperation."

"Fair," Selika said.

Even behind his helmet, it was clear that the chief of Clan Vizsla was uneasy. "I'm still skeptical given the history with the slave trade. But, if you honor your pledge I would be... open to Vizsla entering into a non-aggression pact with the Clans of the Brotherhood. You must all understand that my people must make their living, and our hunters will still take contracts in your space."

"Of course," Selika said. "The execution of bounty contracts at the behest of external clients would not be prohibited by these accords. Unless, of course, those bounties were being fulfilled on behalf of the Children of Mortis. Which I do not expect to be at issue, in any event."

"Then yes, I feel that it is a commitment we could make. And, as with the Jedi, how this takes shape in the future will impact our further cooperation," Korvis finished.

The Mandalorian turned Supreme Chancellor shook his head. "You are Sith, and as the saying goes you are so predictably treacherous. And I have my own history of Conflict with the Dread Throne. But, I am willing to grant that it was another Dread Lord that was at the helm during that conflict. I say that I'll believe that Plagueis will abandon a decade of slavery when I see it, but we will provisionally agree to a compact of non-aggression. I just don't think it will come to anything. Sith and slavery go together like Tatooine and sand."

"I understand your skepticism, Supreme Chancellor," Selika agreed. "But I also understand the depth of the threat the Children pose, and the trade-offs that must be made."

Appius nodded, whether because he agreed or just in acknowledgement, none present could know.

"The idea of mutual defense is an intriguing one," the Consul of Naga Sadow said as he leaned back in his chair and stroked his chin. "I am very interested in working together to stave off the threat posed by the Children of Mortis. I'm an assassin by trade, so I know that information can be as valuable as a vibroblade. Knowing where to strike is oftentimes more important than a sharp blade. Perhaps a sharing of intelligence data?"

"I think that could be arranged," Selika said with a nod. "I, too, acknowledge the value of information."

"Ah yes," DarkHawk replied with a smile, "the spider at the center of the shroud, so to speak."

"And you've been quiet, Emperor," Selika said, turning her attention to Kamjin. "What

is yours?"

"Before I respond I'd like to know what sort of purchase orders Plagueis will be making from the newly expanded manufacturing and agricultural sectors we have brought online in Caperion," Kamjin inquired.

"Always the good capitalist," Selika said. "With our transition away from involuntary laborers as both a labor base and revenue stream, Plagueis will be looking to expand our trade and industrial base. That equipment and those goods will have to be ordered from someone. And I assume that now that you have built up this industry, you now have some portion of your construction sector without work?"

"So we do," Kamjin responded. "I think that this accord will be a profitable arrangement for all involved."

"Then it is settled, then." Selika said.

The assembled Consuls looked at one another and nodded, each placing their thumb scan on the document contained within their datapads. And with that stroke, the six Clans had vowed to not engage in conflict with one another, at least until the threat posed by the Children of Mortis had been resolved. The Consuls rose to take their leave, each in turn handing their thumb scanned datapad to Selika and heading for the exit until only Kamjin and Selika remained.

"Think of it, even five years ago the idea of the Clans signing any treaty with one another was unthinkable. And now, all our hopes rest on this," Kamjin said, his hand resting on the datapad containing the treaty. "Where the tides of fortune take us, no man can know."

Selika reached out to accept the final datapad handed to her by Kamjin. "They're tricky, those tides."