

Ascending Confederacy

Chapter I

Bridge

Ascendancy

Arx System — Brotherhood Territory

41 ABY



The command deck aboard the *Lucrehulk*-class battleship was a change from that found aboard an Imperial star destroyer, but in many ways shared similar features. Sunken command consoles were still present, and the raised bridge walkway. Even the sectioned viewports that dominated the forward bulkheads. The feel was completely different, however. Gone was the brutalist architecture of the Empire, its place taken by more spacious, luxurious trappings befitting those who had designed it. The droids that comprised much of the crew were, however, the largest departure.

"A bit like coming home," came a voice from the bridge entrance, filtered through a helmet speaker.

"A bit," Selika agreed, turning to face Zxyl Bes'uliik, Regent of the Brotherhood. "But unlike the Matron, this one isn't half falling apart and full of ne'er do wells."

"So," Zxyl mused, the grin that must be on his face evident in his tone, "an improvement then."

Selika nodded as she turned back to face the bridge viewports. Beyond the extending prows of the *Ascendancy* space was dominated by the imposing mass of Mattock Station. Just visible in two of the berths along its circumference were the hulls of the two Plagueian dreadnoughts *Goliath* and *Centurion*. Like the *Ascendancy*, both vessels were in dock receiving system upgrades from ACE Shipyard technicians that were crawling all over both ships.

"I take it that both of my ships are proceeding on schedule?" Selika inquired.

"That they are," the Mandalorian replied. "Just pending final remuneration."

Selika sighed as she turned back to him and crossed the distance separating them. "I don't understand why you insist on this," she said.

The Dread Lord of Clan Plagueis applied her thumb scan to the datapad proffered by Zxyl, authorizing the credit transfer from the Plagueian accounts to those of Arx Capital Exchange.

"Come now, you should know the value of 'kissing the ring', as it were," the Regent explained. "And dealing face to face makes it much easier to exact payment for those who don't approach their dealings with... honor."

"You mean it's easier to drive a blade into those who cheat you," Selika said with a wry smile.

The councilor did not answer, instead looking down at the datapad to confirm the payment. "Excellent. The ship is yours, and the upgrades shall be completed as we discussed."

Selika inclined her head with a slight bow of acknowledgement as the Regent turned on his heel and headed out into the corridor beyond.

"My Lord," the human communications officer called from her station. "We have an incoming message from the Pinnacle. The Hurana delegation has agreed to our request. They say they would be happy to visit for in person talks at your convenience."

"Perhaps there is something to be said for kissing the ring," Selika said to herself before issuing orders. "Good, lieutenant. Notify Admiral Ranin that I would like to get underway for Aliso as soon as the Regent has disembarked."

Conference Room

Ascendancy

Aliso System — Plagueis Territory



"These pirates have made trade in the region simply untenable," Chancellor Mcrein Telus explained, slapping his open hand down on the conference room table. "They seem to have come out of the woodwork like bog-ticks in the last few years."

"I understand, Chancellor. They have been a thorn in our sides as well. We have recently been forced to expand our Navy as a result," Selika said with a gesture to the ship's bulkheads that surrounded them. "But as many times as we strike, they melt back into the ether like wraiths."

"That has been our experience with them as well," the Chancellor replied. "It is what makes your offer of membership in this new Confederacy of the Outer Reaches so enticing."

Selika forced herself not to smile outwardly. It seemed these negotiations were going exactly as she had scripted them. Months of outreach to the Huranans had finally paid off. The human colony had been established thousands of years ago during the height of one of the Republic's expansion phases, but had been nearly abandoned by the galactic government for hundreds of years outside of tax collection. In terms of the Unknown Regions, however, Haruna was a hub of industrial capacity of some renown, capacity Plagueis needed to take advantage of.

The freeing of the slaves, while required to facilitate the pact between the Clans negotiated on Canto Bight, had left the already less industrialized Clan Plagueis at even more of a disadvantage than it had been before. Clan Scholae Palatinae were close allies that provided much of that industry as they developed the Caperion System. But Caperion was some distance away from Aliso, which left supply lines vulnerable. More importantly, as Selika had been around long enough to know, alliances tended to shift with the wind in the Brotherhood, with today's friends being tomorrow's enemies.

Hence the Confederacy. Plagueis was, in a vacuum, likely strong enough to take any of the nearby worlds by force as it could muster planetary bombardments that would likely bring any of them to heel. But bombardment would do as much to flatten the industry that Plagueis sought from those worlds. So, the Confederacy of the Outer Reaches had taken shape.

"Two other worlds have already agreed to membership," Selika explained. "With both the Republic and First Order having torn one another apart, we must form alliances of our own for mutual protection and benefit. All those of us that lived on the edge of the Unknown Regions ever saw from the seat of galactic power was corruption and taxation, not a credit of which ever benefited us."

The Chancellor nodded. "And what little protection these galactic powers offered simply by existing, patrolling our space or not, has vanished along with them. Raiders know there is no one there to stop them."

"Unless we work together, Chancellor," Selika implored him.

"As I said, your offer is enticing, Consul," Chancellor Telus cautiously answered. "I think our Assembly could be convinced that it was the right path for Haruna."

"You seem to think that you know what it might be that could convince them, Chancellor," Selika observed.

The Chancellor took a moment before replying, steepling his fingers on the table in front of him before doing so. "Our surveillance service has captured one of these pirates and managed to extract information about their base before he

expired. But our forces do not have the strength to strike at them, nevermind when they are spread across half the sector chasing down raider attacks on our shipping."

"And you think that if we were able to remove this particular irritant," Selika surmised, "that would be enough to change their minds."

CIC

Ascendency

Kyriseema System — Unclaimed Territory

Two Weeks Later



"The Fortress of Kyriseema," Selika said as the holographic display sprung to life. "The pirates have claimed it as their base of operations."

"Why aren't we simply calling in an orbital strike and being done with it?" TuQ'uan asked from his seat at the holotable.

"Hijarna stone," Teylas Ramar offered, "The fortress is built from the stuff."

"So what?" Nora Olen spoke up, "The bombardment cannon should be able to handle some old stone monument."

By way of answering, Teylas pulled a piece of dark stone from his pocket and dropped the fist sized chunk of rock on the table in front of him. Before anyone could react, he produced a blaster and shot it into the stone. Those unprepared ducked for cover, expecting hot stone shrapnel to be speeding towards them. Instead, the stone seemed unperturbed by the blaster energy, the red glow of the shot seeming to disappear into the heart of the rock.

"This stone absorbs turbolaser fire like a very dry sponge," Teylas explained. "There's another one of these structures on a planet in the Inner Rim, discovered about 1,000 years ago."

"The theory is that a superlaser would probably be sufficient to damage it,"

Selika went on. "*Probably.*"

"So it's an assault, then" TuQ'uan reasoned.

"Yes," Selika confirmed. "You both should prepare your Houses for the assault. You all know how critical bringing Hurana into the fold is. Have your forces ready for deployment in two hours. And Quaestors, this is your opportunity to impress me with your work."