

110

periwinkle

LCTN: ELECTRA-4 (Pleiades cluster)
CORD: SAO-761311.07 (134pc from SOL)
DATE: 2323ce-FEBRUARY-3-SATURDAY
TIME: 11:03zulu (local 25:32mst)

It may be midday Greenwich time in the UK, and for everyone living on zulu time, and the E-Z time standard for that matter, but here on the Church Key it's early evening with Electra slowly dropping below the horizon. The sunsets of Electra on the planet Sapphire can be electrifying, and from the top of the Spike they are doubly so, but the windows in Maria's corner office face north and east. Not really an issue because with the entertainment interface she can switch them to any view she wants from any window on the Spike.

Jacob was told to come on in when he got here, and entering her office, she points to the side chair in front of her desk and goes, "*E'ý pachuco!* Take a seat while we wrap this up!"

Jacob nods, sits and, "Pins and needles!"

He can only hear Maria's side of a two-way conversation on the CXi version of the tacnet, "I don't care, John! We got the fuckers down to seven, then they push for nine, and now they want twelve? That's a hard hell no, fuck no, piss no, shit no!"

She puts a hand up to her ear and goes, "This is retarded!" Then after a few seconds she almost shouts, "They meet on this again when? Monday! Okay, let the fuckers know I'll be there on Monday and they'll see it my way. Admin gets one and they get nine and that's it! If these prima donna dweebs don't like it then they can tell it to my face when I get in theirs...Monday!"

With the call cut, Jacob is chuckling, "What was that about?"

Maria puts a finger up, "First, let me tell ya I talked to Bud." She crosses her arms in front of her and leans forward on her desk, "Now, I may be out of the chain but I'm not out of the loop. Get me?"

"Yea, I kinda get ya?"

"Things went well, better than expected on Thursday, but they'll be no more splitting resources like Scorch and Rongo."

"That wasn't my doing."

"I know it wasn't your idea. Maui should have been a failure but the way it turned out, even though Peña called in the Hail Mary option..." Jacob was about to protest where Maria puts a hand up and continues, "It was the right call on his part."

Jacob wonders, "Shouldn't Scott be talking to me 'bout this?"

"Out of respect for you I volunteered. Scott needs only one little excuse to ground your ass, an' we're catchin' a lot of heat to pull that ass off the line. Scott's not quite sure why Bud was there but I happen to know." Maria then throws her hands out, adding drama to what she is saying, "So, there you were on Aroha Atu, just like in the old days, runnin' around and clippin' people when you should've been focusing on ending their asses...permanently."

Jacob rolls his eyes, "I know, that Lieutenant pulled on me."

"Yea, after you shot his fucking legs off. Anyone else, and that would've been a golden ticket but, for a Looey a regen fucks with upward mobility in the CDF, so Bud had to put 'im down."

"There any words from the Alter regarding Rho Tau?"

"No, an' since it's your last hot mission, have fun with it!"

"Is it my last one because I took Diego to Taurus-Littrow?"

"No, but it should be! I've been mullin' over what I should do to get back at you for that one, and du Conde kinda missed the mark."

"Yea, I know, the Statute of Limitations don't apply to you."

"Got that right! Nobody get's off my hook, so you're penance, Chuckle, is next time I ask you to put out...you'll be my monkey!"

"Yea, cool, I think I can live with gettin' off easy!" He shrugs, then points around her while saying, "An' ya gotta admit, that thing does kick ass sittin' on your credenza next to Smiley!"

Maria mumbles, "You're an asshole for taking her there."

"Back to Rho Tau, Boxter thinks it'll be an all-in affair."

"Dude, you just mopped up the MOP, and they've plum run out of options! So, no more humanitarian gestures like Peña did, an' I know that worked out in our favor but it is now a numbers game. Think grade school math! All that matters going forward is simple subtraction. I only wanna see red ink on their side of the ledger!"

Jacob nods with, "Okay, I'll trickle that down."

"But when it comes to addition, you just broke five-hundred!" Maria grins big, "And as for Jessica, wow, thirty-three kills in one engagement! Hot-damn that was impressive!"

"Twenty-eight. Penalty box kills don't count."

"Yea, sorry, the official score is thirty-three." Maria sits back, "Ya know, and we talked about this before, but nobody knew what to think of your daughter until close of business two days ago."

Jacob snickers, "Yea, I heard the talk, them sayin' she was your Sith apprentice, runnin' around doin' dark lord shit for ya."

Maria laughs, "What'd they call her? Darth Hottie was it?"

Jacob nods with, "Yea, and, let's see, there was Darth Mama, Darth Kangy, and my fav, Darth Behbeh!"

"Honestly, if you don't know Jessie like we do, she does come across sort of like an ice princess, but when Scott and Bill posted that fight on the net the troops instantly fell in love with her. She's a hit, and our people now accept her as one of their own."

Jacob ponders that and adds, "It's not the flying or the fight, nor the kills she made that won 'em over. It was some amazing flying, but the fact is—it was her trying to pull it together after she landed. That was the moment she became human in their eyes."

Maria thinks, "Sure, I can see it, every one of us here has been there. I do remember. Ya gotta be one proud papa."

Jacob shrugs, "Always have been...with all my kids."

"What worked in our favor was that Samantha was not at all keen on rolling Security Services in with the Annex after our lil' soiree, but ever since Thursday she's been one-hundred percent on board."

"You talk to Boxter 'bout Thursday?"

"It's cool! Don't worry." Maria then pulls up a bottle of wine and pulls the stopper saying, "Oh yea, don't forgit, *Darth Tomato!*"

With a confused look, Jacob asks her, "You mean tomato? And, wasn't that du Conde who came up with that one?"

"It's French with an 'e' not an 'o' and the 'e' is silent."

"Okay!" He points to the bottle, "What's with the wine?"

Grabbing a pair of glasses, Maria gestures towards the pit, "Let's go watch the sunset an' celebrate you breakin' five-hundred!"

They step over to the pit, and as she has him pour them both a glass, she switches the windows view from the north and east, over

a mile in the air, to the tenth floor view from the south and west.

As they sit, Jacob takes a sip and goes, "I really don't feel like celebrating that. When you get your first five, an' become an ace, you get really cranked up about it. Then hitting twenty was big, and fifty, then eighty, but after I hit a hundred...it wasn't long after that I just stopped caring about the numbers."

"Everyone else is stoked by it!" Maria takes a sip and says, "Ya know you could've broke eight-hundred or maybe even a thousand if you were shooting 'em up instead of coaching and baiting."

"Molding the next generation happens to be the priority."

Maria shrugs, "Like with Ouchie, Kumquat, T-Rex and Neato! You've created a bunch of you to follow in your footsteps."

"They are all purdy good!" Jacob nods to himself, "You know, babe, every fighter pilot I've known becomes a junky for the action but, somewhere when the numbers hit the high two's or three digits, we eventually stop thinking of what we're doing as heroic or noble. At around that point every one of us starts to think of it as, well, what we do becomes..." He chuckles while saying, "Poetically tragic."

"But inevitable...like death and Russian literature."

"Now, there's a correlation I never thought of!"

Maria laughs, saying, "To bring more levity to the moment, you wanna know what that dumb ass call was about?"

Jacob perks up, "Kinda do! What was it?"

"Scientists, like engineers, as smart as they are, they can exhibit all kinds of stone-cold fuckin' stupid."

"That's an obvious given."

"This example *de jour* started last November, but it has now carried over into this month!"

"The mascot thing?"

"No, that was settled—almost settled. There I'm asking for Sandy Cheeks to front Tailgate, the safety AI, over Rocket Raccoon but I'm getting push back."

"You'll win."

"I know I'll get my way! No, here the dweebs wanted some emblem on their insignia that would indicate their specific discipline and, I'm not opposed to that, but what they came up with was not doable. I suggested we add a diamond pip and color code it."

"Lemme guess, they came back with a couple dozen?"

"Four dozen." Jacob's mouth drops so Maria continues with, "We met in December three times and whittled it down to seven. After the first of the year they came back with more and we settled on nine. Now, right out of the chute admin reserved red for security, the Security Militia group, which will be Security Services troops, and that color is the only primary or secondary color on the list."

"Oooh'kay, you want me to ask what those colors are?"

"Since you asked...we got Charcoal, not black, Charcoal for astronomy, Luna, a gray for Planetary Sciences, and that was broken up into Shamrock for botany and Amethyst for Zoology!"

Jacob asks, "Amethyst, what's that?"

"It's a purple. We then have a color called Utah, that's a light brown for geology, Artic for Archeology, Cheetos for Chemistry and Microbiology, Nautical for oceanic sciences and, the one that gets me is Periwinkle for atmospheric sciences!"

"Wha'? Did you say Peri—"

"No! Dude, be careful when you say the last color by name!" Maria stresses then adds, "Did you know there are eight or nine different Periwinkles? I never knew that until this fuckin' project got traction!" Jacob opens his mouth and she puts a hand out to stop him, "Don't say it! In the meetings I was rattling off 'pound-809BC6' or 'pound-7BA1C5' but'chya never-evah say the word itself!"

"Okay, why shouldn't I say it?"

Maria shrugs, "It's for your own protection! I mean, when you actually say the word your jaw goes slack, an' lips flap, and by the time you reach the fourth syllable, saying pewi-wink—" Maria starts gagging, then adds, "Suddenly, someone slips ya the cock!"

Now laughing, Jacob asks, "How's that go again?"

"Pe-wi-wink—" Again gagging, then laughing where she looks at him to say, "You know...that's not a bad idea!"

Jacob's head tilts to the side, "Hu?"

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Ninety minutes later the southern and western views have been switched from just a few meters at the tenth floor to a whole mile up where their floor is. On the ground level, Electra has vanished from sight while approaching local astronomical twilight but, up here, half of Electra is still in view while it is dropping below the far horizon.

With the effortless push of a holographic button on her office's

entertainment interface, part of the three-quarters circular pit flattens out into a full-on queen sized bed. When deployed it has both fitted and flat sheets in place when it fully extends. By pulling the comforter and pillows out from under the other seats you'd be ready for a comfy night's sleep, which Maria has done many times, or bypass all that for other considerations...like now!

Spooning, while watching this now spectacular sunset, with red light streaming into her office, Maria says, "I just ordered a fajita platter for two. It'll be here in thirty-five minutes."

Jacob mockingly snits, "Wha', *olá* again!"

Maria smiles and says, "Get the fuck out I'll eat it all myself!"

"No, I'll hang and suffer with ya." Maria nods with a smile until Jacob asks her about, "I am curious because...didn't you say you have a family thing to bring up?"

Maria takes a deep breath and reaches over for her wine while saying, "Yea, 'bout that. I gotta lil' problem I wanted to bounce off of you while you're here."

Jacob shrugs while reaching for his wine, and with her waiting for a response he nods, yes, and says, "That's why I'm here, right?"

Maria breathes and, "Okay, Guns came to me just before you two tied the knot, and asked if I could find out something for her."

Jacob goes, "Lemme guess, who Brie's father is? I know the family has been bitching at Michelle to find that out." He playfully nudges her and, "So, whaddya wanna bounce off of me?"

"I happen to know who the sperm donor is."

"I figured as much." He takes a sip, and as he puts the glass down he adds, "Ya want to know how to bring it up to him, right?"

"Yea, that pretty much sums it up! The condition for finding out who—was him getting to decide if he wants to have any part of it or not. We need to know if he's approachable when I tell her."

"I get it. Sure, some guys are bags of shit for not wanting to be involved as a father. You know I never-ever wanted to be a dad, but now that I am one I wouldn't give it up for anything."

Maria nods and, "I do want to thank you for being a father figure to Brie all these years. You didn't have to, but you stepped up and it didn't affect your relationship with your own kids."

"Brie and Diego have always been really great friends so, when you think about it, it sorted itself out on its own."

"Our girl thought it was a kick to share you."

"Diego did make a point to let me know."

"Again, thank you for being there when it mattered most!"

"Okay, thanks for the thanks but, on point, if it were me in your shoes I'd give it to 'im both barrels!"

"Right between the eyes?"

"Don't pussy foot around on this one, be direct and give the dumb ass the facts, and list his options going forward!"

"Just like that?"

"Yup, just like that! Brie is of the majority so it's not like he's got a lot of things to do for her. He may be able to catch up, but I got to be her dad when it counted. I lucked out there, but if you're wondering if I'll be cool with who it is, I will be nice to 'im no matter what. Cool beans?"

Maria asks, "Seriously, no matter who it is?"

"As long as he's nice to her I couldn't give a shit. I'll be civil!"

Maria takes a sip, then twists around to look up and grin in his face while saying, "Guess what, motherfucker, you're a father!"

Jacob nods, "That's the way to do it!"

"Cool! My work here is done."

As she swirls her glass, with that twinkle in her eyes, Jacob realizes that it's him, "You gotta be...you're not shitting me."

She asks, "Knocked for six?"

Jacob cringes slightly, "Yeeea...you could say that."

Maria puts her glass down while telling him, "I took a stab at something before I ran her and Brie's blueprints. I checked all the security tracking during the eight-year bash over our victory out at Fifty-One Tau and...well, on camera there was Michelle, stumbling along while dragging your drunk ass out to the free-for-all."

"On the Carrie Nation." Jacob nods, "I don't remember."

"Nobody remembers that night!"

"You confirmed with both our blueprints?"

"I ran the sequencing and 'ca-ching!' You da papa!"

In deep thought, Jacob is shaking his head, "I wonder who is going to be pissed off about this?"

"Listen, nobody is gonna be pissed, what they are all going to be is...amused." She snorts a laugh, "Yea, amused is the word!"

Jacob wonders, "Why is it always the guy that catches hell for this shit? We catch hell for everything!"

"For every one of the things, yea!" Maria thinks about it and points out, "You've been running around being her dad when you were her dad all along and didn't know it. It's comedic gold in my book."

Jacob looks at her with a suspicious eye, "I know you, you've got a whole repertoire of snarky comments and jokes at my expense lined up, don'chya?"

Maria starts laughing while saying, "I got enough material to last the next five-six years and not get stale!"

He shakes his head, "You're a bitch."

She smiles, "Yea, and?"

"At least you have a new career path to fall back on while mine is winding down...and I've got no options on the table."

"I'll give ya that. You'll have the Ninety-Six for only a few years, but Mission Oversight is on your plate forever!"

In deep thought, Jacob admits, "We know that but, honestly, I really want nothing to do with the kOri."

"You know that has to get done."

"I know, but I don't wanna be the one that does it."

Maria looks at her hand, shakes her head and flatly states, "We really don't have a choice."

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