

Star Wars: Continuance

Unexpected

*What if Qui-gon Jinn had survived the battle with
Darth Maul...? Part II*

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"This time, Greivous has gone too far."

Anakin had seldom seen master Qui-Gon so angry. It was true, this debacle of an assault on Coruscant was maddening- hadn't Qui-Gon counseled Count Dooku that it was too soon?- but the abduction of the Chancellor of the Republic- unauthorized by the Triumvirate of the Confederacy- had him truly seething.

And the war had been going so *well*. Not that Anakin had wanted it to come to war; but negotiations had simply broken down- first with Yoda, on Geonosis... were it not for Qui-Gon's level head, Anakin was sure it would have broken into a fight; as it was, their departure from Geonosis under the Republic guns was *tense*, to say the least. And then, with the Republic at large. The Jedi council wouldn't listen to reason; their dogma was holding them back. Or perhaps their stubbornness. Or their ignorance? Anakin found that his list of disgusts with the Jedi council grew daily; how he could ever have imagined serving under them, he didn't know.

However, with several months to plan and prepare, the Separatists; first strike at Boz Pity had been a decisive victory; the Republic, unaware, though not unprepared, had fought back, but the war was simply not in their favor. Perhaps if they'd managed to create an ambush at Geonosis and destroy a large portion of their forces on-planet; but without an early victory for the Republic, they were losing a war of attrition.

Which made Dooku's insistence of a strike on the heavily fortified Coruscant, a maneuver that was obviously months- maybe close to a year- premature, so baffling. If he would just wait... but ultimately, while the Triumvirate of ex-Jedi 'led' the Separatists, Count Dooku had final say over the navy.

And now, they were committed to this chaotic, calamitous assault. And Greivous- that loathsome cyborg; it made Anakin's skin crawl to serve alongside him... part man and part machine... despite Anakin's love of technology, the combination struck him as an abomination- had apparently taken it on himself to launch a secret commando strike; a high-profile captive aboard the flagship changed everything.

Momentarily distracted, Anakin worried about his mother and C-3PO; he hadn't seen them since his decision to join the Separatists; and now, they could be in danger from their assault on the planet below. The residential areas were designated as non-targets, but where Grievous and his bloodlust were concerned...

The doors to the General's Quarters parted with a rumble, revealing the great, open deck; it's wall-dominating massive viewports showing a kaleidoscopic display of roiling lights and flashing bolts, fiery flares and silent deaths. The battle of Coruscant.

On the massive confines of the decking, only two beings resided. Count Dooku, resplendent in his formal robes, cape draped over one shoulder, lightsaber at his belt, stood before a shackled figure in a high-backed observation chair; the Chancellor of the Republic himself, Cos Palpatine.

Dooku looked mildly surprised at their entrance.

Qui-gon strode purposefully forward.

"So, it's true, then. We've captured the Chancellor."

If Anakin didn't know better, he'd almost swear it took a second for the outrage to form on Palpatine's face; as if it hadn't been there before.

"This is an illegal act!" he crowed, in a bleating voice like a nerf's. "An outrage of decency, to attack a non-military target with full civilian population-"

"Surely you're not going to claim that you're a non-military target, Chancellor..." Anakin cut him off with a deadpanned drawl. "You are, technically, the commander of the military."

"Still," Qui-gon noted, the hard these-are-the-facts-now-let's-figure-out-what-to-do-about-this-situation edge in his voice meaning business, "It was never in our plan to take hostages; this will make us a target for every Jedi rescue attempt that the republic can muster. This complicates matters."

"Have no fear, my friend." Dooku's rich baritone was all reassurance. "There is a greater plan at work here; one I regret not being able to inform you of before. Everything is proceeding-"

"Sir! We have Jedi intruders aboard! Roger roger!"

The mechanized voice cut through the air like a knife; Anakin winced- clearly a new batch on board, one he hadn't had the chance to tinker with. Certainly the war-time infrastructure made vocoder replacement a low priority, but Anakin could not stop insisting that the morale victory was handed to the Republic on a platter in every battle in which the Separatist forces sounded like buffoons- thus most of his free time since the war had begun (at least, the times when he was separate from his now-pregnant wife) was spent retuning battle droids to a more menacing vocal profile.

Dooku looked as if he was debating continuing his earlier line of reasoning, then thought better of it.

"Do you have an identification?" He barked into his commlink.

"A red Eta-2 Actis-class interceptor, supreme commander. That would mean-

"*Kenobi*." The low growl from Dooku was almost a curse as he killed the commlink.

Qui-gon looked worried; whether for their safety or that of his old Padawan, Anakin didn't know.

"If Obi-wan is here, he'll have his Padawan with him. And he will be coming directly here."

"Let him come, master. Perhaps we can convince him to join the cause. Yoda wouldn't listen, but perhaps-

"Are you forgetting Tano?"

Qui-gon's tone held a tone of rebuke. Anakin realized belatedly that Kenobi was unlikely to listen to them after all; fate had kept them apart throughout the war, and they had yet to meet on the battlefield; lest they would have attempted Kenobi's conversion far earlier. Instead, Anakin had not seen him since their joint mission to Ansion- a lifetime ago, it seemed, before this war had begun.

But Qui-gon had held out hope for his former apprentice, and Dooku seemed enthusiastic for the idea of swaying as many Jedi from the order as possible, using Anakin and Qui-gon's conversion as a 'foothold.' And so had begun their recent mission to Nelvaan, to intercept Kenobi and his young learner as they attempted to foil biological enhancements of the native fighting force.

Yet fate had struck again; the natives had appointed Kenobi's Togrutan Padawan to go on alone. They had never even reached Kenobi before encountering the girl; in the ensuing duel, she had been killed. Anakin had not meant to strike her down, even as she taunted him with absurd nicknames and foolish chatter- but she was weak from exposure to the frigid surface in her ridiculously scant garments (Anakin had his doubts about Kenobi's morality if he let her run around in that) and her footing wasn't secure; she had fallen to her demise from a high gantry. The operation was aborted; Kenobi would not listen then, nor would he be likely to now, not to those whom he considered Tano's murderers.

"Kenobi and Olin are of no consequence," Dooku opined. "They will turn, or be destroyed. Can you handle this, my friend? I know he was once close to you, but..."

Qui-gon's teeth were grinding. He and Anakin had found, after longer exposure to Dooku, that his methods were harsh, almost brutal, at times, unbound by Jedi codes. It was where they most frequently clashed. Qui-gon suspected Dooku saw the opposite; thought of them as weak, still bound by dogma. Which is why he was not sharing something with them, Qui-gon said. They were being told the truth about the Sith in the senate, corruption in the Republic... but not the whole truth, somehow.

But that was a matter for another time.

"I will do what must be done." He said at last.

"Perhaps this confrontation would go better if I wasn't here, master..."

Qui-gon shook his head.

"I do not wish to fight Obi-wan, but if it comes to that, it will take all of us."

Anakin swore he heard Dooku snort, almost imperceptibly, in derision.

"Well, then, master... what do we do?"

"You could start by releasing the Chancellor. Now."

The voice came from the turbolift bank at the far end of the room.

The vast General's Quarters were suddenly starting to seem crowded.

And yet, incongruously, Qui-gon's face still warmed with a smile.

"Obi-wan; it is good to see you."

Kenobi stood there, tall, proud, saber ignited- a firm and unyielding expression seemingly etched into a face of stone. Beside him, Ferus Olin looked nervous as he held his sword almost clumsily. His appointment as Kenobi's Padawan couldn't have been more than weeks ago.

"Be careful, master Jedi!" Bleated Palpatine with almost theatrical fervor. "These are dangerous men! I just heard them boating of the death of your Padawan!"

Qui-gon rolled his eyes as he stepped forward.

"Obi-wan, listen to me-

"Release the chancellor. Immediately. And we'll *talk*." Kenobi's voice was ice.

"I can't do that." Qui-gon's expression was sorrowful.

Dooku's blade ignited.

Olin started forward in a charge.

Obi-wan shot out an arm to restrain him by the shoulder, and just missed.

"Ferus, wait-!"

And then Olin was locking blades with Dooku. A strike, a strike, a parry, a strike- and he was on the ground. Outclassed by a parsec. Dooku's face was a grit-teethed mask of rage at the impudence of his

young assailant- in another situation, it might have been amusement, contempt, or dismissal, but here... Dooku's saber went up for the killing strike. Olin was sprawled on the decking, trying to rise.

The saber reached its apex and arced downwards towards the decapitation of Ferus Olin.

Kenobi's blade was there.

He was fast, lightning fast. Anakin's saber was out and ignited before he could think; he'd never seen a move like that. Olin rose, bringing his saber to bear on this new sound; Anakin stretched out and kicked him as he pushed off of the ground, sending his saber flying out of his hand. It arced hit the deck spinning, a whirling disc of lethal energy... and with a shower of sparks, sliced cleanly through the base of Palpatine's chair. With a startled cry, the Chancellor tumbled to the deck, still bound into his chair, now almost swallowed by it as he lay on his back, flailing in an undignified manner.

"Protect the Chancellor!" Kenobi barked, as he sent Dooku stumbling back with a forceful strike. He spun towards his old master.

With a gaze of infinite sadness, Qui-gon ignited his emerald blade.

Olin's saber flew through the air, back into his waiting palm, and he charged Anakin. Anakin grunted; this would be a challenge.

He didn't want to accidentally kill another one.

the battle was an intricate dance, a strobing, flashing weave of energy arcing through the air. Kenobi was a masterful swordsman; he had to be to contend with both Anakin and Dooku. Qui-gon seemed the most adept at the dance- never locking more than a glancing blow with Kenobi's blade; somehow, he always seemed to find himself in the part of the battle to confront Olin. In another situation, Anakin might have teased him about sticking with someone his own skill level; swordsmanship was never Qui-gon's mastery.

And then Obi-wan was on him.

The blows were fierce and relentless; Anakin could not see where Dooku or Master Qui-gon were- only Kenobi's snarling face, rage-filled, and the flash of a lightsaber weaving faster than a mortal man could move.

Anakin gave no ground, answering blow for blow.

It seemed to last for hours; it could have been seconds. Time perception was completely meaningless; there was only Anakin Skywalker and Obi-wan Kenobi in all the universe.

Kenobi roared his rage, pouring his hatred into his strikes as they grew, impossibly, faster.

Anakin looked into his eyes and saw the Dark Side. It attracted and repelled him; it seemed to reach for him, to beckon him- this was his place, it said, not Kenobi's. It also frightened him.

"I'm sorry." he whispered.

It could not have been more than a hoarse croak, inaudible over the deafening buzz of the lightsabers- yet Kenobi responded.

"You should be sorry- you killed her, you monster!"

Anakin looked at the depths of his rage- looked past them, saw the depths of his grief- and the guilt that had been plaguing him since Nelvaan rose to the forefront again. He hadn't wanted this; hadn't wanted to create *this*.

"It was an accident!" No, that was an excuse, a defense. "It was... I'm sorry, Kenobi. I didn't mean for her to die."

Kenobi's blade flashed, it's dance of death surrounding him. Anakin didn't know how long he could keep this up.

"I- I was wrong. Proudful. Arrogant- I should have been more careful. I should have saved her. I'm sorry!"

Kenobi slowed, if only slightly, as their duel raged on. His words were a challenge.

"If you didn't want her to die, then why did you attack her?!"

"It wasn't like that! We were searching for you!"

"So it's my fault she's dead?!"

"It was a misunderstanding, Obi-wan!" Qui-gon's voice rang out clearly behind them. "As this is! We don't want to fight."

Kenobi backed off, then, and Anakin turned to see Dooku and Qui-gon; between them, a struggling Olin, and behind them, the Chancellor, still flat on his back.

Kenobi looked weary.

"Master Qui-gon, you've betrayed the Republic."

"Perhaps, Obi-wan. But I've stayed true to the living Force. I am meant to be here; to fight the Sith that

are corrupting the Republic. I have never betrayed the ideals of the Jedi. Please... just give me a chance to explain."

"Master, don't listen to them!" Olin shouted, grunting and straining against his captors.

Ignoring him, Obi-wan nodded, slowly. He deactivated his blade; Anakin did the same.

"All right, Qui-gon. You have one minute."

Olin looked horrified.

"Master, no! Don't listen to the Separatists!"

He struggled futilely against the strong arms of Dooku.

"Be silent, boy- or you will not live to make another sound."

Olin continued to kick and fight against his grasp... but Anakin noticed that he was grinning. His hand was open, pointed towards...

Qui-gon took a step forward, an uncertain but encouraged smile forming on his lips.

"A minute is all I ask, Obi-wan..."

...his lightsaber, clipped to his belt, was quivering.

Olin's hand tightened into a fist.

"Master!" Anakin shouted, throwing his hand up, pushing the lightsaber free.

At the same moment, it ignited.

Olin gasped in dismay as, wherever he'd intended to summon it, Anakin's Force Push sent it bouncing away.

Qui-gon whirled.

Dooku turned.

The lit saber, thrown in a random direction, arced over the chancellor's prone figure.

Towards the bright flashes. Towards the roiling maelstrom of battle.

Towards the viewport.

"Hold on!"

Anakin didn't know who had shouted it. Perhaps it was him. Perhaps Qui-gon. All he could think of was anchoring himself in the Force, grabbing a nearby railing-

And the world disappeared in a roar.

The great viewport shattered into a thousand diamond chunks and the air rushed out of the General's Quarters. Qui-gon's lightsaber was lost to the void, spiraling to infinity, a tiny point of light high dwindling high above Coruscant.

Commlinks were snatched into the void. Gear and loose items were blown into the void. The force of the escaping atmosphere was tremendous; without the Force, Anakin would have been wrenched out immediately.

A chair tumbled into the void.

It was occupied.

Anakin saw terror on the face of Chancellor Palpatine, still shackled helplessly in his chair, as it was sucked into space. His hand was held out in a futile gesture, trying to grab something, anything, outstretched for salvation; it almost looked like a Force gesture. Perhaps in his panic, Palpatine was imitating the life-saving maneuvers he'd seen his Jedi protectors employ.

From Palpatine's helpless position, not even a Force-user would have been able to save himself; with no anchoring connection to the ground to hold on to, no lifeline to grab ahold of, no time to think or concentrate, not even a free hand to gesture with... even a Jedi would have been helpless. He bounced on the floor once, and then he was suspended before the great, blazing battle beyond...

With his last breath, he shouted over the void- it sounded like a plea for help, but it was a term Anakin had never heard before, a nonsense word-

"Tyrannuuuuus!!!"

...and then he was gone.

The tug of the hurricane was almost inexorable; Obi-wan had Olin, who was clearly incapable of saving himself; Qui-gon was pulling himself hand-over-hand along a railing towards the turbolift banks at the back of the room. Dooku was rooted to the spot, his mouth hanging open in disbelieving shock.

The howling wind was beginning to subside, but Anakin's strength was fading faster. They had to get out of there, *now*.

Kenobi's footing gave way as a chunk of the deck was torn free.

Kenobi and Olin flew towards the void.

Anakin's hand shot out, catching Kenobi in an iron grip. The force of the sudden stop nearly pulled Anakin off of his feet. He secured his arm to a railing, pulling against the wind.

Kenobi met his eyes.

There was no forgiveness... but there was gratitude.

They would not fight today.

Anakin turned his attention to Dooku. He hadn't moved; his jaw was slack and his eyes glassy; he seemed in shock.

"Count!" he shouted.

Dooku stared, slack-jawed, at the place where Palpatine had disappeared.

"Count! We have to go, now!"

Dooku took a step backwards. His gaze didn't waver; his mouth didn't shut.

Anakin hauled himself, agonizing inch by agonizing inch, along the railing. Behind him, Kenobi and Olin caught the railing and began to haul themselves along as well. Dooku simply walked backwards against the wind, staring out into the void in abject shock.

An eternity later, they were at the doors of the lift, Qui-gon helping them inside. As Dooku crossed the threshold, Qui-gon hit the Emergency Seal. The doors snapped shut.

It was suddenly very quiet.

Five Force-users eyed each other warily within the lift-tube lifeboat they nestled inside.

"Well master..." Anakin began, slowly, "We appear to have lost our hostage. And I believe that Padawan Olin is now responsible for assassinating the Chancellor of the Republic. What do we do now?"

Qui-gon looked shaken.

"I don't know, Anakin... I don't know. Count?"

Dooku's jaw hung open as he stared forward in a trance-like shock.

Silence.

"Well..." said Kenobi, somewhat uncomfortably.

"It would seem we have that minute after all."

Anakin Skywalker raced home aboard a Republic Starship, aglow. He'd done it. He'd ended the war in time for the birth of his child. And now, he didn't want to miss it.

Pacing the flight deck, ready to leap into his starfighter the moment the craft reverted from Hyperspace, Anakin mused at the complexities of fate.

It seemed that Palpatine was the key to the war. With his death, a shaken Dooku- who had taken nearly three hours to find his voice after the Chancellor's death- had announced that the Separatists had no wish to fight anymore. With the battle above Coruscant close to a stalemate, the negotiating team of Jinn and Skywalker, joined this time by Kenobi and with the full authority of the Separatist movement behind them, were finally able to open a dialogue.

A truce was found. An accord formed.

The war was over.

The Republic was holding votes for a new Chancellor.

Dooku had declined a leadership role within the new government structure, instead retreating to Soreno. He claimed he could do more good to heal the galaxy by setting up a shelter for the lost Jedi, Force-sensitive war orphans, and those disillusioned by the Jedi. To take them in and train them independently of the Jedi order. Who knew? Anakin thought. Perhaps someday he'd found his own order.

Greivous was being tried for war crimes.

Jango Fett had disappeared back into his mercenary lifestyle.

Nute Gunray had disappeared entirely.

And Anakin... Anakin was now a celebrity. As was Master Qui-gon. The former Jedi who'd ended the war; who'd brought the warring factions together- who'd stuck by their principles, against their order. The men who had brought peace.

Which didn't prevent, Anakin, supposed, literally millions who considered them traitors. The Jedi council did not want them back; they rejected Anakin as thoroughly as he rejected the Jedi.

He didn't care.

He had fame. An influential position within the new government; one that would allow him to lead the

battles, take charge of the forces- a position from which he could affect change, do good, without being bound to politics. All the things a Jedi was supposed to do, without the restrictions of the council.

And he had Padme. And soon, a son or daughter.

His dreams come true.

Anakin was stirred from his reverie by the slam of an equipment locker. A clone was in the bay with him, his armor demarcating him as a commando; just above the republic's standard level disposable drone, then. Anakin frowned.

His dreams come true...

"You!" he called out.

The clone turned and approached him.

"What's your identification?"

"I'm Sev, sir."

"Sev? I wasn't aware that clones had *names*."

"RC 1207, Delta Squad, sir!" The clone responded immediately. And then, after a second, "And names are one of the few things they *do* let us have. Sir."

"Tell me... Sev. What are you going to be doing, now that the war is over?"

"Serve, sir."

"Yes, but once your tour of duty is over?"

"Over, sir?"

"Exactly. How does a clone plan to retire? What are you all going to do once you're out of the military?"

The clone cocked it's- his- head and let the silence stretch on for a moment.

"Sir, I don't think you understand. We're born. We're trained. We serve. We die. We don't get *out*. Ever."

Anakin didn't know how to respond to that.

"You're in the military for life? Even if there's no fighting?"

"There will always be fighting. Border skirmishes, pirates to repel, smugglers to hunt. Enough to justify keeping a fighting force. So, yes, sir, we're in the military until we die. they didn't ask us if we wanted to join; why should they ask us if we want to leave?" The clone sarcasm turned to a caustic bitterness. "To them, we're not *made* to have lives of our own. Dismissed, *sir*?"

Anakin nodded, distracted, as the clone departed for... whatever clones did. Whatever their masters told them to, he supposed. Little more than a puppet, an unwilling pawn. This was the corruption of the Republic; a being born into servitude, to fight and die and never have a choice of it's own.

His dreams come true.

Anakin sighed.

Padme wouldn't like this.

She'd agree with him, support his choice. But she wouldn't like it. The war just over and already, a new crusade.

But like joining the Separatists, it was what he *had* to do.

He'd known it since he was a child.

He'd dreamt it. It was his destiny.

And now, his dream *would* come true.

He was going to free the slaves.