

Chapter 7

Perfect Treachery

The boy Palpatine closed the communication portal and sat back to think about his plans for the day. Nearly a year had gone by since Voldemort arrived. The white-skinned being had mentored him through his year as a senator, and taught him a great deal about the dark side of the Force. He also, thankfully, removed the ears and tail given to the boy by the creatures of the devastated Mos Eisley. Still, Palpatine looked forward to the time when the chains would be broken.

“Sir, it is nearly time. Shall we?” asked Kerelik, his fundraiser, entering the room. He was the only staffer who still worked for Palpatine. His former Chief went to a faraway village to run for mayor. His technician now worked for the planetary television network, and nobody knew what happened to the communications consultant. Voldemort had replaced the staff with unpaid interns, who were more than happy to pad their resumes working for the planet’s youngest Senator ever.

Palpatine was set to meet with representatives from the Trade Federation, who had come to Coruscant for a summit. They wanted to open a new trade route through the Naboo system, leading to Tatooine. Since the destruction of Mos Eisley, the planet had become the center of a speculative mining craze. The water that erupted from the crash site held trace elements of magnetic ore, and investors from all around the Republic wanted to extract the mineral.

Naturally, nobody knew that Palpatine and his Chief of Staff Voldemort had anything to do with it.

“Let’s go,” the Senator answered, and the two of them started off toward the meeting room.

The boy Senator was widely considered precocious and daring. He was a skilled negotiator, and many felt it was due to his youth, which disarmed his opponents. Others noticed that Voldemort was often close by whenever the senator made a decision, and some started to suspect that the cloaked consultant held greater sway with Palpatine than was normal.

Voldemort was busy directing the setup of the meeting room. He had chosen a large hall, and had outfitted it with tapestries and flags from Naboo. The senator would sit on cushions on an elevated platform, while the Trade Federation reps would sit in uncomfortable straight-backed chairs, with the seats a few inches too low. The arrangement would favor the Senator. Voldemort knew that presentation was everything.

“Sir, welcome!” Voldemort said as Palpatine and the staffer walked in. “The others will arrive soon, and you will enter from the rear door a few minutes later. Make them wait.”

“Thank you, Voldemort,” said the Senator. “What are our final terms?”

“The walkaway is full jurisdiction and half of the protection cost,” answered Voldemort.

“Very well, less than half means no deal,” said Palpatine. Naboo wanted full control of the route, but the Trade Federation was unwilling to pay any royalty for it.

“Sir, they are on their way,” said the intern by the door.

“Splendid. Places, everyone!” said Voldemort, clapping his hands together. They took positions standing around the hall. Voldemort opened the rear door for the Senator.

The interns opened the main doors for the representatives from the Trade Federation. They were Neimoidians, the dominant species in the organization. Voldemort surged forward to welcome them.

“Greetings, gentlemen!” he announced, bowing.

“Thank you,” said the Neimoidians in their thick accent. Voldemort had heard it before, in impressions of Asian people from his home planet and in the Star Wars films. Even he thought it sounded racist.

“We are very grateful for this audience,” said the leader as they bowed slightly. “And you please us with your red carpet treatment.” They referred to the opulent decorations and the actual red carpet on the floor, thinking it was meant to make them feel like honored guests, though of course it wasn’t.

Voldemort led the three to their seats. “The Senator will be here presently. Please make yourselves comfortable,” he said, gesturing to the stoic chairs. They sat and fidgeted while Voldemort poured them some coffee. He had read that it gave Neimoidians indigestion, though they sold a lot of it.

After graciously taking the coffee from an insistent Voldemort, they all waited a few more minutes for Senator Palpatine. When he finally entered, the Neimoidians stood and bowed. There was nowhere to put their still-full coffee cups.

“Welcome, Sirs,” said the Senator. “I trust you have been treated well.” He bowed slightly.

“Thank you, Senator. Your host has been most gracious,” the leader answered. Voldemort nodded silently from his position next to the Senator’s platform.

“You are Nute Ginrych, is that right?” asked Palpatine.

“Correct, Sir, and this is Taum Deelai and Paat Byookanon,” the leader answered, gesturing to his colleagues. Palpatine sat down, followed by the Neimoidians.

“You are going to profit well from this new trade route, I suspect,” Palpatine said.

“Well, Senator, it will be very costly to maintain, of course,” answered Ginrych. “New routes always carry risk.”

“Then why open the route at all?” asked the Senator.

“The long-term benefits could be very great for both of our interests,” said the Neimoidian.

“I see. Yet you would like us to protect the route at no cost to your organization,” said Palpatine.

“We have no means for protection, Sir,” said Ginrych. Of course, he was lying. The Trade Federation had been secretly arming its ships for years. Voldemort knew this, though he did not realize that Palpatine did as well.

“But you do have the means,” said the Senator. “The profit you earn around the galaxy helps you pay a significant royalty in some cases, such as in the Kessel system.”

“That is a very dangerous sector,” said Ginrych. “Your system is very peaceful. It’s without comparison, Sir.”

Voldemort grinned. The Neimoidian had offered a solid argument and a complement in one statement, but he had also left an opening. He leaned in and whispered in Palpatine's ear.

"Then you won't object to paying one hundred percent of protection costs," the Senator offered.

The three Neimoidians stirred. "One hundred percent?" the leader said. "This is outrageous. We do not yet know the viability of the ore on Tatooine. How can we absorb this cost?"

"I have seen Tatooine," answered Palpatine. "I am concerned about the type of people the route will attract."

"We traders are honest businessmen," said Ginrych.

"Pirates are not," said the Senator.

"Very well, we will pay half of the costs."

"One hundred percent," said the Senator. Voldemort smiled. He had trained the boy well.

"We cannot go above this if you have jurisdiction."

"Our control of the route through our system is not on the table," said Palpatine.

"We realize that," said Ginrych. "But perhaps we can make one additional request."

Voldemort and Palpatine both raised an eyebrow. Introducing new terms during this kind of meeting was unseemly, but it was often a fruitful tactic.

"We wish to have a seat in the Galactic Senate," said the Neimoidian. This was highly irregular, since he represented a private company, not a planet. The very idea was foolish.

Voldemort leaned toward Palpatine again. "You should consider this idea," he whispered.

"What? It's insane," Palpatine hissed.

"They would be forever indebted to you, which may be useful to you in the future," Voldemort whispered into the senator's ear. The eight-year-old senator gritted his teeth. This seemed like a terrible idea to him, but his white-skinned political advisor had never been wrong. Not yet.

"Perhaps I can offer this in a motion to the Senate," Palpatine said to the Neimoidians. "But that is all. Such a bill would be worth the full cost of protection, would it not?"

The Trade Federation representatives consulted quietly with each other. "We agree to your terms," Ginrych said.

The group stood up and exchanged small talk, and then the Neimoidians left. Voldemort stood with Palpatine.

"Sir, that was an excellent outcome. Your negotiating skills have become legend," Voldemort said to the Senator.

"I suspect your intimidation tactics helped," Palpatine answered. "A strange arrangement, a private company holding a Senate seat. Do you think the Queen will approve of this?"

"Why don't we return to Naboo to meet with her?" Voldemort asked. "I could arrange a meeting very quickly."

Palpatine smiled. "A tremendous idea. Please return immediately and work your magic," he said, gesturing at the décor around the room. "I will meet you there in a few days."

Voldemort agreed and left the room. He could apparate around the galaxy, but Palpatine had insisted he use a ship, to

avoid anybody catching on that his Chief of Staff was a powerful wizard. He arranged for a ship from the Senator's fleet and left within an hour.

As Voldemort and two interns left Coruscant's atmosphere and prepared to engage the Hyperdrive, a small unidentified fighter craft approached. Voldemort tried to read the thoughts of its pilot, but got nothing. Spells were difficult to use in outer space because of the huge distances involved.

Before Voldemort could respond, the fighter fired. Its laser cannons blasted the Naboo ship to smithereens.

"The task is complete, Lord," said Ginrych's voice on the intercom in Palpatine's office. The Senator, alone in the room, sat and shed a tear for the two interns with Voldemort.

"Very well," he answered through a voice enhancer. "The Senator was not on board, so he can fulfill your terms."

"Thank you, Lord," said Ginrych. Palpatine closed the portal and sat back. The Trade Federation's robotic fighter craft had worked as planned, catching Voldemort by surprise.

The year of training in the dark side had done wonders for Palpatine. He had learned about curses, charms, and horcruxes. His magic was different from Voldemort's. There were some things he could never do, such as fly or apparate, but he had learned to read the minds of others, and also to keep people, including Voldemort, from reading his. There was no way Voldemort had seen this coming.

A thorough search of the destroyed ship's particle cloud revealed no signs of life. Voldemort was dead.