**A Practical Guide to Malice**

Disclaimer: I do not own Star Wars or a Practical Guide to Evil. While I am convinced I can’t do better than the author of the latter, the former has introduced ideas which look good in theory but are absolutely screwed up when they must take reality into account.

“*Only heroes get to have the torch handed to them. Villains must take it from their predecessor’s corpse*.” Dread Empress Malicia, First of her Name.

**Approximately twenty-eight hours before the beginning of the Clone Wars**

**Coruscant**

**The Senate**

If the news had been relayed to him in his private quarters, Sheev Palpatine would have placed his head between his hands and sighed.

Seriously, what had Nute Gunray been thinking, trying to assassinate Padme Amidala for what had to be the two hundred and fiftieth time in ten years, and then spreading the news it had been successful?

Was the pathetic Viceroy creature erasing part of its memories between assassination attempts? It was the only explanation which somehow made sense, given how famous his target was for using body doubles!

Thankfully, nothing important had been lost. The representative of the Trade Federation was looking like an idiot now that he had announced the young Senator’s death, but he, like the rest of his useless race, would be purged as soon as his usefulness ended – in this one’s case, the deadline was more likely not going to be past this evening.

“It is with great pleasure,” the Supreme Chancellor beamed as the Nabooian Senator’s repulsorpod moved towards the podium, “I cede the floor to the representative of the Chommell Sector, Senator Padme Amidala.”

Sheev Palpatine had to force himself to smile as he saw what the Senator who had replaced him was wearing, though. In the last years, it had become impossible to deny Padme Amidala was a beautiful woman, but at least most of the times her clothes were dignified and conservative, making sure her physical attractiveness didn’t influence the senators who cared about such things...and they were a number far greater than anyone unaware of internal senatorial affairs was aware of.

No, today, her dress didn’t answer any definition of conservative or modest he was aware of. The red robe was certainly purchased from one of the many Corellian luxury dress-makers given how much cleavage it revealed...not to mention more than half of her back was exposed.

Add a ruby brooch, several earrings, and other ostensible symbols of wealth, and the Dark Lord of the Sith was ready to bet this old pervert of Orn Free Taa was literally masturbating at the very sight of her behind the privacy field of his repulsorpod.

“Thank you for those kind words, Supreme Chancellor,” the young woman nodded respectfully before addressing the thousands of beings in the chamber. “I am sorry in advance to importunate this chamber with an issue we have debated countless times, but I fear the recent assassination on my delegation has brought up a problem which needs to be corrected immediately.”

If thousands of holocameras were not directly pointed at him, Sheev would have been tempted to gloat. For reasons which somehow made him greatly question the naivety of his ‘successor’, Padme Amidala had continued to be one of the fiercest opponents against the Military Creation Act.

Fine, they could debate one more time about it. It was going to be one of those amusing chaotic messes which would be recognised as ‘evidence’ the Republic was unable to do anything and-

“I speak, of course, about the Bacta Trade Act.”

What?

His control on his body was near-absolute, so Darth Sidious barely raised an eyebrow. As loud shouts and murmurs filled the chamber, it was evident his reaction was the weakest of the assembly.

“It is thanks to Bacta tanks many of my advisors and security personnel are still alive today instead of dead,” the Nabooian politician’s determined voice engulfed the chamber. “And for the average citizen of the Galactic Republic, this medical service is completely unaffordable; it can’t be, since the Zaltin and Xucphra Corporations have increased the standard price of a Bacta tank by two hundred percent in the last three years.”

The representative of Zaltin was the first to shout back.

“Anti-piracy operations have resulted in a dramatic increase of our operating costs!”

Sheev Palpatine mentally rolled his eyes. This had nothing to do with piracy; it was just few greedy officials eager to siphon into their private bank accounts billions of credits.

“Strange,” Padme Amidala’s tone had a noticeable aftertaste of sarcasm, “did the honourable representative not assure us more than twenty times in front of the Health Committee that it was the impossibility of expanding the production facilities in orbit of Thyferra which was responsible for this situation?”

The middle-aged politician paid by the Zaltin Corporation paled considerably, all the while the one of the Xucphra Corporation sent him death glares. Someone was going to lose his job before the day was over...

“Thankfully, whatever the lies and fake apologies the Zaltin Corporation has for us, this lamentable situation is soon going to end.”

Darth Sidious didn’t like that at all...especially because he couldn’t see what the charismatic woman had in mind. Bacta was only produced on Thyferra, a result of its unique origin: the two strands of bacteria which combined together created the healing substance had never been found anywhere else in the galaxy – or if they had been, neither his dead Master nor himself had heard a rumour about it.

And of course the imbecile of the Zaltin Corporation may have finally shut up, but the Neimodian of the Trade Federation was willing to replace him on the spot.

“And what pray tell, what incredible solution have you found which has escaped the minds of this assembly?”

“Thanks to the astounding efforts of my bioengineers,” the former Queen of Naboo answered with a charming smile the species she had every reason to hate, “I am proud to announce the collaboration between the sovereign worlds of Arkanis and Naboo, supported by many other investors, has succeeded in replicating the formula of Bacta.”

If Sheev Palpatine had detonated a laser bomb into the Senate Chamber, the explosion would certainly have created less tumult and loud shouting than it did after the words were uttered.

With an expert eye, Darth Sidious recognised there was immediately three big categories: those who were ecstatic about the news, those who didn’t believe it, and the Corporate ‘Senators’ who were hyperventilating at the idea of their Bacta margins going down in flames.

“This is ridiculous!” somehow, the Neimodian managed to shriek higher than the chaotic roars of the Senators. “She is lying!”

The Supreme Chancellor suddenly wondered how many stupid remarks and accusations a lackey of Nute Gunray could make in a single session. There had to be a limit, surely?

“I am not lying,” it was said respectfully, but no one could miss the fact ‘Senator’ or any form of respect was absent, “and in order to kill any ridiculous and baseless claims like this one, the sovereign worlds of Arkanis and Naboo have agreed upon a course. Each of the major hospitals of Coruscant, beginning here with the noble institution of Galactic City, is delivered as we speak one hundred Bacta tanks free of charge. The Republic Health Service has already confirmed its willingness to form impartial committees of its most prestigious doctors and medical experts so that it will be confirmed this Bacta is the equal of its predecessor in healing potency and does not create any secondary effects on the body of a patient.”

For the first time in years, silence reigned among the Senators. Most of the Senators were too shocked to snarl or do something idiotic.

Because even those black holes of intelligence understood that if Padme Amidala was willing to go that far advertising the ‘new Bacta’ of Arkanis-Naboo, then it was evident the substance was the real deal and not a hasty fake concocted to artificially decrease the Bacta prices before the Separatist crisis escalated.

This was the end of the Thyferra-based megacorporations’ monopoly on the Bacta.

And none of his spies had warned him something like that this was happening behind the scenes!

Darth Sidious seethed, and began to mentally prepare a few vigorous questions for his intelligence network. How had they been able to miss something of this magnitude? By the ashes of Korriban, how had the girl successfully engineered something like that in the first place? Bioengineers and medical scientists had tried to replicate Bacta since its discovery more than four thousand years ago?

It changed...everything.

And while the Sith Lord had nothing against change, this monumental alteration to the equilibrium of the dying Republic made it...extremely dangerous.

In the mean time, the representative of the Xucphra Corporation had sufficiently recovered to argue with Padme Amidala.

“The creation of this Bacta is obviously illegal! By the Bacta Cartel Creation Act, the sovereign worlds of Naboo and Arkanis should have applied to join the Bacta Cartel when this...this *outlandish* discovery was made!”

Sheev Palpatine scoffed internally. A lot of people wished to insult everyone’s intelligence today. Of course neither Padme Amidala nor her accomplices had warned the Bacta Cartel of their discovery. They weren’t brain-dead morons. Why would they warn the very people who were going to lose their monopoly when the CEO’s megacorporations were playing with the Bacta prices like one played with fuel and fire?

Still, the man – if you were particularly generous given his abysmally low cleverness – had a point.

“While the honourable representative of the Xucphra Corporation may be a bit too hasty in claiming what is illegal and what isn’t, he is correct about the contents of the Bacta Cartel Creation Act, Senator Amidala.” Sheev took great care to present an apologetic face to her.

“In fact, no, he isn’t,” Darth Sidious was unpleasantly surprised, and this time he liked it even less, for it was in politics, his domain of predilection, that his ‘successor’ was changing the game. “The Bacta Cartel Creation Act specifies the sovereign worlds producing Bacta must apply to join *a* Bacta Cartel. There is nothing in it which forces a sovereign world to rally to the Thyferra-founded organisation which has been unchallenged for years.”

The Supreme Chancellor had a near-eidetic memory, and when he replayed inside his memories the exact words of the Creation Act in question, he was forced to acknowledge the red-robed woman was right.

This was an obvious flaw in the legislation, but then nobody had thought the Bacta would be ever replicated without biological materials from Thyferra, which was what had evidently happened here.

“I see,” the Dark Lord of the Sith gave her a small smile, all the while asking himself if Nute Gunray hadn’t a point trying to assassinate her, given how many problems she had just made for his Great Plan. “I assume the proper paperwork is on its way through the committees?”

“It is, Supreme Chancellor. We intend to name it the Green Stretch Cartel.”

If there was some significance to the name, Sheev Palpatine didn’t recognise it.

However, the fact Padma Amidala was making it official was offering opportunities. The war was going to begin in a few days, no one, not even himself, could stop it now. And when it came down to it, Arkanis and Naboo were very vulnerable planets. Both had been fierce opponents of the Military Creation Act, and while they built some starfighters and similar-sized weapons, they wouldn’t fend a few Lucrehulk-class Battleships.

“I see. The two members are obviously Arkanis and Naboo, I suppose?”

Speaking the words, the Sith Lord suddenly realised most of the Senators were going to assume he had supported in the shadows such a move, when he had in fact no idea it was coming. He was the Senator of Naboo, and-

“The *production facilities* have been established on Arkanis and Naboo,” the young woman corrected with a charming smile the girl should not have been comfortable to express a few years ago, “the dual headquarters of the Green Stretch Cartel will also be located there. But in order to assuage fears of a new monopoly, it has been decided unanimously the Cartel couldn’t be an exclusive affair. It is why I have the great pleasure to announce the sovereign worlds of Arkanis, Naboo, Kuat, Sullust, and Mandalore will be the permanent members of the Green Stretch Cartel’s Board.”

What?

No, it was...

Palpatine’s thoughts were court-circuited.

Kuat was the lynchpin of its plan for his future Imperial Navy. It was building thousands of Star Destroyers as this session was happening. Kuat was so deep in his favour they couldn’t breathe without his permission!

And Sullust...Sullust meant the Commerce Guild, one of the economic and military hearts of the Separatist Cause!

Mandalore...Mandalore was representing all the non-aligned.

The Kryze Duchess was one of those naive pacifists unable to see what the Sith had engineered for the galaxy, but she had an enormous amount of influence in certain quarters.

This...this changed everything.

His eyes moved towards the four other Senators which were impacted by this ‘revelation’. All of them were incredibly smug, most of all the Arkanian, but the Kuati Heiress sitting in her repulsorpod wasn’t far behind.

Suddenly, all the manipulations and preparations that he and Tyranus had engineered for a decade were not looking as perfect as they had been a few hours ago.

“I see,” he repeated. “And this new Cartel, per your previous declarations before your...*fascinating* announcement, will sell Bacta at a far lower price than it is currently purchased?”

“We intend to return the prices where they stood five years ago,” Padme Amidala smiled innocently, as if she ignored doing that was going to destroy the Zaltin and Xucphra Corporation before the year was out.

Now that he had the time to evaluate the change, it was far from a disaster. Droids didn’t need Bacta, but Clones did. Therefore the large in increase of the Bacta stocks would allow the copies of Jango Fett to punch far above their weight, making sure the armies of Kamino held the line for the first couple of years whatever the Confederate Admirals did.

“Obviously, this will have *interesting implications* for the **Military Creation Act**.”

And Darth Sidious acknowledged he had not been unhappy enough.

Now how could he regain control before the casus belli which was going to start the Clone Wars?

\*\*\*\*

Two hours ago, the Council had openly told him the support of his Padawan and himself would significantly improve the security detail of the Senator.

Obi-Wan Kenobi was less and less certain it was true.

As the turbolift opened to let their duo accede to the Nabooian-decorated quarters, the Jedi who defeated the Sith Zabrak was greeted by what had to be a small company of black-armoured troopers.

Their identity had already been confirmed before they entered the building and twice before they took the turbolift, but they had another retina and a DNA holoscan before they were authorised to go further.

Oh, and for all the statues, the Force told him there were two turrets hidden on his left. Judging by the size of the decoys disguising them, they were most likely smaller models, but even a small lascannon in a turbolift entrance could kill a Jedi if he didn’t parry with his lightsaber fast enough.

The two antechambers they crossed weren’t exactly less defended. There were at least four guards per room, and the security systems were top-notch. One droid per antechamber guaranteed there would be no slicing to deactivate the defences at the worst possible moment...not unless you had a few thousand slicers working to overwhelm the existing protections, at least.

“Master Kenobi, Padawan Skywalker,” the Jedi duo bowed in respect. Senator Padme Amidala was looking...superb. And the emotions he was able to sense from her were mostly about amusement, which was...disconcerting.

There was some seconds of idle chatter, where to his relief the Senator didn’t comment on Anakin’s obvious stress and troubled feelings. They were allowed to stand on a massive couch in Kuati style, and Obi-Wan was a bit uneasy as the opposite one, the one the Queen and two of her servants used, was a vibrant red with a black sigil of tower.

“Rest assured we will do everything in our power to discover who tried to assassinate you,” the Jedi Master courteously affirmed.

The former Queen of Naboo raised a delicate eyebrow, and shifted her stance so that her black robe emphasized every one of her curves.

“In that case, why isn’t the Jedi Council racing to arrest Nute Gunray? I am ready to bet a billion credits he has forgotten to erase the evidence of the transactions with the second-rate assassins he paid.”

There was no hostility in her voice...but there was no emotion behind it either. Anakin answered the question before he could.

“The Order hasn’t been authorised to investigate the Trade Federation since Naboo...we were told it might destabilise the economy...”

“It might destabilise the economy?” Padme Amidala laughed, and the sound was magnificent...and a little troubling. “The Trade Federation and their friends have been increasing their prices for the last decade so that the entire Republic pays for the expenses of their military build-up. While we’re speaking, there must be over one hundred planets on the Outer Rim whose governments are ousted in coups and fraudulent elections.”

“Kuat and Sullust aren’t exactly the greatest supporters of democracy among the Senate, Senator.”

All he felt was amusement in return.

“You don’t like my choice of allies, Master Kenobi?”

“I think you could have found...people with far more principles to lead this new ‘Green Stretch Cartel’, Senator. Alderaan would have been a far better choice.”

The young woman chuckled.

“Oh yes, Alderaan would have been a far better choice...if I wanted to turn Naboo into a ruin of ashes and cinders.”

“I...I don’t understand.” But he had a bad feeling about this...

“Master Kenobi, Nute Gunray and all his allies of Thyferra hated me years ago, but with the promise of the Bacta trade escaping their grasp and most of the hulls of their gigantic cargo ships no longer having their monopoly, I estimate they are right now giving the orders to their captains to sail to Naboo and Arkanis and raze our planets so all the Bacta production facilities die with their creators.”

The former Queen took a bottle from her servants and began to fill herself several crystal glasses with the content, before adding some sort of powder to the alcoholic beverage.

“Upon their arrival however, they will notice quickly we have borrowed several battle-squadrons from Kuat and Sullust. Thus most of them will die, and the surviving ships will be returned to serve as transports for the Bacta and other indispensable goods we need the trade capacity for.”

Obi-Wan almost believed what he was hearing...it was delivered like it was a dark joke...and Padme Amidala didn’t seem to show the slightest hint of remorse about the sheer carnage which was about to triggered by her actions.

“You’re speaking about a galactic-sized war.”

“Yes? Certainly you don’t think the twenty thousand modified Lucrehulk-class Battleships the Separatist megacorporations have are going to be used as hospital ships or for some charity purposes, don’t you?”

“No,” Obi-Wan Kenobi conceded, “but there is a difference between knowing there are tensions and-“

“Nute Gunray is refusing to pay taxes, the Trade Federation’s killers are assassinating Senators – or in my case, attempting and failing – and your old friend the Count Dooku is trying to carve the Republic apart with Gunray’s enthusiastic support, Master Jedi.” The voice of Padme Amidala had lost all its amusement. “There is a word for it, and we call it treason.”

There were many things the Council had told him to show that the Order was standing in support of democracy and liberty.

Obi-Wan Kenobi was at loss if a single sentence should be said here...by the Force, he didn’t know if he should support Padme Amidala. Assuredly Nute Gunray was not an ally of the Jedi and never would be, but the Senator had just tacitly admitted the unveiling of the new Cartel had been done to provoke a rash reaction from the Trade Federation.

“We know you don’t like the Trade Federation, but-“

“But megacorporations shouldn’t have private armies under their control,” the young woman sipped the beverage of her glass. “Senators **rule** the Republic, the Commerce Guild and the Trade Federation like countless other trade entities must **trade**. Is the Jedi Order selling blasters to insurgents in the Outer Rim? Are the Hutt giving sport lessons in fitness centres? Every species has things it is suited for, and laws have to ben enforced less they be ignored entirely.”

Padme Amidala stopped drinking, and suddenly, her eyes were blue. Not a normal blue, truly a...vivid, ethereal blue. ‘Like the Force had turned them blue’ blue.

Anakin gaped, and he wasn’t the only one.

“How?”

“When my bioengineers tried to replicate Bacta, they returned to Tatooine and found an incredible substance generated by the immense worms you call Sarlacc.”

“You...you used the *spice melange* to replicate Bacta?”

“I did,” Obi-Wan was sure he was missing most of the context of this exchange. “But the Tuskens-“

“The Sandmen had to be dealt with a few times, yes.” The Senator admitted without batting an eye. “But my scientists quickly learned how to synthesise the spice. Now we are only taking it from Tatooine so that we have a large stockpile of Bacta for the war ahead.”

“This is *wrong*!” Obi-Wan couldn’t believe how ruthless and merciless the young Queen had turned out to be.

“Are you sure?” the amusement was back, and the Jedi Master felt something...significant happen in the Force, as the Senator of Naboo nodded to one of the numerous hooded figures leaning against the walls. “I forgot to tell you, but spice wasn’t the only thing I went to Tatooine for.”

And as the cloak fell, Obi-Wan recognised the woman. How could he not when his Padawan cherished the few holo-picts he had of her?

“Mother!” And Anakin jumped to embrace Shmi Skywalker.

“You...”

Obi-Wan Kenobi was speechless...and as he watched the delighted smile of Padme Amidala, a shiver of fear coursed in him.

The Senator was more dangerous than he had thought possible. And looking at his Padawan...Obi-Wan couldn’t help but feel he and the Jedi Order had lost Anakin’s loyalty, if they had it in the first place.

“What do you want, Senator?

“I want many things, Master Kenobi. **I** **want an Age of Prosperity and Peace to return**.”

**Author’s note**: If Palpatine thought he was going to have an easy Clone Wars, well...Padme-Malicia has been very happy showing him it won’t be the case.

And the Jedi Order has now to contend with a Dread Empress in control of the most valuable healing substance’s supply in the entire galaxy...is it too late regretting the Sith Lords?

The Clone Wars have begun, with a third side intent to ruin the day of the Jedi and Sidious alike...

The other links to the sites where An Impractical Guide to the Force can be found:

www. alternatehistory forum /threads /an-impractical-guide-to-the-force .499018/

www. p a treon Antony444

archiveofourown works /27421807 /chapters /67028977