

Wild Space (Star Wars: The Clone Wars)

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The Clone Wars have exploded across the galaxy as Republic forces and Separatists struggle to gain the upper hand. But while the Jedi generals work tirelessly to defeat Count Dooku and his rebels, Supreme Chancellor Palpatine is hatching his own dark plans.

The Separatists have launched a sneak attack on Coruscant. Obi-Wan Kenobi, wounded in battle, insists that Anakin Skywalker and his rookie Padawan Ahsoka leave on a risky mission against General Grievous. But when Senator Bail Organa reveals explosive intelligence that could turn the tide of war in the Republic's favor, the Jedi Master agrees to accompany him to an obscure planet on the Outer Rim to verify the facts. What Obi-Wan and Bail don't realize is that they're walking into a deadly trap concocted by Palpatine . . . and that escape may not be an option.

Inspired by the full-length animated feature film *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* and the brand-new TV series, this thrilling adventure is filled with provocative, never-before-revealed insights into the characters of Obi-Wan, Anakin, Padme, Yoda, Count Dooku, and many other *Star Wars* favorites.

Karen Miller was born in Vancouver, Canada, but was raised in Sydney, Australia, where she still lives today. She has worked as a public servant, a receptionist, in the horse industry, in local government, in publishing, in telecommunications, as a college lecturer, and she ran her own science fiction/fantasy/mystery bookshop. So far she's written six mainstream fantasy novels and two *Stargate SG-1* tie-ins. THEN: THE BATTLE OF GEONOSIS, AFTERMATH

GEONOSIS, HARSH RED PLANET. DUST AND ROCK AND PITILESS HEAT, wind and sand and a sky full of shards. Tenacious life. Capricious death. All moist green beauty long burned away. No second chances here, no soft place to fall. Secrets and sedition and singular minds. Ambition and gluttony and a hunger for death. Refuge for some. Graveyard for others. Blood of the Republic seeping into dry soil. Faint on the ceaseless wind, sorrow and grief. Gathered in the arena, a weeping of Jedi ...

Who wept their tears on the inside, where they would not be seen. To weep for a fallen comrade was to display unseemly attachment. A Jedi did not become attached to people, to things, to places, to any world or its inhabitants. A Jedi's strength was fed by serenity. By distance. By loving impersonally.

At least, that was the ideal ...

Weary and heart-sore, Yoda stood in silence with his fellow Master and friend Mace Windu, watching as efficient clone troopers swiftly, methodically, and not unkindly loaded the last of the slain Jedi onto repulsorlift pallets, then pushed them one-handed out of Poggle the Lesser's brutal arena to the Republic transport ships waiting beyond its high walls. They were supervised by those few Jedi who had survived the slaughter and the military engagement that followed it ... and who were not as serenely detached as Temple philosophy might dictate.

The Battle of Geonosis was over, the Separatist droid army dealt a crushing setback. But

its leader Count Dooku had fled, the traitor, and his underlings from the Trade Federation, the Techno Union, the Commerce Guild, the InterGalactic Banking Clan, the Hyper-Communications Cartel, and the Corporate Alliance had fled also, to safety. Fled so they might continue to plot the downfall of the galaxy's great achievement, its Republic.

"I do not regret coming here," said Mace, his dark face darkened further by shadows. "We've dealt a serious blow to our enemy, and in doing so we've seen what this clone army is capable of. That's useful. But Yoda, we have paid a heavier price than I imagined, or foresaw."

Yoda nodded, his gnarled fingers tight about his ancient gimer stick. "The truth you speak, Master Windu. Nothing gained, there is, without some loss also to balance the scales." He breathed out slowly, a long, heavy sigh. "Foolish indeed would we be, to think we might escape such a confrontation unscathed. But this loss the Temple will find difficult to overcome. Into Jedi Knighthood too soon must we thrust our oldest Padawans, I fear."

Padawans like Anakin Skywalker, so bright, so reckless ... and now so hurt. On his way back to Coruscant already, with Obi-Wan and the determined, brave, and equally reckless young Senator from Naboo.

Trouble for him, and for her, I sense. If only clearly could I see. But a shroud the dark side is. In smothering folds it wraps us all.

"What?" said Mace, frowning. Sensing his disquiet, as he always did. "Yoda, what's wrong?"

Talia Moonseeker, a young Argauun only four months into her Jedi Knighthood, was kneeling beside her fallen former Master, Va'too, head bowed. With an effort Yoda pulled his gaze away from her grief, away from the monstrous arena, still searing in the daylight. A Geonosis day lasted so long. There were yet many hours before the sun would set on this stark vista.

"Answer you plainly I cannot, Master Windu," he replied heavily. "Time for meditation, I require."

"Then you should return to the Temple," said Mace. "I can oversee the cleanup operation here. You are our only beacon in the darkness, Yoda. Without your wisdom and foresight, I doubt we can prevail."

He meant the words kindly, a declaration of confidence, but Yoda felt the weight of them settle into his bones with a cruel finality.

Too old am I to be the last hope of the Jedi.

He watched as Talia Moonseeker withdrew to a discreet distance, so the body of her slain former Master might be decently carried from the arena by the tireless clones who had fought this day, and died this day, so utterly single-minded and fearless that he thought of

droids, not men-droids of flesh and blood, bred and drilled to be perfectly disciplined, perfectly lethal. Bred to die so the people of the Republic might live. Commissioned under the most mysterious circumstances, the truth of which might never be unraveled.

Remembering the Kaminoan cloning facility, its bright white sterility, its impersonal care for the creatures it created so efficiently, so remarkably, so wholly without compunction, he repressed a shudder.

Deep questions of morality and ethics do these clones raise. But answers, are there? Know that I do not. Override ethics our desperate need for them might.

Mace dropped to one knee. "Is it Dooku, Yoda? Is he what's troubling you?"

Bitter pain, pricking deeply. Dooku. Yoda thrust the name, the shock, aside. There would be time later to think of that fallen man. "To the Temple I shall now return, Master Windu. Follow me as soon as you can. Important matters there are for the Council to discuss."

Accepting the gentle rebuff, Mace stood. "Travel safely, Yoda. I'll see you on Coruscant once matters here are properly concluded." With an abrupt snap of his fingers he summoned a nearby clone trooper. "Master Yoda is returning to Coruscant. He requires an escort to his ship."

The trooper nodded. "Yes, sir."

Watching the lethal asteroid belt fall away behind them, watching cruel red Geonosis smear and streak as the ship's hyperdrive kicked in, Yoda released the lingering grief of the recent past in another long, slow sigh. Grief was but a signifier of attachment. It had no useful purpose to serve. If he was to serve the light, as was his purpose, then must he rediscover that perfectly poised place within himself, whereupon he could stand and know he stood upon firm ground.

For once he reached Coruscant, the hard work of saving the Republic would truly begin.

The Jedi Temple's Halls of Healing were beautiful. They had lofty ceilings and enormous windows that spilled golden light over the blue and green and rose-pink walls and floor. Imbued with the Force's most gentle aspects, with love and nurturing and peace, they were full of perfumed flowers and green growing things, with the music of running water and the vibrancy of life renewed. They were the perfect retreat for those who were broken in body and mind, a place where the ugliness of suffering was washed away.

Oblivious to the serenity around her, Padmé glared at the elderly, elegant Twi'lek Jedi healer standing in her way. "I don't need long, Master Vokara Che. Just a few moments. But I really do need to see Anakin Skywalker."

Twin head-tails gently twitching, the Twi'lek clasped her hands before her. "I am sorry, Senator Amidala, but that's not possible." Her voice had that familiar Twi'lek huskiness, but

her Basic was flawless. "Anakin is gravely injured. He has been placed in a deep healing trance and cannot be disturbed."

"Yes, I know he's gravely injured. I just traveled back from Geonosis with him." Padmé gestured at her ruined white bodysuit, heedless of the hot pain any movement caused. "See here, Madam Jedi? This is his blood. Trust me, I know exactly how badly he's been hurt!"

To underscore that claim she could show the Temple's senior healer her crushed and bone-bruised hand, the hand Anakin had clung to as the waves of agony from his monstrous wounding burned through him without cease or mercy.

But I'd better not. He isn't supposed to be holding anyone's hand ... least of all mine. It's bad enough that Obi-Wan was a witness.

The Jedi healer shook her head. "Senator, you are injured yourself. Let us help you."

"Don't worry about me," Padmé said, impatient. "I'm barely scratched, and anyway, I'm not in pain."

Vokara Che gave her a reproving look. "Senator, do not think you can hoodwink me. I'm not even touching you and I can feel your discomfort." Her head fell back and her eyes drifted closed. "Some kind of creature attacked you, yes? And you fell from a great height. There is head pain. Your ribs are bruised. So is your spine. It's a wonder no bones were broken." The Twi'lek's eyes opened, her cool gaze uncompromising. "Shall I continue?"

Aching from head to toe, the nexu's claw marks across her back burning, her battered ribs throbbing with every breath, Padmé gritted her teeth. "There is nothing wrong with me that five minutes with Anakin won't fix. Master Vokara Che, you don't understand. I really must see him. Anakin's my bodyguard. My responsibility."

And this is my fault. I bullied him into going to Geonosis and he nearly died, so if you think I'm abandoning him now-

"Anakin Skywalker is not your responsibility," the Jedi healer said sharply. "He is a Jedi and he is safely home among his fellow Jedi, who know precisely what to do for him. Please, let us treat you so you might leave the Temple in good order." A faint hint of censure crept into the Twi'lek's eyes. "Indeed, I must point out that it's not entirely proper for you to be here, for you to-

"And where else should I be?" Padmé demanded, not caring that her raised voice was attracting the attention of three apprentice healers scurrying about their mysterious Jedi business. Not caring that she was perilously close to making a scene, behaving in a manner unbecoming to a former Queen of Naboo, a member of the Galactic Senate, a politician with a very public face.

I am not leaving this place before they let me see him.

Vokara Che's expression hardened. "If you're not comfortable with receiving Jedi treatment, Senator, I can see you escorted to a medcenter or—"

"You're not escorting me anywhere! I want—"

"Padmé," said a quiet voice behind her.

Master Vokara Che hurried forward. "Master Kenobi! What are you doing?"

Heart thudding, Padmé turned. Obi-Wan. Still in his slashed and burned Jedi tunic. Unhealed as yet. Standing with difficulty in the doorway of a small chamber, clinging to its framework so he didn't fall down. His face was pale; his eyes were darkened with fatigue and pain and something else.

Despair? No. It can't be. Jedi don't feel things like that. At least ... not this Jedi.

"I'm sorry, Vokara Che," he said quietly. "But I need a moment alone with the Senator."

"I don't think that's wise," said the Jedi healer, one hand claspng his shoulder, unrepentantly aggravated. "You are a whisper away from collapse. Obi-Wan. I don't understand it; you should have been healed by now. I expressly sent—"

"And I sent her away," said Obi-Wan, apologetic. "I'd rather not be sunk in a healing trance until I've seen my Padawan."

"You're as bad as she is." Vokara Che clicked her tongue. "Very well. You have a moment."

Other Books

Why We Love Star Wars. Celebrate the greatest saga ever told with this "intergalactically awesome book" (Tiffany "Smithlord" Smith). The first shots of the ragtag Rebels running from the monstrous Galactic Empire. Young Anakin winning the podrace. The first time we saw the crackle of Luke Skywalker's lightsaber. All of us who are deeply influenced by the epic saga of Star Wars have our favorite moments, and each time the screen goes black and we see those words—A Long Time Ago, In A Galaxy Far, Far Away—the music blasts through us and we feel like kids again. In this book, Star Wars aficionado Ken Napzok counts down one hundred of those special moments that makes this series not just the best movies of all time, but the Greatest Saga Ever Told. What began as one movie about good people, evil oppressors, and the space wizards that stood between them has exploded into so much more. The moments that continue to inspire are on screen and in the pages of novels. They are found in the panels of comic books and among animated sequences on television. And they all continue to grow in stature, importance, and myth through discussions, debates, and daydreams. Why We Love Star Wars is a joyful journey through the universe we love to inhabit, again and again.

What remained was Anakin Skywalker, Jedi Knight. ... Palpatine has his new

apprentice right then and there. ... The Phantom Menace brought him back to the role if you don't count the 1997's special edition footage added to The Empire ..."