

STAR WARS

Birth of the New Republic

While Leia Organa, Han Solo, and Luke Skywalker defended Bakura from the Ssi-ruuk, Mon Mothma was making preparations to establish a new galactic government. Clearly, it could take years, even decades, to fully eradicate the Empire, but the victory at Endor would be a symbolic starting point to mark a new era.

Within days of that victory, the Rebel Alliance officially became the Alliance of Free Planets, established as an interim organization until the details of the government could be worked out. One month after Endor, Mon Mothma formally issued the Declaration of a New Republic.

Though the Battle of Endor is viewed as the beginning of the New Republic era, Mon Mothma's declaration marked the "official" establishment of the government. The document was signed by Mon Mothma, Leia Organa, Borsk Fey'lya, and Admiral Ackbar, as well as officials from Corellia, Kashyyyk, Sullust, and Elom. Under the New Republic's first charter, these eight individuals composed the New Republic Provisional Council. Mon Mothma was elected chief councilor.

For several months, the New Republic made no large-scale military incursions into Imperial territory. Instead, they consolidated their holdings and won over hundreds of planets through diplomacy. News of the Emperor's death caused countless worlds to enter the New Republic's fold, most of them in the Rim territories. Captain Wedge Antilles and the X-wing pilots of Rogue Squadron acted as scouts, escorts, and negotiators during this period.

Imperial Fragmentation 4-4.5 A.B.Y.

The New Republic saw no need for an immediate strike at the Empire, since the Empire was doing a fine job of tearing itself apart. Without Palpatine's commanding presence, the Imperial war machine proved unfocused. After the destruction of the second Death Star, the Imperial fleet continued to fight the Rebels, but were systematically beaten back by their numerically inferior foe. Captain Gilad Pellaeon of the Star Destroyer Chimaera ordered the fleet to retreat and regroup at Annaj, where the first signs of stress began to show.

Admiral Harrsk, commander of one task force within the Endor fleet, viewed the death of the Emperor as a great opportunity. Unwilling to take orders from Pellaeon, a mere captain, Harrsk took his segment of the fleet to the restricted Deep Core at the very center of the galaxy. There, among the secure Imperial safe worlds, Harrsk began building up his own pocket empire.

Though Harrsk was the Empire's first breakaway warlord, he wouldn't be the last. The Empire had long rewarded ambition over cooperation; only intimidating leaders like Palpatine and Vader had kept their subordinates in line. Suddenly, post-Endor, everyone wanted to rule the Empire, or at least create their own kingdoms. More than any other factor, warlordism was responsible for the decline of the Empire.

Many other warlords broke away in the first few months. Admiral Teradoc followed Harrsk's lead and established a miniature empire on the out-skirts of the Deep Core, just days after the Imperial debacle at Endor. Admiral Gaen Drommel used the Super Star Destroyer Guardian to subdue his home sector. Grand Moff Arduus Kaine, Tarkin's successor, walled off a large chunk of the Outer Rim Territories and dubbed it the Pentastar Alignment. Admiral Zsinj, ruler of the Quelii sector, would later prove to be one of the New Republic's most formidable foes.

And unbeknownst to all, the threat of Palpatine did not disappear. As with Obi-Wan Kenobi, the Emperor's spirit form survived when his body died. Palpatine's life essence made a tortuous journey to his hidden Deep Core throneworld of Byss, where it inhabited a fresh young body cloned using his own genetic source materials. Palpatine's clone began to reconsolidate his own forces, though it would be years before he made his presence known to the galaxy.

Sate Pestage, the Emperor's former grand vizier and the man responsible for keeping the Empire intact, had been cunning enough to assume the Imperial throne upon learning of his master's death. But the grand vizier lacked the charisma and influence to lead the Empire, and he had a host of enemies within the Imperial Palace. His chief rivals were Palpatine's former advisory staff, who formed a tribunal known as the Ruling Circle. As they schemed to overthrow the new Emperor, Pestage plotted to keep the Ruling Circle in check. Ysanne Isard, head of Imperial Intelligence, acted as a neutral intermediary between the two parties.

Neither faction realized Isard's true goal until it was too late. Isard was secretly pitting each side against the other so she could rise from their ashes and rule as empress.

Black Nebula 4-4.5 A.B.Y.

In the meantime, behind the scenes, the Black Sun criminal syndicate had never recovered from the death of its leader, Prince Xizor. Various lieutenants, or vigos, began to fight one another for what remained of the syndicate. One of Black Sun's lesser operatives, a Jeodu named Deguc, tried to revive the organization under the name Black Nebula, with himself as its head. The Emperor had ordered Deguc

eliminated, and mere days before Endor, Mara Jade, one of the Emperor's Hands, executed him on Svivren.

Jade later learned, however, that the victim on Svivren had been a decoy. Dequc continued to expand Black Nebula in the post-Palpatine Empire, until Mara Jade tracked him down and killed him several months later.

At the same time, Savan, Prince Xizor's niece, attempted to piece together the remaining factions of Black Sun. The key to Savan's plot was the human replica droid known as Guri, who had been Xizor's second-in-command and knew all the syndicate's secrets. Savan located Guri on Hurd's Moon, where she was undergoing synaptic rewiring to erase her memory and her assassindroid programming.

Councilor Leia Organa and Generals Han Solo and Lando Calrissian also journeyed to Hurd's Moon, attempting to prevent the rise of another destructive criminal empire. After a shootout, they took Savan into custody. Guri, her criminal programming purged, was allowed to go free.

Black Nebula crumbled without Dequc, and Xizor's vigos murdered each other in an internecine bloodbath. Black Sun was dead, and it would remain defunct until the New Republic inadvertently resurrected the syndicate during the liberation of Coruscant three years later.

Isard's ascension 4.5-5 A.B.Y.

Ysanne Isard's conspiracy began to bear fruit when the New Republic threatened Brentaal, a wealthy and influential Core World not far from Mon Mothma's home planet of Chandrila. As the New Republic military geared up for an all-out assault, Sate Pestage vowed that Brentaal would not fall.

Acting on Isard's advice, Pestage allowed the incompetent Admiral Isoto to defend Brentaal. There, despite the efforts of the Empire's best fighter pilot, Baron Soontir Fel, and the skills of the legendary 181st Imperial fighter group, Isoto's bumbling allowed the New Republic to capture the world. During the final battle, Baron Fel was taken prisoner by the New Republic, and he would later fly with the X-wing pilots of Rogue Squadron.

To all appearances, Pestage was responsible for the loss of Brentaal, and the Ruling Circle screamed for his head. Knowing that Isard had sold him out, Pestage made preparations to defect. On Axxila, he held a secret meeting with Councilor Leia Organa to discuss terms. In exchange for leaving Coruscant undefended against a New Republic assault, he asked for twenty-five planets he could rule as he pleased. Realizing that Coruscant was the key to the war effort, Organa agreed to Pestage's offer, despite her own misgivings.

Isard learned of the Axxila talks and immediately informed the Ruling Circle of Pestage's treachery. An order was issued for his arrest, and the Ruling Circle set itself up as the new governing body in the Empire.

Sate Pestage fled to Ciutric, but was apprehended by the local Imperial governor. Though the Axxila deal was obviously dead, the New Republic had to take action. If Pestage were rescued by the New Republic, it would serve as an example to other high-ranking Imperials and encourage more defections. Rogue Squadron and a commando team were sent to Ciutric to retrieve Pestage.

The rescue operation was unsuccessful. Pestage was murdered by Imperial Admiral Krennel, who then seized Pestage's personal territory and set himself up as the Empire's latest breakaway warlord. On Coruscant, Ysanne Isard ruthlessly exterminated the Ruling Circle and assumed the throne. Isard would succeed where the others had failed, and hold the crumbling Empire together for more than two years.

Eight months after the Battle of Endor, Ackbar and the New Republic fleet made another aggressive push into Imperial territory. Concerned that the campaign might presage a siege of Coruscant, Isard recalled hundreds of Star Destroyers to defend the capital planet and other key Core Worlds.

One of the Imperial armadas that received the order was the Black Sword Command in the Koornacht Cluster, a little-known patch of territory at the fringes of the Deep Core. As the Black Fleet prepared to depart the central shipbuilding planet of N'zoth, the shipyards' Yevethan dockworkers erupted in a shocking uprising. Led by underground commando Nil Spaar, the Yevetha murdered thousands of Imperials, captured hundreds more, and seized every Star Destroyer in the Black Fleet armada—including the Super Star Destroyer Intimidator.

The Yevetha covered up the incident. The New Republic never heard a word about it, and Isard operating on inaccurate intelligence data—believed that the Black Fleet had perished in a debacle at Cal-Seti, several sectors away from N'zoth. The Koornacht Cluster would remain a closed-border curiosity until the frantic events of the Black Fleet Crisis, twelve years in the future.

One year after the Emperor's death, the Central Committee of Grand Moffs decided to increase their own power base by moving against Isard. They proclaimed their own candidate—Trioculus, a former Kessel slavelord—as Imperial leader and attempted to rally the fleet behind him. Some followed their lead, but the bulk of the fleet, including Captain Pellaeon of the Star Destroyer Chimaera, remained loyal to Isard.

The New Republic moved against the grand moffs under the auspices of the Senate Planetary Intelligence Network (SPIN), a short-lived analysis and infiltration task force formed by Mon Mothma. Isard, meanwhile, freed Jabba the Hutt's father, Zorba, from prison and sent him into the fray as her unwitting agent. Zorba seized Cloud City from Lando Calrissian, who had only recently rescued the city from the clutches of

the Empire. In the end, no fleet battle occurred. Trioculus, Zorba, and a shadowy group of mystics called the Prophets of the Dark Side wiped each other out in an internal struggle. Those grand moffs who had been involved in the conspiracy were executed, and Isard's position at the head of the Empire became more secure than ever.

A few months later, Ysanne Isard was instrumental in foiling a New Republic espionage mission to Coruscant. Pilot Tycho Celchu, a member of Rogue Squadron, took a TIE fighter captured during the truce at Bakura and infiltrated the Imperial capital. Isard, however, uncovered the spy and imprisoned him in a hellish prison known only as Lusankya. Celchu eventually escaped to the New Republic, but was viewed with suspicion by many, who suspected he had been brainwashed into becoming a sleeper agent.

General Skywalker 5-5.5 A.B.Y.

Throughout the Trioculus affair, the New Republic was engaged in a protracted military campaign for possession of Milagro, a world located at a key hyperspace junction. The Empire was prepared to lay waste to Milagro rather than allow the Rebels access to its manufacturing facilities. Following three months of exhausting clashes between AT-AT walkers and the New Republic army, the defeated Imperials slagged the planet's surface with a withering orbital bombardment, then fled.

The New Republic remained in the system, using the Dreadnaught New Hope as an orbital headquarters. When a damaged Imperial Star Destroyer leapt into the Milagro system, hoping to effect repairs, it stumbled into a brawl with the New Hope. General Han Solo led the fighter attack against the Star Destroyer, while Mon Mothma coordinated the battle from the bridge of the New Hope. Finally, Luke Skywalker's superior X-wing tactics forced the Imperials to surrender. The captured Star Destroyer was renamed the Crynyd in honor of A-wing pilot Arvel Crynyd, whose self-sacrifice at the Battle of Endor took down the Super Star Destroyer Executor. For his heroism at Milagro, Commander Skywalker was at last promoted to the rank of general.

General Skywalker was quickly saddled with the responsibilities of command, a burden he loathed. Ever since his experience at Bakura, Skywalker had grown less interested in military conquest and more interested in the spiritual understanding of the Force. His encounter with Dev Sibwarra had convinced him that great deeds could be accomplished by restoring the order of Jedi Knights. Skywalker's views were reinforced when he witnessed the heroic deeds of Kyle Katarn—a force-sensitive individual who, five years earlier, had helped recover the Death Star plans and sabotaged the Empire's Dark Trooper program. Now Katarn was realizing his own potential as a Jedi.

Several of the Emperor's dark-side adepts, led by the Dark Jedi Jerec, had attracted corporate backers and formed a warlord cabal. Their

influence was limited, but Jerec had discovered the Valley of the Jedi on Ruusan, where the spirits of the Brotherhood of Darkness and the Army of Light had been trapped in limbo for a thousand years. Jerec planned to use the Valley's power to topple Isard and rule a vast new empire.

Katarn single-handedly defeated Jerec and his minions before the Dark Jedi's grandiose plans could come to fruition. Skywalker, impressed, offered to train Katarn as a Jedi apprentice, but the other man declined. Soon afterward, the New Republic became bogged down in a brutal military campaign in the Inner Rim. Skywalker led his troops onto the battlefields of Mindor, digging out entrenched pockets of Imperial resistance. Stormtroopers under Lord Shadowspawn fought to the last man, and Skywalker was dismayed at the bloodshed and unnecessary loss of life.

Less than six months after receiving his general's commission, Luke Skywalker resigned from the New Republic military.

The Last Grand Admiral? 6 A.B.Y.

Emperor Palpatine frequently rewarded his most capable servants with grandiose titles, further encouraging the notorious Imperial culture of greed and ambition. The best stormtroopers were molded into Royal Guards, and there were rumors that the best Royal Guards became Imperial Sovereign Protectors on Byss. Initially, the highest possible rank in the Imperial Navy was admiral, until Palpatine created the elite rank of grand admiral; there could never be more than twelve at one time.

The twelve grand admirals, easily recognizable by their stark white uniforms and braided gold epaulets, were the best of the best-unparalleled geniuses at military strategy. In the aftermath of Endor, had the surviving grand admirals united against their common enemy, the New Republic might have been wiped out while still in its infancy.

Fortunately that threat never materialized. The first grand admiral to fall was Zaarin, when he attempted a coup d'etat against the Emperor-just before Endor-and failed. Many other grand admirals perished with the second Death Star-thanks to Palpatine's decision to keep them aboard the battle station rather than send them out to direct the fleet. The remainder of the original twelve met their fates in the ensuing months.

Grand Admiral Syn was outfought by Ackbar during the liberation of Kashyyyk, his flagship vaporized. Grand Admirals Grunger and Pitta turned warlord and annihilated each other in a bitter but futile fight for control of the Corellian sector. Grand Admiral Takel was executed by Trioculus, while the fanatical Grand Admiral Il-Raz committed suicide by plunging his flagship into the heart of the Denarii Nova. Grand Admiral

Batch was assassinated by his second in command, who then took the ships in Batch's task force and joined Warlord Harrsk in the Deep Core.

Grand Admiral Grant, the so-called last grand admiral, defected to the New Republic on the condition that he be granted immunity from prosecution for war crimes and allowed to retire to Rathalay. The defection took place two years after Endor. The New Republic closed the books on the Emperor's grand admirals, thinking they had finally accounted for all of them.

No one realized that one grand admiral remained at large, and he was possibly the most dangerous of all. Blue-skinned Thrawn had officially been promoted to grand admiral by Palpatine in a secret ceremony following the treason of Grand Admiral Zaarin. Soon afterward, Thrawn had been sent to the Unknown Regions, accounting for the New Republic's oversight. Years would pass before Thrawn's return, but the New Republic would once again learn to fear the title of grand admiral.

The Battle for Coruscant 6.5-7 A.B.Y.

Two and a half years after the birth of the New Republic, the Empire was still the galaxy's dominant government. Despite the rise of rogue warlords, Imperials held a majority of settled planets and had a stranglehold on the important Core Worlds. Without an aggressive military push, the New Republic would never bring about an end to the Galactic Civil War.

The most effective way to eliminate the Empire would be to capture Coruscant, the universal symbol of governmental power and authority. The New Republic began seizing planets in Imperial territory as "stepping-stones" to strike at Coruscant. As part of the mobilization, Wedge Antilles was recalled from a propaganda tour and restored to active duty. Antilles's legendary X-wing unit, Rogue Squadron, was reformed with a roster of new pilots.

After two costly attacks, the New Republic captured Borleias, in the Colonies region. Borleias was perfectly situated as a forward base for a Coruscant assault. Admiral Ackbar, however, knew that the capital planet's defensive energy shield would negate any orbital bombardment. Before the attack could begin, Coruscant's shield would have to fall.

Antilles and Rogue Squadron were sent undercover into Imperial City to sabotage the planet's shield generator. Also, sixteen of the galaxy's worst criminals were freed from the spice mines of Kessel and loosed on Coruscant, in the hopes that they would foster chaos. The latter decision was unusual for the New Republic and was opposed by many members of the ruling council, who were proven correct in the end. The freed criminals, led by Y'ull Acib, resurrected the defunct Black Sun criminal cartel, which would plague the New Republic in later years.

Rogue Squadron's operatives gambled that if they could condense a large amount of water vapor and create a monster storm, they could knock

out Coruscant's shields with lightning strikes. The Rogues commandeered a forty-story construction droid to take them to a command building, then took remote control of one of the planet's orbiting solar mirrors. The tightly focused light beam from the mirror flash-boiled one of Imperial City's artificial reservoirs. The steam cloud coalesced into an angry cloudburst, and soon the shields collapsed.

With Coruscant vulnerable, Ackbar leapt into the system with a full armada. The battle was intense, but surprisingly easy; Ysanne Isard had kept only a handful of Star Destroyers to defend the capital. Ackbar wiped out all resistance, and at last Coruscant was in the hands of the New Republic.

The Krytos Virus 7-7.5 A.B.Y.

When the New Republic secured the Imperial Palace, they discovered that Isard had vanished. Worse, she had left behind a sick and dying world, for Isard's chief scientist, Evir Derricote, had engineered an artificial plague-the Krytos virus. Within days of transmission, the Krytos virus turned healthy flesh into a bloody soup. Isard had seeded Coruscant's water reservoirs with the plague before the Rebel arrival, and millions of citizens had already contracted the disease. However, Derricote had carefully tailored the Krytos virus to affect only specific nonhuman species-Sullustans, Gamorreans, and others. The fact that Coruscant's human population was immune drove a wedge between the New Republic's member species.

The Krytos plague spoiled the New Republic's triumph and made it appear ineffectual and weak. Thus, governing the civilian population of Coruscant proved nearly impossible. Furthermore, Mon Mothma was forced to spend millions of cred-its on voluminous amounts of bacta to treat the infected and research a vaccine-credits that the near- bankrupt government didn't have.

Another event diverted the public's attention during this difficult time: the trial of Tycho Celchu. Immediately following the liberation of Coruscant, Celchu, a member of Rogue Squadron, had been arrested for treason and the murder of his fellow pilot Corran Horn. Prosecuting attorneys at his trial claimed Celchu had been operating as a brainwashed Imperial agent ever since his incarceration in the Empire's Lusankya prison.

The truth was shocking: not only was Celchu innocent, but Corran Horn was alive. Horn had been secretly captured by Isard and himself imprisoned in Lusankya, where he was forced to endure regular torture and indoctrination sessions. His only relief came in conversation with his fellow prisoners, one of whom was the famed Alliance leader Jan Dodonna, who had been captured during the evacuation of Yavin 4 seven years earlier.

Horn escaped, forcing Isard to abandon her hid-ing place. As the members of Rogue Squadron flew a mission above Imperial City, a panicked call sud-denly came from the Manarai Mountains district. Antilles and his squadron watched as a massive object rose from the subterranean depths, obliterat-ing vast tracts of homes and businesses as it came to the surface-a Super Star Destroyer that answered to the name Lusankya. Despite the efforts of Rogue Squadron to stop it, the Lusankya tore a gaping hole out of Imperial City's heart, killing

mil-lions. It then vanished into hyperspace, taking with it Ysanne Isard, her forces, and many prisoners.

The presence of Corran Horn, alive, cleared Celchu of the murder charge. Luke Skywalker investigated Horn's background and discovered that the pilot was actually the grandson of the great Jedi Nejaa Halcyon, who had eliminated a Dark Jedi enclave decades earlier. Horn refused Skywalker's offer to train him as a Jedi, though he reconsidered his decision years later.

New Republic scientists developed a cure for the Krytos virus by mixing bacta with kor, a rare grade of the spice ryll. The resulting vaccine, rylca, was administered to Coruscant's alien population and prevented further loss of life. However, though the immediate threat had been averted, interracial sus-picions remained volatile for some time.

The Bacta War 7.5 A.B.Y.

Ysanne Isard fled Coruscant aboard the Lusankya and quickly acted to hold her power base. At Thyferra, the bacta- manufacturing planet, she sup-ported a coup and was elected head of state by the victorious faction. The New Republic was unhappy with the development, but it was against their principles to depose a duly-elected planetary leader. Since the Thyferran government refused to move against Isard, Wedge Antilles and Rogue Squadron resigned from the New Republic fleet. As civilians, they answered to no one and were free to move against Isard on their own.

But the bacta planet was defended by four capi-tal ships: the Lusankya, two Imperial Star Destroy-ers, and a Victory Star Destroyer. A direct, frontal assault would be a quick and expensive way to commit suicide. Instead, Antilles flitted around like a Sacorrian grain fly-stinging Isard, then retreat-ing to a safe distance before she could swat back. The Rogues occupied an abandoned space station near Yag'Dhul and hired smuggler Booster Terrik to manage the station. Terrik obtained weapons from the smuggling kingpin Talon Karrde, and Rogue Squadron began harassing Isard's bacta convoys.

Rogue Squadron destroyed one capital ship in a fight near the rubble of the Alderaan Graveyard and convinced the captain of another to defect with his ship. With half of her defensive force suddenly gone,

Isard ordered the Lusankya and her remaining Star Destroyer to blast the Yag'Dhul space station to atoms.

Antilles and the other Rogues seized the opportunity and jumped into hyperspace to attack the now-undefended Thyferra. At Yag'Dhul, the Lusankya closed to firing range, but the space station suddenly locked on to the Super Star Destroyer with over three hundred proton torpedoes. Knowing that no vessel's shields could withstand such a volley, the Lusankya fled to Thyferra, and the remaining outgunned Star Destroyer surrendered. It was all a bluff perpetuated by Antilles. The Yag'Dhul space station didn't have any torpedoes, just three hundred targeting locks. The torpedoes were aboard the small armada of freighters and Xwings heading for Thyferra.

At the bacta planet, the Rogues and the Lusankya both emerged from hyperspace and fell upon one another with a vengeance. More than eighty proton torpedoes impacted against the Super Star Destroyer, collapsing its shields and ripping its guts open. When Booster Terrik arrived, commanding the newly captured Star Destroyer, and joined the fight, the ailing Lusankya surrendered. The damaged Lusankya was towed to a secret shipyard for extensive repairs. Sadly, Jan Dodonna and the rest of the Imperial prisoners had been transferred off the ship weeks earlier. Their rescue would have to wait for another day.

Ysanne Isard was smart enough to know when she was beaten and attempted to escape Thyferra. Her shuttle was destroyed while trying to make the jump to hyperspace, and Isard was believed killed. Isard, however, had engineered the incident to cover her tracks. She spent the following years putting herself back together mentally, and would plague the New Republic again in the wake of the Thrawn incident.

Antilles and Rogue Squadron were welcomed back as heroes. After much wrangling with New Republic Intelligence, Booster Terrik was allowed to keep his captured Star Destroyer, which he renamed the Errant Venture. The ship became a movable trading bazaar, famous for eclectic merchandise.

In the aftermath of the Bacta War, the New Republic captured another Star Destroyer, the Tyrant, from an underdefended Imperial fueling outpost. This ship had been a part of Darth Vader's Death Squadron and had assisted in the decimation of Echo Base on Hoth. Impressed by the symbolism, Councilor Leia Organa renamed the vessel Rebel Dream and made it her personal flagship.

The Hunt for Zsinj 7.5-8 A.B.Y.

The New Republic had been right about one thing: controlling Coruscant was the key to the Galactic Civil War. As soon as Isard lost control of the capital world, the fragmentation within the Empire grew more severe as officers lost faith in their leaders. A coalition of

moths and Imperial advisers replaced Isard, but their power quickly slipped away in favor of warlords like Zsinj.

Warlord Zsinj became the most powerful Imperial warlord, having gained many new officers, ships, and planets during the post-Isard defections. He was arrogant enough to fight his war on two fronts, against the New Republic and against his former comrades in the Empire, whom he viewed as weak-willed and ineffectual. Furthermore, he possessed the mighty Super Star Destroyer Iron Fist, which could take on an entire armada by itself. The New Republic made the liberation of Zsinj's dominion a top priority and put together a task force under the command of General Han Solo to hunt down the warlord. The task force departed on its mission just prior to the events of the Bacta War.

Aboard the Mon Calamari flagship Mon Remondla, Solo probed the borders of Zsinj-controlled territory and witnessed firsthand the horrors the warlord perpetuated on worlds that resisted his will. Solo was supplemented by the best military units the New Republic had to offer, including the legendary Rogue Squadron, but another group of X-wing pilots would provide the key to toppling Warlord Zsinj.

Commander Antilles, following his reinstatement in the New Republic military, chose not to join the Mon Remonda mission. Instead, Antilles assembled a new group of pilots-Wraith Squadron, composed of commandos, snipers, spies, and infiltrators. Soon after their formation, the Wraiths captured a Corellian corvette belonging to Zsinj and decided to pose as the corvette's standard crew. The ruse allowed them to infiltrate Zsinj's fleet, where they learned of an ambush planned against the New Republic on Ession in the Corporate Sector. The Battle of Ession was a victory for the New Republic, which demolished one of Zsinj's Star Destroyers and bombed a key manufacturing plant into oblivion.

The subterfuge with the captured corvette would not work a second time, so the commandos of Wraith Squadron changed tactics. They posed as a pirate band in order to work their way into Zsinj's loose organization of freelance raiders. The warlord hired the disguised Wraiths as mercenaries for his strike on the vast shipbuilding facilities in the Kuat system. Kuat Drive Yards, still allied with the Empire, had nearly completed a new Super Star Destroyer. Zsinj planned to steal the colossal vessel and pair it with the Iron Fist to deliver a double hammer blow to his enemies. New Republic saboteurs foiled Zsinj's plans by destroying both of the new vessel's topside shield generator domes, and the unprotected warship was blasted into scrap by Solo and the Mon Remonda, though the Iron Fist escaped into hyperspace.

After a brief layover to repair damage to the Mon Remonda, Solo headed back out to hunt down Zsinj. The warlord, however, had a more devious plot afoot. Several of Zsinj's pet scientists had developed a method of rapid, forced brainwashing that could turn even the most placid citizen into a raving murderer, and the technique was tailored to work with specific species-Twi'leks, Gotal, Sullustans, and others. Much as Ysanne Isard had attempted to do with the "aliens only" Krytos virus, Zsinj preyed on the suspicions and resentment that many species felt toward humans.

Project Minefield, as it was known in Zsinj's organization, resulted in hundreds of deaths, including several high-profile assassination attempts. A brainwashed Twi'lek tried to kill Ackbar, while Mon Mothma's loyal Gotal body-guard suddenly turned on her, but was killed before he could injure the chief councilor. Aboard the Mon Remonda, a Twi'lek A-wing pilot shot out the bridge viewport and nearly killed Solo through explosive decompression. Fortunately, New Republic Intelligence cracked the pattern behind the attacks and shut down Project Minefield before it could cause further havoc.

In an unprecedented move, the New Republic formed a loose alliance with the Empire to wipe out Zsinj. The Imperial fleet had their own anti-Zsinj task force, led by Admiral Rogriss. A New Republic representative held a secret meeting with Rogriss aboard his flagship, and the two sides hammered out an uneasy agreement. Each side would exchange all intelligence data it had gathered on Zsinj's organization, no strings attached. The Empire and the New Republic now viewed Zsinj as their common foe.

Growing frustrated at the length of the campaign and the paucity of his victories, Solo authorized a number of lures to draw out Zsinj and force a confrontation. Since the warlord increasingly regarded the conflict as a personal showdown between himself and Solo, a fake mockup of the Millennium Falcon was constructed and flown to worlds deep in Zsinj's territory. This vessel was later fitted with a bomb and used to destroy an enemy Dreadnaught.

Zsinj, however, did not take the bait. He realized the Imperial-New Republic collaboration was crippling his ability to hold his kingdom together, and devised a secret stratagem of survival. Since his enemies seemed fixated on the destruction of the Iron Fist, Zsinj resolved to give them the illusion of what they craved. His agents gathered up all the wreckage of the Super Star Destroyer ruined at Kuat and pieced it back together in a hodgepodge of structural beams and hull plates. On the bow of the makeshift vessel they printed the words Iron fist, then waited for the warlord's orders.

Solo and Rogriss collaborated on an assault in the Vahaba asteroid belt that severely damaged the real Iron Fist. The wounded Super Star Destroyer jumped to the nearby system of Selaggis, but Solo followed with his full fleet, intent on blasting Zsinj into vapor. As the Mon Remonda closed to firing range, the crippled Iron Fist disappeared into a black cube of nothingness.

Warlord Zsinj had obtained an orbital nightcloak—a string of satellites that would absorb all

visible light. By deploying the nightcloak in a cube pattern, he created a small hideaway that his enemy's sensors couldn't penetrate. The decoy Star Destroyer was already in position inside the nightcloak, and Zsinj triggered its destruction. Then the Iron Fist jumped to hyperspace.

When the nightcloak collapsed, Solo saw the wreckage of a Super Star Destroyer that clearly bore the markings of the Iron Fist. Confident that Zsinj's fleet had been crippled beyond recovery, Solo ordered a triumphant return to Coruscant.

The Hapans and the Dathomir Nightsister's 8 A.B.Y

General Han Solo and the Mon Remonda returned to Coruscant. The arduous, five-month campaign had exhausted everyone in the task force, and Solo planned to put his crew in for some much-needed downtime. When he arrived at the capital world, however, he was startled to find dozens of saucer-shaped Battle Dragons in orbit. The mysterious Hapans were making a social call.

Any description of the Hapes Consortium requires superlatives; it is the most powerful, most wealthy, most cultured, and most standoffish political federation in its region of space. Three thousand years earlier the Hapan queen mother had sealed the borders of the star cluster, and as Hapes developed in isolation behind the Transitory Mists, legends of its fantastic riches continued to grow.

Several months earlier, Councilor Leia Organa's diplomatic visit to the Hapan worlds had convinced Queen Mother Ta'a Chume to consider the possibility of a union with the New Republic. The Hapan honor fleet circling Coruscant was a remarkable sight, for this was the first time in millennia that the reclusive society had made significant outside contact.

In Coruscant's Grand Reception Hall the Hapan delegation presented Councilor Organa with many extravagant gifts, including several Imperial Star Destroyers captured by the Hapans during recent border skirmishes. But the final gift was the biggest surprise of all. Prince Isolder, the queen mother's son and heir, presented himself to Organa as a marriage suitor.

Organa was shocked, but though she had for years been romantically entangled with Han Solo, she was politically savvy enough to realize the benefits of an arranged marriage between two political factions. Her own royal upbringing on Alderaan had previously exposed her to such maneuverings. Mon Mothma, knowing that the Hapan navy and treasury could help greatly in ending the Galactic Civil War, urged her friend to accept Isolder's offer.

General Solo, however, grew deeply jealous of the attention showered on her. Hoping to reclaim Organa's affection, he won a habitable planet, Dathomir, worth 2.4 billion credits, in an outrageously high-stakes sabacc game. Solo hoped the planet could house the homeless refugees of Alderaan. Unfortunately, Dathomir was deep in the heart of Zsinj's territory. Disappointed that his gamble had failed, and desperate to get Leia Organa's attention, Solo impulsively resigned his general's

commission and kidnapped her, accompanied by the faithful Chewbacca and a flustered C-3 PO.

The Millennium Falcon emerged from hyperspace near the blue-green world of Dathomir. There, Solo discovered that Zsinj had built an impressive orbital stardock above the planet, where the Super Star Destroyer Iron Fist was undergoing reconstruction. The Falcon fell under attack and barely managed to touch down on Dathomir's forested surface.

The group headed off on foot through the woods, but were soon intercepted by a patrol of female warriors belonging to the Singing Mountain Clan. The women rode tamed rancors, similar to the one that Jabba the Hutt had kept as a pet beneath the floor of his palace. These women, the Witches of Dathomir, could cast "magic spells" by tapping into the Force; they were the descendants of Allya, a fallen Jedi Knight who had been exiled to the planet more than six centuries in the past.

Luke Skywalker, meanwhile, had been scouring the galaxy for lost secrets of the once-great Jedi order. On Toola he discovered data cards telling the story of the crashed Jedi training ship Chu'unthor, and Master Yoda's efforts to recover the vessel from Dathomir. Skywalker returned to Coruscant and learned of his sister's kidnapping; before long he had agreed to team up with Prince Isolder of Hapes on a rescue mission to Dathomir.

Skywalker discovered that the planet's over-whelming life energy had a peculiar magnifying effect on his Force abilities, allowing him to accomplish feats that had previously been beyond him. He and Isolder discovered the rusting wreck of the Chu'unthor and met Teneniel Djo, a beautiful witch of the Singing Mountain Clan. She reunited them with Solo and Organa.

But an outcast clan of witches, the Nightsisters, made an attack on the Singing Mountain Clan in an attempt to steal the Falcon. The Nightsisters possessed dark-side powers and had an army of Imperial slaves at their disposal, remnants of a group abandoned by the Emperor eight years earlier. There had been an Imperial prison on Dathomir, but when the Emperor had learned of the Nightsisters, he had destroyed all the prison's starships from orbit; better to lose a prison than to allow rival Force users loose on the galaxy.

The Nightsisters were desperate to escape their planet, and directed their prison army in a fierce but ultimately futile attack on the Singing Mountain stronghold.

The Death of Zsinj 8 A.B.Y.

Warlord Zsinj was well aware of the existence of the Nightsisters and the extent of their power. He opened negotiations with Gethzerion, leader of the Nightsisters, and delivered an ultimatum. Gethzerion would

give him Han Solo, or he would activate his orbital nightcloak-the light-absorbing device that had been used at the Battle of Selaggis. A full array of nightcloak satellites in position around Dathomir would turn the planet into a frozen ice ball within days.

When he learned that the Nightsisters' attack on the Singing Mountain Clan had failed, Zsinj activated the nightcloak to encourage Gethzerion's immediate compliance. The skies grew dark and the temperature plunged, as the shrewd witch made her counteroffer. Gethzerion agreed to provide Solo, but also asked for a ship to provide a means of escape from her dying planet. The Nightsisters promised to fly the vessel deep into New Republic territory and carve out a path of destruction that would help satisfy Zsinj's thirst for revenge. Impressed, Zsinj agreed to send two transports-an armed craft for transporting Solo, and a defenseless, stripped-down model for the Nightsisters to use as they pleased.

Han Solo was brought to the Imperial prison, where Zsinj's twin shuttles were just landing. Gethzerion turned traitor, killing all the Imperial guards-including Zsinj's longtime aide, General Melvar-with a crushing blow of Force energy. Solo was saved from certain death by the timely arrival of the Falcon, but Gethzerion and her followers escaped on the armed shuttle. The Nightsisters were intercepted just outside the atmosphere by two of the warlord's Star Destroyers. After a brief but withering crossfire, all that remained of the shuttle was glowing metal.

The Nightsisters were gone, but Zsinj's fleet still barricaded Dathomir. The Millennium Falcon knocked out the orbital nightcloak, and the full battle fleet of the Hapes Consortium arrived to take on the Iron Fist and dozens of Zsinj's smaller war-ships. During the chaos, Solo flew the Falcon straight at the bridge of the Iron Fist and released a pair of concussion missiles at point-blank range. Warlord Zsinj was vaporized in an instant. The Battle of Dathomir was over.

In the aftermath, Singing Mountain Clan Mother Augwynne united the witch clans of Dathomir and petitioned for planetary member-ship in the New Republic. Luke Skywalker was given a box filled with log recorder discs from the Chu'unthor wreckage, which would prove invaluable when he established the Jedi academy.

Prince Isolder of Hapes had fallen madly in love with Teneniel Djo of the Singing Mountain Clan, a development that outraged Queen Mother Ta'a Chume. Nevertheless, Isolder soon married Djo, making her the heir apparent to the throne of the Hapes Consortium. Isolder and Djo soon had a daughter, Tenel Ka, who proved very strong in the Force.

The adventure on Dathomir had caused Han Solo and Leia Organa to grow even closer to one another, and they agreed to be married upon their return to Coruscant. The New Republic citizenry were more than willing to forgive Solo for his kid-napping escapade, in large part because it had provided such entertaining fodder for the daily news-nets. Since Organa wasn't willing to press charges, the New Republic Inner Council made no move to censure Solo and tried to cover up the incident, as well as the embarrassing security breach that it highlighted.

The wedding was held in the Alderaanian con-sulate building on Coruscant, attended by hundreds of friends and dignitaries and watched on holovid by billions across the galaxy. For weeks afterward the event was endlessly replayed, and the coverage was universally positive.

Picking up the Piece.s 8..5 A.B.Y.

Prince Isolder vowed to join the New Republic after the Dathomir incident, but his pledge did not sit well with the Hapan Royal Court and the individual planetary potentates. Queen Mother Ta'a Chume was only too willing to bend to their will in the interest of preserving internal stability. Hapes promised to commit their full Battle Dragon armada "in due time." Mon Mothma's hoped-for strategic alliance never materialized.

The sudden implosion of Warlord Zsinj's domain emboldened the Imperial fleet. The coalition of advisers that had supplanted Isard worked furiously. Now that the goal had been achieved, Admiral Rogriss and other fleet commanders moved to seize the newly liberated territory. All pretense of former partnership with the New Republic was abandoned.

One benefit of the Hapan incident was the New Republic's acquisition of several new Star Destroyers, which were presented to Leia Organa as gifts during the Coruscant reception. Though the Hapans did not directly participate in any of the battles, these warships, added to the Star Destroyers the New Republic had already captured, gave the fleet some formidable muscle when Admiral Ackbar led the New Republic to the Outer Rim to fight over the scraps of Zsinj's empire.

Ackbar and Rogriss ran directly into a third fleet—that of Warlord Teradoc, the self-appointed high admiral. The New Republic Star Destroyers were thrown into the worst of the fighting and consequently took the brunt of the punishment. Most of the Hapan ships, as well as the Star Destroyer Crynyd, were destroyed. The Emancipator and Liberator suffered severe damage and were recalled to undergo extensive repairs at the Hast shipyards. At the Battle of Storinal, Princess Leia's flagship Rebel Dream was mercilessly shelled by the Imperial Star Destroyer Peremptory and recaptured by the Empire, its crew of thirty-seven thousand taken prisoner. Organa Solo was on Coruscant at the time of the incident.

But for every hit the New Republic took, they gave it back to the Empire threefold. Admiral Rogriss lost the majority of the engagements. The New Republic at last captured Kuat, giving them access to the system's unparalleled shipbuilding docks, though damage to the yards was so extensive that new construction was delayed indefinitely. Unfortunately, the Kuat Drive Yards design team escaped to the Deep Core aboard the half-completed warship Eclipse. Bloodied, Rogriss ordered a retreat. Warlord Teradoc, whose hit-and-run strikes had made him an exasperating gadfly, scurried back to his own territory. Admiral Ackbar

fortified his newest gains. The New Republic now controlled three-quarters of the settled galaxy. And during the relentless battles, the Republic and Empire suffered grave fleet losses. The construction and acquisition of new warships became a top priority for both sides.