

III

The next morning came much too quickly, as far as Logray's internal clock was concerned, but he did not begrudge the late night and abbreviated sleep, even though he knew he would be exhausted by evening. Meeting so many of his new colleagues face-to-face in an informal setting had been educational, and gave him a more positive outlook toward his potential for success in his mission here. The opposition was well-entrenched, it was true, and they certainly seemed to know their business, dirty though it might be, but they were not invincible. He was sure he hadn't seen more than a tiny fraction of the weapons Danila Kapfaraa had at her disposal, but the first moves in any battle could say much about the overall strategy and tactics the rest would follow. Defeating her would not be easy, but after meeting and conversing with her, however briefly, Logray finally believed that he had a genuine chance of thwarting her intents. That he had already won firm support from others such as Manviri and Tathweelan was definitely encouraging.

He also had no regret for the hours he and Han had spent talking after the reception had ended. Even though they had had plenty of time to do that on the journey from Endor, the subject of family was one they had never really discussed more than superficially. They hadn't intended to stay up quite so long, but the fact that neither of them had noticed the passage of time despite their mutual weariness told the shaman that the time had been well-spent. If circumstances allowed, he could make up for the lost sleep come evening, but for now, he felt sufficiently at peace with the world and intrigued by the prospect of his first day on the Senate to not care about such comparative trivialities.

When he had readied himself for the day — choosing the comforting familiarity of his new blue clothing — he headed down to the small dining room where the family ate their meals. Although his hosts had intended to have all his meals brought to his chambers, thus allowing him a few extra minutes of privacy each day, before he had retired last night, he had asked Han, almost timidly, if he might share those moments with them. Not that he felt lonely; heavens knew, back home he tended to eat alone most evenings, when the Tribe traditionally shared a communal meal, not because he wanted his privacy so much as because he was usually too tired or too busy to make the long hike to and from the gathering hut. In this case, whatever time he was able to spend with the children would improve his understanding of them and make him that much better a guardian, should the need ever arise. Han thought it an excellent idea — even though he warned the shaman that the kids were often at their worst at mealtimes — and had left appropriate instructions with the servant droids.

According to his hosts, they were having a good morning when he arrived, possibly because the children knew they would have company for breakfast, as Han had already told them the shaman would be joining them, and why. It didn't take Logray long to see that of the three, Alyaan was definitely the most talkative, ready and willing to chatter about almost any subject presented. Ben — whose full name, Alyhappily told him, was Benaris, after the father of Leia's mothers, both blood and adopted, thus one of their true grandfathers, though the nickname was also a gentle tribute to Obi-wan Kenobi, Luke's mentor and an actual uncle of the twin Skywalkers, without whose intervention Luke, Leia, and Han would likely have never met — was only slightly less garrulous than his older sister. He preferred to listen for a while first, deciding whether or not the discussion was one he wanted to join, but once he had, there was virtually no stopping him. With her speech impediment, Anya was naturally the quietest, but was also clearly the most thoughtful. When she did speak up, it was always with observations and comments surprisingly well-conceived for one her age. Undoubtedly, with so much time spent in enforced silence, unable or unwilling to talk but fully capable of hearing and understanding, the girl had learned more than outer appearances belied. Within the circle of her family, she made an effort to speak Transglin — a necessity, since neither Ben nor Luke understood more than a few words of Corellese and Leia's grasp was still shaky; only Han and Alyaan were truly fluent, and no one wanted Threepio hanging about during meals to translate casual conversations. Her difficulties were noticeable, though not insurmountable, Logray felt. In time, she would overcome them, and for now, her family displayed commendable patience (save for Ben, who was occasionally frustrated by how long it sometimes took for his twin to say what he thought were simple sentences). It would take a good while for him to become fully acquainted with these youngsters, Logray reflected, but at least this was an acclimation to which he could look forward with pleasure, not dread.

As he was pondering that, the outer world intruded in the form of the arrival of Wedge, who had come to collect his new superior to begin their day's work. He was rather on the early side, since he and Logray had agreed the night before that it might be a good idea if they arrived at the Hall well before the session opened, so that the new Senator might have a chance to thoroughly study his working environs and seek answers to any pertinent questions before they were needed. When they were on their way, Anilles informed the shaman that he had found the information Logray had requested during the reception, and also gave him a warning.

"I don't know if her highness or any of the others mentioned it to you," he said as the new droid-chauffeured speeder assigned to the Endorian mission took them to their destination, "but don't be surprised if one of today's first items of business is you."

The Ewok's black eyes turned away from watching the still unfamiliar byways to regard the Alderaani with a puzzled expression. "Me? I thought I'd completed all the required formalities...."

"You have. But I'm given to understand that it's not unusual for freshman Senators to be asked to introduce themselves to the entire Assembly at the beginning of their first day. Not everyone can attend the receptions, and even then, that sort of hubbub isn't exactly conducive to learning much about another person. It's not mandatory, and you don't have to say anything at all if you don't want to, but I thought you should at least know that you'll probably be asked. It's been two years since a new representative entered the Senate, and more than that since a whole new world joined. Even if there weren't the controversy around you, there'd still be significant interest."

Logray sighed softly. "I wish I'd known this sooner. I'm not a very good extemporaneous speaker."

The wry smile that danced across Wedge's face begged to differ. "In my experience, you're better than most. You won't be asked to deliver a lecture on the history of Endor, just provide a few details about yourself. As I said, you don't *have* to say anything at all, but I think it would be in your best interests to humor them. The more hard facts you can give them about yourself and your people, the less they can use conjecture and rumor against you."

"That's true. There's no better antidote to the poison of lies than the truth — so long as it's believed."
"It will be. And just there's one more thing...."

This time, the wizard's sigh held a note of wistful pain. "Is there always 'just one more thing'?"

Antilles chuckled softly to ease the sting of it. "It's nothing bad, Master Logray, I promise." He withdrew something from a pocket of his jacket and held it out for the Ewok to take. As he did so, Logray saw that it was a ring, fashioned of bright gold metal in a simple design, bearing a single clear green stone about the size of his fingertip, inscribed with the symbol of the Senate. "It's your identification," Wedge explained. "All the other Senators, Ministers, and high government officials have them. If you look closely, you can see it has a hologram of both you and your homeworld's emblem in it. It also has microcircuitry you *can't* see, which can provide any necessary information to positively identify you, anywhere in the Republic. Scanning it will give you full access to any place or system you're cleared to enter — given the fact that you're also an ambassador whom General Solo happens to trust implicitly, you'll find very little denied you — and it can also act as an official seal of your embassy, granting approval without filing mountains of paperwork."

"A very clever device," Logray commended, finding that the ring precisely fit the middle finger of his right hand. "Is this part of why I was so exhaustively examined, yesterday?"

Wedge nodded. "It often amazes me how fast they can make these things, given how detailed they need to be. I have one of my own, as the Security Minister's adjutant. Its programming has been temporarily amended to reflect my new position, but it'll still function as full Security clearance, if necessary."

"Let's hope it won't become necessary," the shaman said quietly, knowing that if it did, they would likely be in serious trouble.

On that sober note, the speeder arrived at the appropriate entrance to the Hall. Antilles, who had learned the layout of every centim of the place in minute detail as part of his job in Security, led the old one by the shortest route to his place on the main floor. More than just a single seat with the ubiquitous computer console, each Senator's position provided working room for himself and at least two aides, a station that was almost a full remote office. The computers, Wedge explained, could not only tap into the various governmental databases — in some cases fully, in others only into those areas not under security lock — but was also linked to the private computers of the Endorian mission. Well encrypted against tampering, those systems would respond only to Logray, Wedge, the Minister of Security, and whoever else the Senator might later see fit to grant access. To do so required not only a scan of the person's ID ring, but a retinal scan and voice verification as well. The redundancy at first seemed a trifle excessive to the shaman, but only until he realized that once inside the Hall, there were no barriers to stop a person from wandering wherever he wished to go. With security any less tight, it would be too easy for unscrupulous types to break into private

systems and collect information they should not have. The Security vid systems were constantly active, of course, but without a greater barrier to stop them, the unsavory might find ways around mere visual surveillance. Logray had no doubt that Senator Kapfaraa had at the very least considered such subterfuge, if what Manviri had told him was true — and all his instincts told him it was.

The chamber was almost empty when they arrived; here and there, a Senator or an aide could be seen at work, probably getting a head start on their work for the day. After about half an hour, when Wedge had finished instructing the wizard — offering his compliments at the speed and sureness with which Logray assimilated the information — others began to arrive, a trickle at first, and then a steady stream as the hour for opening neared. From his vantage on the chamber's lowest tier, the shaman was in a reasonably good position to view much of the informal procession; his view was restricted only in watching those of his own quadrant as they came to take their places.

As the others entered, he saw many faces he recognized from the day before, even though he could not recall all their names, and many more whom he had, at best, only glimpsed for a moment during his Induction. The varied species, appearances, and modes of dress were fascinating to the Ewok, more than he had ever dreamed possible. In his long, long tenure as Shaman, he had become so familiar with Endor and everything in it, he often felt as if he himself had grown into a sleepy old tree, becoming a part of the planet so deeply rooted, were he ever to be removed from it, he would quickly wither and die. But he had not. In fact, with the exception of the battering storms sure to be stirred by Kapfaraa and her associates, he felt more a young sapling again, awake and alive, eager to thrive and grow and learn all the new things he had only imagined.

Last night, he had experienced stimulus of a sort he had not known in years: interaction with many new and interesting people who were both his peers and his equals. In the Tribe, while all adult members were considered equal, he, as Shaman, had no peer — except, perhaps, for Chirpa, who never considered himself so as his personal respect for Logray was too great — and he knew that due to his revered position and age, no one really ever thought of him as an equal, preferring instead to raise him on a pedestal of honor he sometimes felt he did not deserve, and often wished they would not do. It distanced him from the rest of his people in ways that they could not understand, for they only meant to offer him the tribute they felt he had earned, but they never quite realized how their behavior sometimes bordered on worship, which made Logray extremely uncomfortable, and had the unpleasant side effect of setting him apart from the Tribe rather than drawing him more closely into it. It was, perhaps, part of why he had become so fascinated with their offworld guests once he had assured himself that their interaction was benign. The humans and other aliens respected his position within his society, but they did not hold him in awe. Han in particular had not been impressed by his status, which may have been precisely why the shaman had so eagerly cultivated their friendship, once they stopped trying to snap each others' head off. The respect and affection that had grown between them had nothing whatsoever to do with their ranks, which gave Logray considerable delight.

Here as well his past was of no real consequence. The other Senators had no reason to revere him, and looked upon him only as a new member of their circle, an equal. Well, perhaps with a few exceptions, like Danila Kapfaraa, but in general, he was no longer Logray the Shaman, Logray the Ancient One, who had lived longer than any three Ewoks, defeated their most terrible enemy, saved them countless times from disease and disaster, provided seemingly miraculous cures when they were near to death, and worked such wonders among them that his name would never be forgotten. Here, he was simply Logray the Senator, and he was finding even now that he was going to enjoy it.

A reminder of the more positive aspects of this new experience came in the form of Edyk Manviri as the Corellian arrived to take his place at Logray's right on the lowest tier. Even though his Quadrant's Capitol had been removed to the neighboring planet of Cendar to give it more room to grow as it needed, Corellia was still considered the Capitolworld of its Quadrant, and thus was accorded that position on the Senate floor. As the most senior of the four Quadrant Senators, Manviri, Wedge had told him, was the current Speaker for the Senate, the person who officiated over all sessions and to whom the others had to defer in any matters pertaining to the operation of the Senate. He was spared the impossible task of trying to keep track of recognizing those who wished to be heard in the order in which they petitioned by the elaborate computer system; when a Senator wanted to speak, they had only to press a particular button on their console, which would log it into the system in an order broken down into microseconds, and then pass it on to Manviri. If a Senator began a tirade wholly irrelevant to Senate business or launched into a malicious attack against another Senator in violation of their Oath, the system would automatically deactivate all audio and video originating from the offender's station, thus saving Manviri the need to silence or censure them. Logray now understood the full importance of having won the Corellian Senator as an ally, and was all the more grateful for it.

Smiling cheerfully — which seemed to be the man's natural disposition — Manviri paused as he crossed the floor on his way to his own position. “*Gupa*, Senator,” he greeted sunnily, using his new colleague's customary salutation. “I hope we didn't wear out our welcome, last night.”

“Not at all,” Logray assured him. “And good morning to you, as well. I didn't know you were familiar with my language.”

The Corellian laughed. “I'm not. I just looked up a few words in the linguistics databank after you were polite enough to speak with me in Corellese last evening — repaying the favor, though not nearly as well. You have an excellent command of the language, by the way. Did you study on Corellia or one of our colony worlds?”

The Ewok shook his head. “No, but it seems Endor holds a peculiar attraction to your people; we've an unusually large number of Corellians serving on the Base or living in Sharadine. I would have thought, given that the name they chose for the City was of Alderaani origin, the place would draw more of them as settlers, yet while they *are* a significant portion of the population, your people still have them outnumbered.”

“Well, it's probably just another example of that pervasive Corellian expansionism some people like to accuse us of pursuing. Nothing but jealousy, if you ask me. Did anyone say anything to you about this morning's session?”

“That I'll likely be asked to say something about myself? Yes, Captain Antilles was kind enough to inform me.”

“I hope he also mentioned that it isn't required. If you'd rather not, just tell me now and I'll keep it off the agenda.”

Logray smiled faintly. “No, it's quite all right, Senator. The most fertile soil for gossip and the whisperings of hate is silence. As you told me last evening, the best way to forestall a barrage of lies and misunderstanding is by presenting the truth of my own free will. Since this is a Senate tradition, I see no harm in following it.”

“An excellent idea. I look forward to hearing whatever you have to say.” With a small salute of farewell, he continued on to his post.

Shortly after Manviri was settled in, the remaining Quadrant Senators arrived. Directly across from Logray was seated Taima Alikkees, the Senator from Jhantor. Though the world had no native sapient population — one of the reasons it had been chosen to be the seat of galactic government, as it was considered neutral ground — over the millennia many of the people who had come to work here as support to the governmental population stayed, had offspring, and eventually grew to the sizeable population that now considered Jhantor their homeworld. They were a population of mixed human and non-human; at the moment, the Senator was of the latter type, a reptilian of a variety that had evolved so much along human lines, it was difficult to tell that she was *not* human from a distance. Logray recalled meeting her yesterday, and knew that the frill about her head that looked to be short red hair was actually an unusual sort of membrane which could fan out when she was startled or upset, and that the golden sheen of her skin was not an odd color of human flesh, but rather of hide so finely scaled, one could only see it on *very* close examination. Her bright green eyes were large and intelligent, and as she settled into her seat, they glanced upon the Ewok with a pleasant smile of greeting.

On his left was the representative of Dyan Phiyarra, Capitolworld of the K'halaman Quadrant. Though they had not met at all the day before, Logray knew from his studies that the painfully human Leos Gennadel was the current Senator. Although he was of an age with Manviri, Gennadel looked much older, a tall, gaunt gray man — gray of dress, gray of hair, gray of eyes, almost gray of skin. He had none of his Corellian colleague's overt vitality, but from his studies, the shaman knew it would be wrong to underestimate the fellow because of his almost listless appearance. Gennadel might well be gloomy and taciturn, but his record showed that he missed little, and was able to act both surely and swiftly when he felt the need. He tended to vote pro-human on matters in which race could be made an issue, but not with the absolute predictability of Kapfaara and her followers. Two months before, he had cast the deciding vote defeating a bill clearly designed to benefit only humans, which had annoyed the more rigid activists and surprised almost everyone on the planet. Why he had done so, only Gennadel knew, which made him worth watching with care. Dealing with those whose agendas were plain was simple in comparison to dealing with one whose mind was not so clearly evident. It was the difference between predicting how the wind would sway a massive thousand-year-old *kothar* tree and a young, supple sapling. The former would stand straight and tall, unbending, no matter how powerful the gale thrust against it, while the latter could as easily blow one way or the other, without warning. Gennadel saw the Ewok

looking at him as he took his seat; he nodded curtly, not so brusquely as to be impolite, but in a manner that could not be interpreted as the slightest bit friendly. Yes, Senator Gennadel would bear watching, indeed.

Seven tiers above and behind the Phiyarran among those representing subsector capitols in the K'halaman Quadrant, Logray finally noted the place of his prime adversary, having taken a moment before Manviri's arrival to locate the Durean's position in the Senate database on his computer. Kapfaraa, he saw, was already seated, talking with her two cohorts of the night before as well as three other human Senators. For a moment, the shaman considered using his esoteric gifts to listen in on their conversation, but decided against it. Not only would it be impolite, but it would also give ammunition to anyone who might want to hold his Talents against him and claim it made him an unsuitable Senator.

When the hour for opening arrived, a pleasant but nonetheless quite audible chiming signaled for all present, participant and spectator alike, to take their places and come to order. The swiftness with which this was managed was a marvel to Logray, given how many people needed to settle down. He'd often seen the eight other members of the Council of Elders take far longer to do so when Chirpa called their meetings to order, but then, protocol among the Tribe had never been quite as strict as it was here on Jhantor, where without it, all would be chaos. He also supposed that, since the other Senators had had at least two years' experience with this daily ritual and the consequences of not abiding by it, obedience to the call had become a virtual reflex. He noted with interest the positions of eight Allasi observers precisely spaced along the uppermost tier of the actual Senate floor. Seeing them reminded the shaman of Nchien, and made him wonder if they might be so fortunate as to not need his expert testimony, after all. The positive reception he'd received thus far from most of the other Senators had given him hope, but not so much so that he would foolishly rush into the belief that he and his people had already won.

When only a low murmur of voices — mostly from the viewing gallery — could be heard, Manviri spoke. "Good morning," he said pleasantly, his baritone voice carried both by the Hall's acoustics and its amplification system, his image visible not only in the computer viewscreens at each station but also in the holoprojection at the center of the main floor. No one needed make use of external translation devices; when he'd explained the functions of the subcutaneous tracer to the Ewok, the Registrar had also told him it carried a very tiny but very sophisticated translator, which, via bone conduction, would enable the wearer to understand any language spoken in the Republic. Able to be reprogrammed via a microwave pulse, each was customized to accommodate the knowledge of the individual; the device would only activate when a language not marked in the databank as one known to the wearer was spoken. Logray's had been set to ignore Ewokese, Transglin, and Corellese, even though he had learned some Wookese, Allasin, and Pnussiaki. In his own opinion, he knew none well enough to carry on a conversation with any person of those races save those he knew well, and who were thus able to compensate for his novice abilities.

Manviri continued. "As today is the last session for this week, it's time to once again remind those of you who seem to have trouble remembering that if you have new business you want to be put on the agenda for next week, you must inform the Scheduling Officer or his assistant no later than two hours before the close of today's session. There will be *no* exceptions this time, and beginning next month, those who habitually ignore the Scheduling Rules will be subject to reprimand and fines. Grumble about it all you wish, gentlebeings," he added loftily when such sounds did indeed arise from several quarters, "but we all voted to ratify these reforms so that our business would stop being constantly bogged down by those looking for special treatment or those who are simply too lazy to properly organize their own workload. We're trying to run a government, not a private club, and all of us need to put in the time and effort to see it run efficiently.

"I have also been asked by our liaison to the Presidential Cabinet to reiterate the reminder we all received concerning the need for all Committees to file their biannual progress reports *before* the Firstmonth recess, not after it. While we may have that time off to tend to our constituencies, the President and his Cabinet do not, and need the time to read and evaluate all reports before the new session begins. Any Committee failing to meet the deadline will be subject to examination by Internal Affairs Minister Sassacus, which may result in either the dissolution of the Committee or the dismissal of any members deemed responsible for the negligence. Don't bother telling me this isn't Cabinet business, Senator Taizo," the Corellian said as an aside to the representative from Dantooine, who happened to be in charge of one of the committees most notorious for failing to provide information when asked and which had yet to file a single report on time. Yan Taizo, who had been active in the Alliance during the time it had made his homeworld its main base, considered himself a very Hero of the Rebellion, and felt such a position had earned him special treatment and privileges. "We all serve under the same President toward the same goal — a peaceful and prosperous and united Republic — and the Cabinet has to report to him under the same rules that bind us. At the very least we can do our jobs when it's *required* of us, so that we don't slow the wheels of government any more than is

absolutely necessary.” He spoke not with idealistic fervor but with sound reason and dedication to his work; Logray found himself liking the man even more for it.

He had call to question that judgment a moment later, when Manviri changed the subject. “On a more amiable note.... We have the pleasure of welcoming to our august company the first elected native representative from the Quadrant Capitolworld of Endor, Senator Logray. Since he is already familiar with our custom of introduction and doesn’t object to it, I’ll surrender the floor to him so that we may all have our curiosity satisfied. Senator?”

As Manviri hadn’t bothered to rise when speaking, so the shaman also remained seated. When Manviri gave him the floor, he was momentarily startled to see the Corellian’s holographic image vanish and be replaced by his own. It was a briefly dismaying sight, but he quickly found that if he looked through rather than at the translucent projection, he scarcely noted it. “Thank you, Senator Manviri,” he said politely, as good a way to start as any. Let those who might have doubts see that even “barbarians” could have proper manners. “As I am uncertain of how detailed an account is customary, and I have lived for entirely too many years to make the telling of my life’s history both practical and sufficiently interesting, I shall attempt to be as succinct as possible. I am Logray of the Family Eetoku, the youngest and sole survivor of my parents’ three children. In my youth, I was trained as a warrior, not in the sense of a soldier who fights as part of an organized military force, but one whose duty it would be to help protect our settlement from the many dangers and enemies present on our world. Shortly after I had been acknowledged as an adult member of our community, the most powerful of those enemies came to our village and nearly decimated it in order to steal from us a valuable artifact. Many were killed in the attack, including my brother Luja; in what hindsight can clearly recognize as a fit of foolish anger, I followed our attacker hoping to stop her, recapture the artifact, and avenge my brother’s death. Why she chose not to kill me for my impudence I do not know, but I spent the next thirty years of my life as her slave — a tale which I tell you now not to seek sympathy or even to entertain you, but to make it clear to some who may think otherwise that I will *always* stand in staunch opposition to any attempt to condone or legitimize slavery in whatever form it might take.” He did not know where Senator Demberesh was seated, but there was no way the Sivilani could have failed to know the remark was meant for him.

Logray continued. “Shortly after I successfully escaped and returned to my people with a part of our lost artifact, I was taken in as the apprentice of Palakiko, our aging Shaman. Not long after that, Palakiko died, and named me to take his place. The duties of our Shaman are many, some of which include the tending of the sick and injured, teaching the young the traditions of our people, preserving our history and what some might call our religious beliefs. I have had the honor of holding this position for a very, very long time. During those years, I have assisted my people in repelling hostile alien incursions, the largest of which came when the Empire chose our world as the base from which they would build their second *Death Star*. By what seems almost a fortunate accident, we met and allied ourselves with the Rebel forces who came to defeat them, and have since enjoyed a relationship with settlers from the Republic that has been both amiable and profitable for both sides. If we appear to have been lax in our efforts to send one of our own people as representative to this Senate, I’m afraid we have no one to blame but ourselves for allowing the comfort of the status quo to lull us into inaction. It is our hope, and mine, that this situation will now be rectified, and that we may all be made better for our active rather passive participation in the government which was established for our mutual protection and benefit.”

He hoped that he had said enough. From the corner of his eye, he saw Wedge — whose station was to his right — make a small gesture of approval. The shaman had almost allowed himself to hope that Manviri would thank him for the information and continue with the regular business for the day when another Senator spoke up. Although no holographic projection came along with the voice, a footnote at the bottom of his computer screen told him it belonged to one Nico Agoston, Senator of Lakuud, a world in the same sector as Durea. The human’s tenor was unpleasantly shrill, telling Logray more of its owner’s nature than he might have gleaned from the mere sight of him. “I notice you mentioned nothing about education other than this apprenticeship you served, Senator Eetoku. Do your people place no value on such basic skills as mathematics and literacy?”

“Of course we do, Senator... Agoston, isn’t it? I don’t wish to offend you by misnaming you, since my people’s custom would be to call you by your personal name, not your family’s.” When Agoston said nothing, he knew that he was not only right, but that the Lakuudite quite likely had been encouraged to improperly address his newest colleague. “As I said, part of my responsibilities as Shaman is to teach our young both our traditions and our history. Basic education, such as reading, writing, and so on are taught to us by our parents and other family members who are most skilled in such things. Because we are a small society, we don’t have the formal system of schools and standardized testing you require of your own youth, but before they are acknowledged as full adult members of our Tribe, our young must demonstrate reasonable aptitude with the skills you mentioned, and more. A people can grow and flourish only

as their knowledge and understanding also grow, and we have no desire to fall back into the ignorant barbarism that was once the only existence we knew.”

“So you yourself have nothing more than a very basic education?” This time, the query came from a Senator Lokela Quah of Ord Istan, a world not in Durea’s sector, but in another not far removed. “And you feel yourself capable of understanding the complexities of government?”

Logray smiled softly, the expression both patient and deadly. “Even though we are comparatively few in numbers, Senator, we have a system of government, of which I have been an active part for almost six hundred Standard years. I have been exposed to the New Republic system of governance from virtually the moment of its establishment, and have served as an advisor to both the Endorian Governor’s office and the Republic Administration of Base Sharadine during all that time. And insofar as the question of advanced education is concerned.... After working on several projects with Doctor Zarris Nathren, the former head of the Sharadine Medcenter and the current Advisor on Xenobiology to the Minister of Health, he persuaded me to undertake what you call correspondence education from the Medical University of Pnussiak so that I might not only improve my personal skills while still attending my duties, but also obtain permission to use them officially under Republic regulations. After several years of what I admit was very difficult work under Doctor Nathren’s supervision, I took and passed the final examinations, receiving what I’ve been told were excellent scores. I now hold advanced degrees in biochemistry, pharmacology, and internal medicine, and am fully licensed to act as an emergency medical technician on any world in the Republic. You and some of our other colleagues might find me better qualified if I were an expert in political science, but for now, my people were content to settle for me as their representative. Perhaps those who come after me will show better judgment in choosing their areas of study.”

He spoke so inoffensively, it was obvious he knew exactly what Quah and Agoston had been trying to do — make him admit to a complete lack of any serious education — just as he knew the truth would squash their ploy most effectively. Surreptitiously, he cast a glance in Kapfaraa’s direction, and was pleased to see her blanch with the shock of yet another unanticipated parry of her indirect attack, then turn red from anger, possibly with him, possibly with herself, most likely with whoever had told her the shaman was virtually uneducated. It was nice to see her caught in her own snare, the wizard reflected uncharitably.

This time, Manviri spoke. “I’m happy to hear we have someone with decent medical training right here in the Hall,” he said cheerfully, his grin saying that he, too, was pleased to see the legs of Danila’s lackeys so neatly cut out from under them. “Physicians don’t seem inclined to pursue Senate positions, either because they love their work or the money it brings too much to give it up. Are there any other pertinent questions for Senator Logray?” He emphasized not only the proper form of addressing their little colleague, but also the word *pertinent*, implying that the recent grilling obviously had not qualified.

Senator Aldres Bitran of Phan Shilis — an industrial world in the Alliance of Corellian Systems, a virtual colony of the Motherworld itself — did. “I’m sure you’re aware, Senator Logray, that while we all debate and vote upon the passage of bills and propositions and laws, much of the work needed to bring those items to a presentable status is done in various subcommittees.”

The Ewok nodded. “Yes, I know. But I don’t expect to be asked to serve in such a capacity until it can be determined where I could best be of service.”

“Well said. Making that determination does have to start somewhere, and I for one would be interested in knowing what issues are most important to you and your people.”

The shaman chuckled softly. “Well,” he remarked drolly, “we obviously have a vested interest in certain current economic and administrative matters.” His laughter was echoed quietly around the great room. “At this point, my people are interested primarily in seeing to it that this government of freedom and justice which was given new life on our homeworld continues in the noble manner with which it began. Personally, I am also interested in both medical and educational issues, especially where they pertain to the disadvantaged. And as I said earlier, the subject of slavery — specifically, putting an end to it, in any form — concerns me greatly. Does this answer your question sufficiently?”

“Quite sufficiently,” Bitran approved. “Thank you, Senator.”

When no other questions were raised, Manviri thanked Logray for suffering their curiosity, then turned to the remaining agenda for the day.

It being his first day in office, Logray had had no intention of doing anything but listening to the discussion of the various matters he had either studied in depth on the trip from Endor or more briefly that morning. It came as a great surprise to him when other Senators solicited his opinions at times, some, like Manviri, out of a genuine interest in hearing his point of view — and perhaps learning from it what they might expect from their newest colleague in the future — and others, like Kapfaraa, out of an interest in seeing how they might trip him up and make him look ignorant or foolish. The shaman, fortunately, was too alert to get caught by such transparent trickery, and he was careful in giving answers that could not later be used to his detriment. His circumspect replies were accepted without problem by everyone but a few, most significantly the Senator from Durea, who continued to deliberately refer to him by his Family name, despite repeated polite corrections. Shortly before the noon recess, the wizard decided enough was enough.

The issue under discussion was one with which Logray was entirely too familiar, having been one of those Leia had included in her overview of the current Senate. It was also one for which he had developed a definite opinion. The proposition on the surface dealt with providing relief for certain worlds who had been in prolonged economic recessions. On the whole, it seemed a worthy cause, since there were many workers on these planets whose livelihood had either been seriously cut back or entirely cut off as a result. However, there were two significant flaws to the proposal: The capital to be diverted in order to aid these worlds would come not from the General Emergency Fund, nor any part of the Commerce and Trade budget, but from the Education Department, which on the surface appeared to be operating with a surplus. But that surplus was actually illusory; the funds were being held in anticipation of a project to provide major improvements to the schools, academies, and universities in some of the more distant parts of the Republic. The second flaw, in Logray's opinion, was the more serious of the two: There was no clearly defined plan under which these grants would be used. According to the proposal, the money would simply be given to each of the depressed worlds, who could then do with it whatever they wished, with no rules or even guidelines to make certain it was properly and fairly distributed. While such an approach indicated a high level of trust on the part of the Republic, it also threw open the doors for all manner of abuse. Such had certainly happened before — and according to information Wedge provided after the debate was fully underway, it had happened on virtually all of the worlds mentioned as potential beneficiaries of this plan.

Veregil Otzarinn, the representative of Zorangar — one of the seventeen systems for whom this proposal would bring aid — had asked for Logray's input on the matter, and had not liked the answer he was given, that the Proposition seemed ill-conceived and therefore inadvisable in its present state. The man returned with a full ten minute rebuttal of why this action was necessary.

When Otzarinn had finished his rant — or at least paused long enough for someone else to get a word in edgewise — Logray replied in his best diplomatic manner. "I am not questioning the need for the provision of aid, Senator," he said calmly and amiably. "What I question is the manner in which this proposal would allow it to be given. First, it has been pointed out by others besides myself that tapping the funds of the Ministry of Education is both short-sighted and unnecessary. The situation plainly qualifies for support under Republic Emergency regulations, and the Emergency Fund is more than adequate to provide the financial assistance outlined in the Proposition."

"But just barely, Senator Eetoku," Danila Kapfaraa noted, like an experienced teacher pointing out an obvious misconception to an erring student. "Do you think it wise to leave the Fund virtually depleted? What if another crisis were to come, and we had nothing left with which to help?"

The shaman grit his teeth, not at her remark, but at her form of address. By now, even her cronies Demberesh and Foldren had capitulated on the matter, but it was clearly going to take more to break the Durean of the habit. "Perhaps then the situation might justify taking resources from another area, but I rather doubt it will happen. The end of the fiscal year is only a month away, and from what I understand of the Budget, new capital will be placed into every Republic fund at that time. Do you think I'm being overly optimistic in believing that we might manage to survive another month without a major catastrophe?"

Kapfaraa's manner was poisonously pleasant. "I do, Senator Eetoku. This is only your first day in office, and while you seem to have been adequately coached concerning current issues, I'm certain you haven't the proper appreciation for just how often things can and do go wrong in this galaxy."

Logray's answering smile was similarly lethal. "Yes, I'm certain I haven't. But I know enough of the management of resources and past records to know that it's foolish to simply hand over supplies of any type to persons who have demonstrated a complete lack of ability in making efficient and effective use of that which is given them. Have you examined the records concerning these worlds' prior usage of Emergency funds, Senator Herder-of-Kapa-Beasts?"

A mutter ran through the assembly, a mixture of surprise, confusion, indignation, and mostly amusement. The sound that came from the direction of the Durean Senator, however, was somewhat more affronted. "I beg your pardon!" she said, not actually requesting a repetition, but rather making known her displeasure.

"Certainly," Logray replied quite affably, deliberately ignoring what he knew to be the woman's true intent. "I was curious to know just how thoroughly you've examined the records showing the ways in which each of the systems named in the Proposal have utilized any funds given them by the Republic to deal with internal emergencies. It's actually quite educational, although I presume you're already aware of this information, seeing how all of these worlds are within your Quadrant, and six are in the same sector as your own world."

The aplomb with which he ignored Kapfaraa's annoyance — just as she had ignored his repeated reminders of his people's traditions — amused far more of the Senators than it irritated. Their muted chuckles did nothing to ease Danila's wrath. "I know the situation within my Quadrant very well, Senator Eetoku. I have no need to be instructed in it by you."

The shaman did not let her mood dim his deliberate sunniness. "Excellent, Senator Herder-of-Kapa-Beasts. Then you must understand my concern over giving these same worlds an unrestricted allocation of what you yourself admit are already limited funds."

Dark-complected though she was, Kapfaraa nonetheless succeeded in turning livid. "I do *not* find this amusing," she declared tightly.

"Neither do I," Logray agreed, still maintaining his ever-so-pleasant demeanor. "Willfully mismanaging Republic resources is as criminal an act as misappropriating them for personal use."

"That's not what I meant and you know it!"

The Ewok's black eyes blinked in a picture of perfect innocence. "Then what *did* you mean? That we should allow those who have demonstrated either an inability to make proper use of aid or an outright inclination toward embezzlement to continue these habits without direction, simply because it's been done before? I should think you would be against such action, Senator Kapa Beast Herder, since you're clearly quite concerned about the depletion of available funds."

If it had been possible for steam to actually escape the Durean's ears, it would have. "This is positively outrageous!" she fairly exploded. "Senator Manvirī, how can you permit such an insult to continue?"

The Corellian's expression was one of polite confusion. "What insult?" he wanted to know.

Danila happily provided an answer. "I am *not* a herder of kapa beasts—!"

"Of course not," Logray allowed, smiling not only to ostensibly mollify his adversary, but because he could hear Wedge trying very hard not to laugh at Kapfaraa's outrage, which she didn't even seem to realize was of utterly ridiculous proportions. "But certainly your ancestors were. According to the data available on your planet, its cultures, and its languages, *Kapfaraa* is the name of those persons descended from families who made their living in the herding of kapa, which, so the data claims, are small flock-beasts raised for a variety of purposes, including meat, milk, ivory, and a rather peculiarly colored orange fur used in the production of—"

"I *don't* need a lecture on the ancient economics of my own planet, Senator Eetoku, and it is *not* the custom of my people to call each other by antiquated versions of our surnames. I insist that this deliberate mockery end this instant!"

"A splendid idea," Manvirī agreed cheerfully. "I'm sure Senator Logray will be more than happy to honor your traditions — as soon as you honor his. If you don't like that arrangement," he added when the Durean sputtered with

anger, "I suggest you remember your Oath to behave at all times in a manner befitting a member of this Senate. The fact that *you* started this by deliberately ignoring the wishes of our Endorian colleague seems to me to be a violation of that Oath, don't you think?"

A ripple of chuckles and snickers and other suppressed laughter cooled Kapfaraa's overheated temper as quickly as an arctic wind freezes water on Hoth. Instead of boiling in outrage, her anger chilled to an icy stillness, perhaps just as deadly, but no longer so openly arrogant. "I see your point, Senator," she said quietly, her voice tight with control. She understood Manviri very well indeed, both in his open statements and his implied: that if she persisted with her snidely underhanded insults, the Speaker would not only let the shaman continue to repay her in kind, he might just mention her behavior to the Ethics Committee, who frowned on such persistent expressions of bigotry. It was as good as a threat against her life, as far as Kapfaraa was concerned, for the last thing she wanted was to give the Committee any reason, however minor, to begin an investigation against her. The Committee consisted of several Senators, as well as an equal number Presidential appointees and others elected by the general population. With such a mix, it was felt, the Committee's actions would always be honest, for no one part of the government would hold too much influence on it, and thus could neither ignore misconduct nor persecute those in another branch for insignificant infractions. Kapfaraa had no power over them, and had been very careful to keep her less sterling activities well away from any of its members. But in recent years, she knew that they were becoming suspicious, and would use any real excuse to examine her activities as the opening they needed to search for the concrete proof they needed. Once it was found, not only her career would be forfeit — using black mail to manipulate Senate voting was considered treason in this new Republic, and was a capital offense. Exposed, she would face not impeachment, but execution.

Other Senators would never say a thing about her little digs at the Ewok, either because they supported her humanist agenda, agreed with her on other key issues, or had been coerced into cooperating with her. Manviri, however, fell into none of those categories, and she knew that while his position required him to be more tolerant than other Senators — his job was to see to it that the Senate ran smoothly and lawfully, not to use his power to fuel personal witch-hunts — the Corellian did not like her, and would have no inhibition against reporting her behavior, unless it ceased immediately. "My apologies, Senator Logray," she said through clenched teeth. "I intended no insult."

The wizard wouldn't believe that if he lived to be a thousand, but he acknowledged it graciously as the minor victory it was. "Apology accepted, Senator Kapfaraa. We should never let petty differences interfere with the work we are all here to do. And concerning this emergency appropriation...."

By the time they broke for lunch, Danila and several others were wishing they had never asked the Ewok his opinions, not because he had none to offer, but because those he gave were well considered, logical, sensible, and not the bumbling, inexperienced sort of answers they had hoped to hear. Certain matters that had been on the floor for some time — such as the request for emergency funding — he clearly had studied in advance of assuming his post. When he encountered other issues with which he was unfamiliar, however, he was not too proud to admit it, but he listened and learned quickly, and soon had suggestions to make that were as sound as the rest. Even before the break arrived, he had managed to persuade the required majority of his colleagues that the Appropriations Proposal be amended to include Republic approval of all capital usage, thus insuring the money went where it was truly needed and could be used to best effect, not misdirected into the pockets or favorite programs of unscrupulous planetary officials, or misused by the incompetent. No, Kapfaraa realized all too swiftly, she would not be able to ridicule this creature into backing down or running away, which left her with no choice but to resort to sterner — but more effective and viscerally satisfying — measures.