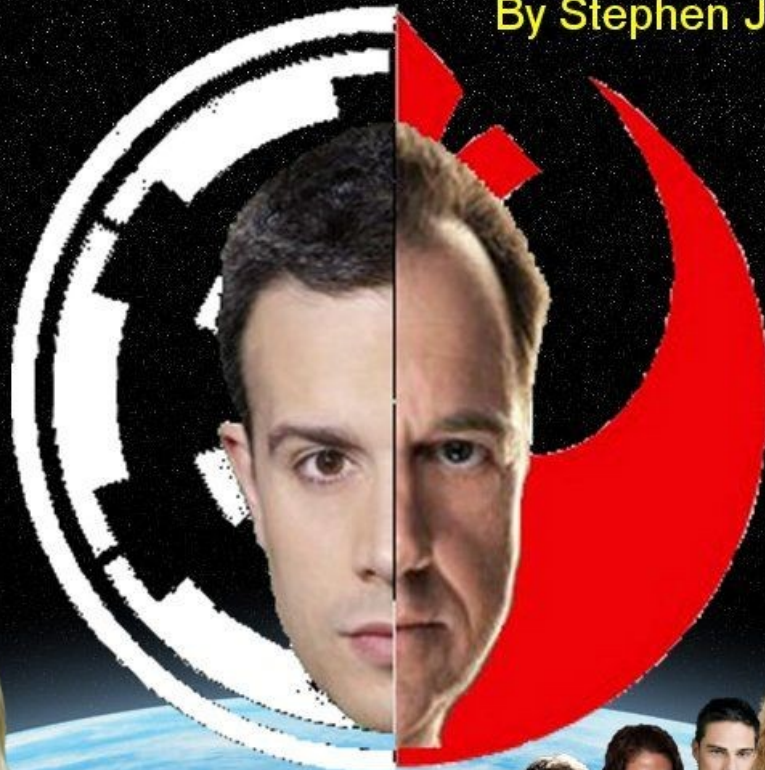


STAR WARS

6-03: Extra-curricular Activity

By Stephen J Dutton



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Civil war turns father against son

IT IS A TIME OF CRISIS. REBEL FORCES FIGHTING AGAINST THE EVIL GALACTIC EMPIRE ARE OUTNUMBERED AND OUTGUNNED BY THEIR FOES. THEY MUST INSTEAD RELY ON GUERILLA WARFARE AND HIT AND FADE STRIKES BY SMALL GROUPS AGAINST STRONGER FORCES.

ONE SUCH GROUP IS LEAD BY THE EXILED NOBLEMAN VORN LARCUS III WHO, WITH THE HELP OF THE SMUGGLER MACE GRAYLE, CAPTAIN OF THE FREIGHTER THE *SILVER HAWK* TAKE THE FIGHT TO THE EMPIRE.

FACING THEM ARE A MULTITUDE OF ENEMIES, BOTH SEEN AND UNSEEN AS THE EMPIRE PLOTS TO BRING DOWN THE REBEL ALLIANCE AND FOREVER EXTINGUISH HOPE AND FREEDOM IN THE GALAXY...

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY

JAYNIE HORPID HAS BEEN ACTING AS THE EYES AND EARS OF THE ISB AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ESTRAN WITH LITTLE TO SHOW FOR IT. BUT THIS CHANGES WHEN THE LIFE OF A SENIOR IMPERIAL FIGURE IS THREATENED...

Original characters created and story written by Stephen J. Dutton.
<http://thehazugfiles.uk/Index.htm>

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1.

"I want all papers delivered to my inbox by the end of next week." the lecturer called out as his students hurriedly packed away their datapads and recording rods. Most of them were paying no attention to him and would come rushing to him at the last moment hoping for an extension to the deadline, but he reminded them anyway before he too began to pack his things away. However, amongst his students there was one that was paying attention to more than just how she was going to get out of the lecture hall as quickly as she could. But Jaynie Horbid was not focusing on the lecturer either.

As far as her fellow students and the staff at the University of Estran were concerned she was a student who hailed from the largely agricultural world of Tarlen in the same sector and she had come here to try and escape what she saw as the drudgery of farming even though her parents had done rather well out of it. Well enough that they were able to supply her with all the funds she needed to study without seeking other employment. That she came from Tarlen and wanted to escape what she saw a dull world was true enough but beyond that everything that people thought they knew about her was a lie.

Jaynie Drud was a spy.

When her older sister Jaysica had defected from the Tarlen Militia to the rebellion against the Empire there had been serious repercussions for her family, her father had lost his job and Jaynie's chances of going to university had vanished altogether. Instead she had been forced to take menial employment to help support her family. Then when a chance reunion with Jaysica had presented the opportunity for Jaynie to prove her family's loyalty by turning in her treasonous sister the plan had gone horribly wrong and she had been the one to end up in prison. That was until a member of the Imperial Security Bureau had made her a simple offer, her freedom in exchange for her help in tracking down a terrorist cell. When that mission had gone according to plan the offer was extended and Jaynie got the chance to attend university after all. Only as well as studying for a degree in subjects that did not involve crops or livestock she was to watch for any signs of treasonous behaviour by other students or members of the faculty and since having to take another job to support herself would give her less time for this the ISB was providing her with a very generous allowance. In fact the size of this allowance had been calculated to allow her to socialise with other students as much as possible, hoping that in more informal settings they would drop their guard and reveal more than was good for them.

So far though she had failed to uncover any signs of treason. Most of the students seemed opposed to the Galactic Empire in one way or another, but so long as they were personally unaffected by its policies and actions they were content to merely grumble about it over drinks and the ISB was not interested in such trivial matters, they were after hard core subversives.

"Jaynie!" a male voice called out down the hallway just as Jaynie stepped out of the lecture hall.

"Droyle." Jaynie replied as she turned to face the student now rushing towards him, "What are you doing here?"

Droyle Tarr was likeable enough Jaynie thought, but he normally said so little that she never bothered to take an interest in him either personally or in a professional manner.

"I came to invite you to a gathering tonight." Droyle replied.

"Actually I wanted to be in the library early tomorrow." Jaynie said as they walked down the corridor together, "I don't have time to go out and party."

"Oh it's not a party." Droyle told her, "It's, well it's more of a lecture I suppose. Look, I'll give you the program." and he produced his datapad. Jaynie took out hers as well and the two devices beeped to indicate that they had made wireless contact with one another, "This is amazing stuff." Droyle went on, "You wouldn't believe what's happening all around us."

Jaynie looked down at the datapad when the transfer from Droyle's was complete and she could hardly believe what she was seeing.

END THE OCCUPATION OF ESTRAN NOW!

The first few sentences of the document given to Jaynie were filled with the typical anti-Imperial sentiment that she had heard many times before. But then came the killer comment, that resistance was possible and that the gathering Droyle was inviting her to would be attended by someone who would explain exactly how to go about this.

"So?" Droyle asked, "Are you interested?"

"I'm not sure." Jaynie answered, one thing she had been warned about was appearing too eager. Anyone who openly called for the downfall of the Empire was either an informer like her or totally insane. Genuine rebel groups avoided both types of people, "I mean what can I do?"

"That's just the point." Droyle told her, "Come to this and we can learn what we can do to change the world. Isn't this what everyone's been saying? Well now's our chance to really do something about it."

"Okay I'll think about it." Jaynie replied, "Who else is going?"

"I've only asked you." Droyle said, "I thought that we'd go together and if its any good we can invite others later."

Jaynie smiled.

"Okay then, I'm in. I'll meet you – wait, where is this? The program doesn't say."

"Of course not. These people don't pin the times and places of their meetings to notice boards where the Empire can find them. They'll call me with the details at the last minute. Hey, here's an idea, why don't we grab something to eat first? Then we'll be together when the call comes."

Jaynie grinned awkwardly.

"How about you just call me when you know?" she said, "I might still change my mind. I don't think I'm the terrorist type."

"But this isn't terrorism. It's resistance." Droyle said, "Terrorism is just what the government tells the media to say it is."

"Fine. Just call me when you know okay?"

"Okay. It's a date."

"No, it's a gathering. You said so yourself."

Despite the walk between the area of the university campus where classes were taught and that where student accommodation was located being so short Jaynie was considering purchasing herself a speeder. Not only would it make the daily trips back and forth quicker but it would give her more freedom to travel off campus without relying on public transport. For now though she had no choice but to walk back to her dormitory and she flinched as a speeder that was coloured entirely black, including its windows pulled up suddenly beside her.

"Get in." the young woman in the driver's seat told her sternly. Jaynie recognised her instantly as Vay Udra, one of the ISB agents that she worked for. When she had first encountered Vay she had been an intern but had since become full agent. Right now though she wore the black bodyglove that she had favoured as an intern rather than the uniform she had now been issued with.

"You know adding 'please' would be more friendly Vay." Jaynie replied as she walked around to the passenger side door.

"We aren't friends." Vay told her, "You work for me remember?"

Jaynie got into the vehicle and was just about to fasten her safety belt when Vay accelerated sharply and Jaynie was suddenly pressed into the padding of her seat.

"You know there are speed limits on campus" she pointed out, "And cameras."

Vay shrugged.

"This vehicle is fitted with a jammer. Traffic speed cameras can't detect it."

"Fine, so it's designed to be the ideal criminal's getaway speeder." Jaynie said, "Now what do you want?"

"I want to know if you're going to do your job." Vay told her.

"What do you mean?" Jaynie asked.

"I mean are you going to that meeting tonight?" Vay asked in response.

"How do you know about that?"

"Your datapad." Vay told her, "We gave it to you remember? Top of the range."

"Yes and I'm very grateful."

"Well it's rigged." Vay explained, "Every file placed on it is scanned for certain key words and phrases and if they appear then the file is automatically uploaded to our system. So when you got given that advert for a cosy little chat with a choice member of the sector's rebel scum we knew about it almost instantly."

"So how many files have you taken from my datapad exactly?" Jaynie asked, "I mean I do a lot of personal stuff on this as well."

"Don't worry, we haven't been pinning information about your sexual fantasies to the ISB notice board." Vay said, "Providing you don't use too many phrases relating to terrorism your private files will remain just that. Private. Garm and I don't have time to read anything that isn't important." The Garm that Vay referred to was Garm Larcus, another ISB agent. He was Vay's immediate superior, but Jaynie understood that there was a strong personal connection between them as well. Like Jaynie's sister, Garm's father was a member of the rebellion so he understood that members of a rebel's family were not automatically traitors as well. Jaynie suspected that this had counted in her favour when he and Vay had approached her to make the deal for her freedom.

"That's a relief." Jaynie said, "But yes, I will be going. But I don't know where it is yet. The guy that gave it to me is going to call me later to tell me."

"Ah, the guy said he'd call you and you believed him." Vay said.

"It's not like that." Jaynie replied, frowning, "Well actually I think he'd like it to be more like that. But he said that the people who sent him the file haven't given him a time yet. They'll call him nearer the time and he'll call me with the information."

"Then make sure you're around to take the call." Vay said.

"Are you going to set up a raid?" Jaynie asked.

"Of course not. For all we know this is just a bunch of malcontents sitting around and pretending that waving some banners will send a message to Coruscant. That sort of individual is best left to a police riot squad. All we want is for you to go to the meeting and see what gets said and who else is there. Don't volunteer for anything that could get you arrested but agree to attend any further meetings. Then just report back to us and we'll decide what happens next. Ah, here we are." and then Vay braked sharply, causing Jaynie to reach out and brace herself on the dashboard in front of her.

"Never mind terrorists," she said as she opened the door, "you're driving scares the hell out of me." then as soon as Jaynie had exited the speeder and closed the door again the vehicle raced away.

2.

Jaynie almost missed the call from Droyle. It came just as she was cleaning up after her evening meal and she had to rush from the tiny kitchen into her bedroom and find her communicator.

"Yes!" she exclaimed as she answered the call, "I'm here."

"Jaynie it's Droyle."

"I know, your number's on my screen." Jaynie pointed out.

"Oh right. Look I just got the time and place for the gathering but it's real short notice. How soon can you get to the monorail hub on Imperial Way?"

Jaynie considered this, Imperial Way was some distance from the university but given that the meeting was to take place at the monorail hub anyway she had an obvious means of getting there.

"There's a monorail car every ten minutes or so." she replied, "Then its about ten more for the trip to the Imperial Way hub. So call it half an hour."

"That's great." Droyle said, "The meeting starts in an hour. Just look for a door marked with a green star and show them the file I sent you. You still have it don't you?"

"Of course I do. What about you?" Jaynie asked in reply.

"Oh I was out with some of the guys, but I'll be there in a few minutes. See you later." and then the channel went dead as Droyle ended the call.

Wasting no time Jaynie took just her communicator and datapad before rushing from her room in the dorm. As she headed for the nearby monorail station she considered informing the ISB of the time and place of the meeting but then she remembered Vay's instructions for her to wait until it was worth bringing the ISB into this before communicating with them.

When the monorail car pulled into the hub Jaynie set about hunting for a door marked with a green star. The size of the hub made this a daunting task at first, but when she realised that the star would need to be placed somewhere that anyone entering the building would see it but that it would not stick out to anyone not looking for it. She eventually found the star drawn on a door in pen, obviously intended to look like a child had scrawled it there while their parents were distracted. Jaynie knocked on the door and waited.

"Yes?" a deep voice asked when a small hatch opened in the door, exposing just the eyes of whoever was on the other side.

"I- I'm here for the meeting." Jaynie replied.

"Let's see it." the individual behind the door said and Jaysica held up her datapad, the file given her by Droyle displayed on the screen. Immediately the tiny hatch slid shut again and the door opened with a hiss.

"Quick, get in." the man now visible beyond the doorway told Jaynie and she slipped past him.

In the room on the other side were numerous other people, Jaynie estimated that there must have been at least thirty of them. The overwhelming majority were human but that was not surprising, Estran was a largely human populated world. But here and there were a handful of non-human species as well. Most of the others were significantly older than Jaynie and dressed as if they held jobs involving menial labour. But there was a cluster of younger beings as well and amongst these she saw Droyle and waved to him.

"Jaynie over here." Droyle called out when he saw her and he too waved. Joining him she thought she recognised one or two of the group he was with from university, though she knew none of them by name.

"So who are all these people?" she said as she looked around.

"Victims of Imperial oppression." one of the young people Jaynie did not know replied, a woman about her age but her hair was cut close to her scalp and what was left of it was dyed bright green.

"They're workers." Droyle added, "People who are struggling just to live under Imperial rule. Plus some aliens of course. I know you don't get much of it around here but there are systems where entire planetary populations are enslaved by the Empire."

"But that's illegal isn't it?" Jaynie replied.

"Nothing's illegal when you make the laws." the green haired woman replied.

Just then a scrawny looking man stood up on a box so that he could be seen by everyone and called out across the room.

"Okay!" he announced, clapping his hands together, "Thank you coming here tonight, now if you'd like to proceed into the next room we'll get things started."

The crowd was then directed through a set of doors into a room where an odd assortment of benches and chairs had been laid out in rows facing a low stage. On that stage a long table had been set up and covered with a banner that simply read 'FREEDOM FOR ESTRAN. FREEDOM FOR ALL' and there were several humans sat behind it. As Droyle and his friends found them somewhere to sit Jaynie studied the people on the stage and she could not help but notice that there was a vacant seat right in the middle of the group.

When the crowd had taken its seats one of the figures on the stage stood up, a woman that Jaynie had the

feeling she had seen somewhere before.

"Okay I think we can get things started." she said, "First I'd like to thank you for all coming here tonight my comrades. The Empire likes to think that it dominate us as it wishes but we are here to teach them that the more they tighten their grip the more star systems will slip through their fingers. And now comrades I would like to introduce you to the man who has made freedom his life's work. The leader of our movement, Comrade Foran Fallir." and there was applause from many in the crowd as well as all those on the stage who got to their feet as a tall man in black appeared at the side of the stage and walked towards the vacant seat.

"Holy kriff." Jaynie hissed as she recognised the man who had led the terrorist group she had been sent to find when she had first been released from prison and she lowered her head.

"What's wrong?" Droyle asked when he noticed her reaction.

"Well haven't you ever heard of him?" Jaynie replied, "He's a terrorist."

Droyle shook his head.

"Come on Jaynie, you know better than that." he said, "That's just what the media say to cover up the work he does."

"Right. Of course." Jaynie said, lifting her head again but keeping a hand over her nose and mouth just in case Foran should happen to look in her direction.

"Thank you comrades." Foran called out as the applause died down and the people with him on the stage took their seats once more, "Many of you will have heard of the crimes inflicted on innocent people by the Empire," he continued, "but the truth is worse than that. For many years before the Empire rose from the ashes of the Republic, going back even to before the Ruusan Reformation a thousand years ago Estran has been bled of its talent and resources to supply the hunger of galactic government. Whether that government has used the witchery of jedi knights or legions of stormtroopers to maintain its control the end result has been the same. A small elite of perhaps one percent has taken what should by rights belong to us all." At this point there were murmurs of agreement from the crowd, particularly from those that Droyle had identified as workers.

"And if it was not bad enough that the profits from industries that should by rights belong to the workers are moved off planet for the likes of trillionaires like Edvars Kurrad and his ilk here on Estran more of the jobs done by those workers are now being carried out by droids." Foran carried on, "Comrades! I say to you that there is a better way. By withdrawing from galactic governance Estran can finally gain the government it's people truly deserve, one that will protect the many rather than the few."

At that moment there was another outburst of applause from the crowd and Foran waited for it to subside before he sat down and nodded to another man sat on the stage who then stood up.

"We are already putting in place everything we need to establish a new planetary government free of the influence of the Empire but what we need is volunteers to undermine the support mechanisms for the Empire and it collaborationist local government.

"What do they mean by that?" Jaynie whispered to Droyle, already guessing that they were looking to recruit members to their network of terrorist cells.

"Let's find out." he replied with a smile that Jaynie found disturbing.

Jaynie sat and listened to one speaker after another explain how simple things like work slow downs and industrial sabotage would undermine Imperial rule on Estran until Foran finally got back to his feet again.

"Unfortunately we have learned that when the Empire does not get its way then it will resort to simple brute force to establish its authority and for that reason we have been raising a defence force of our own known as the People's Liberation Army of Estran. Eventually this will take control of all of Estran's planetary defences but for now we can only engage in small scale strikes to disrupt the Empire's military and to prevent them from being used to break any picket lines. Some of you may be asked to join this force, while others may be called upon to provide them with equipment, logistic support or even a safe hiding place."

Jaynie noticed he omitted to mention the attacks directed against civilian targets that the PLAЕ was known for, but she suspected that many of those present would not listen if she attempted to raise the issue. At worst she could be physically attacked for mentioning it and since she was technically only here to observe she let the point pass.

Finally, at the close of Foran's speech the subject that Jaynie really needed to know about was brought up. Recruitment.

"Every one of you here tonight is here because you want to see us free of the Empire," Foran said, "and now you have your chance join our struggle. Simply leave your details with us and we will be in touch with you to tell you how you can help."

"Why can't we just join up now?" a voice called out from the crowd, "I don't want to wait."

Foran grinned.

"Quite frankly I don't know you yet." he said, "I don't know anyone here properly and until I do you're a security risk. When we know who's interested we'll be able to find out more about you and we can put you where we can make the best use of whatever you have to offer."

Then the woman Jaynie thought was familiar got up.

"Thank you comrade Fallir." she said and they nodded in acknowledgement of one another before Foran turned and left the stage. Jaynie tried to see where he went but as soon as he left the stage he disappeared through a side door. The she turned her attention back to the woman now speaking, "We'll pass datapads around for anyone interested to enter their details on. We just need your name, place of residence and where you work. You can add other information if you want, but its not essential." and at this point a pair of PLAE members began handing out several battered and obsolete looking datapads. As one neared Jaynie she watched the other students in her group all fill in their details but when Droyle passed it to her she simply passed it on to the next person.

"What are you doing?" Droyle whispered, frowning.

"I'm just not sure." she replied, "how do you know what they're going to do with that information?"

"They've already told us. They're going to see if we're of use to them." Droyle said.

"Well I'd like to know if they're any use to me before I give my name and address to them." Jaynie told him. It was a lie of course, she was concerned that Foran Fallir may see her name on the list and make the connection with their last encounter when she assisted the Empire in raiding a PLAE arms storehouse and Foran himself only narrowly escaped by abandoning his comrades.

"Forget her Droyle." the green haired woman hissed, "She's just not serious."

Several monitors were set up in the small room when Foran entered and two PLAE members sat watching them. Each of these had a datapad that displayed images of people's faces and they were comparing them with what they saw on the screens.

"Well?" Foran asked.

"No one we recognise." one of the two watchers replied, "If the Empire does have any spies in the crowd then they're someone we've not seen before."

"No suspicious activity either." the second watcher added, "No one looked like they were using any sort of recording devices and the frequency scanners haven't picked up an transmissions."

"Looks like we do actually have a room full of willing recruits." the first watcher said and Foran grinned.

"Most of them will just be stooges." he said, "I doubt that there's more than a handful that will be good for anything other than a single suicide operation. Of course you never know and we really could do with some new blood right now."

3.

"I let myself in." Vay said when Jaynie returned to her dormitory. The ISB agent had simply been sat cross-legged on the floor in the darkness, "I didn't think you'd mind."

"Are you insane?" Jaynie hissed, "What if someone saw you? How did you get in anyway. I locked the door and the dorm doesn't allow people to just wander in off the streets."

"I know. They're most unwelcoming." Vay said, "Fortunately I was able to sneak past that nerf herder of a security guard."

"And the door?"

"The university should get better locks. There are unpleasant people out there." Vay said.

One of them's in here if you ask me.

The comment came to Vay from within the Force itself. A message from the spirit of one of her long dead ancestors named Lara who persisted in trying to get Vay to change her ways. Vay ignored it.

"One of them's in here if you ask me." Jaynie said.

Ha! That one's not so dumb.

Frowning, Vay got to her feet.

"So how did it go? Did you make lots of new friends tonight?" she asked.

"No I didn't." Jaynie answered, "I spent most of the time terrified that Foran Fallir was going to see me and recognise me. We really ought to discuss you giving me a blaster you know."

"Fallir was there?" Vay exclaimed.

"Uh-huh. He was the special guest there to promote the workers' struggle against, well against people like you. Now about that blaster-"

"You're a person like me as well now. Remember that." Vay interrupted.

She's nothing like you. She's shorter for starters. Oh and she doesn't have the power to be a great force for good in the galaxy.

"And no you can't have a blaster." Vay went on, ignoring Lara once more.

"Of course if you had have raided the place the you could have arrested him." Jaynie pointed out.

"More likely he'd have slipped out of whatever secret escape route they had prepared before we even got in through the front door and we'd have ended up dealing with the paperwork for arresting or shooting a lot of people who don't matter that much."

"Unless I'd been able to arrest him." Jaynie said, "Though for that I'd need a-"

"No, you are not getting a blaster." Vay said sternly, "Do you have any idea of what would have happened if you'd pulled a gun on Fallir tonight?"

"Yes, I'd have-"

"Been killed." Vay said before Jaynie could finish her sentence, "So what did he have to say anyway?"

Jaynie shrugged.

"Just the usual nonsense people like him come out with. Smash the system and power to the people and all that" Jaynie said and Vay nodded.

"The people' he's talking being him and a few lackeys of course." she commented.

"Then he asked people to sign up." Jaynie added and a hint of a smile appeared on Vay's face.

"So you're in?" she asked but Jaynie shook her head.

"I didn't leave my name." she responded.

"Why ever not?"

"Because I was scared that Foran Fallir would see it and remember me. I don't want him knowing where I live." Jaynie said, "I think all of the others who went with me did though."

"Well that's something at least." Vay said, "In fact it may work out better. You went with a Droyle Tarr right?" and Jaynie nodded.

"That's right."

"Then we'll just have to keep tabs on him. If someone from the PLAE contacts him we'll be able to arrest them without raising any suspicions about you." Vay said, "I suggest you just get back to keeping an eye on things around here."

The lecturer was nicknamed 'Darth Drame' by her students and Jaynie could see why. Initially she had seen xenoarchaeology as an interesting way to fill a gap in her class options. But Doctor Jenessa Drame made certain that every student in her class knew that slacking was not an option. So far though Jaynie had managed to keep from being noticed in a bad way. The doctor was part way through explaining how different sites scattered across the sector could be used to build up a picture of the behaviour of the ancient Rakata Empire that had flourished about thirty thousand years earlier when her devaronian assistant slipped into the

lecture hall and handed her a note. Then Doctor Drame turned and looked right at Jaynie.

"Miss Horbid!" she called out, making Jaynie jump at the mention of her name, "Apparently there's a message for you in the administration office."

Jaynie just stared back at the lecturer.

"Well? Are you going to wait for them to bring the computer in here to you?" she said, "Go and see what they want before any more of my class time is wasted."

Jaynie grabbed her datapad and bag and darted out of the lecture hall, heading directly to the administration office and as she entered the room she came to a sudden halt.

"Ah there you are Miss Horbid." the woman behind the counter said to her, the same woman that Jaynie had seen address the crowd at the meeting the previous evening. The one who she had been unable to place at the time. Now she knew where she had seen her and also her name, her badge read Karli Macron.

"Oh, I was told that there was a message for me." Jaynie said nervously.

"This way please." Karli said, beckoning Jaynie to follow her into a smaller office connecting to the main one and as soon as they were both inside she closed the door behind them, "Take a seat." she said and Jaynie sat down at the table that was the main feature of the tiny room before the other woman sat on the opposite seat, "I saw you at the meeting last night." she said.

"What meeting?" Jaynie asked, "I was at home all last night studying." and the woman smiled.

"You don't need to lie to me girl. I'm not working for the ISB. I thought I recognised you so I checked our records and found your name. Why didn't you sign up? All your friends did."

"Why would the PLAE want me?" Jaynie asked, "I'm from Tarlen."

"Yes, but Tarlen has suffered under the Empire as well and once Estran is free we can help Tarlen gain it's independence as well. Besides, I've looked into your records. Your lecturers are impressed with your knowledge and skill set, a skill set we could use. Particularly your ability to use computers."

"I'm no slicer." Jaynie told the woman.

"No. But you can operate a package that someone else gives you." Karli said, "Too many of the people who join us can't. They've never had to learn and we don't have time to teach them."

"I shouldn't be here." Jaynie said, getting to her feet, "I should be in class."

"Are you afraid?" Karli called out to her, "Because we're making you a very generous offer here. As well as checking up on your university records I've been watching you for quite some time now. You hang around with people who hate the Empire because you do too and that's of use to us as well. In fact when I sent out the information about last night's meeting to Droyle Tarr my intention was to see if he'd bring you along as well."

"What do you mean?" Jaynie asked, turning around just as the control to the door cam within reach.

"I mean that I wanted to see if your friends saw you the same way as I did. If he doubted your opinion of our cause then Droyle wouldn't have invited you. But now that you've been shown to share our outlook we're keen to have you onboard with us. In fact you'll find us rather generous if you can get results by the time we need them."

Jaynie paused. Then she turned around and returned to the table.

"Tell me more." she said.

Jaynie did her best to check if she was being followed on the way back to the dormitory and when she got there she went to the windows and looked outside to see if there were any suspicious looking figures outside watching the building. She knew nothing of counter surveillance techniques but she looked anyway before she drew the curtains despite it being daylight still and she headed for the communicator.

The address she entered was one that she had committed to memory. When it had been given to her she had been warned of the potential consequences of anyone coming across it and trying it out for themselves. Even making it look like something innocent such as a relative or often frequented business was risky.

"Hello?" a man's voice said when the call was answered.

"Agent Larcus it's me." Jaynie said.

"What's wrong?" Garm asked in reply.

"I need to see you. The PLAE just tried to recruit me, right on the grounds of the university itself."

"Stang!" Garm exclaimed, "It wasn't Fallir was it?"

"No thank goodness. But there was another woman making speeches there last night that I thought I'd seen before and it turns out she works here at the university. She's called Karli."

"Never mind that now, we can get her details later." Garm interrupted, "What I want to know is if she gave you any clue of what they want you for."

"She focused on recruitment. She even offered me money if I could persuade people to join up."

"That's new." Garm commented, "We'd had intelligence that their numbers had been depleted but we didn't realise that they were resorting to a bonus scheme."

"There's something more." Jaynie said, "She seemed to be in a hurry. She wanted to know how quickly I could recruit people."

"I need you to come in right now." Garm told her, "I'll send Vay to pick you up." and then the line went dead as Garm hung up.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Jaynie said to herself.

Vay met Jaynie just outside the campus in her blacked out speeder and drove her directly to the Imperial capital building. Here all of the major Imperial diplomatic, military and security organisations maintained a presence and for all but the Imperial Navy that was based in one of the many space stations orbiting Estran they were headquartered here.

This was not Jaynie's first visit to the building, but the last time she had been here she had been dragged away in binders to be held for several months in solitary confinement and she was nervous about coming back.

"There's no need to be afraid." Vay said as she drove into the parking lot located beneath the building.

"I'm not afraid." Jaynie replied and Vay smiled.

"Yes you are." she said before bringing her speeder to a halt, "Come on, let's go see Garm."

The office that Vay led Jaynie up to was not Garm's. Instead it belonged to the director of all ISB operations in the sector, Corvin Helieos.

"Ah, Miss Udra." Director Helieos said as the pair entered the room to see Garm waiting with the director, "And Miss Horbid of course. I hope that we're treating you better than Imperial Intelligence did."

Jaynie hesitated.

"Perhaps you'd prefer it back your cell?" Vay asked with a smile.

"I'm fine thank you." Jaynie replied.

"Good, I'm glad to hear it. Now take a seat." the director said and he indicated the two empty chairs beside Garm. Then as the two young women sat down he leant forwards across the desk and stared directly at Jaynie, "So I hear that you've been asked to provide recruits to a rather nasty rebel group." he said.

"I thought that the PLAE wasn't the same as the Rebel Alliance." Jaynie replied.

"There are conflicting reports about just how close they are." Director Helieos said, "But around here we refer to pretty much all terrorists as 'rebels'. It's just easier. Now what sort of qualities are the PLAE looking for in recruits nowadays. Knowing that could give us an idea of what they're up to."

"Karli didn't say." Jaynie replied.

"I'm sorry. Karli?" the director said.

"The recruiter who approached Jaynie." Garm told him, "She's a member of staff at the University of Estran. I've not given any orders to have her picked up or tagged yet. Thankfully she doesn't seem to know anything about Jaynie's involvement with our disruption of their bio-terrorism plot."

"Sounds like they're just trying to build up a base of supporters."

"All she asked was how quickly could I recruit more students for them." Jaynie said.

Garm and Director Helieos exchanged glances.

"That's not building up a base of support sir." Garm said, "That's organising personnel for an operation."

"Organising expendable personnel." the director added.

"What do you mean expendable?" Jaynie asked.

"Unskilled and unimportant." Vay told her, "Turbolaser fodder."

"Not necessarily." Garm said, "Perhaps the PLAE is planning an operation that requires a diversion. They'll put their best people into the main element while using a larger body of as the director puts it expendable personnel as a distraction. They'll tell them nothing about the real attack and use them to draw us out while the real attack takes place elsewhere. Now if that diversionary force gets cut to pieces then they've lost nothing but whatever equipment the PLAE decided to risk handing out to them. On the other hand if any survive then the PLAE will have its new recruits that can be trusted with more important operations later on."

"Karli was interested in my computing abilities." Jaynie said.

"She was regarded as having a professional level of skill when she first enrolled at the university." Garm commented and Director Helieos nodded.

"So useful for manipulating public systems and finding patterns in data streams." he said.

"Exactly." Garm said.

"What does that mean?" Jaynie asked.

"Probably that they want to use you for intelligence gathering." Vay answered, "You'd be asked to find out what information is available in obscure but unsecured networks about prospective targets."

"Or recruits." Garm added, "We check online social networking systems all the time for information on what people think. The PLAE are likely to be no different. They'll want to know what's out in the open as well as what someone thinks they've deleted."

"Okay, we'll work on the assumption that the PLAE is planning an attack on a target that has some level of physical protection that will need a distraction and that the attack will take place soon." Director Helios said.

"That's thousands of potential targets." Vay said.

"Tens of thousands planet wide." Director Helios corrected her, "No, even if we knew where they were going

to hit then increasing security could just scare them off.”

“Wait, are you saying that you want them to attack you?” Jaynie asked.

“It's the best way to catch them.” Garm pointed out.

“Or kill them.” Vay added.

“So we'll have a rapid response force on standby to deploy to where they strike.” Director Helieos said, “A flight of assault shuttles in orbit ought to do. Evenly spaced out they should be able to reach anywhere on the planet in under ten minutes.”

“So you'll be asking Fleet Admiral Vretan for a force of marines then?” Garm asked.

“No.” the director replied, shaking his head, “I'd like to keep this in house as far as possible. Major Kramm's company should suffice.” and Garm winced, “Something wrong?” the director asked.

“It's just Major Kramm can be somewhat unsubtle.” Garm said, “What about our own stormtrooper contingent?”

“I'm not looking for subtlety or finesse.” Director Helieos replied.

“Good, because you won't get it from that laser brain.” Vay muttered.

“I want these terrorist dealt with and the major's troops are quite capable of that.” the director continued, ignoring Vay's remark.

“And what about me?” Jaynie asked.

“You were asked to recruit people for the PLAE weren't you?” Vay said, “So recruit them.”

“But I'd be signing people up to be killed.” Jaynie protested.

She's got a point there. You're asking her to get people killed.

“So only recruit people don't like.” Vay replied with a smirk.

Jaynie grinned back.

“What are you doing in the next few days then?” she asked.

“Vay, take Jaynie back to the university.” Garm said, “I'll stay here and get things started with COMPForce.”

“Fine.” Vay replied, getting to her feet and pointing to the door while looking at Jaynie.

As he watched the two young women leaving his office Director Helieos glanced at Garm.

“So be honest with me Garm, are you sleeping with them both?” he asked.

“No sir.” Garm replied.

“A shame.” the director said, “I mean stealing the moff's mistress is pretty impressive on its own, but to have that Horbid girl as well? Now that would make for something to brag about.”

4.

Jaynie said nothing on the drive back to the university campus.

Fear.

Uncertainty.

Vay sensed her feelings about what she was being asked to do through the Force. But it was only when she stopped the speeder at the same spot where she had picked Jaynie up that she quizzed her about it.

"Now you understand what you need to do, don't you?" she said before Jaynie opened the door.

"Yes, I'm to sign people up to get shot at."

"And you don't have a problem with that?"

"Why would I?"

"Why indeed." Vay said, "But if you feel that this is too much for you we can always cancel our agreement."

"What do you mean?" Jaynie asked.

"I mean that if you don't do as you're told then there's always a cell waiting for you."

Jaynie returned to her room and just sat in silence, pondering what she had been ordered to do. She considered going back to Garm and asking if there was some other way out of this. But then she remembered how she had ended up in this situation in the first place.

It was all her sister's fault.

Had her useless, clumsy sister not joined the rebellion then her family would not have been disgraced to begin with and all of the students who thought themselves so smart in opposing the Empire were just as bad as Jaysica. If they were imprisoned early or even killed then maybe their families could be spared what Jaynie had been forced to go through. Grabbing her datapad Jaynie began to list the names of those who had expressed any anti-Imperial sentiment to her and first on the list was Droyle Tarr.

The list soon had more than forty people on it. Most of them were specifically named but Jaynie also mentioned the group that had gone to the PLAE meeting with Droyle, after all technically they had already signed up for whatever the terrorists had planned. Then when the list was complete she headed for the administration office in person. Though she was not worried about having signals from her communicator listened to, after her conversation with Vay regarding her datapad she guessed that the communicator would be similarly monitored, she considered it likely that Karli would be wary of discussing anything to do with the PLAE over an unencrypted communication line. However, when she arrived there Karli was not present. Instead another member of staff was manning the desk.

"Is Karli Macron around?" Jaynie asked.

"At this time? No, she went home more than an hour ago." the man behind the desk replied.

"Oh no." Jaynie said, feigning displeasure, "I don't suppose she left any notes about me did she? She was supposed to be helping me get my tuition fees arranged and I have the list of references she asked for." and she held up the inactive datapad.

"Name." the man said, turning to the computer terminal.

"Jaynie Horbid."

The man entered her name and then shook his head.

"No, there's nothing here about you." he said.

"But I need to get the completed application in by start of classes tomorrow morning."

"Wait here." the man told Jaynie and he disappeared into a back office. From the other side of the counter Jaynie heard him activating a communicator and calling Karli. Then a short time later he reappeared, "She's asked if you can deliver it to her at home." he said to Jaynie, "Give me that datapad and I'll give you her address. Don't worry its not far, about a ten minute walk."

Jaynie smiled as she handed over the datapad and the man entered Karli's home address before returning the device.

"Thanks." Jaynie said before she turned and left the office. Then she checked the address she had been given. From what she knew of the layout of Estran City the address was more than just a ten minute walk away, but it was still within walking distance and she set off.

The address was an apartment complex that possessed security gates that looked as if they were left open all the time and so Jaynie headed through without bothering with the intercom panel to warn Karli of her arrival. Locating Karli's apartment itself she knocked on the door and moments later Karli opened it.

"Come on in." she said, beckoning Jaynie inside. Then after the younger woman had slipped past her Karli looked around outside as if watching for signs of surveillance, "Does anyone know you're here?" she asked.

"Just the guy from the admin office." Jaynie replied as she looked around the apartment. She had wondered what the home of a traitor would look like and had been half expecting it to be cluttered with seditious leaflets

and the components for black market weapons. However, had Jaynie not known of Karli's association with the PLAE she would not have suspected it from the appearance of her home.

"Good." Karli said, "It's never good to have too much contact between different levels of organisation."

"I wasn't aware I was part of any specific structure yet." Jaynie said and Karli smiled.

"You're going to be the core of a brand new operating cell." she told Jaynie, "Now do you have that list with you?"

"Right here." Jaynie replied, calling up the list of names on her datapad and handing it to Karli and the woman smiled again.

"This is good." she said, "I recognise a few of these names from the meeting and I'm guessing that 'girl with green hair' was there but you just don't have her name right?" Jaynie nodded, "That's fine. Even if none of your other friends can tell us who she is then we may be able to go back to the information we collected at the meeting."

"So what do you want me and all of these people to do?" Jaynie asked.

"We want to organise a protest march." Karli replied, "But the authorities are keeping an eye on too many of us at the moment. As soon as we try and gather anywhere public we'll be arrested before we can start telling the public the truth."

"A protest march?" Jaynie said, confused.

"Of course. Why? What did you think you were signing up to?" Karli asked in reply, "Wait, did you think that you about to become a resistance fighter overnight? Brewing up explosives in the chemistry lab perhaps?"

"Well, maybe." Jaynie said, embarrassed and Karli smiled.

"Sorry girl, but student radicalism is a bit different from an urban insurgency. But don't think that what we're asking you to do isn't important. The most vital resource for our organisation is publicity and your little group will show people that the next generation of Estran's population is not willing to put up with the continued presence of off-world government."

"But you made it sound as if you needed volunteers for something in a hurry." Jaynie said, "Surely we can march through a shopping plaza any day of the week."

"Oh we can, but we want to embarrass a senior member of the Imperial authorities here on Estran and that means catching him when he's most exposed and we've got information about when he'll be in a place that's just perfect to get us on the evening news." Karli explained.

"So it's placards and rotten eggs rather than blasters and bombs then?" Jaynie asked.

"I'm afraid so. Have you changed your mind about doing this?"

Jaynie paused briefly. Though when she had thought she was signing people up to take part in a violent terrorist act she had rationalised compiling the list of anti-Imperial students by comparing them to her sister she found that she was in fact somewhat relieved that she would only be asking them to take part in a public demonstration. Of course the Empire did not tolerate unlawful gatherings any more than it did outright terrorism but it was less likely to deploy a legion of stormtroopers to disperse a handful of students waving banners instead of blasters.

"No that's fine." she said, "It's a bit of a relief in fact. I wasn't sure about asking people to attack somewhere protected by armed guards."

Karli smiled.

"Don't worry girl. We're careful about who we get to carry out our military operations." she said.

Walking back to her dormitory Jaynie waited until she was well out of sight of Karli's apartment before she took out her personal communicator and called Garm's office. Informed that he was not there she waited while the ISB operator diverted the call through to his home.

"Hello?" Garm's voice said and in the background Jaynie could hear what sounded like a young girl making a lot of noise.

"It's Jaynie." Jaynie said, "It's all a false alarm."

"What is?" Garm asked.

"The attack. There is no attack." she told him.

"Then what did the PLAE want with you?"

"They want me to get a group of students together so we can wave placards in the face of some Imperial bigwig while he's out and about." Jaynie explained, "Karli just told me."

Garm sighed.

"So we've got a company of ruthless killers on standby for a student protest better left to local police." he said, "I don't suppose that Karli told you where or when this protest would be taking place did she?"

"No. But I think that it's being directed at a person rather than an event." Jaynie told him.

"Then if we can figure out who it is we may be able to head this off just by varying their routine or cancelling an appearance." Garm said, "I'll let Director Helieos know and you keep me up to date. At the very least we can warn the police to expect a disturbance."

"A pretty loud one." Jaynie said, "I put about forty names on that list."

"Well just remember to keep your head down. I can tell the police that we have someone in the crowd but I can't tell them who you are."

"Oh don't worry." Jaynie said, "First sign of trouble and I'll be telling people to just run."

When Director Helieos arrived at his office the next morning he found Garm already waiting for him.

"I take it you have an update on the PLAE attack." the director said as they both sat down.

"Sort of." Garm replied, "It looks like there isn't going to be an attack after all. This is just some publicity stunt. They'll wave a few banners and then scatter when the cops show up to disperse them."

Director Helieos sighed.

"So it looks like we've nothing to worry about then." he said, "We'll have a few new names for our watch lists but nothing more than that."

"Yes sir." Garm agreed, "Though I'm not sure I relish having to tell Major Kramm that his men won't be shooting anyone anytime soon."

"There's always next time." Director Helieos said, "In any case I'll inform the major that his men can stand down. I take it that you can handle this on your own from now on?"

With Karli's help Jaynie contacted all of the individuals on the list she had compiled and then arranged for them to gather in a group study room at the university. Before going in Jaynie met with Karli again for an additional briefing on what the target of their protest would be.

"He'll be meeting with Lord Torr and Lady Sharva at the Coruscant Moon restaurant at lunchtime tomorrow."

Karli said, "There'll be security from him and probably both of those collaborators as well."

"I don't know who they are." Jaynie admitted, "I'm from Tarlen remember?"

"They're members of Parliament." Karli said, "Supposedly elected to serve the people, but they serve only themselves. Anyway, they're both meeting with the target tomorrow for lunch and its a perfect opportunity to show the world what people think of them all. There's bound to be at least one reporter hanging around that place hoping to get an holo of some celebrity acting up."

"You still haven't told me who the target is." Jaynie pointed out.

"That's not important right now. He'll be wearing an Imperial uniform so that's all you need to look for."

"And what about security?" Jaynie asked.

"It'll be light. These people expect lone assassins so they have bodyguards looking for just that. If you can get all our friends to agree you'll be able to just push your way past the front door and mob them. Just get in there and make as much noise as you can. Then when the cops show up you'll be better going through the kitchen. But remember, make sure no-one lays a hand on any of these Imperial scum and if any of their guards try grabbing at you make sure that all of you start yelling 'brutality'. We want as many news networks as possible to pick this up, so the more scandal the better."

"But no real violence?" Jaynie asked.

"Exactly. We want people to see how the Empire refuses to allow free protest and we'll lose that if the media's got footage of you and your friends beating up someone trying to eat lunch."

"And what'll happen to us afterwards?"

"As well as placards we'll give you all masks, rigid ones that'll stop them using computer imaging to reconstruct your faces under them. So long as you give the cops the slip you'll be fine. But we've only got sixty of these masks on hand, so if people want to bring more friends make sure that there aren't any more than that."

"Okay thanks." Jaynie said, "I think I've got everything now. Time to go recruit some revolutionaries." and she headed into the study room where she was impressed to see that almost everyone on the list of people invited had turned up, including Droyle and his friend with the green hair.

Jaynie hesitated. She was not used to public speaking, let alone trying to recruit people into what was undeniably a criminal conspiracy.

"Well?" the green haired girl said, "Why have you brought us all here?" then she looked at Droyle, "I told you this was a waste of time." she added.

"So who wants to show the Empire what we think of them?" Jaynie asked out loud before Droyle responded to his friend and there were murmurs from the gathered students, "Wow, you lot are so enthusiastic." Jaynie commented.

"Well what do you expect when we don't know what you want?" the green haired girl asked.

"Okay who knows about the Coruscant Moon restaurant?" Jaynie said and several in the crowd nodded.

"Well I've heard that tomorrow lunch they're going to have some Imperial big shot dining there with two parliamentarians and I thought that it'd be a good idea to drop by and present our concerns about the government to them directly."

"Ooh, a petition." the green haired girl commented.

"Actually I as thinking of just marching in there and demanding to know why the people of Estran are being denied self determination. Loudly." Jaynie said.

"Are you insane?" the green haired girl called out, "We'd be shot?"

"For what?" Jaynie replied, "We'll just be making noise, that's all. There's too many of us for a couple of bodyguards to detain and as soon as the first cops show up we rush back out again. Or are you just too scared?" and she glared at the green haired girl.

"What happens when they come looking for us?" Droyle asked.

"They won't know who we are." Jaynie told him, "I've got us masks, placards and transport to and from the restaurant. All I need is to know is who was serious when they told me they hated the Empire and who was just talking tough." and she looked at the green haired girl again.

Droyle looked at Jaynie for a while before he replied.

"Okay count me in." he said.

"I'm with you too." another voice called out from the crowd and then more voices began to call out in agreement. Meanwhile Jaynie looked back at the green haired girl and saw her scowling.

5.

The next morning the students were to gather in a warehouse on the outskirts of the capital city where there were several repulsor vans waiting for them. Inside each were numerous placards with slogans such as 'FREE ESTRAN' and 'END THE OCCUPATION' printed on them. There were also boxes of novelty masks that were rubber castings of a caricatured version of Emperor Palpatine's face. Jaynie was the first to arrive and she found Karli waiting for her with the drivers for the repulsor vans as well as another man. "This is my cousin Galt." Karli said, introducing the man, "He'll be coming as well."

The man just nodded while Jaynie smiled.

"I didn't realise that you'd be sending someone along with us." she said to Karli.

"Oh I thought you could use all the help you could get. My cousin's done this sort of thing before and knows how to handle security without things escalating too much." Karli explained.

"Okay, well I'll just go and wait outside for the others." Jaynie said and she headed out of the warehouse, leaning up against the wall next to an open window.

"You know what you're doing then?" she heard Karli say,

"Sure," a male voice that Jaynie took to be Galt replied, "I hide amongst the kids and nail the guy as soon as I get the chance. Plus his two parliamentary stooges if I get the chance. Then I get out and leave the kids to take the blame." Jaynie gasped and peered around the side of the window, taking care to avoid being seen. Inside the warehouse she saw Karli and Galt talking and under Galt's jacket she saw a blaster in a concealed holster.

"This is him." Karli said, handing Galt a datapad and on the screen she saw an image of Corvin Helieos. Quickly moving away from the window Jaynie reached for her communicator and activated it, calling up Garm's number.

"Oh come on, be there." she muttered to herself as she looked around to make sure that she was not being observed..

"ISB." the operator's voice said.

"I need to speak with Agent Garm Larcus." Jaynie whispered, "It's Jaynie Horbid and it's urgent."

"Hold please." the operator told her and Jaynie frowned as martial music played while she waited.

"Garm Larcus' office." Vay's voice said when the call was answered.

"It's Jaynie." Jaynie said softly, "This isn't some protest after all. They're going to kill him. Get to the Coruscant Moon restaurant and stop them."

"Hold on." Vay replied, "Who are they going to kill?"

"It's-" Jaynie began.

"Jaynie!" Droyle called out and Jaynie ended the call. Looking round she saw the first group of students arriving at the warehouse. Most of them were from the group that had attended the PLAE meeting with Droyle, but Jaynie noticed that the green haired girl was missing.

"Where's your friend with the green hair?" Jaynie asked, trying to act calm despite knowing how the PLAE was using them.

"Oh she's not coming after all." Droyle replied, "Looks like she's not so dedicated to the cause after all."

"Hello? Hello Jaynie are you there?" Vay asked desperately. She briefly considered calling Jaynie back, but had second thoughts when she realised that doing so may put her at risk.

A bit late to worry about putting someone in danger now isn't it?

"Shut up and leave me alone." Vay said angrily. Then she rushed from the office to find Garm. She encountered him just as he was returning from a meeting with Director Helieos, "Garm!" Vay exclaimed.

"What's wrong?" he asked in reply.

"Jaynie just called. She says the protest is just a cover for an assassination attempt."

"Stang! Did she say who it was against?"

"No, the call was interrupted. But she did manage to tell me that the target would be at the Coruscant Moon restaurant."

"Oh kriff." Garm exclaimed, "Director Helieos has just gone there to meet Lord Torr and Lady Sharva for lunch."

"Then we need to warn him." Vay said.

"We can't." Garm told her, "He hasn't taken his comlink. Come on, we need to see if Major Kramm is around with any of his men."

The two ISB agents rushed to the area of the building where they expected to find COMPFforce troopers and as soon as they burst out of the turbolift they heard a familiar voice cursing as its owner kicked a vending machine.

"Captain Layne!" Garm yelled, "Is the major around?"

"No, he's just gone with a platoon to the firing range. Wants to test some heavier firepower."

"Well call him." Garm snapped, "The PLAE are about to try and kill Director Helieos while he eats lunch."

"Holy poodoo!" Layne exclaimed as he fumbled for his comlink, "Let's go."

As Layne called Major Kramm and told him to divert his troops to the Coruscant Moon hotel he, Garm and Vay headed for the parking lot and got into Vay's speeder. A sports model, the tall COMPForce officer had to squeeze into the small space behind the two front seats.

"Glad I didn't stop to put on armour." he muttered as Vay started the engine, "I'd never have fit back here."

"Hang on." Vay said as she set off and Layne was pressed back by the sudden acceleration.

"On the other hand perhaps armour would be a good idea." he commented.

"Lord Torr, Lady Sharva." Director Helieos said as he approached the table where his dining companions waited, "Sorry to be late but I was delayed in traffic."

"No matter director." Lady Sharva replied as he took his seat, "The service is somewhat slow today anyway." and she glared briefly at the nearest serving droid.

"Must be due for maintenance." Lord Torr added.

"So how are things in Parliament?" Director Helieos asked as he picked up the menu laid out on the table in front of him.

"Hoffren and Task may be about to cause us trouble." Lord Torr replied and the director looked up from the menu.

"They're not going to suddenly start calling for Parliament to limit Imperial power are they?" he asked.

"No." Lady Sharva answered, "But both have been asking awkward questions about the supposed benefits of some of our plans. It'll be a PR nightmare if they ask for an investigation before the schemes are given the go ahead."

"We'll have to come at them from two sides." Director Helieos said, "You find out if they can be bought off while I look into them and see if we can find anything we can use to apply pressure." Then there was the sound of speeders' horns being sounded and he noticed a group of repulsor vans had come to a halt right outside the restaurant and as he watched the sides slid open and groups of beings in comical Emperor Palpatine masks disembarked, "Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." he added when he saw the placards they held and that they were rushing headlong towards the restaurant.

Heading for the restaurant Vay increased the power to her speeder's repulsorlift engines to increase its altitude above the rest of the traffic and drove at top speed regardless of the local limits.

"Look over there." Garm said when the restaurant building came into view and he saw the repulsor vans parked outside while other surface traffic did its best to squeeze around them and having just emerged from those vehicles was a crowd of masked figures waving placards forcing their way into the restaurant as the serving droids tried in vain to prevent them.

Vay headed straight for the restaurant, passing over the heads of startled pedestrians as she crossed the wide pedestrian area between the road and restaurant. Then she came to an abrupt halt just outside the building and set the speeder down.

6.

“Corva!” Lord Torr yelled and from the kitchen his personal bodyguard emerged and rushed at the crowd of protesters now flooding into the restaurant and yelling anti-Imperial slogans.

“Stay here.” Director Helieos told Lord Torr and Lady Sharva as he stood up and slid a short cane from his sleeve that crackled with energy.

“The police have been called. They will be here shortly.” a droid announced before it was struck by a placard and knocked to the floor.

“Free Estran!” a voice yelled from behind an Emperor Palpatine mask and the protestor responsible stepped towards Director Helieos only to be jabbed by his cane and scream in agony as the energy discharged into him.

Corva delivered two rapid blows to another protester that knocked her to the floor and caused her to curl up in pain. Then just as he was striking out at another he saw a larger man in a mask reaching under his jacket.

“Blaster!” he yelled.

Director Helieos' jaw dropped and his eyes widened as he saw the weapon emerge, but before it could be brought to bear on him another of the protesters, a small female from the looks of her, slammed into the gunman in the crush and knocked his aim aside.

There were screams of panic from both restaurant customers and protesters as the blaster was discharged into the ceiling and Corva reached for his own concealed weapon. But as he tried to draw it he too collided with a protester who was trying to get as far from the gunman as he could and the blaster was knocked from his hand. Then came the sound of another blaster shot but this was not from inside the restaurant, instead it came from outside and it was accompanied by the sound of the window shattering as the energy bolt superheated the point of impact while leaving the surrounding area untouched and this thermal shock proved too much for it to bear.

“Imperial Security Bureau!” Garm yelled as he aimed his blaster into the crowd of protesters, “Everyone here is under arrest!”

The protesters continued to panic. Some tried to head for the kitchen, but this meant getting past Corva and even without his blaster he was quite able to prevent them managing this. Others just dived for cover, unaware that none of the Imperial agents now climbing through the destroyed window would dare use their blasters again for fear of hitting Jaynie who remained unaccounted for. However Galt was still focused on his mission and he looked around for Director Helieos. The senior ISB agent was at that moment wrestling with one of the larger protesters, attempting to use his power cane to subdue the man. Not caring about accidentally hitting the protester he took aim anyway but was forced to knock another protester to the floor to get a clear shot. Then he fired.

The shot struck the protester that Director Helieos was wrestling with in the back of his neck and he went limp suddenly. Under his mask Galt cursed at having missed his target for a second time and readied himself for another shot. But before he could fire the protester he had just knocked over kicked his leg out from under him and he collapsed to the floor.

“Stupid bitch!” he snapped as he saw the protester lift her mask to reveal Jaynie's face underneath and he swung his blaster around to face her. But all of a sudden a figure in an ISB uniform leapt on top of him, knocking the blaster from his hand.

“Freeze!” Vay yelled as she pressed the muzzle of her own compact weapon to his temple and then he felt his arms being grabbed by Garm and Captain Layne.

With no agents behind them now the protesters withdrew from the restaurant, leaving their placards behind as they fled. But before they could reach any of the repulsor vans the vehicles began to move off as their drivers panicked. However the drivers' escape was short lived as the air was filled with the sound of more powerful repulsorlift engines as a squadron of gunships descended around them. As the gunships kept the repulsor vans hemmed in lines were dropped from the hovering aircraft and armoured COMPForce assault troopers slid down to the ground. Some rushed at the repulsor vans, dragging their drivers to the ground and subduing them with kicks and blows from rifle butts that continued even after they had stopped resisting. Meanwhile the bulk of the troopers formed a barrier to prevent the protesters from escaping and again they used physical blows to subdue them. This was not entirely because they were uncertain about which one was Jaynie since any male protester was obviously not the informant they were expecting, but was also because they simply found beating the unarmed protesters more entertaining than shooting them.

Back in the restaurant Garm watched as Captain Layne dragged a bound Galt to his feet and led him outside while for the sake of appearance Vay escorted Jaynie to where the protesters were being corralled by the COMPForce troops outside. Then he looked around and saw Director Helieos.

“Are you alright sir?” he asked as he approached his superior.

"Yes thank you." the director replied and then he looked around to see who may overhear before in a lower tone of voice he added, "Though I have your informant to thank for that." he said, "Twice she stopped that gunman from shooting me. I think there needs to be a decent bonus in her allowance this month."

Garm smiled.

"I'm sure she'll be glad to hear it sir." he said.

Foran Fallir watched the news feed in silence.

"They have Karli as well?" he said to the other man in the room when the broadcast was complete and he turned off the monitor.

"Yes sir. They arrested her at the university about an hour later. We didn't have time to warn her to get out."

"And I doubt that any of those students will be too keen to continue to associate with us even if they do manage to stay out of prison." Foran added.

"No sir. What do you want to do now?"

Fallir paused to think.

"Oh there are always other groups we can try and ally with." he replied.

The last time Jaynie had been in an interrogation room she had been subjected to a prolonged and humiliating interrogation. But this time she had been left alone and unbound with refreshment provided while she waited to hear what would happen next. This was revealed when Garm entered the room.

"Well the director's certainly happy with today's outcome." he said, "We've arrested more than half a dozen PLAE terrorists and prevented him from being shot. Oh and he knows that we've you to thank for that as well."

"But what happens to me now?" Jaynie asked, "And what about everyone else?"

"You mean the other students? We let them go about an hour ago." Garm replied, "We told them that you'd vouched that they knew nothing of the assassination attempt."

"But you can't let me go back to the university again can you?"

"Why not? We arrested Karli as well and as far as the other students are concerned we were led to her by Galt and both of them have confessed that they put you up to this. Basically you're in the clear." Garm told her.

"And what about Karli and Galt? What if they manage to get word out that that isn't true?"

"Oh I don't think there's much chance of that happening." Garm said, "The only people they'll be talking to for a long time are in our interrogation branch." then he smiled, "Go home Jaynie. You've earned a rest."

"Thanks." she replied but as she got up and headed for the door she halted and turned around, "Vay's not giving me a lift is she?" she asked.