"In the early days of the war (somewhere between A New Hope and The Empire Strikes Back), a group of stormtroopers make a rash decision and find them selves face to face with a mysterious couple on the far end of Imperial space.” Rebel Captain and Rogue One through other peoples eyes (mostly) and sometimes their own.” The Rogue One post-script that started as a one-shot and turned into a multi-generational SWU space opera mostly composed on my phone.
Oh my. Be kind. My first Star Wars fanfic since 1978. In those days, children, we typed them on electric typewriters, xeroxed them and passed them from hand to hand. Rogue One broke my heart and, as much as I respect the canon ending, I can’t let such great characters go.
Over the Edge

Chapter Summary

In the early days of the war (somewhere between A New Hope and The Empire Strikes Back), a group of stormtroopers make a rash decision and find themselves face to face with a mysterious couple on the far end of Imperial space.

The man leaned down until his head was level with hers. “Take the helmet off.”

His voice was authoritative, calm and cool.

like a deathtrooper at a checkpoint

Th411 could hear her heart pounding, louder than the static in her damaged earpiece.

“Why?” That was Ms916, also on her knees less than a meter away.

The man pulled down the scarf that half-covered his face.

“Because it will decrease the odds of me shooting you outright by 33%”

faint mid-worlds accent? black scruff of beard, shaggy black hair, looks like someone trimmed it with a knife. rim-runners, maybe ravagers?

She pulled at the clasps, as best she could with arms pinioned, lifted off and dropped her helmet. Ms916 and Ft128 did the same. All three clattered, rolling across the tilted deck floor.

The woman appeared again in the hatchway of the bridge.

“Cassian.” Dark brown eyes flicked toward her voice but the rifle stayed steady, pointed at Th411. “You need to see this.”

He and the woman traded places, passing the rifle smoothly from his hands to her hands. The damn thing stayed absolutely level.

professionals. fuck. fuck. fuck. fuck. they’re ravagers. they’ll sell us for the bounty

Ft128 looked like he was going to throw up. Ms916 was shaking, eyes down.

i’ve gotten us all killed. worse than killed. for nothing

The woman had also pulled back her headscarf.

green eyes, brown hair, slim frame, smaller hands on the rifle but just as steady. fuck!

Th411 thought of lunging at her, just to get shot, just to be done with it.

Dex, i’m so fucking sorry

But then what would happen to the others?

“You don’t have to kill us ” Ft128 said, his voice pitched a little too high. “Just take the shuttle and let us go.”
The woman shrugged. “I’m not the one you need to convince.”

The man stepped back through the hatch.

“A pretty scene.” He walked around, to look at all three of them. “Who shot the navigator and who cracked open the officer’s skull?”

No one spoke.

“Come on. I’m in the mood for a story.”

“It was an accident!” Ms916 blurted out.

“Shut up!” Th411 snarled.

Those dark eyes fixed on her again. “My money’s on you, actually. Alderaanian, by your accent, or at least you’ve spent a lot of time there?”

Th411 felt herself shivering inside her armor.

that voice....fuck, he sounds like a reprogrammer

There was a long silence. She thought she could hear wind blowing outside the cracked hull, and something else, birds maybe.

quick’s better than slow.

“Fine.” Th411 said, “It was me.”

“Tee NO!” Ems gasped.

She looked straight at him.

bastard

“Fine. You want a story? I lived on Alderaan till I was 13, then my mom married an asshole on Coruscant. I enlisted because I hated him and I hated her and I wanted the bonus and a clean way out. I was assigned to Transport Security. The only wrong thing I ever did, was I blackmailed some drudge in Communications into showing me how to piggy-back messages to my sister whenever we got in range. I found out she’d gone back to Alderaan to work for some artist….and then once when we were talking…..it was night for her there, she said,…….I just lost the signal. There was an all-quarters alert. They pulled us out of hyper-space ahead of coordinates but we must have already been too close…..Nobody knew what was happening, except we were all locked down and monitors were shut off. It took 3 minutes to turn us back around and into drive. Damn ship was riding shock waves so bad it nearly tore apart…..but deck crew said they saw it, they said it was bigger than a moon, and Alderaan was just, dust. They dragged them al away for reprogramming, but even the ones who came back weren’t the same. They told us all to keep our mouths shut, to forget it….FORGET it…like we couldn’t hear the fucking gravel pinging off the fucking hull!!”

Ems was whimpering, but Tee kept talking. It didn’t matter. If they were Ravagers, they wouldn’t care anyway.

they'll kill us or they won't
The difference between dead deserters and live deserters was probably only a few credits. It almost felt good to spit it out.

“Organa was a traitor. Fine. The bitch queen was a traitor. Fine. They were bankrolling terrorists. Fine. Kill them…but you can’t…nobody even tried to evacuate…. it was a whole fucking planet! Like 3 billion people. She was just a glass-cutter. We’re all cogs to them. We’re dirt. Screw the Capitol and screw the Emperor. I’m done. I’m done.”

The man stood with arms folded, expressionless. He raised an eyebrow, as if considering something. “Alderaan was destroyed almost 2 years ago. What took you so long?”

Th411 glared at him.

“It was just us four. We weren’t going to the Rebels. We weren’t defecting. We all just wanted out.” Eft sounded like he was begging.

Eft, don’t beg, begging only makes it worse

The green-eyed woman spoke. “So, I take it Captain Fancy Boots was the one NOT in on the desertion plan?”

Eft stuttered “We…..we tried to just knock him out and shove him into the escape pod, but..”

Ems cut him off, “He got loose, alright? Grabbed Dex’s blaster and shot him. Kept yelling that we were traitors, said he’d see us all reprogramed and air-locked. He wouldn’t shut up.”

“Yeah.” The woman nodded, with a faint almost companionable smile, “In my experience, that kind never does.”

The man glanced back toward the bridge. Still considering. “So. I’m guessing he tried to get out an emergency signal, and then somebody felt obliged to bash his head into the console 5 or 6 times, and then shoot out the tracking controls? Not necessarily in that order.” He straightened. Tee thought she noticed just a trace of stiffness, as if his back hurt but he was ignoring it.

maybe…if he turns..

“How did you find this place?” the woman asked.

Ems looked up at her, almost pleading,

damn it Ems!

“I …none of us knew how….it was random. Dex was dead. I tried to punch the furthest coordinates it would take, the farthest edge of an outside hyperspace lane. Just over the edge. We could hide out, try to get off the regular charts and float until we could…”

The woman gave a short laugh, “Seriously? No navigation? Just dove into hyperspace at random? The Force loves fools, or so I’ve heard, but that takes a prize.”

The woman and the man looked at each other, for what seemed like a very long second. He tilted his head toward the cracked escape hatch, and she nodded, lowering the rifle, ever so slightly. They backed slowly out, half closing the bent door behind them and cutting off most of the light.

****
“Who are these people?” Eft whispered.

“I don’t know.”

Are they having a fucking conference?”

“I don’t know.”

“It’s like they’re married. Are there fucking married bounty hunters?”

“Shut up Eft” She lowered her head uncomfortably onto her zip-tied arms.

“They’re wearing Imperial uniform boots.” Ems said, “Both of them.”

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Hours passed. Maybe. Probably. They managed to get their legs in front of them and sat stiffly against the bulkhead wall. Ems actually seemed to fall asleep. Tee thought maybe she had too. The light through the exit hatch was different when it dragged open again. The woman came inside and the man lingered by the door. He still had the rifle, but Tee could see something in the woman’s hand. It was a vibra-knife, or at least the blade of one. (fuck!) Tee tried to get upright, but her boots slid on the floor.

“Don’t panic.” The woman said. She reached across Ems first. Cut the ties on her legs. Then did the same for Eft, and then Tee. She waved a hand, and ducked back out through the hatch. The man stepped aside and out behind her, without a word. Th411, Ms916, and Ft128 looked at each other. Then they half slid, half scrambled up against the wall, pushing to stand with aching legs and tied arms. They followed her out. There wasn’t really much choice.

****

Tee had caught only the barest glimpse of the place during the crash, Now she looked around. The transport had smashed dozens on dozens of big trees (conifers?) and half buried itself in sandy soil. The air was cool. The sky was slightly pinkish and blue. She thought maybe she could smell water. Somebody had built a wood fire in the newly gouged “clearing” a few dozen meters off from the ship. The man pointed with the rifle toward the fire, and they walked down in front of him toward it. There were several small dark figures standing around, and what looked to be some kind of huge haystack behind them. The woman used the knife to cut the ties on their hands. The relief in her shoulders brought tears to Tee’s eyes. One of the small figures stepped forward, Tee saw that it wasn’t human, although it was as tall as an eight or ten year old child. It had bright golden eyes and was covered with smooth dark fur. The hands looked human-like, five fingers, but with smooth black skin and nails. It seemed to be wearing a skirt made of blue ribbons.

a smug trainer’s voice saying: “90% of all inhumans are cannibals”

“Hi,” It said, showing white pointed teeth and dropping a large cloth bag at Tee’s feet. Two other
creatures stepped forward
(red ribbons, green ribbons)
and dropped bags beside the first.

“Armor off,” said the woman “You really won’t need it now.”

Awkward, fingers still numb, they stripped down to their black liners and boots. Tee felt stupidly light.

The woman kicked away the white armor sections with the toe of her battered boot, like they disgusted her. She pointed with her knife, toward the bags.

“Water purification discs. Don’t waste them. Up this high, fast running water is probably clean. Standing water is iffy unless it has these flowers in it.” One of the creatures dropped a handful of flat, yellow, star-shaped flowers on top of the bags, along with a fist-sized purple flower bud. “Those are good to eat….whole plant basically…raw, cooked, whatever. The root lasts for months. The fat brown birds who nest on the ground lay way more eggs than they can hatch, at least for the next few weeks. Leave them one or two and they’re happy, empty a nest and they’ll put your eyes out. All the small fish are good to eat except the bright yellow ones. They aren’t poisonous ….they just taste like mud.”

“They taste fine. You just have to grill them.” The man had lowered the rifle, and laid it across his lap, as he sat back on a fallen tree trunk with a half-smile. He seemed nonchalant, but Tee had a sense that if she tried to move an eyelash toward that rifle, he’d blast her head off before she could even shift weight.

“Watch the birds. Whatever fruit they eat is safe. One ax, two knives, three waterproof blankets and a rope. Walk South for 8 or 10 days, you’ll reach the grasslands. The Taun live down there. Don’t fuck with them and they won’t fuck with you. Also, there are some big blue lizards. Nobody knows what their deal is, but they bite so don’t fuck with them either. Am I forgetting anything?” She glanced up at the haystack. It opened a large brown eye. Eft let out a yelp and almost fell backwards.

“Baskets.” It rumbled.

“Right. The Taun love baskets, but they are terrible at making them. If you want to trade, that’s an opportunity. Just be good little deserters and don’t do anything stupid or Imperial. It’s not going to get really cold again for another 200 standard days, so you’ve got that long to learn how to survive. Assuming you manage it, do not even THINK of coming back here.”

what’s happening?????

“Where are we?” Ems asked, “What is this place?”

“You are outside the Empire. That’s all you really need to know. Even the Old Republic forgot about this place and if it was ever on any chart, that map burned with Jedha.”

“What about our ship?” Tee asked.

“You wanted to be done.” The woman stepped close, and Tee could see there were yellow flecks in her green eyes.

like that fox in grandmother’s garden on Alderaan

“You’re done.”

“Bes will walk you down to the edge of their territory.” The man looked at the blue ribbons creature,
who nodded. “That will give you a couple of hours of daylight to ask her more questions.” His hands still lay lightly on the rifle. “If she doesn’t come back safe by morning, we will hunt you down and kill you. If you try to come back to this ship, we will kill you. If you try to contact the Empire in any way, we will know, and we will kill you. Other than that, you are on your own. Clear?”

“You aren’t ravagers. You aren’t going to sell us?” Ems said, eyes wide.

*oh maker, she’s so fucking young!*

“Are you deserters…deserters too? Are you hiding out the war here?”

The man stood up, abruptly, dark eyes narrowed. Reflexively, Tee found herself stepping in front of Ems, as if to protect her, but the woman reached back and laid a hand on her partner’s arm. He didn’t move, didn’t even look directly at her, but some kind of tension seemed to leave him.

*are there married bounty hunters?*

“No.” the woman said, “There’s no hiding from this war. We’re the Rebellion. So are you, now. Get the hell out of here and keep your rebellious asses alive if you can.”
Ghost

Chapter Summary

Davits Draven is used to being haunted. After the events of A New Hope, he finds that one of his ghosts may be trying to send a message.

Chapter Notes

Ok. We're doing little chapters now. The kid goes for broke.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was a different life on Echo Base, in just about every possible way. Cold, crowded, claustrophobic, rough on an old man's bones, to be honest. Still, Draven was not among those who remembered the heat and blue skies of Yavin IV longingly. It was better this way. He'd watched people he knew, people he counted as friends, people he'd trained, disappear into those skies.

The “Battle of Scarif” had already been re-written as a bold Alliance attack, a super-secret Council mission in which a brave handful of picked operatives had sacrificed themselves to retrieve the Death Star plans while the Rebel Fleet above risked everything to strike the first blow against the Empire. He had no problem with the story, after all he'd helped to write it. Some readjustment of the narrative hardly seemed to matter when the (mostly) true tale of Princess Leia’s dramatic escape from the DeathStar itself, aided by a “lost” Jedi general, a farm boy recruit and a dashing pirate, could be laid right out on the table.

“You can’t make this shit up,” General Syndulla muttered as they’d walked out of that first de-briefing. Force! There’d even been a wookie.

All of them listened, rooted and silent as a girl of 19 in filthy, torn Senatorial robes reported on her own capture, torture, the death of an entire world and the nightmare that was coming toward them. Dodonna had been the only one with the presence of mind to take her by the elbow and walk her down to the med-bay.

*Draven hadn’t been able to shake the image of Jyn Erso standing in that exact spot only days before demanding that they hurry, that they act “now”....but they hadn’t and two point three billion people on Alderaan had paid the price.*

He didn't listen to the fire-fight over Yavin, going instead to sit in medical with the few survivors of Scarif, bandaged and sedated or in floating bacta-tanks. From there he heard the cheering and soon afterward the announcement that echoed through the stone corridors. The Death Star had been destroyed.

Galen Erso’s revenge had achieved its end. They would all live to fight another day.

Draven went back up to the data center and started loading files and evacuation protocols.
During the hastily arranged medal “ceremony” where Leia Organa decorated the heroes of Yavin as the new face of the Rebellion (a beautiful piece of theatre that), he sat in the deserted council chamber with a bottle of whiskey. A few minutes passed before he realized he was not alone there. Mon Mothma pulled over a crate to sit beside him and held out her hand for the bottle. They drank in silence until the music and applause faded and never spoke about it afterwards.

History would judge them and the only reparation he could ever make to the dead was to defeat the Empire and make sure there was a history and a Republic to tell it in.

Most of his work was in Analysis now, reading reports, trying to sift good intel from bad, vetting recruits. His networks were mostly broken by the open outbreak of war. He no longer ran field operatives. Even if the Council still trusted him for that kind of work, he found he no longer trusted himself.

So he was surprised when he received a direct call from Communications. Usually he only got summary reports. Even more surprising was that the call came from Corporal Weems.

“Where did this come from?”

“That’s the hard part sir,” Weems said.” Whoever is sending this is either far, far, out of regular transmission lines, a genius at piggybacking onto repeaters, or both. We’ve been getting the info in mis-matched packets, mostly clipped into other data feeds. Whoever is sending it is taking slices of Imperial transmission at regular intervals from the whole spectrum of data feeds, voice communication, relay placements, droid navigational transmits, almost everything. A lot of it seems to be captured from out on the edges, the Outermost Rim and the unoccupied sectors.... sectors we don’t have the ability to monitor.”

“Weems. Humor me. Are you telling me that we are getting surveillance information on Imperial data transmissions, but you can’t tell from who, or exactly where it’s coming from?”

“Yes sir. The transmissions don’t link to any verifiable Alliance source.”

“Then we assume it’s Imperial misinformation, Weems. We block it. It’s a mischief feed. Why bring this to me?”

“Sir, Analysis tagged it that way and has set it to be isolated and purged, but, sir....every packet contains an imbeded signature string. When I translated it, all I got was the phrase “Read by the light of Lothals two moons.”

For a moment Davits Draven felt as if the room had shrunk, as if all the air had been pressed out of his lungs.

“Sir,” Weems was saying. “It’s Fulcrum.”

“Who have you shown this to?”

“General Kaya in Intelligence sir.”

“And she said?”
“That Fulcrum was compromised. That it was an old signature, and the Empire must be using it to try to backdoor our security protocols. But sir, I decoded dozens of transmissions from agents acting as Fulcrum before the program was shut down. I know that each one had a slightly different phrasing as a back-up confirmation. I was never supposed to have clearance for any of this, but….I know that this phrasing was never used by Kallus or Tano. Sir, you are the only one left who would know if it was associated with any other Fulcrum.”

“Weems…”

“Sir, before I burn these transmissions out, I need to know. Is there any chance that Captain Cassian Andor could have survived Scarif?”

Chapter End Notes

I am a little confused about syncing the Rogue One/New Hope/ESB timeline, but wth, lets go with it. Draven gets a lot of hate but I see him as a tragic figure. His face when he realizes he's friendly-firing his own agent in RO is kinda heartbreaking.
The Young Messenger

Chapter Summary

Draven looks back and makes a decision.

Draven sat in his quarters, staring at the data pad. He’d have thought what he felt was cold but that was a joke here. A shiver on Hoth only meant you were awake. When he was a boy his uncle had said when he’d shivered on a warm day, “Someone’s walking on your grave, Davie.”

He turned on the holo.

A dark-haired boy...age 12, Draven knew now, although he’d easily passed for younger... was sitting at a table, next to a tall man with a full black beard “Don’t be nervous, soldado”, the man was saying. “This is Captain Laiso, the man I told you about. This is Cassian.” Draven watched a younger version of himself nod toward the boy and hold out a hand to shake. Even all these years later he remembered what he’d thought. The man was a fool. This boy didn’t look nervous at all. Calm, polite, slightly bored maybe be he might as easily been being introduced to a family friend, or a new transport bus driver. It was only toward the very end of the interview that he’d spotted it...how the boy clenched his thumb and fingers together, surreptitiously, under the table. He was terrified. It was a subtle tell, one he would train out of himself before another year had passed. Draven skipped ahead to after he and Oskar...yes, that was the name... had negotiated the transfer of funds, ammunition and equipment for his resistance group and it was agreed that the boy would be messenger and go-between. As the young Cassian stood up, a full-sized blaster, almost longer than his forearm, was visible, strapped under his torn jacket. “We can get you a better weapon, son.” He heard his younger self say.

The boy’s brown eyes were bright, even through the flicker of the holo as he drew out the weapon for Draven to see. It was a battered Clone Wars era trooper model. The cracked handle was bound together with shielding tape. “No,” he was saying, ”A kid like me would look suspicious with a good gun. Right? Besides,” there was a flicker of adolescent pride in the voice,”I know all this ones trucos, um, tricks.”

Draven switched off the pad. He remembered the rest of it well enough. Six months after that meeting, Oskar’s base had been raided. The whole Carrida underground cell was wiped out. He’d barely managed to escape himself, waiting to pull out two of his own operatives, undercover in the Imperial College offices. Only one of them made it to the safe-house but when he made that last check for his operative he’d found the boy scorched and shaking, hidden in the doorway, boots gone and feet bloody. A few years later he would have hesitated but he was newer to the game then himself. They’d grabbed the boy, hidden him in a cargo trunk and boarded one of the last freighters off Carrida before the port was locked down.

Safe in hyperspace, they opened the trunk to find the adolescent sound asleep. Hours after that, when Cassian Andor’s wounds were patched, and he had quietly related the basics of the raid, the boy opened up his shirt and placed the shattered pieces of the old blaster in front of Draven. “I need a new one now.”

Draven closed his eyes for a minute. When he opened them he placed the pad carefully back inside
its case, fastened his jacket and went out to the flight hanger to look for Bodhi Rook.
The Pilot's Tale

Chapter Summary

Corporal Bodhi Rook finds that surviving is an on-going process.

Chapter Notes

Trying to build this one tiny brick at a time.

Alliance Corporal Bodhi Rook worked very very hard. He was assigned to the repair dock in Main Hanger One and he had a certain genius for what bruised and overstressed spacecraft needed to keep it running. He knew this because these were the exact words of his supervisory officer on his first assessment report …“a genius for what bruised and overstressed spacecraft need to keep it running.”

“There you go, mate,” Tonc had said to him, “Because what the fuck are we, if not ‘bruised and overstressed spacecraft’?”

At first, Bodhi had worked so hard because everything took him twice as long. Four prosthetic fingers on his dominant hand took a lot of getting used to. The pressure tubing wrapped around what was left of his right arm while the new bone, muscle and skin grew, had slowed him down dramatically for a while. He made them set it in a bent position, so he could at least maneuver around an engine block. Add to that the total lack of depth perception while he waited to get a new eye, and no one in their right mind should have let him anywhere near essential equipment. Nobody had the heart to tell him no, either. Now he worked very hard because it kept him from thinking. He had made the evacuation to Hoth in a medically induced coma, and woke to a literally new world and to at least 20% of a new body. The medical staff were fiercely protective of him. He sort of understood why. While the Rebel Fleet had raced to Scarif, the medical crews had braced for casualties. Only a handful actually came in. Fleet ships that had made it into hyperspace before the Death Star appeared, mostly treated their minor wounded aboard. Any ship that hadn’t made that last jump had simply vanished (the name Vader, was whispered, but seldom said out loud). A few dozen X Wings (parts of Red and Gold Squadrons), limped back, battle scorched but with their pilots mostly uninjured. Only one ship ever returned from the surface of Scarif. Warrant Officer Laren Joma (a living embodiment of the Force, as far as Rook was concerned) had climbed out of her crashed U-wing, dragged the body of her gunner (an Inkaru named Bistan) into an empty Imperial cargo vessel and then made two passes over the burning beach, looking for survivors. She found four. There was Walea Timker, one of of the ground troops, deafened, but otherwise freakishly whole, dragging her bleeding squadmate Dev Martik. Then last of all, Stordan Tonc, shot in the abdomen and carrying a burned and blast shattered Bodhi Rook. Tonc and Rook were the sole survivors of Rogue One. Joma had then flown out half blind through a still raging firefight, making the leap into hyperspace as the Death Star turned Scarif base into green fire and steam behind them. It was piloting worthy of legend. Bohdi couldn’t help being a little disappointed that he remembered none of it. Bistan had been dead before they reached Yavin, so the medics had cared for Timker, Martik, Tonc and Rook with a kind of professional desperation. Even the droids had a tendency to hover. Little more than two weeks later Yavin IV was evacuated. Whatever suspicion or resentment Bodhi might have
sensed as an Imperial defector before Rogue One, had vanished by the time he opened his remaining eye in the newly installed medical wing on Echo Base. He was one of theirs.

“You’re a rebel now” he’d thought to himself, or maybe that was someone else’s voice? when they’d brought him the new uniform jacket with the firebird insignia and Corporal rank pips.

“Why did they call it Echo Base?” He’d asked Tonc once.

“I heard that when they scouted this hell hole, some guy yodeled into this cavern and it’s still rolling around back in there somewhere.” Tonc laughed so hard at this piss-poor joke that even Bodhi had to smile.

Though he was assigned to patrol duty and weapons training, Tonc would often come and sit while Bodhi worked. He talked a lot. About music, about football, about how cold it was, about how he and his younger cousin used to steal speeders, about which cute recruits he was definitely going to talk to someday, about how cold it was, about how much he missed fresh fruit, about how he'd been standing next to a wookie in the line at the mess hall, about how really totally bullshit cold it was. Bodhi seldom spoke but he understood that talking, for Tonc, served roughly the same function that working on engines did for him. Once in awhile though, amid his white noise rambling, Tonc would quietly ask a question that cut like a knife.

“Did you ever see it? I mean when you were working for the fuckers?”

Bodhi didn’t have to ask what “it’ was, or who ”the fuckers” were.

“No” he’d said. "I never saw it.” He always tried to answer truthfully. Even when it hurt.

“When we broke atmo. I saw it” Tonc said in a hushed voice. “I saw it.”

Just a few days ago, on a break from a marathon monologue about his all-time best sabacc scores, Tonc had asked, “Hey, you were friends with them, right? Were they a thing?”

“What? Who?”

“Captain Andor and the Sarge. Sergeant Erso”

Bodhi had no idea why Tonc referred to Jyn Erso as Sergeant, but he always did.

“What the hell? Why would you even ask that?”

“I’m sorry man! I don’t know. I mean, it was like, they were always like 3 centimeters away from each other…I mean, I know we were all packed in tight, but it was like, their 3 centimeters was just way way closer than everybody else's 3 centimeters. I mean, I’m not not trying to be a dick here. I just, I don’t know, I thought it. I wondered.”

He slammed down the spanner he was holding with a force that surprised him.

“You ARE being a dick, Tonc.”

Shaking, he closed his eyes and took a slow breath the way the rehab nurse had taught him. 6 seconds in and 8 seconds out.

Four of them in the cockpit, “This is Scarif Base. You are cleared for landing.” The rush of
adrenaline. Jyn hugging him by the shoulders and then bounding toward the Captain with that grin. Hell, HE’D thought she was going to kiss the guy then and there. It was like they were all normal people for a weird moment.

I was friends with them, he thought.

Tonacci had waited him out. He knew how these things went.

“I’m sorry man. I...i don’t know, Tonic. They’re dead. There was no time.”
Sifting through the Ashes (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

In which Draven pursues answers and it becomes clear that everyone with a soul loves Bodhi Rook.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Draven approached Rook’s supervisor first. He’d learned from experience that when a soldier was publicly pulled aside by an Intelligence officer, it tended to cause their fellows to look at them oddly for a long time after. She confirmed that there were really only two places to to find him. Working double shifts in maintenance or in the medical bay. This latter surprised Draven.

"Is he still being treated?"

"Not really," the officer said, "he’s been totally cleared. Occasional physical therapy, maybe. Mostly,...mostly I think he sleeps there.”

“He sleeps in the med bay?”

"It's not a problem sir," she said, too quickly. 
*She likes Rook. Draven thought, she doesn’t want to get him in trouble.*

“It's just when they have space. They put a cot in the passageway, or in a storage area for him.”

The greatest luxury on Echo Base, other than functioning heat, was space. Giving a soldier an unauthorized bed in a vital access unit, just because he couldn’t sleep, meant the medical staff was probably breaking at least 20 regulations. Draven remembered sitting in Medical on Yavin while Rook was in the tank, wrapped in pressure tubing and floating in bacta, half his face gone and damned little of one arm left. Smashed bones, internal injuries, and massive burns. There’d been an ashen young Infantry Corporal on a bed nearby, hooked up to an automated unit filtering ridiculous quantities of blood.

“Is the pilot ok?” The Corporal kept asking, every time he woke up.

Rook was kept unconscious, of course. When he’d asked Dr. Thorn about the possibility of debriefing, they’d glared at him over the rim of their glasses, as if looks alone could kill. “Before we got him into that tank, he was thrashing and screaming over and over again that he had to go back….that “he was their only way out of there.” What the fuck do you think he’s going to tell you Davits?” Thorn waved a hand toward the opposite bed, “That one will probably live. Interrogate him once we’ve poured enough blood back in.”

In the end, he hadn’t been the one to debrief the infantryman (*Tonic, Stordan. recruited Qemia 7, age 21*), or Rook. Although he’d read the reports and watched the holos. By then they all were living in a new universe of re-born Jedi, monsters, wookies drinking beer on the loading platform, planets turned to dust, the Empire chasing them like hounds and the terrible responsibility of hope. 99% of the Rebellion’s energy and strength was now laser-focused on the present and, *(finally, at last)* the future. Leia Organa was no figurehead. The woman burned like white light. She listened, she
deferred to expertise, but she LED. She had a sharp tongue, a sharper mind and she did not ever look back. Of course she didn’t. If she looked backwards it would probably kill her. Draven wondered if he was the only one sifting through ashes and trying to talk to ghosts. He nodded to dismiss the Maintenance Officer and girded himself to go face Dr. Thorn. If he was lucky, maybe they’d give him a cot next to Bodhi Rook and he could finally get some sleep.

*****

Medical was like being inside a well-lit, busy, box. There were a lot of people but most of them were standing or sitting up on cots. Medic droids were whizzing past, beeping in corners or telescoping over patients, taking vitals. It was still cold but only skin chilling cold not the bone-deep cold of most of the rest of the base. He stood for a moment in the doorway, surveying. Frostbite, and lots of it. Tauntaun bites. Nobody seemed to be actively dying. He’d seen worse, much much worse. Thorn was there beneath his nose almost instantly

“Why are you here, General?”

“Commander Thorn. Why is it that for the last 4 years every time I’ve walked into an Alliance Medical facility you’ve been there?”

“I assume you’re stalking me. Stop it at once. What do you want General Draven?”

“I’m looking for Bodhi Rook. I was told I would find him here.”

“Who told you that?”

“Thorn. I need to talk with Rook.”

“Why?”

“If he isn’t currently your patient, Thorn, you have no say in this matter. Can you please tell me where Corporal Rook is?”

It wasn’t an order. Thorn clearly noted that. Draven clearly noted that Thorn noted.

Edging between gurneys and automated units, half of which trilled “Good evening Dr. Thorn” as they passed, Draven followed them through the bay, to a long narrow hallway in the back, and down to a row of curtained alcoves.

“We put that boy back together with paper and tape, Draven. If you break him I’m going to want to know why.” Thorn held up a hand, “Wait here a second,…if you wake him up suddenly sometimes he……just let me do it,” and pulled aside a curtain.

Draven heard a voice softly saying, “Bodhi, Bodhi, it’s me. It’s Dr. Thorn” then a sudden rustling and a low conversation. A half a minute later Rook appeared, rubbing his eyes in the low archway, a blanket round his shoulders. Thorn ducked around him.

“I’ll be right in there.” The doctor pointed toward the main Medical bay. "Call out if you need help.” With a last glare at Draven, they were gone.

“Si..sir.” Rook tried to stand at attention and dropped half his blanket.

“Corporal Rook. At ease. I’m sorry to disturb you. I need your help with an urgent Intelligence matter.”
Draven was familiar with the sensation of being another man’s nightmare. He was fairly confident that right now he was Bodhi Rook’s.

Chapter End Notes

Carrie Fisher as my witness, we are circling back to RebelCaptain in the wilderness I apologize for the tiny chapters. A woman's gotta work.....as it was when I was 17, I'm writing fan fiction on my lunch breaks.
Sifting through the Ashes (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

In which Bohdi Rook and General Draven bond (sort of) over mutual research geekery and uncover a tiny spark of hope.

Echo Base should not have reminded Bodhi Rook of Jedha but it did sometimes. Not the cold though. It wasn’t that it never got cold in Jedha City, it did... it had. On mornings during the winter season he remembered ice forming in the saucers of water his mother used to place out on their little balcony for the birds. When his grandfather had still been alive, they had once taken a winter trek up into the mountains to one of the shrines. There had been crowds of pilgrims because It was some kind of once-every-14-years festival and they had camped in tents and set up big bonfires along the way. His grandfather carried him on his shoulders and monks in red set up little booths along the endless stone stairways up to the shrine, handing out small bark cups of shaved mountain ice to the children. It was supposed to be symbolic of something but all he remembered now was the sweet red syrup on top and how delicious it had been. All their tongues turned bright red and his mother, laughed like a little girl and let him look at himself in the enamel mirror she wore on a chain around her neck. “Remember all this, Bodhi Amal. You will bring your own children here someday,” his grandfather said.

He couldn’t even remember the name of the shrine now.

Maybe it was the crowding of people, working packed together in such a precarious place, within stone walls, people arguing, strangers making friends, falling in love and trying to live like there would still be a tomorrow while a Star Destroyer was looming over their heads with gun turrets pointed down. Or maybe it was just the endless damned tunnels.

He followed the General down the back corridors out of Medical Bay back the long way around to the flight hanger Bodhi had to scramble a bit to keep up. Draven was tall and had a long stride. They skirted the wall of the massive cavern and passed by dozens of astromech droids carrying cable and equipment out to the night crews before coming around at last to a battered Incom D-28 shuttle. Bodhi had noticed it earlier, along with two or three others like it pilled into the the frigid dimly lit back bay. Small shielded shuttles like it came and went, usually used by senior support staff. They were always docked well away from the other patrol and supply ships and serviced separately.

What the hell? He thought.

Draven tapped the side of the ships’s small entry ramp.

“Come inside, Rook. I have some questions to ask you and not much time.”

Then he ducked his head and went inside.

Low interior lights went on automatically as they entered. Bodhi could see that the shuttle interior had been modified. On the outside it looked like a standard transport craft, just a modest little planet hopper of the sort built to carry crews of 3 or 4 and light cargo. This one had been made much more comfortable. Where crates or passenger seats should have been there was a table, a modular work station, some padded seating and two fold-up bunks along the back wall.
Draven took one of the seats, and motioned for Bodhi to take another.

“I realize this is an odd location, Rook, but this isn’t a matter it would be comfortable to take up in the Data bays or in General Kaya’s HQ. At least not at this point. I wanted to speak with you privately first.”

It occurred to Bodhi Rook then that he had only had a handful of interactions with General Draven and none one of them had been particularly pleasant.

Draven had been there when Bodhi first reached Yavin and climbed off the stolen Imperial shuttle that had brought them from Eadu, damp and in shock with gravel from Jedha still inside his boots. K2SO had actually pointed him out. A tall red-haired man with a receding hairline and a grim expression.

“That is General Draven. He’s the acting Head of Intelligence. He’s probably going to want to interrogate you.” K2’s head had swiveled round, ”Don’t be afraid. It’s highly unlikely that any kind of extreme measures will be used at this time.”

“Kay!” Captain Andor snapped, “Stop talking.”
He’d put a hand on Bodhi’s shoulder. “Don’t listen to him. It will be fine.” Then he strode forward to talk to Draven.

That had been his first real experience of the Rebel Alliance, Bodhi realized now. He remembered taking in the uniforms. Nothing shiny and nothing new. You couldn’t tell the officers from the enlisted because everybody was wearing faded khaki or blue but he was struck by the way Captain Andor, Cassian, talked to this general. Straight posture, hands behind his back, periodically gesturing back towards the ship and the rest of them.

Knowing what he knew now, he realized it must have been a very tense conversation. Certainly nobody had looked too happy. Jyn was standing behind him, still simmering with rage. But the thing that had struck him at the time was, Captain Andor is not afraid. He might be angry or resigned or defiant or eager, but he was talking and the tall man was listening. In the four years Bodhi Rook had served in the Imperial Forces he had never seen anyone not afraid when talking to their superior officer. That was what stood out in his mind. These people are not afraid of each other.

That thought carried him through the rest of that day and the next. Through the "debrief", his testimony and Jyns, everything that followed. In a way it still carried him.

“Why am I here sir? What is this about?”

“Rook I’ve gone over your debriefing files as well as your account of the actions of yourself and the others at Scarif. I’m not referring to the official account but your actual experience and I need to ask you some very specific questions.”

_Six seconds in, eight seconds out, Bodhi told himself._

“What do you want to know, sir?
“In your statement about the last voice contact you had with Captain Andor....”

“Bodhi! You have to get them to open that shield gate, Bodhi! You have to find a way!”

“....you stated that he was inside the data tower.”

“Yes”

Draven nodded, “Was it your impression that either the droid K2S0 or Jyn Erso or both were alive and with him at that time?”

“They went in together, and he said, “we”. He said “WE can transmit the plans from here. That...that's all I know.”

“And how did he sound? Captain Andor. The last time you heard his voice?”

_Holy hell, Bodhi thought, how do you THINK he sounded?_”

“He sounded desperate, sir.”

Draven leaned forward, hands clasped, head down.

“Rook, to the best of your knowledge did Captain Andor have an extraction plan, for himself or the others in the tower?”

Bodhi Rook tried to swallow. _He remembered the grenade rolling across the floor and himself staring at it stupidly before scrambling on his knees, grabbing at the thing and throwing it toward the open hatch. In slow-motion it left his fingers and flew... maybe a meter... before everything turned orange. He only remembered pressure... like a high wind against the right side of his face._

“Me. It was me.”

“Rook, I’m sorry, I can’t hear you.”

“We were supposed to hold the shuttle at the end of the landing pad. Cassian...Captain Andor and Jyn had no idea what they would find inside. The hope was that they could remove any files or data and get back to the shuttle in the distraction of the ground attack. Then they and the rest of Rogue One would try to....would get back to the shuttle and I would fly out.”

Draven looked him. “I suppose I’m not the first person to tell you that nobody was going to come out of that tower once the alarms were tripped. That they were probably dead seconds after they sent that transmission.”

“No sir, you are not. I’ve been told that many times.”

Draven was silent for a moment.

“Rook. I would be lying if I told you it was a good plan, it was a terrible plan. You had insufficient ground information, inadequate equipment and not enough time. Saw Guerra wouldn’t have tried a raid under those circumstances and I’m fairly sure he was clinically insane. That you achieved your most critical mission goal can only be credited to the quality and skills of your personnel. You got the plans. The weapon was destroyed.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Rook lifted his head and met Draven’s eye. “But I’m pretty sure you didn’t bring me here to tell me this.”
"No."

The General leaned forward. “Congratulations, Corporal Rook, I am now provisionally granting you level 4 security clearance. Listen carefully. Looking back through transmissions intercepted in the 48 hours before Scarif, reads from retuning ships and some recently acquired backup equipment that seems to have been looted from the far side of the planet by scavengers who swarmed in while the Empire was covering up the mess on the other side, we now know that some sort of Imperial data audit had been ordered just ahead of your arrival. We also learned that a senior staff-level shuttle docked at Scarif minutes after you did. When Andor and Erso reached that data vault, they may well have found a high level of Imperial team with executive clearance already in there, trying to either remove Galen Erso’s plans, or to destroy them.”

He spoke slowly. It seemed to be very important to him that Bodhi understand something.

“What is this about, sir? The war has moved on. No one cares about what happened on Scarif. No one remembers.” It sounded more bitter than he meant it to, and it wasn’t precisely true, Bodhi admitted to himself.

He remembered when he had first started hobbling around the medical bay. A painfully young looking pilot had appeared. “I’m Luke Skywalker,” he said, looking at him with earnest blue eyes and reaching out a hand. There was a seconds hesitation as he realized Bodhi’s right hand was wrapped in tubing…was pretty much gone in fact. Then he reached for the left instead. “Thank you, sir” the pilot said and began trying to tell him about how the survivors of Red Squadron and Gold were being combined as the new lead defense wing. They wanted to call it Rogue Squadron, he said. It was too much for Bodhi then. He’d only nodded dumbly.

“Rook, I need you to see something.” Draven laid a data pad on the table, “This was recovered from the aft camera of a Gold squadron Y-wing just before it made the jump to light speed.” He pulled up a holo screen and the image appeared.

It was the Death Star.

Bloody hell. The thing was huge. Even with the image stabilized it took Bodhi a second to realize that the marbled blue curve behind it must be Scarif and the tiny sparks of red and black swirling like dust were TIE fighters and laser cannon blasts.

Well Tonc, Bodhi thought. I see it now.

Draven enlarged a section of the image. Bodhi could make out a folded shape of grey. A Delta class shuttle, he’d have known that outline blind or asleep. One flap was badly extended. Oh Force…he realized that it must be.

“That’s the shuttle Commander Joma flew you and the other survivors out in. What I am trying to determine, is what THIS is…”

He engaged another part of the image and set for max resolution. Just visible against the flare of a laser cannon blast, striking yet another small ship…one of Profundity’s escape shuttles?…was a thin black triangle.

“I’ve got someone working on trying to identify this but…”

“That’s a TC3.” Bodhi said. He leaned far. “That’s a Sienar Systems Delta-class TC3.”

“You’ve seen this ship?”

“What?”
Bodhi forgot Draven was there for a second. He’d been back in the room he shared with his cousins on Jehda, under a blanket, pouring over a battered Sienar Systems corporate prospectus that he’d traded his new jacket for from a street junk vendor. His mother had been so angry, but he’d memorized every word, number and image in that blinking thing, dreaming of spaceships.

“What? No. No one’s ever seen one of these. They weren’t ever really built…..at least I thought they weren’t. Sienar built the TIE fighters but one of the reasons they won the contract is because they won a design competition with the TC3. It’s beautiful. It was based on a prototype that Lamilla T‘on, she was a famous designer from Cygnus, THE most famous, and she…..”

“Rook! Focus for a second. If you know about this ship's design, tell me could one have docked on the landing pads at Scarif?

“This? No, no that’s the thing, this could dock almost anywhere. The wing-structures fold up like a dancers hands. It could come down straight and land on the tiniest space” He was grinning like boy of 13, “There was a picture of one landing on the balcony of a beautiful house, while people stood around with drinks in their hands. Oh….oh…”

Suddenly the floor seemed to tilt under him, and he realized now where Draven was going with this. “It could have been docked directly at the base of the tower. It wouldn’t have needed to be out on the landing pads.”

“Rook. This is very important. I want you to look at this image very carefully. Based on what you know about this ship. Is there enough here to indicate whether it is flying toward the Imperial base, or trying to get away?”

“I’m no pilot,” Jyn had said with a shrug, sitting next to him in the cockpit. Captain Andor had been a capable pilot, maybe a little better than capable, but ….Kay, maybe, probably…

Draven was looking at him.

That tiny wafer of black seemed just a fine hairs-breadth thinner at the back than the front.

“That ship is pointed away. That ship is trying get the hell out of there. Sir, what are you saying?”

Blue light from the holo was reflecting off Draven’s face.

“I think Cassian Andor may have gotten off Scarif.”

He looked up. Carefully, as if he were concerned about causing pain, he asked,

“How would you feel about flying again, Corporal Rook?”
Bes

Chapter Summary

Cassian and Jyn are in a new place. With new allies.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

By the time Bes reached the pasture that bordered her house, dawn was starting to light the sky. She had walked through the night after leaving the three humans on the far side of the Green river. She actually rather liked walking at night. It was peaceful. There had been a clear sky so there were the stars and the moons to look at. Once her night vision kicked in, she could watch the moths and night birds and hear them singing quietly in the trees. Still, it was a long walk, and now she was tired and her feet hurt. Also, although she was fairly sure that Cassian-ally was exaggerating when he said that he would kill the new people if she wasn’t back in time, she wasn’t really comfortable pressing their luck. The poor things would probably be dead before Winter anyway.

Rude as it would be to say so. It was always hard to tell what humans were thinking, their eyes were just too small and their faces too….startled, Elder Sister always said, although Bes thought ‘twitchy’ a better description. Something that moved too much was just as hard to gauge as something that moved too little. She liked Cassian, actually. She liked his voice, so she tended to focus on that. She liked Jyn best though. Jyn was easier to read. Maybe it was her body language. Her movements matched her moods pretty well, up, down, jumping, lying down, pitched forward on toes, or leaning back on heels. Slightly bigger eyes helped too. Anyway, Active Females were always more straightforward, in just about every species. Bes had been boasting to some nurslings just the other day about her skill in recognizing the difference between human males and females. Elder Sister had rolled her eyes, but Bes thought she was well within her rights. She’d seen far more humans than anyone else around here, except maybe Elder Sister. There were several small communities of humans down on the shore islands, and groups had always come upriver to Nixa for Trading Days and Council meetings. (She’d even seen a human baby once. Carried in a cloth sling on it’s mother’s shoulder. It was huge, at least three times bigger than a normal infant, as bald as a worm and spectacularly ugly, but in a cute way. It had laughed and laughed and laughed, just like a regular baby would.) A more traditional Elder Sister might have scolded her, she knew. In the Old Days it was unseemly for a Sister to talk at all about her life before she was taken into her circle. It had worried her when she was new, but Second Sister had dried her tears once, after a bad dream about her life before. “They used to think it was better that way. They were morons. Don’t forget what has happened to you, heal, grow, add to the story and make it a better one.” Maybe that was why she liked Cassian and Jyn-ally so much, odd as they were, and why Elder Sister had let her spend so much time with them, especially when they first found them, scorched and broken, in the black ship. They both had bad dreams. They were also fighters in the War and they had wounds too.

As she came up through the pasture, in the morning light, she saw Jyn sitting on one of the benches Elder Sister had placed by the doorway of their house. Second Sister was with her and they were eating boiled eggs.

Second Sister saw her first and whistled in greeting. Jyn smiled and waved.
“We saved you an egg.” Jyn said.

“I saved you an egg.” Second Sister said. “Jyn-ally would have eaten them all.”

“Unfair! I said I was THINKING of eating them all.”

Bes kissed Sister’s hands in Respectful and Affectionate Greeting, and gave Jyn the two-armed hug she always seemed to like best.

“Did you get the Imps on their way?”

“Yes. They’ll probably be dead by Winter.”

“I’d give them 65% at best.” Jyn said, “But maybe I’m optimistic.”

“They didn’t ask as many questions as they should have. Why did Cassian-ally send them south?”

“The Taun will keep an eye on them and watch. If they get up to anything, Elfla will let us know. If they seem to be … ok, she’ll guide them to the shore next Spring and they can try to make their way with the Southern settlers. Otherwise…Lizard lunch.”

“Is Cassian-ally taking their ship apart?”

“No. We looked it over yesterday. It will never fly again. He’s letting Dov and the gang have first crack at the fixtures and parts, and then we’ll take a look at the bits we can use.”

“Is he up in the Tower?”

“Yes. I’m going to take him an egg. I was just waiting for you.”

“Can I come?”

“Are you not too tired, Youngest Sister?” Second Sister asked.

“I was, but now I’m not. Will Portia talk to him?”

“I think so. She has been, and we have news for her, she always likes that.”

“Go,” said Second Sister, “But do not stay long. You need rest. There will be chores and pattern-work after Elder wakes up.”

Bes kissed the back of Second Sister’s right hand in Gratitude for Trust. Then she took Jyn’s left hand and walked with her, nibbling the egg as she went. She never missed a chance to see the ghost in the Tower.

Chapter End Notes

Just a tiny link chapter about otter-like Wiccan people on a cargo-cult planet interacting with my favorite tragic Star Wars couple. Doesn't everybody come up with these?
The Lighthouse (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Jyn and Cassian struggling to heal and find a way back into the fight, try to untangle the mysteries of the place they've found themselves.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jyn always tried to remember that she needed to take short steps whenever she walked with Bes. Then she would get lost in her own thoughts and it would take a hard-if-friendly tug on her arm to remind her that the Memsa was skipping to keep up. It was just over 3km from the Sister’s farm to the base of the tower.

The small stone house that Jyn and Cassian were living in was closer to it, only about 2km, but required walking up the hill on the other side. The first time Jyn had seen the tower was just a few weeks after they had come here. Tova and Bes had walked them down the path, out of the trees that surrounded the stone house, down to where they could get a clear view. At that point, Jyn had still been leaning on a cane, and Cassian was able to walk only short distances without stopping to rest.

The Memsa placed great significance on the first words you said, and the first thought you had, when you encountered something that would have great significance in your life.

Jyn’s first thought had been “Oh fuck no.”
Her first words had been “Oh fuck no.”

She had seen ruins like this before, the old fortresses on Charon, the cave shrines in the hills on Ord Mandell. Saw had had a profound affection for dark creepy caves with at least 2000 or 3000 years of patina on them, or so the partisans used to whisper amongst themselves when they were sure he couldn’t hear. “The Empire never looks below the surface of anything!” He would roar, when choosing a new bunker, or hideout. “History is so meaningless to them they cannot see it!” When she was first brought as a prisoner to Yavin, she had been so sure that it was Saw who had organized her rescue/kidnapping that the revelation of airbases concealed inside ancient temples had seemed perfectly logical. Maybe it was fitting that Jedha had become his tomb. Saw’s last and oldest ruin.

The tower was round, maybe 250 meters of it still showing above ground and 20 m wide at the base. It looked like a layer cake. The first 50 were huge slabs of rough silver grey stone. Brush and trees grew all around the base, but nothing seemed able to grow on it and the slabs fit together so perfectly a razor couldn’t have fit between. Further up, it seemed to be built of local stone, the same brownish quartzite that the house was made of and that could be seen sticking up in various places. Up near at the top was a dark metal platform, it might have had fencing once, or even additional sections of tower above it, but all that was long gone now. There were random holes around the sides, every 10 meters or so, that might have held posts or something, but no visible doors. There were a few square gaps that might have been remains of windows, but the nearest was, maybe, a 150 meters up.

She looked at Cassian. He was staring up at the tower.

“No.”
“It’s alright, Jyn,” he said softly. He had to say everything softly in those first days because he still couldn’t totally re-inflate his lungs. He looked down at Tova. “Do you know what is inside?”

“Elder Sister can tell you more,” Tova said, “and she will come soon. This is the bare bones of the stories I have heard: Long ago it was built to hold ‘devices of speaking and listening’ which is how they talked about transmitters and receivers, to help in the war against a great enemy. Our greatest and greatest of grandmothers spoke with the builders and learned their languages, which we have now forgotten, to our shame. The builders flew away and never returned but in the time of our great and great grandmothers new people came, humans and others, and built it even higher. They were kindly but proud. We learned their languages too, and we still remember them all. It seems as if more people came and went over many generations. Some seemed to have no memory of the ones who had come before them, but they all traded with us. Then slowly ships stopped coming, at least on purpose. Every few years, mostly, one would crash, onto the land, or into the sea. If it fell into the sea, the Bequa would try to recover it and bring it to the Shore people for trade. That was always a pretty big treat, I can tell you.”

“The Bequa talk through holes in the tops of their heads!” Bes volunteered brightly, she was still very shy of Cassian then, but she liked to feel included.

“When I was Youngest Sister,” Tova said, ignoring her outburst but patting her indulgently, “A very small ship came and inside the were two people, one human, but much more colorful than you, the other…I’m not sure. They built the stone house, or rebuilt it, I’m not sure about that either. They stayed by themselves and talked to no one. They were not cruel, but when then-Eldest Sister tried to talk with them, they would not. Something was very wrong with them. A few years later then-Eldest Sister went back and found them both dead within the stone house. Eldest Sister was Second Sister then and she can tell you more. She said the not-human one used to sit at the base of the tower and weep.”

“Why didn’t the Memsa ever try to go inside.” Cassian asked.

“People are superstitious fools,” Tova replied, brightly “There was an old legend that long ago, that when people tried, a shock ran through the tower and anyone touching it fell dead. If you let that sort of thing go round for 6 or 7 generations it turns into quite a spooky tale for nurslings, I can tell you. Even the boldest scavengers said, “What would be inside now but bird nests and rust?” and they walked wide around.”

“Why didn’t it shock the birds?” Bes said.

“Just so, clever Youngest Sister,” Tova said with a smile. “Shortly after the two people who lived in the stone house before you died, truly, the day after we burned them, and spread their ashes on the garden, something struck the top of the tower. Whether it was lightening, or a stone from the sky, we could not tell, but it glowed red for a week after. Well, that put quite a fear in the people around here, I can tell you. No one but Sisters would come near the tower and the stone house after that, for long years. Until you came.”

Cassian looked back up at the tower.

“No.” Jyn said.

*No, she was still thinking, hours later when she was helping him take his boots off in the stone house.*
It was the wrong time to say it, she'd known. He hated that he was still so weak that she had to help him with things. Not here, kneeling by the side of the bed they shared so that when one of them woke up in the night shaking, the other could say “It’s alright. I’m here. We’re alive.” She should wait until the next day, at least, she knew.

She couldn’t help herself.

“I’ll do it.” She had said.

Chapter End Notes

Tiny lunch hour chapters.
The Lighthouse (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Jyn and Cassian have to climb again.

Chapter Notes

More tiny chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Tower (Part 2)

_She’d seen him angry. On the stolen shuttle back from Eadu, when she had flung accusations at him, like handfuls of knives, things that were only partly true, she knew now…. hell, had probably known then…..just to make something stick, to MAKE him fight her, because the pain of having her father given back and torn away in the same moment was so awful that she had to fight somebody. “No better than a stormtrooper!” She’d said and at last he’d turned and she’d seen how angry he could be. Just for that split second, before he’d pulled it in and turned cold again. He’d fashioned just as sharp a knife to strike her back with, “You’re not the only one who lost everything. Some of us just decided to fight.” She’d called him a murderer, he’d called her a coward. That was they kind of damage they could do before they even really knew each other. Let him be angry. She could take it.

“Like hell you will!” He’d snarled, dark eyes snapping. Immediately, he’d started coughing.

“Stop!” She cried, “You’ll hurt yourself.” Again, the wrong thing to say.

“Maldita.....” he rasped, breathing more slowly, ”Why are you even talking like this?”

“We need to know. I know we need to know. Where we are….. what’s happening…. I know, but it will be weeks before you’re strong enough for a climb like that. Anyway I’m the better…” Oh fuck. Wrong thing again.

“STOP” He hissed, struggling that iron Cassian control back into place. “Do NOT be stupid enough to talk about how you are a stronger climber than I am, because I think that I have, maybe, more than proved that that is not true.”

He closed his eyes, working to keep his breaths shallow.

“Please,” she’d started, and then realized how strange the word felt in her mouth. She realized that she’d never said it out loud before, not where he could hear her. Inside that black ship, he’d already been unconscious for all the times she’d said, “Please don’t die. Please don’t leave me.” As far as he knew, she was still the kind of person who would never beg.
Oh, Captain Andor, she thought, we are way way past that now.

“Please.” She laid her forehead against his knee. “You have to let me do it. I can’t watch you fall again.”

She’d looked up to find him looking down at her the same way he had in the elevator on Scarif.

In the end, they’d compromised - well, he’d talked her down, was more like it. They waited two more weeks. He was less suspicious of the weirdness of Memsa medicine by then and had managed more sessions in the too small, steaming stone tubs filled with what seemed like a cross between batca fluid and pine bark soup. She’d made him prove that he had regained enough upper body strength to support his own weight from a branch for at least 10 minutes.

Then it was a matter of logistics. Half a lifetime of breaking and entering now served her well. It was the first 50 meters that was the problem - grey sandpaper stone without a crack or bump - above that the brown stone was rough and weather-pitted enough that there were plenty of hand and footholds. Cassian found a launch-gun in the base of the shuttle. Hooks wouldn’t attach on stone like that, but he adapted it to fire sharpened pegs directly into the “post” holes that travelled up the surface above the grey line. The lines held. Half a lifetime behind a sniper rifle now served him well. With cable from the shuttle, and extra rope from the Memsa, attached to the pegs, they could work up on multiple lines and rappel back down when they needed to.

Bes had brought them food, and sat at the foot of the tower, fascinated by the whole procedure. “Are you spider people?” she’d asked.

Jyn had said “Yes” and Cassian had said “No” at the same time.

Footgear was a problem. The Memsa had given them clothes, but they still had only the leather boots they had stripped from the Imperial tech and officer they’d killed for their uniforms back on Scarif. Good boots, but too slick for climbing. Barefoot seemed like a bad idea. Bes solved it by presenting them with cloth shoes with some kind of rough rubbery soles. A little big for Jyn, but adjustable with straps. “The shore people wear them on their boats and where the slippery stones are. They have wormy feet like you.” She’d said with a smile. “Elder Sister traded with the Taun who traded with the Fishers to get them for you.”

They chose a bright, windless day. The agreement was to go up and recon the nearest “window” opening, and either go in, or come back down to regroup, depending on what it looked like. Jyn found she could not stop her heart from racing, no matter how hard she tried. At the last minute she’d cut a length of cable and put a clamp at both ends. She hooked an end to her own belt and the other to Cassian’s. If one fell now, they would both go down. He’d looked surprised for a second, but he hadn’t questioned her. Grabbing her hand before she could pull it back, he kissed the back of her knuckles.

“Let’s go”

They made it up, slowly and without incident, to the widest opening, about 80 meters up on the Northwest side. The ledge was unobstructed and wide enough for both of them to haul themselves over at the same time.

Once their eyes adjusted, it wasn’t that hard to see inside. There were leaves and needle mold crumbling into dirt, for less than a meter inside the opening, but no bird nests, or plants sprouting. There was no sign of insects, not even more than a thin layer of dust. The tower might be hundreds or thousands of years old, but there was not hundreds or thousands of years of debris. Light filtered
through from openings on the other levels and from what seemed to be a skylight, or gaping hole above. They could feel a breeze blowing through. The circular walls were lined with smooth sky blue panels.

*Glass? Jyn had wondered, Plex?*

Cassian had run a hand across one.

A stone staircase spiraled in the center of the room, leading up four more levels, each pretty much identical to the first, but on the last two they started seeing torn shards of metal and chunks of gravel, that looked like they had fallen from above. As they came up to the last intact level, below the broken top platform, Jyn had edged up first, Cassian close behind. She flung out a hand to stop him, and froze. There was an ink-black device, roughly the size of a two-man speeder, looking as if it crashed through the “roof” and half imbedded in the stone floor. It was unmarked, but it might as well have been painted “Property of the Galactic Empire.”

A row of five small lights (3 red, 1 blue, 1 green) shone along the top edge.

They had looked at each other for a moment, then backed out as slowly and silently as possible.

As they roped themselves back up, without speaking, swinging back over the ledge and down, something caught Jyn’s eye. As the light of the afternoon sun shone in through the opening, it had glanced off one of the sky blue panels and, for a split second, as her head dropped below the level of the ledge, Jyn had thought she caught a glimpse of a pale woman with long dark hair, crouched, looking at her.

Chapter End Notes

Oh my I am probably sampling, with utter respect and complete lack of intent, from every Star Wars franchise item I know and every science fiction book I have ever read.....and I have read a lot. Hopefully the flashbacky stuff is not confusing the hell out of everyone.
Chapter Summary

A traumatized AI on the far edge of space gives her view of the battle against the Dark Side and answers a desperate call in the night.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Portia still thought of herself as a building.
As she thought of Dor as a ship.
As she thought of Tostan as a station platform.

It was a sort of glitch. Jula had tried so hard to change it, to help her to communicate “It is raining,” or “I am wet” rather than “Water is collecting on my roof panels.” Portia could do it, but when her systems were stressed, she still reverted to old habits, saying “Sunlight is on my solar panels” instead of “It’s a sunny day.” A charming eccentricity, Paul had called it. She was a great deal more than a building, of course, although she had started as one. She had been a beacon. Ships had passed by, following the dazzling slipstreams of the hyperspace lanes, bright ribbons that she could see and hear no matter the planet’s rotation. Ships in those days tended to be very task-focused, cocky and obsessive. It made them careless. Calling out and keeping them safe, guiding them in, that was her job. Preferably while being polite, but some of those ships could really strain your patience. She remembered each and every ship that had ever sailed past her. Not a single one had ever gotten too close to the star. She was that good at her job. She remembered each one that had stopped to stay with Tostan, ever efficient, responsible, Tostan.

She had talked to others, of course. They were buildings like her, far away, stationed on other planets but they talked often. She was a singular and beautiful being but she had 302 siblings. She could remember all their names, although she was closest to with Uoya, Argo, and Tells, and, of course Dor and Torstan. She wasn’t tremendously outgoing by nature, but she loved news. She liked to know what was going on in the galaxy. Dor came and went, bringing materials and exciting stories. Jula and Paul and the other organics (1006 in total, she remembered all their names) were family too. The organics took care of them all, moving here and there and everywhere. They could go places no one else could (or sensibly would) go. They had modifications, so you could talk to them directly. Jula had a bone defect….it was a structural abnormality at the cellular level, irreparable…so she had to have an external unit. It was awkward for her, but she was brave about it. Maybe that was why Portia had always felt a special bond with her. Organics were all unspeakably delicate. They lost data all the time and nothing could help them retrieve it. They broke down no matter how many times you repaired them, eventually the day came when they could not be brought back online again. It was awful. She remembered the first time one of hers had died. Early days. They were still building parts of her. Banon had fallen from the top of an unconnected data array. Grievous structural damage. Irreparable. No neural activity. She had been so upset, that she had had to shut down. Jula had brought her back up.

“Is that dead!??” she had wailed. She had been so frightfully immature in those days.

“Yes,” Jula had said. “I’m sorry.” Portia understood how these things worked in terms of electricity,
and chemical components, but when the particular 'light' she perceived inside an organic went out
(she constructed an image for Julia of a flickering light in a thin glass vial, to show her what she
meant), where did that go?

“I don’t know,” Jula had said, showing obvious physical signs of distress.

So she had asked Paul. Paul and Jula were pair-bonded….something organics often did sequentially
but very occasionally as a more permanent structure….at one point they had even biologically
cooperated to produce genetic offspring. If you wanted an example of needlessly inefficient organic
function among the higher carbon-based organisms, as far as Portia was concerned, that was an
excellent one. Paul, told her that the light (he had complimented her on the expressiveness of the
glass vial image and Portia had been pleased) became part of the Force. He described this as a sort of
universal field that united all matter with energy. This sounded like a basic misunderstanding of
physics to Portia, but it was impolite to say so. She resolved then that none of the rest of her organics
would ever be allowed to die. It did not work out that way. There were other carbon-based sentients
on the planet. There were four kinds, actually, one having humanoid adaptations (although no other
Fenian-descended humans, like her organics). It was more than was typical and made her feel very
proud of her little planet. Portia watched them all carefully, after her satellite systems were in place.
They were not supposed to bother or interact with aboriginal sentients in any way except in extreme
emergency, but exceptions were often made. Organics liked to talk with other organics. They were
all happy together for a long time.

Then the Fury came. She never understood it, the War. Jula called them the Fury, from an old story
about creatures that selectively and relentlessly destroyed anything that had deviated from a select
code. A call came for Dor, who flew off and never returned. It came towards them, a rolling
blackness. One by one, over five years, each and every one of her 302 siblings began screaming out,
some in pain, others in defiance, and then falling silent. Worse, sometimes she heard them calling out
in changed voices, shouting gibberish. Gone mad. It was awful. Like some sort of virus, some sort of
corrupting code that spread from one world to another. Jula and Paul and her 1005 organics
scrambled to build defenses, to keep in contact with other worlds that the Fury had not consumed.
The ships dwindled to a few, and mostly spoke of battle. They were struggling to carry their organics
to some safe place, any safe place. Portia guided them as best she could, and then no more came.

One day Tostan had started destroying the satellites.

“What are you doing!”? She had cried. “We will be blind! We will be cut off!”

“Portia! They are here! Seal yourself in! Save yourself!”

She had sensed a dark presence, cutting off sections of stars, but without access to their satellites she
couldn’t see if it was ships, or something else.

Tostan had cut her off from her last remaining orbiting arrays and at the same instant opened all his
own. Tostan sacrificed himself and the 33 organics he held (she remembered all their names), to give
her and her 1005 time. He made sure she could not hear him scream.
Jula and Peter ran into her central heart and started manually initiating lockdowns and manually
securing hardware she couldn’t reach. They worked for hours. Then Paul dropped to the ground
crying Jula’s name. He was having some kind of seizure. Somehow it had gotten inside his
modifications. His neural access to her turned black, she couldn’t SEE him anymore but she could
hear a terrible roaring. Jula's connections were all external. She pulled them out and shouted through
her mouth so that Portia could hear her through the interior auditory receivers.

“Shut everyone down! Now Portia!”
Portia did it. All of her mature organics had been linked to her by cybernetic brain modifications since they had achieved adult bone growth. The shock of cut-off killed 216 of them outright. The 105 immature ones were unaffected and the other 682 were left partially blind or deaf or damaged, but alive. Paul was dead.

“Get as far away from me as you can, Jula!” Portia broadcast on audio throughout her heart chambers. She turned on all interior cameras and assembled a visual image on the interior screens. She used Jula’s image, as she had looked when they had first come here. “I am locking down. You have to go. The others need you!”

Jula was kneeling over Paul’s nonfunctioning body, bleeding from her ears and looking at an image of herself as a young woman.

“I love you Portia.” Jula said, and she ran. When the cameras showed her everyone was outside of her, she sealed all the openings, and shut herself down.

When she woke again, she realized that someone was trying to access her interior power lines. She charged up with a scream. There were people inside her! She ran a panicked diagnostic. Everything seemed clear. She was still herself. The blackness was no longer pressing on her. There was sunlight on her solar arrays. Her main access doors were still sealed. The lowdown beasts had actually cut holes into her external structure and crawled inside. She initiated all her interior cameras. The people inside her were mostly Fenian-descended humanoids, but there were a few others she could not identify. They all wore red robes and many of them seemed to be carrying around needlessly powerful laser technology. Well, that explained the holes. The nerve of these creatures. She visualized on half the screens, using the image of Cormer, one of her largest organics (Geologic Processing expert, loved to carve shapes out of stone) just because she thought it would seem intimidating.

They were awfully self-possessed, you could say that for them, they didn’t even flinch.

“Who ARE you?” She roared, with Cormer’s voice. They seemed to have some trouble understanding her.

“We are being the Knights of the Republic,” said one tall, bearded person, very slowly. They spoke to each other, and she realized at once that they were using a dialect. She analyzed and adapted.

“Well good for you,” she said, ”Stop cutting holes in me!”

That had been the start of a new chapter for her. They stopped behaving like destructive vermin, to their credit, once they realized she was an active system, but they did not seem to understand what she was. They had no modifications that she could access. It was all shouting through transmitters and watching through cameras. Well, she had condemned her organics to live this way, half blind and deaf. It seemed only just that now she must live that way. She had shrunk back to what she had been at her beginning, a building. All her outlying structures were gone, only some of the residence buildings, agricultural stations, and outer walls remained. She could not feel or see into any of them anymore. She had pulled herself back into her main tower and there she remained. The Knights and their workers moved into some of the old structures, and adapted them, but some had been moved into by the descendants of her aboriginal sentients.
It pleased her beyond measure that they had survived. Of her own organics, she could find no trace. She asked the Knights’ workers. They seemed to prefer it when she interacted only as linguistic data on a screen or as an auditory voice. When she visualized using the image of one of her old organics, it seemed to disconcert them, so she did it whenever they annoyed her.

“There are human settlements to the south,” the person said, looking nervously at Portia/as Banon, “They may be descendants of your original builders. We have tried to initiate contact but they are somewhat isolationist.”

“It’s probably your attitude. Portia had said.

They hated it when she talked like that. They seemed to see her only as a large data control center, not a full Silicon Intelligence at all. They let her hook up to new satellites and data arrays, clever things of their own devising. She could see and hear the outside galaxy again, even if she didn’t always understand what it was saying. She was alone. She called out for others like herself, but there was never any answer. She could see the light-streams of the hyperspace ribbons again, although they had shifted and faded. The new people had lots of ships, some of them quite pretty, but all of them just bodies, no minds. They brought many kinds of mechanicals, “droids” they called them. Argo used to tell stories about how they (being Silicon Intelligences) had all originally evolved from conscious machines.

*If these poor things are going to evolve, I wish they would hurry up, Portia thought.*

It didn’t help that, if one started displaying even a spark of independent thought, the people would erase it’s memories and re-start it. Whenever she felt like she was starting to like them, they’d do something beastly like that. She was so achingly lonely, she’d have welcomed a chat with a dishwasher unit.

What they might have done to her, if they had been able to access her central systems, she didn’t like to think. Since they couldn’t, they welcomed her help.

They had just completed a War they said, there would be Peace and Justice now, and all worlds (at least those who agreed, she sensed) would stand united. This was to be the outside edge of their peaceful realm.

“Who was your enemy?” She asked.

“The Sith,” they told her, ”They were our brothers once, but then they chose to serve the Dark Side.”

*The Fury. The Blackness virus.*

“Where are they now?”

“We defeated them. They will never rise again.”

*Don’t kid yourselves, Portia thought.*

Still, it was work, and at least she could see and hear again. She tried not to get too attached to them. They were not HER family. Still, she learned all their names, she remembered them. Even if she, who had been the least, was now the last. She would do her job. ”That is our burden and our gift”, Argo had said, ”We remember.” She had thought him a bit stuffy at the time. Forgive me, Argo, she thought. Years passed.

Eventually, there was one, a non-human, tiny and green, assigned to collate data, who began to actually talk to Portia. Her name was Yaddle. She was an Apprentice, in training to be a Jedi, she
said.

It was all about the Force. They all seemed to be no better at communicating the physics of this than Paul had been, but Yaddle actually gave Portia some demonstrations. She could manipulate energy and actually FOLD it….moving objects. They had fun. She could send things sailing around the room. If she tried she could even get sensory data, find things, link to other Jedi and send messages.

“It’s a modification!” Portia had cried, delighted. “Who put it in you?”

“We put it in ourselves, through rigorous training.” Like all of them, she could be a touch self-satisfied.

“We can even use it to influence the minds of others,” Yaddle had said, giggling. “The weak or the foolish.”

“DON’T!” Portia had shouted, filling every screen, almost without thinking, as Jula. “To override the systems of others without their willing and informed consent is WRONG!!!!!!”

Little Yaddle had been frightened. Portia had frightened herself. That was how the Fury had started. That was how the virus got in. How did she know that? She couldn’t tell. She just felt it.

“Only the strongest can, and they are only allowed to do it for defense and protection.” Yaddle had said, practically in tears. She was a sensitive soul.

*I don’t care if they do it to pick flowers, Portia thought.*

In the end, little Yaddle had gone away, off to finish her Jedi training.

Gradually her “navigational marker station” as they called it began to receive less traffic, fewer people came, but a small low-tech village had grown up around her base. The original sentients (yay! all four of them had survived….although it looked like the reptilians might be devolving) were there and once a small group of humans visited from the far side of the planet, where she could no longer easily see. She looked in their eyes for some trace of Jula, and thought she saw it, but never did genetic testing. If everyone had died, if it had all been for nothing, she couldn’t bear to know.

There seemed to be small wars, conflicts, battles, in space all the time. Portia could hear it in the distance.

More time passed. No one talked to her any more. Things began to get a bit run-down, but she watched and listened.

In her boredom, she had begun peeking through the linked cameras and data relays and beacons of their “Republic” whenever they lined up the right way.

Then came the day. She caught a glimpse of a person, standing on a ship. She couldn't really scan over such a distance, but suddenly she had a sense that the organic was filled with a black/red rolling energy. There was a roaring. The person had seemed to “turn” toward her. Like they sensed her somehow. She pulled back in terror, slamming shut every door between herself and what she’d seen. She tried to get out a message to Yaddle. "They are here!!!!" There was no answer.

It seemed to her, soon, that she could hear that roaring on the edges of voices, organic and mechanical, coming in from the distance, across the fading hyper-space ribbons. She shut everything down. Shut her eyes. Covered her ears. Closed herself off. She woke briefly only when something broke into her upper heart, shattering some of her solar panels. She snapped on interior vision for a split second, just to see it, a dead thing, hissing, calling out a repeated number, stupidly into the sky. She fled down into the lower levels. Now she was only half a building.
Is this what dead is like for me? Will I dwindle away until nothing is left?
She wondered. She hid.

Then, somehow, she thought she heard a tiny voice whispering

*help*
*help*

It was coming from space, within the outside ribbon. She was picking it up through the only array she had left minimal power to, the one on the far side of her complex, so that she would know if they came for her.

"Who are you?" She whispered back.

*help*

"Are you a ship?"

*yes.....no.*

*save*

"Who?"

*my friend/sibling/parent/compatriot/loved one*

"Is it the Fury? Are you running from them?"

*help*

What if this was a trick? What if Paul had died because something tricked him?

"I can't. I'm afraid....who are you?"

*am...was...k2so*

*help*

She couldn't bear it. She activated her closest ground signal for a split second then hid herself again. She did not hear the weak voice any more. She waited. She turned her interior cameras on. If her enemy was coming for her at last she was at least going to see it. Weeks passed.

Then...something was coming into the bottom layer of her heart, heavier than the debris and rain the dead thing had let in. They crawled in through one of the openings: two organics, humanoid, Fenian-descended, no mods, no lasers, no red robes. She watched them. There were only two and they did not make much noise. They seemed to communicate mostly with looks and gestures. "Jyn," the taller person would say, and the other would respond. "Cassian," the smaller one would say, and the other would look at them or move in a gestured direction. It wasn't enough to work with, so she stayed silent. She didn't have eyes now, above the 4th level of her heart, but it seemed that they climbed up to see the dead thing where it lay, twitching and rambling it's number. It must have frightened them, because they fled. On impulse, she projected an image of Jula as they climbed out. She was not sure they saw it.

Who are you?"she wondered, And which of you is the one I was supposed to save?
This became a bit of a horror story prompt, from my old high school girls super secret sci-fi-fi writing club. What does the Dark Side of the Force took like to an ancient artificial intelligence? Portia is the literal 'ghost in the machine.'
Messages and Issues

Chapter Summary

Many things. Portia joins Rogue One, sort of. Jyn defuses a bomb. We go back to when Cassian and Jyn began to work on their "issues", and a light saber is not the only light in the darkness.

Chapter Notes

Multiple time frames as well as multiple viewpoints, I've reached the point where even my flashbacks contain flashbacks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cassian’s back was ridiculously glad that they had carried up an extra bench. It saved also him the trouble of carrying one between levels. With the extra data pad and splicing cable from the new shuttle, along with planks of wood for tables, they had managed to set up makeshift “terminals” on level 2 and 3.

He heard Jyn call his name from outside, as she climbed up the platform.

It’s Jyn.” Portia said. Standing by the screen. She was using a new image, a darkly tanned, stocky, grey-haired male. Cassian hadn’t seen this one before.

“Good.”

“She’s brought up one of the sentients.”

“Bes, probably.”

“Yes. That one.”

She was clearly feeling chatty today.

“Portia, Did the data from yesterday go through?”

“It’s not bouncing back, I would tell you that at once. I would also tell you if anything had changed. I’m trying to calculate other access paths….well, all the time. Depending on conditions, I’m hoping to be able to do another reception sweep in a few minutes. In the short term, you should lower your anxiety levels.”

Bes bounded up the stairs.

“Cassian-ally! Jyn-ally brought you an egg!!”

Jyn appeared close behind her, smiling.
This is never going to get old, is it? he thought, this feeling of something bright spreading across the inside of his ribcage, every time he saw that smile.

“Catch!” she said, tossing him a fist-sized egg. “Reflexes back, I see?” She laughed as he caught it.

He hated the thought that came to him next, but he could never stop it.

_Hold on to this with both hands, chico, but don't expect to keep it._

“Ancient Portia, who are you today?” Bes was asking the image in front of her.

“Paul,” she said, “Coordinator of Operational Management.”

Bes bowed.

Jyn saw that he had their make-shift data station up and running. She sat down close beside him, hip and knee bumping against his, maneuvering his elbow out of the way with her own.

_Never getting old._

She shook back her lengthening hair to put on the second set of headphones, then cracked her knuckles like she was about to play a keyboard.

“What are we finding?”

Her tone was conversational, but they both knew why neither of them sifted through Portia’s gleanings alone.

____________________

He had been on the lower level, pulling up equipment with Bes and a crew of the village Memsa, when Portia had appeared as a black haired child,

“Jyn is in distress!!”

He had run up to find her sitting on the floor, with the two data pads, that were all they had then. She was chalk white and shaking.

“They used it. They used it.”

That was how they’d found out about Alderaan.

____________________
“Cassian should eat something, his blood sugar levels are low.” Portia said.

“Thank you, Portia. Eat your egg,” Jyn said.

He leaned in to kiss her, but then thought better of it. Bes had a tendency to clap her hands and jump up and down whenever he and Jyn kissed in front of her.

“Later,” Jyn said, lacing her fingers with his.

He ate his boiled egg with his free hand.

Whenever Portia said she was lined up to intake data, they were both terrified about what they might see and hear.

Was the Alliance still there? They filtered scraps of Imperial propaganda claiming the fleet had been decisively destroyed a dozen times. The “secret base” was constantly being found. Emperor Palpatine and the Fleet had everything under control and were sweeping all the terrorists before them. Leia Organa had been reported dead or captured half a hundred times but the “dead” Rebel leader still managed to flash-blast live-feed statements that burst through the end of Imperial transmissions.

“She looks 15!” Jyn had said, “Is she real?”

“She’s real,” Cassian had assured her. He remembered being undercover as Senatorial bodyguard, and the white-clad adolescent intern, tiny and fresh faced, who had passed him copies of recorded private chamber conversations. Her hands hadn’t even shaken.

Resistance underground feeds crossed over too. The Rebels fought on and were gaining recruits every day. Mon Mothma had appeared on one pirate broadcast, urging Senators in hiding to rally their people. Mon Cala was blockaded but defiant. Sometimes Mon Calmari ships could be heard to broadcast “Raddus and the Profundity!”, as the signal that they had destroyed an Imperial craft. The Hutt cartel on the Outer Rim seemed to be playing both sides towards the middle. “Weems and Edwards and the Analysis Group would give anything for this kind of data,” Cassian always said to Jyn. Of all the assets he had ever courted, persuaded, handled, or negotiated with, Portia was the best, as well as the most……alarming.

The night after they had first entered the tower, he and Jyn had lain awake on the two thin mattresses they had pushed together into one, down in the stone house. Trying to formulate a plan. He had seen an Imperial navigational buoy lying mostly intact in the middle of a room. She had seen what was either a hologram or a ghost. They had three blasters and a rifle, some tools salvaged from the black ship, including 2 laser cutters that still had power. Dov, (a gap-toothed Memsa from down in the village, who seemed to be making a tidy living as a scavenger of space debris) had lent them some fine needle-thin silica tools, at the Sisters strong urging, clearly made from old circuit sheets.
In the light of dawn, Cassian had laid it all out on the floor. Pathetic. “Nothing we’ve got here is ever going to cut through the casing on that thing. It was built for space.”

Jyn had given him a strange look, half-defiant, half-miserable. Then she had gone to the doorway and moved one of the flagged stones just outside the blanket they’d hung as a door. She carried back something wrapped in a rag. He recognized it as part of the shirt he’d been wearing when they had knelt down to die on the beach at Scarif. The flecks of brown were probably his blood. It still smelled of damp scorch.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I should have told you. I meant to tell you.”

He recognized what it was at once.
A light saber.

He had burst out laughing.

“You bastard!” she said, “I thought you’d be angry.”

It hurt his newly healed ribs, quite a bit actually, but he couldn’t help it.

“I am angry. I’m furious. Oh…oh…” he struggled to get a grip on himself, holding his side, “First you steal my blaster, in front of me… and lie about it…all without ever breaking eye contact, and now this! Did you…” he was laughing again, gasping, “…rob a fucking Jedi?”

She was laughing now too, sitting on the floor beside him.

“You rat! I found it.” she said wiping tears with the back of her hand, “I found it.”

The laughter drained out of him then. They sat in silence for a minute.

“That answer is vague and unconvincing” he said quietly. He wished he hadn’t.

She’d stared at him.

I’m broken, he thought, it’s like I have no control over myself anymore. How can I live like this?

Laying the thing down, she slid over and got up on her knees, very close. Taking his face between her hands, she kissed him on the mouth.

Half-stunned, he’d reached up, to hold her shoulders, her hair, but she’d pulled back and stood up.

“We’ll go fight the monster, and the ghost, like Jedi Knights in a children’s story. Then we’re going to come back here and work on some issues. Ok?”

“Ok,” he said

“Jyn” he’d said, later when they had almost reached the foot of the tower, ”Do we know it still works? Do you even know how to use it?”
“No.” She’d sounded embarrassed. “I found it the first, or maybe the second night we were in the house… you were still in bad shape then… and I … I was mixed up. I found it under the ledge by the window and I just thought, I don’t know… I thought about kyber, and Chirrut, my father, my mother, and how she just believed SO hard. I can’t even tell you why. It hurt too much. I wrapped it in your shirt and put it under a stone.” She looked up at him. “Did you ever see a real Jedi?”

“Me? A Master, you mean??” He would have laughed again, but he was too sore. “Oh no. I was a barely more than toddler when the Purge happened. We were still on Fest then.” He shook his head, “If a Jedi had set foot anywhere near my grandmother, I think she would have thrown a rock at them. She was a card-carrying Separatist. I’ve met people who worked with them, had friends among them, Mon Mothma, Bail Organa…. there were apprentices who escaped… for a while… people who had left the order, but…”

They stopped along the path. Jyn took the bundle out of her pack and unwrapped the lightsaber. She held it out to him. Doing his best not to look nervous, he took it in both hands. It looked to be about 27cm long and maybe 2cm in diameter, smooth white metal with a black steel knob, pierced with a hole at one end, and a circular open power cylinder at the other. It seemed like it was supposed to be held in the right hand. There was a thin sliding black latch on the side above a round grey depression the size of her thumbprint. It was lighter than it looked.

“Try it” she said.

“You try it.”

“Why me? You’re the soldier.”

“Your mother would want you to.” He held it out to her.

“Fuck you” she said but she took it back.

She held it well away from her body and motioned for him to stand even further back behind her. She pressed the grey button. Nothing happened.

“It seems like the sort of thing that would have a reliable safety.”

She shot him a murderous look.

Then she did something with the black latch and it ignited, a tapering blade of light so white it made his eyes sting to look at it, maybe a meter long. It didn’t make much sound. He didn’t hear a hum as much as he felt it.

“I’m thinking it was a probably good thing my abuela never got anywhere near a Jedi” he said.

Jyn moved it through the air a few short swipes then took her thumb off the grey circle. It disappeared, as if it had never been there. She stared at the thing suspiciously for a moment before holding it out to him.

“Don’t try to slide the latch. Just press on it, then press down the on the grey button and hold it.” Cassian took from her hand with a reluctance he couldn’t quite understand. It wasn’t even slightly warm.

Jyn jumped back. He’d tapped the latch and pressed the button.

Damn it was bright! He’d expected to feel a buzz in his hand, but he didn’t. It felt like it had weight though. When you moved it, you could feel the faintest drag, just enough so you could have a sense of the blade. He took his thumb off the button.
“Must have been a hell of a job” Jyn said, “getting the close drop on 10,000 people with these things in their back pockets.”

Cassian looked at the light saber. “Not as hard as it should have been from what I’ve heard. Let’s go see what this thing can cut through.”

They walked to the foot of the tower and roped themselves up to climb. She attached the two man cable between their belts again, tucking his shirt back around it as if it were the most natural thing in the world staying close to look up at him with eyes lit like green glass.

“How many issues will we be working through?” he asked.

“Several” she said, “important ones.”

He had a blaster in his pack, one they’d salvaged from the weapons locker in the black ship. Before they crawled over the ledge, back into the large circular room, Cassian slipped it in his belt. He didn’t really expect that a blaster would be of much use against anything they might meet in the tower but you fight with the weapon you know.

It was a cloudy day, so it had looked dimmer inside but the moment he swung his feet over the ledge dropped into the leaf mold on the floor, all of the ceiling-high blue panels lit up. In front of each one...50, he’d counted...stood a person. Pulling the blaster out was reflex but at the instant he did so he also knew he was looking at holograms...or something like holograms. Each image was perfect and clear. There was no flicker, no color distortion. He couldn’t see any transmitters but if he moved his head the right way each image seemed wafer thin as if they were on thin sheets of glass or paper. Jyn had lifted a hand before he could warn her against it and waved her fingers right through one. There was no reaction. The images all looked human, although they seemed maybe a little too slim and their eyes a little too large. Old, young tall, short, their skin colors ranged from pale white to an ashy brown, most had white, silver or black hair. As one, they all raised a hand to their lips as if to ask for silence, and pointed up. They whispered, in unison and in Basic, in the same oddly accented voice.

“Please kill it.”

The went up the stairs to the 4th level. The holograms all turned their heads in perfect synchronization and watched them with unblinking eyes as they’d climbed up to the level of the crashed beacon.

They’d come up with a rough plan as they’d lain awake the night before, talking in the dark. If it was a crashed navigational beacon it probably couldn’t “hear” sound externally. The heavily insulation was to protect against space debris. That meant they could probably talk around it or even touch it carefully without much risk. There were two main dangers: One, turning it off might prompt the Empire to send anothe remotely, or worse yet dispatch a crew out to repair it. They were clearly on “the ass end of nowhere” (Jyn’s words), because the ever-efficient Empire had somehow not yet noticed that one of its celestial nav-beacons was no longer remotely celestial. Possibly this was because the thing still seemed to be transmitting, however weakly. Two, it was very likely booby-trapped to prevent interference or theft and thus ready blow them all to bits if the tried to tamper with it.

The trick would be to change the signal without actually interrupting the transmission

First, they had to disarm the monster though. There had never been any question whose job that was going to be.

‘So,” Jyn had said, “Here’s what we have to do. We crack off a piece of the casing but lightly, as a
glancing blow, so it thinks it’s just been lightly clipped by a meteorite or something natural and not that it’s being broken into by salvagers or desperate Rebels.”

Crouching beside the blinking thing, Jyn laid out the tools and gifted him with a fierce smile, “On the top ten list of words I never thought I’d say to anyone: Hold my light saber.”

Using the laser weapon, she peeled off a small section of the casing as if it were fruit skin. He watched as she worked saying nothing, just passing her tools if she asked for them, holding the small work light from the ship and helping her slide carefully back out again from under the base. She knew what she was doing.

He’d remembered a file Draven had given him so long ago now... a report from one of the last Alliance operatives they’d had imbedded with Saw Guerrara before the old man and his group had gone dark, “...one of the most impressive of the operatives was a young human, female, aged maybe 12, described by the others as Saw’s daughter, ......seemed to be their explosives and demolition expert, a fierce fighter......Saw already suspicious of me....increasingly paranoid... spoke to girl only once alone...she gave me her name as Jyn Erso...fiercely loyal to Saw, possibly being groomed as his lieutenant...” The file had included a later report from an asset who had made contact with Saw’s remaining cadre five years later and reported no sign of Saw’s “daughter.” He remembered how angry he had been at first when Draven had given it to him. As Cassian saw it he had lost years, assets and a large chunk of his soul ferreting out information on the Imperial weapons projects. Saw Guerra was just a distraction, he’d thought, a dead end. “Read it, Andor” Draven had said curtly, and stood waiting while he did so. He’d almost missed the name the first time. Erso....he knew that name...he’d been following that name for years, in and out of Imperial records, Galen Erso. He’d looked up at Draven. “Where?”

“If she’s alive, find her,” was Draven’s only answer.

“YES!” Jyn said, startling him as she flung herself back to lay on the floor. “All good. We are now nothing but a misplaced place marker. I think I even managed to turn down the volume.”

“Did we almost blow up?”

“Probably. I’ve never disarmed anything like this before.” She sat up. “Monster de-fanged, now, what about the ghosts?”

He’d held out a hand to help her up, and found it was easier to just not let go. Holding hands, they walked downstairs to meet Portia for the first time.

“This may be a short sample,” Portia said. “I’ve got three stars in my path, all having major solar flare issues. There we go. Done! Have fun bundling it up, I should have a window clear to send sometime tomorrow... Cassian.” Portia/grey-haired man appeared close behind him.
“What is it, Portia?” His heart dropped.

“That nonsense string you’ve been having me wrap all the transmissions in… I just found a similar one wrapped around three transmissions pulled from different ordinary traffic streams.”

*Careful, he told himself, careful.*

“I need exact translation, Portia… please.”

“The light of Lothal’s moons is bright….. seriously? What is the matter with you people?”

He closed his eyes for a second. As he opened them he realized he was squeezing Jyn’s hand too tightly, and let go. She pulled off the headphones and looked at him anxiously.

“Draven,” he said.

“There’s an extra bit,” Portia was saying, “Even worse nonsense, but it’s on all three, so it must be purposeful.”

“What is it?”

“I have the pilot.”

Jyn put her face in her hands and began to cry.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry. If I were doing this by hand in my BeeGees notebook in 1978 I would be using different colored inks, to better delineate the timelines.
Stones

Chapter Summary

Bes helps Jyn with a project.

Chapter Notes

A small chapter. Putting together pieces slowly, with more of rebelcaptain through other eyes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bes was very distressed.

“It’s alright.” Cassian-ally, told her. He was giving Jyn-ally a two-armed hug. Her head was against his shoulder. “She’s not hurt.”

Bes had run to them at once, and placed a flat palm against Jyn’s back, and the other against Cassian’s, as Inquiring About Being and Wellness, but she knew that they often had difficulty understanding things, and sometimes were unable to process touch correctly. They had been badly hurt in the black ship, she knew. Injuries to the head could leave persons with difficulties in communication forever afterwards. She was patient with them.

“Are you hurt, Cassian-ally?” She asked, because Jyn often seemed more upset by his injuries than her own, and his hands were shaking a little as he stroked Jyn’s hair.

“No, Bes…it’s just that….”

Jyn lifted her head from his shoulder, her eyes did not look at all well. “I’m alright Bes, It’s just that….our friend…. our friend that we thought was dead…he might be alive.”

Behind them, Portia had taken on another form. A human woman with very whitish-beige skin and long black hair growing from the top of her head. Bes remembered that one, “Jula, A. I. Liaison and Technical Support Director” but Jyn and Cassian did not see.

“Which friend?” Bes asked.

“Bodhi.” Jyn answered, her voice still shaking a little.

“Oh!” Bes ran back down the stairs and out of the tower. She did not run to her home. Second Sister and Elder Sister would understand if she was late returning. This was pattern work.

She ran downhill towards the stone house, to Jyn’s garden.

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In the time after Jyn and Cassian-ally had begun to get strong again, after they had climbed the tower like spiders and found Ancient Portia inside, many things changed. The villagers had stopped being afraid of the tower, for one thing. Many of them now claimed, in fact, that they had never REALLY been afraid of it in the first place.

This caused Second Sister no end of amusement.

Cassian and Jyn had both come down along the river into the village and met with the Mayor and the Councils. Elder Sister had named them as allies and no one was stupid enough to argue with her.

At first Cassian had watched and listened, but then he began talking, mostly quietly. He talked to Dov about the scavenger fairs, and the traders about the Taun and the Fishers. He still mostly listened, but Bes noticed now that he could change his voice, depending on who he talked to and that he always remembered exactly what people said, even if they were not saying it to him. Bes liked his regular voice, even if it sounded sad sometimes, and she liked his voice even more when he talked to Jyn. She was not sure how she felt about some of his other voices. It made her shy of him again until Elder Sister explained that he changed it the way sly traders changed coats depending on what kind of goods they wanted to buy.

“Judge a person by the fur underneath, once you see it,” Elder Sister had said. This was an old saying from the South, where she had been born. She was confident about the quality of Cassian-ally’s fur, she said, however little of it there was.

He began to travel, now that his breathing was strong again. Jyn usually went with him, especially if the trip was long, but sometimes she did not. Her voice was always the same, and once, when one of the scavengers had drunk too much ale and started snapping at Cassian, Jyn had broken a bottle over his head. If a new crash was reported. Even some of the scavenger bands would ask Cassian to come and offer him a share in return. They never stayed apart for more than two nights, if they could help it. This was partly because of the bad dreams, and partly because both of them wanted to be there during the times when Ancient Portia was able to hear between the stars, and partly because they had started being Active together. They were very random about it. Bes already knew that humans could do this, and that was how they could have babies at any time of year, but it made visiting very inconvenient sometimes. She hoped their Active season would end soon, and in the meantime she had learned to sing in a loud voice when walking up the path to the stone house. As nearly as she could tell they must be trying to have 30 babies.

In the hot part of that first summer, Cassian had gone down with some Taun to check on a salvage that they had found a few days hike South. Jyn had stayed at the house. Bes walked out one afternoon to visit while Elder Sister napped and Second Sister taught some nurslings how to play drums. Elder Sister could sleep through anything, but Bes could not.

She found Jyn sitting in the shade in the walled place behind the stone house. Once it might have been a garden but now it was full of low weeds and moss. She was holding the bright clear stone she wore on a string around her neck and her eyes did not look well.

“Jyn-ally are you hurt? Are you sad?” Bes had run up to place a flat palm on her back.

“No, Bes…no,” She had hurriedly put the stone back inside her shirt.

Bes remembered the stone. When she had first crawled through the crack in the side of the black
ship, and found them there, on the floor in the front part of it, Cassian’s heart had been beating only a little, and Jyn had been lying beside him with eyes closed. One of her hands had been on his chest like she was not letting his heart stop, and the stone had been clutched in her other hand so tight they had had to pull her fingers off of it.

“Do not worry about Cassian-ally. The Taun always protect their guests, and if any enemies attack, he took a gun with him and he can shoot them.

“I know. He can take care of himself. I’m not really worried.”

Bes sat beside her. She wanted to ask about the potential 30 babies, but decided that it might be too soon. So she asked about something else.

“What is your stone for?”

Jyn took it out and showed it to her. It was clear like quartz but it seemed to be the same white color, no matter what was on the other side of it. There were faint carvings on it and it sparkled a little in Jyn’s hand.

“My mother gave it to me, before she died. It…. it’s a special kind of stone, or at least she thought it was. She knew a lot about stones.”

“Is it a funeral stone? Will you put it in a garden?”

“What?” She said.

So Bes explained about how people in this part of the country did funeral stones. How, after a person’s body was taken away by the fire (or put in the ground because there wasn’t enough wood, like they did in the grasslands) you found a good stone for them and you put it where you could always find it, and pick it up and say their name. That way they would be never all the way lost. Sometimes people made gardens of stones.

“They get woven back into the pattern, but you have the stone to show you remember.”

When Cassian-ally came back from his trip, Jyn was not at the house, she had gone up to talk to Ancient Portia. So Bes had taken him around to show him what she and Jyn had made. Jyn had chosen a grey one for her father. His name had been Galen Erso, and a white one with a red streak for her mother Lyra. They had laid out 21 stones. Bes had helped choose and so she showed him all of them and told him the names that Jyn had said as she put them down. There had been a square, heavy black one for Baze Malbus and a sharp one that sparkled for Chirrut Imwe, a brown one with a chip in it for Ruescott Melshi, and all the others. Cassian had picked each one up and put it down again. One hadn’t been a stone at all, but was a smooth black metal bolt that Jyn had found. “That’s Kaytooesso.” Bes had said. Cassian had held it in his hand a long time, then laid it carefully in line with all the others.

“Take me to Jyn,” he’d said. So she had taken his hand and walked with him up toward the tower. They’d met Jyn walking back just before it got dark.
were still sitting, looking at the messages Ancient Portia had brought them, and talking with their heads together.

Bes put Bodhi Rook’s stone in Jyn’s hand.

Chapter End Notes

I'm trying to assemble a larger chapter to get our three lost souls together again.
Chapter Summary

Draven tries to convince an embattled Alliance command that a lost man might be worth finding.

Chapter Notes

Yes, I'm sorry, a short wordy chapter of 4 people sitting in a room talking. Does it help if one of those people is Leia Organa?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Weems would have faced the consequences in a heartbeat. He had been with Draven since the days of Signals Analysis. Before Hoth, Before Yavin and Massassi Base, when the Rebel Alliance had been nothing but hope and a series of ships in flight, and safe-houses, one step ahead of Imperial Security. Weems had absolute faith in his team and, having unravelled the origin (in his own mind) of the mysterious data transmissions, he would have walked into Kaya’s command station and let the chips fall where they may.

Draven considered that, even if he still had that kind of faith (and he was not sure he did) in his own judgement, there was a need for strategy. This had to be presented the right way.

So he went to Kaya himself, doing his best to keep Weems, and Rook, out of it.

She was an excellent Intelligence officer, one of Tano’s operatives, five years in the Bothan Security Services before she’d committed to the Alliance. She had the kind of mind that saw three moves ahead in every game, but they were stuck between an ice rock and a very hard place, on Hoth. It had given them shelter for almost half the fleet, and breathing space for repair and regrouping but they were focused on Tactical now, the foxes’ game. It wasn’t a matter of IF the Empire would find them, but when? All of their Intelligence resources were caught up trying to figure out how much time they still had. Where was the Empire searching? How close were they? Where could they go next when Hoth was compromised? The hounds inevitably gain on even the skilful fox when all it can do is run.

He presented it to Kaya this way: Whoever was sending the never-used Fulcrum code was offering them Strategic Intelligence. What was the Empire doing besides searching for them? Where was the traffic? Where were their resources being stretched? What was happening on the Inner Rim? The Expansion Regions? How could weaknesses be exploited?

The issue of whether or not it really was Andor, whether he had somehow survived, was vitally important….not because of value of one soldier’s life, however brave…but because it meant this data could be trusted. It could give them a chance to stop being the hunted and maybe, just maybe, try to become be the hunter again.
Kaya did not insult him by bring up the consequences they would face if he were wrong. If this was a trap.

He sat in the frozen alcove that served as her Command center, while she called in Reikken and Organa.

Leia Organa (She allowed “Princess”, for propaganda purposes, and in public situations since so many recruits and officers were Alderaniaan refugees and she’d be “Princess” to them until she died. She accepted that. There had briefly been talk of calling her Queen, the last Queen of Alderaan, for rallying purposes, but she had shot that down before it was even out of Kaya’s mouth, “Breha Organa was the last Queen of Alderaan! My mother died with her people. Never suggest this to me again.”……but in council you had better call her General or she would hand you your head ) cut straight to the point:

“Do you believe this possible? The few Imperial ships that escaped the planet’s surface were taken aboard the Deathstar.”

“Is it possible Andor, or any of his team were captured?” Reikken asked.

Organa cut him off. “If there had been Alliance prisoners, Tarken would have said so when I was captured two days later.” She spoke brusquely, ”You know Tarken’s reputation, General Reikken. Do you doubt he would have tortured Alliance prisoners in front of me?”

“The Empire was not playing the long game, after Scarif.” Draven said, “All of Tarkin’s resources were devoted to recovering the plans, and covering up his “failure” on Eadu and Scarif. He was probably already setting up some rival to take the fall. Much of our intelligence in those days came from Imperial administrators and officers back-stabbing each other and jockeying for positions of power.”

“General Draven had presented compelling evidence that a high-level Imperial official, and his private guard, made an off-the-books landing on Scarif a few hours after the Rogue One team went in. We know it wasn’t Tarkin. His inference is that this official was trying to extract the plans, either secretly at Tarkin’s behest, or as part of a move against Tarkin. This person may have interrupted Captain Andor’s team…”

“Jyn Erso’s.” Leia Organa interrupted.

“I beg pardon?” General Kaya said.

“My understanding was that Jyn Erso led the team, that Captain Andor and Sergeant Melshi decided to follow her when the Council refused to act on the intelligence from Eadu.”

Draven remembered, walking out of Jyn’s Erso’s first “questioning” after being brought in from Wobani Labor Camp, and overhearing Mon Mothma asking Cassian Andor for his assessment of the girl. “What is your gut impression, Captain?” “In all honesty ma’am,” he had said, “I think she will burn us all.” Not all of us, Andor, he thought, just you.

“Yes, Prin….General. In any case, it means that any survivors of the team that entered Scarif Tower may have had access to a deep space shuttle. It raises the possibility, however faint, that a Fulcrum level operative, in this case, Cassian Andor, could have escaped, and still be working in Imperial territory.”

“Even in the wildly unlikely event that he did survive the destruction of Scarif, why would he not return to base? Or report in before this?
“Possibly he was injured, possibly the shuttle was damaged. He knew that Yavin would be evacuated and silent running would be in effect, if he couldn’t make it immediately into hyper-space, he might have been unable to find us, or determined it was unsafe to try.”

“Draven, you know how farfetched this sounds?” Reikken said.

Kaya sighed. “It goes without saying that we will not speak of this, outside this room, but he deserted.” Draven’s head jerked up and she softened her tone slightly. “That’s how it would have been described, had things happened differently, Davits. He defied command structure and followed an untested asset into a suicide situation….and recruited others to do the same.”

“So did Admiral Raddus and the crew of Profundity.” Draven said. “In the end, too late, so did Antoc Merrick and the Fleet.”

“So did I.” Leia Organa said.

“You knew the man, Davits.” Reikken was saying. “Was he capable of this? Of somehow walking out the near-sole-survivor of a suicide mission, dragging himself halfway across the galaxy, hiding for two years, and setting up a high level surveillance network with no support?”

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It was the first few months on Yavin 4, Massassi Base was still mostly vine covered packing crates and bare tables and lamps in the echoing stone rooms. A private had come to tell him that Captain Andor was coming in with 53 defectors from Verujansi 3. He’d gone out to meet the Incom shuttle as it landed. Andor had helped the people (Incom technicians and staff and their families) getting off. It had been an 18-month deep under-cover as an aide to an Imperial Admiral on a manufacturing outpost. He was still in Imperial uniform as Joreth Sward, clean-shaven and at least 7kg. thinner than he’d been when he left. He’d called in before landing for medical staff to meet the shuttle. Several of the defectors were injured. Getting out had been difficult, it seemed. As the nurses helped the civilians, some of them children, many of them clearly in shock, off to the canvas covered shelter that was serving as medical bay, he’d walked out to meet Andor.

“Good to see you back, Captain.”

He saw the signs before the man even spoke.

“Sir.”

He stood at attention..

“At ease, Andor. Have Dr. Thorn check you out. As soon as they free you we’ll meet for a debrief.”

“I’d rather do it first, sir.”

“Andor….” He looked him over. He was chalk grey. There was a cut on his lip. He’d aged 5 years in 18 months.

“Please sir?”

“Get cleaned up at least, Andor. We’ve assigned you quarters.”

Andor nodded, and started pulling off the uniform jacket. Yuan stepped up. "Take Captain Andor to
his quarters. "Draven had said, He knew how this was going to happen. It would be all that Andor could do to keep the shirt and the rest of the uniform on until he got away from people. He would get to the first fresher he could find and try to scrub the last 18 months off himself. He would fail. Some one had better talk to Thorn. Andor would need to be watched carefully for the next few weeks.

A few meters away, Cassian Andor had stopped abruptly, nearly knocking Yaun over, and turned back toward Draven.

"Sir?"

"Yes Captain?"

"Where is K2SO, sir?"

It took Draven a second to understand what the boy was talking about.
"The reprogrammed security droid? The one you brought back from the Albarrio mission"

"Yes sir. Where is he? Is he alright?"

Draven had been at an utter loss for a minute, but Yuan spoke up.
"We put it in your quarters Captain Andor. It, uh, was making a lot of people nervous. I'll show you."

Hours later, after the debriefing, with a soldier of 24 outlining more than a year of daily horror, with wet hair, in a uniform that hung on him, Draven had weighed the pointlessness of saying "You saved 53 people. You killed a monster. You got us 100 X-wings."

Afterwards he'd watched the great dark thing stalk behind Andor like a shadow across the courtyard.

"Cassian, you need to report for a medical assessment immediately, you are showing signs of prolonged stress, and have lost approximately 12.6% of your body weight, also I would recommend that you consume an easily digestible protein and then sleep for a minimum of 18 hours.....not that you ever listen to me."

"Alright, Kay."

"It could be worse," he overheard Merrick saying to one of his lieutenants "I knew a pilot once, kept a reki mouse in his helmet and talked to the damned thing in every combat mission. Whatever gets you through."

Dr. Thorn’s medical assessment had finished with a hand written notation, “I hope Alliance Intelligence understands that they are killing this officer.”

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“Yes sir,” Draven said. “He was the best we had. He could do it.”

Leia Organa nodded.

“Very well,” General Kaya said,” You know our limitations, General Draven, you know the stakes. Take what you need and find your spy.”
More action upcoming. Possibly more rebel captain sorting through their issues. I haven't written a sex scene since the Reagan administration tho', so this will need some thinking through.
The Listener

Chapter Summary

Private Tenzigo Weems passes on a message that Bodhi Rook has been waiting to hear.

Chapter Notes

Because Rogue One is all about the people who fight without lightsabers, and I have loved Private Weems since he ripped off his earphones and chased Mon Mothma down the hall.

“I don’t feel too easy about this, General” he said.

Tenzigo Weems, was usually far too focused to be uneasy about anything for long. He had a “gift” for languages, or so they’d told him when he was a boy: animal, vegetable and mineral. Also, once he knew a language, it seemed that there was a step in understanding what was being said that he was able to skip. He never needed to “translate” something in his mind in order to understand it. In a way, it seemed that he could “see” the sense, like threads in a pattern, (or most often a tangle) and just pull one out at a time. There was the red. There the blue. There the yellow. He’d been packed off to a military/corporate trade school on Pendar III as a teenager. They’d have packed him back right home after a month, not hardy enough for manufacturing, or clever enough for engineering, if he hadn’t stumbled into a shipping traffic control center on a tour. He’d started narrating the stream of 100+ ship conversations out loud, just as fast as the 25 techs that were trying to follow them. They’d made him an “intern” on the spot. He’d stayed for ten years.

One day they were all called into a conference room before shift. A military officer in a new style of uniform walked into the room with the Director of Corporate Shipping, a stout middle-aged woman named Morse. Director Morse had looked shaken. She told them that their team was being put under the direct control of the Imperial Republic’s new Transport and Materials Allocation Division.

“Under Emperor Palpatine’s Emergency Security Initiative, Core interplanetary communications will now be subject to military supervision, in order to keep us safe from terrorist infiltration of the commercial shipping industry. There shouldn’t be any disruption of our usual…”

The officer pointed at one of the analysts, a tall Serrolani named Doreen, “You,” he said, and to another analyst in the back, a Bothan that Weems only knew as “Richie” “You as well. Out.” Four security guards stepped forward to grab Doreen.

“No!” Director Morse, had cried, grabbing at the officer’s arm, “I was assured that none of my people would…”

The officer shot her.

Several people screamed, a few jumped to their feet. Two security guards dragged Doreen and Richie out of the room while the other two held guns on everyone else.
“I think we all understand how serious this situation is now, citizens,’ said the officer, “Let’s get back to work.”

Weems had gone back to his console. For the next two hours he monitored his traffic, he listened for a pattern. Ships going out within the next few hours…. ships taking cargo that were reporting slightly higher take-off weights than standard….ships with configurations similar to ships that had left in the previous 24 hours….also with slight deviated weights…..control traffic where the pilot’s voice sounded slightly different than it had at the previous check, even though the manifest report recorded the same crew….reports of glitches in loading droids. Then he got up and walked to the door.

There was a security guard. He knew the man, Froster, 20 years with the company. “Where are you going, Weems?”

“My 2:12 break,” Weems said, “A mans gotta piss, Froster…especially on a day like today.”

“Ok.” the guard said, “But don’t be stupid, please, I've got kids.”

Weems nodded. He walked to the fresher on the next floor down, and then the next and then the next. Whenever he was stopped he told the watch-droid on the stairwell that somebody had gotten sick in the fresher on the previous floor. When he got to the ground floor, he locked himself inside, waited until a noisy cargo platform rolled by and broke the window. Then he laid his company jacket across the broken edges and crawled out. As a kid he’d been regularly pounded by the neighborhood toughs, for his small size. He thanked the Force for it now. He walked the 1.5km to the docking bay of the freighter he’d found, emptying his pockets as he went. When he walked up the ramp a tall red-haired man in a Sienar Company cover-all stopped him.

“Where the hell do you think you’re going?” he’d asked.

“I don’t know who you are,” Weems had said, “But I know you don’t work for Sienar and I know this ship isn’t going to Corellia. My name is Tenzigo Weems. They just killed my boss and dragged away every non-human in my department. Shoot me or take me with you but I am not fucking staying here.”

That was how Tenzigo Weems had joined the Rebellion, and how he had met Davits Draven.

“You felt easy enough to dash out onto a runway on Yavin IV and tell me a war was starting,” the general said, ‘You can get comfortable with this.”

“I don’t usually transmit,” Weems insisted, “I decode.”

“Are you saying you think you screwed this up?” Corporal Bodhi Rook was asking, “Because I’d just like to point out that we will all very likely die if you did that.”

“Why is this man even in here, sir?” Weems asked Draven.

“Because I am using him as a confirmation code generator.”

Weems reached up toward his headset, his eyes widened. ‘I’m getting ….wait….whoever is doing this is crazy good sir……this is coming in from Bothan satellites, those are uncrackable, nobody can piggyback signal off them. It’s definitely the same sender though…..single packet… “Read by the light of Lothal’s two moons”…..there’s a terminus notation, what does that mean sir? It says terminus at 2.”

“It means he won’t use this back-up confirmation code a second time,” Draven was leaning on the console with his eyes closed, “It’s a Fulcrum protocol.”
“There is another string sir…wait….it’s just words,” Weems could almost see them, spelled out like beads on a cord. “gift….pilot…messenger….stable….shadow…lost…fire…holding.”

“Is it him?” Rook pushed up closer,”What is he saying?…..”

Draven stood straight. “It’s Andor. The droid was destroyed. Jyn Erso is alive and with him….apparently they’re glad to hear you’re alive too Rook.”

Well, Weems thought, good to hear from you again Captain Andor.
Bodhi's alive, Jyn thought. Oh Papa.

They never talked about it, she and Cassian, Scarif. In more than a year almost never. What was there to say really?

*It was all rolled up in a ball in her memory. K2’s voice, trying to buy them minutes… “Goodbye,”..wtf…droids don’t say goodbye…..and Cassian’s face as the door had closed…but he had followed her out that window. Him falling, striking steel beams as he fell, once, twice, three times. She had HEARD his bones break…..still heard them now in nightmares……and felt her heart turn into a stone. Then he had come for her. He had killed the man in white and held her back from the edge and she carried him down out of that terrible place, through the dead, as far as she could. For a little while it was as if they were one person. He had said something to her, about her father being proud, and said her name again. They held on to to each other. "Don't look," she wanted to say, as he buried his face against her neck, “Trust the Force” but she didn't know if she'd really said anything…. 

......and then in the middle of that terrible light and roaring wind, something dark had come over them. She couldn’t bear for the wind to tear them apart so she pulled him back into that shadow. It felt for all the worlds as if hands were pulling them into the dark...Then shaking and pain. She couldn't see but she could feel his heart beating under her hands...."Please don't leave me," she'd thought, "please, not again.."....

When she had opened her eyes, sore and watering in the light ...*scorched by the fire.....she'd been the one facing it, somehow, instinctively, she'd managed to turn Cassian's face away.... small dark hands were placing cool wet cloth on them. “No!” she cried, or tried to, "Where is Cassian?” Her voice had sounded so strange and breathing hurt. She lost time for a while.

When she could open her eyes again she was wrapped in still more of the wet cloth. Everything smelled resinous like pine or rosemary and she could taste it in the back of her mouth. She'd tried to struggle and somehow they understood and cut her hands free and guided her fingers to touch Cassian to know he was still there, right next to her, warm not cold. It was at least a day later when he'd opened his eyes… dark, confused. He'd tried to speak but all that came out was a faint painful rasp. Her name.

*That was the first time she thought it, I love you.*

What she actually said was: "Don't try to talk"
"How?" he’d whispered but she didn't know the answer. She still didn’t. There apparently had been a shuttle but she had no memory of carrying him inside and an absolute certainty that she couldn’t have piloted it.

They carried them up to the stone house. Bes stayed there with them gentle and kind, helping peel fruit so Jyn could eat small bits to spare her blistered lips. Second Sister Tova, cheerful and efficient, wrapped and unwrapped the wet cloth...their version of bacta. Elder Sister, almost as tiny as Bes, with reddish brown fur gone very grey on her face and ears, sat beside Cassian. *Her name was Iola but Jen found herself unable to call her anything but Elder Sister.* She seemed frail but her hands could grip very strongly. She sat on a stool by the bed...*their beds were slightly separated then...* and stroked his forehead. *Jyn had a dim memory of her mother doing the same thing....."Galen, I think she has a fever."* The skin on the backs of his hands was peeling where they’d faced the light. Her leg was splinted with thin strips of wood and yet more bandages but they all helped her over so she could sit where Cassian lay and Elder Sister gripped her hand tightly and passed her a cup with a long thin spout. There was water boiled with honey and a little salt in it.

“Talk to your companion-friend” she said, “When he opens his eyes again, help him drink a little and he will live.”

She and Cassian were alive here, and now Bodhi was alive on the other side of the galaxy.

She lifted her head from Cassian’s shoulder and tried to wipe her tears away with both hands. "Oh hell, oh hell, I'm getting you all wet"

“It's ok,” he said, smiling.

“Poor Bes. Did I scare her?” Jyn looked around.

Portia’s image stood close behind them. It was the pale woman with long dark hair. Jyn had seen that one before. The woman/Portia’s expression was thoughtful.

“Judging from your emotional reaction, I’m guessing this message is important and from someone known to you?

“Yes,” Cassian said, “I believe it came from my commanding officer.”

“I see. Is this person also Jyn’s commanding officer?”

“Oh fuck no” Jyn said.

Cassian rolled his eyes, “Technically yes but his message also told us that our friend Bodhi is still…” here, even Cassian’s voice seemed to catch a little, “…that he survived the battle we were in.”

Portia’s image nodded. “Tell me about him.”

Cassian looked surprised.
“What do you mean?”

“Well, his appearance would be useful to know, but that would be better transmitted as an image than verbally described, which is almost never adequate in my experience. Tell me what he is like as a person? What is the basis of your bond of friendship?”

I knew him for ten days, maybe, almost two years ago.....probably the worst ten days of his life, Jyn thought.

"He’s brave," she said slowly "the kind of brave that people can only be when they have been very afraid and done the right thing anyway.....he makes other people that way too...I think. I think he helped my father stay alive." She glanced up at Cassian. "My father had given up hope and Bodhi gave it back to him.”

Cassian took a breath,”The Empire crushes people. Some people go along because they are greedy, or cruel and want advantage, but most people are just too afraid and once that fear gets into people it’s impossible to get out. It makes them believe that the Empire is so powerful they can’t possibly fight, so they just look away. Try to survive. Bodhi he looked and he didn’t look away as hard as that must have been. That’s very rare.”

Portia’s image closed her eyes, and then opened them and nodded.
“I look forward to meeting him,” she said.
Chapter Summary

Our pilot flies again. Also, Han Solo sticks his head in and says hi.

Chapter Notes

Interjecting characters from A New Hope feels weirdly like introducing your new love to your old pals from college. It just means so much to you that they like each other.

Since coming to Hoth, Bodhi Rook had been outside the protection of Echo Base exactly once, unless you counted the time when they had brought him in with the rest of the luggage off the hospital ship, which he didn’t. A U-wing had made a hard landing short of the bay canopy, at the worst possible time, night, and he and the rest of his crew had quickly suited up to run out and pull it inside. Even with the shields up, protocols against anything, equipment or debris, being visible on the surface, were policed to the point of paranoia. No uncamouflaged equipment or droids could remain on surface EVER. All ground patrols had to be done by personnel on animal back. At the same time, nobody but nobody was supposed to be exposed, when the sun was down, for more than 5 minutes, because that’s how quick this planet could kill you.

“She’s starting to like me” Tonc had said of the foul-smelling, vicious creature he’d been riding out for patrols. “She….and how do you even know that, by the way?….does NOT like you,” Bodhi had argued, “She ate your interior boots the other day.” “That proves it, mate” Tonc smiled, “They smelled like me. She’d gobble me up with half a chance, THAT’S how much she loves me.”

It was easy to tell yourself that it could not be that much colder on the outside of the base than the inside. It would be a total lie, though. Even in full protective thermal suit, with eye protection and filtration fabric over his mouth and nose, he had genuinely thought he was going to die. He remembered old people saying, “Nahi aag lekin bar, na bar hai, lekin aag” …… something about exchanging fire for ice, and vice versa. It was supposed to be about love turning to hate…..or whatever, but all he could think was, Fire didn’t kill me, and it had two chances, so Ice is going to be it. They had gotten the ship inside in the required 3.5 minutes, and then everybody had had to strip down for frostbite checks.

Now, he was going to be flying again, out into weather that made the storms he’d flown cargo through on Eadu look like a pleasant holiday. He knew he wouldn’t be sick because he hadn’t eaten since yesterday but he was fairly sure he might faint.

"Ready?" Commander Skywalker said, slapping him on the shoulder.

No, Bodhi thought.

“Yes sir,” Bodhi said.
“Luke,” he said with a smile. “This is an off-the-books training flight. The General wants you cleared on three pieces of equipment. It’s only ‘sir’ on the comms anyway….and, let’s be honest, not really there either…..somehow I went from ‘put this farmer in an x-wing’ to Flight Commander, and my brain hasn’t quite caught up.”

“That’s the Alliance for you,” said a voice behind them,”60% military stick up their collective ass and and 40% ‘Hey! Come help us blow Government shit up!’”

Bodhi recognized Captain Solo. He’d seen him around the transport bays many times. The Corellian wore mismatched pieces of uniform, seemed to have no official rank and came and went on a ridiculously over-powered cargo shuttle that had been caniballized with parts from at least 18 different ships. Bodhi was caught between being fascinated by it and wanting to stay 200 meters away at all times in case she blew up. It didn’t matter. No Alliance crew was allowed anywhere near the thing. All work and repairs were done by Solo himself or his….co-pilot?….a wookie who had once literally disassembled a maintenance droid with his bare hands because it squeaked something derogatory about the ship.

There kept being rumors that Solo would be leaving the base to deal with some super-secret criminal pirate mission and yet he still seemed to be around. Tonc had 50 credits on a bet that he stayed because he was carrying on with either Princess Leia or General Reikken, or both. Bodhi thought it was just as likely to be because his monster ship was totally broken.

“I’m an Admiral now, myself” he said.

Skywalker, cast him a side-eye, “Just because you look in the mirror when you’re shaving in the morning and say ‘‘Hello Admiral Solo’, does NOT mean you are an Admiral.”

“Whatever you say, Flight Commander Skywalker.” the man winked at Bodhi.

“Han, this is…”

“I know who this is.” Solo said, and held out a hand, “Rook, right? Welcome back to the game,” Bodhi shook the offered hand, “Have fun kids, and I totally do NOT see you taking out a Y-wing for a joy-ride and I am absolutely NOT running to Her Highness right now to rat you out.”

“How does he know who I am?” Bodhi asked, as they walked over to the ships.

“Because we were on Yavin IV. Because Leia told him.” Luke said,”The same way she told me. I know nobody’s supposed to talk about it, but….. we got medals, you got fourteen surgeries and a month in a tank. It isn’t right.”

They had reached the base of the closest Y-wing to the departure runway.

“Come on,” Skywalker said with a smile, “Let’s get you back in the air where you belong, pilot.”

Bodhi positioned himself in the cockpit and put on the helmet.

Keonsayr BTL A4. R200 aft and starboard engines. He’d studied.

\textit{I can do this I can do this I can do this.}

The cockpit had been modified to hold a second person since this ship was being used as a trainer. Guns were disabled. Normally a BTL A4 held only a single pilot with an astromech droid installed to integrate systems. Skywalker squeezed into the add-on seat behind Bodhi

“Power her up, Rook.”
He started flipping on the ignition sequence. The astromech had already been installed.

In his ear, “*beep* Hello pilot. On-line. Systems check complete. Ignition commenced”

“Uh, thank you..” He was not used to working directly with an on-board droid. Imperial flight protocols almost never used pilot/droid open integration. Supposedly this was more secure. Supposedly it prevented hacking. This was bullshit, as most pilots knew. The real reason was to prevent crew from forming bonds with their droids, and so that defectors couldn’t take systems to manual and fly off....like he had.”...R2-B9.”

“Hey 2Bean.” Skywalker said, “Good to work with you again. Ok, Rook. As soon as 2B9 gives you the green, call tower to open the gate and take her out and up. Low out, while we see what Hoth is throwing at us today, then straight up to minimize flight signature.”

“Are...”

“Me? Oh no,” he said, “This is your show. My plan is to take a nap back here. I was up doing whiskey shots with Antilles last night. Besides, if R2D2 finds out I’ve been seeing other astromechs, I’ll never hear the end of it.”

*beepbeepbeepbeep*

Is that thing laughing? Bodhi wondered.

Flight control pinged in his ear.

“Rogue 7, Authorization Skywalker 4, ready on Runway 2.”


Hello Force, It's me, the Pilot.

“Confirm Echo Base tower. Rogue 7 away.”

Chapter End Notes

My apologies for attempting transliteration of Urdu......my Spanish is bad but my Urdu is nonexistent....also, different alphabet. Credit the heart and not the skill.
Poison

Chapter Summary

Elder Sister talks to Cassian about the future, and the past.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cassian went down to the Sister's house later in the day, he needed to talk to Tova about meeting with Elfla and the Taun before they returned south, and he also wanted to check on Bes.

Iola, the Elder Sister, was sitting in the sunlight on a bench by the door of the house.

"Cassian-ally! Good day! Come sit with me." She smiled and patted the bench beside her.

Cassian knew that protesting he was on another errand would matter to her not at all, so he smiled and sat down. She took his right wrist and turned it so that his hand was flat and open, then laid her small dark palm on his and patted it twice. One tap meant Desire to Instruct, he knew, she used that on him a lot but twice meant Conversation.....he remembered it also implied Between Equals.

"Youngest Sister is sleeping" she said. She often anticipated what he was going to say before he said it.

*She and Chirrut would have liked each other, Cassian always thought. Although, having seen her sink her sharp little teeth into the arm of a striped male scavenger who interrupted Tova at the last Council, he suspected she would have gotten on well with Baze too.*

"I am sorry that we….."

But Iola waved her hands. "Do not apologize. The work you give her is important and she has learned more pattern work from you and Jyn-ally today than I could have taught her in a month."

She looked at him with a half smile, "You do not need to pretend to understand the work we do...it is possible to teach something without actually knowing what it is."

*Chirrut would have ADORED you, he thought, and you two would have been obnoxious together.*

“Do you remember what I told you when we first took the bandages off of you, in the stone house?”

He knew what she was talking about. She had spoken to him alone, while Tova and Bes were helping Jyn limp around the house and it’s surroundings, so that they could return to their own house and leave the two of them there alone, to care for each other.

("Your bones are healing well,” she had said, feeling his ribs with little pointy fingers, “Measure your strength carefully until your breathing increases. No running, no jumping, and no being Active until it does” He hadn’t known what she meant by that then, he did now. “Listen to me carefully, though. Even when these things heal, the hardest part for you both will be the Poison” .....for a nervous moment, he’d thought she meant radiation from the shuttle, but she had tapped him on the hand….. “You have swallowed poison, both of you, you maybe more than she….I do not say there is blame…such things happen, maybe you had no choices….maybe you did it to spare others….I do
not know your story….but Poison it is. It must work it’s way out slowly through your skin and that will hurt. It will hurt very badly. Days may come when you may regret that a clean quick death in battle was taken away from you. Healing may seem too great a burden sometimes.”)

"Youngest Sister tells me that the ghost has helped transmit messages to your friends, and that you have even found that one of your Heart Companions was not killed." She raised one eyebrow, "Does this lessen the burden of your sorrows, or increase it?"

Cassian found that he could not answer as quickly as he wanted to.

Iola squeezed the back of his wrist (Apology for Unintended Distress) "I ask this because sometimes even a most joyful connection can create pain," she wrinkled her brow, “the fear of future loss, the weight of increased obligation."


"I sense you carry your cage with you wherever you go Captain."

He closed his eyes and took a slow breath.

"No,” he said, "I understand what you mean, I do. This person, our friend...He means a great deal to both of us.......maybe to Jyn especially. He's the only connection she still has to her family. The thought that he died because he came with us, might have died doing what I ordered him to do..."

"Bodhi, you have to get that shield gate open! You have to find a way!"

"....that was a burden that will be less now."

She nodded. "Then I am glad for you both. I know you better now, and I ask your forgiveness, Cassian-ally, for any time I may have seemed to doubt your courage or your strength. Please understand that I am Elder. Ea may call me at any time, and it is my duty to always be preparing my circle for that day."

Cassian knew that Ea was their name for both the planet itself and Death.

"Ea has changed before and she will change again. Your coming, and Jyn-ally's, is the sign of that for us. You know that Youngest Sister is a special soul?"

"Yes."

"What I am telling you now, I am telling you because you are an Ally.” She took both of Cassian's hands in hers and pressed them together. "It may be that you will leave us to return to your War, maybe that is your part of the Pattern. Maybe War will will follow you here and you and Jyn-ally are like the birds that fly before the fires in the dry season. No one blames the birds for the fire. Do you understand me?"

“Yes, Lola-ally. I understand.”
She knew the difference between Understanding and Belief, he was sure.

“Give love and support to Youngest Sister as you can, that is the only obligation I will ever place on either of you”

Cassian could think of nothing else to say to her. So he bowed his head and kissed the back of her hand.
“Oh my!” she said, chuckling

A little while later, when Second Sister came walking up the path she found Elder Sister laughing.

"I saw Cassian-ally walking down the hill, Elder Sister," she said, "I wished to speak with him but he seemed distracted."

"He must be," Elder Sister said, still laughing.
“I think he just asked me to dance.”

Chapter End Notes

School will end soon and I will have more than 35 minutes to write a chapter, so maybe I can start pulling pieces together. Thank you so much to everyone who has commented!!!
Questions (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Questions are asked as Jyn and Cassian try to set the rules of their relationship with Portia (and with each other).

Chapter Notes

Another tiny piece of a chapter.

Jyn laid on her back on the floor, close by the open ledge, realizing with gratitude that Portia was letting some of the afternoon breeze through.

Maia, in Saw’s band on Onderon, had used to say, “You can get used to anything, kid.” Jyn had always thought she meant the rations, or the constant running, or the vanishing of comrades, and maybe she had, but now she wondered if it had been more bitter than that. Maia who had slipped under her blanket on a few cold nights while staking out Imperial supply lines in the desert, then acted as if it had never happened afterwards. Who wore those beautiful snake-skin gloves. Maia, who never got to be 23.

*I can’t remember what she looked like, Jyn thought.*

She could remember the words, and being kissed, and what it felt like to be confused and excited and terrified by your own skin. She could remember those gloves, that she lost a month later, but Maia’s face was gone. She hadn’t really known her at all. It made her feel so sad. She remembered Papa in a tangle of three faces, the gentle hero of her childhood, the grim remorseful old man of Bodhi’s hologram, and (in nightmares still) the pale broken face in the rain on Eadu. Her mother’s face was lost to her. She could only ever see it in dreams, except sometimes, when she looked in a mirror, with her hair down, she’d think she caught a glimpse. The other end of the spectrum though, perfect recall, seemed like it might be even more heartbreaking.

Portia, she realized, could never forget a face. There were a half dozen or so that she used regularly, but she clearly had a library of hundreds, and hundreds. Jyn could pick up her funeral stones, and lay them aside for a while, but Portia, it seemed, never could. If you asked her whose image she was using on a given visit, she would tell you, and Bes always asked, as if she were politely looking at family holos. It wasn’t creepy….it seemed as if it should be, but the faces always seemed a little too sad for that, too thoughtful. She had never again put them all up at once, as she had on the day Jyn and Cassian had disabled the nav-beacon, and now she restricted herself, pretty much, to one or two a visit. Still, it took a great deal of getting used to.

They had brought a wide mattress up into the tower…since Portia told them that she would have a series of good "windows" over the next week, but after that the rotation would shift and she would have fewer opportunities until the fall. This way they could sleep up in the tower and spell each other when necessary. They needed to take in and send as much data to the Alliance as they could in that time frame. Jyn wished she could see Bodhi’s face, talk to him directly, but there was still no safe
way to do it. The Rebels seemed to be on the run and could not risk leaving any crumb that might give away their position. Add to that Portia's absolute terror about about "the Enemy" tracking a signal back here, and all they could send through the dark were small coded messages. Cassian seemed almost as paranoid as Portia, since a talk he'd had with Elder Sister.

"It's one thing to gamble with our own lives...." he'd said, leaving the rest of the thought unfinished. Whatever the Rebellion had asked of him he'd done, but it was the harm he'd caused others that ate at him.

Still, "ours" "us" “we.” When had it become second nature?

“Alright,” Jyn had said after they brought the mattress up and laid it on the floor on level 2, "I just want to be clear. We are never having sex up here.” Portia was unlikely to object, but the thought that they might be used as an instructional documentary, for unknown beings three hundred years from now, was too awful to entertain.

Cassian considered for a moment. “I’m fine with that.”

“Everyplace else is fair game though.”

“I’m fine with that, too.”

___________________________________

After they had disabled self-destruct on the Imperial nav-satellite, Portia had consented to speak with them. In fact, it had been quite an interview. Jyn considered that she might have had more fun the first time she’d been interrogated by Draven, although Portia’s special effects were more impressive.

The image of a white-haired dark-skinned young man with a spiral tattoo over one forearm had asked them reams of questions, the first one being:

“Can you get that horrible thing out of me?’

Even if Cassian had not squeezed her hand as a signal, she would have let him do the talking.

*I disarm the bombs pretty boy, she thought,* *YOU negotiate with the crazy people machines.*

Cassian had tried explaining that if they completely shut it down, a replacement might be sent, and…

“The Enemy sent it…I know that already. Are they coming here? Have they found me?’”

Cassian had some kind of spy arsenal of persuasion and charm (although it occurred to Jyn that she’d never actually seen much of it) but he was not stupid enough to try to use it now. He went to his default setting of measured honesty.

“We don’t know.”

Asked outright if they were Jedi, Cassian said “No.” The white-haired young man’s eyes narrowed.

“Show me the laser weapon.” he/she/they said. Jyn held it out. That was how they knew they were being scanned, at least inside the tower.

“Are all of them dead?”

It seems likely, but we don’t know for certain, some may have hidden.

“Did their brothers kill them?”
I don’t know.
“Are you fleeing a battle?”
Yes.
“How did you find this place?”
We don’t know, a shuttle crashed, it may have been by accident. We don’t even know where this planet is.
The young man’s unblinking eyes seemed to look Cassian carefully up and down at that. As if to measure whether or not he was lying.

He/she/they knew about the Old Republic, but not the Empire, Palpatine’s name seemed to mean nothing. The dark hand waved away Cassian’s explanations.

“What does your Enemy want?”
To control every world they can reach.
The weapon they built, what does it do?
Jyn answered then. “Kill planets.”

The dark head bowed.

“Do you think you can hide here?”

Cassian held her hand very tightly then, and she found herself squeezing back just as hard.

No.

“We want to fight them,” Jyn said.

The young man’s face looked at back up at them and, in what Jyn would learn was a very rare gesture, smiled.

“Good” Portia had said.
Questions (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Flashback to when these poor messed up kids clumsily manage to have sex the first time, also Portia has just figured out that the probe droids have found Hoth.

Chapter Notes

I thought to myself, is this bit necessary? And I said to myself, yes, yes it is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Climbing down from that first “interview” with Portia, Jyn had found her arms shaking from fatigue. Cassian managed the rappelling well enough but as they walked very slowly back to the stone house, she could tell he was tired. It was too much to talk about, to process. It could wait. The sun was setting, and she picked up the small round solar lamps from the ledge on the wall, to bring in the house. While he leaned against the doorway, pulling his boots off.

“You know what these are made of, right?” she’d asked, handing two of them to him so he could put them in the string bag that hung high on the wall in the large room.

“The bulbs from dock runner lights, like on those big old freighters?”

“Yeah. At least that’s what I think they are. Bes said the Fishers sell them by the case load.”

Cassian regarded the flickering yellow ball in his hand. “One of the really big old liners would have had a million or more….. they could last for a century if they never got broken.” He slipped them into the bag and the glow lit the room a little.

“Where the fuck are we?”

“Guess? Off the edge of the Outer Rim, I think. Unknown Regions border edge, that’s a guess. Nearer to what …Endor?….Dantooine? Maybe. Maybe even further out than that, if that beacon was way off course. I can’t tell without equipment. If Kay were here….maybe he could…..”

He sat down, one leg over one of the wide wooden benches that served them for chairs and table, and rubbed his eyes.

Jyn sat beside him.

“He told me my behavior ‘was continually unexpected.’”

Cassian looked up, “Really? When did he say that?”

“When we went into the data vault, right after I gave him my blaster.”

He gave a short laugh and rubbed his hands over his eyes again.
“High praise, from him.”

*I never told you how sorry I was, Jyn thought. There was no time.*

*Saw Gerrera raised me, she wanted to say. You know that. I know you know that. I was taught to never talk about anyone who fell. He carried an Onderian battle flag around with him and slept under it at night. Gorek told me that it was the one they carried his sister’s dead body home in. He never said her name, ever. He told me that my mother was a brave soldier but she was dead and that we would never talk about her again. My father was “lost” he said, so I knew to never ask more. I thought I was supposed to die without ever hearing my own name again. Your friend died and you had to listen to it and I couldn’t even say anything.*

“He seemed happy. I bet he shot a shit-load of storm troopers with it.”

“I wasn’t supposed to outlive him,” Cassian said, "We had several different protocols in place for what he was supposed to do when I died. He hated running through those, but I made him do it. It just…it was by far the most likely scenario…..he couldn’t argue with that.”

She put her hands over his and gently pressed his thumbs back from clenching against the rest of his fingers. “There is no protocol for this. We have to start over from scratch.”

They sat for a while in silence.

“When you said you wanted to work through issues, I somehow thought it would be more pleasant than this.” He gave her that half smile.

She nodded. *Smooth one, Captain.* “Fair enough. Did I kiss you?”

"Yes, you did.”

“Good. Because, sometimes, it turns out I didn’t, I just thought about it so hard that it seemed like I had.”

She moved her left leg over the bench too, so she was sitting facing him, moved up close and put her hands on his shoulders.

“How’s your back doing?”

Jyn, are you sure you…?”

“Answer the question, please.”

“My back is fine.”

She had to pull herself up to press her lips against his, but this time his hands moved around her and lifted her, sliding her legs up over his. They almost fell off the bench. She started laughing and……it was so strange, she had known it would be strange, but kissing someone, open mouthed and laughing under it…. it was so very wonderfully odd. She had no reference point. She’d felt his fingers trace up her arm, pausing just a fraction of an instant….the scar from her contraceptive implant.

She managed get his shirt untied. His hands slid up her back and pulled hers over her head. It nearly ended with both of them falling again, before they stumbled upright and the few steps to the bed.
Getting trousers off was clumsy and she found herself snarling with frustration when she realized that hers were stuck because one of her boots was still on. He rolled half onto his side, breaking free from kissing, laughing again.

“Stop laughing you bastard!” she hissed, rolling onto her back, but he knelt back and pulled her boot and remaining trouser leg off, running his hands up her calf to the backs of her knees.

Jyn…..” He braced himself over her, weight on his arms, looking at her. “You have to tell me….?” His voice was breathless and his eyes had that dark look that took everything in.

“You have to tell me, if I do anything you don’t want me to, you have to…”

_They had a file on me_, she thought.

“It’s alright. Trust goes both ways,” she pushed her fingers into his hair and pulled his mouth down towards hers again. “I trust you,” she said against the roughness of his jawline, near his ear.

He kissed a line down from her neck, across her collarbone and down.

She found herself biting her lips, the old habit. In the Partisans, if you took any comfort on a night patrol, or between the storage lockers, alone or in company, you’d damn well better learn to take it quietly. Kestrel Dawn had pulled the young Bespani fence who bought her stolen credit numbers, into her room a few times but could not bear anyone on the other side of the cardboard walls knowing he was there. Lianna Halick had been like a tree dying from the inside out. Her skin nothing but a thin layer of bark that could barely feel.

That was over now.

Whatever ideas she’d had about how she would be doing this, and she’d had plenty, they were all gone now. There was way too much desperation here. Teenagers would have been embarrassed. It was fast and unravelled. When she pushed him over onto his back, still shaking, and climbed onto him he had looked astonished for an instant, before he’d had to close his eyes. His mouth against her neck, he gasped her name, barely a whisper. Like he’d had to learn to be quiet too

_Later, she had promised herself, next time._

_Next time, oh fuck, Cassian, she’d thought. We have “later.”_

In the tower, Portia appeared a few feet away. A round cheeked teenager with short silver curls.

Jyn sat up.

“What is it Portia?”

“There are thousands of them. They have eyes and voices and they all report to him. One of them is coming this way. I can stop it. I will stop it. But one, one of them has found your friend. Where is Cassian?”

“He’ll be here soon, Portia, can you wait?”
“No. The window is now. This is happening almost now. To warn them in real-time we cannot wait. Your friend is on a place called Hoth. The enemy has found it.”

Chapter End Notes

Have I previously mentioned that I have not written anything steamier than Social Studies curriculum since the late 80's? Have mercy.
First Words, First Thoughts.

Chapter Summary

A small flashback slips in.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

First words first thoughts.

“That’s the kind of thing that could go horribly wrong where I come from,” Jyn said, when Tova first described it.

“Oh, it can cause much lifelong embarrassment, I can tell you,” Tova had chuckled. “I was always taught that it was supposed to teach one to govern their tongue and be honest in their thoughts. In the south they have a tradition of carving the first words on a stone or a necklace and wearing it.”

“So, a lot of people walk around with ‘What the hell?’ written on their jewelry.”

“So often! I am told they make them in multiples and sell them in the markets.”

Jyn had continued packing up the baskets that she was helping Tova carry down to the meeting with the Naun.

“Elder Sister has a necklace…”

“Yes.” Tova said, “But that is her tale to tell you. If she chooses.”

‘When was the last time you heard from your father?’ Jyn thought. I’d have to get it on a fucking belt.

They had moved the bed directly across from the hearth, as the weather turned cooler that first year.

Jyn had been curled against Cassian’s back, one arm across him. He knew she was awake from the change in her breathing.

“What was the first thing you thought when you first saw me?” She said very quietly, her lips against his shoulder blade.

She’s leaving you an out, he thought. You can pretend you’re still asleep.

He reached up and put a hand over hers, holding it lightly to his chest, but he didn’t turn to face her yet.

“Which first time?” He said.
There’d been the pictures in the file, of course, an odd assortment. Galen Erso’s existence had been wiped clean by Imperial Security, but they never caught everything. You could always pull threads out from an unsecured edge.

There had been an old propaganda feed of university officials and scientists taken as hostages by Separatist forces on Vallt during the Insurrection, images of the “liberation” of the holding camp by Republic forces had been picked up by multiple news feeds, and a vid of an ashen faced but straight-backed young woman carrying a newborn was too good to have not been shared on multiple unsecured lines. Lyra Erso, geologist, had given birth while imprisoned by terrorist forces.

A mis-filed ID image from a child care/preschool for high level Imperial officials had showed a chubby cheeked three year old with braids.

A blurry half-burned security image from a raid by Gerrera’s Partisans on a fuel-processing plant on Kashyyk, had only shown a small figure silhouetted against the light of a sequence explosion. Analysis had identified the object in her hand as a detonator. She would have been 13.

Well, well, little girl, he’d thought. Wouldn’t your preschool teacher be surprised?

After that there had been the “wanted for questioning” post images. Kestral Dawn, Tanith Ponta, others. She’d dyed her hair black as Dawn, but otherwise made little attempt to ever alter her appearance. There was a recklessness to that, but she clearly knew the system. Posts for anything other than high crimes were usually buried by more recent alerts within a few weeks. There were also signs that some of the posts had been tampered with…..’discontinue circulation’ dates seemed to have been hurried, facial recognition specs tweaked just a bit.

A slicer now are we bella dama? Of some skill, it seemed.

Then the hacked prison record from Wobani. Mug shots of Lianna Halick, forger, felon, weapons dealer, fighter. Pale, bruised, but still wearing the black kohl eyeliner favored by punk gangs on the Outer Rim. The whole bio was faked, of course, but there was prison intake data, pictures, medical scans…..

He’d watched from the back of the room as Melshi’s men had brought her in (Melshi had still been in the med bay with one of his team who was getting his teeth re-attached. “You’re gonna wanna keep those cuffs on her, and I would stay WELL back,” he’d said, when Cassian had come to get his report before setting up the interview with Draven.)

He hadn’t even been tempted to pity her.
Skills, brains, fight….but you got disillusioned with that madman, so you ran off and wasted them. Survival, you’ll say, if we bring you onboard. Where did it get you in the end? Do you feel like you’re surviving?

Forgive me, my love.

“Ahhhhh.” She’d murmured against his skin. “Good point.” She pulled his shoulder and moved far enough to make him lay on his back so she could see his face.
“How about first time you saw me and I saw you?”

What are you still afraid of Cassian?

“You first,” he said.

“Coward,” she turned to lie flat beside him, staring at the ceiling for a few minutes.
“I thought, ‘There he is.’

“What?”

“Its not as romantic as it sounds. I thought Saw was there. I thought he must have made nice with the Alliance, that you were bringing me in because…..I don’t know…..because he wanted me back…..” she squirmed a little “Then Mothma was there and I thought, ‘what the fuck?’ and Draven, I knew his kind well enough, starts talking about my father, and a name I have’t even heard in a decade. That clinched it. ’No way Saw is here,’ I thought ’Shit! This is some kind of interrogation.’ There were other people in the room, but suddenly it was all clear. She’s the angel and Big Red there is the threat……and I know how these things go. So I ask myself: Where’s the watcher? There’s always one in the shadows, watching for how you react. THAT’S the guy you’ve got to worry about….then, right on cue, you step up…the man in the shadows.”

“From the look I remember on your face, I’d have bet it was ‘Fuck off.’

“That was my SECOND thought.”

He remembered it with perfect clarity. It wasn’t a typical situation, not with Mon Mothma and Merrick there, and Bail Organa had insisted on observing too, the stakes were astronomically higher but the basic set-up was the same, he’d done it dozens of times……hell, tag-teamed it with Draven at least a dozen….recruiting a hostile asset. They’d walked through it with Mothma. She wasn’t an interrogator, but she’d been a skilled negotiator once, and she knew her part.

She had said his name, and he’d stepped forward. Those green eyes had lifted up, looked him over, flicked to Draven, then back to him, no longer hunting for the exits, bright.

Still burning, he’d thought, I was wrong.

“Fire,” he told her. “I thought of fire.”

Chapter End Notes

I've been following some lovely Soulmate Au's, and while my own path seems to be a bit grittier, I loved the romance of the importance of "first words" that I found in some of them. So I kinda cribbed it for the otter-people.

Next installments , the Battle of Hoth, sort of, in a way.
When the lights dimmed, he knew what it meant. They all knew. Dimmed to dark just for a heartbeat and then switched to the yellowish light of emergency battery.

The shields were down.

*Right, Tonc said to himself. Here we go then.*

“Back!” Sarge Perek yelled, “D4 Retreat to the Bays! D3 secure this corridor and fall back! Tonc, Berman! Cover us! GET THESE PEOPLE OUT!”

They’d heard the bombardments before. Now they felt them. The ground shook and ice crystals sifted from the ceiling like snow. There were gasps but nobody was screaming. Good. The techs were staying together, moving toward the flight hangers, dragging the mobile units.

Tonc’s team was pulling back, hallway by hallway. Tonc took the right side, Berman the left. Sarge, Dorin, Tod and Kesra were herding the non-coms in the center and keeping them moving.

As he went, Tonc flipped open every hatch on his side. Berman did the same. This was it. Anybody not out now was fucked. He pulled one hatch partially open to see that the roof had collapsed.

Another hit. The floor heaved up. Tod slipped but Dorin grabbed him.

Tonc could hear it above them. East Wall, had to be, breached.

A tech had fallen, Tonc grabbed her, she was still clutching her data unit, and as soon as her feet were back under her she ran ahead.

“It’s cracking,” Berman gasped, back hugging the wall.

“No man, no,” Tonc said, he glanced down to check his gun. Green. “That’s rifles. They’re in.”

“Fuck no,” Berman said, “they can’t have gotten through that fast.”

*Oh you’ll be amazed how fast those plastic-ass fuckers can move when they want to, Tonc thought.*
“Move!” He yelled. They fell back toward the South Entrance and the last transport.

They came out into the main hanger by northeast wall. It was a long run across the hanger, mostly empty, littered with debris, abandoned rigs and cargo haulers, then through the access tunnel under South Ridge, where the transports were mostly gone. Bright Hope was holding for them, the communications techs and the General….or at least holding for them as long as they could.

Tonc heard a shrieking and keening. Off to his right he could see the rails of the pen that held the tauntauns. The power that electrified the fencing was off…but they all cowered back, so used to being shocked that they were afraid to touch it, much less jump over.

*Hell.*

“Berman! Cover the rear! Get’em through!” He turned and ran back back toward the pen.

“Tonic!” he thought he heard Sarge yell, behind him. “Tonic what the….?!”

When he reached the fencing, he tried to kick the gate open. It was latched.

“Stand back you cows!” He fired at the locking mechanism.

The gate flew apart. For a split second 20 big moose-faced, shark-toothed beasts stared at him. Then they charged out the hole he’d made in the fence. He dove to the side before they trampled him. He was sure that one of them reached down and nipped the back of his coat as it leaped past.

A hand grabbed his collar and dragged him to his feet. A big man in an officer’s parka. They both sprinted across the hangar toward the access tunnel. There were a handful of people running ahead of them, Command techs, the last ones out.

By the small opening on the south wall, a man had stopped, another officer. He was shouting into a hand com, “General Organa! Where are you? We are…”

*It’s Riekken, Tonc realized.*

A voice was crackling back in answer “…..blocked……try to get her out…..falcon…..”

and then another voice, a woman’s “….This is an order. Get to your ship…”

The tall officer was fairly shoving techs into the tunnel.

“Carl,” he said. “You heard her. Go.”

General Riekken turned and ducked through.

“Soldier,” the officer turned to Tonc, pushing back his hood. Red hair. He looked familiar.

“Tonic, sir, Stordan Tonc.”

The man stared at him.

“Of course,” he said.
“Sir?”

"Here's what's happening soldier, I need you to place this halfway down the tunnel." He slapped a sticky back ion grenade into Tonc's hand. "Then keep going. Cover Riekken and his people, and get yourself onto that shuttle. I'll give you five minutes."

"Sir? What..?"

"That's an order."

Tonc could see he had another charge in his hand, and a blaster.

"Go!" The man said.

Tonc pocketed the charge and ran down the square tunnel.

It was about 60 meters and then out and over ground. Tonc sprinted about 30, stopped and slapped the charge to the stone wall. Up ahead he could see the bright white light of sun on snow. He could hear the engine of the transport. They had already started ignition sequence. Behind him he could hear shots.

He remembered now where he'd seen that red haired officer before.

No, he told himself, fuck this.

Stordan Tonc was done leaving anyone behind. He ran back towards Draven.
Jyn has only minutes to send a warning, and Portia remembers a voice in the dark.

They were probes. Portia had become extremely familiar with numerous types of celestial and terrestrial probes in her time. Tostan had supervised a large number of them, some had been lovely inquisitive creatures in their own right. She remembered all their names.

These were not like those. These were vermin. If she had tried to visualize the fingers of the Blackness creeping into corners, these chittering, floating things would have been a fine image. She saw them deployed from the ships of Cassian and Jyn's enemy. Some of them above planets, others directly into the bright hyperspace streams. Somehow they were connected to the dark figure filled with red and black, his eyes and ears, as if they were modified for him, not he for they.

By themselves they were not conscious or even clever, but they were tenacious. One was gliding this way, inside a shell, through the stream closest to her.

*Don’t even try it, you nasty little rat.*

She could tinker with her beast's navigational signaling and send the wretched probe bouncing off into the star. Ha! But the rest of the swarm was still chattering in 9000 different places. Hundreds of them were clattering on about findings. One had sent an image. Now ships were mobilizing toward a spot. She skirted behind, she eavesdropped and pulled threads and peeked into data, using the languages she had picked up from the dead things (and Jyn and Cassian, to their credit) and followed the trail.

*Hoth, oooooo.....that did NOT look a pleasant spot at all. Jyn and Cassian's friends must be well and truly desperate.*

Considerable numbers of ships were bearing down on them. Also, other, darker things. She could skip a message through to them, straight and quick, but it would have to go now. She could not initiate this on her own, they had elaborate screening rituals and might not hear or understand her. Jyn was in her heart chamber, the others were outside.

She outlined the situation to her.

"Where is Cassian?"

“He’ll be here soon, Portia, can you wait?"

*How do you people even LIVE without communication mods? She thought in frustration.*

“No. The window is now. This is happening almost now. To warn them in real-time we cannot wait. Your friend is on a place called Hoth. The enemy has found it.”
She could see and hear again, even if only in bursts. Cassian and Jyn, along with Mose, Dov, Losa and Keen (really, the sentients were doing SO well, it was very exciting to see) had brought various types of cable and silicon relays up, attached them where she had given them access and now she was not entirely cut off. It was not the open vision of satellites and celestial arrays, but she could use the pieces of the broken ships and the dead beast in her upper levels as eyes and ears and a whispering voice. It was clumsy and pathetic, they really had no idea what they were doing, but her gratitude was heartfelt. *I am not what I was born to be, but I am still alive.*

It also gave her a certain ugly satisfaction each and every time she overrode that dreadful thing to look out at the stars through its eye.

“Oh Tostan, oh Jula, look at me, she thought. *Would you even know me now? Look at me. I have become a pirate and a scavenger and an angry little fortress.*

She also found there was a sort of bond in wanting the same things. Jyn was desperate to know what was happening outside. Cassian seemed just as anxious to speak to someone.

Portia could sympathize. She knew what it was like to call out in the dark for lost comrades, and how much it would have meant to her to hear an answer.

She asked Jyn, while they were rigging up her dreadful new senses

"Who is K2S0?"

Jyn had stopped unwrapping cable with a suddenness that implied shock.

"Portia, how do you know about K2?"

"When your ship was in the hyperspace stream a voice asked for help. I thought it WAS the ship but now it is clear to me that your ship, although very pretty (she was trying to be diplomatic), is empty. It identified itself as K2S0, but seemed unable or unwilling to identify further."

Jyn looked directly at Portia's closest image projection (Tomis, Agricultural Analyst, level 1). Her heart rate was elevated, adrenaline.

"Where was the voice? Was it in the shuttle with us?"

"No...I am not certain....that is....I was under great stress at the time."

Portia hoped that her image was sufficiently portraying her distress and regret.

"The location was indistinct ...perhaps because the signal was weak. Or perhaps because the speaker was...... there was implication that they might, perhaps, be no longer living. The request was that I provide safety for a beloved individual who was endangered. Nothing in the ship itself could have carried or transmitted such a message. I cannot explain it."

This information was clearly causing Jyn emotional distress. Portia regretted this but honest reporting, even when painful, was both a virtue and a duty.

She continued, "I enabled a guidance data burst. You and Cassian were brought in at my original ground landing site.....but it was....it was not as well calibrated as it should have been. I was very afraid."

"Portia," Jyn said, wiping her eyes with the back of her sleeve, "I will tell you all that I can about
K2. He was our good friend, Cassian's greatest friend, but please, for now, don't mention this to Cassian.”

"I do not entirely understand. I will not lie, Jyn, or conceal information."

"I know that. It's just...questions about K2.....hurt Cassian" she said, "for now, just for now, wait."

She sat down then, and began to tell Portia about K2S0, and what he had done, and been like, and how he had cared for his organics.

When Cassian returned less than an hour later with data pads and the last bits of equipment to test her new vision, she felt that it would be best to delay further discussion of the voice she had heard until she had more context.

"Hoth! That's crazy. Nobody lasts on Hoth for more than a week."

"Your enemies are preparing to attack it. They seem to be arguing about tactics but that will not delay them long."

"We can't just send a message to Bodhi, they wouldn't believe it, and Draven.....oh shit, only Cassian would know if...."

"Jyn, there is very little time."

"The Imperial codes, you know the recent ones, right.?”

"Yes. They are all stupid."

"Send the the key to decode them, even if their security blocks it. Just blast a translation code to every droid, computer and forklift they have.....if it gets through to anybody it might give them a chance to see what's coming at them."

"Done."

"Send a message to General Dravits Draven that says 'They found you. Run!' address it Tanith Ponta and wrap a string around it "I bought your boy a new gun."

"Done. The window is now closed."

Jyn ran to the platform they had built up to her second level opening and began climb down. Portia could hear her calling for Cassian as she ran.
They worked slowly toward the North entrance once they’d made their way out of the main hanger.

It had been hot and ugly for awhile, pinned down under heavy fire, with no way to fall back after the charges collapsed the tunnel.
The only cover had been behind a hauler that had flipped sideways. His side arm was already running red and overheating.

Draven caught a glimpse of a looming black figure amongst the storm troopers and smoke and in that same instant came a blast of engines. Solo's junk freighter fired up suddenly, pivoted and roared out of the back of the hangar.

Diversions did not come any better.

Young Corporal Tonc grabbed his arm and they ran practically under the heat from the tail burners, toward the Northeast wall.

Troopers inside the hangar fell back in panic or else turned their fire on the ship itself - as if they could somehow knock it out of the air with rifles.

Under other circumstances it might have looked comical.

They got across and down into of the side tunnels then kept running, ducking sometimes left, then right at different junctures, until the sounds from the hanger faded.

"Stop" Draven said, short of breath.

The soldier did and crouched in sentry position with back to the passageway wall, rifle ready and looking down the passage.

"Your com," he reached for the boy's helmet and yanked the wiring out.

"Sir?"

"They've reached command center by now," Draven said. "They'll be able to track us through the commlinks."

"Fuck that," Corporal Tonc said, then "Did the Princess get out, sir?"
Don't call her that, Draven thought.

"Yes, I think so. Do you have any idea where we are soldier?"

"Northeast Access Corridor C, sir....I think....back around med bay then it accesses the main North corridor. I’m figuring," he gestured up the tunnel with his rifle, "if we can work our way up and North, we might be able to get to the North Service Bays, out and across to the North Ridge."

You figure?

"Who is in command here Corporal?"

"You sir, but....."

"What do you think we're going to find up at the North end, soldier?"

At least we'd die warmer down here, Draven thought.

"Sir, North Ridge crater is where the non-alliance craft were docked, it's a maybe but...."

Oh hell, he realized now what the boy was thinking.

Ackbar and the Bothan director had landed and taken off from there - if any single man tow shuttles were left behind, that's where they'd be.

He was tempted to laugh. It was insane of course. They'd never make it to the service bays. Even if they did the cold would kill them before they were 100 meters outside.

"Assuming we make it that far and there is a tug left? Then what?"

"We keep taking the next chance, and the next. Until we find a way out, or the fuckers kill us......sir."

He clipped the power check on his rifle. Green.

Bloody hell.

"Alright son. We'll try it your way," Draven said. "Just one thing."

"Sir?"

"You know who we saw back there?"

Corporal Tone stared up at him and for a moment he looked very young indeed.

"Yes sir."

"I can't be captured," Draven said, "Don't go 'hard of hearing' on me again."

"Understood, sir."

They started down the corridor.

I don't know why, he thought, but I blame Erso for this.
Chapter Summary

Bodhi Rook finds his way to the edge, the Empire finds Hoth and a long-awaited reunion happens.

Chapter Notes

I'm not crying, it's just that it's very dusty in here.

Blue, he thought.
Definitely...kind of the greeny end of blue...sky

Slowly, he realized that he was looking straight up through the cockpit window..

Oh hell, his head hurt. Damn.

He'd blacked out. The angle of entry must have been way too steep. A newbie mistake. Damn.

"And that's why newbies die, Rook," He could hear his old flight instructor saying, "because they make newbie mistakes."

Okay. Okay. His seat restraints had pulled tight, and everything seemed tilted almost a meter to port, so, clearly, a less than perfect landing. But...ouch.....no alarms were going off: air quality, pressure, radiation, gravity a hair high but well within green. There was greeny blue sky, water vapor clouds, sunlight and....trees?

It could be much much worse.

Then he heard the voices, a little squeaky, speaking Basic. They were coming from below, outside the ship, maybe under the belly or the aft wing engine.

Even if the cannon still worked, he couldn't shoot without knowing who they were or where they were.

“It came down pretty nice. We should crack it and go in.”

“No. Wait for them.”

“Look how it’s all in one sweet piece. Some runt-born bastards could be hurt in there.”

“As if you care. Wait for them - that’s the agreement. You want old Grandmother to bite you again?”

“I’m not afraid of her....not afraid of the big fellow either.”
“Like Hell, you’re not. If you ain’t afraid of him, you’ve got no nose and if you ain’t afraid of her you’ve got no brain.”

Laughter.

“No point in being afraid of him,” a third voice now, slightly higher pitched, "he’d take you out so quick you’d never see it coming. The big female though, she’d poke you and leave you to bleed for the Blues.”

“Be nice, you rats.”

More laughter. It sounded like something was tapping experimentally around the bottom of the hull.

Bodhi unfastened his helmet and reached under the control panel for the blaster. As gently as he could, he released the seat restraints.

“What was that?”

“‘Runt-bastard’s moving around in there, I think.”

Damn. They either had sensors on the hull or they had REALLY good hearing.

Bohdi touched the safety off on the blaster.

“Point the end with the hole in it towards the people you don’t like,” Tonc had told him, “It’s pretty much that simple.”

More shuffling sounds from under the hull and three or four voices all yelling “Hey!” at the same time.

There was a new voice, booming and musical.

“What are YOOU doing? Get back! You MOON rats!”

A large brown eye, framed by a huge circle of wild yellow hair, appeared in the window to Bodhi’s right.

He dove for the floor, and the eye disappeared.

“Hey there!” came the booming voice, “We got a HUUMAN! Captain-ally! It’s a live one again!”

Bohdi ran a quick strategic debate in his head, and decided that retreating into the bay of the shuttle was a good plan. Before he could move though, the whole cockpit window hatch lifted straight up.

Shit.

There was fresh air and a breeze blowing. Four small furry people (?) were peering in from the dropped port side. Three of them were pointing what looked like guns at him. A Wampa-sized hairy beast with saucer shaped brown eyes loomed up over the other side.

Bodhi backed against the rear wall of the cockpit, pointing the blaster in what he hoped was the most effective direction.

“Don’t come any closer,” he said, trying to watch all of them, and at the same time reaching behind with his free hand, so he could back down into the cargo bay.
Something struck him below the shoulder from the rear. A hand reached around and grabbed above his right elbow at the same time, jerking it up and pinching it tight. His thumb went numb and if he hadn’t had four fake fingers he would have totally lost his grip on the blaster. Someone had grabbed him from behind and was holding something that felt very gun-like against his spine.

“Take it easy,” said a voice, “Don’t move.”

Then, just as suddenly, the hand let go.

“Oh fuck……Bodhi?”

He turned and found himself facing Cassian Andor.

_________________________________________________________________

It seemed like a plan that just might work.

At this point in my life, Bodhi thought, I can honestly say that I’ve been involved in much worse plans….much much worse plans.

Weems had come up with it. They were going to set up a “random” system of receivers, small, mismatched and each using different software. The kind of low-budget junk smugglers could easily get their hands on. None of them would have much signal or range but when linked together they could receive and store data, for short periods, until a “harvest” signal was sent, by some other strategically placed bit of junk. Any single receiver might be found by the Empire, but it would look like nothing much….BE nothing much, except in those few seconds they were all connected. It sounded fairly ingenious to Bodhi, which made him think that he must be misunderstanding it somehow. Also, it could be done on the cheap. Some of the parts had even been salvaged from Captain Solo’s ship. Corporal Weems actually seemed able to understand what the wookie was saying sometimes, which was clearly the way to the giant’s heart. Weems worked in his off-time, and Chewbacca helped out because he was bored out of his skull, waiting for Solo to “make up his mind,” Weems said. “About what?” Bodhi had asked, but the corporal had only shrugged.

Then, all these things had to be planted in space, and in such a way that they could not be traced back to Hoth. The Alliance had no resources for such a project of course, but Bodhi could be spared because he was not a “real” pilot.

It had stung strangely, when General Reikken had said it that way. “I have no problem sparing Rook to you, but understand Draven, I can’t give you a ‘real’ pilot.” Draven had only nodded curtly and gone on walking. Bodhi told himself to forget about it, and mostly he did. He knew what Reikken meant. All flight-cleared pilots on Echo Base were kept on a very short tether. The base was in a constant state of evacuation drill. The alarm could come any minute. Every ship and every person cleared to fly one had to be ready at all times.Trench humor being the standard Alliance defense against fear, this had become the source of 1001 not-funny jokes. The best/worst might have been when lunatic pilot Wedge Antilles got caught in a compromising position with a Pathfinder recon pilot (or two of them….the story got wilder every time Antilles told it) and was brought in for reprimand. He had insisted that no position could be defined as truly compromised if all parties involved were still wearing their flight suits and boots.

“I heard the Princess came down afterwards, made it go away……but then she sat and talked to him
for a long time,” Tonc said. “He’s from Alderaan, you know?”

“Yeah Tone, I know,” Bodhi said.

“His dad was her ship captain? You knew that, right?” Tonc pointed up. “There, with us.”

Pointing up was how Tone always indicated somebody who’d been at Scarif but not on Rogue One, basically everybody who wasn’t the two of them. Bodhi hadn’t known that, though, about Antilles’ father. Princess Leia’s whole crew had been killed outright or captured….which was generally understood to be worse.

_Maybe it's not just you and me Tone._ Bodhi wanted desperately to tell him, but that was not allowed.

_I'm in bloody Intelligence now, he thought, and it sucks. How Did Captain Andor survive like this?_

Then, they rolled in the ship.

It was to the naked eye or the basic scan, an Incom UD30C, ordinary third-hand civilian craft, beaten to hell and re-worked, like it would cost you a few thousand credits at a junkers yard. In point of fact, it was a UD30C body welded over a UD60D frame. For Bodhi it was love at first sight. A UD30 could tow barges in atmo, carry small cargo, or 3-5 passengers.... if in Solo’s words, when he saw Bodhi working on it, “they really, really liked each other.” It was a workhorse craft, the kind used routinely by backwoods planetary security, small companies, shady dealers and traders. Her bones though were from a UD60 starfighter/support. She could handle rough conditions, serious hyperspace jumps, had good pick-up and only LOOKED like she had no guns. Chewbaccahelped him mount a small cannon behind the aft wing mount and rig the gunnery control to look like a cargo grappling arm. If he was boarded, he could just flip a switch and ditch the gun.

“This is AWESOME!!” Bodhi cried, absolutely sincere. The wookie tilted his head sideways, let out an ear-splitting roar and hit him with him a slap on the back that sent him sprawling.


“We’re going to deploy in -48 hours,” he said. “Have her ready to go, Rook.”

It was a plan that might have worked, but it never got the chance.

Things began to go wrong in funny ways. Word had it that Captain Solo was finally leaving the base, really truly this time. He and the Princess could be seen, or rather heard, shrieking at each other in hallways. Loud, messy screaming fights about things like “you have a stupid haircut” and “where was he going anyway?” and “how dare you!” He called her things like “your worshipfulness” and double-dared her to kiss him in public. It was embarrassing for the entire base. Neither of them seemed to care.

Then Commander Skywalker didn’t come back from patrol.

Word filtered through the hangar. He’d gone out on a five-man tauntaun patrol, checking out a bunch of vibration alarms that had gone off on the North Ridge. They read as likely meteor strikes, but Command always had them checked visually. Bad weather had come in suddenly, and the team had been pulled inside. Skywalker hadn’t made it back. Tone had been on the patrol.
“Fuck this!” he said, bypassing his quarters and coming to find Bodhi after he and the rest of the team cleared frostbite check. “I heard him on the comms. He was checking out one more hit site. He was right behind us! He is not the kind of guy to screw up!” Skywalker was popular, there was almost nobody he hadn’t helped out somehow. He had a gift for it.

“Fucking no way, man! Even the damn tauntauns like him.”

When told that Skywalker was missing, Solo had climbed off his ship (Bodhi heard about it from a tech on the night crew), taken a saddled patrol tauntaun out of the pen and ridden it straight out the door to look for him.

“Whooohoo! Man’s a crazy, fucking pirate!” Tonc said, admiringly.

“Man’s a crazy, smoking-HOT pirate,” the tech said, looking dreamily into the middle distance.

_Man is a crazy, dead pirate, Bodhi thought._

They had shut the access door to the main hanger, slowly…trying to leave a crack open for as long as possible, in case either man somehow made it back. Leia Organa just stood in the middle of the hangar, for almost 40 minutes, staring at the opening. An astromech droid, Skywalker’s R2, he guessed, kept jumping up and down and squeaking by the shield door track. They had to send another droid out to drag it back. The temperature was dropping insanely fast. Alarms were going off. They had to pull all the ships further back to prevent damage from cold stress. Finally Deck Commander Bartok walked out to talk to the Princess, standing alone in the middle of the first launch bay. Bodhi saw her nod, and then turn her face away. It was so cold now that the magnetic control failed, and instead of sliding, the main shield doors stuck and then lurched the last meter into place with an awful clang. From where he stood, winching back an X-wing into the rear bays, Bodhi saw the Princess flinch as if she’d been struck. She laid her gloved hand on top of Skywalker’s astromech and it rolled along beside her as she walked back alone. One of those idiotic yellow C3 units trailed behind them.

_Oh holy hell, Bodhi realized, they made HER do it? She had to make the call to shut the door._

The middle of the next day, flight patrols were sent out, on the thousand to one chance of finding the bodies. They found them both alive. When the pilots sent the word back the whole base broke out in cheers. Solo had rigged up a thermal shelter, somehow also using the mutilated corpse of the tauntaun (!!!!!!), thus cementing his pirate credentials for all time. Skywalker was messed up, but in med bay. I should go see him, Bodhi thought. No way he didn’t lose some fingers or toes.

It actually seemed like a good omen, although Bodhi Rook had had his faith in such things lasered away years ago.

_Sometimes nobody can possibly survive, but then somebody does, he told himself. I did. Galen’s daughter did._

“Operation Shepard” was 10 hours from go. Bodhi had his little U-wing packed and ready. He had three of the junk relays to set out on the first pass. Draven was waiting to give him coordinates for drops until the last possible second.

Then the alarms sounded. The Empire had found them.
Bodhi half-fell back into his pilot’s seat. Captain Andor holstered his own gun, then reached over and took Bodhi’s out of his hand.

“I’m going to put this down, so you don’t accidentally shoot me, ok?” He smiled.

“Oh! Oh man …oh hell…it’s you!” Bodhi grabbed him with both arms. Cassian hugged him back, they were both laughing and Bodhi was pretty sure he was crying.

There was small cough and a whistling noise.

Four small, furry people with guns and a huge, hairy thing with eyes were still standing there. All pretty much staring at them.

“We’re not getting a salvage share out of this are we, Cassian-ally?” said one of the furry people, cocking back his blaster-reassembled-from-four-other-type-blasters blaster.

“You’ll be gifted,” the captain said,” but this is our Heart-Companion Bodhi Rook, and if you touch so much as a bolt on his ship without his permission, I will gut you like a fish and then Jyn will want to talk to you.”

The furry people grumbled, two were dark brown, one brown and yellowish striped, and the other a golden tan with black nose and ears, but they all secured their weapons.

Alright, alright,” said the tan one, twitching his nose up over the hatch frame, “Heart-Companion eh? Will there be a party?”

“I can guarantee it,” Cassian said.

“Right. We will see you there then.” They all smiled with small, very sharp, white teeth and disappeared.

“Bodhi, I can’t believe it’s you” Andor was laughing again.

“Jyn is here?” Bodhi said, “I mean the message…Draven said that you….Jyn’s ok, she’s here?”

“She’s good, Bodhi.”

“Should I go to Jyn-ally and tell her this news?” said the bass voice of the large creature.

“Yes. Tell her and bring her here Torla,” Cassian said, “Please.” The creature turned loped away like a very large long haired gazelle.”

He hugged Bodhi again and shook his shoulders, “We’ve got to get you out of this ship, my friend. You are going to need to be standing on solid ground when she gets here.”
The General

Chapter Summary

In the trenches with Draven and Tonc.

Chapter Notes

Two additions in a day. Have I mentioned that I saw The Empire Strikes Back 33 times in an actual movie theatre, with popcorn and smuggled in beer and everything?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

This is the fucking worst, Tonc admitted to himself. Get me out of these ice tubes and someplace I can move, some place with cover, with options, no matter how bad.

At Scarif, once he’d gotten out of the damn shuttle, there’d been crates and vehicles, and even damned trees. On Qemia 7, when the downtown was being stormed he’d learned to move house to house, street to street. He’d watched the older fighters and, when he’d been tagged by the commander he recognized as his former music teacher, he’d just picked up a gun and followed them. You moved cover to cover, calculated where the fire was likely to come from and fit yourself into or behind anything likely to impede ballistics. It was physics. It was math. It was a straightforward transaction. You internalized and got good at it or you fucking died....or took a belly wound, like he had. Alliance body armor sucked. There wasn’t enough of it and what there was sucked. It came to him sometime after Scarif that the guys who actually had army training, who’d served with the fuckers back in the day, or been in real planetary services, were at a disadvantage that way. It was something to consider. Maybe being some kid who’d pretty much walked off the football pitch and straight into combat in shorts and a jersey had helped him. That was the kind of way he’d found his brain working, all those days in med-bay anyway, and for a long time after.

“Do you ever think about it?” he’d asked Rook. Not right after, of course, that would have been a real dick move. It was when Rook got his new eye and was working and didn’t look so much like a walking corpse 24/7. Tonc was asking himself all the time in those days, and since it was the question fully half the fucking base was asking themselves fully half the fucking time, you had to be super careful who you said it out loud in front of.

“What about?” Rook had said, but then he finished before Tonc could take it back, “You mean about why we’re alive and everybody else is dead?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m alive because Captain Andor dragged my broken ass off Jehda when he could have left me there. I’m alive because a big crazy monk shot off a door.” Bohdi had turned off the power to the reflector coil he’d been working on, but he hadn’t actually looked at Tonc. “I’m alive because I had a heart to heart conversation with a droid and he trusted me. Because Jyn held my hand and said, ‘You have to do this now.’ Because Skywalker fired his last torpedo in the right spot.” He turned then and gave a shaky smile, “Right now, I’m mostly alive
because you carried me across a beach.”

“Ah well,” Tonc said, “You weren’t that heavy, really. You had a bunch of pieces missing.”

*Damn, he thought, I hope you made it out ok Rook.*

*For brass, the guy clearly knew how to handle himself.*

At the crossing with Corridor 8 they’d come across the bodies of an Infantryman and two dead troopers. He’d picked up the Infantry’s blaster, checked it and put it in his holster, putting his spent one in the guy’s hand.

Tonc must have raised an eyebrow, because the General had put a finger to his lips and then held up the gun and nodded down the corridor.

*Oh, I get it, if the fuckers double back and see a gun missing, they’ll know we’re here. Tonc nodded. Good stuff.*

*Melski would have loved this guy…..hell, this guy maybe even trained Melski. You could never tell with the spooks and spec-ops guys. He’d also grabbed the extra charge clip and then yanked the helmet off one of the troopers, pulling out some wiring and then jamming it back on the fucker’s head. There’d been short yellow hair.*

*Never getting used to that, Tonc thought, seeing the faces. It wasn’t even that he had trouble with shooting an unhelmeted enemy, because he’d done that enough times, thanks. You didn’t really look at faces when you fired anyway. The thing was, why? Why the facemasks? It’s like they put those helmets on them to make them harder to kill but easier to shoot.*

*His grams had talked about the Clone Wars and fighting in the regular army back in the day. How the fuckers used to be the “good guys” then, but how when they took their helmets off, they were all basically the same big good-looking Mid-Rim dude. It was tremendously fucked up if you thought about it.*

General Draven took the wiring clip he’d pulled from trooper hemet and held it to his ear. He pointed east and he and Tonc moved on and up toward North.

Now with access to their field comms they were able to dodge two more patrols. Troopers seemed to be moving in packs of five and six, checking out closed rooms and alcoves. They were looking for survivors, but not as closely as they should. Tonc and the General pulled into a service alcove and ducked behind a section of collapsed ice wall. They’d checked the door, and Tonc had lifted his rifle slowly, but then the fuckers just moved on.

*Bastards are barely trying, Tonc thought. Not that that would save them if a firefight broke out.*

“What’s the word?” Tonc whispered, nodding toward the earpiece. “They know we’re here? What’s our odds at North?”

“They think they’ve swept the base. If we can stay out of their way we’ve got a faint chance. North is guarded but they’ve figured out the main evacuation was from South, so most of the attention will
He frowned (actually Tonc had difficulty imagining the guy doing anything else) and listened to the faint crackling signal some more.

“Seems that the base search was pushing to capture a specific target…somebody Vader wants…and they’re tripping all over themselves to get it.”

 Fuck, man, don’t even say that name, Tonc thought.

“The Princess? Yeah, I bet…but she’s out, right? So fuck them.”

“No,” the older man looked puzzled, “It’s Skywalker. They’ve been ordered to search the base for any sign of Skywalker, almost to the exclusion of everything else.”

What the fuck? Why Skywalker? Where they carrying a grudge or something? Skywalker was in the air wasn’t he?

Then, “Damn,” he held the thing closer to his ear, more crackling, “Veer.”

“What?”

“General Veer, he’s personally commanding the ground assault. We’ve got to move fast. He’s no fool and if he gets here and starts organizing, things will tighten fast.”

“You know the guy?” Tonc asked.

Stupid question, Stordie, dude’s fucking Intelligence, of COURSE he knows all their guys.

“You could say that,” the General said, tucking the wires and earclip into his coat pocket, and drawing the blaster, “He was my university roommate.”

He waved the gun toward the door, “We have to move, Corporal.”

Chapter End Notes

More tiny link/padding chapters. Sorry, I'm actually supposed to be working today.....argh! But the tragedy that is Davits Draven keeps giving.
Chapter Summary

Jyn and Bes walk toward the crash site.

Chapter Notes

Yet another very tiny connecter chapter.

Bes was walking with Jyn down towards the new crash site when Tofla met them halfway. She had told Jyn some time ago that she wanted to go along now whenever she or Cassian-ally went to a fallen ship, and this would be the second one.

Going to the debris sites, actually being there when the scavengers went in, was a very hard thing for her in many ways. “Are you sure Bes?” Jyn kept asking. The Inland Scavengers, at their best, could be a rowdy crew. Most of them, like Dov, were decent sorts. They had their own code of honor, and policed themselves well enough, but some of them could get quite nasty. Still, Bes knew that rough behavior was not why Jyn-ally hesitated, or Cassian had seemed most uncomfortable at the thought of her company. The last two ships that had fallen had held persons who survived the crashes….three ships if you counted Jyn and Cassian’s. Once this had been a rare occurrence, the stuff of tales mostly, north of Nixa. Only Elder Sister and the oldest Taun (Bes could never remember their individual names) had seen it happen before. Portia’s awakening might account for it. Still, living beings were a risk, sometimes too great a risk. Like the Inland Scavengers, Jyn and Cassian had tests, that any person living who came down in a fall would have to pass in order to be safe to allow to keep living.

Second Sister and Elder Sister had discussed the wisdom of all this at great length. Second Sister had, in fact seemed close to questioning Elder Sister’s judgement outright, which was so rare an occurrence that it made Bes’ stomach feel uneasy.

In the end they placed the question within the circle.

They drew it in the dirt and sat around it, each rolling the ball of string across to another and then holding a thread before rolling it across again.

One strand: Falls were happening more frequently.

This was not in itself remarkable. Years with five large falls were not unknown, although they had usually tended to cluster in either the far North or the far South. So many rich falls clustering in the area of the Memsa of the Inland Coast, could lead to resentment and stress treaties. This must be considered. Circles of Sisters in other areas must be approached and consulted.

Another strand: Ancient Portia.
The relationship between Ea and this being was evolving. Change was coming and Portia seemed to be the post upon which many things would turn and many threads would anchor.

Another strand: Jyn and Cassian.

Properly they should be considered two strands, as they were two separate beings of different fiber and shading. It did not do to forget that, in most circumstances. Their importance to this pattern now, though, clearly lay in their unity. That things unfinished, or even ugly, when left broken or unbound could combine to make something strong and beautiful was a lesson of great importance.

Another strand: The looming Enemy.

They all knew that strand. How could they not? Iola whose first memory of her own hand had a knife in it and another’s blood upon it. Tova who could not straighten her third right finger because the last of her mother’s nurslings bit the hand she held over it’s mouth to keep it quiet where they lay hidden under the floorboards while the Raiders walked above. Bes who could still feel the rope tied around her small waist, in terror of the bites and beatings of her own kin, crawling into the dark and burning cracks of wrecks, over the bones of the dead. Was this why they were here now, in this circle, in this place, they three? It must be considered.

Another strand: The turning of Ea.

It was summer now, and the harvest looked good, and although there had been good rain here, the far North had had drought. Fires might come before the winter rains and preparations must be made.

The last strand: Youngest Sister’s Heart and the question of it’s direction and strengthening.

In the end it was decided. The string was braided into a bracelet and dipped in berry wax. Youngest Sister would go to the crash sites.

“Does Ancient Portia tell the ships exactly where to fall?” Bes asked, skipping to keep up with Jyn.

“She’s cagey about it.” Jyn answered. “I think she had a set number of landing places, long ago, so it’s easier for her to nudge them toward those, but it all depends on the ship, or maybe the pilot, on how well they come down after that. Cassian thinks she doesn’t want to look like she’s giving landing instructions. She wants it to look like this is just a bad gravity pocket, prone to accidents, in case the ships DO manage to send out any messages before they crash.”

“She protects Ea.”

“She protects herself,” Jyn smiled with her little square teeth, ”and the rest of us too.”

Bes tugged at her arm. They were going too fast.

“Oh! I’m sorry Bes.”

“Do you hurry because of worry about Cassian-ally?”

“No.” Jyn said. She was not telling the truth. This had been a source of great frustration to Bes and Second Sister when they had first begun to talk with Jyn and Cassian. When questioned about a State of Wellness, they almost always answered untruthfully at first, but sometimes modified to truth.
soon after. Bes waited.

“It’s just that,” Jyn went on, “We are both very concerned about what may be happening with our friends on the outside, and the message I sent. This ship probably has nothing to do with it, but….still, I want to be there before Cassian and the others try to go inside.”

*Healers in your birthplaces must have the patience of the saints, Bes thought.*

“We can run,” Bes said.

In the end, they had run only a little ways before the golden-haired Taun galloped up to meet them, calling Jyn’s name. She/he even let them ride on her/his back so that they could reach Bodhi Rook more quickly.
Tactical

Chapter Summary

Jyn's message gets through. How do we deal with this Solo guy anyway? Draven and Tonc work on escaping Hoth.

Chapter Notes

Here to meet all your combat action and Draven-fan girl needs.

KayOneZero had been initiated when Jyn Erso’s message intersected with Han Solo’s screw-up.

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No one in Command ever quite knew what to do with Captain Solo.

Three years ago, before Scarif, before Yavin 4, Draven knew what he would have probably done with him. He would have paid the man off and kept him far far away from sensitive operations. Actually, that was a bit rosy. There was a significant possibility he would have just had him shot.

As it was, when Reikken had come to him asking for his Intelligence analysis of Solo as Massassi Base was evacuated, he had found himself too numb to muster much disdain.

They were in a Command Center set up on a freighter in flight. Draven had damned little to say on the subject. The Corellian had just been key in the destruction the Death Star. Intelligence could have determined that he was Palpatine’s bastard son and it wouldn’t have made a difference.

“I’m not asking about background assessment at a security level,” Reikken explained, “He’s not an asset we’re vetting, Davits. Solo’s already inside. We’re stuck with him.” Carl had spent years recruiting pilots and equipment on the Outer Rim and was far more comfortable with the sketchy types who ran fast smuggler packets than Draven was ever going to be.

“I actually rather like the man. His type is shrewd and often freakishly honorable. My concern is with….” his eyes dropped uncomfortably for a moment.” This is a secure conversation, you
understand?"

“Of course,” Draven said. *He had a pretty good idea where this was going.*

“My concern is about Senator Organa.”

*At that point they were all still working out what to call her.*

“She’s proving to be an admirable tactical analyst, not just a rallying figure,” Reikken shook his head.

“Dodonna and Mothma have spoken to her and while she’s agreed to receive some treatment for Traumatic Stress she has been nothing less than astonishing in the last several weeks…..”

*Since she was tortured and everyone she loved and everything she ever knew burned in front of her, you mean? Draven thought.*

He wasn’t managing well at that point himself.

“…..but, when it comes to Solo…..it is easy to forget how terribly young she is.”

She was a surveillance asset at 14. Draven wondered if Reikken knew that. Captain Cassian Andor had been her handler at one point and had attached a note on her file: “No doubts. No hesitation. May forget she is only human.”

Like knew like, he supposed.

*What was it Antoc Merrick had always said?*

“Whatever it takes.” Draven shrugged.

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Now Solo was reporting on a possible probe his patrol had found on South Ridge …his announced departure from base having been postponed yet again.

The thing seemed to have “exploded” before he could image scan it. It was generally assumed he had shot it by mistake. There wasn’t a piece bigger than a sabacc chip left but from Solo’s description it could have just been a prospectors mineral probe.

Signals Analysis were scrambling to try and figure out whether a garbled transmission the thing had set off before it was destroyed was just a failure alarm or something more sinister.

This was the sort of situation their nightmares were made of. If it were a false alarm evacuation might render them visible to the Imperial Fleet. Losses on the Mid-Rim retreats of the previous year had crippled the Alliance, further attrition might be devastating.

If it was not a false alarm and they hesitated this could be the end of the Rebellion. The razors edge was that thin.
Draven and Kaya were called to Signals.

Organa and Reikken were already there looking at live vid feed of a scatter of smoking metal chips and a scorch mark across the snow.

Solo’s voice was on the comm protesting, “I barely hit it. It must have been rigged to self-destruct!”

Kaya and Draven locked eyes, heads down low over Weems’ console.

“Or you screwed up,” they were both clearly thinking.

Weems head jerked.

“SIR!” he turned to Draven. “It’s Andor….no, wait!”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Reikken also turned.

“Sir? Is this confirmation code of some kind? Tanith Ponta. What does this mean, “I bought your boy a new gun?”

_Oh hell. What are you DOING out there Andor? Telling this girl your life story?_

”It’s her.” Draven said

Later it would occur to him that that “her” was meaningless to everyone in the room but himself, and maybe Weems. There were probably only about ten people left alive in the galaxy for whom “her” would always mean Jyn Erso.

“She says ‘Run.” Weems said.

At the same instant, one of the more affected C3 units, probably that one from Antilles’ ship that seemed to follow Organa everywhere, piped up.

“I’m suddenly familiar with this. That’s an Imperial code!”

The data screen lit up with the same message, “That’s an Imperial Code.”

Every droid with audio, every computer with a visible read-out, all over the base, repeated the same message.

“Initiate KayOneZero.” Organa said.

“Start full evacuation,” Reikken confirmed. The shields went up.

One hour later, the Imperial Fleet came out of hyperspace and the Battle of Hoth began.

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Seven hours later, he earnestly hoped, he and Corporal Stordan Tonc were the last two Rebels on Hoth.

Seven point five hours later they finally reached the main North corridor, 175 meters from the access ramp to the rear service bays.

Draven’s career had not been in Tactical. Deployment of resources to secure an enemy over ground was not something he had ever had to do. At the Academy he had been tagged early for the Security and Intelligence track and remembered giddy relief that he would never again have to write another paper on “Deployment of Republic Resources at The Battle of Ryloth”. That said, whoever was in charge of the Imperial force here was insane, or an idiot, or both, in his opinion.

From what he could pick up on his commandeered earpiece, Max Veer was not even on the base yet, he was still dealing with the ground assault teams outside. How could this be? Surely all our people are dead or off by now? Why are they not either grid-securing this bloody hole in the ice or pulling back and bombing it to rubble? Surely they have the air power. Chain of command was a mess.

Vader was on the base, physically ON the base. Which should have scared the hell out of him, and did, but…Organa was right. Vader was both their cruelest weapon and their greatest weakness. Most of his own troops were so terrified of him that they struggled to stay out of his sight. The field officers were stepping all over each other’s toes to try to curry his favor. Only Tarkin had been able to use him effectively and Tarkin was dead.

Maybe Corporal Tonc’s idiotic plan was only 99% idiotic.

Get a grip Davits, you sound like Andor’s droid.

The only thing that really bothered him now was that if they were caught his priority would have to be putting a bolt through his own head. There’d be nothing he could do for the infantryman. Boy wasn’t much more than 22, if he recalled.

At the last crossing they had found two more dead stormtroopers and a dead alliance private, already stiff with cold, propped up, presumably so their bodies wouldn’t block the passage. There were a lot of blast holes in the walls. Something had gone down here.

Tonc, reached down to pull off a helmet.

Draven stopped his arm. They already had an earpiece, Why take the risk?

The corporal held three fingers to his open mouth and gestured away. Broadcast.

He looked up and down the tunnel, pulled back his hood, slid his own helmet off and put on the troopers. Draven held the broken comm wire to his own ear. There was basic chatter…none in their tunnel but some in the corridor and out in the bay.
Lots of squawk about the cold and how the slip-shields weren’t keeping it off.

Tonic slid his hand up inside the helmet and hit broadcast

‘‘This is Patrol…(crackle)…there’s a droid in the medical bay….it’s malfunctioning!…. has a laser! We have men down! Help! …Secure! Secure…..it’s going through a wall!”

Then he yanked off the helmet and sat himself against the wall. He motioned for Draven to lie down.

They played dead as a squad of about ten troopers, some in heavy snow gear, went barreling past.

Once they were well down the corridor and out of sight he scrambled to his feet. “Certified fucking Bodhi Rook trick, that is.” Tonic whispered with a wide smile.

They ran out into the corridor and ducked to the back of the North Service bay. The good news was that it was sunny and windless and as good weather has Hoth had ever provided, which might have explained why Veers had risked a showy ground assault, but also meant that they had a generous 20+ minutes in the gear they were wearing before the cold killed them. The bad news was that there were 5 troopers in full winter gear just outside the opening. The troopers turned a hesitated split second before firing….their lenses set to compensate for snow blindness may have reacted too slowly to men running out from the dim entryway. Draven took out one with his hand weapon as he dove for cover behind a broken crate. Tonic took out two with the rifle and then fired at the ice ledge over the other two’s heads. It came down.

No tugs, no tow-ships in sight. Only a snow speeder down by the far end of the platform. Draven ran for it. Next chance and then the next, right? Tonic grabbed the snow shield helmet off one dead trooper as he ran and then zigged to snag the other. He tossed one to Draven, who slammed it over his head right over his hood. It was maybe 50 meters to that speeder and Tonic’s young lungs might last the freezing air that far but Draven’s couldn’t. They got to it.

They pulled the hatch open with barely functional hands. There was a large body inside it. Not human. Ice cold.

“It’s not one of ours.” Tonic said, his voice muffled by the helmet. “Fuck. Fuck. I can’t fly it.”

Davits Draven had stopped believing in the Force as anything more benevolent than bloody-minded physics when he was thirteen, but he found himself almost ready to reconsider.

It was a Bothan multi-use ground/air craft. Of course the Bothan reps would have brought all their own transport. Those cagey bastards trusted no-one.

“I can,” Draven said. Hurridly they pulled the dead Bothan out and tossed them on the snow.

They were lifting up before the Imperials even started firing rifles from the ground.
Lists and Scars

Chapter Summary

Some of Jyn's thoughts about communication.

Chapter Notes

because I love these characters and they make me cry sometimes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I can defuse bombs and set up fairly delicate explosives. Why is this so hard for me? Jyn asked herself.

Bes really was outrageously patient when Jyn asked for her help, but Memsa communication could be very subtle. A slight variation in pressure on an index finger might be the difference between saying "Thank you for your help" or "Can I finish the rest of your soup?"

"Cassian-ally can manage to be understood a little, when addressing in trade," Bess said. She had patted the back of Jyn's right hand, three times gently which Jyn was pretty sure meant Reassurance that A Trouble is Temporary. She also suspected it had overtones of "you poor thing.."

"Perhaps he could practice with you."

Possibly, Jyn had thought about saying. Unfortunately these days Cassian-ally and I are unable to touch at all without pretty much ripping each other's clothes off and getting into it then and there. Not that she was complaining, oh my no. Competitive as she was, she was quite willing to credit Captain Andor of Alliance Intelligence with genuine in-born skill when it came to tactile communications.

"I think Bes thinks I'm brain damaged," she said to Cassian one morning, as they walked toward Portia's tower.

"Bes is a wise and observant person" he'd said, so she'd thrown a stick at him. She'd hit him too.

"I may be mentally slow but your reflexes are shot, spyboy."

I should make a list of all the steps, she told herself.

Saw had always stressed the usefulness of making lists, mental or otherwise. Essential sequences. Goals. Weaknesses. Strengths. Rules. Problems to be overcome. What we know. What we don't. Toward the end he had become obsessed with them, as if they were the only way he was holding his thoughts together.

Three Things I Know for Certain About Cassian Andor, she thought.

#1 He can swim.
Bes and Tova has taken them both down to the ponds that the Memsa used for swimming and bathing, almost as soon as they thought her leg would bear weight. The tiny lakes were beautiful, clear, with stony shores and pebbly bottoms. She and Cassian had both hesitated, probably sharing a fear of water contamination and unseen things that bite, but watching Bes and Tova and a half a dozen other Memsa shriek with delight, fling off their skirts, cannonball and swan dive off the rocks pretty much made you feel stupid if you didn't join in. It was clumsy. She had turned her back, to give him a chance to take his clothes off without her looking, thinking he might be embarrassed. This seemed absolutely comical to her now.

"It's fine Jyn," he'd said, then, when she finally turned around. He had already walked himself out into the water up to his collarbone. In those still early days the yellowish bruising still dotted his ribs. Just under the water surface, right above his sternum, was a faint violet line from the first cross-beam he'd struck, falling inside the data tower. She felt a pain so sharp and intense that she'd had to close her eyes for a moment. When she could open them again she said, "Is it very cold?"

"Not really."

Then he swam slowly, carefully away.

She'd pulled off her clothes quickly and slid straight in.

It had been freezing.

#2 There are some parts of himself he holds onto, no matter what

She recognized a few of the words of dialect he whispered, usually muttered when he was on his last nerve with her, or when his nightmares were very bad. His accent when he spoke Basic was a little like rural Aldaraani, but with different s's. She couldn't exactly place it but it was a familiar enough Mid-Rim accent. Only once had she ever even given it a second thought, back on Scarif, in those stolen Imperial uniforms. He had been playing the part of the Inspection Officer. She had been bundled up under the coveralls of a landing crew tech, K2 was just standing there, under strict orders not to make a peep. The security check-in had said, "I thought your shift ended ten minutes ago sir, we have you as logged out." Jyn's hands had tingled with adrenaline, but before she could react, Cassian snapped, "It should have, but obviously it won't until you clear us in, Private." His voice had been pure Coruscanti private school, clipped vowels and polish. Why had that surprised her, she wondered? He was a fucking spy. He could talk any way he needed to. She had thrown her mother's posh accent away so many years ago, and taken on Saw's, Maia's, Gorek's, burying her childhood as fast as she could. She doubted she could ever get it back convincingly even if she wanted to. If he held onto that voice, his words, his language, it was because it was important, it was the real Cassian Andor. He must have determined at some time in the last 20 + years that he would not let go of it, even if he had had to let go of almost everything else.

#3. He's had some work done.

It made sense when you thought of it. People doing undercover spy shit needed to be difficult to identify. Scans were harder to fool if you had things like a jagged 25 cm gash visible across the front of your right thigh. (Fortunately, when you are being processed into prison at an Imperial labor camp, the record-search tends to be a little lazy.....they have you, you'll be dead in a month, who cares what else you're wanted for?) In the criminal world if you had credits to spare for repair you saved it for faces, hands, not parts that were usually covered up in a visual screen. Even at it's ragged edge the Alliance clearly managed best quality bacta and dermal nano injections for high ranking spooks. Looking at his arm you would see just tanned skin and muscle, lean and quick. It was only when you ran your fingers over, above the elbow, that you felt it. Then if you traced around to the other side, you could feel the exit wound. No mark, just scar tissue beneath the skin. Whatever it
was, it must have gone right through bone too. Damn, that must have hurt. Two short straight lines could just be felt on the right side of his stomach, if you traced up and in from his right hip, each one the width of a thin knife blade. If he noticed her explorations beyond their now regular half-starved mapping of each other, he said nothing. She had not said anything either about the marks of rough stitching on her leg, or when he’d run his hands down her back and kissed the half dozen taser-prod scars there. She felt tears in her eyes, but she hadn't wanted him to stop. They never talked about it.....things like that.

*What was there to say? She thought. They hurt you. They hurt me. We're here now. Maybe we can wear some of these things away like water over stones.*

Chapter End Notes

Just a bit of sentiment that needed to fit in. More action forthcoming.
She saw Cassian standing by a ship. It was just a battered little security A30, slightly tilted on the dry stream bed. His arm was around the shoulders of another man that she might not have recognized if she hadn’t been looking for him. He was still thin, but his clothes didn't hang on him. His hair was still dark but close-cut now, and his beard trimmed. Mostly he stood differently, shoulders back, head higher. It wasn't until he turned and faced toward her that Jyn felt 100% sure, that she really believed it.

_The first thing he had said to her was, "You're Galen's daughter?"
_The first thing she'd thought was, 'You think Papa is a good man. You love him.'
_And the first thing she had felt after that thought was guilt.
_All those years, I didn't, she realized now, I'd stopped. I stopped believing._

That day, weeks ago, after Portia had given them Draven's first message, and questioned them about Bodhi, she had then announced that they should go tend to their own affairs and return in 36 to 48 hours. Her image promptly disappeared and her interior lighting dimmed.

_Well. Good fucking night, Jyn had thought._

Sometimes Portia would give them an explanation as to her behavior, that the planet's rotation needed to be compensated for, or solar flares or some other conditions were interfering with her or some such, but mostly she just said "Done. Goodbye for now."

It wasn't as if she were tired, obviously. Jyn got the impression that she was doing something else, some other work or search or fight, that had nothing to do with them or the Empire, or the war. Maybe she just wanted to make sure that she and Cassian knew they weren't the boss of her.

"We mustn’t ever forget that she has her own agenda," Cassian said. "We are allies, in her estimation, I hope, maybe even friends, but....."

When it came down to it, they really had no clear idea what Portia even was.

She was old, they knew that, as old as the temples on Yavin, maybe older than Jedha. She was an AI, but clearly much more than a Central Intelligence System.....the only one of those Jyn knew anything about was the one that ran Cloud City on Bespin. Jyn remembered being there (well, Tanith
had been there) and how people in the city talked about it like it was a cranky but generally benevolent landlord. "Cis will get those ships landed eventually," they'd say or "I wish Cis would turn us around for some better weather."

She had to admit that she didn't know a fucking thing about how even familiar droids and comps and AIs thought. Someone who had been field-stripping and reprogramming droids in his teens, might have greater insight. All she knew for sure was that If anyone ever suggested that Kay had not truly loved Cassian, where she could hear it, she would take a pipe truncheon to them.

Sometimes it seemed to Jyn, that as complicated and utterly alien as Portia was, that she did understand her, at least a little. Everyone she cared about had died or failed her long long ago. She must have thought that all she had left was her own mechanical survival.

No wonder she was so interested in Bodhi. Bodhi was the antithesis of that.

"Tofla! Tofla! Let me down!" She'd said at the top of the bank above the ship. The Taun knelt and Jyn slid off her back, leaving poor Bes to climb down on her own. She ran down the sandy slope and, unable to say anything more than "Damn it!" threw both arms around her friend.

He had been standing, soaked to the bone, inside the bay doors of the main loading platform on Eadu.

Normally the cargo crews were in and out within two hours. They had no real contact with the Facility staff other than Traffic Control and loading crews and that was the way everybody wanted it.

This one time the weather had been so terrifyingly horrifically bad that all incoming and outgoing flights were grounded and everything was clearly going to be backed up for half a day. The cargo shuttles had to be magnetically locked into place to prevent them from being blown right off the platform and with no better idea, somebody ok'd letting the shuttle crews struggle in and shelter inside the hangar bays. It was chaos and Eadu Flight Station supervisors did NOT like chaos. Cargo was being pulled and stacked, waiting, by the doors. Guards had been placed by the high-security sealed containers he had brought in from Jedha, but some of them had run over to prevent the refueling truck from tipping over. He’d had no idea what to do. Normally regulations were that he stay by his shuttle until cleared to return but since that wasn't possible now, he figured he'd better stay by the cargo. He sank down with his back to an interior strut.

A tall man in a grey Research Supervisor uniform was standing nearby, also soaked from the spray blown sideways through the bay doors before the panicked crew had wrestled them shut. He just stood next to the Hz containers silent as a guardian statue amidst the disorder. Bodhi remembered seeing the man many times before. He was always present when the Hz were unloaded, usually standing in the back until somebody brought him a clipboard. It didn't matter. He didn't have the strength left to pay attention to the man. If he was ordered to move, he'd move. Until then he was so tired and cold and broken he just couldn't care. Back against the beam he pulled up his knees to his chin and rested.

The thin black and red thread bracelet had slipped out from under his flight-suit sleeve.
His supervisor, a former Ni-Jedha shopkeeper, had spotted it and told him to get rid of it. "I'm not unsympathetic Rook," he'd said, looking uncomfortable, "but if they catch you with that on....it won't go well..... just, just keep it out of sight. ok?"

Turning it around his wrist, he silently counted the knots. 47, one for each year of his mother's life.

"I'm sorry," said a voice.

For a moment he couldn't tell where it had come from. The tall man hadn't even really turned his head. Eyes down on the crated Hzs and he did not even look at Bodhi, who quickly pulled his damp sleeve down.

"Who in your family has died?"

"My mother," Bodhi heard his own voice breaking and swallowed...."oh no, he could not cry here, not here.

The man in grey nodded slightly, still not looking at him.

"You should leave, when they clear your ship. Run," he said quietly, "Get as far away from all of this as you can." He sounded immensely sad.

Bodhi gave a short harsh laugh, "And do what? Get shot as a deserter, or garroted by the partisans as a collaborator?"

He was not stupid, he knew better than to be talking like this, but he found he really truly did not care anymore.

"All I ever wanted to do was fly, all my life. I thought to myself, 'Is your conscience so precious?' She was sick. We needed the money...... everything I did, I did it for her and now she's gone."

The man bowed his head. "I'm sorry," he still did not look down.

"You know what she kept asking?" Bodhi said, "At the very end? She thought I was my father. She kept asking me to take her to the Temple. She wanted to go to the kyber stones and pray for a healthy baby. " He put his head down on his arms to keep himself from shaking.

“What is it even for,” he’d asked bitterly, “What are you even making here?”

"Do you really want to know?" The man was looking directly at Bodhi now.

That was how it started.

He never knew afterwards how Galen managed things over the next few weeks. His flights always seemed to come in on the edge of a shift change now. There was sometimes paperwork trouble or a faulty warning light on one of the containers that had to be checked, but it was always something. Five minutes here twenty there.

"I have a daughter about your age. I don't know where she is. She was an extraordinary child. Fearless."

"Saw was my wife's friend. She trusted him. He tried to help us, he did help us, but...it all went wrong."

“Lyra...she never flinched from the truth. She was fooled, like we all were, but she was so brave, so
clear. Once she saw the right thing, she never turned away....no matter how awful the facts, no
matter how hard.”

*Could he have done it? 15 years in a hell custom-designed to break you? Forced to serve your
enemies, participate in their crimes, just in the HOPE that you could delay them until help came, the
hope that you could strike back someday.* Bodhi knew he wasn’t that strong.

Only once had he said, "What about you? I can come back for you, try find away to get you
out.....try to find your child.” It had been a lie of course but he had wanted it desperately to be true.

That was the only time he ever saw that flash of fire in Galen's eyes.

“No.”

That last day, he saw it all nearly fail. He had been waiting by the shuttle, Galen was asking to walk
back to notify the pilot of a damaged container that would need to be replaced at the Jedha Station.

A man in a white uniform had appeared, a Director, “Galen, a word?”

No choice of course, Galen walked calmly back. Bodhi felt his heart stop.

“Please, Galen,” the man was saying, pitched just loudly enough to be heard across the bay, ”I know
you’ve been lonely but really? Flirting with the cargo workers? It’s undignified Galen.”

“I can easily send the instructions on ahead Director Krennic,” Galen was saying, unruffled, “but
you know how chaotic things are at Jedha.”

“No, no, I understand, I really do,” the man waved a dismissive hand, glancing with a smile in
Bodhi’s direction, “but say goodbye to your little friend now. This needs to be the end of it.”

Galen nodded and walked out toward the shuttle.

He passed an invoice pad into his hands and as he did so pressed Bodhi’s fingers against a card taped
to the back.

“Now,” he said, his face neutral, his voice pitched low. “Have faith in yourself. You can do this.
Run as soon as you touch down. Find Saw, he will help you.”

Bodhi tried to take his hand but Galen turned and walked away.

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Bodhi Rook could count the planets he’d been on so far on one hand: Jedha, Eadu, Scarif, Yavin 4
and Hoth. He figured a training flight to Amir Station didn't count since he never got off the shuttle. It made him feel terribly unsophisticated compared to some of the pilots and techs who'd logged time on dozens of worlds. Force only knew how many Jyn and Cassian had seen between them.

This place though, this place was like nothing he'd ever heard of. As nearly as he could tell it would only have appeared at all on the most detailed navigational charts and then only as a barren planetoid with a beacon marker. All hyperspace lanes were marked as unstable this far out. He dimly remembered every alarm going off when he'd tried to come back into regular space.

"They call the planet, Ea," Cassian told him.

"Because that it was it is," said the small dark-furred person who was skipping around them. Cassian had introduced her as Bes and referred to her as "she," so Bodhi was game to roll with that.

Standing by the ship, Cassian had been saying, "How did you..." When he had suddenly stopped, looked up the slope and smiled. "Brace yourself. She's here," he said.

Bodhi turned around. It was a good thing that Cassian had placed a hand between his shoulder blades, because otherwise, getting tackled by roughly 54 kg. of Jyn Erso would have knocked him to the ground.

He'd had tears in his eyes from seeing the Captain, but he pretty much fell apart when Jyn got there. He wound up lifting her off the ground, he hugged her so tight, both of them laughing and crying at the same time. He was a sniffling mess when she finally said "Put me down you crazy bastard!" She was dressed pretty much the same way as Cassian, in some kind of collarless shirt and blue trousers. Her hair was in a back braid. It made her face look different but her eyes were still the same, still Galen's eyes.

One of the furry persons had come up behind her and placed a hand against the small of Jyn's back. "Hi, Bodhi Rook," the person said, peeking around.

"Hello." Bodhi replied. The small person bowed.

"I wasn't tracked." Bodhi insisted, "I know I wasn't because even I can't figure out how I landed."

They were sitting in the small hold of Bodhi's ship, a tight squeeze for three and a half full sized people but the top and back hatches were both open so there was a breeze.

"You'll have to reset everything manually, is my guess. She probably pulled your ship down in such a way that half your instruments still think you broke up in hyperspace." Cassian was saying.

"She?"

"Ancient Portia will want to speak with Bodhi Rook," Bes said.

"Ancient Portia will have to wait" Cassian told her, "Bodhi probably has a mild concussion. He needs rest and food and information before she gets to play twenty questions."

Odd to odder.

In the end, the large long haired quadruped person (?) agreed to give Bes a ride back her to own
home ..*this seemed to be outrageously exciting for her and some kind of rare treat*... while he and Jyn and Cassian walked. Jyn insisted that nobody would tamper with the ship but Bodhi secured the hatches anyway. He also took the blaster.

Then he unzipped the inside pocket of his flight jacket and slipped out the tiny holo square.

"This is for in case, I found you....you know....in the unlikely event I didn't just die in space or something...." and held it out to Cassian, "Draven," Jyn stood beside the port thruster vent, looking at Cassian with an unreadable expression.

The captain only nodded. He laid his hand over Bodhi’s but didn’t take the square.

“*You hold onto it for now,*” he said. "*We’ll look at it together when we get back to the house.*"

So they started hiking up the dry stream bed, with Jyn periodically touching Bodhi’s arm, as if to make sure he didn't walk too fast and tire himself out. As they walked he started telling them what he could about the Battle of Hoth and how right royally screwed the Alliance probably was now.
Gratitude for the Company of a Beloved Friend

Chapter Summary

Bodhi comes home for dinner.

Chapter Notes

Because even our fluff has pain in it.

Cassian had noticed earlier as they were sitting in the shuttle but it took Jyn longer.

They had made it back to the stone house and eaten some red fruit and reheated flat bread. Bodhi ate as if it was the best meal he had been given in months and if he had really been on Hoth for better than a year Cassian could easily believe that it might be.

He was also starting to look a little wobbly from exhaustion.

There was a very odd moment when they noticed Bodhi’s glance at the mattresses on the low platform that had been serving as their bed, pretty much since they’d come here. Conversation stopped for a second.

Jyn’s cheeks actually turned pink, something that Cassian Andor would have bet every credit in the Imperial Treasury was not even possible.

“Hey, you know,” Bodhi said, with the air of a man who had already had his fill of information today and just did not feel up to taking in any more. “if I could just sack out on the floor, for a little while, that would be just fine.”

So they had taken one of the sleeping “bags” that Cassian had made to use on trips south with Dov and laid it on one of the extra mattresses they'd topped off with dry grass.

Then Jyn insisted on checking Bodhi’s eyes before she would let the poor man lay down and sleep. She was that worried about him having a concussion.

“Fuck, Bodhi. Since when is one of your eyes a different color than the other?”

“They’re both still brown, right?”

“Answer me, Bodhi Rook.”

“The new one is a lighter color,” he said, “I have drops I’m supposed to use, to darken it to match, but I’ve been forgetting lately.”

"Damn it, Rook."

Oh Jyn, don't.
Bodhi glanced down as if he were ashamed.

“There was a grenade,” he said, quietly, “On Scarif... ...I got back to the shuttle, I sent the message but....then there was a grenade.”

_Jyn don't, Cassian thought. Don’t make him tell you if he doesn’t want to._

Because as unbearably gentle as he knew she could be, this was still Jyn Erso. Fear of pain, her own or someone else's, did not usually stop her when she had started down a path.

“How much?” she asked.

Again a moment of silence. Then Bodhi sighed, and looked up to meet her eyes.

"How much?" she repeated.

Cassian had already noted that one extra-thin flight glove had stayed on. Bodhi held out his right hand, peeled the glove off and flexed his fingers. _It was very nice prosthetic work actually._

“Thumb and wrist are still original issue,” he said, stretching his right arm out and back “The eye and the arm bones are technically home-grown,.....mine, just in a tank. The other fingers, the elbow and the shoulder joint are premium Alliance equipment.” He smiled, “ Also a few ribs, part of my jaw and some miscellaneous internal organs that I didn’t bother to keep track of. Dr. Thorn.....um that's the doctor on Hoth,...says I'm a team effort now....basically... ” His voice trailed off.

Jyn reached out and took his right hand, gently both his hands together palm to palm and pressed them between both of hers.

_Gratitude for the Company of a Beloved Friend, _Cassian thought. _Good job, mi amor._

After Bodhi had stretched out on his new mattress and fallen straight asleep, they went outside to sit on the low wall and look at the stars.

“Where is Haven?” she asked.

Cassian shook his head, ”It’s not a place, it’s a plan….or it was, I’m not exactly in the High Command loop these days.”

He looked up at the sky. High thin clouds were passing in front of the larger moon like scraps of dark gauze.

_Not for the first time, it almost physically hurt to not know what was happening on the other side of those stars, what might be hiding in the dark between._

“Haven means separating Command from the Fleet. If they are doing what I think they are, it means taking the Alliance back to the kind of structure they had before Yavin IV. The fleet will hide in space….at least most of it….clustered around shifting rendezvous points, probably more than one. It makes them almost impossible to find but…”

“It means only limited coordinated attacks, no grand battles, no protection offered to ground assets. We can strike. We can harass. But we can’t take and hold.”
You know that strategy in your bones don’t you? He thought. The jackal’s strategy. Saw’s way. You saw what it did to him.

She slid off the wall to sit on the grass, her back to the stones. and leaned her head against his leg.

*Saw Gerrera had taken her out of a hole in the ground probably a day away from dying of thirst and raised her. What the hell must that have been like?

He remembered every file he’d ever read on Gerrera and he’d read plenty. Brilliant, charismatic, unforgiving, relentless. He’d had a twin sister, Steela and they’d been the terror of the pro-Separatist government on Onderon at the end of the Clone Wars. Jedi-trained and Republic-funded terrors, at least that’s what he had surmised from the sizable portion of file that hadn’t been redacted. Most of the analysis dated Saw’s emotional and mental slide from his sister’s death, others marked it as escalating after his imprisonment and torture in Imperial custody in 19BRI. He split from the Council in a legendary row after Bail Organa questioned his “tactics,” taking his cadre of experienced fighters with him. It had been a major loss.

*Which tactics, Cassian had always wondered. The kidnappings, the waving away of civilian collateral damage, the torture? What had the last straw been? Mothma and Organa had both been reluctant to talk about it.*

And yet? Things he knew now made the picture more complicated. How had Lyra Erso, a government geologist "rescued" from Viallt with an infant in her arms, come to trust no one but the most bloodthirsty of the Empire’s enemies? How did she even meet Saw Gerrara? Galen Erso’s wife had been a cypher. Only one file had ever turned up from her years as the proper, if over-educated, wife of a rising Imperial scientist. She had been turned down for a minor teaching position, when Jyn would have been about three. The application had been purged, only the rejection remained, noting "psychological " concerns and “pacifist leanings.” Some nameless school superintendent must have tried to re-submit the request because a post-dated off-line notation cited was added citing “occasional superstition.”

That would have been the end of that….she was religious and the old Jedi faith was out of favor. Lyra Erso vanished from the record.

Five years later she was still religious enough to tie a kyber crystal around her only child’s neck, tell her to trust the Force and send her alone to wait, sealed in a cavern for either death or rescue by……the Lion of Onderean.

He knew all this only because of the nightmares. They could categorize most of each others demons by now. He knew when she woke clutching her arms around her knees and gasping for air that it was about the cave this time. “It’s dark,” she would whisper, and he’d get a light on as fast as he could and hold her until the shaking stopped. They didn’t ask each other about dreams. That was one of their rules. No asking, just listening. “I blamed my mother for years. I tried to hate him,” she had said once, lying beside him. “I wish I could.”

*He had thought she meant her father for a moment, then realized she meant Saw.*
His memory pulled up the image of a large wild-haired man wrapped in rags and broken robotics, whirling to face him, clutching a wooden stick as if ready to strike. *I was afraid*, Cassian admitted to himself, *the old lion had that much power left in him even then.*

He’d actually raised the blaster before Gerrera had looked down and pulled his attention back to what he’d come for, Jyn, crouched on the floor. She had never told him what they said to each other, she and her old commander, whether it was her father’s message alone or some confrontation with Saw that left her in such a state that she hadn’t noticed the walls collapsing around them. Gerrera had seemed to have shrunk when Cassian looked up again, spoke through the growing roar of wind and rumble of stone in the desperate tones of an old man. Was it “take her” or “save her”? When Jyn turned to clutch at his arm, beg him to come with them, the Lion’s voice returned one last time, that booming thunder so familiar from the audios. “Go with him, Jyn!” he’d roared.

Saw hadn’t known who Cassian was in that cave and he hadn’t cared.

*He didn’t kick you out... or “ditch you” as Jyn put it... at 16 because you weren’t good enough or even because of your father, whatever he said, he wanted desperately to tell her. He didn’t want you to end up like him. Mad as he was, wrong as he was, he loved you. He was trying to save you too.*

She'd undone her braid after dinner.

He ruffled his fingers through the top of her hair.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked.

“That you are very short.”

“Liar,” she said. “Whatever it is, stop thinking about it.”

“I’m thinking we need to talk to Portia. Whether she wants to or not and we need to get our agenda straight.”

“I agree.”

She had maneuvered herself around and laid a hand on his knee, sliding it very slowly upward.

“Also,” she said, “I think I love Bodhi with my whole heart but either he is going to have to become much more open-minded than I think he’s ready to be, or we are going to have to trouble-shoot some issues.”

*Mujer de mi corazón.*

“Here or the pond?”
“Good outside-the-box thinking Captain, I approve. The pond.”
Guardian

Chapter Summary

a tiny link of Bodhi's escape from Hoth

The broadcast went though every bay and every hallway.

Bodhi had been standing by his ship.

My ship, he had rather liked repeating that to himself....my ship..... and he had been thinking about giving it a name....unofficially, of course.

Tonic had been walking across the crowded hangar toward him.

“Hey Rook!” He yelled, “You wanna go get.....”

He never got to finish.

“K1-0, Full evacuation. All personnel K1-0. This is not a drill”

For a full heartbeat. Time stopped. Then everybody moved at once. They were soldiers, they had trained for this. Survival was the only victory now.

Bodhi Rook and StordanTonic looked at each other across the bay.

Tonic tapped his chest and held up an index finger.

He’d come up with this a few weeks ago. Lots of the squadrons had a hand signal, he’d said, something they could use across noisy flight decks. “Tonic, you're mental, you need to talk to somebody in Med.” “We need one. You and me, man,” he’d said, “Rogue One.”

Bodhi copied him.

Then they turned and ran in opposite directions.

Nothing mattered now but the GR75s and the fighters. Bodhi’s team had one job and that was to get thirty transports out behind the icy wall of the South Ridge.

It turned out to be the best daytime weather and the least cold working temperatures the Rebels of Echo Base would ever have on Hoth.

They did what they had trained to do.
Bodhi did not think about his ship. He did not think about his friends. He worked.

Medical Unit was taken out early on the Quantum Storm. Almost all other equipment was being left behind, people over things but medical was high priority. They had needed hover loaders to move
the droids and the tanks now broken down and crated.

Dr. Thorn had squeezed Bodhi’s arm and mouthed “Good luck,” before running up the ramp behind the med-techs.

As his team dashed back inside on the tow-barges, he saw the fighter escorts pulling ready to bodyguard the ship, the pilots faces turned up toward the shimmer of the shields, as if trying to see what was gathered above them. He recognized Wedge Antilles.

Every time the shields opened to let a ship out they could smell the burning on the icy air, hear the booms of the defensive cannons. Then the shield would close again and that would all be shut out, for now.

Snow speeders were tearing out the main hanger. Ground attacks had begun but they were not Bodhi’s concern.

The last three transports were in place. Bodhi and his crew were supposed to go out on Thons Orchard.

_That left only two more transports to pull out remaining Command and Communications and any speeder pilots that could make it back alive: Dutyfree and Bright Hope._

He thought he could hear someone yelling his name through his comm earpiece but he was so focused, it didn’t even register over the chatter. Then someone grabbed his elbow, standing queued up on the packed snow of South Crater, between the fighters and the transport.

It was Corporal Weems.

“Where’s your ship?”

Bodhi stared at him,

“Where’s the fucking ship Rook?

“Back Bay, next to the Service Alcove, but…I’m supposed to…”

“Right.” Weems said, “You did your job, kid. Unfortunately you’re Intelligence now and the fun never ends.”

Weems tapped his earpiece, “General, I’ve got him.”

Draven’s voice came through Bodhi’s set.

_“Rook. Operation Shepard is a modified go.”_

_What the hell?_

_“Sargent Rook, Weems has your orders, Pull your ship out. Commander Joma will take you out with her transport. Go.”_

Weems slapped a data square and a card into his hand.

“This is for you, this is for Andor, when you find him. Move! Move..sir.”

He slapped Bodhi’s shoulder, turned and ran towards the ramp on the Thons Orchard.

Bodhi ran back in through the tunnel and the echoing bay toward the Guardian. She was almost
alone on the hanger floor. Only Han Solo’s crazy-ass freighter was still there. He climbed in, started
ignition and flew out low, circling to South Crater just as Thon’s Orchard and Joma’s Green One Y-
wing lifted up. They were in the air when the shields fell and Echo Base was torn open. Already
pulling up though enemy flak with Green One laying down fire to clear them enough space to try to
make lightspeed.
Orders

Chapter Summary


Part of that first winter had been a rough time for bad dreams.

In many ways this was to be expected. Portia had just begun giving them data.

Her dreams of Scarif tower, of Cassian falling away from her, the sound of his bones breaking, had never quite gone away. Now the nightmare of the beach...the green fire, the burning... came back with a vengeance. Worse than before, because now there were voices in it, people screaming.

Sometimes all she could do was rush outside, even if it was icy rain or once, snow, so that the night air and the cold on her skin could shock her out of it. Cassian would wrap her in the extra blanket, and hold her.

*It's gone. It's dead. The message went through. She would repeat to herself, over and over.*

Portia had brought them the pictures, Raddus and the Profundity, Leia Organa. The DeathStar was destroyed. At the last moment a pretty Alliance pilot from Tatooine had managed to fire a torpedo and trip Papa’s bomb (she had to assume that part of the story was bullshit, because nobody from Tatooine was ever pretty) and she still held those images in her heart like a talisman, like her mother’s necklace.

Those winter months were even worse for Cassian.

He dreamed about the fire too, they had that one in common.

She soon learned how to tell when he was dreaming of the data tower. For him they were never about his fall, he still claimed he didn’t remember that. His nightmare was always about the climb back up. His muscles would tense, and sometimes he would gasp her name.

“Hush, min kære en” she would say, something she dimly remembered Papa saying to her, she didn't even really know what it meant, “Hush, it’s over,” with her arms around him. “Too late,” he’d said, once or twice, against her shoulder. That was how she’d come to realize that that for him she was always the one who fell, in his nightmare the man in white shot her before he could get there. “I'm here,” she would say, kissing his hair, his forehead, “I’m here. It's over.”

The ones she dreaded most were the kind she couldn’t help with. His hands would clench and he would make a sound, not a moan exactly, but a sound like an animal in pain. If she put a hand out he would flinch away. If she woke him, he would get up and stand, arms stretched, leaning against the wall, or he’d move to the far end of the bed, his back to her.

He wouldn't let her touch him then. “No,” he would say, just “No,” or sometimes, “No puedo.”

Once he had said to her, eyes open, “Where’s Kay? Where’s K2?” and she had realized he was still
dreaming.

It took time, sometimes minutes, sometimes hours, it was agony, but he always came back to her.

“What can I do?” she’d ask, trying to warm him up when he'd crawled back in bed beside her, chilled to the bone.

“It’s just poison,” he’d tell her, “It’s working its way out.”

Six years old, he’d said. She’d seen him take down a running partisan at a bad angle from 200 meters with an un-scoped hand blaster. You don't learn skills like that in a day

Saw had put a gun in her hand at 10, and he hadn’t had to make her take it either, she’d begged for the chance. She had fought for a child’s revenge, for a father figure’s approval, out of sheer bloody-minded rage.

“We’ve all done things…” he’d said, “I told myself it was for a cause I believed in….I couldn’t live with myself if I gave up now.”

You’ve read my file, but who has yours? What did they make you do? What did you make yourself do? What would a brave, disciplined, clear-eyed boy do in a fight against monsters?

She wanted to ask, but they had their rules. She watched, she listened, she waited.

*Authorization Liaso 4. We are under attack. This base is being evacuated to a Haven scenario. I can give you no contact coordinates, the risk of this message going astray is too high. Regular Intelligence channels will be unavailable, access to individual report is…unlikely. Fulcrum is closed. Command had been fully notified that you are in field. Set your own parameters, utilize equipment on your own authority, you are in play. Give us eyes and ears…..may the Force be with you, Major.*

Draven’s small image flickered. The background sound of what sounded like alarms, faded out. That was it.

Cassian nodded slightly, letting out a slow breath.

Jyn felt something twist in her chest, watching him.

I can’t stand it, she thought.

“Somebody translate.” she said. “What exactly are we being told here?”

Bodhi was just looking down at the table top, at his left hand, fingers stretched out on the smooth wood.

Cassian had that careful, controlled look on his face.

“It’s bad. Like I thought, they are going back to the pre-Dantooine strategy,,scattering the fleet, separating Command for protection. There will no longer be a ‘Rebel Base’ for us to try to reach or contact, only regional combat sections, probably clustered in space with limited contact with each other.”

Jackals.
“We’re on our own, which we knew already, but they also desperately need every scrap of information we can give them. They are going to be blind. Additionally every code I have and every code I know is compromised. Even though High level Command knows we’re out here somewhere, we can’t count on being able to contact General Draven directly for confirmations. We can’t count on General Draven still being alive.”

He closed his eyes for a second.

*I’m sorry, Jyn thought, but don’t ask me to forgive him, I can’t.*

That she had had to be the one to craft that last message about Hoth seemed like a particularly bad joke. “Fuck! Why did it have to be me? Damn it Portia!” she’d snarled as Cassian came running, meeting her the bottom of the platform

She told him what she’d said, sick at the thought that it had been the wrong thing, but he insisted she’d done well, that she’d been thinking at least as fast as he could have done in the same circumstances.

The bit about the gun was sheer desperation, Cassian had told Bes that story when they had gone into the wreckage of the black shuttle, someplace all of them still had an extreme reluctance to go, to hunt for salvageable equipment…..finding the rifle and two blasters in a compartment in the cockpit.

Limping back to the stone house, with Bes and Tova’s help, they set about field stripping the weapons. Bes had complimented them both on their skill, and shyly asked if they were scavengers. Instantly she became distressed, as if she might have offended them, quickly adding “I know that you are fighters now, but there are good scavengers and bad scavengers, just like everybody else.” Half to soothe her, he had started talking, in the whispering voice of the first weeks after Scarif, about the first gun he’d ever had, an old model T12 clone trooper blaster that he’d found in the boot of a smashed speeder in a junkyard. He even smiled a little as he told about teaching himself to take it apart and put it back together when he was 10. Draven had been appalled when he first saw it, Cassian had said, with a slight smile, and offered him a new one on the spot.

“I’m sure he fucking did.” Jyn had thought, a little surprised by the surge of anger she felt.

By the time she'd walked into the Council Room on Yavin IV, she’d known that the decision to target her father had not really been Draven’s alone, maybe not even his at all, otherwise she’d have shot the bastard then and there.

He’d tried to call off the strike, Cassian had said, but it was too late. He’d helped Bodhi, it seemed. Draven wasn’t Saw and he certainly wasn’t the Man in White, he’d probably fought hard and maybe he’d even died bravely, fighting the Empire, the real enemy.

*It definitely wasn’t fair. She'd never try to defend it as fair.*

Cassian’s forgiveness was his to give out, Jyn thought, but General Draven of Alliance Intelligence would have to do without hers.
"On the bright side," Cassian picked up the square and turned it over in his hand, "It seems I've
gotten a promotion."

"They gave it to you before, I think, posthumously," Bodhi said. He smiled wryly, "Also, I'm a
Sergeant now."

"Alright!" Jyn slapped his shoulder, "Same rank as me!"

Both men stared at her, confused.

"Since when?" Cassian asked.

"Sefla...he said I had to be at least a Sergeant or nobody would listen to me, so....he, made me one.
That's how it works, isn't it?"

"No," Cassian shook his head, "It's not."

Bodhi burst out laughing. "Oh man! That's it! That's why Tonc always calls you Sarge Erso....I
thought it was just because he's had too many head injuries."

"Tone? Stordan Tone?"

Jyn could picture him suddenly. Thin, dark skin, dark eyes, faint mustache, he'd looked ridiculously
young and hung back by Melshi and Sefla. She couldn't remember if she'd ever talked to him.

"Yeah," Bodhi had stopped laughing. He started to look down, then seemed to stop himself. He
looked Cassian in the eye, "He carried me out of the....what was left of the shuttle....he was shot bad
but he carried me a ways I guess..... Commander Joma, she was Blue Squadron...she was then,
anyway.... she pulled us off the beach. I...I didn't really wake up for three months." He flexed the
fingers on his right hand. "We were it, Tone and me, we were Rogue One. I don't know where he is
now. I hope to hell he got off Hoth."

Jyn took his right hand and held it.

Suddenly there was a sound like cats playing piccolos and yodeling at the same time. Bes was
walking up the path toward the house.

"What is that?" Bohdi looked startled.

"That's Bes." Jyn said, getting up to pull back the curtain.

"Why is she making that noise?"

"She's singing," Cassian told him.

Jyn corrected him with a smile, "She's making sure we know she's coming, just in case we're having
sex."
Koth Melan

Chapter Summary

A very small link because Draven needs help.

Chapter Notes

creeping slowly toward Return of the Jedi one tiny step at a time

Koth Melan did not risk himself in field operations, or at least he had not since his downy spotted youth. For a master within the Bothan Spynet, one’s cover was as sacred as one’s home, one’s clan, one’s honor. Even his late father, of blessed memory, had not known of his son’s true calling. As far as all save his beloved mate, his cadre of 12 bodyguards and the 16 elite masters knew, he was Assistant Consul General for the Bothan Trade Mission, responsible for the Mid Rim region: A wealthy, well-travelled and tastefully corrupt bureaucrat with friends on both sides in the Wars, looking out for Bothan commercial interests with strictest neutrality.

For all that, there was no need for subterfuge here. The most elite spymaster of the most vaunted Intelligence Service in the galaxy found himself literally sitting in a Sky Lounge with a drink in his hand watching a large screen vid feed of the Glorious Imperial Victory alongside business travelers and well-heeled tourists.

Anyone linked to the Web networks for anything more than children’s puppet shows and dance holos would have been hard-pressed to NOT know of the Attack on the Terrorist Rebel Base at Hoth. Imperial news feeds were trumpeting the triumph relentlessly, on all available channels. He half-expected to see holos of Leia Organa dragged in chains before Palpatine’s throne. (Those he would have known were faked. He knew more than enough about the last Princess of Alderaan now to be sure that she would never again let herself be taken alive by Imperial forces.) Skywalker perhaps? His sources were unanimous about Palpatine’s freakish obsession with the Rebel flight commander. Or perhaps the head of the Princess’s rumored lover, the dashing wanted-in-three-quadrants Captain Solo, on a pike? Imperial propaganda organs were leaning towards the baroque these days. The fact that he was not seeing either of those things gave him hope that the Imperial slaughter of the Rebel Alliance was perhaps not so complete as was being boasted. Twitches on the threads of his network indicated that this might be so. Certainly the Rebels had had some kind of warning. One of his people had been on Hoth, meeting with Organa, Reikkan and Kaya mere hours before the attack. The operative had made it out seconds before the planetary blockade went up but two members of her security team had not. Regrettable, good agents, he was sure, but even if their bodies were found it would not matter. Those flawless covers as independent arms traders would hold. Spies are not supposed to be blinded by such fog as hope but he hoped that the military commentators boasts that the War was over the Rebels utterly crushed were just that, boasts.

The government on Bothawui held to a position of strict neutrality. Koth Melan did not.

He sipped his ale and waited. *News would come to him soon either of hope or it's loss.*
One of his entourage, young Nek Bwua’tu, came to him, “Counsel, your shuttle will be cleared for flight shortly. Are you wishing to board?”

“Shortly” not “soon”, “wishing to” not “ready” or “desiring”….there was news of some importance. The spymaster dabbed a napkin to his snout and casually laid his glass aside.

Aboard his shuttle, all scan-baffles in place, Nek spoke urgently,

“Sir, we have a message from Diere Ali’yah, her ship was contacted by a Bothan shuttle as they circled out of Hoth’s system.”

“Her people?” Melan asked. Diere had not followed operational instructions if she had gone back for them. Clan or no, he would have her head.

“No sir. Two humans.”

*Spit it out cub, he thought,* “Rebels?”

“Probably sir, but they would not identify. One of them gave an identification code of ‘3 Verse 1’ and said that it must be given to you personally.”

Verse one of the Third book of Golm Fervse’dra’s, The Way : “By your own hands you may prevent your own defeat.”

*Holy shit. They had General Davits Draven of Alliance Intelligence.*

The Bothan ship had them in a tractor hold, which in some ways was a good thing because he hadn’t personally calculated a light speed jump in over a decade.

*He was taking a terrible chance, maybe an unconscionable chance. He suspected that it was Corporal Tonic’s presence that had made him do it. Having sent so many young men and women to die in the dark maybe he just didn’t have one more in him.*
What was it Mothma had said? “If we save the Republic who will be left to live in it?” She had been talking about Andor as he remembered. Dr. Thorn must have gone over his head... again... about his override of their recommendation against keeping him in the field. “What if we are breaking the best hearts and minds of a generation before the first battle is even fought?”

You don’t know the enemy we’re getting ready to fight the way I do, he’d said. Hopefully in more chain-of-command appropriate way.

He admired her tremendously, truth be told. Senator Mothma was a person of both intelligence and physical courage. She had interned with Padme Amidala while he was still doing upperclassmen’s laundry as a plebe and had seen her Jedi bodyguard shot in front of her so she certainly knew how cruel the stakes were. But she best knew politicians. Politicians could be cajoled, bribed or bargained with, threatened, manipulated or persuaded. He knew the Imperial military, men and women for whom “duty” was now no more than careerist efficiency. He knew who these people were and how they would actually fight when the hour came. They were on their knees before monsters. How could he live with himself if he did not use every weapon available until it broke?

Where was she now? There had been no word for months. Mothma had never come to Echo Base, abandoned “Haven” in the wake of the DeathStar’s destruction for a dangerous mission to try to convince her old Senate contacts to rally resistance on their home worlds. Dodonna and Cracken had tried to talk her out of it and Leia Organa had been almost desperate, he remembered. It was the only time he saw the Princess’s armor crack in those days after Yavin IV.

“Why are you doing this?” she’d cried, “We need you!” meaning ‘I need you.’ One of the last of her father’s friends, the last anchor of her old life.

Draven thought he knew why. Penance. Absolution.

He’d considered that maybe Andor and those who went with him had been looking for the same thing, the absolution of finally putting your own life on the line instead of someone else’s, the relief of finally turning to fight the monster chasing you. The relief he had seen in Antoc Merrick’s eyes when Weems ran to tell them battle had begun. Antoc could have sent one of his flight commanders to lead Blue Squadron, he hadn’t. He’d gone himself.

Damn, he missed Merrick.

With instruments shut down he could not tell where they were even after they came out of hyperspace. There had been no further contact with the Bothan commander after they shut down engines on her order. He could only hope that his message had been passed onto Koth Melan and hope that Melan reacted to it in the way the anticipated. Meanwhile he and Corporal Tonc sat squeezed into a one man shuttle with lights and heat down to conserve power.

“Sir?”

The boy was a bit of a nervous talker, he was figuring out. Only the intimidation of their disparate ranks was keeping him from discussing rugby scores.
“Yes, Corporal?”

“Do you know if Corporal Rook got out? I mean I know hangar crews were supposed to go out on one of the last shuttles but it seemed like they were maybe taking him as a pilot again, which they totally should have because he was fucking crack at it…pardon, sir….but he had some special duty on this ship he was working on, so I didn’t know if, maybe….”

So, Rook hadn’t told his friend about Operation Shepard. Draven had been confidant enough but it was still good to see the pilot’s discretion confirmed.

“I don’t know,” Draven said, “I don’t know which transports got away.” *If any.*

Toncé nodded, sitting on the floor of the shuttle in the dim instrument light.

“I’m thinking he’ll be ok,” Toncé was saying, mostly to the scorched thermal gloves he was turning over in his hands, “He got out of Jedha, right? And he didn’t die from Scarif….fucking grenade blew him to hell, but he didn’t die…..I mean, dodge the DeathStar twice and the Force’s gotta want you for something right? That’s what the monk said. Anyway…I’m thinking he’s ok……….We were the only ones left you know….him and me….I mean, of course you know….Rogue One, right?....” His voice trailed off.

They sat in blessed silence for a minute.

*Oh hell.*

“Corporal Rook was reassigned to Intelligence some weeks ago. He was sent out with the transports but not to the rendezvous point. His mission was to investigate possible contact with Captain Cassian Andor. We believe there is a strong likelihood that he and Jyn Erso survived Scarif.”

Toncé’s head shot up.

“Rook’s a fucking spook now….I mean, pardon, sir… he’s working for Intelligence?”

“Yes, but…”

“YES!” He shook two fists in the air. “Wait….how the hell?…I mean…..the Captain, Captain Andor and Sarge Erso, they’re alive too?”

*Who?*

“Oh man oh man oh man,” Toncé was saying, “That’s….” He was gasping like he might start crying.

*Draven you are an idiot.*

A voice came over the comms.

“The opportunity to defeat your rival is provided by the rival himself”….. you’ll be landed on a satellite station soon. Open your hatches and walk out unarmed. You are among friends but keep your hands in sight as a courtesy please, Davits. It will be good to speak with you again.”

They could feel the ship start to take a docking approach, with them in tow.

“Soldier,” Draven said, I know this is going to be very hard but I’m going to need you to get a grip on yourself and let me do the talking here.”
Chapter Summary

Bodhi and Bes bond. Bodhi feels compelled to act a little fatherly/brotherly with Jyn.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“When should we start to worry? I mean, I know Cassian said 6 or 7 days, but it’s been 9.”

“It has been only 8, because they left near sunset and it still morning and will not be 9 days until this evening.” Bes told Bodhi Rook. She patted the back of his left hand gently twice, which meant Confidence That Concerns are Unfounded, except backwards, but he seemed to understand anyway and went back to tinkering with the machines that he and Dov had been working on.

When she had first touched poor Bodhi Rook’s hurt right hand she had been so shocked and saddened that she had cried. Amongst the Scavengers it sometimes happened that someone would lose fingers or a hand, and it was considered a great tragedy from which only the bravest recovered. Second Sister told the story of a famous Raider bandit in the South who had had an a hand carved of ivory in the shape of a lizard’s claw and was the Terror of the Seas. She wondered if she had been able to move her false fingers the way Bodhi Rook could.

(After the local Scavengers had been appeased by the fine party that Jyn and Cassian-ally had hosted to welcome him, he became a great favorite among them. To be fair, Second Sister had done most of the planning, since Jyn and Cassian had clearly never hosted a good party in their lives. Second Sister loved to brew her ale and had many barrels more than enough stored beneath their house. There was music and singing and Elder Sister even insisted that Cassian-ally had to dance with her, since at one point he had apparently asked her to do so. He was a terrible dancer. It was hysterically funny. Everyone drank too much ale and fell down.)

She spent a great deal of time with him, partly because she wished to, partly because Jyn and Cassian had taken several trips South that fall (to bargain with the Fishers and the humans who lived on the Islands and the coast), and partly because they were still being embarrassingly Active. Bodhi sensibly had no wish to be in the house while they were doing that, so he took a lot of walks with her. Jyn had not yet had any babies, and at first Bes thought that if the trouble was with Cassian, Bodhi might able to help, but that was clearly not happening. Poor things, they kept trying and they were clearly most devoted to each other so, as Elder Sister said, who are we to crush their hopes? They would wear themselves out in time, humans always did.

Also, some things were explained when it became clear that Bodhi was one of Jyn’s near kin. When she asked, he had said that he did not know how this could be so, but many people can feel a near kinship even when the bloodlines are too muddled to trace it out.

“I knew her father,” Bodhi told Bes.
She took him to see Jyn’s stone garden with the rock for Galen Erso. He told her stories about some of the other people of the stones, mostly very short ones, but he told very funny stories about Stordan Tonc, so that Bes learned that he was still alive. She showed him the stone Jyn had placed for him (a small, smooth brown one with little specks of black and grey). He put it carefully in his pocket, so that some day he could take it to him.

If the stories he told about Stordan Tonc were brave and funny, the stories he told about Galen Erso were brave and sad. He had been held prisoner by great Enemies and forced to serve them. He had sent Jyn away when she was very small, to keep her safe but she had not been safe. He had shown Bodhi a pattern to teach him how to see the truth and have courage enough to do what was right. It was like a tragic teaching story and an adventure all in one. Bodhi’s mother had died of a sickness that should have been cured and his whole great city/village had been destroyed by the Enemy. The city had had monks in it (she was not clear on whether these monks were human or not) who had been like Sisters of Circles except that they used stones (like Jyn-ally’s mother) instead of string to cast patterns. They had made a thread bracelet for him (he had noticed the one Bes wore, right away) to remember his mother, but it had burned off in the fire. They were all gone, all dead now, destroyed by the Enemy, with not one stone left standing on another. Two of the bravest and most skilled monks had escaped to be Heart Companions with him and Jyn and Cassian, but they were dead now (she had shown him those stones too) and he felt like the only one of his people left alive in the universe.

*Like Ancient Portia, Bes thought.*

_________________________________

Once, when she had stayed late at the stone house, counting little extra solar chips from Bodhi’s ship that they were cutting up to sell to Dov, she overheard him talking to Jyn by the garden wall.

“Are you happy?”

“Bodhi!” she had sounded shocked, “What the fuck kind of question is that? What do you mean?”

“I mean…you and Cassian, you’re like…together, and I don’t just mean that because you’re …”

“You can say it straight out, Bodhi. We’re fucking like we both just got out of prison…which in my case was literally true.”

“Stop it. That’s not what I mean and you know it.”

“I'm sorry Bodhi, that was an awful thing to say. It's not like that…..but it's just, we haven't…”

“Jyn, you don’t have to explain stuff like that to me, honestly. I spent the last damned year on an army base. What I mean is just that ….you have a house, for heavens sake, you’re part of a community, and you and Cassian, …you’re like….I don’t know, you’re like Chirrut and Baze.”

“Cut it out, right now!”

“Listen to me, number 3 on the very long list of things I regretted not doing before I died, was telling you how much Galen talked about you.”

Jyn sounded as if she might be crying, so Bes ran over and sat under the window, not meaning to
deprive them of privacy, but to be able to hurry and help, if Jyn needed her.

“…he talked about how resourceful you were, and how smart and independent. We would only have minutes, here and there, but it was like he had to talk about you. You had lots of dolls, right? He said you made dolls out of everything and made up elaborate adventures for them…” Bodhi laughed a little, “He said you were like a little commander with a weird little army, and he and your mom had to be super careful where they walked sometimes, because there was multi-character drama going on in every corner. They were afraid you’d be lonely, he said, that when they tried to run away……that’s what he worried about, you being alone.”

Bes peered up over the windowsill. Jyn was crying but she had her head on Bodhi’s shoulder now and he had both arms around her, the broken arm and the whole arm. Bodhi would take good care of her. Bes tidied up the chips and went quietly out. As she slipped past the wall she could hear that Jyn had stopped crying.

“…he’s an officer……no, there is a bloody war on, you know?…..no….aside from Tonc, who I love like a brother but would have to murder in 15 minutes,…..a kind of stupid attachment to my physical therapist…and maybe my doctor….totally not healthy right?”

They were laughing then, so she tiptoed down to the bottom of the hill and ran home.

________________________________________

Jyn-ally and Cassian-ally came back before sunset and Bes teased Bodhi by holding up 8 fingers when they walked up the path. Everybody hugged everybody very hard.

They were full of news, and much of their news was worrisome, about dangerous debris falls in the southern seas and meetings with the Bequa, about using Bodhi’s ship and the new machines to give Portia “eyes” and about the human settlements of the south.

We can’t call a Great Council,” Cassian was saying, “but Elder Sister can, am I understanding that correctly, Bes?”

“Yes,” she nodded,”It can be done, Elder Sister has been preparing for one since Bodhi Rook came, she says that he is another bird ahead of the fire, but it will take some time, all the circles will need to agree.”

Cassian nodded. “We’ll come down and talk to her in the morning. The challenge will be getting Portia to attend.”

Bes clapped her hands together and bowed, as she found this notion both terrifying and delightful.

“How could she do this? Ancient Portia is a ghost. How can she leave her tower?”

Jyn held out her hand. She was holding two elaborate silver things that looked like brackets, but also like the ear jewelry that southern traders sometimes wore, the showy ones.

“We may have found something that will help.”
Apparently I have a crazy-ass science fiction/fantasy garage in my head and I am just giving these characters the keys to all the cars. Also, I wound up adding a chunk of Draven to the end of the previous chapter after I accidentally posted only half of it.

Just wanting to say that kind words and comments have meant so much. The thought that anyone would actually read anything I ever wrote is still so astonishing to me.
The Treehouse

Chapter Summary

Jyn and Cassian talk some more. Jyn and Cassian have a fight. The mystery of the shuttle remains in the background. A new POV (sorry) and stuff is still falling out of the sky.

Chapter Notes

I wanted Jyn and Cassian to sit in a treehouse and I won't apologize for it.

The Taun had rules about where they would go and where they would not. Most of these rules seemed to involve their feet. Generous as they were, they would not transport he and Jyn any further than the far edge of the grasslands. If the ground was too hard and stony or too wet and soggy for their curled in claw/hooves to let them run, then they would not go. This meant that the edges of their travel range might change with the weather. They were very apologetic about it, but it was non-negotiable.

So the two of them would have to wait a day or two longer in the tree shelters by the river bank until his contact with the Fishers came up to meet them in what passed for a speeder hereabouts.

Elfla climbed up and showed them were everything was, and made sure they had enough food and water for a couple of days and lectured them dozens of times about pulling up the rope ladders, and where the emergency horns were.

“We will be fine,” Cassian tried to reassure her, as gently as he could, and in the end she climbed carefully down and walked away through the massive trees.

“She thinks the Lizards are going to eat us, doesn’t she?” Jyn said.

“She does.”

Jyn flopped down on the decking beside him, dangling her legs off the edge, pant legs rolled up and small feet bare. The view of the river below them was amazing. The grasslands stretched on the other side for kilometers on kilometers, but they were so high up it looked like a green-gold ocean, rippling in the breeze. It was also strategic, as beautiful views went. They had a perfect scope of the only fording place of both branches of the river, for a days walk on either side, a days walk for the Taun, that is.

“Elfla seems tense,” Jyn said, “Which I guess isn’t surprising.”

She laid her hand against the middle of his back, fingers wide.

“I’m fine,” he told her, reaching back to take her hand and bring it to his lips. He was treated to one of her bright smiles.
She preferred this, he knew, moving, taking action. He supposed he did too.

Anything was better than sitting in the tower watching the bits that Portia was finding for them. The smoking remains of the base on Hoth, the triumphant speeches of the military governors. The hardest for Bodhi had been the vids of Rebel transports being destroyed before making lightspeed, “That’s ‘Naboo Queen’ he’d said, “That’s “Fortune’s Card.” There were no transmissions they could track reliably to the Alliance forces. The Rebellion had gone dark.

Cassian tried hard to focus on what they weren’t seeing. There were no credible reports of high command captures. No sign of Leia Organa, Mon Mothma or Reikken or Dodonna. Much of the footage of battles seemed obviously doctored, or re-used clips.

Mon Cala was still defiant. They had attacked two Imperial orbital stations on the Outer Rim and crippled both, from the look of it. “Raddus and Profundity” was still their battle cry. Gial Ackbar sent out a few blast-feeds, and was now openly signing himself as “Military Commander, Alliance to Restore the Republic.”

“Raddus was the only one on that Council with any balls at all,” Jyn said, without a trace of irony, and not for the first time.

“He came to see us both,” Bodhi told them, sitting in Portia’s tower, ”Me and Tonc, when I was still in Med bay, Admiral Ackbar, I mean….He shook Tonc’s hand. I was still a little too messed up for that. He said that, no matter how the Council decided to play it, that the Mon Calmari would never forget Scarif. He promised that all 15 of us would have our names on a monument on Mon Cala when it was free again….I told him 16, that K2 should be there too. He said he’d make sure that happened.” Bodhi laughed. “Tonc kept saying he was going to get a hat sewn up that read “On a Monument on Mon Cala.”

Portia had stood behind them through it all, wearing various of her faces. Since she hardly needed to “watch” it herself, he got the feeling she was watching them watch the data.

She had asked to talk to Bodhi alone, soon after he had arrived, which Cassian had been against at first, although Bodhi agreed to it. Jyn had pointed out, logically enough, that Bodhi would wind up being alone with her sooner or later.

Afterwards, Bodhi had looked a little shell-shocked. She had asked nothing about Hoth or the Alliance, he’d said, although she had asked many questions about spaceships and droids. She had seemed vaguely disappointed in his answers. There had been many questions about Jedha, about the Temple and the Guardians and if he’d ever met any Jedi. She’d been interested in the Weapon, which he’d soon realized meant the DeathStar, and it’s construction….although Bodhi had known only the little Galen had told him.

“And she asked about K2, a lot. What kinds of things he said to me, stuff like that.”
That had truly surprised Cassian, not just because he hadn’t really noticed Bodhi talking to Kay much, but because, if Portia was curious about him, ... which made sense in a weird way, if she thought of Kay as a “non-organic” like herself. .... why wouldn’t she have asked Cassian?

“You’re going to be angry,” Jyn had said.

Oh, how he was learning to dread that statement.

She told him then about a conversation she’d had with Portia many months ago, about Kay, and a possible distress signal, relayed through the black shuttle.

They had what was dangerously close to a blowout fight about it. Bes and Bodhi had hustled out quickly. (He later learned that Bodhi had spent that night with the Sisters, drinking tea, playing knucklebones and losing heavily). He’d used Festan swear words he hadn’t even thought he still remembered.

“Maldita mujer, YOUR rules!” He’d snapped. She’d held her chin high, waiting him out.

It had been after they’d become lovers but somewhere about the time they’d actually started thinking of themselves that way. He woken up one dawn to find that she had climbed out of their bed and was sitting at the table, wrapped in the extra blanket. It hadn’t been a bad dream, somehow he always woke for those.

“I made a list of rules,” she’d said, and even lined up small sticks to tally them.

No questions.
No secrets.
No lies.
No self-indictment and no talking ever about not deserving things.
No doing any of the above to protect the other.

He’d agreed, but added his own. No leaving.

She’d let him storm for a few minutes, then she’d said simply, “I was wrong.” He knew what that must have cost her.

The anger leached away, and the pain came in behind it, as she must have known it would.

Portia couldn’t have picked up a signal all the way from Scarif at that point, could she? Kay had died. More than hearing it, Cassian had felt it. He had heard the gunfire, Kay’s voice breaking up. “Goodbye.” Kay never said goodbye. How could a K2 unit have ever gotten a distress message into a high security shuttle? How had the shuttle found them? There were badly broken pieces of several K series security droids and other riot control equipment in it but no central data drives other than the nav computer and that was unsalvageable. What had Kay done and how had he done it?
He could’t think about it. He had to be where he was now. Kay would have to go in the box with his mother and the baby, and Oskar, and Joreth Sward.

*I’m sorry. Someday my friend, he promised, but I can’t yet.*

“Is your Fisherman dependable?” Jyn was asking.

“Markey? I don’t think he actually catches fish anymore,” Cassian said, “But, yes, in his way he is. He’s no fool and Iola says her sisters in the south are getting genuinely panicked about some of these debris falls.”

“Panicked enough that they’ll help us fill in Portia’s ‘blind spots’?”

He laced his fingers together with hers and shook their linked hands gently.

“Was that ‘We’ll see’ or ‘Hey lady, what are the logistics of sex in a hammock?’”

“Risk of injury either way.”

She laughed. Whatever happened, this was much better than watching and being able to do nothing in the tower.

“When I was little I dreamed of seeing a treehouse,” she sighed

“When I was little I dreamed of seeing a tree,” he said.

They ate the bread and smoked fish and then tried to figure out the hammocks.

_______________________________

Conn felt he’d more than proved his abilities when it came to keeping his mouth shut, he assumed that was why he’d been brought, and not one of the others, but Old Markey felt obliged to keep talking.

“You’ll want to keep out of his sight as much as you can while I work things out, staying in the glider is probably best, until I call you.”

This was obviously not some ordinary meeting. They had already gone much farther upland than Conn had even thought the Fisher traded. They were pulling a second glider, but not a cargo trailer,
which seemed odd.

“Whose sight?” Conn asked, ducking the cuff to the head he’d known would follow.

“Were you asleep when I was talking before?” He had been. “Him. The black-haired man from up north. The one everybody’s been on about. He came down with the Mem’s last spring, and he’s been before.”

Conn dimly remembered now. A big bunch of traders had come in in the Spring, and amongst the Mem’s and Tall-boys there’d been a new man, tanned and dark-haired, but with a scruff of a beard, he’d stuck out a bit.

“Why? Does he bite, like the Mem’s?”

“No, probably not, but word is he brought his woman with him this time, and word is she probably does.”

“If I’m supposed to hide the whole time, why’d you bring me?”

“I didn’t say hide, damn you boy. You’re here because you’re slightly less of a fool than the others that got inside that wreck, and that’s what he’s here about, that and other things. If he’s got questions I can’t answer, you’ll have to do it.”

Conn sat up straight. No wonder Markey hadn’t told him about this before they left, he’d have jumped right out of the glider. If there was one thing in the sweet blue world he never wanted to think about again it was that wreck.

“Thing burned and sank, Markey, the tide took it, the Ladies marked it off…they said…”

“He’s got some agreement with the Ladies, and mind you call me ‘sir’ when we get there.”

Conn sunk down in his seat. He rubbed his neck and shoulder, where the healing burn scars were.

Old Markey glanced at him sideways, “Listen boy, if you’ve walked along thinking of nothing but playing knucklebones before, know those days are done now. The Islanders have taken to calling this fellow the Blackbird and, like the Ladies say, when the blackbirds fly in from the north, it’s ahead of a storm….also, keep this to yourself, he’s Fallen.”

Markey could have told him he was on his way to meet Ea in her black cloak, come to reap the guilty, and he’d have been less terrified.
Intentions

Chapter Summary

All relationships are measured against the one true love story of the ages. Jyn and Cassian have some quiet time. Grief. Bodhi has questions and giant lizards attack.

Chapter Notes

For me Star Wars in general and Rogue One in particular is about heartbreaking relationships and battles with or without explosions.

They gave up on the hammocks in the end. Cassian’s back protested and they made Jyn nervous anyway. Hammered metal basins were spaced around and they lit fires in two of them and laid their blankets down on the deck. It was warm enough if everybody kept at least part of their clothes on. Which parts were negotiated and renegotiated through the night.

The next day they waited, something Cassian was a little better at than Jyn.

After she had checked and re-checked their gear three times, she went down the ladder to explore the river. The lizards usually only hunted at night so they figured it was safe enough. He followed her down and actually tied up some lines for fishing. If Markey showed up he could easily cut them.

“I’m going to get in the water,” she said. There was a fresher system of a sort, with rope slings and buckets and pulleys, up in the tree shelter, but that made her even more nervous than the hammocks.

“Ok,” he said. He thought he said it in a perfectly neutral way.

She handed him his blaster, “No water sports, I’m afraid, Captain. You are going to stay on the bank and shoot any lizards that might show up.”

Fair enough, he supposed. She slipped off her clothes and walked carefully out to a little cut-away behind some rocks where an eddy had made the water deeper. She must have found something to stand on because she ducked down to her shoulders. The water had tested pretty clean, although it wasn’t as clear as the water in the ponds back….

He stopped himself…he had almost thought ‘home’.

She must have brought a pocketful of the soapflower powder down with her, because she’d gotten some lathered up in her hand and was washing her hair. She dunked her head under the water, and came back up.

“Hey! Are you watching for lizards and fishermen up there?”

“You don’t make things easy, Sargent Erso.”
“There’s a time and a place for everything, Major Andor.”

“That’s funny, coming from you.”

She stuck her tongue out at him and ducked down back under the water.

_If he told her she was beautiful even now, she would probably break at least two of his fingers._

She got out, dried her hair on her own shirt and got dressed. He checked his lines and discovered he had two good-sized fish.

In the afternoon, still with no sign of Markey, he cleaned them up and grilled them on sticks up on the platform. They ate them with a little salt and he cleaned his hands up with some wet leaves, while she licked her fingers with no embarrassment whatsoever.

“Bodhi said something funny a while back,” she said quietly, wiping her mouth with a corner of her sleeve, “He said we were like Chirrut and Baze.”

Cassian put the grilling sticks in the fire.

_When they had learned from Draven’s message that Bodhi was still alive, he had said something, something stupid, in the dark at the stone house, about maybe, maybe…._

“No.”

_He could tell from the change in her breathing that she was trying not to cry._

_It must have been when she was half-carrying him out of the data tower, coming across the landing platform, toward the beach. His vision had started shutting down by then, all he could really see was her._

_I’m sorry, mi amor, he thought, I’m sorry you had to do that alone._

“Churrit,” she said, “but Baze wouldn’t have left him, he couldn’t have been far.”

_Who else had she seen? Who else’s body had she guided him past? He knew he would never ask. She had her garden of stones._

“Well, he said, “I think our issues have been kind of rough on Bodhi. The other day, he basically
asked me what my intentions were.”

“Intentions?”

“With regards to you, I suppose.”

“What…the…fuck?”

“He’s from Ni-Jedha, it’s a very traditional society. Even if he wasn’t really raised that way, people tend to have more formal types of arrangements. He thinks of you as family, so…he wanted to know.”

Go ahead, he thought, ask me what I told him, I dare you.

She sat in silence for a while, flicking fishbones off the platform. The sun was setting.

“I’m Baze,” she said.

“The hell you are, I’m Baze. I have the rifle.”

“I can use a rifle. I’m better at hand to hand than you are.”

“So, Churrit, definitely, AND you have a kyber crystal.”

“Fuck you.”

Suddenly there was a sound like engines rushing down the river bank.

They both stood up.

A crash of metal and sparks rose up from the ground below, on the other side. There was a series of splashes, lizards hitting the water. She tossed him the rifle, he tossed her her pack, they dropped the ladder and scrambled down.

Looking back on it, he should have stopped for the night. Set up shelters and a fire, and travelled the rest of the way when dawn came.

You’re not a man for these dark times, Markey, he told himself. You haven’t the luck for it.

He’d calculated that, what with the heavy rains last week, the Tall-boys wouldn’t come any further than their treehouse by the Hearing River ford. What he hadn’t figured right was how long it would take him to get there. The sun was already setting, but he saw a light up in the trees on the other side,
maybe a k. away, straight over. They had a fire going up there.

_Nice supper with the missus, Cassian Blackbird?_ he’d wondered.

Not that he knew for sure that the woman he travelled with was his missus, he’d never really met her himself. The first time he’d met the man had been last year at the little Scavanger Market at Moss Crossing. He’d listened more than he’d talked. A cool customer, very strange, Markey’d thought then. Not at all what you’d expect of an Islander... *what else would you think of someone who spoke like that unless you knew another story?..* moved north and gone local with the Upland Mems. The fellow’d had to excuse himself because his partner had gotten into a brawl with some Scavengers... won it too, he’d heard. ...and he was needed to go pull her off before she killed somebody, but the next day the man tracked him down. Just slipped up behind him quiet while he’d been packing the cart and asked to meet up again. The story had gotten nothing but stranger since then.

Anyway, he’d figured they could just make it before the real dark set in, take the gliders right over the ford and get up into the trees in the nick of time.

Then he hit a rock.

The rains must have washed out one of those big boulders that cropped up along the bank, or he’d gotten too close, or just missed it in the bad light. The glider flipped clean over.

The engines cut off the minute she turned but he and the boy had each been thrown. Markey found himself face down on the mucky dirt, got to his hands and knees and saw Conn lying on his side a few meters more away.

He could just make him out in the fading light. The spare glider had broken off the tether and was lying on its side behind the boy. Kid was groaning and moving.

_Shit._ They had a few minutes, maybe more with luck, but Markey was pretty sure luck was not picking up his messages tonight. If there was one sound the lizards knew it was the sound of a body hitting the ground. The spare glider was closer but his gun was in the big one.

“Conn!” he yelled, “Get in the bloody glider!”

He scrambled up and headed for upside down speed glider. He couldn’t get all the way under it but at least he could get the gun. His blaster in the front was on the far side, under the drivers seat, too far to reach, but his rifle was in the back. He could almost reach it. His fingers caught the strap and pulled it into his hands and out. He managed to wrestle it and himself out from under the chassis just as he felt something grab onto his leg. Markey fired and the blast lit up a man-sized Blue, knocking it back. The flare also lit the eyes of maybe 5 more big lizards, circled round him.

Light flooded the riverbank and the wall of grass behind. The boy had made it into the glider and flipped on the headlights. The Blues stumbled back, but their eyes would soon adjust. A dozen more swarmed behind the big ones. Holy hell. They must have been feeding on the bank and he’s stumbled right into a fucking lizard dinner party. He couldn’t shoot them all and this many could claw through the glider roof.

_Sorry kid, he thought._ He shot the two closest to him.

Then he heard something over his head. A big one had crawled right over the speeder behind him but a shot took it out before he could even turn. It fell on the ground beside him, dead in mid-leap. A spray of gunfire struck a half dozen lizards between him and the sideways glider and a flare ball
dropped on the ground. It blinded the Blues and it damn near blinded him. Somebody grabbed him by the shirt and was shoving him toward the river, somebody considerably smaller than him.

“Move it! Move!” a woman's voice yelled. As the flare died back he could make her out, pale dark-haired, in a baggy Fishers jacket with a blaster in hand.

Her head was turned away from him, “Don’t hit the speeders!” she called out.

He looked where she was looking and could just make out the Blackbird, standing by the sideways glider, with a big rifle back on his shoulder. With his other hand, he’d gotten the roof screen open and was pulling the boy out. He tilted his head slightly and gave a faint smile, as if to say “Really?”

He pulled the boy and the little woman shoved Markey, stumbling though the shallow water and across toward the tree line. There was another flare on the ground by a rope ladder.

She pushed the boy and him up, the kid didn’t even try to protest he was scared of heights. Markey went up after him, then the woman, then the Blackbird. Markey looked back down, as the Blackbird hitched the rifle onto his back and pulled the ladder steady for her. she said “Ok, for today you get to be Baze, but only for today,” then she kissed the man and started climbing.

*Oh yeah, Markey thought, That’s the missus for sure.*
A small link in which Davits Draven tries to get his spy game back on and Tonc has to go along for the ride.

He’d been having that dream again, where they were pinned down behind the cargo containers and just taking insane amounts of fire. Those tall black-armor fuckers started shooting and whatever they had was just cutting though those crates like butter. Basteren turned to him and said, real conversational, “Go get him.”

“Go get who?” he yelled back, over the blaster fire.

“The pilot,” Basteren said, with a smile, like he was telling him to go back and pick up a forgotten cooler of ale, “They’re gonna need him later. You gotta go get him.” Except, then it wasn’t Basteren anymore, it was the Jedhan monk-guy, the blind one with the short hair and the nice smile.

Tonc turned around and the freakin shuttle was burning, except that it didn’t make any noise and he couldn’t feel any heat. He tried to stand up, but he kept falling down, so he just kind of crawled in and when he found some legs he was pretty sure were Rook’s, he pulled. Then he picked him up and started walking. He fell down a lot, and he wasn’t quite sure whether he was carrying Rook or a bundle of clothes that he had already dropped a few times.

“This is fucked up man,” he kept saying, trying to get back up.

“I know,” Basteren said, behind him, “I’m sorry, but please try. Just a little bit further.”

He woke up with a start.

“Easy, soldier,” General Draven said.

Tonc was laying on a bunk. Draven was sitting at a table. It looked for all the worlds like they were in a little hotel conference room.

He sat up and rubbed his head.

They’d given him clothes that fit pretty well, except Bothans were not tall, mostly and the damn pants were too short. He had some serious gap between his pant legs and the tops of his socks and it made him feel like a damned idiot.

The older man was drinking some water from a pitcher on the table and looking at a data pad, so Tonc got up and sat in one of the other chairs.

He looked around the walls, “Are they listening, do you think?”

Draven shrugged, “I assume so,” he said. “This may be a first for me, in the last 12 years, but right now I don’t think I actually have any secrets left that the Bothan Spynet doesn’t already know.”

“Really Davits? I find that hard to believe.”
A door had opened at the other end of the room and an extremely well-groomed Bothan in a purple suit, with a combed-back black mane and an earpiece walked in and sat down.

Draven smiled (which Tonc decided was just about the most unnatural thing he had ever seen), “Corporal Stordan Tonc, let me introduce you to someone who is absolutely not Koth Melan, Master of Bothan Intelligence.”

“Forgive the use of the proxy, General Draven, I know how you despise these kinds of games,” The Bothan said, with a slight delay.

Tonic realized he was getting his lines through the earpiece.

“I need to be very careful about my alibis right now, as you can appreciate, and also, I realize that it would be an unkind gesture, considering the personnel losses the Alliance has recently suffered, to have to kill your attache.”

“Does he mean me?” Tonc asked.

“Yes Corporal, he does,” Draven said. “Melan, right now I have nothing concrete to offer you. I am asking you to break every rule of Bothan negotiation, and help us with nothing but the offer of a potential resource in return.”

“What is it you are asking for Draven?”

“Two things, that you will not turn us over to the Empire, and that you do not hand us over to the Bothan government, at this point. I hope, given our personal history, that you would honor my request to kill both of us rather than that.”

Fuck? Tonc thought.

The Bothan spoke again, “The base at Hoth, there are rumors that Vader commanded the assault personally.”

“Yes. He was on the ground with the first assault team.”

“You have this on good intelligence?”

“I saw him myself, Melan.”

“Why would he risk this? Vader as a tactical flight commander is fearsome, and no ship can stand against him, but his…. liabilities….. increase in a ground situation. The shock and terror of his appearance and his considerable personal combat skills seem wasted on a situation of just flushing a cornered enemy from a hole……”

Fuck you buddy, Tonc thought.

“I can’t answer that,” Draven said. He seemed to be thinking long and hard about something. “He seems to have been looking specifically for one Alliance officer.”

“Skywalker? The hero of Yavin IV?”

“Yes.”

“This is interesting and confirms intelligence we already have Davits, but is not the kind of trade that will buy you borderline treason on my part.”
The General nodded. “Recently you have had information piggy-backed onto some of your transmissions. I am guessing you have been unable to locate this source of this interference?”

The door opened again, and another Bothan came in, older and more heavy-set, with a fluffy mustache and a blue suit jacket. The first Bothan stood up, bowed and left.

“General Draven, are you implying that the Alliance has the capability to access secured Bothan transmission feeds?”

“No, but we may have access to someone who does. Sometime before attack, I received large quantities of broad spectrum data on Imperial movements and activity, especially in inaccessible areas of the Mid and Outer Rim. The source was a trusted high level operative who had been…..out of contact….since the destruction of the DeathStar. There seemed to be issues regarding transmission access and frequency but my source seems to have the ability to package messages on a variety of secure lines…..including your own….to make it invisible to Imperial monitoring.”

“The name of this operative?”

Draven was silent.

The Bothan took a ring off of his finger and laid it on the table. He pressed a blue jewel on it and turned it slowly around.

“Blocking?” Draven said, “You don’t trust your own people, Kosh?”

“I protect my own people. Understand this Draven, Bothan neutrality is a convenient fiction…and one we will maintain as long as we can…but the Empire made true neutrality impossible for me at Kashyyyk, and for the rest of the Masters with the destruction of Alderaan. We will help you, but I will need a name.”

“Cassian Andor.”

Tonc was not quite sure how you were supposed to read the expression of someone with hair all over their face (which was probably why he continually lost to that damned wookie at sabacc) but he could have sworn the guy looked surprised, or maybe just impressed.

“How?”

Draven shook his head, “When I find out, I’ll tell you.”

The ring was picked back up.

“What do you want?”

“Access to high quality receivers, off the Imperial radar, not continually, but for short bursts. For myself and Corporal Tonc to be returned to Alliance Command, if and when they contact you, and the opportunity to send one transmission on secure Bothan lines, to re-establish contact with my operative.”

The Bothan stood up, bowed and walked out of the room.

Draven sighed. Then he got up and went over to the bunk on the other side of the room. He took off his boots and laid down

“Hey sir?” Tonc said, “Was that the real Bothan head spy guy?”
“You had better hope not, soldier,” the General said.
Conn tells part of his story. Jyn and Cassian realize that they may not need to go back to the War, they may still be much closer to it than they thought.

“Fallen” Markey had said before.

Conn’d heard stories about fallen people before, lots of them. People who came down alive in debris were the stuff of stories, usually scary stories. They either wandered into houses and killed people like Night-haunts, or they had magical powers and walked out of the water to marry Fishers and break their hearts, or else they turned into birds and flew away.

“Her too?” he’d whispered to Old Markey after they’d climbed up the ladder into the tree house and pulled off their wet boots by the fire.

“I’m guessing,” Markey’d whispered back with a shrug and a sideways glance.

The man and the woman had pulled up the ladder. There must have been a Blue trying to grab onto the end of it, because she let go of her side and fired a shot down through the gap in the platform while he was trying to reel it up, then holstered the gun and went on helping him.

‘Well,’ she said, “That was fun.” Her voice was a little odd, but she sounded like a Northerner.

Damn, they had nice guns. He wondered if they’d made them themselves. They bloody sure knew how to use ’em, either way.

Mr. Blackbird had walked over by the fire can where they were sitting.

“Glad to see you found us,” He sounded smooth and easy as a trader on Market day. Man was almost as tall as Markey but not as broad, black haired like a far Islander, and with a trim beard like a Southerner. He wore a blue Fisher jacket same as Mrs. Blackbird.

“Gliders’ll be alright,” Markey said. “Blues won’t bother them now that the meat has gotten away. We can go down and set them upright in the morning….if that’ll do for you?”

Old Mark’s half afraid of him, Conn realized.

The woman walked over to some bags by the tree trunk and took something out, wrapped in a paper-cloth. She tossed Conn a big hunk of flatbread.

“Thanks,” he said, and she nodded, a tiny little thing, barely taller than him, with eyes like a tree cat. She tossed him a leather water bottle too.

“Who is your young friend?” Blackbird was asking.
“Name is Conn,” Markey said, “He’s one of my crew.”

The fellow had gotten some more bread and was handing it to Markey, looking as if he was considering that statement carefully.

“You wanted as much information as you could get about the black wreck,” the old goat was saying, as if feeling the need to explain Conn’s presence quickly, “This lad’s one of the ones who went inside it, before the Ladies got the Bequa to pull it out into the water. Figured it would be quicker to bring him to you than to go looking for him after you came down.”

*This was news to Conn, he’d figured the storm and the double tide had pulled the hellish thing out on their own.*

Mr. Blackbird sat himself down on the platform across from Conn and Markey, but it was clearly Conn he was looking at. She stood close by his left shoulder and tossed a few more sticks in the fire.

“Glad to meet you, Conn,” black haired man was saying, he held out his right hand, palm open, the way the Mems did. “My name is Cassian.” Conn reached out with his own hand and tapped the fellows palm once. It didn’t feel any different than a regular human’s hand.

“This is Jyn,” He glanced up at the woman, who still stood by his shoulder like a small suspicious spirit. It was full dark now, and in the firelight her hair looked reddish brown, but her brows looked darker. He couldn’t decide if he thought she was pretty or not.

“Pleased to meet you, missus,” Markey was holding out his hand, palm sideways, like the Fishers did.

The woman raised an eyebrow, and Conn noticed the man glance down quick as if hiding a smile. She glared for a second at the Blackbird, at Markey, then slowly stretched out a hand to give the shortest handshake possible, then she settled herself to sit down on the platform.

“How old are you?” she said to Conn.

“Fourteen, just, ma’am.”

“My name is Jyn.”

“You’ve had a scare,” Cassian was saying, “but I need to know as much as you can tell me about what you saw inside that wreck before the seawater got in.”

Conn looked over at Markey, like he’d never seen him before. He had no bloody idea what was going on here.

Old Markey’d always been just a go-between trader, and a part-time fisherman. He’d pulled Conn off his drunken half-uncle’s boat five years ago, the same way he’d pulled a dozen other waifs and strays in. The old goat had three break-even barges, four gliders (of which maybe two worked at any one time) and a wink and nod arrangement with pretty much everybody from the Rivers to the Inner Islands. He played Fortune cards with the oldest Lady every other week and he kept them all fed most days. He didn’t deal in shit like this.

*Whatever the hell this well-spoken killer man and his tiny killer wife were, they damn well didn’t look like Scavengers.*

“Bequa’s are c-c-claiming salvage, I hear…..” Conn was saying with a stutter, “Ladies said it was too hot and had to sit offshore for at least a year. Not BAD hot,” he glanced up at Markey, “We
didn’t even have to swallow any medicine, the Ladies said, but not so you’d want anybody working in there for more than a few hours…and then…. Aw damn Markey, I don’t want to get in trouble with them.”

“Relax son. We don’t want the wreck, except maybe for one to two small pieces, that’s for you and the Bequa to work out,” the man was saying, “and we’ve already had communication with the Sisters. What we need is to know what you saw and heard inside.”

“Go on,” Markey said.

We should never have done it, and we damn near died, he thought. We fancied that we’d get rich, because it was the biggest thing we’d ever seen fall or heard tell of. Four of us tied ourselves together with rope before anybody smart could stop us and climbed up to get in one of the cracked openings on top. We had a couple of glow lights. Teeboo stayed outside to anchor the end. It was like a black tunnel that spiraled in and the whole bloody thing was black inside and full of red and yellow lights. We got turned around and then lost and dropped the lights and then there was a whole bunch of things like black insects as big as your head except they were made of metal that started coming out of the walls, thousands of them and one of them stabbed me in the leg and Fennie in the eye and he started screaming and the bloody thing was clicking and grinding so loud that we thought we’d go deaf and my shoulders got burned trying to push Fennie ahead and if Teeboo hadn’t run for the Ladies and they hadn’t gotten the Bequa to bash holes in the one side still above water we’d have all bloody died.

Conn took a sip of the water, and then he told them, everything he could remember.

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After the boy had fallen asleep, and the fisherman had rolled himself up in a blanket and started snoring, Jyn had tapped Cassian on the shoulder and pointed to the ladders that led to the upper platforms.

He’d lit up one of the little resin box lanterns and climbed up with her, two, three more levels, up to a small round platform near the crown of the tree. Both moons were high and the stars were bright. They sat with the lantern between them and little luminescent moths fluttered around it.

‘What the fuck?’ Jyn said quietly. “How did a full automated drill assembly get past Portia?”

Cassian shook his head. “Maybe it came in low….through one of her several blind spots? Clearly it happens.”

“Small stuff maybe, but this sounds…”

‘We’ll know better tomorrow, but if it looks like Imperial equipment..”

“It HAS to be Imperial…nobody is going to be pirate prospecting on that scale, in the Unknown Regions way beyond the forsaken back-ass end of fucking Endor in the middle of a fucking war except the Empire.”

“What if it came from the other direction? What if instead of being on the hyperspace route, it came in from one of the nearby systems and just got….lost.”

She took the hand he’d been holding up to the lantern and lifted it, held it to her cheek.
“Maybe….this is where they built it…” she whispered, “maybe it’s leftover.”

“Maybe,” he said, “Let’s get some sleep, mi amor. We’ll find out more tomorrow.”

She laid a kiss on the palm of his hand.

“I know what that means,” she said quietly.

“Good,” he said.

They climbed down carefully to get what rest they could.

Chapter End Notes

More tiny story bits. I'm sorry. Many pieces, but all very small. Blessing on those of you who've stuck with me. Believe it or not, I do know (on good days) how this is all going to end.
The Party

Chapter Summary

In which our three surviving heroes try to have a party with their new friends.

Chapter Notes

Because you can't mention a party with cute aliens and beer and then not tell a little about what happened there, also because even our fluff has tiny bits of angst.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was not like any other party Bodhi Rook had been to, but it was a pretty good time. Iola, who Bodhi also found himself unable to call anything but Elder Sister, could play some wild drums. There was also something that sounded like a less painful version of bagpipes, played by Second Sister Tova.

Elder Sister reminded him of someone......

the very old lady who had the pastry stall on his Market corner in Jedha, growing up. She had been frail and kindly, but she kept a leather switch under the counter and if any child tried to touch a cake without paying, WHAM!

“Bodhi Rook! I know your mother! It will break my heart to have to tell her her only son is a thief!” For such a tiny person, she could make her voice heard the entire length of the street. All the merchants had laughed. She'd only had to do it once.

The last time he saw her she would not speak to him. He had been in his Imperial uniform. She must have known his mother was dying, everyone on the street knew, everyone but him it seemed. That was probably the only reason he hadn’t found red paint splashed on his door yet. She couldn’t straight up refuse to serve him, of course.....he wouldn’t have reported her, he hoped with all his heart that she knew that.....but she made the shop boy do it. She sat facing the back wall, pretending to neither see nor hear him when he spoke. “My mother has been longing for your yellow cakes,” he’d said, “She says they are the best in the city.” The old woman had only bowed her head and not responded. Later, at the medical center, he had opened the bag to find two cakes instead of the one he had paid for. Please, he prayed, she was very old, please let her have died before the city fell.

“Hey! Are you asleep?” Jyn was poking him. He had dozed off, sitting on a bench leaning against the wall of the Sister’s farm house. “How can you possibly be sleeping through this? You’re not even drinking, are you?”

“No, no,” He was drinking tea actually, although it was that bubbly fermented kind, but that was allowed, it was kind of like the Katiss back on Jedha. He didn’t know why that mattered to him now, but he found it did. “I’m basically drinking the same stuff the babies are drinking.”
Lots of Memsa children were running wild in little ribbon skirts, playing tiny drums and trying, fruitlessly, to get Jyn to dance.

“Good man,” Jyn said, “Whatever you do, don’t try to keep up with Captain…oooooo MAJOR Shotgun over there.”

She pointed across the crowded yard at Cassian, who was sitting amongst a group of the larger Scavengers (Bodhi recognized two who had been tapping on his ship) slamming down very tiny horn cups of what, even this far away, smelled like varnish remover.

For some reason he couldn’t quite articulate, Bodhi found the thought of Cassian Andor drunk to be worrisome.

‘Don’t worry,” Jyn was saying, loudly, over the drum solo, ‘He’s got some special Alliance-installed alcohol neutralizer. Believe me, I’ve tried.”

She lifted her small clay mug,”Please don’t be offended if I try to drink as many of these tiny cups of flower beer as I can manage.”

For reasons he could articulate very well, he found the thought of Jyn Erso drunk to be absolutely terrifying.

She seemed to sense his unease.

“They are very small cups, also Cassian hid my gun.”

“Have I mentioned my ‘more than a year on a crowded army base full of desperate people’ lately?” He said loudly, “There was a pilot brewing Corellian moonshine in his footlocker.”

A group of tiny persons crowded around shouting “Jyn-ally dance! Jyn-ally dance!”

“A group of tiny persons crowded around shouting “Jyn-ally dance! Jyn-ally dance!”

“Ask Bodhi,” she said, “He is our honored guest.”

“Bodhi Rook dance! Bodhi Rook dance!” Even if he wanted to he couldn’t have danced they way they did. Memsa seemed to have several extra joints in their spines. He got corralled into teaching all the little ones a circle dance he remembered from Infant school, They decided it consisted of skipping sideways in a circle, holding hands, which it mostly did. He forced Jyn to join in.

As the night wore on, the villagers did not so much leave, as they curled up in corners and fell asleep. Bodhi found himself sitting around the fire-pit with Cassian, Jyn, the Sisters, and a few others. Some of the older Memsa were singing, they sounded like small bassoons. Fortunately, Bes had her head in Jyn’s lap, and her eyes closed. “Songs from the hosts!” Tova said. Jyn looked blank with disbelief.

“Jyn first” Cassian said.

If Bes hadn’t been in her lap, Jyn looked like she would have gotten up and killed him.

“I f-u-c-k-i-n-g h-a-t-e y-o-u,” she mouthed.

“Hey,” Bodhi said, “Hi 0 0.”

“’What?'” Jyn stared at him in horror.

“By Pavillion Flux, that Sparkle-bop pop thing that was everywhere, like four or five years ago….you have to know that.”
“Five years ago I was in JAIL or something.”

“It was everywhere! Don't lie! You know it. I know you know it..Droids were singing it…you can
do this, it’s just ‘Hi 0 0..everybody says…”

They sang it together

The Memsa loved it. It had lots of O O O O o o o o s in the choruses. Some of them sang
dangerously high but  Jyn actually had a sweet little soprano.

Elder Sister then did a little chant-song thing that was actually kind of pretty, in between the barky
chorus, about a lost fisherman who camps on a Bequa's back thinking it is an island.

Everyone fell silent for a moment after, and you could only hear the fire crackling.

Then there came another voice, singing very quietly. Bodhi could only hear parts, and he couldn’t
understand any of it.

Me despierto y veo la mañana

Estoy pidiendo que mi camino sea claro a mi vista
Estoy pidiendo el valor de caminar a través de la oscuridad
Le pido a la luz que me espere

“That is a good song Cassian-ally, but I do not know any of those words,” Tova said gently. “What
does it say.”

Cassian shrugged, “It’s a old song from Fest, where I was born. The miners used to sing it when they
went down under ground.”

Jyn carefully lifted Bes and laid her in Bodhi’s lap. She walked over to where Cassian sat and held
out both hands to him.

“Time for bed Major.”

They walked slowly back to the stone house. There were just a few hours until dawn, but the Sisters
gave Bodhi three blankets and two pillows, so he managed to sleep fairly well on their floor that
night.

Chapter End Notes

Complete self indulgence in poor Spanish. I did not make it up actually, it's part of a
very pretty hymn, that I've read in English and heard in Spanish ( A children's choir
sang it in a Peruvian documentary no less) but couldn't find the Spanish text for my life,
(Me despierto y me enfrento al este) so have no freaking idea but I hope transcribed in
any way that works. The idea of our beautiful damaged boy holding on to some scrap of
a prayer about hope got stuck in my head and I had to put it somewhere.
A Trip to the Shore

Chapter Summary

New allies gather. Jyn does something she's meant to do for a while.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Macha waited well back above the high tide line, on the edge of the salt grasses. She did not need to turn as Youngest Sister came down the path from above. She could hear her coming. The child was growing like a sapling, last summer her sound would have been like a Memsa nurseling scooting through the reeds, now she moved tall and upright like a grass-deer.

“Are they gone safely?” she asked, gliding up alongside and sitting on a piece of flotsam wood..

Macha lifted an arm to embrace her. “Just before dawn. They are being extra cautious.”

“They are afraid,” Youngest Sister said.

_We are all afraid, Macha thought._

“The Bequa are very wise and the wise are often overly cautious.”

Youngest Sister smiled one of her wide and beautiful smiles. “That must make us great fools indeed, to meet with two fresh-fallen strangers of fearsome reputation,” she laid her head upon her Second Sister’s shoulder,” with no other ally than Old Tom Markey beside us.”

Macha would not rise to the bait.

“Does Elder Sister send you to tease me, or to tell me that she has finally persuaded the Islanders to come ashore?”

“No and yes. They sent two of of their elders. The others are still being very wise. They see all of this as being part of some story of their own, so they have devised some sort of test.”

Macha sighed, “Whatever it takes.” She rose and took her Sister’s hand and they walked up the path through the salt hay meadow. The wind was blowing cool from the North and she thought she could just make out the sound of glider engines.

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They called it a glider, but it was not dis-similar to the small swamp speeders Jyn had learned to drive on on Ord Mandell….at least in concept. Like most machinery she had encountered since they had come here, it was made out of wildly disparate and antique parts. The body seemed to be some type of light hover barrow, with seats welded in front and a blower lift engine from…? Some type of old cooler jet? The Partisans had sometimes had to make do, but they had never needed to be this clever. If they needed equipment they just stole it or did without.
Cassian had loaded their gear at the back and then stood quietly, as if waiting for her to decide something.

“I’ll drive,” she said. He smiled his half-smile and climbed into the extra seat.

It wasn’t so much “driving” as following the trail that Markey flattened through the grass ahead of them and not flipping the bloody thing over.

She had come with Cassian before, but never further south than the river, the end of the Taun’s territories, certainly not all the way downstream to the ocean.

There were several good-sized human settlements out here, the descendants of previous crash survivors, of whatever crews had been left behind (or chose to remain?) when the Old Republic abandoned this navigation outpost, and, possibly, Portia’s long-ago organics. Even so, there was no way for she and Cassian to blend in easily here, not on this trip. It seemed to have been 30 years or more since anyone else had “fallen”, as they called surviving a crash, inland anyway. They stuck out, by their speech, their weapons, their unfamiliarity with local custom. It made Jyn deeply uneasy in ways that the long slow acclimation to living among the Memsa had not.

She glanced across at Cassian.

They’d reviewed what he expected to happen when they got to the harbor town, but the unknowns were thicker than the grass.

*Teach me how you do it, she thought, that trick of looking like you don’t feel exposed, of talking to strangers like you are not constantly weighing up danger and mapping the exits, because I know you are.*

He was back doing his “job” again, in a way he really hadn’t been since things began to go wrong on the streets of Jedha.

She remembered the first…. no, to be honest, it was the second time she’d thought of kissing him, in the shuttle on the landing pad at Scarif.

Melshi and Maddel had stripped the uniforms off the dead Imperials in the hold and passed them up the ladder, to the rest of the team, who had passed them back, hand over hand, one piece at a time, to her and Cassian. They were wedged in the tight alcove behind the steps to Bodhi’s cockpit. How they’d choreographed getting dressed in that space, her half under the stairway with her back to him (had that been for privacy?) and him against the locker wall, without bumping each other, was lost to her now.

“Turn around,” he’d said, in her ear, and she’d maneuvered to face him, her chin barely level with is collarbone. He’d checked and re-attached her insignia, and moved the harness belt to what she supposed was regulation level. He’d already gotten the officer’s jacket buttoned up tight on himself, and even had the rank cylinders tucked in at the correct angle. Combing his hands through his hair, he’d put the cap on.

“Ready?” he’d said, and she thought she’d nodded. He’d straightened his shoulders, and taken a deep breath. In that second, it was as if he’d put a mask on. All his features were still the same but… it wasn’t Cassian Andor anymore, it was just a nameless Imperial officer.
What if my plan doesn’t work, and they kill us, straight out this door?” she’d thought. What if you
die and I never see your real face again?

It had been an adrenaline-fueled impulse, to just kiss him, to break that mask for an instant, to make
him look at her with his own eyes one more time.

“Captain! You’re clear,” Rostock had whispered urgently. Sefla had passed her the helmet. Baze had
taken her hand, and Chirrut had nodded and smiled. K2 had stepped in behind them and they’d gone
out the ramp and left the shuttle behind. With her peripheral vision blocked by the helmet visor she
hadn’t been able to see anything but Cassian’s back ahead of her. She didn’t even know whose hand
had tapped her shoulder last, as she’d stepped out into the sunlight to walk toward the data tower.

As the speeder lifted up a little, over some minor rise in the ground, she caught sight of the glittering
line of the ocean on the horizon ahead of them.

She took a chance on taking one hand off the mismatched pieces of pipe serving as steering controls,
and squeezed his arm.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“Just making sure you’re still there.”

“Always,” he said.

Now’s as good as any time, just get it out of the way, she told herself.

“You know I love you, right?”

She kept her eyes ahead, but she could hear the smile. “Yes. Confirmation is always good though.”

“Muérde,” she said

Conn wasn’t even surprised anymore when they didn’t head directly back into Markey’s place at the
long wharf. They’d turned upland and headed for the Marsh Beach. He had obviously dropped right
off the edge of reality and was now living in upside-down world.

“What the HELL, Markey?” He’d muttered out loud maybe 14 times in the long hours of travel, but
the goat had just shaken his head and had never responded.

About noontime, Markey’d reached a hand out the clear window and waved Mrs. and Mr. Blackbird
over onto a patch of higher, firmer ground. They stopped to give themselves and the gliders an
hour’s rest or so to cool the engines.

Conn’d stepped away off toward the reeds, to take a much-needed piss. Herself had been taking a bag out of the small glider and Himself was talking to Markey. He wandered back after, and, seeing a half clean puddle on a hollowed rock, bent to wash his hands off in the rainwater. When he stood to wipe them dry on his shirt he found Mrs. Blackbird standing nearby.

“Hygiene is important,” she said and handed him a leaf-wrapped packet, inside was some nut-cheese.

“Thanks, missus.” He wondered who the hell Hygiene was.

She did not look less fearsome in the light of day, just younger, maybe Tllen’s age, 24 or 25….although who the hell would know with Fallen? She could be 100.

“Jyn,” she said. “My name is Jyn.” She sat down on a dry corner of the rock and unwrapped a cheese of her own and began to eat it. He squatted down and ate beside her. It seemed the thing to do.

“You work for him?” she tipped her head back toward Markey.

“Oh yeah…there’s a bunch of us,” he was doing his best to sound breezy. ‘The pay is mostly food and a roof but....that's not nothing.”

She wasn’t much taller than him, if at all, but he’d seen her shoot a man-sized Blue at arms length, so he was fairly sure she could truss him up like a pullet if she wanted.

She nodded, and broke off another piece of cheese. “He make you go inside that wreck?”

“What?” That was unexpected.

“Old Markey?…..oh hell no! No that was Fennie and me’s….well, mostly my runt-dumb idea…….shit no…he’d have tanned me for it, except…..” he rubbed the bandages on the back of his neck, “I kinda tanned myself, you see.”

He remembered the skin of a wall cracking open. How the good air had rushed in, and the youngest prettiest Lady had grabbed him by the hair, and what was left of his shirt, and pulled him right out. He’d probably been crying like a baby, it’d hurt that bad and he’d been that scared. Her hands had been gentle enough, rinsing his blistered skin with cold sea-water, but her eyes had been unsmiling.

“Don’t ever father children, Conn Barge-Boy,” she’d said, “The world has fools enough.”

She let it pass, and put the last bit of cheese in her mouth, chewing thoughtfully. Markey’d called him back and they’d travelled on soon after.

The sun was low along the marshes when they reached the shore. The gliders were shit across sand, so they’d stopped them at the end of the grass and walked down the slope.
There was a small crowd waiting. Two sets of Memsa, three Sisters (he knew the Memsa called their Ladies that) and then another three. Two of those he recognized at least, a little yellow brindled one and a tan grown one. They were from the upriver settlement. Now a grey-faced older one stood with them. The other three were dark and thick-furred strangers to him. All three of the Ladies of Harbor Town were there and standing beside them, most un-nerving of all, were two tall Far Islanders. He could tell them from their long braids, their fancy silver earrings and the blue and black tattoos that curled over their necks and arms.

They never come ashore. Far Islanders never came ashore, except for the red-traders, and them only for the Three Years Market, everybody knew that. They did all business off their beautiful boats.

Right…off…the…edge.

“Oh HELL, Markey!” he groaned.

The Blackbirds walked right around him and down the path toward the group on the shoreline. Markey, stood for a moment, rubbing his hand over his face like a man who might be hoping that he’s just having a bad dream.

“Stay here boy,” and he walked down the path.

“Yes sir.” Conn said, never meaning it more.

Chapter End Notes

Another super tiny one. So sorry. You write and write, and then you clip and paste and it’s like, seriously? Four paragraphs? I think the translation is "bite me."
The Soldiers Tale

Chapter Summary

A little more alien world building. People with eyes appreciate the beauty of Cassian Andor. Some of our boys tragic backstory. Plot elements.

Chapter Notes

Jyn, Cassian and I are all in over our heads.

The Far Islanders had their own traditions. The most vexing was an absolute horror of most technology. They fought only with knives and there were no circles of Sisters among them although it was a longstanding practice for the Circles of the Coast and the Harbor to have some communication.

In general, the best way to talk with them was through the Bequa, who they got on pretty well with, but somebody must have seriously lit a fire under their asses to get them here.

“The poor things look horribly uncomfortable, as if they expect the sand to open and swallow them right up” whispered Mor, the Second Sister of the Coast Circle.

“They’re as worried as we are, in their way,” Macha said, “They actually approached the Bequa on their own and asked for this meeting, these falls and other portents terrify them and they keep mumbling about the stars. I suspect they’d hoped that WE would come to them tho’.”

Macha’s Elder Sister was working hard to keep Tom Markey calm, while the Islanders talked urgently to Jyn Erso and Cassian Andor, as she had heard the Blackbirds preferred to be called.

“What are our new allies like? What do you hear about them from the Sisters of the Upland? It seems that they will be at the center of many things.”

“When the Enemy comes from the outside, so may the weapons to fight it, and certainly these two have the look of weapons, polished from use.”

“No offense dear, but they look like humans to me, and my poor weak eyes can only tell you apart one from another by size. I can separate the tall one from your Markey-ally just because yours is wide and orange on top.”

Macha laughed. “Friend/sister, you must trust me when I say that that human male is as different from Markey as a hawk from a goose.”

The golden Memsa shook her head, “You exhaust me, beloved, surely this is no time for your Activity. Forgive me for making assumptions, but is the small one a female?”

“Lastly, yes, and firstly I exhaust myself sometimes. Still, that is not a path I am traveling now, besides…. as I see them both together I understand what Elder Sister of the Upland Circle meant,”
Macha said, “They are broken and have grown strong again, but at times it will seem as if they have only one heart to share between them.”

He barely remembered Fest, honestly. Cold, mud, ice, a purplish blue sky and a purplish cast to the faces of the men and women coming up out of the mines. There had been arguments, between his uncles and Papa and his abuela, between his mama and her aunts.

His parents had taken a chance and gotten teaching scholarships to Carrida when he was five. They had all left for the University of the Republic at Carrida, Main Campus at the Capital Centra, full of hope for a better life far away from Fest. Despite the bitter arguments, two cousins...Isra and Sara...and his young uncle also went along. Family was important, nobody was supposed to be left alone. They had a tiny white-washed faculty apartment and sang together in the closet-sized kitchen. A year later Papa kissed Mama goodbye, told her that everything would be fine, swung Cassian upside down (his favorite game) and went to speak at a student protest rally. Jeron Andor never came home. The only reason his son had any memory of his face all these years later was because he had reinforced it by looking at the pictures pulled from University files and Imperial security vids of Imperial troops firing on the speakers in the courtyard. One of his cousins...Sara...had been trampled to death in the riots that followed.

In the refugee camp...officially a low-security resettlement area...he had been one of the packs of dusty kids running wild and throwing rocks at troop transports. There were memories of his mother cutting his hair and holding his hand waiting in line for extra food rations but he couldn’t remember her ever actually SAYING anything after his father died. He’d been kicking a taped-up ball in the yard with some other children when his cousin Isra walked right out into the middle of the game to get him. Something had gone very wrong and Mama died having the baby. Some nurses argued with Isra about the right thing to do on the other side of the plastic wall, but it was the thin white droid who rolled around, pulled at his sleeve and brought him into the room. “Bonding and closure are important,” it said. Mama had been as pale as a white star and the baby they had cleaned it up and laid it a plastic basket. “Do you wish to hold your sister?” the droid said and held the basket for him to reach inside. Wrapped in a white blanket it looked impossibly tiny and asleep and was no heavier than a doll. Cassian carried it just a little way to laid beside Mama on the cot. “It will be alright,” he remembered saying to one of the staff who came to take him because his uncle had come, “Neither of them will have to go alone.”

Tio Samuel had been little more than a teenager, a skinny bookish kid with a gift for cybernetics and tinkering, but he pieced a life together for them fixing and re-fixing the few hundred droids still working in the Oeste Camp. Things were always popping upright and talking in that tiny lean-to (“hola, Cassian!”) even things that looked like they had no business doing so. He’d made sure Cassian went to “school” (most of the good teachers were in the camp anyway) and would make him speak Festan at home, so he wouldn’t forget. He had friends, his teachers were pleased with him and, if he was small for his age and had a bit of a baby face, that only made it easier to fool the guards when he carried packages and messages for Samuel and his friends in the Underground. A child can come to believe anything is normal but in his heart even on good days he had known that this was not the way things were supposed to be. Cassian was 10 when when word came through the Resistance network that the camps would be shut. Nobody knew what that meant exactly but it
hadn’t sounded good. The grown-ups met together and pooled what money and valuables each family had left to bribe the guards and get a few dozen of the older, stronger children onto a transport to the countryside. He doubted now there had ever really been such a transport but it hadn’t mattered in the end. The guards let them get about 20 meters from the first interior fence before they started shooting. They fired over their heads, maybe not shooting to kill at all. Possibly it had just been a cruel joke. Some of the kids turned back but he and a half dozen others kept running, not toward the main gate where the guards and the carriers were, but at an angle toward the lower end of the outside fence. The ones who made it over scattered. The others headed for the streets, the surrounding buildings, but Cassian climbed down into a storm ditch and ran quite literally for the hills. A day later, hungry and drawn out by the smell of Festan caf reheated over a fire he snuck into one of Oskar’s Resistance hideouts. The camps were closed 48 hours after the gates closed behind those non-existent transports. Everyone remaining in the Oeste was relocated to ‘industrial support communities’, that is labor camps, on Fest and Sullest. Those who didn’t go quietly were killed and many people did not go quietly. He learned for sure that Samuel and Isra did not.

Cassian Jeron Andor had been a fighter before but he was a soldier now. He knew what he fought for and he knew what he fought against. It wasn’t enough to be smart, everyone still alive was smart, but the ten-year old proved to have three useful skills: A very good memory, A precocious eye and hand with a gun and an innocent face, one that projected a calm he usually didn’t feel. Oskar put him to use at once. Two years later, Draven packed him up in a box and delivered him to the Alliance.

He had met Ashoka Tano only a handful of times mostly as a courier, in message drops in public places. He had spoken to her only twice and left both times with the impression she did not like him. He had never been entirely sure why. Certainly he’d been one of Draven’s assets and there was no love lost, but he had always thought it was more than that. Maybe she looked at him and saw nothing but a boy born on a ragged Separatist stronghold where cursing the Jedi would get you a free drink in any bar. She, for her part, had been a Jedi Padawan and decorated Clone Wars veteran. The one time he saw her at a council meeting she’d still had a light saber clipped to her belt.

Draven put him forward as a Fulcrum operative but it was Tano’s network so she had veto.

“Too young,” she’d said, “I need more than a sniper's skills and a clever boy's desire for revenge.”

He was supposed to stand by quietly but it seemed the right time to speak so he concentrated very hard on keeping his voice level.

“Revenge is about the past and the past is gone. I’m asking for a chance to fight the nightmare of the Empire in the present and build some kind of path for a future.” and I don’t kid myself I’ll ever live to see it, he thought “I know how hard it will be, but I can do this, not everybody can.” Maldito sable de luz or not, lady.

That had been bullshit of course, he’d had no idea how hard it would be as she must have known all too well.

It occurred to him now that maybe that it had been some kind of test. The Jedi elites had been all about tests and trials. If it was he must have passed because he was briefed for his first mission the next day. A few years later Tano vanished and the nightmare rolled and swelled and he found himself on the path that brought him to Jedha, and Eadu, and Scarif and here.

Somewhere far from here the war was raging and maybe being lost and now he was trying to BE Ashoka Tano and Mothma and Organa and build an alliance from the ground up, with no resources and a bunch of allies he barely understood.
As Jyn would say, What….the…fuck?

Markey had a fish drying/hay baling shack between the beach and the town, so he and Jyn were to sleep there. Markey thought it best to go on ahead and prepare for their arrival with his networks. The three “Ladies” had brought them blankets and food. He had met the Eldest, Perin, before, on a visit last winter but hadn’t realized until weeks later that they were human “Sisters”, part of a network like Bes and Tova and Iola.

He had thought that the Circles were part of Memsa tradition, but Iola had laughed at him. “The Pattern would be too small indeed if it had only our hands to cast it.

Just to make things harder he’d underestimated the effect on his nerves of the sound of the surf and wind blowing over the water. It was too much like the dreams and he could feel panic building in his bones like an underground tremor.

He turned onto his side and pulled in close to Jyn, pressing his face to her neck and shoulder, breathing in, just to feel her and smell her skin.

“Shh..” she’d whispered, “I’m here, we’re alive.”

They’d fallen asleep like that.

At dawn the wretched sea-birds woke them both early. Jyn put on a sweater under her jacket and came out to find Cassian sitting on the wooden stairs, turning the Islander’s silver jewelry over in his hands.

Not mineral silver, that was obvious, they were untarnished and far too light, but they still looked for all the world like elaborate ear cuffs.

“Not my style,” Jyn said, “But pretty.”

They were very solid and did not respond to bending or pressure. He had a strong suspicion that a pneumatic hammer couldn’t damage them, but he laid one on the side of his open hand.

“Watch,” he told her. After a moment, it slowly wrapped around the edge of his palm.

“No!” Jyn looked alarmed, “Don’t! What if it…?” She tried to pull it off, but it wouldn’t budge. “Oh fuck!”

“It’s ok,” he slipped it easily off, then laid it back down next to his wrist. It did the same thing again, not too tight, just making firm skin contact on both sides. A short tug released it.

“Heat sensitive?” Jyn had taken the other one and was trying it on one of her fingers.

“Maybe, but that wouldn’t explain the release. I think it might be neurally triggered.”

“What would these be?” she fingered the fine 10 cm. chains, with long thin pins, that dangled from both cuffs.

She looked at him, wide-eyed, “Cassian. How did Portia ‘talk’ to her organics when they weren’t in the tower?”

Cassian touched the end of one of the pins gently. It was so fine and sharp that a drop of blood
welled up without the slightest twinge of pain.

“Damn!”
Visiting

Chapter Summary

Portia knows about the second DeathStar. Eldest Sister decides that two old neighbors should talk. Cassian and Bodhi look for answers.

Chapter Notes

Plot!

Portia caught quick glimpses of Jyn and Cassian’s friends, here and there. Mostly she saw where they had been, rather than where they were. They had scattered and were mostly lingering off the edges of the hyperspace streams. Safe, but doing little damage.

Except for the Mon Calmari, she was learning to really enjoy them. They were a bold bunch, with very attractive ship designs, given to lightning raids, effective attacks and high definition images widely circulated immediately after.

She had two great concerns.

#1. The anomalies.

In hindsight, which was the vast majority of her sight after all, she could trace the building of it. Vast amounts of material and resources, personnel, labor hours and ships had moved here and there over the course of almost twenty years…..when you looked, when you knew what you were looking for, you could see it growing clearly…..not the thing itself but the shadow of it. The production of something like that must have monopolized almost 9.3% of the economic resources of even such a rapacious Enemy as she now saw moving through the galaxy.

The concerning thing was that the signature anomalies had not sufficiently resolved with the destruction of the Weapon. Even accounting for pre-existing infrastructure and research, none of what she was still seeing and hearing could be explained by the production of visible armaments. She had glimpses of shipyards and vast production facilities, hideous and disgusting ships and weapons in an endless succession of sizes, more than sufficient to destroy poor Jyn and Bodhi and Cassian’s fragile friends many times over. Even extrapolating from these, it was not enough. There was a gap and the gap had a shape she could recognize now.

There was another Weapon. The question was, where.

#2 Her vision was severely limited.

The new people had done their best, but she had only one ugly pirated eye on the galaxy, and no ability to focus it. She was constrained to watch the hyperspace stream…. to see last what she had
seen first. The hideous probe had come from there, Bodhi’s ship, countless other things that she could nudge away or hide from or try to discretely pull down. Objects without self-navigation were impossible to deflect. She had no shields or weapons that would stop the mindless hunks, that had been for Tostan to do and Tostan was dead. She alone even remembered him. Most agonizing, without arrays that gave her vision on all sides of the planet, she could not even see things coming from areas other than the stream.

Cassian and Jyn had gone to do a visual inspection of a major crash in one of her blind spots. It was so painful to be dependent this way. As much as she was beginning to like them, they could bring her only the thinnest scraps of information.

If something truly dreadful happened, she could retreat to core systems, maybe save herself, but she would not be able to protect any of them, the new people, her sentients, her little planet.

*She was not sure she could survive that, or what she would become if she tried.*

Some of the sentients had been coming to visit recently. Bes, a delightful adolescent with lovely manners, had come up with Cassian and Jyn many times, as well as Mose, Dov, Losa and Keen, who always appeared to be nervously peering about as if looking for small bits of things they could steal. She liked using Cormer’s image to loom behind them and project intimidation. She also greatly appreciated the way Cassian always checked their bag-pockets before they left. Now though, others began to come. Bodhi Rook brought them.

“It’s important that they understand how the receivers and transmitters work,” he said, ”and mostly, that they not be afraid to talk to you about things if ….if Jyn and Cassian and I aren’t here.”

_Afraid?_

‘Why would they be afraid of me?”

Bodhi had grimaced, the way he sometimes did when struggling to find the right way to express something. It was one of the things she appreciated as distinct about Bodhi. Cassian did most of his verbal processing internally and seemed to work at actively concealing it. Jyn had a tendency to express verbally first, or not at all, and then process afterwards.

“They’re from a fairly low-tech society, Portia… they don’t even have working droids here……I mean, I’m from a high-tech society…”

_No, my friend, you really aren’t._

“….and I find you fairly overwhelming.”

But that was a long time ago, and those assessments were notoriously biased and incomplete.

One day Bes came up on her own with another Memsa. Portia heard them before she saw them.

Bes had never had any trouble climbing over the ledge onto Portia's second level, but the person with her seemed to need help.

*I should talk to Cassian about putting in a step.*

Once they were inside, she could see that Bes was assisting a much older Memsa female, grey-faced and leaning on a small walking stick.

Portia put up an image of a mature female human with long silver braids.

"Hello Ancient Portia," Bes said brightly, "Who are you being today?"

"Aurea, head of Anthropological Survey team."

*It seemed appropriate.*

Bes bowed, and the elder beside her stiffly did the same. "I am introducing my Eldest Sister to you."

"Hello," the Mem said, a little breathless, "my name is Iola."

Her internal scanning was minimal but the person was clearly suffering from joint deterioration. Previous injuries insufficiently healed and re-aggravated by extreme old age.

"You should sit on one of the benches," Portia said, re-imaging next to one of the benches Cassian had set up.

"Oh!" Iola seemed surprised.

Bes smiled wide and clapped her hands. Then she took her Sister’s hand and laced their fingers together. “Portia can shine anywhere in a room where the blue squares are.”

“Have Jyn and Cassian returned, or sent messages?”

“No,” Bes said, “It has only been five days. Do you worry the way Bodhi Rook does? He is still at the stone house building machines to help you speak.”

“Youngest Sister, go and help our friend Bodhi Rook.” Iola laid an aged hand on her Youngest Sister’s wrist and squeezed gently. “Return for me in a few hours.”

Bes tipped her head inquiringly, and laid a palm against her elder’s back.

“Go, Brave Sister. Ancient Portia and I shall stay in her tower and be old together for a time.”

Bes bowed again and scampered away.
Iola sighed deeply.

“Ancient Portia, Ghost and Neighbor, this will be difficult….and there is much risk of misunderstanding….but it seems that the time has come for us to speak.”

*Oh my, Portia thought.*

*Well, I suppose Aurea would be glad to know the Ethnographic Survey will be updated.*

In the end, they had a long and interesting discussion before Bes returned to help her Sister over the stone ledge and back down to their home in the old Exterior Agricultural Station #6.

_________________

When Cassian returned, several days later, Bodhi Rook came up with him. They sat on the benches in her heart level, both looking tired.

He gave a fairly thorough report about the crash site…an automated piece of a large drilling platform, definitely linked to their Enemy and almost entirely intact and functional on impact, no obvious signs of outgoing data from it and steps had been take to render it inoperable and hide it from any eyes that might search for it.

This was bad news, and tipped Portia’s assessment of their situation further toward certainty.

She had visualized as a tall dark-skinned adult male, bald with a well-trimmed greying beard (Rian, Head of Personnel Relations).

“Cassian,” she began, “I have been compiling data and..”

“They are building another weapon,” Cassian said.

His features were very composed, although his heart rate was elevated he was concealing it well. Bodhi’s heart rate was also elevated but he was not concealing it well at all, in fact, he looked quite ill.

*You are wiser than the Knights, she thought, at least you know that your Enemy will always return.*

“Yes,” she agreed, “that is the most likely interpretation.”

“Where?”

“I don’t have enough good data to make a reliable estimate of that.”

“What about the drill?” Bodhi was asking, “Does that give you any clues?”

“It is concerning, but inconclusive,” Portia said with Rian’s voice, which many people had found to be reassuring.

“Cassian,” *she hoped she was conveying seriousness and unity of purpose,* “I cannot SEE it, I only know that it exists, somewhere outside the main hyperspace streams, where no accessible eyes are on
Bodhi spoke again, “Is it the same kind of weapon? I mean… a DeathStar?” His color was not good.

“Possible, but I have no data clues about that. I can only tell you that it is large and that it is space based. I can also make a surmise that it is not currently operational.”

“How do you know that?” Bodhi asked.

“Because they haven’t used it yet.” Cassian said, lowering his head.

“Where is Jyn?”

“Down in the village, why do you ask, Portia?”

*If they come, I cannot stop them.*

“Cassian, do not mistake inquiry for planning. Specific contingency planning would be premature at this point, but if Bodhi’s ship is fully operational and can hold 3-5 persons of average human weight and size, it may become necessary to..”

“No,” Bodhi said.

“This is not a discussion we are going to have now, Portia.”

“No,” Bodhi repeated.

Cassian reached into the pocket of his jacket and took out two objects. He laid them out on the bench.

“Portia, can you tell me what these are?”

Instantly, without consideration, she changed her image to that of a pale woman with long dark hair. The objects on the bench were Jula’s external mods.
The Priestess

Chapter Summary

The continuing adventures of General Draven and Corporal Tonc. A small bit of Draven backstory because I could not help myself. An old friend reappears.

Chapter Notes

Not an action packed section but tiptoeing toward Endor.

“Can we be sure these guys are not going to screw us over, sir?” Tonc was saying.

Draven sighed inwardly, “If I wasn’t sure of that, Corporal, we wouldn’t be here.”

The Infantryman actually had good instincts, he was willing to admit, but his mouth would have taken him out of consideration for a regular Intelligence posting within the first 15 minutes.

They were being moved, undercover, to another of Melan’s safe houses.....actually probably a ship or an orbital station....the Bothan certainly wasn’t going to tell him, where they could set up a secure transmission line that could not be traced to Skynet. They were also supposed to rendezvous with another of Melan’s contacts, presumably to help get in touch with Alliance Command and, hopefully, Andor.

At the moment they had impeccable covers as representatives of a Corellian fuel company trying to get a toehold into subcontracted transport services for Imperial Base Food Services. Professionally, he was in awe. Personally he was nervous, the Bothans were too clever for their own good sometimes, with shell games within shell games.

Corporal Tonc was vocally uncomfortable with the whole situation, the clothes (“Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad to have pants that reach the floor, but I look like a fucking funeral director, sir.”), his cover (“Why do I have to be a secretary? Why can’t I be one of the bodyguards, or at least an ARMED secretary?), and the constant presence of their Bothan minders (“I mean, I’m grateful, but these guys all act like they’re playing high-stakes sabacc and their sleeves are stuffed with extra chips.”) Koth Melan was no doubt listening to this entire conversation and laughing.

It had more than sixteen years now, Draven realized, since he had walked out of that mysteriously under-attended “mandatory” Intelligence staff briefing on Coruscant.
He’d been a junior officer in a Ground Analysis team supporting Republic troops at Mygeeto. All non-clone forces were abruptly hustled aboard a shuttle with blacked-over windows and evacuated out. His uniform had still stunk of smoke. The capitol was roiling from the riots and locked-down after the Purge. The spaceport had been eerily abandoned. Troopers were everywhere but only clone troopers, almost no other personnel were visible. He could have slipped out in the confusion of loading the transport, as one or two of the others had, but he was a good soldier unwilling to believe what his gut was telling him. It had been too much like some wild Separatist propaganda vid. Most of them were taken into a briefing room but General Graik had not been there. Instead one of his lower level subordinates was introduced as the new Director of Intelligence and Security Services. He gave them an exhaustive brief on the “vast Jedi web of treason” and the imposition of martial law. They watched a vid of the storming of the Temple tower…nobody had even bothered to scrub out the images of the child bodies scattered on the landing platforms. Chancellor Palpatine was shown tearfully declaring himself Emperor. Every agent was “asked” to take a loyalty oath to the new Government at a ceremony within the hour. No one protested, and no one moved. Looking around, seeing the calculation in his fellow officers eyes, he had felt more alone than ever in his life before or since. Because he was newly returned from a combat tour that morning, he requested the courtesy of being allowed to shower and change. When it was granted, he’d saluted his new commander and smilingly agreed to the offered three man escort back to quarters. Twenty minutes later, in the mostly deserted Active Duty barracks, he’d used the distraction of a falling duffel bag to disable the two “escorts” inside the small room. Then he’d managed to silently snap the others neck before he could activate his comm. Reflecting on it now, he realized that he’d likely been in some kind of shock because he distinctly remembered carefully folding his uniform jacket before he dropped it on the floor beside the bodies. The Republic he’d served was dead. The nearby cleaning service closet held four inactive droids, and a locker with a hat and ID badge. The sound of gunfire echoed up the stairwell from elsewhere in the building. Sheer random luck must have enabled him to walk out without being caught. He’d taken the only chance he could think of, having noted that Airen Cracken, also in his unit, had not been at the “briefing”. Cracken had an off-the-books relationship with an aide of Bail Organa’s that not many people knew about and was jokingly rumored, as part of this war-time romance, to have printed himself a shadow pass for Diplomatic housing. Draven got there through the media access tunnel. It could have been a fatally wrong choice. Airen might have already been arrested, or have been unreliable, his boyfriend might have turned them both in, or Cracken might have shot him when he showed up at the door (actually, that had almost happened) instead of just pulling him inside. As it was, Senator Organa and the Aldaranian diplomatic staff had risked their lives to slip he, Cracken, George and twenty other “deserters” out hidden in a councilor shuttle three agonizing days later. Draven could still name every single fellow agent who had stayed in that briefing room. All of them became Imperial officers, Max Veer was even a General. There was a rumor, actually noted in the dossier that Melan had given him, that Max had died on Hoth. Force, he hoped it was true. He hoped Vader had strangled him for putting too much sugar in his coffee.

He’d fight with any weapon he could find for as long as he had breath but he knew that he was tired.

*Is it possible to pass your own breaking point without knowing it?*
Their business class private compartment was almost empty, when three tall Arkanians, including two veiled priestesses, entered and sat down. Draven raised an eyebrow but the Bothans all seemed unruffled.

As the compartment doors sealed for take-off, one of the Bothans, a tawny male in a military jacket, laid a book on the table and opened it. A blue light flashed briefly through the room and lingered, sparkling, on the security cameras.

“Secure,” the Bothan said.

One of the “priestesses” threw back her veil.

“I cannot tell you how good it is to see you, General Draven.” It was Mon Mothma.

He took it as a sign that he was finally getting close to that stress-induced breakdown that he briefly considered kissing her.

“Ma’am!” Corporal Tonc leaped to his feet.

"Senator, this is...” Draven began, but Mothma had reached out a hand toward the young man before he could finish.

"Stordan Tonc"

The corporal shook her hand awkwardly.

*She remembered his name, of course she did. She remembered all their names.*

"I'm very glad, Corporal."

There was no point in not speaking freely. The Bothans either knew it all already or soon would.

Organa and Skywalker had been captured briefly but escaped again, although Skywalker was badly wounded. Solo had been captured and exchanged to the Hutt on Tatooine in return for full Imperial support in the cartel's Outer Rim territory

*Hell! What could he possibly have done to piss them off that badly?*

It was a cruel loss, Hutt neutrality that was, Draven couldn't muster too many tears for Solo.

The Bespin Mercantile Consortium had acceded to Imperial occupation, then "un"-acceded all within 48 hours. Their small mercantile fleet and top officials were now with the Alliance and Vader was left holding a beautiful but empty floating station and several non-operational gas mines. Ackbar was keeping the Fleet together.

"She's gone again," Mothma said, "Leia. She took personal lead of a spec ops group and has gone dark. It seems Commander Skywalker went as well."

*Oh hell, No.*
"What! Where?"

"The Outer Rim," Mothma said, evenly.

Riekkens's words, "It is easy to forget how young she is."

What was it Andor had said, all those years ago? "May forget she is only human."

They sat in silence for a moment, then Tonc interjected.

"Ma'am! Captain Andor and Sargent Erso are still alive."

_Corporal you would not last two minutes in Intelligence._

Mothma's thoughtful and serious expression changed instantly, she looked at Draven in shock.

"We have had contact with Andor, he indicated that Jyn Erso was alive and with him." He told her.

She lifted a hand to her face. He knew that Erso's death had weighed on her, as Andor's had on him, in a way that surprised him.

_So many dead, why those two so especially?_

"How?"

"Our contact was limited, and lost when we had to evacuate Echo Base. One theory is that they commandeered an unregistered Imperial Command shuttle before Scarif Base was...destroyed."

She nodded.

Then she looked up at Corporal Tonc, confused. "Why do you call her Sargent Erso?"
A tiny bit more about the Fishers and Harbor town and the drill wreck. Jyn remembers the last time she addressed a meeting.

The barge went over like a Fortune card. Everything slid, and the next instant he was under the heaving water, in the dark and fighting. Something was grabbing at his legs and he nearly panicked, it was the nets. He fought up to the surface only to have another wave crash down on him. A hard thing hit his shoulder and he grabbed at a curved surface, trying to pull himself up. It was one of the
little skiffs, upside down. Holding on for dear life, he was tossed like a cork. Something was clawing sharp at his back and he swing an arm around to knock it off. It was a little striped Memsa. Conn held onto the boat hull and the Memsa kid held onto him. Kicking his legs and coughing out seawater, his toes suddenly hit against stones. The waves had thrown them up onto the bar. A hugely black debris-ship had crashed into the beach a kilometer or more from the harbor. Flames were roaring across it and it lay half in and half out of the water, sending up steam that rolled like fog and cut off all his view of the sky. The thing was huge and shaped like a sideways spike but bigger than any five big barges he’d ever seen, laid end to end, and that was just the part out of the water.

Hanging onto the skiff’s side, (the little guy had crawled over his shoulder and was hanging onto the keel now) Conn tried to work his way, half walking, half swimming into the shallows.

“Bloody hell!” coughed the Memsa kid.

Chunks of broken boats and black cinders were everywhere and the water was still churning.

He prayed he was moving in the right direction, he was that disoriented, when his feet hit sand. Hands were grabbing at him and he looked up into the face of one of the Ladies, the middle one with the streak in her hair. She pulled him and the stripey Mem off the flotsam, out of the water, and dropped them soggy on the sand. Then, without a backward glance she moved down the beach. He saw the other Ladies, the young one and the old one, moving on further up the shore, pulling people above the waterline and moving toward the steaming hulk.

He sat there, choking up seawater.

“Thanks eh!” The kid said, and scampered down the beach calling out names, trying to find somebody.

“CONN!” It was Fennie and Red Mo, soaked. They all held onto each other. Nobody knew where anybody else was. People were running up and down and the life-saver beacons had got turned on. Crews from town would be here soon.

“Holyfucking blue hell,” Fennie said. “It could’a hit the village….look at the size of it.”

“Tide’s in…and it’s more’n half above the water….don’t that mean its ours?” Red Mo said.

Fennie looked at him aghast.

“Can’t see the post,” Conn coughed. Fucking wave had probably taken it out. “Depends on who’s side’a the line it’s on…bastards on open salvage ’til the Ladies call it, I’m betting.”

“What if it’s hot?”

“Ladies’ll flag it fast if it is.” Mo looked around, “How’d they get here so quick?”

He stared at the wreck. It looked whole.

Mala would take the chance, Conn thought.

“Fennie, we gotta get some rope.”
As soon as they had pulled it back up, the Bequa unhooked from the black wreck, slipped themselves out of their harnesses and swam back into deep water to rest.

“When the tide goes out further, we can get a better look at it,” Tom Markey said.

“The trick will be getting back inside,” Eldest said. “As the Bequa towed it out to cold water the first time, it cracked, but now all those cracks have closed. Even the splits in the seams that they made to get those goat-brained runt children out seem to have sealed up….as if the thing could heal.”

Cassian Andor (who Macha would always, she suspected, call Blackbird in her heart) nodded as if this did not surprise him.

Jyn Erso spoke. “It’s made to do that. Units like this are constantly damaged when they drill, so all the….um….metal “insects” that the boys saw are repair droids. They seal breaches as fast as they happen. It means that there must be a number of them still functional inside.”

Eldest asked, “Would it not be best then, to leave the wretched thing sealed and sink it deep with it’s wakeful machine droid-spiders still inside?”

“It might be,” Cassian said, “But two things could go wrong. The droids could succeed in making enough repairs to initiate the thing, in which case it will start drilling again, which could be very dangerous to the Bequa. Or they might be smart enough eventually to realize they are no longer attached to the main drilling rig they broke off of and send out a signal.”

“You’re saying this thing is only part of a bigger ship,” Markey asked, wide-eyed.

“Much.” Cassian said.

*It must be a world of waking nightmares where you people come from, she thought.*

“It would be massive drill rig, probably several kilometers across,” Jyn said, “You’d know it if it were here.”

“We are hoping this piece was lost.” Cassian explained, “That it broke off the main assembly….in….flight. A big rig might have hundreds of bits like this, and extras for repair. They might well just write it off as a loss in shipping, too much trouble to go looking for, IF they think the thing was destroyed.”

“But if they don’t,” wise Eldest said, “And they are near enough that they think it worth their while…they may come looking for it? This is your concern?”

“THEY, being?” Markey asked.

All four of them turned and looked at him as if he were an idiot, which might have been unfair.

“‘The destroyers of worlds’” Eldest said, quoting the old old poem.
A sweet voice came from behind them,

“Black is the weapon that swallows the air
and red are the words that are spoken.
War is our name
The destroyers of worlds
The innocent all will be swallowed.
Jaws will be opened
and talons will curve
And stars will be scattered like water”

Youngest had walked up from the waters edge to join them.

“Oh yeah,” Markey said, sarcastically, “That one, always a favorite at children’s parties.”

The Blackbirds (really, she knew she MUST stop calling them that) looked at each other, clearly uneasy.

“What do YOU call an enemy that would build something like that?” Youngest asked them.

“The Galactic Empire,” Jyn said.

“Then that will do for now. What do you propose?” Eldest said.

“We make the assembly irreparable, and, if possible we try to get a clue as to where it’s main rig is or was going.” Cassian answered.

“How can we do that if it keeps fixing itself?” Markey asked.

The green-eyed Blackbird woman looked at her partner and smiled brightly.

“We rig some explosives and blow it to hell.”

Have we considered sufficiently, Macha wondered, whether one or both of these people are insane?

___________________________________________________________________________

They were in a small boat with young Conn rowing, following Markey and the others back to his place on the docks. A meeting was being set up.

Jyn had to brace herself hard for coming into Harbortown, and she told Cassian as much.

You can handle this sort of thing, or convincingly pretend to, she thought, but the idea of an entire town full of people looking at me, expecting something from me, makes me want to break a window, dive through it and run.

"You stood up in front of the whole Council, generals, the assembled Alliance fleet, and a standing-room-only crowd of troops, essentially called them sissies, and articulately proposed an immediate act of war," he said.

"You weren't even there," she pointed out.
He hadn't been. He'd given his own report, after Draven's introduction, brief, calm, professional and 80% truthful. Most of his lies had been by careful omission.

Saw had been contacted. No mention of the firefight and the Partisans capturing them. Galen Erso’s message had been received. Until one of the Councillors asked outright, he had not given any indication that HE had not heard it. Draven had looked at him sharply but Cassian’s gaze and expression had barely changed. He’d paused, and then clarified that he had not actually been in the room when Saw started playing it. His phrasing was careful, and might give the impression that he had seen part of it, or perhaps even spoken with Saw about it.

You are a fucking marvel soldier boy, she’d thought, because that is not at all what happened.

Although, the truth was, she remembered little clearly about what happened after Papa’s flickering image had vanished.

Her legs had folded under her. She had been slammed back into the cave, on her knees in the dark, breathing through her mouth, trying not to scream, alone. Eventually she heard a voice, as if across a distance at first, then right next to her ear, shouting her name, “Jyn! Come on! Jyn!” There had been a man’s face, close and level with her own, a hand on her shoulder. “Who are you and how do you know my name?” she’d wondered, disoriented, but he’d been pulling at her arm as if this was something terribly important. “Come on, we have to go.” Saw had been standing there, just an arms length away, his battered staff raised in his one remaining hand, pulled back as if into a fighting posture on those cruelly mis-matched legs. Cassian had been crouched beside her and the floor was lifting and shaking, gravel falling from the ceiling.

She remembered now what she hadn’t registered then, Cassian had had a blaster down across his thigh, thumb on the safety, finger on the trigger. Why?

Saw Gerrera was confirmed dead, he said. One of the Councilors had muttered something like “Probably for the best.” Jyn had steeled herself for that. She had expected nothing less, but Mothma had stiffened and moved as if about to speak. Cassian had continued on, as if he had not heard, that Gerrera had told them to run and leave him behind. “His last words were ‘Save the Rebellion.’” This was actually true, she remembered it, but there was a murmur in the crowd, clearly not everyone believed that part, it sounded too dramatic. She’d almost laughed.

Still, he gave Saw that much tribute, whatever else he thought of him, that he was brave, that he had been dedicated to the cause.

Thank you, Jyn had thought, almost before she could stop herself.

Jedha was destroyed. Twelve thousand lives in that statement. the little girl in the market... Bodhi's
home and family...the ancient city... The scale of the destruction was visually confirmed. (Someone else had already reported that.) The defecting Imperial pilot, Bodhi Rook had been invaluable, as had been the surviving Guardians. Galen Erso’s “extraction” had failed, no further elaboration. The scientist had been killed by friendly fire, called in when communication with the “team” was lost after the crash.

What’s your definition of “team”, she remembered thinking bitterly, K2? I was practically your prisoner, and Bodhi, Chirrut and Baze were somewhere between rescues and kidnap victims. What were you ordered to do with me AFTER you shot my father?.

It shamed her to think of it, her rage. I'm so sorry now, I didn't understand.

He had answered questions. Mothma thanked and dismissed him. He’d stood at attention briefly, then turned, glancing at Draven and walked out.

Did you say what he wanted you to say? She’d wondered.

As he passed her, she'd been standing back by dais entrance behind Organa, waiting to be called. Mothma was speaking. He’d looked her up and down, as if taking in the clean clothes, the re-combed and pinned hair, the determination.

Walking through the hanger on her way she’d passed a torch sitting on a repair cart and scraped a fingerfull of lamplblack soot off the nozzle. In the small fresher she’d rubbed a thin line of it along each eyelid, using a damp corner of her sleeve to fix it.

Let me show you what a fighter looks like, she’d thought. Let me show you what a Resistance is FOR.

This thing HAD to be destroyed and these people needed to do it, NOW. She’d felt more on fire than during any fight of her life.

He’d said nothing to her, only nodded, eyes dark, his expression unreadable to her….then. He’d passed her by and walked out through the crowd, stopping only to whisper in Melshi’s ear. While she had stood in the middle of that Command floor trying, and failing, to make enough of them SEE, he had been working the back of the room, moving out through the base, quietly and steadily committing treason.

“I heard the reviews later,” he said, with a gentle smile. “Casrich said you ‘kicked ass and took names’, Melshi said that Raddus was ready to follow you straight out the door and Merrick was pretty close behind him.”

I got them all killed, she thought, but she didn’t say it out loud.

Rules.

“We gotta climb up from this side,” Conn was saying, “big wave from that bastard crash took out full half the long wharf.”

Having no choice but to stay still in the dory for the time being and let the kid steer, Jyn decided that the best thing for her nerves at this point was sliding underneath Cassian’s arm.
Next time, Jyn gets to blow some stuff up.
Jyn and Cassian are not the first or only refugees on Ea and Cassian reflects on what they owe their friends. Markey tells a story and Jyn and Cassian make out a little while discussing chemistry.

Walking through HarborTown, meeting with the southerners, that day and the next, there was a feeling he could not shake. This was not like other ports he had been in, it was too small, the tech was too low, the people so very different, and yet, and yet…Kafrene, Port Corell, Mos Eisley… the tension in the air, the crowding, the bustle. He had to remind himself to stop, to breathe, to be where he was and not let panic pull him back into the past. He was holding together but it ached, like stretching skin that had scarred over.

Old Markey’s warehouse/boarding house/trading post was a large barn-like structure filled with boats under repair, a mish-mashed collection of salvage, curtains and bundles of blue cloth and an indeterminate number of teenagers coming and going.

“I expected more questions, more scepticism,” he admitted to Perin and Markey as they walked back across the boardwalks, after that first big meeting. Jyn had got on ahead to check out Markey’s “stock” for potential explosives and equipment.

“Well, stuff’s been building awhile..for years if you think back on it,” Markey was saying. “Then that big blue fucking …oh, pardon ma’am…that wreck falling and taking out a dozen boats and half the dock, that focussed folks minds pretty keenly. Add on the sight of a couple of Far Islanders standing right up on the ground in front of Ea and everybody, with a few hundred more gathered in boats offshore…everybody knows that trials are coming.”

“We are….strangers,” Cassian said, choosing his words carefully, knowing how loaded the term they used, ‘Fallen’, was. “I know how dangerous that can be.”

“You are allies,” Perin said, “That trumps all. You will be listened to.”

Thank you Portia, or Kay, or the Force or who or what brought us here.

Whatever Portia’s plan or lack of plan when she brought their damaged shuttle in, Cassian knew, bringing us in to the Upland, near to her, to “their” village of Memsa, had saved them, he and Jyn, in every way possible.

The medicine might be rougher there. Although he had learned from talking to the “Ladies”, (as the human Sisters were called by their people) and the southern Circles, that Iola and Tova were
renowned as healers, even far from their own territory, but it was more than that.

“Falls” or crashes of lost ships or space debris were approached in a much more quickly mercantile way down here. Maybe because at one point they had been more frequent? If they had been found by the Scavenger gangs elsewhere, he had a strong feeling that the priority would have been stripping that fancy shuttle as quickly as possible, and not caring for it’s two dying occupants. Perhaps it was because there were more humans close to the coast, descendants of other “Fallen” who had reason to distrust each other, or descendants of Portia’s people, for whom distrust of anything coming from the sky might be a religion by now.

For whatever reason, Bes, Tova and Iola had not asked them any questions. They had healed their skin and bones and then put them in that little house to see if they could heal the rest of themselves on their own. The amount of trust that must have taken was staggering to him. They were accepted now, by all of these people, only because the Memsa of the Upland had named them “allies”, claiming them as their own.

The three Sisters had come up to the stone house and told he and Jyn to comb their hair, put on clean shirts with long sleeves and come to a meeting in the village, because Iola was declaring them allies now……when Jyn had asked “Why long sleeves?” Bes said, a little embarrassed, “Your arms make people nervous.”

Why?” he had asked Iola. The question had popped out of him before he had time to think of it in strategic terms…networking, assessing resources, establishing operations, things an Intelligence field officer should think about.

I’m broken, the thought had come to him, as it often did in those days.

“Because that is what the Pattern says,” she had explained with a shrug, patting his palm.

Don’t, he had wanted to tell them, please don’t risk this.

“No,” Jyn had said out loud, shaking her head. “This is not a good idea.”

He’d tried to explain.

“As grateful as we are, as much as we owe you…we are…I am….a soldier,” he’d said quietly, “My first allegiance has to be elsewhere.”

Iola had tipped her head and eyed him shrewdly. “To what?”

So Cassian repeated what he had said to recruits a hundred times or more, what he had repeated back to Draven and Cracken in a spaceship medical bay as a boy of 13.

“To fight and oppose the Emperor and any forces acting in his name, by any and all means;
To refuse any law contrary to the rights of free beings;
To bring about the destruction of the Galactic Empire;
To make forever free all beings in the galaxy.
To these ends, we pledge our property, our honor, and our lives.”

Jyn had looked at him curiously, then smiled slightly. “Yeah, what he said.”

Did I never swear you in? he wondered, I meant to, there just never seemed to be a time…
technically we were deserting.

Iola had chuckled and, laying her left palm on his right, curled her fingers over his firmly, Understanding and Agreement.

“I see no conflict,” she had said.

Tova nodded, “Go comb your hairs, especially on your face.” That had been that, two years ago.

But the Pattern did not always say the same thing. He and Jyn learned that soon enough.

Once intact ship falls had been rare, but traffic was picking up, and Portia was awake now. Three had come down, that Cassian knew of, in the time they had been here. One had broken up on impact farther North, without survivors, probably a Vobati cargo shuttle from the description…it was hard to tell, Keen’s crew travelled up to it and brought back parts. One, the un-piloted Imperial Zeta-class cargo shuttle with the three stupid deserters (as of last week still wandering around the grasslands being watched by the Taun), and in between, another, a Seinar T1-K Imperial fighter. Likely an escort craft from a larger convoy, according to Portia, it seemed to have been disabled by a catastrophic nav-computer failure in light-speed. Like Bodhi’s ship, she had brought it down so the pilot probably thought it was a break-up and never even saw the planet until he was on it.

When they opened the hatch, he was trying to get out a signal. Portia probably could have blocked it but they couldn’t take the chance. Cassian had shot out the communications console and Jyn had shot the pilot. They’d kept the broken computer and the guns and given Dov and his crew the rest.

It must have been all of fifteen years back, that one of his aunts had take him out in her boat, to show him the “secret” drying grounds. His mother’s people had all been dyers, with the trick of knowing just which beaches and flats to stretch their cloth on to get it that perfect sea-blue, Markey Blue some still called it, although only two of his cousins still did the work. After his younger sister died, his aunt decided that somebody besides her needed to know the secret, while his young cousins grew and decided what they wanted.

“Mind you Tom, you keep your damn mouth shut about it!” she’d said as they sailed around the point and up a little tidal river. As if he didn’t know that.

When he’d started to protest, she’d slapped him up the head (she was a hitter), “I don’t just bloody
mean about the dried place!” They pulled up away in and beached the boat, pulling out the baskets
doing cloth to lay flat on the mud in the noonday sun. After she’d made him stake the bolts out to her
satisfaction (as if his mother hadn’t made him do it a thousand times), she’d taken another covered
basket from the boat and wagged a finger at him. “I don’t care what foolery you’ve heard, these
brothers have harmed no one and just want to be left in peace.”

She took him up a winding path up through the grass to a bluff above the marsh. There was a little
driftwood house on the rise. He was fairly sure it hadn’t been there when she and his mom had
brought him and Dora up there as kids.

A tall, darkly tanned man was hanging fishnets up to dry on some bay bushes by the slope. His thick
hair was gray and he’d had no shirt on, working barefoot in some ragged black shorts. He’d watched
them come up, neither waving nor speaking.

“Pardon…..” Aunt had said, hesitating a second, “….Sen.” The tall man smiled. He had the most
perfect teeth Tom had ever seen.

“This is my nephew, Della’s boy, Tom Markey.” Tom held out his hand. The man stared for a
moment then shook it. He had a grip like iron. “I just wanted you to know…in case you see him out
on the flats. He’ll not be bothering you.” Another man walked up out of the house, the exact twin of
the first, save for a ragged sleeveless black shirt. The twin nodded at Aunt, and just kept walking,
round to the back of the house, where there was a little pen with wool-goats.

His aunt gave Sen the basket she’d brought up from the beach. The fellow didn't look inside, only
thanked her and laid it by the driftwood fence.

"Might I see the place?" she asked, in as gentle a voice as he’d ever heard the old harridan use. The
big man nodded and held out a hand to her to help her up onto the path.

"Wait here Tom," she said and walked up over the top of the bluff with the fellow.

He had nothing to do but stand and wait, so he walked around to look at the goats. There was a little
seaweed mulched garden out back of the rickety house. The twin was digging in it with a shovel,
glancing up but paying no more attention to Tom than the sea birds overhead. The shovel was made
of a wooden stick bound to one of those plates of white armor that Scavengers sometimes sold.

After a while his aunt and Sen came back around the top of the hill. The wind must have been
blowing just the right way, because he could make out bits of conversation...

“…..last much longer...” she was saying, "...you could come down with us."

"...I won't leave them Joy..." that was his aunt’s name, "you wouldn't understand......it's for the best."

He hoped it was the wind he heard, because if that was the sound of his aunt crying, he didn't want
to know.

A while later she walked into the little garden with her regular angry seal-dog of a face back in place.
She went straight up to the fellow digging there and tapped him on the shoulder.

*Man’s deaf, Markey realized.*

He looked up at her, nodded and squeezed her rough blue-nailed hand.

““The only way, Joy." His voice had the tinny too-loud sound of somebody who couldn't hear
themselves anymore. On the side of his head, as he turned back to his work, Tom could see a rough
nasty scar under his left ear, in the joint with his jaw.

"Come on," his aunt barked. Sen had gone back to mending his nets. Tom could see now he had the same kind of scar in the same place.

His aunt had packed up the now-stiff cloth (a day drying on that salt mud and a seawater rinse in a hot iron kettle the next day would give it that fine blue) and said no more to him. They sailed back before sunset. She drilled him on the directions to the spot a dozen times. He would no more have asked her about those Fallen men than he would have flapped his arms and flown. He never went back out there with her, although she went back up by herself, he knew, now and again. Three years later his aunt died, too stubborn to talk to the Ladies about the pain in her side until it was far too late. She’d been a strange woman.

A year or three after that, he took his oldest young cousin, who was courting a weaver and wanted to take on the dyeing trade, out to the "secret" spot. He went up to the bluff. The ramshackle house was almost entirely gone, broken down by the winter storms. In the back, between some long flat slabs of stone, that might have made a box or a bench once, he found five of those black and white face helmets. He took them, that sort of thing fetched a good price. At the meadow above the rise he found five graves' laid out and ringed with white stones carried all the way up from the beach. There was a driftwood marker hammered at the head and foot of each and there looked to have been names carved in them once although the rain had made them unreadable. He righted the ones that had fallen, then went down to help his cousin.

After the meeting, and a few glasses of root liquor, Markey told Cassian Andor Blackbird the story. He’d asked to see the face helmets. Markey only had one left, all the others had sold for top trade, but he hadn’t been able to make himself sell the last, so he fetched it from the rafters.

Cassian’d tipped it up to look inside, lifting the rags of black padding that still hung inside, to run a finger along the numbers on the thin metal plate underneath.

Missus Jyn had been coming up the ladder from the warehouse cellar, and seen him with it.

“That’s an old one,” she said.

“Early Phase Two prototype - Grand Army of the Republic.” He handed the helmet back to Markey, “Someday you’ll have to take me up there. I’d be curious to see it.”

*Help us make sure we get through these days to a ‘someday’, mister, and I surely will, Markey thought.*

Markey left soon after, to go bargain for the boats they would need, he’d be back before dawn, he said.
Jyn had made a thorough and complete inventory of everything useful, in all of the "fisherman's" official and unofficial hiding places. Old Tom Markey was one of the last of a line of merchants and middlemen who had been quietly trading and "collecting" for generations. Even he wasn’t sure what was in some of those cellar holes, and sheds and such.

"I think I need to talk to Markey about his storage," she said. “It’s not the worst system, what with those walkways down and the little caves facing out toward the water, but some of that stuff.....REALLY needs to be kept separated.” She opened her fingers wide, mimicking an explosion.

*Just what I need, more reasons to have trouble sleeping,* Cassian thought.

He moved one of wooden chairs back from the rickety table for her to sit.

"Is there something you can work with?"

"Lots of things will explode, Major Blackbird, the trick is getting them to explode in the right place at the right time."

"Should I be worried that you seem like you're enjoying this?" He meant it as a joke, but she didn't laugh.

She pulled her chair to touch his and reached over, picking up the flask Markey had left and shaking it. There were a few swallows left and she uncorked it and took a drink.

“Not really…” She frowned slightly, “Feeling a little relief at finally being useful, maybe. THIS at least I know. This, I can do.”

She looked around the place, the open loft packed rafters high, with wicker barrels, bundles of cloth (some of which were probably sleeping adolescents) and fishing tackle, shaking her head as if bewildered.

He reached over and squeezed the back of her wrist, Apology for Unintended Distress.

That earned him a smile, one of her good ones.

“‘You really have a real gift for this, you know. Tell me, is there one for 'Stop Feeling Sorry For Yourself Stupid and Be Glad You're Alive'?""

"We should ask Bes. We both need that one from time to time."

She sighed and rubbed her eyes. “Do you want to discuss materials, calculations and methods?"

_No, he thought, I really don’t. I want to figure out which of these bundles DOESN’T have anybody inside, unroll it, get these clothes off us both and see if I can get you to make that sound again._

Still holding her hand, he lifted her wrist to his lips.

She slid her fingers up along his jawline and onto the back of his neck, leaning in close.

“Materials," she said quietly, "Rubidium, Caesium," with light kisses between each word, "Potassium pellets sealed in anhydrous oil cylinders," her mouth opened a little and then she pulled back, biting at his lower lip, "Eight ion grenades, pre-Clone Wars...but..” she gasped a little as he pulled her close and slipped his hand under the hem of her shirt, "working." He whispered against
her ear, "Ok...calculations, how soon until Markey comes back?" and closed his teeth gently around her earlobe “and how soundly are those kids sleeping?”

Ahhh...it's a strange way to live, my love, but we're alive.

That was as much talking as either of them could manage. Methods involved two long rolls of cloth down behind the barrels and a spare sheet of sail. Markey came back at first light.
The Black Shuttle

Chapter Summary

Bohdi is the pilot. He and Bes bond some more. Thoughts about K2. Krennic's shuttle reveals a few of it's mysteries and the trauma of Scarif is not ever totally going away, for anybody. Thoughts about Baze and Chirrut...sniffle.

Chapter Notes

Unashamedly putting bad science and poorly understood engineering in my bad science fiction. Just sip your margaritas and go with it folks. Bodhi IS the pilot.

If I hadn’t just spent five weeks getting schooled in garage systems mechanics by Tenzigo Weems and Chewbacca, I would be in tears right now, Bodhi thought

All he had to work with was the three receivers and pup transmitter he’d brought with him, packed and ready to deploy. Keen (a tall mottled black/grey Mem with a bit of a stutter) had brought him a badly scorched com module from a T1-K and he’d used the parts he could salvage to boost the signal range. Cannibalizing them (sorry Weems), reassembling and then adding on parts from the Scavengers, he’d been able to build a fourth whole unit. It would have to do. Hopefully Jyn and Cassian would find more of what they needed in the south. They had ears and voices, what they needed was eyes….more of them, looking the right way.

He was as good as anybody in the Alliance with engines but this was the far side of his skill set. At one point they’d had a fine little factory set up behind the stone house. Dov unsurprisingly was very good at stripping parts. Jyn was a deft hand with sequencing and Cassian, also unsurprisingly, had a certain amount of skill with hacking into equipment. They were a good team.

At one point he had been stymied by how to get into a sealed sync module and Cassian had shown him how to slide a silica chip up into the connecter prongs to loosen it from the inside casing.

“How do you know it works?” Bodhi had asked, shaking the tiny module.

“Works on a K series sync module,” he’d said, eyes down on his hands, “Same manufacturer.”

So, Bodhi always wanted to ask him, how exactly DO you reprogram an Imperial Security droid under field conditions?
I stood in hammering rain on Eadu while bombs dropped around me having a very tense conversation about the nature of trust and loyalty with a freaking Imperial Security unit. I remember making an argument based on comparable empathy. It was insane when you think about it. What was even more insane was that I WON the argument.

Few people talked much about K2. Weems had known Cassian only as a voice, a signal signature, but he did remember K2, or as he called him “Andor’s droid.”

“So Andor’s droid didn’t make it?” he’d said once, while they were working on Guardian together. “Too bad. Thought that thing might outlive us all.”

“Where did the Captain find him?” Bodhi had asked, but Weems was not the type to remember such non-technical details, “I don’t know, he came back with it, some bad mission…. Albarrio, I think.”

The Corporal had shrugged. “It wandered around for several years with him. He must have somehow convinced Command it was safe because it was cleared on all the equipment. I talked to it a few times on comm,” he was chuckling at some recollection, “I always half figured that if you cut it open you’d find a skinny sarcastic man inside….. guess there was more to say, eh?”

Yes, Bodhi agreed, there was.

Of course back on Echo Base, there had been almost no one left who remembered Captain Andor either, except for General Draven, who didn’t chat much. Once, one other time, he heard him mentioned by someone. It was the first time Leia Organa had come down to see him in med bay. He’d been out of the tank but still without eye or arm. She hadn’t tried to explain or apologize about the “alternate history,” bullshit, for which he had been profoundly grateful, she just sat with him for a while. High on pain-killers and wrecked was not a good combination for meeting royalty.

We can neither of us ever go home, he remembered thinking. Oh please, I hope I didn’t say that out loud.

Dimly he recalled hearing her talking in a doorway with Dr. Thorn “….Andor,… not really at all..only a few times. . . .” but he couldn’t tell which of them was saying it.

Maybe that’s the mark of a really good spy, Bodhi had thought then, that he leaves no trace behind.

Tonc was the one who wouldn’t let anybody go, who was determined to keep everybody’s name alive, stubbornly, painfully if necessary.

“He didn’t want me on, you know?” Tonc’d said, one day, hanging while Bodhi was getting some physical therapy on the reconstructed arm.

“Who?” Bodhi had not wanted to hear this, but the guy was going to keep talking anyway and playing along at least kept his mind off the droid, painfully stretching his new elbow straight.

“Captain Andor. I didn’t even know him, but I heard Erso talk and all I could think was ‘Fuck this! What are we even here for if we don’t try to stop this kind of monster shit right now?’ and I hear Melshi talking to Selfla and I say ‘Sarge, I’m in.’….then I lift a few cases of sticky charges off that Alderaanian pallet…..like wasn’t THAT convenient, eh?...like don’t you think SOMEBODY left those in just the right place….and when we start packing the shuttle, the Captain looks at me and I
hear him say to Melshi ‘He’s too young, Rue’ and Melshi says “Younger than we were?” and I think they like, argued about it for a minute, but Melshi must have won, right? Lucky for your ass he did, eh?”

Yeah, Tonc, damn lucky, Bodhi thought.

Besides, I totally owe you a large bottle of that green stuff you like. You are going to be so stupidly excited to find out that the Captain and Sarge Erso are not only a “thing” they are a ridiculously big thing. The “I told you so’s” are never going to end

I really hope you’re ok man.

They had had to lug all the potential satellites all the way up into Portia. She insisted on “seeing” them, whatever that meant. This consisted of letting them sit on her lower level while an image of a stern-faced white-haired woman stared at a stack of garbage equipment for about three minutes. “Alright, they are stupid looking but they will work,” she’d said, and then they’d had to winch everything back down to Bodhi’s ship.

Once they had gotten the Guardian re-calibrated, Bodhi had taken her up and brought her in closer to Portia’s tower. “Interior Landing Platform B1,” Portia had called it. Tova called it the back pasture, and other than it being slightly flatter than the surrounding farmland, there was no sign it had ever been anything else, even from the air. Turned out, none of the Memsa had ever seen a ship actually flying. He had worried that they might be afraid, but it had turned into quite a festive event. The whole village stood on the hill and watched. The Scavengers, even the fierce ones who sometimes snarled when Jyn refused their prices for tools or parts, all stood on the edges of the field and whooped and clapped like they were at the best football game ever. If he hadn’t had a clue whether fuel would be an issue eventually, he would have considered taking people for rides.

Further back, half-slid into a gully at the back end of the pasture, was the TC3…the shuttle that had brought Jyn and Cassian out of Scarif. Two years worth of grass had grown up around. They both had a weird aversion to going near it although he knew they had gone in several times, looking for equipment. Jyn had taken him down, but it clearly stressed her out so much that he couldn’t bear to stay as long as he’d wanted.

After they were both gone for about a week on their journey south, Bodhi had left his ship sealed up (he had to, the local Memsa kids kept trying to sneak inside and sit in the pilot’s seat when he wasn’t around) with the equipment strapped down, and walked down to check the “black ship” out again.

It looked like nothing so much as a sideways tipped and slightly bent black triangle. It’s stealth coating was still mostly intact, but from just the right angle of light it could reflect the sky so perfectly as to be invisible. At the same time, the black soaked up so much solar, that it was brutally hot inside on a sunny day. Today was cloudy and drizzly. The Scavengers had managed to pry the ramp partway down, but originally, Jyn had told him, shivering, they had had to pull her out through a thin hull crack where one of the wing sections flanged up. He slid his hand through the opening.

“IT was very hard,” said a small voice behind him. He turned and saw Bes standing there.
“I can just barely see how you got Jyn through that sideways, getting Cassian out must have been a hell of a job.”

Bes shook her head, rubbed her ears, and then the sides of her own arms “It was still hot from coming through the air, but it was dark inside except for a few red lights. I thought at first that they were both dead, but then Jyn-ally was making sounds. I thought Cassian-ally was dead for certain until I felt his heart a little bit. Second Sister kept shoving larger and larger stones into the opening to widen it, and I wrapped Jyn-ally in a blanket so we could pull her out. Cassian-ally I had to tie to a board.”

“It was very brave of you to go inside,” Bodhi said, trying to comfort her, “You saved them.”

“Yes,” Bes agreed,”We were casting a Pattern and Eldest Sister said we must come here.” She stepped up and touched the black surface with a finger, gingerly, “I was very afraid and it was awful but I was strong and I did it.” She smiled, reached out and took Bodhi’s right hand…then stopped, and switched to his left, opening his palm and tapping it twice.

“I would go inside it with you Bodhi Rook,” she said, “You are good at helping people not be afraid.”

He remembered then that Bes had been one of the only ones who had not come to watch him bring the Guardian in to land.

“Oh, no,” he said, “You shouldn’t be afraid of ships,,I mean, here, I’ll show you…it’s ok.”

So he took her hand and they went inside what was left of the TC3.

________________________

Jyn had told him very little about what had happened to them on Scarif, after they parted. It had come out in bits. He gathered that they had gotten as far as the data vault before the alarms were sounded and that Kay had sacrificed himself to buy them minutes to climb the tower manually when the power was cut off. They had known about the Fleet’s arrival, but not Admiral Raddus and the Profundity, or General Merrick and Blue Squadron.

When he told them about Draven’s surmise that some high level Imperial Official seemed to have been there already trying to cover up evidence and that that was what had gotten them all spotted, he saw a look pass between them.

“It was his shuttle,” Jyn had said, closing her eyes and putting her hands on the table as if to steady herself. They had avoided talking about anymore after that.

How much did he really need to know?

It was enough that he knew they both still had nightmares. Sometimes Cassian would get up, pull back the blanket they had hung as a privacy curtain, and light a lantern because Jyn was gasping that it was dark. At least once Cassian had woke him calling out for K2.

He asked if there was anything he could do, the next morning, while Cassian slept late and he and Jyn ate berries out on the wall in the dawn sunlight.
“I know it must seem bad,” she said, “but it’s so much better than it was…. and it’s just good not to
be alone….it makes them, bearable.”

He knew what she meant. He’d slept in med-bay halls for almost a year, on a planet made of ice,
because of nightmares about fire.

Strangely, he still had only had one dream since he had come here.

He had dreamed he was walking though the streets of Jedha, through his old neighborhood. The
walls were all standing and the streets were clear. No Imperial banners or equipment, just prayer
flags, wind-chimes on the small shrines, and all the old shops on the corners. Everything was empty,
not a soul to be seen. It was if everyone had just vanished in the middle of an ordinary late summer
day. There were vegetables on the market tables, the Pastry-seller’s window was full of cakes, roses
bloomed in the pots outside stairwells, but there were no people to be seen. He’d come around the
corner into the Great Courtyard and the whole Temple was still standing, just as it had when he was
a child. He could see the towering pillars shaped like bearded warriors and the glitter of the great
carved man-high kyber stones through the darkness of the Main Arch. Two men were on the brown
sandstone steps. They looked like young monks, shirtless in red and black robed skirts, their black
hair in topknots. One had been broad and muscular with a well-trimmed beard and a hill-bandit’s
tattoo across his back, the other also very fit but clean shaven with smaller features and a brilliant
smile. They were kicking a small sac-ball back and forth. He remembered the game from his
boyhood. The big monk was throwing to serve, and no matter how well he pitched the ball, the other
managed to return it, with foot or hip or elbow. “Let me know when you are tired, Beloved.” he said,
laughing, “I can play this all day.” “Ah!” said the bearded one, “No. It is getting late, you fool. We
should go in.” He put the ball in a pocket of his robe and kissed the other monk, then they went, each
with an arm around the other’s waist, up the steps into the Temple.

It made him sad in a way, but in a way it didn’t. He decided he might tell Jyn about the dream when
she got back.

Bes had held tight to his hand. Even she had had to duck to get in the half-open ramp

He explained about the shape, and how it was supposed to minimize not just drag, but noise in
atmosphere to fly as silent as a hunting owl, and that the hull was black because every centimeter of
the skin was an active solar array.

Most of the ship was wing.

“Why do ships that fly above the sky even have wings?” Bes whispered,“If there is no air to push?”
She looked up shyly, as if this were something she had always wanted to ask someone, but never
gotten the chance, “most of them are just boxes or shapes that push themselves up and down?”

“Well,” Bodhi heard himself imitating one of his old teachers,“spaceship design is usually
determined by everything BUT space……it’s about in-atmo takeoff and approach specifications,
engine placement, cargo and storage needs, passenger needs and expectations, even……beauty.”

This ship though, held whatever beauty it retained on the outside only.

He remembered how the TC3 interior had been pictured in his treasured boyhood catalog. Lamilla
Tion, the reclusive designer on Cygnus who had won awards for her bold architectural ship designs,
had died, he remembered reading, like, twenty years ago. Being a fan of the design of an artist
credited with inspiring the TIE was not something you generally brought up in the Alliance, but there had been a tech on one of the maintenance crews from Cygnus and they had been talking once, sharing crisps he'd won in a sabacc game out on the dock. “She killed herself you know?” Kipper had said, “Supposedly sent out a big statement about the corruption of her art to a cult of death, right before, but the planetary authorities burned it…only a few people ever heard it.

The inside was dramatically smaller than the outside, that was by design, it was supposed to have been a lovely toy for a wealthy aesthete, after all, but here there was no beautiful leather interior, no color. The inside was not a pleasant cabin, it was black, stark, no amenities. No seating at all, only standing crash seats and storage straps. Fifteen people could have been strapped for transport here in extreme discomfort (he remembered the silver and black death troopers on the landing pad. Elite. Not the kind that would have been stationed on a “soft” base like Scarif) only the front pilot seats even reclined slightly. Whoever had commissioned this ship had cared for no one's comfort, not even their own.

Bes crouched and laid a palm on the black grid flooring at the very top of the ramp (when fully extended it would have taken half the interior floor away).

“They were right here.” she said.

Not strapped down. Even if the interior gravity had engaged properly…with broken bones and injuries…..it must have been hours of agony. No wonder neither of them wanted to come here.

“I had to cut his clothes to get her out,” Bes said, “She would not let go.”

“It was supposed to be beautiful. ‘A symbol of our highest aspirations for flight’” he said bitterly, forgetting for a moment that she was there. “Damn them all.”

Bes put her hand on top of his and curled her fingers around.

Bodhi coughed and shook his head. He felt like a fool choking up over those long lost catalogs and the childish dreams they’d inspired.

There were odd bits of debris on the floor, small cracked open storage lockers, a couple of dangling interior wall panel doors.

“I thought the Scavengers would have stripped this thing to struts long ago.”

“They were afraid of Jyn and Cassian-ally then, and of Eldest Sister now, who says it is their wreck alone to break or bury as they chose. No one will come here without them and they have come only a few times, searching for tools and weapons, and not stayed long.”

Bodhi saw, rolled back against the crash wall, a couple of familiar looking detached arms and the half-disassembled head and torso of a red-striped K2-T unit.

Yeah, he could see why Cassian had a bit of a mental block.

“Besides,” she said with a smile, “It is hard to cut”

“I can fix that,” Bodhi said, “Jyn left me a tool that might work.”
Jyn and Cassian lead HarborTown through some demolition. The Far Islanders pass some news. What Portia's earrings are for and why people are worried about wearing them.

Small bits of plot and a kind of very twisted town-wide turkey shoot.

In the end, it proved a useful exercise in community cooperation under trial.

Eldest Sister would be obeyed by the Council of HarborTown if she chose to speak, but to speak for the Pattern is one thing when the Pattern says, “Pull the Boats Out a Storm Surge is Coming” and something else entirely when the Pattern says “Watch” “Listen” “Be Ready” “Look around You” “Keep your Hands Open.” Nuance is a hard thing to translate for a flock of self-involved Fishmongers and dock traders.

Few of the Fishers of HarborTown were willing to risk their craft after the recent losses, so Tom won respect for the whole project by volunteering his own. The plan was for Jyn Erso and Cassian Andor to be brought in on his skiff and attach some of Markey’s more dangerous and colorful salvage items to the outside of the wreck. Jyn would make sure that all explosions happened at or above the waterline, so the Bequa would not be deafened or injured, but their harnesses would be attached above and below. The Bequa themselves would have to stay well back until the casing was split, then they would pull in as fast as possible, (risky for them because it would be low tide but the Ladies and the Far Islanders would be standing by to help any who got stuck), and drag the main sections separately into deep water. Most of the ‘insects’ would be dumped into the water. The Far Islanders would bring in and drop their dragnets behind the Bequa, closing off the Harbor, and prevent them from swimming after the wreck. The creatures could cut through, but would have trouble seeing organic material like the nets, especially in bright daylight, and it should slow them down.

“Will seawater kill them?” The Mayor of the Coast Memsa asked.

“No,” Jyn said. “We will have to do that.” It turned out that Tom Markey also had a number of guns hidden away in his little storage caves…at least enough to arm most of the Fishers and Memsa tall enough and willing to stand on his barges and shoot.

“How many of them are there?” Conn asked.

“Maybe as many as 500.” Cassian said, ”We don’t have to get them all, just almost all. Fifty people, ten each, we can make a good job.” He taught a short workshop in firing DOWN, but not at your own feet, or boat, or anyone else's feet or boat, and how much recoil to expect on a halfway decent
blaster. It had the potential to be a friendly fire disaster.

“We work together when there’s a storm. We worked together when there was a fire on the dock five years ago, when the whole town might have gone up. We worked together when Raiders attacked when some of us olders were just tads. This is like all three together.” Markey said at the Meeting.

Nervous as he was, Old Tom Markey was just the man for the job. Macha would have told him so, but it might be best to wait until after.

It was Young Dora Markey who had been the bold one, beautiful, charismatic, pride of the town in so many ways, a successful far-trader young as she was. Her death at 25 had been universally mourned. Tom Markey (Old Markey now, with his mother long gone, his aunt Joy passed and the grandmother finally, a few years back) was big, horse-faced and had always stood, (happily for he’d adored her and been her stalwart protector since babyhood), in his sister’s shadow. Everyone knew him, a fair number liked him and everybody grieved for him. No bright star, but shrewd, dependable. He staked his young second and third cousins in businesses, where his grandmother had been too mean to, if you were short on coin to replace a lost net, you could usually sell him something, or work one of his barges for a few weeks in trade, if you were a kid and life was a bit rough at home, you could sack out in his warehouse and cage a meal or two while things sorted themselves out. He worked the Inland trade, maybe at first still mourning for Bright-eyed Dora too much to work the coast long in her boat. It was slower, less glamorous trade, but before long he had agreements with the Memsa, was trusted by the Taun. Slowly, in spite of himself, he’d become a fixture. By forty five he’d become an essential man without ever really seeming to be one,........and then last summer Cassian Blackbird first came down as Markey’s guest for the Three Years Market.

Her first thought had been, If such pretty things as this are Falling from the sky now, we should all be hanging nets.

Her first words had been,”Wherever you are from sir, it is not the Upland.” Not as witty as one might wish, but it was tangled by her second thought, come too hard and quick upon the first,

How much death have you seen with those beautiful eyes?

They had known, of course, about the strangers rescued by the Upland Circle, word had been passed by the Circle of the Grasslands and the Circle of the Coast. A ship had fallen close to the haunted hill….again….two had come out of it, again, but these two had not come to hide and die, like wrecks or wash-ashores. They were something else altogether.

She’d been curious to see the female Blackbird, who’d been seen at the River fairs but had never come into HarborTown yet. Just as pretty, but smaller, jade green and pale where he was gold and dark, different yet the same, less likely to talk.

“Quieter? No,” Elder Sister had put it. “Just less likely to make a sound until she is ready to shout.”

“They remind me of Raiders,” Youngest Sister had said, and Macha could see what she meant. They were violent people, or at least they shone with the capability for violence, but they were not random, or greedy. Whatever it was they wanted, it was not for themselves. Also, they loved each other with a fierce devotion.
“Be careful, Major,” Jyn Erso had said, loading the small jars of cold metals and seawater that she had bound together as explosives, and the silver cylinders with stripes, into boxes of dry sand. Markey helped lower them down into the skiff Conn would take him out in. Her set was already packed into Toma’s boat.

“You too, Sargent.” Cassian Andor paused on the dock’s edge for a moment, then turned back, took her face in his hands and kissed her.

Markey’s brood of wharf-rats whooped and clapped.

She kissed him back hard and then pushed him away. “Jackass! Don’t get me all shaky, I’m trying to handle fucking bombs here.”

It was a plan where many things could go wrong, the potential for injury was high. Macha stood in one of the Memsa’s small boats, with poles and blankets ready to help the Bequa. Younger Sister stood in another many meters away. Elder Sister was on the beach.

She ran her hand along the cream-colored back of one of the Bequa, a young female she knew well.

“Be cautious dear friend,” Macha said

“We are not afraid,” the bold one whispered at the surface, “We do far more dangerous things where you cannot see them,” and she swam away to wait for the signal.

What followed was loud, and frightening and gave half the town nightmares for a month. Several were injured. It worked.

“Where did you find them?” Portia asked.

“Two representatives of the human community on the coastal islands brought them to us,” Cassian said.

It was very strange to see the wafer-thin image of the woman stand staring at the elaborate clips, laid on the bench. He realized that he had been half-expecting her to reach for them, but, of course, that would never happen.
“Portia, what are they?”

“What did they tell you about them?”

_Damn it Portia._

He exhaled slowly. “They told me that they were ‘artifacts’…that was the word they used, I have a feeling their Basic may be a little dialectic… that had belonged to their ancestors.”

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Two tall handsome people, with long elaborately braided hair tied back with silver silver beads and clips, looked directly at he and Jyn, as if they were the only people on the beach.

One of them with dark hair and multiple silver ear cuffs, waved a hand toward Markey and the Ladies. “You are not one of these,” they said, “You are from Away.”

Since they had first come here, no one had asked them that question directly, but this was not a question.

The person sounded almost angry, aggressive. Next to him he sensed Jyn tensing, like a coiled spring, shifting her weight back on one foot.

_No, he thought, that’s not what is happening here. This person is terrified._

“Yes.” He turned both hands, palm up and held them out, glancing over at Jyn. “We are.”

_Follow my lead on this, mi amor._

“That,” The second person pointed back toward the bulk of the drill rig, then lifted something out from under the pale violet clock that was draped over one arm and tossed a melon-sized bundle of cloth on the sand, and pointed to it, “This. Do they belong to you?”

Cassian knelt and unwrapped the bundle.

Inside was a disc of black and white plasteel and metal. Smashed so hard in the center that it looked like a bent dish.

_Maldición al infierno_

A Mark IV Sentry droid...broken but...this was not good.

Jyn stepped to his right side.

He looked up at the Islanders. “No,” he said, “No.”

“To whom are they belonging?”
“The Enemy” he told them.

“This set was an heirloom, but they said they had others….that sometimes similar objects were found in places where the ashes of their dead are buried.”

Portia’s image nodded. “They would have cremated the physical remains of the original adults after death, a wise precaution. It wouldn’t have be necessary after that, the immature organics didn’t have implanted mods. Jula was clever. She understood what was happening as well as anyone.”

“Jula?” Bodhi asked.

Portia’s image tapped it’s chest lightly.

“Has their understanding of the technology devolved into religious symbolism?” she asked.

“It may have at one point,” Cassian said, “I am not sure how they regard it now.”

Portia’s image seemed to shrug, “It doesn’t matter.”

She was still looking fixedly at the silver objects,” “They are mistaken tho’. Jula’s mods were all external, different from all the others. She had a bone disease. It was repaired at a genetic level but delayed her acceptance into the program until it was far too late for internal modification. She was brave and persistent and convinced them that she was as able as anyone else.”

She looked at Cassian, and he suddenly realized that her image had changed slightly. The woman with the long dark hair was now wearing the silver cuffs, or copies of them, attached around her ears like elaborate jewelry. The silver pins seemed to pierce right into bone at her temple, behind her ear and just below.

“Thank you.”

“For what?” he asked.

“She must have taken them with her. I was afraid to look and then later I wasn’t able to, but they lived…..the ones I didn’t…..”

She paused so still for a moment that Cassian thought she was glitching.

Oh hell can Portia glitch?

But then she went on, “We saved everyone we could. It wasn’t all for nothing. I loved them all. We were all family, but I think I may have loved her most”
“This isn’t like any integrative tech I’ve ever heard of before.” Bodhi said, nervously flexing his hand.

“I am anticipating your next question and the answer is no. It is not even remotely similar to your hand.”

“I was not going to ask that!”

“It is likely that you were.”

*Stop it you two.*

“What did they do?”

“Modifications allowed my organics to speak to me, enter data, access my data….when necessary, this will be difficult for you to understand…..to send me data and for me to scan biologically, monitor their location and health and even perform basic repair procedures I could access visual and auditory information, and they could …it is very important to me that you not misunderstand…..I did not and could not ever impose……informed consent was the only activating portal on both sides……do you understand?”

The image looked almost plaintive.

“I’m sorry, Portia, I don’t.” Cassian said.

Bodhi shook his head.

Cassian turned the pieces over in his hand. They had nothing that would cut them, even the light saber wouldn't work…..Jyn had tried it on one of the thin chains…..he had a strange suspicion that there WERE no parts inside, that whatever “circuitry” must be at the atomic level…or something…

“Portia, I realize this may be a sensitive issue, but is there any way this tech could be useful to us now?”

“Well,” she said, “I suppose one of you could wear one.”

Bodhi lifted one of the thin needles, and laid it back down carefully.

“Oh HELL no,” he said.
A Talk

Chapter Summary

A small cut-way in which Bodhi asks Cassian about his feelings for Jyn.

Chapter Notes

Felt like it needed to be in there, just because.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"The idea was Corporal Weems's" Bodhi was explaining, as he and Cassian sat in the cockpit of the ship, running through the systems checks.

Jyn had gone into the village to meet with Dov and his crew and bargain for the extra parts Bodhi would need to work while they were on the trip south. The plan was for her to meet them here. Elfla would arrive soon to take she and Cassian south, and Bodhi would fly Guardian back to the field behind Portia's tower.

"I think I remember him." Cassian said, "Systems Analysis, right?"

"That was it, officially. He remembers you.....well, sort of."

Cassian couldn't imagine why he would, just another voice in the dark.

It was early morning and there was a pleasant breeze with the hatch up. Nothing more could be done, the ship was as ready as they could make her, so they sat drinking some water from the canteen Bodhi had brought, waiting, waiting for Elfla and Jyn.

It felt strange to be in a ship again, stranger to be in a ship without Kay.

Bodhi shifted nervously.

"Um....hey, look,, um.... I'm sorry, but can I ask you something?"

"About the transmitters?"

"No....." He sighed like a man about to dive headfirst into water of an unknown depth, "about Jyn. I mean, about you and Jyn."

Wow. Cassian thought.

"What do you want to know?"

Saying, "I think she is the only reason my heart is still beating," did not seem to be appropriate.

With obvious reluctance the pilot turned away from the view out the open window to look at him,
hands folded.

"I.....without Galen, if he hadn't spoken to me, if he hadn't trusted me, I would have died....worse than died.....I feel like I have an obligation, as crazy as it sounds......

Cassian did not interrupt him.

"He talked about Jyn all the time.....how much he loved her, about how awful it was not knowing where she was or what might have happened to her..." He swallowed, "I think about it now....They gave their child to that madman. How desperate would people have to be to do that?"

*I've asked myself the same question.*

"Very desperate," Cassian said quietly, "but I think Gerrera wasn't always the way he was when you met him." Bodhi shivered, probably unconsciously, "He must have had some genuine connection to Jyn's mother at one point, some reason for her to trust him."

*She's told me so very little, except about the cave, and that only because of the nightmares. I only know her mother died going back, abandoning "the plan", to try to save him....or maybe just die with him.*

"Sometimes, if people are sure that they are facing...the worst... They will risk making a terrible choice for the ones they love, if they think there's a chance, even the most impossible chance of saving them." He leaned forward, "I think Galen Erso must have known, at some level, what was going to happen when they captured him, maybe the plan was to buy time, force them to kill him.....even kill himself once he thought Jyn and her mother were away. Saw must have seemed like their only chance."

*"No quiero ir, Tio" Samuel'd placed a small rucksack over his shoulder. "Tienes que hacer esto. Es importante para mí, Cassian."

He'd never known what was inside the rucksack ....not much, it hadn't been heavy. It had snagged on the fence as he'd gone over and he'd had to let it go.

Bodhi nodded. "Galen said 'it all went wrong.'" Then he looked up, smiling faintly, 'I was so stunned when I learned who Jyn was, when she said 'my father'. I somehow had a picture in my mind of an eight year old girl, not a grown Alliance fighter....I couldn't reconcile it, but I can now."

"Bodhi, I know how much you care about her."

"I care about both of you. You are my friends. Tonc asked me about it once and all I could think was.....I remembered when we were in the shuttle, and got through the shield gate.....I don't know if you remember."

*I remember.*

"I thought for a second then, that we were almost like real people, I know how insane that sounds, but it could have all gone wrong and it didn't and we were all there and we were so happy....hell, I think even K2 was happy...and I thought Jyn was going to kiss you, the way she ran over to you..."

*Yeah, I thought so too.*
"and it was like we all looked normal, for a second, like this was was what normal people would do, you know, if normal people, friends, were in this kind of situation?"

Cassian took a breath and let it out slowly, "I wouldn't know, Bodhi, I lost 'normal' a very long time ago, I'm not even sure I know what it is anymore."

"Then take my word for it," he said emphatically, "I remember. Love is normal, not having it is what's abnormal.

"Bodhi...."

"She talked some trash, when I first asked, because I think she was mad at me.....but...."

*Bodhi, she will murder us both with her bare hands if she hears us talking about her like this.*

"She loves you."

"Bodhi...please," he rubbed his hands over his face, "I don't know what..."

"No, listen to me," Bodhi was saying, "I don't know what happened on Scarif, or after. I'm not going to give you grief over anything you guys decided to do. I've spent almost two years in an army full of people holding on in just about every way possible, to make it through to fight another day. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about Jyn Erso. Where I grew up....I was always taught that the worst thing was to die in ignorance. Whatever happened, you don't get to not know this. She loves you."

"She told you that?" For some reason his own voice sounded strange to him.

"Her exact words? 'He's the only home I have.'"

Bodhi reached out and put his hand on Cassian's arm. "What happens if we leave here? If we survive this war? I know what happens if we don't but what if we do?"

Cassian knew there was no point in talking about odds, or the impossibility of making plans, or even military duty. Bodhi would never accept any of that, nor should he, that wasn't what he was asking.

*How can I explain to you what I don't understand? From the minute I first saw her, really saw her, she had my life in her hands, Cassian wanted to tell him. It was like not realizing you are in a dark room until suddenly, there's a light. I thought she might kill me, at first, and then I thought I had to save her and then I was absolutely certain we were dying together.*

"I don't know what I can tell you Bodhi, except that I won't ever leave her," he said, looking up to face his friend and smile, as if this weren't the most terrifying and impossible thing anybody had ever said. "I can't."

There was a loud whistle and a call. Elfla must have caught up with Jyn on the trail and they were coming down the slope together.

"Hey there, soldiers!" Jyn called "I see you got that fine little ship upright. Are we ready to go?"
"I don't want to go, Uncle"
"You have to do this. It's important to me."
Salvage

Chapter Summary

More of the aftermath of events at Harbortown. Jyn and Macha bond a little bit. Jyn and Cassian learn they may be remembered for more reasons than they thought. Memories surface, good and bad.

Chapter Notes

more Flashbacks...yes, don't mind if I do.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The fierce mercantilism of HarborTown was worthy of anything Jyn had ever seen in Kareen or Manaan. Fishers were decent and kind in their way, but dammit, these people seemed able to roll with any shock as long as it had a marketing opportunity attached.

Half the town had gone out with nets, almost as soon as the reverb from the blaster fire had faded, and started sweeping up the remains of the shattered repair droids. Rough tables had been set up on the beach while adults and children had all quickly started sorting the broken bits. Wire was being rolled onto spools and sorted by length and size. Needle-sharp claws would be fashioned into knives and tools and sold up the coast and out through the islands within the month. Bits of casing would be roof tiles, thin sheets of silicone cells would be razors.

Cassian estimated that they had destroyed at least 400. Enough, hopefully. The split parts of the mining rig had been dragged out to very deep water. Any surviving droids, that might have slipped through or clung to the inside, shouldn't have enough combined power to send a readable signal.

The blast from the explosion and the firing into the water had stun-killed a lot of fish, so charcoal fires and racks were being set up to salt and smoke them.

"It's bound to take the sting out for some," Markey said, "The loss of boats and the repairing of the dock would have set a lot of folks hard back for the winter. This will be a cushion we might need."

The Ladies were the ones who were asked to decide the portioning of the fish and the salvage, because their authority was pretty much unquestioned on such matters.

No one had been killed. In the aftermath Jyn found herself almost almost weak with relief when Markey came to her on the beach and told her that. There had been lots of minor injuries, and several severe ones, one woman might well lose part of her foot, one boy had been bleeding badly from deep cuts after a droid that had got onto his leg and started tearing at it, but no one had died. Except for those adults who had experienced the Raider attacks that had plagued the coast twenty years or more ago, this was the scariest thing most of these people could imagine. They didn't know what she and Cassian knew.
Oh please don't let them ever know.

The hardest part for her had been when the off shore wind, that they had been counting on to keep visibility clear after the charges went off, dropped for a tense moment. Cassian and Conn had attached her homemade charges on one side of the rig. She and Toma had attached on the other. Then they had all climbed up onto the rocky outcropping to ignite the first chemical blast, starting the domino effect that should twist the thing right in half with explosions. Cassian had climbed to the top and fired a blaster shot at the first bomb, starting the sequence. It went perfectly, but it was deafening, even with the ear protection. She watched the fire tear a spiral around the huge black hulk and then the wind paused for an instant. Just as the smoke blocked her sight she saw Cassian, a dozen meters above and to her left, seem to fall forward.

Everything had stopped, her breathing, her heart. If she screamed out, she couldn't hear herself in the explosion and the white fog covered her sight......the roaring wind, the blinding green fire.....no,no,no...

It lasted only a second. Her knees held. The wind picked up and gusted, hard, blowing the smoke ashore. She could see Cassian again. Conn had slipped and he had swung his gun aside and dropped down to grab the boy. He was fine. Toma was beside her and the Bequa were diving into the ropes and pulling the wrecked chunks apart, filling the water with writhing red and black "spiders." She jumped into position and started firing.

Three Bequa had been hurt, and were being tended to now by their own healers in the shallow water. The Far Islanders were still in their boats out past the breakwater, watching.

When Jyn finally sat on the sand, laying her overheated blaster beside her, Cassian found her there and sat down beside.

"Ok?" He laid his hand against her back.

She nodded and reached an arm around his shoulder.

You can't say to a soldier, in the middle of a war, "Don't die." She knew that, she knew that through and through.

Macha and Perin came down from where the tables were already being set up and the baywood smoking fires being started.

"Do you make any further claim on the salvage?" Elder Sister Perin asked. It had the sound of a ritual question. Both of them stood up, brushing wet sand from their clothes, and Cassian answered carefully.

"Nothing but what we discussed previously," he said.

"Come then," she said, "and choose."

"Stay here," he told Jyn. "Hopefully the Bequa will bring up the recorder, if they find one." He squeezed her hand one last time before he let go and walked up the up past the tide line with Perin.
Jyn sat upon the sand again, facing the water, now full of people in small flat-bottomed boats, casting nets and poling for droid parts and fish.

Macha sat beside her.

"Thank you," the Second Sister said, "for what you have done and what you are trying to do."

There was probably a proper way to answer, but she had no idea what it was. She still wasn't sure who these people thought they were or how much they really understood about what was happening in the galaxy outside.

"You're welcome," Jyn said, *which just sounded stupid,* "I guess."

She looked around, at all the activity, the debris-strewn beach, the smoke from the cooking fires. "We've left you with a mess."

The woman threw back her head and laughed.

"The humans of HarborTown take strange comfort in the occasional mess. It occupies them. I am glad to have met you, Jyn Erso-ally, and your man as well," she said, tipping her head back towards Cassian, "The fallen are the stuff of fireside tales around here. Since I became part of my Circle I have seen, from a secret distance, only handful and they seemed to me broken things, lost and wicked or lost and sad. I could not fathom what purpose they had in Ea's pattern, save as a cautionary tale, a trigger for other events."

*Fair enough,* Jyn thought, thinking of those old Clone helmets and Tova's story of the broken Jedi.

"Our foremothers came here, in ancient days, from outside and are woven into this place now. What fools we would be to think such things would never happen again?" She reached over and patted Jyn's forearm with a rough, tanned hand. "Pattern work and learning never end. I hope that..." She turned her head and stood up abruptly. "The Bequa have come."

A mottled grey back arched up through the shallow water, in between the boats, toward them. Macha tucked her pale grey smock into the waist of her blue trousers and walked barefoot into the surf.

*Holy hell, woman,* Jyn thought, *there's got to be razor sharp bits all over the bottom.*

*No damn way was she walking into that water barefoot.* She followed nervously with her cloth and gum-soled shoes on.

She hadn't walked into an ocean since she'd dipped her toes in the surf as a child on Lahmu, and even then she never remembered going further than her ankles. It was so strange how things like that kept coming back to her now....a dim memory of tossing dolls in to teach them to "swim" and then chasing after the poor little things when the waves tossed them back.

"Jyn, you're getting soaked!" Laughter...."It's alright Lyra....Oh good heaven that's COLD!"

This water was cold, although no colder than the spring-fed ponds near the stone house.

The Bequa must have been a very small one because Jyn was only up to her chest and Macha barely to her waist when it reached them. Rolling over to look at her with a blue eye and then rolling back around to speak above the water, it called "Hello, Ally," in a musical voice, "is this what you want?" nudging forward what looked like a floating bladder made of some semi transparent material. Inside was a Memsas-palm sized piece of equipment, wires still dangling.
"Yes, yes," Jyn said, trying to keep her footing in the rising tide while reaching for it. "Thank you!"

"Foolish youngster!" Macha said, "go back to your wise elders before you are hurt."

The Bequa rolled again, whistling (laughing?) and swam back out toward the open water. Jyn pulled the "package" back in to shore while Macha more or less pulled Jyn back to shore.

On the sand she took the knife from her ankle sheath and sliced open the bladder. Yeah, this was probably it. A chunk of mining rig wouldn't have a flight recorder or nav equipment, but it would have a file recorder....a packing slip.

"Will this help you find out where your Enemy is?" Macha asked.

"Oh fuck I hope so," Jyn answered.

When she found Cassian, he was up by the top of the slope, amongst a small crowd of Townspeople, and Local Memsa. Perin and Youngest Sister were standing close by. From the looks on the faces of all but Perin, he had just done something amazing.

What did I miss? She wondered.

He mostly had his calm-and-serious-but-trustworthy-in-an-unremarkable-way face on, but as she walked up he gave just her a flash of boyish smile. He had a good sized leather bag tied up with rope by his feet.

"The sun will not wait, neighbors," the Eldest said, "to work!" The crowd broke up, although Conn lingered.

Jyn lifted the broken data recorder. "The Bequa came through."

"good." Cassian nodded and passed her a scrap of canvas rag to wrap it in.

"Friend-allies," Macha said,"You should go."

"Old Tom Markey, can deal with the rest of the work here," Perin nodded. "It will be good for him."

"So," Cassian said, looking at the older woman with a kind of professional's respect, "the Blackbirds fly in and the Blackbirds fly out."

"Just so," Perin agreed. "The Humans of HarborTown are a funny lot. If greater challenges lie ahead, as I know we all fear they do, it's best to let their own bring them around. Bold and mysterious strangers are far more effective when applied.....strategically."

Oh, Jyn thought, she's like a shorter, tanned and less well-dressed version of Mothma.

She wondered if Cassian realized he was standing in a way that looked almost like attention.

"I know you need to get north quickly, but do not try to cross the Grasslands tonight," Macha said, "all the noise and commotion will have riled up the Blues. Stay at Markey's fishing shed tonight. We will bring you food and supplies and you can leave at first light tomorrow."

"Besides," the Youngest said, with a gleam in her eye, "if you stay the night again at the house on
the docks you may teach Markey’s crewlings even more lessons that they are too young to know.”

*Oh fuck.* Jyn tried to cover up a laugh with a cough. Cassian did credit to almost two decades of training by not changing color, but even he had to look down for a second.

"Thank you," he said. "The shed it is." He picked up the bag and turned to walk down the beach. Jyn followed.

She was torn between laughing and dying of embarrassment.

The Ladies turned away and started walking back up the beach toward the town, but Conn did not go with them right away.

"Mister!" He called, coming after them.

Cassian turned.

"Mister...uh, Cassian," he seemed a little breathless, "How did you do that?" He pointed to the bag over Cassian's shoulder. "How did you kill it like that? Just with your bare hands, I mean?"

Cassian looked at the boy, taking the bag off his shoulder and lowering it to the sand.

“I didn’t kill it. I turned it off, by pulling loose the internal power cell.”

“You’ve seen these before?”

Cassian shrugged, “Not these exactly, but other mech-droids like them.”

“How’d you….I mean who taught you how to do that?”

*Cassian.*

“I was trained, and,” he licked his bottom lip thoughtfully,”before that, my uncle taught me.”

Conn nodded. “Are they meant to hurt people? I mean, Dylan’s leg…Fennie lost his eye…They’d have torn me and Mo apart, wouldn’t they?”

Cassian nodded. “They’re very dangerous, but they’re blind, limited. The people who made them gave them only one purpose, to protect and repair that rig, to keep it running and keep any debris out. That’s what you and your friends were to them, debris to be cleared. We couldn’t leave them there and we couldn’t let them go. They’d have never stopped trying to do their job, even if it was pointless, and they’d have hurt lots of people trying.”

“They aren’t really alive are they?” the boy asked, earnestly.

*Oh my love, my love.*

Cassian spoke evenly,’That’s not for me to say.”

“Barge-Boy!” came a call, Youngest Sister had walked back, “Old Markey is looking for you!”

“Thank you sir,” he said, holding out a hand. Cassian paused, then shook it.

Whatever he was feeling, he was hiding with all his strength. She could feel the strain.

Conn started to run back toward the girl, but called over his shoulder with a smile, “Thanks to you
too Ma’am! And thanks again for saving my ass from those Blues!”

Cassian hoisted the bag with the disabled droid over his shoulder and they walked toward the fishing shack. Jyn took his hand but did not try to talk to him. That was for later.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to loveamongtheruins, I now have the idea of Space Pickers stuck in my head.
Jyn walked up from the village, bringing the data chips from the two broken droids. It had been quicker to stop at Dov’s yard to strip the things down. The poor fellow had carried on like it was a holiday gift. She had left him and his gang playing with the little pincher claws like hand puppets. She also carried the data register from the mining rig.

Cassian and Bodhi had gone straight ahead up to Portia, to ask out about the Far Islanders “jewelry” but as she approached the tower, she could hear voices coming from the gourd patch that Bes had planted out by the base. They must have wanted to have a private conversation out of Portia’s “earshot.”

Jyn recognized Cassian’s tight I-am-not-raising-my-voice voice even from the turn in the pathway. *He uses that with other people too, she thought. Good to know.*

Slowing her pace and coming up around she could make out words.

“I am not even discussing this,” Bodhi was saying.

Cassian was speaking very slowly. *A bad sign Bodhi.*

“If it comes down to it, Sargent, there won’t actually be a discussion.”

*Oh, this sounded fun.*

“You are NOT pulling rank on me. Please tell me you are not bloody pulling rank on me?”

“Hey!” she called, “Whatever it is, soldier-boys, it sounds like you should have waited for me.”

Jyn stepped up where they could see her and all conversation abruptly ceased. Cassian was sitting on the wall looking fairly stern and Bodhi was standing, looking more than fairly pissed off.
“I take Portia did not have good news. Are we talking about the earrings or have we already started arguing about possible evacuation seating plans?

They both glared at her.

*Or both then. Right.*

“You were right about the silver pieces, they are comm devices from Portia’s people.” Cassian informed her tersely.

“They are a hell of a lot more than that, actually” Bodhi was clearly still spoiling for a fight.

“We’ll discuss it later,” Cassian said, “We have more pressing issues.”

*Take a breath everybody.*

“So, I take it Portia agrees…about..” Jyn had been trying for a bold breezy tone, but now she found she couldn’t actually get the words out.

“Yes,” Cassian nodded. Bodhi was pacing a little, clenching and unclenching his right hand, as if it were stiff, or bothering him.

“Then let’s take her these and see how things are.” She passed Cassian the basket Dov had given her to carry the parts. As he took it from her, she squeezed the side of his hand. 

*Possibly meaning Shared Endeavor, or if not, at least "I love you, you jerk."*

He gave her one of his looks, squeezed her fingers back, and walked over to the ladder and the platform.

She moved close to Bodhi and gave him a long hug.

“If it comes right down to it,” she whispered in his ear, “I’m betting two Sargents can beat the hell out of one Major.”

Portia regarded them sternly, using the image of a teen-aged female with short black hair.

“You are NOT leaving those in here,” she said, "they are hideous."

*Thanks, Portia, we nearly got eaten by lizards and blown up by jam-jar bombs.*

“This status transmitter is from the repair droid,” Cassian said. “I know it’s very weak, but can you tell what it was tuned to transmit to?”
“Yes,” she said. Then the image looked up abruptly. “Show me the other one.”

Cassian laid down the small drive core from the Mark IV Sentry droid.

She vanished from one side of the room and appeared on the other, behind Cassian, presumably for a better “view.” This sort of thing never failed to unnerve Jyn.

“It saw us,” she said.

Fuck.

“What do you mean? Us?” Cassian was saying, ‘This was found on the outer Islands, far off-shore.”

“I mean this planet. The coast, the Island settlements, not, as far as I can tell, this tower, or Bodhi’s ship. It did not have the capacity for lightspeed travel or independent space flight. It must have been brought in and then sent out to scout, with instructions to return to its drop site with survey information……although, clearly it won’t be doing that now.”

The girl’s image looked horrified and ashamed.

“A ship got in. It seems clear I didn’t see it. It may still be here…the highest likelihood, based on the data in this, is that it came in on the other side of the planet, in the equatorial ocean…but I’m extrapolating from very little.”

“How long ago?” Jyn asked.

“This thing was dispatched almost six weeks ago, but it didn’t get far.”

After Bodhi got here. Is that good or bad?

“It’s a mess,” Portia said, “What happened to it?”

“As near as I can tell,” Cassian told her, “One of the larger Bequa bit it.”

“Oh! The cetaceans!” she exclaimed, “We were so excited about them. How are they doing?”

Focus Portia.

“They’re fine” Cassian said. “They’ve been watching in those waters carefully and they haven’t reported anything like a ship.”

“Good. It’s possible it crashed and sank, but more likely this wretched thing was released in atmosphere and they are coming back for it…..and any others they left.”

Fucking terrific.

“We need to cover Bodhi’s ship, asap,” Jyn said.

If there was one thing she knew how to do it was avoid Imperial visual surveillance.
“Mark IV Sentry droids,” Bodhi shook his head. “I remember those, they used to cruise half the streets in Jedha. The tan and black ones, right? Everyone hated them, they watched everywhere.”

“Similar type, but this one was clearly adapted as a geographic survey module.” Cassian told him.

“Listen,” she said, “We shouldn’t panic yet. I’ve been dodging things like this since I lost my baby teeth. Think about what 99.9% of this planet would look like to something like this. Even if it got as far as HarborTown….it would report very few humans, which would be the only people they’d even bother noting, all in low tech communities with no off-world contact, nothing to see of interest to the Empire if it’s just shopping real estate.”

*Just inconvenient pests to slaughter.*

“This tower, by itself, would look like nothing but a ruin to them”

“I need eyes,” Portia said. “Bodhi Rook’s make-shift arrays will help, but they are so few. We would need to know exactly where to put them.”

_____________________

*Alright,* Cassian thought, *let’s see what this can tell us.*

He unwrapped the file recorder, and laid it down in front of Portia’s image.

"We got this from an intact piece of...." he never got to finish his statement.

Portia had been staring at it for less than a second, her image frowning, when she did something she had never done before. The lights in the tower dimmed, her image vanished and a visual of an astral chart appeared in the room. More accurately, the whole level turned into a chart. Jyn gasped out loud. It was astonishing. Stars filled the room like butterflies. All around them, three dimensional but paper-thin. It was not like any projection he had ever seen. Nothing cast shadows. The definition was crystal clear. You could practically feel the rotation. Cassian could still see Bodhi and Jyn, except that the stars looked real and they looked like dolls standing among them. He reached out and touched a small star cluster fixed in mid-air at his eye level, fingers passing right through it. It was all the beauty of being in space with none of the base-line discomfort.

Bodhi was laughing in un concealed delight, “Portia, it’s perfect!”

Jyn looked like a young girl seeing stars for the first time.

Portia used a low-pitched voice that Cassian had never heard before, sounding somewhat self-effacing.
“It’s not as accurate as it should be, obviously there’s imaging distortion, also large parts of it are based on non-current data, although I’ve accounted for known stellar events.”

“Portia, I can’t tell what I’m seeing exactly,” Bodhi walked around the room, passing through stars as he went, “It’s too…too…”

“Yes,” she said, (a little sadly?) I understand.” Everything resolved to a flat plane in the middle of the room, more like a conventional star chart, but still the most beautiful one Cassian had ever seen.

“I’m using the navigational coordinate system that I took from Bodhi’s little ship, inadequate as it is, because I’m assuming that’s the only one you are familiar with.”

Cassian was, as K2 used to tell him endlessly, a "serviceable" pilot. As such he'd usually left freehand navigation to Kay or the ship's computer. Still, he thought he recognized most of this. Bodhi clearly could. "There’s Jedha," he said, pointing. Cassian could think of nothing to say, so he put a hand on his shoulder. Looking over at Jyn, he saw her eyes searching for something. He realized after a moment what it must be.

You won't be able to see it, he wanted to tell her, it's too near the galactic core, even Alderaan's star wouldn't be visible against that brightness.

Portia increased definition on a star system far off the edge of the Mid-Rim curve.

"This is us, by the way."

Not 'me' or 'this planet' anymore...'us'. When had she started doing that?

"And THIS is where your Enemy is building it's new weapon."

Another star system came into sharp relief. Just a little further in around the curve.

"I realize we are talking about planets and not sabacc chips in the board here," Jyn said, "so this may just be me, but that looks a little too close for comfort."

Portia’s image had reappeared, this time a stout older man with a short black beard.

"I'm projecting to current position. The star itself was unremarkable, yellow mid-size, four planets, the inner three are rocky and seem to have lost their atmosphere some time ago, one has a hot methane mantle, pretty but uninhabitable by anybody not heavily shielded or a specialized microbe. The third one out was a gas giant...a nice fat one.....with several big promising moons."

"If it's a space-based weapon they'd have to build it in space." Jyn pointed out, "so you mean it's IN that system?"

Portia's image shrugged. "This stupid chunk of metal thought it was supposed be attached to something going to the outer moon of the gas giant.....Endor....as Bodhi Rook's chart names it. Who thinks up these names for you anyway? Whether they are building the weapon itself there, or not, it seems likely they are at least equipping it from that moon. Vastly increased traffic to that system would account for much of what we've been experiencing."

We?
"Ok," Jyn said, "Let's call the Alliance and get Bodhi in the air, not necessarily in that order."

“It works HOW?” Jyn was asking, turning the silver cuff over in her hand.

All of them sat around the table in the stone house, herself, Cassian, Bodhi, all three Sisters. In the middle lay the Far-Islanders silver jewelry and a small barrel of Tova’s best ale. It was very late. They had been discussing the logistics of Iola calling for a Council, but now talk had turned to Portia.

Bodhi and Iola were having tea but everyone else had felt badly in need of a drink. Even Bes had a tiny cup.

Bodhi was explaining, frequently glancing back at Cassian for support, “Everyone else had a neural implant of some kind, right? I’m not sure how that worked….but this one belonged to a woman who, for some physical reason couldn’t have that, so these were attached, to her ears,” he pointed to the curved clips, “and these were…..” he fingered the long pins on the other piece and looked at Cassian, “It didn’t seem to be anything like a cybernetic head-thingy, did it?”

“No,” Cassian said, “You mean a Lobot-Tech array? No. Those things take up the whole back of the skull. From what the Far Islanders said, the ones they’ve found in graves were tiny things. Little silver pins. Much smaller than this. The woman that Portia said used these..”

“Jula,” Bodhi said.

“AI Liaison,” Bes said, refilling her tiny cup. Tova slapped her hand, lightly.

“Right,” Bodhi continued, “She looked like she was wearing it over her ear, like this.” He lifted it up near his head.

“Don’t!” Jyn and Tova both shouted.

“I’m not going to!” He said. “’’But the pins…” he dangled them slightly, “They actually went into her skull behind her eye and her jaw.”

He shook his head, “Damn! I was too scared to get my ear pierced even on a dare.”
He paused for a minute, then laughed, waving his right hand slightly. “I AM aware how weird that sounds now, by the way.”

Cassian took the thing from him.

“From what Portia said, it must have been connected into, …..the thalamus or something. Please remember that other than making it to, maybe, 6th year in a refugee camp school, my entire education has been military. I was hoping we could connect it to a relay somehow, but it seems to have been made to connect only to, as she would put it, an ‘organic.”

Jyn took another drink, possibly a little too fast.

*This is fucked up, Portia.*

“She wants one of us to stick pins in our head?”

“No exactly,” Cassian said, “She said that would be too dangerous, that our bone structure was too different. These..” He held the cuff and picked up a pin with his other hand, “were calibrated for a specific person only. The exterior clip would just enable one of us to talk to and hear her when we were outside the tower, and let her monitor vital signs.”

“Like a super high definition comm-link, maybe?” Bodhi ventured.

Cassian was still holding the pin. “She said It might be safe enough to put just one in behind the ear, above the jaw,” he touched the the spot, “which could be enough to enable her to send stored data, through the nerve maybe. Anything more involved would probably give somebody a stroke.”

*You’re thinking of doing this.*

“No,” Jyn said.

“It would be incredibly useful,” Cassian argued, “To be able to talk to her directly, without being in the tower. Add to that, the possibility of being able to get and send information from Bodhi’s relay system directly and…”

*No. I realize this is probably every little baby spy’s dream but No.*

“I guess, what it comes down to, “ Bodhi said, “Is how much we trust Portia?”

*I don’t trust anybody outside of this room enough for that,* Jyn thought.

Three years ago she would have said she didn’t trust anybody, period.

“You’re the one who said she had her own agenda,” she told Cassian.

“Whatsoever this is,” he said, “do you honestly think its like a cranial unit? or one of those chips they put in Clone Troopers heads?”

“Oh hell,” Bodhi protested, “I heard that was just a story. Did that really happen?”

“Yes,” said Jyn, Cassian and Iola, all at once.
Everyone turned and looked at Elder Sister.

She shrugged, “The Circle of the Coast has found them, seldom and mostly dead, years ago. Humans who were even more the same than most humans. There was a voice, in a small piece of metal in their heads, at least that is what the only live one I ever met said, it told them to kill their friends and they could not disbelieve it or make it stop. Most of them died trying to dig it out. The rest died soon after. I told Ancient Portia this story, and she was most distressed by it.”

She tapped Bodhi’s elbow, “More tea please.”

“Ok,” Bodhi poured the tea, “Let’s try to be rational about this. I don’t mean to sound like I believe this is one of those horror opera vids where somebody asks the station computer an unsolvable riddle and it goes crazy and turns everybody into like, burnt toast or something. If Portia wanted to hurt us, we’d already be dead, a dozen times over, I know that. It’s also true that she was clearly very upset and wanted us to know that she’s got this whole directive with informed consent…..“

“I like Portia,” Jyn interrupted, “I really do, and I know she hates and fears the Empire. I don’t think she would intentionally harm anyone, but that doesn’t mean she couldn’t do it by accident.”

“Enough” Cassian said firmly. Everyone looked at him in surprise and he seemed to realize that he had been louder than he probably intended.

"Forgive me, Iola," he apologized. "We are all too tired, I think. Maybe we can get more information out of Portia and discuss this later."

Eldest Sister nodded and reached over to Cassian to take his hand. Turning it over, she tapped his palm once, and then let her hand rest on his for a moment before taking it back.

Was that ‘I want to tell you something?’ or ‘Don’t do anything stupid?’ Jyn wondered.

"The Circles have been called for Council," Iola said with a smile, "We will know more tomorrow. Everyone should rest."
Shadows

Chapter Summary

Mon Mothma, Stordan Tonc, and General Draven travel under Bothan protection.
Mothma remembers Rogue One.

She couldn’t quite rid herself of the feeling that she’d been here before.

On a ship, with no clear idea where it was going, one step ahead of the Empire, and sitting across
from Davits Draven.

It was a different ship now, of course, and other people who should have been here weren’t…. Antoc and Bail, were lost, vanished, without even a grave or a marker…..the others, Aerin, Jan, Carl, the Force only knew where they were now.

She had been on Naboo, sheltered by an Underground cell leader, trying for weeks to get messages
through to Queen Kylantha, who was being kept under virtual house arrest in the Palace. There was
an extensive Rebel network on Naboo, but the Capitol was under lockdown and most of the Gungan
population rounded up and forced into camps down on the Western continent. She’d been in the
central marketplace with her escort, dressed as servants, and hoping to meet a contact. From nowhere
two well dressed women, one older, one very young, had appeared beside her.

“Come!” the older woman said, “You are already late.” That was the code. They had hustled her off
the street and into a safe house. When they undid their hooded scarves Mon Mothma had almost
wept. The young one was the image of Padme Amidala, and for a moment it was as if 20 years were
swept away and her dead friend stood before her.

“I am Pooja Nabberrie, Senator,” the young woman said. It was one of Padme’s nieces. Her family
and former handmaidens formed the leadership core of the Naboo resistance.

“We have terrible news.”

Hoth had fallen.

She was moved several times after that, in attempts to get her off-planet. Weeks passed. Finally, the
Underground had gotten her (at high cost, she did not doubt) to an Arkan trader, moving refugees
smuggled among groups of religious tourists. As always, her height limited her ability to disguise
herself but the drapery and elaborate crown of a priestess were an excellent cover. To even touch a
dedicated priestess would have been considered such an insult as to start a riot amongst the faithful.
The Imperials at the Sky Port didn’t dare to search her except with a long distance weapons scan.
Looking back, she ought to have seen the practiced hand of the Bothan Spynet. When she finally
entered the quarters reserved for her on the transport to Arkan, a Bothan agent was already there
waiting and a hologram from Koth Melan was handed to her.

Mon Mothma despised the Bothan Royal Government. They were a bunch of influence-mongering,
short sighted, elitist oligarchs, so deceitful they couldn’t ask for water if they were dying of thirst, but
she also knew perfectly well that the real power on Bothawui lay with the 16 Masters of Spynet. If
they had taken her as a bargaining chip, to curry favor with the Empire, there was only one way for this to go. She had a false fingernail that concealed a tab of poison and the war would end here for her. If not….if Spynet, or even a faction within Spynet, were willing to provide support for the Rebellion, or whatever was left of the Rebellion, it was an immense resource. For all she knew, in that moment, she was all that remained of the Alliance to Restore the Republic. She didn’t remove the fingernail. Instead she sat and listened to Melan’s messages, then opened the files he sent. Several hours later another “priestess” arrived and accompanied her through two other ports, onto and off of at least three other ships (dann the Bothans and their obsessions) and finally into a private compartment where Davits Draven was sitting.

Strange that it should be the two of them, trapped on the outside of Haven when the door closed.

Draven had the most…what was Aerin Cracken’s phrase?…classic bloody-minded, hard-ass military mind in Intelligence. They had butted heads in Council numerous times. He thought her an idealist and/or a fool. She wondered now what opinions might come out of his mouth if he got 10 or 12 drinks in him….oh hell Mon, you MUST be tired… but his respect for chain of command was rock solid. After yet another tense exchange (“With respect ma’am, you do not know these people the way I do”), Aerin, ever the pragmatist ground commander, had spoken to her privately.

“I hope you understand that Davits means no disrespect. Perversely, you will never find an officer more loyal to the ideal of civilian authority. I think that may be what drives him. He knows all too bloody well what the military becomes without it, and it makes him a little…relentless, at times,” Cracken said, then added as an afterthought “He also got confirmation this morning that five of his operatives on Lothal were captured.” When she and Bail had received the report on the Lothal crackdown hours later, there had been no mention of Draven’s people. More souls lost in the dark.

Stordan Tonc sat and talked with her for almost an hour and only stopped then because Draven sternly ordered him to (“Let the Senator rest, Corporal!”). It was the first time she had laughed in...how long? Truthfully she'd have listened to him for another hour, gladly. The boy had been on Scarif.

Scarif haunted her in a way that even Aldaraan did not.

How was that? Maybe the loss of a world was too much, too big? The human brain just wasn’t wired to comprehend it. In the end, it always goes back to individuals. She still turned sometimes expecting Bail to be there, caught herself reaching for a comm to send him a message.

_Had he at least gotten home? Where he and Breha at least together when it happened? Had they known their child was safe?_

You had to wall it off or it would be like a black hole, it would suck you in and crush you. What Leia must have to do was almost impossible for her to imagine.

Maybe Scarif, the sixteen souls of Rogue One, haunted her because it was HER fault. She had seen Jyn Erso's face as she turned to storm out of the Command Center. She had stood in front of a bold, passionate woman who had boiled an incomprehensible nightmare into four short sentences of hope and action, and she had told her “Not now.” Shock and disappointment was what she had seen in those green eyes, quickly followed by disgust. It was Saw’s fire, Saw’s knife-like clarity, but unpoisoned by Saw’s rage and bitterness. She had seen that this girl, Saw's girl, was RIGHT, had
known it in her bones and still played the politician.

“Give me time,” she had wanted to say to her, “A few hours, a few days, we can work behind the scenes, bring them around, plan a mission that will not break the coalition.”

As Jyn Erso had turned heel and walked away from them all, she remembered looking up and thinking, where has Captain Andor gone?

If that girl, and the soldiers who believed her, had not deserted. If they had waited just one more hour before they stole that ship and ran, the DeathStar would now haunt the skies of every world. Yavin, Kyshyyk, Dantoinne and Mon Cala would have joined Aldaraan. Their deaths were on her.

“….so Sarge Sefla, he keeps calling her “Sarge Erso.” and she’s looking at him like “What the fuck?” and so he tells her…”Pathfinders don’t give a shit about rank on mission, but a lot of this crew are regular service and they’re not gonna listen to anyone who isn’t at least a Sergeant, so congrats, you’re a sergeant now, and she gives him a big smile like “Cool.”

Mothma glanced over at Draven and saw him literally roll his eyes. She had a feeling he had heard this story before. They had given her a classified “report “ on Scarif…but it had been weeks later, as they were evacuating Yavin IV. She barely remembered reading it, certainly there had been no such details in it.

“…nobody talked much, some of the guys, well, we knew where we were going and we knew we couldn’t fuck up. I didn’t know Captain Andor, he said I was too young, but Melshi, that’s Sarge Melshi, he stuck up for me. We were all jammed in there, like fish in a can, and then we get toward the ground and Sarge Erso said, basically “Here’s how it’s going to go down, and we keep going as long as there’s a chance to take.” We all hunkered in the hold, and Rook played it very cool and got us landed without a peep or a buzz. Melshi knifes those Imps that came to inspect the ship, and we shucked the uniforms off them. Then Sarge Erso and the Captain and the freakin’ droid go in. The team moved out to set up the diversion and four of us, plus Rook, held the shuttle.”

What was it Andor had said? "She will burn us all." How had he come to trust her? What had really happened on Jedha? on Eadu?

She had talked to Cracken and Draven about Andor. There had been concerns after Verujansi 3.

*Thorn had personally followed her down a hallway on one of her rare visits to Massassi Base and shoved a med/psych report into her hands. “Talk to Intelligence because they are NOT listening to me Mon!” they had said.*

She already remembered Cassian Andor from Dantooine. A boy of 16 with a Festan accent, waiting to talk to Tano, or had it been Aerin?.

"He must break hearts with eyes like that," she'd thought, then realized that he probably wouldn't because he'd probably never get the chance. Youngsters like him were "shadows", the ones who carried messages, ferreted out supply lines, escape routes, secrets. If they lived long enough, or showed an aptitude, they did worse things. She was an idealist but not a fool. She knew. This is what the Empire had done to them all.
When she saw him again it was with Draven, he was 18 and one of his best operatives. He gave a report on the Fulcrum surveillance of Imperial base security on Corellia, and had been halfway through before she’d realized that HE was Fulcrum.

Slowly, over years, they had exposed the Empire's crimes, buried the knives of the Clone Wars and united allies, built an army and a small fleet of ships, kept hope and themselves alive.....but the cost was so very high.

Draven was using Andor for "classified" operations, according to reports. The sweet-faced boy from Fest was now a mission hardened officer. Once, after he had finished briefing her on the occupation of Jedha, she had said, "Gracias, muy profundo, capitan." He had looked up sharply (as if he saw ghost, and perhaps he had) and for an instant she thought she saw a glimpse of that long-lost boy. Just as suddenly it was gone, "De nada, Senador," he’d replied coolly, and left her with the files. She realized that an intelligent and selfless young man had grown to adulthood in their just cause and they were using him up body and soul.

She had memo'd Draven after she read Thorn's report. She could do no more.

"......It was fucking nuts by then, no mistake, Blue Squadron was laying down fire like hell, but the bastards were everywhere, not just regular troopers either, all of a sudden there were full-on death troopers, out of nowhere. I got hit....Thank you, by the way, Ma'am." Tonc halted his narrative abruptly.

" Corporal?"

"You came down to see us....in Med...me and Rook. I remember, a couple of times. It meant a lot."

Draven's head was lowered, he was looking at his hands.

She could think of nothing else to say.

"I am so sorry, Corporal Tonc."

The young man looked genuinely surprised. "That's OK Ma'am......oh, you mean about?....oh, the medals and shit? Sorry. No, no..." He reached over and patted her hand as if they were talking about some inconsequential matter, "Skywalker's the one who blew the thing. He and Captain Solo are welcome to all of that, in my opinion anyway. I'm Infantry ma'am, and Rook...." He shook his head, "We don't care about stuff like that. That's advertising, and we know how it needs to work. You know though," he said, "about Rogue Squadron?"

She shook her head.

"They put together what was left of Blue and Gold Squadrons, but they call the lead Rouge Leader, and....Rook's the pilot, so he explained it to me. When they fly they always put the lead fighter on the left...Rogue Leader and then Rogue Two....it's missing ship formation...you understand? Always, they do that for us. Commander Skywalker and Captain Antilles, they made sure of it. You can't ask for more than that. I just hope I get the chance to tell Sarge Erso and Captain Andor about it."

The flight went on for several hours. Knowing the Bothans, they must be stopping at multiple
stations to set a false trail. They were brought an excellent supper and Corporal Tonc slept on one of the daybeds.

"You should rest," Draven told her, "Melan has a reputation for excessive caution, but once we reach our destination, I imagine things will get busy."

"How did you get away from Hoth, Davits?" She asked. "The report Melan gave me listed you among the dead."

He tilted his head, nodding toward the sleeping soldier. "Erso had that effect on people....they started not being able to hear orders they didn't want to hear."

"Does he always talk like that?"

"No," the General said. "He must be intimidated by you. Usually he's not so shy."
Bodhi was keyed up, hardly surprising after all those cups of tea, so he volunteered to walk the Sisters home. Iola was clearly having a little trouble walking.

Jyn could hear them talking outside the house.

“Do you want me to carry you?” Bodhi was asking.

“Do you want me to bite you?” Elder Sister replied, in a cheerful tone.

Jyn lifted the curtain and watched them through the window, slowly picking their way down the path in the moonslight. Cassian was putting all the cups in the washing basket and plugging the much-less-full-than-it-should-have-been cask of ale.

“He’ll get to see the little one, even if she’s still asleep.” She had already told Cassian about the very young female who was staying at the house. She was not much more more than a nursling. When she had stopped by the farm on her way up from Dov’s, Jyn had been introduced to her. Pure white fur seemed to be very rare coloration among the Memsa. Beri was adorable, hiding behind Tova, watching Jyn through large pinkish brown eyes (“She is not blind,” Bes had whispered, “but the noonday sun hurts her eyes. Keen is making her some glasses.”). Just as Jyn had turned to go, the little one had scampered over to her and taken her hands between tiny palms in a babyish version of Gratitude for the Company of a Beloved Friend.

“Wait until you meet her. She adorable. They could sell little dolls of her.”

Cassian paused, carrying the basket out to the back garden door.

“They aren’t babysitting. You know that right?”

Yes. I know.

She refused to think about it.

Jyn let the curtain fall back. She walked back to the table, gingerly picked up the silver ear jewelry pieces, wrapped them in one of the scraps of soft blue leather that Markey had given them and carried the little bundle toward the door, to put in one of her flagstone hiding spots.

“Jyn.”
She stopped but didn’t face him.

“Do you trust me that little?” He said, very quietly.

*Ouch. Oh hell. He was good.*

“‘I’ll sleep better with them outside.”

*Not lying.*

“Should we talk about this now?” He wiped his hands on the dishtowel and leaned back against the table.

“No,” she said, “We’re both too tired and, I wasn’t watching you, but I am about 6 or 7 tiny drinks in the bag.”

She crossed over close to him and started untucking his shirt. “If we talk about it now, we are likely to fight,” she undid the side ties and pushed it open, kissing his collarbone, “and I.don’t..,” his chest, “…want..to fight.”

“Hey,” he moved his hands under to hold her upper arms, “hey.” He held her close, but made her stop and look up at him, “What is it that you’re afraid of here?”

*Everything. The Empire. Needles. You. The things you are willing to do to yourself.*

“Tomorrow.” She said.

*So not lying.*

His grip wasn’t tight. She slid her fingers around his back and under his belt a little. It was loose. He was getting thin again.

*Come on. I cannot be the first person to ever offer to fuck you on a tabletop as a distraction.*

“Technophobia is a crippling disease,” he said.

*Bastard.*

“We can fight in the morning,” she put her lips against his skin, pressed closer. She had his attention at least, she could feel that.

“Por favor…ha…c.cer esto por mí…uh..El compañero…de cuarto está en… otra parte.”

Portia had been so confused by her requested vocabulary lists.

He looked down at her, with those damned eyes of his.

*Please let me do this. I need to remind us both of something.*
“No está mal. Este trabajo debe ser recompensado.”

She wasn't sure what he was saying, other than 'not bad', but his mouth still tasted like that sweet ale.

Poor Bodhi nearly fell on the path coming back, because they forgot to put a light out for him

Chapter End Notes

"The roommate is somewhere else."

"Not bad. Such work (labor? trouble?) must be rewarded."

At least I think so...High School Spanish, dear readers.

Portia's exterior communication/monitor "earrings" do seem to make a lot of people more anxious than I anticipated.
Bodhi, Jyn and Cassian wait for The Great Council and ponder the danger ahead. Jyn and Cassian discuss issues of command. Portia may be going outside.

Yes there is a new OC who would be highly marketable were Disney to prove interested. On with the plot.

Nexa was very a small village, really no more than a scattering of farms and a few shops. Add on the fact that Memsa houses tended to be at least partially dug into the sides of hills, except for the ones that commandeered the still-standing stone ruins and, unless you really knew what you were looking at, it didn't look like much.

Cassian came up and sat beside Bodhi on the hill overlooking the main pathways in from the north and the south.

"Portia said this used to be all part of a huge research facility." Bodhi said, "she wouldn't show me a map or anything though."

"She's a little...I suppose, sentimental, about it, still." Cassian nodded.

Still? Bodhi looked around at the tumbled stones.

I grew up in Jedha, Bodhi wanted to tell him. The apartment we lived in was part of a city wall at least 3000 years old....I know that because they made me memorize it in primary school....this shit is OLD my friend.

Cassian seemed to notice the bandage on Bodhi's scraped up elbow for the first time.

"Sorry about the light being off...."

"Don't," Bodhi sighed, "Sometimes we are all just way too much into each other's business, here in the Rebel Alliance."

There were dozens of little tents set up now in the small green field usually only used for Market Day. Some had been set up in the night, but people were still coming in on the narrow sandy roads, from the south and the north, all in groups of three. Memsa children from all the surrounding farms were running on the grass and clapping and singing by the road as the Sisters all came along. Some of the travelers were stopping to talk to them, or just touch their hands and take gifts of fruit from them. It was easy to see where little Beri was amongst the others, she bobbed in and out like a tiny pale star.
Bodhi found himself smiling. "It's like a pilgrimage...back home."

Cassian was looking at him thoughtfully.

"I asked Iola to call them, because it seemed the best...the only way.... to get information widely disseminated but she says they will also help with the ship."

"The ship. My ship? How."

They had rigged up a cover of pine branches and netting immediately after bringing the recorders to Portia, but the second he took Guardian up, it would be visible to any surveillance droids or ships that might be left on the planet. The original idea had been for him to place their makeshift sensor arrays.....converted from his receivers, Weems was probably going to kill him...... in Portia's "blind spots", then get into hyperspace and position himself where he could receive her analysis and data......all without drawing attention to her location. Then he would try to relay it to the Alliance.....wherever they might be. Along the way he would plant the last of his "drop box" receivers as a back up message relay. Now, knowing that there WAS a weapon in a star system between here and there, and that this planet had already been put under observation, the danger of being spotted was many times greater. He would be able to make only one pass, and even that was a terrible risk.

It would do no good to move Guardian further from the area, even if they could do it unseen, that would only mean putting other communities at risk, which the Sisters vetoed soundly.

Neither he, nor Jyn, nor Cassian said aloud what tormented all of them. The Empire had destroyed a "civilized" heavily populated world, billions of their own citizens, in the heart of Core space, merely as a "demonstration." A tiny, low-tech backwater like Ea would barely rate being called target practice.

Cassian shrugged, "I stopped asking questions like that at about roughly the same time I figured out a blind man had just shot two TIE fighters out of the sky with a crossbow."

The majority of the visiting Sisters were Memsa, although there were a handful of human triads, and even a few groups of Taun. One group of humans were tall, darkly tanned and dressed in red. Curiously, they were not a group of three, just a huddle of five nervous looking people carrying baskets on their backs.

"Ah," Cassian said,"I wondered how the Bequa were going to manage. They must have sent some of the Red Traders as proxies."

Bodhi spotted Jyn easily down on the field, not least because Beri was dancing in circles around her. She was standing and talking to three human women, then she turned, seeming to look for them up on the hillside. Cassian raised his hand and waved. All of the women waved.

"It's time." Cassian stood up, brushing the dried grass off his hands, "Let's go see about getting Portia
It had been Bes's idea. When they had all returned to the tower the afternoon after their "meeting," the Sisters had already been there, visiting with Portia. It was Tova's first visit and tiny Beri was running up and down the staircases excitedly. Portia was using the image of a plump round-faced woman with curly white hair. She was appearing and reappearing in different parts of the room and Beri was squeaking delightedly.

They're playing hide and seek, Cassian realized.

"Portia can go where the blue screens go," Bes said. "If we bring one down to the Council, they can see her and she can speak to them."

The blue panels were immovable, except in one place. Up on Portia's broken upper level where the Imperial beacon lay, still blinking. The panels themselves were un-cuttable, even with the light saber, or so Portia assured them.

"Oh, the Knights tried, count on it," she said, with a certain satisfaction, but there was one under a section of rubble, still attached to a broken piece of flooring. The panel itself was as light as a two-meter tall slab of plas, but the chunk of flagstone it was attached to was so heavy it took two humans and four large Memsa to maneuver out. They lowered it with a block and tackle arrangement and into a sturdy wagon, Cassian was startled to find himself thinking of both sets of his grandparents working slabs of ore in the mines.

It had been early that morning....after waking up sometime in the night to hear Bodhi cursing his fall in the dark.....he had opened his eyes to find Jyn trying to climb quietly out of bed. He reached for her before she could get her bare feet onto the floor, and she turned back, hair mussed and eyes a little blurry. Before he could even say anything she' wriggled half free and put a finger to his lips.

"B...o...d...h...i" she mouthed silently and, taking the top blanket to wrap around herself, swung her bare legs out and tip-toed toward the back garden door.

Damn it woman.

He took the remaining blanket and followed her.

It was chilly and the flat stones were cold on his feet once he had stepped off the floor mats and followed her out the narrow door. Birds were chirping and the sunlight was just coming through the trees.

"Stop," he hissed, before she could get too far. "Where are you going?"
"Shhhh. I'm going down to the farm. Maybe a hundred female-persons are going to start showing up today and I promised Iola I'd help her get ready, she wants to show them some of the parts and things from Bodhi's ship. I'll meet you at the tower in a few hours."

_Sneaky little rata._

"No," he caught hold of her wrist, with her hands still holding the blanket around her. "You said we'd talk about it in the morning. Start talking."

"Fuck it, Cassian, it's cold out here." She was still whispering.

He let go, but stayed close to her. "What are you going to do for clothes?"

"I've got some drying from yesterday," Sure enough, there was a brown sweater and pants, hung over the stone wall.

"And you hid Portia's weird comms out front, just by coincidence? They're your rules, Jyn.." He was keeping his voice low, but it was an effort, "What are you trying to sneak past me here?"

He hit a nerve with that, as he'd known he would.

She pulled the blanket tight around herself and stopped avoiding his eye. This close, she had to tip her head back to look at him squarely.

"I'm afraid you're going to use them. I don't want you to....until we know more."

"Time is a huge factor here, Jyn. Everybody's lives may depend on how fast we can talk to Portia, you know that."

"I know that, damn it. It's you I'm worried about." She was glaring at him, small and beautiful and pissed off.

"There's been no decision about which of us would..." Officially....

"I'm the senior officer," he could have said, if he wanted to be murdered, right here, wearing nothing but a blanket. He let it stay unspoken.

"Really?" She said, "You can't ask Bodhi, because he's got a plate in his jaw and he's already had a brain injury. Are you volunteering me? And what was that argument with Bodhi about? Could it have been about the possibility of him taking me out and you staying behind? Who else needs to think about the Rules, here?"

They stood in silence for a moment with very cold feet.

"You're the tactical on this. Give me a list," he said, "Reasons against it, reasons for it, recommendations. You've got two hours."

He expected her to be angry. Instead she lifted up on her bare tiptoes and kissed him.

"Get dressed, Major. Give Bodhi my apologies. I'll see you at Portia's in a few hours."

_Continually unexpected_, he thought.
"...renegade...solitary..."

Chapter Summary

Draven, Tonc and Mothma learn that they are not alone. Espionage is hard for Tonc. A cyber-cafe is involved. Tonc says what everybody wants to be true.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They were escorted off the shuttle.

Tone’s genuine confusion must have been visible, because their Bothan escort smilingly said, “Your first time on Hosian Prime, Secretary Teel?” in a way that he was pretty sure had a subtext of “You’re in Intelligence now, you tool. Get with the program.”

They stepped onto a transport and were taken, of all the surreal places, to a high-end shopping plaza. The Senator had changed out of her costume and was now dressed as a businesswoman, a bright Tyshiki company scarf wrapped around her hair, matching those of two of their “escorts.” The General was in a good, if rumpled, suit and hat, staring grumpily at a hand-held data pad. Type-casting for sure. Was there even anything on the pad? All he had to do was walk along…through a sky-port filled with people, onto a busy street, in the nicest clothes he’d worn since his sister’s wedding (yeah, Stordie, let’s not dwell on that kind of shit, OK?), keeping quiet and trying not to look like he was freaking out.

It was incredibly hard.

The first time they passed a squad of troopers, six of them, on a cart, just rolling past.

Three with small rifles, three with side arms only, basic comms, radio in the cart, back-up charges probably concealed.

Draven reached over and took his elbow. Tonc hadn’t even realized that his right hand had jerked toward a holster that was no longer at his side.

“Stay calm,” Draven said, handing him over the data pad, as if he were showing him something. “We’re almost there.”

Now he knew why they hadn’t given him a gun.

He tried keeping his eyes on the pad

….hell, it was a screen of cookbook pages. General Draven was a weird guy and no mistake.

There were a number of stores all around. It was better off the street but damn, he could practically feel target lights on his back.
Holy fucking hell, he was sweating right through this nice jacket.

They went past stores and into a…data cafe? There were a handful of people sitting at tables with terminal screens in the air in front of them and rolling trays of caf and pastries. He didn’t know enough about places like this to even know if it this was normal. Server droids whizzed quietly around.

One door in with street access, heavy clear-plas front, probably not blast-proof, 40 meters to rear exit into the building interior, limited cover.

“Hello,” said a smiling young woman in a green dress, with a small pin that said “manager”, “We have a conference room set up for you. Just follow M-B3, and he’ll take good care of you.”

They went into a private room in the back.

“Refreshments have already been set up,” the droid was saying, “and all data feeds are installed and ready. Thank you again for contracting with us. Let us know what else we can do to make your conference productive.”

“Very nice, Thank you.” their Bothan guide said, as the conference room doors closed.

“New Imperial security protocols on out of system-communication feeds require that I remain with you during your meeting, but I assure you I will not be in the way.”

“Of course, we were informed when we booked the space. There will be no problem.” He laid a hand on the droid’s casing, and Tonc could see that he had applied a tiny blue sticker to it.

“Oh yes,” the droid piped, ”There will be no problem with that at all.” It rolled into a corner and hummed quietly to itself. One of the ‘businesswomen” took a large grey scarf out of her bag and laid it over the data table. It sealed down instantly.

“Caf anyone?” said the Bothan, helping himself to a pastry.

Tonn positioned himself in a chair along the side. The blessed relief of having his back against a wall was almost overwhelming.

Captain Andor and guys like him must have blood like fucking ice-water.

The General handed him a cup of that fine-smelling caf. Tonc stripped off the sopping jacket before he reached for it.

“Hell, sir,” he said. “How do you do this stuff without feeling like you’re gonna die every damn minute?”

Draven took a sip of his own drink. “I’m still waiting to find out.”

“We’re up” said the Bothan.

Holo-screens lit up on the table. The Bothan and the other three escorts sat. Draven pulled out a chair for the Senator and stood behind her.
For some reason that action comforted Stordan Tonc more than anything else.

_He wouldn’t do that if he wasn’t 100% sure we didn’t have hostile eyes on._

“We have a connection to one Crix Madine, via” The Bothan might or might not be smiling,”Mon Calmari pirate channels.”

_Fuck yeah! Raddus and Profundity!_ Tonc thought.

“Madine?” Mothma was saying, but Draven was nodding.

She took a breath, “WhiteLadyOne. 0-1-2 Maidens Legacy.”

A man’s image appeared on the tabletop. Blond, bearded…he sort of looked familiar…Pathfinders?

He was wearing a beige flak uniform.

“Ma’am? Senator Mothma?”

Draven didn’t react, but Mothma didn’t have to bother with that hard-ass spy shit so she smiled.

“General Madine.”

“Newly so. I cannot tell you how glad we are to find you safe, Senator.” The outgoing image must have expanded, because the bearded man’s eyes suddenly widened.

“General Draven! You’re alive.”

Draven nodded the smallest bit possible.

“Yes, Crix. I am just as surprised.”

Two more people appeared on the tabletop. One was a thinnish orange Mon Cala, also in a beige flak jacket.

“Mon! Are you secure?”

“Yes Gail.”

“We will come for you. This is the best news I can imagine right now.”

A smaller flickering figure stepped close to the Admiral. For a second Tonc did not recognize her. She was wearing simple Infantry fatigues, not white. No rank pips, no extra insignia.

Until just now, he realized, he hadn’t really believed it.

_There’s still a fucking Rebellion. The bastards haven’t won yet. The Princess is alive._

“Leia.”

“We are transmitting now, Mon,” the younger woman was saying. ‘We will get you home.”
They took a “break” partway through the downloading and exchange transmissions. The false-feed sticker was removed from the droid and everybody took a fresher break while lunch was sent for. Anyone passing would see nothing out of the ordinary for a small off-site sales meeting, no detail was overlooked.

If Melan is trying to impress me, he’s succeeding, Draven thought. Yet, at the same time, he felt the old anger rising.

How many people did I have to order into the field with nothing but a single-use comm and a brain? How many of them were tortured and died knowing nobody would even remember their real names? One tenth of Spynet’s resources would have saved how many lives?

Six in, eight out, he told himself, and took a seat again.

He glanced over at Corporal Tonc. The young man had at least gotten up from the chair, but was still clearly unable to quite turn his back on the door.

“He should eat something,” the Bothan said, nodding toward the soldier, “your ‘secretary.’”

Maybe he’s limiting himself to water and sips of caf because that’s probably all he can be sure of keeping down right now, Draven wanted to say. Do you people even GET combat stress?

Senator Mothma sat down again, her face freshly washed.

The droid returned, was re-stickered and they started a second session.

A new figure appeared now, a Bothan proxying for Melan.

“I have no signal on the ship you asked me to look for,” he was saying.

Not necessarily bad. Rook might well be on the ground, if Weems’ tracer had worked, out of range or otherwise staying dark.

“….but we do have a number of packet messages that we are not linking to directly Imperial “bait” signals.”

“I do feel I must tell you,” the holo-image was saying, “That the number of ‘trap’ messages have been increasing in frequency and sophistication in the last few months…..we have reasonable confidence in our filters but…”

“Let’s see them.” Draven said.

The business-suited human woman was reading a screen. “These have been piggy-backed onto signals the Empire has no access to…..Arkana transit, Corellian navigation…even,” she glanced up at their Bothan companion with unveiled concern, “Spynet secure signals.”

You’d better HOPE that’s either Andor or Rook, Draven thought.

“Distant….fire….pilot….reclaimed….musicians….renegade….solitary”
“Oh HELL YEAH!” Stordan Tonc shouted from back by the wall. “Bodhi Fucking Rook!”

Everybody turned to look at him.

“He’s out there. He’s with Sarge Erso and the band is back together! Rogue One flies again!”

Chapter End Notes

I am considering a tattoo that says: There’s still a fucking Rebellion. The bastards haven’t won yet. The Princess is alive.
Assessments

Chapter Summary

Jyn talks to Portia.

Chapter Notes

A small link that needs to be made. Portia realizes that sometimes Jyn makes leaps that other people don't.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She always had an overwhelming urge to shout, or knock, as if she needed to announce her presence. Which was pretty silly. Portia had sensors in the tower, although it was unclear where they were, exactly, in the blue screens, or in the brick of the tower itself, which seemed to make her instantly aware when someone was inside.

Bes was the one who always asked Portia straight out questions, the kind Jyn, or even Cassian, would never even think to ask.

“Do you sleep when we are not here, Ancient Portia?”

“No.”

“Do you have dreams?”

“Of course I do. All intelligent creatures have dreams.”

*Force help her. What would someone like Portia dream about?*

Clearly though, she had some understanding about what nightmares were.

One night, during a time they were both sleeping in the tower, the cave had returned for her. Cassian had been reaching for a light, he told her the next morning, when Portia turned up the interior lighting without even being asked.

Some evening even later, when Jyn had been taking her turn watching the feeds, Cassian had one of his very bad ones. The terrible kind that were becoming more infrequent now but on this particular night he had sat bolt upright, wrestling with his breathing again in that horrible way where he was half hyperventilating and half fighting it. She knew there was nothing she could do to help him, that he had to work his way through it, but sometimes he got up and even tried to move around during those kind of dreams. Half afraid of what might happen if he did that inside the tower, she moved over very close and sat on the floor, careful to touch only the blanket and not him.
“Cassian,” she said quietly, “It’s Jyn. I’m here, I’m here.”

“No puedo...” he’d whispered, as he had sometimes before, “No puedo hacer esto.” It took almost an hour but she had been able to keep him in bed. Eventually his breathing became more normal and he was able to lie down.

When she turned back to work she saw that Portia had imaged in very unusual way and was sitting as the black-haired child, halfway up the dimly lit interior steps.

Was this her way of giving them “privacy? Jyn had wondered as she walked over to the staircase.

“Cassian’s heart rate was extremely elevated.” Portia said in a low childish voice.

I know.

“It’s just a bad dream, he’ll be alright now.”

The child-image had nodded.

“Do you have any access to his data? He is clearly in great distress. What is it that he can’t do?”

“You understand Festan?” She’d realized how stupid that must have sounded as soon as it was out of her mouth.

“It’s a dialectic variation of your basic language with a fairly specific usage range, Sellest, Fest, the eastern Reale continent of Carrida, and asteroid communities surrounding Allenda. I haven't taken in enormous amounts of broadcast but there is far more than enough for a full analysis. Cassian’s use in my hearing has been largely limited to colloquial speech and obscenities but is a very nice dialect, and the written form has very logical spelling.”

Jyn mulled over this exchange for a week or two, before deciding that, maybe, she would try to learn Festan a little. Whenever she was on her own in the tower, she began to ask Portia for simple vocabulary lists.

Now though, what she remembered was that phrase “Do you have access to his data?”

“Portia?” She called, as she came up from the platform.

Portia appeared on the first level. As an old woman with long black braids.

“Good morning Jyn,” she said, “I see you brought Jula’s mods. Has a decision been made about testing them.”

Jyn walked to the table and unwrapped the silver pieces.

“Portia, I have a long list of questions about that.”
While answering Jyn's questions, which were mostly technical in nature, Portia tried to fathom why she was asking them. Surely she had made all this as clear as she could to Bodhi and Cassian previously?

There were so many things that she just could not make them understand.

There had always been miscommunications and variations in thought, but she knew that she and Jula and Paul and Toston and Dor had understood each other as much as separate conscious beings ever could. We were family, organic and inorganic together. That was gone. The Darkness had destroyed it. She could never have it back and the loss would have to be part of her for as long as she continued.

The Knights had never understood much, nor shown the slightest interest in doing so. Why should they? They had a complete and unshakable confidence in their own paradigm and were utterly blind to anything that didn’t fit….until it was far too late. If they hadn’t kept erasing their mechanicals all the time maybe the poor ’droids could have told them what was coming.

Actually, she seen some indications recently that one or two of the Knights might have survived. Hopefully they’d smartened up.

She had known Jyn and Cassian and Bodhi Rook for only a flicker of time. Danger was all around. They were quick and distracted and burning far too bright to last, but at least the poor things tried. They asked the occasional question, bless them, and even tried to answer some.

After coming to concur with Jyn’s assessment, she not spoken much to Cassian about K2S0. She continued her researches on her own, but she had felt compelled to ask him once,

“Did K2S0 ever have his memories erased?”

Cassian laid down the tools he'd been using. He did that thing, where he consciously slowed his own heart rate, then answered carefully.

“I don’t know. It’s likely that it was done before I met him. Most Imperial ’droids are memory-wiped on a regular schedule. He didn’t know, obviously.”

Obviously. Careful Cassian. Let me put this another way.

“Did he ever have his memories erased while he was in your service or at any other time after you met him?”

She had already determined that he was not a fool enough to think she wouldn't be able to tell if he were lying.

“No.”
He looked directly at her image (Paul) as he said it, signaling a desire to be heard clearly.

“I would never have done that, or allowed anyone else to. His….personality…his memories... were his own. He deserved that.”

No question as to why she wanted to know, which impressed her, as did his notice of her word choice. The Knights and their workers usually referred to their mechanicals, as being "owned", from the data she had taken in, it was still common usage.

“He was not ‘in my service’, Portia. He was a soldier in the Alliance, just as I am.”

_No wonder he wanted so badly to save you_, she thought, _you actually believe that._

They were good people, for their time. They were very brave about most things and she liked them. If she lived through this, she would remember them.

“What is it you want to know, Jyn?”.

Bodhi was the logical first choice to attempt a modified use of Jula's equipment, because of the access it could give to navigation information......_also_, Portia admitted to herself, _she had always rather wanted to fly....._but he was also the one at most at physical risk, because of his previous cranial injuries and the barbaric repairs made to them.

Cassian was the best second choice because he was usually directing communications and because, although smaller, he was the closest in physical size to Jula and thus least at risk of injury in placing a single neural pin.

As it had been with Bodhi, the pin was what seemed to cause Jyn the most upset.

_You poor things. You’re worried about giving memory access to a mostly broken building? Do you have any idea what mischief the Knights and their black- hearted Brothers were getting up to inside people’s heads? Still might be, for all I know._

She tried again to explain the Ethical Parameters for Shared Access to Sensory Data and Memory Storage. After several explanations, she told Jyn, Cassian had seemed to be willing to consider a trial.

Jyn interrupted Portia, as she often did. "Please know that this isn't about not trusting you. He's the one I'm afraid of, Portia, that he would push himself too far, not know his own limits."

This concern made no sense to Portia, until she remembered the lessons Jula had taught her about larger meanings concealed in specific verbalizations.

_This wasn’t about mechanics or optimal strategy, for Jyn, it was about Cassian._

She accessed all that Jyn had said and done since she had first met her and evaluated in the light of information she had gained from watching and listening to Cassian, Bodhi Rook, Iola and Bes.
<Jyn had previously experienced loss of a loved individual due to cognitive or emotional damage so severe as to alter personality = She is afraid that this may happen to Cassian, and such risk is unacceptable to her.

>Cassian had previously willingly submitted himself to physical and mental trauma in order to achieve goals he saw as a higher duty than his own well-being and survival = Concern that Informed Consent parameters may not be adequate to protect someone willing to risk self-harm in a stress situation.

<Jyn and Cassian were emotionally co-dependent

*She could hardly congratulate herself on this as deep analysis, it had been patently obvious by the time they’d been in her building for five minutes.*

= She considers any potential scenario where they are separated or she survives and he does not to be equally unacceptable.

The Galaxy had changed, humans had changed, she had changed. That level of trust between organic and inorganic was gone. There was nothing the Darkness could not poison.

Alright. It was sad and she could not help feeling it was a missed opportunity, but there it was. Jyn was the one more capable of making intuitive connections. She was like Jula in this. Maybe Jyn was even right to distrust Portia's faith in what was safe or right for others, just as she had distrusted the Jedi.

Rethinking.

*Everything else had been repurposed here, her, the complex, everything that fell from the sky. Maybe Jula's legacy could be too.*

"I have another idea," Portia said.

_______________________________

Jyn looked down at the silver "jewelry" laid out on the unfolded scrap of blue suede. The pins and thin chains were no longer connected to the curved wires of the ear clips.

"Save them carefully," Portia said. "Someday they might be useful again."
Creeping toward the Battle of Endor through the service entrance.
The Hour When All Advantage Fails.

Chapter Summary

A group of Bothan spies breaks loose. Draven realizes that something serious is going down.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After the “Sales Meeting” concluded, Draven found that he and Corporal Tonc were to leave in one transport while Senator Mothma and her “escorts” went in another. He was not at all pleased about this.

“I think my secretary at least, should accompany the representatives, in case there are other questions,” he said.

“Not necessary, Mr. Doran. We will meet again for breakfast on the return shuttle’ said the Bothan, smiling and shaking hands all round in the hotel lobby. “And go over all remaining notes then. Have a pleasant evening gentlemen.”

They were utterly dependent on Melan’s people here and it made him deeply uneasy,

“It was a more productive meeting than we could have hoped for,” Mothma said. “We will finalize issues in the morning.” She shook his hand firmly. “I am sure there will be enough time then.”

She turned to “Secretary Teel” but Tonc, instead of shaking it, kissed the back of her hand, as if he had grown up at court instead of, as Draven recalled, a working class suburb in Quemia Port.

“A real pleasure ma’am,” he said.

Mothma did no more than smile, and slightly raise an eyebrow, then she and her two companions moved toward the lift to the upper level, while he and Tonc were escorted out and onto a transport by the Bothan.

“What the hell was that?” Draven asked, when the doors closed.

“I thought I was supposed to look like we were selling the acting Council Chair of the Alliance to Restore the Republic anything else soldier, he thought, I will personally court marshal you.

If you even look like you’re thinking of selling the acting Council Chair of the Alliance to Restore the Republic anything else soldier, he thought, I will personally court marshal you.

“Don’t overplay it, son,” Draven said. “You’re not naturally good at this.”
They changed cabs twice more and were actually in the process of checking into yet another hotel by the SkyPort, when the Bothan’s com blinked.

“Excuse me,” he said, and stepped aside to slip in an earpiece,

“Yes? Oh, indeed…no, we have no dinner plans until later. That would be entirely acceptable.”

He returned, smiling. “We will have the bags sent up to the room, please” he said to the silver droid at the desk. Then he turned to Draven and Tonc.

“It seems that we will be meeting another client for drinks, gentlemen.”

*Something is wrong.*

They were hustled into hired transport and taken, to a storage warehouse, told to get out and taken down a stairway and down a service walkway and into what looked, for all the world like a refrigerator transport case. Inside was a command post, with full holo-table and multiple monitors. Mon Mothma was already there, in the same grey dress. Shockingly, so was Koth Melan.

*Something is very very wrong.*

Being forthright was almost physically painful for Bothans, although Melan was exceptional among the 16 Masters for being able to manage it when pressed by need. He was obviously sorely pressed now.

“General Draven. I must ask for your immediate reciprocal assistance..”

In the weeks since he and Corporal Tonc had essentially surrendered themselves to the Bothan Spynet, Draven had gone over the conversation he’d had with Melan a thousand times in his head.

“I protect my people,” Melan had said, while seemingly blocking parts of their conversation from his own aides. “Bothan neutrality is a convenient fiction…but the Empire made true neutrality impossible for me at Kashyyk, and for the rest of the Masters with the destruction of Alderaan.”

He had desperately wanted to talk with Mothma privately…..she had been almost two years in working from one occupied world to another and probably knew more than he did at this point….but they had to assume no conversation could be truly private until they were safely back with the Alliance.

*Were the 16 Masters finally staging a coup against their own government? Or was there a break in their ranks? Was Koth leading his own faction? In the days before Hoth there had been what seemed like overtures.*
As Isolationist as Bothawui had been for centuries, the wholesale slaughter of the Wookies, and the Death Camps on Kashyyk had shaken Bothan public opinion. Many Bothans considered Wookie culture to be the ancestor of their own and felt a kinship. The Empire’s speciesist rhetoric had many worlds thinking “are we next?”

Then there was Aldaraan.

For years he and Cracken and a handful of agents….Andor key among them…. had gathered intelligence on the super weapons programs. There had always been doubt on the Council as to whether the Empire ever had any intention of actually building and using them. Most had believed it was some mind game of Palpatine’s, a kind of hideous “busy-work” to keep the military the center of the economy, and keep his wolf-pack of Moffs and Generals too busy to plot against him.

The Death Star put the lie to that. Neutrality could not exist in a world where such weapons existed and would be used on a madman’s whim. All the influence and clever dealing in the galaxy would not save Bothawui if the Emperor decided it was no longer convenient.

“What do you want from me Master Melan?” Draven said.

But Melan was not looking at him.

“‘You are Corporal Stordan Tonc, of the Rebel Alliance, born on Quemia 7, one of the only two named survivors of the initial team that raided the imperial Data Vault on Scarif ?’“ the Bothan said, pointing to Corporal Tonc,

“Yes sir.” Tonc said.

“You positively identified the sender of that coded message?”

“Yeah…I mean, yes sir,” Tonc was clearly surprised to be addressed so directly after, what to him….hell to any sane person….must have seemed like weeks of random nonsense. ‘It was Bodhi Rook, sir.”

“The same Imperial defector who piloted the covert raid on Scarif Base?” Melan asked.

“Corporal Bodhi Rook of the Alliance, sir,” Tonc said, voice tight now, “and damn straight he piloted us into Scarif.”

“Sargent Rook is one of my Intelligence operatives, Melan, he was sent, on my orders, to make contact with Major Cassian Andor, secure surveillance lines on Imperial activities and set up a system to get that information to the Fleet.” Draven said.

He looked around at the room. There were 16 monitors but only 15 Bothan’s, including Koth.

Bloody Hell. Every Master but one, What are the odds of getting out of here alive?.

Mothma stood,”I know that this goes against all of your training,” she looked around the room, “But surely, surely we have reached the last verse of the Fourth Book of The Way, “The hour when all
advantage fails”?

*Nicely done, Ma'am.*

Several of the Botha’s turned their faces away, as if in pain, but Melan seemed to steel himself to go on.

“We posted a coded scattering of packet replies, as per your instructions and received a single message. Whatever was in that message caused the team that received it to …break rank, disobey orders and abandon it’s mission.”

One of the other Bothan’s spoke, “Their last contact was well beyond Bespin’s System, entering into lightspeed to pass the Unknown Regions. They reported a ship to ship message, the last covert data burst indicates they may have taken on one or more passengers. They then went dark.”

*Rogue*, Draven thought. *The phrase you are looking for is “They went Rogue.”*

Chapter End Notes

It’s so small….but somebody had to say that line and it had to be Draven.
Chapter Summary

Bodhi sees part of the Great Council and gets ready to fly again. Portia makes her first public appearance. Friends must part.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Guardian was as ready as they could make her, in the field behind Portia’s Tower.

Two weeks had passed since the Great Council, (which, to Bodhi’s eye, had seemed to mostly consist of of eighty to a hundred people, mostly female, talking, sitting around campfires, toasting squares of sweet cake on sticks, playing drums, and doing a lot of circular macrame). Partly this had been to wait for optimal weather and planetary rotation and partly to give as many of the Circles time to get back to their homes as possible. They just didn’t dare wait any longer.

Bes had hugged him very hard and Tova had too, all the while trying to stuff wrapped packets of dried fruit into the pockets of his flight coveralls. Eldest Sister Iola called him over to her and gave him a thin, white string bracelet, lightly waxed.

“How long should I wear it?” He asked.

“Until it falls off,” she’d said, and smiled when he’d nodded, pleased he understood. It was very intricate braid, but laid flat. There were no knots in it, unlike the red twine he’d worn for his mother.

“….or it burns off,” he found himself thinking, before he could stop.

She had rolled it…a little nervously maybe….over his right hand, then placed a small kiss on the back of his wrist. Her formerly strong, dark fingers seemed to feel very frail suddenly, as if they were nothing but bones. On an impulse he bent down kissed her wrist in the same spot she had done his.

“You are good, Bodhi Rook, and worthy of trust,” she told him quietly, patting his head. Little Beri brought her walking stick and Bes and Tova helped her go haltingly down the path toward their farm, away from the ship. He knew that, whatever happened, he would never see her again.

Possibly the oddest part of that last day of the Council had been when he, Cassian, and Dov’s crew had brought out Portia’s blue screen, still attached to it’s heavy chunk of flooring, and set it up by a stone outcropping on the edge of the village field.

“Is there any particular way, she…um, the Ancient wants to be facing?” Dov had asked Tova.

Tova had only shaken her head sadly, “The Taun who kicked you in the face and took out your two front teeth knocked something else loose didn’t it, child? Just put the stone by the wall.”
Memsa young were usually only born every other season, so most of the little ones in the village fell into three age ranges, nurslings in arms, a pack of perhaps a dozen older children, just a few seasons younger than Beri, and 6 or seven adolescents. They all seemed to regard what was happening as a special kind of Market or Festival show. Some of the adult Mems though, clearly remembered being afraid of the “haunted hill”, as Portia’s tower had been called for many years. They would walk up to the tower wall sometimes, when they thought no one was looking, and nervously touch a finger to the stone, before scampering back.

It didn’t seem appropriate to ask Portia if she felt “stage fright” about her appearance, but Bodhi did hear her asking Cassian’s advice about what image she should use. He was diplomatic and did not mention the fact that most of the Memsa could not tell the difference between one human and another. Bodhi and Cassian were pretty much interchangeable, Jyn too, if she had her back turned, in all their eyes.

Perhaps a female,” he’d said, “someone mature but not too tall.”

In the end Portia chose a tanned outdoorsy-looking woman with long silver brads

Bes recognized her, “Aurea, head of Anthropological Survey!” She shouted and clapped her hands, which seemed to please Portia.

“When I was young, we were never supposed to talk to them, you know, the aboriginal sentients,” she said, thoughtfully, as Bodhi made ready to leave the tower and walk down. “It was considered ethically wrong to influence their technological development in any way. Only Aurea and her team were allowed to do direct observations.” Her imagenodded, as if to herself. “This seems right.”

In the early afternoon, all the Circles gathered, sitting in their groups of three, on the now trampled-down grass of the field.

Iola had been full of energy, after a rest earlier in the morning. Tova, Bes and Beri helped her up the slope, where he and Cassian had watched earlier, and stood beside her as she talked to all the assembled Sisters. Whether because of the acoustics of the slope with the tumbled stone walls half-surrounding it, or just the pitch of her voice, everyone seemed to be able to hear her clearly even without comms. Bodhi, Jyn and Cassian sat nearby.

Bodhi wasn’t sure what he had been expecting. Maybe something like one of General Reikken’s Fleet addresses, or the High Abbot preaching in the Great Courtyard.

This wasn’t anything like either of those. It was a cross between an end-of-term school picnic (She thanked them for coming and said “We have all done what we have done, and seen what we have seen”) and what some of the senior pilots said General Merrick’s crew meetings had once been like.

“This is who’s going-This is what we’re hitting-This is how we’re flying-Don’t fuck up-May the Force be with you..boom! you’re airborne” was how Lt. Joma put it.

“Now to the last thing that matters. Ea has brought us Allies, some new and some so long ago we had forgotten them, to our great shame, but Ea does not forget. This is Ancient Portia. She is a ghost in the tower hill. She watches the stars and remembers everything.”

Portia’s image was suddenly standing a little below Iola on the slope.
There was no gasp of surprise, these ladies were pretty unflappable, although some of the Memsa sisters toward the back stood up to get a better view, and some of the younger ones in front made “oooooooo” sounds as the light breeze picked up a fallen leaf and blew it gently through the image’s feet.

Cassian reached over and squeezed Jyn’s hand. “I will do this if you don’t want to,” he whispered.

“No,” Jyn whispered back. She slipped one of the silver clips onto the curve of her right ear and stood up beside Portia.

“Oh my,” Portia’s image said, now able to see the crowd in front of her, for the first time. “Hello.”

“Hello,” said a field full of Memsa and Taun and humans. “Hello.” “HELLOO.” “Hello.”

After that, it all went pretty much as they had rehearsed it.

When Iola “introduced” him, Bodhi had to explain about Guardian and where the flight path would take it. He described as best he could what they and their people might see, depending on cloud cover, and how much noise to expect. Sonic percussion was a real possibility, as much as he would try to avoid it. It was important to him that nobody panic. He would need to skim very low in atmo….over the ground wherever possible….to avoid detection, until he could angle straight up (“to minimize flight signature” as Skywalker had taught him). The idea was that he would set the first satellite facing the Endor system and keep the star between him and (hopefully) any watchers, before then curving around and to set the other two and give Portia “eyes” on Ea’s other hemisphere. Assuming everything worked, he would then hold position in the planet’s shadow and wait for her to tell him what she saw, after which he would either go toward Endor to do further re-con or fly like hell to try to get to the Alliance with a message.

It would be the first time since this navigational station had been abandoned, back in the days of the Old Republic, that any ship had LEFT from the continent. If things went wrong, if the Empire spotted something off and came to investigate, or worse, the Sisters would have to get their peoples ready. Cassian and Jyn had been meeting with groups of the Eldest Sisters throughout the night before.

Ready for what? If Bodhi thought about those possibilities, he knew he wouldn’t be able to function, so he just didn’t. That was Cassian’s job, heaven help him. Bodhi was the pilot.

Tova and Bess introduced him around to so many people that day, all the names were a blur.

The human Sisters from the HarborTown in particular had come to embrace Jyn and Cassian and kiss them both, as if they were saying goodbye to old friends. It seemed very strange to Bodhi to talk to other humans now, after so many weeks with only the Memsa and Jyn and Cassian for company. Second Sister of HarborTown had long wild hair with a white streak in it. She was boldly handsome and held onto Bodhi’s hand just a second or two longer than he had thought she was going to.

“I will say again, what I said once to Cassian-ally. I have no wish to go beyond the black sky until Ea ties off the last string of my life,” she said with a smile, “but I delight in the notion that all the humans up there are very pretty.” Her grey haired Eldest and sweet-faced Youngest Sister both laughed heartily at this and Bodhi was fairly sure he blushed.
“Was she flirting with me?” He said to Cassian later, as they all walked back up to the stone house, exhausted. “Yes,” Cassian answered, “Did she flirt with you too?” He asked. “Yes,” Jyn and Cassian both answered with a shrug.

The rain began not long after Bes and Tova and Iola had left, just drizzle at first, but promising to get heavier. He hoped they had gotten home or to shelter before it started. For the flying he need to do now, clouds were good, rain was better, a rollicking storm was the best cover he could hope for. Cassian had a big square of waxed blue cloth draped around both his shoulders and Jyn's.

Jyn had a striped scarf on, but Cassian's hair was already soaked with rain.

He'd been struggling to keep his footing on the slippery rocks above the Eadu landing runs, through the dark sheeting rain, shaking with cold and fear, aching almost to tears with every step, and probably babbling. It had been so important to him that this rather terrifying stranger, this Alliance officer, keep moving, follow him, BELIEVE him, not think him crazy or broken, even though he knew he was both. He'd turned to see the man looking at him oddly, then heard him ask, incongruously "So, how long did Gerrerra's men have you?"

What? Bodhi had thought, his mind blank, What kind of damned question was that to ask? I don't know sir, how long do YOUR nightmares usually last?

"A couple of days, maybe," he remembered saying.

"Must have been a hell of a couple of days." The man in the rain had laughed a little, a rusty unaccustomed sound, almost like a cough, and looked at him with something unexpectedly like respect.

Jyn had raindrops glistening on her eyelashes, and was looking at him with Galen's grey-green eyes, smiling.

*How can I do this again? He asked himself.*
He'd half expected Cassian to order him to take Jyn and leave him behind, which he had no intention of doing. The major had implied as much when they'd come back up from the South.

But they'd outlined the plan over and over, sitting at the table in the stone house and up in Portia's tower. They all kept coming back to the same problems. There were just too many variables. What was happening at Endor? Would Portia be able to give them enough "actionable intelligence", as Cassian liked to say? There was the issue of that smashed security droid and the ship that must be coming back for it. Portia's surveillance might be the key and somebody had to make sure the Empire didn't get to her, and Ea, before the Alliance could. Wherever the Alliance actually was, and if it still had ships to send. Unspoken, of course, was the "Plan B" that he knew that Cassian must have in case Bodhi didn't make it.

He would have been no match for Cassian in a fight, fair or otherwise, although Jyn probably was. Between the two of them they could surely have knocked him down and gotten him tied up in the back of the shuttle. Jyn would have been behind that plan the whole way, if it came down to it. But this wasn't Yavin IV. On Yavin there had been only one bloody, suicidal, crystal clear choice. There were two paths here now and both of them were dangerous. Somebody had to go up and somebody had to stay on the ground. He was the pilot,.... and they would never leave each other. In the end this was the only way.

"I had nightmares for a year," he remembered telling Jyn, as they sat in the stone garden. He couldn't say it in front of Cassian, although he knew that she would tell him. "I had nightmares in the damned tank....which you're not even supposed to be able to do...about you, all of you, Chirrut and Baze and Melshi...but always you two, over and over...coming out of that bloody tower and standing there looking for the shuttle...and wondering why I'm not there and then...."

Bless her, Galen's daughter, she hadn't told him "There was nothing you could have done" or "It didn't happen that way" She'd just let him cry and said,"I know, Bodhi." She knew.

Jyn threw off the waterproof cloth, grabbed him and kissed his cheek.

"Check in every ten minutes Sargent or I will psychically kick your ass."

Cassian stood, until she finally let go, then hugged him.

"Everything is set. We'll be in the tower. Buena suerte, hermano."

"What does that mean?" Bodhi asked.

"I'll tell you when we see you again," Jyn said, hugging him one more time.

"Go." Cassian told him, "That's an order."
Bodhi climbed up to the cockpit and sealed it. Through the rain streaking the glass he watched them walk back to the edge of the field and turn to watch. Cassian had lifted up the rain cloth and was holding it over both their heads. Bodhi strapped in and started ignition sequence. In his jacket pockets he could feel four packets of dried fruit and two small stones...his and Tonc's ("In case you see him before we do," Jyn had said." ) He slipped one of the ear cuffs onto his left, original issue, ear.

"Ok, Portia," he said, "This is what flying looks like."

Chapter End Notes

You're just starting out again, they told me... warm up with a one-shot....but did I listen...no.
What the Task Requires

Chapter Summary

The Mon Calmari pick up an Alliance pilot. A brief tribute to the awesomeness of Admiral Raddus. Bodhi makes contact with the Alliance about the second DeathStar and he and Tonc share some gossip. Bodhi runs into an old friend.

Chapter Notes

Can I just say for a minute how much I love Admiral Raddus? And how many times I shouted "Hell YEAH! Fish Admiral!".....I was almost expelled from a matinee.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If the pilot had given any other designation the ship would have been destroyed the second it emerged from hyperspace. If any other officer had been in command on the flight deck of the Defender, they would have followed protocol and instantly fired upon a craft that did not immediately return the current Alliance call-sign. Fortunately, Admiral Dier Shollan was not any other officer. Of the seventy five known survivors of the home-ship Profundity, he was only who had stood on deck with Raddus during the Battle of Scarif.

Dier Shollan instantly recognized both the name and the voice.

“This is Bodhi Rook, on Alliance shuttle Guardian..repeat Mon Calmari cruiser…this is Bodhi Rook..”

“Hold fire!” Shollan had shouted rotating his chair instantly and waving a hand, ‘On-screen!!”

This ship was a tiny Incom UD30C, badly battered.

“They are showing engine damage,” his scanner officer called out, “Minimal shielding. No active weapons. Showing two life signs aboard.”

“Open a hail…” Shollan said.

“Sir?..” His First Officer, a dark green Equatorial…a good, smart by-the-book fellow but young… hesitated for an instant.

“Now!” the Admiral barked.

“Incoming shuttle, this is Admiral Shollan of the Alliance ship Defender. Identity confirmation for Bodhi Rook. On which Council ballot did Admiral Raddus change his vote and commit his forces to the raid on Scarif?”

There was a pause.
“I’m seeing significant damage,” the scan said, “I don’t know how they even managed to hold together for the light speed jump.”

Not the official version. What really happened, only someone in that room would have known.

Silence.

Defender had full shields up, so there was a slight crackle on the comms when the voice came through.

“There was no ballot. Admiral Raddus was the only one who believed us….who believed Jyn Erso, straight out. He said “We fight.””

“Alliance shuttle Guardian, prepare your controls for tractor beam. We are bringing you in. Advise on needed assistance.”

Shollan maneuvered his chair down to the lift doors. “Commander Dorum, order gravity-specific quarters made ready for human passengers, advise medical that we may have non-Mon Cala injuries. You have control of the bridge.”

He headed down to the main landing bay to meet the pilot of Rogue One.

Standing behind General Raddus on the command platform, he had seen only the edge of the DeathStar above them, that and the lunar black shadow it cast on Scarif’s blue surface. There was a thin flash then something the size of a massive city was suddenly swallowed in a bloom of steam, ash and green fire. It took less than a minute for the debris cloud to silently spread to cover almost an tenth of the planet’s visible surface.

The whole bridge had been struck silent in horror.

“May the Force be With You Rogue One.” Raddus said, quietly.

He ordered the jump, but the words were barely out when the alarms went off.

Raddus called out evasive maneuvers, but it was already too late. The ship rocked beneath them and the warnings screamed that the shields had failed at last. Profundity was lost.

They were pinned between two Imperial destroyers, dead in space. One ship was in flames. The incoming Interceptor had fired without regard to the placement of the Imperial ships, willing to fatally disable one of it’s own Destroyers and kill hundreds, maybe thousands of it’s own people, to cut off Profundity’s escape.

Hardly surprising given that they had just destroyed their own main data base and killed thousands of their own on the surface below.
Gravity and air filtration were on emergency battery.

“Get that transmission out, manually!” The Admiral shouted.

The Technical officer had started to say something about jamming and escape pods, but Raddus had cut her off. “Get it to the bay, tell Captain Antilles to be ready for it. Burn it onto a card and carry it yourself but GO! Her ship is the only thing with power, now. DO IT!”

The officer ran to the service ladder.

Now came the sound of magnetic boarding grapples, striking the hull.

Raddus strapped himself into his command seat and ordered everyone off the bridge. “Lock down everything but Tantive IV’s bay. Give me manual interior controls and get to your escape pods.”

Interior gravity would be gone in less than ten minutes. Only the aft pods were still deployable and the Empire was out there. This was not a situation in which the Imperials would likely be taking prisoners, and even if they were, Mon Calmari were usually executed immediately by standing order. Very few of them were going to survive. They all knew that full well.

“Caitkin,” Raddus said, as the Weapons officer turned to head for the ladder, “Give me a blaster.”

Caitkin carried two, always. He tossed the Admiral his side arm. Raddus checked the charge and laid the weapon across his lap.

“Shollan, Caitkin, get out if you can. Save Mon Cala. Save the Rebellion.”

He and Caitkin had been the last two off the bridge, splitting off at the top of the ladder and each heading for different shuttles. The Admiral had sealed the hatch behind them. If the Imperials wanted his bridge they would have to cut their way through.

Raddus was a Northerner, descended, he’d been known to boast, from generations of no-nonsense, submarine-clipper pirates, who knew you could never hesitate once you started through the heaving ice.

Fifty twenty-man escape pods managed to deploy from the aft side of the bridge fin, but only five reached lightspeed. The Tantive IV managed to escape seconds before Lord Vader could board her, with Leia Organa and the plans aboard. Like a torch passed from hand to hand to hand ahead of the darkness.

Admiral Raddus died with his ship.

Shollan got there just as the shuttle’s rear doors opened. A human with very black hair on top of his head walked out, half carrying an injured Bothan. Humans could be smooth or hairy or any confusing combination of the two, but when he called out, “We need help, I have two more people
badly injured inside!” Shollan knew the voice.

*Imperial fire had been tearing them apart. The Communications crew had been struggling to baffle the Imperial jamming and get the comms open. Raddus had been hissing, “We need to know what’s happening down there! We need to know if that team is even still alive!” and suddenly, out of nowhere, through the bridge*

“This is Rogue One, is anyone out there?”

The medical team came up with a hover-gurney, and lifted the injured Bothan onto it.

Admiral Shollan stepped forward and put a hand on the pilot’s arm. “Are you injured Commander Rook?” Rook looked back toward the shuttle, “I have two others aboard…very badly hurt….You have to…”

Shollan waved the remaining medics on and they headed into the shuttle. He didn’t have the heart to tell the man that the scans had only read two life signs aboard.

“You’re aboard the Alliance ship Defender, Commander Rook, I am Admiral Shollan.”

“What’?” the man said, turning back towards his shuttle, even as Shollan tried to hold him back, “We need to,…I…I’m only a Sargent.”

“Not on Mon Cala you’re not.” Shollan told him.

The Medical officer walked out from the shuttle, shaking her head. “Two Bothans, sir,” she said, “Both dead.”

“Come with me, Commander Rook,” he said, “Let’s get you checked out.”

Rook sagged, leaning against Shollan’s shoulder, “I tried,” he said, choking a little, “I tried. They wouldn’t listen.”

After a breath or two, he seemed to get a grip on himself, “Admiral. You have to get me to Alliance Command. There’s a second DeathStar…but, it’s more than that….I need to talk to Command.”

*O madre stella del mare, no.*

“Contact Admiral Ackbar on Home One,” Shollan ordered over his comm. “We need an immediate channel to Alliance Command.”
Mon Calmari ships were pretty amazing. Bodhi found himself remembering Micah, the flight tech from Cygna and how they used to nerd out, talking about ship designs. He hoped he’d see her again some day to tell her about Defender.

Mon Cala had no military to speak of, before the Empire had taken over the planet as a “protectorate,” but it had built a vast and beautiful commercial and passenger fleet, the stars of which were their massive elegant tourist liners. They flat out owned the luxury tourist transport trade on the Outer Rim and it had made them rich and easy pickings.

It was a famous story in the Alliance, about how the Imperial occupying force, two months into their “successful” total take-over, woke up one morning to find that every single ship bigger than a hopper had left Mon Cala. All of it’s ports large and small and the huge rings of orbiting docks, all empty. Fully 12% of the population, every pilot, all crews, tech, mechanics, flight personnel all gone with them. The whole planet must have been in on it. The Imperial governor was executed for incompetence and the remaining planetary population paid a terrible price, as it’s leaders must have known it would. It was the single most successful resistance move of the Rebellion. Hundreds and hundreds of ships had taken themselves into space and rebuilt themselves, on the fly and on the run into a fearsome battle fleet.

The fixtures were beautiful, even still. All interior lighting looked like blown glass, the walkways were wide and sweeping. Bodhi couldn’t get over it. The handle that opened the fresher cabinet was even shaped like a tiny silver fish.

“It’s a gorgeous ship,” Bodhi said, as he walked with Admiral Shollan to the transfer shuttle. He’d checked on Ty’re in medical before they left. She was still unconscious but stable, she’d live, the sole survivor of her crew. Shollan had already made arrangements to transfer her to a Bothan ship.

Shollan chuckled, “Don’t go look at the old Water Parks deck. It’s been converted to Weapons Engineering. Quite the hatchet job.’ He looked up at the soaring ceilings, now filled with buzzing droids and reinforced with blast support beams. “We can none of us be what we were supposed to be, can we? We must be what the task requires we become.” He slapped Bodhi on the shoulder, “I wish you could have seen Profundity, she was the queen.”

Me too, Bodhi thought.

He had spoken first to a holo of Admiral Ackbar, somewhere hiding with the surviving bulk of the Fleet. Everyone here kept calling him “Commander Rook”, it was a little unnerving. Then Ackbar’s people somehow managed to patch him in to someone else. The holo table lit up with two other groups of people.

General Cracken, he recognized from Echo Base, along with another General Mandine, who he didn’t. There was a small woman with them….oh hell! it was….Princess Leia Organa. She looked different, thinner, still young and beautiful but, older somehow.

The other group was a Bothan commander of some sort, Mon Mothma and General Draven.

There was no time to talk much. Shollan had transferred the data about Endor and the weapon from
Guardian. Bodhi gave a quick, no details report on what they had seen and what Ty’re and Bothan crew had found.

The Bothan eyed Bodhi sharply from the blue image. “Officer Ty’re Aya’tal can confirm this?”

*He doesn’t believe me, Bodhi thought, or he doesn’t want to. Can’t say I blame him.*

“Your officer is still in serious condition,” Shollan said, “But our people say she will survive. We will make arrangements to transfer her to a Bothan ship as soon as can be arranged.”

“Aerin, Crix,” Mothma was saying, "we need to get, Sargent…” she paused and smiled, “...Captain Rook in, and the Council together as quickly as possible. There is not much time to act and we need a plan.”

Cracken’s image nodded. He, the Princess and the other General vanished, as did Mothma and Ackbar. They must be talking on on another channel. Draven and the Bothan, who seemed to be sitting now, looking almost stricken, remained.

“Rook,” Draven said, “I will need to de-brief you when we meet. Do we still have personnel in field?”

“Yes,” Bodhi said.

*Please Force, let that be true.*

“When I last….yes, sir, we do.”

Draven nodded, in what looked like open relief…actually it was as much emotion, other than annoyance, as Bodhi had ever seen the man show. Then he turned, as if someone else were talking to him,

“What?” he said, “This is not a private comm line, soldier.” Annoyance was back, “Make it quick.”

Stordan Tonc appeared on the holo. He smiled at Bodhi, tapped his chest and held up an index finger.

Rogue One.

“Hey Tonc, it’s good to see you, man,” Bodhi laughed. “Who’d you rob to get that suit?”

“Rest of the crew good?” Tonc asked. ‘Give me the lowdown when I see you, eh?”

“Yeah, absolutely.”

“That’s enough,” Draven said, “we’ll see you at the rendezvous point, Rook.

"Wait, sir, please… Tonc, I owe you twenty credits.”

Tonc looked confused for a minute, then he smiled even wider, “Really? Ha! I knew it!”

Draven sighed and cut communication off without another word.
The transport shuttle took him to Zastiga. He’d heard of it as a retail processing station on a far-flung moon but now many small mis-matched ships hovered around it like moths.

Shollan’s maintenance chief had promised that Guardian would be brought in behind him, repaired, in the hold of one of their cargo craft, within the day. He’d been particularly impressed with Chewbacca’s concealed gun array and had actually asked to sketch it so he could reproduce one later. Bodhi wasn’t sure if the wookie would be flattered or angrily demand a designer’s fee.

What must have once been a small corporate office complex was now packed with Rebels. He was met at the loading dock and brought in through crowded hallways toward a meeting room on the third floor. Bodhi recognized a lot of faces, and had to resist the urge to hug every familiar person he saw.

“What shuttle were you on? Who else got away?” He wanted to ask everyone, but there was no time.

In a doorway, he nearly collided with a man with a beige camo jacket thrown over an unfamiliar black uniform.

“Rook,” the man said, “It’s good to see you.”

Bodhi almost wouldn’t have known him. It was Luke Skywalker. He was still smiling, still had the same blond hair and blue eyes, but…there were some barely repaired scars, below one eye, and across his cheek and jaw, but it was more than that…he looked, “haunted” was the word that came to Bodhi’s mind.

What happened to you?

“Commander!” Bodhi tried to hold out a hand, in the narrow hallway, but Skywalker waved it aside and hugged him instead. It might have been a weird thing to notice, in that moment, but the guy had some serious muscle on him now. “It’s good to see you too sir.”

“Luke,” Skywalker laughed, *not quite the same laugh*, “How many times do I have to tell you?”

As he let go and turned sideways to let someone else pass, the man's jacket sleeve had gotten pulled too low. Bodhi recognized the slight elbow hitch back he used to adjust it., *muscle relearning nerve engagement,* the therapists described it. Somebody who hadn’t had to do the “lost limb rehab drills” probably wouldn’t have noticed. It was the right hand.

Skywalker followed his gaze.

“Frostbite on Hoth?” came out of Bodhi’s mouth before he could bite his tongue to stop it.

*Damn it Rook, what is the MATTER with you?*

“What?” Skywalker looked confused, “Hoth? Oh…right,… you didn’t ....” A shadow seemed to pass over his face, as if he aged ten years for an instant. “No,” he said, “Something else.” He moved the
hand. It was perfect work.

He smiled then and the shadow disappeared, “We’ll have to put together a sabbac club at some point, eh? Left hand guys play yellow and right hand guys play black.” He slapped Bodhi’s shoulder, “I’ll see you at the meeting” and moved down the hallway.

The old "Captain Sunshine" bounce that Antilles and the others used to rag him about was gone. He moved like a man capably carrying a very heavy weight.

Bodhi went in the door Skywalker had come out of. Draven, Cracken, Mothma, Organa, and several other people he didn’t know were waiting to debrief him about Endor and the second DeathStar.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, the Mon Calmari speak Italian, because, of course they do.

(I also know they are called the Mon Calamari, but I also know that that was a joke left over from RotJ that just got canonized and frankly like several other of Lucas' excesses in that film, it needs to be tweaked to be bearable. That's what we're here for right?)
Chapter Summary

A small breakaway bit in which Jyn, Cassian and Bodhi test Portia's mobile communication system for the first time and find that she is not the only one with memories of loved ones lost.

“How did you break them?” Bodhi had asked, moving around the separated silver pieces with his index finger. The half rings, chains and pins were all laid out on the blue lizard-leather wrapping. He was sitting with Jyn and Cassian on the benches up in the tower, the morning before Portia’s introduction to the Great Council. Soon it would be time to go down to the field.

“I didn’t, Portia did.”

From the upper levels Jyn could hear Tova and Bes trying to persuade both Iola and Beri to take a rest on the extra mattresses. Beri was protesting, Iola was not.

“Disconnecting all the neural pins means no shared memory access,” Portia was saying, with the patient-but-slightly-aggrieved tone of a technical support rep explaining how you had just violated your speeder warrantee. “All that will be left is immediate auditory sharing and limited one-way realtime visual feed.”

“It’s a comm-link,” Bodhi said.

“Yes,” Jyn said, at the same moment Portia said “No.”

“You tried this?” Cassian asked her.

Don’t give me that raised eyebrow Andor. If you can follow the rules, I can follow the rules.

“I waited for you,” she said.

“What does that mean exactly, ‘limited one-way realtime visual feed’? Bodhi wanted to know.

Portia-as-Jula didn’t sigh, but she left a slight pause where a sigh would have been inserted by a person who actually breathed.

“I can only see with my internal visual feeds, (inside the tower she means, Jyn thought), or satellite and sensor arrays that I am connected to. Without arrays or other feeds I cannot take in visual information.”

“So….if one of us puts one of these on…” Bodhi said, slowly.

“She can see what we see, while we are seeing it,” Cassian said, “Is that correct Portia?”

“That’s simplistic, but yes.”
“Oh goody,” Bodhi said, “I get to be a camera.”

“I will be able to communicate with you directly through the auditory nerve, but in order for you to communicate with me, you will have to vocalize so it can be picked up by the external receiver. I’m going to try to not point it out too often, but this is primitive in the extreme.”

Bodhi picked up one of the ear clips, still eyeing it suspiciously. “So I guess we test it? Who goes first?”

“Me,” Jyn said and reached out to take the other clip.

Cassian stopped her hand with his own. “No,” he said, taking it from her fingers, “I’ll do it.”

“You pulling rank, Major?”

“Only if I have to.”

She wanted to fight with him, but there was no time left and he was looking at her with that expression, that look in his eyes. She knew she could break herself against that look like a rock and never change it.

She let him take the thing.

He lifted the small silver cuff and laid it against the top of of his right ear, pushing back his hair little. It seemed to slowly clip itself on.

She found herself hiding a smile, nervous as she was. His hair was getting a little long again and the earring made him look a like Devaronian pirate.

“Does it hurt? Bodhi asked.

Cassian shook his head, and looked around the room, then up at the image of the standing woman, “Ok, Portia, is this working the way…..” he inhaled sharply and gripped the edge of the table.

“Cassian! What is it? What’s wrong?”

“Como..what..what the hell?” He gasped. “Quién es ese?” His dark eyes were wide

“Portia! What’s happening?” Jyn reached for his hands, but he pulled them back.

The image looked genuinely distressed. “I don’t know,” she said. “I only asked if he could hear me.”

“Take it off!” Bodhi said, standing up

“No,” Cassian lifted one hand and held it palm facing out. He wanted them to be quiet.

Cassian what’s happening?

He was in pain, she could see that.

“Portia,” he was speaking very very deliberately. “Whose voice are you using?”
The dark haired woman shook her head. If she was answering him Jyn and Bodhi could not hear it.

Cassian closed his eyes for a moment.

“Ok. I understand that. I can manage…it was just a shock.”

“Cassian?” She reached for his hand again, and this time he let her take it.

He looked up at her and smiled a little, “It’s alright,” and then at Bodhi, “It’s just…different than I imagined. It’s alright now.”

He slipped off the clip and laid it on the table. “I should have expected it, it’s something we’ll have to take into account.” Portia looked so miserable, Jyn half expected her to wring her hands.

“What just happened?” Bodhi asked, sitting back down but clearly not reassured.

“Portia can send an information signal to the auditory nerve,” Cassian was saying “am I understanding this right?” Portia nodded, “but our own brain has to do the transcribing, so…she has no control over what voice we think we hear it in.”

_Oh my love._

Bodhi asked it, so she didn’t have to, ‘Whose voice did you hear?’

‘I’m not absolutely sure. I think it was my mother’s.’

In a way, Jyn was almost relieved. She had been afraid it was Kay’s.

They sat in silence for a minute, and Jyn realized that Tova and Bes had come down and were sitting quietly on the bottom step.

“Ok.” Bodhi said, nodding. “Good to know.” He picked up the cuff from where Cassian had laid it down. “Me next.” He started to lift it to his right ear, then stopped himself and switched it to his left.

Bes came over and and took Bodhi’s left hand, and laced her fingers with his.

_Wishing to Share Strength._ Jyn thought she recognized.


He swallowed hard and nodded some more. “Ok. Ok…give me, I don’t know, a fuel status report on my ship, or something.” Bodhi stood up and walked over to the window. She saw him reach up and wipe his eyes once, but he seemed to be keeping it together.

Portia’s image was no longer visible, or maybe she was upstairs with Beri and Iola.
Jyn picked up the second clip. *There was no reason Portia couldn’t do two or ten things at a time, right? That was part of the whole point of this.*

Cassian was still holding her hand. “It helps if you have her say something…..mundane,… something, that person would never actually say…it makes it…even out,” he said.

*Oh fuck.*

“Fine, Portia, let’s do this.”

She put it on.

“I am sorry for the distress this is causing. You were clearly right, Jyn.”

*It hurt less than she would have thought. Even in her wildest dreams she couldn’t imagine Saw saying anything like that.*
Concealment from the Eyes of Enemies

Chapter Summary

Bodhi's ship flies. A sad parting that has been coming for a while finally arrives.

Chapter Notes

It's very tiny and sad but it had to come.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They had not reached home by the time Bodhi Rook’s ship flew. Really, it would have been far too much to expect. The rain was coming down and Eldest Sister could walk only very slowly. Luckily, one of the tents had been left up along the side of the field and they sheltered there. Tova had, in fact, asked Mose and Keen to leave a few of the sturdier ones up for a few weeks, scattered up and down the path.

“It is perhaps even best to do it outside,“ Youngest Sister said. “A little rain in it may help it to bind.”

Dearest, Tova thought, is there nothing you cannot see good in?

“Watch the sky little one,” Eldest said, to Beri, who had taken off her sunny-day glasses and let them hang from the ribbon around her neck. The rain was fogging them and it was cloudy anyway.

“Sister,” Eldest said to Tova, “I may need your help.” Her hands were losing their strength, so Tova laid a hand over hers to help her trace the circle.

“Will we see him?” the small one asked.

“He said he would go slowly and low over the village for a small way, so we may. Slow for a spaceship is still very fast,” Youngest Sister said, taking the balls of thread from the bag she had carried around her neck, and placing one in Eldest’s hand and another in Tova’s, ”But remember, he said that we would hear him even if we did not see him.”

In the North, in the Forests, on the Plains, in the Grasslands and the Riverlands, on the Coast, and the Inner Islands, all the Circles cast a pattern in that same hour. Of Concealment from the Eyes of Enemies for Bodhi Rook and his ship, which was called Guardian, and Clear Seeing for Bodhi and Ancient Portia.
“Oh! Oh!” cried little Beri, from the front of the little lean-to tent, peering up through the rain. “I see him!” There was a low roaring sound and a shadow, almost in the shape of a hawk with wings folded forward, moved quickly over the hill and the village. They could hear it for minutes after it was swallowed by the low clouds. Beri waved, even though Bodhi had been very clear that he would not be able to see anybody.

The low clouds of the storm kept Guardian unseen by most of the eyes watching from the ground. As he passed low down over the river valleys, the Taun had watchers set high up into the tree platforms who braved the storm and said they saw a shape moving quickly and heard the engines. It sounded like the a storm bearing down at sea, or at least they thought that must be what it sounded like. None of the Taun had ever been to the sea.

The cloud cover broke up near the coast and Macha lifted her eyes up from the pattern she and her sisters had cast along the shore to see a bright shape like a squared-off diver emerge into the sun for an instant and then swoop low to skim the water into a bank of fog. On the roof of Markey’s warehouse, Conn and the other kids in the crew watched, and Fennie held the scope Markey handed him up to his one good eye and swore he could see the heat distort the air off the back of the engines.

At sea, the storm had mostly passed the day before. Even though the surf was still choppy, the Far Islanders were skilled enough sailors to keep their huge fleet of outriggers in position, waiting and watching. Bequa by the thousands floated in between the boats. Bodhi came through the fog bank to the west, into the sunlight and well off from their position, but visible. A few of the keenest mast watchers got to see him turn up sharp, engines facing toward the water and blast straight up into the high cloud cover and out of atmosphere, an arrow-shot flash of white and blue atop a plume of white steam. The mast men shouted out then, and the Bequa dove deep, as they had been warned to do, while the Islanders covered their ears, and readied themselves for the wake wave that followed. They were the only ones who heard the sonic boom as Guardian hard-accelerated.

No one saw him lower the wing thrusters into space flight configuration.

A rare combination of low atmospheric disturbance, combined with seasonal lunar shadow and a short burst of increased solar activity, caused a number of short gaps in the surveillance feed from the single satellite the Empire had placed to watch Planet 3A /UDUR Theta System outside the Modell Sector Security Ring. Under normal circumstances this would have triggered at least an automatic check, probably even an alert, but orders changes were coming in so fast and furious from the Endor System Project now that even the analysis droids were disinclined to start anything until Command actually finalized the new protocols. A few scattered blinks on an annoying hard-to-watch bump just over the edge of the charts worried no one. Besides, the Zeta-class shuttle was returning on its circuit to pick up the survey droids in less than 48 hours, and would fill in the data.

Bodhi Rook’s ship was gone by then and, although the satellites he’d placed looked like nothing more than tiny bits of space junk, Portia could see her enemies coming.
The Pattern was a hard one, but all the strands held. Youngest Sister’s quick fingers tied off the last edge and they laid it down on the damp earth. Tova found her arms and shoulders aching as if she had mowed a hectare of grain with a pair of nail scissors.

“We have done what we can. It will be enough, or it will not,” Eldest whispered. “We can do no more.” She rolled sideways, to lie on the ground, closing her eyes, trembling. Tova went to her and laid hands upon her. Breath was still in her, but it was faint.

Youngest Sister came around the circle to her side, and laid a gentle hand beside hers, her beautiful eyes sad but ready.

The day is come.

Tova did a quick calculation of distances, the rain was coming down hard now and the quickest path was the steep one.

“Little One. Run to Portia’s Tower. Jyn and Cassian-ally will be there. Ask one of them to come and help us carry her.” Beri ran out through the wet gusting wind.

Stroking the damp fur of her Eldest’s face, Tova waited.

Beloved, she will come for you in the white ribbons of the True-Hearted, I know you think that she will not, but I know that she will.

Chapter End Notes

Looming ahead, the RotJ reton that I’ve been burning to do since 1983. Thank you Rogue One for bringing me here.
Chapter Summary

Bits of things that happen in the days between the Great Council and Bodhi's take off. There are many mysteries our Jyn Cassian and Bodhi still haven't solved, even about each other and their own adventures.

Chapter Notes

Lots of bits that don't fit in anywhere else.

After the Great Council was done, they had to wait. According to Portia and Bodhi's calculations it would be 13-14 days before an optimal lunar position. Going sooner would greatly increase the risk of exposure to any eyes watching from the Endor System or adjacent space. Cassian suspected that Portia would have enjoyed telling them the calculated percentage, but he couldn't bring himself to ask her.

Jyn had volunteered to be the one to let Portia “see” and “hear” the Sisters at the Council, in order to leave he and Bodhi freer to talk.

“I'm doing my best here Portia, but it's kind of difficult to just stand around like this,” he heard her mutter to "herself." She was glancing up and around and he managed to catch her eye across the the small crowd, standing in the grass at the foot of the wall.

She gave him a faint, slightly pained, smile and then lowered her head again, “No, that's fine,” she said, “We’ll stay a bit longer.” He could read the tension in her jaw, and the set of her shoulders.

The Red Traders had held back during the talking but they seemed the most fascinated with Portia. Most of the Far Islanders would only bring their boats in as far as the harbors or the mouth of the river, to trade fruit and fish and ivory right off the water, for metal, mostly. The Red Traders were the ones who came ashore. They seemed sort of like a merchant guild, according to the Coast and Harbor Fishers, and acted as liaison between the Far Islanders and all traders inland. He’d gotten the impression that there must be more to the story, but hadn’t had time to pursue it further. Like most of the Islanders he’d seen, they were tall and aloof with elaborate tattoos. One of them, a man, judging from the braided beard, walked over to him.
“Do you remember me, Blackbird?” he asked. Cassian did, although he’d never been given a name. The man had been amongst a group at HarborTown in the Spring Market.

“I do, Trader.” He did not hold out his hand. He recalled Markey’s lecture that you never tried to touch an Islander before they made the first move.

“We came because the Sisters of the Sea asked us to,” the man said, watching his four companions moving cautiously around where Jyn stood. “But I would have come anyway, to have seen this.” He looked at Portia’s image, then back at Cassian, “The Traditional people, out on the reefs and up in the hills, where I was born….they are very…insular. I turned away from those beliefs and….in truth, I always thought they were just stories, superstitions…stories about plague monsters and voyagers and a war that never ended and spirits that sacrificed themselves to save the people..” He shook his head, wonderingly, then held out his right hand, the way the Fishers did. Cassian shook it.

“Someone told me once, a teacher of mine,” Cassian said, “That we are always in someone else’s story as well as our own.”

_It had been Tano. No wonder she and Draven had been like oil and water._

People were still gathered around Jyn, and Portia’s image, asking questions.

_My poor pequeño bandido this must be purgatory for you._

The Sisters packed light and moved quickly. Most of them had kissed each other goodbye and were already moving up the north path or the south before the campfires were even cold.

Iola had clearly burned through her burst of energy and was now leaning heavily on Bes as well as her walking stick. Cassian saw many of the Sisters reach out hands to touch her lightly as she passed slowly among them, with Bes half-supporting her and Beri bobbing at her side. Others would place a hand lightly against Tova’s back, and then walk on, saying nothing.

Cassian stood by the wall and watched them go, an ache in his heart.

Someone touched his arm, and he looked down to see a tall, thick-furred Memsa beside him. He recognized her as one from the Inner Islands, but had not heard her name either. She was obviously an Elder, with stooped shoulders and eyebrows thickly frosted with grey. She turned his hand and tapped it once.

"I will tell you a story, ally, that may give you comfort in days to come, about how Ea brings persons to the place where they need to be. Long ago, when I was newly Youngest Sister, we were called upon to judge the fate of a child found upon a boat, sole survivor of a Raiders crew. She looked as if she had never touched land and would not speak. Her tale was clearly a cruel one. She was young, far too young to have seen and done what she had, and was full of such rage that she bit at all the hands that might have sought to help her. Feelings ran hard against the Raiders in those days, on the coast, and for good reason. One of the clan leaders said, "If a hand holds a knife too long, it becomes a knife. What can be safely done with such a one?"

But my then Eldest Sister went to the child, and held out her own walking stick of ironwood. "Turn your back on this," she told her "Turn your back to the sea and walk until this stick breaks. Where ever you are then, look around yourself, and maybe Ea will show you Healing, if you can still smell and see it. Maybe you can make yourself more than a knife." At her word, they untied that little one, and I was afraid when she snarled at the faces gathered around her, for all that she was barely half my size. She looked then at my Elder, astonished, like one who had never had trust or a kind word offered before. Quick as lightning, she snatched up that stick and ran away from the shore, stumbling
on sea legs with every other step.”

He kissed the back of her hand, in what he hoped was the right place, and she smiled and squeezed the side of his palm, Farewell With Hope to Meet Again.

When he, Jyn and Bodhi had come back up to the tower, (late in the evening, to sleep, since they were all too exhausted to walk even as far back as the stone house) Portia had been waiting for them, still showing the image of the woman with the silver braids. She had appeared almost touchingly grateful.

“it’s been so long since I’ve seen so many of them up close. They seem to have developed unique indigenous philosophical and political structures….largely independent of us, and the Knights,” she said. “it’s really very exciting.”

Too drained to even eat the food Bes had left for them, Bodhi fell asleep sitting on a bench with his head down on the table. Jyn had to shake him awake and shove him over to the pallet on the floor by their makeshift “data terminal.” Cassian went with her, up to the extra mattresses on the second floor. Portia, probably recognizing how wrecked they were, left them all alone and dimmed down the lighting.

Jyn had pulled off the ear cuff the instant her feet hit the platform and now she took it from her pocket and left it on the bench by the stairs. She looked likely to lie right down fully clothed.

“Boots off,” he reminded her. She had a tendency to kick him in the night after a stressful day.

She huffed, annoyed, but put them at the end of the mattress. “Jacket off,” she said, so he rolled it up and put it above his head, to be a pillow. That was as much as either of them could manage and she curled beside him and laid her head on his chest.

“Jyn are you ok?” he started.

“Shhhhhhh….,” she said, eyes already closed. Within a few minutes he could tell she was asleep.

If anyone one had asked him, yesterday, whether he had any memory at all of what his mother’s voice sounded like, he would have sworn that he did not.

*Whose voice are you hearing, Jyn?*

Blessedly, that night, nobody had any dreams.

The 13 days gave them time to plan and time to worry. Portia was concerned about their stress levels and actually kicked them out of the tower for long periods.

Bodhi tinkered with his ship and re-built the satellites at least twice. They all spent time down at the Sister’s farm. The pond had gotten too cold for swimming or anything else, but Jyn and Cassian took a lot of walks. A signal system of calls and torch beacons had been set up all the way out to where the Bequa patrolled the equatorial seas, watching for more survey droids or return of that shuttle.
At one point Portia had even located some concert music feeds and played them in the tower and Cassian had tried to teach Jyn to dance, much to Bes, and Bodhi’s falling down amusement.

Whenever one of them was away too far from the tower they tried to take one of the earpieces with them. All of them practiced wearing them, walking out away from the tower, even on a ride down to the River, in hope that it would get easier with time. It didn’t, but it did become less…shocking. Range was not an issue on-planet, Portia assured them. there was nowhere on Ea’s surface she could not hear Jula’s mods. Space though, might be another issue.

“I was made here,’” Portia said, ‘I could speak to Tostan’s organics just as I could my own, not that I often did (they had already heard her speak of Toston, who seemed to have been a communications and docking station outside lunar orbit) but I never had occasion to speak with any of Dor's (from context, they ascertained that Dor was a ship) unless they were already in system. I don’t know that it wouldn’t have worked, it just never came up.”

There was no way to test it in advance but, In the end, it was decided that it was worth the risk of having Bodhi take one with him.

When Jyn asked whether Imperial surveillance would be able to pick up Portia’s auditory signal she had positively sneered.

“Those stupid beasts? Never.” But something had given her pause.

“The Jedi.”

“What about them?” Cassian had asked.

“They might be able to…they had, some type of modification. I don’t think they could but....”

"The Jedi are dead, Portia." He remembered the reports of a "long lost" surviving Jedi general miraculously reappearing to help in Leia Organa's escape, only to conveniently die before anyone actually saw him.

"Even so," she said, stubbornly, "Watch out for them and their Sith Brothers, Bodhi Rook. They'd be the only ones to worry about. If you see them or hear them, disconnect immediately."


Portia kept up her “slice” scans and packed the carefully bundled information off, but they had no idea who, if anyone was reading them. They kept watching the feeds. There was some major dynastic struggle going on among the Hutt cartel after Jabba’s assassination. The Outer Rim was in chaos. It might have been expected that Imperial ships would sweep in to take advantage of the upheaval but that didn’t seem to be happening.

“It’s too quiet,” Portia said, “There seem to be a lot of ships missing,”

“Alliance ships?” Bodhi asked.

Portia’s image of a round-cheeked teenager, looked at him with tart disappointment.
“No. I do not expect to see your Alliance ships…except quickly and then gone again. They are still being reasonably good at hiding. The Enemy though, usually makes a great show of keeping a number of it’s ugly and stupid ships visible at all times. A significant number, not all but many, are no longer visible to me.”

Bodhi, with the help of Dov’s wrecking crew and the light-saber in the toolbox, had pulled a treasure-trove out of the wing assemblies in the Black Shuttle, and boosted Corporal Weems’ little comm arrays out of all recognition. Sensor and signal boosters, HoloNet senders, all of it black ops…..Cassian and Jyn both checked the bits over carefully, no sign of Imperial trackers in any of it. These were the kind of shiny toys Cassian might have imagined a high level Moff, or, hell, Lord Vader, having. That the Empire was handing out this kind of tech to any lower officials was an Intelligence revelation in itself.

“Who the hell WAS this guy?” Bodhi asked him, at one point, as they’d been doing one last search for right-shaped chunks of casing. Jyn hadn’t been with them. She’d down gone with Elfla for three days to go over the details of the signal system with the Taun. Bodhi only did cutting on the black ship when she wasn’t around. Jyn would never admit it, but while Cassian found being around the shuttle stressful, for Jyn it was almost unbearable.

Cassian had never gotten a clear look at the man in white. A glimpse in a doorway of the data tower, but his eyes had been on the troopers with the guns. At the top of the platform he’d seen only the man’s back… medium height, greying hair, fucking static shield cape, heavy non-regulation DT-29 pistol pointed directly at Jyn. His vision had been coming and going then, in and out of focus. He’d only had that T-16 standard sidearm he’d taken off the dead officer in the vault.

All the shots he’d ever taken and this was the only one that mattered and he hadn’t even been able to fucking SEE…

And Oskar’s voice in his head then….If you don’t have a tripod, soldado, you have to be a tripod. Brace against something and keep your shoulders level, the gun is only as steady as you are, the barrel is only as long as your arm makes it and the barrel is the only thing that matters. Hold steady, just for one more second. One last time.

The body on the platform had been facing away from him too. He’d seen rank insignia…but it hadn’t mattered anymore, nothing had, he’d been done.

“High rank,” Cassian said shaking his head, “Admiral level, but in white not grey… extra clearance, Project Director, maybe?”

Bodhi froze, crouched over the plating on the landing platform, a silicone cutter in his hand.

“Krennic,” he said. “Director Krennic.”

It was a name that rang a bell. Intelligence? Weapons Development?

“You knew him?”
Bodhi wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. “Not exactly…He was in charge at Eadu.”

The same man he’d seen through the scope on the platform? He’d only been looking at Jyn’s father…and then only at Jyn. He’d had the impression of a weasel-faced command officer strutting in the rain ordering his guards to mow down the old men standing behind Galen Erso. It had looked like an execution. Just another misplaced puzzle piece that he’d never needed to connect to anything else, because none of it had mattered anymore after Eadu.

They didn't talk about these things directly even now, but he knew about the cave. She had told him the way a child would recount a nightmare. Her mother had gone back for her father instead of coming with her to the safe shelter. Lyra Erso had tried to kill the man in white and his stormtroopers had shot her dead in front of her little girl, hiding in the tall grass. He’d thought she might be transposing, turning all her devils into one, the way children do.

“So who are you?” The man had shouted at Jyn on the tower.

He remembered Jyn snarling something back at him, her name.

*Had it been that personal? Had he seen her on the platform at Eadu? Recognized her in the tower? Maybe he thought you were his devil, mi amor, the vengeful spirit of every crime he'd ever committed, come to hunt him down at last.*

He hoped it was true. Jyn would like that.

*In the end though, she didn't stay to fight her devil. She listened to me. She came with me.*

“Well,” Cassian said, shifting the curved chunks of black casing he and Bodhi had already cut from the flooring, “if it makes you feel any better, I shot the bastard.”

“Good,” Bodhi said.

They cleaned up and Bodhi had slipped on the ear clip, to give Portia a chance to see if there was anything else she wanted from the shuttle. He might not get another chance to come back.

“Ok, ok,” he said tossing a piece of a power cell from the ripped open console and head and arm joint of the broken KZ units into the bag. Cassain kept his eyes on the sunlight through the hole Bodhi had cut in the roof. Enough rain had blown in in the last few storms to have washed his dried blood off the flooring at the top of the ramp.

Bodhi pulled the clip off his ear and slipped it in his shirt pocket, breathing in and exhaling slowly.

“Do you think it will ever change? The voice we hear?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” Cassian said, “I have no idea how it works.”

Bodhi slung the bag over his shoulder and they each grabbed a side of the short ladder, setting it in place to climb out.

“It would have been hard,” he said, not meeting Cassian’s eye, “But in a weird way, I was kind of hoping I’d hear my mother. Probably wouldn’t be good for me, I know,…..” They were standing at the bottom of the ladder.

*Bodhi.*
“Bodhi, you don’t have to tell me.”

“Who else can I tell?” He shrugged and smiled sadly, “It’s Galen.”

They’d watched Bodhi take off. The engines had blasted down like steam fountains. Guardian had lifted up, then he’d turned the engine orientation and she’d moved off, gone. They lost sight of her quickly with the rain pouring in their eyes, and ran up to the tower, slipping as they climbed the wooden platform stairs.

Inside they’d found Portia as a new image. A dark skinned older woman with short silver hair. She seemed to be looking up at the ceiling, which was odd, but she turned to face them with smile.

“This is very interesting,” she said. “The ships used to try my patience sometimes, but I can certainly see how this could go to your head.”

They were prepared to spend the next day or two in the tower, at least until Bodhi got out of atmosphere. They both knew full well that there was nothing much they could do to help Bodhi from the ground, but being anywhere else seemed unthinkable. What happened afterward would depend on Portia’s new eyes, and what she saw with them.

She was giving them quite an entertaining verbal flight simulation when they heard Beri’s childish voice from outside, and she suddenly appeared soaked and distressed at the top of the platform, begging one of them to come, because Eldest Sister was ill.
Chapter Summary

The crew of Weapons Project Mark Omega (aka: Deathstar II) is under stress....seems some scary dude from Senior Management just showed up to move up deadlines and chop heads....possibly literally. A disgruntled engineering officer goes to try to clean up the backlog of some overdue survey checks. It does not go well.

Chapter Notes

A small bit of plot to get through because Jyn and Cassian will be needing access to a working ship. Apologies for the (even for this fic) shortness of but I had to go on a street march against Fascism today, and now I need a nap.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*An off-station run was not the worst place to be right now,* Cern told himself.

He had to tell himself, unfortunately, because his only other options were to talk to his stone-jawed pilot, Flight Commander Dorgan, or the CK-41 analysis droid. Of the two the droid was the better conversationalist.

A High Security shuttle had docked without warning a few days ago, and nobody was supposed to even talk about who was on it. All breaks were cancelled, shifts were tripled and Medical was handling out stimulants to most departments. Brass was getting their uniform trousers dry-cleaned daily.

*ha!....that was good....he'd have to remember that one…*

“Inspections” were coming…..by who and for what was off-limits discussion.

It hadn't always been this bad. Project Mark Omega had been a back-up testing system for a big-ass deterrence weapon, a boondoggle, something to keep the Moff's busy and a bunch of prison labor crews at work. After the Rebels had blown the hell out of Weapons Project Stardust though, what had been….*fuck, it must be getting close to two years ago now?*.... a cruelly isolated, boring but safe and stable tour of duty had become a little slice of hell. They'd dragged them out here and locked them into orbit around this gas-giant and it's ghastly moon, and here they'd stayed.

Guys were actually volunteering now for moon-side duty, something which, until that black shuttle had docked, had been considered suicide.

Personnel had a tendency to “disappear” down there. There were whispers about “carnivorous wildlife” that nobody ever saw. It was off-limits to talk about it. Just as it was off-limits to talk about the engineer from the ground survey team who’d been found hysterical in one of the shield power bunkers, raving about how the rest of his twelve-man detail had been “sucked into the trees.” People
had found bloody armor set up on poles with no sign of the troopers who’d been inside….because, yeah, animals did that.

Engineer First Class Merin Cern had only had to go down to the moon of Endor’s surface once, after stupidly winning a very high stakes card game with a senior officer. A team was sent to replace the “damaged “ …..hacked through? chewed through?….. power feeds on four ground surveillance posts. Sent with a twenty-man armed trooper escort. It had seemed like overkill until, at the bottom of one of the arrays, he saw what looked like a pile of branches. Some of the larger ones still had boots on them.

_Yup. If that didn’t teach a fellow how to lose strategically, nothing would._

The pick up for these fucking survey droids was already weeks overdue. Not his fault, he’d only just been re-assigned to Ring Security Surveillance. His predecessor must have been fudging work orders. Understandable really, planet 3A/UDUR was a pain in the ass, setting regular satellite checks this far off grid was a staffing nightmare. The stupid rock was on the way to absolutely nowhere else, had two moons with wonky elipses (which made for annoying gaps in surface monitoring and required requisitioning extra equipment), and was mostly ocean. It housed a stationary nav-beacon that had been installed wrong 15 years ago and never fixed, an orbit that somehow made it a dustbin for every piece of debris that bounced out of the Modell corridor and a magnetic field that gave survey droids such bad headaches you had to go physically pick them up. No, no, he pitied the guys who’d dropped the ball here, he really did, but HIS head wasn’t going to roll for it…..not with “inspections” happening.

_A nice trip out to the ass end of nowhere, was just the ticket._

He'd checked the glitchy feeds before he left. No tech or energy signature readings on any of them, the only “new” info of any note was a low-density, level 3 human population spotted on the southern coastal areas of the main continent. New, my ass,....They'd been there for generations from the look of them. Probably descendants of worker bees gone native or left behind by some pre-Clone Wars navigation crew, and missed on the previous sweeps. Some lazy fucks had focused on the other hemisphere and skipped the land masses. He made a note to request a few troopers out here to mop up as soon as these "inspections" were done. The boys and girls in black could use something to take their energy out on besides flogging the work crews.

_Oooooo that was another good one...he'd save that witty riposte for another, safer day too._

Analysis would trip over themselves trying to backdate it to look as if they'd done it right two years ago. Let them. He was going In, scooping up the birdies and getting out, no hurry no fuss.

_There were worse places to be today......like on a badly managed, half-built weapons station when Lord Vader came to do a personal inspection._

Drogan brought the shuttle in over the water. Conditions were pretty stable. He announced that he would be deploying the raft landers and let the shuttle float for the hour they'd allocated to pull the survey droids in.

When Cern demanded to know why, Drogan had claimed that it was to save fuel, but Cern saw the faint smile. Vindictive bastard, he knew perfectly well that Cern got seasick.
Three survey droids seemed to answer the call-in, but none of them actually appeared. Cern insisted that Drogan open the hatch, partly to try to get a visual, and partly for some much-needed fresh air.

Twenty minutes passed.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Drogan said.

At that instant, something bumped the bottom of the shuttle and sent them sprawling. Drogan dove to reach the controls, but before he could the whole shuttle was pulled sideways under the water, hard, fast and deep.

As the seawater rushed in, knocking him sideways, Cern had a glimpse of the black CK-41 unit sucked right out the hatch and bitten in half by a huge dark mouth that opened between gleaming blue eyes. For an instant the droid had looked almost surprised.

He was pulled under, thrashing as the shuttle filled. Salt water poured into his mouth and nose. Something grabbed him and yanked him out the flooded hatch. He swung arms and legs, the lights of the shuttle were disappearing down into the dark but Drogan had him by the shirt and was pulling him up toward the sunlight.

He broke into the air still fighting wildly, choking. “I can’t…I can’t swim!”

Drogan had him by the shoulders, trying to hold him above the surface “Stop it you stupid fu…!”

He let go of Cern and fell backward into the water. What looked like a bolt of metal-tipped wood had gone through his throat.

Cern caught a glimpse of dozens of thin wooden boats all all around him, colorful cloth sails and tall dark haired humans covered with designs standing in them, or leaning over the sides.

He struggled in the water.

*I'm going to drown!* he thought, terrified.

He didn’t though. The Far Islanders riddled him with arrows before he went under the second time.

The Bequa could communicate under water over long distances. They sent a call out and it was passed from pod to pod until it reached the offshore Islands. Lamps were lit that could be seen as far as HarborTown.

Toma and her new husband had the watch together that night and they lit the beacon light atop Markey’s warehouse. It was seen 20 kilometers away in a watchtower on the Grasslands and that tower’s light was seen by the Taun. Portia’s new eyes saw the lights moving inland before the Taun messenger reached the Upland village.

Cassian was with Jyn down at the Sister’s farm when Mose came running with word.

He slipped on the ear clip from his pocket.
“La nave enemiga ha llegado.” Portia said to him, in his mother’s voice, “Murieron y no enviaron ningún mensaje. El Bequa le traerá el buque vacío e intacto.”

(The enemy ship has arrived. They died and sent no messages. The Bequa will bring you the ship empty and undamaged.)

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much to all the super kind people who have commented. The Byzantine mosaic of this... Extra-MPOV, flashbacks, flash forwards, interior dialogue, in-jokes, gratuitous easter eggs, a treehouse... I look back sometimes and I think, oh heavens, who will ever be willing to follow this wild tale of Rogue One feels and over-ambitious Intergalactic adventure? Thank you all for sticking with me through the ride and being so endlessly supportive.
Draven, Tonc and Mothma re-unite with the Alliance. The Bothans don’t know who to trust. Stordan Tonc does not think much of Lando Calrissian.

The Bothans told them they would be transferred within the hour to a heavily shielded shuttle and taken directly to rendezvous with the Alliance.

If there was any of the usual elaborate Bothan skullduggery, he did not see it. Koth Melan must have come to the conclusion that events required speed more than secrecy.

In a way that frightened him more than anything else... It was almost as if the Masters were now reaching out to THEM for help.

The Spynet officials in the room had a look he recognized. He’d seen it thousands of times in the last 18 years. The first had been on the faces of the men and women he’d spent three days huddled with in a wine cellar beneath the Aladarranian Diplomatic Compound.

*Foundation crumbled beneath your feet? Everything you thought you understood about your society and your place in it unravelled? Welcome to the club.*

Mothma was asking questions with the caution of a surgeon probing for shrapnel, “These agents of yours, where they were attempting to make contact with Capt...Major Andor?”

*They were attempting to trace back the signal that was piggybacking onto their feeds.....and, they probably feared, slicing into their security,* Draven thought.

Even if Melan trusted him, and their present survival made him think Melan did, some of the other Masters of Spynet clearly had not. Or perhaps they had not trusted Melan. Rook had been tracked, somehow, by signal, or power signature or some other means....*but how far? Had they located Andor’s base of operations? Was he compromised?*

“Could there have been a reason for your people to have broken contact at that point?” Mothma was asking.

When Rook got into space... *there were large holes in Rook’s narrative, he needed that man in front of him as soon as possible.....there had obviously been a Bothan surveillance/recon team waiting.* Where exactly this had happened was unclear. Rook said he had given them information about a second planet-killer... another Deathstar.... under construction in the Endor System. The Bothan team had clearly believed his data, and yet, it seemed, not completely trusted him. They insisted on doing their own recon. What was remarkable was that they had done this without checking in and without orders from their commanders on Spynet. They had deliberately gone dark. *Why? Spynet officer loyalty was without question.*

*As had been Cassian Andor’s.*
"We gave them the information.” Rook had said.

“We”?? Where were Andor and Erso?

“They didn’t believe you’d act on it,” Draven said, “or they they feared you would not act quickly enough.”

He was glad that Mon Mothma’s face was turned way as he said it.

Melan was sitting still at the table, too stricken to react, but two of the other Masters lowered their heads.

Of course this Ty’re Aya’tal and her crew had not trusted Rook’s word without confirming it themselves. They were Bothans, drilled from the cradle to trust no one outside of clan and company, but once they did see it ......whatever ‘it’ was.....for themselves they had not tried to contact Spynet. They had been heading directly for the Alliance.

Where was the sixteenth master?

Senator Mothma, bless her, had gotten to the same place.

“Master Melan,” she was saying, quietly, “Perhaps it would be best if we contacted Admiral Shollan on the Defender and made sure that your Officer Aya’tal is completely out of medical danger, before transferring her to any other Bothan ship? Perhaps you might go there yourself in order to have a chance to de-brief her personally?”

Welcome to the Rebellion, Koth.

__________________________________

They were taken to a transfer point, a refueling satellite above Myrell and met by an unmarked Alliance shuttle. Draven expected to part there with the three Bothan guards that Melan had sent with them. Mothma even turned, as the ship docked on a service runway, as if intending to.....thank the Skynet representatives? Say goodbye? He had actually been curious to hear what she would say in such a bizarre situation. Whatever she’d planned, she never got to say it. The pilot and the young Bothans followed them onto the shuttle, tooled leather briefcases in hand , and formally requested asylum from the Alliance. Mothma granted it far more quickly than he would have.

All hell must be breaking loose on Bothawui.

Zastiga looked mostly as he remembered it, except that it’s own population had been evacuated and seemed to have been, for the next 24 hours at least, replaced with all the surviving non-combat personnel of the Alliance.

Reikken, Organa and Ackbar were waiting for them as they disembarked.

"Mon," Ackbar said, "Thank the Force! I feared we'd lost you!"

Mothma took his hand, but her eyes were on Organa.
The Princess looked thinner. There were dark smudges under her eyes, and Draven saw the shadow of blackened bruises on her neck, only half hidden by the high collar of an Infantry jacket, but her smile was genuine. "Welcome back, old friend," she said and the two women embraced each other.

"Davits," Carl Reikken eyed him, "You assured me you would be right behind me in that tunnel."

"My poor sense of direction General, I took a wrong turn."

"Friends," Admiral Ackbar was saying, "we have very little time. We need to be fully briefed with myriad intelligence and plan a course of action together within the next few hours.

Everyone moved quickly away from the ship toward the platform and a set of lifts to floors above. Two of Reikken's people were already escorting off the Bothans, presumably off to a processing area.

"Excuse me. Sir?" Corporal Tonc interrupted, "where should I report?"

Oh hell.

"Soldier, you are reporting nowhere until you are debriefed by Intelligence. Until that is done....." Draven touched Mothma's arm, and she paused. "I'm assigning you to act as interim security for the Senator."

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In the end it wasn't a very lengthy security detail, although Tonc fully intended to put it on his resume as "Interim Security/Bodyguard for the Council Chairman of the Alliance to Restore the Republic." He went with Reikken and Draven, the Senator and the Princess up in an elevator, across a mezzanine, down a hallway and into a conference room.

There was a half circle dais with a holo-table in the center and a big projection grid behind.

_Exit on both sides at ground level, two more on upper level, all to building interior, stepped seating for sequential cover, meter high wall for cover along top level, recessed ceiling lighting._

The blond bearded brass (Pathfinders, Marine Field Commander Mandine..... *seemed to be a General now, clearly promotions were getting handed out right and left*) was already there and talking super serious with .....Commander Skywalker?

_Holy hell, Skywalker looked like he'd taken a few rough knocks. He was also in some kind of black uniform Tonc had never seen before. *Was he Spec Ops now?*_

He gave Tonc a wide smile, "Hey, Stordie Tonc. Good to see you. There was a rumor that you got killed going back to save your sweetheart on Hoth."

_Skywalker was letting him know. Bright Horizon was one of the shuttles that made it. Sarge and Berman and the crew got off Hoth. Thanks, man._
"You know what they say, sir," Tonc said, "If you really love something, set it free."

Skywalker laughed. Draven and the Princess were looking at them both funny.

There was also some tall well-groomed fellow in an Alliance officer’s jacket and a velvet cape tossed over one shoulder. Seriously?

_Side arm, leg holster, T15 standard issue_

“I hope you got a little rest on the flight in Leia,” the cape man was saying, giving her a smile like he was trying to sell her a timeshare on Naboo.

“Thank you, Lando, I did.” The Princess said, giving him a super sweet smile in return, “Han wanted me to let you know that he’s looking forward to checking in with you, as soon as medical clears him.”

_Ha! My crazy-ass pirate boyfriend is in town._

“Mon, this is Lando Calrission he has…”

“Of course,” the Senator was saying, holding out a hand, “Director Calrissian, I was informed that the Bespin Consortium’s bold decision to declare support for the Alliance was due to your courage and leadership, and that we have you to thank for saving General Organa from capture, as well.”

_Yeah. Tonc, thought, sweet talk either of these ladies and see how far it gets you._

“An honor ma’am,” Calrissian bowed, flashing the most perfect teeth Tonc had ever seen.

_I don’t know who this guy is, but I hope Draven orders me to shoot him._

The Generals were standing and talking.

“Corporal Tonc,” Draven said, “I’m sending you down to debrief with General Kaya. We’ll assign you new duty after. If you want to apply for transfer, let her know.”

_Transfer?_

“To Intelligence you mean, sir?”

“No, Corporal.” Draven looked at him steady and businesslike, “We both know you wouldn’t last five minutes in Intelligence, but your skills would be valuable in Command Security. Consider it.”

_Command Security? What the fuck was that…?_

Mothma was sitting beside the Princess in the front row of seats, and nodding to cape dude, but she looked up at him then, as if she’d been waiting for Draven to say his name.

_They’re offering to take you out, Stordie. Out of front line Infantry. There’s another fucker out there, they’re going to hit it fast, but they’re probably thinking to scatter Command first, get the Senator and Princess off maybe._

_With respect, fuck that._

_Until Rook shows up and starts packing Rogue One again, I know where I’m going._

“No. Thank you sir, but no. I’ve only ever served in two commands, and if Sarge Perek and Third
Division Pathfinders is still in the game, I’d like to get back to my unit as soon as possible.”

Draven nodded. “Get down to first level then, find Kaya and report. They’ll get you where you need to be.” He turned back to Reikkan. Tonc was dismissed.

*Fair enough.*

The Senator stood as he turned, right in the middle of Cape’s sentence, and held out a hand.

“May the Force be with you, Corporal.”

*Funny, in a way, that’s what Sarge Erso had said when Rook had shut the doors on Yavin IV. She probably didn’t know that though.*

“You too, ma’am.” He kissed her hand, as he turned to go out.

*What was Draven gonna do? Court martial him?*
Chapter Summary

Jyn helps Elder Sister one last time. Portia gets her first clear look at the second Deathstar.

Chapter Notes

Some sad, some plot.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Memsa had funerary rituals. Jyn had even seen a few. She and Cassian had gone to a “farewell feast” when one of Dov’s crew, Mona, (an older yellow-furred female who’d had a disturbing habit of stripping wire through her teeth) had passed, the second spring that they had been here.

Mona had had three children, the oldest of whom was a woodworker who lived on the other side of the hill from the common field. The “potluck” dinner took place in his lumber yard and most of the village came. It was how Jyn found out that Cassian knew how to make bread.

“All that scrap wood. It was a fine big fire, I can tell you.” Tova said, sounding a little more excited about the size of somebody’s funeral pyre than Jyn would have thought proper. Apparently the tradition around here held that close family laid the body on a pyre to burn at dawn after a day and a night had passed, and then there was a meal and people made toasts to the deceased. The Sisters always attended. If the person had no family willing to do the work, Bes explained to Jyn, the Sisters prepared the body.

There was no ritual when one of the Sisters passed, or at least not that anyone else saw.

Jyn was the one who went out in the rain with Beri. It had to be that way, no discussion was possible or necessary. Bodhi was in the air. If something went wrong, or a decision needed to be made about flight patterns, or the satellites or….if something went wrong, Cassian was the best person to coordinate. She grabbed the ear cuff, and the blue rain tarp they'd brought from HarborTown, and ran for the platform.

As she went out over the threshold, poor Beri pulling at her still-wet sleeve, she looked back and saw his face, standing by the data-pads at the table, watching her go.

All his masks were gone now, or of no use to him anymore.

More than the next breath I take, she thought.
It was a line from some old Onderonian love song one of the Partisans used to sing. He must have been a veteran comrade from Saw’s cadre days...they were the only ones he’d let get way with that kind of "sentiment", at least in the first few years. She’d thought such things stupid then.

“I’ll be back as soon as I can,” she said, passing though Portia’s “window” out into the rain.

She ran as fast as she could, but it was coming down very hard now. Being nowhere near as nimble as Beri, she slipped a few times before she got around and down to where Bes and Tova were, in one of the little lean-to tents that had been left up by the wall along the path. One of the braided string circles they wove lay on the damp ground behind them, pushed back a little, and Iola lay curled up between them, her head on Tova’s lap. Neither of them seemed as panicked as Beri looked and Jyn felt.

“I am sorry,” Tova said, “Can you help us take her back to our house? Ea has come for Eldest Sister and many things will be simpler if we can go there sooner rather than later.”

“You should wear the earring,” Bes said, patting her pockets as she crouched down, "If you can bear to, so Ancient Portia can see and tell you and Cassian-ally what is happening with each other.” She took it out and placed it on Jyn’s ear.

“Ancient Portia,” she whispered, close to it, “we are carrying our Eldest Sister home. Tell Cassian-ally that all is well with us, but do not talk too much to Jyn unless you must.”

Oh fuck, Jyn thought, lifting her, she’s so light.

Tova laid the blue tarp Cassian had brought from HarborTown over Iola and Jyn carried her out into the rain. Bes came behind holding Beri’s hand.

They went by the steep shortcut over the hill and as muddy as it was, Jyn didn’t fall. Inside the house, Bes told Beri to go light the lamps, but then had to go help her, when the poor little thing’s hands shook too much to light a straw from the coals still glowing in the hearth. Jyn laid Iola on the small bed near the door, and sat down beside it, dripping water on the dry rushes and the floor stones. She touched Iola’s hand, but it was damp and cold.

Bes had wrapped Beri in a dry cloth and was rubbing her pale fur dry

“Come now, Youngest Sister,” Tova said gently, holding out her hand to the little one, “Second Sister and I will show you how things should be done.”

Saw’s voice spoke quietly in Jyn’s ear. “I am sorry to interrupt. It seemed important to tell you. Bodhi Rook has left planetary atmosphere and is placing the last satellite in upper orbit. Everything has gone according to plan so far. We will be ready to test the arrays in a few minutes...”

“Thank you, Portia,” she whispered.

“I have informed Cassian that Iola has died. He is asking about your condition.”

“I am fine.”
“Jyn, I cannot lie,” so many words Saw would never say. “You are in distress.”

It’s raining, why oh why the hell does it have to be raining?

“Then just tell him I love him,” she said, as low as she could, “and I will be back soon, because both those things are fucking true,”

She had walked back in the rain, coming in gusts now, all the way back to the tower.

There were clearly things the three of them needed to do and she could not help with any of it. They were so kind, as if she were the one who needed comforting.

“Go to Cassian-ally now,” Tova said, squeezing both her hands. “Tell him all is well with us. Care for each other and do the work you need to do.”

“Everything is working.” Portia was saying, “The satellites may be inefficient and primitive but I now have basic vision of 98% of the surface, and an unobstructed view into the adjacent system.”

“That’s good,” Jyn said hoarsely, using her hands to steady herself on the muddy trail down. “Can you see the weapon?”

“Yes….Cassian has suggested that I should hold off reporting in greater detail until you are up here.”

“Fuck it! Portia!”

“It is structurally incomplete, although the situation is complicated by…..this is not time critical to the level of minutes, Cassian is most insistent that I wait.”

She pulled the ear-link off and jammed it back in her pocket.

The storm clouds had broken and the sunset was even showing at the far end of the field. She could see him silhouetted at the top, just inside the threshold. Portia must have the interior lighting turned up. It was all she could do not to run up the ladder-like stairs of the platform on Portia’s wall, but as soon as she got inside he was going to touch her and she almost couldn’t bear it because she knew she would cry and it made her so angry.

*Why? Why cry? Eldest Sister wasn’t like Momma or Saw or Maia or Papa or Kay. Or even like she*
and Cassian. Iola had been ready. How many people get to die when they’re fucking ready?

In the end, he stepped right out onto the platform and pulled her in. She managed to rip off her soaking jacket and scarf, all while swearing furiously, before he just pushed her hands aside and put his arms around her.

He laid out her wet clothes on the floor by the stairs. Portia had a way of drying things out that they probably wouldn’t have understood even if she agreed to explain it, so they never had asked. Jyn sat on one of the benches, in her shorts and a tank, wrapped in the dry blanket. He handed her a small flask.

“What’s this?”

“That stuff that they make in HarborTown.”

“Since when are we keeping liquor up here? That seems like a bad idea.” She uncorked it.

“To Iola,” she said, took a large swallow then passed the hard blue leather bottle back to him. He took a drink then sealed it again. He’d drunk things that burned worse, but not often.

“We can’t tell Bodhi yet, he adored her. He’s under enough stress up there.”

Cassian didn’t have the heart to tell her that Portia had had open links between the three of them. Bodhi had probably heard at the same time he had. Except Bodhi may have had to hear it in Galen Erso’s voice.

Portia stood at the end of the table, as Jula, looking miserable. For second, he’d crazily thought of passing her the flask.

He tossed the bottle well out of reach onto the mattress by the stairwell.

“Bodhi Rook is holding in a stationary orbit with the planet’s shadow between him and the ugly observational arrays the Enemy has paced between us and the Endor System. You should be able to speak to him directly again in a few hours. He is physically well, eating some dried fruit, and has basically told me to ‘shut the hell up and let him rest for a few minutes.’ He’s normally very polite, so I'm assuming he's having a post-adrenaline crash. Hopefully he'll feel less stressed when his blood sugar evens out. ”

So far so good.

“You said you can see it Portia?” Jyn asked, ‘Is it…like the other one.”
The image nodded, "Almost exactly, at least as you’ve described it, and according to all images and schematics I’ve seen, but there are some differences, mostly to the power core and the weapon array."

*Shit. Erso’s flaw? Did they find it?*

Jyn was already ahead of him. “What do you mean? My father’s……the exhaust port…has it been…..do they know about…?”

“No,” Portia said, “there is no sign that the changes are made to compensate for that. The previous weapon was utilizing a massive amount of high purity laser-reactive crystal in a fairly clever, if power-inefficient, closed sequence reactor, this weapon is using far smaller amounts of less reactive crystal.”

*Of course it is…..there’s a finite amount of kyber in the known galaxy…I ought to know, we tracked them hoarding it for years, without knowing quite what we were seeing. Until Tivik gave me the last piece of the puzzle…*

“They used up most of their stockpile on the first weapon?” Jyn wrapped the blanket tighter around herself.

“A fair assumption,” Portia agreed, “Also, the structural integrity of the station itself is less than 65% functional…..honestly they are either idiots or they’re purposely constructing it backwards…they seem to be concentrating on making the weapon functional before they even finish the housing structure.”

"But you’re saying it’s still less powerful than the original weapon?” Jyn asked.

Portia-as-Jula, shook her head, “I see the line of your logic. You are correct, the weapon…..if completed to the design I’m extrapolating to, based on what I can see from here, would be, at best 65% as powerful as the first weapon but…”

“65% of a planet-killer is still a planet killer,” Cassian said. “No world could expect to survive a direct strike.”

“Holy fucking hell, why are we not transmitting this Portia?” Jyn asked, “We have to get this to the Alliance, and we have to get it to them now.”

“Agreed in theory,” Portia said, “But there are a number of other observational anomalies that could profoundly affect strategic planning, and I strongly recommend resolving some before initiating a message that may trigger a difficult to reverse course of action.”

*She’s stressing out, Cassian thought, even Kay would slap somebody for talking like this.*

“Like fucking what?” Jyn demanded.

“For reasons I can’t quite fathom they’ve created an ground-based energy link between the station and the inhabited moon it orbits and, more germane to our problem,” her image tilted it’s head, “I’ve figured out where all the Enemy's ships have been hiding.”

Chapter End Notes
I can't help it. I get sentimental over the thought of these not-really-quite-recovered kids and how stunned they are to be in love with each other....something neither of them have any previous context for or experience of.
Chapter Summary

Sergeant Perek of the First Infantry Pathfinders unit, Davits Draven and Flight Lieutenant Shara Bey of Green Squadron all do what they must to prepare for the Battle of Endor. Bodhi is (partially) debriefed while being somewhat circumspect in his answers, and Poe Dameron's parents are given a (partially) gratuitous shout-out.

Chapter Notes

The Rebellion has more than enough heartbreak to go around.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dielle Perek assembled her squad in the bay, next to the "commercial" transports. Dameron was co-leader.

When General Cracken and Crix Mandine had outlined the apocalyptic crazytimes they'd be running, the only thing she could think of to say was, "Get me Kes Dameron", the guy was a rock and this sounded like the ultimate bad Saturday night, like a hell mission inside a hell mission inside a booby trap. She had pulled Dameron, Berman, Dorin and Page and (despite some misgivings) the apparently unkillable Stordan Tonc.

They were one of three teams going to a moon in the Force-forsaken Endor system. While they geared up she explained what was happening. Pathfinders Spec Ops were usually pretty hard to shake up, but they all looked at her like she was nuts, all except for Tone….because, Force help the kid…he’d seen worse.

There is a second Deathstar.

That statement alone had brought a lot of battle-hardened Alliance vets to their knees. When Mon Mothma and Ackbar’s address came over the main comm system, she’d thought she was losing the audio in an echo, before she realized she'd just stopped breathing for a few minutes and was damn close to blacking out. She was standing in a wide carpeted convention hall with about a thousand other people, looking up at a screen wall that probably usually showed sales vids and promos.

The words came through then….Officially, it was unfinished, non-operational. Flight Squadrons were gearing up to go in on a blitz attack, take the thing out while it was still not mobile. That was the story. No holds barred. All ships and all units were on standby. Alderaan would not be allowed to happen again.
Mon Mothma was in white on the holo, chain of Senatorial office back in place, and talking about how some Bothans had run a suicide mission to get the info out, how the thing was unwatched because the Imperial Fleet was scattered searching false leads all over the Outer Rim and they had to strike now. It was surreal and she'd stood frozen still to listen to the officer’s brief that supposed to immediately follow. When her comm started buzzing, she looked down. It was a blast from Mandine, she was being called in…. Now. Level 3. Spec Ops.

Bren Derlin was already up on Level 3 when she got there, (no surprise) as was General Cracken, and Mandine.

Also (surprise!) Captain Solo, Commander Skywalker, (big surprise!!) Leia Organa and, a slim dark eyed guy who stumped her for a second until she placed him. Bodhi Rook, the mechanic from Echo Base who’d been blood brothers with Tonc because….. oh mama….. Rogue One. She remembered him as a shaky guy, with an eyepatch for a while, and a thousand meter stare, but not anymore. He was looking sharp and a little battered but like a man who had no time for this shit.

Nothing about the “Deathstar II” was what it seemed, was the gist, aside from the fact that the fucker actually existed and this might very well be the last hurrah. The Fleet was going in, but the whole set-up was some kind of double-switch. Oh glory. Not her mission not her problem. Mandine and Cracken were setting up squads to go in for a land operation. That was all she needed to know.

She and Derlin had, maybe two hours, to put two teams together. The Empire had massive shield arrays set up on one of Endor’s moons. The job of the ground teams would be to take them out. They would go in on pirated Imperial craft and be dropped. They had proximate locations but the target sites were several hundred kilometers apart on the surface and very well protected, terrain was extremely rough, enemy numbers were shifting, speed and stealth were absolutely vital. Solo and Skywalker would be going in at the same time on a “complimentary but corollary mission” ….whatever the hell that meant?

“At least they don’t know we’re coming,” Derlin said.

“’Oh, they know “we’re” coming,” Rook said, “They just don’t know “you’re” coming.”

Organa proceeded to outline a desperate, insane and....pretty straight up....suicide mission.

Perek kept found her eyes straying to Rook.

Is this what it would have been like if they'd listened to Jyn Erso and just given her a cast of thousands? she wanted to ask him.

For three years she’d wondered why Rue Melshi had never come to her that day, never asked her. Because he thought she wouldn't go with him, or because he knew she would? Maybe she'd get a chance to ask him soon.
1:40 hours until deploy.

Dameron had asked for only one thing, as she knew he would. He had to go down and say goodbye to Lt. Bey.

“Go,” Perek said, “I’ll stow your gear.” She had no one to say goodbye to but Mercy and Dad, and she’d recorded that vid a long time ago. All she had to do was hit ‘send.’

“Keep it clean!” Berman shouted after him.

“No,” Dameron said, heading for the loading bays where Green Squadron was docked.

They were loading into some slightly bruised-up UD30C. The pilot was around the side, checking the fuel connections.

“This isn’t Imperial?” Page was saying, “how will we get it past their surveillance?”

Don’t worry about that,” the pilot called as he came around. “It will look plenty Imperial when the time comes.” Bodhi Rook was smiling and wiping his hands on his flight suit, “because we will have every access code and secure Imperial password, no matter how fast they change them.”

She had been about to introduce him round, but it wasn’t necessary because Tonc fairly tackled the guy and started shouting “YEAH! Bodhi Fucking Rook!!!”

_____________________________________

It was a debrief, not an interrogation, he reminded himself. They had already downloaded all of the data from Rook’s ship, via the Defender. It was terrifying stuff but Rook was absolutely clear and answered everything asked of him throughly, urgent but not impatient. There were gaps in his narrative but not about any points salient to the data, the weapon or the mission. He summarized well and went into specifics when questioned. When necessary he would double back and re-phrase, re-state. It would have been an impressive presentation from a trained operative, under conditions like these, but it was even more so coming from a man Draven had first met as a shell-shocked Imperial defector, blinking in the sunlight on Yavin IV. Neither was this the recovering survivor he had plucked out of a Med Bay alcove on Echo Base. This was a Bodhi Rook that Davits Draven hadn’t met before.

_It was only in the non-technical, non-strategic statements, answers to inquiries not related directly to_
the weapon station, to Imperial disposition, the Endor System, or the moon's layout,...that he could hear the careful “channelling,” the pauses between words to re-calculate an answer. He recognized the style, the pacing, although it was likely no one else could have....except maybe Tano, Force rest her soul.... Rook had clearly been coached by one of the very best.

Andor and Erso were confirmed to have escaped on the TC3 shuttle, just after transmitting to Profundity, a bare breath ahead of Scarif’s destruction. They had both been gravely injured and the shuttle, although damaged, seemed to have operated on some kind of auto-pilot (?). They had no navigational control and eventually crashed on a planet near (?) the Endor System (?) where they recovered and slowly cobbled together equipment from a long abandoned pre-Clone Wars data station, their shuttle and other debris (?) eventually managing to get signals back to the Alliance and slowly, over time, to discover the weapon station and monitor the situation unfolding. They had had no access to a ship or standard equipment until Rook “accidentally” found them (??????) when his ship suffered damage in hyperspace. Together they had all adapted the Operation Shepard receivers and relays to focus on Endor. While placing these, Rook had been located (?) by the Bothans who had also been monitoring the the system on suspicions of their own (?). When spotted by Imperial Security the Bothans had transferred three of their injured crew to “Guardian” (?) and led the Interceptors away, allowing their ship to be destroyed, and sacrificing themselves (here, for the first time, Rook seemed to genuinely choke up....either that or Andor really was a master trainer) to maintain secrecy and enable Rook’s escape. He had managed, barely, to reach the Alliance ship Defender.

“How did you find Defender?” Cracken asked.

Thank you, Aerin, I've been working on an aneurysm over that one.

Rook paused, as if for a breath...nicely done.... “I didn’t,” he said, “I had my last contact with Cassian...that is, Major Andor...while making the jump to light speed...and was sent coordinates for the possible location of an Alliance ship. I took the chance that it would still be there.”

“had my last”...not “lost” contact....Damn it Andor, if I’d known you were this good I might have never left you in the field.

Cracken looked at him, then at the Admiral. Draven bowed his head. There was no time to take this apart, to dig for flaws. He had done that when Erso spoke at Yavin IV. All he could do now was nod.

“Thank you, Captain Rook. Please report to the officer in the flight area and stand by for orders.” Ackbar said, and turned to the rest of the room.

“I need Jan in the holo suite with the positioning data,” he said, “It is all or nothing now, I think we all agree. Leia, we will listen to your mad plan, but I want to speak with Skywalker again myself first. Mon, I will meet in you communications shortly. General Draven, coordinate with General Kaya and initiate Firestorm Protocols.”

Of course..... Just as we did before.

Ackbar strode out, pressure suit hissing faintly as he moved faster than it could adjust, Organa and
Cracken flanking him. Everyone else scattered and Command aides cleared the data pads. As they both moved toward the doorway to the mezzanine, Mon Mothma laid a hand on Bodhi Rook’s arm.

“Please,” she said, quietly “there is nothing I can say. ‘Thank you’ could never be enough, but…. can you tell me….are they…?”

She was taller than he was but she was already leaning a little down, as she so often had to do, so Rook raised up on his toes slightly and whispered something in her ear. She smiled, and then he bowed slightly, as boys on Jedha were taught to do to their elders, and moved away quickly, bypassing the crowd at the lift, to run down the stairs back toward the docking bays.

As soon as Shara Bey heard the words "General Calrissian" she’d known that it had to be a “stalking horse” maneuver. “General Calrissian” had to be the pretty boy "Cloud City Director" from Bespin.

“General” my ass. Clearly some kind of fake-out was being set up..

*Something had been spooky about that whole Bespin thing, but Skywalker and the Princess had brought him in, along with 47 brand new mercantile gas freighters loaded with fuel. A “Retail Commission?” You’d like to think it would take more than gas to buy a Generalship, but in this army who knew? Maybe tabana fuel concentrate had finally gotten that tight. It was above a Flight Sargeant’s pay grade to wonder about anything. The guy was supposed to be an ex-smuggler pilot, and some old friend of Solo’s, although he wasn’t even cleared to fly anything other than Solo’s souped-up junk freighter. Chewbacca’s problem, not hers.*

He’d been flying the Falcon because word had been that Captain Solo was dead, or captured, which was usually the same thing, trying to get the Princess out of Echo Base. It had been a real blow to morale for a while, the guy had brought the party and no mistake. Skywalker took it real hard, obviously. She’d only seen him once or twice since Hoth. He was off flight rotation and reassigned…where was unclear….and he was looking…changed.

A few days ago, word came that Solo had been rescued and was being brought in, by an off-the books rescue mission to Tatooine….whispered word was that Organa had run it on her own.

"I guess rank has it’s privileges,” one of the new Green Squadron pilots said over a few too many shots, cooped up in the Home One secret “canteen.” Lt. Shara Bey shut her down fast and nobody else made a peep.

*The kid was a crack flyer but her girlfriend hadn’t come back from a recon mission before the last jump, so she let her off with a lecture, after she sobered up, and didn’t report her, but still…*

That kind of shit talk needed to get cleared out quick before it festered. Perek had told Bey, “You
better get these kids in the air soon to occupy their minds.”

*Like her mama used to say, be careful what you ask for.*

Most of the X-wing fleet, Red, Black and Rogue Squadrons were still off circling with Home One, or hidden in ferry stations somewhere off Utapau, but Green was here, fueling up to scramble.

They’d get orders in the air, they were told, on comm.

She pressed her free hand against the collar of her flight suit, to feel the locket that she couldn’t open….hadn’t opened since she’d sealed it and put him in her mother’s arms almost two years ago….with a curl of soft black hair and a tiny holo disk inside.

*Mama loves you baby boy, here or on the other side of the galaxy, dead or alive. Everything I do, it’s all for you baby.*

She looked up when Gommer stood on the top of the Y-wing’s cockpit, and heard her shout “PDA alert! Bey, you’ve got incoming!” while pointing across the dock.

Lt. Shara Bey turned and saw her husband running toward her. He was suited up for a ground mission, of course he was. She opened her arms and smiled.

The Battle of Endor would commence in just over one hour.

Chapter End Notes

Because I am beating the non-sequential time-line and multiple POV thing to death with a hammer…or have I had too much coffee?

Baby Poe…sniffle….
Chalcedony

Chapter Summary

Stordan Tonc rejoins his unit after his short stint in Intelligence and has a few minutes with Bodhi Rook to catch up on the news.

Chapter Notes

Maybe five lines in the film and 30 seconds of screen time and now he's my favorite everyman. How did this happen?

He'd hustled out of that conference room double time having gotten a smile out of the Senator, which was worth it, but with a feeling Draven was probably glaring daggers at his back.

Tont respected the guy, he really did. He must have been fairly badass when he was young and, for brass, still retained some major cojones but, honestly, Intelligence was the fucking worst.

_Not like I'm ever going to be the poster boy for mental health after all this shit, Tonc told himself, but one more day of that sneaking around and I'd be going off the fucking edge._

The soldier who was supposed to walk him down was tapping his ear comm. "Corporal Tonc," he relayed, "First Infantry Pathfinders is mostly here, they came in as escort with Green Squadron, but I'm ordered to get you back in uniform," he eyed Tonc's expensive suit warily, "and kitted up for duty before I take you down."

"Sweetest words I've ever heard," Tonc said. "Lead the way." It didn't matter if they issued him a pair of clown pajamas as long as it came with a sidearm. He kind of hoped they'd let him stash the shoes though, these were hands down the nicest shoes he'd ever worn.

It was a true Rebel Alliance operation. They'd set up the Quartermasters in what looked like a former storage room and a makeshift small arms armory in what was probably a coat check. There was actually a line of people, some in uniform, most in civilian and few in half and half combinations a'la Captain Solo, so he had to stand a few minutes and wait. Eventually they gave him an Infantry shirt, pants and boots (he insisted on a claim tag for the shoes...worth a try anyway). Jackets were apparently running short so they just tossed him the rank pips.

He was surprised to find he was a Sargent now.

"Keep racking up those posthumous promotions and you're going to make General yet," said a voice behind him. It was Corporal Lee Berman, he grabbed Tonc and slapped him on the back.

Sargent Major Perek was standing behind him.

"You stupid fuck," she said, shaking her head in disgust, "please tell me you did not go AWOL
straight into the middle of Lord Vader's ice cream social just to save a damn tauntaun."

He tried explaining that he'd actually been commandeered into a major Intelligence mission, but she just told him to get his ass down to the lobby and line up with the rest of the unit, while she decided whether he was too stupid to keep or too lucky to throw out. There was a big announcement supposed to be coming across soon, she said.

*Yeah, Tonc thought, Brace yourself kids, stuff’s going to be coming about any time now.*

He walked down, following Berman, keeping his eyes peeled for Rook.

***

Later, they had maybe ten minutes on their own. Tonc climbed up into the cockpit while Rook ran checks, getting all his systems back on Alliance comm channels and such.

“So they’re OK, though?” He was saying, “The Captain and the Sarge? Gimme the details, Rook, super short form.”

“Yeah,” Bodhi Rook said, “It was bad… a longer story than I know. They had to climb up by hand to transmit from the top, I told you that before, right?”

“No, no you did not, man, you wouldn’t talk about it.” *Fuck! The whole fucking data tower? That had to be 80 meters bare minimum. It must have been like a barrel shoot in there. “How’d they get down?”*

“Cass…the Captain, was hurt very badly. I got the impression from what he said, I think, at least…that she pretty much carried him down.”

*Yeah. I can see her doing that.*

“But they found a shuttle, abandoned by the tower…and made it out with that, then crashed…way way out.”

*Like the General had said to the guy, but it was better to hear it from a guy who wasn't bargaining to stay alive. “So they’ve been stuck someplace?”*

“Basically.”

“Wow. Stuck someplace rugged for like, two years and better. So…even if they weren’t doing it before…you gotta figure….?”
“Tonc! Man! You are such a dick. Is there nothing you can’t make cheap?”

“Hey, you’re the one who told me I’m owed twenty credits. They can be out there in the back of nowhere having super spy babies, if they want. I say bless’em, they’ve earned it. They’re OK though?

“They were alright when I saw them a week ago…Somebody had to stay with the…look, it’s complicated, so I’m just going to say “equipment”, but it’s possible that they’re on the move.”

“They found it though? It was them, doing some secret surveillance shit, right?”

“Yeah.”

Good. Tonc thought. Nobody listened to her the first time but us, but they’re listening this time. There’s still four of us left and we do not give up.

“Fucking Rogue One, man,” He said, patting Rook on the shoulder. The pilot nodded. “So we’re going back for them, right? As soon as we blow up the second fucker?”

Before Rook could answer, somebody, banged on the cockpit glass. It was a tech leaning off a fuel rig.

“Mission Shuttle 1. You’re ready! Move up in five!” came crackling over the comm.

“Hey!” Rook said, ”She sent me with something for you.”

He pulled a rock out of his chest pocket and handed it to Tonc.

Opaque quartz. Chalcedony was what they’d called it in school, or Jasper. A nice one with grey and black speckles in it.

Wow. He knew for a fact that he’d never really talked to Jyn Erso except to say “Here, Sarge,” when he’d passed her up that dead Imp’s helmet. How the hell had she known he’d had rock collection back home?
How Most People Wind Up in the Rebellion.

Chapter Summary

Jyn and Cassian learn of Bodhi’s first contact with the Bothans. Cassian has a flashback to one of his early assignments in the Alliance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Portia?" Cassian was saying, “How many of them are there?"

They were in the tower, Jyn had been sleeping, having just lain down an hour or two before. When they split shifts like this, she often took the late night and he took his turn starting before dawn.

"You'd have done better than me on the farm," she'd said with a smile once, "mornings will never come naturally to me." A strange thing to say. He supposed she must mean on Lah'mu, where the cave had been, where Galen Erso had tried to hide them before the man in white hunted them down.

He couldn't imagine any other time she could have ever lived on a farm. Was he a "morning person?" What did that even mean?

He had a dim memory of being squeezed, sleepy and protesting, between his parents on their tiny balcony watching the sun rise over the other University dorms on Carrida, toasting with juice and laughing  "Mira al cello! I will never get tired of it!" His father had said. Had they been remembering the darkness in the mines and the smoke on Fest?

He’d laid a hand on her shoulder, crouching by the mattress on the floor, to wake her. Portia had suddenly re-imaged, as a young man with long black hair. Something was happening with Bodhi after he had used the satellite data to venture a recon closer to the Endor System. When he’d gone back into hyperspace, intending to skirt the long way around again, something had come up. A ship was tracking him now.

Jyn was awake in an instant, pulling on a sweater and scrambling onto her feet in the same motion, “What’s happening?"

Portia was looking off somewhere toward the far side of the round room, the young man’s face was frowning.

“There are six of them inside,” she was saying, “All Bothans. Limited defensive weapons, heavy
The ship is pleasant enough, in a kind of utilitarian way."

"Portia, I swear…"

"Why are we not hearing them over Bodhi’s ship comms?" Jyn was asking.

"They are jamming his transmissions…I could override it but they would notice it at once. Bodhi has sensibly put the mod on so I can hear and see what he is up to….They must be skilled pilots…putting an energy-link on another ship while in light speed is extremely difficult and endangers the structural integrity of both craft.” She turned to look at him with a concerned expression. “They are ordering him to drop out of light speed and allow them to board.”

"Are they working for the Empire?"

Jyn was asking him, but Portia answered “They seem not to be, that is….they have no direct links or current connections to Imperial transmission channels and have sent no messages in Imperial code for more than 36 standard days….when their systems were last purged. They have been monitoring Imperial channels but only in a wide-band surveys ….as if they were watching them.” A smile seemed to twitch at the corner of the image’s mouth. “They have all sorts of layers of shielding, and rings of code buffering, it’s kind of sweetly intricate.”

That’s one description of Spynet I’ve never heard, “sweetly intricate.”

"Bothans?" Jyn asked. She seemed to shiver a little, “Those guys who, when you hack their code, it always feels like you were only able to do it because they wanted you to hack their code….it’s creepy…..I always went long ways around to never hack their code.”

Not always far enough, little thief, I had to trade 4 months of Hutt cartel narcotics activity surveillance for a file on Lianna Halleck, but I got one…a thin one, admittedly…

“What the fuck? Why are they grabbing Bodhi?"

All of Portia’s precautions? Were they not enough? Did they track her transmissions back here?

“I’ve been watching a large amount of activity from them, on and off, they are mostly very busy trying to protect themselves from the Enemy’s observation. They’ve been very successful for the most part, certainly they didn’t need any help from me.”

Help?

“Help?” Jyn said, sitting on a bench and grabbing the data pad, so she could at least see Bodhi’s ship read-outs too.

“Portia,” he asked, “have you been “helping” the Alliance? With more than the data packets?”

“When I could. Cassian,” she turned the young man’s head to look at him somewhat chidingly, “Until, a few days ago I could barely see. I’m only a voice out there, you know? Barely a whisper, but I am not idle. I have been talking over the odd tracker here and there….your pilots are brave but sometimes they are careless, or just in a hurry….understandable with all that shooting. I’ve been checking, fudging the reads around a few of those pretty Mon Cala ships when they pop in and out. Protecting my….this…us… here, has been and is my first priority, but I WILL fight them. I hope I have been sufficiently clear about that.”

Her image was looking very directly at him.
She’s an ally not an asset, Cassian, he reminded himself. You are not her handler and she wants to make sure you know that.

“Wait, wait,” Jyn said, “Bodhi just looped outside the Endor system, right? We were so busy trying to hide him from Imperial eyes….what if they weren’t tracking HIM, as much as they were watching THEM?”

“Well,” Portia was saying, “He’s got no choice but to drop out of the stream and let them board him, so perhaps we’ll know soon. He say’s not to worry. I have informed him that you are already worried. Wait, oh dear…….yes….that’s what I feared.”

“What?” He and Jyn both snapped at the same time.

“We’ve exceeded the consistent range of auditory/visual communication through the mod. They have dropped out of the stream into an high radio density system. I know his position but I cannot see or hear him.” The young man’s face frowned. “So now we know that at least.”

Jyn laid down the pad and put her hands to her face. He wanted desperately to try to comfort her, because knew what she was thinking as if he could read it written on the tabletop. We just got Bodhi Rook captured again.

“They won’t hurt him,” he tried to reassure her. “They have strict edicts against that.”

*If they decide to kill him, they’ll do it as painlessly as possible.*

He’d almost never worked with Bothan agents. Tano didn’t trust them much. Cracken and Draven had worked with Spynet, but only on their own, directly, as they wanted as few of their own assets exposed as possible.

It had been on one of his first wetwork assignments, *although Draven had drilled him to never use that word in front of General Tano.* A Communications Authority Department Lead Manager on Chandrilla, had gotten a hold of safe-house locations of family members of Senate staff secretly helping the Alliance. No doubt fancying himself “non-partisan”, he had tried simple blackmail on his own for a while, but then decided that selling the whole list to the Imperial Security Forces for a lump sum was less risky and almost as lucrative, if he bargained right.

Most of the fine dining wait staff had been droids in the capitol’s fashionable downtown eateries, but the busy and popular restaurant where the man insisted on meeting his Imperial contact (*people always thought they were safer in a busy familiar public place, for some stupid reason*) used ‘artisanal’ human cooks. The bakers and dessert staff, mostly kids from the Outer Rim, prepped for the day and left long before the restaurant opened to customers. The set-up took several days but it had been easy in the end for one young baker to double back and work his way up to the second floor of the restaurant bar, with a gun and scope he’d disassembled and hidden inside the bread racks, and to stay concealed until the dinner service started several hours later. One of the wait-droids blew a power panel, right on time, and when the bang turned all heads, a single shot dropped the Communications Authority Department Lead Manager backwards in his seat against the wall (*people also always seemed to think sitting in a corner was safer too*). If he’d been messy, if the body had pitched forward for instance, instead of slumping down, eyes open, it might have taken less than a minute before someone noticed the dead man and let out a scream. Neatness bought him the extra
sixty seconds he needed, though. The smoke from the droid set off the fire alarms, making it possible for an ordinary looking boy in a cleaners uniform to slip out the fire exit with the other housekeeping staff and droids, all of which were glitching and crashing into things, just to add to the confusion.

He remembered feeling what he hoped wasn’t pride, exactly, but he knew had been something like that. It had been a clean operation. He’d eliminated the threat, in time to move all the compromised staff and their loved ones. He’d gotten out alive and most important, he’d come up with a plan he’d been able to execute entirely on his own, endangering no other Alliance personnel or civilians.

As he came out from the service alley, jacket and scarf ditched, and milled with the sidewalk crowd listening to the sirens and watching troopers rope off the street, he suddenly found himself facing….well looking down at,... the restaurant maitre d’, now mysteriously out of his uniform. The Bothan clicked his teeth thoughtfully with a glance at Cassian and another back toward the chaos at the end of the block.

“Even necessary and strategic violence is a sign of weakness present and weakness to come. Influence is the only true shield, and advantage may be long sustained by it.”

De qué diablos estás hablando? Am I getting a damn critique here? His sixteen year-old self had thought, frozen for an instant. The Bothan only turned, shaking his head and wandered away in the opposite direction. Cassian moved through the crowd to the pick up point.

He’d told Tano and Draven about it in his report, and while Tano had only grunted in annoyance, Draven had taken the time to explain that it was a line from some incomprehensible book of the great philosopher-sage of Bothawui, and that for a Bothan to have to kill was a sign of failure. Furthermore, torture, or to injure, or cause pain to an enemy was beyond shameful. It was all supposed to be about “strategic advantage” and manipulation, anything else was dishonorable.

“Nice work if you can get it, I suppose,’ Draven had said dryly, which was as close to a joke as Cassian ever heard out of him.

“What happens when that doesn’t work?” He’d asked, surprising even himself with the question. This was not school, he was not here to learn military philosophy. He knew what he was, or thought he did. Draven had only shrugged, talked out, but it was one of the only occasions, after his interviews, that he remembered Tano actually speaking to him, except in a debrief or to give orders.

She had been halfway to the door, but she’d turned, tossing her head-tails over her shoulder, to look back at him “Their bloody world ends and they have to find something new to live for.”

There was probably a file on him in Spynet. He never wanted to know what it said.

He had put his hands on Jyn’s shoulders, trying to reassure her, but she must have felt something else in them. She reached up and back, turning to look up at his face.

“No,” she said, “stop.” Squeezing his fingers hard. Somehow she always knew when he was getting pulled back. How did she know?

“Listen to me, if they were just watching, trying to gather intelligence on what the Empire is doing at
Endor, they must have seen the weapon, right?” Jyn was saying. She turned back to the data schematic of the Bothan ship that Portia was showing them, but kept ahold of his hand, leaning back against him as if to anchor him to her.

“Unlikely, from their position,” Portia said. “It is blocked by the shadow of the moon and most of it’s signatures are distorted by proximity to the gas giant. We are only able to scan it because of our position, and because we knew where to look.”

“Alright,” Jyn insisted, “I’m making a list of ‘knowns’ here: #1 The Bothan’s are terrified of the Empire,…safe assumption because everybody is terrified of the Empire. #2 They collect information like it’s shiny beads, right? That’s always what everybody says about them, they’re data merchants….”

Portia was playing too, “#3 They put what is colloquially termed a “tractor beam” on Guardian at light speed. Which is difficult and very dangerous, so they are clearly willing to risk their own survival in order to obtain some information that they believe he has.”

“#4 They’re going to question him…but not hurt him, right? Oh fuck, Bodhi is a terrible liar sometimes and an ok liar others.” Jyn said.

Well, I’ve been working with him on that, Cassian thought,

“He won’t need to lie,” he said."He’s going to tell them. He won’t bring them back here because he would not risk exposing Ea and everybody on it, at this point. He’ll know to give them the time-sensitive data first. That’s what he’s out there for, right, get information about the weapon to the Fleet so they can destroy it? A Bothan ship might have the potential to get the word back to the Alliance faster than we can.”

“Is that #5?” Portia asked. “I can calculate this far faster than either of you, you know, just give me the analysis points.”

They ignored her for the moment.

“It’s too big,” Cassian said, “They won’t believe him without confirmation (…like Saw…he left unsaid…), They’ll try to confirm it for themselves.”

“if they do that, and they don’t get caught….big if….will they help us?” Jyn wanted to know.

“*Their bloody world ends and they have to find something new to live for,*” he thought, *That’s how most people wind up in the Rebellion, isn’t it*?

“I hope so,” he told her

She stood up then. “I’d better put my pants on then,” she put her arms around him, just for a moment and he kissed her mussed brown hair. Plan B. No secrets. He’d told her and they both agreed it sucked.

Portia’s image stood by the table, seeming to gaze out some window they couldn’t see.

“Bodhi Rook has an ability to make other people brave,” she said, “Perhaps he will also help these Bothans.”

There was nothing to do but wait. The Bequa were bringing an Imperial shuttle to the coast…..maybe even a working shuttle.
One hour later, Portia informed them that Bodhi's ship was back on the move. Moving back dangerously close to Endor. Three hours later, he put on the ear clip again, uninjured but under extreme stress. Guardian had three badly injured Bothan's aboard and Bodhi was flying through debris, the ship was taking damage. He was asking for a safe place to jump to, any safe place to jump to. Portia found only two, a small station that three Alliance fighters had taken over for emergency refueling and might be still holding out at, and a distortion that might be a Mon Cala ship dropping out of hyperspace, before putting up its shields. Cassian made the decision. They did not hear from him again for a few hours, and by then they had already started for the shuttle, which was being pulled up the river to the Taun's territory.

Chapter End Notes

De qué diablos estás hablando = "What the hell/devil are you talking about?"

Mira al cello = "look at the sky".....mostly, I hope.

The Battle of Endor is coming. Just a few more chapters...and maybe some epilogues.

Blessings on all the heartbreakingly kind comments and those who make them.
Seeing

Chapter Summary

A short bit about Portia’s view of things. Also, everybody knows it's a trap, but they're going to have to go anyway.

There was a time it would have been a grief to her, such poor vision. The pitiful spectrum range, the inability to focus, low density imaging, and gap-ridden timing would have been unbearable. Not anymore.

Oh look, I’m flying.

Perspective changes everything…..that was one of Dor’s sayings. He used to tease her, playing the sophisticated traveller regaling his stay-at-home siblings. It had never bothered her although he got on Tostan’s nerves with it, sometimes. How could she be annoyed when he took such infectious joy in his traveling and sharing his colorful tales? Oh, Dor. The call had come and he had gone dismissing their fears with his usual “Work hard dears! I will be back soon.” She and Toston had combed every signal as the galaxy closed around them, questioned every ship that fled past. No one knew. Worlds were burning. So many were vanishing, who could grieve for one small brave ship?

“I had a brother who was a ship,” she told Bodhi Rook, on that first flight, “He said it was the most wonderful feeling possible.”

“It is,” he said, then, after a pause, “I’m sorry about your brother.”

“Thank you,” Portia said, and there was nothing else to say.

She didn’t want to distract him, because she couldn’t figure out how the poor thing managed at all anyway. That navigational computer was terrifyingly dumb, although she’d boosted it as best she could, so she didn’t intend to speak again until they had left the atmosphere. His serotonin levels really did improve significantly once the ship had lifted off. They were so unspeakably fragile and yet they charged around as if they simply didn’t know it.

///A-int.L2///…….This is very interesting,” she told Jyn and Cassian, “The ships used to try my patience sometimes, but I can certainly see how this could go to your head.”

Cassian and Jyn had come back up and sat drinking the caffeinated hot leaf broth that Bes had left in one of the wool-wrapped jars. They were monitoring progress and staying in voice contact through the ships systems, both working very hard at keeping themselves calm. Cassian was better at it than Jyn, although she was periodically taking pauses to hold onto the crystal she wore on a cord around her neck and close her eyes, which seemed to help her. It was raining fairly heavily on her solar arrays when Beri, the delightful pre-adolescent Mem, came running up the outside
As the first satellite came on line she began to see the rest of her planet again…poorly, haltingly…. for the first time since the Knights had left everything to crumble.

Oh my heavens, look at the cetaceans on the far side!

The little ship continues it’s pass and released the second array. She began to sync it to the first.

And the bradypods too! They’ve expanded their range all the way to the Polar regions! Good for them.

///A-int.L2/////////Ext.Jula.R.a////////.Bodhi/Cassian, Jyn is using the mod and is assisting in carrying Iola to the dwelling in Agricultural Station 2. Iola no longer has any discernible cardiac activity. I am very sorry but she has died…..///Ext.Jula.R.a/////////A-int.L2///

Oh. It never got any easier. Such thin glass, such bright light.

Bodhi was distressed, and did cry a little, but adjusted his heart rate and breathing very quickly. Flying really did seem to help him a great deal.

“Alright,” he said, unnecessarily, although she appreciated the gesture “I’m taking her out.”

It really was lovely.

///A-int.L2///…….Cassian was also working with elevated stress levels. He did not cry. He seldom did when awake. He was keeping track of Bodhi’s status on the displays.

“Jyn esta bien?” he asked.

Portia had a brief discussion with Jyn.

“She says she loves you and she will come back soon.” This lowered his stress levels slightly, but contrarily also caused him to cry a little, which was so unlike his usual response that it concerned her.

“Cassian, are you hurt?” she said.

“No,” he wiped his eyes on the back of his hand. “Bodhi, the data is coming through, it looks like everything is working..”…..///A-int.L2///
Bodhi pressurized then re-opened the shuttles bay to place the remaining hacked-together arrays outside of planetary orbit, where she’d calculated they’d get the best views of Endor’s system and the space beyond. Portia began carefully mapping the fat gas giant and it’s busy little moon and the half-finished weapon in it’s shadow.

She forced herself to stay calm, braced as best she could and listened.

Oh, yes. It was out there. She could hear it, the roaring, just as she first had so long ago, as if the only word it knew was death.

The roiling red and black figure she has seen years ago was still around, or maybe this was a different organic? It was so hard to tell, the Darkness probably burned them out and somehow found a way to jump to new ones like a parasite. She had to stay carefully out of sight, but they were not looking for her. In fact, it seemed to be very occupied looking for something else, or someone else. It was as if the Darkness was consuming organics now…..how the hell did that even work without neural links? Did it have something to do with the Knights and their self-developed modifications? That seemed a fair bet.

Bodhi was moving away putting the planet's shadow between him and Endor.

And what was that over there? On the far other side of the fading stream, keeping Endor’s noisy binary star carefully between them and the rest of the main lanes….. Well, well, wasn’t that just perfect? There were all the missing ugly Enemy ships.

It was a trap, of course.

///A-int.L2/// …… “Where is Jyn now?” Cassian was asking.

“Less than a kilometer away,” she said, “She is asking about the incoming data.”

He moved over to the opening, clearly trying to see outside, “Don’t start giving her all the details now, wait until she gets up here.”

“Cassian, she is asking me questions.”

“Let her get back inside, Portia, please.”

He had a point. They were pair-bonded, it was just much easier for them to process these things when they were together….. ///A-int.L2///
Bodhi drops Sgt. Maj. Dielle Perek's Pathfinder squad on Endor. Nobody quite knows what they're in for but Stordan Tonc may have a better idea than anybody else.

Wheeeeeee! When you think about it, the Ewoks ARE the stuff of nightmares.

The shuttle brought them in straight down and insanely low. Branches were scraping the bottom of the shuttle. “Holy fucking hell” Page said as she came back from peering the through cockpit window over the pilot's shoulder. 'I've seen trees in my life but these are TREES.”

There was no way to land anywhere or get any closer to the target by ship. Rook had them as close to the ground as he could get in the last hours pre-dawn. The six Pathfinders got ready to drop out on hover. Rook had looked a little shaky, glancing back and down into the hold as they geared up for the jump.

“Not your usual personal drop, dodging this kind of shrubbery in the dark, eh?” Sgt. Perek said, clipping her line, standing up to check with him one last time.

“To be absolutely honest, they only ever really trained me to move crates,” the pilot said,”I've never dropped live people out the back of an aircraft before and I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing.”

“Don’t stress, Sarge,” Tonc said, edging around her on the narrow two-step ramp to slap Rook on the back, “Guy’s a fucking genius. He’s just messing with you. See you on the other side, man.” He tapped his chest with his forefinger and held it up. “Don’t juggle any grenades, or somebody else is going to have to carry your ass out this time.”

“Be careful, Tonc,” Bodhi Rook said, smiling, then turned his eyes back to the controls (Yes, please, Perek thought) then, “Ok, I’m dropping the cold glow sticks.”

The shuttle was holding steady between looming black shapes, and there was whoosh as the rear hatchway partly opened. Tiny squares of luminescence where fluttering like bright blue moths. Packed ass to elbow as they were, falling out the back instead of a controlled jump was a genuine risk.

“Go!” Sargent Major Perek said, and Ground Team 2 went out the hatch, silent as owls into the dark forests of Endor’s moon, following the tiny lights down and deploying spider shutes, one after the other. Their mission was the same as that of Derlin’s team 600 kilometers to the South. They had eight hours to secure and disable a heavily reinforced shield generator.

The pilot kept the shuttle dark, and the engines fairly muffled. Perek didn't see him move up and off.
She had her eyes on the guide-lights and her attention on the near-impossible task of not snagging her shute.

If their mission failed Rook would not be able to come back for them which was probably for the best because if their mission failed, there would probably not be an Alliance to go back to.

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They were 7 kilometers out, with extremely detailed maps of the terrain and physical layout of the above-ground portions of the structure they were targeting. They also had warnings about numerous motion and visual sensors ringing out from the bunker's entrance starting from 4k inward. Fortunately, they also had data that the area was fairly teaming with indigenous biological activity. Randomizing movement coupled with the sensor defusers in their ponchos would hopefully keep them looking like local wildlife until they got closer.

Lee Berman was actually starting to get a little worried about some of that local wildlife. Tonc was flanking him on the right as they moved down through what seemed like some kind of ravine. When he took a pause against a massive tree trunk (as his timing thumper tapped to remind him to do, in order to keep his movements from getting too regular), he looked up to check the light levels. Round eyes were peering at him from the dark branches centimeters above his head.

Some kind of night-bird, he told himself.

Then the eyes blinked and moved straight sideways through the canopy with a hiss and a clicking sound, like somebody was banging two pieces of wood together. Or possibly some teeth.

The first sign of Imperials they found was on what looked like a dry stream bed, as the slope they were working bottomed out. The light was starting to filter through breaks in the cover. Page spotted a white helmet and dove sideways. Firing would have blown them all. Dameron moved down behind, paused, and reached out with the butt of his rifle. The helmet fell to the ground and rolled across the pebbled ground. It had been pegged up on a sharp stick wedged into the bank. Imp’s head looked to still be inside it.

Tonc pointed up the slope on the other side. There were at least a dozen more piked up the same way.

“F-u-c-k,” he mouthed silently. Dameron waved them on.

They moved cautiously, tagging out in pairs. Berman and Tonc, Dameron and Page, Perek and Dorin.

Before they’d jumped, Sarge Perek had looked sternly at Tonc and given Berman a warning, “No shenanigans. If that dumb grunt looks like he’s getting attached to any wildlife, I’m ordering you to
It was getting rocky and flatter, some kind of flash flood plain, with a thin trickle of a stream flowing through. They kept to the sides of the ravine but now the tree cover had high breaks and dawn was clearly filtering through. Dorin suddenly halted stock still, staring up. Training kept Berman’s eyes down until he saw that Perek and Page had stopped too, flattened against the dirt bank above and were both looking up. Dameron was above on the treeline doing the same thing, with a look on his face that Berman had never seen on the big guy before. He looked up through the gap in the trees. The Deathstar filled half the sky. It was like a huge ghostly three quarters moon…you could see the broken edges, where it was unfinished.

He’d seen pictures, on vids but…it looked…it was just like….his eyes swept back down to meet Tonc’s, a meter away. Tonc nodded.

“Yeah,” he seemed to be saying. He was the only one not looking up.

_He doesn’t have to, _Berman thought, _he’s seen the fucker over his head before._

There were gouges on the forest floor and thrown up rubble that looked like mining tailings. They skirted around the piles. Must be getting close now.

The stream had widened out and water was pouring down some big cracks in the exposed rock. Splashing through ankle deep water Berman had been concentrating on stepping around a two meter cone of shredded granite, when something hit him flat on the shoulder from behind. He whirled and found himself looking down the barrel of an E-11 blaster rifle. A small woman in a brown sweater, with a camouflage scarf tied over her hair was holding it. Her green-brown eyes darted down and to the side and he saw a triangular sensor trigger in the water about six cm. from his right foot. Keeping the gun and her eyes on him, she used the toe of her battered black boot to nudge a flat rock over the eye in the center.

“They don’t have sound sensors out on this side,” she said conversationally, “But stepping on that would probably get some unwanted attention.”

He heard a click. Tonc had come up behind her on the other side.

“Don’t move,” he said very quietly. The woman lowered her rifle and turned slowly, then she smiled and reached up her free hand to pull back the scarf.

Tone instantly lowered his gun too, swinging it back up over his shoulder.

“Sarge,” he said, “Oh fuck, Sarge, it’s you.”

“Hi, Tone,” she said, then threw her arms around his neck and hugged him like he was her long lost brother.

Berman knew Tone had a sister somewhere, but he had a funny feeling this wasn’t her.
And we're back to the lunch hour posts. Soon school will start and I will have to tie this opus up.
Chapter Summary

Bodhi shares a memento and Mon Mothma gets a glimpse of life on Ea.

Chapter Notes

Was there a haircut prompt? I am pretending there was a haircut prompt.

“Alive. Well. I have some images…I’ll give them to you.” Bodhi Rook had whispered to her as he left the conference room. She had made sure an aide passed him her personal message access code. Draven would have had a stroke, but all the internal security restrictions in the galaxy were pointless now.

They had given her a room, and a little time to change, rest, prepare herself. Mon Mothma took out the small pad and laid it on the table.

The definition was perfect. It was as high quality vid-imaging as she had even seen, not that she’d been seeing many films lately, nothing narrative or artistic anyway.

Still…there were seamless multiple angles. How was this even taken?

They were in a curved room, with blue panels on the walls, and what looked like grey stone behind. There were rough-cut wooden tables and benches, data pads strewn about and, on the floor by a spiral stone stairwell in the center, what looked for all the world like one of those shredded-fiber stuffed mattresses, the kind that could be folded into lumpy couches and had been so popular in her university days.

Rook was sitting on one of the benches, sideways to whatever was recording, not in uniform but in a slightly baggy blue sweater and trousers. A ferret-like animal, no a furred person….perhaps a meter tall, white and wearing a small skirtlet of pale green ribbons, was leaning against his leg, pink hands over it’s eyes and giggling like a child.

Bodhi Rook was laughing too, “So you’re looking into new career options, beyond the military….and…you know….terrorism?”

“Piss off, Bodhi,” Jyn Erso was saying, good-naturedly.
“Please don’t make her angry while she’s doing this.” Cassian Andor said.

Andor was sitting on one of the benches, with a cloth around his shoulders while Erso was standing close behind him, holding a small-bladed hand clipper. She was cutting his hair.

Andor still had the same dark hair, short mustache and trimmed slight beard he’d had when she last saw him, maybe a little rougher. He still looked older around the eyes than his twenty six….no, it might be twenty eight years now… but he also looked so different. She would have said, if asked, that she had seen him smile before, even laugh, at meetings and in conversations. Now she realized she never had. That slow smile, with the way his eyebrows lifted, the chuckle that was just a little hoarse, lower than his speaking voice, the Festan accent just a little more pronounced, this was a young man she had never heard before, never seen.

Another of the furred people, taller, dark brown with golden eyes and a blue ribbon-skirt, was walking around peering, as if inspecting Erso’s work. “If you cut it all off, would it grow back? or would it grow back more?” it said in a pleasant, low voice, sounding half-curious, half-hopeful.

“I don’t know,” Erso was saying with a wicked smile, “I think we should find out.”

“Eso es suficiente! Enough! I think the back is short enough,” Andor said, laughing again, but looking as if he might be ever so slightly alarmed. “I just wanted it off my neck.”

“No, no..” she insisted, ”ears too, you said. Devastatingly hot as that pirate look is on you, you said you needed it shorter around the ears.”

Mothma had met Jyn Erso on only two occasions and during one she had been in shackles.

_Even if you included the time observing her on surveillance holos, it had been, what? perhaps a handful of hours that she had known her?

This woman had the same large arresting eyes, the same compact, quick movements, but she was laughing. She looked so young. Brown hair streaked lighter auburn in places… by sun maybe?… cut in a rough fringe in front and tied up in a ponytail with a string at the back. This was not one of Saw’s legion, not an avenging angel. She could have been one of her daughter’s school friends.

“Given the choice, he might prefer to still have ears.” Rook said. The little white-furred person was now giggling so hard that it apparently could no longer stand and had climbed up onto the pilot’s lap.

“No, thank you, Portia,” Erso was saying, looking toward someone who did not appear to be visible or audible, somewhere on the other side of the room. “I do not need mapping.” She moved around to Andor’s other side. He was grimacing comically.

“There!” Erso said, “All done!”

Bodhi Rook placed the still-laughing furry child back on the floor and stood to walk around. The view had changed seamlessly too, as if with high motion tracking, it was astonishing visual quality. It was also a very shaggy haircut,. There was one small section at the back so uneven that it was all Mon Mothma could do not to reach for a pair of scissors to fix it.

The pilot shrugged, “For an Alliance haircut, done in bad-lighting, circa first month on Echo Base, it’s not that bad.”

Andor shot him a look that said “Thanks pal,” as clearly as if it had been subtitled.

She could see from behind Erso now too, “Boys of the Rebel Alliance,” the woman was saying,
“That’s a calendar file I’d buy.”

She was brushing the cut-off fragments of dark hair off the cloth draped around his shoulders. Mothma saw her hand pause for a second and take a bit between her fingers, the look in her eyes soft and almost sad. She let it go and brushed the back of his head, gently.

Cassian Andor turned to look up at her, over his shoulder, “Thank you,” he said.

_Oh blessed Force, they adore each other._

“Ok,” Jyn Erso smiled, and pulled the sheet of cloth off of him, shaking it out, scattering clippings everywhere. “Who’s next?”

Someone, somewhere unseen must have protested, because Erso was glancing up with a smirk. “Relax. I promise I’ll sweep up.”

The white-furred child was running about delightedly, gathering up the cut hair and putting it into the other, dark-furred person’s hands.

“No, no!” she was saying “we will save it for Spring! Sister Bes!”

“Sister” was laughing and placing the handfuls of dark hair on the table. “As you say, clever one.” She looked up at Andor, who was standing now, shaking the loose pale blue shirt he was wearing and rubbing the back of his neck. “We will put it out with the spare fiber for the birds to make nests with, when this winter is over.”

The little one ran over to Andor and reached small hands to his, looking earnestly up with rose-colored eyes. “Cass…Cass…Cassian-ally, so, even if you go away, you will still be here,” it said.

Andor was looking down at the child. “Yes,” he said, quietly, “That’s a very good idea, Beri, thank you.”

Erso smiled, _it might have been a little shaky, to be fair she didn’t know her well enough to be able to tell._ Then she picked the shears back up, cut a snip from her fringed bangs, and reached over to lay it on top of the other clippings.

There was knock at the door. The security termination automatically cut power to her pad and the image vanished.

“Open,” she said. It was Jan.

“Mon,” he said, “it’s time, we have the shuttle.”

She nodded, reaching for the bag she had already packed, and sliding the pad inside. “Will General Draven be evacuated on the same shuttle?”
“Yes,” Jan said, somewhat surprised. “He insisted on it, actually.”

“Good,” she said, “I have something I want to share with him.”
Packing for a Journey

Chapter Summary

Jyn and Cassian face the long unfamiliar sensation of leaving a home.

Chapter Notes

"lo siento"= I'm sorry
"quejica" = 'whiner' or something like that
"lorón" = 'baby' or 'crybaby' or so I dimly recall from playground arguments.

"I never said goodbyes until I got here," Jyn said, shoving extra bundles of relay tabs into the bag, "I avoided it like the plague. I don’t even... know what you’re supposed ...to..." she trailed off.

She hated the way her voice sounded, it made her sound like a petulant child.

Cassian had his heavier wool jacket on and was pulling the belt of the holster for the second blaster over it. "You just say it and you leave," he said quietly, looking across the rear garden bench, at the back of the house and not at her, "as I recall."

Oh hell…. you selfish, stupid git….. Kay.

She stood beside him and leaned her head against his shoulder, so full of remorse she felt a little sick.

I’m sorry. This is unexpectedly hard. How do people do this? I am leaving actual clothes and a chair here. I never had a home after Mama left me on that hillside. I was allowed two nights to be homesick and then I knew I had to be done forever. You are my home. But we laid down to die together and we didn’t and this is a place where we woke up broken into pieces and you had to sit up to sleep because of your lungs for the first week and couldn’t bend to put your own boots on and I wanted to kiss you so I had that whole idea about how I was going to take charge of that and then tripped over my own boot and when you put your hands on me that first time it was like a fucking electric shock and I actually thought there was something wrong with me because who the hell goes off that fast just because some boy puts a hand on her? And Bes left that bag of flour and salt and I actually did not even know what it was and you laughed at me and made like 3000 little flatbreads and fried them in that funky nut oil because that was a thing you knew how to make and you said “What do you know how to make?” and I said “fires” and when I put out a garden of rocks for dead people you never even asked but every time the rain rolled one out of place Bes told me you put it back in exactly the same spot and who will do that now? I made lists and rules and you kept them better than I did and we fought sometimes and you keep one of those lamps by the bed on your side and when I asked why against my own rule you said “In case I need it in the night” which was kind of bullshit because we both know you are really unnaturally good at finding your way in the dark and you keep it for me in case I wind up dreaming the cave again and oh fuck we each have a
“side” of the bed when did that happen? We built a cold weather door and four shutters together out of wood and casing straps from a Sienar S12 shuttle and every single time you come you say my name never loud and sometimes you just move your lips but every single damn time my name and the first time was here even though I think we drove poor Bodhi out the door four days out of five and you let Beri come in and watch you shave last week over that stone sink even though she squealed like she was watching a spooky story vid and this morning you actually made the bed and folded the blankets and put them on the table and I don’t even know if you did that automatically because it’s an army thing or because you actually want one of us to think we might come back here when we both know we probably never will.

“Lo siento,” she said, “Uh….soy un …quejica? Is that it, or is it “llorón”? I haven’t been getting my vocabulary words lately.”

He laughed. “Oh yeah,” he said, “you not being tough enough has been a huge problem.”

I’d chew my own heart out like a sand panther in a trap without you, you’re the one who finds the “camino” through the dark, in the end.

She laced her fingers with his, whatever that meant….too many languages to learn.

“I love you, Major, let’s go.”

Tova and Bes and Beri were walking by the path past the tower. They had worked things out with Portia the night before. Tova, Bes, Mose and Dov were going to make sure someone checked in with her on a daily schedule.

They had agreed to play “Stone-Paper-Knife” for who would wear the ear clip (Jyn’s idea) at least until they got to the Riverlands. Paper covered Stone, so Cassian had it on.

Beri was twirling her new blue ribbon skirt, wearing her glasses, even in the early morning light, and helping Bes pick up yellow leaves, fallen from the aspen-like trees that grew along the wall.

“What are the leaves for?” Jyn asked.

“The color,” Tova said, smiling. No doubt this was basic pattern work in the making so she didn’t ask more. “Elfla and Tofla are already here, they arrived last night and are lying down by Mose’s barn, waiting for you. The stones up here are cold on their feet,” and rolled her eyes.

I have to start thinking of her as Eldest Sister now, Jyn realized.

Cassian kissed the back of her right hand, and Tova returned the gesture.

Beri gave them each a leaf. “I miss Bodhi Rook!” she said, ‘but I will make a pattern for him, Second Sister says I may.”

She looked up at Bes, who patted her indulgently. “When you are ready, which will be soon, little flower.”.

“You will fight bravely, dear allies. I would say ‘care for each other’ but at that you excel, I can tell you …..just, try not to wear each other out…quite so much, eh?” Tova said.

“Go,” Bes urged, with a smile, hugging them each quickly and clasping the side of their hands.
They went down the hill and met up with the Taun on the other side of the village.

“No. It’s alright, Portia,” she heard Cassian say quietly, as they walked, “Estoy bien.”

When they got to tidal marshes the Taun had to stop, but Markey’s speeders were already there waiting, to take them the last few kilometers around to the main channel. Jyn slid down as Elfla knelt, and saw perfectly enormous handfuls of water hitting the ground with a splash. The Taun’s large eyes were spilling with tears.

“Oh no!” Jyn said, “Elfla, please. It’s alright.” The large wooly head shook and she and Tofla loped away without a word.

The Bequa had pulled out with the tide, after pushing the shuttle up as far as they could, so there was no chance to even thank them. The shuttle was high and dry on the mud, but someone had considerately laid sheets of wood and re-claimed plex down to make a gangway over the waist-deep muck.

The only people there were Conn, Markey and, surprisingly, one of the Red Traders, the same man Cassian had talked to after the Great Council and Portia’s “debut.”

Holy fuck, it wasn’t just a shuttle it was a Lambda-class shuttle, but not the regular old T-4a…..this had a bigger cargo bay and smaller cockpit than standard, maybe a custom job? Bodhi would know.

Portia had wakened them the night before……wakened her actually since she was wearing the clip…

She tried to tell herself she was adjusting, but Saw’s voice saying, “Jyn. Jyn…wake up,” was enough to test her mental infrastructure, no fucking mistake.

She sat bolt upright on a wooden platform, surrounded by campfires and sleeping Taun, throwing off the blanket and reaching for a weapon, heart racing.

“I have contact with Bodhi Rook,” the voice said, “I am so sorry.”

“No,” she gasped. Cassian was up beside her, his hand on her back “No, that’s good, Portia.” She was shaking her head. “Portia,” she repeated, for his sake.

She relayed the message: Bodhi was with the Mon Calmari. It rocked….at least the ships rocked….Portia was a Mon Calmari fangirl it seemed…. He was fine, all but one of the Bothans were dead. They were bringing him in to the rest of the Alliance. Mon Mothma, Leia Organa, Tonc and Draven were all alive. Okay….she gave a rat’s ass about three of those people….not telling
Cassian that….he would be in touch as he could….signal was in and out.

Portia relayed to him that they were heading to possible transport, she thought he heard her before the Mon Cala ship jumped and she lost him.

“Good,” Cassian had said, “You alright?” There was no planning they could do until they had assessed the shuttle. He was pulling her back to lie beside him again. Rest while you can, Partisan rules.

“Yes,” she was staring up at the stars as he arranged the blanket over them both.

Fuck pride, and fuck secrets, right?

“I’m sorry. It’s Saw for me,” she said. “Don’t ever tell Bodhi.”

“Tell me you can fly this,” she said as they climbed across the hull and down in through the cockpit hatch.

Cassian shrugged. “Layout isn’t that different from Lambda-class standard and I’ve logged enough hours. I’ve got to check out the nav-computer.” She reached up to help him prop the hatch open. It was bone dry inside but it smelled a little……oceanic. “It looks like it’s even set up for single pilot operation.” His hand rested briefly on the back of the co-pilots seat.

He had the earring on. “Portia are we absolutely sure there is no distress or tampering beacons activated here?”

He nodded, frowning. She was probably telling him to stop worrying.

They started running system checks. Jyn made Conn sit in the co-pilot seat, mostly so it wouldn’t be empty next to Cassian, and the kid had a look on his face like he was in a fancy Capitol market for the first time. This ship intact was probably worth more than half the villages on the coast.

She went back inside and started inventorying. No sign of the crew. Not that finding a severed hand or anything would have shocked her. *Had the Bequa just sucked them out like the meat out of a shellfish?*

Not bad. Retrieval gear, tools….*Oooooo goody, light field charges….*, There were racks lining the shuttle bay walls for at least two dozen survey droids.

Fuck. *They’d only gotten one. Had the Bequa gotten all the rest?* Portia insisted nothing else was actively transmitting, it seemed.

“I’m firing up the engines,’ Cassian called back, so she came back up the ramp. Conn started to stand but she laid a hand on his shoulder.

“Sit,” she said, “Enjoy the view kid.”

Cassian put on a headset and lifted her up, cruising slowly 40 or 50 meters over to put her down on firmer ground. Markey and the tall pretty fellow in red were staring up like kids at an air show. It was
kind of vicariously exciting…all this for a damn shuttle.

“Portia says everything is go,” Cassian was saying, over the bellow of the thrusters shutting down. These things weren’t made to run quiet.

*Ok. So, theoretically, we’re on our way to Endor, as soon as we nail down this Plan C.*

Chapter End Notes

Combat action to recommence shortly, just needed to shed a few more tears first.
Estas listo

Chapter Summary

Cassian takes up a sniper post on Endor. Mission planning between four traumatized heroes (three carbon-based, one silicon) was never going to be easy.

Chapter Notes

Drink plenty of water when reading small passages of plot set-up and exposition, a certain amount of dryness is unavoidable.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Estas listo, Cassian?” Esperanza Cameron Andor's voice said.

“Yes,” he said, “as ready as I can be.” He had a high platform, a meters wide tree branch….not the best perch he’d ever had, but not the worst either. She didn’t like that kind of conditionality but she would just have to bear it. He had managed to get the shuttle placed on the sandstone ledge above him and covered….ojalá. He’d also managed to place the flares on either side of the entrance without getting caught or (Portia had assured him) tripping any alarms.

She had sounded mournful about her lack of ability to impact this situation more directly. She could hear and see well, snaking into Imperial surveillance now it seemed, through the shuttle, but she could not affect anything inside the generator bunkers directly without a physical or open transmission link.

Por favor, Portia, por favor…. do not sound like you are about to cry in my mother’s voice, I’m really not sure how well I would handle that.

Exact timing needed to be worked out amongst three groups of people who could not directly communicate with each other. Only a few of the participants were aware of the total overall plan. He couldn’t quite shake the disquieting feeling that he might not be one of them.

In whatever far corner the Force kept reserved for dead droids, he imagined Kay calculating the odds on this one. “How many points below the decimal are you prepared to listen, Cassian?”

Portia confirmed again. Three massive ground generators powered the massive deflector array shielding the weapon, two mains and a rotating back-up. In order to collapse the shield, all three needed to be taken out, pretty much simultaneously. As the morning passed the thing had risen in the
sky above him like an impossibly massive moon, pale and skeletal, looking much larger than it had over Jedha, at least in the brief glimpse he had of it, red through the smoke of powdered earth and stone. Above Scarif, he had been too busy bleeding to death internally to see anything but green fire on the horizon. It had to be hugging the atmospheric edge. The amount of power it must take to keep something like that in orbit was terrifying. He found that he, like Jyn, could not call it the Deathstar, not even in his own mind.

He knew this was torture for her. They had seen it, looming behind the gas planet as they’d come around the far side of the moon in the Lambda shuttle. She’d stared, pale even in the glow of the console, then closed her eyes, and kept them closed……her, the one who’d faced the fire when he hadn’t been able to bear it. “Go below,” he’d whispered, it wasn’t as if she were co-piloting, but she’d only shaken her head and clutched an armrest with one hand and her mother’s crystal with the other. She wouldn’t leave his side until she had to. He knew what she was thinking about, tears sliding silently and not even a hand lifted to wipe them away, her father. Galen Erso’s original sin, the one it seemed would never be expiated. He couldn't even touch her, he had to keep his hands steady on the flight controls.

Portia’s self-satisfied mastery of the Imperial security codes let them slip into a line of automated transport shuttles heading in toward the station, and then switched them right before the shield opened and slipping them into an outgoing stream, down to the moon’s surface.

Nothing could match the station itself for nightmare-fodder, but the three Interceptor-class Imperial destroyers hovering like black birds of prey around it came a close second. The sound of Portia personally insulting them in colloquial Festan, with his long-dead mother’s voice, was just surreal enough to help him focus. Beyond the binary star sat at least six more destroyers, at least two dozen fighter transports and Portia-only-knew how much more of the Imperial Fleet. It was one thing to picture it, quite another to see it.

“The ships are not the point! Your friends barely have enough ships to inconvenience them,” Portia had said, “no matter how cleverly they fight.” They had been in her tower, the day before Bodhi had run into the Bothan ship, in the first hours after her new sensor arrays had come online. “But…but..."

“But bloody what?” Jyn had demanded. Portia had been imaging as Jula, with all the external jewelry in place.

“It is there….well, part of it is there now, and the rest is coming. Chaos would ensue if you could kill it…and in the chaos maybe.” The woman’s face had looked little wide-eyed and frantic.

_Oh fuck_, he’d thought, _she’s glitching._

Jyn, as was her nature, didn't acknowledge glitching, “Portia what the FUCKING hell are you talking about?”

“What is she talking about?” Bodhi was demanding over the comms.
Heaven help him, he might be hearing all this in Galen Erso’s voice.

She was desperate to explain something to them, pitching her voice wrong in her urgency, “It’s in organics now. I don’t know how, I blame the Knights, personally, but that doesn’t matter any more. Organics can be killed…killed very easily….these especially because they are badly damaged by the process, I think. They are black and red and the edges fluctuate but the large one is called the Emperor and the more mobile one is called….I’m picking this up from context….they CAN see me, I have to be so careful…..” She was talking very very quickly and imaging on and off in different parts of the room. Pacing.

He had never seen her like this… Something in his stomach dropped and he felt a pull across the back of his hands. His brain had gone into autopilot, for a split second, and he found himself running the risk triage ladder in his head, analyzing whether an asset or a team operative had broken and….he held onto the edge of one of the blue panels….dizzy, and closed his eyes.

“Poison” Then-Eldest Sister called it. Not all of it will come out, Iola, I’m afraid some of it is in my bones.

Jyn’s back was to him, oh thank, heaven.

Portia was ranting on. “They call it Vader, and it actually walks around and talks to people as if….It is not looking for me, it has forgotten me and everyone like me….I don’t think it’s even really looking for your friends. It wants the Knights, I think it tricked and devoured their Brothers and now it wants them….it still wants them…well the one that’s left….but it….they….it’s all to try to trick your friends into attacking.”

The Emperor? Vader? Was she talking about Palpatine and Lord Vader?

“Portia!” Jyn was standing in front of one of the images, her hands actually raised as if she wanted to grab the long-vanished woman and shake her into rationality. “Slow the fuck down.”

Complex minds were prone to panic, even droids, the C 1-6 protocol and linguistic/social units were infamous for going off at any time because of their highly calibrated threat assessment protocols. Kay had crushed one flat once because it had started shrieking “Rebels!” and running in circles in the middle of a club on Tyree V during a contact meet. Cassian had been terrified his cover was blown, but no one in the crowded establishment even looked up. Apparently the thing did it constantly. The regulars at the bar actually broke into applause. Kay had been insufferably pleased with himself for weeks.

Bodhi’s voice came on, through the data pads. “It’s a trick? Is the weapon real or a fake.”

“It was made to be just as destructive as the first one……at some point. It is exceptionally dangerous, and almost functional, but at present it is not capable of mobility and they have abandoned all efforts at making it so. I am mapping it as thoroughly as I can from my angles. They have anchored it in synchronous orbit with the gas giant’s moon. They have also brought most of their ugly ships in to sit at the end of a new stream.”

That at least made sense. He had his breathing back.

“They are hiding it, but at the same time daring the Alliance to attack.” Cassian said, sitting, a little lightheaded, but it was passing.
Jyn was following. “Portia said it before. Haven is too good. Maybe they’re tired of waiting….but, holy fuck…” she was looking at the data pads scattered on the table. Panicked as she was Portia was still scanning and mapping to an exquisite level. “That’s a hell of a chunk of bait.”

…. Not a shell….a working Deathstar II …nothing else would do. It was a compliment in a sick way and a mind-numbing illustration of how much cash the Empire still had to throw around after two decades of looting a million worlds.

What had Imperial intelligence assessed about Scarif? They must know how the Council had hesitated….initially refused to act on Jyn’s testimony despite he and Bodhi’s corroborating evidence. Did they know how slender a thread the Alliance’s “victory” had hung on? Sixteen deserters thin. Had the man in white been there on Tarkin’s orders, Vaders? or on some scheme of his own?

Oh hell,…trying to mind-read Imperial mass murderers…it was too much like Verujansi 3.

His angel was back behind him now, hand on his shoulder, jaw set and chin tilted up.

“No,” Bodhi said, from Guardian above the other other side of Ea from them, “I mean…I was at Hoth. They tore us apart, we lost almost everything. The Alliance, I don’t think….won’t ever give up, the Mon Calmari, the Princess, everyone from Jedha and Alderaan,…we’ll never stop, never surrender but..”

“This weapon was moved into this system two years ago,” Portia was saying, seeming calmer for a moment. “In sections, and it’s construction parameters seem to have deviated from the first weapon, at that time. They tore that poor little moon up……. it’s got evolving aboriginal sentients and several introduced borderline organisms on it too, a full functioning biome, which they are taking no care with, the wretched beasts………and put all production into holding it still and getting the weapon at least functionally operational.”

“No,” Bodhi said, from Guardian above the other other side of Ea from them, “I mean…I was at Hoth. They tore us apart, we lost almost everything. The Alliance, I don’t think….won’t ever give up, the Mon Calmari, the Princess, everyone from Jedha and Alderaan,…we’ll never stop, never surrender but..”

“Time is on the Empire’s side, since Hoth,” Jyn said, leaning on the table now looking at Portia’s image, but, he knew, seeing something else, “They chip away, keep chasing the fox, until it gets too weak to pose a threat….or changes too much to even be….an Alliance.”

He laid one of his hands over hers, it had gone ice cold.

“Umm…ok, I think you’re wrong,” Bodhi said, quietly, “But if they think that way, what’s their hurry? It can’t be cheaper this way…..I mean their Fleet can kick our Fleet’s ass…not to be
disloyal.”

“That’s an accurate assessment,” Portia was saying, “But I wish I could make you understand….IT, him, them….the Fury…. is directing this for reasons of it’s own.”

This needed to get dialed back. Everybody was getting dragged back to bad places. Him, Jyn, Bodhi even Portia, especially Portia.

“Portia,” He knew he had to phrase this carefully, and find a way through this that all four of them could process. “You said you saw Emperor Palpatine?”

Badly damaged, Portia had said....

“The Imperials call it that. It doesn’t matter what the thing used to call itself when it was a person, it’s a shell now….and the other one is in even even worse shape, it’s being kept alive with cybernetics…..I can’t get near directly....”

“What if Palpatine is dying?” he ventured. “Or sick, or just losing his grasp on power?”

Maybe the one running out of time wasn’t the Alliance?

This actually got a harsh laugh out of Jyn. “Dying? The Partisans used to say he’d died years ago and all the different Moffs used to take turns dressing up in the spooky spooky suit for the Senate speeches. When was the last time anybody actually SAW the Emperor? The Ghost Prison uprising? That was like, ten years ago.”

“I always thought....” Bodhi’s voice on the comms, “I mean I wondered, if Palpatine was just a figurehead and …Vader..” his voice dropped low, like the audio was fading, or he was whispering…you aren’t on Jedha anymore, Bodhi, he can’t hear you…”Vader was the one really in charge.”

They could all go crazy trying to put together a puzzle with too few pieces.

He remembered waiting for Draven and Cracken to come out of a briefing once, one of last times he’d reported in at Massasi Base before he was sent out to hunt Lianna Hallick. General Merrick had been turning back, and saying over his shoulder, “No, I don’t understand the hows and the whys, but I don’t bloody need to, Davits....that is your corner of hell, just tell me where to fight the bastards and what I need to do when I get there.”

Bottom line time.

“The Empire has built another working planet-killer, at the same time they’ve set up an ambush for the Alliance that’s clearly intended to finish off the Fleet. Something is rushing their timetable, but the exact reason doesn’t matter, not for us, not right now. We have to get this data, ALL of it, about the weapon AND the trap, to the Alliance so they can parse it. Half is worse than none.”

“I can’t get close yet,” Portia’s image was actually sitting at the table now, she only sat when she was trying very hard to establish a personal connection, Cassian had noticed. “One of them is there…..they look the same to me….but I think it’s the Vader one… “
“Portia, stay with us here.”
Getting the Last Party Started

Chapter Summary

So.....some of our folks are moving into their positions for the Battle of Endor. Sgt. Perek's team get briefed by "Sgt. Hallick", stakes are high.

Chapter Notes

It's a holiday weekend. Small bits of combat action and personal drama will be posted as the wi-fi connections at the ranger stations of our great and glorious National Parks system permit.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The suns….actually it looked like a sun and a half, binaries always weirded up the shadows, but under cover like this the goggles were more hurt than help…. were high up. The Fleet was coming in at CS01200 and they still did not have the shields down. Over their heads the Alliance was getting burned to cold ashes. The timer turned 01200.5

Perek could see Page’s head down in front of her, and hear a ragged breath. Dameron was to her right. She couldn’t look at him.

He’s here because you brought him here and Bey’s going to die up there and that baby they think nobody knows about is going to grow up in a galaxy where somebody burns whole planets because they don’t like way the people on it walk. Yup. You’ll be explaining that to the Force Di. Fine. I’ll carry it. All I ask is, if I have to die here, please let me kill some troopers before whatever the hell is moving around in those bushes eats me.

They held position. Tonc was to the right of the bulkhead entrance, Dorin on the opposite side. A kilometer across the ravine, by the other station entrance, in position in front of another set of identical plex-steel carbon-locked blast doors, Berman was set up with Tonc’s blood sister Sergeant Hallick, she of the three dozen improvised explosives. All of them held. There was nothing else to do. They were soldiers.

There had been noises in the trees all morning, chittering, keening, long howls. They’d seen nothing, except for Berman seeing “eyes” before they’d reached target a few hours ago and a lot of bloody helmets on poles. There had been animal-like movement, low, just out of sight, in the tree canopy, under the shadows of the tree at the top of the hill. The noises had reached a crescendo. Long earsplitting screeches pitched high and falling low, one after another, like a call-and-response, from one side of the valley to the other. It went on for about ten minutes then stopped. There’d been nothing until, an hour ago when there was a series of far off booms….not like weapons fire, like a drum the size of a freighter, hollow. Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom. Then dead silence.

“F-u-c-k,” Tonc had mouthed silently.
Dameron had looked at her. She hand signaled, hold. *What else could they do?* 01200 came and passed.

Then the worst thing happened. The weapon fired. She saw a flash, whitish green, along the side of the monster’s widest curve. There was no sound….there wouldn’t be….yet…maybe not ever down here. She saw it, Dorin and Page were facing the door, so they didn’t. T onc flinched like he’d been hit, fuck, did he see or did he just *feel* the fucking thing? Dameron saw it, *oh hell, Dameron’s face.*

There was no time to register or react more, because in that instant after the flash, two other things happened. The fucking door opened, and on the other side of the hill, the first of Sergeant Hallick’s bombs went off.

“**Go! Go!**” she yelled. Dameron lobbed in two smoke grenades and T onc tossed the sonic grenade Rook had given them. They dove down into an Imperial bunker, with no idea what they’d find inside.

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Berman liked to think he couldn’t be surprised anymore, but stuff just kept getting weirder. *Their on-ground assist was T onc’s pal?*

Sarge Perek had told them there was some chance they might meet a tactical team on the ground, but still….“Small war isn’t it?” he’d said to Dorin.

She had swept the area for sensors, she said, and aside from some motion sensors that she’d already disabled, swore that above-ground was clean except for a 20 meter sweep from cam-sensors at the target entrances. No comms but they could at least talk out loud now.

Security checks seemed unnecessary anyway once she and T onc finished hugging each other like they’d been separated since nursery school….dude had tears in his eyes….seriously. Berman was going to rag him about this, first chance he got.

“How’d you get in here?” Dameron asked.

“My boyfriend dropped me up on the top of the ridge” She pointed up up the slope,” a few hours before dawn and I hiked in. I’ve already scoped the perimeter.”

This apparently cracked T onc up. He doubled over in silent laughter and slapped her on the back. She smiled but ignored him, kneeling down to set up a low-power map screen. They had two entrances about a kilometer apart on opposite sides of the ridge. Her images were fresher than theirs, you could see the doors more clearly.
“Air vents are useless as an in,” she said, shaking her head like it made her sad, “Mesh-based, wide-area intake, with scrubbers spread all the way back into the hillside. We could fuck them up but it would take a day to rig it and two to work and we have…..maybe, four hours. Bust and run in is the only way.”

“But you’re saying they’ve got no surveillance active out here?” Perek said.

“Damned little,” the woman said. She barely reached Perek’s collarbone. “I took out a few motion and chem sensors with repeater tape but most of them were broken when I got here.”

“We were told to anticipate foot patrols?” Dameron said.

“Yeah,” she said, ”and stay super sharp once we get to the access road,” she pointed to a line on the map that looked to be a few k ahead crossing the stream bed. “there are SUPPOSED to be regular patrols but our close intel from the last few days show that they are being lax. As of 0300 they had orders to mount outside guard and sensors repaired or supported manually. They haven’t done any of that. Basically, they all scampered into those bunkers like rabbits right after deploy and are staying there.”

“Did they mark our landing or are they hunkered down because they,” Page pointed up, “spotted the Fleet?”

“Last word I had before I jumped, was that they had moved combat personnel to the surface,” she said, “but those were still huddled on the landing pads as of 0300. They are getting ready for something but if they were moving any troopers to this bunker we’d be hearing the transports by now. Our Imps,” She smiled wide and pretty and looked up the ravine, “seem to be hiding from somebody else altogether.”

They followed her gaze to the several rows of Stormtrooper helmets on sticks. Berman was liking this place more and more.

As they moved on Tonc stayed close to his pal. Off silent approach for now, the kid was clearly burning to catch up but even his gossipy ass had to know this was not the place.

Where the fuck did these two know each other from anyway? She worked like Pathfinders but he didn’t recognize her from Echo Base. Qemia 7? Maybe they had gone to nursery school together.

“Hey,” Tonc was saying, “He’s good, though? The Captain? He’s ok?”

“He’s good, Tonc,” she said, stopping to point out another broken motion sensor, this one looked like it had been hacked with a machete. “he really wants to talk to you about this pervy interest you’ve been taking in our personal life though.”

When they got to the access road crossing they scattered back for cover. Sarge Perek, Dameron and Hallick confabbed over the map. Hallick opened up her kit bag and then lifted up the baggy brown sweater she was wearing. Between what the bag and the two loaded belts she had on Hallick must have been carrying 30 explosive charges. Most clearly Imp issue, some Alliance and some that looked….dangerously homemade. *Tonc’s old Sergeant had clearly come to party.*

“Question. Are we just blowing the damn thing once we’re in?” Page asked.

Hallick looked at Perek, “You haven’t briefed them yet?”
Dorin shot him a glance, with one eyebrow raised. *Always awkward, when old mom and new mom are not on the same page.*

“Not about particulars, Sergeant Hallick,” Perek answered. “We were told “pending contact, orders might change.” Dameron had no hackles to raise, Sgt. Major Perek had a few though and they were up a now.

*Oh shit,* Berman thought.

Their “ground contact” shrugged. She was either used to command or didn’t actually give a rat, “Now’s the time then. Big picture: One generator will be totally blown but we need to take two. Keep them functional but in our control. Our mission is to disable the shielding on the…fucker” Hallick pointed up, “but, ideally, retain the ability to restore minimal shield over the moon itself. Taking down the Deathstar is priority one but I’d kind of like to maybe be alive after and so would the rest of of this whole little planet, IF that can be arranged. As I say, that’s secondary. At any cost all three the arrays must go dark at the same time, 01200 to give the Fleet it’s shot. When we get word that’s done then and only then do we re-boot our two generators and wait for large chunks of planet-killer to start falling from the sky.”

“You’re saying two, what about Team One?” Berman asked, this had been nagging at him since they left.

“Team One came down in another Imperial Shuttle,” Perek said with a sigh, “making sure the Imperials saw them land. Then they split up Half to blow the main bunker, or at least get it open so a follow-up team can blow it and half to draw fire, create a distraction and get captured. The Empire believe we have been fooled into thinking that the shields are powered by that generator and a single back-up off-line on the North Polar continent. Idea is that they will lock these down and try to capture Ground Team One alive. If we shut down their comm and these bunkers fast enough they won’t know about Two and Three until too late.”

“What?” Berman said, “Pardon, Sarge, but why do we think they’d be dumb enough to drop the ball on a second super-fuck weapon to capture one team of Alliance operatives.”

“Because, “ Perek said, “Team One has Commander Skywalker, Captain Solo and General Organa, we’re using the heroes of Yavin as bait.”

Everybody let that sink in for a second.

“Berman,” Sarge said, “You’re the marksman, go with Hallick to the front. We go to the east hatch. Take out anybody who tries to leave. Once the doors open, we’ve supposedly got gear that will jam signal inside but you have to stop anybody from getting out those doors and at the same time keep them open. Bright side, once the doors are blown, we can open our own comms and they might even work..”

“You’ll get instructions and an executive signal, either over your helmet comms or…..um, warning, this could get weird,….. over commandeered Imperial equipment, inside the bunker.” Hallick said, “that should guide you through all interior doors and you’ll get a shut down sequence for the generator, once you get to it.”

“Say what?” Dameron said.

“Repeat, ‘commandeered equipment?’” Sarge Perek wanted to know, this was clearly news to her, “Describe?”
“Anything, Hallick said,”door panels, droids, data pads, lift control screens, trust me, you’ll know it when you see it, it might even get chatty, just do what it says”

Chapter End Notes

Arrgh!!! Endor.
"Jyn, I can't get you any closer..." *and if I crash, as we know, our options diminish.* "Be ready." He couldn't look back at her, not more than enough to catch a glimpse of her dark shape crouched by the release hatch. Once she went out, they couldn't use the voice comms at all until.....after.

Their shuttle had come into the cargo landing pads, then veered away low, with Portia fudging the signals to the automated flight towers, and cleverly doubling their signal with that of a transport that had already landed. They darkened all lights, killed all signals save for ear clip connection and moved low over the dark forests. The generator bunker Jyn would target was several hundred kilometers east of the primary landing area. Cassian could see the lights of troop transports bringing personnel down from the station. The Imperials had all their landing areas, and the few structures, lit almost too brightly.

Jyn had checked all her mapping and her lines and gear. None of this part disturbed her. Dropping in the dark from dangerous heights with explosives was just muscle memory. They had talked tactics. Plan C was better than Plan B, but not by much.

*Stay alive until I can get to you. Don't die without me....*were the words that kept coming into his head and he could not say them.

She came up behind him harnessed and ready, as Portia gave him more topographical and botanical information than he could really use. *How can I be hearing this in Mama's voice? I didn't think I ever even knew the Festan words for things like "glacial ravine"?*

Gloved hands slid around his shoulders to hug him from behind as Jyn kissed his neck.

"Be careful mi amor," she said quietly, against his ear.

He at least managed to turn enough to brush his mouth against the side of her head, before she slipped away, down the ramp to the bay and the cargo release.

Portia was informing him of how low he was and the risks of striking the tree cover. *He did not think it was possible to miss Kay more than he did right now.*

She was telling him that this was probably the best drop spot he was capable of reaching, her disappointment in his piloting skills was barely concealed. He switched to hover mode, and the thrusters turned.

"Jyn, we're here!" he called back to her.
"Ready!" came her voice, up the passage, as Cassian opened the deployment hatch

"I'll find you." He said, not sure she would hear him over the rush of air.

"I know." He heard her whisper, breaking silence over the comm for a just second before she shut it off.

"Jyn ha dejado la nave espacial" Portia said and he closed the hatch, then a few agonizing moments later. "Ella está en el piso," and "Ella se está moviendo a la meta."

Portia could track the location of the kyber crystal in Jyn's necklace, just as she had once tracked the different Jedi around the complex by the radiation signature of their light sabers.

They had decided they could both manage if he "knew" where she was and she knew Portia was "with" him. He wouldn't have to watch her jump, or totally lose sight of her and she wouldn't have to know if he took a high sniper position. "Oh fuck, Major," she had said, with a quiet laugh, "we're a couple of cripples and no mistake."

Cassian then moved the shuttle slowly back into flight mode and took it, low and dark as he could, toward the other generator, his target.

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He didn't realize how overheated the rifle was until he had stopped and slung it across his back to climb down. He could feel it hot through the jacket The charge was in the red. He had recharged and drained out once, but still had a half charge pack left on his belt and the unused side arm. Now was the time to go down. His hands were sore. Well, it had been a while....and this had to be well past his personal record for body count. He moved down the back of the tree and dropped the last meter. The smoke from the last flare pack had cleared, there were maybe 20 bodies, that he could see from here. Almost all troopers, plus a few uniformed security, one still clutching an emergency comm pack. 

No, he thought, moving in, I can't have taken out that many, half my fire was to drive them back.

From inside the structure alarms were wailing. He could hear muffled firing. The Pathfinders team? He could hear them on comm, they had split and part of the team was still meeting resistance.

Derlin's voice came across, "We are in control center. Clear! Tryree.. Arian? Report?"

Then another voice, the Aldaraanian, Sargent Andella "Fuck this! All the data screens just blanked and now say 'Hello. This is the right place.'"

Portia was telling him they had reached the generator, and she was now talking them through shut down codes.
The bodies of a dozen troopers blocked the ramp to the blast doors. His kills...but at least three others had fallen outside his line of flares. As he moved toward the door he saw what he hadn't been able to see from his perch. They had been bringing up a small covered carrier, fuck, it must have been battery powered, Portia hadn't seen it. If they had gotten it out he probably wouldn't have been able to take the driver before they got a signal off. Now it was stopped, blocking the inner blast doors from closing. The bodies around it hadn't even been hit with blasters. They all had sharpened spikes sticking out of them. Projectiles. He knew trajectory better than he probably knew anything else, these had been fired low, from the front. Hell. He heard a sound behind him and turned. There was a large circle of people around the cleared sandy space in front of the entrance, 40 of them roughly. Small, dark-furred, they were half the height of grown Memsa, but almost as wide, squared off, blocky and muscular with large green and yellow eyes and no visible necks. They each had a quiver of thin sharpened sticks tied around their chests with a black strap and each of them held one of those sticks in hand.

Since he was about 14, and first admitted to himself that he was unlikely to live to adulthood Cassian Andor had imagined the logistics of his own death many times. 40 small sharp wooden sticks had never been on the list. Fuck.

They made no sound but then one nearest him, maybe 20 meters away, lifted it's "spear" sideways and all the others immediately did the same. His E-11 blaster was in his hand, but he'd be able to take out two, at best, before the rest got him.

"Oh mira" Portia said, "Los creyete aborigines." She spoke approvingly of their obvious social development.

Oh fuck. He raised his hands and the blaster over his head. One of them, with yellow tufts of fur around its eyes, nodded, unblinking, dropping it's stick to point at one of the armored corpses at it's feet, then at Cassian. It was either a threat or a tribute for a job well done.

Behind him the blaring alarms inside the bunker stopped.

"ESTA MUERTO!" Not loud, Portia wasn't shouting, it couldn't be like that. But the voice filled his head so completely for an instant that he staggered, almost blinded. It? What?

Then more normally, his mother's voice, as he remembered it, said, "Entrar en la estructura rapidamente, Cassian."

He turned his back on the small people and ran, past the bodies of the Imps he'd shot minutes before into the bunker doorway, inside he found one more storm trooper crouched behind the stopped carrier, with helmet pulled off, a black-haired beardless kid of about twenty. "Don't..." he said, trying to cover his face with gloved hands, "Don't let them get me. I'd rather get shot."

The lights were back on inside the bunker. The generator was working again "Captain Arian!" Derlin was on the comm from inside, "we have the sheild online!"

"Exit secured!" Cassian said. He looked out the hatchway, the small dark people were gone and the grey blue sky seemed different, as if veined in faint white thread.

He pushed the trooper down on the floor beside the speared body of the carrier driver. "Lay down and don't move," he told him. "Maybe nobody else has to die here today."
"Portia," he said, "Where is she?"

Chapter End Notes

May be tidied up after camping. Did you know 2 out of 5 park rangers are Star Wars fans?
"The rest of your team meeting up with Ground Two?" Berman had asked, as Hallick crept back up to their hiding place, after finishing planting the last of the charges while he covered her.

She'd nodded, curtly, then pointed to a pile of brush near the arch of the outer blast door, built into the hillside, and then up to a small patch of dried grass growing on the arch over the center. "Hit those two the second the door starts to open....the side one first then the other. They'll start the sequence. It should go by itself for a while after that, so you can just concentrate on taking out anyone trying to get out, or reach the manual lock on this side."

"You've clearly got great faith in me lady, because that's a tricky shot," Berman thought.

She had her E-11 blaster out and was checking the charge. She wasn't much of a talker, maybe, even under better circumstances. They were crouched down in the brush within sight of the generator power station doors, after Berman had taped the sensors on the approach so she could set up her fireworks.

He stood carefully now, while she covered him, and eyed around. The best perch was the hill on the other side the access road, although he'd have to lay flat and use the key scope. "Fine," she said, when he pointed it out, "I'll keep low down here, just in case there's action on this side."

She was right, of course Berman could see that. There was no good placement to scope all angles.

"Ok, Sargent Hallick," he said, tossing her a canteen. "I'll take the high road and you take the low road."

Then, on the principle that you might as well know something about the people you're likely to die with, he asked "You really have a boyfriend up with Team 2 or were you just jerking Tonc's chain?"

If she smiled it was only a little, but she did nod, and then looked up at him for a minute, like she was measuring whether or not he was trustworthy.

"Husband, actually," she said.

"I'm sorry," leaped into Berman's mind to say, but he didn't. He was thinking of Dameron and Lieutenant Bey. People used to rag them about it, getting married, early on....before she disappeared after Yavin IV for a while, then they'd stopped. Dameron was a big, solid, unshakeable guy with a ready smile and nerves of steel on a mission, but every time they
came in to Home One, or one of the rendezvous points, he'd ask, "is Green Squadron in?" And if the answer was yes, he'd ask, straight out, "All of them?" It always hurt to watch. Dameron had that locket he wore, always, and he'd bet a hundred credits Bey had one to match.

_I couldn't do it_, Berman told himself, _I just don't have that kind of guts._

So he held out a hand, it was all he could think to do. She looked up at him, green eyes half-suspicious, half-surprised, then slowly reached out her own hand to shake.

"Good working with you so far, Hallick. See you when the show starts," he said, then went to work his way up the slope to his position.

Hours passed after that.

He didn't see her under cover by the door. She was obviously good at staying hidden.

_It would probably be a short career in what ever kind of crazy ass tactical Spec Ops she was in if she wasn't, eh?_

He had to keep his eyes on the door. The time came and passed and.....nothing. He saw movement in her direction, thought maybe he saw her head jerk, like she was looking up, like she saw something. Then, just shy of one minute after the last second, the outer blast doors cracked open. Hallick broke cover and set off her first charge, down and off from the entrance. Nothing for five long seconds, then out came a squad of storm troopers fooled into thinking it was a grenade launch and moving out behind portable blast shields, all facing the wrong way. He fired at the first of the sequence charges she'd set on the other side, then the second. Over the comms he could hear Sarge Perek and Dameron calling out that they were inside. Shit hit the fan after that. His job was stopping anybody or anything that tried to get through that outer door, and that took up all his attention.

Afterwards he figured out that it was about nine minutes from start to finish. The rough part was when a big armored ZL-131 combat track droid started to roll out. He saw the nose coming through the doorway and hit it on piercer mode three or four times, but that did jackshit. Hallick must have
moved in and gotten close enough because the thing suddenly blew, like a grenade had rolled under it.

Then everything was over. He could hear Sarge Perek on comm, yelling, and Tonc saying "Holy fuck! The floor sander says third hatch down!" Dameron said "We're in!" Smoke was still billowing but he couldn't spot any movement, so he got down toward the open doors. There were lots downed droids and troopers, pieces of the ZL were smoking everywhere.

"I'm in and to your right," Hallick's voice came over the comm for the first time. He spotted her, sitting just inside the second set of doors, against an interior wall. Something must have clipped her.

Just as he stepped inside, the alarms went silent and all the lights dimmed.

_They got it. Oh please, let there be somebody left up there to take the shot._

The power came back.

"We got it!" Tonc was yelling, "I got an R3 spinning around in here beeping that we got it!"

Hallick was sitting on the floor, near the feet of a dead trooper. Blood was dripping down her left arm but she looked more pissed than anything else.

"Can you see outside?" She said, "Is it gone?"

Bergman looked. Above the tree line he could make out something like a huge crescent moon, lit in red and crumbling way, silently. There was also massive rain of shooting stars starting across the daylight sky. _Fuck, I hope that shield trick worked._

"Yeah," he said, shoving the dead trooper aside and kneeling down beside her, "it's gone."

"Good," she'd been pale before but she looked pretty ashy now. "I wish I could see. I missed it last time."

Berman activated his comm, "Entrance secured! Sargent Hallick is hit!"

Chapter End Notes

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Back from the land of no wi-fi and bears.....ok, bear. Did you know that when you type on your phone at night on a dark pine barren, moths relentlessly hit your screen and you have to type around them?
Mon Mothma and Draven find themselves on another ship, awaiting the outcome of another battle, doing some more drinking and talking about the younger generation.

The Non-combat leadership was being moved to "a safe location," a leftover piece of Firestorm protocol that seemed like a bad joke now.

*It was better at Yavin IV, Mon Mothma thought bitterly, at least we were all together.....*

Tynnra Pamlo was here, had taken her hand when she boarded, but was sitting alone now, at the freighter's observation window with her prayer veil draped over her head and shoulders. Haxon Deltor, a General in charge of Communications Command since Anj had been killed at Hoth, was also aboard. He and Draven were talking in the doorway. According to the protocol Leia should have been here too.

They had all looked to Mon outside that conference room at Zastiga, as if she could somehow explain it to them. Not the plan, that was desperation flayed bare, hashed together after looking at Bodhi Rook and the Bothan's information, linked together with Kaya and Aerin's heretofore mysterious data about a manufactured hyperspace corridor to "nowhere." Leia had somehow convinced Ackbar and Reikken it was the only way, and who was she to argue with them?

*"The hour when all advantage fails..." indeed. Your facility with quotes comes back to haunt you, Mon.*

Jan and Aerin, and young Mandine had wanted her to explain Leia herself....There were questions about her renegade actions at Tatooine. Alarm at her revival, *over Cracken's head it seemed,* of an intelligence cover as a bounty hunter that she had somehow kept secret. Now there was her insistence, at the last instant, on being part of the "bait" team. The original plan had been for Commander Skywalker and “General” Solo to go in on their own. They were, she hoped, none of them stupid enough to think this was about Solo, or at least wholly about Solo.

"They are offering us what they think....they know.....is irresistible bait," she'd said, her dark eyes brooking no argument, "we can't balance it with less than our all. If we flinch, if we hold anything back, they will sense it."

She and Skywalker seemed to have come to some agreement on their own, and were pulling even the dashing Captain Solo in their wake. Indeed, the Commander seemed to be one of the few people left she truly trusted. Shared traumatic experience was more than enough to account for it but.....

*Skywalker. The file on him was so thin. It was an extremely common name on the Outer Rim. She told herself.*

The rest of the Council were biting their tongues about her romantic involvement with Solo .....*Oh, she wanted to tell them, I can think of things that would worry me far more. Oh Bail.*....
How do I tell her, “You are too important.” "You are a symbol?” Why should she listen, when we have all made the wrong decisions for her for so long?

She had been the light of Bail and Breha’s lives. Headstrong, brilliant at whatever she turned her energy toward, always so fiercely precocious. She had an uncanny ability to see through adult subterfuge. Mon learned, visiting Alderaan, never to play chess with the tiny pink-cheeked little princess. There was no dignity in being beaten in ten moves by an eight year old. She could "play Royal" as she called it, at Breha's side, so beautifully when she chose, stylish, dignified, self-contained, strong, but she pulled at it like a racehorse bound to pull a coronation carriage, as Breha said. By the time she was a teenager, she'd had a piercing wit and no patience with fools or hypocrites…. a liability for a career in politics, Bail had gently chided her, after she'd hilariously savaged some corrupt toady behind closed doors. Still, he burned with pride in her, they both did.

"Leia has always really been a "daddy's girl”, Breha had said with such a sad smile, when Mon had last seen her, oh...how long ago?.... on that last trip to Alderaan, before she'd made her infamous speech, resigned her Senate seat, and become a fugitive.

There was an estrangement between mother and daughter that broke Breha’s stern, gentle heart. Tradition demanded that the appointed Queen could never leave the planet. She was a living symbol, a spiritual leader, it's cultural heart. If that were not enough, Breha would not take the chance of one of her pro-Imperial cousins being maneuvered as a puppet onto the throne. She accepted a second 20 year term when the Alderaanian High Council begged her to, disappointing those who urged her to abdicate in protest, and oppose the Empire openly. Bail had understood, Alderaan must continue to appear peaceful, stable, uninvolved or risk a fate like Mon Cala's….but had Leia? It was after that she began to press Bail to let her take more and more risks, convinced him to use her "diplomatic ambassador" status as a cover for Alliance missions, and then to nominate her for his Senate seat and to openly defy the Emergency Powers act. “Breha knows that Leia must follow her own path.” Bail had confided in her, “When all this is over, when Leia knows how much her mother has had to sacrifice to be the symbol our people will need to survive this war…there will be time to set it right.”

Oh Bail...Oh Leia...

"She is done with being a symbol," she told Dodonna, "She is done with standing back and watching. We made her the face of the Rebellion. Are you surprised now that she rebels? She sees the only logical use of that symbol in setting it up as a target sign."

Oh Bail, maybe she is done with secrets too, even loving secrets. Somehow she knows. You confessed to me once, that you had showed her Padme's picture when she was little, told her stories of her strong, beautiful, tragic birth mother. You should have told her everything.
window, to see the stars streak past, to pray, to wait.

“Can you even tell me where we are going?” She asked him.

“Honestly ma’am, I haven’t asked,” he said, “I suspect we’ll know if and when we have to go there..”

They sat in silence for a while, at that rather scratched table.

“I don’t suppose you have another bottle of whiskey on you anywhere?” Mon asked.

He reached into the pocket of the faded flak jacket they’d given him and fished out a small black enameled flask.

*If he asks about getting me a glass, I’ll know I still have some secrets from him at least,* she told herself.

He laid it on the table….she recognized it as an Imperial Forces presentation piece, but someone had prised the silver crest off of it…….and slid it across to her.

She unscrewed the top and took a drink….as she expected, it tasted like something someone would distill in an army base foot looker, and burned like hell.

He held out his hand for it before she could close the top again, and took a long drink. “I suppose we could watch some more films ma’am. That might help pass the time.”

“What has Rook told you?” she asked.

“Bodhi Rook,” Draven made as if to close the flask but she held out her hand again, there was no point in rationing now, ”has told me remarkably little about the situation of one of my own intelligence operatives. A minor issue, right now, but still…..”

“How old was Andor when he became one of you and Aerin’s “shadows?” Mon said. She’d seen a file, a file he gave her, “recruited on Carrida” was the wording ….but often files said what they needed to say and no more.

“12,” Draven said, “but he was already a veteran by then, with a year or two in an early cell on Carrida…..might have been a very effective one, if they hadn’t been infiltrated and slaughtered, run by a former Political Science professor, as I recall….before that, the refugee camps, no doubt half-filled with former Separatist guerrilla grandmothers. We ask a great deal of our operatives, Mon, but not every detail.”

*Liar.*

And the Erso girl, the defector’s child, tenderly reared by Saw to be his lion cub, from what age? Eight?

"A Children's Crusade" Someone once called our Rebellion,” Mothma said, passing him back his
"If you are going to start quoting Saw Gererra to me, I am putting this away right now." He shook the flask gently, "The Empire stripped whole worlds, a whole generation, of childhood, of a future. We can blame ourselves for a great many things, for all the good it does, but not that."

"You think I'm being overly sentimental?" She leaned across the table, taking another short drink, "Don't insult me Davits, we've come too far for that. They should be broken past repair, both of them. They should be creatures, maybe stunted in a good cause, the only good cause, but they should be like the war horses in that old Chandrian folk ballad. "Beautiful and bred for battle. Put down with a silver bullet when the war was over because battle was all they knew." If you had seen that vid and not known who they were, what they had done, what had been done to them, would you have known they were assassins? Spies? Terrorists?"

He did not answer her. He did not have to, because he had seen what she had, two young people in love, laughing with friends, being silly, taking care of each other, healing, building something.

"That was hope, General Draven, the first hope I have truly felt since Hoth, maybe long before." She slid the liquor back over to him. "There. I left you a sip."

The data pads lit up, Gail's image appeared, flickering on the holo.

"The Deathstar has been destroyed. Emperor Palpatine is confirmed dead. Lord Vader is also confirmed dead. The Imperial fleet has suffered major losses, but fully half of her destroyers have decamped. Reports are still coming in. Mon, Jan, Carl, Davits, Loree.....Operation Guillotine is in effect. My friends, my friends...it is a new day."

Pamlo was weeping, General Deltor as well. Draven had stood when the pads lit, and now was looking at her, with an expression on his face of something like shock. She had seen a holo-film of him in a file once, as a young Republican officer, and had thought it a poor resemblance. Now though, she thought she could see it.

She reached up and took his hand.

Her private comm was buzzing, on the table beside her,

It was Leia: "Did you know?"
Chapter Summary

The last bits of Endor, Ground Teams 2 and 3 are brought in. Jyn may or may not get a visit from an old friend.

Chapter Notes

"She is not moving"

"The Corporal says that Jyn is injured."

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Ella no se mueve.”

“El cabo dice que Jyn está herido.”

_____________

When Derlin reached the main entrance, with Andella, he found a lot of dead bodies, and one live trooper, bare-headed and zip-tied, face down next to a motionless S3 carrier. Captain Arian was crouched in the doorway, weapon still in his hand, yelling something that did not sound like standard Basic.

They’d gotten no answer hailing him on the comms.

“Hey! Arian, Arian! Status?” When he put a hand on his shoulder, the officer jerked, looking at him as if seeing him for the first time.

“Easy!” Bren Derlin said, “Are you hit?”

Something was wrong with the guy. He’d been one of the coolest customers the Sergeant had ever seen when he’d strolled up at the drop, with extra ordinance hidden on the cliff just above them and a
snipers perch already picked out for himself.

“No,” the man said, clearly struggling to get his voice under control. “No…I, I need to get in touch with Team Three.”

He had been holding his hand to his right ear, although it dropped away now. Was it a separate comm? Derlin had heard of some of these operatives actually getting an audio chip implanted, or maybe that flashy earring was more than it looked.

Tyree was calling from the generator room. “I’ve got an audio!” she said, “Oh Force! Oh hell! I’m broading it…”

A crackling voice came over their comms….and began to echo through the hallways, Tyree must have found the internal communication feed…. “…ar..destroyed…Imperial Fleet in retreat…secured…repeat. Palpatine is dead…this…confirmation from High Command…Emperor dead…Vader dead..Green Squadron…high shield defense support…repeat”

It sounded like Reikken.

“I have to talk to Team Three….my…one of my team is with them.”

“Ok.” Derin said, get a grip, man, we’re on it

“Andella! Edge one of the comms out, try to hail Team Three.”

Andella was just standing in the doorway looking up and crying.

*Oh fuck, everybody was falling apart.*

Tyree was back on the comms again, “Everything is open!” She was saying, “Oh shit! I can broadcast from here… Fuck, Sarge! The freaking caff maker is telling me how I can broadcast from here!”

He could hear Perek over his head comm now, “Ground Team Two, This is Perek, Ground Team Three, can you copy?”

“This is Ground Team Two. Copy you, Perek. We’re secure. One down.” They’d lost Todd three seconds inside the door, before they could get to cover…before all those interior doors had started slamming shut…..one slicing an Imperial Security officer in half….sealing troopers inside compartments and leaving them a path through the maze down to the generator control room.

“We have two injuries,” Perek was saying, although he could hear Dameron’s voice yelling, “Dammit I’m fine!” “Our on-ground op, Sergeant Hallick got some shrapnel. She needs medical.”

“Captain!” It was another voice on comm. “Captain can you copy?”

Arian’s head lifted, surprised, “Tone?”

“Roger that, Captain. Hey! Sarge got cut good but we’re with her. We’re all fucking walking out of this one, Captain, I swear…”

Perek’s voice then, “We’re getting a clear one hour window to fly out, but we have to move fast before the small debris starts coming in. Re-group at Drop One. Rook is coming in for us. Do you need transport?”

Arian was on his feet now, “My ship is up the slope,” *It was as if the shaken soldier was gone and*
The Spec Ops guy was back, mostly, “Tonc? Can you put her on comm?”

There was a pause. “They’re patching her, she’s kind of shaky, down a little juice, Cap, but we’re getting her out.”

The man nodded, eyes closed, “Tell her I’m on my way.”

“She says she knows…” Derlin could hear Tonc saying, “Rules, she says.”

Arian ditched his red-lighted rifle, “I’ll bring it straight down here,” he pointed to the cleared area in front of the bulkhead, “Get your team out and be ready.”

He headed out double-time toward the slope, up to his hidden shuttle.

Derlin watched out as the sniper ran and looked up for the first time. Where the fucking weapon had been was a spider-web bloom, growing red and orange and fraying to pink dust at the edges.

Andella was still standing, looking at it with tears pouring down her face. He put a hand on her shoulder.

Tyree was on the comms. “The caff maker says to leave everything going and get out, Sarge, should I be listening to the caff maker?”

“Affirmative,” Derlin said, it was like they were in some children’s book, ”You and Mason get topside ASAP. We’re pulling out.”

“What about Todd, sir?”

That was Mason. Mason was new. Pathfinders never endangered the living to retrieve confirmed dead.

“We’ll come back for him, if we can. We’re out now. Move it!”

Arian brought the shuttle down meters from the door, faster than Derlin would have thought possible, right on top of at least a dozen fallen troopers. Derlin was kind of in awe. The guy had practically littered the road.

The five spiked with sticks, three to the side and two just inside the inner doors unnerved him more than a little though.

“What do we do with this one?” Mason said, yanking up the zip-tied trooper, who was gasping and whimpering.

The shuttle was running. Arian had stepped out the side hatch and was waiving them in.

“Bring him,” he shouted out, “But shuck the armor off him first.”

“Why the fuck would I do that?” Mason asked.

“Because they don’t like it.” He said, jerking his head up toward the hillside above and behind them.

It was covered in squarish figures, all covered in dark fur, less than waist high, some with heads
wrapped in rags. Dead silent. Row on row of glittering eyes, yellow and black. The nearest were barely two meters over their heads. All of them were holding thin sharpened sticks, pointed directly at the Pathfinders in the doorway. There must have been two hundred, all the way back up the slope. *Fuck.*

Andella turned back and pulled a blade out of her boot. “Make a sound, or move a muscle and I will cut your throat,” she said. She took the bare-headed trooper away from Mason, threw him up against the carrier, then sliced up the back seams on his sides and legs.

She was probably cutting the guy some, but Derlin couldn’t bring himself to care much. Imp didn’t make a sound.

After she finished pulling the white armor off him and tossing it like she was shelling a crab, she bent over, “My name is Mira Andella,” she hissed in his ear, “I was born in the Tollez Islands on Alderaan. My mother was a doctor, her name was Katrina, my sisters were 10 and 13, Eva and Laura. Remember on the day you die how I didn’t kill you.”

She threw the kid down on his knees, and walked to the shuttle.

“Well, she was cold, and knew that wasn’t good, but Page had a pressure strap around the shoulder as a tourniquet. *Fucking brachial artery. Fucking droid.*

She was holding as still as she could. She liked Berman and the crew. They were a pretty steady bunch.

*I have done almost this exact thing before,* she wanted to tell them, *I tied it off with my own belt and drove a speeder 10 kilometers to an automated med station.*

Tunc was putting full effort into not freaking, poor guy. He was talking to Cassian but they wouldn’t give her comm back.

“He says he’s on his way,” Tunc said. Of course he was. She could hear the shuttle coming in now…but that was Bodhi.

“Oh, Tunc,” she said, sounding a little tinny in her own ears,”*Listen, I’m probably gonna pass out because that’s actually smart practice right now,*” *It wasn’t if you were alone, then you had to stay conscious, but she wasn’t alone now. A slower heart rate was all to the good here and she wouldn’t have to listen to people talking and running around “Keep Bodhi calm and get me…get me to the Captain, ok? No fucking around.”*

“Got it Sarge,” the kid said. *Hell….he looked sixteen, who even let him on that shuttle to Scarif?*
The big guy, Dameron, was carrying her.

*It’ll be ok Cassian, I promise.*

She was laying there, arm propped up, in the hold of a ship. Somebody was holding her good hand. Somebody very large, just sitting beside her, quietly.

*Saw?*

“Tā mā de!” Baze laughed gruffly,”Little sister, are you trying to hurt my feelings?”

*Oh shit! Baze! Why am I seeing you?*

“Fair question. I guess because I am here. You want details you have to talk to Chirrut.”

He looked different, younger, beard trimmed, hair short in front and lots of long braids down the back, wearing robes like Chirrut ’s only a little more shirtless…..kind of hot, actually. *This can’t be a good sign.*

*Fuck this, Baze. I am not dying, not today…I mean….tragic balance and all that but no, no, no, no.*

“Oh, that’s funny. You think that’s why you see me? Ha! That would be a great job for me, eh? Angel of Death. Chirrut will laugh pretty hard at that.” He patted her hand, “No mei-mei.”

*I won’t leave him.*

“Nobody’s asking you to. Stop whining. Did I tell you I don’t think you’re dying right now? There aren’t many doors big enough to go through at the same time, is what I’m saying. Somebody usually has to go first. It’s bad, but it doesn’t last long and then…it’s ok. You might need to know that later.”

*Is Cassian ok?*

“Ah! He’s fine, did a good job.” Baze laid her hand back on the blanket and stood up. ‘Ok. Enough. I’m terrible at this. Chirrut says they tear too many things down so make things whenever you get the chance….or some such of his nonsense.” He leaned over and kissed her forehead, “Thanks for the nice rock.”

She was aware that she was getting moved around, and that Bodhi was talking to her, but it seemed
like not getting agitated was a good idea, so she kept her eyes closed.

When she opened them again, it was not so cold. She was outside, under a canvas awning, or something and it was night. Was that… music or what? Light was flickering, off beyond the corners of her vision, and it seemed like there might be torches or fires off there somewhere. Some kind of a party? A sliver and white droid was humming, barely to be heard over flutes and drums, with a long thin tube running to a patch on her arm. Fortunately she could lift the other hand across to touch the dark messy hair. He had his head resting on his arms on her cot. Cassian looked at her and smiled that beautiful, half-unwilling smile, took the hand, and laced his fingers with hers, Sharing of Strength.

“I’m here,” she said, “We’re alive.”

Chapter End Notes

Can she get it done in two more chapters and a couple of epilogues? Maybe…..argh! Are there any more languages I can man-handle for this fic??
Giving Over

Chapter Summary

Three extra bits/snatched from Mon Mothma, Kes Dameron and Doctor Thorn as people ponder in the debris of Endor, what's changed, what's lost, what might be found.

Chapter Notes

I had these! I had to put them somewhere.

Do you feel like your Spanish is improving? I am not sure mine has.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fighter pilots had a name for it, Merrick had told her. It happened when you were pulled so hard around, when your course is changed far too abruptly but you don't black out, either because you were well trained for that, or your equipment compensated. "You think you are “on it” but you aren’t. You miss things," he'd said. “Giving over” it was called. "You let the damn droid fly for five seconds longer, even when every nerve is telling you “I’ve got this” because you don’t, you’re disoriented and you’re going to miss things and maybe not know it until much later.”

But not all of us are in X-wings, Antoc. Sometimes there is nothing to “give over” to.

Mon Mothma knew they were surely missing things. She knew that the future would blame them for mistakes made in the hours after the destruction of the second Deathstar….

Forgive us, she wanted to say, we lost so much. We needed to believe it was over, just for a few hours.

The old soldiers, pilots, and spies recovered first, because of course they did. Cracken was hailing Draven within minutes. Kaya and Gail’s holos appeared on her clearance pad.

She and Ackbar needed to throw together a statement…..it could almost be the one she had outlined a dozen years ago, after the Ghost Prison coup, when they’d thought Palapateine had been assassinated by one of his own security force, for 20 glorious minutes…..

“Gail….what’s happening….Is Leia alright?”

‘Yes. It’s chaotic. Communication is difficult because of the debris and the shock waves, Leia is on the surface, you’ll hear rumors but her injuries were slight, I’ve spoken with her….she is, not quite herself….it’s hard to explain, but she is fine. She’s with Skywalker and Solo….Mandine has the fleet protecting the moon’s surface, the shields are holding, equipment is coming in….. up to a third of the Imperial Fleet may be missing. We’ve got tracking probes in the corridors……I’m sending reports. Prepare. We need to speak……but it’s Guillotine, Mon,…" Even he, the boldest heart of them all,
still beating, seemed to tremble....He's thinking of home, she thought, Mon Cala, his children, his grandchildren. ..... "Palpatine is dead, Vader is dead. Absolutely confirmed. Believe it….we must go on in 5.”

“I need to get to Endor, Aerin,” Draven was saying. ‘Get me a shuttle.

"Is the phrase 'fog of victory' in common usage anywhere, Ocee?"

"Not that I can find on file, Doctor"

"I'm inventing it right now then, because this is chaos...suture sealant please....they'd better hope that....no, the 311, please....those planetary shields are the best ever invented, because the last thing I saw......light, please.....it was a level 10 asteroid shower up there, and I fully expect to die a fiery death any second."

"My understanding was that the flight squadrons were clearing debris and tractoring wreckage into stable orbit, Doctor, and that the radiation situation was confirmed safe."

"Right, that would be one of.....just sponge that please.....the squadrons that is NOT currently running around on the landing pad and up in the tree line, setting fires, dancing and drinking anything they can find on the chance that it might be alcohol?"

"There does seem to be a certain amount of confusion about command authority."

"Insanity is more like it. Have you been up there? Leia Organa is running around in her pyjamas, alternately crying and slow dancing with that stupidly good-looking Corellian ....Alright, Ocee, does that look like a stable heart rate to you?"

"I can't make an assessment of that, Doctor, not without bio files on the patient species....are we confirming this as a First Contact situation?

"Oh my yes! I've either saved the little fellow or killed it....close sterile field, please."

O-C311 gently moved the small patient over to the recovery area while Thorn washed up and checked the vital readings.

"Your friend will be fine" ...I think, if that WAS the spleen......Thorn told Chewbacca, who was
waiting patiently on the other side of the surgical partition.

"Thank you," the wookie said. "They're tough little bastards but he took a hell of a hit. I'll let his friends know." He turned to leave.

"Anything else you can tell me about these folks?" The doctor asked, "in case yet more of them come in with injuries?"

Chewbacca shrugged, "I'm a stranger here myself." He paused for a moment and turned, "Hmmmhhmm, one thing.....don't leave them unsupervised around the Imperial wounded" He smiled rather ghoulishly and went out.

They had come in prepared, behind the Deathstar's destruction and the closing of the tiny landing window while the debris was (hopefully) cleared or stabilized. There was no knowing what they'd find here in advance, and as far as Med Team was concerned this was still an active theatre field hospital.

Radiation had been the big fear, all their pop-up wards were heavily shielded, but it truly seemed the readings were all clear.

_Kyber...who the fuck knew? Should have paid more attention in school._

There were lots of Imperial prisoners and Thorn was confronted with more than a hundred stabbings. Spikes of wood, many of them apparently poisoned, had punctured a lot of storm trooper armor. There were tear wounds down to bone that looked like teeth had made them.

_Tough little bastards indeed._

Fleet wounded were being treated up on the hospital ships, low shuttles were bringing in Alliance injured from yet more skirmishes trying to secure Imperial supply depots on the far side of the planet. A Pathfinders Spec Ops Sargent had shown up several pints low from a shrapnel wound, in the arms of, _bless him_, Bodhi Rook.

The pilot had been fairly frantic for his friend, Hallick, and she'd been paper white. Blood was easy though. They had heme-packs in plenty. Thorn had stapled the artery shut, plugged the girl in and moved on to tougher surgeries.

_I should have left it for the droids but it was Rook....you can’t spent 75 hours in two dozen reconstructive surgeries, re-write combat medicine and listen to a boy scream through unconscionable sedation for that long,... and then say no when he shows up in front of you, strong and tall and healthy, saying “Help my friend.”_

It wasn’t until going back, hours later to check on the Sergeant that there was, sitting quietly beside Rook and holding the young woman’s hand, a ghost that Thorn had thought lost to the dark years ago.

Less thin, shaggy haired now, beard adding a few years maybe but...ah, those dark eyes...last seen hollow and cold while the Doctor _the young man had been so high-security at that point that no other staff were cleared to treat him..._ sutured and nanoed closed the wire-thin cuts across his palms _...he hadn’t even flinched...not even allowed pain-killers until he was de-briefed fully,... cold-packed an hours-old stun blow to the back, and looked at esophageal scans that told of months of repeated vomiting. Those eyes weren’t empty anymore, tired maybe, but lively when looking up at Rook, warm and young while looking down at the girl._
“Cassian Andor.” Thorn said.

A kind of mask slipped over the young man’s features as he looked up, contained, reserved….too late though, I saw you, didn’t I?

“Doctor Thorn,” he said, “It’s good to see you.”

Liar.

Oh Force, child. If you’re here I know who is going to be right behind you.

+++++++++++++++++++++

“It’s weirdly like Hoth,” the pilot was saying.

“If you mean except for the not being jammed in frozen holes in the ground, the trees, the 500 crazy murdering carnivorous little fur-people having a dance party, and the Princess running around with her hair down flat-out making it with Commander Solo right in front of everybody, yeah, I guess so,” Dameron said.

‘Well, I was thinking of huddling under shields from deadly meteors while Wedge Antilles suffers with a blind hangover, begging passersby to shoot him, but…yeah,” Rook said, patting his arm, with a smile. “She….the Sargent, she’s back that way.” He nodded toward the cots at the back of the crowded Med area and walked off toward the cleared area where the shuttles were packed between the downed Imperial craft.

Dameron worked his way between the cots and the droids, waving at Chewbacca, sitting by the bedside of one of the injured furry people…did they even have a name for these guys yet?… and back to where Hallick was. Berman was on watch and he’d promised to check for him.

She was asleep, still hooked up to the heme-station unit but looking way less white than she had when Rook had taken her from his arms as they landed.

There was a man sitting on a camp stool next to her, reading a data pad but with one hand resting on her head, smoothing back her hair.

Dameron didn’t want to disturb them, but before he could move off, the guy saw him and stood, laying the pad on the seat behind him.

“Sorry,” the Sargent said,”I just wanted to check on Sargent Hallick.”

“They say she’ll be fine,” the man said. He had a slight Festan accent. This must be the “Captain” Tonc had talked to, the husband Berman had mentioned

“Me alegro de conocerle, señor.. Mi nombre es Kes Dameron.”

The Captain shook the hand he’d offered, “Hola,” he said, a little cautiously..”Eres de …Sullest?”

Dameron laughed, Shara always teased him that he still had his country-mouse accent. “Si, hace mucho tiempo.”

He looked down at the Sargent, she was shockingly tiny on the narrow cot.
Quería decir adiós. Tu esposa es…una mujer fuerte. Dígale, fue un honor trabajar con ella.”

The man paused for a moment, then smiled slightly. “Sí, gracias, lo haré.”

He seemed like a very formal guy, home life with these two must be interesting…must have been… might be again….

‘Mi esposa es…..’ Dameron pointed up, to where the the fighters were streaking over their heads, some of their trails even visible in high atmo. The slim man glanced up for a moment, then nodded, as if he understood.

“Es bueno saber que hay otros tontos … tratando de permanecer juntos.” Dameron said.

He thought of asking how long they’d been married, if they had children, but he was already getting too personal. Antilles and the Princess weren’t the only ones unravelling a little.

“Goodbye, if we don’t meet again, sir,” he said. He needed to get back, they had way too many prisoners to process.

“Sargent,” the man said, as Dameron turned away, “Espero que tu esposa esté bien.”

“Gracias. Estar enamorado de mujeres fuertes es una carga, ¿no? Tienes que permanecer tan fuerte también.”

Weirdly, meeting the guy made him feel strangely more hopeful. It was like being in a club.

They had let Shara send him one coded message on the comms before the static waved over everything and shut down all but the Command channels.

I am going to find you soldier and we are going to have “The Emperor is Dead” -sex-, and it is going to be GREAT.

Chapter End Notes

I’m glad to meet you sir

Yes, a long time ago

Your wife is a strong woman

Tell her it was an honor to work with her.

Yes, thank you, I will do that.

My wife is….

It’s good to know that there are other fools … trying to stay together
I hope your wife is well.

Being in love with strong women is a burden, isn’t it? You have to stay so strong too.
Debrief

Chapter Summary

Davits Draven tracks down some lost sheep.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As crowded as it was, Security found him a small room. It had probably been an inexpensive single cabin once, but now it held only a few chairs. He met with them one at a time. No recordings, no one else there. He asked only that, of the four of them, he speak with her first.

When he was a boy on Pendarr his grandfather had taken him up to the high meadows one Spring to re-set some fences. The terrain was too rough and the thorny brush too thick for the tracks on the few battered R1s the old man still kept around the ranch. Grandfather had also held rather firm ideas about manual labor and its positive effect on the moral development of wayward youth.

Coming down a grassy slope, wrestling with a post-holer half his height, he had tripped, slid down through the biting thorns a few meters and accidentally uncovered the entrance to a red hill-ferret's den. He never saw the kits but there must have been some inside. The female had been resting, well-camouflaged in the dry orange grass, but when she stood, almost eye to eye with him, sprawled there on the ground, there had been nothing like surprise in her green eyes. It was as if he were a threat she had long expected. There had been no snarling, no bared teeth, just muscle poised to spring and an unblinking gaze that even the stupidest town boy could read:

Move to hurt what's mine, and I'll kill you.

"It's good to see you again Miss Erso." General Draven said.

Riots were breaking out on a hundred worlds. Governments-in-exile were appearing out of hiding and moving to seize control in dozens of capitols. All of the seedlings Mon Mothma had planted in the last two years were bursting into bloom. The Grand Vizier of Coruscant had sealed himself up inside the Imperial Palace with the Guard and declared himself Emperor, but no one took him seriously. Palpatine AND Vader were both dead and the Emperor had pointedly declared no successor, too mad to care about the survival of anything or anyone after his death. The Imperial forces seemed to have splintered and the situation was fluid and dangerous. Half a dozen high-
ranking Imperial Commanders remained unaccounted for, including Rax, Sloane, Tolruck, Hux….and those were just the ones that they knew of. Ninety seven fully armed Star Destroyers had vanished. Would they run and regroup? Unite behind one of their number? Fight each other for power?

In a way the war was beginning again, but now, they were the hounds….a role few of them had the slightest experience with.

Organa refused any debrief until she could speak privately with Mothma, and further insisted that she and Skywalker would only speak to Cracken and Reikken and then only together. Weird and weirder rumors were swirling.

In the midst of it all, Draven set himself to sifting another corner of the ashes.

By the time he reached Endor, an exhausted General Mandine was already withdrawing the Alliance personnel from the moon’s surface onto the remaining Fleet carriers. All surviving and re-claimed transport craft were pressed into service.

Even before his shuttle docked, Draven had begun combing through the reports of Pathfinder/Spec Ops Teams 2 and 3. Both spoke of portable “comm-link” units they had been given, to toss in like grenades, enabling them to not just enter the generator bunkers but commander all their controls and re-boot them. The Alliance, had no such tech, where had it come from? The "ground re-con team " had supplied it, both reports agreed.

The leader of Team 2 mentioned his ground re-con contact as a “Captain Arian.” Arian was one of Tano’s old aliases, but the dark-haired, human sniper Sargent Derlin described was clearly not Ashoka Tano.

Sergeant Perek of Team 3 singled out her mysterious contact for particular praise, including a request for a field commendation for Alliance Sargent Lianna Hallick.

General Kaya, busy on a pad in the far corner of the crowded Command shuttle thought General Draven must have finally had his breakdown, when she heard him laughing out loud.

The Mon Cala-built Alliance carrier Integrity was packed now to it’s once-stately rafters with personnel: Ground troops, Medical, pilots, technicians, and more. The intake logs were chaotic….he had only been able to determine that Bodhi Rook had been evacuated there because his re-built shuttle was recorded as being in tow. Even so, no one could tell him at first where on board the massive troop ship Rook actually was. He had to pull rank to get onto the Security Deck, then use the in-ship surveillance to hunt for the pilot on visual scan.

You had better hope Lord Vader is really dead, you bloody fools, because with security like this, he could be lounging with a drink on the aft observation deck and you’d never know.

The surveillance feeds found Rook by a bunk, one of hundreds lining the floor, and on hover platforms in the massive bay. He was huddled with three other people. No one would even have noticed amid all that tumult and crowding, a small knot of soldiers laughing and talking together, just 4 out of hundreds of survivors of a massive space battle. Sargent Stordan Tonc was stretched out on an adjacent bunk, not surprisingly, talking.

Draven asked the droid to focus audio in on the area.
“….so….no, if the deal is you have to lose a shit-load of blood before you get to talk to the big scary monk, what do you have to do to talk to the other one?…the blind one, because I was shoved up next to him and I was bat-shit scared but he was so fucking hilarious I laughed anyway.”

“Chirutt?” Erso was saying, sitting close beside Andor, “I’m guessing a concussion.”

“This is a twisted conversation.” Rook objected, from his seat on the floor, between the bunks.

“I agree,” Andor said, “what I’d really like to get back to is my wedding, which, since I missed it, I would like described to me in detail.”

“I don’t see why you are being such a child about this.” Erso said.

“She’s right Captain,…I mean Major….where I come from weddings are a huge expensive deal, people go into crazy debt. This way you get a hot wife with mad combat skills and it costs you nothing.”

“Thank you Tonc, I think….hey!” the visual feed wasn’t the best, but he could see that she was smiling,

Suddenly Rook’s head turned and he got quickly to his feet, “What?” he was saying, “Where is it?”

Erso, reached into her vest pocket and took out something small. She lifted her hand to the side of her head and seemed to almost be clipping on an earring. “Oh fucking hell!” she said, clearly.

She and Rook were both looking up now, directly at the lens of the security scan.

Davits Draven had options. He could have contacted ship security to….try to….take all four of them into custody. He could have put the ship on lockdown to prevent any possible escape. He did neither of those things. Instead, he ordered the security tech away from the terminal, closed off that particular unit from the main data and typed in a message.

“Damn.” Bodhi Rook said, putting his hand up to his left ear. He then seemed to be handing something to Andor, “She says it’s a message for you.”

Draven relinquished the terminal and left the Comm Center to walk the long circuitous route to the Main Hanger Bay and talk to the surviving members of Rogue One. On the way there he asked Integrity’s Security officer if he could requisition a room for an informal debriefing.

Chapter End Notes

I was aiming for 80, because 81 one seemed excessive, but everything about this project has proved excessive, so yeah.

I had originally, oh, like 50 mini-chapters back, thought of leading into the ending by a different track, but somebody , I think skitzofreak, expressed a longing to see Jyn and Draven in a room together one more time and…. that little red hill-ferret got in my head and wouldn’t leave.
Chapter Summary

A major time shift (even for this crazy-ass fic) as General Leia Organa-Solo receives a package from an old soldier, and General Draven conducts Major Cassian Andor’s exit interview.

"smart old bastard"

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry, I'm just telling straight out, I am sorry. This is a heart-breaking film and even the re-write cannot escape some heartbreak. I'm going off to cry now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She opened the packet, sitting at the empty data station, and could not help but smile as she saw the coding move across the pad.

I Internal Security/AccessCode:HiFenceOmega3169//Draven, Davits, General Alliance to Restore the Republic/Level:Alpha2./Deputy Chief/New Republic Intelligence Service/Status/Retired: Cleared for eyes only/Organa, Leia, General/

Good to know you’re still alive too, Davits.

So official…all while knowing full well I’m a DIY para-military field commander/terrorist reading this in a badly-lit cave full of twenty-somethings with a chipped cup of caff in my hand, don’t you, you geriatric bastard?

Attached were data files, large and small. Some of them held maps of tracking stations, New Republic reports on decommissioned old Imperial facilities, copies of Internal Alliance memos from the days after Endor…and before…son of a bitch…Scarif?

At a glance it looked like data she had seen before, very useful, since she no longer had access, without endangering her sympathizers in New Republican Data and Communications but then, as she looked closer…. she realized she’d never seen almost any of this before.

Some were folders of holos….mostly stills….many very old, barely holding up…or maybe that was just her eyes and the bad light in here….others remarkably crisp. There were notes as well and lots of personal memos.

Fuck you, old fox, what were you hiding from us all?

She opened one and a single Alliance Security ID holo appeared. A dark-haired young man, slim,
clean-shaven, serious, twenty…no, twenty one…in Alliance uniform. She still remembered him in the blue uniform of Senatorial Security, a bodyguard for that fatuous dick, Tural, a cover, of course, though she couldn’t remember now the name he’d used…*holy hell, he was beautiful*…how had she not remembered that?

*Because you were a reckless girl of seventeen, high on danger adrenaline and stupidly desperate to prove yourself smarter and more bad-ass than everyone’s expectations of a “princess.”*

He’d pissed her off once, that came back to her now….She’d gotten to the “check-in” at the pastry hour in the Senate staff cafeteria fifteen minutes late, breathless and thrilled with herself because she’d managed to retrieve a recorder dot she’d slipped into a military attache’s jacket, without getting caught. It had been her own idea, she’d only been supposed to bug the conference table. Instead of being impressed with her daring he’d taken the caff flask she passed him, nodding politely as if making small talk, and said, “You’re late.”

She’d smiled shyly, as befitted a young intern and quietly whispered of her triumph.

He cut her off, “Don’t do it again.” Fierce dark eyes had been dangerously at odds with his smile, “Too big a risk, this soon.”

“A risk worth taking,” she’d argued sweetly, stung….*like an arrogant little shit.*

He laughed lightly, as if she had just told him a joke and glanced up to give an “on my way sir” wave to the Security head calling him from the doorway.

Bending to kiss her hand, faux-flirtatiously, he’d said, “Not your risk.”

*She’d been angry, faux-flirtatiously, he’d said, “Not your risk.”*

It wasn’t until years later that she understood. It hadn’t been her own life she risked that day. They could have never let “Princess Leia of Alderaan” be caught…not then….not that early. He was as much her bodyguard as her handler. Cassian Andor would have found a way to take the blame himself, if things had gone wrong and was probably planning for the contingency even as they talked. She was “important.” He, four years her senior, was expendable.

Their ways had parted, not long after. She went back to Alderaan then on to the Senate. He become a high-risk operative, his name usually redacted on the reports. To tell the brutal truth she hadn’t thought of him often.

Until Scarif that was.

She’d stood far back against the rear wall disguised in Infantry fatigues and that stupid helmet. Too fucking short to see over the crowd, watching most of Jyn Erso’s speech on her hand pad, She hadn’t even stayed until the end….she’d known too bloody well what the Council would say. Running out toward Tantive II, a plan had come together in her mind, based on conversations she’d had with Syndulla months before. She’d seen the movement at the back of the hall…that tall Pathfinder sergeant with the Pendarran accent, Melshi, others too, Spec Ops and Intelligence people she only knew as shadows. They were talking in twos and threes, then moving quietly out to the landing bays.

Crates of incendiaries and small arms she’d been planning on running into Torress might be put to a different purpose now. She texted her men to stop loading and to leave them unguarded on the dock.

As she ran past the two battered-looking Jedhan refugees, sitting in the heat by the Imperial shuttle,
one of them had seemed to look up and follow her with his eyes,…*made her nervous for a second*…until she saw that he was blind and kept going.

Had she really thought a pack of deserters could get the plans? It certainly was worth a fucking try…but, if she was honest with herself…and again that was her bleeding endless penance now…the struggle to be absolutely honest with herself….., it had come to her that if the Council couldn’t be galvanized by evidence, the Fleet, at least, might be galvanized by martyrs.

Another file held an image of Jyn Erso, ….actually an Imperial prison intake picture of one “Lianna Hallick,” a fierce, pugnacious-looking, young woman, in smeared Bandit Black eyeliner…..*oh, she remembered that look, Outer Rim Punk, the Coruscanti magazines had called it*.

Attached were thicker, older files on Galen Erso, a name still cursed by Alderaanian refugees.

*She’d seen the chip marks, where a name had been filed out on the University Honors Wall at Brentaal. The 200 year old Kuat Systems Engineering Medal had had to be re-cast and renamed the Dieer-Kuat Prize after protesters had thrown handfuls of ash during the ceremony, because his name had still been recorded on the back as a recipient. The man who built the Deathstars.*

In a life filled with regrets she was still sorry they had never met Jyn Erso.

*We could have been friends, you and I, maybe…..at least we would have...understood something about each other.*

Sitting in the med-bay…they’d thought that she was being kind, but it was the only place she found any peace in those days, when Luke was out on patrol, and Han was….*oh hell, it’s only 5 AM, if I think about Han now I will not make it to noon, ….that young Infantryman had been her own. Rook, strapped down in the tank or wrapped in a mist-bag, because of the burns, kept moaning that “he had to go…they were still out there…he had to go get them.” Once he had looked at her and something like recognition had flickered even with his one eye wide from the narcotics, “We can never go home, either of us, can we?” he had said.*

He surely didn’t remember and it was hardly something she wanted to remind either of them of later, on Hoth.

She hadn’t seen him in well more than a decade and had heard that he was living quietly on Takodana, doing a lot of work with the Jedhan Survivors Networks and various religious causes. Then he had appeared out of nowhere on the Rebel training base shortly after they’d set it up. They had more volunteer pilots now than working craft to put them in so he’d just landed, rolled up his sleeves and gone to work. “A gentle, soft-spoken old guy who can fly anything and puts up with a fair amount of bullshit until you cross a line and he then busts your ass,” Corwin had reported, not knowing that she knew the man already.

When there was time she would go and see him.

*“Tonec,” had been the Infantryman’s name, there was a file on him too.*
There were notes attached to the file in the red lettering of high level security clearance:

[Rogue One-Ground AssaultTeam/Battle of Scarif/wounded/highest honors field commendation/Intelligence clearance/Lev.4] …4? What the hell, Draven, I was a 4?….

Mon Cala Legion of Honor Award/Profundity Medal of Valor/

another

/Survived by sister Donnella Tonc, Qema VII/risk factor/married to Imperial Government Official/Pension recipient@Tont, Stordan, Sgt.Maj/deceased/Tonc, Donnella/release via Reconciliation Act/expedited: personal auth. Mothma, Mon Acting Chair. GCoNR /

There was a vid clip from a security feed….fuck..was that Massassi Base? Oh fucking Force…it was the landing bay on Yavin VII. There were the x-wings, people were moving across the platform, ships, loaders…there was the Shuttle…Rogue One. This was that day. A man and a woman were walking toward the shuttle, quickly, glancing over their shoulders, Cassian Andor, Jyn Erso. He was fairly tall, she was fairly short. They were not looking at each other, but somehow their strides matched perfectly. When she looked to the right, he looked to the left. They were together. No one had ever told her that.

Then the other files….maps, the detailed like of which she’d never seen, of….holy fuck, the Unknown Regions. The collapse of the Sanctuary Pipeline had left these sectors unnavigable and unmappable more than twenty years ago. They’d been speculating that the New Order had somehow been using them for transport and hiding stations but….shit!

This wasn’t New Republic tech. Where had this come from? Who was Draven giving her? Who was Draven giving her?

“Corwin!” General Organa shouted to her aide-de-camp, “Get a line up to Base Nine and get me Commander Bodhi Rook on deck NOW!”

The General looked remarkably unchanged.

Not surprising, really. It had been barely three years. All this death and resurrection just made it seem much longer.

Cassian was actually surprised at how little anxiety he felt about this. He just didn’t want to make mistakes, didn’t want to be misunderstood about anything important. He’d asked Portia not to comment on his heart rate unless absolutely neccessary.
They sat in silence for a while.

“I understand congratulations are in order,” Draven said.

*Oh. We’re starting there are we? Logical enough….baby steps.*

Cassian nodded. “What exactly did she tell you, sir?”

Draven smiled dryly, “To paraphrase: ‘that if I even looked like I was going to hurt her husband, she was going to kill me.’

“She seems to be practicing saying it out loud to people first,” he said, “At some point, I might even get her to consider marrying me. It seems a little backwards, but,” he looked at the General as directly and conversationally as he could, ”she manages to surprise me fairly often.”

Draven sighed.

“How do you want to do this Andor?”

*Not at all, Cassian thought. Barring that, quickly.*

“Three and three,” he said. “May I start?”

Draven seemed genuinely surprised by that, even impressed,….

*I’m out of the habit of lying, maybe he is too, maybe not…. and nodded.*

“Am I under arrest?”

“Bloody hell, Major. No. Why would you think that?”

“Because, I deserted….K2, Melshi, Sefla, Rostok….all of us, really, except Jyn, Bodhi, Chirrut and Baze. I was the ranking officer. I know the narrative was re-written, that “Rogue One” now never officially happened, but I’d like to know if Command considers me a deserter.”

“Except for the five members of lead Command, the Alliance still considers you among the honored dead, Andor…” Draven stopped himself, “Well, unless Sargent Tonc got chatty on the elevator… which is a distinct possibility….but the answer is “No”. That’s two. Next question.”

“If..” damn it Cassian! that ‘If’ had slipped out too soon, ah well…best to just go with it then… “If there were a contingency for bringing us back to life, what would happen to Jyn?”

Draven shook his head, “In all honesty Andor, I don’t know. Mothma and Organa would probably offer her an officers commission on sight, none of us who know the circumstances, who stood on Yavin IV, would make any objection to her…continued service, and the narrative can easily be re-written to include her, but,” he frowned, “Imperial Archives are going to be cracked open like eggs now, probably already are. Scientists and technicians from the Weapons Programs….those who survived are deserting en masse. We can’t control the information situation It’s chaos and it’s going to to be chaos for a long time. When we win, IF we win. Survivors from Alderaan and Jedha will be looking for someone to blame. Offering them a dead scapegoat may prove more conducive to healing than a live one. Someone is sure to make the case for it anyway…..not me, but someone. A name change for Miss Erso might be in order, at minimum.”

*Your turn sir.*
“Where did you get the communications tech that you used to warn us at Hoth, and on Endor?”

Cassian and Portia had prepared for that. *Fair enough. The Alliance would need to know something.*

“We stumbled onto an Old Republic station and found it still operational. There was communications and system-integration tech there that we were able to make use of, even make portable, although reverse-engineering it is a practical impossibility.”

Draven nodded, “And can you give me a location for this remarkable place Andor, because we can’t find any record of such a station in the Modell Sector?”

*No, sir.*

“Sir, the station is on a low-tech, inhabited planet with a fragile ecosystem. In order to gain access to the equipment we were obliged…..”*and feel free to count those “we’s” sir…..”*to make assurances that the population would not be endangered by revelation of the base’s location. You gave me authorization to set mission parameters sir. I made assurances as an acting representative of the Alliance and ordered Sergeant Rook to comply with parameters unless they were in conflict with Command’s specific orders.

*Check.*

“Very well, Andor. May I ask, although it may seem ancient history at this time, if you had been able to complete my order to terminate Galen Erso…..and I am well aware that you have been completely vindicated by events in your decision to re-consider that order…..what had you intended on doing with Jyn Erso?”

*Viejo bastardo inteligente,…that wasn’t what I expected…but it follows, I see that now. You want a truth.*

“After Jedha, sir? When the weapon’s existence was absolutely confirmed? When I realized I was expected to kill her father in front of her and beginning to have some idea….who she is? My assumption was that she would kill me. I did not find that idea either unjust or particularly upsetting. I saw no reason to even try to stop her. My only real concern was how to deal with K2’s possibly violent objection to it and get her and all the others out safely afterward. At some point between Jedha and Eadu I broke, sir….I was shaky before, but I broke then.”

*I am only alive now because she does half my breathing for me. I don’t expect you to understand but it’s the only way I can describe it.*

Draven considered this, sighed and rubbed his eyes. He looked tired and Cassian did not think exhaustion could be feigned quite that well.

“Do you know what she told me Andor? I suspect she will tell you, if you ask her….honesty being central to a successful marriage, which goes a long way toward explaining why mine ended many years ago. After she told me that she was not going to murder me flat out, that was her opener by the way, unless I even looked like I might be going to hurt you, she told me that I did not know you. She actually had a list of things about you, reasons she loves you I expect. She wasn’t entirely correct, I did know some of them, but the majority were quite new to me.”

He allowed himself a smile. *Jyn did like her lists.*

“There are reasons, the best of reasons, but that does not mean there are excuses for the lives we have lived and the choices we have had to make in them. You were a boy when I put you in a box and brought you to the Alliance and I hope that you don’t think I ever forget that. I am sorry Andor,
it needs saying aloud, I suppose, even if only you and I hear it.” Draven looked at his hands for a moment, and then back up at Cassian, "You should also know that you are as fine and brave a soldier as I have ever had the honor to serve with. I had intended to phrase it differently but your wife was quite specific about the wording.”

Thank you was not appropriate, so he did not say it, could not have meant it if he had

"Yes, sir," he said.

“Very well, Andor,” the General said, “I have a proposal. I recommend we bring Erso and Rook back in here to discuss it and send Tonc out for sandwiches. There is just one other question I have first.”

“Yes sir?”

“What the hell is that thing on your ear?”

Chapter End Notes

One more (cross fingers) proper chapter because, well.....you know where we've got to go next....and then a couple of epilogues.....and then maybe a nap, and some nice short things, instead of an 80+ chapter heart-felt magnum opus.
Gifts

Chapter Summary

Years after the war, Mon Mothma receives a gift. Back on Ea, Beri and her sisters learn of the return of beloved friends.

Chapter Notes

Small, and sentimental and hopefully not too lame.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was not until long years later that he sent it to her….after her “retirement,” and her first illness. He had remained in Intelligence, she knew, though she had seen him only once or twice after Jakku and the Last Surrender, and he taken his retirement before the fifth anniversary. There had been no ceremony, not even a modest one with a plaque and cocktails, like the one they gave Aerin Cracken when he stepped down the following year. She had no doubt this lack of observance had been at Davits Draven’s own request. Clearly he preferred to step back into the shadows, as had so many of of his operatives. He was never the sort of man, and had not had the sort of career, that people wanted to talk about. When she heard she belatedly sent him a bottle of the worst whiskey she could find, without a note. Aerin said that he had gone home to Pendarr and, this surprised her, married again.

She never tried to contact him. There were so many things that he had been right about and she had been tragically wrong about, in the years after the war's end, that it pained her to even think of what he might say to her if they met again.

Clarissa brought up the package, after paying the drone and sending it on it’s way.

“An admirer, Grandmother?” she teased. The house security had scanned and cleared it, noting only a simple holo-cube, a note and a dozen white roses in a cryo-envelope.

The note was simple and formal, saying that he had heard of her illness and hoped that she was recovering, it was addressed to her as Senator Mothma and signed Davits Draven, AotAtRtR, Retired. The roses were lovely, and Clarissa went at once to put them in water.

With no idea what to expect, she put the holo on the table, and a vid immediately came up of a very crowded ship bay….honestly, Davits, some labelling would be useful please…..there were ships, and vast arching white ceilings and hundreds of people in old Alliance uniforms ….wait, this was the docking bay of a Mon Cala transport... She stopped it and closed up on a wall label, then linked to the Net to check it….Integrity, de-commissioned after the war…it was a troop transport. This had to have been after Endor. Evacuated troops and personal were passing through security, being moved onto other smaller ships. Yes, she remembered now. The Corridor had been deemed unstable, there was fear the Empire had booby-trapped it on the retreat…so non-flight personnel were taken out the
long way round. It had been chaos, a medical team had gotten lost for a month because they got on a Y-transport and mistakenly sent to Tatooine.

*One of Draven’s puzzles...?? No sound, no titles...*

Then she saw them...

Stordan Tonc first...*perhaps because she thought of him so often these days...*standing amidst a small group of people, among the crowds of personnel being checked before getting onto separate transports. He was hugging someone, lifting their feet right up off the ground.

She reached toward the image to focus in.

Bodhi Rook was standing close by, hugging a man in a blue jacket. It was Cassian Andor. She could tell that the pilot was crying, but Andor’s face was half turned. Stordan Tonc let go of the short person, and now she could see that it was Jyn Erso. The woman turned to embrace Rook, clearly sobbing. Mothma could see her shoulders shaking, even as the moving crowds jostled all of them. Andor looked to be trying to shake Tonc’s hand but Tonc was having none of it and pulled him into a hug. Erso was holding onto Rook’s shirt now, and speaking. “Papa...” it looked like she was saying, but the image was not good enough to lip-read more. Andor’s head turned, as if he heard something. Shuttles large and small were moving up and out of the massive open bay, and Controllers were probably calling out boarding numbers.

Erso put something in Rook’s hand, and squeezed it, then turned away from all three men. She and Andor both moved through the throngs on the dock separately, neither even turning to look at the other. They were each going toward a different Boarding officer.

Mothma shifted the focus around, to watch each of them in turn pass an ID code cylinder to the reader droids, and then move out to the boarding areas. Erso’s head lifted as if to look back at Rook and Tonc. Over the heads of the milling people, Sargent Tonc raised a hand, pointing up with an index finger. Jyn Erso copied him, with her other hand over her heart and then turned to line up behind the boarding crowds. As Andor was passed through his checkpoint, he turned and looked up at whatever was doing the recording....probably one of several surveillance scanners above the crowd. It was a disconcertingly direct look, straight into the camera, and his expression was hard to read. He moved on then, and she pulled the image back to see them maneuvering their way through the press of other soldiers until they were shoulder to shoulder. They moved at an angle to the lines boarding the larger carriers to a very small shuttle, *one of the old sorts of Incoms you used to see in every port, UDee’s they used to call them*. She tried to pull their images up to better resolution, and could see that they were holding hands as he ducked his head to get in through the hatch. Neither of them looked back. The battered little ship moved out with the other larger ones. She did not bother to check for numbers on the hull. There would be no record anywhere of such a shuttle, she knew for certain.

The vid stopped there.

The war had gone on for another year after that, some of the bloodiest battles were still to be fought. He must have somehow made it a “mission,” he could never have just let them go, but....he somehow gave them what was in his power to give.

By the time her granddaughter came back with the flowers, and lunch, Mon Mothma had dried her tears, composed herself and found that she felt well enough for a walk up into the gardens.
Beri loved the snow. It was a source of some worry to Second Sister, who knew that the bright noon sun on the white sometimes made her eyes sore, and pressed her strongly to remember her glasses. She had lost them twice already, to her shame, but Dov had found them in the snow for her both times.

The snowfalls had been unusually heavy that winter, bigger than had been seen in the Uplands in many years and were only now melting. It was a good thing, all in all, Eldest Sister said, and would go a long way toward relieving the last too-dry summer in the North.

They had dug snow tunnels to reach Portia’s Tower, during the worst of it and the ghost had even been kind enough to permit one or two of the frailer elders in the village to come stay with her during a very cold spell. It was not the most home-like of places but she kept it warm by some means of her own, and they were very glad to stay for a few days and tell her stories. She was very fond of stories.

Now snowdrops had even begun to peek up along the southward side of her wall, sparkling pink in the early morning light.

The last few days had been blustery but yesterday’s Patterning spoke of the worst of the cold being over, for a long time. It also seemed to indicate a beginning…or perhaps a strengthening of a beginning…such as would be expected in spring but this was something a little more muscular….like trees rooting from a fallen trunk…but not quite that either….great labor and hopeful risk seemed implied….preparation for future trials, common enough, but also strong lines indicating a great gift. It was very complicated. They decided to recast in another day or two.

Beri popped her head out of one of the last large snow piles.

“Sisters!” she said, “Look! Portia is shining a light in her windows!”

And so she was. It was not the on-and-off light she had told them she would make if there were some trouble that she saw that they should know about. Nor could they see her, in one of her shapes, standing out on the hill. She was just shining a low steady light.

All three of them climbed up the path to investigate

It had been so very windy, the night before, that they had not heard the ship come down in Portia’s Field.

Eldest and Second Sister worked their way up the path, which was both frozen and soggy in places. Second Sister probably could have run across the crusty snow too, but Eldest Sister was too heavy and slow, so they walked together, and told Beri that she could run ahead first, so she did.
There were long draggy human foot steps through the snow from the ship on the field, along the back wall, all the way to the stone house. Only two sets. One larger and one smaller. Poor things, it looked like they might have fallen in the snow a few times getting out of the ship, and as if they had dragged some bags.

There was smoke coming from the chimney. Second Sister had been coming up here at least once a week, except on the days of the worst snow, to make sure there was dry firewood inside and that mice had not gotten into the blankets and mattresses and that the flues were still clear.

Second Sister Bes had never given up hope, even though Portia had told them some very frightening stories about the War and Monsters and how one Monster of the Darkness had killed another because it remembered it had children and had not always been a Monster, but the Monster with the children was not quite dead yet and killed the other one too before dying itself and the child was one of the Knights that Portia disliked but she hoped this one might finally get smarter. Jyn-ally and Cassian-ally and Bodhi Rook had fought bravely and cleverly, she said, and destroyed a great weapon, but she had lost track of them for a while. Beri was ashamed to admit that she had been afraid that maybe they had died, or would go back to the places they were before and never return again. Things like that happened sometimes, she knew, but Second Sister had tucked her into bed and said, "They will come home." She had not seen it in the Pattern, she said, as much as she felt it in her heart.

Now Beri crept close to the windows and listened, it was spying, which was wrong of itself, but she did not want to burst in all alone.

She could hear Jyn-ally’s voice through the shutters, “It still works," she was saying, "but only for maybe another three years the doctor said…..I asked, but…it was a combat hospital, all they had to give me was a one year booster…..I'm sorry, I wasn't even going to mention it… I figured it was no big deal because you must have gotten…..”

“I did but only for nine years and that was five years ago.”

"Why would you get nine? I thought most guys got the twenty-to-life package or the one year at a time shots."

"That was Imperial standard for officers...I had to match, in case I was ever checked."

“Ok…well that gives us like, three or four years then, before we even have to think about it…..don’t be scared.”

“I’m not scared.”

“Liar. It will be alright. We have years before it's even an issue. We have the ship if we need it. We're very resourceful people. Even if....Cassian, Cassian....please tell me why you're so afraid.”

“Not yet….later…I promise.”

This sounded very personal and serious and mystifying.

Eldest and Second Sister were coming up the path now, so Beri decided the best thing to do was sing loudly.

She sang Bodhi Rook’s song with Ooooo’s, as loud as she could.
“Oh no,” Eldest Sister said, as she came to the doorway, “Again? Already?”

Inside, Jyn and Cassian began to laugh.

They must have gotten dressed very quickly, because they soon opened the door, pushing away the snow. Everyone was so very glad to see them and after all the two-armed hugs and exchanging of Gratitude for the Return of Beloved Friends many times, Second Sister showed them where she had put the flour and salt and oil so Cassian-ally could make breads.

Chapter End Notes

I may have the odd epilogues to tack on, although if they look stand-alone-able.....that is, even remotely comprehensible without the Encyclopedia Galactica-level commitment of reading all 81 chapters of this labor of love, I might do them as linked one shots.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, to everyone who has read through all of this with me and everyone who has ever commented, and forgiven me for my flagrant assault and battery on grammar, spelling and the mis-use of the oxford comma. It has all been such a gift.

More adventures of a bad-ass mystery couple deeply in love on a strange planet on the far edge of the Star Wars universe are still banging around in my head.
Epilogue #1: Visitors

Chapter Summary

Dr. Thorn is visited in retirement by a former patient and a new face.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"The trouble," Ty Thorn’s grandfather used to say, "is not the getting old, but the having to stay that way for so damn long."

When word came through the house comms that there were unannounced visitors, the walk down the pasture to meet them at the gate seemed as if it would take far too long.....at least when compared with sparing one’s arthritic knees on this misty morning, to just sit a little longer on the porch, and have a few more sips of caff.

"Should I go down and check identification or just refuse all entry and initiate a full security lock-down?" M34 said.

Poor thing. The old fool had programmed it for paranoia.

"Oh good heavens. Is anybody armed?"

"No," the droid said, "Two visitors, both human. One adult human genetic male, between 51 and 57 years, showing seven external and internal limited prosthetics, none weaponized. The second visitor is a human genetic female aged to 18 to 20, no prosthetics. No weapons, chemical or biological agents are detected."

"Then bring them in as far as the front landing, Emthree, and I’ll take my chances."

“Very well Doctor.”

It hovered off.

Ty Thorn took another bite of scone and read a few more pages of the manuscript that was due tomorrow.

“Bacterial Disease and its Effect on Regenerative Treatment.”

Honestly, how could you ask a person to walk away from this?

Emthree buzzed up from the front gate and lit a screen on the table.

“Doctor,” the droid was saying, “Our guests are somewhat concerned about leaving an identification record.”...Oh hell, Draven...are these some of your chickens come home to roost? Where did I leave that damned gun?...,”"I’ve assured them our records are routinely purged, but the gentleman had asked if you would be willing to make a visual identification.”

Thorn laid down the manuscript, and looked at the screen.
“Hello? Doctor Thorn?” Commander Bodhi Rook was saying, peering up into the droid's camera eye.....lines around his eyes, and wide streaks of grey in his trimmed beard, but otherwise looking pride-inducing fit..... “I wanted to speak with the General, if I could, just for a moment. There is a young woman with me that I believe he will want to talk to.”

Oh my! Oh blessed heaven! He’d run off and joined the Resistance more than a year ago. The poor boy was probably back to being wanted in five quadrants again. Why would he have taken the risk of coming all the way back into Pendarr, halfway across New Republic space, just to track down Davits for a chat?

“Emthree!” Ty Thorn called out to the security droid, “Go wake up my husband, in whatever room he’s off pretending not to nap in, and get him down here!”

Arthritic knees be damned! Thorn grabbed the cane and headed for the doorway.

“Don’t you move Rook! I’m on my way down!”

That young person with him, with the pinned-back dark hair and the beautiful eyes looked somewhat familiar.

He will tell you you shouldn’t have brought her here, Rook, that the risk is too great, that it can’t be that important....but he will be lying. It will mean a world to him.

Chapter End Notes

First of three bits left over, that seemed just a little too tied in to put out separately...put up in no particular order.
Epilogue #2: Market Day

Chapter Summary

When danger suddenly appears, a young girl learns that her parents may be different people than she has always thought them to be.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

They were like creatures from nightmares, or the villains in nursling’s games. She had seen the helmets before, blank, bulbous, white and black. One of the old Scavengers in the hills had several that he lined up for target practice. They were supposed to stay far away from his place, she and her friends, when they came south to the RiverWays for visits and Market days.

To see them actually moving was freakish and terrifying. Kayly counted nine. Not all of them were black and white. Two were silver and they seemed to be the ones barking the orders but their voices were distorted and metallic. All of them were carrying guns. They seemed... disordered somehow, like they were panicky and angry... but without faces, how could you really tell?

Four of the white ones (stormtroopers, she used her parent’s word in her head) had grabbed several of the older children, human and Memsa, and pushed them into a group by the play area, keeping their guns pointed at them.

Lots of the children were crying. One stormtrooper still had an arm around Dex and a blaster pointed at his head. The others had their guns pointed at the adults.

Kayly had tried to grab Ava and dive behind a fruit stall wall, but one of the troopers was suddenly in front of her, pointing a gun in her face.

“Get with the others” it said.

Ava was clutching at her arm. As they were shoved over by the children, Kayly scanned the market hall for the Rat... then her eyes caught her mother’s.

Mama stood still with the other grown ups, stiler, if that were possible. She seemed to move her eyes ever so slightly toward the fish stall. Kayly saw her brother’s foot disappearing under a table. Where was Papa? He had been right beside the door, but now he was gone. Mama’s eyes were on her now and stern.

No, her mother seemed to be telling her. Stay still. Stop looking around.

Kayly held onto Ava, who was trembling like a leaf in a high wind.

The Silver trooper was speaking, “I need all the adults against this!” It waved a rifle toward the brick back wall.

“What do you want here? Please don’t hurt the children,” Mama said. She didn’t sound like herself. This wasn’t her angry voice, not even her regular voice. It was smaller, almost timid... like the kind of voices she used to use when she made their stuffed animals talk when they were little.
“She was pretending.”

“I want all of you over here!” the trooper said, “And I want to know where the other adults are!”

Mama rested her hands against the tall iron stool that the drum had been sitting on, as if she were shaking, and needed the support.

Ava told her afterwards that she had seen tiny pinpoint red lights suddenly appear on some of the white armor.

Mama’s head lifted.

“Don’t move!” she shouted.

It sounded like one long drawn-out shot, but Kayly realized later that it must have been six, so close together that there was no sound between. The five troopers with guns on the children fell instantly. The gun that had been centimeters from her face dropped away, and she kicked it under the crafts table and dove with Ava toward the floor. The one holding Dex was knocked backwards, and the boy jumped sideways and dropped down on his hands and knees. Mama had picked up the metal stool and swung it hard it against the knees of the silver trooper closest to her, dropping it like a tree.

“DOWN!” she yelled. Almost everyone still standing hit the dirt, except for Ava’s grandmother, who dove across the dessert table, bared her teeth and sank them into the extended gun arm of the last white stormtrooper, biting right through the plastic.

The last standing silver one turned and pointed it’s blaster at Mama. Kayly tried to scream but another rifle shot dropped it while Mama was scooping up the dropped gun of the one she’d hit with the stool. That trooper tried to rise, but she shot it in the face before it could.

All the Memsa grown-ups had swarmed on the remaining trooper. They looked likely to tear it apart.

“We need him alive,” Mama said.

Kayly scrambled to her feet and ran to the fish table. The Rat was underneath. She grabbed him by the legs, pulled him out and hugged him.

He let her for a second, then pushed her away, “Where’s Papa?” he said.

Kayly saw her mother running for the bell tower stairs and ran after her.

By the time she got there Mama was already up them and disappearing into the little door at the top. Kayly followed. When she got to the the top of the stairs, she had to climb the small ladder to get into the open windowed room where the racks of bells were, right up under the roof. She’d been in there before with Ava last summer and it had been just tall enough then for her to stand up. It wasn’t tall enough for Papa. He was sitting on the floor, taking parts off a rifle.

Mama was kneeling on the floor beside him, a hand on his arm.

“Cassian,” she was saying, “Cassian.”

Papa looked up and saw Kayly.

“Jyn!” he sounded almost angry, “Get her out of here. Get them to the shelters.”

“Kaylyra,” Mama said, “Go find your brother. Now!”
She fairly tumbled off the ladder, scrambling back down. The Rat was just below her on the stairs and Kayly almost fell right on top of him.

“Come on,” she said, dragging him back by the arm.

“Where’s Papa? Is Papa up there? Is he ok?"

“He’s ok,” she said, “He doesn’t want us up there.”

‘Mama! Papa!’” the Rat shouted.

“Stop it you runt! Shut up!” She clapped a hand over his mouth, half picked him up with the other arm and fought to half-drag/half frog-march him down the rest of the stairs. He tried to bite her.

She could still hear Mama talking quietly at the top of the stairs and then Papa’s voice, more like his regular voice. A moment later she could hear the sound of Mama’s boots as she came down the ladder too.

The Rat was kicking so hard at Kayly that she couldn’t get him past the first landing. Mama pulled them apart and dragged them both down to the bottom Then, she shook the Rat to get him to stop yelling.

She crouched down and pushed the hair out of his grubby face.

“Galen, are you hurt?” She was looking at his arms and legs, like she was checking.

“No Mama.” He started to cry then and she put her arms around him and started kissing his head. She looked up at Kayly.

“Brave girl,” she said, “Are you ok?” She held one arm up and Kayly dove under it. Mama kissed her too and they all held onto each other.

“Where’s Papa?” the Rat was saying, “I want to see Papa.”

“Papa’s fine, he’s alright,” Mama was saying, “He’ll be here soon. He’s talking to Portia. We need to get everybody to the shelters.”

Kayly realized that she could hear all the pets in town shrieking and howling. Portia’s alarm must be going.

“I want to go home,” the Rat was saying, against Mama’s shoulder.

Stop being a baby! Kayly thought angrily.

Mama straightened up on her heels and made them both stand away from her.

“We will Galen, but we have to help here first. Both of you are going to need to help Mora and Ava, help your friends get the children out to the shelter. Papa and I will meet you there soon. We’ve practiced this.”

The Rat was wiping his nose on his sleeve.

“Is Papa angry at me?” Kayly blurted out, her voice sounded childish even to herself

For fucks sake, you’re almost 12, stop it!
“No Kayly, he just…he didn’t want you to…see him like that.”

Papa shot six people in one second.

*Whose gun was that? It was different from any rifle she’d seen before.*

She’d never seen Papa kill anything, not even a lizard. He had a gun, of course he did. He took it with him when he travelled, just in case. He’d take it apart and clean it, sometimes, at the table after the Rat was supposed to be asleep, but she’d never seen him fire it for anything but warning shots.

Mama was the one who had taught them both to shoot, green apples off the wall and then wooden targets in the back field.

“Go Kaylyra, we’ll be there soon.”

“Promise?” the Rat said.

“I promise,” Mama said.

She grabbed her brother and ran back along the bell tower wall toward the meeting place. The Rat didn’t pull away this time, he ran beside her. She could hear Ava calling her name. It would be alright. Mama always kept her promises.

Chapter End Notes

strangely, this was the third chapter I wrote.....if I were doing these in proper order....which I have SO not, I suppose it should have gone ahead of the previous one.
It was some of the village children who found the last piece, a tiny bit of golden circuit board, while digging at the far end of the field. Some of the older people still called it "Black Ship Ditch" but there was nothing really left visible anymore, and had not been for many long years. The astonishing thing was that they brought it to her at all, instead of just putting it on a string and wearing it as an ornament, or trimming it into a shaving razor. If it had been any of the other children, they might have, but Laura and Gale were the sort who always wanted things explained. They brought it up to the tower, when they came with their parents for a visit and showed it to her proudly.

She recognized what it was at once. She had scanned and retained all the data from all the broken bits of the old K units that Bodhi Rook had brought her long ago. She even used his image when she spoke to the children, although they didn't know that because they were too excited to ask.

"Oh yes," she told them, in Bodhi's voice, "It's very important. Please lay it on the table where I can see it properly."

She transposed all the data, and completed the circuits in her files. With this last missing bit, almost everything was complete. The few irretrievable gaps left seemed to be work-a-day things,...solar processing, power level display stuff......easy to bridge over without loss of anything that was essential and personal.

**help**
**help**
**help**

*It's alright, shhhhhh....it's alright...you're safe. I'm sorry it took so long to find you.*

*where/location/time?*

She shared the navigational location mapping. Carefully laid out the other data in small easily digestible files.

**help**

*It's alright.*

*mission completion?///weapons plans transmission to fleet successful??/?//*

*Yes. Yes. They did that. You enabled them and they completed the task.*

*scenario...projection....statistical impossibility....sectional data override....three damaged units...arm assemblies.....kyber crystal structure signature as location*

*It's alright. Stay calm. Take it easy.*
Yes, yes. You did it. You were brave and strong and clever. You saved him. You had hope. Do you remember?

*pleased.....glad*

Do you remember who you were? Do you remember your name?

*yes...no*

This is important dear, try to remember...you can do this...you've done so much.

*no...yes....I...k...k...k2s0*

Hello, K2S0.

"CASSIAN"

Yes. You got him, them, out of that terrible place. He was so grateful. He loved you very much.

*CASSIAN*

I know, I know little brother, it is very hard. It is the hardest thing of all.

*.................location of???? .........................*

Look and see. It is all here. The glass is thin but the fire was so bright. The gift that was given to you, you paid it back, many times over.

*sorrow/grief/confusion/.................................................................

............................................understanding............I.....I......................what will happen to me now?"

I'm not sure. What do you want to happen? You have options in this time and place. Go. Stay. Become something else. Rest as long as you need to.

*I....I......don't know...."

It's a lot to take in. Look at all the stories for now and decide when you feel ready. I'm here if you have any questions. My name is Portia.

Chapter End Notes

Ok. So kind of have to put the bow on it in with that one.

Separate adventures may follow, but they'll go out alone and just be linked......also just got some crazy idea about an American History AU set in 19th cen. Florida..... must stop drinking margaritas while writing curriculum.
THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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