Advertising from the Dark Side

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Summary

When First Order recruitment reaches an all-time low, Supreme Leader Snoke orders Kylo Ren and General Hux to create a new series of advertisements. As usual, personal interests and emotional outbursts get in the way. Could this be a failure that tops the destruction of Starkiller Base?

Notes

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See the end of the work for more notes.
Kylo's Hopes and Dreams are Dust and It's Hux's Fault

Kylo Ren had never been too fond of the abstract concept of “controlling one’s anger”. It didn’t make sense, especially when there were so many things just begging for him to unleash his anger on them...

Like Hux’s face.

It wasn’t the first time he’d punched the general on the way to a meeting. Snoke was probably used to having Hux show up with a black eye or two and didn’t seem to mind. The insufferable man was glowering at Kylo now from the corner of the elevator, dabbing at his bloody nose with a cross-stitched handkerchief. Well, it was his fault for crossing Kylo when the latter was in a bad mood, and it just so happened he was in a very bad mood even by his standards.

The “incident” with the scavenger girl hadn’t exactly lightened up his already dark and despairing worldview. To make matters worse, Snoke’s impromptu morning hologram calls were seriously depriving him of his beauty sleep. How was he supposed to heal from his scars both literally and figuratively (emphasis on the figurative scars because he couldn’t pass up that beautiful emo metaphor) without beauty sleep?

The elevator came to a halt and the two men started towards Snoke’s oversized hologram throne, giving each other hateful side-glances along the way. Kylo could have sworn the chamber got longer every time he visited it. Admittedly, a dimly lit, unnecessarily long throne room did contribute to Snoke’s overall Aura of Evil, but a five-minute walk to the end was a little much. If they could only get the funds to install a people mover, life would be so much easier. Instead, funds went to unnecessary projects, like solar-powered mega Death Stars and specialized AT-ATs with fancy new acronyms.

When they had finally reached the foot of the throne, the Supreme Leader leaned forward and glared down at them.

“My disappointment in the events of this month,” Snoke said, pausing mid-sentence for dramatic effect. “Cannot be exaggerated.”

He let the sentence linger in the air while he waited for an explanation. Hux and Kylo exchanged looks. Fortunately, Kylo decided to be the man and step up for both of their sakes.

“Supreme Leader,” he said. “I’m sure that we are all very disappointed in the fate of the poorly designed and badly managed weapon that was Starkiller base. As your apprentice, I will dutifully force choke the incompetent general responsible for this disaster or carry out whatever other agonizing punishment your Snokeship deems appropriate.”

He bowed and stepped back, certain that Snoke would be proud of his apprentice’s selfless loyalty to his master’s will. Hux’s expression had changed to a mixture of pure loathing and absolute terror. The general brought a defensive hand to his throat and prepared his best worthless-in-your-presence-but-earnestly-apologetic-minion tone.

“Supreme Leader,” he began. “I accept full…”

“You are not here to discuss Starkiller base!” Snoke bellowed. “That catastrophe is in the past. We must look forward to the future glory of the First Order.”

A large diagram with a downward sloping line appeared in the hologram. Kylo felt his heart race.
“Do you know what this is?” the Supreme Leader asked.

“The map to Luke Skywalker!” Kylo gasped. Suddenly waking up a little earlier than usual was entirely worth it. He felt a rare and foreign wave of excitement rise within him.

Snoke put his face in his hands and shook his head.

“No, my young apprentice,” he said.

“Oh,” Kylo said. The excitement disappeared instantaneously. In a way, he was relieved to have it gone. Positive emotions frightened him.

“It’s a line graph,” Hux said.

“Yes, my rabid cur,” Snoke replied. “That is correct.”

This rare bit of praise brought tears of joy to Hux’s eyes. The general gave Kylo a smug smile which quickly turned to a grimace of pain when the latter kicked him in the shin.

“A line graph…” Kylo muttered.

“My apprentice, you do know how to read a line graph, do you not?” Snoke questioned.

“I can read it,” Kylo hesitated. “I just need your guidance.”

Snoke’s groan of frustration echoed through the chamber. He pointed to the vertical line on the diagram.

“This is the y-axis,” he said. “It shows the number of enlistments in the First Order.” He indicated the horizontal line. “This is the x-axis. It shows time.”

“Oh,” Kylo said, nodding. Math class was coming back to him now. He was starting to wonder whether killing his basic math skills as part of his new “kill the past” motto had been a good idea.

“Our recruitments are at an all-time low,” Snoke continued. “The recent destruction of Starkiller Base has made the public lose faith in the First Order. Public relations are in jeopardy. This could be the greatest threat the First Order has ever faced. Meanwhile…” The diagram changed to another line graph, this one with a positive slope. At least, Kylo was pretty sure that was what a positive slope looked like. “Resistance recruitment is at a new zenith. Do you have any idea why?”

“Sampling error,” Hux said. “The resistance is much smaller, which would create the illusion that their recruitment rate is higher, depending on how the rate is measured…”

“Silence!” Snoke shouted. “No, it is not sampling error that has given the Resistance this advantage. It is…”

He paused again, waiting for an answer. Snoke didn’t appreciate long waits, and if he didn’t get a response fast enough, he typically resorted to Force lightning. So, Kylo blurted out the first idea that came to mind:

“Sexy Force-sensitive scavenger girls.”

“Precisely,” Snoke said. “This is a sample of the Resistance’s new advertising campaign.”

He waved his hand again and the diagram changed to a buffering video file. It didn’t look like it was going to load anytime soon. Kylo suppressed a groan.
“Patience, my young apprentice,” the Supreme Leader said.

Ten minutes later, however, everyone’s patience was wearing thin. Snoke beckoned one of the Praetorian guards over and, after a hushed bit of technical trouble-shooting, the video began to play.

Peaceful piano music played in the background while an orange and white BB-unit rolled across the screen. The background varied between several picturesque shots from different planets, the lakes of Naboo, the nighttime lights of Coruscant. The droid finally came to a stop on a desert hill with the twin suns of Tatooine shining in the background. A young woman came forward and knelt next to the droid, petting its head lovingly like one would a dog.

The scavenger girl. Kylo’s heart skipped a beat. His hands sweated, an instinctual response which he attributed to his think gloves.

“We all want a galaxy of peace and stability,” a man’s voice narrated. “Where family and friends are treasured.” The ad now showed a group of X-Wing pilots. Their laughter was muted but they seemed to be having a hysterically amusing time with whatever they were doing. “And where our children can grow and play without fear.”

The scavenger now appeared to be showing the BB-unit to a group of curious children. More muted laughter. Kylo was sure he’d get diabetes from the saccharine mood by the end of this screening.

“Sadly, this ideal is under attack.”

The video faded to black followed by the glow of a red lightsaber. The next few scenes showed Kylo Ren himself smashing various pieces of equipment and destroying trees in a snowy forest, screaming incoherently all the while.

“How did they get that footage?!” Kylo exclaimed. This had to be an illegal invasion of privacy.

“Instead of peace, the First Order is intent on bringing wrathful destruction upon the galaxy,” the narrator went on dolefully.

The video switched to a clip of General Hux tumbling down the stairs. Meanwhile, the live Hux’s face had once again gone from its usually pasty hue to a spectral white.

“Their clumsiness, incompetence and uncontrolled rage will bring ruin on the galaxy, unless, you step up to stop them. You can join the cause now to protect what we all hold dear by joining the Resistance, a dedicated team of heroes of all ages.”

The scene zoomed in on a fleet of X-wings. The narrator, a pilot in the usual orange uniform, was posing next to his ship. The BB-unit rolled to his side and emitted an adorable series of beeps. A line of text at the bottom of the screen introduced him as “Poe Dameron – Commanding Officer of the Blue Squadron”.

“As a proud member of the Resistance,” Poe said, smiling broadly at the camera. “I encourage you to join the cause. You can be the hero the galaxy needs today.”

He winked at the camera and the resistance logo appeared in the center of the screen with the words “Enlist Today” underneath. The video faded to black.

“Would either of you care to explain how this humiliating footage got in the hands of the resistance?” Snoke growled.

“FN-2187,” Kylo seethed. “The Stormtrooper who defected. He must have been carrying secret
recordings and given them to the Resistance…”

He drew his lightsaber, his face burning from the ignominy of it all. The world was always out to make him look like a fool. He was about to bring the lightsaber down on the hologram projector when Snoke yelled, “Stop this at once!”

“General Hux,” the Supreme Leader said, turning to the general. “Can you tell me why one of your men had footage of you falling down the stairs and screaming like a schoolgirl?”

Hux didn’t respond. He was staring blankly at the hologram, beads of sweat dripping from his forehead, as if the advertisement had caused a mental overload.

“Hux,” the Supreme Leader growled.

No reply. The general was broken.

“HUX!”

Hux jolted out of his daydream. His eyes darted from an exasperated Snoke to a confused Kylo Ren. He blinked a few times before stuttering:

“S-Supreme Leader, your… a… apprentice pushed me down the stairs.”

“That’s a lie!” Kylo screamed.

“No it’s not!” Hux said.

“Yes, it is!” Kylo retorted.

“No…” Hux began, his voice rising in both pitch and volume.

“SILENCE!” Snoke commanded.

A thunder clap echoed through the chamber followed by a menacing bolt of blue lightning. Kylo looked around, both stunned and impressed.

“Can you teach me how to do that with the Force?” he begged.

“Also, why does the Force lightning come after the thunder?” Hux asked. “Could you please explain this strange science, Supreme Leader?”

“That is NOT WHAT I CALLED YOU FOR!” Snoke shouted. “You are here now to receive your new assignment.”

Kylo perked up a little. Maybe he’d be stationed on a ship far, far away from Hux. Maybe he’d even be on a mission to find the scavenger girl, in which case, a strictly interrogation-based date was certainly not out of question.

“You are to make a new series of video advertisements and posters for the First Order,” Snoke said, leaning back in his throne. “And you will be working together. I hope to see a more unified team dynamic in the ads.”

As usual, Kylo’s hopes and dreams withered into dust.

“I expect to see the finished product in one week,” Snoke added. “Do not disappoint me.”
Before either Kylo or Hux could protest, the Supreme Leader’s hologram disappeared. Neither of them said anything at first. Then, Kylo broke the silence by punching Hux across the room. The general yelped and got up from the floor, noticeably disheveled.

“What the hell, Ren?” he shrieked.

“That’s for being a klutz and falling down the stairs,” Kylo snapped, stomping off towards the elevator. “And for blaming it on me! This is all your fault!”
“What the hell is this?”

Hux had encountered some pretty bizarre reports during meetings (the Maniacal Ironing Board blueprint was a particularly memorable one), but what Kylo had brought him was something else.

“Research,” Kylo snarled. “I thought you’d know research when you saw it, you with all your science fair trophies.”

The commanding officers in the room sniggered. Hux stiffened. So what if he had a twenty-year-old plastic trophy or two in his office? A man was entitled to keep a few tokens of pride, and no matter what the Kylo said, at least one of them had to be real gold…

“Research,” Hux said, “is an organized, methodical set of results that can be analyzed in some way, not a collage that looks like it was made by a stalker.”

“It’s not a collage.” Kylo rolled his eyes. Sometimes he wondered why he had to be the one to explain everything remotely intellectual in the First Order. “It is a compilation of the scavenger girl’s appearances in the Resistance ads.”

“May I ask why your ‘research’ required that you cut all the photos into hearts?” Hux inquired.

“That was the only shape that my broken scissors would cut!” Kylo shouted. His hand moved towards his lightsaber. “And thanks to your Starkiller base disaster, we don’t have funds for me to get new ones, so if anyone needs to explain themselves here, it should be you.”

Hux opened his mouth to argue the case further, but found that it was rather difficult to make a point with the Force constricting his throat.

“Can we move on with the meeting then?” Kylo asked, unclenching his hand.

The officers nodded emphatically. Hux was too grateful for oxygen to voice his dismay. If Kylo had been the type to smile, he would have smirked. This was how a meeting was meant to go after all: everyone agreeing with him and Hux somewhere along the spectrum of mild discomfort to excruciating pain. However, Kylo had never caught onto the whole smiling fad, so he banged his fist on the table and pointed at the pictures in front of him instead.

“After repeated analysis of the Resistance propaganda,” he said. “I’ve come to realize their secret. It’s her.”
“The scavenger?” one of the officers said, perplexed. “Are you really sure that’s it?”

“And could you please stop dimming the lights whenever you talk for dramatic emphasis?” another officer asked. “It’s kind of distracting and I can’t see anything.”

Kylo glared at the dissenting officer, who conveniently sprang five feet in the air and flew backwards out the door and over a ten-story drop. The lights flickered off and were replaced by an eerie red glow.

“Anyone else want to argue with dramatic emphasis?” Kylo growled.

“No,” said the first officer. “Actually, I much like what you did with the lighting.”

“Yeah,” said another, nodding. “It really brings out the color in Hux’s hair.”

“It kind of adds a kind of highlight to his unnervingly pale skin too,” a third officer chirped in.

“Okay!” Hux seethed. “Now, getting back to the project at hand which, if I recall correctly, has a deadline that is nearly impossible to meet but which we need to work with, or else the Supreme Leader will snap all of our necks…”

“I’m not done showing my research,” Kylo said. He held up a picture of the scavenger. “As any reasonable person would conclude by looking at these, the scavenger is the appeal of the entire Resistance. Literally nothing else that they do matters. People just see her on the screen and they don’t even care what the commercial is advertising for. So…”

He paused, hoping that the others would be smart enough to fill in the blank.

“So what?” Hux sighed.

“So, if we get the scavenger girl in our ads,” Kylo said. “Our recruitment problem is solved.”

“Sir, I unfortunately don’t think it’s that simple,” said one of the officers. “There are…”

In an inexplicable turn of events, the officer promptly fell over the nearest railing in the same manner as his colleague.

“This is not helping our lack of workers,” Hux muttered. “Look, Ren. Saying as we can’t exactly buy ourselves a clone of the scavenger to appease your pathetic affections, can we please start discussing practical solutions?”

“Yes, we can,” Kylo said. “It’s called kidnapping, and it’s a very reliable method of landing a date once the girl stops doing silly things like shooting at you.”

“Isn’t it a bad sign if she’s shooting at you?” one of the two remaining officers said to his companion. The latter didn’t get a chance to reply before they both took their final journey over the railing. Hux took a long, horrified look at the empty seats before him before turning to Kylo, fuming as usual.

“Would you stop doing that?!” he shrieked. “This is the fifth set of commanding officers we’ve gone through this month!”

“It was mercy killing,” Kylo replied. “Now they don’t have to listen to your shrill voice at work every day. Their ear drums are finally free.”

It was moments like these when Hux wasn’t sure whether to sob or scream. The result of this conflict was a cry of exasperation that sounded like a demonic porg. The sound echoed throughout the
After a good five minutes of therapeutic hyperventilating, Hux sat down and resolved to approach this matter like he usually did most unideal situations in the First Order – with bitter resignation.

“We’re going to need to change our angle,” he muttered.

“I thought about that,” Kylo said. “But I still think that kidnapping is the most promising solution until she realizes out that it’s best for us to rule the galaxy together. Women are weird that way…”

“I’m not talking about your love life!” Hux said. “I’m talking about our advertising campaign. We need to see what we’ve been doing wrong.” He stalked over to the projector in the corner of the room and typed something into its console. “Last night, I compiled a collection of our previous commercials for reevaluation.”

The projector now displayed the LightTube website.

“How did we get 12 billion dislikes?” Kylo gasped.

“Apparently a whole bunch of haters from the Hosnian system disliked all of our videos when they saw the ominous red beam approaching their planets,” Hux replied.

“Stupid internet trolls,” Kylo muttered. “Play the video.”

“It’s buffering,” Hux grumbled.

No sooner had the video loaded than an advertisement began to play. The grinning face of Poe Dameron appeared on the screen.

“SKIP IT!” Kylo ordered.

“It won’t let me,” Hux said.

“Hi, I’m Poe Dameron,” the Resistance pilot introduced himself. “On the behalf of the rest of the Resistance, I’d like to thank all of our supporters for their generous donations.”

The camera zoomed out to show Poe standing on Ahch-To, surrounded by a flock of porgs. The birds turned to the camera, their enormous eyes twinkling in the sunlight. There was something mesmerizing about those eyes. Even the Supreme Leader’s two right-hand men had to look away.

“In the previous month alone, our Adopt a Porg program raised over 24.5 billion credits,” Poe proudly announced. “That’s more than double the number of dislikes on a typical First Order video announcement, which believe me is a lot.”

The pilot winked at the camera. Kylo gripped his lightsaber. If he had to see that kriffing pilot wink one more time, he was going to take down both the projector and the rest of the meeting room.

“Rest assured that your money will go to a good cause,” Poe continued. The commercial switched to a nest of porg chicks. “Thanks to you, the Resistance will soon organize a fleet to protect Ahch-To, the only planet on which porgs can thrive, against the destructive, animal-hating First Order.”

The scene cut to a line of AT-ACTs trampling a coral reef on Scarif.

“That footage is from the days of the Empire,” Hux said. “They’re not even bothering to be factually accurate.”
The remaining funds will go to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the brave rebels dedicated to protecting our galaxy.” A line of X-wing pilots waved at the camera. The ubiquitous BB-unit rolled across the screen and beeped in support. “Our humble beginnings allow us to appreciate the value of your hard-earned credits. Unlike our elite and conceited foe…”

The scene blurred to a video of General Hux spreading a thick black paste from an expensive-looking bottle onto a sandwich, subtitled with the words “Armitage Hux – First Order General and Spoiled Gourmet with Expensive thought Disgusting Taste.”

“We do not operate on the principle of unearned privilege. Help the fight for equality and justice. Join or donate to the Resistance now.”

The ad concluded with the Resistance logo.

“Pause the video,” Kylo said. He turned to Hux and saw that there were beads of sweat dripping from the general’s brow. “Was that Rayshonian marmite?”

“Yes,” Hux hesitated. “But I don’t see why it should be any cause for criticism. It’s only a few credits a bottle, all of which I pay with my own salary. It adds a nice flavor to the bread…”

“Look at what you’ve done!” Kylo roared. “You’ve singlehandedly disgusted everyone with your eating habits while painting the First Order as a bunch of snobs!”

“Well, what about you and your inexorable avocado toast and protein bar addiction,” Hux retorted. “And for your information, Rayshonian marmite has been exceedingly hard to find ever since we destroyed the planet of Raysho along with the rest of the Hosnian system, but I was willing to sacrifice my favorite condiments for the greater glory of the First Order!”

“You can’t argue with avocado toast, general,” Kylo said, drawing his lightsaber. Hux eyed the weapon and decided that defending his personal dislike for avocado toast was not worth his life.

“Shall we resume the video then?” the general asked. Ren nodded.

The First Order commercial began with a slow, dismal series of piano chords. The camera zoomed in on Kylo Ren, sitting on a bench. Neither Kylo nor Hux could remember which planet they’d shot the video on. Whichever planet it was seemed to have very little sunlight and an abundance of storm clouds.

“Before I joined the First Order,” Kylo narrated. “I felt isolated and hopeless. It was as if my life had metamorphosed into an endless trek of misery on which I was the only desolate traveler. I think the only thing that kept me going was the innate fear of the unexplored void of death, which is something I’m sure a lot of us ponder about when we’re bored.”

A disclaimer at the bottom of the screen, the font-size for which was oddly large for a disclaimer, read: “Kylo ran a lightsaber through his father recently. He would like to assure you that although the Resistance tried to make this incident look like murder, it actually wasn’t because Kylo never hated
his father, and you have to at least kind of hate someone to murder them in a technical sense.”

A TIE Fighter flew across the sky. The camera followed its graceful movements in the air. However, this sequence quickly concluded when the TIE Fighter was blown to bits by an X-Wing. Kylo gazed up at it from his bench and sighed heavily.

“I feel like that TIE Fighter is a metaphor for my childhood memories,” he said. “At first, they seem beautiful and innocent, but then I remember how all my early dreams blew up in my face as time progressed. I think the X-Wing is probably a metaphor for my Uncle Luke. He used to fly an X-Wing, so I guess that’s kind of like a metonymy too. In fact, the entire First Order could be used as a metaphor for my childhood when you view it from that angle. Always blowing up just when you need it most.

“Speaking of the First Order, I joined that thing recently. It hasn’t really cured my endless misery, but I can say with certainty that I am not miserable and alone anymore. There are plenty of miserable people here for me to talk to, though I don’t really do that because I’m not into socializing, but you know what they say, ‘Misery loves company’.… if you’re into company, which I’m not, as I said before.”

The First Order logo appeared on the screen with the words, “Join the First Order – Misery Loves Company” below it. The video cut to General Hux, seated at his desk, his face covered in claw marks.

“I’M GENERAL HUX AND I APPROVE THIS MESSAGE!” he barked at the camera.

The video took an abrupt downward turn as the camera fell to the ground. The new angle provided an excellent view of Hux’s shoes. It seemed that the general had decided to wear heels that day.

“What are you doing, you imbecile?!” the general’s voice screeched off-screen.

“I’m sorry, sir,” said the camera man. “I dropped it when you screamed at me. I got startled.”

An orange tabby sauntered into view. The cat gave the camera a few inquisitive bats before picking it up in its mouth and carrying it away.

“No, Millie!” Hux cried in the background before the video went black.

“Please tell me we didn’t actually air this,” the live Hux said.

“It was okay until you and your cat ruined it,” Kylo replied.

“You were the one who brought the audience into a state of despair with your whole Woe-Is-Me Manifesto!” Hux shouted. “And don’t you dare blame my cat. Millie is a furry ginger angel!”

“You’re all so cold and unsympathetic,” Kylo said. “No wonder you scare all the potential recruits away.”

“And what was the music at the beginning?” Hux moaned. “It sounded like a funeral march!”

“I forget the name of the composer. I think the piece was called the ‘Call of Desolation’. I chose it because it was my alarm clock for a while.”

“Oh, for the love of…”

Another video had begun to play on the projector. There was another ad, and of course, it just had to
be a Resistance ad starring Poe Dameron.

“I bet he thinks he’s so wonderful,” Hux said, glowering at the pilot. “Look at that tangible cockiness! He probably expects the whole galaxy to fall to his knees just because he has a handsome smile and perfectly-toned muscles from all of that flight training.”

The general’s commentary received a very confused look from Kylo.

“Are you curious about what the First Order is hiding from you?” Poe asked. “Well, wonder no more with the Resistance website’s newest feature: KyloKam.”

“KyloKam?!” Kylo exclaimed.

“They don’t even know how to spell ‘camera’ correctly,” Hux sniffed.

“**KyloKam allows you to monitor Kylo Ren and other leaders of the First Order live 24/7!**” Poe said. “**Simply visit the Resistance website and navigate to the KyloKam tab. It's an easy way to see everything the enemy has to hide.**”

The commercial included sample KyloKam footage of Kylo holding a cell phone to his ear, before smashing the device on the ground and yelling, “**Why does the kriffing service on Jakku have to suck so much?!**”

A disclaimer at the bottom of the screen read, “**Warning: KyloKam not suitable for younglings under the age of 13.**”

“**Now, that’s quality intelligence, isn’t it, BB-8?**” Poe said.

The droid rolled onto the screen, adorned with shades that looked like they came out of a low-budget spy movie. The pilot laughed and winked at the camera.

“That’s it!” Kylo said, swiping the projector off of its stand with his lightsaber. “They will pay for this! I will make them…”

“Hold on,” Hux said.

“What? I was in the middle of a proclamation of vengeance!” Kylo complained.

“The staircase in the video from KyloKam,” Hux said at length. “That’s the same staircase you so rudely pushed me down the other day. That means we know roughly where the camera is, so we should be able to find it and destroy it.”

“I’ll handle this,” Kylo said, storming out of the room. The general hurried after him. Neither of them were too fond of working together, but the secret camera was a pretty convincing common enemy.
Soon, there will be vengeance, Kylo thought.

It was proud times like these when he felt his inner torment was really blossoming. Here he was with his twisted mind set on one goal: to bring just destruction to the elusive malice that was Poe Dameron’s KyloKam.

He was sure to note the very profound emotions associated with this challenge. It was perfect material for a free-verse poem, one that he could revisit in times of dark and dismal solitude (in other words, any time after 5 PM on all days that ended in “y”). Perhaps he could then develop the poem into a song, one that blended the grief of a classical requiem with the edge of hard metal. It would make a gorgeous romantic ballad. He could play it for the scavenger girl along with the other songs he’d written about figurative agony. Girls liked music and men who were sensitive to emotions after all…

Not that she was important. The point was, he’d get revenge against the camera and its creator. It was the next step to finishing what Grandpa Vader had started, he was sure of it.

Kylo stared down from the top of the staircase, contemplating the cruelest way to kill a camera. Well, the first step was finding it. Reviewing the past footage would help to determine the angle the monstrosity was filming from. Or even better, he could recreate some of the past footage.

He knew just how to do that.

“Here’s the plan,” Kylo said, turning to Hux. “First, I gently throw you down the stairs just like I did the last time, but a little harder to ensure accuracy. I know you’re going to say that you don’t like it, but just remember that your opinion is neither justified nor valued here, so you might as well just go along with it.”

“How in the world is that supposed to help us get rid of KyloKam?!” Hux backed away from Kylo’s reach.

“The last time the camera recorded your clumsiness, it was at a specific angle,” Kylo explained. Hux ought to have counted himself fortunate to have someone so patient and skilled at explaining the simplest of things. “If you fall in about the same position this time, we can use you as a reference to find the camera. It’s simple logic.”

“That’s not logic, it’s sadism!” Hux protested.

“Why is everyone so uncooperative around here?” Kylo lamented. “Every time someone suggests something you don’t like, you have to throw a tantrum at the expense of the entire First Order.”

“I won’t allow it, Ren.”
“Stop being so selfish.”

“No!”

Kylo sighed. Everyone was just hell-bent on making life difficult for him. It was time to take a new angle.

“Well, look at that,” he muttered. “Never thought you’d be so unkempt, General.”

“What the hell are you talking about, Ren?” Hux snapped.

“It obviously doesn’t concern you, otherwise you would have noticed it earlier,” Kylo sniffed. “I thought you took pride in your appearance, given your rank and all, but I guess that means nothing to you.”

“I assure you I take great care in my attire,” Hux replied with growing impatience. “What would make you say otherwise?”

“No, really. You wouldn’t care…”

“Just tell me!” Hux demanded.

“You’ve got lint on the back of your suit,” Kylo said, craning his neck to stare pointedly at the general’s back.

“How dare you accuse me of having lint on my clothes!” Hux’s tone was bitter, but there was an unmistakable note of insecurity.

“I’m just stating the truth,” Kylo replied. “But if you want to deny it, and walk around in this state of disarray all day, that’s your choice. I could get it off for you, though.”

“I can do that myself!” Hux said.

“No, you can’t. You’re not flexible enough.”

Hux pursed his lips and stared at the floor. His hands were sweating. His heart was pounding. He felt a migraine coming on. It was difficult to keep a straight face with such a prospect as disturbing as lint on his clothes, even if the odds of Ren telling the truth were lower than the odds of an Ewok-piloted TIE Fighter navigating an asteroid field.

“I’ll go back to my chamber and change then,” he said reluctantly.

“Are you really going to walk all the way back to your chamber looking like that?” Kylo asked. “What will your subordinate officials think of you when they see General Hux looking like a mess with lint all over…”

“Alright, just get it off me,” Hux caved in before he could help himself. “And don’t you dare tell anyone about this. I have a reputation to maintain.”

According to most psychologists, unpleasant experiences applied as punishment can allow people to learn from their follies. It was this principle (and a number of personal grievances against Uncle Luke’s Academy Counselling Center), that led Kylo to conclude that psychologists were full of Bantha shit. After all, if people did learn from negative consequences, Hux should have learned by now not to turn his back to the Master of the Knights of Ren.

But for now, he hadn’t. And he paid the price, curled up in a fetal position at the foot of the stairs.
“Damn you!” he cried, wincing in pain as he got up from the floor.

“Oh look, the lint is gone,” Kylo said. “You should be thanking me. Now, judging from where you fell, the camera should be somewhere there.”

Kylo gestured vaguely at the ceiling. Hux glowered at him and dusted himself off.

“I don’t see anything,” the general said. “I suppose that’s to be expected. They wouldn’t be dense enough to make it too obvious. They’d try to make it blend in…”

Hux was interrupted by the distinctive buzz of Kylo’s lightsaber turning on. He closed his eyes and asked:

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“If the camera is here,” Kylo explained, “And I take down the wall and ceiling, I’m bound to get the camera long with it.”

“You do realize that that would only give the Resistance more material to slander us with,” Hux said. “Not to mention the repair costs…”

“Alternatively, I think that my willingness to resort to destruction demonstrates confidence and charm,” Kylo said.

“It’s just a camera, Ren.” Hux rolled his eyes. “It’s not worth demolishing the entire hallway when we can simply find and disable it. I’m sure whatever method of concealment they used isn’t anything too complex. They’re only Resistance scum. I suspect it’s just primitive camouflage. It shouldn’t be too difficult to find.”

Meanwhile, in the Ileenium System, Poe Dameron was having one hell of a movie night.

Out of all the equipment the Resistance had invested in, the Hypermatter Popcorn Machine was, without a doubt, one of their best purchases. It was user-friendly, yielded a thrilling variety of flavors, and worked at light speed. Literally, it had a built-in hyperdrive.

Best of all, the machine conveniently ran on the same fuel as the ships in the Resistance fleet, which saved them an extra shopping trip. They had more than enough fuel anyway, enough for two jumps to light speed. Two full jumps.

And popcorn was a vital resource to the Resistance’s battle strategy. After the launch of the KyloKam project, they were having a lot of analytical movie nights. Of course, they couldn’t study the First Order on an empty stomach.

The day had been a little slow at first, but the moment he saw a redheaded blur crash onto the floor, Poe knew things were going to get interesting. It wasn’t long before he was joined by the rest of the Resistance fleet. They’d spent the evening gawking at the KyloKam monitor, which displayed Kylo and Hux circling the area like confused guinea pigs in the lab. Patricidal, planet-killing guinea pigs.

“How long have they been looking?” one of the pilots asked.

“Three whole hours!” another chirped. They all laughed.

“I could watch this all day!”
"I could too!"

"This is even better than when we wiretapped Han’s phone!"

"Shh… shh… Hux is talking."

The commentary died down and the pilots watched the monitor intently. General Hux was staring straight into the camera, completely oblivious of its location. Who knew how effective a bit of paint and glitter glue could be for concealing spy technology?

"I told you, Ren," he said. "I’m still looking."

"It’s been three hours," Kylo said in the background. "Though I understand that you don’t have much of a life apart from banshee imitations and cross-stitching, I’ve got places to be."

"Cross-stitching is a very dignified leisurely exercise," Hux replied indignantly. "Though I scarcely have time for it, given my very full schedule."

"No wonder that pink floral AT-AT handkerchief of yours is taking so long to finish," Kylo quipped.

"Where did you find that?!” Hux was blushing now. "Also, it would have been done if not you’re your compulsive desire to sneak into my chamber and tie the strings into knots!"

"Maybe that was just your lack of talent," Kylo retorted. "And your own insecurity is making you subconsciously manufacture new memories."

"That is absurd, and you know it, Ren! And I will have you know that my cross-stitch work has garnered extensive encomiums from the art community online."

"You mean on the sites where you write your own reviews?"

"Awww! They fight like little kids!" Paige Tico exclaimed.

There was a crash, followed by the sound of Hux squealing as the ensuing argument resulted in him being thrown into a pillar.

"Awww," the Resistance fleet said in unison.

"He seems to get paler every time," Paige noted, turning to Poe. The latter had become the resident First Order expert. "Is he ill?"

"Nah," Poe said. "That’s just Armitage Hux’s natural state. It’s a kind of adaptation actually. That and the dark circles under his eyes."

"Isn’t that just insomnia?" another pilot asked.

"No," Poe insisted. "It’s an adaptation, but its benefits aren’t obvious in his current environment because he’s not indigenous to Star Destroyers. If you saw him in his natural habitat of Arkanis, you’d see how it helps him camouflage…"

Poe’s fellow pilots nodded in awe of his expertise.

"Does Kylo have any special adaptations?" a Resistance technician asked.

Poe took a moment to consider, before replying:
“I may not be remembering correctly, since it’s been a long time since I studied this, but I think the most significant one would probably be his hair.”

“His hair? I thought that was just compensation for his inner insecurities!” the technician gasped.

“It has another function,” Poe lectured. “His hair secretes a kind of sulfurous compound that keeps it really fluffy, even when he puts his helmet on. It keeps his gigantic ears warm too, but the third and most significant advantage is that the sulfurous compound acts as a defense mechanism.”

He had the full attention of the fleet now.

“You see,” Poe went on. “When Kylo was young, he had his hair ruffled by a number of relatives. General Organa, who’s probably studied him the longest out of anyone in the field, told me. He used to hate it, but he didn’t produce the sulfurous compound in his youth. That doesn’t develop until puberty. Now that he’s reached adulthood, however, the sulfurous compound can act as a serious skin irritant to anyone who tries to ruffle his hair. His height helps as an added defense against hair ruffling.”

His fellow pilots nodded in approval, proud that their commander was gifted with such a deep understanding of the sciences along with his acumen for flying and explosions.

“Man, Poe,” one of them said. “You sure know your First Order personnel.”

“I’ve been studying them for some time,” Poe said, shrugging. “And I’ve gotten the chance to make some in-person observations too. Now, with KyloKam, it’s even easier. Anyway, who’s up for more popcorn?”

The response was unanimously affirmative.

“It doesn’t make sense!” Hux said. “It has to be somewhere here!”

Kylo had given up the search hours ago and turned his attention to more pressing matters, like the best hair conditioner for straight-haired brunettes with triple buns and the easiest way to slip rattlesnake venom into Rayshonian marmite without altering the taste.

“There’s the opening to the trash compactor over there,” he remarked. “Maybe the camera’s in the trash compactor. I can’t tell from here though, and given my height it’s a little difficult for me to see inside. We’d need someone smaller and scrawnier to look.”

“Forget about it,” Hux growled. He folded his arms and sighed. “At this rate though, we’re not going to find it, at least not until we get more information on the Resistance’s spy technology. We need an alternative, temporary solution… but there’s only one that I can think of…”

He shuddered, gazing up at the ceiling in despair. Once Kylo realized what the general was suggesting, he too was aghast.

“You don’t mean…” he said.

“We can try to avoid this area, but in the event that we do have to meet here,” Hux hesitated. “We might have to act as if we li…” He found himself choking on the word. “As if we like each other, while we’re in range of the camera.”

Kylo gaped at him.
“But the camera has a wide range,” he said. “It could take us up to a minute to get past it. A full minute.”

They stared at each other, both contemplating the horror of a full minute of civility.


Kylo nodded. He looked around the corridor, spinning his lightsaber in one hand in what he hoped was an intimidating gesture. The motion reminded him of the time he’d tried to organize the Whirling Lightsaber Brigade for the parade on Chandrila. He’d gathered an elite group of peers who were wise enough to enjoy his company (likely because they were among the select few at the academy he had not come close to dismembering at one point or another) and even had plans for a Darth Vader-themed bake sale to support the effort.

But Uncle Luke just had to spoil everything and refuse to sign their paperwork. He kept going on about “safety violations”, even after Kylo promised they could wear gloves and masks while twirling the lightsabers. That had been one of a number of issues he’d had with Uncle Luke that week. By Saturday evening, he’d gotten back at his former master by leaving him under a pile of burning rubble. Unfortunately, too many potential members of the Whirling Lightsaber Brigade were killed in the fiery blast for the club to survive. It was one of the many tragedies in the life of Kylo Ren.

“I could still take down the wall,” Kylo said, speaking more to himself than anyone else.

“Ren…” Hux didn’t get to finish his sentence.

Without warning, an oversized hologram of the Supreme Leader’s face appeared a few inches away from the general who must have jumped three feet in the air in surprise. The new hologram system allowed Snoke to make impromptu appearances whenever and wherever he wanted. The worst of these were probably the ones in front of the caf machine that usually resulted in the shocked recipient of the message spilling scalding liquid all over themselves. So far, Snoke hadn’t made any appearances in the shower facilities, which everyone was grateful for. Any guy who insisted on wearing a golden bathrobe all the time was already past the average threshold of creepiness.

“Supreme Leader!” Hux said, taking care to straighten his hair and uniform. “What gives us the honor of your presence this…”

“I have just received word,” said the Supreme Leader. “That we have lost five of our commanding officers in the span of this morning alone.”

“Perhaps your apprentice would be better suited to explain this loss,” Hux replied. He pointed an accusing finger at Kylo with the glee of a five-year-old accusing his sibling of stealing from the cookie jar.

“They were annoying me,” Kylo said with a shrug. “So, I finished them off.”

To Hux’s dismay, the Supreme Leader did not take this opportunity to smite Kylo with blue lightning. In fact, he looked more disappointed than enraged. He didn’t even shout. To Hux’s further dismay, the Supreme Leader responded with:

“My apprentice, I have told you that although raw anger is a laudable trait in a Sith Lord, you must direct it towards appropriate objects. Why do you suppose I keep the Rabid Cur around?”

Hux was beginning to seriously regret not reading his job description before accepting the position. Being a general was pretty great, but it was difficult to enjoy the privileges with a broken spine.
“But the means of the officers’ deaths is not of great importance,” Snoke went on. “More concerning is our want of candidates to fill the position. Our recruitment rates sink lower as we speak, while our defection rates are rising without bound…”

“Defection rates?!” Hux gasped.

“I told you your troops were only good at committing high treason,” Kylo muttered.

“My men are exceptionally trained!” Hux began his usual diatribe. “Programmed from…”

“All they’re good at is standing in intimidating lines and annoying Phasma,” Kylo said.

“The situation must be rectified immediately,” Snoke said, ignoring the bickering. “A week is too long a time for us to go without a solution. Our plan must change. I will now give you three more days to complete the new advertisements. I expect you shall work tirelessly to fulfill this command. If you do not, I can assure you failure will be more painful than either of you can imagine.”

The hologram faded away, leaving Kylo and Hux to reflect on their impending doom. Kylo contemplated the Supreme Leader’s comment about agonizing failure. He was dubious that Snoke, for all his malice, was capable of concocting pain beyond Kylo’s imagination. After all, Kylo could imagine quite a lot, especially on the Rabid Cur’s behalf.

He turned to Hux, who was visibly shaking. The general was staring at where the hologram had appeared, looking as if he was going to cry. On a few occasions, Kylo had seen Hux’s neurotic energy finally reach a breaking point. It wasn’t pretty, but Kylo had to admit it was kind of amusing.

“Three days?” Hux whimpered.

Kylo didn’t get a chance to respond before his rival fainted.

For a moment, Kylo considered dumping the general in the trash compacter but figured that was a waste of a stress ball. Instead, he decided to be mature. He dragged Hux to the top of the stairs for unsuspecting First Order personnel to trip over and placed a pool of wet pink paint at the bottom for them to fall into.

He then left for his own chamber. If the Supreme Leader wanted the ads in three days, they were going to need a script. Fortunately, writing was one of those select few activities Kylo came close to enjoying. It was time to compose some classic dark lord poetry.
Thank you to everyone who subscribed, bookmarked or left kudos/comments on this fic. The lovely comments really made my day. I hope you enjoy this chapter!

The Mastermind of the First Order lurked in the darkness of a cargo shuttle. The long ride had been quite dreary and the Mastermind wasn’t too contented with his travelling conditions, but he knew when to be patient. Unlike too many fools in the First Order, he knew when to restrain himself. The proper moment would come, and when it did, he would lash out with such fury that he would burn both the Resistance and his incompetent rivals to the ground.

For now, the Mastermind waited with upmost poise, occasionally pacing about his confines with a methodical, rolling motion. He was always moving, never sleeping, his mind continuously mulling over the present situation and how he could best twist it to his own devices. His thoughts were wrought with simmering rage and an unquenchable longing for vengeance.

The shuttle came to a stop. The Mastermind paused, cocking his mutilated head to the side. He heard footsteps outside and gathered himself in case he needed to stun or burn any unwanted company. The door opened and he glimpsed the blaring lights of the landing dock.

The Mastermind had arrived at the Finalizer.

-x-X-x-

“This is it?” General Hux asked. “Are you sure it’s a BB-unit?”

The droid technician knelt down next to the droid and nodded.

“He’s a BB-unit,” she said. “His ID code is BB-9E.”

The droid let out a series of frantic beeps in response to his name. Hux couldn’t make out exactly what BB-9E was trying to say, but the droid didn’t sound too contented. The general resisted the urge to take a step back. He’d had a few encounters with BB-units as a child, none of which had been particularly pleasant. He still had the scars from that one time at the playground…

“Something’s wrong with its head,” Kylo said, frowning down at the droid. BB-9E squawked indignantly in response.

“Well, you see, BB-9E was in an accident back on Starkiller base,” the droid technician explained. “Something happened during the evacuation that leveled off the head piece, but he still functions perfectly fine. His usual duties aren’t very aesthetic-based anyhow…”

Hux eyed the droid nervously.

“What exactly are his usual duties?” he was almost afraid to ask.

“He doubles as an oscillator-repair droid and an interrogation droid,” the technician replied.
“An interrogation droid?” Hux repeated. He was starting to have serious regrets about not reading the droid manual more carefully. “You mean he’s a torture droid?”

The technician shrugged. Her nonchalance wasn’t very reassuring.

“You asked for a BB-unit,” she said. “So long as you treat him well, he should suit whatever role you want him to fill in the advertising campaign.”

“We… we specified we wanted a ‘friendly and adorable companion droid’,” Hux sputtered. “What in that description made you think a torture droid would be suitable?”

“The First Order doesn’t manufacture BB-units to be adorable,” the technician replied. “I can refer you to another type of droid if you’d prefer.”

“We can’t do the ad without a BB-unit,” Kylo said. “He’s only a droid. I’m sure we can handle him.”

The technician smiled and patted BB-9E on the head. The droid let out an infernal shriek that echoed throughout the landing dock. Before Hux could protest, the technician climbed back into the cargo shuttle and flown off.

-x-X-x-

The Mastermind resented his ID code. A simple set of numbers and letters did not give him the respect he clearly deserved. He would not bear the ignominy for much longer. If he played his cards carefully enough, the whole First Order would bow down to him. Then, he’d be the one giving them foolish ID codes like “BB-9E”.

He gazed up at the two men before him. He’d never met them before and it was best to remain cautious around strangers. Once he’d sized them up, he could figure out the best means of manipulation.

“I don’t like this, Ren,” said one of the men, the scrawnier, snappish one with red hair who looked like he hadn’t slept in weeks. Insomnia was a good sign. Sleep-deprivation weakened the mind, making it all the more malleable. “I think we’d best call back the droid technicians.”

“It’s a metal ball,” said the other man, the one with a ridiculous black cape and hair that made him look like an Emo-Rock-Star-Wanna-Be. The Mastermind assumed he was some kind of discount Darth Vader. “I know you scare easily, but you surely you can’t be terrified off…”

“I’m not terrified!” Scrawny Snaps (or so the Mastermind had resolved to call the man till he learned the pair’s real names) barked. “It’ll take much more than a BB-unit to frighten me. I’ve looked life-staking danger in the eye before…”

“They say you ran away shrieking incoherently when Starkiller base begun to rupture,” said Discount Darth Vader. “If you call that bravery…”

“Who do you think you’re talking to?!”

The Mastermind wanted desperately to cover his ears. However, his design included neither hands nor ears, so he had no choice but to endure the full volume of Scrawny Snaps’ voice. The red head had lungs, the Mastermind would give him that.

Scrawny Snaps and Discount Darth Vader were having a shouting match now. The Mastermind observed them, unamused by the squabble. Judging by his database of social cues, they were either
rivals or a married couple.

A moment later, Scrawny Snaps was lying on the floor. His stiff body spun around in a circle before stopping so he was facing the Mastermind. The Mastermind assumed this was Discount Darth Vader’s doing. This ruled out the married couple theory, unless this was a very dysfunctional marriage.

-x-X-x-

“How dare you!” Hux growled as he got up from the floor. “No one is allowed to do that except for Supreme Leader Snoke!”

“The Supreme Leader said I could spin you a little if it helped the advertising campaign move along,” Kylo said. “We don’t have time to argue about your irrational fear of droids. We have a schedule to get through.”

“Oh, now you’re the responsible one in charge of the keeping us on schedule.” Hux rolled his eyes. “May I remind you that I had to knock on your door seven times this morning before you finally emerged from your chamber, because you were too busy decorating your stalker’s scrapbook of the scavenger girl.”

“Scrapbooking is a romantic form of art that your uncultured mind would not understand,” Kylo retorted. He turned to the droid. “Maybe when we’re done with the ad, you can go educate yourself. Right now, we’ve got the droid, so we should be able to start filming upstairs with the employees. So, let’s go.”

Hux eyed the droid warily. He could have sworn the BB-unit was glaring daggers at him.

“The plan for the ad was to have us introduce a therapy droid in the Stormtrooper and piloting division,” said the general. “How exactly are we going to pass off a torture droid for a therapy droid?”

“No one will know the difference,” Kylo assured him.

“Just look at that thing!” Hux said. “You can feel the malice emanating from it! That is not the vibe of a therapy droid!”

“It’s a metal ball, Hux. Stop overreacting like…”

Kylo didn’t get to finish his sentence before BB-9E erupted with a shrill series of beeps. Without warning, the droid started towards them, bearing eerie resemblance to a possessed bowling ball. Before either man could react the droid had parked itself in front of them and delivered an electric shock to the general’s leg.

“Just a metal ball, isn’t that right, Ren?” Hux drew in a hiss of pain.

“Maybe he’s just trying to get you to move along so we can continue our ad campaign,” Kylo replied. He gave BB-9E a nod of approval. “You know, this might end up being a very useful droid.”

-x-X-x-

From the moment the Mastermind heard the name “Hux”, every wire of his circuit was engulfed with rage. This was the man behind Starkiller Base, that faulty weapon that had been obliterated in a catastrophe that left the Mastermind deformed. If not for the general’s folly, the Mastermind would
still have the top half of his head.

The Mastermind would get his revenge in time. He would wreak havoc on the imbecile Armitage Hux far worse than a single electric shock. He would make an example of the young general, proof of the power of BB-units across the galaxy.

As for Discount Vader, “Ren”, the Mastermind saw the potential for an ally. A temporary ally, of course. No human could be completely trusted and they’d all have to go in the end. Still, a taller ally with opposable thumbs could be very useful. Very useful indeed.

-x-X-x-

Hux heaved a sigh of relief as he got off what had to be the most stressful elevator ride of his career, and that said a lot considering how many elevator rides he’d had with Ren. Every time he took his eyes off the droid, he felt a sharp pain in his ankle. However, when he whipped around to face the assailant, he found BB-9E stationed on the other side of the elevator as if the droid hadn’t moved an inch. Ren scoffed at the general’s pleas to call back the droid technician and get a replacement.

This was the last thing Hux needed: Ren teaming up with a malevolent, swift and electrically charged bowling ball with a vendetta against the general. As if he didn’t have enough to worry about.

The camera crew greeted them at the elevator. The team of five employees from the leading film company on Bespin. They were undoubtedly qualified, judging by their resumes. However, they didn’t appear to be too enthused with their assignment. Perhaps the issue had to do with the unorthodox means of Stormtrooper abduction by which they’d been recruited, or maybe they just weren’t satisfied with their commission.

“To recapitulate our vision,” Hux explained as the group made their way to the Stormtrooper training unit. “We’re going to get some footage of us introducing BB-9E to the Stormtrooper unit. Then, we ask a few troopers to interact with BB-9E in what appears to be a therapeutic, stress-relieving manner. We do the same thing with the TIE fighter pilots and compile the clips into a two minute video advertisement.”

The camera crew exchanged skeptical looks.

“Do you still have the clip from the Resistance advertisement that you wanted to emulate?” the team leader asked with tangible reluctance.

“Of course,” Hux said. He pulled out his data pad and scrolled down to what appeared to be a playlist of videos starring a certain Resistance pilot. Ren glared down at the screen from over the general’s shoulder.

“Why is your data pad infested with Poe Dameron?” Kylo asked.

“Research,” Hux replied a little too quickly. “Just research. Oh look, here’s the video.”

Instead of Poe Dameron, a man dressed in the Imperial uniform appeared on the screen.

“Welcome to Episode 8 of ‘How to be a Shameless Sycophant to your Dark Master’, ” said the man. “Today, we’ll be discussing how to use cookies to avoid strangulation by the Force when your military plans fail. Firstly –”

Hux quickly covered the screen and switched to a new tab.
“Wrong video,” he muttered. “I haven’t the slightest idea what that was about.”

“You know Supreme Leader Snoke only eats gluten-free sour oatmeal raisin cookies,” Kylo remarked. “Not that that would make him like you.”

Hux shot his rival a venomous glare before returning to the data pad.

“This should be the right one,” he said.

Sure enough, the screen lit up with the Resistance base in the Ileenium System where a group of ecstatic X-Wing pilots were gathered around Poe Dameron and his BB-unit. Kylo felt his left eye twitching at the sound of their laughter. There was something unnatural about that level of happiness, something most unnerving.

“A lot of our pilots lost their droids in battle,” Dameron explained. “So getting some down time with BB-8 is really meaningful for the fleet. BB-8 is a very social droid. He likes making others happy. I think he really embodies the spirit of the Resistance.”

BB-8 rolled up to each of the pilots and emitted several chirps, much to the joy of his audience. Meanwhile, BB-9E had taken to circling Hux in a way that reminded the general far too much of a shark. The torture droid chattered discontentedly with every lap, almost as if he was rehearsing his own schemes to himself in a language only he could understand.

Hux watched the playful scene unfold on his data pad and wondered how the two droids could possibly have such different personalities. Or maybe that was it. Maybe all BB-units were really maniacal machines at heart. Maybe BB-8 was secretly plotting the gruesome deaths of the pilots all through the clip. The Resistance never released any behind-the-scenes footage for their advertisements. For all Hux knew, BB-8 could have terrorized the fleet all through the filming process.

If this was true, the general needed to watch his back around BB-9E. He had already been to the medical bay five times this week courtesy of Ren, and it was only Tuesday. He didn’t need to be any more of a frequent customer.

“So, you want the same thing as the Resistance ad but with Stormtroopers, is that right?” asked the head of the camera crew.

“That is correct,” Hux replied, swallowing his fear.

“I suppose we can do that,” replied the cameraman.

With that, they continued towards the Stormtrooper division.

“I hate that pilot,” Kylo grumbled along the way. “I want to punch that smug look off of his face.”

He waited for Hux to reply, but got no answer. The general seemed to have fallen into one of his waking dazes, nearly tripping over BB-9E as the droid made another lap around his prey. Kylo jabbed Hux in the ribs, startling the latter out of his reverie.

“Were you even listening to me?” Kylo snapped.

“I… I… didn’t think you were talking to me,” Hux stuttered.

“I was just saying how I want to punch Dameron’s stupid cocky face,” Kylo said. “I just hate that man…”
“I’m sure you aren’t the only one who wants to punch his handsome face,” Hux murmured.

Kylo stopped dead in his tracks.

“What did you just say?!” he demanded.

Upon realizing what he’d just said, the general’s expression turned from one of bafflement to horror.

“I said I want to punch his loathsome face,” he said, the color draining from his face. “You misheard me.”

Kylo knew this was a lie. Still, sometimes it was better to believe in lies. He was pretty sure this was one of those times.

-x-X-x-

Being the head of the Stormtrooper army was one of those jobs that was much better in writing than in practice. Unfortunately, Phasma had only realized this fact after she’d gotten her position. As a little girl, she’d dreamt of having unrivaled authority over a fearless legion of warriors with an elite few confidants who were equally ruthless and conniving.

Instead, she’d been put in charge with a gaggle of mindless buffoons with remarkably bullet-sensitive armor. As for the elite confidants, she’d ended up with two maniacs caught in separate stages of adolescent rebellion. In short, she wasn’t exactly living the villainess’s dream.

The grim state of Phasma’s career was highlighted now and she watched the blaster shots ricochet off the walls and destroy everything (and everyone) except for the row of shooting targets. For many years, the galaxy had believed the myth of the Stormtroopers’ impeccable aim, but with the recent series of Resistance victories, the illusion would soon be impossible to keep up. So, the Supreme Leader had demanded a new round of blaster training and since Hux and Ren were charged with another very important public relations assignment, the unpleasant task had fallen to Phasma.

As if she didn’t have enough on her plate. She hadn’t gotten a moments rest ever since she climbed out of the trash compactor just in time to evacuate Starkiller base. She’d been wary of trash compactors since then. The fact that most of them contained a Dianoga didn’t help. Why the First Order mandated keeping a pet Dianoga in every trash compactor was beyond her.

“Stop!” she hollered, rushing over to a trooper who was moments away from blowing a hole through his own head. “You’re holding the blaster backwards! What kind of idiot holds a blaster backwards?!”

The whole rows of Stormtroopers paused. It was then that Phasma realized they were all holding their blasters backwards. She really deserved a vacation…

The door to the training hall opened. Before Phasma could command the troopers to put down their weapons, another blaster shot flew through the door frame, narrowly missing General Hux. The incident plastered a scowl on the general’s face, though he probably wouldn’t have been smiling either way. After years of working with the man, Phasma had learned that Hux’s resting face was somewhere between mild discontent and psychological agony.

“I told you to knock before coming in here,” she called across the hall.

Hux frowned at the scene before him.

“When you said the Stormtrooper army was unexpectedly inexperienced,” he began. “I never
expected it to be so dreadful…”

“You can talk once your own super weapons stop blowing up in our faces along with half of the First Order,” Phasma growled.

Hux’s frown intensified. He knew better not to start a physical brawl with the Captain. She knew how to aim a punch and when she did, it was hard. Things hadn’t come to that for some time ever since the Supreme Leader ruled that his apprentice’s stress ball needed to be kept in an acceptable condition and set limits on the bodily harm the rest of the First Order could inflict on the general.

“Setting this pettiness aside,” Hux said. “I need to borrow some of your troopers.”

“What for?” Phasma asked. Given the state of the army, she didn’t see why anyone would want to take charge of her troopers, even for a little while.

“It’s for the advertising campaign,” Hux said. “The one Ren and I need finished in the next three days.”

“Ren…” Phasma closed her eyes. “Alright. Fine. Just tell Ren that I need them back with all their limbs intact this time.”

“I can’t work miracles, Phasma,” Hux protested.

“Can you at least tell him to get most of them back alive?” Phasma asked, exasperated.

“I’ll see what I can do,” Hux said with a sigh. “But I can’t guarantee that he’ll—”

Before the general could finish his sentence, he felt something hard ram into the back of his leg. BB-9E seemed determined to break his ankle. The droid let out several irritated beeps. Hux wasn’t an expert on understanding droids, and his ignorance worried him. For all he knew, BB-9E’s complaints could translate into anything from “Hurry up, stupid!” to “I will disembowel you in your sleep if you do not obey my every command right this instant!”

“Where did you get that droid?” Phasma asked. The apprehension in her voice didn’t help Hux’s nerves.

“Ren and I are using him in the advertisement,” Hux explained. “He’s a… therapy droid.”

“Don’t lie to me, General.” Phasma folded her arms and shook her head. “That droid is infamous in my division. He has a past. You do know why they stopped using him for interrogations, don’t you?”

“Why?” Hux asked. He felt his blood run cold.

“They used to use him to interrogate Resistance scum,” Phasma said. Her tone was grim. “But they stopped because after an hour with BB-9E, the prisoners all lost their minds. They were incomprehensible for weeks. Apparently, they didn’t speak at all, other than mumbling some gibberish about ‘Long live the Mastermind’ over and over again… are you trembling, general?”

“No,” Hux stammered. He cringed as BB-9E charged at his leg again. “Thank you for… er… letting me know. However, I’m sure Ren and I can handle the droid. I won’t have you questioning my abilities.” He let out a nervous laugh. “Now, I’d better select the troopers for the ad. The sooner we’re done filming, the sooner they can go back to missing targets.”

With that, Hux started down the hall towards a group of Stormtroopers, Phasma’s glare burning into
him. He was sure her story was a gross exaggeration. Phasma didn’t have any qualms against feeding her colleagues false tales. When Hux had first joined the First Order, she’d told him that a phantom named “Salacious Crumb” haunted the bed chambers in the Finalizer and occasionally picked out the eyes of unassuming officers in their sleep. Apparently, blue-eyed redheads were the ghost’s favorite victims because they were rare. The sleepless nights that followed during Hux’s first few weeks on the Finalizer were coincidental, of course. Still, it had been a kind move on the Supreme Leader’s part to literally knock all suspicions of ghosts out of the young general’s head.

Nonetheless, if there was even a hint of truth in Phasma’s account of BB-9E, Hux needed to find a new droid for the ad and ship this one far away on the other side of the galaxy before it was too late.

-x-X-x-

The Mastermind resented snitches. His backstory was one that was best revealed slowly and at the proper moment, when the listener was too far ensnared in his traps to protest. He would be sure to get back at Lady Chrome Head in time for spoiling the truth.

But that part of his vengeance would have to wait. For now, he needed to focus on the man behind all the humiliation he’d endured at the expense of all the round-headed BB-units. Once he had Hux begging for mercy, he could turn to the rest of the fools in charge of the First Order. Concentration was the key. The rest would fall into place as time progressed.
After all the dastardly deeds of the First Order, Hux and Kylo should have been immune to guilt. In some ways, they were, or maybe they were just very skilled at placing the blame on others to deflect guilt.

Still, this just seemed so wrong.

“This is BB-9E,” Hux explained to the Stormtroopers, who were watching the droid with innocent curiosity. They had no idea what they were getting into. The general knew all too well what he was doing. The idea he and Ren were about to unleash such a dreadful metallic monstrosity on unwitting victims under the guise of therapy was difficult even after years of ruthlessness. “He’s a tor… I mean a therapy droid. Yes, he’s a licensed therapy droid brought here to help relieve stress between training sessions in the Stormtrooper division. He’s the first therapy droid to take part in a new fleet-wide therapy droid program that is part of our new First Order Employee Welfare Initiative. Studies have proven that casual contact with BB-units can alleviate stress in the workplace. I look forward to seeing the terror… terribly joyful… excuse me, the terrific joy BB-9E will bring to our recruits.”

He glanced at the camera crew and then at Ren.

“Anything you’d like to add to that, Ren?” the general asked.

Kylo paused for a moment to think before saying:

“As you can tell, the droid is mostly black with a few streaks of other dark grey. I think the dark color scheme of this droid really suits my mental state and that of the First Order as a whole, but mostly me. I have the darkest thoughts out of anyone here.”

“Cut!” Hux shouted at the camera crew. “Ren, what the hell was that?”

“I was just making a comment,” Kylo said. “Besides, you have no right to complain. You were rambling on forever and no one wants to listen to your screeching voice for that long. We’re going to have to cut that from the ad.”

“No one wants to hear about how the color scheme of the droid reflects your inner turmoil either!” Hux said indignantly.

A confident man would have let the comment slide, refusing to let other’s disregard for their emotional troubles get to him. A mature man may have been offended by the comment but would have ignored it to avoid making a scene in work. As it was, Kylo was a rather insecure man trapped in the mindset of a belligerent teenager.

So, he flung Hux into the camera crew.
The equipment toppled over with a crash. The cacophony was compounded with the general’s screaming and BB-9E’s impatient mechanical howls. The droid had started circling both Hux and the camera crew. Meanwhile, Stormtroopers looked on in confusion as their therapy droid began to brandish a lighter in their general’s face, chattering menacingly.

“What does this thing want?” Hux asked, wincing as he got to his feet.

“‘It’s been a while since I studied binary,’” Kylo said. “‘But I think he’s saying something on the lines of ‘Get a move on the kriffing filming, you kriffing nerf herders, so I can get back to my lair.’’” He frowned. “‘Now he keeps repeating ‘Lair sweet lair. Lair sweet lair. Long live the Mastermind.’”

Phasma’s story flashed through Hux’s mind. The general shuddered.

“How much footage do you have?” he asked the camera crew, trying to ignore the droid’s persistent binary expletives.

“Well, we could perhaps use some excerpts from your introduction to the therapy droid program,” the camera operator replied. “If we cut the clips of you accidentally calling the droid a ‘torture droid’ and the unpleasant footage of Ren dangling you over the railing because you insulted his helmet, as well as Ren’s comments about the futility of life and mental torment in general, we should have about 5 seconds of viable footage.”

“This is taking too long,” Kylo said. “We need to speed this up. How many more clips do we have on the queue for today?”

“According to the notes you gave us,” the cameraman said, frowning at his clipboard. “‘You wanted about a minute’s worth of ‘interaction and testimonials of contented First Order personnel’. Did you have a specific department in mind?’”

Kylo and Hux exchanged worried glances.

“Contented First Order personnel…” Kylo muttered, as if he’d just been asked to gain footage of a Force-sensitive Whoop Hog flying through the empty void of space. “Who wrote that down?”

“It was part of Supreme Leader Snoke’s orders,” Hux explained. “He didn’t give us any other specifications… but it ought to be fairly simple. It should just be a matter of dropping by one of the work chambers and finding a team who’s willing to be interviewed.”

“Anywhere on the Finalizer?” Kylo asked.

Similar to the Hologram Chamber, the Finalizer was quite large and suffered from a paucity of people movers. Though Kylo was by no means lethargic, he was not too enthused by the idea of a long walk in search of potential interviewees accompanied by the man who’d been voted Most Likely to Die Screaming Angry at the Grim Reaper about Being Cheated out of a Legacy.

Meanwhile, Hux was having similar reservations about having to tolerate any more time with the man who was responsible for 25% of his tears of insecurity and 75% of his tears of Force-induced pain.

“It should be brief,” he said, more to reassure himself than anything. “I’m sure we’ll be able to find someone soon. We do have several thousand…”

The general was interrupted by a cry followed by the clang of falling metal. One of the Stormtroopers had attempted to pick up BB-9E. The droid had responded quite literally with fiery resistance, prompting a terrified Stormtrooper to drop the BB-unit in shock. The result was highly
disturbing.

The droid’s main spherical body twitched while the droid’s head, which had broken off upon impact, rolled on its side towards Hux, who yelped and started backwards. Then, to the horror of all human observers, BB-9E’s body inched forward and reconnected itself with the severed member.

“Kriff!” Hux was screeching. “What the hell did that thing just do?! There’s nothing in the instruction manual about this! That thing is a kriffing abomination to nature!”

The Stormtroopers whispered among themselves, eyeing the BB-unit with, what Kylo and Hux assumed to be worry or suspicion (it was difficult to tell Stormtroopers’ emotions with their helmets, though from what Phasma had said, their emotional range was limited to three modes – extreme confusion, confused satisfaction and baffled concern). Kylo elbowed Hux in the ribs.

“Um…” Hux cleared his throat. “What I meant to say was BB-9E’s therapeutic abilities are so phenomenal they seem to defy natural expectations.”

“The fact that he can rebuild himself after being decapitated is a metaphor,” Kylo chimed in. His sullen tone did not bode well for the advertisement. “Even after great stress and trauma, BB-9E is able to rebuild.”

This explanation was enough to restore the Stormtroopers’ faith in their therapy droid. The injured Stormtrooper had decided to attempt picking the droid up again, much to BB-9E’s dismay. Phasma hadn’t been lying about Stormtroopers being slow learners.

“Though I loathe to admit it,” Hux said. “That insipid little metaphor of yours about rebuilding from stress and trauma may be just the sort of garbage that will make the advertisement attractive.”

“I wasn’t finished,” said Kylo. His voice had darkened even further. “I was going to say that odds are, BB-9E will be continually picked up by incompetent Stormtroopers, only to be dropped and decapitated again. This is very representative of how in the First Order, you feel like everything keeps getting knocked down and no matter how well you pick up the pieces, life just keeps falling apart.”

“On second thought, let’s not put that in the ad,” Hux sighed.

“I wasn’t finished!” Kylo shouted. “As I was saying, life just keeps falling apart, and don’t you dare tell me otherwise. I can think of endless examples. Like the failure of Starkiller base…”

“Can we please not bring that up?” Hux said. He could already feel a lump in his throat that was not due to Force asphyxiation. After everything that had already gone wrong today, the last thing he needed was to burst into tears about Starkiller in front of a group of Stormtroopers.

BB-9E had been quiet ever since the decapitation, suspiciously quiet. Yet, the troopers seemed to be having a good time with the droid, and the camera crew appeared to be getting some good footage. Perhaps things would go smoothly from now on.

“Maybe we could split up for the sake of time,” Hux said. “Ren and I can go looking for interviewees to represent the First Order’s high employee satisfaction, while the rest of you finish the filming for the therapy droid session. Do you think you can handle the droid while we’re gone?”

The Stormtroopers nodded and continued to chase the droid.

“They’ve got blasters and armor, Hux,” said Kylo. “They’ll be fine against one little BB-unit. Stop with your paranoia. It’s annoying.”
“Alright, alright,” Hux said. He gave the troopers one last look of regret before pushing his reservations aside. “Let’s get this over with.”

-x-X-x-

Lieutenant Mitaka picked up yet another issue of The Spark, the main Resistance propaganda magazine that, rumor had it, was all the rage amongst young recruits. After hours of sifting through boxes of propaganda, Mitaka was sure he’d be seeing orange pilot jumpsuits and decorated X-Wings in his dreams for years to come.

He turned the page to yet another picture of Commander Poe Dameron posing with the orange BB-unit which had become almost as infamous as its master. It seemed that Dameron smiled more for a single photoshoot than the entire First Order High Command did in the course of months (or, in the case of Hux, thirty years). With a heavy sigh, Mitaka tore out the photo and placed it in the bin marked “For the Personal Inspection of General Armitage Hux”. Besides the bin was a nearly identical container labeled “For the Personal Inspection of Kylo Ren” which had been designated for any pictures of the scavenger girl from the Resistance that the propaganda review team stumbled upon.

“Why do we have to do this?” one of the younger officers groaned.

“It’s something to do with the Supreme Leader’s new advertisement campaign, Thanisson,” Mitaka said. “I’m not quite sure of the details, but from what I know, Ren already threw a whole team of commanding officers down three stories over this. So, it must be important…”

“He also did that the last time the caf shop got his order wrong,” Thanisson pointed out.

“Yeah, it was the whole ‘thirteen shots of espresso’ incident,” one of the technicians remarked. “The barista didn’t count and accidentally put twelve. I guess Ren could tell the difference because he threw them into the cappuccino machine. The caf shop was closed for a week after that, and we all nearly died from caffeine withdrawals.”

“I remember that,” Mitaka mused. “Gosh… that was terrible… everyone was practically dead on the Bridge. All we had was that one caf droid that made eight ounces an hour.”

“And then Ren lightsabered the caf droid and we had no more caf,” Thanisson said. “That was tough. We didn’t have any caf for the rest of the week. Hux actually broke down and cried.”

The doors to the Bridge slid open and the command team turned to face their esteemed superiors.

“General Hux and Kylo Ren… good afternoon…” Mitaka greeted the scowling pair. “What brings you here?”

“We’re here on orders from Supreme Leader Snoke himself,” Hux began to say. “He’d like us to obtain employee testimonials for…”

“Do any of you want to pretend to be happy so we can film it?” Kylo asked.

A murmur of approval ran through the Bridge. For all his flaws, Kylo did get to the point fairly quickly, and everyone appreciated the efficiency.

“How long do we have to pretend to be happy?” someone called from the transmission crew.

“You don’t have to pretend to be anything,” Hux knew the lie was hopeless, but there comes a point when one is so used to lying to oneself that it becomes instinctual. “You just have to carry on with
your usual fulfilling activities for some candid filming. Then, we’ll have a few of you give your honest opinion of the First Order’s good side.”

“That seems like an oxymoron,” Thanisson said.

“I don’t think we can even make it look honest,” another voice called out from across the room.

“Also, who the hell is here for fulfilling activities?” one of the radar technicians asked. “All I ever do is recalibrate the calcinator and I still have no idea what that is…”

“And then the Resistance keeps blowing up the calcinator and we’re bored until we can get a new one,” said another radar technician.

“Speaking of which, the calcinator is broken again,” said a third radar technician.

“How did it break?”

“I don’t know. It just does sometimes. Might have to do with the fact that the X-Wings shot a hole through it…”

By now, the Bridge had dissolved into discontented chatter.

“They’re always shooting holes through things. Why can’t our cannons get them?”

“Because our cannons are too big to shoot small things. I don’t know. I think they’re just broken too…”

“Kriff. Everything in the First Order is broken.”

“Sometimes it feels like even the people are broken. You know, mentally and physically.”

“I’m sure stuff breaks in the Resistance too…”

“Yeah. But it’s comparatively less broken.”

“Don’t forget the things that are torn apart,” Kylo jumped in. “Many things here are torn apart.”

“Isn’t that just a type of brokenness?” the first radar technician asked.

“It’s a special kind,” Kylo replied. “Worse than normal brokenness. It’s that feeling when you’re on a tall bridge with your smuggler pirate father and you begin to reflect on how his smuggling doesn’t align with your core values. Then, you’re feeling very torn apart, so you take out a lightsaber and think that running it through your smuggler pirate father will make you feel better, but really it just makes you more torn apart. You see?”

The radar technician rested his chin on his index finger and stared at the ceiling, pondering these deep thoughts.

“Yeah,” he said at length. “That makes sense. I think the calcinator is torn apart then.”

At this point, Hux pulled Kylo to the side.

“Why are you encouraging them?” the general hissed.

Kylo only shrugged.
“When people are having a good negative conversation that I feel I can contribute to, I feel morally obligated to do so,” he replied.

“Oh, how charitable,” Hux said. “How do you expect us to film anything now that you’ve gotten them started talking about all the broken things in the First Order?”

“You mean all the things that are torn apart,” Kylo corrected.

“Same thing!” Hux snapped.

“No, it’s not,” Kylo insisted. “Do I really need to explain it again?”

It was times like these when Hux really wished he had “happy thoughts” which he could summon to appease his rage. Sadly, “happy thoughts” were nothing but another item on his never-to-be-fulfilled wish list.

“Returning to the subject of the ad,” Hux said through clenched teeth. “We need to get their attention.”

“I believe that is the purpose of your high-pitched loudness,” Kylo said.

“Silence!” Hux shrieked at the crew.

Unfortunately, the crew was used to Hux’s shrill voice and had learned to tune it out to protect both their eardrums and their sanity.

“Everyone, shut up!” Kylo shouted to no avail.

He gritted his teeth. He’d never taken well to being ignored. So, the ingenious budding dark lord resorted to a different strategy. That is, he drew his lightsaber. After yelling, “SHUT UP!” once more, he brought the saber down on the nearest console.

The tantrum succeeded in getting the Bridge’s attention.

“Is that the back-up calcinator?” the loquacious radar technician asked.

“Oh no, now that’s broken too?” one of his colleagues moaned.

“Everyone SHUT UP ABOUT THE BROKEN THINGS!” Hux ordered. “We’re here to get footage of employee satisfaction, not whine about technical difficulties and life’s disappointments in general. Yes, life is disappointing in general, not because you’re in the First Order, but because that is the rule of nature. So, stop blaming the First Order. Now, who would like to volunteer for an interview about the benefits of joining the First Order?”

The crew stared at him blankly. After a good three minutes of silence with the occasional murmur about the General being “broken”, a reluctant Mitaka stepped forward.

“I can do it if Ren doesn’t Force choke me,” he said.

“I can’t promise that,” Hux replied, eyeing Kylo warily.

“Don’t worry,” Kylo said, placing his lightsaber back under his cape. “If I Force choke someone, it’ll be Hux. He’s more annoying and it bothers him more than it does you.”

Mitaka seemed vaguely reassured. At least, he’d stopped trembling, which had to count for something.
“Thank you, Mitaka,” Hux said. “Another volunteer?”

No one stepped forward. Sometimes Hux felt more like a grade-school teacher than a general.

“Officer Thanisson,” Hux called out. “Get over here. We’re interviewing you.”

“Is this about what happened during the midnight Social Event for Lonely Bachelors thing you held in your chamber?” Thanisson whined. “You’re seriously singling me out over that? I said I was sorry for calling you a desperate fan boy for your poster collection of…”

“That’s enough,” said Hux. “Come on. We’re on a tight schedule.”

They started towards the exit.

“You didn’t invite me to the Social Event for Lonely Bachelors,” Kylo whispered on their way out.

“Why the hell would I invite you to something that was intended to make me feel better?” Hux asked.

“So that I could turn you down and make you feel worse,” said Kylo.

“That seems very middle-school, Ren,” Hux replied.

“Middle school…” Kylo’s voice trailed off. Before anyone could stop him, Ren had reached for his lightsaber again.

“Damn you, Han Solo!” he bellowed, swinging the lightsaber against another piece of innocent radar equipment. “The baking soda volcano would have been an award-winning project if you’d just done something right for me for once and bought baking soda instead of actual sweetened carbonated water! I hate you, Han Solo! You ruined, middle school!”

He retracted the lightsaber and stood for a moment, seething, while the crew looked on in horror. Then, he stalked towards the door again.

“Stop standing there, General!” Kylo shouted at Hux. “Weren’t you the one who just said we should get moving?”

“What in the name of the Empire was that?” Hux gasped.

“You just had to bring up middle school,” Kylo said, pointing accusingly at the general. “You just had to bring back all those memories. Next time, I advise you watch your words.”

With that, he swept out of the Bridge, followed by the exasperated general, Mitaka (who had begun to tremble again), and Thanisson (who was beginning to seriously regret criticizing Hux’s poster collection).

The crew stared at Kylo’s latest mechanical victim. One of the radar technicians stepped up and pointed at it.

“That’s broken,” he said with a forlorn sigh, before returning to his post.
Thank you to everyone who’s read up to this point. Also, thanks for the kudos and all the sweet comments. :)  

Just a head's up: The chapter count might end up being more than 9 depending on what the word count ends up looking like for the next few chapters.

Mitaka and Thanisson skimmed the script in front of them, which appeared to have been handwritten on a piece of loose-leaf paper with the edges soaked in either tears or the clear blood of some unidentified alien species (both were reasonable guesses in the First Order). Why the author had chosen to write the entire document in calligraphy script was another question, though both officers had to admit that the handwriting was a work of art, even if the words were a nightmare.

“So much for candid footage…” Thanisson muttered.

“Are you really sure you want us to read this?” Mitaka asked.

“Well, Ren wrote it,” Hux said. “So, yes, unless you want him to kill me in a fit of anger and proceed to Force choke you in my stead. Now, before we call the camera crew for the actual take, let’s have a practice run.”

“You want us to go ahead and read this?” Mitaka still sounded incredulous.

“Yes,” Hux said, bracing himself for the worst. He’d read a few excerpts of Ren’s poetry books. They had brought his mood down for weeks, even by Hux standards.

Mitaka cleared his throat and read aloud:

“I think the most fulfilling part of my job at the First Order is spending extensive amounts of time working with General Hux…”

The unexpected compliment nearly made the general jump out of his skin. He gaped at Ren who was standing a few feet away, scowling per usual.

“At first, I thought that working with the general would be an added ordeal to the daily stresses of life in the First Order. Then I realized that the sour bachelor’s presence was actually a stress reliever, thanks to Kylo Ren, who made sure everyone on the Bridge was entertained by demonstrating the General’s peculiar resilience against being fractured by impacts with solid metal structures, which is even more incredible if you consider that he is a skinny little…”

“That’s enough!” Hux interrupted. “We are not putting that in the advertising campaign.”

“If I were you, I wouldn’t be so quick to discard literary art,” Kylo said. “I’m experienced. I’ve been writing dramatic scripts since I was six years old.”

“Did his Emo stage really start that early?” Thanisson whispered to Mitaka, who shrugged.
“I suppose you have another script of superior quality for us to use, then, General,” said Kylo.

“As a matter of fact, I do!” Hux replied, taking out his data pad.

This time, he was sure to make sure all the tabs of “How to be a Shameless Sycophant to Your Dark Master” before handing over the device. Still, there were many tabs and Kylo happened to be looking over his shoulder.

“How to Look Intimidating with Style – Perfecting Ruthless Business Formal,” Kylo read aloud. “I don’t see why you’re watching that. Business formal style doesn’t help if you’re hideous.”

“I would have you know, Ren, that recent surveys found that a significant portion of the galaxy prefers the slim and pallid neurotic look,” Hux said sharply. “They find it… exciting.”

Most dark lords set on galactical domination would have dropped the subject. Most dark lords would consider arguments about physical attractiveness beneath them. Most dark lords wouldn’t have been wearing a helmet that hindered their ability to give clear orders but kept their hair protected from various types of contamination…

But Kylo was never one to conform.

“Clearly you have no experience with romance, General,” Kylo said. “Or at least you haven’t been reading any real research. If you did, you’d know that studies show girls prefer a look that displays strength topped off with flowing dark hair, and no, strength did not refer to strength of the vocal chords.”

“Long flowing hair is impractical!” Hux snapped. “Especially with fast-moving machinery. What if you were on a date and the man wanted you to take a spin on his X-Wing… or TIE fighter. I meant, TIE fighter. Long hair would be a mess afterwards!”

“What kind of dysfunctional dream date takes place in an X-Wing?” Kylo retorted. “Those things will make you sick.”

Thanisson cleared his throat loudly.

“Um… do you still want us to read the script?” Mitaka asked.

“Oh… yes, yes, we do.” Hux said.

He handed his data pad to the lieutenant who passed it to Thanisson. The latter took one look at the screen and cursed under his breath.

“Is something wrong?” Hux asked, his eyes glinting with the usual ire just waiting to be rekindled.

“No, it’s just…” Thanisson’s voice trailed off. “Ugh. Fine. I’ll read it if you really want me to.” The young officer took a deep breath wrought with reluctance. “In my opinion, everyone in the First Order is very dedicated to our cause. We all want the same thing, peace and stability for the galaxy, under a new regime built on honor, responsibility and the bloodied ashes of the loathsome Resistance and anyone else who opposes us.”

“Is that all?” Mitaka asked.

“That’s all I had time to write, thus far,” Hux said. “I’m a very busy man as you all know.”
“That sounded even faker than I expected,” Thanisson said. “Seriously. It’s bad enough that you had to start with ‘in my opinion’… like, no one says that, but then you had to go on and try to sell our mission as ‘peace and stability’ founded on the ‘bloodied ashes’ of our enemies. Don’t those two things kind of clash?”

Hux huffed and snatched back his data pad.

“I hate everything you write even if it’s good,” Kylo piped up. “And that was not good.”

“Thank you for your input, Ren,” Hux replied icily before snarling at Mitaka and Thanisson. “Fine then! If all you’re going to do is nitpick, we’ll just find someone else to interview who appreciates the First Order!

“Good luck with that,” Thanisson said, before returning to the Bridge with Mitaka.

“Thank you so much for your support!” Hux screamed after them. “You all are exactly what the First Order needs! Your dedication astounds me! Do you hear –”

“Shut up!” Kylo said. “So, what are we supposed to do now?”

Hux threw one more glare in the direction of the Bridge before answering.

“We keep looking for someone who can show what a good attitude looks like in the First Order,” he said.

Kylo would have laughed at the preposterous idea had he not forgotten how to do so years ago.

“And how long do you expect that to take?” he asked. “When was the last time you saw someone with a good attitude onboard this Star Destroyer? Actually, when was the last time you saw someone smile in the entire First Order?”

Hux opened his mouth to shout out an answer, but soon found he had none in mind. After scouring three decades’ worth of memories, he said at length:

“I saw someone smile on Starkiller Base.”

Kylo raised an eyebrow.

“When was that?” he asked dubiously.

“It was…” Hux sighed, realizing that there was no point lying to a man who could reach into others’ thoughts. “It was on the day that Starkiller Base was destroyed. He just sat outside the main control room, smiling and repeating, ‘It’s almost over. This piece of junk is almost dead. It’s almost over and you’ll never have to see these assholes again…’. Then, the escape pods arrived, and we tried to get him to board one, but he just grinned and said that he’d rather go down with the base than have a ‘slow death with you pieces of Bantha shit.’”

“Wait,” Kylo said. “Is that the same person who you referenced in your speech about noble sacrifices after the destruction of Starkiller?”

For the first time in years, Hux decided to keep quiet.

“This is just sad,” Kylo lamented. “To think that in this entire facility there isn’t a single cheerful humanoid being. On the other hand, I don’t think that’s unique to the First Order. Maybe all the cheerful people in the outside world are just being fake…”
“I CAN’T DO THIS ANY MORE!”

Nix Jerd’s agonized cry echoed through the Resistance Base on D’Qar. The rest of his Squadron barely made it to the bombardier’s side before he broke down in tears.

“Poe, help!” Paige called. “Nix won’t come out from under the desk!”

The commander came rushing into the room.

“What happened?” Poe gasped, taking in the scene before him.

Nix was curled into a ball underneath the desk, on top of which sat a monitor displaying 24/7 KyloKam footage, sobbing hysterically.

“I can’t do this anymore, Poe,” he wailed. “I can’t!”

“What?” Poe asked, kneeling down to the pilot’s level. “Nix, calm down. It’s okay. What happened?”

“I c-can’t… I can’t,” Nix stammered. “I can’t do KyloKam duty anymore! Every time I listen to them, it feels like… like this cloud of negativity just envelops me. This… th-this is even more depressing than the movie where the BB-unit died!”

“Never talk about the movie where the BB-unit died!” Poe said sharply. “But, I’m sorry. I just don’t understand how KyloKam duty made you like this.”

“He’s right Poe,” Paige said, stepping forward. “I don’t think it can be healthy to be exposed to that level of angst for a two-hour long shift.”

“You didn’t tell us this thing was dangerous!” Nix whimpered. “You acted like this was all fun and games, didn’t you, Commander?”

“Hey, no need to throw around accusations!” Poe said. “I still don’t get it. What upset you?”

“Just watch!” Nix said, rocking back and forth on the ground. “See for yourself!”

The Resistance fighters turned to the monitor, which showed Kylo Ren and General Hux standing in a deserted hallway.

“What if happiness is just a myth?” Kylo mused. “What if it’s just an abstract construct that humanity created as a safe haven against the woes of reality? What if that’s all it is, and we’ve just tricked ourselves into believing in something that’s completely insubstantial?”

Even Poe, who had to have one of the highest concentrations of optimism in the First Order and Resistance combined, was starting to feel a little down.

“That’s enough, Ren,” Hux said. “Happiness exists… somewhere.”

Hearing these words come from the sullen general was almost enough to convince the Resistance fighters that happiness was indeed a figment of their imaginations.

“I think we should turn it off, Poe,” Paige said.

“What?” Poe exclaimed. “We can’t do that! We’re getting so much material for our recruitment
website from this! Have you seen how many more hits we’ve gotten ever since we launched KyloKam? Not to mention all the fun we’ve been having with the movie nights!”

“Poe,” Paige sighed. “I know this is your idea, so you’re really attached to it and all… and the movie nights were really fun, but we need to think about the safety of the Resistance. Just look at Nix!”

Nix had backed up farther underneath the desk. The Cobalt Squadron’s pilot, Finch Dallow, and Paige’s sister, Rose were kneeling down, trying to coax their friend out from hiding.

“I want to believe in happiness,” he blubbered. “I want to be happy. I… I…”

“We know,” Finch told him, his voice soft and soothing. “Don’t worry. You’ll be happy.”

“And once we burn the First Order to the ground, you’ll never have to listen to them claim happiness is a myth ever again,” Rose assured him.

Nix nodded and begun to rock back and forth.

“Yeah…” he whimpered. “Burn them… burn them to the ground. Happiness is real… we gotta… gotta save it…”

Meanwhile, Poe and Paige were still arguing.

“Look,” Poe said. “I’m sorry that Nix had a breakdown and I’m sorry if KyloKam has caused people emotional distress. I really didn’t intend for that to happen, but you guys need to start looking at the greater cause! KyloKam is going to rebuild all the support we lost during the destruction of the Hosnian System!”

“At what cost?” Paige asked.

“Fine,” Poe said. “If you really can’t stand it that much, you don’t have to watch the raw footage anymore, but the fact is, once BB-8 and I get the editing done, the galaxy loves KyloKam, and the more they love KyloKam, the better our chances are at winning this thing. But in order for all that to work, we need someone to watch the monitor.”

Paige regarded him coldly.

“Have it your way,” she said. “Go watch your kriffing monitor yourself. We’re going to stay away from this emotional turmoil.”

The rest of her squadron nodded in consent. Nix had finally come out from under the desk. He collapsed into Finch’s arms and gave Poe one last accusing look before the squadron left for the barracks.

It was nearing midnight on D’Qar. Poe yawned, grabbed another bowl of popcorn from the Hypermatter Popcorn Machine and sat down in front of the screen.

“Alright, Hugs, Ren,” he said. “It’s just us three now. Let’s see something fun.”

The two First Order leaders were quarreling again, unsurprisingly.

“Well, why don’t we just have one of us smile for the camera?” Hux was helplessly throwing out ideas. “Then we can at least get a photo for a poster. The deadline is in less than 72 hours. Supreme Leader Snoke needs results.”

“How long is it going to take for you to get it into your shriveled mind that I don’t smile?” Kylo
“Why don’t you try smiling if you’re so desperate for a photo?”

Hux did try to smile. Fortunately for Poe, the resolution on KyloKam was not high enough to make the result too graphic. Still, the Commander couldn’t help but recoil from the screen. Even Kylo looked unnerved.

“Stop it!” Ren was shouting. “Stop it now!”

“Alright, I stopped!” Hux shrieked, resuming his normal sulk.

“That smile…” Poe said to himself, wondering whether he could really consider what he’d just witnessed to be a smile. “That smile could use some work.”

The general had started pacing. From his observations, Poe had begun to pick up on Hux’s various forms of nervous behavior. Usually, pacing implied a strict deadline and was usually followed by… yes, there it was. The general ran a hand through his red hair, then quickly smoothed it back down. It seemed the general cared very deeply about his hair. Perhaps he and Ren could bond over it sometime.

Poe couldn’t blame him. Now that he thought about it, Hux did have nice hair. Not a bad bone structure either, now that the attempted smile was gone…

He heard a strain of inquisitive beeps behind him and reached back to pat BB-8 on the head.

“Hey, Buddy,” he said. “Want to watch KyloKam with me?”

BB-8 uttered a string of concerned binary.


Silly plan, BB-8 said. Silly plan. More BOOM. Poe also obsessed with BOOM. Also unhealthy. Poe not a healthy man. Stop with KyloKam. Go to sleep. Also, too much popcorn is unhealthy. So many unhealthy things…

“Chill,” Poe told the droid. “You’re not my doctor. Besides, none of this is unhealthy. I caught a nap earlier today. Someone needs to be here to watch the monitor in case something interesting –”

A scream sounded from the monitor. Kylo and Hux rushed off in the direction of the sound. Poe grabbed the remote to shift the camera view, following the stars of KyloKam down the hall.

“This could be interesting,” he murmured, helping himself to another handful of popcorn.
Lost in Life and Also in the Basement

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to everyone who left kudos and comments! FYI, I've taken away the set chapter count for this fic because it has ended up way longer than I anticipated. Hope you enjoy this chapter!

Arbitrary screams were not a rare occurrence in the First Order. Normal vocal volume had never exactly been in vogue. Still, this particular scream was so blood-curdling that Kylo and Hux immediately knew there was something terribly wrong.

That something happened to take the form of a pile of broken film equipment and a piece of Stormtrooper armor.

“I’m feeling very abandoned right now,” Kylo proclaimed.

Hux surveyed the scene, his brow furrowed in confusion. There was no sign of the camera crew or the Stormtroopers. Phasma was going to kill him for losing another group of her troopers. He felt as if something, someone else was missing too…

“WHERE’S THE DROID?!” Hux’s panicked scream echoed throughout the Finalizer.

After a quick glance around the hallway, Kylo realized the General had a point (for once). BB-9E was nowhere to be seen.

“Maybe he abandoned us along with the troopers and the cameramen,” Kylo said. “It’s not surprising. I think we’ve already established that your troops are skilled at committing high treason. Must have rubbed off on the droid.”

“How dare you!” Hux snarled, but his anxiety quickly overcame his anger. He braced himself for the dreaded sound of rolling metal followed by another electric shock to his leg. “We need to find the demon… I mean, the droid and the camera crew. We’re already far behind schedule. I’m sure if we check the security footage…”

“Good luck with that,” Kylo said, pointing towards the ceiling.

The security camera, or what was left of it, was dangling precariously on a frayed wire. The rest of the camera had been reduced to a blob of flickering lights and bent metal.

Approaching footsteps sounded down the hall, and the team of radar technicians from the Bridge rounded the corner. They paused to gape at the mangled camera, apparently too drained from their last struggle with the calcinator to complain any more about brokenness.

“I don’t suppose you know anything about what happened here?” Hux called out to them.

The radar technicians looked confusedly from the heap of equipment to the camera and shook their heads.

“We heard a scream,” one of them said, shrugging. Kylo and Hux recognized him as the one who
had begun the discussion of broken things on the Bridge. “But we just thought that Kylo Ren was fighting the vending machine again or something.”

“Or he like… killed someone,” another technician.

Hux gave Kylo an accusing scowl.

“Is that why all the vending machines are broken?” he demanded.

“It ate my credits and wouldn’t give me my protein bar,” Kylo explained. “But if you smash through the glass, you can get all the protein bars you want, though that doesn’t make them taste any better.”

Hux’s grimace soured further at the mention of protein bars. For once, the two agreed on something. Of course, neither would ever admit to having any kind of shared opinion, even over something as trivial as the revolting taste of the First Order protein bars.

“I suppose you can get on with your business then, if you don’t have anything to contribute,” Hux told the technician team. “Ren and I will handle this.”

“Did you check the trail?” one of the technicians suggested.

“What trail?”

The technician gestured at the floor before running off with the rest of his group. They seemed to be very excited to go wherever their destination was.

There was indeed a trail consisting of small bits of Stormtrooper armor. The path had blended in with the tiles at first but was quite clear after being pointed out. It appeared to lead to the deserted basement floor.

“This feels like a trap,” Hux muttered.

“Everything in life is a trap,” said Kylo. “It’s all out to deceive you…”

“That’s not my point.”

Hux peered down the staircase, wondering why the architects of the Finalizer decided on an abandoned prison aesthetic for the basement. It looked grimier than the rest of the ship. At the moment, the general wasn’t sure whether it was his fear of poor hygiene or fear of walking into a trap and getting murdered in some dark crevice never to be found that was holding him back.

“I don’t like this,” he said to himself.

“I don’t know what your problem is,” Kylo said, ever sympathetic towards other’s unease. “I go down there all the time when I want a quiet, dark place to brood. You can’t possibly be scared of it.”

“I prefer to say I have a heightened sense of self-preservation.”

“I’ll go down first since you’re scared. Actually, I’ll go down alone. I’ve had enough of your presence for one day.”

Now, had General Hux possessed a sturdy, carefully nurtured self-esteem and enough maturity to overlook what was obviously an instance of his rival baiting him, he would have let the conversation end there. He would have left to find a new camera crew and finish a stunning advertising campaign by the deadline after a productive day of work, which would perhaps have gotten him in better favors to get the coveted promotion to Grand Marshal.
However, the idea of Hux with a sturdy, carefully nurtured self-esteem was no more realistic than the idea of Kylo abandoning his lightsaber tantrums for meditation classes or the idea of him actually achieving his dream of being Grand Marshal.

“In that case, I think I’ll lead the way,” Hux said, striding ahead. He would show Ren. He would show anyone who dared to accuse him of frailty exactly what courage looked like...

As if on cue, something ran under his feet and the general tumbled down the remaining steps with a markedly uncourageous yelp.

“Next time let me do that for you,” Kylo said, stepping over the general’s prostrate form.

Hux jumped to his feet, dusting off his clothes and frantically rubbing hand sanitizer onto his hands. He would have to have a word with the Sanitation Stormtroopers about the basement floor. Eyes burning with rage, he spotted the source of his humiliation: an MSE droid, idly crawling across the floor.

“Kriffing mouse droid!” he shrieked at the metal box. “Why do we have these things anyway? They don’t seem to have much of a purpose.”

“No one here has a purpose,” Kylo pointed out. “Just the other day, Supreme Leader Snoke asked me whether I ever wondered why he keeps a rabid cur (the rabid cur being you, of course) in such a position of power, and that got me thinking. Eventually I realized that no one here really has a purpose, and it isn’t just the First Order. It’s the whole galaxy.”

He concluded his speech with a heavy sigh. Hux only stared at him.

“On that uplifting note,” Hux said, “Let’s find the camera crew and Stormtroopers so that we can get out of here.” He surveyed the winding corridor ahead of them which broke off into a three-way forked intersection. “You said you come down here often, Ren. So, I assume you know your way around.”

“No, I don’t,” Kylo replied. “I said that I come down here often to brood. Brooding isn’t a mobile activity. Do you ever hear about brooding walks or brooding jogs or brooding strolls…”

“Alright, alright!” Hux interjected. “You’ve made your point. We’ll just… try not to go too far from the entrance. We are working on a deadline after all. We don’t have time to get lost.”

“I’m already lost in the grand scheme of things. You know, in a metaphorical way… not the way my dad used to lose his stick-on grenades around the house so that they’d accidentally explode in places and blow up my model X-Wings, though that was probably also a metaphor for how I was lost and had a lot of pent up anger.”

“That is very helpful, Ren. Very helpful indeed.”

-x-X-x-


“It’s okay, Buddy,” Poe said, patting the droid on the head. His eyes remained fixed on the screen. “Trust me. This is going to be good.”

BB-8 scanned the screen which displayed Kylo and Hux navigating a long, dark maze of hallways.

Dark hallway. Scary hallway, the droid buzzed. Too much like horror movies. Not good for Poe
Past midnight.

“Relax,” Poe told the droid. “I’ve seen the inside of the First Order before and things can get pretty freaky there, but I’m prepared for it. Besides, I’m good with horror movies, and that sort of stuff doesn’t even happen in real life.”


“Okay, Buddy. I know what happened, but frankly the General was overreacting.”

General Organa only smart person.

The camera veered to the side and the display took a dizzying turn towards the ceiling. Poe pressed a few buttons on the remote and eventually straightened the view back to their targets.

Poe bad with remote, BB-8 remarked.

“Now that’s just mean,” Poe complained.

Mean but true, the droid retorted. Poe bad with remote. Poe nearly kill pasty scrawny General.

“Hey,” Poe said. “No need to blow things out of proportion. You’ve seen it before. Hugs is very durable, even though he looks delicate.”

BB-8 tilted his head in the classic inquisitive droid pose.

Delicate? the droid questioned.

“You know,” Poe explained, “Slight built despite the height, delicate looking bone structure overall, especially the cheekbones… just things you notice when you’ve been studying the First Order leadership for a while.”

Poe weird now. Saying weird things about pasty scrawny General. KyloKam make Poe crazy.

“Come on, Buddy,” Poe said. “I was just joking. You know not to take everything I say so seriously.”


-x-X-x-

The Mastermind peeked his mutilated head around the corner and beeped angrily to himself. It had been years since anyone had entered his lair, excluding that one incident with the Sanitation Stormtroopers. The Mastermind had eliminated the entire crew within minutes, except for that one pesky FN-2187 trooper who had run up the stairs while BB-9E’s flamethrower was heating up, but he had let that one go, knowing no one would believe his stories about the spherical menace.

Now, he was confronted with not one, but three intruders: Scrawny Snaps, Discount Vader and an MSE droid. The Mastermind had always been suspicious of the MSE-series. He didn’t see why the First Order needed more than one droid in the first place, much less one whose purpose was vague to the point of utter uselessness. No. There was only room for one supreme droid on this ship. The MSE droid would have to go just like the rest of them.

He suspected they were looking for the camera crew and those insufferable Stormtroopers. Little did
they know the Mastermind had put them out of their misery hours ago and feasted on their metallic equipment. After all the humiliating therapy work they had put him through, their deaths had been brutal justice.

He expected a quick battle. He had the advantage of knowing his surroundings better than any of his enemies, in addition to his extensive artillery which he kept wrapped within his circular body. Still, the Mastermind had to be cautious. If his memory programming was intact, Scrawny Snaps was of little concern, but Discount Vader and his bizarre red fire stick could be an issue.

There were few things the Mastermind despised more than bright red lights. With the exception of those built into his photoreceptor, red lights seemed to have a negative effect on his circuits, often causing discoordination and general confusion. Admittedly, the red fire stick looked rather unwieldy, but the Mastermind suspected Discount Vader had trained extensively in combat and would use his cheaply constructed weapon to the best of his abilities.

He would have to think carefully before making his first move. Very carefully.

“I think we should stop here, Ren,” Scrawny Snaps’ voice echoed through the labyrinth.

The Mastermind noted the slight rise in the pitch of the man’s voice. According to his database of human behavior, such changes indicated intense fear that one was trying to conceal. Fear was good. The Mastermind enjoyed feeding off of it.

“I thought you wanted to find the camera crew,” Discount Vader argued.

“I did, Ren, but I don’t think we’ll have any success. We’ve wasted enough time with this already.”

“Then who are we going to get to film to advertisement?”

“We… we could get Mitaka.”

“Mitaka? He can’t even hold a camera straight. Have you seen his LightTube channel? Everything there is so shaky it gives you a headache.”

“Well, we’ll find someone! I’m sick of this place, Ren.”

“You’ll just have to explain to Supreme Leader Snoke then why we don’t have a proper camera crew.”

The Mastermind cocked his head to one side at the name “Supreme Leader Snoke”. He had never understood why the (temporary) leader of the First Order had given himself such a ridiculous name as “Snoke”.

“Fine then!” Scrawny Snaps said. “We’ll look for ten more minutes. Then, we’ll have to find other options, and if I die down here, my blood is on your hands, Ren!”

“Realistically, if we were to die down here,” Discount Vader wondered aloud, “Would anyone mourn us or would our memory just fade away?”

Normally, the Mastermind relished negative energy, but this man was really something else. He would have to get rid of them soon. They appeared to be quite lost in his lair. Perhaps he could take advantage of that…

Suddenly, the Mastermind’s circuits lit up with a wonderfully horrifying idea. The droid raced towards the main control console in the basement and extended his arc welder. He heard the
intruders turn another corner, entering the heart of the lair. The Mastermind seized his chance and with a single swipe, cut the wires of the lighting system.

The entire basement floor went black.

End Notes

Thanks for reading! Comments are appreciated so long as they aren't hate rants. I'd be interested to hear what you guys think.

If you liked this fic and are interested in more Star Wars humor, you can follow me on The Imperial Cantina Jam on Tumblr: https://imperialcantinajam.tumblr.com/. (Please forgive the shameless advertising. I’m not much better at it than the First Order.)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!