Instinct

by treenahasthaal

Summary

There was something about the blond boy in the crowd of detainees that caught Commander Yarryn's attention. Something that pulled at his gut and told him there was more about this captive than met the eye. It was his duty to find out what it was the boy was hiding - and find it he would, for Yarryn was very good at his job.

12 weeks after the destruction of the Death Star.

Notes

There are several reasons for this story. There is my undying fascination with putting Luke into Imperial hands. There was a nugget of an idea in my head when a friend said she loved reading about Luke from the POV of other characters. There was also the horror I felt (watching it on tv) during student protests in London and how innocent bystanders were kettled by the overhanded tactics of the police. I have also been horrified by recent reports that so-called civilised western countries, that once condemned "enhanced interrogation" techniques and called them torture, are now embracing them and using them in the name of "freedom."

I also did quite a bit of research into techniques used by the Gestapo during WW2 and the KGB during the Cold War and the effects that such a process of questioning has on a subject.

Thanks to Kazlynh and Veronica. W for reading over this tale. Any errors are my own. Also thanks to Kazlynh for Thiohexium Phenate.

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A Face in the Crowd

Instinct

Part One

It was instinct that drew Commander Yarryn’s attention to the boy.

The youth was like any of the other detainees slowly moving across the courtyard from the transports to the towering edifice that was the Imperial Repatriation, Re-education and Subversive Containment Headquarters. There were thirty long, thin lines of beings, each one moving single file toward the temporary registration desks where each individual would have their Identification checked and verified before being directed to three different groups; those for immediate release, those set for further checks and those whose destination were the holding cells in the bowels of the centre to await interrogation and eventual execution.

Looking at the numbers trekking footstep after footstep to the waiting desks Yarryn knew he was in for a long few days: for it would take days to weed out the innocent from the guilty. That was always the danger of the type of action they had taken to quell the protests that had arisen that day. Street after street had been cordoned off, blocking all escape exits for the protestors, shoppers and workers alike and thousands had been herded and kettled and held for hours until transports could be called to ferry them to the IRRSCH for processing.

There had been deaths of course. There always were at these protests. Young eager activists, radicalised by the Rebellion, who always seemed to chance their luck and paid for it in their own blood. It was too bad that their actions always seem to result in the loss of innocent lives, too. Mothers and children out walking to buy clothes in the shopping district, workers on a lunch break stepping out of a café and being gunned down because the protestors had decided to bring their rally down that particular street at that particular time.

A sad waste of life that the Empire, and its Emperor, condemned in the most sombre and angry tones. Swift and severe justice was promised for those who had planned and participated in the chaos.

Whether this boy was directly involved was still to be ascertained, but Yarryn had a feeling about him and, more often than not, his instincts were proven right. He had gift for seeing the guilt beneath an innocent exterior.

The young man’s head was down, staring at his feet as he shuffled forward. Blond, average height, dressed in faded black pants and bright yellow jacket the youth looked like nothing; no one of significance. Every now and then his head would rise and he would glance up and around at the heavily armed troopers stationed on the high walls above the moving mass of detainees. Then the head would drop as though resigned.

Wanting to test his gut-feeling, Yarryn stepped closer to the desk the boy was approaching and the seated trooper behind the temporary workstation waved away a tall Gran toward the group for further investigation. Shoulders slumped the Gran lumbered reluctantly away in the direction he was shown with a trooper at his back and the human youth stepped up to the desk.

“Identification,” the bored trooper barked.

The boy stiffened and swallowed at the stern tones, blue eyes blinking, and then he fished in his
back pocket and drew out an ID chip. Nervously licking his lips the boy passed it over and watched as the soldier ran it through the portable reader. Personal Information immediately appeared on the screen and the verification came up green indicating that the ID the young man carried was valid.

“Name?” The trooper asked, sounding bored. Yarryn knew the solder would ask a few random questions to check the information on the ID chip.


“You’re not from here, Luke?” It was more of a statement than a question.

“No sir, I’m originally from Tatooine.”

“Farmboy, huh?”

There was a blush on the boy’s face and Yarryn was hard pressed to place the source; embarrassment or anger? The boy was quite difficult to read and that was intriguing.

“Yes, sir…”

“Where are you staying just now?” The information was on the ID, but double checking everything did no harm.

“In the Covell District, sir. The Mosbree Hostel.”

“Rough area,” the trooper observed. “Heard there was another murder there last night; a Clawdite with a crushed throat.”

“It’s all I can afford,” the boy confessed with a shrug.

“What is your business on Corulag?”

“I’m looking for work,” the boy glanced up at the high walls, squinting in the afternoon sunlight.

The trooper looked up, regarding the youth before him. “Farming not good enough for you?”

The red deepened. Anger, definitely anger.

“No,” the boy replied, honestly, his eyes returning to the seated soldier. “I want to go to the Academy, but I need to take extra classes to pass the entrance exams. That costs money.”

There was a smile in the trooper’s reply and Yarryn was pleased that the soldier wasn’t weary enough that he was willing to accept every answer without testing further. He had probably heard similar stories from twenty others before the youth.

“Academy, really? What division?”

The boy’s reply was immediate and there was enthusiasm in his voice, a true desire. “Pilot. Combat pilot.”

“You want to fly, kid?”

“Yessir,” the boy nodded, a smile creeping onto his face. At that moment he fairly exuded innocence, but Yarryn hadn’t travelled the hyperspace lanes in a garbage scow. He knew a play when he saw one.
The trooper glanced at the card, glanced at the screen again. “You could volunteer, enter the Army Corps, become a trooper.”

A genuine grin creased the youth’s face, the blush fading. “I don’t think so, sir. Someone once told me I was too short to be a Stormtrooper.”

The soldier laughed, and Yarryn saw the youth relax a little with the banter and he had to admit the soldier was impressing him. So was the boy.

“When did you arrive on Corulag?”

“Uh… two weeks ago, sir.”

“From where?”

The boy thought, eyes moving right as he remembered. “From Nar Shadda.”

The trooper looked sharply up at him. “And what had you being doing for the Hutts?”

“I… uh… I’m good with mechanics, ships engines,” he lifted his hands, showed the calluses and ingrained oil and dirt still under his finger nails. “I worked in the spaceport, saved for the trip here.”

The trooper nodded. “So, Mr Wannabe-Combat-Pilot, what were you doing in the Trading Centre today?”

The boy’s jaw tightened… Yarryn saw it, the trooper couldn’t have failed to have seen it… and he swallowed again. “Looking for work,” he explained, “like I told you. I heard that Jenniks was hiring staff.”

The trooper tapped something into his console, more information filled the screen. Again Yarryn saw that the boy was being truthful. The department store was indeed having a recruitment drive.

“Had you already made an application?”

“No sir, I was on my way to apply when… he shrugged, indicating his current predicament, “… you know…”

“Pity,” the soldier said, “that could have verified your story. Did anyone else know you were heading there?”

“No, sir,” the boy conceded and Yarren could see concern filter into the blue eyes.

“Anyone else with you?”

“No, sir.”

“Did you tell anyone where you were going?”

“No, sir. I keep to myself in that place.”

The trooper nodded. “Probably wise, but it’s a pity all the same, we might have got you out of here sooner if we could verify your story.” He tapped some information into his console and turned around waving at the stormtroopers gathered behind the desks. One of them stepped forward.

Yarryn saw the boy’s jaw tighten again, saw understanding filtering into his eyes, saw a flare of…
and again he was unsure of his reading of the boy’s emotions. It might have been fear he had seen, it might have been apprehension, it might have been something entirely different.

Frustration?

“Okay, Luke,” the trooper spoke smoothly, giving the boy the same story he had given the Gran before him. “Everything seems to check out, but we need to confirm and verify your story. The trooper here is going to take you inside to a holding area and….”

The boy was rigid, he glanced up at the massive building then down, his eyes darting between the soldiers and then that blue gaze met Yarryn’s and only then did he realise that the Commander had been watching. Yarryn knew what the youth saw; a head taller than the troopers around him, steel, grey eyes and a scar that ran diagonally from the bridge of his nose across his left cheek and down through his neck.

He held the boy’s gaze until the youth glanced away, dropped his eyes to Yarryn’s rank and operational insignia. The boy paled, swallowed, seemed on the point of running.

Yarryn tensed, ready to shout the order for stun settings only if the boy should bolt. He wanted to speak to this young man.

“… further checks will be carried out. With any luck you’ll be out of here by tomorrow morning.”

And the boy relaxed, shoulders loosening, hands shoved deep into pockets. “Tomorrow? What kind of checks?”

“We’ll contact the hostel, make sure you are living there. Ask about any associates. Verify that the bio details on your ID actually match you. It shouldn’t take long.”

“Oh, okay…” Compliance, submission, an understanding that there was nothing else he could do about his situation.

“Please go with the trooper here.”

The boy nodded, blue eyes glancing at Yarryn again, before stepping away from the table in the direction indicated. The commander watched him go and then leaned over the shoulder of the sitting trooper and lifted the boy’s Identity chip. “Have his details sent to my office.”

The trooper glanced up. “You think he’s one of them, sir?”

Yarryn looked back, watching the blond head disappear into the growing numbers of detainees being sent in the same direction.

“I’m not sure,” Yarryn confessed, “but I intend on finding out.”

It was the middle of the night and the vast court yard and landing zones were lit by high beam lights as the last of the detainees were processed and the portable equipment and tables were packed up and returned to storage. A brief chilled breeze kicked up dust and debris scattering it across the duracrete; it would all be gone by the morning, cleaned and cleared by the caretaker droids who were already rolling out of the building.

Commander Yarryn sighed, wishing he could clock off and head home, but he knew from experience of these police actions that he would be snatching only an hour or two of slumber in his
office as the detainees were processed. He had a busy few days ahead and would probably get less sleep than those singled out for interrogation. A single drop of water hit his face and he glanced up at the dark of the night sky. Rain….

Turning on his heel he marched toward the open doors and the banks of elevators beyond that would carry him below to the detainment rooms, the cells, the interrogation chambers and a night of deciding who would be released, who would be further questioned and who would die.

Organised chaos was the only description that Yarryn had to define what he walked into when the elevator doors parted. The reception area of the prisoner processing area was heaving with bodies; species of all shapes and sizes jostling for space and position, while protesting their innocence with appeals and pleas. Harassed staff shouted orders at the detainees and at subordinates. It was a similar scene, albeit in a slightly smaller scale, to the one from the outside courtyard earlier in the day.

Yarryn started through the throng, initially having to push past bodies, until his uniform, rank and stature were noticed and the way ahead suddenly parted easily for him. Fear, he found, created respect and the reception area quietened a little with his presence. Except for…

… he turned at the high pitched cries, at the accompanying sobs, looking for the source and saw a young human woman cradling a child in her arms. The babe was struggling with its blankets, little arms and legs kicking as the weeping woman gave her name to the bored guard sitting behind the desk.

Yarryn moved closer, while taking note of other children among the crowd.

“… please, I have already given this information and my child needs…”

The guard didn’t even look up at her, barking out. “Silence! Just answer the questions asked.”

“Yes, sir… but, my child…”

“What is going on here, Sergeant?” Yarryn asked quietly; he found he rarely needed to raise his voice.

The Sergeant looked up, paled. “Uh, sir… I’m just processing this prisoner.”

Yarryn looked at the woman’s tear stained face and at the squalling child in her arms. “Prisoner?”

“Yes, sir… she’s…”

“A mother with a hungry child,” Yarryn observed to the guard. “I also see other children. There are elderly, too.”

“Sir, orders dictated that those who cannot verify…”

Yarryn sighed. “I am aware of the orders. You would have thought we would have learned from the last round of protests.” His eyes wandered the crowd. “Get this woman’s home address and release her. Do the same with all children under the age of twelve standard years who are alone or with parents and all elderly prisoners over the age of eighty. We can verify their identities and affiliations at a later date.”

“Sir… I… some may be Rebel sympathisers and antagonists.”

Yarryn nodded. “True,” he conceded, “some may be… but we have a back log to clear tonight and
with the space ports shut down and the city traffic routes closed they won’t get very far if they try to run. So, release them.”

The sergeant nodded. “Yes, sir!”

Yarryn placed a hand on the woman’s arm and smiled as she instinctively flinched at his touch. “You’ll be home soon,” he assured her. “My apologies for your inconvenience.”

He saw disbelief in her eyes, and relief. “T-t-thank you,” she stammered.

“My pleasure,” Yarryn briefly bowed his head to her, before turning back to his staff. “And sergeant?”

“Yes, sir?”

“Don’t question me again.”

The man swallowed, Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat as he forced out. “Yes, sir.”

The atmosphere in the area changed, it was no longer charged, no longer felt on the verge of anarchy. With his presence and with a simple act of kindness he had restored the crumbling order. Fear won respect – in that the Tarkin Doctrine was correct - but softening it with common sense, with fairness, helped preserve that order and respect.

He slipped his hand into his pocket and took out the identity chip he had lifted earlier. He wanted to salve his curiosity about the boy from the courtyard. “I want this run again,” he ordered, handing it to the officer, “I want to know everything there is to know about Luke Dunestrider. Contact the garrison on his home planet. Run facial recognition for the last week on the city security systems I want to know what he’s been doing, where he’s been going and who he has been meeting. Summarise it and send it to me, but I want his actions during the protests today in full. I want to look at that myself.”

The officer glanced at the hordes behind Yarryn, looking harassed and anxious, but he did not question this time. “Yes, sir. It will take more time to get his background if he’s from off world.”

“Tatooine,” Yarryn supplied, turning away as his men thinned the crowd; picking out the elderly and the young. “He’s from Tatooine.”

“I’ll start this immediately, Commander.”

“See that you do, Sergeant,” Yarryn dismissed, then asked. “What holding cell is he in?” He could hear keys being tapped as the man responded to his request.

“Minimum Holding, cell sixteen.”

“How many are in with him?”


Yarryn nodded; it wasn’t unusual for rooms to be overcrowded after such action. “Process the room as normal, but delay him until the nearer the end. Make him wait, but not the last though, and alert me before his release.”

“His release, sir? I thought you…”

Yarryn turned, lifting an eyebrow in warning.
“Yes, sir!”

The detainees still waiting to be processed parted again as he passed through them, heading for his office and the quiet it offered him. On entering he activated his computer, removed his hat and shrugged off his jacket before settling into the chair at his desk.

He flicked through the monitor systems until he found the feed from Holding Cell Sixteen. It took a few moments to find the boy in the crush of bodies, but Yarryn spotted him sitting on the floor against the far wall when the large Horaarn hiding him shifted to the side.

Yarryn tapped in come commands to the keyboard and the cell camera zoomed in and focused on the sitting figure. He relaxed into his chair and considered the youth, considered the information on the ID chip.

Luke Dunestrider. Aged nineteen and born on Tatooine in the Bestine area. Orphaned young in a Tusken Raider attack and raised in a local facility for disadvantaged juveniles. No record of any criminal offenses and very average academic scores. Yarryn scoffed, and this boy wanted to be a pilot with scores like that?

The ID had recorded that the youth had left Tatooine four months previously and travelled to Corulag via Nar Shadda just as he had said. Yarryn made a note to check that the youth had actually passed through that system and had been working at the shipping port as he claimed.

He glanced back to the monitor as the cell door opened and three detainees’ names were shouted. The crowd of prisoners shifted nervously, anxiously, as the three left the cell to an unknown fate. Yarryn didn’t care how his men processed them, his focus was on the youth now sitting gently tapping the back of his head against the wall. The boy was nervous, unsettled, by his situation – which was to be expected of all the detainees and yet Yarryn had the feeling that this youth had more reason to be nervous than most.

And he was going to find out what that reason was.

ooOOoo

Yarryn yawned, his jaw popping painful, and dropped a couple of stim-pills to give him an extra boost for the many hours still ahead. It had been a long night and an even longer day and he had only managed two hours of snatched sleep at his desk, but the processing of the previous days detainees had gone well. Through low ley interviews he and his men had already identified forty individuals who had been marked and advanced for more enhanced questioning and had even more released; innocents of the day who had been in the wrong place at the wrong time who would now be home and in bed as another night drew in.

He chewed the tablets, grimacing at their bitter taste, and swallowed them down with a gulp from the lukewarm glass of water he had sat on his desk a few hours before. Placing the glass down he shifted through the pile of data cards, glancing at the information they contained on the detainees so far. It was with some disappointment and chagrin that he realised that, over 24 hours into the investigation, they hadn’t yet identified any of the ringleaders behind the previous day’s protests.

He threw a datapad to the desk and collapse back into his chair, rubbing his eyes. His superiors would be disappointed if he was unable to produce anyone of note.

A tone from his desk comm buzzed.

“Yes,” he barked, answering it.
“Sir, you wanted to be alerted when Dunestrider was about to be released?” It was a reminder, spoken like a question.

The boy from Tatooine. Yarryn smiled, suddenly more alert and focused.

“He’s been through first stage interview?”

“Yes, sir,” the tinny voice told him. “Everything has checked out so far. His ID is authentic and his story has been verified by the authorities on Nar Shadda. Lieutenant Towen has marked him for a Conditional Release until we have confirmation from Tatooine. We don’t expect that back for a few hours yet and…”

“What about the security footage I asked for; the facial recognition for the last few days and for the protest itself?”

“We only have some partial footage from the protests prepared for you, we’re still working on the…”

“Send through what you have. Stop and arrest him before he leaves. Have him progressed to stage two. Take him immediately to interrogation. Have Towen and Gran’et assigned to him. No sleep, but allow him water. Run question pattern Onith: no coercion, nothing physical or threatening yet. Feed his questioning through to me.”

“Yes, sir!”

Yarryn stood, stretched, and yawned again. He buttoned his jacket, pulled it down to draw out the creases and lifted his cap from the desk. It was time to go to work. Time to focus on just one prisoner.

Yarryn strode into the prison’s Discharge and Release section and positioned himself at the back of the room so as not to interfere with the process, or unsettle the officers currently dealing with those being released from custody. Some, like the boy, were being given a Conditional Discharge; having a temporary tracker placed just under the skin on the back of their hand to ensure that the Empire could monitor their whereabouts until such times as their stories had been fully verified. Others were being released unconditionally after being cleared of any wrong doings.

The relief in the room was palpable; each being, whether human, Twi’lek, Bothan, or Sullustan, held expressions of cautious hope, nervously glancing at the exit and the officers stationed on either side of the door as they picked up their ID chips and any belongings that they’d had to relinquish when arrested.

Dunestrider was different. He didn’t look at the exit once. His attention was fixed ahead, face grim, thoughtful. He looked as though he had things of a greater weight on his mind.

At the moment he was listening intently to the officer behind the partition as it was explained to him that his ID chip had been misplaced and he was being issued with a temporary one. A flash of uncertainty crossed the boy’s face and he looked up, saw Yarryn, and locked eyes with him.

The understanding in those blue eyes was immediate and Yarryn had to quash a smile of satisfaction; it seemed the boy’s instincts were as good as his own. Except it wasn’t fear he saw flash across the youth’s face. It was anger.

It was time to end the charade. It was time to show the boy what he was really facing. Yarryn nodded at his men standing either side of the doorway.
The officers stepped forward as Dunestrider turned to face them.

“Turn back around,” he was ordered sharply.

The boy held his hands up, palms out, protesting. “I…I don’t understand. I’m being released…” he glanced at the other beings in the room, but most of the others turned away, refusing to look at him; just glad it wasn’t them. “Please…” he tried, sounding wretched.

“Turn around,” he was told again, “and place your hands on the counter.”

A few seconds of heightened hesitation and, just before Yarryn was about to authorise the use of force, the boy’s shoulders sank. He turned around and placed his hands, palm down, on the counter. He kept his eyes down for the time it took for the guards to cuff one wrist and sweep it behind him, before grabbing the other to shackle them together behind his back.

The simple act of applying the cuffs told the youth how serious this was, but the caution the guard began to recite to him drained the blood from Dunestrider’s face.

“You are being indefinitely detained under section thirty-two of the Anti-Insurgency Act. There are suspicions that you have conspired against the Imperial throne…

“What? I… no! This is a mistake!” At his protests the guards took his arms and began walking him back toward the detention area.

“…you have no rights to legal representation during questioning. If you fail to answer when questioned more direct pressure may be applied to you.”

The boy’s steps slowed and he twisted around to catch Yarryn’s eyes once more. There was a silent plea in the blue irises, fear, but also… Yarryn straightened watching the youth being manhandled through the doorway… resentment?

Definitely something other than the desperation and terror he was used to seeing from prisoners in the boy’s situation. Where was the panicked struggle, the fight? Dunestrider had protested, had not gone willingly, but he had gone quietly, with reluctant resignation and something elusive, something Yarryn couldn’t quite place.

Was he truly a Rebel? A hardened terrorist who was now saving his energy for the rigours of interrogation?

Yarryn sighed, the boy was an enigma. No outward sign of subversion, everything pointing to the youth as being an innocent bystander who had merely gotten himself caught up in the crowds of the protest and ended up kettled and arrested. But Yarryn’s interest had been piqued, his gut feeling telling him to ignore the obvious and look below it, to look at what the boy wasn’t displaying.

The Commander returned to his office and to his desk, immediately turning the monitors on and switching each one to show the same interrogation room but from different angles. It was empty for now save for a bare table and two chairs sitting on opposite sides. It was a boring room; plain, dark walls with shadows banished by bright light that streamed from above. It was supposed to look innocuous, it was supposed to look bland but somehow every prisoner that had ever sat within its confines had eventually told them everything they wanted to know, and some things that they hadn’t even been asked, and often without any form of enhanced persuasion.

He was good at his job. His staff were good at theirs and, despite the enigma he presented, Yarryn did not doubt that the youth currently being processed would be just has happy to answer every
question asked of him.

It would be a while yet before the boy would be placed into one of those chairs. An arrest under the anti-insurgency act meant that he would stripped, searched and changed into prison attire. Yarryn’s staff would bag his clothes, take hair, blood and DNA samples. His room at the hostel would be searched and his possessions confiscated. Everything would be forensically tested and, if the boy really had travelled from Tatootine to Corulag via Nar Shadda then chemical and mineral traces of his journey would be found within his hair, on his clothes and bags.

The Commander tore his eyes away from the room and picked up the first data pad. It contained visual data of the protests, specifically security recordings of Luke Dunestider’s movements in the city that day. He settled down to scroll through the snatches of silent video that his staff had pulled for him.

Just under an hour later and he had watched all of the footage. Dunestrider had left his hostel and had indeed headed straight into the city centre. He had caught public transport and had alighted the speeder a few blocks from the department store. There had been little interaction with others; a nod here and there when his eyes had met those of others, the odd brief snatch of conversation that suggested the boy was asking for directions and then he had turned a corner and found himself in the same street as the protest marchers. Dunestider had tried to keep his distance, had backed into a wall and stood for a few minutes beside a trash container watching the procession as it snaked past him.

He had moved away, still keeping as close to the wall as possible and had bumped into a dark haired man. They appeared to exchange pleasantries, shook hands and went their separate ways. Moments later chaos descended and the crowd of protestors changed direction and started running up the congested street; pushing and shoving their fellow collaborators and pedestrians alike.

Panic ensued when the troopers appeared encircling the area, cutting off streets and herding the crowds into three separate corrals with overwhelming numbers. Some tried to fight back, pushing and shoving at the soldiers, but a few, quick, street executions stilled the urge to fight back and with the bodies dragged off the streets temporary barriers were erected keeping hundreds in place and giving the authorities time to organise transport and detention.

Dunestrider had been lost in the crowds, but had been picked up again by the security cameras. He had been caught in the ornate square just outside the department store where, he had claimed, he was hoping to gain employment. He was standing in a squash of bodies near the centre of the square, looking lost, looking frightened, looking all the world like the unemployed youth he claimed to be.

The footage ended just as the sound of a door opening came from the speakers. Yarryn turned his attention from the datapad to the monitors. He watched as Dunestider, hands now bound in front of him, was lead into the room and pushed down into the chair furthest from the door. His cuffed wrists were lifted, stretch straight and fixed to the catch hanging from the edge of the table, leaving his hands dangling loosely. His ankles were shackled to the chair legs. It was an intentionally uncomfortable position; given the distance of the chair from the table the prisoner was unable to sit straight, was unable to lie down. Eventually his shoulders would ache and his back muscles would cramp. Bent over as he was his breathing would become laboured and difficult. If left in this position for hours the pain and discomfort for the prisoner would become unbearable.

The heat of the room would gradually increase until the air was muggy and humid. The close atmosphere was uncomfortable for all – but the interrogators could leave at any time, the captive could not.
Yarryn watched as the officers exited and the boy was left alone. Dunestrider’s eyes immediately lifted to the view room he found himself in. Four metres by three metres, blank walls, blank table, and with a bank of lights above there wasn’t much to see and the blue eyes dropped back to the table top and small whisper reached the room’s audio system.

“Kark…”

Yarryn grinned at the Huttese curse that seemed to perfectly sum up the youth’s situation. It would be a few hours yet before anyone else entered that room. The subject would left alone to sweat it out, both figuratively and literally, before the interrogation began.

It was then that the boy would wish to be alone again. Yarryn turned his attention back to the datapads scrolling once more through the footage from the protests not knowing what he was looking for, but feeling he had missed something important.

ooOoo

Two cups of stong caf and another couple of stim pills and Yarryn was still wide awake. His eyes were stinging from the need to sleep, his body felt sweaty and dirty and he knew he ought to shower and change before much longer, but still this youth kept his gut churning despite the fact that he had learned nothing new about the prisoner.

The recordings from the protests had yielded nothing more despite repeated viewings and the additional footage sent through to him from the preceding few days and also failed to give further, useful information. All it had shown was the boy going about his daily business; entering and leaving stores with purchases, frequenting various employment agencies, visiting local entertainment facilities, having a drink and, a couple of times, leaving with a female companion. Two different woman, Yarryn smiled; lucky boy.

He had already issued orders to follow up in the stores, agencies and clubs and had asked that the women be identified and brought in for questioning. Any avenue was open to investigation.

A cough from the monitor’s speakers drew his attention and he glanced up as Dunestrider squirmed in his seat. The youth was now in obvious discomfort and was trying to alleviate the growing ache of his body, sweat had darkened the blond hair and plastered it to his skull, and his breathing had become a little laboured.

It was already a stark contrast to his first low level interview with Towen. On watching the recording of Dunestrider’s first interrogation Yarryn had been struck by how amiable the boy was – even after sitting in a holding pen for several hours watching others be called and released before him. He had easily and eagerly answered everything put to him, just as he had in the courtyard. He had been open, earnest and his story had not changed. His Identification was valid, and he had been easily verified as staying at the hostel and really they had no reason to detain him further. Towen’s decision to conditionally release him had been the correct one.

But there was that niggle in his gut, that instinct that told him there was something about this boy. Yarryn watched a bead of sweat run down the side of Dunestrider’s face.

It was time to increase the pressure.

Yarryn reached across his desk and briefly activated his comm. “Send in Towan.”

A few minutes later the door of the interrogation room swept open and a tall, ungainly, dark haired man dressed in the black uniform of an Imperial Interrogator, entered the room with a carton of
water and a data card in his hands. He addressed the cautious and suspicious youth immediately.

“I’m sorry about the wait you’ve had,” he apologised as he un-cuffed Dunstrider’s left wrist and handed him the water. The boy’s hand shook as he took the carton and drank thirstily, “but we’ve had many to process and we only have a limited number of staff. Hopefully we can get this cleared up and send you on your way.”

Give the prisoner water, give him some hope. Towan was pleasant and unassuming. He could also be a ruthless bastard.

“I’m Lieutenant Towen. I think I spoke to you before?” he introduced, now setting the datapad down as he waited for Dunestrider to finish the water, “and you are…” he turned the datapad, glancing at the screen and reading, “Luke Dunestrider?”

The youth glanced at the Imperial, nodded and swallowed nervously but gave no further reply.

“Yes, I remember now. Tatooine, right?”

Another nod.

Towan lifted the empty carton from Dunstrider’s hand and gestured to the empty cuff. “I’m sorry, but I have to secure you.”

The boy capitulated, allowing the cuff to be snapped around his wrist once more.

Towan moved to the other side of the table and, pulling the chair out, he sat down. He was quiet for a moment as he flicked through the information on the datapad and then he glanced up at the subject and began the interrogation with a warning.

“You are obliged to answer truthfully to every question I ask. If I am not satisfied with your answer, or if you do not answer I am required, by law, to use more enhanced interrogation techniques…”

Another nervous swallow.

“… do you understand?”

A lick of the lips, a nod.

Towan smiled. “I need a verbal answer.”

Dunestrider’s eyes flickered to the walls, obviously realising that he was being watched and recorded. He cleared his throat “Ye… Yes. I understand.”

“Name. Age. Date, planet and place of birth?”

The boy frowned, brows brought together, eyes narrowing. “I, Uh, I’ve already answered these questions before when…”

Towan didn’t look up from his datapad. “And you need to answer them again.”

Trying to roll his shoulders to ease the strain on his muscles, the boy answered. “Luke Dunestrider. I’m nineteen standard years. I was born on Tatooine, Bestine township on the first day of the Empire and…”

Towan glanced up and noted. “An auspicious birth date.”
The boy shrugged, dismissively and Yarryn sat forward at the gesture. The tell could mean one or two things; that the boy was weary from a life of it being noted he was born on the same day that the Empire was created, or that he was indifferent of the Empire itself.

Yarryn could see by the slight narrowing of Towen’s eyes that he had also noted it.

“Okay,” The Lieutenant continued, his voice lighter, trying to put the prisoner at ease somewhat to see if he could be tricked into another mistake. “Tell me about your parents, about Tatooine and what has brought you to Corulag.”

And so the youth repeated what he had already told them on his initial arrest and interview. He was an orphan. He had left Tatooine and come to Corulag to apply for the Academy. He was looking for work. He was wanting to be a pilot. There was nothing remarkable about him. He was ordinary and everything rang true… except that it didn’t.

There had been that tightening of his jaw when previously asked why he had been in the Trading Area, there was the glib shrug of his shoulders when Towen had remarked on his birthday being Empire Day.

Towen took him back to the protests, walked him through his route to the city right up to his moment of arrest when the troopers began clearing the kettled areas.

Towan nodded, listened, tapped his fingers on the datapad as the youth spoke. Dunestrider was tired, sore, the heat and humidity in the room was unbearable and yet Towen had only just started.

“So, you want to be a fighter pilot?” The Lieutenant asked.

“Yes, sir.” Short answers. No elaboration. Little deviation from his previously given answers. He was either telling the truth or had training in resisting interrogation.

“Why?”

“I want to fly.”

Watching, Yarryn sat forward, suddenly more alert. Towan glanced up at the youth and Dunestrider himself stiffened. They all knew he had made a mistake.

It was a minor one, but it was there nonetheless.

The question was… would he try to fix it. Would he stammer out a quick fix, or would he sit it out and see what happened.

Towen maintained silence, patiently waiting for Dunestrider to fill it.

He didn’t. The boy sat quietly and waited for Towen to speak.

There was now a power play in the room. Towen had asked and the boy had answered and was giving no more.

However, The Lieutenant was no fool. He knew exactly what was happening. “Just to fly?” he asked, pleasantly, as though the tension in the room was a figment of their imaginations. Then he highlighted the youth’s error. “Not to serve the Empire?”

The youth frowned in feigned confusion. A drop of sweat gathered at the tip of his nose. Had he not been tethered to the table he would have wiped it before answering, he would have hidden his
mouth as he answered with the lie. “Yes, sir. Of course, to Serve.”

Towen smiled. “Of course.” His tone implied he had heard the falseness of the answer. “Tell me what happened on the day of the protests.”

The youth sighed, eyes rolling to the ceiling. He was sore, scared, tired, fed up and was now having to repeat himself for the third time since his capture.

“I was going to Jenniks. They’re hiring staff and…”

“Start before that. Start from when you woke.”

“What?” There was confusion. “What do you need to know that for?”

“I asked… you need to answer,” he was reminded.

The youth’s eyes went to the ceiling. “I woke up. I got dressed. I had breakfast…”

“What did you have?”

Incredulity flitted over the boy’s face, but he answered the questioned and gradually walked Towen through his day once more right up to the moment he was taken from kettle and placed in the back of a troop transporter.

As he finished Towen nodded, made a few notes of the data pad and glanced at the youth and again stated. “Tell me your name.”

ooOooo

Three hours later Yarryn was standing and stretching, bones popping, when Towen lifted his data pad and thanked the youth for his time and explained that someone would be with him again in a few minutes and that hopefully they wouldn’t need to keep him for much longer. The Commander could tell that the exhausted prisoner didn’t believe him.

It wasn’t long before Towen stepped through his office door.

“I think you’re right, sir,” the Lieutenant offered, wiping sweat from his brow with his sleeve. Hardly behaviour expected of an Imperial Officer, but understandable and forgivable under the circumstances. “There is something off about him. He’s only giving what he needs to give with his answers. He’s keeping everything short, no elaboration or description and, although we haven’t been specific yet, he seems to be avoiding or omitting information.”

“And his comment about just wanting to fly?”

Towen thought for a moment. “He knew he had made a mistake, but it could be that the Academy and service in the fleet is the only way for him to achieve his ambition of becoming a pilot.”

Yarryn glanced at the monitors, at the youth still under surveillance. “His school scoring on his ID doesn’t indicate an aptitude for flying. Does he strike you as being Flight Academy material?”

Wiping sweat from his face once more, Towen snorted. “No, sir, not on first viewing,” then he frowned, “but, sitting across him…? He’s intelligent alright.”

Yarryn nodded, thoughtfully. “I agree. We need that background information back from Tatooine and the forensics on his clothes and biology.”
“I’ll have it chased up, sir. Meanwhile?”

“Take a break, leave him to sit for a while and then send in Garn’et.”

“Still Pattern Onith?”

Yarryn nodded. “Keep it low key, keep it repetitive. I want him exhausted. Let’s see if we can trip him up again.”

“Yes, sir,” Towen turn on his heel to leave.

“Wait,” Yarryn called. “At some point have Garn’et strike him. Just once, then you take over. It’ll give the boy a measure of our patience, and warn him of consequences.”

Town nodded with a smile. “Yes, sir.”

ooOOoo

Specialist Garn’et laced his fingers and placed his large hands on the table, leaning forward as he spoke. “I know you’re tired, Luke,” he placated, smoothly. “But we needed to recheck all your information before we can consider releasing you.”

He was a bull of man. Shorter than Towen, stockier, but no less intelligence and quite possibly more ruthless than his colleague. Garn’et enjoyed the more physical aspects of enhanced questioning. However, for now, he was content just to play along with the Onith question pattern.

The youth’s head hung, his eyes heavy with fatigue. He’d had no water, had been offered no more since Towen had questioned him seven hours earlier. Garn’et had already repeated all the questions, had gotten the same answers. Perhaps they were more stilted, more whispered, but still the same answers. This was his third repetition and he was ready to change the tempo and see what reaction they got from the prisoner.

“So, I need you to tell me again: what were you doing in the Trading Centre?”

It was taking Dunestrider longer to answer. At times his words were slurred as he fought thirst and fatigue. “I… told you,” there was taut, but powerless, frustration in his answer. “I was…. looking for work.”

“What?” Garn’et tilted his head, as though he hadn’t heard. He ducked lower trying to see the boy’s eyes.

“…looking for… work.”

“You hadn’t planned in taking part in the demonstration?”

A small shake of the head and sweat fell from his hair. “No…”

Yarryn was watching again. He’d left his office after his conversation with Towen. Had showered, changed and had something to eat. On his way back he had been handed another datapad with the results of the forensic tests and had been annoyed when informed the background checks from Tatooine had not yet reached them.

The boy had been in custody for over forty-eight hours. For the last eleven he had been sitting under hot lights and in high humidity with little water and no respite. His clothes were saturated with sweat. Shackled by his legs to the chair with his wrists, now bruised by the tight cuffs that
bound them together, still fixed to the lip of the table. He’d been kept bent forward placing pressure on his back, and shoulders. He was breathing heavily, gasping in air against the cramping of muscles. Yarryn wouldn’t be surprised if his legs were numb.

“And yet you did,” Garn’et suggested. It was the first time in any of his questioning that an accusation had been posed to the youth.

There was a pause, a beat of time as what Garn’et implied sank in to a brain and mind fuzzy with dehydration and lack of sleep.

Then. “No…”

Dunestrider had dropped the “sir” a few hours ago.


There was no movement.

“Luke, you were there for the demonstration weren’t you?”

The youth raised his head, the blue eyes seemed darker, deeper as he answered, putting some emphasis behind his words. “No… I… told you. I was looking for,” a lick of dry lips, “work.”

“Tell me what you did when you saw the protestors?”

Dunestrider squeezed his eyes shut, opened them, pupils flaring in the lights and shook his head. It was obvious to Yarryn that he was fighting to stay awake, fighting to keep his wits about him.

“I tried… to keep away. I didn’t want… caught up in… anything.”

“What were you doing at the Trade Centre, Luke?” Garn’et repeated. Starting to backtrack in an attempt to confuse his subject.

The boy’s head dropped. “Work…,” he sighed.

Garn’et feigned puzzlement. “You were working?”

“No… looking for work.”

“What do you think about the Empire, Luke?”

Dunestrider dragged his head up again at the unexpected question, looking baffled. “What?”

Garn’et slouched back, picked up the datapad and tapped its edge on the table top. “The Empire,” he said. “What are your feelings about it?”

“I… I don’t know what you mean.”

Still he tapped with the datapad. “Do you like it? Hate it? Support it? Think the order the Emperor has brought to the galaxy is a good thing? A bad thing?”

Despite his tiredness, despite his weary fatigue the boy’s voice had an edge to it. “I.. don’t… I’ve never thought about it.”

“No?” Garn’et assumed surprise. “Surely, you must have considered it when you were going to apply to one of its academies?”
“I… just wanted to…. fly.”

So, Yarryn noted, the boy was ambivalent to the Empire. Which could account for his earlier error around serving the Empire. Or, perhaps that’s just what he wanted them to believe.

More tapping as Garn’et considered the boy sitting before him; slim and slight and struggling. Then abruptly the officer stood and the boy stiffened, looking out from under his sweat darkened hair, startled by the sudden movement of the interrogator. “Tell me your name.”

Yarryn grinned at the sound that came from the youth. It was a sob of disbelief. It had taken eleven hours of sitting in a chair being repeatedly questioned, but at last the prisoner was beginning to despair as, once more, the questioning returned to the beginning. Garn’et was a tenacious interrogator and Dunestrider would get no respite from him.

“Please…”

The plea was a whisper through the speakers of the monitors.

Yarryn absently lifted his own datapad, the new one he had brought into the office after his break, as he watched what was happening within the interrogation room.

The appeal from the boy was ignored by Garn’et. “Tell me your name.”

Silence. Heavy breathing. Head hanging low, sweat dripping from saturated hair.

“Tell me your name!”

Yarryn frowned at the continued silence, had the boy passed out?

Finally, Garn’et leaned over the table roaring. “Tell me your name!”


Yarryn paused with his thumb over the activation button of his datapad. They had him!

Garn’et smiled, lifted his own chair and brought it around the table and turned it, setting it next to the boy. He dropped into it, straddled it and rested his arms on the back. He regarded the youth with hooded eyes and asked with humour. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“You didn’t sound very sure.”

The boy tried to swallow and gagged dryly. “I’m tired… I… I… need to… sleep… please.”

“Tell me you name.”


“I told you!”

“I think you’re lying.”
“No…”

“Tell me your name!” Garn’et’s voice was rising.


“That’s not your name!” Garn’et roared. “Tell me your name!”

The boy looked up him, eyes wide, desperate. “Luke Dunest…”

The heavy backhand blow to the boy’s face was sudden, violent, abruptly cutting him off and lashing his head to the side. Had he not been tied down he would have been knocked to floor by the force of the blow.

The door to the interrogation room swept open and Towen entered, shouting, “Specialist Garn’et, you are relieved!”

Garn’et smartly stepped back from the prisoner, turned on his heels and left the room.

The boy, with a thin trail of blood weaving down his chin from a split lip, was watching Towen carefully. There was a little more fear in his eyes now. Just as there should be. He saw the youth’s eyes flicker to the thick baton Towen now wore attached to his belt.

Yarryn watched as Towen lifted the chair and placed it carefully on the opposite side of the table to the prisoner and sat down.

Onith was over. Level two was over. The interrogation had just elevated and the next phase of questioning, Krenth, had begun. At this level the questions would be still repeated, but now suggestions would be made to the prisoner, evidence presented and, if need be, true enhanced methods would be introduced.

Towen cleared his throat. “We know you made an error, Luke. You know you made an error. You have shown ambivalence to the Empire. You were in the vicinity of a protest march against the Empire and the Emperor. And, just moments ago, you stumbled over your own name.”

“I…”

Towen lifted his hand, placed his finger at his own lips cutting the youth off. “I’m not finished.”

He allowed the silence to drag, watched the boy try to lick away the blood; tongue probing at the cut.

“I remind you that you are required to answer all of our questions honestly and openly and we do not believe that you have been doing so. I also remind you that we are sanctioned to use whatever means we deem to be necessary to encourage you to answer our questions. Do you understand what I have just said?”

A muscle twitched in the youth’s cheek. His breathing quickened. “Yes…”

Towen smiled. “Good, then perhaps we can avoid any more unpleasantness. I am going to ask all of the questions again and you are going to answer. I’m only going to ask them one more time and the answers you give will either satisfy us, or they will not. What happens after this hinges entirely on your answers, do you understand that?”

Dunestrider, his identity now in doubt despite his ID being recognised as valid, nodded. “Yes…”
Towen leaned forward, placing his elbows on the edge of the table. “Then, please, tell me your name.”

Knowing he was trapped and with a heavy sigh of acceptance, the boy answered. “Luke Dunestrider.”

Yarryn shook his head. The boy was tenacious and, despite everything, he was sticking with his story. Truth be told, they still didn’t have enough evidence to prove beyond doubt that the youth was what they suspected; either a ring leader in the organisation of the protests, or an actual member of the Rebel Alliance. If asked Yarryn would lean more toward the latter although he could still not explain why he believed this.

It was a gut reaction. It was purely instinctive.

Yarryn turned away from the monitors and brushed his thumb over the activation switch of the datapad. He quickly scrolled through the results of the forensic examinations of the samples taken from the boy himself and his belongings and immediately felt his heart sink in disappointment; the boy did indeed appear to originate from Tatooine. His journey was confirmed by the mineral and chemical results; he had indeed travelled to Corulag through Nar Shadda.

He scrolled down. The boy did have traces of lubricant, oils and fuel on his hands which also backed up his tale of working with engines and…

The hair on the back of Yarryn’s neck stood, a cold chill washed through him…

… and tiny amounts of particles that suggested the youth had handled a zero-four Z Cryogenic power cell.

…used solely in Incom T-65 fighter/X-Wing class craft. There is also sufficient data to confirm that the subject has spent significant time in the Yavin system within a time scale of twelve weeks from the date of this exam. His hair sample shows…

Yavin. Where only a few scant weeks ago, the Rebellion had massacred thousands of Imperial personnel and citizens during one swift attack.

Yavin. The first major defeat the Empire had suffered and the anger and outrage they all felt still ran fresh and deep.

Yavin. The fact the boy had been there within the timescale of the attack said more about him than anything else and that fact also decided his fate.

Luke Dunestrider, or whoever he was, was affiliated with the Rebel Alliance. Luke Dunestrider was either a fighter tech or a pilot. Luke Dunestrider was a dead man.

Yarryn reached for his hat, ready and prepared to enter the room and take over the interrogation. But he stilled his hand and lifted the datapad with the footage of the protests from his desk. What was one of the Yavin Rebels doing on Corulag? What mission was he on? And who was he with – for surely he could not be here alone.

He turned data pad in his hand, looking at the blank screen. There was still something in the footage that he knew he had to find before he took over the boy’s interrogation.

Let the Rebel sweat a little longer.

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Facing the Evidence

Chapter Summary

Additional pressures are placed upon Luke Skywalker during his interrogation and he is compelled to co-operate. However, Commander Yarryn's instincts are about to backfire on him as this young prisoner is so much more than what he seems.

Chapter Notes

The previous disclaimer still applies.

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Instinct

Part Two

The room stank. That fetid, rank, stench of old sweat and body fluids. The boy sat still and silent, pulling in slow breath after slow breath giving no indication that he was even aware of Yarryn's presence at the open door. His head was down, hair dark and lank but no longer dripping with sweat despite the heat and humidity in the room as his body tried to conserve what little fluid it had left. Dark spots of blood from his split lip dotted his prison shirt and black bruises encircled his wrists and ankles from the shackles and binders.

The Rebel was a sorry sight already and they hadn't yet fully escalated his interrogation above the second level of intensity. Indeed. Yarryn was going to oversee that himself.

Garn'et was with him; having swapped again with Towen two hours before. They were now fifty-four hours into his captivity, seventeen hours into the intensive interrogation and the boy's responses were becoming incoherent and jumbled from sleep deprivation, dehydration and from the discomfort of his forced seated position, but he had yet to give them anything of note.

And still the background checks had not come in from Tatooine. Not that his identity really mattered anymore. They had more than enough evidence to condemn him now.

"Let's turn down the lights and cool our young friend down," he said to no-one in particular knowing his request would be obeyed. He stepped into the room making room for Towen to do likewise. The Commander busied himself setting out his datapads onto the table and seated himself while Towen and Garn'et prepared the prisoner.

The Rebel stirred at the noise. The binders clinked as he moved, as he lifted his head and squinted at them with bewildered confusion

Towen placed a pack on the table and the two specialists both pulled on gloves. The Lieutenant popped open a container of fluid; a blend of water with essential minerals and electrolytes to combat dehydration. He reached out and took the Rebel by the chin, tilting his head and placed the rim of the bottle against the youth's split and cracked lips. Towen squeezed the youth's cheeks,
pursing his lips and tipped the fluid until it ran into his mouth. Dunestrider drank desperately.

Garn'et meanwhile began to set up a field medkit's intravenous fluid transfer feed. Yarryn had found them useful to not only bolster his subjects with fluids but it was also an easier and more efficient system to feed the necessary interrogation drugs directly into the prisoner's system.

Of course a dose could always be given directly if necessary, but the prisoners tended to fight, to struggle to avoid the injections and that could sometimes work against the Interrogator's needs if force was necessary to contain them. It was often easier to start with the initial injection and then drip feed the drugs as necessary.

Almost semi-conscious Dunestrider jerked, weakly trying to pull away when Garn'et slapped repeatedly on the back on his hand to raise the blood vessels; a difficult achievement given the Rebel's dehydrated state, and slipped the canula into his vein and secured it to his skin. The Specialist quickly finished fixing the fluid line and opened the valve, setting the feed to a steady flow. Then he lifted a syringe, popped open the injection port cap and quickly injected the first of the drugs that Yarryn had ordered for this interrogation; a stimulant and a blood thinner – they needed him awake and they needed him alive. Having him sitting for so long risked a blood clot and they had no wish for him to die of an embolism.

Both Garn'et and Towen stepped back as Dunestrider moaned and placed themselves a pace away at the back of the youth. There they would provide a steady threat. A presence that the prisoner knew could be called upon at any time.

The lights dimmed, the heat dropped to a more comfortable level and they waited patiently for the youth to respond to the fluids and the stimulant he had been given.

Another groan and the muscles of the youth's body locked, he gasped in a breath, "Ah…," and squeezed his eyes shut against the pain of his forced sit.

"Luke?" Yarryn tried, leaning forward and trying to capture the Rebel's attention. "Luke? Do you know where you are?"

Silence. Just muted gasps and laboured breathing.

"Luke," Yarryn tried again. "Open your eyes and look at me."

The youth shook his head. "Please…"

"Luke, I need you to look at me."

Dunestrider lifted his head. His face was marked, bruised from Garnet's backhand, his eyes were shadowed and heavy and the blue of his irises had darkened.

"Do you know where you are?"

The Rebel glanced at his hand and the line feeding into it with bewilderment. He frowned at the sight and Yarryn saw realisation slowly dawn.

"Please," he said, sounding panicked, sounding desperate. His voice still rough and dry. "Please… don't do this."


"Please," the Rebel pleaded, swallowing, "you don't want… to do this."
Yarryn hesitated that that sentence, staring in thought at the youth. It had been a plea, but it had also sounded like a warning.

"You are right, Luke," he conceded, "I don't want to do this. I have no wish to hurt you or pressure you any more than you wish to be hurt or pressured. But I have a duty to the Empire and you are so much more than you pretend to be and I am required to find out all I can…"

There was a sound, a choked sob. The Rebel shook his head. "I'm not… I'm not what you think I am."

"… so the sooner you answer my questions truthfully the sooner this will end." Yarryn finished, ignoring Dunestrider's statement.

The Rebel fought to swallow again, he shifted in his seat trying to ease the discomfort of sitting too long. "I… have been truthful."

Yarryn shook his head. "No, Luke, you haven't," Yarryn lifted one of the datapads and turned it on. He pushed it across the table allowing the prisoner to view the image on the display screen. It was a frozen still from the security footage of the protests; a picture of a dark haired man. "Do you know this man?"

Dunestrider stared at the image, he shook his head. "No," he said tiredly, pitifully.

"Look again."

The boy did, blinking slowly as he stared at the screen. Again he shook his head. "I've… never seen him before. Please… I…"

"And you're sure about that?"

"Yes."

Yarryn lifted the datapad and tapped in command. He slid it back across the table for Dunestrider to watch the footage play out.

The boy watched himself turn into the same street as the protestors, he watched as his image kept close to the wall of building, as he collided with the dark haired man and as they briefly spoke to one another and shook hands before parting. The recording ended.

"He wasn't picked up," Yarryn told him.

The boy shrugged, winced, worried his wrists in the cuffs, but Yarryn was sure he saw some relief flicker in his eyes. "Lucky him."

The Commander smiled. "So, you know him."

"No…" The Rebel closed his eyes against it all. "I just… bumped into him." His voice was getting stronger as the stimulant and the fluids did their work.

"You spoke to him."

Dunestrider opened his eyes. He smiled in disbelief, the cut on his lip catching and pulling. "I…we said 'sorry.'"

"And that's all?"
A sigh. "Yes."

Yarryn lifted the datapad once more, changed the display and set it back down again.

This time the youth watched himself stand by a trash container for few minutes. Then the picture enhanced and he was shown his own hand slipping into the bin and curling around something. Again the boy watched as he was once again present with the footage of him bumping into and shaking hands with the other man, using the same hand that he had slipped into the litterbin.

Yarryn took the datapad back and the youth glanced up at him, his bruised face expressionless. The Commander input another command and again slid it back across the desk to the youth.

It was another picture of the dark haired man. This one taken from an ID. The man looked a little younger; fresh faced and eager to face the world. The individual's details were listed, as was his status in the Empire.

"Wedge Antilles," Yarryn announced, breaking the tense silence of the last few minutes. "Identified a few months ago as being a pilot in the Rebel Alliance. A low level Rebel, but a Rebel nonetheless."

Dunestrider lifted his tired eyes away from the picture. "I still… don't know him."

"No?"

The boy heaved in a breath, exhaled heavily. "No."

Yarryn watched him for a moment, contemplating his next move.

The Commander leaned over the desk. "What did you retrieve from the trash, Luke?"

Dunestrider swallowed. "Nothing."

"You didn't put anything into the bin. So you must have lifted something out."

"Need I remind you that you are required to answer?"

Again the youth's eyes flickered to his. It was a look of contempt, a look of joyless humour. "You need to ask a question."

Garn'et partly slid his baton from the belt loop. Yarryn shook his head. Now was not the time for violence.

"What did you take from the trash, Luke? What did you hand to Antilles?"

"Nothing."

Yarryn wasn't surprised the youth was still in denial was refusing to yield and give the answers they desired. From experience the Commander knew he would continue to refute all the evidence presented to him. What was he holding out for? Was there something going down on Corulag that gave the youth something to cling too? Some mission he had to protect, some people he had to protect?

Yarryn lifted the datapad, changed the display and pushed it back for Dunestrider to view. "What about these Human women?"

The Rebel quirked a brief smile. "What about them?" He asked.
Yarryn's mouth turned down at the question. The boy was required to answer, not ask. "Thus far we have been unable to trace them. Unable to identify them. You could save us a lot of time and tell us who they are."

Dunestrider shrugged, grimaced in pain. "I don't… remember their names."

The Commander leaned across the table. "We checked with the hostel you didn't take them back there. Did you go back their homes? Sleep with them? Surely they told you their names?"

Yarryn was humoured to see a blush flush over the boy's face. "No."

"You didn't exchange names?" Smiling, the Commander lifted an eyebrow at the men standing behind Dunestrider. "Just body fluids?"

The youth shifted uncomfortably the blush now a fierce crimson. It would be funny if the situation weren't so serious.

"Their names?" Yarryn demanded.

"I… I can't remember…"

"So, no second dates?" Another look up at the waiting specialists and a laugh. "It looks like we have a young player on our hands," back to the Rebel, "or perhaps you just didn't impress them with your prowess in bed?"

A flash of those blue eyes in his direction, that anger again… at the taunt? Or was it concern for others? "It… it wasn't… like that…"

"I don't really care what it was like, Luke. I just need their names..." Yarryn smiled at him. "Just to rule them out of our investigation," he appeased.

Dunestrider sniffed, eyes turning away to look at the blank wall behind Yarryn. "I can't tell you. I… can't remember their names."

"Were they your contacts on Corulag?"

A shake of his head and shudder ran through his body. "No…"

"What was your mission?"

A breath. Another. "No… mission…"

"Tell me the names of the women."

The boy lifted his eyes to stare at the back wall above Yarryn's head, his lips slightly curling and he answered. "I… don't know…"

The Commander's eyes narrowed. Dunestrider seemed to be stifling a smile, as though he were laughing at a joke only he knew. It was unsettling, disconcerting. The boy was a lot stronger, harder, than even he had given him credit for.

"Okay," he announced, moving the datapad to the side and lifting another one. It was time for a change in conversation. Time to lay some more cards out for the boy to consider. "We'll come back to Antilles and the women."

He pushed the new device to the boy and directed him to look at the screen and the data it
presented. He saw the blue eyes widen, saw the fear behind them when the youth's gaze lifted to him. Yarryn smiled with some satisfaction. At last he had shaken the boy.

"Tell me about Yavin," he said, casually.

The blood drained from Dunestider's face, he looked away and Yarryn knew there could be no pretence now. No hiding. No denial.

"Tell me about the X-Wing. Did it need its power cells charged? Replaced?"

A heavy swallow. The Rebel shivered.

"You were on Yavin approximately twelve weeks ago. You remained there long enough for minerals and particles to enter your system. They were picked up in your hair. Your clothes and belongings also carried traces," he told the boy, needlessly explaining the data to the Rebel, but he wanted Dunestrider to know that it was all over for him. "Twelve weeks ago the Rebels were on Yavin. Twelve weeks ago they destroyed an Imperial Space Station in the Yavin system. So…

"… tell me all about Yavin. Tell me the name of the pilot who took down the Death Star."

Dunestrider chewed on his lip, bursting the split; blood ran freely.

Again Yarryn leaned over the table, his voice cold, hard. "Let me be perfectly clear. You, young sir, are never leaving here. What happens to you from this point on depends on the answers you give to my questions. If you co-operate, if the information you give us is useful in capturing your accomplices – particularly the pilot who took down the Death Star – then I will request that the Judiciary be lenient with your punishment. However, if you continue to play us, if you continue to deny your involvement, if you refuse to answer or misdirect us further there will be very little left of you for any form of punishment…" he paused, allowing his words to hit home. "… Do you understand?"

Dunestrider licked away the blood, cleared his throat. His eyes flickered to the door and back to his interrogator. He swallowed. "Yes," his voice was strained, hoarse.

Yarryn smiled, not fully placated. There was something about this youth even now with all his lies being exposed, there was something about him that set the Commander's instincts screaming. The youth had been shaken but hadn't crumbled when shown the evidence against him - and had that been a smile he had suppressed when the Death Star pilot was mentioned?

"Good," Yarryn nodded, gathering in all the datapads. "So let us try this again. Tell me your name."

Dunestrider hung his head, groaned, giving in to the pain of his body. Then he lifted his head and stared at the Commander.

"Luke," he said, the defiance in his eyes already telling Yarryn what he was going to say next. "Luke Dunestrider."

ooO0oo

Yarryn stepped out of the Interrogation room and leaned against the wall of the corridor, heaving in breaths of air. It wasn't fresh air by any means, but it was a hell of a lot cleaner than the air in that room.

He was exhausted. Another round of questions, another two hours of the same answers, the same
denials from the youth and he had learned nothing new.

Where the hell was the information from the Tatooine outpost? He needed to know more about this boy. He needed to find that crack, that weakness, that he could pry open bit by bit to see what the Rebel was truly hiding.

"Where is Wedge Antilles now?!

"…don.. know…"

"The name of the pilot who destroyed the Death Star?"

"… don… know…"

"What is your name?"

"…uke… Dune…. Dunestrider…"

"Where are you staying?"

"…looks… like… here."

"Where are you staying?"

"…Mosbree Hostel. Covell… District…"

"Who were the women? Were they your contacts?"

"No…"

"The name of the pilot who destroyed the Death Star?"

"… don… know… Can… can't tell…"

The youth was faltering, a hacking cough now wracking his body. His breaths coming in gasps from the forced sit. His speech becoming slurred, incoherent once more despite the fluids. Almost twenty hours of straight questioning, of sitting hunched over and unable to move and still the Rebel refused to yield.

He had made mistakes. He had wandered and backtracked. He had mixed up events and he had confirmed that he did know Antilles only to retract it when challenged and pled confusion. But after each mistake he seemed to rally, he seemed clamp down and become even more stubborn.

Yarryn couldn't but help admire the boy's strength, his misplaced tenacity, but it was a tenacity that needed to be removed and so he had ordered Towen and Garn'et that the youth be given more water, more fluids and more stimulant to bring him around and to keep him lucid while he stepped out to collect what he needed.

Footsteps caught his attention and he glanced up at the Specialist who approached him with a small case in his hands.

"Sir?" The officer held the case out to him.

The Commander straightened and took the offered container. "Ten twenty millilitre ampules?"

"As you ordered, sir."
Yarryn nodded his acknowledgement. "Anything from Tatooine?"

"Not yet, sir."

The Commander's mouth turned down in anger. "Contact the base Commander at Mos Eisley and tell him that if he doesn't come up with anything within the next hour that I'll personally report his incompetence to Imperial Centre and bring charges of obstruction against him."

"Yes, sir!"

Yarryn waited until the officer had returned to his duties before opening the case and glancing in at the ampules of Thiohexium Phenate. A truth drug, a mind probe drug, like Bavo Six, but more potent, more ruthless. It combined with epinephrine in the body, obstructing receptors in the brain and making the subject more pliable, more likely to answer truthfully. However, the right amount of hormone had to be present for it to work and for that an individual had to be under pressure, in pain.

Violence was distasteful, but sometimes there was little alternative.

He turned on his heels and took in a last breath of clean air and re-entered the interrogation room.

The Rebel was shivering badly. Perhaps from the lower temperature, perhaps from the high dose of the stimulant, perhaps from shock, perhaps from fear. His body was shuddering, shaking and the manacles around his wrists and attached to the table clinked tunelessly. He was more alert, his eyes cautiously watching the Commander as he returned to the seat opposite, pulled it closer to the table and sat down.

Yarryn opened the case again allowing the youth to see the pure, clear, contents of the ampules. There was a definite flash of recognition in the blue eyes, a definite flaring of fear and the boy's jaw clamped shut, muscles bunching. The fact that Dunestrider knew the drug just confirmed that the boy was a Rebel who had, more than likely, undergone some instruction on resisting interrogation. It confirmed the short answers that sounded more and more rehearsed with each repetition. They had become the youth's mantra, his chant that he so desperately clung too.

"Thiohexium Phenate," he supplied, for the youth. "But it looks like you already know that. Just like you know that if we are forced to use it that you will tell us everything we ask." He sat back into the chair, lounging comfortably. "I have no wish to use this, I have no wish to subject you to unnecessary pain and so I will ask you one question. Just one. If you do not give me the answer I am looking for… I will use the Thiohex."

The boy let a breath out, he sounded panicked, desperate. "Please… don't do this…" he gasped, finally showing real signs of fear and horror. "Please… you don't… know… what… you're doing."

Yarryn frowned, again perplexed by the Rebel's pleas. The warning in his tones. He stared at the youth for a long moment and then asked. "What is your name?"

The youth eyes flickered to waiting case of the drug, he was quiet; considering his poor choice of options. Then he licked his lips, his body stiffened in anticipation and he lifted his chin, answering. "Luke…. Dunestrider."

Retribution was swift, severe; a crack of a bone and a prolonged scream that fell away to panted cries of agony. Garn'et stepped away palming the heavy baton he had used to break the youth's out stretched arm with just one strike.

Towen popped open the injection port of the cannula in the boys hand, slid an ampule out of the
"No!" a cry, a plea that was ignored, "Don't! You... don't want... this."

... and injected the full dose of Thiohex.

Dunestrider grunted as the cool of the drug raced into his body. One fist curled, one fist hung limply in the cuff.

Yarryn watched and waited, allowing time for the drug to course through the boy's blood stream, for it to combine with epinephrine and for it to reach the brain.

He leaned forward, elbows on the table. "Tell me your name."

The Rebel's eyes were closed; tightly shut. Face twisted with pain and effort.

"Tell me your name."

The boy swallowed, choked, and gagged, reminding Yarryn that Thiohex caused nausea.

"Tell me your name."

Silence....

Garn'et lifted the baton ready to strike again. Then slowly...

"L...u...ke," the youth supplied, again and Yarryn could feel the first stirrings of disbelief then...

"Sk... Sky... Skywalker."

There was a stir at the back of his head. A feeling that he knew that name, but Yarryn smiled, praised. "Well done, Luke. That's very good. Where are you from, Luke?"

"Tat... ooine. Anchor... head."

"What age are you, Luke?"

"Nine... nineteen..."

"Are you a member of the Rebel Alliance?"

Hesitation, a breath. A grimace as he fought against the drugs. A loose nod, a sob. "Yes..." the word ended like a hiss.

"Rank?"

"C...can... can't say. Can't say.... Said... too much..."

Garn'et didn't need prompting. The baton fell again on the same arm. The boy shrieked, head thrown back, the sound ripping through his vocal cords.

Yarryn waited until he had quietened. Waited until he could get a word in between the moans.

"Rank."

"Fli...ght... flight Lieut... Lieutenant," he was weeping.

"And you were at Yavin when the Death Star was destroyed?"
"...Yes..."

"Tell me the name of the pilot who destroyed the Death Star."

There was giggle. A hitched laugh...

"Luke?"

"I can't... I can't feel it..." Skywalker shook his head, face contorting in concentration. "Gone..." he said with some wonder in his voice. "It's gone..."

"What's gone?" Yarryn stood, gut suddenly churning and he had no idea why. Something was wrong, something was off and he didn't know what.

*Skywalker...*

He leaned over the table, demanded. "What's gone?"

Skywalker lifted his head, opened eyes hazy with drugs and pain. "Me," he said. He smiled, opening the split in his lip, blood running unchecked down over his chin. "...can't feel me."

"What?" Yarryn barked, not understanding the Rebel's garbled words.

*I can't feel it... It's gone... Can't feel me...*

He needed to redirect the boy, he needed Skywalker...

*Skywalker...*

... to focus. "The Death Star, Luke. The name of the pilot!"

The Rebel stared at him, grinned with bloodied lips. "Luke... Skywalker."

Yarryn was on the verge of chastising the youth. Was about to tell the boy that he wanted the name of the pilot, not his own name again. But he stopped, chilled and straightened.

The name of the pilot.


He had the pilot in his custody! This boy was the pilot. He had captured and uncovered the most wanted individual in the Galaxy and it was a nineteen year old kid from Tatooine!

Yarryn glanced up at his staff. Saw them make the same connection, saw the hardening of their attitudes and resolve.

Yarryn slowly sat; the interrogation was not finished. It had only just begun. "You destroyed the Death Star, Luke?"

"Shit...."

The Commander smiled, through the fog of drugs and pain Skywalker had only just realised what he had said.

"Shit..."

Yarryn tilted his body, fished in his pocket and retrieved his comlink. Activating it he ordered,
"Get me any information you can on individuals named Skywalker."

"No..." the Rebel protested... "don't... you don't... want this."

A hollow, muted voice asked. "Any other search parameters, sir?"

Yarryn thought for moment, staring at the youth, intrigued by his entreaties. He didn't know where to start, didn't know what it was about that name that had piqued his memory. Something from long ago, his childhood. "Start from twenty years ago, just before the Empire."

"Yes, sir!"

Switching off the comm he placed it on the table. Taking his time to consider his next question. "What is the Death Star pilot doing on Corulag, Luke? Why are you here?"

Skywalker panted, head down once more. "Can't... please... don't..." Beads of cold sweat dripped onto the prison pants as the Rebel turned away, face twisting with effort. "No..." he groaned, struggling to hold his tongue against the powerful drug, sounding distraught. "...not... working... can't feel... can't... he'll come... he'll know..."

Another vicious strike to the fractured arm. Another prolonged, instinctive scream. Another wait until the Rebel caught his breath.

"Corulag, Luke... why are you here?"

"Ah... I... please... you don't want... this..."

"Why are you here?!" Yarryn barked.

"Ah... Ah... algorithms... trans... mission code.... algorithms... Hy... hyperspace co... coordinates..."

Yarryn considered the information, his stomach tightening. The Rebels were here for information for... code algorithms for... for hyperspace routes... but where...?

The Academy!

Of course! The research grant that the Corulag Academy had been awarded by the Naval High Command.

If the Rebellion could get its hands on the algorithms being researched and developed to encrypt transmissions then Imperial communications would be compromised. Fleet movements, troop movements, weapons and supply distributions, everything would be opened to the Rebellion and, by also getting their hands on hyperspace algorithms, they could open new routes and make it even more difficult for the Empire to track their fleet.

But how? Who within the Academy would betray their Empire? The research team were led by a renowned professor of Algorithmic Mathematics and Applied Sciences and the graduate students on the team were vetted, all cleared by the Imperial Security Bureau.

Yarryn shook his head; they would all have to be brought in. All questioned and the programme shut down.

"The women?" Yarryn asked, of his labouring captive. "The women were your contacts?"

A loose nod, a stifled retch. "Ju...st one."
"One of the women was your contact, and she made the drop, didn't she, Luke? Into the trash container?"

"No…. please… don't… do… this…"

"Answer me, Luke!" He pressed. "She made the drop, didn't she?"

A sigh. "No…"

Yarryn made a quick nod and Garn'et leaned forward squeezing the wounded arm rather than striking it. The effect was the same.

The Commander waited once more, waited until he could be heard over the cries and the pants. He leaned forward again. "The woman made the drop into the trash container, didn't she?"

Skywalker shook his head, tears fell, snot ran from his nose. "…No…"

"No?" Yarryn's brows furrowed, he thought quickly, out loud. "She was your contact…"

The youth nodded, despite no question being asked.

"… she was the go between. The negotiator between you and the person with the information?"

Another slack nod.

"So, who was it that made the drop? Who is the traitor?"

"…don't know…" an intake of breath, a prolonged grimace as pain purled along his arm. "… please…never found… out…"

Yarryn let out a breath of disappointment. That was a pity, it could have made the ISB's job, his job, easier if they knew who the traitor was within the Professor's team.

"But, you picked it up, didn't you and passed it to Antilles?"

"Ye… es…"

Dammit, the Rebellion already had the information.

"Where is Antilles now?"

Skywalker shook his head, looked up at Yarryn from under his hair. He smiled and more blood wept down his chin, dripped onto the shirt. "G..one… home."

This was now damage control. "The other woman? What part did she play?"

The Rebel made a strangled noise. It sounded like a laugh. "… just.. for… fun…"

Despite his tension, despite his elation at the information, the affirmation of his gut instinct, Yarryn had to laugh. The boy, this Rebel, was a lad like any other and even in the midst of his Rebellion he had sought out female comfort and succour.

"Where are they now, Luke?" He asked, still smiling. "Where are the women?"

"… no women…"

Anger stirred within Yarryn, but also admiration. Beaten as he was the youth was still fighting, was
still buying time for his team to escape, still had reserves of strength. His voice hardening Yarryn explained. "You have already told us about the women, you have already told us one of them was your contact…"

The youth grew quiet, his eyes flickering up at Yarryn, his irises dark and the Commander felt a sudden chill, something niggling at the back of him mind. "Where are the women, Luke?"

Silence, no answer. Was the Theohex wearing off? It was too soon to top up the dose, he had no wish to over dose the prisoner.

Yarryn stood, banged down on the table in frustration, the boy jerked in reflex. "Where are the women, Luke?"

The Rebel swallowed thickly, gagged. "… there… are no women…"

Yarryn straightened, his gut telling him Skywalker…

Skywalker…

…something about that name. Where was the information he had requested?

….was telling the truth.

Yarryn looked down at the hunched prisoner as he shivered with pain, with fright, with powerful drugs flowing through his system. So if there are no women…

"Explain to me, Luke… Tell me about the women…"

"No… women."

Frustrated, angry with cryptic answers, Yarryn glanced over at Towen. Too hell with the overdose, he needed answers. "Give him another half ampule, another strike!"

"No!"

"Then tell me…. Tell me about the women!"

A sigh, a hitch of breath. "… just one…. Clawdite… she… changed… for… fun. To throw… you off…" his eyes slowly closed. "Ne… never… same face… twice."

Clawdite! Of course! A shape-shifter. How clever. At least they were getting somewhere, had another lead.

Yet… again, there was a connection to be made here, something out of reach and elusive. He had heard a Clawdite mentioned recently.

"That's good, Luke," Yarryn praised, genially, throwing his errant thoughts to the side for now. And concentrating on his prisoner. "You're doing well. Now… where can I find this Clawdite?"

The youth lifted his head, glared at his tormentor and opened his mouth as though to answer when suddenly his attention shifted. He glanced to the side, his head tilted as though listening. Then he closed his mouth and smiled, "… back… I can feel…” he stiffened, eyes widening in wonder and horror and he looked to Yarryn. "He's… coming," He whispered, feverishly.

Confused, unsettled by the Rebel's strange words but determined to get his answers Yarryn tugged down his uniform. "Give him the half ampule…"
He turned away listening to the pleas, to movement of bodies as the youth struggled, to the grunt and intake of breath as the drug was administered, to the sweep of the cudgel as it cut through the air and the crack of bone as Garn'et obeyed his orders. Skywalker screamed.

The door of the room burst open. "Sir!"

Yarryn turned at the interruption, anger flushing his face. "What is it?"

The Specialist thrust a datapad at him. The commander took it, scrolled through it. It was the information from Tatooine, all they had on Luke Dunestrider. It listed everything they already knew about the youth's false identity. Name, age, date of birth, the youth centre he supposedly grew up in. There was nothing else.

"What is this?" He asked, perplexed, ignoring the groans of pain from behind.

"Sir," the specialist shifted on his feet clearly uncomfortable and yet it wouldn't be the state of the prisoner, or the fetid atmosphere of the room that caused his discomfort, this man was an experienced officer. "I… noticed the Ident serial number was off by a digit. It's not a Tatooine identification."

Yarryn glanced at the number. "The Rebels made a mistake," Yarryn supplied. "Used a stolen identification to build a false cover for the boy."

The man nodded. "That's what I thought, sir. So I ran it against reported thefts. There was no match and yet this is a real Ident. Green light all the way."

"I'm not following," Yarryn told him.

Behind him the Rebel retched and vomited water onto his lap.

The Specialist glanced briefly at the prisoner. "Sir, our search seems to have triggered an alert…I… I think he's one of ours."

"What?" Yarryn burst, laughing. He pointed across at the boy. "He has just confessed to being the Rebel pilot who destroyed the Death Star!"

The Specialist looked shaken, uncertainty crossed his face. He nervously licked his lips. "Sir, I... I think he's deep cover Spec Ops."

Yarryn's mind reeled, struggled to keep up with the information.

"He's coming… isn't he?"

The voice, thick with pain, was a whisper. Yarryn glanced back at the struggling youth as the Rebel laughed, the sound tinged with hysterics and a cool doubt pooled in the pit of the Commander's stomach.

"I knew he would… couldn't feel me…"

Yarryn crossed the floor and leaned close to the boy. The stench of him making Yarryn want to gag. "Who's coming? Who are you talking about?"

The youth glanced up and, just for moment, just for a microsecond of time, Yarryn was sure he saw a flash of ochre in the blue irises. The Rebel heaved in air fighting the drug, fighting the agony of his body. But he had to answer, was compelled to answer. His lips curled into a smirk, but his voice
was resigned. "My… father…"

_Father?_

Yarryn turned back to his staff. "What does he mean?"

The Specialist paled, the blood draining slowly from his face. "I think… I don't know… but… Lord Vader is on his way here."

"What?" Yarryn rasped, feeling the whole world tilt around him. He had just had the ridiculous notion that the boy he had been interrogating may be the son of Darth Vader.

The specialist swallowed, looking at his three colleagues in the room. He licked dry lips before repeating. "Lord Vader's on his way. He'll… be here within the day. He… uh… he's ordered a halt to the prisoner's interrogation." He reached out, and flicked the screen of the data pad and changed the readout.

Yarryn glanced down, read the orders. Saw the words "cease," "desist" and "detain" and suddenly there was a cool pool churning in the pit of his stomach.

"Take him to a holding cell," he heard himself say through the hissing of white static in his ears. He had a hundred more questions, more demands for the prisoner, needing to know what was going on here. However, he dare not disobey an order issued by the Dark Lord. "Have a medic see to him. Treat his injuries."

Towen and Gan'et quickly pilled the cannula from the youth's hand, undid his manacles and shackles and lifted him from the chair. Skywalker cried out at the movement; legs numb, dead, collapsing under him. His eyes rolled in their sockets and he fell limp in the Specialists' grasps. Yarren stepped to the side making room for Gran'et and Towen as they dragged the boy past him.

Numb at the turn of events, trying to gather in all the information into some coherence in his brain, Yarryn handed the datapad back to the waiting officer.

"Sir," the man said. "There is something more. That name you asked us to search."

Yarryn was almost too afraid to ask. "What about it?"

"I… uh… There are a few Skywalkers, sir. Not a common name, but enough that…"

Yarryn lifted an eyebrow, telling the Specialist to get on with it without having to speak.

"…it… ah… only one stood out though, sir. It was the last name of a Jedi Knight from the Clone Wars. Anakin Skywalker. He was reported killed with others at the temple when Lord Vader led the attack against their insurgency and…"

_Jedi!_

_Anakin Skywalker! Of course! The hero with no fear! How could he have forgotten his boyhood hero? His boyhood traitor!_

And Yarryn felt himself shiver as his mind suddenly snapped onto facts: Darth Vader was on his way here. The boy had said his father was coming. The boy carried the same last name as Anakin Skywalker.

_Was the Lord Vader…?_
"… sir?"

"Yes, Specialist?" even to his own ears his voice sounded numb. His mind refusing to complete the connection.

"Lord Vader has asked that you meet his shuttle."

Yarryn nodded, looking back in at the cell. Looking at the blood and the sweat and the vomit. His instinct had been right, there was something about the boy; it just wasn't what he had expected.

It was far worse.

ooOOoo

For the first time in his life Yarryn felt his legs weaken with fear. Not even the explosion that had shredded his face had made him feel this terrorised, this helpless, as he watched the black bulk of Darth Vader stride purposely down the shuttle's ramp. The Commander had seen The Dark Lord of the Sith from afar and on holovids. He had heard the stories about him, had even spoken to a few officers who had met him, but nothing had prepared him for the true experience of being in the man's presence.

It was overwhelming. Terrifying.

Could Anakin Skywalker truly be the man behind the mask?

Stepping from the shuttle in the Centre's courtyard Vader's pace did not slow and Yarryn had to quickly about turn and walk beside him.

"Explain," The Dark Lord demanded without preamble, choler heavy in his tones.

Taking in a breath, Yarryn did. He explained about seeing the boy for the first time, about his gut instinct. How he had felt that the youth was more than what he seemed to be. Vader had turned at that, had tilted his helmet and those dark lenses had examined him before the man gestured and ordered.

"Go on."

Yarryn explained about following all the leads he had, about the results of the forensic examinations. As they walked, as they rode in the turbolift to the securest levels of the prison, Yarryn talked and explained it all.

"… and so we administered Thiohexium Phenate and…" he paused, licked his lips choosing his next words carefully, "… placed him under some… duress as prescribed."

"You are thorough, Commander," Vader complimented, sounding no less angry; for of course he was addressing the man who had tortured his son no matter what euphemism was used to describe it. "And your instincts are strong."

"Tha… thank you, my Lord," he accepted, feeling confused about the situation. He gestured to a blank cell door. "He's in here, My Lord."

The Dark Lord opened the cell door and stepped down.

Yarryn was stunned to find the youth already standing, a little hunched over, in the middle of the room. Skywalker cradled his dressed and splinted arm against his ribs as he lowered himself stiffly
to one knee. "My Lord Father," he greeted.

*Where had he found the strength to stand? Where had he found the strength to kneel?*

"You have failed," Vader ground out.

The prisoner shot to his feet. "No! My cover…"

The vicious backhand to the boy's face sent him stumbling backward and he collapsed to the floor.

"Get up!"

Skywalker hauled himself up, dragged the back of his hand across his lips. He looked at the blood on his skin, then turned his gaze to the Dark Lord.

Another brutal strike, Vader not holding back and the boy was powered backward into the wall. He dropped heavily to the floor grunting in pain.

Enraged Vader took a step forward. "You allowed yourself to be interrogated. You allowed yourself to be injected with Thiohexium. Palpatine felt your loss of presence in the Force!"

Yarryn started in surprise. Allowed? The boy had allowed his interrogation? Shaken his eyes locked with the fallen youth's.

A slow smile spread over Skywalker's battered face and with some effort he push himself up and, again holding the broken arm close to his body, he took a couple of faltering steps forward shifting his gaze from the Commander to his father. There was defiance in the look, there was hatred. He eased himself back onto a knee. "Forgive me, father."

Even Yarryn heard the falseness behind his words.

"Our master is most displeased with your performance."

"Which part?" The boy asked insolently, voice still hoarse from his interrogation. "The Death Star? Or that I got caught and discovered here?"

The Commander was astonished by the change in the youth. There was no sign of the amiable boy he had first met, no sign of the young man who had pleaded with him and begged of his innocence. This boy… no… this man, was an entirely different creature.

"All of it," Vader told him. "Palpatine is most aggrieved at the loss of the Grand Moff Tarkin."

"He was a threat to us," Skywalker replied, his eyes now to the floor. "He was becoming suspicious of your motives. He had to die."

Yarryn shifted his feet, uncomfortable with the conversation. Uncomfortable that the two were discussing The Grand Moff's death. Uncomfortable with the implication that the two were somehow complicit in Tarkin's demise. Suddenly aware of how vulnerable he was in a confined room with two Sith.

"His death could prove to be yours," Vader coldly told the boy. "I am to return you to Imperial Centre for… chastisement. Our Master will show you no mercy."

"I expect none, Father," the youth stated, lifting his chin in defiance, but Yarryn saw him hesitate, saw him gather his courage before speaking again. "but… I cannot return yet. My mission is…”
"Over," Vader finished for him.

The younger man glanced up at the Dark Lord, partially rose from the floor, trying to get his point across. "I can still do this! I can finish what I begun!"

Vader's fist tightened and Skywalker dropped back to his knee to avoid to being struck again. "Your cover has been discovered."

"Not by the Rebels," the boy protested, "They still…"

"You murdered your contact," The Dark Lord thundered, towering over the kneeling prisoner.

"Father, please. I executed the Clawdite traitor. She was of no further use and her death cannot be attributed to me. The Alliance will have no cause to doubt me."

Yarryn stared down at the youth, at his admission. He had killed the creature who had passed him the algorithms.

Clawdite…. Of course!

"Where are you staying just now?"

The day the boy was arrested,

"In the Covell District, sir. The Mosbree Hostel." Skywalker's tones had been unremarkable, believable.

"Rough area," the trooper had observed. "Heard there was another murder there last night; a Clawdite with a crushed throat."

The youth had shrugged, showing no reaction to the killing. The killing he had committed. "It's all I can afford."

Skywalker was cold. A consummate operative. A talented actor. He had fooled the Alliance and had almost fooled Yarryn.

"Another reason to be pulled from the field," Vader rasped towering over his son. "Alive she may have lead you to the traitor in the Academy. You need to exercise control."

"You have your traitor, father," The youth explained, eyes to the floor, but he was grinning. "It was the whole team. I just needed the Clawdite to set up the drop and then... she told me everything just before I killed her."

The elder Dark Lord was quiet, the silence of the cell broken only by artificial breathing, but Yarryn could sense Vader's pride in his son's accomplishment. However, to him it just validated what he already knew; the Professor's entire research team would have to be brought in.

Skywalker, licked his lips and filled the cloying quiet, he sounded pleased with himself. "I am close to Organa," Skywalker stated, arguing succinctly, smoothly, refusing to give up. Perhaps having heard the slight softening of the Dark Lord's bitter tone. "I have become her confident, her friend. She trusts me. They all trust me. It won't be long before I have secured a place on the command staff. I can still give Palpatine Mon Mothma. I can end this Rebellion."

The Dark Lord was quiet, and Yarryn sensed the man was considering his son's statement. He could almost feel the temptation in the atmosphere of the cell. "It may appease our Master to have
Mothma, but you have still wronged him. He will still demand recompense."

The youth nodded his understanding. "Then let him take his pound of flesh. It will only make me stronger." He began to rise, began to pull himself from the floor. "Let them keep the algorithms, father, allow them to use them."

Yarryn took a sharp intake of breath. The boy was suggesting that they leave the traitorous research team intact in the Academy. He was suggesting that they sacrifice Imperial troops, Imperial property and for what?

"So that they continue to trust me," Skywalker stated, looking directly at Yarryn. His eyes bright, his eyes… were no longer blue. They were something else, the boy was something else. "I have been captured and questioned, I need them to believe that I did not break."

The Commander took a step back, horrified that the youth seemed to have read his thoughts, his feelings. The air thickened, tighten around him.

"You have good instincts, Commander," the boy said limping closer and, although Yarryn was taller, broader and more physically intimidating, he took a faltering step backward. "Instincts that have served you well… until now."

Rooted to the spot, frozen with sudden fear and sudden understanding…

…I know too much… I've done too much…

… Yarryn could only watch as the boy glanced at his father with predatory glee and as the Dark Lord nodded ascent.

Skywalker turned to him, sickly eyes shining in the lights of the cell. "You are lucky, Commander, that I am in a forgiving mood."

The Commander did not live long enough to feel relief. Neck broken he dropped loosely to the floor.

"You have been captured, compromised," Vader reminded his son, the death of the Commander meaning nothing to him. "The Rebels will not expect your release."

"Then don't release me, father" He smiled, grinned up at his parent, before his eyes slid back to Yarryn's corpse. "Let them rescue me."

ooOOoo

Wedge Antilles stretched in the tight confines of the Millennium Falcon's belly gun turret. He grimaced and shifted his body, trying to ease the growing ache in his butt from sitting too long. He yawned and shook his head trying to dispel the fatigue that threatened to close his eyes while reminding himself he was there for Luke.

*Dammit Skywalker, getting yourself caught just as it was all going down. The whole mission had almost been a bust.*

*Dammit that intel had not expected the protests.*

"They'd better be right about this one," he murmured, bitterly. They had got the badly needed algorithms but they had lost Luke.
He stared out at the star field beyond the viewport, at the empty field of space beyond the planetary body that Red Flight and the crew of the Millennium Falcon were currently hiding behind. They were under comm silence and all engines were dead. He shifted again, impatient anxiety beginning to nibble at the edge of his nerves.

The ship they were waiting for was overdue.

If Intel had got this wrong, if this was messed up in anyway, then Luke could be lost for good. It was hard to believe that the kid had only been with them a few weeks; he'd gone from being an annoying, forever-asking-questions pain in the ass to a good friend. He had gone from a fresh face to an old hand, from a green pilot to seasoned veteran.

Such was the life of a fighter pilot in times of war.

Antilles pinched the bridge of his nose. Skywalker had been the Alliance's saviour. He had been the man to make that impossible shot and had given renewed hope to the Rebellion and to the galaxy and yet, unlike others, the kid never bragged, never used his accomplishment to gain favour. Instead he was quiet, contemplative and there were times when Antilles could see the pain in his eyes and a heavy weight on his shoulders whenever the Death Star was mentioned. Killing thousands, perhaps millions, was a burden no man should have to carry.

If the Empire knew what they had, knew who they had, Luke would have had a one way ticket to Coruscant and a face-to-face with Palpatine himself. Instead Intel had picked up that the kid was being shipped to the ISO-L8 prison facility for further investigation and interrogation; which was Imperial jargon for the kid giving the Imps the run around and making their life difficult. Which also meant that Luke would have been put through the wringer more than once already and Antilles knew that few beings escaped Imperial Custody without scars.

Even Leia Organa hadn't emerged unscathed. He'd overheard her nightmare on the journey here, saw her emerge from the sleeping quarters pale faced and had seen the haunted look in her eyes when he passed her the hot cup of caf, neither of them saying a word but both knowing. Then she had taken a sip and smiled and was suddenly the Princess again.

He shifted again, wiggled his toes. Yawned.

"Okay," Solo's voice broke through the internal comm. "We have something on the scanners. A small ship has just drop from hyperspace seven clicks out. Trajectory has it heading for the prison…. Hold it…" A burst of static, silence and then ".yup… we have a squad of TIES coming out from the prison on intercept and escort duty.

"This is it!"

The Falcon's engines roared to life and the starscape shifted, tilted, as Solo gunned the ship forward and into battle and suddenly the comm was filled with voices.

"Locking S-Foils…"

"Red three and four with me," that was Narra, Commander of Red Flight. "Let's stop their engines dead."

For a brief moment Wedge wished he was in the cockpit of his fighter, free in space and….

"Wedge! Two coming your way!"

And suddenly he was spinning in the chair chasing the TIE's with his guns, spitting out red light
and…

"Got him! Leia… one coming around and…"

"I see 'im!"

Wedge grinned, listening to the Princess open fire from the other turret. She was a pretty formidable woman and he hoped he never found himself on the receiving end of her wrath; although Solo seemed to thrive on it.

"Good shot Red Six! Janson one on your tail!"

"Hobbie, take out their deflectors!"

Wedge grinned, picking up another TIE in his sights, bouncing in the chair as the Falcon's deflectors took a hit.

"That's it!" Narra announced. "We have them. Falcon move into position. We'll hold them off while you get Luke."

"Wedge!"

"I'm on it!"

Antilles clambered from the seat and quickly climbed the steps to the deck above, meeting Solo and Derlin's boarding party at the portside docking ring. There was dull clang, a cycling of hatches, a hiss of air and the Wookiee barked over the com.

Solo unlocked the hatch and pulled it in. One of Derlin's men came forward and planted a small charge against the hatch lock of the Imperial ship and moved away quickly.

"Fire in the hole!"

Solo pulled his blaster, Wedge did likewise and a tiny explosion burst in the confines of the air lock sending a billow of smoke into the corridor.

And suddenly he was following Solo, blaster pistol firing at shapes moving within the confines of the small Imperial vessel. The squad fanned out, chasing down the retreating troopers and prison guards.

"This way!" Solo shouted and Wedge ran after him down a corridor with six narrow doors running along each side. He could hear the spat of blaster fire as the squad mopped up.

"Which one?" Wedge called.

"Open them all!"

And so he did.

A woman cowering in the dark.

A Trandoshian holding up his cuffed hands against the light from the corridor.

The ship rocked, hit.

His breathing was harsh as he punched open another cell. A young Wookiee lying dead in a puddle
if blood.

*Sons of banthas!*

Empty!

Empty!


*Luke! Where was Luke?*

He turned, desperate now.

"Wedge! Here!"

He ran to the cell across the hall and stepped down. Solo was hunched over, trying to lift the limp figure from the sleeping platform and calling Luke's name. He looked over his shoulder at Wedge.

"Help me!"

And Wedge did. Trying not to see the battered and bruised features, trying not to see the blood stains, trying not to see the shattered arm and infected wound. Trying not to smell the unclean body that was his friend.

He was still cuffed.

*Bastards!*

"Leave them, Wedge! There's no time."

It was only at Solo's shouted that he realised he'd tried to take the cuffs off. He eased his arm under Luke's shoulder, wincing as his friend grunted in pain. He didn't even know if Luke was awake, if he was aware of what was happening. Together they dragged him from the cell, from the corridor, from the ship and onto the Millennium Falcon.

"Get the rest!" he shouted to the Alliance soldiers. They couldn't leave any prisoner still alive within that ship.

"More TIEs, incoming!" Someone shouted.

The coupled ships bucked again under fire.

There was a clang, a recycling of locks and…

"That's it! Get us outta here, Chewie!"

A roar of engines, the spat and spit of gunfire, the Falcon shuddered, sparks flew from the ceiling and then there was the tell-tale tug of hyperspace.

They dumped Luke on the med-bed in the sleeping quarters and Wedge lifted his friend's legs onto the soft air mattress as Leia Organa rushed into the confines of the compartment.

Skywalker's head rolled, his bruised eyes flickered opened and he blinked slowly at his friends. A smile pulled at his split and chapped lips. "Dammit," he said closing his eyes. "They were… just about… to serve breakfast."
Wedge heaved a sigh of relief, felt the tension leave the room at the quip. Luke may not be completely intact, may have a long recovery ahead, but he was alive and he was home.

He turned to leave, felt a hand on his arm, and looked back at the Princess.

"Thank you," she told him, her dark eyes large with gratitude.

He just nodded. Suddenly tired, suddenly needing to find somewhere to sit alone. He dragged his feet through the ship to the passenger lounge where the squad were tending to their own wounded and to the prisoners they had freed.

It was strangely quiet, strangely subdued.

Wedge found a space in the corridor and slid down the bulkhead to sit on the scuffed deck. He pulled his knees up and his dark head dropped with fatigue, suddenly feeling exhausted as the adrenaline surge from the fight waned and died. He closed his eyes….

It may only have been moments, it may have been a couple of hours that he had been sitting there when he felt another body ease down to the floor beside him. There was a grunt of exertion, a hiss of pain and Wedge grinned.

"Shouldn't you be in bed?" he asked without opening his eyes.

He felt Skywalker shrug, heard him stifle a groan, then… "There are some worse off… than me."

Wedge glanced beside him, at his younger friend. He saw the swelling and bruising on Luke's face, saw the healing pinprick on the back his hand, the fresh dressings that the medic had applied to the fractured arm that he held close to his body, the abrasions and contusions on his wrists from too tight binders. "You smell," he observed.

Luke snorted, laughed, and hitched in a tight breath. "Yeah," he agreed, resting the back of his head against the bulkhead.

They were both silent for a moment, for beat.

"The algorithms?" Skywalker wanted to know.

"With Intel," Wedge told him.

"Worth it?"

Wedge considered that for moment, considered what Luke meant. Was the information they had retrieved worth his pain and torment. What to say? What to tell his friend? Was anything worth the experiences Luke had just been through?

Antilles licked his lips, hedging, "they may save lives. They may give us an edge over the Empire. At least for a while."

"Good," was all Luke said, but Wedge instinctively chilled at the tone of the word. It sounded harsh, bare, and yet there was some satisfaction behind it, some edge that he couldn't quite place, something he had never heard from Luke before.

Uneasy, his eyes flickered to his friend, and he was horrified to see tears slide from Luke's eyes. Wedge dismissed his brief disquiet, forgot it, as he slipped his arm around his friend's shoulder and just held him as he cried.
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