

*"The ending, to all great stories, is written by destiny."*

Unknown

With a hiss, the shuttle finally did a joggle landing on the platform. Or so it was in comparison with most imperial vehicles, with an exception perhaps on the lambda-class shuttles, at least that's what Commander Alexander Haakan thought. "Well, I'm planetside, let's get out of this bird." Picking up his hand luggage, he heads into the open hatch, along with the rest of the passengers, ponding ground as the shuttle crew gave welcome messages to Malastare, duly ignored by both him and the rest of the passengers as well, as they're walking down the ramp, right into the port facilities where the local customs office was.

He arranged for a meeting with his two ex-partners, Eckther and Karvoss for a nice chat among friends, remember good old times and to talk about business... oh, indeed, it was necessary to talk about retirement plans now that there might actually been an end to the war.

Since Palpatine's death, the situation has been degenerating rather quickly. It has been news after news, rumors, shortages, famine, propaganda, irregular incidents of all sorts not to mention the increasing intensity of warfare itself and the multiple theaters of operations. These days have been so bursting with dramatic events and harsh experiences that they now seem to last weeks, the weeks seems to last months, the months...years.

Particularly, for the Imperial Starfleet action has been relentless. Effects of news on morale and integrity of the Imperial military would be, according to his judgement, even fascinating to study if it wasn't about the decline of the New Order he truly believes in, fought and still fights for.

It has been interesting to see the variety of reactions, to find out the Empire is not a monolithic entity where you could find "some tendencies", but a set of real rivalries, disloyalties – and it isn't like it hasn't been internal conflicts here and there. On the contrary, Haakan has witnessed and dealt with coups, fought against them, fought defectors, betrayals, corrupt officials and inside mafias, all dealt with, in the name of the New Order and he never hesitated on his will to serve, not even after Palpatine's death.

Until the infighting begun, right when they were supposed to be united, after the terrible blow received on Endor. A headless empire, with a disproportionate amount of good officers and ships lost, an overwhelming feeling that the whole government was barely holding its own yet totally lacking a clear set of goals, on the defensive side facing a growing number of illegal, illegitimate, corrupt and rebellious actions, a generic sensation of inefficiency and individualism, power struggles, a toppling New Order and an endless search for peremptory, material personal interests that doesn't benefits the Empire at all and in spite of this, that despicable, self-proclaimed New Republic arrogantly humiliating the imperials battle after battle and even on the mass media, striking hard at the image of the Empire with its fake news and open sabotages which Haakan

thinks “smells” like psychological warfare. Indeed, the same New Republic that proclaimed now all those traitorous worlds are “free, decent, democratic” while those systems still under nominal Imperial control are “evil, chaotic, despotically ruled” and must be “liberated”, putting everything on childish black and white terms with that *bantha fodder*, hiding their trash in a blatant display of hypocrisy. He suspected if he could investigate some of their leaders, he’d find more than one of them involved with the corporations and enterprises affected by the regulations imposed during Palpatine’s reign.

He couldn’t review the *status quo* on his mind while on his way towards the checkpoint as he was intercepted by two officers to inspect his luggage. They were local customs officers, although they were human, not Gran neither Dug yet they wore local security uniforms, they were *seccers* after all in both uniform and attitude. “Excuse me, open your bag, please” demanded the tallest of the two *seccers* in a particularly serious tone, denoting the tension in the air, while the other was looking with caution at the questioned civilian, blaster in hand with no intention of using it yet “What’s in your pockets?” The officer demands dryly, almost in an accusative tone. “Nothing, just my stuff” replicates Haakan while a dose of adrenaline ran through his body. Despite years of experience, fighting and representing authority and despite exercising total control over his actions, he will still feel some nervousness at first in the face of dangerous situations, especially when he feels a threat arising. He simply assumes that being shocked as a first reaction, for a human, is something he will not be able to completely control or sort out of his mind, no matter how much training he receives although he can hide those emotions from the rest of the beings and act accordingly to the circumstances.

And yet, without haven’t been doing anything wrong and being himself, theoretically a legal representative of the Imperial authority, he could only perceive these *seccers* as a real threat, not so different from getting robbed on a dark alley on the lower levels of Coruscant.

He reached for his belongings on the pockets of his jacket to show the *seccers* what he held inside them. It was useful to have his more personal things in those pockets on his chest, it was difficult for those objects to be snatched away from him, not without him realizing of the robbery and also, by placing them there, they were quite easy to pluck away. Once he pulls his civilian I.D., the officer carrying the rifle asks him in an almost imperceptible tone “What do you do for a living?” as Haakan took out his two commlinks - he used to keep one on each pocket. “Why do you have two commlinks?” The tallest officer asked in an accusative tone, almost taking for granted his implied accusation and without leaving a chance to reply the first question, which perhaps would have saved the impasse. Haakan knew there’d be trouble. It was unusual for someone to take more than one commlink into outer rim worlds where rampant delinquency has occurred more frequently since Imperial forces have been busy – and in some cases overwhelmed with open rebellions, or being diverted to attend multiple theatres of operations or simply deserted in numbers and faded away from the whole stage. The local defense forces have had to take over many of the functions left unattended by a weathered imperial military and have been under a lot of stress for the amount of extra work, he reasoned.

But these two considered him a little more than an *aruetti* loose on Mandalore.

With both *backrocket* commlinks visible, he did a reasonable attempt to equal the dry voice tone of the officers and replied "Because they're mine, I use to commli-". He couldn't finish the sentence as the tallest officer, with those bulging eyes, totally brainbolted, immediately ordered him to open both commlinks and give away the serial number of each one, printed on the back side of the plastic cover and give again the same number, this time coming from the commlinks' software. "Let's see if they're being *requested*" said while the other officer did a lacking attempt at pretending to use his datapad to confirm whether those were actually stolen commlinks. "Where did you acquire them? Where are the legal ownership documents of those commlinks?" the tallest seccer asked, aggressively projecting his voice further as he flushed angrily. "Oh, those were couple special discounts one of the Imperial-owned comm corporations made on a sales operative on my homeworld" said Haakan with ease as he noticed both officers actually honored Gran's reputation for constantly lying in a short amount of time. Nobody would bother carrying property documents for commlinks or any affidavits unless related to hovercars or any sorts of vehicles nor did they truly care about where he did come from or his name. "What do you mean by *documents*? They're on my personal quarters, on my homeworld. Do I have to pick them up?" he added as casual as he could, while the officer pushed him towards a wall at his right side and the other one followed suit, clearly more interested on chatting on his datapad instead of looking for the commlinks' serial numbers – He'd have found them already. "We're putting you into custody and we'll seize the commlinks. You stole imperial property and we'll taking you under arrest", the tallest officer shouted. Suddenly, out of the influx of civilians, a woman approached the officers and excusing herself, scolded the two seccers for the visible abuse their detainee was being victim of. It was something admirable, thought the Imperial. Practically nobody would bother helping some unknown in a totally uninterested way. Nevertheless, her attempt was in vain since the officers pushed her away from the scene yelling a series of expletives and drawing the rifle towards her and so she walked away shouting back on the general direction of the whole situation. It'd be better that way given how events would unfold.

At this time, Haakan already had all the elements to argue that, rather than a misunderstanding, it was a deliberate attempt at framing him for a preventive arrest at best or plain rob him of his both commlinks (objects already hard to obtain now that production and distribution lines have been interrupted by war) or for something even worse maybe. Now his initial shock and surprise make room to his formal training received at the Academy as an Imperial Officer, including personal defense and martial arts. For now, he plays his role on their game and sees how far this charade'd go, while they take him across a nearby hallway, *casually* stopping away from the surveillance cameras. "You're going to jail, thief, who did you take'em from?" asked the tallest officer while pushing Haakan against the Wall as the other officer remained silent. It was time to analyze possible consequences and analyze them fast; just two opponents with only one weapon, not primed yet; if he acted and neutralized them, he could even take them into custody for attacking an Imperial officer or even eliminate them. But, judging from the aggressive way the seccers acted, it would seem these couple had some extra authority. Would it be possible for Malastare to have

been seized by rebel forces without him noticing on his way here? If so, he'd be at disadvantage, at an extreme risk and had to leave the planet and leave it fast.

Either way, there wasn't much more to analyze when the tallest officer in front of him and without saying anything, hit Haakan with his left fist right into his chest. As a response, he deflected the fist with his left elbow as he thought *"Are we really going into this?"* The seccer, realizing the upper was deflected, threw a second upper into his chest (where evidence of the hits wouldn't be noticed) but instead of what the attacking seccer expected, the detainee – now blatant victim of aggression not just blocked it with his other elbow, but used said upper at contact with his elbow, to impulse his own fist right into the officer's jaw to which the second officer hastily aims the blaster rifle towards their "detainee". Once Haakan notices the blaster rifle at his right side, decided to buy time laying down on his right knee, putting his hands behind his neck pretending a surrender while shouting "I'm being robbed, help!" which got the seccers quite nervous who demanded him to shut up. It was crystal clear they were breaking the law and were panicked at the sight of this abuse becoming public and notorious "Are you nuts? How're you gonna say we're robbing you? Do you want to get us in trouble?" claimed the seccer desperately "Chaos takes me! Do I have to let you intimidate, rob and attack me without any reason?" and in a mere fraction of second, Haakan budes in spiral his right hand, grabs the blaster rifle's cannon and once he managed to clench it, stirs the line of fire away from his head on a semicircle on the opposite direction as he stands up and moves a step forward. With the weapon away from his body and aiming somewhere else, he pulls the rifle towards himself to bring the seccer closer while he hasn't reacted yet and punches him using his other hand to keep him still on shock so he doesn't react while he turns around and kicks using his right leg straight into the tallest guard's mouth, without releasing the rifle to make sure it keeps aiming away from him. He then proceeds to lunge and punch again the second guard, who still has not quite reacted and keeps holding the weapon on his hands, this time he hits the guard with his left hand's knuckles bent, directly on the seccer's right temple, buying him enough time to turn the rifle up, twisting the guard's finger still on the trigger, making the guard scream in pain. Haakan then trips up the guard's leg, toppling the guard to the ground, seizing the rifle on his hands, knocking off with the weapon's butt the tallest guard, loading the weapon just in case and backpedals a couple diagonal steps to his right, away from both seccers not turning his back on them, ready to shoot.

"I'm Commander Alexander Haakan of the Imperial 321st Flight Squadron, 37th Navy Task Force and you just attacked an Imperial officer. In the name of the Empire, you're under arrest. Throw your weapons and put your hands over your head" said both casual and coldly looking back and forth between the two seccers. Both officer's looks were one of shock, the tallest, more aggressive at first, was full of both fury and helplessness as well, judging by the look in his eyes while they realize their detainee turned the tables on them as they stripped off their side weapons, throwing away the blaster pistols. Around them, nobody dared to interfere, especially if it was a couple local seccers subdued by a civilian. And given the fact they were far from the surveillance cameras and didn't ask for reinforcements and it was still their guard it means nobody would go assist them to the seccers' dismay.

Big question was: what's next?

Wasn't exactly a good idea to lead two seccers unarmed and subdued back to their own base and expect a warm welcome. The option was to appeal to local Imperial command. Assuming, of course, there is still such a thing. It isn't lack of training; it's just that, after years of service, for the very first time, Haakan was on the losing side, he wouldn't be recognized anymore as an officer of a legitimate government. Moreover, he could be seen as a fugitive and this incident could prove it. However, given the turn of events, he risked opening his commlink, dialing the military frequencies of the imperial forces "Commander Alexander Haakan here, I.D. # AH-11929 of the 321st Flight Squadron, 37th Naval Task Force. I'm on the hallway of landing platform #2 on Malastare's spaceport. I fell under attack by local forces; situation is under control, request instructions, over". Adjusting his commlink so the message is broadcasted on a loop, Haakan did what he could do then: wait.

*"Welcome to Malastare"* he thought.