

Chapter 9

Traitors

The mobilization was immediate. Every starship in the Empire from the smallest shuttles to the city-sized Star Destroyers was out looking for the traitor. His last known location, Mos Eisley, on the remote and desolate Tatooine, was swarming with Imperial storm troopers.

None of the Imperial subjects or soldiers knew exactly why the Emperor had issued such a decree against his own apprentice, but the orders were clear and unquestionable: Locate and destroy the traitorous Sith Lord Darth Vader.

The workers on the project Vader had overseen, the building of several X-Wing fighter prototypes, were on the edge of revolt. The Emperor had many of them questioned, some several times, and always with extreme aggression.

Vader's treason supposedly had something to do with the X-Wing project. The demonstration that Vader had failed to oversee went disastrously. An out of control fighter caused the deaths of dozens in the audience and maimed hundreds more. Palpatine would normally not care, but the project was also behind schedule. It was thought that he suspected Vader of sabotage, kickbacks, or both.

A pall of discontent had fallen over the factory, with the Emperor constantly in his chambers. The place was always more fun to be around when the relatively jovial Vader was in charge. Many of them wondered who the new guy was; the

bald, sniveling albino with the black cloak. He always seemed to tag along whenever the Emperor walked the corridors.

On Wednesday, the Emperor's new apprentice Voldemort was on the warpath. He had learned from the daily inventory count that a plasma synthesis unit was missing and not one of the workers was able to provide any clues about it. These things were big. For one to suddenly disappear from the building would have taken a great deal of conspiracy. The Dark Lord suspected that only Vader could have accomplished this.

"Corinda, please bring up the access log from the past week," Voldemort said cordially as he entered the administration office. He had done everything he could to appear friendly, by smiling, carrying a binder, and wearing glasses. It amazed him that Potter was able to trudge through his meaningless life wearing such an uncomfortable apparatus on his face. Maybe it was easier with a nose, he figured.

His ruse didn't work, however. Apparently just being Palpatine's apprentice was enough to send people scurrying into bathrooms whenever Voldemort approached. Corinda clearly loathed him, though she tried to hide behind a façade of extreme obedience.

"Yes, your Lordship, Sir. I can do that," she said tepidly. She tapped a few buttons on the workstation in front of her and Voldemort heard a series of irritating beeps.

"Oh, what is it now?" Corinda sighed.

"What? What's wrong?" Voldemort demanded, forgetting to smile.

“It’s the database, it’s down again.”

“Let me see,” Voldemort said, putting on his phony air again. He put down his folder and slid next to Corinda. She cringed. Most of the workers agreed that they felt a chill whenever he was around.

“No, it’s not working,” she said. “It’s-”

“Move!” Voldemort yelled. Corinda shrieked and backed away, terrified.

Voldemort smiled again. “I was, I was just, uh, kidding, see? Ha ha! Get it?”

Corinda stood with her back against the file cabinets. She stared at him and shook her head slowly.

“Very well,” Voldemort said. He turned to the terminal and tapped a few keys. A message came up that read, “Server unable to respond, please try again later.” Voldemort groaned and Corinda slid further away from him.

Voldemort tapped a few more keys and saw the same message. He angrily reached into his cloak and started to pull out his wand, but he stopped, looking at the terrified secretary.

“Corinda, my dear, where is the server room?” Voldemort asked, smiling again, though weakly.

“Out in the warehouse,” she said, pointing toward the corridor. “In the back,”

“Thank you,” he said, and then left. Corinda exhaled. She could not have gotten him out of there quickly enough. She looked up and saw Voldemort’s binder still sitting on the desk.

Voldemort stormed into the warehouse with a loud flourish. He saw the workers back away from whatever they were doing. They made sure not to make eye contact with the wizard, but they also kept watch on him as he passed through.

The warehouse was the size of a hangar, and Voldemort had to walk all the way across it to get to the server room. A transport ship had just arrived, and a deliveryman dressed in a brown uniform with shorts walked right up to him, holding out an electronic tablet and a stylus. His label read “IPS”.

“Sign for this, Sir?” the man said.

“What is it? I’m busy.” Voldemort answered without breaking stride.

“Just a shipment, Sir, a replacement plasma unit.”

Voldemort stopped. “How is this possible?” he demanded, looking around the room at the workers.

“I don’t know, Sir, I just make the deliveries.”

Voldemort scowled at the fool in the brown uniform. His insolence would mean certain death if Voldemort was not trying to hide his power. “Let’s see this plasma unit,” he said.

Several of the workers ran to the gaping doors of the transport and began to pull out the crate. It was large enough to house a full-sized Rancor, and required its own wheels.

“Open the box!” Voldemort ordered.

The workers pried open the crate and the panel fell to the floor, revealing the huge, grey device. It was shaped like a cylinder, and had hardly any features other than a button panel and some warnings stenciled on the side.

Voldemort frowned, and then took the tablet and signed it. The deliveryman took it and closed the doors.

“Good work getting a new one so quickly,” Voldemort said to the workers. “There is still the matter of the missing-”

“Sir! Sir!” a voice yelled from the door to the corridor. It was Corinda. “The server’s back up!”

Voldemort watched as the transport ship hovered out through the giant hangar doors. The workers went back to what they were doing. Corinda stood in the doorway and waited.

“Fine,” Voldemort said, marching back toward the office. After reading the access logs, he saw there were too many workers in and out of the warehouse. There was no way to tell who removed the plasma synthesis unit. He took his binder and left in a huff.

Something outrageous was definitely going on, but Voldemort was unable to get a read from any of the workers’ tiny minds. He headed back to his chamber to think about what to do. On the way there, he stopped by Palpatine’s chamber. The two guards stood aside to let him through the doors.

Palpatine sat behind his desk, with a vacant look in his eyes and drool dripping onto his cloak. He looked up at Voldemort as he approached.

“Oh, look at you,” Voldemort said. “Disgusting.” He took a tissue and wiped Palpatine’s face. The Emperor looked more haggard than usual, and clearly needed something to eat, but Voldemort figured it could wait until the morning. He renewed the Imperius curse and retreated to his own chamber.

That night, a light glowed from underneath the double doors to the server room. Inside, about two dozen of the factory workers huddled together, some sitting on crates, and others leaning against the server racks. Corinda sat in the middle.

“I can’t take any more of this,” said one of the men.

“Yeah, we almost got nailed today. Are you sure the mind block is working, Corrie?” asked another one.

Corinda looked at them somberly. “It is working, but today was a close call. He almost saw the program.”

“And it’s all coming from these servers?” said another.

“Yes,” said Corinda. “It’s a powerful magnetic field. Our minds can’t be read as long as we stay in the building.”

“So the plasma unit is back. What now?”

Corinda looked them. “I don’t think we can wait any longer. We have to do this now.”

“Are you sure we’re ready?” asked a worker.

“Guys, how ready do we need to be?” Corinda asked. “You said you can’t take this anymore. The guards, the questionings. The Emperor and this new apprentice-”

“Yeah, I don’t know who’s creepier.”

“Then the plan has to start now,” Corinda said.

“But we know what the Empire will do,” said a man.

“We’ll be fugitives immediately,” added another.

“They’ll call us rebels,” another declared.

“Guys, there is something you have to know,” Corinda said. The men groaned. “It’s this.” She held up a copy of a reorganization plan from Voldemort’s binder. “This says the

company is no longer going to be contracted with the Empire,” she said, followed by a cacophony of grousing.

“What?” several of the men yelled.

“What about the X-Wing project?”

“What about our jobs?”

“Oh, your jobs will still be there, guys,” she told them.

“The company is going to be absorbed into the Empire.”

All of the workers fell silent. They knew what this meant. Working for the Emperor as contractors was incredibly tiresome, but nationalizing the company would be devastating. Skilled engineers and pilots were to become equal to random clones. They would be just like the Emperor’s own slaves.

“This cannot stand, guys,” one worker said.

“Yeah!” several responded.

“Let’s do this,” another man said. He opened the doors and went out into the dark warehouse, and several others followed him. Corinda stood and followed the workers out.

They went to the large cylindrical plasma synthesis unit and punched a few of the buttons. Several hydraulic servos hissed and retracted. The cylinder opened and the men stood back. Many of them kneeled while others stood aghast.

Darth Vader stepped out of the cylinder and looked at them. “Thank you for arranging this, Corinda,” he said.

“We needed you back, my Lord,” she answered. “This new guy is killing us.”

“Well, we’re going to kill him,” Vader said.