

Chapter 10

A Rebellion Begins

The Emperor and his heavily-armed entourage moved through the corridor with a sense of purpose. Voldemort's cowering figure brought up the rear, held in low esteem by even the cloned storm troopers.

The plan was simple. They were about to take over the factory by force, planting storm troopers in every hangar, office, corridor, and warehouse. The company and its workers were about to become the property of the Emperor himself, and all contracts would be null and void.

As for the whereabouts of the traitorous Darth Vader, the recent disappearance of the plasma synthesis unit, and the trouble with the servers, the behavior of the workers was highly suspect. The Emperor planned a systematic inquisition, which nobody would expect, that included extreme torture and even death. He would start with the redheaded secretary.

The Emperor burst into the administration office and yelled, "Corinda! I need you to-"

Palpatine looked around the room. It was empty. Not only was Corinda not sitting at her terminal, but the terminal itself was gone. The file cabinets were gone, marked only by a section of wall slightly paler than the rest of the room. Bare network cables hung from holes in the walls, and a single stark, bare light bulb hung overhead. Even the fixture was missing.

Palpatine stormed out of the room. Voldemort looked aghast at the scene, and then followed the rest of the group.

They entered the giant hangar, and saw a very similar scene. The shelves were completely bare, and the assembly machinery had been removed, evidenced only by sheared bolts in the floor. Every one of the X-Wing prototypes was gone, including the black ship Voldemort had taken from Tatooine, and the remains of the ship wrecked during the demonstration. The empty box that had arrived with the plasma unit stood empty. Beyond, they could see the open server room, also emptied of its contents.

Palpatine screamed loudly and reached out to each side with bolts of energy, quickly killing two of his storm troopers. "How could this be?" he demanded. He turned to Voldemort, yelling, "You have betrayed me! How could you not see this?"

Voldemort kneeled immediately and bowed his bald head to the floor. "My Master," he said. "I have failed you. You must bring your justice upon me."

The armed men turned and trained their weapons upon Voldemort. The Emperor walked toward him and scowled. "Your failure can be erased," he said, "only with your assistance in finding and destroying this rebellion."

Voldemort looked up. "I have no doubt the traitor is behind this, Master."

"Very well," said Palpatine. "Rise, and we will cleanse the Empire of this filth."

Voldemort stood, maintaining a slight bow in his posture. The men raised their laser weapons away, and Palpatine ordered them to begin a full-scale search of the star system, and to ready a Star Destroyer for him. All Imperial troops were to abandon the factory planet immediately.

Before long, the Emperor and Voldemort stood on the bridge of the Star Destroyer, watching Imperial fighters race toward the vacant factory complex. Only a few strikes were needed to reduce the entire region to rubble, leaving vast scorch marks that were visible from orbit.

Palpatine searched his mind for any sign of Lord Vader. He could find nothing, but it wasn't entirely his fault. His mind was clouded by the spell over him; a curse cast by his apprentice Voldemort, causing his every word and movement. Voldemort stood next to him, also reaching out for Vader and the factory workers. The wizard suddenly opened his eyes.

"Master," he said in his high-pitched hiss. "The traitors have gone to Naboo."

Palpatine paused as he thought about the prospect, and so did Voldemort. Both of them realized it was an excellent place to hide. It was lush and vast, critical to sustaining, or disrupting, commerce in the Empire, and was also rife with independent spirits. For these reasons, the Empire had established a large presence there. The traitors had essentially hidden directly under the Emperor's nose.

The starship armada gathered and began to position itself for the hyperdrive jump to Naboo. Storm troopers had already rounded up the Queen and several dignitaries.

"Ready on your order, sir," said one of the bridge officers, directly to the Emperor.

"Crucio!" Voldemort screamed and lashed out with his wand. The officer immediately hit the floor and cried out in unbearable pain. Several members of the bridge crew looked, and then turned back to their stations. Voldemort finally pulled his wand away and glared at the terrified man.

"We have a chain of command here!" Voldemort yelled. "All of you will speak directly to me. Got that?"

The crew nodded.

"Go to hyperdrive! And get this insolent fool off my bridge," Voldemort said. Some of the crew helped the officer up and escorted him out.

Voldemort looked out the windows and saw the other ships going to hyperdrive. He grinned as they disappeared into nothing. They seemed to leave a hole in space shaped like a starship. It was not at all gimmicky like he had seen in the movies. Then the star destroyer they were on made the jump, and Voldemort looked at the Emperor, who nodded.

Naboo was a dangerous place for the rebel workers to go, because it was suspected to be a seat of resistance. The engineers from the company and their X-Wing development knowledge could turn a small resistance into a powerful force.

Voldemort and the Emperor were resolved to snuff them out, even if it meant demolishing the whole planet.

The ships finally arrived at Naboo and contacted the Queen's palace, where she and the dignitaries were being held.

"Queen Kayala, do you know who this is?" Voldemort asked over the communications portal.

"I do not. Please state your purpose," said an aristocratic voice. Voldemort seethed. He remembered a queen like this from decades before, and twice a day he thought about embedding her in a wall. The old hate came flooding back.

"This is Darth Voldemort. We demand your assistance with the capture of the rebels."

"I know of no rebellion here," replied the Queen. "If you have evidence of such a transgression, we shall allow your authorities a limited search."

Voldemort curled his hand angrily. If only he had Vader's choking grip, he thought. The Emperor stood close by, listening to the whole conversation.

"Destroy her," Palpatine said. Voldemort and the rest of the crew stared at him in shock.

"You heard me. Wipe the palace from the surface."

Voldemort grinned. "Yes, my Master." Her nodded to the crew, and the ship's immense plasma cannons whirled around and took aim at the palace.

"Oh, Queenie," Voldemort said. "We will not require your assistance after all."

"Excuse me?" said the voice.

"Do it!" Voldemort said to the crew. The huge cannons powered up and fired. From the ship, the explosion appeared as a tiny silent flash on the planet's surface. On the ground, the massive strike obliterated the palace, shook the city and killed the Queen, along with thousands of unsuspecting citizens.

From a defunct hangar several miles from the palace, Darth Vader felt the tremor and watched the plume of smoke and debris rising into the sky.

"Sir, what was that?" asked one of the workers.

Vader turned and started walking toward the X-Wing fighters standing ready. "That is our cue," he said. "Ready?"

The workers nodded. Several of them were already dressed in flight gear. Not only were they skilled engineers, but more than a few were accomplished pilots from the old Army of the Republic. They had flown with Jedi, and were now about to join Vader. All they knew was that he was a traitor to the Empire, and that was good enough for them.

Corinda stood by the ladder of Vader's fighter. He approached, and she stood up on her tiptoes and kissed him on the side of his helmet. He turned to her in surprise.

"That's to make sure you come back," she said.

"Corinda, I am not coming back," he said to her. "If I do, I will have regained my service to the Empire, and I will seek to destroy you."

Corinda's eyes started to dampen.

Vader lowered his voice to a whisper. "Because you have helped me this far, I will advise you with this: As soon as we are gone, take everyone, everything, and leave."

"But where should we go?" Corinda asked tearfully.

"It is best for you that I never know," Vader said.

Corinda backed away with tears streaming down her cheeks. Vader climbed into his black ship as the others climbed into theirs. Support crew removed the ladders and released fuel lines. Vader powered up the engines and grinned.

"You will follow my instructions," Vader said into the radio. "Our target is the white apprentice, not the Emperor."

"Yes, Sir," replied several voices on the loudspeaker.

The six prototype X-Wing fighters rose into the air and hovered out through the hangar doors. As soon as they were clear of the building, they blasted toward the Imperial armada.

"Yes, yes," said Voldemort from the starship bridge. "I see you. It is here we meet again. This is our time."

Palpatine looked at him curiously.

"Sorry, Master," Voldemort said. "The traitor has shown himself. Shall I take a squadron and engage?"

Palpatine nodded mildly. Voldemort spun and left, looking for the flight deck. He turned to one of the storm troopers, who pointed the way.

Voldemort entered a gigantic room that held dozens of small fighters, each with a small pod-like cabin and two large vertical foils. He knew what they were; TIE fighters. This was going to be fun.