

Crewman's Log

Downtime

FL/LCM neurotictim/Beta 3-1/Wing I/ISDII Hammer

"I don't know why I do this to myself."

I often mutter to myself out loud when no one else is around. Pretty sure that's just one of many habits I picked up from Corran Horn some 30 odd years ago, and I doubt I'll ever be able to break it. Something about saying things out loud makes them more "real" than thoughts kept to myself. Corran *swears* it helps him organize his thoughts, even to this day. I sometimes wonder what his fellow Jedi think of that.

I've been wrestling with a lot lately. I've really tried to avoid letting it interfere with my day-to-day life, especially my flying, but it's tough.. I wouldn't call it depression, but I'm certainly not content, and I think others are picking up on it. I haven't slept well in weeks, and my performance is suffering as a result.

I think I can zero in on the start of this mood, but I'm not sure it helps. Running into the Corellian Security Force a few weeks ago got me started downward this spiral, but it wasn't really their fault. I just had the bad luck of needing stick time to keep my qualifications current, and got stuck on a mission that had a high probability of running into them. Escorting Gamma Squadron as they picked up supplies from Corellia to supplement the *Hammer* stocks seemed like a pretty straightforward assignment, but I should have known that seeing a pair of Lambda shuttles escorted by a pair of TIE Defenders, a brand new TIE Advanced fighter, and a heavy assault TIE/SA would attract their attention.

I've never really gotten over the way they unceremoniously dumped me, if I'm being completely honest. "Failed to conform to CorSec standards" apparently means I'm not suspicious enough of everyone, all the time, and unable to see things in a sort of "good or evil" perspective, the way CorSec does. For that matter, the way the Empire does as well.

The truth is, CorSec wants mindless drones to pursue what *they* perceive as justice, and I just don't see it their way. They're probably right in dismissing me; a person who looks for nuance and tends to see everything in shades of grey would cause a lot of headaches for them. I don't know how Corran managed to survive in their ranks for as long as he did. Maybe I'll ask the next time I talk to him, if I can find him.

He was a mentor to me, going back to our childhoods. We grew up in Coronet City, not far from each other, and he was very protective of all of us younglings. He was kind of a small kid, but managed to project a *presence*, a kind of innate authority,

that even the swoop gang respected. If I hadn't looked up to him for a number of reasons already, his bravery in the face of those guys would have done it.

In any case, he had been quite successful in CorSec, and then gone on to find his fortune in the New Republic. Last I'd heard, he was kind of a big name for them. It was often hard to get good intel on that sort of thing through the Imperial channels, but the holonet dramas buzzed with his stories, from becoming an ace pilot in Rogue Squadron to learning his true origins and claiming his Jedi heritage. Little Corran Horn, protector of middle class younglings, now a Jedi Master. What a weird galaxy.

"Looks like that 'Jedi purge' wasn't quite as thorough as the Emperor claimed," I said sardonically to the disorganized pile of datapads. Seemed like Jedi were cropping up everywhere lately. Even if half of them were charlatans trying to cash in on Old Republic nostalgia, there were certainly more mystical space wizards out there than I'd like. I have to take Corran's word for it that this "Force" thing is real, but I doubt it imparts any special wisdom to those with access to it. As far as I'm concerned, it just gives them the power to enforce their worldview on others, and that will *never* sit well with me.

The datapads didn't respond to my musing; I took it as a good sign that I wasn't going crazy. But they *did* need to be tended to, so I dove into the reports from the Beta Squadron Flight 3 members, logging them dutifully. I made it through half a dozen before my mind started wandering off again.

Beta Squadron Commanding Officer, Commander KeblaOmega - or as he liked to be called, just "Kebla" - was pretty forgiving of late or incomplete reports, and relied on his Executive Officer Captain Wildfire to keep us on track. It's a thankless job and I do my best to make it so that he doesn't have to worry about me or my Flight. The Wing Commander for Wing I on the *Hammer*, Lieutenant Colonel Narwen Task, is an absolute stickler for reports, and has little patience for excuses. So it isn't really that I am *that* on top of things, as much as it is me doing what I must to stay off of the Taskmaster's radar. Truth be told, that's been my goal for basically everything for a long time. I am, more or less and for better or worse, perfectly average.

Whether it's paperwork, physical fitness, or piloting, I generally do well enough to get by and fly under the radar. I'm never the guy to get his reports filed first, or score the highest on the fitness tests, or fly at the highest levels. It's not something I work diligently to maintain, it just sort of works out that way. I'm not really bad at most things, and I won't intentionally "sandbag" myself, but I also don't really strive to succeed either, so I stay comfortably in the space where expectations meet reality.

Though I had made some progress, a sizable stack of datapads remained on my desk when I pushed my chair back and stood up to stretch. I needed a change of scenery. Glancing around my quarters, I made sure everything was properly stowed before stepping out. The cleaning crews, staffed by junior Crewmen who have yet to select *(or be selected for)* a specific Department on board the *Hammer*, typically cleaned up the officer staterooms, but they had learned over the last few weeks that mine was rarely in need of more than emptying the rubbish bin.

Once again, it's not so much that I'm a naturally organized person as much as it is that I hate the idea of being *served*. Even droid servants make me uncomfortable, and though I'm not sure why I have that reaction, I am reasonably sure that I'm the only organic on the ship that feels this way. I decided early on in my career that it would be much smarter to keep that quirk to myself, but it just doesn't sit right with me. I would *swear* the little droid in ship's laundry got a little emotional the first time I thanked it for taking care of my uniforms. It took the bartender droid at the Drunken Bastion weeks to scold me into not tipping him, and I don't think the servitor droids that bring food up to the wardroom *(where the officers eat)* even know I exist. I'm a "grab and go" kind of guy, and I prefer to eat alone anyway.

That's not to say I don't enjoy the company of others from time to time. I have a number of friends on the ship, but I value my alone time. I'm good for the occasional drink at the Bastion, or some sort of physical activity at the gym, and it's rare that I'd skip out on the chance to enjoy some live music. I had a different destination today though, one I don't think many people know about or utilize.

The ship's library was by most standards rather small and had a very limited selection. Skewed heavily in favor of pro-Empire historical texts, the relatively small space was my semi-secret getaway location. Oddly, it was staffed by a single Chief Crewman, a human woman who had been in service to the Empire for the entirety of its existence. She was a young noncombatant during the Clone Wars, and somehow managed to stick around during the long period when the Empire was almost exclusively human and male. In the years since the death of the Emperor and subsequent upheaval of the highest levels of command, she had been promoted to Chief and taken over the library, as part of the Personnel Department. She worked alone, maintaining and updating the ship's archives and in general being useful in a position no one else wanted.

"Good afternoon, Commander," the Archivist greeted me quietly as I walked in. Chief Crewman (Personnel) Dolores Lan'gella was perhaps 70 years old, looked to be in her 50s, and had the whipcrack wit of a teenager. She refused to greet me by my actual rank - *Lieutenant* Commander - because in her words, "at the rate you're climbing, you'll be a Commander by the time I get used to calling you Lieutenant."

Of course I *could* have insisted, or even ordered her to use my proper rank. I am a commissioned officer, after all. Two things stop me every time I consider it. First, junior officers ordering around the senior enlisted rarely works out well. They've "been there, done that" and typically aren't shy about it. In fact, one of their primary responsibilities is to *train* junior officers, using their wealth of experience to keep us from making rookie mistakes. Second, and probably more importantly, I don't know that High Admiral Plif himself could reliably order this woman around. She seemed like the type to take a ruler to the knuckles of *anyone* that crossed her, and I have no intention of finding out if that's true.

In any case, I nodded my head respectfully. Rank notwithstanding, this woman had my respect as a junior to his elder. She wouldn't have gotten any less respect from me had she been on the cleaning crew.

"Good afternoon, Chief Lan'gella. Anything interesting or new for me this week?"

I visited the library about once a week, when downtime allowed. Early on I tried to find a time when CC(P) Lan'gella wasn't in here, but it seemed the woman needed no sleep, no respite. Early morning or late in the evening didn't seem to exist in the library, and she ruled over this domain.

"Actually, I do, and I think you'll find it *very* interesting." I paused on my way to the holonet display, my usual first stop. Looking over the desk to meet her eyes, I saw a mischievous twinkle that I'd never seen before. "It's a perspective piece from that Chiss philosopher Mitth'row'andahl that has caused *quite* the uproar in the usual channels."

The "usual channels" were the official Imperial News networks and their affiliates. Chief Lan'gella and I both viewed them with a sort of resigned cynicism, and shared the opinion that Imperial citizens deserved to know the truth, not the heavy-handed propaganda so often espoused in those networks.

The Chief directed me to a desk tucked into an alcove in the back of the library. On the desk, a sign proclaimed "Archivist Use ONLY!" and to my knowledge, no one could access it without Chief Lan'gella's direct permission and supervision.

The computer on the desk was one of the newest models available, with a combination holonet receiver, comm hardware, encryption module, and scrambler built in. It was said that the Archivist had used more than half of her annual budget to procure it, but the truth was that WC Task had acquired it for her as a way to pay back a debt long owed. How he got the cost past Vice Admiral Berkana was above

my paygrade, but I'm sure it was buried somewhere deep in the hundreds of reports he submitted on a quarterly basis.

I sat down at the terminal, Chief Lan'gella punched in her personal code, and the display - a flat space on the panel, not a hologram - resolved into view in front of me. On it, an absolutely *ancient* Chiss male was speaking directly to the viewer. As I read the captions scrolling along at the bottom of the screen, my jaw dropped and I felt my heart skip a beat or two.

"This... is on the *Imperial* holonet?!?"

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. The elderly Chiss was a philosopher known to the galaxy as "Rowan." His philosophical ideals were often controversial and could be counted on to inspire contentious debates, and so he was a wildly popular figure among the average citizen. The caption read, "Chiss philosopher believes the Empire was 'doomed to fail' in new writings."

I turned the volume up so I could hear him speak. He was calm and collected, but his conviction was present in every syllable.

"...what I am saying is simply that there is *no such thing* as 'good' or 'evil,' that these are constructs of the sentient mind that help us categorize those who are *with* us, and those who are *against* us. The Empire was doomed to fail, as was the Old Republic, because we - the citizens of a galaxy spanning millions of systems and thousands of species - *insist* on that dichotomy. But as a subjective dichotomy it fails all logic when deciding who is evil, and who is good, relying purely on who you ask."

He was as matter-of-fact about it in person as his writings, and he was *right*. I missed the next question, lost in my own thoughts.

He continued, "...the galaxy is a complex and nuanced place. The galaxy isn't "good" or "evil," it exists in a frame of reference *outside* of those labels. And I believe it is time for us to recognize that our place - be it Empire, Republic, Ascendancy, or otherwise - is outside of those labels as well. To do otherwise is to be as doomed to fail as those who came before us."

There was more, much more. I spent the next few hours in the library with Chief Lan'gella, reading his latest series of essays, discussing the interview, trying to understand the implications of his broadcast appearing on public holonet feeds throughout the remains of the Empire and more. It was quite late when I returned to my quarters, exhausted but feeling stronger emotionally than I had in a long time.

I don't know why, but his words resonated with me. Without a doubt, millions of beings throughout the galaxy were having discussions very similar to my own, and I began to feel a little less alone. Perhaps there was hope for us yet.

I slept like a newborn bantha that night.