

The Untested

34 ABY

Ensign Calamak stood over a bank of terminals that he was barely familiar with, looking frantically back and forth between images of critical structures flashing red and warning messages blinking on readout screens. Alarms blared throughout the thruster control room as the deck shuttered with the residual fallout from the initial explosion.

A senior officer whose name Calamak had not yet memorized shouted from across the room. “Hit the shutoff button, Ensign!”

Calamak racked his brain, trying to remember from his training not even a week ago where the shutoff button was on his panels. There were so many round buttons with alarming pictograms etched onto them that he couldn’t remember which was which while his ears rang from the klaxon.

He flailed his arms in desperation as if the movement could jumpstart a non-existent memory. “Which one is that, sir?” he shouted back.

The officer grimaced and left his own station, dodging sparks arcing down from the flickering overhead lights as he ran across the room and slapped a blue-capped button that Calamak hadn’t even considered in his panicked evaluation. The deck shuddering almost immediately stopped, but the flashing readouts remained alarmed.

“How could you not know where the shutoff is?” the officer yelled over the continuing klaxon.

“I’m sorry, sir,” Calamak loudly replied, “it’s my first week, sir.”

The officer shook his head and turned back to his station. “It’ll be your last if these attacks don’t stop soon.”

Breathing deeply, Calamak turned back to his panels and began to turn off warning after warning to try and bring it back under control.

#

Corporal Melih Yuche trotted in front of his squad through the corridors of the fuel station, his open-faced helmet doing little to muffle the din of the squealing klaxons. A momentary flash of pride at his squad’s audibly-synchronous bootstrikes passed through his brain, but the preoccupation with the current task at hand forced it out quickly.

This was the third attack within four days. Station Command had finally identified that the attacks were coming from inside the station, and that they had insurgents on the walls. They apparently were well-familiar with the fuel station, dodging security cameras and infiltrating guarded areas like ghosts - the running assumption was that they were left-over First Order operatives.

Yuche and his squad turned the final corner to the portside thruster maintenance access room and stopped short of the door. A heavy smoke denser than the station’s air wafted slowly out of the door, creeping low against the ground like a thin film. The door was stuck open, the control panel beside it sparking. The rotating red lights from the sirens rebounded off the shiny metal in the room and was absorbed by the low smoke.

He signaled for his squad to slowly advance, and he raised his blaster carbine as he approached the open door. Flicking on the weapon’s flashlight for extra visibility in the alternately dim and crimson room, he stepped through the threshold.

The room was large for a designated maintenance room, but Yuche supposed that was fair due to the relatively essential nature of the station's navigation thrusters. His boots slowly stepping forward sent spirals of the low smoke in tendriled waves away from his footfall and echoed in the silence of the room. The engines were shut down, and otherwise one wouldn't be able to hear themselves even think in this room with klaxons and such close proximity to the thrusters.

The metal casing of the thrusters took up the entire room's height and much of its lateral space, creating a right angle in the room. Corporal Yuche slowly approached the corner, and with an abrupt pivot and gun point that he had learned in the Carrida Academy, turned around it.

No saboteur stood crouched over the control panel, no giant bomb stood propped in the corner primed to explode. Yuche relaxed his posture and signaled to his squad that it was safe. They filed in behind him and began wordlessly to inspect the room.

It was only a few dozen seconds before one of them who had been inspecting the thruster wall stood up straight and beckoned Yuche to come over.

"Look at this, corporal," he said, pointing to what Yuche saw as he approached to be a small hole in the wall near the ground. "It's where the smoke is coming from."

Yuche nodded, now clearly seeing the smoke slowly flowing out and away from the pea-sized perfectly-round hole. The other troopers had gathered around, peering at it, and one of them started rustling through a pack he had attached on his hip.

"I remember seeing something like this in a holo-film," he murmured as he pulled out a medium-diameter magnetically charged wire. Everyone backed away from the hole and he knelt down in front of it. As he slowly began to feed the wire down the hole, which barely fit it, a hush fell in the already-quiet room, amplified by the klaxon suddenly shutting off.

The wire hit the end of the hole. Frowning, the trooper touched it against the back again to make sure he had reached the end, and then began to draw it back out. The smoke had stopped its slow-motion waterfall from the hole and slowly was thinning out around the entire room.

Pulling the wire all of the way out of the hole, the cadet chuckled in sudden satisfaction. Attached to the end was a little tiny machine the same diameter of the hole, wiggling around with its few legs and a small jagged set of wheels.

"It's a miniature drilling bot," the trooper said. "And I bet you all a round planetside that it's got some massive detonation charge in it for when it reached the inside of the thruster."

Yuche grinned. "Well done, trooper. Contain that, and let's move out." He turned and reached for his communicator, pressing the activator button. "Yuche to Command," he said.

"Go for Command," came the response.

"Ventral portside thruster maintenance room cleared," he reported. "No opposition, but there was a small droid drilling through the thruster wall packing a detonation charge we recovered intact."

After a brief pause, Command responded back. "Bring it to the analysis room. We'll instruct all other search parties to ensure this attack isn't replicated."

"Roger that," Yuche said, and grinned again with the satisfaction of a job well done.

#

The new mechanic staff was all lined up in the mess hall. The room was silent except for the back-and-forth pacing of the Chief Mechanic, whose name Isanakul Luren had not learned yet in the few days she had been assigned to this station.

She was transferred to the fuel station from the ISDII *Warrior* on short notice. She counted her blessings that she lived light and fast, because the whiplash transition would have rocked anyone with sturdier roots in the ground. In actuality, she was growing weary of the TIE pilots stationed aboard and their above-average capacity for self-esteem.

The Chief Mechanic stopped his pacing and stood in the middle of the line, some twenty people long. With a frown, and an obviously concentrated effort to appear intimidating that his short stature betrayed.

“You are gathered here,” he began, “because it has come to my attention that a new addition to the crew might be a security risk.”

Some of the crew shifted back and forth on their feet, the Chief’s accusation serving well to punctuate his intimidation.

“All of you that have been added to the staff since this station was captured will be questioned,” he continued. Obviously seeing the continued discomfort of half of the assembled line, he amended, “you have nothing to fear if you have nothing to hide.”

That drew an internal smirk from Luren. *What a thing to say*, she thought, but dared not break her stoic face in fear of being singled out.

“We’ll begin at this side of the line,” the Chief said, pointing to the end of the line that Luren was only a few people away from.

The first person there followed the Chief into a small room off the side of the mess hall. As they walked, Luren finally dared a smirk. *I’ve never seen that person before*, she thought, *so hopefully they are the problem and we’ll be done with this mess soon enough!*

It wasn’t them, unfortunately. Probably another transfer like herself, Luren reasoned. And before she knew it, she was at the front of the line and being beckoned into the room.

Stepping through the threshold, she saw a protocol droid seated on the opposite side of a desk. The Chief stood to the side as Luren sat down and looked at all of the machinery laid upon the desk. The droid pointed at her arm, indicating to her to raise it. As she did, she gulped. *Hopefully they don’t hurt me...*

#

The Fuel Station Rapier One, formerly First Order-known Hydrostation Seventy-Seven, held a remarkable amount of secrets. The space between the walls held more space than one would imagine, and much more than the official schematics showed.

Nyra Korr sat hunched over between a maintenance corridor and some officer’s dorm, waiting for her comrades to return. Plans for the station lay on the ground in front of her, with critical infrastructure highlighted. She had packed them and hidden away as ordered by her superiors as the evacuation of the station commenced a few weeks ago, and starting a few days ago proceeded with the plan.

Her other saboteurs were late, however. They had agreed to rendezvous at what was serving as their headquarters at 1900, but it was nearly three hours later than that without an appearance. She had heard their explosions and felt them rock the platform, and was glad for one further step in their plan having been done. But since then, none of the three who had left had returned.

The rattle of the metal wall panel that hid their entrance indicated that her wait was finally over. Caution prevailed in her worried mind, though, and she grabbed a blaster pistol laying nearby in case that their space had been found and she’d have to go out in a blaze of glory.

But it was a co-conspirator who came crouching through the hall. Out of breath and frantic, Dynnian crept into the space and sat down in front of Nyra.

“Where are the other two?” Nyra asked, her arms questionably positioned.

Dynnian’s eyes were wide. “We all got rounded up, all the new ‘mechanics,’” he said, putting the last word in air quotes. “I slipped away in time before they rounded us up for interviews, but Polin and Wemixx didn’t make it out.”

Nyra frowned. “We’ll see if they can make it out of that unscathed. There’s no way these Remnant pagans have an interrogation droid or anything sophisticated here, so hopefully they can lie their way out of it. I’m optimistic about Wem, but we might have to write off Polin.”

“We don’t have the people to be sacrificing,” Dynnian groaned. “We didn’t hit all of the thrusters last time because we could be at each one simultaneously.”

“Their dumbasses got themselves caught. We’ll make do with what we have at the end of the day.”

Dynnian nodded in reluctant agreement, and Nyra pointed at a circled area on the schematics between them.

“We didn’t hit both thrusters, so we have some makeup work to do. We’re going to hit the thruster control room. Do a good enough job there,” she said with an excited wink, “and this whole station will spiral into the planet.”

Dynnian rubbed his hands in excitement together. “And how do we get out after that?”

“You’ve seen the escape pod cordoned off for maintenance on Level Three? That’s our escape route.”

Dynnian’s head tilted in slight confusion. “A broken escape pod?”

Nyra put her head in her hands, wishing silently that Wemmix had made it out instead. “It doesn’t actually need maintenance, you cretin. It’s just marked off so nobody takes it but us.”

With understanding and a slight dash of embarrassment, Dynnian nodded along.

Emphatically pressing the schematics with a finger, Nyra said again, “If you and I can do enough, we can be out of here by tonight.”

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Solo patrol duty through the station was less than ideal. Yuche had grown used to being backed up by a squad and in command, but instead he was assigned a route on Level Three, condemned to walk past blank walls and malfunctioning escape pods under the orders to detain anyone suspicious around. The only spot of life he could look forward to on his rounds was the thruster control room. Every circle he made he’d poke his head in the door and acknowledge the staff there.

The closest one to the door was this young technician that had a particular persistent air of confusion about him. He’d glance up distractedly each time that Yuche popped his head in, as if he were still trying to learn what each of his buttons did. Eventually Yuche felt bad and introduced himself, and the man gave his name as Calamak.

Boots flagging on the silver deck, he made round after round. Nothing changed, not even by an atom. Until one time he turned the corner to the hallway where the control room was and two mechanics were standing outside.

#

Luren's comm buzzed with the staccato rhythm of a job call. Slowly rising from her half-nap state on the uncomfortable ready desk in the mechanic's quarters, she turned off the vibration and opened her pad where her orders would show up.

Station Reset: Thruster Control

Report ASAP

With a groan, she stood up and grabbed her small toolkit and made her way to the elevators to go down to Level Three.

When the elevator doors opened she was only half a hallway down from the Control room. Leaving the lift, she looked up from her briefing pad and saw two other mechanics outside the door with a trooper member talking.

She frowned. *I thought they only sent one per job, and the orders would have specified.* She walked towards them, still frowning.

#

Calamak leaned against his terminals, still studying his buttons. Over the past day he felt that he had been getting a better grip on things, but it was still shaky at best.

He looked up from his station, hearing conversation through the closed door. Furrowing his brow in confusion, he looked around. Nobody else in the room seemed to notice, so he shrugged it off as Yuche reporting in. But then he clearly heard contrasting voices, and they began to raise in pitch. Still confused, he mustered up the courage to step away from his console without orders and open the door.

He saw two mechanics standing directly in front of the door, as if they were about to knock on the door. To the right stood Yuche, standing slightly away and with his hand loosely over his sidearm. To the far left, much to Calamak's confusion, stood another mechanic. He didn't think that they had requested a mechanic, much less three.

The one on the left, the third mechanic, was talking. "I wasn't told there would be others. It's just a routine reset."

One of the two in the middle, the female one, responded. She seemed assertive and confident. "Change in the orders. We got told to report down ASAP."

The third squinted. "Where are your bags, then? You'll need some tools to be useful."

The other of the middle pair chuckled. "As soon as possible meant exactly that, compadre. No time to pack."

The third continued to press and Yuche watched on. Calamak stood in the doorway, and nobody appeared to have seen him. "I don't recognize either of you. What shifts do you work?"

"We were just transferred here a few days back," came the reply.

"I don't recognize you from the new mechanic lineup party we had last night either," the third accused.

Yuche chimed in. "As a matter of fact, I was told to stop *anyone* on this floor. Let's see some identification from all three of you."

The third complied readily, stepping behind the pair with an ID chip outstretched to Yuche. "Isanakul Luren," she said as a form of identification. As Yuche scanned it, Calamak watched the two other mechanics look at each other. One raised an eyebrow, and the other nodded.

All of a sudden, they pivoted on their heels and dropped into a dead sprint. Yuche's reaction time was nearly instant. Dropping Luren's ID and reaching for his comlink, he started after them, yelling into the comlink. "Suspects found, Level Three outside thruster control!"

Calamak and Luren stood stunned. Calamak looked around, but nobody in his room seemed to care what was going on. He stepped out in the hallway and watched the three of them run away down the hallway and then turn right.

Calamak and Luren looked at each other confused. Luren shrugged, picked up her ID off the ground, and started off the other direction. Looking back, she shouted, "It's a circle around this level. Let's head them off!"

Calamak hesitated, looking back into the room. Nobody seemed to notice, or care, so he took off after her.

#

The two groups met each other in front of the escape pods, on the opposite side of the level. The two unknown mechanics had opened an escape pod designated for maintenance. Luren had seen it and a few others on the project list, but it wasn't her specialty so she had ignored it.

Yuche had his pistol drawn and pointed at the two as they stood frozen in front of the pod's open hatch. Luren and Calamak stood a few dozen meters behind them.

"Don't jump in there!" Yuche yelled. "I'll get one of you, and then the station will just shoot you down anyway!"

The female saboteur smirked. "The turbolasers were the first thing we attacked, idiot."

"Then I'll have to shoot both of you," Yuche threatened.

It was silent for a second. The female saboteur looked behind her at Luren and Calamak, and then suddenly, with shocking force and speed, dove into the pod, tackling the other with her and slamming the door behind. Yuche held his fire, afraid of hitting Calamak and Luren, and the escape pod shot out of the berthing.

Calamak looked puzzled. "Clearly not under maintenance."

Yuche scratched his head, and looked into the pod's empty space. "Apparently not."

Luren chuckled, walking over to the berthing. "But neither are the turbolasers. We had those back online within a couple hours of their attack."

Grinning, Calamak ran over to watch through the porthole.

"The two saboteurs are aboard that craft," Yuche reported into his comlink.

The three watched as the pod drifted away, and then as green lasers lanced down from above like celestial judgment until the pod was nothing but an explosion and a memory.