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What Others Want,

UACC DATABASE ACCESS TERMINAL 2391023
LOCATION: SPACE STATION [REDACTED]
DATE: 10/03/2178
TIME: 14:08

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[STARTING HANDSHAKE]
> 29382-3-249103293230
[HANDSHAKE CONFIRMED!]
[Entering UACC Database node 2893!]
[Requesting Access key!]
> *****
[IDENTIFYING WAIT FOR ~1 minute]
[ACCESS GRANTED]
[Permission level = 4]
[Hello my name is Eve, What is your query?]
> FILE #230194305-4
[**SEARCHING**]
[FILES Found!]
[DECRYPTING FILES]
[Have a safe day!]
[TERMINATING EVE QUERY ENGINE]
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OPENING AFTER-ACTION INTERVIEW FILE #230194305-4

>>CONTENTS PANE

SUBJECT

Operation "Gaslight"

After-action interview file metadata

Location: [REDACTED]
Filing date: 03/02/2180
Filer: [REDACTED]

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INTERVIEWER(S)

Pv1 [REDACTED]

White

Pv1 [REDACTED] (OBSERVER)

INTERVIEWEE

Captain Sable

!NOTE BY INTERVIEWERS!

Now under usual circumstances the normal written after-action report should suffice, however because of discrepancies with other testimonies and Sable White's own After-action report, High Command has requested an interview to be done with Captain Sable White to clear the discreptencies up.

>>AUDIO FILE TRANSCRIPT

!NOTE!

The transcript has been edited for ease of reading, the contents of the interview however have been left UNALTERED. Access to FULL audio file logs are available on request at the OFFICE OF LOGS of the United Americas !

[START OF TRANSCRIPT!]

Q: Captain White, please state your name and rank for the record.

A: My name is Sable White and I hold the rank of CAPTAIN. I'm a member of the 3rd fleet, 2 Colonial Marine Division, 3rd battalion "The Dragoons" specializing in anti-Terrorism, Asymmetrical warfare Tactics and Human intelligence. I mostly work with other teams as a sort of attache lending my knowledge to them.

Q: Do you know why you have been called here for this interview?

A: Honestly, I presume it's regarding my latest operation isn't it?

Q: Well yes, now when I look through your history of other operations this one has been a bit of a, well how should I put it?

A: A bit of mess?

Q: *Chuckle* A "bit of a mess" doesn't even cover half of it.

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A: [Silence]

Q: Normally you have been a stellar performer regarding these types of operations, able to clean up whole cells or terrorist networks quite effectively, but this operation.. is just *odd in my eyes*.

A: In what way is it odd?

Q: You just let them get away didn't you?

A: With respect, I don't 'let' anyone do anything , especially letting a leader of a cell get away. I make Assessments. I calculate outcomes. I ACT. What happened in that operation was unfortunate and certainly "Odd" as you put it, but it was not negligence, and certainly not sympathy

If the "**Phoenix**" escaped, it was because the operation had other priorities when we became aware of them, the priorities were to preserve civilian lives, prevent a chain detonation of CHEMICAL WEAPONS in a high density zone and keeping our forces intact. If you are insinuating that I lost control of myself or the operation then I would suggest you reread my report.

I made a choice. And frankly I stand by that.

[Tone shifts to a measured one]

And if you're asking me whether I let someone go out of sentiment? That's a civilian question, not an officer's, leave that to the newspapers.

Q: Very well, why don't we start from the beginning, the brief I suppose and then skip down to the spicy part of the operation.

A: Well we did our homework, Operation itself was at LV-849, A big mining colony responsible for feeding the local shipyards and consumer factories. For what was lying there I was amazed that we did not find it earlier.

!TRANSCRIPT CONTINUES!

Switch to "To the EARTH" document tab

But What I Didn't Say.

The humm of the ship drones in the background with a tactical table in front of me, how many times have I stood here now. The glow of the table lit me and every squad leader up in an eerie green/bluish light making us out like some “monsters” from a fairy tale. I got the signal from Major Aline Roer to start the briefing,

“Alright, welcome everybody. This is the formal brief for Operation **GASLIGHT**.

Today we are gathered here to respond to credible information about an insurgent attack, which we believe will take place this evening. Our main mission is to disrupt this attack and take out one of the organisation's leaders known as “**Phoenix**”.

Human Intelligence and intercepted communication have in the past hour confirmed a few facts.

One, the known terrorist organization “**The Workers Flame**”, is planning the assault. As most of you know this cell has been active across the districts of LV-849 otherwise known as “Drossia”. They themselves have claimed at least 3 strikes on corporate convoys and 2 attacks on mineral processing centres. That's 5 times they have already danced about without any consequence, today we will change it.

Two, We have confirmed the location they will be attacking, it's one of the corporate industrial zones belonging to “Ravx Mineral Solutions”. The area is big and at least 20.000 workers and miners live there. If the insurgents breach the facility they will highly likely go for the executive zone and go for high-value hostages for them to use. We haven't told them that they will be targeted, as this moment can be used to wipe out a significant proportion of the Flame's operational manpower. They will want leverage. Instead, they will find the end of their little underdog story.

Three, Current local law enforcement and corporate security forces are already stretched thin and unreliable as we believe some of the Flame's operatives are embedded in them. So telling them about the attack will lead to uncertainties in my plans which I'm not willing to take, the Major has concurred with me.

As standard to operations on LV-849 we can't rely on orbital support due to the interference of the clouds and storms in the stratosphere. Comms can be spotty and patchy at best and non-existent at worst, so prepare for that.

I will now lay out the plan and give the orders.

Due to the fact we are on such short notice, we are working with a limited force. We only have 49 men aaatoday for deployment, it is not ideal as we presume the attack of the Flame will be at least 50-100 strong, but it's what we have thus **I will and can make it work.**

We will be splitting our forces into 2 groups, a 40 men defence group with the callsign "**Wall Watch**" and a 9 strike group with the callsign "**Nomads**".

Wall Watch, under the command of 1st Lieutenant Yirske Nuer, will go to the executive zone. Your objective is to protect the HVT's and make sure to keep them out of terrorist hands, while also maximizing terrorist casualties. I have already identified strong locations to defend from and pointed out some ingresses on where the insurgents might come from. The map should be uploaded on your hud for your group to use.

Nomads, under the command of me, Captain Sable White, will enter the AO through the lower industrial corridors as soon as we get confirmation of the attack by **Wall Watch**. Our objective is to head to one of the old mining elevators, where we believe the staging area is of the insurgents and where I expect "**Phoenix**" to be.

Remember this is no rescue operation, this will be an audit and we will make sure they fail.

Any questions?

Good.

Review your gear, check your comms and be on your toes.

We are moving out in 30 minutes, good luck men and happy hunting."

I never quite got used to operating on LV-849, even though I have been operating here for 3 months. The air is tinged with the smell of rust, oil and earth, suffocating you slowly. The sky has a permanent shade of a yellow that oddly looks like the yellow of those bruises in their latest state of healing. It's too dim to really call it daylight and the stars look tired from here.

I understand why the "**The Workers Flame**" has such a ready presence here, this place does something to you. Every corridor, work site and room echoes of a form of desperation, you can see in the labourers eyes, the wear and tear by the grit and shift work, they are dull from breathing toxic fumes with barely working respirator and a choking bureaucracy that seemingly wants to keep them here.



I've operated in numerous warzones in a diverse set of conditions and hell scapes. But something about LV-849 just gets under your skin. It's slow and in my opinion it **seeps**.

"This is Lance Corporal Heif Mase, Wall Watch come in over.."

"..Thi.. is Wall Wa..ch. We're ---STATIC--- CONTACT.... REPEAT WE --STATIC--MADE CONTACT!.."

I gritted my teeth, operating under these conditions is never fun.

"So it has begun as predicted, 1st Lieutenant Yirske Nuer has made contact with the forward elements of the attack. Now Is our time to strike and decapitate their leadership. I looked over to my second command, Sergeant Matt Raden, he seemed nervous.

"Captain, not to be a bit of a doomer but won't there be a lot of insurgents at the staging point? Like you said there could be up to a 100 insurgents fucking about and we are with just 9 people." said sergeant Matt.

"Sergeant, you honestly believe there will be 100 insurgents at the staging area? The vast majority of them will be at the executive zone, I predict there will be at least 20 people left at the staging zone, as security and to cover a retreat. We might see more non-combat personnel than actual insurgents there.

Anyhow, let's get moving and decapitate this snake.

We quickly left for the staging area of the insurgents, we moved fast, no chatter, weapons hot, scanning for every shadow that even dared to move as we descended into the lower corridors. The staging area was two levels down through rusted vents and forgotten shafts. If Phoenix was indeed down there we had to move quickly to catch him off balance.

We moved in like shadows, the nine of us, spread out in a staggered line, slowly and as silent as possible, boot making barely a sound against the grated steel. The air down here was suffocating me a bit, hot and stale. The lights flickered above us casting our silhouettes long across the walls and then swallowing them back up again.

I kept my rifle trained ahead of me, eyes locked to my motion scanner, it was not pinging. Yet.

"200 meters ahead," Sergeant Matt whispered right behind me. "The old elevator shaft should be past this loading bay"

I gave the signal to hold and I heard the soft footsteps of my squad stop.

I could hear something, footsteps, approaching from one of the corridors leading away from. A group, maybe two dozen of them. I could also hear they had a cart with them, probably loaded with stolen supplies.

"Set up an ambush" I whispered. "Spread out like in training. Sound off by hand, no noise, I will take the first shot"

I felt a tap on my shoulder, Sergeant Matt taking half the squad to the left side to a higher section while the others were being led to the right by my FTL Corporal Delany, then slipping behind a pipe cluster. No words, just movement and trust.

I crouched low behind cover, rifle steady but my heart not.

The footsteps grew louder. Voices I started hearing to, rather faint. One of them laughed and another was telling jokes.

I raised my hand, 3 fingers up

They came around the corner, looking relaxed, weapons slung low, no formation, only grouping around the cart with....

A cart, old, used for transport of ore, repurposed into a canister holder.

My eyes locked on the canisters, I didn't recognize them. Four of them. Sealed. White. Blue and purple markings with a litany of warning on them. Why would they be transporting canisters and not supplies or wounded? It doesn't make sense.

My breath caught and I gripped my rifle tighter.

I dropped my hand to signal and opened fire.

We wiped them out and quickly at that, they never stood a chance. I gave the signal and we moved in to secure the cart and that's when my Sergeant Matt spoke up.

The cart was sitting on the junction, bodies strewn about. The 4 canisters are secured by metal clamps and sealing foam. The kind used for volatile compounds.

Sergeant Matt walked to one of them, wiping the sweat off his brow. "Captain? Do you know what's inside these canisters? They look dangerous.... And definitely unhealthy"

I stepped closer. The label barely visible, an old corporate logo buried beneath the grime cleaned off. It read.

"Ravx Mineral Solutions X-33"

My stomach twisting.

"This.. my Sergeant is... bad news.. Really BAD news. It seems the "**The Workers Flame**" got their hands on some real nasty stuff. It's not supposed to be here, its scientific name is compound X-33, but the local workers like to call it the "Aurorean Hue" due to its colour"

"Is it a weapon?" Asked Lance Corporal Sabine, the hospital corpsman embedded with us.

"Well no, not officially" I stared at the canisters, a bit scared they might break their Seals.

"Companies who are deep into mining operations like to use it, it's a sort of life form scrubber used in deep cave extraction zones. Its purpose is to kill off native life forms, especially fungal types. Makes it safe for the workers to go in.

"Okay but what does it do to people if they get exposed to them?" Lance Corporal Sabine asked.

"Well.... It melts them"

Everybody at the squad stared at me blinking or mouths agape. Matt even stepped back.

“Well to be more precise it turns the lungs to foam, eating through the mucous membranes. If you breathe it you die choking and drowning on your own fluids and blood.” I tapped the side of the container feeling their cool touch. This chemical is banned outside industrial zones like this area and is even on some chemical weapon lists, however corporate lobbying managed to create an exception for the mining sector as like previously stated it does help with keeping the lives safe of the underground workers supposedly.

“So.... insurgents with chemical weapons that melt you... sounds like disaster waiting to happen” said Sergeant Matt

I was still staring at the canisters when my Corporal Delany called me over.

“You will want to see this Captain” said Corporal Delany, handing me a folded manifest he looted from one of the corpses. Not a corporate standard one, a handwritten one. Crude, but it did log timestamps and movements.

I read it over, but the top entry caught my eye.

“4 Canisters recovered of the Auroran Hue, Warehouse 14-B. EVACUATION REQUIRED More men needed, rigged to detonated - 30 minutes”

I read it again, eyes blinking.

“Matt, it seems we killed the wrong people, they didn’t steal them to use them, they were trying to move them out.” as I handed the paper back to him.

“Captain? What the fuck do you mean, they’re carting around canisters of lung melting chemical weapons!” he spoke in an elevated voice.

I pointed to the log in question. “It seems if I’m guessing correctly Ravx has rigged a warehouse to blow, with more of these canisters inside, hoping to catch the insurgents in a trap, where the gas will wipe them out including the civilians with them and unintended also with us included. Ruthless but efficient and deadly, I should have informed them of our arrival and this might not have occurred.” I sighed heavily, fucking corpos and their easy cost efficient ways.

Lance Corporal Sabine looked at me and said “Jesus, Youre saying the Flame found the warehouse and tried to stop it?”

I nodded. “looks like it, and those jokes they were cracking? Nervous men, young, hoping to ease their tension. People doing something dangerous they didn’t sign up for.

"For fuck sake," Sergeant Matt muttered. "We just wiped out one of their groups doing a rescue operation, didn't we?"

"Well not exactly, they didn't tell anyone and haven't tried to negotiate." I said. "Haven't even tried to contact anybody."

"No," my SL responded. "Nobody would believe them even for a second"

Standing here, I wasn't sure if I would have either.

"Torch-Tree, come in, did you get the canisters out? Warehouse 14-B won't stand for much longer. If you are still in the blast radius MOVE QUICK. Over"

We all froze, one of the radios continued to crackle.

"This is Phoenix. I repeat, Torch tree respond to my last. Our last minute diversionary attack is petering out and they might counter attack soon, we are pulling back soon, say something God dammit!."

The voice itself wasn't quite what I expected, feminine, calm and tired. Somebody who is trying to keep their people alive... it was almost looking into a mirror for me

Matt looked at me for orders, I stayed silent. A few seconds later the radio came alive again.

"... Please. Just say you have made it."

The silence dragged on... then I did something I never Imagined I would in my whole life.

I reached down and pressed the side of the radio.

"Phoenix, Torch Three isn't coming. They are all down."

The line was dead for a second before springing back to life.

"Who is this?"

"Captain Sable White, I'm a member of the 3rd fleet, 2 Colonial Marine Division, 3rd battalion "The Dragoons". We have encountered your people, canisters and the manifest."

Silence.

"You're not supposed to be talking to me like this Captain White..."

"Oh, I'm aware"

Another pause.

"You know what it is?"

"Compound XX-33, otherwise known as Aureorean Hue, RavX made and used. I know what it does and I know where you found it"

The radio fell silent for a bit again but then there was a sound crackling over the static.

"They have rigged the warehouse with a big bomb that is remotely triggered. The whole place is primed to blow, they want to wipe us out and the civilians in the area. They will blame us for this incident, I know they will."

"And I believe you."

My squad's eyes shifted, eyes locking on to me. Corporal Delaney stunned, Sergeant Matt jaw tightening, but he didn't speak up or interrupt me. I could see in his eyes he understood the severity of the situation.

"Then help us."

I started to bite my tongue in my mouth.

"I have studied up on doctrine and I KNOW you have a commtech in your squad, we need them. We can come to an agreement, you and whoever deals with your gear get here to the warehouse, weapons lowered. The timer is still running and we have 20 minutes. If the bomb explodes 10 thousand people would die, you included."

I looked around....

First at my squad,

Then the bodies around it,

Then the cart full of spiced up gas of death.

I pressed down the radio and spoke.

"My commtech is still alive and I know how to get there, I will see you in about 5 minutes if we haul ass."

"Won't you get court martialled for this or something" Phoenix giggled.

"Not if anybody writes it down."

My squad nodded, that was at least a good sign they trusted me with their lives.

“Alright everybody, group up, we are moving to the warehouse. I want everybody to hold outside incase shit goes wrong and this is a big trap, which I doubt. Lance Corporal Heif Mase, you’re with me to defuse a big bomb.”

“Let’s move, we got a city to save”

Me and Lance Corporal Heif Mase entered the warehouse, it reeked of coolant, oil and chemical. Somewhere I could hear the steady beep of a timer. I followed it and signalled Heif to follow me.

Phoenix was there, leaning over the bomb wiring she had already pulled out, waiting on us.

She stood there, sleeves rolled up, fiery red-orange hair tied back into a messy bun, grease smudged on her pinkish cheeks. Her uniform didn’t look like the standard one I had seen. No markings or insignia. Just plain function. Her hands were deep in the guts of the wirings of the bomb, spilling them out. She noticed us, eyes flicking, pulling her hands out and putting them on her pistol holster.

I gripped my rifle tighter

She didn’t flinch.

“You brought a commtech?” She asked while looking me up and down

In person her voice, unlike over the radio, was steadier, but tired. She was tired and I could sense it.

Lance Corporal Heif brushed past me, looking at the bomb.

“Mhhh... I can work with this!” He said with happiness.

Phoenix didn’t even bother looking at him, she kept staring at me.

“Captain White”

I tried to respond, but they caught my throat. I wanted to say something authoritative and smooth, but nothing came out.

She was... *unexpected*.

Not quite a picturesque freedom fighter I normally see on their propaganda posters. I could see fire in her, but not the kind I expected from profiling her through second hand eye sightings and reports. She was colder, sharper and controlled. She reminded me of someone....

She didn't look afraid or scared, but she did seem to know what it was like to lose everything or almost everything at least

"You're Phoenix" I stated plainly.

"And you're the one who killed some of my members, I should kill you." She replied curtly

A beat passed.

"I'm also the one trying with all my might to stop this bomb."

She smiled a bit, tired but a real one.

"Then we are both going off the script"

For a second the surreality hit me like a freight train, me a descendent of a Noble family interacting with my history sworn enemies, a rebel. We stood there, surrounded by one of the most deadly chemicals this side of the sector, death approaching through a timer, the lives of 10.000 people depending on us.

Funny how this job goes.

But you what seized me up? How I noticed the way her eyes were glinstering in the harsh warehouse light. How I wondered what she would sound like when she didn't give orders or lead an operation.

For the first time I felt seen, seeing my whole, exposing me.

I blushed for a second and tried to regain my focus.

"Captain? Are you... okay?" asked my commtech with some worry in his eyes.

"Err, yes... why wouldn't I be okay?" As I said this I could hear a light laugh coming off Phoenix.

I frowned at her.

She nodded at the detonator "One of the wires is a failsafe rigged to trigger the bomb. I'm having trouble identify it and getting through to the sheatings with my primitive tools here"

"You know how this works?" I asked with a bit of worry.

"Well duhh, dummy I'm a freedom fighter not some back seat commander" She stated plainly

I'm not sure if that was directed to me or to my superiors.

I crouched next to Heif.

He was untangling some wires, slowly and carefully as if it was his firstborn he was pulling out.

"Red to Blue, to this junction, connected to this resistor and battery.... Mhhhh then yellow?

Captain please don't touch anything, I have a reason to believe that with one sneeze we might be dust" He told me while holding a hand out to Phoenix.

Phoenix dropped to one knee beside him, her shoulder made a brief touch with me, just lightly. But enough for me to notice.

Heif apparently wanted a tool Phoenix had and then she glanced at me, I turned my face away.

"I didn't expect you to respond," she said in a hushed tone. "When torch-tree didn't respond and you unexpectedly picked it up, I thought I was hallucinating."

"And I especially found it interesting that you accepted my offer"

She reached across to me to hold a panel Heif was working on, her arm brushing against mine again... warm, steady and scars all across her arm.

I didn't dare to move.

The steady beeping stopped, I heard some hissing and Heif exhaling hard

"Alright," He said "I think that's the end of the road for this bomb, no big boom tonight... heh"

"Let's not test our luck further" She muttered while rising.

I also rose with her

I looked around and saw more members of the Workers Flame, eyeing us suspiciously as a dangerous moment had passed. Rifles half raised, uneasy.

But then I look back at Phoenix and I was enraptured once again, her chest rising and falling as the weight of what could have been.

"Alright boys, lower your weapons, I have a feeling we can solve this little standoff with some diplomacy. Can't we Captain White?" She spoke to the insurgents whilst turning to me.

I quickly nodded and I realized something, I didn't hate her. Didn't hold her in the same contempt as other so-called "freedom fighters" and also the fact that I was standing rather close to her.

Something in me was already leaning forward, before I caught myself.

"We should talk" I said.

Phoenix nodded. "Yeah. But not here. We are still standing in a pile of chemical weapons."

A pipe hissed above me, I glared at it. The room we were standing in was just close to the exit of the building. A bit too close to the open ground outside. I could hear over local comms how my squad was repositioning, getting anxious. The situation was still dangerous as ever, one trigger pulled away from death.

I looked over to Phoenix, she was glancing out of the window to the outside darkness. Her posture was still but I could see the tension in it. Like she was expecting a betrayal;

"I presume your squad is out there?" She said as she glanced at me.

I nodded. "If I don't call in, they will probably storm in, guns blazing. Very professional, very loud"

She gave me a rather dry amused look. "That would complicate things."

I rubbed the back of my neck, exhaling sharply and then said it before I could think better of it, maybe a bit ashamed of myself.

"Look.... this situation? It's been a general cluster fuck to epic proportions, like actual FUBAR levels. So I can't believe I'm saying this, but I appreciate what you have done for me and this city. I will tell them to let you go" I said annoyingly.

Phoenix raised her eyebrows and something behind her eyes flickered.

"I will tell my squad to let you go. You and your people. No pursuit, no fire fight, I will make up a story with the squad as I go..." I groaned a little.

I dragged my hands across my face .

"God I hate being reasonable, Mercy isn't soft. It's measured" I told myself

Phoenix folded her arms across her chest. "Are you sure your squad's going to be okay with that?"

"It will be fine" I muttered, then keying into my comms. "Heif, what's your opinion, Be honest."

The comms were static for a second but over these short distances , the comms network works just fine.

"Frankly? After defusing a bomb laced with lung melting industrial death gas? That was close enough to the edge for me today. So yeah. Meh. I'm fine with letting the people who helped us not die today walk away." He said over the radio with a dry tone.

I glanced at Phoenix. "You're in luck today, he usually acts like our squads moral compass"

"I'll talk to the others," Heif added "Though no promises on Matt, he is still wound up."

"Good, distract him for a bit and let him chew on it, he will see reason soon enough I suppose" I replied over comms with a smirk.

Phoenix turned back to the window. "You're quite a bit different from what I expected, Captain White. Normally the corporate security forces would salivate at the thought of me bleeding out in some random ditch. Always looking out for their own interests and the corporate once. But maybe today...." The hardness in her face relaxing and softening. "I can Imagine a future where we don't have to do all of this bombing and hostage taking to get our voices heard, just maybe." She chuckled.

I laughed too for a bit, more out of disbelief towards myself than amusement. "Yeah? You're not what I expected either. Honestly you caught me completely flat footed"

Phoenix tilting her head, curious I suppose.

"I've never been good at showing quarter to your kind" I admitted flatter than intended. "But I always knew war was rather grey".

I didn't add that I'd started to drown a bit in that grey sea when she looked at me like I was more than a uniform.

Didn't say that she shakes my morals and jumbles me around.

Didn't say that for the first time in a long while, I hesitated. And hesitation in this line of work gets people killed.

I just grumbled.

So I just simply stared out of that damn window into the abyss.

And said nothing for a bit.

"Guess we both got surprised today huh?" Phoenix told me.

"I suppose so." i replied

Then I hit our squad comms again.

"This is White. Confirmed Phoenix has cleared the AO. Don't pursue, Squad acknowledge" I asked over comms.

One by one greenlights blinked from red to green on my squad HUD. I heard no grumbling over the radio and nobody argued. At least not out loud, anyway.

Phoenix turned her back to me,

"This won't change anything y'know?"

"I know." I sighed.

"But it might change how we fight it"

She nodded once at me, and slipped through the door with her team, disappearing and melting into the shadows outside

And just like that... she was gone.