



SUBMITTED IN ENTRY TO CSP COMPETITION: CDW:
ASPECTS IN WRITING

The Conspirator

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THE CONSPIRATOR: Elinia Rei is history's ghostwriter, pulling the strings from the shadows through elaborate schemes, plots and machinations. While some of the biggest events in Scholae history have been the work of Elinia, those who associate her with them are often dismissed as crazy conspiracy theorists.

May 23, 2016

Prologue

23ABY

Ear-piercing screams disturbed the Ohmen night. ‘THE CAUSE! THE CAUSE!’ the twi’lek screamed hysterically as she ran through the streets, pointing towards a dark alley.

Hal Quiller’s hand moved to his blaster. This was the moment he had been waiting for, a chance to finally prove his worth to the newly formed Imperial Scholae Intelligence. The Cause were the enemy of the Empire, the arch enemy of the ISI, a group of terrorist insurgents, operating from the shadows, hellbent on overthrowing the Emperor. Wordlessly, Hal gestured to his partner, and towards the alley, drawing his pistol, a mixture of excitement and nerves hidden underneath ebon black combat armour covering the body from head to toe.

Their lights illuminated the alley, sharp, trained eyes scanned for suspicious movement. The path was clear, empty, almost eerily so. Hal sensed a rush of movement behind him. Drawing breath sharply, he turned to his partner.

Hal could only watch as the knife was pulled from his partners back. Blood splattered across the pavement. Before he could react, he was surrounded by a group of misfits, in plain clothes with weapons drawn.

‘Remember our name,’ said one, stepping forward. ‘We are The Cause. Your Emperor has oppressed the people for too long. Tell your Emperor that soon Judecca will be back in the hands of the people. Leader Tonal’la is coming for him.’ A sharp blow to the back of the head then knocked him out cold.

Chapter 1 - Codeword Nexu

Golden-skinned twi’lek, Director General Impetus M’Nar Palpatine, looked over the survivor, analysing his story. The Cause had been a thorn in the side of Imperial Scholae Intelligence ever since she founded the organisation a year before. They knew the secrets of deception and subterfuge as well as her best agents.

Hal bowed in respect and awe of the Mother of the Special Forces. Impetus’ reputation did not lie. Her lack of notable clothing almost distracted Hal from his story, his

mind half-focused on keeping his eyes from drifting downwards. Impetus absorbed the information relayed to her, her bright, azure eyes sharp and calculating. Her trusted advisor stood beside her, a young human whose greasy black hair framed a cold, analytical stare of crimson eyes, devoid of emotion.

As the story reached its conclusion, Impetus waved a hand to cut short his rambling apology for failure. ‘The Cause have always interfered with our operations. But assassinating one of our agents... this is a worrying change of strategy. This will not go unpunished. Are you wounded?’ she asked, faking genuine care. Hal shook his head in a non-verbal lie, wanting to get back into action as soon as possible.

‘Good,’ Impetus said plainly. ‘You will join the counter-offensive. We’ve recently discovered the location of one of the terrorist strongholds, rumoured to be the base of operations for Leader Tonal’la. The Cause will bow to the might of the Empire. Soren,’ she turned to the advisor. Assemble an assault team as quick as you can, I want the best agents available to us. Tonal’la will die, alongside every man, woman and child in the stronghold,’ she demanded.

‘Are you sure that’s wise, Imp?’ Hal looked up in surprise at the informality from Soren.

‘Codeword Nexu. Get it done.’

Chapter 2 - The March

On the streets of Ohmen, The Cause marched. A band of demonstrators a thousand strong swamped the main roads, blocking transport. In the centre of it all, their spokesman addressed the people, his voice amplified a thousand times.

‘The time has come to take back Judecca!’ he shouted to the onlookers as the demonstration marched. Raised banners showed pictures of Imperial oppression, of brutality from the Imperial police, witty catch-phrases aiming to gather further support for their movement. ‘For too long have they manipulated us for their own cause!’

On the edge of the demonstration, protesters handed out fliers to anyone that would listen, describing the Emperor as the evil leader of a dark cult, and their Leader Tonal’la as the one that will grant salvation. Many branded them as crazy conspiracy theorists,

but hundreds would join their cause.

Tempers flared when the Legions of Scholae arrived to quell the protest. As some members of The Cause saw this as the perfect example of the Empire using the might of the Legions to suppress freedom of speech, others grew violent, attempting to meet force with force. Knives met riot shields, crowd control weapons were discharged into the demonstrators.

From the rooftops there was a bright flash of red light. The ISI snipers never missed their mark. The man on the microphone was struck through the heart by the blaster bolt. The last sound he ever made, a blood-curdling scream, reverberated across the city. The crowd dispersed.

Chapter 3 - The Emperor

‘So let me get this straight...’ the Emperor said from behind a mask, menace in his voice. ‘You have the whole strength of the ISI at your disposal, a unit *you* formed at significant expense to the clan, and this ‘Cause’ are getting the better of you?’

‘The situation is under control, my lord,’ Impetus said, bowing her head respectfully.

‘They’re beating us at our own game!’ the Emperor roared. ‘The shadows are *our* domain, and they’ve been assassinating our agents while gaining more support on the streets!’

‘They are,’ Impetus said serenely, inclining her head respectfully. ‘And The Cause don’t understand how dark the shadows can be. We have a mole on the inside, high in their hierarchy. I know where they hide. A full frontal strike has been ordered. We will kill these terrorists in their own home, and mount Leader Tonal’la’s head on a spike.’

‘This had better work,’ the Emperor said threateningly. ‘You may be a fellow Palpatine... but you know the punishment for failure.’

Chapter 4 - The Traitor

They attacked under the cover of nightfall. Five elite Imperial Agents, armed with the best blaster rifles that money could buy. The stronghold was an unused warehouse that

The Cause had inhabited, turning the derelict building into a functional base of operations.

Hal had never handled a weapon like this before, slightly starstruck by the experienced agents he had been chosen to work with. Intelligence from Impetus sounded in the earpieces of the team. ‘These are not military men. We’ve hacked into their surveillance systems. They will not be equipped to deal with men of your calibre. Take no prisoners except Leader Tonal’la. She is located in an office behind a blast door at the back.’

Silently, the agents crawled through the darkness into position. On the signal of the leader, the team opened fire. Every window of the warehouse was destroyed within seconds. Any insurgent forces that attempted to fire back were immediately eliminated by sniper fire before they could even locate the Scholae Forces. With another hand gesture, a volley of smoke grenades covered the entire warehouse in a thick, opaque cloud.

The agents moved in, blasting through the front door with heavy weapons, infra-red sights providing perfect vision through the smoke. As Impetus had predicted, The Cause had no response to the attack. The firefight inside the warehouse was swift, brutal, and one sided. Shots fired from the cause lacked direction, unable to even see their targets through the smog, while the Scholae agents struck their targets with clinical precision and ruthless efficiency.

When the smoke cleared, the stronghold had become a graveyard. Corpses littered the floor. The only ones left alive were the non-combatants, the women and children, families of those who had devoted their lives to The Cause. Rifles raised, the Scholae forces rounded them up like cattle, forcing the survivors into a corner near the heavy blast door that marked the hiding place of Leader Tonal’la.

The sound of Impetus’ voice was in the agents’ ear once more. ‘Survivors can rally support. Kill them all,’ she said plainly. Impetus watched through the warehouse surveillance camera as her troops opened fire on the unarmed hostages, mainly women and children, leaving a huge pool of blood and a pile of bodies on the floor. Hal felt disgusted. He had joined this mission to fight terrorists, yet had just participated in a massacre. The men alongside him were hardened veterans, familiar with the fact that the ISI sometimes must perform unsavoury duties.

‘Proceed to Tonal’la,’ Impetus commanded. As the team approached, the blast door opened automatically, the leader presumably aware that the Scholae forces would force

their way in eventually. The office was minimalistic, no decoration, just a desk and a high backed chair, facing away from the door. Dramatically, Leader Tonal'la rotated the chair to face the agents.

‘Hal. I’ve been expecting you.’ Impetus said serenely.

‘You! You’re a traitor!’ Hal shouted as the rest of the team trained their rifles on their commander.

‘I’m a traitor?’ Impetus questioned, laid back in a relaxed posture. ‘I know where *my* loyalties lie. Do you? I’ve been monitoring you. You hesitated to follow my orders and kill the hostages.’

‘I thought you were a hero!’ Hal shouted, torn apart by seeing the true picture of who Impetus truly was. With a terrible battle cry, he raised his rifle towards Impetus’ head and fired. There was a small, audible click, but nothing happened. The blast door slammed shut.

‘I’m the Director General of the ISI,’ she said in such a casual tone with a little laugh that sounded more like she was chatting at a cantina bar. ‘Obviously I deactivated your weapons when you pointed them at me.’

Impetus rose to her feet and snapped her violet lightsaber into action.

Epilogue

The news spread across the holonet like wildfire. Video footage of the assassination of an unarmed protester by an Imperial Sniper was the first to make the rounds on social holonet channels, but the surveillance footage of the ISI murdering innocent women and children was worth more than any amount of credits could buy.

State media were still forced to peddle the official story, the news of brave Imperial Scholae Intelligence that saved the lives of thousands by performing a successful raid on a stronghold of terrorist group. Meanwhile, the video footage of the events in the warehouse reached millions of eyes, rolling on the success of the viral posts following the protest. Anti-Imperial sentiments were reaching a level that hadn’t been seen since Scholae first forced its rule on the system. While many dismissed those sharing the videos as crazy

conspiracy theorists, as they had done with anything related to The Cause, others began to see the conspiracy theorists as the ones sharing the real truth. While Impetus' plan had cost them hundreds, thousands more would soon join their ranks.

Another step had been taken towards the grand plan. In a secret location, Impetus met with her closest ally, friend, and co-conspirator. 'Everything is proceeding as planned. The Cause is growing in strength. System instability is at an all time high. Soon it will be time to strike, and the Cocytus system will kneel to *Emperor Xen'Mordin Vismorsus*.'