

It was yet another day at Imperial Checkpoint CCC-1138. Or as Dymo and his fellow stormtroopers begrudgingly called it, 'The Hole.' The galaxy was a huge place. Dymo had been promised adventure and excitement when he had joined the Imperial ranks as a man in the white armor. It had been anything but exciting. Where he had been promised a chance to see the world and visit exciting places, he had been stationed at a post a few hours away from his home on the planet. He had become little more than a glorified traffic cop, serving as an additional layer of security so the Imperial elite could feel just that little bit safer.

The job was a bore. After a morning working in virtual silence, save for the occasion speeder rolling through, Dymo finally spoke up. "So, did you hear about the clone trooper that they caught in the middle of Imperial Center?"

The white-armored stormtrooper posted to the opposite side turned his head, his eyes invisible behind the army-standard visor. "Oh? I had heard that something went down. It is a little hard to believe that anybody would try to assassinate the Emperor at the heart of the capital."

"Well, that is the thing, Keener," Dymo tilted his head toward the speeder rushing up toward their checkpoint with a sigh. "It is the ones that you do not expect that tend to be the troublemakers." He broke off the conversation as the passenger in the speeder handed over documents. Several moments of scrutiny passed before he handed the documents back to the speeder's occupant and waved them on. "It isn't as though everyone in the galaxy is here for the glory of the Empire. Some of us have not forgotten our history. The Empire replaced the Republic, and I may serve in the cogs of that Empire. However, a paycheck does not breed blind devotion."

"Blind devotion?" There was obvious anger in Keener's words, betraying the neutral expression afforded by his helmet. "The Emperor brought unity to a galaxy wrought by chaos."

"Oh, don't get me wrong. He was quite effective- almost creepily so. He also dresses it up real nice, but he is still just a politician. Can't argue that he was not effective. He is just not the be all and end all. I mean, it isn't as if he were to die, the whole Empire would come down around our ears or something, yeah?"

"But still, a clone trooper? Weren't they of the old guard from when the Emperor forged the Empire into its current form?"

"Well, that is the thing, I guess. If you have been around to see the formation of a government, and you remember how things were, it might make it a little sour if everything did not come out just right. Or hell, who knows, maybe the clone lost a buddy on 'name your planet' during the War and has held a grudge ever since."

"So, are you suggesting that a **clone** charged at the Emperor with a knife in the middle of the capital in a blind rage because he 'saw some shit' during the War? I did not think that combat shock hit the old Clones like that."

"War is nasty. Here or there, then or now, War never changes. But nah," Dymo shook his head, "it was not anything quite as straightforward as that. Though, that would make for an infinitely more interesting story. He didn't try to take out Emperor Palpatine in a manner as simple as looking through the scope of an old *E-5s* either. No, in a manner far more dramatic, he just tried to blow up the Imperial Throne Room."

"Kriff." Keener shook his head. "So he went as bold as all that?"

"As bold as all that." Dymo shook his head, raising his right hand to flag down the next speeder to approach his checkpoint. Short words were exchanged, documentation was presented, and the speeder was waved through the checkpoint. "He tried to plant a ton of explosives right under the Emperor's seat cushion."

"So who discovered the explosives before it was too late?"

"Oh Keener, my boy, it was another good, young Imperial like yourself. This boy, a nosy young lad, had been hired to help the old Clone load some boxes onto a speeder. He had seen the man off, had almost become complicit in the act, but that day he decided to grow a conscience, and ratted out the man whom he had helped."

"Like a good citizen of the Empire." Keener nodded.

"And for his trouble, do you know what he got? He is on ice in a detention cell, awaiting trial for attempted treason." A silence passed between the men as Keener shifted from foot to foot. Dymo capitalized on the silence. "That is why I see this position as just a job. If I see something, I will either report it, or ignore it. I will make a decision and stick to it."

"Like a good soldier should."<https://wordcounter.net/#>

"If it puts my end in the fire, I will pull out and report it up to a superior. That is not loyalty, that is just survival. Those detention cells are not a vacation home. Do not let them catch you unaware. If the Empire catches a whiff of indiscretion on your part, it will be pulled into the light. You might be sharing a cell block with a terrorist."

Keener was silent for several moments, to the point that it seemed the conversation was wholly over. Then, he spoke again, his words coming out more slowly, as though he were mulling over each one in turn. "So where does your loyalty lie then, Dymo? If an old soldier came to you offering huge money to help out in an act that could fracture the public's security, would you-"

"Hey, hey, hey now." The stormtrooper shook his head. "You are doing me some injustice now. When I talk about survival versus loyalty, do you really think that I would be stupid enough to try to plant a bomb or kill an official like that? I might not be a clockwork trooper or an Imperial golden boy like yourself, but I am not seditious, either." He shrugged his shoulders. "I am just suggesting that we maintain a bit of historical perspective when we have folks putting our Emperor on a golden throne as the greatest thing since sliced bantha." The trooper let out a chuckle in an attempt to relieve some of the tension of the moment. "But I will tell you what, let me finish up with this next vehicle, and I can tell you some stories from before the War. My father has told me a lot of old, interesting stories. I can promise you that quite a few are much cheerier and much more interesting than a failed attempt on the life of an Imperial government figure."