

# Into the Fire - Fiction I

March 23, 2019



*The Palpatine Colossus, the imposing statue of Emperor Palpatine that now stands a good head higher than the Caelestis city's tallest building and watches over its spaceport and the bay. A, imposing symbol of Scholae's power and influence, it's construction was started a few weeks after Scholae forces captured the city; councilors unanimously passed a motion that no building should ever block his view or ever surpass him in height.*

*Left: The Colossus as seen from the lower plateau as people journey from the north towards Caelestis city.*

Calindra stood by her desk, the blue haze of a holo image transmission floating a few inches above the desk's smooth surface.

"That certainly supports the lack of forced entry. Any survivors?" Calindra asked the intelligence operative on a Collective station far away from Caperion.

The man's image froze, suddenly looking amused, the audio recorded some static, but was otherwise strong. "Why yes," the audio spurted, the operative's amusement ringing clear despite the hologram's choppy quality. The hologram reset itself, the operative's smile suddenly catching up to real time. "Some squint nearly wet himself with relief when he saw I wasn't a Collective agent. He's ready to sing like a Alderaanian finch bird. We've also got our hands on the base's data core," he lifted the drive for her to see.

Calindra whistled appreciatively, "Good work! I'll send you doub--" the transmission suddenly winked out to the sound of a nearby blast, the room shaking and trembling enough that Calindra had to grab on to her desk to stop herself from falling.

Seconds later, the bleating of sirens resounded throughout Adinoram tower. Calindra instinctively reached for her desk to stabilise herself in case another tremor shook the building, but none came, so she grabbed her datapad and lightsaber, f her office doors sliding open to reveal a decidedly confused Jorm, a worried looking Aylin, and an angry Shadow Nighthunter.

Shadow looked at Jorm accusingly: "Was that your handiwork..?"

The Kiffar's long cornrows of dark hair shook left and right, "Not this time..."

He hesitated, as if something had suddenly crossed his mind, and quickly turned towards the Nautolan girl next to him, looking directly into her dark bulbous eyes. "We had nothing to do with this, right?"

Aylin started to shake her head, imperial personnel running towards their emergency stations; the garrison was quickly being mobilised, and data started streaming on Calindra's datapad. Shadow instinctively reached for it, "Lemme see that..!"

Calindra raised a hand, and moved the datapad out of Shadow's reach, winning Calindra an unamused flash of anger from the Emperor's golden eyes, but Calindra ignored her and kept on reading. She looked up to the others, "We've been--"

"Bombed!"

All eyes turned towards a young blue humanoid skidding to a halt between Jorm and Aylin, lightsaber in hand, his brilliant powder blue eyes wide with excitement. Kadrol was slightly short of breath, but the excitement was clearly on his face: "We've been bombed!"

Calindra frowned at the young man in front of her, the intelligence reports streaming in on her datapad when an intelligence officer rushed towards her in the pandemonium and saluted crisply, "Madame Director, we've secured the Empress and the tower is locked down. No one will be able to get in or out, but reports are coming in: Meraxis sympathisers are threatening several more high profile targets."

"How do we know it's not just a stunt to keep us busy, while their operatives escape?" Shadow growled, giving him a look of displeasure that made the officer wince and take a step back.

"We obviously don't," Calindra replied calmly, giving the officer a reassuring nod. "I suggest we scour the tower for any infiltrators and bring them post haste for interrogation, confirming their next target. In the meantime, they are more likely to strike highly visible and symbolic targets. Might I suggest we divert some imperial forces to these locations," she added as she handed her datapad to the newly appointed Imperator.

Shadow snatched the pad from Calindra's hand and scrutinised the list. "The Colossus?!" she snorted in disbelief. "We don't have time for wild gundark chases...!"

Calindra seemed unphased. "What better target than the massive statue of our very own and beloved Sheev Palpatine. His statue towering over Calestis City as a symbol of our strength. Destroying it would remind the citizens that Meraxis can still strike at the heart of the imperial city..." Calindra explained, "but there are other potential targets, though much less symbolic..."

"They already detonated a bomb within proximity of the Empress' chambers, how more symbolic can that get?!"

Calindra smiled coyly, "you mean a work detail stumbled on a poorly maintained Meraxis power conduit, which exploded during the maintenance repairs being performed to address the issue. Fortunately, the almighty Empress wasn't anywhere near the area."

Calindra nodded towards the datapad, "at least, that's the press release we can prepare in such a situation. It will prevent the enemy from gaining any free press... but we'll have much more trouble explaining things if those other targets get exploited."

Shadow grumbled and handed the datapad back, turning to Kadrol. "Looks like we're going to be rounding up some Meraxis sympathisers. We'll need them alive," her voice dripping with displeasure.

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The group disbanded, leaving Calindra and the imperial intelligence officer in the middle of the corridor. He took a cautious step towards her, clearing his throat to get her attention.

"Sorry to interrupt your thoughts, Madame Director," he said when she looked up from the list she was reviewing, "I just wanted to thank you for stepping between me and the Imperator, ma'am. I..."

Calindra interrupted him with a wave of her hand, "No need, lieutenant. Not everyone appreciates advice, or understands the amount of work that's put into this," she said waving the datapad. "We make things look simpler than they actually are," she said as she turned her gaze

out the window and considered the streaming city, her gaze falling on the towering statue of the emperor.

Calindra closed her eyes and searched inward, putting her attention on her feelings. She tried to calm the various thoughts racing in her mind, focusing instead on the calm that was at the centre of the maelstrom. She felt the winds tugging at her, felt the city teeming with life, people going to and fro, the crashing waves against the shore, and the malevolence...

She focused her attention on the dark malevolent feeling that danced about at the edges of her consciousness. It felt like trying to catch a slithering eel, or trying to fetch a rogue piece of egg shell from an egg white, which kept sliding away from her finger the more she tried to remove it. She took a deep breath in an effort to stay calm, and finally managed to place a finger on the issue.

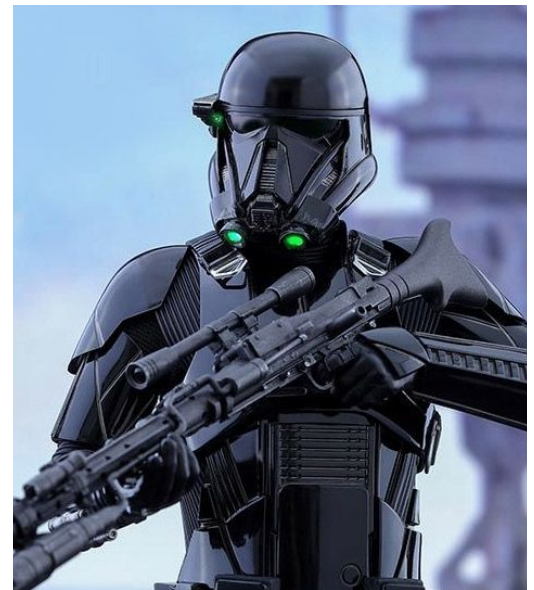
Her eyes suddenly opened, her brown eyes intently focused on something in the not so distant future. Her eyes narrowed dangerously, then turned towards the intelligence officer, surprising him with the intensity in her voice. "Prepare the shuttle and bring a squad of elite troupers," she ordered, "we leave in 15 minutes."

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The imperial pilot hovered the personnel carrier a few meters above the ground as the imperial troops jumped out and assembled at the base of the Colossus. Calindra shouted a few orders over the din of the ship's engines to an elite sniper standing next to her, pointing something at the top of the statue. The sniper looked towards her extended hand and nodded. A few moments later, he jumped out and Calindra held on to the rear door's suspension beams while the pilot ascended the craft towards the Colossus' outstretched hands.

Calindra leapt from the back of the personnel carrier, crossing the dizzying gulf between the safety of the ship and Palpatine's outstretched hand, wind suddenly lashing at her as she landed gracefully in his palm... Taking in the majestic and humbling view of the late emperor's cowed figure, she then took one long look at the city scape before her.

The city sprawled in every direction before her, the beauty of the bay and the crystal clear waters of the city's bay moving her. "I wonder what you'd say if you were still alive to see this?" she said



out loud over the wind. In that moment she felt proud and honored to have served the empire. "Had you still been around, we'd have peace across the galaxy," she added regretfully, "but despite having lost you... we've achieved great things."

The Colossus remained uncaring and silent as Calindra took a few more moments taking in her surroundings. She then turned towards the statue's outstretched arm and made her way into Palpatine's left sleeve. Deep within the darkness of his robe, away from prying eyes, she found the statue's access door and panel. A few keystrokes later, the blast door hissed open.

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The Sith battlemaster made her way through the surprisingly vast complex hidden beneath Palpatine's surface. The access corridors twisted and turned, opening up onto a vast cavernous chasm of the statue's hollowed interior.