**Carred’s Cantina**

**Bilbringi**

Granta Prackx was very pleased with herself. Her latest plan had succeeded; Andrelious and his family had fled from the Caelus system, believing that agents of Taldryan were pursuing Kooki for murder. In reality, the entire scheme was an elaborate ruse to get the Mimosa-Inahj family away from the safety of Taldryan.

The only drawback was that Andrelious had disappeared. Prackx had hoped that Andrelious would head to Corellia and meet with his parents, but the Rodian she had paid to follow Parck and Licon Inahj had come with no more than the day-to-day business of a couple in their late 60s.

Granta emptied the last of her second glass of Ebla beer, and was about to go and order a refill when she noticed her datapad flashing, indicating that she had received a message.

*What do they want?* Prackx wondered to herself, idly fingering the display to access the message.

*Biometric Scan Complete. Identity confirmed. Granta Prackx.*

*Priority Message Received.*

*Decrypting…*

*From: Taelyan, Evant*

*To: All Inquisitors*

*Members of the Inquisitorius,*

*Negotiations with the Severian Principate have gone awry. Any of you that can provide assistance, head to the attached coordinates.*

*Evant Taelyan*

*Deputy Grand Master*

***Resurgent-*class Star Destroyer *Endeavor***

**5 parsecs from Lyra-3K-a system**

It was not often than the Inquisitorius rendezvous point was the Brotherhood’s flagship, but Prackx guessed that the severity of the situation required for all branches of the Brotherhood to work with a little more unity than they were used to. She had also expected far more of her fellow Inquisitors to turn up, but had been told that many were working with their clans, instead. As she was not attached to a clan herself, Granta had nowhere else to be when the call came in.

The *Endeavor* was an impressive ship, one of the *Resurgent*-class vessels that served in the fleet of the First Order. As a life-long soldier, Prackx was far more interested in where the action was, even as a few of her Inquisitor colleagues seemed quite enamoured with the ship.

“Welcome to the *Endeavor*,” a crew member declared, gesturing the group into a nearby meeting room.

Inside, the wavering blue hologram of Ness’arin Ohnaka, the Director of the Inquisitorius, filled a platform at the front of the room.

“Are you *SURE* you’re not just an AI?” Prackx sneered.

“There may be a crisis, but I assure you that there’s more to do than just deal with what’s happening in the Lyra system. Besides, do you really think I’m stupid enough to put myself in a room full of some of the most dangerous people in the galaxy?” the Weequay shot back.

“I see that Andrelious and Kookimarissia Mimosa-Inahj aren’t here. A shame…” Granta commented.

“They have reported in. They’re with their new clan. Don’t think we don’t know about your dealings with that family, Grand Inquisitor Prackx,” Ohnaka declared in a serious tone.

“I heard the last time didn’t go too well for you anyway,” one of the Inquisitors stated, gazing at Prackx’s cybernetic left hand.

“She got lucky. I know what to expect next time I catch up with her,” the Juggernaut hissed.

“Enough!” Ohnaka ordered. “I have arranged for all of you to take command of parts of the Iron Forces. What your assignments actually are will depend on your skills,”

**Former Imperial Outpost**

**Moon of Eorilia**

Prackx wasn’t at all surprised when she was given a posting within the Iron Legion. It was highly unusual for a Force sensitive to be given such a role, but with the Brotherhood about to go to war, things were changing. Her sheer fighting ability, combined with a strong tactical mind, had led to her being put in charge of an entire battalion’s worth of men.

“We need to get in and deal with the Collective. Every second we waste out here puts more of the colonists at risk,” a Lieutenant complained.

“I want to be in there, Lieutenant, but we have to wait. Don’t forget that the Principate still thinks that it was Brotherhood forces that attacked them. We can only move in once they’ve received proof that it was the Collective,” Prackx explained.

The former Imperial facility that Granta’s battalion had taken to serve as their HQ was the closest that they could safely get to the Lyra colony. The outpost, although abandoned, was largely intact and Prackx’s men hadn’t found it hard to establish a solid link to other Iron Legion forces across the entire Lyra-3k-a system. Comm chatter was fairly muted, with little more than complaints over how long everything seemed to be taking. At one stage Prackx was sure she even heard Andrelious’ voice, but had no way of ascertaining exactly where he was.

**Governor’s Office**

**Lyra Colony**

Jar’deon Blazio had demanded his head of security’s presence almost as soon as the attack on the colony began.

The attack itself had damaged Lyra Colony, and inflicted many casualties, both civilian and military, but Amara Cirrus had coordinated the defence perfectly, and the last few attackers were being swiftly mopped up.

“What motivated the Brotherhood to do such a thing, Amara?” Blazio questioned.

“According to the Collective, they are led by a Sith,” the female began.

“The Sith? I thought they were just a legend. My father used to tell me silly campfire stories about evil Jedi with red lightsabers. Never believed a word,” the Governor answered.

“I don’t think it adds up, either. Although I don’t really buy what the Brotherhood have said about the Collective, either. I think they’re just two groups at war. Why they want to drag us in, I’m afraid I can’t say,” Cirrus sighed.

Jar’deon nodded. “That much is obvious. Apparently, the Brotherhood’s diplomatic team have claimed the attacks on Principate assets was nothing to do with them. In spite of the rather damning evidence to the contrary.”

“If it’s so damning, why aren’t we intercepting any of the Brotherhood landing teams that have stationed themselves throughout the old Imperial facilities? And why haven’t *THEY* attacked *US*?” Amara queried.

“That is indeed most curious. There is also a significant Collective presence. If they attack each other, I’m going to have to make a decision,” Blazio replied in a worried tone.

“Indeed you will, Governor Blazio. I just hope it is the correct one,” an accented female voice stated.

Blazio and Cirrus turned to regard the new arrival, who was a fairly tall Nautolan dressed in modified Clone Commando armour.

“I thought that we had an understanding, Miss Ordam. We let your forces into our colony on the understanding that you wouldn’t enter any government buildings without express permission,” Blazio responded, trying but failing to sound assertive.

Ordam shrugged. “Times are desperate, Governor. The Brotherhood is trying to claim that it was *US* who were responsible for the brutal attack on this colony.”

“And there are people analysing the Brotherhood’s evidence. Not all of us are sold on that it was them,” Amara replied.

Blazio’s expression indicated surprise; he had not heard of such evidence.

“It would be rather disappointing if you were to turn on the Collective now. Our forces are ready to *DEFEND* this colony. But defence can become attack. All I have to do is say the word,” the Nautolan responded, her tone quickly turning hostile.

The datapad on Blazio’s desk illuminated with the notification of a message. The Governor grabbed his device and begun reading the message.

*From: Principate Intelligence*

*To: [Recipients encrypted]*

*This is an urgent Intelligence bulletin.*

*The evidence supplied by the Brotherhood confirms that the attacks were a false flag operation. Collective is responsible.*

*Do NOT allow any further incursion from Collective forces.*

Blazio swiped the message off the screen of his datapad, before placing the device back on his deck. He nodded gently at Amara, who nodded back.

“An important communique, Governor?” Ghaffa asked.

“Not at all. Just my wife wondering when I will be home for dinner,” Blazio answered nervously.

“Anyway, I think it is best that you leave this office, Ordam. At least until the investigation is complete,” Amara added.

“I am afraid that my orders do not allow me to do that,” the Nautolan answered, narrowing her red eyes.

“And I am afraid that I must insist. Amara, please escort Miss Ordam out of my office,” Blazio ordered, trying his best to sound assertive as the two women began to eye each other up.

**-x-**

The virtual silence across the comms had suddenly been interrupted with the news that the Brotherhood had proven the Collective to be responsible for the attacks across the Lyra-3k-a system. Prackx wasted no time in preparing her battalion, but still the order to proceed with the attack hadn’t come.

The outpost’s holocommunicator activated with the figure of Damon Nix.

“Chief Inquisitor Prackx. It is time. You are to rendezvous with Colonel Bel’kork. You will be assisting his men in securing control of the outskirts of the Lyra Colony.

“Bel’kork. Right. What do you know about him?” Granta questioned.

“Military man. Father served in the Stormtrooper corps. His mother was an Imperial Navy pilot. Both decorated,” Nix explained matter of factly.

“So you don’t know anything really, do you?” Prackx replied.

“Not as such,” the Lord Marshal admitted.

“I’m sure we’ll find out what kind of man he is in time,” Granta observed as she smiled wryly.

**Outskirts, Lyra Colony**

Colonel Dam Bel’kork was not enjoying the situation at all. He much preferred the idea of a straight fight, so the fact that relations between the Principate, the Brotherhood and the Collective were in a state of flux.

“What is the situation? I understand that we are now expecting support from the Brotherhood?” the Colonel asked his second-in-command, Major Quaner.

“I really don’t like any of this. The whole situation feels like we’re going to get double crossed,” the Major answered.

“All we can do is give our best, Major. With luck we’ll be on the winning side,” Bel’kork mused.

Quaner nodded.

Things had become very interesting.

­**-x-**

Granta Prackx and her men hadn’t found any Collective presence on their journey to meet with Dam Bel’kork’s forces, but the entirety of Lyra Colony was clearly on high alert. Military units were patrolling the streets in large numbers, with very little in the way of civilian activity.

“This is the rendezvous point. I’ll find out exactly what we’re going to be doing. Just remember that the situation may still change. Be ready for *ANYTHING*,” the Sith ordered.

Colonel Bel’kork arrived from one of the nearby streets, followed by Major Quaner. He greeted Prackx with a salute.

“Grand Inquisitor Prackx. I am Colonel Bel’kork. I understand that you served with the Empire yourself?” the Colonel began.

“And unlike you, I didn’t abandon the Empire when the traitors signed that illegal surrender document. The Empire *WILL* rise again, Colonel. Assist here and I will make sure there’s a place for you in the restored Imperial military,” Prackx replied coldly.

“The mission we have will be more *you* assisting *us*,” Major Quaner interrupted.

“Well, then you’ll owe me one, won’t you?” Granta challenged. “What exactly do you need from me, anyway?”

“We recently lost contact with Governor Blazio’s office. He was in conference with Lyra Colony’s head of security, but shortly after the Brotherhood exposed the Collective’s involvement in the attacks, they fell silent. I don’t know for sure, but I suspect foul play,” Bel’kork explained.

“Very well. I’ll assume that standard Imperial colony design was followed?” the Juggernaut questioned.

“We may have walked away from the worst aspects of the Empire, Grand Inquisitor, but we kept the things that *DID* work,” Quaner replied in an offended tone.

*You gave up the right to call anything you stand for ‘Imperial’ the day you joined the Republic!* Prackx thought as she craned her neck around the area, looking for the tallest building.

“We think that the Collective will try to storm the entire colony at once, with a focus on taking over the government buildings,” the Major stated, pulling out her datapad to show a map of the colony.

“Urban combat. The key to defending your colony will be to keep hold of the main thoroughfares. If we do that, the enemy can’t do much with their vehicles. They’ll try to sneak infantry through back streets, but that shouldn’t be a problem. The defender always has the edge in this kind of battle. At least, unless you bombard the city into submission first,” Prackx commented.

“They won’t try that. Not with the 5th fleet in orbit. And with backup from whatever your Brotherhood’s brought,” Bel’kork replied.

“Speaking of the fleet, we should get everything in the air. The Collective will definitely try everything to achieve victory,” Granta added.

“Looks like we have our plan, then. Let’s do this!” Colonel Bel’kork cried, pointing at a distant column of vehicles.

­**Streets of Lyra Colony**

The Collective had hit hard, but the combined Brotherhood and Principate forces were well prepared, in spite of the fact that a lot of their equipment dated from the Galactic Civil War.

AT-AT Walkers, backed up by hovertanks, airspeeders and speeder bike squads, stayed in the larger streets, but foot soldiers quickly disappeared into the web of smaller streets and alleyways. The TIE squadrons of the Principate did their best to hold off the Collective’s fighters, but the new models of the Brotherhood’s Iron Navy were getting the lion’s share of the kills.

Unlike Colonel Bel’kork, who’d taken to commanding his forces from the cockpit of one of the AT-ATs, Prackx seemed quite happy to take a much more hands on approach. She flew through the backstreets like a woman possessed, allowing her hatred of the Collective to immerse herself deeply in the dark side. Her lightsaber quickly picked off any Collective soldiers unfortunate enough to meet with her, but they still kept coming with an almost fanatical zeal for their cause.

Colonel Bel’kork watched on as his troops fought hard to protect the colony. He was surprised by just how effectively they were fighting; even the rookies seemed to have a confidence that usually only came with experience.

“Major Quaner. How are things going out there?” the Colonel asked over his comlink.

“We’re holding them back, but they just keep coming! It’s as if we’re fighting an army of droids!” the Major complained.

“Just keep it up. We’re detecting that the incoming waves are starting to peter out. You’re nearly there!” Bel’kork replied.

Prackx smiled as she heard the Colonel’s announcement. She watched on as a group of Principate troopers clashed with some Collective infantry near the doorway of a cantina. As the blasters started to fire, the Sith noticed that a Principate TIE Bomber was rapidly losing height, thick black smoke spewing from its engines. The TIE Bomber slammed straight into the cantina. Its unfired bombs helping to totally level the building and eliminate both groups.

“That’s it! The Collective are on their last legs!” Bel’kork announced over the comlink.

“Then now it’s MY turn!” Prackx yelled. Her lightsaber sliced through another Collective soldier, but her next target wasn’t aligned with Rath Oligard. Instead, the crimson blade stabbed Major Quaner straight through the back.

Dropping to the ground, Quaner could manage only a surprised expression be

“This is Prackx. Eliminate the last of the Collective forces, then blow the Principate off the face of this moon. I want total military supremacy!” the Juggernaut ordered, her comlink quickly tuned to a frequency that only her forces could hear.

­**-x-**

Jassik Prelanx manouvered his TIE Bomber to shoot at a Collective airspeeder, but before his gunner could get a shot away, a Brotherhood TIE Defender took the kill.

Prelanx started to look for another target, but he spotted the Brotherhood ship turning towards him.

“It’s the Brotherhood. They’ve turned on us!” he declared.

“Treacherous dogs!”

“We should cover the Colonel’s AT-AT!” the gunner advised.

But as the Principate pilots watched, proton torpedoes slammed into multiple AT-AT walkers.

Colonel Dam Bel’kork had no chance.

**-x-**

Granta Prackx smiled as the Brotherhood forces under her command routed the surprised Principate army. In short order, their superior technology and the fact that the enemy suddenly lost a large amount of their coordination left the battle’s final outcome in little doubt.

The Brotherhood would soon overrun the entire colony.

And the traitors to the Empire would be punished.

Prackx’s new Empire was rising.