

As my body hits the floor, I twitch involuntarily. I hear blood pounding in my ears, as well as laughter from the creature who took *me* by surprise. Talk about irony.

So I guess that means now is as good a time as any to recap. I mean, what better time is there than when you're lying on the floor with some short statured fool looming over you, waiting for you to breathe your last breath? As someone who has seen a good deal, let me tell you that there are few better times.

We could go back to the very beginning of my life and start from there, but even though this is *my* life we're talking about, some of it isn't very interesting. So let's just jump ahead to the operation that led to this situation.

---

The marketplace was a wall of bodies. There were barely a few centimeters between each person there, and the locals considered that a slow day; people weren't getting trampled, you see. People peddled their wares from inside kiosks, some of which had been established generations ago, while others from all corners of the Empire participated in their favorite (and only) pastime: not getting screwed over while simultaneously trying to screw over everyone else on the planet.

The city of Cardel is found smack dab in the middle of the Empire, which makes it the Empire's prime center for trade. The affluence that brings also makes it the Empire's most valuable city besides the capital, which is why there's such a large military presence. Of course, they can think it's theirs all they want. This is *my* town, I just let the Empire use it.

People dressed in everything from garish royal finery to wrestling thongs fought for ground in the marketplace, so no one could care less about the two cloaked figures pushing their way through the crowd. The advanced trackers on their bodies told the owner of the devices where they were at all times; to make sure that the operation was proceeding according to plan. A smart leader keeps tabs on all those below him, and a brilliant one makes sure they don't know he's doing it. I am the latter.

Not much could be discerned from them physically, but I know everything there is to know about both of them nevertheless. One was of normal height, the other quite short. The taller one was a girl named Rachel Wickers, though she thinks she's the only one who knows that name anymore.

She goes by Ariel now, which if I'd have to guess is because she just really likes the name. It has an air of mystery and beauty about it or something. She was born in the capital to family that wasn't too wealthy, but not poor either. Her mother was a housewife who occasionally cleaned homes for wealthier families, while her father supported the lion's share of the bills with his paycheck from the Empire. He's a security officer you see. She ran away from home at the age of 12 after her mother died in a terrorist attack, the girl blaming her father and the government for not protecting its people properly. That was seven years ago, and since then she has been doing odd jobs and living on the streets of Cardel--except for a year and 11 month long stint where she lived as a (very clumsy and regrettable) maid in the service of one of the city's greatest crime lords; a person whose real name is known by no one but a select few, which of course includes me if anyone. Everyone else knows this powerful man as simply "Markus."

Anyway, now she's a member of a group of terrorists who have been trying to create civil unrest and expose the government for the "uncaring and overly-controlling monsters" that they are. Which, considering how much dealing I do with people in the government, I'd have to agree with that assessment--save for a few smart members who know whose actually in charge of this city.

The other was a Skrale. Scratch that, you probably don't know that term. Most Skrale don't even use it anymore. The other, shorter one was a "Scatter." You know, because they squat in their

own feces? Still too high brow for you? Fine, as I heard a fruit cart owner once put it so eloquently, "Yous ugly lizard throwbacks better git outta here, and don't let mah foot hit dat stupid tail of yers on the way out! Frilled bastards." ...Still? Fine, *lizard person*. There, I cannot explain it any simpler. He was one of those, and as I'm sure you know they aren't very well loved in society. So there was more than one reason for his cloak, besides the domestic terrorism. Oh I'm jumping ahead now, ignore that part for a bit.

His name is Kinyaf, and like every Skrale he lives alone. Parents were killed because someone felt like it, and now he does anything that will keep him fed, happy, and in control, including working for and with people he knows are scum. Which, in the city of Cardel, is pretty much everyone.

After a lot of grunting and shoving, they finally pushed themselves free of the throng, heading north towards the city's Citadel. The large military spire jutted out powerfully above the entire metropolis that is Cardel, and is proof positive that the Empire is full of insecure dicks. This was their target, or at least the location of their target, the Empire's data storage facility in the basement.

Even outside of the crowd they attracted no attention, save for a guard noticing the tip of Kinyaf's tail poking out the back of his cloak and stepping on it. The reptilian was still muttering angrily as they approached the back of the building, moving not towards the door, but instead towards an air ventilation shaft in the back. After discreetly popping the grate off, Kinyaf pushed his way into the bowels of the building, navigating the labyrinthine vents. About five minutes later, he was opening the delivery garage door at the side of the building, and Ariel was slipping quickly under it.

"That was easy," Ariel said, speaking the first time since the mission began. She shed her cloak as Kinyaf shed his, both dressed in the maintenance uniforms standard to the Empire. The only difference between them is that Ariel was concealing a large package under her robes, for which she felt no reason to hide now.

"Now we just need to plant the transmitter and it'll do all the work for us." She looked down at her cohort, who had been silent since she first met him a week or so ago. Well that's not entirely true. He favored her with a grunt of approval every so often. Still, she didn't expect an answer.

"Heh, right."

She almost halted her pace entirely for a moment, surprised that he actually spoke to her. You know, words. Was it because they're on a mission, or because of their location? What changed? Not only that, but why was his tone so derisive? It was interesting watching her mind work, I'll admit. Despite the crowd she fell in with, she wasn't a total fool, just a child.

"Did I forget a step?" She spoke with a bit of uncertainty now, picking her pace back up and looking at the package she was given for the mission. The brown wrapping paper was devoid of any instructions, and their superior simply said to "Attach it to this area on the console."

"Quiet."

He held up a single clawed hand in her direction and she silenced herself immediately, seeing why. Two guards made their way towards them, both looking suspicious. This wasn't in the plan, seems someone got some information wrong. Oh well, I wasn't worried. They weren't prepped for this, but one way or another the operation would be a success.

"What are you two doing here? There's no maintenance scheduled for today," Said the bigger, scarier of the two.

"Yeah, and we don't need no lizards in here either," said the other, though his laughter was halted by his bigger cohort. Great, not only was the big one in charge, he was smarter too. Sometimes the military isn't completely incompetent.

Ariel was having a panic attack, though she hid it admirably. She had no idea what to do, what to say. She wasn't armed enough to take these men on herself, and if she did they wouldn't make it

out of here alive. And if they just ran, the operation would be ruined. She was starting to sweat, seconds from making a rash decision--when a deep, authoritative voice spoke up, all eyes falling on the Skrale.

"We know there isn't any scheduled today, we're here to perform emergency maintenance. We're trained in software consolidation as well as hardware repair, and the package we have contains the necessary tools. Our clearance code is 2f480. Now, if you don't mind...?"

The smaller, stupider guard shared Ariel's look of disbelief, though thankfully she got over hers far quicker. The larger guard just nodded.

"Sorry to have doubted you, and thank you for complying. For the Empire." He was pretty polite too, for a guard. Makes me almost feel bad now for what ended up happening to him.

The two pairs started past each other, the small guard still shooting looks of disbelief at Kinyaf every so often, thinking he didn't notice. They walked down the corridor, past a few offices and archives, until they reached the end, the main computer storage room. Large monoliths surrounded them, some filled with exabytes of data, though most were for cooling and powering this room alone. Once they were safely inside, Ariel spoke.

"How on earth did you know to say all that stuff? That wasn't in the briefing they gave us! Are you a plant?" She grabbed Kinyaf by the collar and turned him around, though he just huffed, pushing her away.

"No one planted me in your organization, I'm here because I want to be. I'm telling you the truth, believe me or don't," he said calmly.

"Then how do you explain knowing all that stuff, huh?" Ariel said, crossing her arms.

"Because," he replied, taking the package from the console she set it upon and unwrapping it, "unlike most people, I make sure I'm completely prepared for anything, even being unprepared. Now quit asking silly questions and watch the hall. We have to hurry." With incredible efficiency he popped off a metal panel and began installing the device, while she took up watch at the door, still shooting him a disbelieving glance every so often. When he finally hooked all the wires in, he flipped the switch as per the instructions, and a countdown appeared on the wall mounted screen before him.

"Huh, wonder what that's for," Ariel said, no longer watching the door. "Oh, right! That's when all the info about the government's spending and stuff will be played over the city's loudspeakers!"

He stared at her for a moment, then at the countdown, which read 10 minutes. Though he seemed completely composed while installing the device, when the countdown appeared, his look turned sour.

"Only 10 minutes? Bastard!" He wasted no time, immediately running over and taking the nonplussed Ariel by the arm, yanking her in his direction.

"Come on, we're leaving now!" Luckily the tone of authority with which Kinyaf yelled was enough to get her running along without asking why, and they ran down the corridor in silence, knowing fear motivating one, and confusion pushing the other. The trip that took minutes before now took only one, the only snag being that Kinyaf insisted they put their cloaks back on ("Escaping won't do us any good if they know who you are!").

They made it out with a little under 9 minutes to spare, but there was no time for rest. Ariel complained, but Kinyaf insisted, and slower though they were, they continued to run as far and as fast south from the building as they could. They were definitely starting to draw attention at this point, and Ariel pointed this out, but Kinyaf cared not. He kept running, shoving, screaming at anyone who got in his way. One of the people he pushed didn't even get back up, and Ariel wanted to stop, worried he really hurt the man. But she couldn't ask, because he didn't relent for even a second.

"Ahh, stoooooop!" Ariel screamed, stopping dead in her tracks and pulling him into one of the city's many alleys, "Look, we have to be at least 300 meters away by now. No one was chasing us, no one was even suspicious until we started running! Nobody will be able to link us to it! What is wrong with you?"

"You really don't understand you fool?" Kinyaf screamed. He didn't seem out of breath at all, and he certainly looked antsy enough to keep going. "That wasn't a transmitter. We weren't even meant to get out of there in the first place!" Strong *and* intelligent, quite the threat to anyone, this guy.

"What do you mean? Wait, that was--"

But she never got the chance to finish, or perhaps she did, actually. But no one would know, because at that moment, the bomb they planted went off, and the Citadel began to explode from the bottom up.

The next few moments were chaos. Peoples' screams barely rose above the crumbling concrete, shattering steel, and glass hurling in every direction. Half of the building fell over like a tree into the western half of the city, crushing buildings and people alike. The other half crumbled in on itself, bits of it flying in every direction. It was no less destructive though, for the dust cloud that billowed forth swallowed scores of people. Chunks of glass as large as a person splintered and shot themselves towards the ground with terrifying speed; they cut people down no matter where they hid, or how far they ran. And through it all, Kinyaf and Ariel just kept running, running away from the destruction. A stream of hot tears cut through the dust caked on Ariel's face as she looked back, seeing what terrible ruin her good deed had wrought.

---

Now, my story isn't done yet. I still haven't explained how I ended up on the floor of some abandoned building, dust moving up my nostrils as that tiny bastard walks around my supposed corpse, speaking to his cohort like he got the drop on me. I do wish he'd quit huffing and strutting like that, he broke my concentration. I mean, there's nothing more amusing than someone who thinks they're in charge, and despite being clever enough to get himself out of harm's way quite a few times, but this short-sighted fool has a lot to learn about who is in control here. Not only that, but I'm trying to silently monologue here, it's called professional courtesy. But I digress, now where was I?

Right, the Skrale and the woman had successfully escaped, despite the fact that they were not supposed to. More than half of the city was nothing more than a cloud of dust; rescue and repair teams scrambled about, trying to do what they could, even though they were completely useless at the moment. It was all a show really, an act to make people believe they were the Empire's first priority. Instead, all the real manpower was set on one task. Immediately finding and killing the terrorists who had destroyed one of the greatest symbols of the Empire. Which Ariel figured given her past associate with the Empire, and was the reason why she blubbered like a child as Kinyaf dragged her through the alleyways towards the man who gave them their assignment in the first place, "Y."

"Quiet down, you'll attract attention," Kinyaf muttered irritably, looking down, around, and above before pulling her into the next alley.

"You don't get it do you? We did that, we killed all of those people. And what's worse, they're gonna kill us for it! We were betrayed and it doesn't matter because the Empire's gonna find us and torture us! The Commissar himself is probably gonna see to it personally! They're never gonna find our bodies, we'll just be gone, and nobody's gonna know where or how!" Ariel no longer cared for stealth or anything else, it seemed. Her blubbering was so loud a tracker wasn't needed to follow her

anymore, I could have just had one of my men listen for the sound of her crying voice. Which is why the self-preserving reptilian looked so on edge and annoyed. That is, until she said the word "Commissar."

"You actually think he exists?" the lizard said, looking like he'd be laughing at her if their situation wasn't so dire. "He's a tale told to scare children and keep them in line so they obey the glorious Empire, feh."

"No you idiot, he's real, I know he is! People just think he's not, but my dad knew. I heard him talk on the phone sometimes about him, and he sounded like he was gonna shit himself every time the Commissar was brought up! Like the bastard was in control of everything, even more than the Emperor! And now he's gonna kill us for what we did!"

Kinyaf stopped, finally. He turned to look her in the eye, and though she didn't stop crying, she was silenced by his sudden change in behavior. She didn't know what brought this on, or what the look he gave her meant. As far as she (or the trackers could tell), it looked like he was more infuriated at her than ever for spouting nonsense. Only I knew the real reason for that look, and it was why I would later tighten security detail amongst my men by considerable degrees.

"Come, and quiet yourself," the Skrale said simply, turning away from her and pulling her along again, "We need to keep moving and meet up with Y. He will instruct us on what to do next." Ariel stifled herself to a series of soft sobs, and followed, not even a city block away from the superior that sent them on a suicide mission.

Far more stealthily than a minute ago, they both made their way down the last alleyway, finding a pile of garbage boxes stacked haphazardly on top of each other. Behind these boxes was the secret entrance to the terrorist hideout, and after they pushed these boxes away they would then slide the hidden door panel off to the side, making their way into the organization's hideaway. At least, they would have, if after the first couple of boxes they didn't notice that the door was already cracked slightly. Their slow, methodical pace became a hurried rush, neither of them caring to stay inconspicuous in the face of this new development. Because he was smaller and more maneuverable, Kinyaf made his way in first, jumping over a box and slipping through the small crack the door already afforded him. Ariel took a moment longer, not hearing Kinyaf's annoyed sigh or seeing his eyes roll when she entered the room they usually met with Y in; she was too busy screaming.

The scent of blood hung heavily in the room, making the air inside it feel hot and sticky, as if the heavens were about to rain a bloodbath down upon them, and for good reason. Two other organization members' body lay mangled in corners of the room opposite the entrance, one of them looking like it was beaten to death and the other stabbed repeatedly. I knew the real cause of death, gunshot wounds, but such a simple death didn't make for such a terrifying warning as this did. It looked like both of the men's blood painted the walls of the room a nightmarish red, swipes and swatches of the stuff upon the walls, floor, even the table. But when the object against the middle of the back wall was finally identified, it became clear most of the blood did not come from the two fellow terrorists.

Y's body was crucified into the concrete with what must have been an industrial nail gun, body mimicking a grotesque "t" from some hellish alphabet. And I do mean, "t," not a cross. The head had been hacked off in a wholly unprofessional matter, and when the Kinyaf saw a melon-sized object concealed by a black and red handkerchief upon the table, he had a good idea where it went. I knew things would be in this state of affairs when the two terrorists were set to arrive, but I had no idea that the killing would be executed so badly. Considering the effect that the men were going for here, I was not impressed.

"Hmm, as expected," the Skrale muttered, lifting up the handkerchief to reveal Y's head, not flinching for a second. Ariel had nowhere near the same incredible constitution as he did, and prompt-

ly vomited near the door, her empty stomach now adding the scent of bile to the blood's already heady brew. Hmmm, now that I think of it, that smell reminds me of a few disemboweling I had to perform before... But now's not the time to wax nostalgic. After a moment of examining the head, Kinyaf walked over to the crucified corpse and took Y's phone from his pocket, pocketing it for himself and then walking over to Ariel, Kinyaf looking quite impatient as she composed herself. You'd think she had never seen a warning kill before. Sure, it was sloppily done but that was no reason for her to lose her head over it too.

When she was finally able to stand herself up straight again she almost immediately leaned herself over to look her Skrale compatriot in the eye. She was crying again, but this was no blind fear or terrible regret. She had come to the conclusion that Kinyaf had minutes ago already. This was to be a message sent to all members of their organization who would inevitably come here: They were already found out, and would systematically be killed. There was no running, no hiding, they would be wiped out, just like Y and the other two.

"I told you," Ariel said in a whisper, sounding out of her mind, "It's the Commissar. He's going to find us, and kill us, just like this. Just like Y." At this, Kinyaf just scoffed.

"Just like this? Not if I have any say in it. There is no Commissar, no self-respecting Empire officer would send a warning like this. Amateurish at best," he said, sighing and shaking his head. He looked back at her with intensity in his eyes, once again surprised by his air of authority.

"Listen to me. You are not going to die like a dog at the hands of some unprofessional fool like this. I promise you that when you do finally die, it will be the right time, and you will have served your country properly. Not the Empire, not some backstabbing terrorist, but someone that really needs you. I promise they won't hurt a hair on your head, so long as you promise to trust me." He nodded slowly, and she did the same. His words had reached her, she sniffled one last time, the stream of tears ending.

"Now come on. There will be people waiting outside for us. We'll have to leave through the front."

"Wait, what," she said with a start, "How do you know someone's waiting out there for us?" Kinyaf did not seem like he was listening, and instead had pushed the bloodstained table against the wall, callously knocking the head off and reaching up to the vent. Only when he started to tug at the vent cover did he speak.

"Because this is obviously a trap. They left these bodies here so that someone could find it, lose their cool, and try to run off to find other terrorists to warn them. Then when everyone was accounted for the teams following them move in and finish each off in a synchronized matter. It's a standard-arghhh," he pulled off the vent cover with one great tug, tossing it to the floor, "standard maneuver. On top of that, he'll probably have the other bodies be found like these. Someone wants to show everyone else that he's in charge."

Ariel was dumbstruck by this sudden explanation. Was it because it was so logical in the face of their insane situation, or because the implications of said explanation just struck her? As said before, watching her mind work was an amusing thing, and I would have loved to watch more, but things were moving quickly.

"Now come along," Kinyaf said, "it'll be a tight fit, but after a few feet we should be able to pop out again." He then jumped up and slid easily into the tight hole, small thuds echoing confirmation of his escape.

Though reluctant, Ariel followed after; she had a bit of trouble squeezing in, just as her cohort said, but she managed, heading forward towards the unabated light in front of her. Kinyaf made it out very quickly apparently, and she could hear his muffled voice coming from outside the hole. Hoping

they had not been caught already, she slowly pushed her head out to see him alone, talking on a phone.

“Who’re you-” The Skrale held up a single clawed digit to silence Ariel’s question, looking intensely focused on the conversation he was having.

“Yes, there has been a betrayal. Someone has been manipulating your organization from the inside, and we’re next. We figured we’d warn you. Oh?” Kinyaf looked quite taken aback, Ariel craning her head in a vain attempt to hear what was being said by the person on the other line, “Yes, of course then, where? Three blocks south, old apartment building about to be renovated. Alright.” He closed up the phone and looked back up at Ariel, who was staring back in confusion.

“What was th-”

“I used Y’s phone,” Kinyaf said, having no qualms about cutting her off once more, “I knew he had to have some sort of direct line to the person in charge of this organization, and I was trying to get some answers. Seems the one in charge was taken by surprise as well. He wants to meet us to discuss things, he said.” Kinyaf just shrugged as he put the phone away, but Ariel looked less pleased.

“Wait, he expects us to believe this all just happened under his nose?” Ariel said, sounding angry, “this has gotta be a trap!”

“Oh, of course it is,” Kinyaf said nonchalantly, walking through the hallways of the office building, presumably empty because of the chaos outside, “but we don’t have a choice in the matter. We’ve got nowhere else to go but where he wants us to. And besides, I promised they won’t hurt you, remember?” He turned around, actually giving her a smile.

---

The streets were still chaotic, even if they were quite far from the destruction now; people ran to and fro trying to find family and friends; security vehicles still rampaged through the streets with reckless abandon; some buildings were still falling apart, debris hitting those that were not wary. This was fortunate, as it allowed the two fugitives to run without worry (or at least, more than they already had) southward. They both kept silent, Ariel’s face a mixture of many different emotions all quite visible: fear, confusion, suspicion, and the slightest sliver of hope. But Kinyaf’s was the opposite. His jaw was set in determination, but save for that he was unreadable, just as he intended. They pushed their way through the panicked throng until they reached the dilapidated apartment building. Kinyaf walked in first, Ariel close behind and closing the door with an audible creak.

Waiting for them were two men in uniform, standing stoically before a door that looks like it may have led to a laundry room at one time or another. One of them nodded to Ariel and Kinyaf, indicating towards the door they guarded, simply muttering “M is waiting for you.”

Their uniforms weren’t bad (though they would have been better if I actually had a hand in designing them), just mediocre. Not the best work, but the implication of them was loud and clear. They belonged to a task force of sorts, and I could tell Ariel thought she knew whose. Kinyaf just pushed past them, and barged into the laundry room first. Seconds later a gun was drawn, and that’s why I’m laying on the floor.

So the tiny bastard got the drop on me. I didn’t expect him to be so tenacious or see me as that big a threat, but there we go. However, as I said to Ariel before, I am prepared for everything, even being unprepared. Which is why I feel no fear as I lay on the ground, listening the man behind the fake terrorist organization spout his pitiful plan as he closed in on Ariel, thinking me dead and that all his loose ends were about to be tied up.

"So now with the city thinking that the 'Commissar' is pulling the strings and exacting revenge on you terrorists, I have complete control. It doesn't matter that the government constantly denies the secret police's existence, all that matters is that people will find your bodies, find the calling cards my men left, and then even the Empire officers will be afraid of the man I pretend to be." Even I have to admit it's not a bad plan, but as Martin Kustive—Markus—struts back and forth like that, all I can feel is contempt for a man that thinks he's in charge, that he can pretend to be me.

"The only person I have to take care of is you Ariel. It's too bad it had to end this way, you did so well up until this point." With his speech finishing and my men having arrived about twenty seconds ago outside and securing the perimeter, I feel that now is as good a time as any. I yank out the fat fool's leg from under him as he almost steps on my frill, and knock him to the floor, shooting the guard standing against the wall opposite the door with my own glock, and putting a few bullets into Markus's limbs for good measure. Don't want him going anywhere.

Unfortunately, I didn't see that there was another guard near the door itself when I walked in; I was too busy being shot I guess. And this terrified crony already has Ariel by the neck, his own gun to her head.

"Put your gun down, put it down! God, fuck, put it down you bastard, or I'll fucking kill her!" The guard points the gun at me, then at her, back and forth. He's on edge, and probably likely to do something drastic. Ariel stares at me, fear in her eyes. She whimpers a single sentence, her tears almost holding them back.

"Kinyaf, you promised." I nod at her, and she nods back. I've seen that look before, trust. I don't intend to break my promise.

"I know," I say, putting a bullet in her head. The guard gasps, now wearing the look Ariel had only seconds ago. In his fear and confusion I promptly give him the same honor Ariel received, one he's nowhere near worthy of. Now there's just the Markus and me, and he definitely does not like the smile I have on my face. I am about to show him what happens when someone besmirches the name of the Commissar.

"So, using a major terrorist attack and the quick cleaning up of it afterwards to make people think that the Commissar really does exist; that they need to be afraid of him because now he has his eyes on this city. Not bad," I pace back and forth in front of the soon to be ex-crime lord's mangled body, taking off the cloak, and then the maintenance uniform, much more comfortable in my normal clothes, my button-up, tie, and slacks. I move over to the table Markus once sat behind for a moment, and rip off a table leg. I bounce it against the palm of my hand a few times, it has good heft. I turn back and see that I was wrong a few seconds earlier; he *could* possibly look more scared than he was before.

"Now, I didn't mind that so much. I mean, if you had pretended to be *anyone* else. But you were impersonating me." I test the table leg on his, and his pained whimpers are accented by a scream of agony. Not complete payback for ruining my good name with his sloppy performance, but it's a start.

"Which is why I decided to take care of this personally. I'm a hands-on kind of guy Markus. Sure, I could have saved myself the hassle of sending myself on a suicide mission you prepped for your subordinates, but I love my work, and was looking forward to thi—"

"Wait, you knew? You knew I was going to blow up the Citadel? You work for the Empire!" Fear turns quickly to surprise, poor Markus clearly forgetting his place for a moment. I glare furiously, hood flaring and causing the look of fear to return. I let him have it, breaking a rib or two to shut him up. He's wheezing and sobbing now, but it worked more or less I guess.



"I was speaking!" I scream, readjusting my tie and lowering my frill. I hate it when people interrupt me.

"Don't misunderstand Markus, I work for me. This is my city, and you were trying to take that away from me." I lean back, unable to handle his stench anymore, even if snarling at him so up close felt so good.

"Besides, it was an ugly tower anyway. Since *I'm* here now, when they rebuild it I can make sure my city has a proper looking military Citadel. Plus, I was able to personally capture you personally. Pretty worthy trade I'd say." I give him another smile, and it seems like this little man is starting to understand. I make sure I get what I want, through any means necessary. Good for him, though it won't do him a lot of good for much longer. I lean over, giving him one last glare, maybe he'll remember this when he wants to mess with the status quo in his next life.

"So from now on, please care to remember that *I* am the Commissar," I say darkly, raising my arm, "And. This. Is. My. City!" Every word causes a new, satisfying vibration up my arm, the hot taste of iron hitting my cackling tongue. I hit him a few more times, just to drive the point home. He was dead after the second strike, but I wouldn't be the Commissar if I didn't make sure the job got done.

I pull away, and wipe the blood from my face with the cloak. I clean myself off as best I can, though I don't care, I've got new clothes waiting for me back at my quarters. I adjust my shirt and tie again and walk out; my men are waiting for me, their simple black uniforms a feast for the eyes compared to the fashion nightmares that poser designed.

"All other members of the terrorist organization have been eliminated, all evidence erased sir," says one of my subordinates. I don't know his name, though it wouldn't matter. No identification, not distinguishing marks. My men don't exist, and neither do I. But I thank him all the same, telling him to get a team in there to clean up that mess as well. He nods and instantly directs others inside; in less than five minutes it will be as if none of them ever existed either. Except for one of them.

"Take the girl's body and prep her for burial. She'll be going in my plot, I won't need it anyway." My subordinate may be confused by my order, but he doesn't show it, just like I like. Ariel's is the only body removed rather than disintegrated on the spot, and I stop my cleaner that's carrying her.

"You kept your promise Ariel, and I kept mine. You served your country well." I figure she deserves a proper burial. She's one of the first people in a long time who served me perfectly to the bitter end. I respect that, and am glad I had someone like her to use. My only regret is that I had to keep my promise so quickly, and not have her serve under me longer. But no point thinking about could haves; she died for someone much greater than her, and she was more than happy to do so.

I send the cleaner away, and he walks out back to take care of the body. I make a quick call to my tailor, telling him to get a funeral uniform ready for me, as I've never attended one before. Afterwards I turn around, passing my men to go out the front door. It's time to walk through my city as the Commissar once more, not slink through it like that scum, that nobody Kinyaf. These are my buildings, my streets, and my people, all to be directed at my whim. I will take full advantage, and rebuild it all to the image it should have had in the first place when I became the Commissar. I walk past the last two guards holding their position at the front door, pushing it open and still hearing screams.

"Glory to the Empire," they each say, voices muffled behind their masks. I just smile.

"Glory to the Commissar indeed."