

*May 4, 2501 – 1415 hours; Griffin Park, Clay Hills suburb of Saga City, Cadorius in the Endrake star system*

Shortly after the fighting between the Militia and pirates ended, those whose homes were destroyed were setup in tent housing until more permanent accommodations could be found. Emergency services and the police departments flooded the area with personnel, material, and equipment. Even now, the police department maintains a visible presence with numerous foot patrols through the tents to keep stealing and assaults to a minimum.

Although a month has passed since the fighting, volunteer services continue to see to the people's needs. They provide medical services and prepare and serve three meals a day. Religious clergy and social workers see to the well being of people. Those that remain are those that have no other family on Cadorius to take them in or those that refuse to leave the area.

A large cadre of people makes their way through the congested tent city. Like an onion, the cadre consists of an outer layer of city police, ensuring that the way is clear for the others. Behind them, clad in flat black tactical combat armor, members of the Hawdon Special Security Services team scan their immediate surroundings from behind their closed helmet visors, fingers gently resting on the outside of the trigger guards of their automatic, techsighted weapons. A group of three videographers, each paired with a sound engineer, each pair wearing a different outfit representing their respective organizations; Hawdon Communications, Stellar News Service, and VidLibre, a FPC news organization, surround the center of the onion, jockeying with each other to get the best shot possible.

Unbeknownst to everyone there, an unseen layer of the onion arrived on scene earlier this week, consisting of several undercover operatives disguised as service workers or displaced citizens. They have been talking to those in the camp. Anyone the least bit suspicious was quietly taken away from the camp using various, unobtrusive ruses, medical testing and the like. Far overhead, unmanned drones of the HSSS circle the area, scanning with every conceivable sensor. Orbiting nearby, but out of sight of the camp, are several heavily armed and armored tactical craft, ready to descend into the camp and defend the center of the onion.

Nikko Asmodo, commander of the HSSS, quietly scans the various video feeds coming in from the cameras of the vid crews, the overhead drones, and other cameras throughout the tent city. Various audio channels play into an earpiece resting on the outside of his ear. Occasionally, he gives the tech seated in front of him instructions to bring a different feed up on the main screen. He wears the same flat black tactical uniform as every other member of the HSSS present today. The only difference is that the automatic rifle is replaced by a pair of swords strapped on his back.

Eight people comprise the center of the onion. Six of them listen raptly to the attractive blond woman wearing the white flowing dress leading them on a tour of the tent city. The last of the group, walking alongside the blond woman, wears a baseball cap, a black jumpsuit, and her dark brown hair pulled back into a ponytail is armed only with a sidearm. She keeps an eagle eye on those near her, lest any of them decide to endanger the life of her charge, Avis Hawdon.

On the audio feed, a wail can be heard in the distance. "What is that and where is it coming from?" asks Nikko.

On the video feed, the woman in the black jumpsuit looks around and brings her hand up to her mouth as if quietly coughing. "A baby in a nearby tent," Katherine Morgan, "Katie" to those that know her, whispers into her microphone, "I see it. A woman is trying to console it."

"Confirmed," one of the nearby techs reports to Nikko.

With the second wail, Avis Hawdon stops and turns her head. When she sees the baby, she immediately excuses herself and makes her way towards the open sided tent.

"Oh shit! ..." exclaims one of the techs, but the remainder of the statement is cut off with a quiet glare from Nikko. The tech says, "Sorry for the outburst sir," and returns to his duties.

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"Katie, get on point and keep an eye on her. Surround the tent and keep the group together. Look sharp people. This is nothing to panic over," Nikko says. If the unexpected change in direction surprises him, his stoic Japanese features do not reveal it.

Katie nods to no one in particular and takes up a position half a step behind and to the right of Avis. The layers of the onion part, envelop the tent, and make it part of the center. The others in the group stop at the edge of the tent as Avis and Katie approach the mother.

The mother, gently rocking the baby, looks up and recognizes who is approaching. "I'm so sorry ma'am. The doctor says she's been fighting a viral infection," she says while blushing.

Avis shakes her head no while smiling, "There is no problem. May I?" she says while holding out her hands.

The woman is dumbfounded, but says, "Uh. Sure" and carefully hands the baby to Avis.

Avis takes the child in her arms, begins to rock it back and forth, and make cooing noises at it. All the while, the video cameras record the event; Avis is completely oblivious to the remainder of the group.

"What is her name?" Avis asks.

"Maey," the mother responds.

"What a beautiful name. And yours?" Avis replies.

"Joan. Joan Borales," she says.

Avis awkwardly holds out her hand to the woman, "Avis Hawdon. Pleased to meet you," Avis says.

"Than- Thank you. The pleasure is all m- mi- mine," Joan stammers out.

Avis looks around the other empty cots in the tent as she rocks the baby. "Where is Maey's father?" she asks.

"My husband, Mark, is at work. He's a member of the city police force," Joan says with some pride.

Avis nods her head, "The public service people of this City and world have gone above and beyond in their service to its citizens. Is anyone looking into rebuilding your home?"

"It was not destroyed, just damaged. But without water, sewer, and electrical services, the inspector said we could not live there," Joan answers.

"A wise precaution, especially with this little one in the house. Here you go," Avis whispers, handing the now dosing infant back to its mother. Looking at Katie she whispers, "Make sure that the Borales' home and others like it are given priority. The fewer people we have to have living here, the better." Katie just nods.

"Thank you for your and your husband's sacrifices Joan. Have a good day," Avis says quietly and she walks back to the front of the tent; the other six people just watching her quietly. Joan shocked in silence watches as the new head of the Hawdon Business Group walks away.

Nikko says in the command center, "Jeff?"

"Already on it boss, I'm on the line with City services," someone behind Nikko says.

"And do another deep background on the entire family, just to be sure," Nikko says, "Good job everyone. Let us keep making it look seamless out there."

Avis approaches the group, her faces completely somber, and gestures over her shoulder, "This is what I am talking about. Everyone in this part of the City had their entire lives disrupted or destroyed by these marauding pirates. The pirates destroyed the water and power nodes in this part of the city. For what? Pure greed? Control? At least this story will have a happy ending. At least Joan, the mother, will not have to explain to her daughter why she no longer has a father because of this."

Nikko gives the screen a big grin and shakes his head.

After Avis lets that sink in she says, the smile returning, "But let us continue... Just beyond these tents here are the medical tents..." Avis moves the group towards another cluster of tents.

The tech in front of Nikko turns around to tell him something and stops when she sees his face. "Sir," she says, "Is there a problem?"

Nikko looks from the screen to her and says, "You just saw two things happen in one fell swoop Lisa. The first will be the cover vid for every news piece in known space tonight. Avis Hawdon holding a baby and comforting a mother made homeless by the vicious pirate attack of Saga City. The second is Avis Hawdon graduating, in the media's mind, from socialite bimbo who inherited her daddy's money and position to compassionate ruler of a broken world. She is the head of the largest, and arguably the most reviled, corporation in known space. A harshness that her father failed, despite many attempts, to soften in his lifetime. <Nikko nods towards the screen> She did it, unscripted, in under five minutes. Who would dare criticize her now? At least in the near future."

The tech looks back to the screen with a sense of awe cross her features.

Nikko continues, "The media underestimated her at every turn. I suspect governments and other corporations did as well. Her ability to seize any situation and turn it into her benefit makes her a formidable woman to deal with. Woe be to anyone who crosses swords with her. Known space is just now beginning to see the inner strength of Avis Hawdon."

Nikko looks at everyone in the now quiet command center then says as he walks towards the door, putting on his tactical helmet, "I will be back in fifteen. Call me if anything happens."