

Hey everyone! This is a short story I wrote for a Star Wars contest written by [starwarsfans](#) in their book called The Maw! It's 875 words out of 1,000 (which was the limit). I'm late for the deadline because somehow I missed this but the prompt was A Step Too Far; the Empire asks your character to do something they can't. I hope you enjoy :) Ratrax, my MC, his picture is above. Let me know what you think :)

Bright crimson lasers zipped across the sky in a criss-cross of fire. Several of them hit Ratrax's Lancer-class pursuit craft starship called *The Griffon*. "Kriff!" he cursed. He fired the two twin forward mounted light laser cannons at the target head of him, but it was the one behind him that gave him the most problems.

"Calculate the jump to hyperspace, R7." Ratrax cast a glance at the white and green R8 unit who plugged into the hyperdrive of *The Griffon* and started the calculations. Gritting his teeth, he barrel rolled out of the way of incoming proton torpedos and jerked the ship forward. "Hurry up!"

R8 squealed in response and Ratrax hoped he had the calculations correct. He punched it and the ship took off faster than lightspeed.

"Here's the prisoner you asked for." Ratrax crossed his arms as he threw the poor human man down at the Imperial Commander's feet. As a Nautolan, he had several dozen tentacles for hair and his skin was bright blue, which often made the xenophobic agents of the Empire frown down on him. They couldn't argue with his skills as a bounty hunter, though, which was the reason he guessed that they kept him around as long as they had.

"Good work, Vraluk," the commander said, staring down his nose at the Nautolan. Between that and the use of only his last name, Ratrax could only imagine how much the commander hated him. Yet they needed him, which put he had to put up with Ratrax... for now.

"Got any other missions for me?"

"Yes, in fact, we do. Head to these coordinates and watch this holo-recording. It will instruct you on what more to do. Good day." He handed Ratrax a hologram and a data disk. With that, the commander gestured to two Stormtroopers, who hauled the human male off.

Ratrax forgot what the man had done to tick off the Empire so badly; probably stole some cargo or some other similar offense. After taking some time to eat and relax for a bit, Ratrax sat in the back of his ship and finally turned on the hologram to see what all the secrecy of his next mission was all about. The blue, transparent hologram appeared as someone Ratrax never imagined he would ever see.

Darth Vader.

Fear slithered up his spine as chills and Ratrax forced himself not to shiver. It was only a recording.

"We have found a group of children in hiding on the distant planet of Christophsis in the Outer Rim. They are protected by a band of rebels there and it is believed that these group of children are Force-wielders. Your task is simple. Bring the children to us and if they resist, kill them. Wipe out this small band of rebels. Use any methods necessary to achieve this goal. All the gathered intel we have on this band of rebels and the children is on the data disk given to you." With that, Vader's holographic image disappeared.

According to the data, the group of rebels was made of a ragtag team of citizens on Christophsis. Thus far, the planet had often had rebellions and this was small and no different from the others, which had been dealt with swiftly and efficiently. Most of them were teens and barely young adults. The eldest of them was a young twi'lek woman who was also rumored to pregnant. She had a high bounty on her head and they wanted her dead. The Force-wielding children were all three years of age and younger.

Ratrax pounded his trembling fist on the data disk, shattering it.

No.

Not this. They couldn't make him do this. Thus far, he had done whatever the Empire had wanted, asked no questions, just did the mission, got his credits, and kept working. It wasn't ideal but it was work and it kept him alive and more importantly, it made the Empire treat him as an ally rather than an enemy.

Who was he to go against the Empire though? Doubts and questions wrestled with his morality inside his soul. How could he do something like this? He had confidence that he could kill the rebels; they were kids, after all; untrained, undisciplined, with little to no resources, and no defenses. It was the reason why the Empire hired a Bounty Hunter to wipe them all out, rather than Stormtroopers. Could he do it? Kill them all, steal the children, who were little more than babies?

No.

Ratrax didn't think he had it inside him. He may have done terrible things for the Empire. Killed men and women alike, kidnapped teenagers, arrested families, held others hostage, blown up ships, stolen, pillaged, captured... The list went on and on but this...

This was too far.

"I won't do it," Ratrax growled as he started up his ship and jumped into hyperspace. He didn't head toward Christophsis but in the opposite direction. In all his travels, Ratrax knew of a few places he could escape to where the Empire wouldn't find him. Even a ruthless Bounty Hunter had a line he refused to cross. He refused to let the Empire change who he was.

Ratrax wouldn't let the Empire control him any longer.