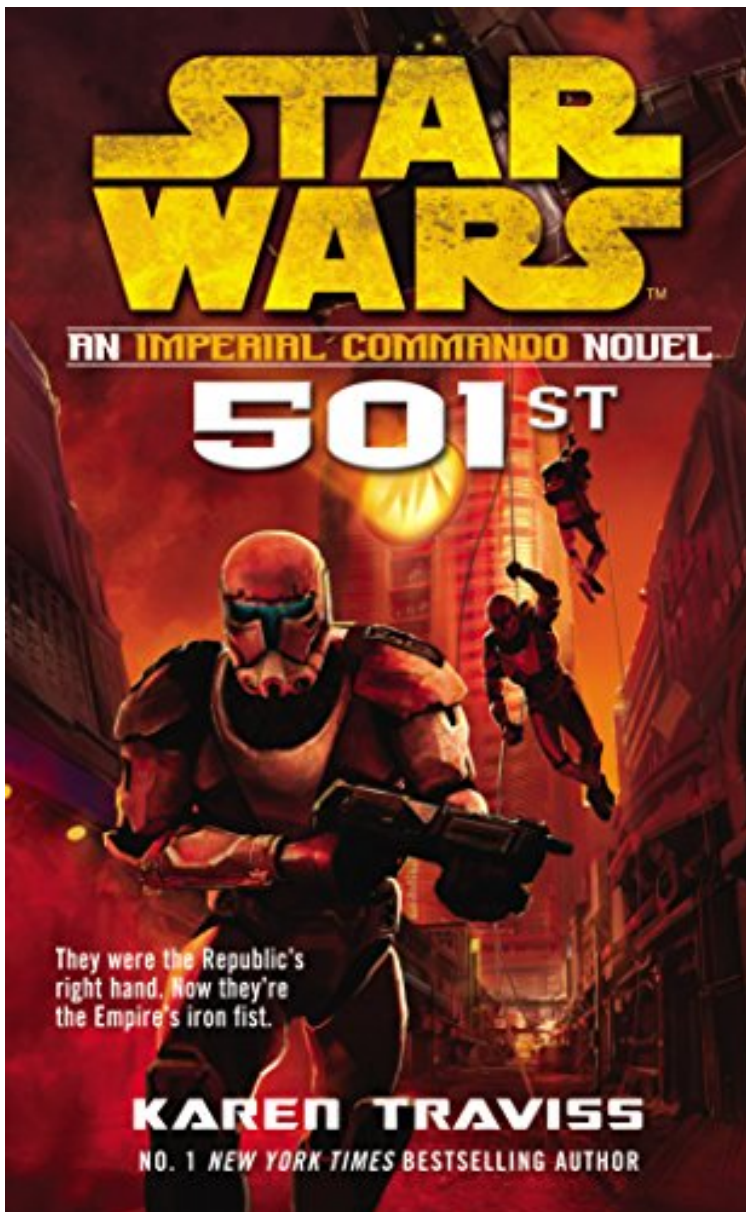


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Star Wars: Imperial Commando: 501st



*Par Karen Traviss
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWhen the Jedi decide to target Count Dooku-Darth Tryanus- himself, they turn to his ex-apprentice, Asajj Ventress, for help in getting close to the slippery Sith Lord. But when unexpected sparks fly between Ventress and Quinlan Vos, the unorthodox Jedi sent to work with her, the mission becomes a web of betrayal, alliances, secrets, and dark plotting that might just be the undoing of both Jedi and Sith - and everything in between!ExtraitChapter OneMalcontents and troublemakers will always be with us. They exist to dissent. A galactic cease-fire is exactly what most of them dont want, because it takes away the cover for the small and implacable grievances that give their lives meaning. If they happened to winthey

would be lost in aimless despair. Emperor Palpatine, on being told that opposition to Imperial rule was continuing on a number of worlds, despite the end of the Clone Wars. Commercial freighter Cornucopia, Mezeg Sector freight terminal; third week of the new era of the Empire. Ny Vollen had never broken her word to anyone, but now seemed like a sensible time to start. I must be out of my mind. This is going to get me killed. And them, too. What was I thinking? She didn't even dare imagine the word; her two passengers were just them. The brief time she'd spent with Force-sensitives had made her nervous at a gut level, and she was now irrationally afraid that her thoughts, feelings, and anxieties were somehow broadcast to anyone with the skills to detect them. It was crazy, she knew . . . but she didn't know. She couldn't be sure her mind was still private territory. And that was what bothered her. Just keep your heads down and shut up, both of you. Is that so hard? You can do your Force stuff to make guards go away, right? Well, do it. The Mezeg terminal smelled of lube oil, blocked drains, and those sickly sweet hot buns that were sold with near-undrinkable caf wherever freight pilots gathered. She gnawed unenthusiastically on a bun, trying not to imagine what the hard chewy bits were made of. The scent of artificial vanilla always made her feel sick. Now it added to the turmoil in her stomach, threatening to overwhelm her as she stood under Cornucopia's fuselage waiting for her vessel to be inspected. She rehearsed a convincing reaction in case her hidden passengers were discovered. Never seen them before in my life, trooper. These refugees get everywhere, don't they? Thank you, trooper, now get them off my ship. But none of those lines would have convinced her, so she doubted they would persuade any of the Imperial stormtroopers searching vessels entering and leaving Mezeg. If the stowaways were discovered, then at least they had no idea where Cornucopia was headed. And she hadn't yet programmed a course for Mandalore, so there was no data to extract from the new computer and lead the authorities to Kyrimorut. At least the worst wouldn't happen. But I know exactly where we're heading, all the names, all the places, so the worst that can happen . . . will happen to me. She was far too old to be embarking on a life of lawlessness. If she was caught and interrogated, she had no idea how long she would hold out before she revealed what she knew of Kal Skiratas' refuge for clone deserters. Her chances of escaping from the search team of four fit troopers, a civilian guard, and an akk hound looked close to zero. Come on. Are they really going to suspect me of anything? I'm a woman. I'm old. My ship's even older than I am. As to which of us is in worse shape . . . Waste of kriffing time. The Rodian pilot in the line next to her had a tiny courier shuttle that couldn't have concealed a jackrab, let alone stowaways. He kept checking a chrono hanging from a fob on his jacket. This is costing me. Can't argue with the Empire, Ny said. Suck it up. The white-armored stormtroopers didn't scare her. She knew they should have. They weren't Kal Skiratas' adopted sons, the special forces clones she knew, like Aden, Mereel, and Corr. They might have looked identical under those helmets, but if she thought they were friends that was all wrong, deadly wrong. These men had their orders. They probably didn't include being kind to old women who thought they were all nice boys at heart. Anyone aiding fugitive Jedi was an enemy of the Empire by definition. And why am I doing this, anyway? The freight port security guard held his search akk on a choke chain as he went from vessel to vessel, letting the animal snuffle around cargo bays and hatches. Four stormtroopers waited to pounce if the akk reacted to a scent or a sound. I suppose they're bored now they haven't got a proper war to fight, the Rodian said. Nothing better to do with their time. And how much has Palpatine spent on all that new armor? What was wrong with the old style? More taxpayers' credits wasted. They're looking for Jedi, Ny said. And my friends, like Aden . . . and Ordo . . . and Kal. She wondered if the Rodian actually paid any taxes at all. We don't know how many escaped the Purge. Enough to worry Palps, obviously. But Etain Tur-Mukan was one of the many Jedi who didn't get away, although she hadn't been executed in the Purge. She'd died stupidly. She got herself killed. Ny was used to the angry phase in bereavement, and the guilt that followed blaming the dead for being dead and leaving you so lonely that it wasn't worth taking the next breath, but she hadn't even known Etain before she took her body home to Mandalore. Crazy kid. If she'd just walked by instead of getting in the way, defending that clone trooper, then she'd be alive now. And Darman would have a wife to come home to, and their baby would have a mother. What a waste. What a terrible, terrible waste. A war for absolutely nothing except a corrupt old barve's ambition. Or a whole bunch of corrupt barves, if Kals right. My Terin should still be alive, too. Stang, I miss you, baby. The pain was at a manageable level these days, although she wished she hadn't found out the details of how her husband died. But if she hadn't, she would have imagined worse. Her old man was dead, gone in a matter of minutes, and that was all there was to it. He wasn't the only man in the merchant navy to die in the war; she wasn't the only war widow in the galaxy. Her grief was nothing special. I hope they find all of them, fast, and then we can get back to normal business, the Rodian muttered. Who? Ny was miles away, walking with the dead and trying to resist

asking them why theyd done such uselessly brave things that hadnt made the slightest difference to the course of the war. What? Jedi. I never trusted them anyway. My buddy he lost his ship once, no compensation, nothing, when one of their fancy Masters commandeered it for some getaway. No please, thank you, or heres some creds to tide you over, friend. Just took it. Higher authority. Mystic and righteous work. Piracy, more like government-backed thieves. Well, they got theirs. Good riddance. Ny thought of Jusik and Etain, and bit back a defense. Would you turn them in if you found any? she asked. Even without a reward. The Rodian snapped his fingers. Like that. Ny wondered what he would have thought if he knew that it was another Force-user still running the show anyway. But she wasnt even sure she could blame it all on this . . . Siff? Shith? Sith, that was it. Whatever kind of saber-jockey Palpatine was if hed engineered the whole war, like Skirata said then he hadnt needed to encourage some worlds to fight each other. Old enemies were just waiting for an excuse to start. Ny hadnt even heard of Sith before she met the renegade clone clan.

Bardan Jusik had explained the ancient feud between Sith and Jedi, as pointless as the sectarian war on Sarrassia, where two factions of a religious cult had been fighting for thousands of years over the proper ritual for handling some holy relic a goblet, a statue, a set of bones, Ny forgot which. They just seemed to define themselves by not being the other faction. She didnt understand any of it. Osik. That was the word. Mandalorians knew how to cuss, all sibilants and explosive consonants. It was all a load of osik. There were plenty of other things Ny didnt know or understand that were much closer to home. She hadnt known Etain, so she couldnt fathom the depth of Skiratas guilt about the girl. She hardly knew Darman, come to that. She didnt understand why Mandalore had allowed an Imperial garrison on its home turf. And she didnt know how she fitted into the gathering of misfits that was Clan Skirata, only that she now thought of Kyrimorut as her home base and that it had happened almost overnight. But that didnt matter now. She was doing this for two reasons, two good reasons, but the second one was starting to trouble her more the closer she got to Mandalore. I gave my word. And . . . stang, why do I trust Kal Skirata so much? At last, said the Rodian. The akk handler was heading his way. The Rodian turned to her and nodded in a way that seemed to transcend species, the gesture of an exasperated pilot on a tight schedule whose timetable had been messed up by idiots. Im going to lose my on-time bonus thanks to this. Ny stood with Cornucopias manifest in one hand. That was the drill; to have your admin data ready on your pad for inspection, stand clear of your vessel, and wait for the security guy to talk to you. Speak when youre spoken to. Some things never change. Dont point that out to them, will you? she said. Or else theyll keep you here until Mustafar freezes over. She realized her pulse was racing. If the akk got a whiff of her two passengers, shed be finished. It was a huge gamble. But then her passengers had everything to lose, too, and she knew they could make themselves a lot harder to find than the average stowaway. Ny waited. She concentrated on feeling impatient, imagining the time and creds she would have been losing if this had been a real delivery, and hoped it was enough to disguise her fear from both akks and humans. She wouldnt have been the first freight pilot to find illegal stowaways in her vessel, or the first to deny all knowledge. And sometimes that was true; illegals knew all the tricks when it came to slipping past security checks. But what had once been routine and occasional searches by assorted authorities for a variety of reasons like Boriin not wanting skilled metalsmiths leaving its territories, or Mil Velay not allowing anyone with a criminal record to enter its space was now a matter of life and death. The akk strained on its leash as it came toward her. Both of its front legs lifted clear off the ground as the handler leaned back against the animals weight to restrain it. He slackened the leash, and the akk raced up Cornucopias open ramp and vanished inside. Ny handed her datapad to the stormtrooper. She couldnt see his eyes behind that visor, but she was used to guessing where folks who wore helmets might actually be looking, and he seemed to be reading the pad. Name, maam. Nyreen Vollen. Cargo? Food and basic supplies, bound for LodeCorp Mining asteroid Nine-Alpha-Four, Roche system. Presentation de l'diteur When the Jedi decide to target Count Dooku-Darth Tryanus- himself, they turn to his ex-apprentice, Asajj Ventress, for help in getting close to the slippery Sith Lord. But when unexpected sparks fly between Ventress and Quinlan Vos, the unorthodox Jedi sent to work with her, the mission becomes a web of betrayal, alliances, secrets, and dark plotting that might just be the undoing of both Jedi and Sith - and everything in between!