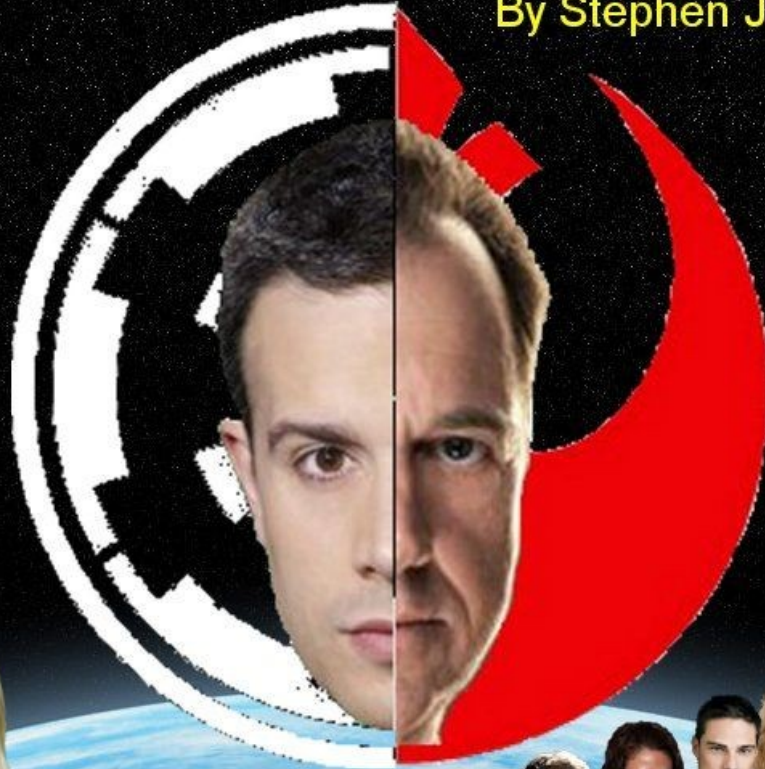


# STAR WARS

## 0-00: First Assignment

By Stephen J Dutton



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Civil war turns father against son

IT IS A TIME OF CRISIS. REBEL FORCES FIGHTING AGAINST THE EVIL GALACTIC EMPIRE ARE OUTNUMBERED AND OUTGUNNED BY THEIR FOES. THEY MUST INSTEAD RELY ON GUERRILLA WARFARE AND HIT AND FADE STRIKES BY SMALL GROUPS AGAINST STRONGER FORCES.

ONE SUCH GROUP IS LEAD BY THE EXILED NOBLEMAN VORN LARCUS III WHO, WITH THE HELP OF THE SMUGGLER MACE GRAYLE, CAPTAIN OF THE FREIGHTER THE *SILVER HAWK* TAKE THE FIGHT TO THE EMPIRE.

FACING THEM ARE A MULTITUDE OF ENEMIES, BOTH SEEN AND UNSEEN AS THE EMPIRE PLOTS TO BRING DOWN THE REBEL ALLIANCE AND FOREVER EXTINGUISH HOPE AND FREEDOM IN THE GALAXY...

## **FIRST ASSIGNMENT**

WITH SUPPLIES OF FUEL RUNNING LOW THE REBEL ALLIANCE DECIDES TO TARGET A MASSIVE CONTAINER SHIP BEING USED TO RESUPPLY THE IMPERIAL NAVY. BUT THE SHIP IS HEAVILY PROTECTED AND TO CAPTURE IT THEY TURN TO MAJOR VORN LARCUS III, WHO'S FIELD TEAM IS AS OF YET UNTESTED...

Original characters created and story written by Stephen J. Dutton.  
<http://thehazugfiles.uk/Index.htm>

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# 1.

For millennia spacecraft travelling through hyperspace had needed to obtain navigational data from an outside source to ensure that they did not collide with any mass shadows in hyperspace. This data could come from planet-based archives, but the Republic had also invested in an extensive network of beacons in interstellar space that could serve as waypoints. Approximately four thousand years before Emperor Palpatine rose to power and transformed the Republic into the Galactic Empire this system was made obsolete by advances in computer and communications technology that allowed up to date navigation data to be calculated and stored aboard even the smallest of vessels and over time the network was abandoned. However, the stations themselves remained in place. Some of them had developed into trade hubs home to thousands of individuals and these continued to function as societies in their own right while others were simply left to decay. Of these some became home to groups of outcasts from Republic society while the rest remained empty and were forgotten. One of these forgotten stations was abandoned before it was even completed. Fully constructed but never added to the network the station was in a volume of space known as the Shadow Region, located at the base of a column of stars that were intern known as the Spire Worlds. These in turn were located between two massive clouds of gas that extended from a local nebula, a stellar nursery that held hundreds of systems difficult to reach and explore.

As Palpatine tightened his grip on the galaxy the spirit of rebellion spread and gave birth to the Alliance to Restore the Republic. This Rebel Alliance fought Palpatine both politically and militarily and for this they need bases in locations where the tens of millions of ships of the Imperial Navy could not locate them. Locations such as a space station that had been long forgotten by the authorities but was found in an obscure record in a local university. A record that was quickly deleted. Now the station provided the Alliance with a safe place from which they could plan and launch their operations throughout the sector.

General Syres Kain looked around at the rebels he had gathered for the meeting.

"Our situation is serious." He said, "If Rear Admiral Aphanar is to continue to operate her vessels then we need more fuel." And he looked to the female mon calamari sat at the opposite side of the desk, one of two members of the species present.

"Support Services is doing its best general." A human woman responded.

"No one here doubts that Shyla." The admiral said, "But it is a simple fact that your best has not been good enough. If we are to capitalise on the Alliance's victory at Yavin we must demonstrate that we present a credible military threat to the Empire. But my ships have less than a month's worth of fuel remaining to them. If more cannot be located then I will have no choice but to withdraw."

"That would leave us vulnerable." Another human commented and he looked at Kain, "General my troops can't operate without support from space. They have to be able to-"

"Yes I am aware of that colonel." The general interrupted, "That is why I have called this meeting. I believe that Colonel Sallir has found us a solution." And he turned to the other mon calamari present.

"Indeed I have general." The mon calamari replied and he leant forwards to activate the holographic projector built into the desk. Immediately an image appeared in the air above the desk of a starship. The vessel was a transport, a massive vessel designed to move millions of tonnes of cargo between systems, "Here you see the solution to our fuel crisis." Colonel Sallir went on, "The fuel carried aboard this ship will last our forces for decades. Even if we send ninety percent of the fuel to Fleet Headquarters at Dac we will still have enough left to keep our ships running for several years."

"A ship like that will be heavily guarded colonel." Admiral Aphanar pointed out, "And to have my ships battle its escorts runs the risk of a stray shot destroying it."

"I am aware of that admiral." Colonel Sallir replied, "Which is why I believe that field operations should take the lead in seizing it."

"A field team?" the human colonel responded, "Six people in a light transport to get past the escorts and seize a ship that big?"

"Not exactly Colonel Collis." Colonel Sallir replied, "The transport is due to dock at Estran in four days, when it will take on a group of Imperial Navy observers who will oversee the distribution of the fuel to several of the local Imperial Navy squadrons. I suggest that we use this opportunity to sneak some of our people aboard and sabotage the ship, disabling its long-range communications and bringing it out of hyperspace at the wrong location. Several light hours should do. Then the team can impersonate a ship that has happened to overhear the distress signal they will undoubtedly send via conventional speed of light wireless and will be allowed aboard before the signal can reach an inhabited world and be relayed to the Empire."

"That sounds reasonable." Admiral Aphanar said, "But which team do you intend to deploy?"

"Because of the nature of the mission I want to assign a ship that has an entirely human crew so that they will blend in better with the target's crew. The Imperial observers in particular." Colonel Sallir said.

"That's your ship out then." Colonel Collis said, "In fact half your teams include at least one member who is recognisably non-human."

"I was thinking of Major Niel's team aboard the *Lucky Thirteen*." Colonel Sallir said, "But unfortunately their vessel is being overhauled."

"What about Commander Kord's people and the *Beauty Queen*?" Shyla asked.

"Two of the team assigned to the *Beauty Queen* are currently listed as sick." Colonel Sallir said, "And both the *Lazy Days* and the *Full Throttle* are out on assignment."

"Then I suppose that only leaves the *Scarlet Knife*. Major Shrell's team." General Kain said.

"Normally yes." Colonel Sallir replied, "But the *Scarlet Knife* has only just returned from another mission and I'd like to give Major Shrell and his people some down time."

General Kain frowned.

"Colonel, if we don't get that fuel then all of us will be getting nothing but down time because we won't be able to go anywhere." He said sternly.

"Indeed general." The colonel replied, "Which is why I propose to despatch our newest team. I believe you know Major Larcus?"

"Vorn Larcus?" General Kain said, "The nobleman from Estran? Yes, I've met him. I thought he was part of our tactical planning department."

"Until recently he was." Colonel Sallir explained, "But it seems that he was able to find the two extra personnel he needed to form a field team."

"One of them is one of my sergeants." Colonel Collis commented.

"Actually no colonel." Colonel Sallir replied, "Sergeant Verser's assignment to SpecForce was always temporary. Major Larcus has taken on Specialists Jaysica Horbid and Kara Bilstran."

"Bilstran? I know that name as well." General Kain said.

"She's the one that punched Captain Tarl in the face." Colonel Collis said and a look of confusion appeared on the general's face for a moment.

"Ah yes, I remember seeing the report on the court martial now." He said, "She was reduced to the ranks and lost her flight status."

"She is now Major Larcus' team medic." Colonel Sallir said.

"What about a ship?" Admiral Aphanar asked.

"They've taken the *Silver Hawk* haven't they?" Shyla then asked before the mon calamari colonel could answer, "Captain Grayle spoke to me yesterday about being reassigned."

"That is correct." Colonel Sallir answered, "As a YT thirteen hundred the ship is sufficiently anonymous to allow them to travel throughout the sector."

"Well then," General Kain announced, "I suggest that you let Major Larcus know that his team has its first assignment."

They called it the 'Captain's Table'. The exact location of it changed each time the gathering occurred, the attendees making use of whatever quiet spot they could find that was of suitable size for however many gathered together. On this occasion there were six individuals sat around the crates that were serving as the table itself, located in a storeroom that adjoined the main hangar bay of the rebel headquarters.

For Mace Grayle, captain and owner of the light freighter *Silver Hawk* this was his first time at the table and he was still attempting to determine the other players' tells. There were five others taking part in this particular game, all but one of them human. Captain Nassar Ghal was the only alien. Like his engineer and the field team assigned to his ship, the Harpoon, he was a member of the aquatic mon calamari species. His vessel carried the field team of Colonel Sallir himself, the commander of all the local field teams. To one side of the mon calamari sat Dayle Jessen who like Mace captained a YT-1300, while on the other was Anzar Deller. Anzar was a tall man with dark skin. He had been a mercenary once and had attempted to build a career as a free trader to avoid the dangers of combat. Now though he had drifted into a life with the rebellion and had found himself under fire once more. Not least from his first officer, a small woman who was known for being exceptionally cautious. Mace sat next to Anzar and then on his other side was Trent Myrell. Trent was the only one of the card players who was not outranked by the commanding officer of the field team assigned to his ship, who in Trent's case also happened to be his wife and it was she that owned their ship the *Artist's Impression*. This left only Bail Vollen, a man who like Mace had begun his involvement with the rebellion by smuggling for them.

"How about you actually play?" Bail said, looking at Mace over the top of his cards.

"Hang on." Mace replied, "I'm thinking." And he looked closer at Trent. Out of all of his opponents so far only Trent held a hand that Mace could not guess at the strength of. Mace's own hand was weak but he was hoping to be able to bluff his way to victory. Then the pause was broken by the sound of the hatchway opening.

"See, I told you they'd be in here." The woman who then appeared in the doorway said and she stepped through, followed by an older man.

"Hi there Grayce." Trent said to his wife as she wandered over to him and leant over to wrap her arms around him and kissed him on the cheek.

"Mace." The other man said, "We need to get going. Colonel Sallir has given us an assignment."

"Ahh." Mace replied, "Any chance I could finish this hand major?"

"We are on the clock." Major Vorn Larcus told him and to emphasise the point he tapped the chronometer on his wrist.

"Don't worry." Grayce told Vorn while looking at the cards in her husband's hands, "I think my Trent will have things all done in a couple of minutes." And there was a collective groan from most of the other card players as they put their cards face down on the table and pushed them away.

"Thanks for that." Trent said as he reached out for the pile of cash in the centre, "I could have got this pot about twice this size."

"Sorry dear." Grayce replied.

"Hang on." Mace interrupted, placing his hand on top of Trent's just as he was about to take the money, "I call." And he then tossed in another coin and set down his rather poor hand.

"That's all you've got?" Anzar asked, "And you're calling him? My hand was better than that."

"Sure I am. You could have called him yourself if you wanted to." Mace said and then all the players turned to Trent and watched as he smiled and turned over his cards to reveal an even worse hand.

"You win." He said and Mace grinned widely as he pulled the money towards him, Anzar looking on and frowning.

"Okay major," Mace said, "I'm done here." And he stood up at the same time as he stuffed his winnings into his pockets. The two men then calmly left the storeroom but just as they began to cross the hangar deck they found their path blocked by an attractive human looking woman and Mace frowned.

"Hello Inra." He said, "I thought you were sick."

Inra smiled.

"No, not me." She said, "Just Sen and Marse." Then she spotted that there were several banknotes sticking out of one of Mace's pockets and her smile widened, "So you got lucky huh? Did you win enough to buy a decent ship?"

"Hey, just because you've got a fancy YT twenty-four hundred it doesn't mean—"

"Not now." Vorn interrupted, "Captain Grayle, we need to get going." And he sidestepped Inra to keep heading towards Mace's ship.

The *Silver Hawk* was a YT-1300 class transport, making it sufficiently anonymous that it would not look out of place in any part of the Empire or surrounding territories. Mace had owned the ship for more than a decade, beginning as a free trader before the increasing burden of Imperial commerce regulation drove him to at first supplement his income by smuggling before throwing his lot in with the Rebel Alliance entirely. A single ramp led up into the ship and the two officers headed straight inside. Stepping into the lounge area just inside the ship they found a young woman leant over the sink unit furiously scrubbing at an item of clothing.

"Is the washing machine broken Kara?" Mace asked, looking along the wall to where a washing machine was also set into it.

"Huh?" Kara replied, looking back over her shoulder, "Oh hi Mace. Boss."

Vorn frowned.

"Don't call me that." He said.

"Sorry Major Larcus your lordship sir." She said, saluting him but doing nothing to lighten his mood. Then she held up the garment she was scrubbing in the sink and looked at Mace, "That Jaysica knocked over a can of lubricant onto this. It's my favourite and since I'd already done my laundry I had to wash it by hand."

"Another accident?" Vorn responded, "How many is that now?"

"Oh give her a break boss." Kara said, ignoring the look on Vorn's face at her use of the word 'boss' again, "Our engineer didn't seem to think it was a big problem and he's been following her around cleaning up after her for the past two days. Personally we think that Tobis has a little crush."

"We? You and Jaysica?" Mace asked.

"No. Me and Tharun." Kara answered, "Its not for us to say anything to her. Let him."

"Someone call my name?" a man's voice asked from the direction of the crew's quarters and a tall man in combat fatigues entered the lounge.

"Ah Sergeant Verser." Vorn said, "I hear you and the specialist have been discussing our team."

"Huh?" Tharun asked, approaching the caf maker and pouring himself a drink.

"Never mind. We have an assignment." Vorn replied.

"Is Tobis in the workshop?" Mace asked.

"Err no." Tharun replied, "I saw him in Jaysica and Kara's room."

"He's cleaning up the mess she made." Kara added.

"What about the droids?" Vorn then asked.

"Cockpit I think." Tharun answered, "Oh except that mouse droid. Poppy is it?"

"Penny." Kara corrected him, "I tell you the way Jaysica talks to her its like she's a puppy or something."

"Well go get her and Tobis while I go get the droids. I want everyone to hear this together." Vorn said looking at Kara who smiled back at him.

"Sure boss." She said and before he could berate her she headed for the cabin she shared with Jaysica.

There she found Jaysica, a woman several years younger and about fifteen centimetres shorter than Kara lay on the top bunk of a set of three, reading while a man in overalls was busy wiping the floor. Kara frowned.

"Tobis aren't you supposed to just be helping her?" Kara asked and then she looked at Jaysica.

"He said he could manage." Jaysica said and Kara looked down at Tobis instead.

"Err, well." He said, "Ahh, its just that the lubricant is, err-"

"Never mind that now. The boss wants to talk to us." Kara replied, "So Tobis needs to stop scrubbing and you need to stop whatever it is you're actually doing. I don't think you want to be late, he seems really picky. In fact I think he's a bit of a snob."

"I'm coming." Jaysica said and she began to lower herself down from the top bunk only to suddenly slip and fall, dragging the sheets with her and she plummeted to the deck and landed on top of Tobis and as he in turn collapsed the bucket of water he had been using to clean the floor was knocked over and the dirty water splashed across the floor and the bottom most bunk of the three. Kara's bunk.

"Oh you're kidding me!" she exclaimed and she held her head in her hands.

"It was an accident." Jaysica said as she untangled herself from the sheets and picked herself up, not bothering to check on Tobis.

"Oh not now." Kara said, "But after the briefing I'm changing to the middle bunk and I think I'm going to get the boss to order you to take the bottom one. See if you can fall out of that. Now come on the pair of you."

"Are you actually allowed to say stuff like that?" Jaysica asked as she followed Kara from the room, "Its not like you outrank me."

"Well you don't outrank me either." Kara replied, "Tobis does, but not you."

They found Mace and Tharun sat at the table in the lounge while Vorn leant against the sink, sipping at a drink and a gold coloured protocol droid stood beside a red and white R5 astromech near the corridor that led to the bridge.

"Glad you could join us." Vorn said as Jaysica, Kara and Tobis also sat down.

"You're welcome boss." Kara replied, "So what mighty blow will we be striking against the empire today?"

"Harvey if you wouldn't mind." Vorn said, looking towards the astromech droid. But all the droid did was let out a brief chirp.

"Wouldn't mind what?" the protocol droid said, "Major Larcus clearly wants you to display the schematics you downloaded from the station computer." Then the droid turned to Vorn, "I'm sorry sir, but unfortunately the R5 series can be somewhat troublesome. I suggest replacing him with a-

"Thank you Jeeves." Vorn interrupted, "But I'd rather just get on with the briefing. Now Harvey if you could show everyone what we're up against."

The droid chirped again and then an image of a transport ship was projected into the air above the table.

"This is our target." Vorn said, walking forwards and pointing to the hologram, "This is the *Glory of Corellia*. Right now we're critically short of starship fuel and this vessel is carrying enough to last us for years. So we're going to steal it."

"Err." Tobis said, his hand lifting up from under the table.

"Yes Corporal Dorfus?" Vorn asked, "Something to add?"

"Oh, err, well its just that – Well that class of ship requires a crew of over one hundred to operate properly."

Then he paused, "But err, I suppose it could be run with just-"

"Yes I am aware of the crew requirements." Vorn interrupted, "But we won't actually be stealing it from a starport."

"So we're supposed to capture it in flight?" Tharun asked, "Major, I've not done much in the way of boarding actions but isn't forcing a ship out of hyperspace somewhat difficult?"

"Not to mention trying to penetrate the shields on something that big with our little cannon." Mace added.

"I'd be more worried about what happens if we do penetrate the shields." Kara said and she held up her hands and spread out her fingers to mimic an explosion.

"The plan is to get aboard the ship in port and sabotage it's hyperdrive and FTL comms." Vorn explained,

"Then we'll wait in a system just a few light hours out from where the ship will exit hyperspace and act like we're reacting to their distress signal."

"But if their subspace radio is out how ill they send a distress signal?" Jaysica asked.

"Oh, err, if we do it right then they'll still be able to make a normal speed of light transmission." Tobis told her.

"Exactly." Vorn said, "We'll position ourselves somewhere that means we'll get the signal a few hours ahead of the nearest planet or Imperial outpost. Then we meet up with the ship to offer our help. We will conveniently have the parts they need to fix the ship, but in reality those parts will also have been sabotaged



so that the ship will only jump to our headquarters before its main computer crashes and takes out all their systems. After that it's up to Colonel Collis and his marines to board the ship and secure it."

"What if the crew decide to blow up the ship?" Tharun asked.

"Oh its not a navy ship." Vorn told him, "It's a civilian vessel that's been chartered by the Navy. Intel doesn't expect more than a token Imperial presence."

"So not Imperial fanatics that'll destroy the ship to take us with it then?" Mace commented.

"No." Vorn said, "Now I'll talk to you all in more detail about your roles later, but for now I need to discuss the first stage of the mission with Captain Grayle. The rest of you have two hours before we leave. Dismissed."

## 2.

Mace and Vorn headed for the *Silver Hawk's* cockpit where they sat in the two seats closest to the control panel.

"What's wrong?" Mace asked, noticing the look on Vorn's face.

"Kara." He replied, "I've got a bad feeling about her. It looks like Kord was right."

"Kord? You mean Commander Kord from Inra's ship?"

"That's right. He heard that the two young ladies assigned to my team are a joke at my expense. It seems that my persistence in trying to put together a field unit offended him. You know she used to be a pilot?"

"Yes I heard about that. At least if we run into trouble we've got a decent gunner."

"There is that I suppose." Vorn said and he sighed, "Anyway, enough of this. We've a mission to plan. How do we get past the security cordon around Estran?"

"Easy." Mace replied, "I've done it plenty of times. Estran is the sector capital and the most densely populated planet for more than fifty parsecs in any direction. That means that it gets thousands of flights in and out every day. Imperial customs can't stop more than a tiny fraction before they land."

"And what about after we land?" Vorn asked.

"I thought you were a member of Estran's Parliament major." Mace commented, "Didn't you ever get security assessment reports?"

"I used to. But when I started questioning the way the Empire was running things I got removed from any committees that had anything to do with planetary security. Perhaps if I'd taken the hint I wouldn't have been expelled."

Mace snorted.

"You - take the quick and easy path? Never."

"It certainly would have been easier as far as my family was concerned." Vorn said, "Lyssa's not speaking to me at the moment and from what little I've heard Garm's been suspended from his post in the ISB."

"Well if you'd been keeping up to date then you'd know that customs concentrates its resources on a handful of major starports on Estran and that leaves hundreds of smaller facilities short on staff. That means that morale at those places is rock bottom and unhappy customs agents are more easily bribed."

"How much will we need?" Vorn asked, "The Alliance has assigned us some operating cash and I've got my own funds but-"

"Hey, it's me." Mace interrupted, holding up his hands, "Major we won't need to bribe a single customs agent because I already know where they've been bribed to turn a blind eye to everyone unless otherwise instructed. Plus as an added bonus there's an individual located nearby who can help us get whatever we need."

Vorn frowned.

"A criminal?"

"Well he's not wanted for treason like you are. But yes, he's a criminal. He's the one I owe a lot of money to in fact. Beyond being a loan shark he's also a thief, a black marketer, a slaver and a killer. Providing we can pay him he'll get us whatever we need."

"I don't like the idea of relying on someone like that." Vorn said, "Perhaps I should meet with him first."

"Bad idea major. If he figures out who you are then he's likely to turn you in for the reward. He knows me and Tobis and he won't ask too many questions. Just let us handle it."

"Okay then." Vorn said, "But take Tharun with you as back up just in case."

"You ladies know how to use those?" Tharun asked from the doorway of Jaysica and Kara's cabin as he watched them preparing their blasters, Tobis standing behind him in silence discretely watching Jaysica. Kara's weapon was a military spec Blastech BH-17 blaster pistol, a bulky weapon capable of delivering significant stopping power at ranges of over one hundred metres in the hands of an expert shot. It was identical to the ones currently carried in the holsters worn on Tharun and Tobis' hips. On the other hand Jaysica's weapon was far smaller, a holdout blaster designed to fit in a pocket or concealed holster. Significantly less powerful than Kara's weapon the holdout blaster could still kill at close enough range though.

"I've been practicing." Jaysica replied as she slammed a power cell into the weapon and released the safety, "See." And then her face fell as the power cell dropped out and clattered to the floor.

"Practice more." Tharun said sternly and then he looked at Kara, "What about you?"

"Oh, I know what I'm doing." She replied, "I've been carrying this about for more than five years now." Then she paused before she added, "Of course I've never actually used it on a person before. A pistol isn't much



use when dog fighting TIEs.”

“Well I told the major I’d make sure you both know what you’re doing. So if you have any questions-“

“What is his problem?” Kara said suddenly, interrupting Tharun, “I mean does the boss really think he’s so much better than us?”

“Well, err, he is our superior.” Tobis said nervously.

“Oh he’s not superior to me.” Kara responded before he could get and further, “He just outranks me. Do any of us know anything about him? All I know is he’s some lord who landed a desk job and now thinks of himself as a secret agent. He’s a dilettante with delusions of grandeur if you ask me.”

“He’s a veteran.” Tharun replied, “He served in the Clone Wars as a navigator aboard a star destroyer. And he’s not afraid to stick his neck out for what’s right. He was there when I needed him and it’s cost him almost everything.”

“That’s right.” Tobis added, “He, err he knows what he’s doing.”

Kara sighed.

“He does have that kind of distinguished and charming air to him I suppose.” Then she paused, a frown briefly appearing on her face and she looked at Jaysica who was still trying to get the power cell to stay inside her blaster, “What do you think Jaysica?”

“About what?” Jaysica replied as the power cell finally remained in place.

“About the boss. What do you think? Him and a girl like me?”

“Eww Kara.” Jaysica exclaimed, “That’s disgusting. He’s really old.”

“Plus he’s got kids.” Tharun added, “Two of them. Both older than you.”

“Yes, err, well his son’s in the ISB.” Tobis added and both Jaysica and Kara looked at one another.

“You’re kidding me.” Kara said, “The boss’ kid is an Imperial G-man?”

“What about the other one?” Jaysica asked.

“His daughter’s on a safe world.” Tharun replied.

“What’s she like?” Jaysica asked and now Tharun and Tobis looked at one another as they attempted to think of how to describe Vorn’s daughter.

“Have you ever seen a rancor?” Tharun asked, “Because I think they’re more pleasant to be around. I’m not surprised she’s still single because only a complete nerf herder would ever consider marrying her.”

At that moment Jeeves approached the rebels.

“Excuse me.” The droid called out, “But Major Larcus has asked me to ensure that you are all ready for departure. Both he and Captain Grayle are wishing to leave.”

“Sure, we’re ready.” Tharun replied and then he looked around at the other rebels, “Well,” he said slowly, “I suppose this is it. What’s that old saying? May the Force be with us.”

### 3.

Capable of travelling across the galaxy in a handful of days, the hyperdrive of the *Silver Hawk* took the light transport from the rebel headquarters to the Estran system in just a few minutes.

"This never gets old." Vorn said from the co-pilot's seat as Estran's orbital facilities came into view. As the capital world of the sector, Estran served as the home base for a large portion of the Navy's sector fleet and its orbital dockyards were a vast structure capable of holding hundreds of capital ships at once. Right now one of the mile long star destroyers was visible in its berth, though looking at it from this angle Vorn could not tell if it was one of the hanger less tector-class or the far more common imperial-class. Beyond it and dwarfing the warship in size was the *Glory of Corellia*. For a moment both rebel officers looked at the vessel they had been sent to steal and were struck by the thought that it was an impossible task for just the six of them to seize control of a ship more than four thousand metres long with a crew that numbered in the hundreds. Then Vorn looked at Mace, "So where are we headed now?" he asked.

"Just over the equator." Mace replied and he pointed towards the planet below, "There are no customs ships in our path so this should only take a few minutes."

Vorn leant forwards and activated the intercom.

"Okay everyone, we're about to enter the atmosphere. We should be touching down in about ten minutes."

And he glanced at Mace who nodded to confirm Vorn's estimate.

"Okay boss. We're ready." Kara's voice responded and Vorn frowned.

"Wonderful young lady." He said as he leant back in his seat, "Instead of wanting to kill her I'm actually starting to like her."

"Really?"

"No."

As the *Silver Hawk* descended through the atmosphere of Estran, Vorn saw through the cockpit canopy that there were no other craft on the same course. The starport that Mace was heading for was an out of the way one, far from the capital city and the impressive range of services that it offered. Instead the starport chosen by Mace for its corrupted staff was located several hundred kilometres further along the coast. The sun was just setting as the *Silver Hawk* reached its destination and there were few visual clues as to the location of the docking bay, only an automated beacon to guide air traffic in safely and when the ship set down the bay itself was totally deserted.

"See, I told you it would work." Mace said, smiling at Vorn, "Not a single customs agent in sight."

"They aren't even going to make a show of doing their job?" Vorn asked as he peered through the canopy as he attempted to find a customs agent waiting for them.

"Why bother?" Mace replied, "They're paid to look the other way and don't want to risk their payoff by accidentally stumbling over something they shouldn't see."

"Like a ship full of rebels?"

"Exactly. Now the guy I need to see will probably already know I'm here so I better get going." Mace said as he got up. Vorn did the same and followed him back to the lounge where the rest of the rebels were waiting.

"Sergeant Verser," Vorn said, "I want you to accompany Captain Grayle and Tobis. They're going to make enquiries about obtaining the things we need. If things go badly they may need your help."

"Yes major." Tharun replied, "I'll just go grab my rifle." And he turned and headed for their cabin.

"Tobis we're of to see Balve." Mace then said and the smile that had been on the engineer's face vanished.

Odras Balve made his base of operations in an ordinary looking cantina close to the starport.

"I'll go in first." Tharun said as the trio looked at the building from across the street. Tharun wore a long coat that covered the combat fatigues he still wore as well as his armoured vest and weapons. Right now he carried two blasters, the pistol holstered at his hip and a standard Imperial issue Blastech E-11 rifle. The rifle was a compact design for a weapon intended for use at up to three hundred metres and with its stock folded it was little bigger than his sidearm, "I'll just wait in the main bar and you can signal me if you need me."

"Agreed." Mace responded with a nod and Tharun darted across the street and into the cantina. Once inside he took a brief look around and saw that aside from one of the bar staff no one had looked around in his direction. Clearly this was not the sort of place where individuals took an interest in strangers. Tharun smiled, knowing that this would make it easier for him and he went directly to the bar.

"Beer." He said simply, placing coins on the bar.

Without saying a word the barman poured Tharun a drink and took the money. From behind him Tharun heard the entrance opening and he guessed that Mace and Tobis had just entered. However, remembering how the cantina's other patrons had reacted to his own arrival he did not look around. Moments later Mace was stood at the bar as well, Tobis right beside him.

"I'm here to see Balve." He told the barman.

The barman then looked around at a thickset alien stood beside a nearby doorway and nodded before turning back to Mace.

"Go on through." He said, "Mister Balve has been waiting for you."

Mace and Tobis headed through the door, ignoring the thug on guard who glared at them as they passed. Both knew well enough that Odras would not tolerate his underlings harming people who owed him money without his prior approval. Of course, if Odras decided that he wanted the pair dead then the guard would undoubtedly carry that order out on the spot. Immediately beyond the door was an office that was decorated more luxuriously than the bar itself and behind a large desk sat Odras Balve himself. Odras was a human almost twenty years older than Mace who grinned at him as he entered. Behind him a massive wookiee towered over him, glaring at the two rebels as well and snarling. Mace was aware that the wookiee had at some point incurred an honour debt to Odras and now served him as a personal bodyguard and he was the reason that neither Mace nor Tobis had been disarmed prior to entering the room. Anyone attempting to harm Odras would be unlikely to survive.

"Ah Mace my good friend. Do take a seat, you engineer as well." Odras said, still grinning, "You are well I take it?"

"Quit the sweet talk Balve." Mace said as he and Tobis sat down opposite the crime boss and Mace reached into his jacket and took out a bundle of banknotes that he tossed across the desk.

"I do so like these visits of your Mace." Odras said as he began counting the money. Mace was relaxed about this but Tobis watched closely, concerned that Mace may have accidentally left one or two Alliance notes in the bundle along with the Imperial notes he was paying with, "Too many others come here with nothing but excuses for why they aren't going to be paying me." Odras went on, "But you – You always have the money. Even if you are a little late sometimes, you never show up empty handed. At this rate you'll pay off your loan in, oh maybe ten or twelve years."

Mace then glanced at Tobis.

"The datapad." He said.

"Oh, err, yes of course." Tobis replied and he produced a datapad. Then looking nervously at the wookiee bodyguard he activated the device and handed it to Odras.

"And what's this?" Odras asked, looking at Mace.

"We have friends that need everything listed there." Mace told him.

"Well let's see. Security passes, Imperial Navy uniforms, orbital flight schedules and a navi-computer primary circuit board. Yes I can arrange all of those." Odras said with an almost friendly smile, "Wait, what's this at the bottom? A dead what? Well I suppose there must be some around. Yeah, I'll get you all of this."

"By tomorrow morning." Mace added and Odras' smile vanished.

"Ah, now you see that's going to be a problem." He said, "An expensive one."

"How much?" Mace asked.

"Ten thousand."

"Ten thousand?" Tobis exclaimed suddenly.

"All in advance." Odras said and then before either of the rebels could protest further he added, "I have people to pay off. People who don't give credit on the reasonable terms I offer."

Mace took out a credit stick and held it towards Odras.

"There's ten thousand on this." He said.

"I'd prefer cash."

"If you want cash then bring your price down to eight thousand." Mace said, "Don't worry, its clean, my new friends know about hiding their activities. Now do we have a deal?"

"Yes, we have a deal." Odras replied, snatching the credit stick from Mace's grasp, "Now get out of here you pirate before I forget what a good mood I'm in. I'll have your goods delivered to your ship by dawn."

"Odras, you're a wonderful human being." Mace said as he and Tobis got back to their feet and Odras snarled. Then he waited while the two rebels left his office and then called to the guard outside.

"Morsker come in here for a moment please."

"Right away Mister Balve." The guard replied as he stepped through the door, closing it behind him, "What can I do for you?"

"Two things." Odras replied and he held out the datapad Mace had given him, "Firstly I need you to pass this to our suppliers. I need everything on there by sun up. We should already have most of it in stock but there are a few items we'll have to procure."

"Of course Mister Balve." The guard said as he accepted the datapad from his employer.

"There's one more thing as well." Odras went on.

"What is it Mister Balve?"

"Captain Grayle appears to have some new friends. I believe that one of them was waiting in the bar while he was in here, trying to act as if they were not together. I want to know who they are. I would hate to think that

the good captain was reaching out to any of our rivals.”

”I see Mister Balve. And if he is?”

“Then his new friends will have to find themselves a new captain because Mace won’t be taking anyone anywhere ever again.”

## 4.

Vorn quickly turned off the communications panel as the cockpit door opened and Kara stormed in past Jeeves and sat down in the pilot's seat, folding her arms and glaring through the canopy.

"I've had it boss." She said, "I can't take any more."

Vorn stared at her for a moment.

"I've told you not to call me that." He said.

"Oops, sorry boss. But that Jaysica is driving me up the wall. Can I move into yours and Tharun's cabin? You've got an extra bunk."

Vorn sighed.

"What's she done?" he asked.

"What's she done? What hasn't she done? She spills anything that flows and breaks everything that doesn't. Look." And Kara jumped to her feet and pulled the top of her trousers down just far enough to expose the side of her underwear, "This underwear is the only set I've got left." She said.

"Kara I-" Vorn said, averting his gaze.

"That klutz has managed to put a blaster bolt through the laundry hamper and my clothes have been roasted." Kara added as she sat down again.

Vorn frowned.

"But Mistress Bilstran, isn't discharging a blaster inside a starship a serious breach of safety regulations?" Jeeves said from behind them both.

"Yes it is." Vorn replied, "And if-" then he noticed that Kara had suddenly gone quiet, "What is it Kara?" he asked.

"Well I'm the one that actually fired the shot boss." She said, "But it was Jaysica's fault. She barged into me while I was putting it away and my finger caught the safety and the trigger."

Vorn sighed again and cradled his head in his hands.

"She's in the workshop now boss." Kara said, "And I hate to think of the damage she could do in there."

"Oh don't worry, she's shouldn't be touching any of the ship's systems." Vorn said, "I asked her to prepare some charges that's all." And Kara's eyes widened.

"Explosives? Are you insane? That's klutz is going to blow us all into orbit." She exclaimed and she got out of her seat once more and rushed to the door.

"Where are you going?" Vorn called after her.

"I'm abandoning ship boss and if you've any sense you'll come too."

Vorn got up and went after her.

"Specialist!" he yelled, "Get back here."

Kara halted and turned around, pointing towards the exit.

"Boss we need to get away from here."

"Firstly stop calling me that." Vorn told her, "And secondly come with me right now."

"Where are we going?" Kara asked.

"To the workshop to see Jaysica. I refuse to believe she's as incompetent as you claim."

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." Kara commented before accompanying Vorn to the *Silver Hawk's* workshop.

The workshop not only allowed access to several of the *Silver Hawk's* major systems, but also provided a workbench and ample space for the storage of tools. Right now Jaysica was stood by this bench carefully mixing chemicals together.

"Be very careful." She said quietly as the door slid open and Vorn looked in, Kara cowering behind him with her hand resting on his waist as she peered over his shoulder.

"Would you mind not doing that?" he said to her.

"Sorry boss, didn't mean to get you excited."

"Having your hands on my waist isn't quite enough to get me excited specialist."

"Tell me what will and I'll do it if it'll get me out of her cabin. Honest, just tell me boss."

Vorn ignored her and looked at Jaysica.

"What exactly are you doing specialist?" he asked her.

"Making explosives." She replied.

"But I thought you had a supply of detonite." Vorn said.

"Oh I do." Jaysica answered, "But since this job calls for precise damage to be inflicted I thought that using military grade explosives would be a waste. So I'm mixing up something less powerful. This'll put a hole in the navigational computer of the ship, but won't take out the entire electronics suite at the same time. The drawback is that its really unstable so don't nudge me."

Kara scowled, then a look of confusion appeared on her face.

"Hang on. How come you've not blown yourself up yet?" she asked and now Jaysica frowned.

"I'll have you know I came top of my explosives class in training with the Tarlen Militia. Did you?"

"I grew up on a farm. Farming's a reserved occupation so I didn't get drafted." Kara replied.

"Then why don't you just trust me? I know what I'm doing."

"You made me shoot my undies. Now what am I supposed to do if I get run over?" Kara snapped.

"Kara that's enough." Vorn interrupted, "Now let's just leave Jaysica to get on with her work." And he stepped away from the door before closing it, "Happy now?" he asked Kara.

"Not really boss. I'd still rather not be sharing a cabin with her."

"Anybody home?" Tharun's voice suddenly called out and Kara and Vorn stepped back into the lounge area where they saw him with both Mace and Tobis as the trio returned from meeting with Odras Balve.

"How did it go?" Vorn asked.

"It was expensive." Mace replied, "But Odras agreed to supply us with everything. He's sending it over to us by morning so it may be a good idea if you all keep out of sight until his henchmen have been and gone."

"Err, where's Jaysica?" Tobis asked, looking around.

"The klutz is back there." Kara told him, jabbing a thumb in the direction of the workshop, "Mixing explosives which I don't mind saying scares the living daylights out of me."

"Err, well, maybe I ought to go check on her." Tobis said and Kara and Tharun exchanged glances.

"Yeah you go check on the little lady lad." Tharun said, "Your girlfriend may need a hand."

"What?" Tobis responded, "Oh, err, Jaysica's not my girlfriend. We err, well I haven't"

"Just go Tobis." Mace said and Tobis headed for the workshop. When he was out of sight Kara spoke.

"Maybe I could swap bunks with him." she said, "I mean I'm sure he'd be glad to share a cabin with her."

"I'm not sharing with you." Mace commented.

"No problem." Kara replied, "You can move in with the boss and Tharun then everybody's happy. Right?"

All three male rebels looked at her and slowly shook their heads.

## 5.

"Captain Grayle! Captain Grayle!" Jeeves called out, knocking on the door of Mace's cabin.

"What is it?" Mace replied when he opened the door, following this with a yawn. Then from down the corridor came a shrill series of chirps from Harvey.

"Captain Grayle, Harvey has observed movement outside the ship." Jeeves said.

Without saying a word Mace turned and shook Tobis awake.

"Huh? What's going on?" Tobis asked.

"Maybe nothing, maybe trouble. Get dressed and grab your blaster." Mace said and he took his gun belt from where he had hung it. Fortunately Mace had chosen to sleep in his clothes that night and so he was able to head straight for the cockpit, the slower moving droids following behind him. From there he looked out into the darkened docking bay, hunting for any signs of movement.

"I don't see-" he began, but then he suddenly stopped and instead added, "No, wait there is someone out there." And he then rushed back to the lounge where he found Tobis just emerging from the corridor leading to their cabin.

"Captain, what's-" Tobis began.

"Just wait here." Mace interrupted, "We may have trouble. Wake the others but tell them to keep quiet." And then he ran to the access ramp. Drawing his blaster, Mace lowered the ramp and crept down it.

"Captain Grayle." A gruff sounding voice called out from the darkness and Mace spun around and aimed his blaster.

"Who's there?" he asked and a figure stepped into view. Immediately Mace recognised it as one of Odras' men.

"Mister Balve sent us." He said, "Now lower your blaster."

Mace returned his weapon to his holster.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"We have what you ordered." The man told him and another pair of figures stepped into view. Between them they carried a battered looking spacer's chest, "Where do you want it?"

"You can set it down right there." Mace told them.

"Are you sure? We can take it aboard if you want."

"No that's quite alright. This is my ship and I like to keep strangers off it." Mace said.

The man nodded to his companions who set the chest down where they stood. Then without another word all three backed away into the darkness and were gone. Mace waited a few moments to make certain that they were gone and then began to drag the chest towards the ramp.

"Hey in there!" he called out towards the ship, "Can you come give me a hand with this?" and Tobis promptly came rushing down the ramp to help.

"The others are getting their things together captain." He said.

"Good. Then let's hope that what's in here is worth the price we paid."

In the lounge the other rebels gathered around to see what was in the chest.

"You couldn't get dressed?" Tharun commented, looking at the robe Kara was wearing.

"Well there didn't seem like much point." She replied, "I'd only have to change into the uniform that's supposed to be in there." And she indicated the chest, "This way I only have to wait for the oven to dry my underwear." And at that point there was a 'Ping' as the oven timer finished and Kara smiled before dashing to it and opening the door.

"We make food in that Kara." Jaysica commented.

"Err no." Kara then replied, "We all make food. You make sludge that triggers the smoke alarm."

"If we can ignore Kara's laundry perhaps we should open the crate." Vorn suggested and Mace opened it up.

The chest contained everything Mace had ordered as well as the datapad he had given Odras.

"Here you go lad." Tharun said as he took the datapad from the chest, "I seem to remember this was yours."

"Don't forget to do a full wipe and reset." Mace pointed out, "You never know what Odras will have put on there."

"Oh, err, yeah. I will." Tobis said and then he reached down and removed a sealed plastic bag from inside the chest.

"Is that what I think it is?" Jaysica asked, frowning.

"It better had be." Mace said, "But I suggest we wait to check it until we're in a more ventilated location."

"Uniforms look good major." Tharun said as he removed several Imperial uniforms of various types. There were three navy service uniforms, one set of technician's overalls and a black fleet trooper's uniform.

"What about boots?" Jaysica asked as a service uniform was handed to her.

"They're just plain boots. You should have those already." Vorn told her.



"They're all scuffed." Jaysica replied.

"Then polish them." Tharun said sternly, "In fact I want to see both you and Kara in uniform ready for inspection in ten minutes and I better be able to see my face in your footwear."

Kara groaned.

"Well what are you waiting for?" Tharun then asked, looking at both young women and as he tossed another service uniform at Kara he snapped, "Move!" and both of them rushed back to their cabin," So what about the rest of the gear?" he then asked.

"IDs look good." Vorn said as he studied a set of identity cards before handing them to Tobis, "Can you get our pictures on these?"

"Err, yeah. But, well, what about the biometric data?" Tobis replied.

"Don't worry." Mace told him, "I doubt that the Empire will do more than cursory checks. They won't actually look at the chips in any of those."

"Not unless we try to enter a restricted area or do something that draws unnecessary attention to us." Vorn added and then he, Mace and Tharun all looked in the direction Jaysica had gone.

"Keep your girlfriend under control lad." Tharun then said as he turned back to face Tobis.

"What?" Tobis responded, "She's not-"

"Never mind." Vorn interrupted as took out the final item from inside the chest, a flat plastic case that when opened revealed a circuit board.

"That looks good." Mace said and then he looked at Tobis, "Can Harvey sort this out?" he asked

"Oh, err yes captain. Harvey should be able to rig the circuit to corrupt the navigation data request and always give the same answer."

"Good." Vorn said, "Then I suggest we all go and get ready." Then he looked at Mace, "I hope you don't mind me borrowing your engineer for this."

"Not all major. I'm sorry I won't be going along with you." Mace replied.

"Well don't worry about that. We'll be back before the transport leaves and we'll all go aboard together when it comes out of hyperspace."

"Unit ready for inspection sir." Tharun announced, saluting Vorn. Tharun wore the fleet trooper's uniform with his usual blaster holstered at his side. Meanwhile behind him Jaysica, Kara and Tobis were stood in a line with Jaysica and Tobis at attention while Kara's posture was more relaxed. Jaysica and Kara both wore service uniforms with rank badges identifying them as enlisted personnel, while Tobis wore the technician's overalls. This left the last of the service uniforms for Vorn, who's rank badge identified him as a captain.

"Very good." He said, "I think we'll fool the Empire long enough to get in and back out." Then he looked towards the cockpit and called out, "How long Mace?"

"Five minutes." Mace's voice replied, "We're on final approach now."

"Good. You heard him." Vorn told the rebels gathered in front of him, "Now grab your gear and lets get moving. Jaysica, don't forget Penny."

Since the *Silver Hawk* had only flown from elsewhere on the planet the authorities at the starport just outside the capital paid it little attention, especially when the five individuals who disembarked were all wearing Imperial uniforms and presented what looked like valid identification as they made their way into the military controlled section.

Vorn glanced down at his datapad.

"We're looking for flight trill herf xesh one one three eight." He said, "It should take us right up to the orbital dock where the *Glory of Corellia* is."

"Then we just stroll onboard do we boss?" Kara asked.

"Yes and stop calling me 'boss'."

"I'm not calling you 'boss' boss. I'm calling the Imperial captain you're impersonating 'boss'."

Vorn frowned and then halted.

"Look." He said, pointing along a row of shuttles to one that was marked up THX-1138, "That's our flight."

"Oh, err, it looks kind of busy." Tobis pointed out.

"Yes it does, doesn't it?" Tharun added as he looked at the column of white armoured figures lined up as they marched aboard the shuttle.

"What are they doing there?" Jaysica asked, "I thought that there were just supposed to be a small technical party on board."

"Well it appears that someone decided to add a contingent of marines." Kara said, "Boss, I've got a very bad feeling about this."

"Don't worry." Vorn replied, "Once we've sabotaged the ship and are safely back on the *Silver Hawk* we can call headquarters and tell Colonel Collis what he's facing. Now hurry up before they decide to leave without us."

The rebels dashed towards the shuttle.

"Just in time." An officer called out to them, waving them aboard and not even bothering to check their identities, "We're about to lift off."

The rebels rushed up the ramp as the officer stood clear for it to be raised and they found themselves in the crowded interior of the shuttle, with three full platoons of stormtroopers occupying most of the rows of seats while their commanding officer was sat up at the front with the shuttle crew. Fortunately there was a set five vacant seats near to the back of the shuttle and the rebels took those. This put them in amongst the stormtroopers, but the elite soldiers acted as if they had not even noticed them. They all kept their helmets on throughout the flight and did not even speak amongst themselves, let alone try and engage any of the rebels in conversation.

There were no viewpoints in the compartment where the rebels were sat and their position did not allow them to see clearly through the cockpit's viewport. Therefore the first any of them knew about coming to their destination was when the pilot announced it.

"Docking in T-minus five minutes." He called out.

"Okay this is it." Vorn said softly, well aware that they were all surrounded by Imperial troops, "Just stick close to me okay?"

"Got it boss." Kara replied and Vorn frowned again.

There was a dull 'clump' as the shuttle touched down in one of the hangars built into the orbital dockyard and Kara gasped.

"Where's the Empire getting its pilots nowadays." She said, "I could do much better than that."

"You and me both." The stormtrooper sat behind her suddenly said, much to her surprise and she smiled nervously at the helmeted soldier.

"Come on quick." Vorn said as the ramp began to open, "Before we have to try and squeeze through all this lot." And he got up and rushed for the ramp, Kara, Tharun and Tobis close behind.

"Err, where's Jaysica?" Tobis said, looking around.

"There she is." Kara said, pointing to where Jaysica was attempting to pull the bag containing Penny from under her chair whilst all around her the stormtroopers were getting back into lines and marching out of the shuttle.

"I'm so sorry." Jaysica said as some of the stormtroopers squeezed past her, "My bag's stuck. I don't suppose you could lend me a hand could you? One of you? Anyone?" the stormtroopers however remained focused on their duties and simply disembarked from the shuttle under the watchful eyes of their officer. The rebels then watched as the stormtroopers marched from the hangar. With the shuttle now empty Tobis set down his own bag that contained some of the unit's bulkier equipment and rushed back aboard to help Jaysica untangle hers from the seat.

"Those marines better not be setting up a checkpoint." Kara said, still watching the direction they had marched in, "We'll never get past them if they are."

"Well we'll just have to hope they're not then." Vorn replied.

"And if they are?" Tharun asked.

"Then we try and find another way to the transport. There has to be an airlock around here somewhere and spacesuits tend to be stored near them."

"Oh great. A spacewalk." Tharun commented while Kara grinned.

"Yeah, I can hardly wait to see how Jaysica handles zero-gee." She said then she mimed someone vomiting and Tharun's expression turned to a grin also, "Oh come on boss, you've got admit that would be funny." She then said when she saw the stern look on Vorn's face.

"Oh okay it would be." Vorn admitted, now joining the others in smiling, "But stop calling me 'boss'."

With Tobis' help, Jaysica untangled her bag and the pair came running down the access ramp.

"Finally." Kara said as Tobis picked up his own bag.

"Indeed." Vorn added, "Now let's get a move on. We're on a clock here."

The rebel group hurried the short distance through the space station towards where the *Glory of Corellia* was docked. At the airlock they saw the double column of stormtroopers marching into the ship while their officer stood talking with a man whose civilian clothing suggested that he was part of the crew. Either side of the docking hatch stood a fleet trooper, but neither seemed to be doing anything while the stormtrooper company boarded the ship.

"We're in luck." Vorn said, "Those guards may not both us at all if we can look like we're with those marines."

"Ah, err, but our uniforms don't match them." Tobis pointed out.

"Maybe not lad, but we came up on the same shuttle so even they may think we're supposed to be going aboard with them." Tharun said to him.

"Can't hurt to try." Vorn said and he waved the others on as he hurried to catch up with the stormtroopers.

Sure enough, neither the stormtroopers or the fleet guards seemed to notice as the rebels joined the back of the column. The guards assuming that they were support staff for the stormtroopers while the stormtroopers and their officer assumed that they were associated with the technical crew they knew to be aboard already.

Once onboard the *Glory of Corellia* the stormtroopers continued on towards their barracks, leaving the rebels alone.

Okay," Vorn began as he looked around, "Kara you and I will go find another airlock. You need to go EVA. The rest of you go find the ship's computer." Then he looked specifically at Tobis and held out his hand, "We'll need the package." He said.

"Err, right. Yes sir." Tobis replied and he undid his bag and took out the sealed package.

"Thanks." Vorn said as he took the package. Then he added, "Kara, with me."

The group then split up, with Kara and Vorn heading to the opposite side of the ship and the others heading for the prow. Before setting off Jaysica opened up her bag and removed Penny, setting the mouse droid down and activating it.

"Come on Penny." She said, "We need to find the computer."

In response the little droid whistled and set off ahead of Jaysica and the others in her group, relying on the technical specifications provided by the Alliance for guidance.

Despite having seen a large force of stormtroopers come aboard and well aware that there was a full crew and a party of genuine Imperial observers present on the ship Vorn and Kara saw no one as they navigated the corridors to the airlock they expected to find on the opposite side. However, given the massive size of the vessel when compared to the actual number of occupants this was not surprising.

"So who were you talking to when I walked in on you?" Kara asked suddenly, keeping her voice low.

"When?" Vorn replied.

"When you were in the cockpit of the *Silver Hawk* with Jeeves." Kara said, "The moment I walked in you cut the channel."

"It was just an old friend. Someone that may be able to help us out."

"So when are you going to introduce them to the rest of us?"

"Oh about the time Mustafar freezes over." Vorn said.

"Why? Do I embarrass you?"

"Yes. Now shut up. Here's the airlock. I'll keep watch while you find what we need."

Vorn then stood and watched the corridor as Kara began to go through a row of lockers located beside the clearly labelled inner door of the airlock.

"Get a move on." Vorn said softly, "And remember vacc suit, not space suit. We don't have time for pre-breathing."

A vacuum suit was a much lighter weight version of a space suit and unlike the bulkier type that was in effect a pressurised balloon it prevented decompression by gripping tightly against the wearer's body. This meant that it did not require the lengthy procedure of pre breathing oxygen prior to putting on the suit since in order to maintain mobility a space suit could only be inflated at a low pressure and without the pre-breathing procedure the wearer could develop deadly bubbles of gas in their bloodstream.

"Hey boss this needs to be right." Kara replied, "I need to find one just the right size. Ah, here we go." And she pulled out a vacuum suit and its associated helmet and life support pack, "Fully charged, just as regulations require." She then added before opening her tunic, at which point Vorn suddenly turned to face the other direction. Kara smiled, "You know I like that you do that boss." She said.

"Do what? And stop calling me boss."

"The way you turn around while I get undressed. It makes me feel like a real lady."

"Well I'm glad that my good manners count for something." Then there was the sound of footsteps from down the corridor and Vorn hissed, "Someone's coming!"

"What?" Kara exclaimed and then as she too heard the sound of booted feet echoing off the deck plates she unexpectedly lunged at Vorn.

"What are you two doing here?" a voiced called out sternly as the Imperial officer came around the corner to see Kara and Vorn locked in a tight embrace, their lips pressed together. Kara released her grip on Vorn and both rebels turned to face the new arrival, noticing the rank badge that indicated he was a commander. As she turned Kara's tunic fell open and the officer was momentarily distracted as he stared at her barely covered chest.

This was all the opportunity that Kara needed and as she gasped and held her tunic shut she lashed out with her other hand and slapped the officer as hard as she could. Vorn winced as he heard the sharp 'crack' as her hand struck the man's face and he staggered back. But he also saw his chance and reaching into his pocket he drew his hold out blaster and shot the officer in the chest.

"That was some quick thinking Kara." He said as he put his weapon away again, "Now get suited up while I deal with this guy." And he began to drag the body into the airlock before rifling through its pockets and removing everything he found. When he emerged Kara was fastening up her suit and he reached down and picked up the plastic package, "Don't forget this." He said, putting it in the airlock with the body.

As soon as Kara had finished putting on the vacc suit she entered the airlock and waited as it depressurised.

"You reading me boss?" she asked, testing the frequency to which her suit's built in comlink was set.

"Loud and clear." Vorn replied using his own comlink, "But keep chatter to a minimum, we can't be certain that the channel is secure."

"Got it boss. Cycle's complete, opening outer door now."

Kara just about heard the sound of the outer door opening, the vibrations passing through the deck plating and up through her own body. Vorn had positioned the body of the dead officer next to the outer door and so when Kara gave it a kick it was propelled out into space where it tumbled away from the ship.

"Okay here goes." Kara said to herself and with the package in her hand she stepped out onto the hull.

Making use of the magnetic soles on her vacuum suit Kara headed towards the stern of the ship until she found what she was looking for, an inspection cover for a power line and she bent down and pulled it off.

Letting go of the cover she allowed it simply float away from the ship just as she had done when disposing of the body and began to tear open the package. Inside was a dead mynock. Silicon based lifeforms that lived in the vacuum of space; mynocks were well known for latching onto starships and feeding off their power. It was not known which star system the species had first evolved in, but over tens of thousands of years they had spread across the galaxy. Kara took out the tube of adhesive sealant from her vacuum suit's emergency kit and squeezed out some around the mynock's circular mouth. Then she pressed it against the exposed power cable and held it there while she counted to ten. Upon releasing her grip the mynock remained in place and Kara smiled. Then she tossed the empty plastic wrapper into space and turned around and headed back to the airlock.

"All done?" Vorn asked as Kara stepped in through the inner door and removed her helmet.

"Just as planned boss." She replied, "If they send someone out to investigate why they've dropped out of hyperspace it'll look like a mynock disrupted the power to the engines and got fried in the process. Couldn't have them suspecting little old us now could we?"

"No we couldn't." Vorn agreed, "Now lets' just hope that the others can arrange for the ship's hyperdrive to fail at the right time."

## 6.

Unlike Kara and Vorn the other three rebels encountered a fair number of people as they made their way through the ship towards the computer core. Penny's instructions had been to avoid places where there were any of the Imperial overseers, the ship's crew would likely just assume that the rebels were part of this group but the Imperial personnel themselves may notice the unfamiliar faces. Therefore, although they reached the computer without incident it did take longer than they had hoped.

There was just a single technician present in the core, there to monitor the performance of the ship's network and he looked up when the door to the room slid open.

"Is there a problem?" he asked, looking directly at the rebels.

Tharun glanced at Tobis.

"Tell him lad." He said softly.

"What? Oh err, yes." Tobis said, "Err, I mean no. There's no problem. But we – we need to err."

"We need to check out your navigation and communication hardware." Tharun interrupted, "Isn't that right?" he then added, looking back at Tobis.

"Oh, err. Yes. That's right."

"Well the nav computer's over there." The technician said, pointing, "And the comms are right underneath it. How long will this take?"

"Err, just a few minutes I hope." Tobis said.

"Good, because I've got work of my own to do and you guys are making everything harder than it needs to be." The technician said and he turned back to his terminal.

"Come on, let's get to work." Tharun whispered and the three rebels walked over the navigation computer and crouched down behind it so they were out of sight of the technician.

Tobis worked quickly, removing the panel covering the computer to expose the circuitry beneath it.

"So which is the main board?" Jaysica asked quietly, sliding a packet of her homemade explosive from her pocket.

"Err, this one." Tobis told her, tapping one of the boards and then he slid it free of its mounting.

"Can you just do that?" Tharun asked with a frown, "Won't they notice?"

"Err, I shouldn't think so." Tobis replied, "The board doesn't become live until the ship's powering up its hyperdrive so there's no reason for anyone to be monitoring its status."

"And I need it out so I can add this to it." Jaysica added as she opened the packet containing the explosive paste and squeezed it gently out onto the board. Then using the empty packet to keep the paste from her skin she began to spread it around the entire board.

"So what will this do?" Tharun asked.

"As the board runs parts of it will heat up." Jaysica explained while Tobis removed another nearby circuit board, this one from the communication system, "And that heat will trigger the explosives and fry this entire board." She then swapped the board from the navigation computer for the other one Tobis was holding and began to smear it with explosive as well.

"What about the others next to them?" Tharun asked.

"Well apart from this one they should be fine. The flash from the nav computer should trigger a reaction from the explosive on this board as well but the casing will provide more than enough protection from the flame for the rest and there won't be much the way of shrapnel. I doubt that anyone looking directly at the board from as close as we are will get more than some singed eyebrows."

"Err, it should just look like an overload." Tobis said.

"There, all done." Jaysica then said with a smile.

"Then let's get this board back in and get out of here." Tharun said, "Before that guy over there figures out we're up to something."

Carefully so as not to trigger the explosive prematurely, Tobis slid the circuit board back into place and secured it while Jaysica moved backwards and took out a foil wrapped bar of candy that she unwrapped and began to eat.

"Can't you wait?" Tharun asked.

"I'm hungry." Jaysica protested, her mouth still full.

"You could at least offer to share." Tharun replied.

"Err - Actually I don't think you should be eating in here." Tobis commented as he picked up the panel.

"Oh what harm can it do?" Jaysica asked, "Its just a bit of candy." And she rolled the now empty wrapper up into a ball and with a grin she flicked it at Tharun. The former mercenary scowled as the tiny foil ball bounced off his helmet and then his jaw dropped as he saw it fly through the open panel of the navigation computer.

The ball dropped out of sight and then there was a brief flash from below accompanied by a sharp 'crack' as something short-circuited.

"What the hell did you do?" Tharun hissed.

"It was an accident," Jaysica protested.

"Hey what's going on over there?" the technician suddenly called out.

"Nothing." Tharun replied, glaring at Jaysica. Then in a lower tone he looked at Tobis and asked, "What's happened?"

Tobis peered into the computer and shone a work light inside.

"Err, I think it struck the boards below." He said, "They – they're, err, well they're part of the ship to dockyard intercom system."

"So not the nav computer?" Jaysica said, "Well that's okay then isn't it?"

"That kind of depends on what that short circuit just triggered doesn't it?" Tharun said sternly.

On the bridge of the *Glory of Corellia* the comscan operator noticed that a light had come on at the side of his console.

"Captain, signal from traffic control. We're clear for departure." He called out.

"Already?" the captain replied as he approached to see for himself. Sure enough the light that had just come on was indicated 'LAUNCH CLEARANCE'. Looking across the bridge the captain called out to the senior Imperial officer assigned to his ship, "Commander Asran do you know anything about this?" he asked.

"No captain, I've not been informed of an early departure." Asran replied, "But we did inform control that we're fully loaded and the security company is aboard. They must have moved us up the schedule."

"Well I'm not going to question this and risk losing our slot then." The captain said and he looked around to address the entire bridge crew, "Okay people we've got an early departure. Seal us up and take us out. Helm, I want a half power burn until we're far enough out to make the jump."

The crew went into action immediately, double-checking that the ship was properly secured for launch and got ready for departure. None of which went unnoticed by the traffic controllers of the orbital dockyard.

"*Glory of Corellia* what the hell are you doing?" an angry sounding voice yelled over the communication link, "You're not cleared for departure?"

"Then why did you give us clearance?" the captain demanded in return.

"We didn't. Who is this?"

"This is Captain Dowe and I'm telling you that we've got an all clear signal at this end."

The Imperial officer then stepped closer and joined in as well.

"This is Commander Asran of the Imperial Navy." He said, "I can confirm that we've received an automated clearance signal."

"Well we didn't send it commander." The controller replied, "Captain Dowe you better shut down your drives or-"

"Or what?" Dowe interrupted, "Now look here, do you have any idea how much it costs to start up and shut down a ship like this? We've been given an all clear and we're damn well going. Unless you'd like to tell your superiors why I'm billing them for the mistake." And then he shut off the communications link, "Helm, continue to take us out." He ordered.

The confusion over the *Glory of Corellia's* sudden and unexpected launch spread to other parts of the orbiting dockyards as well. The force of frigates detailed to act as escort to the massive vessel were unprepared for this and they were still docked as the *Glory of Corellia* began to move.

"What the kriff is happening?" Vorn signalled over his comlink.

"The ship is launching major." Tharun replied as he, Jaysica and Tobis hurried down a corridor towards the airlock they had used to get aboard the ship.

"Yes I can see that. We're by a viewport and wondering why everything seems to be moving outside. Now how about you tell me why sergeant?"

"Tell him it wasn't my fault." Jaysica said to Tharun.

"Jaysica did it." Tharun said and Jaysica's face fell, "Is there any way off the ship for us?"

"No. We're going along for the ride." Vorn replied.

"Oh, err, what about the *Silver Hawk*?" Tobis asked, "We didn't, well, um, we didn't tell Captain Grayle to-"

"We'll just have to hope that Mace notices we've gone and heads to the rendezvous point before we drop back out of hyperspace." Vorn said.

"And what about all those stormtroopers boss?" Kara asked, "How will we let the colonel know in time?"

"Yes, well it looks like we may need to figure out a way of dealing with them ourselves." Vorn replied.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Kara said.

"Captain Grayle sir! You must come quickly." Jeeves called out.

"What's wrong?" Mace replied, "Has the major checked in?"

"Oh no sir. But Harvey has been monitoring the *Glory of Corellia* from the cockpit and he says that the ship is leaving."

"Leaving?" Mace repeated as he rushed to the cockpit with Jeeves shuffling along behind him, "But it's not suppose to leave for another three hours yet."

"Precisely sir." Jeeves said, "And it appears that it is leaving with Major Larcus and the others still on board. What are we to do?"

"Do? We head to Procis that's what." Mace said as he began to bring the *Silver Hawk's* systems on line, "We need to meet up with the others when they come out of hyperspace."

Plugged into the *Silver Hawk's* flight console Harvey let out a low whistle.

"I entirely agree Harvey." Jeeves said, "I've got a very bad feeling about this as well."



## 7.

"Its us!" Tharun called out as he, Jaysica and Tobis came rushing around the corner to find Kara and Vorn both waiting with blasters in their hands.

"You did this!" Kara exclaimed, taking a step towards Jaysica before Vorn held her back.

"Never mind that now." He said and then he looked at Jaysica, "How will our early departure affect your bomb?" he asked her.

"Not at all." She replied.

"Are you certain?" Vorn asked.

"Oh yes sir. The explosive is designed to go off when parts of it reach a specific temperature and that will only happen after a specific amount of flight time in hyperspace. When that time starts is irrelevant. But can't we just leave? What about an escape pod?"

"Because we're over Estran." Kara pointed out, "The most densely populated and heavily defended planet in the sector. As soon as we launched we'd be seen."

"Look all we need to do is keep out of sight for an hour or so." Vorn said, "I'm sure we can manage that. And while we're at it we'll try and figure out a way of dealing with those stormtroopers before Colonel Collis and his men come aboard."

As planned the *Glory of Corellia* and the trio of escort frigates jumped into hyperspace together. The *Glory of Corellia* was much slower than the frigates in both hyperspace and realspace and so it was no effort for them to catch up with the transport. Additionally when the *Glory of Corellia* did not drop out of hyperspace with the frigates their crews were not immediately suspicious. Instead the ships deployed their fighters to ensure that the area was free of pirates and rebels and waited for both the *Glory of Corellia* and the warships it was supposed to refuel.

Meanwhile the circuitry of the *Glory of Corellia's* navigational computer were steadily heating up as it processed the data being fed into it by the ship's sensors and the hyperdrive itself. This heat was then being transferred into the highly unstable explosive compound that Jaysica had covered it in. At first there was just a slight wisp of smoke from the explosive, but as soon as the first part of it reached the critical temperature there was a flash of flame that spread across the board, burning off components and melting the delicate tracks. Exactly as Jaysica had planned the flash of heat subsequently triggered a second explosion from the communications board and between them there was an audible crackle and a plume of acrid smelling smoke that billowed out from behind the panel covering the circuitry and causing the computer technician to look around just as the ship lurched suddenly.

"What's happening?" Captain Dowe demanded as through the bridge viewport he saw the streaking lights of hyperspace coalesce back into the stars of realspace while the ship shook.

"Hyperdrive malfunction." One of the bridge crew called out, "We're back in realspace."

"Yes I can see that for myself." Dowe replied, waving at the viewport from his seat at the centre of the bridge,

"But why? And where the hell are we?"

"Looks like interstellar space sir." The navigator said, "About six light hours from Procis."

"Procis?" Dowe asked, "What about our escort?"

"Probably right where we were supposed to come out of hyperspace." Commander Asran said. Then he folded his arms and added, "Don't worry captain, we can just signal our escorts and they'll be here in a few minutes to keep watch while your crew figure out what went wrong and fix it."

"They better had be." Dowe said.

"Subspace comms are of line captain." The ship's communications officer reported, "I guess the same fault that took out the hyperdrive must have affected the subspace radio as well."

Dowe sighed.

"Six light hours to Procis?" he said, "Then I guess we're stuck here for six hours while we wait for a radio transmission to reach them."

"More than that." Asran corrected him, "The outpost is deep in system and it will take four to eight hours for a radio signal to reach them on top of the time for it to reach the outer edge of the system. I suggest we get comfortable."

Dowe frowned.

"Well I'm not just going to sit here and do nothing. If we're forced to sit here and wait for half a day then I want to know what went wrong with that jump."

"You know captain," Asran then said, "it seems rather odd to me that first we get a signal telling us to launch three hours early and then we're unexpectedly forced out of hyperspace and left completely cut off in the middle of nowhere. Don't you?"

"Yes I do." Dowe answered, "Perhaps you should get those stormtroopers of yours to prepare for action."  
"Well I don't see that it can hurt." Asran said and he headed to closest intercom panel.

The Tector-class star destroyer *Horrific* and an accompanying attack line of older Venator-class ships were waiting when the frigates assigned to escort the *Glory of Corellia* emerged from hyperspace.

"Comscan where's the tanker?" the commanding officer of the Tector-class vessel asked as he looked out through the bridge viewports.

"No sign of her admiral." A lieutenant replied from one of the crew pits, "Just the escorts."

The admiral frowned.

"Then get me one of those escorts Lieutenant Halowan." He ordered and he paced towards the rear of the bridge.

"Channel open now sir." Halowan replied and a glowing hologram of another man in a navy officer's uniform appeared.

"Captain Sayer this is Admiral Hall. Where is my fuel?"

"I don't know admiral. The *Glory of Corellia* entered hyperspace with my line. However, as you may have noticed we are ahead of schedule. The transport left spacedock without clearance and we had to rush to catch up. It's possible that whatever caused her to leave early has also cause her to go off course."

Admiral Hall scowled.

"Get me Captain Naje's ships as well." He called out, glancing around at Lieutenant Halowan and a few moments later three more holographic figures appeared, all of them women.

"Captain Naje reporting." The oldest of the three said as Admiral Hall looked along the line of holograms but he did not return the greeting.

"As I'm sure you've all noticed the *Glory of Corellia* has not emerged from hyperspace as planned and I suspect either foul play or a technical fault." He instead responded to all of the holograms, "My ship lacks the hangar capacity to mount a serious rescue operation so I will remain here to co-ordinate the search and wait to see if the ship arrives of it's own accord. The rest of you are to spread out. Captain Sayer I want your ships to head back towards Estran while Captain Naje's line spreads out around us."

"Admiral the search could be made easier if I'm allowed to deploy my scouts." One of the two female captains subordinate to Captain Naje stated.

"Yes I am aware of that Captain Celtis." The Admiral replied with a frown, covering up the fact that it had not occurred to him to order scouts ships to be launched in addition to the capital ships available to him, "Captain Naje, Captain Yay, you will also deploy all the hyperspace capable scouts you have in a quarter parsec spread, increasing by another quarter for each full parsec from this point. I want that transport found. Hall out." And then without even waiting for the holograms to fade he turned and strode back towards the front of the bridge, "Comscan I want all sensors to maximum. Find me that transport. Oh and let Fleet Admiral Vretan know that we may be delayed in joining him."

"On it right now sir." Lieutenant Halowan replied as he tapped at the screen of his datapad.

Unseen by any of the crewmen around him was the exact nature of the message he was composing.  
*Glory of Corellia's flight disrupted as planned. Assume stage two in process.*

Tharun stood at doorway, his hand resting on the blaster rifle he had recovered from Tobis' bag as he peered in the corridor outside to keep watch. The five rebels had simply found a remote storeroom that had the look of not having been used for some time and chosen to wait here while they considered their next actions.

"Did you feel that?" Kara said as she felt the ship shudder.

"Yes. Err, we've just dropped out of hyperspace." Tobis responded.

"So the little lady's charge actually worked then?" Tharun said from the doorway, "I'm impressed."

"Thank you." Jaysica said and then she frowned, "Hang on. Was that supposed to be an insult?"

"Well assuming that the ship's long range communications are also offline then we should have several hours before Mace turns up." Vorn said.

"Assuming that he's in position and not still on Estran waiting for us." Kara commented.

"For now we assume he's ready to proceed with the plan." Vorn said, "But we still need to come up with a way of dealing with those stormtroopers."

"What about luring them into ambushes a few at a time?" Jaysica asked and apart from Tobis the others all glared at her, "What?" she then asked.

"If we do deal a few of them that way then we'll give away our presence here." Kara pointed out, "Then how long do you think it will take a company of marines to find us?"

"Not to mention they'll figure out that it was sabotage that disabled the ship and refuse to let anyone other than Imperial military personnel aboard." Tharun added.

Then Vorn smiled.

"Actually I think that could work." He said.

"What? Us getting killed? How does that help boss?" Kara asked him.

"Oh we won't get killed." Vorn answered, "But if we can get all the stormtroopers on the ship to come to us then with a bit more sabotage we can seal them all in somewhere where they can't do any harm. Oh and stop calling me 'boss.' I won't tell you again."

"Sure boss."

"So where exactly should we try and seal these stormtroopers in?" Tharun asked. Then he looked at Tobis, "You've been studying the plans lad. Got any suggestions?"

"Well, err, I've been looking at them for less than an hour." Tobis replied.

"I was thinking about one of the storage sections." Vorn said without waiting for any further information from Tobis.

"Hang on a minute boss." Kara said, "This ship is carrying fuel. You do remember that don't you? All it takes is one stormtrooper to fire off his blaster next to one of the storage tanks and the entire ship will go, taking all of us with it."

"Err, actually no it won't." Tobis said and he held out his datapad on which a schematic of the *Glory of Corellia* was shown, "Each individual section is isolated by armoured blast doors and flame arresters in the ducting. An explosion in one section can only spread to an adjacent one if the blast doors are left open or the flame arresters removed."

"So that's what we do then?" Jaysica asked.

"Yes." Vorn said, "But it has to be timed right. We have to wait for Mace to already be on board with the rigged circuit board. We'll stage an attack that makes it look like we're trying to stop the board from being installed."

"So the crew will believe it's genuine?" Kara asked.

"Exactly." Vorn replied, "Then we try and draw the marine contingent into the hold and seal them into as few sections as we can."

"Err, there is one slight problem major." Tobis said nervously.

"Go ahead corporal." Vorn replied.

"Well, ah, its just that the storage areas are sealed by default and monitored from the bridge." Tobis explained.

"Then we need to not only override the bridge controls to unseal the hold, but also do it without anyone noticing." Vorn said, "Can you do it?"

"No pressure here lad." Tharun commented.

"Err. Not without access to the bridge." Tobis said.

"Stormtroopers." Tharun hissed.

"We're supposed to get stormtroopers to take us to the bridge?" Kara asked.

"No, stormtroopers." Tharun repeated as he ducked back inside the storeroom.

"We need somewhere to hide." Vorn said, looking around, but the room was lined with narrow lockers far too small for even Jaysica to fit inside and there was only one door.

"Boss, cards." Kara said.

"What?" Vorn replied.

"The deck of cards you took from that officer you killed. I saw them."

"Of course." Vorn said as he plucked the deck of cards from his pocket, "Everyone sit in a circle."

"What for?" Jaysica asked.

"Because we're all hiding in here and playing cards instead of doing work." Tharun said as he dashed to the centre of the room with the others and sat down while Vorn passed out some cards, "Stang." Tharun muttered, "This is the best damned hand I've been dealt and it doesn't count for anything."

"What's going on in here?" a voice called out from the storeroom door and the rebels looked around to see a pair of stormtroopers standing there.

"Oh hi guys." Kara said, "Care to join us for a few hands?"

"Who are you?" one of the stormtroopers demanded, "What's your operating number?"

"What was that?" Tharun said, "I couldn't quite make it out."

"He asked who we are." Jaysica said and Kara scowled at her, realising what Tharun was up to.

"Really, you understood that?" she said looking straight at Jaysica. Then she turned to Vorn, "Didn't you hear a weird buzzing?" she asked.

"I did." Vorn said, setting down his cards and standing up. Then he approached the pair of stormtroopers and spoke directly to them, "Could you say something again? I think your comms are acting up."

"There's nothing wrong with our comms. Now who are you?"

"Did you just ask who I am? Your voice is very distorted." Vorn said and he indicated Tobis, "Perhaps you should let him have a look at your helmets."

"What? Oh, err, yes. I could check the transmitters for you." Tobis said and he too got to his feet.

The two stormtroopers glanced at one another for a moment and then one of them reached up and removed his helmet, followed by the second one.

"You still shouldn't be here." The first stormtrooper said as he held his helmet towards Tobis.

"Look we just came here for friendly game of cards that's all." Vorn said, trying hard not to stare at the identical faces of the two cloned soldiers, "We didn't mean any harm by it."

"Well you and your team should get back to your duty station sir." The second stormtrooper said as Vorn took his helmet from him and glanced inside.

"Oh we will." Vorn said and then he paused, "Actually I think I see the problem right here." And he held the helmet back towards the stormtrooper.

"Where?" the stormtrooper asked, leaning forwards.

"Right here!" Vorn snapped and he swung the helmet upwards and slammed it into the stormtrooper's face.

As he staggered back with blood pouring from his nose Vorn dropped the helmet, drew his blaster and shot him in the head. At the same time the other stormtrooper raised his rifle but before he could fire Tobis dived forwards and took him off his feet, the pair of them landing in a heap on the deck. Tharun leapt up and rushed to help, slamming his fist into the stormtrooper's face while Tobis held him fast. Then Tharun wrapped an arm around the stormtrooper's neck and twisted until there was the sound of bone snapping and the stormtrooper went limp.

"Would someone mind explaining what's going on?" Jaysica asked, "Won't they know that we just killed two of their men? I thought the plan was to wait until Captain Grayle got here."

"They won't know we killed anyone little lady." Tharun replied, picking up the helmet Vorn had dropped.

"But when those two don't report in-" Jaysica began.

"They took their own helmets off laser brain." Kara pointed out, "That means that they will have shutdown their comlinks and when Tharun and the boss put on that armour they'll still work."

"And we should be able to escort Tobis to the bridge without drawing undue attention." Vorn added.

"What about us girls boss?" Kara asked.

"Well if we're taking their armour," Vorn replied, looking down at the two dead stormtroopers, "I suppose you better get rid of the bodies."

"And make sure they're not found." Tharun added.

## 8.

"Emergency. Emergency. This is the *Glory of Corellia*. We have been forced out of hyperspace in interstellar space six light hours outside the Procis system at bearing one four six by twenty one. Our subspace communications are also disabled and we require urgent assistance."

Mace grinned when he heard this and he looked at Jeeves, the droid being sat beside him in the co-pilot's seat.

"That's the signal we were waiting for." He said, "What's our lead going to be?"

"Given the current position of the planetary bodies in this system it will take an addition five point three hours for that transmission to reach the nearest Imperial vessel Captain Grayle sir." The droid replied and Mace looked down at Harvey.

"Okay Harvey, plot the jump and let's go be helpful."

There were crewmen rushing about frantically when the bridge doors slid open and Tobis stepped through. Behind him stood Tharun and Vorn, both clad in the armour of the two dead stormtroopers. Right now they were the only ones in Imperial uniform present, all of the genuine Imperial personnel having left to try and determine what had gone wrong.

"So which one's the station that monitors the hold then lad?" Tharun said softly.

"Oh, err." Tobis replied as he looked around, "Oh, its that one over there." And he nodded towards a control station that was currently unmanned.

"Nobody there." Tharun commented.

"They've probably got bigger things on their mind." Vorn replied, "But it looks like the Force is with us because it means we're less likely to be spotted. Now let's get moving before anyone notices us just stood here and starts asking questions."

The rebels began to move forwards, but just as Vorn was stepping through the doorway there was a 'crack'.

"Oof." He exclaimed as Tharun and Tobis both looked at him.

"Are you alright major?" Tharun asked.

"Fine. It was just my shoulder. I can hardly see in this thing." Vorn replied.

Calmly the three rebels then walked across the bridge towards the vacant control station where Tobis sat down and began to access the systems that monitored the cargo hold and controlled all of it's doors.

"What are you doing?" a voice asked sternly and the rebels looked around to see one of the *Glory of Corellia*'s officers staring at them from close by, "I thought all Imperial personnel were supposed to be looking for the fault."

"Well, err, I am." Tobis replied.

"What? Here on the bridge?" the officer asked.

"Well. Ahh. It's just that, well-"

"Spit it out man. I don't have all day."

"Err, well its just that if any of the cargo had leaked it could have unbalanced the ship in hyperspace and caused a surge in the power distribution network." Tobis said, "So I'm checking for leaks."

"Of course." The officer said, irritated that it had not occurred to him, "Carry on." And he turned and walked away.

"That was close." Vorn said as he watched the officer leave.

"So was any of that true?" Tharun asked, looking down at Tobis.

"Err. Ahh. Maybe. But the amount of fuel that would have to leak would be enormous. I doubt that-"

"Never mind that now." Vorn interrupted, "How much longer?"

Tobis took out his comlink and plugged the compact communication device into his datapad.

"I'm just finishing up now sir." He said, "I'm adding a back door to the monitoring software that allows me to, well to give orders using this datapad. Orders that the system won't report to anyone at this station. We could open all the cargo hold blast doors and the only way to tell would be to go down there and take a look."

"What about camera feeds?" Vorn asked.

"Err, there aren't any in the hold. It's normally sealed so there wouldn't be anyone down there to watch." Tobis told him.

"Good. Then finish up here and let's get back to Jaysica and Kara before Mace gets here." Vorn replied.

"Captain! Contact to starboard. Looks like another vessel has just dropped out of hyperspace." One of the bridge crew called out.

"The *Silver Hawk*?" Tharun suggested.

"It had better be." Vorn responded, "Or all of this will have been for nothing."

Worried that opening an airlock to eject the two bodies into space would attract attention; Jaysica and Kara instead located two suitably sized storage lockers in which to place them. These were located next to the hull of the ship beside a viewport and just as Kara was slamming the door to the second locker shut there was a flash of light from outside.

"What was that?" Jaysica asked.

Kara looked through the viewport and caught a glimpse of something heading towards the *Glory of Corellia*. Something with a familiar saucer-like shape.

"What is it?" she replied with a grin, "It's the *Silver Hawk* come to pick us up. Looks like Mace figured out what happened and came here to meet us."

"So the plan's going to work then?"

"Well assuming we can deal with all those stormtroopers, yes."

"*Glory of Corellia* this is the *Grey Ghost*, Mace Grayle commanding. Do you read me?" Mace transmitted making use of the *Silver Hawk*'s own radio communication system.

"*Grey Ghost* we read you." The reply came almost immediately, "Be advised we are on Imperial business. Explain your presence here."

"I was on the outskirts of the Procis system when I happened to pick up your signal. A radio transmission sent that far? You must be desperate. So I thought I'd come and offer you my assistance." Mace replied. There was a brief pause and then the same voice responded once more.

"Welcome *Grey Ghost* you are cleared for docking in the starboard hangar. *Glory of Corellia* out."

Mace grinned and looked around at Jeeves.

"I told you it would work." He said.

"I never doubted it for a second." Jeeves replied and Harvey let out a sudden rude sounding noise, "I did not say any such thing Harvey!" Jeeves snapped and the protocol droid slapped the top of the astromech as Mace began to pilot the *Silver Hawk* towards an opening in the side of the *Glory of Corellia* large enough to permit the ship to enter.

Tobis skidded to a sudden halt when he rounded the corner and saw Jaysica aiming her hold out blaster directly at him.

"Whoa!" Kara exclaimed, pushing the weapon aside before Jaysica could shoot the engineer.

"Careful there little lady. Those things will kill you if you're not." Tharun added as he too came around the corner and removed the helmet from his disguise. Moments later Vorn appeared, also still in full stormtrooper armour and he let out a brief cry of alarm as his shoulder struck the corner of the bulkhead.

"I'll never get used to this stuff." He said as he removed his helmet, "There was a reason I opted for fleet duty rather than the infantry."

"Boss we think the *Silver Hawk*'s here." Kara then said to Vorn.

"It is." Vorn replied, "We overheard the transmission from Mace."

So are we leaving now?" Jaysica then asked.

"We've still got the matter of a stormtrooper company to deal with little lady." Tharun responded.

"But, err, at least we've got control of the cargo hold doors." Tobis then added, holding up his datapad before Kara snatched.

"Cool! Let me have a go." She said.

"Leave that alone for now." Vorn ordered, "The last thing we need is for the crew to figure out that we've tampered with anything."

"So how are we going to let Captain Grayle know what we're planning major?" Tharun asked.

"Oh that's easy." Vorn replied and he looked at Jaysica, "We'll send Penny."

"Penny?" Jaysica exclaimed, "But what if something happens to her?"

"Oh, err, I doubt that will happen." Tobis said, "One mouse droid looks pretty much like another."

"Yeah, nobody pays any attention to them." Tharun added, "Don't worry yourself. That little droid will be just fine."

Mace descended the *Silver Hawk*'s access ramp nervously, suppressing his urge to reach for the heavy blaster pistol holstered on his leg when he saw the squad of stormtroopers lined up waiting for him. The anonymous soldiers were not something that he had counted on being aboard the *Glory of Corellia*, but a single squad was not the sort of thing to stop Colonel Collis' SpaceOps troopers from securing the ship. The stormtroopers were not the only ones in the hangar however. Standing in front of them were two more men, one in civilian dress and the other in an imperial uniform.

"Captain Grayle I am Kier Dowe, captain of this vessel." Dowe announced, "And this is Commander Asran. He is in charge of the Imperial contingent aboard my ship."

"Government minders?" Mace commented, "You must be hauling something important to get that sort of protection." Then as Asran scowled Mace raise his hands, "No don't tell me, I know it's probably classified."

Now how can I help you?"

"Our nav computer has failed captain." Dowe explained, "It seems that we picked up a mynock somewhere that attached itself to our hyperdrive and triggered an energy surge that fried not only the nav computer main board but also our subspace communications as well."

"So now you're adrift in interstellar space and had to use conventional radio to call for help." Mace said.

"We could just make for Procis at sublight speed," Dowe replied, "but that would take us at least three days."

"And the Empire isn't prepared to wait that long." Asran added, "Captain Grayle, I must commandeer components from your navigation system to—"

"No need commander." Mace interrupted, "It just so happens that I've got a spare main board."

"Not the sort of thing most ship's carry." Asran commented, "Why do you have one?"

"Because I recently upgraded my nav computer and thought I'd hang onto the old board just case something happened."

"Like what?" Asran asked.

"Oh I don't know." Mace answered, folding his arms as he glared at the Imperial officer, "Maybe I could end up with a mynock stuck to my ship that blows out the primary and I'd need to replace it."

Asran scowled again.

"Point taken captain." Dowe said, "Now what would you want in exchange for your spare board?"

"Call it a thousand. Payable when you get where you're going." Mace replied.

"Five hundred." Asran said.

"Bye." Mace responded quickly and as he turned he heard the sound of the stormtroopers all raising their weapons.

"Fire on me and my droids will seal the ship and take off commander. Now are you willing to pay two grand or shall I be on my way?" Mace said, turning back towards the other two officers.

"It was one thousand not long ago." Asran noted.

"Yeah, well I altered the price when your men started pointing blasters at me. Pray I don't alter it further."

"Two thousand will be just fine." Dowe said, glaring at Asran, "Won't it commander?"

"Very well, two thousand." Asran reluctantly agreed.

"Good, then I'll just go and find it." Mace said and he walked back up the ramp into the ship. He made his way into the lounge and sat down.

"Captain Grayle, what do you want us to do next?" Jeeves asked, both protocol droid and Tobis' astromech waiting in the corner.

Mace picked up the circuit board that had been left on the table and stared at it as he answered.

"I want those creeps outside to think I'm still looking for this." He said, "It wouldn't seem natural if I just so happened to have the part they were looking for already to hand. It's enough of a coincidence that I've got a spare."

Just then there was a high pitch chirping sound from the access ramp and Mace leapt to his feet and hid the circuit board behind his back.

"Captain Grayle sir." Jeeves exclaimed as Mace's free hand went to his blaster, "It's Penny."

"Penny? What's she doing here alone?" Mace asked and the mouse droid whistled some more. This was followed by a whistle from Harvey as well, "I don't speak droid." Mace commented.

"No Captain Grayle." Jeeves said, "But fortunately I am fluent in over six million—"

"Just get on with it. What did they both say?"

"Apparently Penny is carrying a message for you from Major Larcus containing details about how he plans to complete the mission that the original plan has failed."

"Failed how?" Mace asked, "I can hand over the circuit as planned and we can all get out of here."

Harvey then let out an abrupt sound.

"Yes Harvey I was just getting to that part." Jeeves said, "Captain Grayle sir, the stormtroopers in the hangar are not the only ones aboard. According to Penny, Major Larcus has discovered an entire company of them aboard the ship."

Mace slumped back down in his seat.

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." He said.



## 9.

"Here you go captain." Mace said with a smile as he handed over the circuit board to Dowe, "If it's alright with you I'll come along and watch your men fit it. I want to make sure they do it properly so that he doesn't feel the need to go taking my only other one." And he briefly glared at Commander Asran who just stared back at him without reacting to the obvious insult.

"Of course." Dowe replied, "If you'll come with me we can get right to work. I'm sure you'll understand that we're all somewhat eager to get out of here."

Mace nodded and followed both the captain and Commander Asran out of the hangar while the stormtroopers remained in position until after they had gone. Ignored by them all Penny rolled down the Silver Hawk's access ramp and headed for a different door, steadily beeping along the way.

Given the size of the *Glory of Corellia* it took some time to walk all the way from the hangar to the computer core where numerous crewmen were inspecting every part of the computer itself. In addition to the civilian crewmen there were also a number of Imperial personnel assisting with the task, all under the watchful eyes of a squad's worth of stormtroopers.

"You're taking no chances I see." Mace commented as he looked around at the open inspection panels that seemed to be everywhere.

"No I'm not." Dowe answered, "That power surge took out supposedly protected circuit boards and its cost me enough already without me finding out that there's more damage that hasn't made itself obvious yet."

"And what's with all the security?" Mace then asked, looking at the stormtroopers he could see scattered about the room.

"Just a precaution captain." Asran stated, "With the ship disabled we have to be alert to the possibility that someone could try to board us and this room would be a key target for any board party."

"Crewman!" Dowe snapped as he approached one of the technicians hard at work and he held out the circuit board, "This is a replacement navigation board. Have you confirmed that the system is stable enough to allow it to be fitted without damaging it?"

"Yes sir." The crewman replied, "The EVA team has removed the mynock and we've sent test pulses through the system. Everything's within tolerances."

"Good. Then get that installed." Dowe said.

"Yes captain." The crewman said.

Mace watched this exchange impatiently and he briefly looked back at the doorway where he saw two more stormtroopers appear and a hint of a smile appeared on his face. Realising that he was between the two newcomers and Commander Asran he stepped aside just as both stormtroopers raised their weapons and opened fire.

Their fire was not directed at the Imperial officer however, instead they picked off the stormtrooper guards closest to the doorway and then one of them began to pick off as many of the others as he could while the second removed his helmet.

"I am Vorn Larcus the third and in the name of the Alliance to Restore the Republic I am seizing this vessel!" Vorn yelled and then he fired again, aiming a burst just over the head of Mace and the officers stood close to him. The high-energy blasts were close enough that Mace felt the heat stinging his head and he winced.

Expecting this attack, though unaware of just how close Vorn's fake attack would come to taking his head off Mace was able to quickly draw his own heavy blaster pistol and return fire, taking a chunk out of the bulkhead beside Vorn while both Captain Dowe and Commander Asran ducked.

Despite his attempt to take out as many as he could, enough of the stormtroopers avoided Tharun's shooting long enough to be able to return fire at the two rebels, forcing them back out into the corridor behind them.

"Don't just stand there!" Asran bellowed at the stormtroopers as he saw Tharun and Vorn fleeing, "Get after them!" and the genuine stormtroopers began to give chase.

Kara peered around the corner and confirmed that a group of stormtroopers had taken up a position at the far end of the corridor, protecting the engineering section of the ship.

"Okay I see eight of them." She said, "You both ready?"

"Err." Tobis said, "Eight?"

"We can't take out eight stormtroopers with just these hand blasters." Jaysica added, looking at the two military style pistols Kara and Tobis held as well as her own compact hold-out blaster.

"Then it's a good job we don't need to take any of them out isn't it?" Kara responded, "We just need to get them to follow us."

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this plan." Jaysica said and Kara looked at Tobis.

"Hey Tobis, how about you get your girlfriend under control."

"What?" he replied, "Oh, err, she's not my girlfriend."

"Never mind." Kara said and all of a sudden she spun around, leant round the corner and opened fire several times. She did not take any time to aim, not wanting to give the stormtroopers the chance to notice her first and so all of her shots went wide. But they did get the attention of the stormtroopers who fired short bursts back towards Kara just as she disappeared back around the corner, "Okay they're coming." She added as there was the sound of running, "Let's move."

Asran's comlink chimed and he plucked it from his belt. Before he could speak a panicked sounding voice spoke instead.

"Commander the troops near engineering have reporting coming under fire. They're in pursuit now." The voice said and Asran scowled.

"We have rebel infiltrators aboard the ship." He replied, "Alert all stations and tell them to shoot to kill. I don't care about prisoners."

Mace turned to look at Dowe.

"Looks like we know how come your supposedly durable systems got damaged." He said, "I'd say it was sabotage."

"I agree." Dowe replied, "Now I suggest that we withdraw to the bridge until the commander's men have the situation under control. It's heavily protected."

"Sounds good to me." Mace said, "But just in case there's something I'd like to get from my ship. I want more protection than just a thick door and a pistol."

Tharun had also seen fit to discard his helmet by the time he and Vorn arrived at the cargo hold.

Communication between the rebels would rely on their own comlinks and wearing the enclosing helmet of a stormtrooper would interfere in using such a device. Vorn pressed himself up against the bulkhead beside the still sealed cargo hold and took out his comlink while Tharun turned and fired a burst at the stormtroopers pursuing them. The lead trooper was hit, toppling backwards into one of his comrades who was directly behind him. The surviving stormtroopers dragged their downed comrades back and retreated out of sight.

"Tobis we're in position. Get the door open." Vorn sent.

"Err, just a moment sir." Tobis' reply came back after a brief pause, the signal distorted somewhat with static caused by the amount of mass between them. In this case not only the ship's structure but also the precious cargo it carried.

"What does the lad mean?" Tharun exclaimed, "Doesn't he remember the plan?"

"Tobis we've got the best part of an entire marine platoon just round the corner." Vorn transmitted, "What's the hold up?"

"Well, err. Sorry."

"Sorry?" Vorn repeated, "What do you mean sorry. Get this door open."

"We ran into some old friends boss." Kara's voice said over the comlink, "Two platoons of them I think. Tobis is just trying to find his datapad."

"Well tell him to quit trying and either do it don't do it so we know where we stand." Vorn said and then he shut off the comlink and returned it to his belt before he joined Tharun in firing his blaster purely to keep the stormtroopers pinned down.

There was a sudden rumble from behind the two rebels and looking around Vorn saw that the heavy blast door separating them from the cargo hold was slowly opening.

"Go! I'll cover you!" Tharun snapped and Vorn nodded before diving through the steadily widening gap between the segments of the blast door. Then as soon as Vorn was clear the former mercenary leapt through after him.

## 10.

When Mace returned to the bridge of the *Glory of Corellia* he had a short, bulky weapon with a flared barrel slung over his shoulders.

"A deck sweeper?" Captain Dowe commented when he saw the weapon and recognised it as one used to discharge a powerful stun pulse in a wide arc.

"I hope you have a permit for that." Commander Asran added, frowning.

"Really commander, do you have to quibble about such things at a time like this?" Dowe asked.

"What's happening?" Mace asked as he approached the two officers.

"Well it looks like there are two groups of rebels aboard my ship." Dowe replied, pointing to the display that both he and Asran were watching closely.

"There's no need for concern." Asran added with confidence, "My men have both groups pinned down near the cargo hold. They've nowhere to go."

"Signal from the stormtroopers sir." One of the bridge crewmen suddenly called out, "The rebels are retreating into the hold."

"Impossible!" Dowe snapped, "The hold is sealed and only we have control." Then he rushed to the console where Tobis had sat to gain control of the cargo hold doors, "See commander, this board confirms that all the hold blast doors are sealed."

"My men know what they're seeing captain." Asran replied, "Clearly the rebels must have found some way to override the doors."

"Then how come your man didn't spot it when he was checking earlier?" the same bridge officer that had confronted Tobis asked from his post, looking straight at Asran and the Imperial officer frowned.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Your technician sir. The nervous one who sat right there and checked that console."

"He had two stormtroopers with him as well." Another of the bridge crew commented.

"Stang!" Dowe exclaimed, slamming his fist down on the console, "They were right on my bridge commander. Those two fake stormtroopers and one of the other rebels came here and sabotaged my ship."

"Right under the noses of your crew it would seem." Asran replied.

"Someone get over here and find out what they did." Dowe ordered, "I want control of my ship back before we jump to hyperspace."

Mace tensed, tightening his grip on the sling that held his blaster over his shoulder. If the *Glory of Corellia's* crew succeeded in regaining control of the blast doors then the other rebels would be trapped, not to mention the problems that a stormtrooper company would pose to Colonel Collis' men.

"Captain," he said, "five rebels isn't enough to control a ship of this size. It seems likely to me that they're waiting for reinforcements. Perhaps we should think about concentrating on getting out of here before worrying about control of doors."

"Captain Grayle is correct." Asran said, sneering, "My men can deal with a handful of rebels captain. They are converging on the hold as we speak. And they can make life very difficult for a larger force arriving to support them as well. But if rebel warships decide to just destroy this ship then there's nothing any of us could do to stop it. We need to get out of here."

Dowe sighed.

"Very well." He said, "Navigation, plot me a jump to the rendezvous point just as soon as the nav computer is confirmed back on line and functioning. I want us to be out of here within the hour."

Kara led the way for Jaysica and Tobis as they crept through the cargo hold. She still held her blaster in her hand despite the fact that almost everywhere she looked there was a bulky container labelled to indicate that its contents were highly volatile. On the other hand Tobis had holstered his blaster and was instead focusing on his datapad, opening blast doors as the group came to them or as Vorn requested. Jaysica was also keeping a close eye on her datapad that like Tobis' had her comlink attached to it. In this case it was so that she could monitor the feed being sent by Penny. The tiny mouse droid was following behind the pursuing stormtroopers and letting the three rebels know exactly where they were.

"They're gaining on us." Jaysica warned suddenly.

"Okay then I think its time to confuse them a bit." Kara replied, "Tobis open both the doors up ahead. The one to the right will lead them to the boss and Tharun so we'll take the one to the left and close it behind us. Can you manage that in the time we've got?"

"Err. I think so." Tobis replied as he tapped the screen of his datapad and the two sets of blast doors up ahead of them began to open.

"Okay let's move." Kara said, rushing through the doorway to the left before the blast door was even fully open. Jaysica and Tobis followed her through, but just as Jaysica tried to slip between the still opening blast door she caught her foot and tripped. Instantly Tobis turned towards her and held out a hand.

"Forget about the klutz I've got her." Kara exclaimed, "You just get these doors shut again."

"Oh, err, I can't not yet." Tobis replied and Kara's eyes widened.

"Why the kriff not? Kara demanded, "Those marines are on their way."

"You know Kara technically Tobis is in command here." Jaysica said and Kara glared at her.

"How you like it with your foot still stuck between those doors when they close again?" she replied angrily and then she looked back at Tobis, "Why can't you close the doors?" she asked again.

"Err, because I need to wait for the opening sequence to be fully complete before I can close them again." He answered.

"Oh great." Kara said, looking at the slowly moving doors. Then she looked around instead and saw a narrow gap between two of the fuel containers where a stair led up to a walkway overhead, "Over there!" she snapped, pointing to the stair, "We'll hide and wait for them to go past."

"How will we know when that is?" Jaysica asked as she and Tobis followed Kara to the stairs.

"Because that droid of yours will tell us genius." Kara replied.

"But what if they come this way instead and find us?" Jaysica then asked.

"They won't." Kara replied.

"But why not?"

"Because when they get to that junction back there Tobis will trigger the next door along in the direction we want them to go in. They'll hear it and go that way instead. Now hold your datapad where our beloved leader can see it."

The stormtroopers arrived at the junction and ground to a halt as they tried to determine which way the rebels had gone.

"Have they split up?" one of the platoon leader's suggested. The officer was not an armoured clone like his men; instead he wore a standard grey service uniform with a lieutenant's badge on his chest.

"Perhaps." The other platoon leader responded, another non-clone officer, "There are only three of them in any case. I'll take my platoon this way and you go the other."

The first officer nodded in agreement and they were just about to split their force when Tobis ordered the next door along in the direction away from the rebels' actual location to open.

"Sir, did you hear that?" a stormtrooper asked, "It sounds like another door opening."

"Then they've gone that way." The officer whose idea it had been to split up responded looking at his fellow officer, "come on, let's get after them. The other way is just a decoy."

"But shouldn't we at least check out this other way?" the other officer suggested.

"Leave a couple of your men behind to keep watch if you want, but I'm taking all mine this way." The second replied and stepping through the open doorway ahead of him he waved his men on after him.

"You and you." the other officer said, pointing to two of his troops at random, "Wait here and watch for any signs of the rebels having gone the other way. Signal if you see anything."

"Yes sir." The stormtroopers replied in unison and the officer then waved his men on as well, following the first platoon to have gone through the doorway.

"That still leaves two of them." Jaysica whispered.

"Better than fifty or more." Kara responded, "Now we need to get that door closed behind them."

"But won't that tip them off?" Jaysica asked.

"Oh definitely." Kara agreed, "But it also puts that blast door right behind them from this angle and means I can use this without worrying about hitting anything that'll go 'bang'." And she held up her blaster, "Do it Tobis." She added.

Without replying Tobis accessed the blast door control system again and there was the sound of motors closing the heavy door.

"What's happening?" one of the stormtroopers sudden exclaimed as both turned to face the blast door as it slid shut.

"It's a trap!" the other added and he activated his armour's built-in comlink, "Sir the blast door is closing behind you. You'll be sealed in." The thick door then slammed shut and the two stormtroopers raised their weapons and looked around, guessing that they were being watched from somewhere.

"Over there." The first said as he caught sight of Penny, lurking beside one of the fuel storage containers, "All this time the rebels have been using a droid to monitor us."

"Then maybe they never came anywhere near here." The other added, "This could all be a wild bantha chase."

Seeing that both stormtroopers now had their attention focused on Penny Kara leant around the container beside her with her blaster in her hand and opened fire, shooting the weapon repeatedly at them. The first shot barely missed one of the stormtroopers but the second slammed into his chest and punched right

through his armour. Then as the second knelt down and tried to take aim at her Kara fired again and put a shot through the faceplate of his helmet. Then she grabbed her comlink and activated it.

"Okay boss you've got two more platoons ahead of you that have been sealed into two section just ahead of our position." She signalled.

"Tharun and I are in section dorn-six right now." Vorn replied, "We're heading aft. There's still just one platoon after us we think, so that still leaves one to be dealt with."

"Copy that boss." Kara said, "Do you want the ones after you sealing in where they are? Or shall we try and get both groups to hook up and get them all in one place?"

"I think two is good enough." Vorn told her, "Have Tobis open the door up ahead and we'll let you know when we're through."

"Captain! Technical crews confirm that the new board has been fully tested and is operational." A crewman called out across the bridge and Mace breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well done Tobis." He muttered to himself. The prospect of having the sabotage to the nav computer circuitry being discovered had been worrying him every since he had handed it over. Having told Asran and Dowe that it belonged to him would have made it impossible to explain away a failure.

"Then get us out of here." Dowe ordered.

"Commander reports from our marines. The rebels have sealed three platoons in the hold." Another voice called out, this one coming from an Imperial crewman manning one of the bridge stations.

"What?" Asran exclaimed. Then he rushed to where more of the *Glory of Corellia's* crewmen were attempting to discover what Tobis had done to the door control systems, "Where are you up to?" he demanded.

"Nowhere sir." One replied, "There's no extra hardware been added so the rebels must have amended the source code. That means going through the process flow until we find how they're communicating with it and keeping us out."

"Navigational co-ordinates set." The ship's navigator called out.

"Helm get us into hyperspace." Dowe ordered and as the ship accelerated rapidly Asran turned back towards him.

"It hardly matters now then." He said.

"Why would you say that commander?" Mace asked.

"Because even with three of my platoons cut off we still have a full platoon at our disposal Captain Grayle and when we reach the rendezvous point we can have our escorts send more troops across to secure the ship. Those rebels are no longer a threat to us at all."

Kara peered into the hangar bay at the *Silver Hawk*. The ship was silent and there were no signs of movement at all.

"Okay there's the ship." She said softly to the other two behind her, "I don't see anyone but—"

"Then let's just go." Jaysica interrupted and she ran past Kara and towards the *Silver Hawk's* access ramp.

"No wait!" Tobis called out but it was too late and as Jaysica ran across the open hangar bay a figure appeared that had been obscured by the *Silver Hawk's* access ramp.

"Halt!" the stormtrooper yelled, raising his blaster as a second armoured soldier appeared beside him.

Jaysica gave out a sudden yelp as she skidded to a halt and slipped on the floor.

"Don't move! Keep your hands where we can see them!" the stormtrooper yelled as he approached Jaysica with his blaster still trained on her. Meanwhile the other stormtrooper aimed at the hatchway she had come from. He had heard Tobis' shouted warning and knew that someone was hiding just outside.

"Looks like your girlfriend's in real trouble now Tobis." Kara said.

"Oh, err, she's not my girlfriend." Tobis replied.

"Stop saying that." Kara said and she quickly leant around the doorframe and fired, her shot missing the nearest stormtrooper and instead provoking a burst of powerful blaster bolts in reply that took large chunks out of the bulkhead beyond the hatchway.

"Okay that didn't go so good." Kara said as more blasterfire came through the hatchway.

There was the sound of running from behind them and both Kara and Tobis turned to see Tharun and Vorn rushing up the corridor towards them, still clad in their stolen armour without the helmets.

"Where's Jaysica?" Vorn asked, breathing heavily.

"In the hangar boss." Kara replied, "The klutz has got herself caught. She ran straight in there."

"Then I suppose we'll need to go and rescue her won't we?" Tharun replied and he quickly leant around the side of the hatchway with his rifle in his shoulder and fired a short burst of three blasts that took the nearest stormtrooper off his feet.

"Jaysica now!" Vorn yelled out and at that moment Jaysica lashed out with her foot and kicked the stormtrooper standing over her in the side of his knee. Crying out in pain the soldier dropped to his knees, still holing on tightly to Jaysica's shoulder. The distraction was all that the other rebels needed to rush

through the hatchway and a single shot from Tharun sent the already injured stormtrooper sprawling across the deck.

At that moment there was an electronic whistling from the *Silver Hawk's* ramp as both Harvey and Jeeves descended.

"Oh Major Larcus sir it is such a relief to see you." Jeeves exclaimed, "We haven't heard from Captain Grayle since he took his decksweeper and headed for the bridge."

"Okay it sounds like Mace has got everything sorted on the bridge then." Vorn said, "We need to secure this location. Tobis see if you can patch the *Silver Hawk's* computer into the *Glory of Corellia's*. It would be nice to know exactly what's going on. Tharun, Kara and Jaysica can help me barricade that hatchway." Then after a moment's pause he added, "At least we'll do that after I've been able to get out of this damn armour."

# 11.

"Commander I've reports from the starboard hangar bay that our sentries are under attack." The Imperial communications technician reported.

"My ship is there." Mace said, feigning concern that his ship could be damaged.

"Don't worry Captain Grayle." Asran said, "Its not as if the rebels can launch your ship in hyperspace and when we get to our destination there will be enough of our ships there to prevent them from escaping with it." It was then that the *Glory of Corellia* shuddered as it dropped out of hyperspace again.

"There you go." Asran then said, smiling as he turned to the main viewport and saw a pair of Nebulon-B escort frigates, "We've arrived at our rendezvous point and our escort is waiting for us."

"Where's the third frigate commander?" Dowe asked and then he called out, "Comscan report!"

"There's a third frigate to our stern captain, but the transponder signals do not match those of our escorts captain." The comscan operator replied, "I'm reading the *Outrider*, *Ranger* and the *Nova's Light*."

"The *Nova's Light*?" Asran exclaimed, "But that ship was seized by rebels two months ago."

"It's a trap!" Dowe yelled, "Get us back into hyperspace. I don't care where we go just so long as its not here."

"Captain I'm reading launches from all three enemy vessels." The comscan operator warned.

"Order first and second squads to deploy to port and starboard airlocks to repel boarders and third to secure the portside hangar." Asran ordered, "Then have forth squad deal with the rebels in the starboard hangar."

"How long until we can jump?" Dowe demanded.

"Err, there seems to be a problem with that captain." The navigator replied.

"What sort of problem?"

"Each time I enter jump co-ordinates the navigation computer is rejecting them. It claims that we are already at those co-ordinates."

"Then try different ones." Dowe told him.

"Have tried that sir. Four different sets, but nothing works."

Asran rushed to the navigation station.

"Run a stellar fix." He ordered, "Check against our plotted position in the nav computer."

"Aye sir. Running now. Wait, that's not right." The navigator said, a puzzled look on his face, "The star positions are all wrong. We're at least six parsecs from the rendezvous point."

Scowling Asran whirled around to stare at Mace.

"You did this!" he bellowed, "That circuit board you gave us was rigged. You're one of the rebels." And he reached for his sidearm.

Mace was quicker.

He drew his heavy blaster pistol and shot Asran in the chest. Even if he had been wearing armour at this range it would not have protected him and he fell dead as the other occupants of the bridge looked on in horror. By the hatchway two fleet troopers who had been standing guard also reached for their weapons, but Mace was quicker once again and he raised his decksweeper with one hand and pulled the trigger. There was a brilliant blue flash as it discharged an expanding energy pulse that enveloped both men. The weapon was designed only to fire stun blasts, but it was powerful enough to render the guard unconscious and then Mace turned and gazed at the shocked faces all around him.

"Step away from your stations all of you." He instructed the crew, "Unless you want to end up like the late commander."

"You'll never get away with this you rebel scum." Dowe said, snarling as he backed away from Mace.

"Never?" Mace replied, "I already have. There's a company of Alliance Space Ops troopers closing in right now."

"And stormtroopers waiting at every access point to stop them." Dowe pointed out.

"For now maybe." Mace said with a grin, "But I think my friends in my ship will be able to take care of them."

Harvey whistled excitedly.

"Major Larcus," Jeeves transmitted using the *Silver Hawk's* communications to connect with Vorn's comlink, "Harvey indicates that there are Alliance boarding craft approaching. But there are stormtroopers at every available access port."

Vorn ducked as another volley of blasterfire from the attacking squad of stormtroopers blew apart one of the crates that made up the hastily improvised barrier that the rebels were using for cover.

"Okay I got that. Warn them that there are stormtroopers aboard but advise that we're about to take action against them." He responded and he looked at Tobis, "Okay do it now." He said and Tobis nodded. Then the



engineer set down the stolen stormtrooper's blaster rifle he had had been using and took out his datapad, his comlink still attached to it.

"Make sure you get the right doors lad." Tharun commented as he sprayed fire at a pair of stormtroopers who had made the mistake of trying to rush through the entrance to the hangar, "None of us is dressed for a spacewalk."

In the corridors just within the *Glory of Corellia's* airlocks and in the portside hangar bay the squads of stormtroopers deployed to defend the massive transport against the approaching rebels waited patiently. Since deploying to these locations they had received no further instructions from the bridge and so just waited to see if the rebels would attempt to gain entry to the ship through the route they were protecting. They expected the rebels to either use electronic means to override the hatch seals or alternately just use breaching charges to blast their way through the hatches. What they did not expect was for someone to simply open the hatches from within the *Glory of Corellia* while they were right next to them.

There was a sudden rush of air as each hatch opened and the magnetic field across the hangar bay was shut down, evacuating the air. By keeping internal hatches open Tobis caused the decompression to spread further into the ship. This did not turn the entire ship into a vacuum since the life support systems maintained an ample supply of reserve air but it did keep up the pressure on the stormtroopers who simply released their weapons and did their best to hang onto anything that would prevent them from being blown out into space. Their armour provided full protection against vacuum, but without any form of manoeuvring unit they would be unable to return to the ship. Finding a way of staying inside was their only hope.

Colonel Collis checked his armour one last time before his ship reached the *Glory of Corellia*. He believed in leading by example and so had taken personal command of the boarding action, bringing with him three platoons of hand picked men. In the shuttle with him his own platoon was preparing their weapons. For dealing with a civilian crew and a handful of Imperial advisors and guards only lightweight weapons were expected to be needed so each man carried a standard issue blaster pistol and was equipped with an armoured vest and helmet. Stun grenades had also been distributed amongst the troops just in case some of the crew tried to hold out in fortified areas and each platoon had been issued a fusion cutter to allow them to breach such fortifications as well as the outer airlock doors. Then the pilot of the assault shuttle placed a hand to his communication headset.

"Copy that *Ranger*. Will pass it along." He said and he glanced at the colonel, "Sir, the *Ranger* has just received a signal from Major Larcus' unit aboard the target vessel. He says that there's a full company of stormtroopers aboard."

"Stormtroopers?" Colonel Collis exclaimed, his eyes widening in horror as he realised that his troops were inadequately armed to deal with such a threat. They would be both out numbered and outgunned. Added to that a unit of stormtroopers would be far more likely to try and destroy the ship before allowing it to fall into rebel hands, a relatively easy prospect given its cargo. For a brief moment he considered aborting the attack.

"Yes sir. Apparently most are contained and the Major's unit is about to deal with the rest before we dock."

"Deal with them? How?" the colonel asked and it was then that the *Glory of Corellia's* hatches suddenly opened and figures in white plastoid armour came shooting out into space.

"I think like that." The pilot said and then he flinched as one of the stormtroopers bounced off the viewport of the shuttle.

The rush of air near the airlocks ceased not because Tobis resealed the hatches but because the rebel assault shuttles sealed the breaches themselves when they docked. Only in the port hangar bay did Tobis have to assist the rebel assault force by reactivating the magnetic field to hold in the atmosphere when the tap he had placed into the *Glory of Corellia's* surveillance system let him see the rebel shuttle had touched down.

From all three shuttles rebel soldiers burst into the *Glory of Corellia*. There were only a handful of stormtroopers remaining at each location and almost all of them had lost their weapons when they were forced to secure themselves. The first man out of his shuttle, Colonel Collis spotted a stormtrooper staggering back to his feet that had managed to retain his rifle by holstering it and he shot the enemy soldier before he could release the securing strap and draw it.

"Come on men!" he yelled, "For the Alliance and may the Force be with us!" and then he ran in the direction of the bridge.

Mace had all of the remaining ship's crew and their Imperial overseers gathered together along one wall, knelt down and with their hands clasped together on their heads. The deksweeper would allow him to disable a large number of the prisoners at once if they attempted to overpower him, but its slow firing rate meant that if they all rushed him at once some of them could have reached him and since the weapon had no lethal setting it was possible that they would decide to take their chance rather than be interned in an

Alliance prisoner of war camp. Therefore he had set the deck sweeper down on a nearby console and was instead keeping his prisoners covered with one of the blaster pistols that the fleet troopers he had stunned had been armed with, his own heavy blaster pistol back in its holster. He watched them carefully, paying particular attention to the remaining Imperial personnel when his comlink chimed.

"Go ahead." Mace said as he activated the comlink.

"Mace its Vorn. The colonel's docked and he's heading up to you now. What's your status?"

"All secure Major. I'll be waiting for him to knock. How are you?"

"Holding out just about. Thankfully only a few of the stormtroopers attacking us could come through the door at once and four rifles firing on automatic seems to have countered that nicely. Be aware that some of them have broken off though and may be heading for you. Don't open the door without Colonel Collis' order. Understood?"

"Understood major. I'll wait for the colonel. Trust me, no-one here is going anywhere."

With his comlink connected to a headset Colonel Collis received updates from all his troops as they advanced through the *Glory of Corellia's* corridors. The platoon that had come aboard from the other airlock was already poised to break into the engineering section and so far had reported no resistance while the Colonel's unit was almost at the bridge and had encountered nothing more than a handful of civilian crewmen who surrendered without a fight. That left only the platoon sent to relieve Vorn's unit in the starboard docking bay and they had reported encounters with several small groups of stormtroopers who had split off and seemed to be trying to reach the bridge as well. Therefore it came as a relief when the armoured blast door leading to the bridge came into view and was still sealed. He readjusted his comlink to the frequency used by Vorn's unit and then activated it and at the same time he banged his fist on the blast door.

"Open up in there!" he ordered, "It's Collis."

There was a brief pause and then the door began to open, revealing Mace standing immediately inside the bridge aiming a blaster a large group of crewmen. Immediately the colonel's men rushed onto the bridge, some of them heading for the prisoners and securing them while others headed for the various duty stations to assess what, if any damage had been suffered by the ship. Colonel Collis on the other hand remained by the doorway with Mace.

"Well the ship's all yours now I suppose colonel." Mace said, lowering his blaster.

"There's still some areas to be secured but we should have that done pretty quickly. Plus we've got some search and rescue ships out picking up as many of those stormtroopers you blew into space as we can. No sense losing them or their gear." Colonel Collis replied, "All in all you've netted us quite a haul here today captain."

"Yeah." Mace said, "It's a pity I'm not getting paid a percentage."

## EPILOGUE

Odras Balve picked up the datapad that was slid across his desk by the man he had instructed to look into Mace's new associates. Calmly he read the report and then he frowned before looking up at the man.

"Are you certain about this?" he asked.

"One hundred percent Mister Balve." The man replied, "I got pictures of all four of the newcomers and that was the only one I could identify."

"Vorn Larcus the Third." Odras said, "So our friend Mace had gotten himself involved in politics has he?"

"The others are probably rebels as well Mister Balve. I'm sure that the Empire would pay well if—"

"Am I the only one who thinks about the bigger picture?" Odras interrupted, "If we turn Mace's rebel friends in then the Empire could pick Mace up as well and he knows too much about my operation. Plus he still owes us a lot of money. On the other hand if we allow Mace to continue to associate with these people then maybe we can find new business opportunities in it. Like the items we supplied for him yesterday. That was very profitable." Then he paused and changed the datapad display show images of Jaysica and Kara, "Who knows what we may be able to acquire from him in return."

It was raining as Moff Gregor Horatian stood at the edge of the rooftop landing platform on top of the Imperial capital building on Estran with just a pair of stormtroopers behind him and watched the lambda-class shuttle descending towards him, its wings folding up alongside its tail as it came in for a landing. The shuttle's ramp hissed as it opened and Moff Horatian stood up straight as a single slender hooded figure descended and strode towards him and his guards.

"Good evening." He called out to the newcomer, "I was told to expect your arrival but I—"

"You may dispense with the pleasantries moff." A female voice replied from beneath the hood and the figure lowered it to reveal the face of a young human woman barely out of her teens with long blonde hair and blue eyes. The moff saw that beneath her cloak she wore a form fitting black body glove and at its belt hung a cylinder about thirty centimetres long and he tensed. He had served in the Galactic Senate some years earlier and he knew a lightsaber when he saw one, "I am here to help you with your rebel problem."

"I wouldn't exactly call it a problem." Moff Horatian said but the woman held out a datapad.

"This man was identified by your own spacedock surveillance system as one of the group that hijacked the *Glory of Corellia*, correct?"

"Yes that's correct." The moff replied, "He's Vorn Larcus. He used—"

"He used to be part of the Estranian Parliament until he defected to the rebellion. That makes him dangerous moff. He was popular and that popularity could become popular support for the rebellion locally. He needs to be stopped."

"Yes of course. My forces are—"

"It also needs to appear that we are not specifically targeting him. Any hint of political persecution could backfire and turn him into a martyr." The woman said.

"And what do you suggest then?" Moff Horatian asked and the woman adjusted the datapad to show an image of a younger man, "You're kidding me." The moff said.

"No." the woman replied, "I want him." and Moff Horatian sighed.

"I'll see to it." He said and then he paused, "By the way, they never told me your name. What do I call you?"

"My name is Vay. Vay Udra." The woman replied and for a moment Moff Horatian frowned, certain that he'd heard that surname somewhere before.

"What?" the woman asked when she activated the communicator set beside the bed.

"I need to speak to Garm." A male voice replied.

"Do you know what time it is?" the woman asked.

"Of course I do. Now put him on, its urgent."

The woman sighed and rolled over.

"Garm it's for you. It sounds like your supervisor."

Garm groaned as he rolled over and emerged from beneath the covers he had pulled over his head when the communicator had sounded, revealing the same face that had been on Vay Udra's datapad.

"What?" he asked.

"Your suspension's been lifted Agent Larcus." The caller said, "Report to the ISB branch office at nine hundred hours for assignment. We've got a job for you that comes straight from the top."