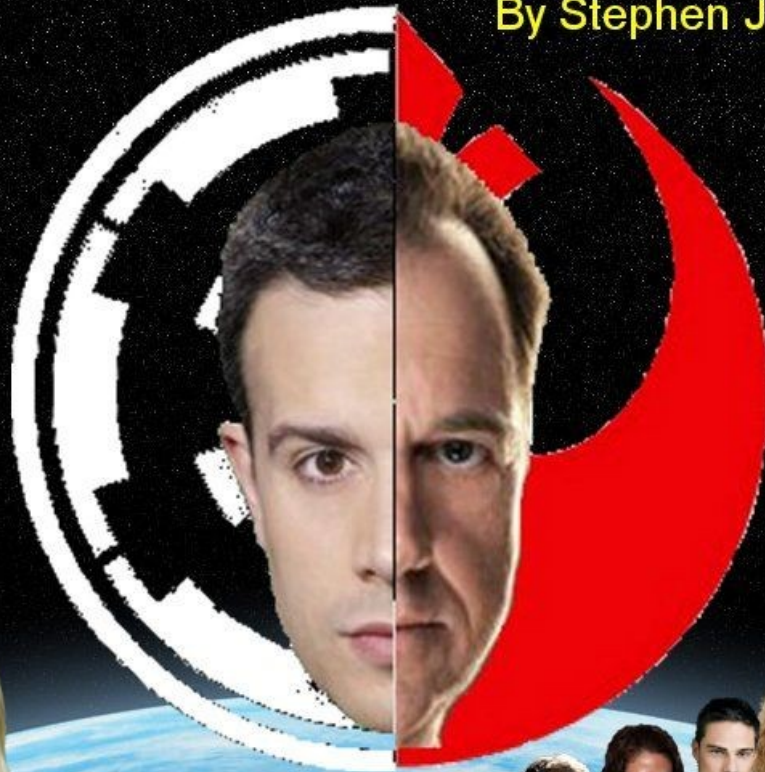


# STAR WARS

## 8-03: Laws of Salvage

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 GUERILLA 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 MAGE 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...

## LAWS OF SALVAGE

A CRASHED STAR DESTROYER IS POTENTIALLY A VALUABLE SOURCE OF WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT TO THE ALLIANCE. BUT THE NECROMANCY SITS AT THE BOTTOM OF AN OCEAN AND THERE ARE OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES WHO DO NOT WANT TO SHARE THEIR BOUNTY WITH THE CREW OF THE *SILVER HAWK*...

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

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# 1.

"Abandon ship! All hands abandon ship!" the commanding officer of the Imperial star destroyer *Necromancy* shouted when his vessel shook violently as it began to enter the atmosphere of the planet below. Imperial-class vessels were capable of atmospheric operation but this required a great deal of power and full control over its systems, neither of which the crew currently had. In the space above the star destroyer there were two mon calamari MC-80 cruisers and one smaller MC-30 frigate. The fighters launched by the rebel ships had rapidly overwhelmed the squadrons of TIE fighters carried by the star destroyer, still depleted since their recent engagement against the alien rakata. This had left the *Necromancy* at the mercy of the three capital ships and their fighters.

The frigate's torpedoes had caused massive damage to the forward sections of the star destroyer before the two cruisers had compounded this with volleys of turbolaser fire that had ripped through the ship's engine decks. But to make matters worse the cruisers had followed up their turbolaser attacks with volleys of fire from their ion cannons and the highly charged blasts had overloaded most of the star destroyer's critical systems and sent it tumbling into the atmosphere of the remote world they were fighting over.

More than thirty thousand officers and men aboard the star destroyer, not counting the regiment of ground troops that the vessel carried, all hurried towards the escape pods and life boats. Evacuation drills called for an orderly approach to the various escape craft so that each one could be filled up before being launched and crew starting to fill the next available one. But with the ship feeling as if it was about to break apart at any moment all of this training and practice fell apart as the panicked crew rushed to the closest means of escape and took off. Even designated evacuation co-ordinators succumbed to the panic and lifeboats were launched while still only half full as their occupants placed their survival ahead of those just short of reaching them. It was a similar story in the star destroyer's hangar bays as crewmen rushed to the available shuttles, fighting to get aboard. In one case this resulted in a shuttle taking off while crewmen were still trying to get aboard and as it flew out through the magnetic field sealing the hangar the flames surrounding the star destroyer as it entered the planet's atmosphere got into the interior of the shuttle through the open hatchway and it exploded, killing everyone on board instantly.

Meanwhile the star destroyer itself continued to plummet towards the planet and pieces of its lower hull were torn free by the friction of the atmosphere itself acting against it. The star destroyer's angle remained shallow, however and this enabled it to survive as it finally came down in one of the planet's oceans. The impact of the mile long vessel threw a massive plume of water up into the air as it skimmed across the ocean surface, losing yet more of its hull in the process and the ocean waters flooded into the vessel. All of this extra mass reduced the star destroyer's natural buoyancy and, starting with the nose of the ship, it disappeared beneath the ocean's surface.

But even after the crew were done getting off the stricken star destroyer they were far from safe. Surrounding the assortment of shuttles and escape pods were rebel fighters supported by the three capital ships overhead. Many of the shuttles and a handful of the lifeboats were equipped with hyperdrives of their own and these rushed to get as far from the planet as they could, jumping to hyperspace as soon as they were clear of its mass shadow. The majority however, could not escape. The first to abandon ship were simply scooped up by the cruisers' tractor beams and taken aboard the star cruisers. On the other hand some of the lifeboats made it to the surface of the planet. But the rebel fighters tracked these and the orbiting warships were able to deploy troops of their own to pick up the survivors. The commander of the rebel task force monitored the time being used for this operation closely. Given that some of the crew had escaped it was a distinct possibility that they would reach a nearby colony and another Imperial task force would be sent to deal with the rebels. But when the last of the survivors was brought aboard one of the cruisers from the surface she gave the order to retreat and the rebel vessels also vanished into hyperspace.

The YT-1300 class light freighter *Silver Hawk* shuddered as it dropped out of hyperspace and from the co-pilot's seat Vorn Larcus III threw an accusing look at the teenage girl flying the ship.

"Cass," Vorn said, "are you sure about flying the ship? Tobis could easily-"

"Hey!" Cass exclaimed before he could finish, "With Mom and Dad off on their honeymoon this is my ship."

"Mace may not see it quite that way." Vorn commented, "Besides, why didn't you go with them?"

"Because there's not much to do on that safe world but look at things and spend time as a family and I'm hoping that they'll be giving me a baby brother or sister real soon. For that to happen they need some alone time." Cass explained.

"Can you get us down without shaking us apart?" Vorn asked and Cass nodded.

"Of course I can." she said.

"Good. Then I'll be briefing the others." Vorn said and he got up and left the cockpit, walking the short

distance to the ship's lounge area where he found another young woman, this one a number of years older than Cass cleaning up a pot of spilled caf from the floor.

"Oh be careful major." she said when she saw him, "the caf got spilled when the ship lurched. It was an accident."

"On this occasion Jaysica I can really believe it was." Vorn said.

"Don't listen to her boss." another woman's voice called out from the direction of the crew cabins and Vorn looked up to see a tall woman wearing a bikini step into the lounge and she walked over to him before putting her arms around him and kissing him, "The klutz poured that caf all over herself and the floor before Cass tried bouncing us all to death." she added. Then she looked around to where an R5 astromech droid stood in the corner of the room, "Right Harvey?" she asked and the droid responded with a rude sounding noise.

"Where are Tharun and Tobis?" Vorn asked the woman with her arms around him and she shrugged.

"I don't know. I was getting changed." she said.

"Isn't it a bit soon to be wearing that Kara?" Jaysica asked.

"Hey, you can change when you want but the boss is staying here with Cass so I wanted to make sure he got plenty of time to see me in it. He is my husband after all."

"For which I am eternally grateful." Vorn said.

"I know." Kara replied. Then she turned her head towards a doorway that led to the *Silver Hawk's* cargo hold, "Tharun! Tobis! Get out here. The boss wants you." she shouted and Vorn flinched as the other two male members of the *Silver Hawk's* crew appeared.

"Major." the taller of the pair said, looking at Vorn. Then he looked at Kara and added, "Lieutenant." before frowning, "Are we already there?" he asked.

"No." Jaysica said as she finished cleaning up the mess on the floor and got to her feet, "Kara's just flaunting her body in front of the major. It's disgusting."

"Careful little lady." the big man said, "That's my mother in law you're talking about there." and Kara shuddered.

"Stang Tharun, stop calling me that." she said, "I'm younger than you and the major's little princess."

"He is technically correct." Vorn pointed out and Kara gasped before pulling away from him.

"Right, just for that you get to look but not touch. See how you like that." she said as she went to the couch and sat down.

"Tobis, how's the equipment looking?" Vorn asked, looking at the other man.

"Oh, err, it's all intact." Tobis replied, "The cargo straps just came loose."

"The cargo straps that the klutz said she'd tightened." Kara muttered.

"Well we'll be setting down soon so I want to go over the details before you all need to get ready. Now this isn't a combat operation but I want you all armed just in case there is someone left aboard that ship in a compartment that didn't flood. Is there an extra case that can be used for your blasters?"

"Err, yes. There – there's an unused case for some of our normal personal gear." Tobis replied, "Though, err, we will have to be careful about how much space it takes up."

"Good." Vorn said, "Now as you know Rear Admiral Aphanar and her task force brought down the star destroyer *Necromancy* over this world and scans taken at the time indicated that it came down relatively intact. You are to get aboard an survey the ship for-

"For any toys that didn't get broken?" Tharun suggested.

"Correct." Vorn answered, "Even with the Empire on the run at the moment we still need to grab hold of whatever resources we can find and that star destroyer is a gold mine just waiting to be exploited. As well as all the spare parts for our ships we may be able to get hold of there's the arms and equipment meant for a stormtrooper regiment to be considered." then he looked at Tobis again, "Tobis, have you had chance to study the technical report?"

"Oh, err, yes major." Tobis replied, "It, err, it appears that the ship was badly damaged in its engineering section. So, err, so these are likely to be flooded and that's why it sank on impact."

"How deep down is it?" Tharun asked.

"The command tower is about forty metres under the surface." Vorn answered, "You'll need to dive down to there to gain access to it. Fortunately it's a tropical area and the water is warm so you-

"So we don't need wetsuits." Kara interrupted, "Just breathing apparatus and frankly I'm glad of that. The klutz may be into skin tight rubber but I'm not." and Jaysica frowned.

The pitch of the *Silver Hawk's* engines then changed, indicating that the power being used for propulsion was decreasing significantly. Then the ship lurched again and there the sound of it hitting the water.

"We're down." Cass announced over the intercom.

"You don't say." Tharun muttered as he grabbed hold of a nearby bulkhead to steady himself.

"We're floating right above where the star destroyer went down." Cass continued, not having heard Tharun's comment about her landing.

"Time to get ready then." Vorn said, "I'll meet you all in the hold."



## 2.

With Vorn and Cass remaining aboard the *Silver Hawk*, the rest of the team changed into swimming costumes before they gathered in the transport ship's hold. In here were sets of breathing apparatus that included masks that would cover their entire faces. These allowed them to breathe normally and also to communicate with one another by means of built in comlinks. These had a limited range underwater compared to on dry land but they were better than nothing.

"Stop staring at Tobis." Jaysica said when she noticed the teenager looking at Tobis as he and Tharun carried out an inspection of some of the breathing apparatus while wearing only their swimming trunks. "Maybe she was looking at me." Tharun commented.

"Why?" Jaysica asked.

"Can we just get on with this?" Vorn said and he looked at the golden coloured protocol droid that was standing beside the controls to the cargo hatch set into the hold's floor. This was the reason why the team had gathered in the hold. Opening the hatch in the bottom of the floating *Silver Hawk* gave them direct access to the ocean below, "Jeeves, open the hatch."

"Of course Major Larcus sir." the droid responded as it opened the hatch.

"Sure, turn around little lady and let's get this air tank onto you." Tharun said, lifting up one of the compressed oxygen cylinders fitted with a body harness.

"Careful there Tharun." Kara commented, "The klutz went for a rubber swimsuit again. That tank's liable to just slip right off her."

"Oh shut up Kara." Jaysica replied as she passed her arms through the straps that would hold the tank on her back, "Just because you've only got that tatty old bikini while I've got this. The major's daughter told me it's a designer label."

"Well if you're going to loot a star destroyer you may as well look good doing it." Tharun said, "How's that little lady?"

"Fine." Jaysica said, "I just need to adjust this and-" and then she tugged on one of the straps of the oxygen tank's supporting harness. But rather than tightening it to fit her body better the strap released the tank itself and it dropped to the floor with a loud 'Clang!' before it toppled over and landed onto one of Tharun's feet.

"Kriff!" he exclaimed as there was the sound of breaking bone and he leapt backwards, clutching his injured foot.

"Stang Tharun are you okay?" Kara called out as she rushed to his side, letting him lean on her, "Let me see." and she looked down at the foot that was already starting to change colour.

"Kara how is he?" Vorn asked.

"It looks bad boss. It's broken." she told him, "I can set it but there's no way that he can go on this op."

"It was an accident." Jaysica said when Kara glared at her.

"Sure. Sure it was." Kara said.

"Never mind that now." Vorn said, "Kara I'll help you move Tharun to the lounge so you can treat him then I'll get changed and take his place.

"Oh no, I'm not having you doing a dive this deep." Kara told him.

"Kara I'm perfectly capable of-" Vorn began.

"No you're not boss." she said, "A forty or fifty metre dive is not going to do your heart any good at all. Besides, I want you here to give me mouth to mouth when we get back."

"Kara you're a competent swimmer, I doubt you'll need-" Vorn began.

"I didn't say I'd need it. I just want it." Kara interrupted, "Oh and a warm drink and blanket as well."

"But, err, don't we need four people for this mission?" Tobis pointed out.

"Yes we do. For safety. If someone gets hurt then one person can stay with them while two others go for help." Vorn said.

"Then we scrub the mission." Kara said, "Colonel Sallir and his team ought to be doing this anyway. Mon calls don't need any of this diving gear."

"The colonel and his men are occupied elsewhere," Vorn replied, "and this mission is too important to cancel."

"Can I go?" Cass asked, raising her hand, "I have a swimsuit I can change into." and Vorn frowned.

"Mace would be furious if anything happened to you." he said.

"You didn't want me on the ship at all at first." Cass reminded him, "It was dad's decision so he obviously thought I could handle it."

"Boss we really don't have any choice." Kara added and Vorn sighed.

"Go and get changed." he said to Cass, "Kara, let's get Tharun into the lounge and you can look at his foot."

"It's not exactly inconspicuous is it?" Vorn said when Cass emerged from her cabin wearing a bright yellow swimsuit in contrast to the black being worn by the others.

"It'll do boss." Kara said, "This isn't a combat mission, you said so yourself."

"Very well. Now get kitted up and off you go." Vorn said.

It took just a few minutes for the group diving down to the star destroyer to put on their breathing apparatus and swim flippers before Vorn and Jeeves assisted them into the water one by one. Tobis was the last into the water and Vorn handed him the case that held their weapons and some other personal equipment.

"Comm check." Vorn said into his comlink.

"Oh, err, reading you sir." Tobis responded.

"Good. Then off you go." Vorn said and Tobis promptly vanished beneath the waves.

Vorn then made his way to the cockpit where Tharun now sat in the co-pilot's seat with his injured foot in a foam filled cast raised up onto the control console.

"Here you go major." Tharun said, "Be the first to sign it." and he held out a marker pen towards Vorn.

"Thanks." Vorn replied as he took the pen and used it to sign his name on the outside of the cast, "Are you going to ask the others to sign it too?" he asked as he then sat down in the pilot's seat and returned the pen to Tharun.

"Of course. Lyssa too and I was thinking that we could put a hand print from Hallanah on it." Tharun said.

"In that case I recommend using something that can be erased when you get Kara to sign it." Vorn advised him, "She's likely to write something obscene on it and my daughter will never put her name to something with that sort of thing on. Let alone allow her own child's hand print to be added."

"Maybe I'll leave Kara until last then." Tharun replied. Then he looked out of the Silver Hawk's cockpit canopy at the ocean on which the vessel currently floated, "So how do you think they'll do?" he asked.

"Frankly Tharun, I've got a very bad feeling about this." Vorn said.

"Yeah. Me too. But isn't that generally where the fun starts?"

Even by the time the four rebels were ten metres below the surface of the ocean, the amount of light around them had fallen to around a quarter of the level on the surface and glow rods were essential for them to see where they were going. But even with these devices the environment around them was still murky and out of this gloom the command and control tower of the star destroyer Necromancy suddenly appeared beneath them.

"There it is." Kara said, "Follow me. I've done this before." and she swam towards the tower.

Kara knew that there was an air lock located on the control tower, not far from the bridge itself and it was to this that she swam. Here she accessed a manual release control so that she could crank open the outer hatch far enough that the rebels could swim inside with their air tanks still on their backs. Inside Kara used a second manual crank to close the hatch behind them.

"Tobis," she said as she did so, "there's a manual control for the inner hatch over there. Get ready to open it."

"Wait." Cass said suddenly, "Don't we need to decompress or something?"

"Oh, err, no." Tobis replied, "The interior air pressure will match that of the ocean around the ship. Otherwise the water would have filled the entire thing. We, err, we should be fine. I hope."

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

"Tobis knows what he's doing." Jaysica added.

"Just get on with it." Kara said and Tobis began to work the manual control on the inner hatch.

As soon as the door started to open there was a blast of air from underneath it that produced a cloud of bubbles as the water inside the airlock escaped into the corridor outside. With the water gone, the rebels were able to remove their breathing apparatus and breathe normally.

"See?" Kara said as she removed her helmet, "My lungs haven't exploded. Now let's get to the bridge."

"Why?" Cass asked, "What's there?"

"Control consoles." Kara said, "Just because the lights are out doesn't mean that nothing works. From the bridge we'll be able to find out what does."

Leaving their diving equipment by the air lock, the rebels followed Kara to the star destroyer's bridge where she and Tobis began to inspect the various control stations, looking for one that showed any signs of life.

Making his way down into one of the crew pits, Tobis found saw a tiny blinking light coming from one of the life support monitoring stations and he smiled.

"Over – over here." he called out and the other rebels came to see what he had found, standing above the pit and looking down at him.

"Tobis, what is it?" Jaysica asked.

"It, err, it's a life support station." he replied.

"How does that help us figure out what still works on this ship?" Cass asked.

"If the console is working then that means it has power," Kara said, "and if it has power then that means the computer network here is functional. Go grab his datapad and we'll see what else is drawing power on this wreck."

Cass scurried back to where the team's equipment crate had been left at the back of the bridge and returned shortly after with Tobis's datapad that she tossed down into the pit to him. Tobis promptly plugged this into the console in front of him.

"So what's the story Tobis?" Kara asked, "Does anything still work on this ship?"

"Oh, err, yes. I think so." he replied, "In fact quite a lot."

"Good. Then that means there's a lot we can salvage." Kara said, "Don't forget though, just because we're here for the Alliance doesn't mean that we can't grab anything that takes our eye as well. If you see something you like then it's finders' keepers. The Alliance can have what's left."

"Err." Tobis said suddenly, frowning.

"What's wrong Tobis?" Jaysica asked.

"There's another active console." he replied.

"Could some of the crew still be aboard?" Cass asked.

"It's possible." Kara said, "Though I'd have expected them to have abandoned ship after it crashed even if they couldn't before. After all it's been here for four days now and the Empire hasn't sent a rescue ship."

"So what do we do now?" Jaysica asked and Kara walked back to the equipment crate.

"Well you and Cass stay right here." she said as she reached down and took her blaster pistol from the crate,

"But Tobis and I are going hunting."



### 3.

Harvey was plugged into the *Silver Hawk's* flight console while Vorn and Tharun waited in the lounge. Tharun had dismantled his heavy blaster rifle to clean its components while Vorn was reading instead when all of a sudden there was a chirping sound over the intercom.

"Sounds like Harvey's found something." Vorn said as he set down his datapad and got up.

"Hang on, I'll be right there." Tharun replied as he too got to his feet and started to hobble towards the cockpit.

"Harvey what do you have?" Vorn asked when he reached the cockpit ahead of Tharun and sat in the pilot's seat beside the R5 unit. Then the droid adjusted the *Silver Hawk's* sensors to focus on a small area of the sky where a tiny black dot was revealed to be a starship.

"What's going on?" Tharun asked as he then appeared in the cockpit, hobbling to the co-pilot's seat.

"Harvey's spotted a ship." Vorn replied.

"Imperial?" Tharun said but Vorn shook his head.

"No. It looks like a Ghtroc freighter. An older model, a five-eighty I think."

"What are they doing out here in the Spire Worlds?" Tharun said, "We're more than four parsecs off the nearest trade route."

"It could be smugglers. It could be-" Vorn said before he was interrupted by a sudden burst of sound from Harvey, "It looks like they're heading this way." Vorn said.

"I've got a bad feeling about this major." Tharun said.

"So do I." Vorn replied, "We need to get into the air so we can raise our shields."

"Think you can fly this thing?" Tharun asked and Vorn shrugged.

"I can pilot a speeder. At low level a starship ought to be pretty similar. Besides, I'll have Harvey to help me. Do you think you can operate the turret?" he said.

"Not as well as Kara but I'll give it a go." Tharun answered.

"Good. Then go. I'll charge it up and get us out of the water." Vorn told him,

"What about the others?" Tharun asked as he pulled himself out of the co-pilot's seat.

"We've no way of contacting them. They ought to be okay down there though. There's nothing aboard that star destroyer that can hurt them."

Ordinarily starships used conventional repulsorlift engines for propulsion in a planetary atmosphere and Vorn hoped this meant that he could treat the *Silver Hawk* like the air speeders he was more used to piloting in his younger days. Slowly the transport rose up out of the water and then the intercom activated.

"Major Larcus sir." Jeeves' voice exclaimed from the cargo hold, "Is the *Silver Hawk* taking off?"

"Stang." Vorn hissed, realising that he had forgotten to tell his protocol droid to close the cargo hatch, "Yes Jeeves." he added, "Close the hatch and get up here."

"Of course sir, I'll be right there."

Vorn lifted the *Silver Hawk* up to an altitude of about a hundred metres before levelling out. The freighter felt sluggish and he found himself repeatedly having to correct for over steering. Checking the sensors again he saw that the unidentified freighter was still closing with the *Silver Hawk* but it had yet to make any attempt to contact the ship.

"Major Larcus sir," Jeeves said as he appeared in the cockpit, "might I enquire as to what is going on? Why have we taken off while Master Tobis and Mistresses Kara, Jaysica and Cass are still off the ship and why are you acting as pilot?"

"There's another vessel on an intercept course." Vorn replied. Then he glanced down at Harvey, "Harvey can you raise the shields?" he asked and the astromech droid responded with a brief series of chirps, "What did he say Jeeves?" Vorn added.

"Begging your pardon Major Larcus sir, but Harvey indicated that not only can he raise the *Silver Hawk's* shields but he also believes that he could simultaneously pilot the ship better than you are able to."

"We may be going into combat Harvey." Vorn said, "I may not be a combat pilot either but at least I can adapt to lethal situations better." and then Harvey produced an unpleasant sounding noise.

"Really Harvey." Jeeves exclaimed, "Major Larcus was merely stating a fact. There's no need to be so rude about it. Why you're lucky he doesn't blast you into a million pieces right here."

"Just get those shields up." Vorn said before Harvey chirped again.

"Major Larcus sir, Harvey indicates that our shields are now raised and the turret is fully powered. Am I to take it that Sergeant Verser is currently manning it?"

"That's right. Now see if you can contact that ship out there. I want to know who they are and what they want." Vorn said.

"But what shall I tell them about why we are here Major Larcus sir?" Jeeves asked.

"The truth. That we're a salvage team. But leave out the bit where we're part of the Alliance. If they're bounty hunters they may decide to tip off the Empire about us being here."

"Of course Major Larcus sir." Jeeves said and then the droid sat in the seat behind Vorn and activated the communication panel set into the wall beside the seat.

"Attention unidentified craft, this is the transport ship *Silver Hawk*. We are conducting salvage operations here. What is your identity and purpose for being here?" Jeeves signalled and Vorn winced when the droid used the *Silver Hawk's* actual name instead of an alias, wishing he had reminded the droid to do that.

The response from the approaching Ghtroc freighter came in the form of a flash of red light as it fired its turret mounted laser cannon at the *Silver Hawk* and the blasts struck the YT-1300's shields.

"Oh Major Larcus sir! They're firing on us!" Jeeves exclaimed and the droid waved its arms over its head as it spoke.

"Tharun," Vorn said into the intercom, "they've fired on us."

"Yeah I saw major. Want me to return the favour?"

"Yes. Fire at will. No warning shots." Vorn told him.

Sat in the *Silver Hawk's* dorsal turret Tharun turned the ship's laser cannon back towards the Ghtroc. In front of him the turret's targeting system told him where the cannon was pointing but Tharun was not used to the weapon and his first volley of fire went wide as the Ghtroc's pilot veered off unexpectedly.

"Stang." he hissed as he turned the turret as fast as he could, overshooting and having to bring the weapon back again before he fired a second volley that did nothing more than clip the Ghtroc's shields.

The other freighter then suddenly ascended rapidly into the sky and vanished into the clouds overhead and as it flew off it unleashed a second stream of laser blasts that missed the *Silver Hawk*.

"Hold on." Vorn said over the intercom, "I'm taking us in after him." and the *Silver Hawk* also ascended into the clouds.

Although the clouds blocked visual detection and could in theory hinder both thermal and radar tracking, they could not conceal the Ghtroc from such sensors fully.

"Harvey," Vorn said, "I need directions. Jeeves, translate for me."

"Harvey indicates that the other vessel is currently below us sir." Jeeves said when the astromech droid produced a sudden string of whistles.

"Okay Tharun, we're going down." Vorn said, "Watch your scope."

"Got it major." Tharun replied from the turret and he spun it around as the *Silver Hawk* descended again.

Catching sight of the Ghtroc on his targeting scanner Tharun turned the laser cannon back towards it and fired. The attack caught the Ghtroc off guard and the entire volley slammed into its underside, penetrating its shields and producing an explosion as the energy blasts punched their way through its hull, "I got him!"

Tharun exclaimed and in the cockpit Harvey let out more whistles as the Ghtroc started to veer to port.

"Major Larcus sir, Harvey indicates that the enemy vessel still has control of its systems. You would be advised to-" Jeeves began translating.

"Don't get cocky yet Tharun." Vorn said, not letting the droid finish, "He's not done." and then there was a sudden red flash as a laser blast struck the *Silver Hawk's* forward shields, "Tharun! Target dead ahead!" Vorn exclaimed and moments later he saw the Ghtroc emerge from the clouds in front of the *Silver Hawk*.

Alerted by Vorn, Tharun turned the turret to face forwards and unleashed a steady stream of shots from the laser cannon, continuing to adjust the exact facing of the cannon as he fired it.

The Ghtroc flew right into the sustained burst of laser blasts. Its shields held for the first few hits but then they suddenly overloaded and the next hit struck the freighter just beside its forward mounted cockpit module which was instantly filled with flames. Immediately the freighter began to tumble and as it passed by the *Silver Hawk* the two ships came into contact, the Ghtroc striking the side of the *Silver Hawk* with enough force to flip the YT-1300 over and Vorn struggled to regain control as the freighter went into a spin and the cockpit was filled with the sound of alarms.

"Harvey take over!" Vorn yelled, realising that he lacked the skill to recover from the spin before it plummeted into the ocean and the droid responded with another series of clicks and whistles.

"Harvey states that he did try and warn you about your piloting skills Major Larcus sir." Jeeves said but Vorn just held on tightly to his seat, praying that the little droid would be able to avoid crashing the ship.

"Major, what's going on?" Tharun asked from the turret, "Much more of this spinning and I'm going to barf in here."

"Harvey's got it under control." Vorn replied before the ship lurched to a complete stop, hovering in the air just a few metres over the ocean, "See? I told you it would work. Now what happened to that Ghtroc?"

"Don't ask me major, I didn't see anything after it hit us. I'm guessing they didn't pull over so we could exchange insurance details?"

"No they didn't. I just hope the damage isn't too bad." Vorn replied. Then he looked down at Harvey, "Harvey take us back to where we were when the others left the ship and set us down. Then I'll go out and take a look at how bad the damage is."

Harvey whistled in reply and the *Silver Hawk* moved off, its acceleration far smoother than it had been when

Vorn was actively piloting the vessel. Then when the ship reached the correct location Harvey brought it down into the ocean again.

But while the *Silver Hawk's* occupants had been distracted by the spin their vessel had been caught in, none of them had noticed the escape pod that ejected from the stricken Ghtroc freighter that fell into the ocean just over a kilometre from where they landed.

On a ship the size of an Imperial-class star destroyer it took a considerable amount of time to travel from the bridge to the nose section without being able to make use of the turbolifts, especially when Kara and Tobis could not be certain that they would not run into a squad of stormtrooper marines who had chosen to remain behind when the ship crashed into the ocean around the next corner. The two rebels took turns to advance, darting from one junction to the next before halting while the other caught up and then moved on to the next one. Along the way they found numerous inactive droids, many of which had collapsed after being shut down when the order to evacuate had been given. Imperial doctrine did not allow for the evacuation of droids from a damaged vessel and there was always the worry that any faults in their programming would enable them to take escape pods meant for organic crew members first when their self preservation functions took over.

"Think we could turn any of these guys back on?" Kara whispered when they encountered a cluster of inactive labour droids.

"Oh, err, perhaps." Tobis replied as he considered the practicalities of reactivating the droids, "They, err, they should be able to operate independently of the ship's systems. I - I wouldn't recommend it through. They will be programmed to be loyal to the Empire."

Kara paused as she thought about this."

You don't think that any of the droids could have escaped being shut down do you?" she asked, "Maybe that's what we're looking for. A droid."

"That, err, that would make things easier. Err, unless it's a probe droid or assassin droid." Tobis replied and Kara sighed.

"Don't remind me of them." she said, having encountered both types of Imperial droid before. Then she looked around, "So which way now?" she added.

"This way." Tobis replied and he waved her down a corridor that led off to the side of the one they were currently heading down, "The, err, the active console was located near the garrison store."

Imperial-class star destroyers often carried the components necessary to construct a fortified surface garrison that they could deploy in pre-fabricated sections to be assembled on the surface of a planet. The static nature of a garrison base meant that the structural components themselves were of little interest to the Rebel Alliance which despite its recent successes still had to be ready to evacuate any base at a moments notice. But as well as the structure itself, the star destroyer also carried the personal equipment that would normally be deployed along with the garrison and if this could be recovered then it would enable the Rebellion to equip thousands of soldiers for combat. But as the two rebels neared the area where all of this equipment was stored they found that they were not the only ones to be interested in it.

"Someone's there." Kara hissed as she crouched down beside a wall, raising her blaster and shutting off her glow rod and Tobis did the same behind her. At this point they ought to have been plunged into pitch blackness but instead a dim light remained in the corridor as it reflected off the walls ahead of them.

But more significant than the light was the sound coming from somewhere out of sight. The sound was that of cutting equipment being used to cut through bulkheads and blast doors and it was clear that there was more than one set of the equipment in use. Kara and Tobis waited for a short while and when the various sets of cutting equipment all fell silent at the same time they heard voices.

The voices were obviously alien, they did not speak basic and there was a gruff sound to them. This eliminated the possibility that they were members of the *Necromancy's* crew who had been unwilling or unable to evacuate the ship, the Imperial military remained wholly human and the only alien aboard a star destroyer would be prisoners. It was of course possible that there had been captives aboard the star destroyer who had been left to die when the crew abandoned ship but it seemed more likely to the two rebels that unfortunately they were not the first ones to come aboard it since it had crashed.

"Think they're friendly?" Kara whispered.

"I, err, I don't know." Tobis replied and Kara sighed.

"That was rhetorical Tobis. It doesn't matter. We need to make sure that they don't steal all the best stuff before we can." she said and then she got back to her feet, "Come on, let's go see who they are."

Kara then crept towards the source of the light and sound and peered around the corner ahead of the two rebels. Here she found herself looking at an open hatchway that led to a raised platform of some kind and she made her way forwards as far as the opening. From here she could see that the platform was in fact a short walkway that overlooked a larger chamber and in the walls of this chamber were lined with massive sealed doors that a group of figures were using heavy cutting gear to force their way through. There were a dozen of the figures in total, all of the same species and Kara recognised it as soon as she saw them.

"Karkarodons." she said softly.

Karkarodons possessed bodies of the typical humanoid form that stood vertically with two arms and two legs but they were far from being human. Completely hairless, their muscular bodies possessed webbed hands and feet and heads that were reminiscent of the sharks that inhabited the oceans of many worlds across the galaxy.

This explained how they had come to get aboard the star destroyer at the bottom of the ocean. The vessel was inclined downwards and the far end of the compartment was underwater, meaning that there was a route from here that led out into the ocean itself. Unaffected by the pressure of the ocean depths, the karkarodons would have been able to simply swim through the hull breach and into the vessel, emerging here where it seemed that there was plenty of salvageable equipment.

"Err, I'm not familiar with them." Tobis replied as he looked around Kara's shoulder.

"They're bad news." she said, "Or at least they can be. They're apex predators and they know it. During the Clone Wars a lot of them fought with the Separatists and they were brutal."

"Did, did you know someone who fought against them?" Tobis asked but Kara shook her head.

"No. But I remember growing up on Tarlen and a bunch of them turned up and settled by a local lake that the farmers all used for irrigating their crops and watering their herds. All of a sudden the karkarodons starting claiming water rights and demanding that they be paid for access to the lake we'd used for centuries. The police were having none of it of course and the Empire even sent sector rangers to deal with them. That's how I got to hear about them. The sector rangers had been briefed and they brought in some old clone trooper who fought against them in the war as an advisor who told the stories to the locals. The karkarodons got kicked off Tarlen but they caused a lot of trouble before they left, a lot of equipment was sabotaged and stolen and they helped themselves to more than a few animals as food."

"So, err, what do you want to do now lieutenant?" Tobis asked.

"Well I doubt that they'll leave of their own accord if we just ask nicely. Their presence here is probably as illegal as ours is. We're going to have to use our blasters. Be warned though, they're pretty tough. If you don't hit something vital on the first try then you'll need several shots to bring one down." Kara replied and then she unhooked her comlink from her bikini and lifted it to her mouth, "Jaysica are you there?" she signalled.

"Yes, yes I'm here and so is Cass. We're still on the bridge. Do you want us to come down to you?" Jaysica asked in response.

"No, I think Tobis and I can handle this. Your little tiny blasters aren't going to do us much good anyway."

"Why? What's wrong?"

"There's a bunch of karkarodons aboard." Kara told her.

"Karkarodons? But what are they doing here?"

"Same thing we are it looks like. Trying to steal everything they can." Kara said. Then she glanced at Tobis when she noticed a light shining onto her arm and added, "Tobis turn off that glow rod. You'll give us away."

"Oh, err. Right. Ah, my glow rod's not switched on." Tobis replied and both of them suddenly looked around to see another pair of karkarodons standing behind them.

One of the aliens let out a sudden roar and charged headlong towards the rebels. Kara tried to aim her blaster but Tobis was in her line of fire and by the time he reacted the karkarodon was upon them. Grabbing hold of Tobis by his throat the karkarodon lifted him off the deck and hurled him against the wall. With Tobis no longer in her way, Kara fired her blaster and the shot caught the karkarodon just under his arm from where it pierced his chest cavity and he fell dead. But before she could move onto the second alien it reached out and ripped the blaster from her grasp, scraping the skin of her hand and drawing blood. Then the karkarodon pushed her to the floor and reached down, placing a hand on her chest and pinning her in place.

"Kara? Kara what's happening?" Jaysica's voice called out from the comlink that Kara had dropped in the struggle and the karkarodon turned his head towards it and growled. Then he reached out and brought his fist down on the device, smashing it to pieces.

## 4.

"Kara? Kara what's happening?" Jaysica asked but all she heard in response was a growl followed by a 'crack' and then silence.

"What's going on?" Cass asked.

"I don't know." Jaysica replied, "Kara said that there were karkarodons aboard. If there are then we're in trouble. I've got a very bad feeling about this."

The karkarodon hurled both Kara and Tobis at the feet of the group's leader.

"They were spying on us from up there." he said, pointing back to the walkway.

"Were they indeed?" the commander replied as he looked down at the two dazed rebels.

"I think there may be more as well. The woman was using a comlink to talk to someone. We are too deep for a signal to reach the surface."

"Yes we are. Tie them up then go and find out who else is aboard our ship." the commander ordered before turning his back on Kara and Tobis.

As he pulled Tobis back to his feet the other karkarodon waved a third member of the group over to help him secure the two rebels. The pair were dragged across the chamber as far as the flooded section where a ladder was fixed to the wall and using sets of plastic cable ties the two karkarodons bound the rebels' wrists to it, leaving them standing knee deep in water and secured to the ladder.

"So you're just going to leave us here then?" Kara said as the two karkarodons walked away, "Or are we lunch?"

"Oh, err, maybe you shouldn't give them ideas?" Tobis suggested nervously.

"No need to worry little man." one of the two karkarodons replied, "We aren't going to eat you. When we sell this salvage we'll sell you as well. We can't do that if we've eaten you now can we?"

Tobis looked at Kara.

"I, err, I'm sure the others will find a way to rescue us." he said and Kara winced.

"I've got a really bad feeling about this." she said.

Jaysica opened up the equipment case and started to rummage through it.

"What are you looking for?" Cass asked.

"Our blasters of course." Jaysica replied, "If Kara and Tobis have been captured by the karkarodons then we need to go and rescue them." then she paused for a moment, "Well, Tobis at least." she added and then she smiled as she found the belt that had her compact holdout blaster holstered on it as well as several other pouches of items she thought might be useful on the mission and she wrapped it around her waist.

"So what's the plan going to be then?" Cass said as she took her sporting blaster from the case and double checked that the power cell was correctly in place.

"We need to find out if there really are karkarodons on board and if so where they are." Jaysica said, walking down into the crew pit where Tobis had found the active console and plugging a datapad of her own into it,

"Then we need to rescue Tobis and we'll figure out how to get the karkarodons off the ship."

"And Kara." Cass said.

"What?"

"We're rescuing Kara as well." Cass pointed out.

"Oh yes, I suppose so. But I bet she won't thank us." Jaysica replied, "Okay, I've got the location of where Tobis found the other active console. I'm guessing that the karkarodons are there, that's how Kara and Tobis managed to get captured by them."

Cass stared at Jaysica and her eyes widened.

"What's wrong?" Jaysica asked as she climbed back out of the pit.

"What if the karkarodons didn't take them prisoner? What if they're-"

"No." Jaysica said suddenly, "Tobis isn't dead. Don't say that, he's alive and I'm going to save him." and then she headed for the exit from the bridge.

"Okay I won't. But wait for me. If we're walking into a trap we'd better stick together." Cass called out as she hurried after her.

The ocean was relatively calm but it was inevitable that the *Silver Hawk* bobbed up and down somewhat as it floated on top of the water. The vessel had enough buoyancy to remain afloat but a large wave could potentially swamp it and Vorn would be hurled into the ocean if this happened. Therefore, using a syntherope line to secure himself to the *Silver Hawk* just inside its upper hatch Vorn moved cautiously across the hull of the ship to inspect the point where the vessel had collided with the Ghtroc freighter before the latter crashed

into the ocean. Meanwhile Tharun watched him from the hatchway so that if he happened to fall or be washed overboard then the former mercenary could drag him out of the water using the line connected to the safety harness Vorn wore.

"See anything yet major?" Tharun called out.

"Not yet." Vorn replied, "But I think that the Ghtroc hit the very edge of the ship, 'I'm going to have to get closer to see over."

"Just remember that I can't dive in and save you with my foot in the state it's in." Tharun said.

"I'll be careful." Vorn said.

Tharun was about to reply when all of a sudden there was a dull 'clump' from beneath the *Silver Hawk* that attracted his attention.

"Major I think something just hit our hull." he said, "Could be a piece of wreckage from the Ghtroc."

"Go take a look, make sure the hull's not breached anywhere. I'll be fine" Vorn told him.

"Okay major. I'll be right back." Tharun said and he disappeared down through the hatchway, leaving it open. Back inside the *Silver Hawk*, Tharun hobbled towards the cockpit, looking down at the deck and searching for any signs of water leaking into the ship. Spotting a small box shaped droid in the corner of the lounge he called out to it.

"Hey Penny," he said, "help me make sure that we're not sinking okay?" and the droid whistled as it rolled towards him, following him into the cockpit.

Meanwhile Jeeves still waited in the hold, standing beside the open cargo hatch just in case any of the team sent down to the *Necromancy* happened to return. The droid heard the sound of something dragging against the hull and peered into the water.

"Hello? May I assist you?" it asked.

All of a sudden there was a splash of water as a muscular figure came to the surface and dragged itself out of the water into the hold.

"Oh my!" Jeeves exclaimed upon seeing the karkarodon, "You are not part of this vessel's crew. What are you doing here?"

The karkarodon looked at Jeeves and snarled. Then the alien roared as he lunged at the droid and clamped its head between his hands.

"Major Larcus! Sergeant Verser! Help me!" Jeeves called out as the karkarodon began to swing the droid sideways, lifting it up as he turned towards one of the four narrow pillars that surrounded the cargo hatch. There was a loud crashing as Jeeves' body slammed into the pillar and the droid's head was torn free. The headless body flew across the hold before it fell to the floor while the karkarodon hurled the severed head into the corner and looked around before striding towards the nearest door.

In the cockpit Tharun heard the commotion coming from the direction of the cargo hold and looked back through the doorway behind him.

"Harvey, see if you can find out what's going on back there." he said and the astromech whistled at him, "I have no idea what you just said." Tharun added and Harvey sent a text stream to one of the displays on the main flight console.

JEEVES IS NOT ANSWERING THE INTERCOM.

"Stay here. Both of you." Tharun told Harvey and Penny, "Lock the door behind me and don't open it for anyone but me or the major." and then he started to hobble back towards the lounge. Turning directly towards the cargo hold he drew his blaster from its holster on his thigh and opened the door in front of him to find the cargo hold in darkness.

"Jeeves?" he said as he peered into the darkness and he felt for a light switch. When the lights came on Tharun saw the droid's apparently headless body immediately and also that someone had closed the cargo hatch, "Kriff!" he exclaimed and he started to hobble across the hold towards it.

At the same time as Tharun was moving as fast as he could to check on Jeeves the karkarodon emerged into the lounge via the passageway that ran past the *Silver Hawk's* workshop and the first thing that he noticed was the door leading to the ship's upper hatch was open. Stepping into the combination storage room and air lock the karkarodon released the safety line he could see connected beside the ladder, tossed it out of the shop and then sealed the top hatch.

Meanwhile in the hold Tharun confirmed that Jeeves' head had been forcibly removed and winced.

"Stang Jeeves, I hope Tobis can fix that." he said as he looked towards the other doorway out of the hold and saw that it was open. Realising that whoever had decapitated the droid had probably left the hold that way Tharun reasoned that he and this unknown party were probably both now circling the core of the *Silver Hawk* where its power plant and turret were located. If this kept up then the pair would chase one another around this forever without coming into contact with one another and so he doubled back, heading back towards the lounge in the same direction he had come from.

As he neared the doorway back to the lounge he heard the sound of footsteps coming from the short corridor that led to the cockpit and then a roar followed by the sound of someone banging their fists against a sealed hatch.

"Don't like being locked out huh?" Tharun muttered to himself, "Well let's see how you like having my blaster pressed against the back of your head shall we?" and he hobbled towards the cockpit. However, the karkarodon heard Tharun's approach and turned to face him just as he appeared behind the alien and roared at him, "Stang!" Tharun exclaimed as he raised his blaster and took aim at the karkarodon. But just as he was about to fire the karkarodon lashed out with one of his webbed hands and knocked the weapon aside, causing the blast to go into a bulkhead instead and knocking the weapon from Tharun's hand before he could try for a second shot. Instinctively Tharun stepped back, intending to drop into a stance suited for unarmed combat, but he forgot about his injured foot as he did so and he slipped. This gave the karkarodon the chance to strike and he slammed his fist into Tharun's face, propelling him back hard enough that when his head struck the bulkhead behind him there was an audible 'crack' and Tharun dropped unconscious to the floor.

## 5.

Vorn was lying flat on the upper hull and looking over the side to inspect the damage when he noticed that his safety line had gone slack.

“Tharun-” he began, looking back towards the Silver Hawk's top hatch when he noticed that it had been closed, “Stang.” he hissed, realising that something was wrong and he scabbled across the hull towards the hatch where he found that it would not open. Vorn was now faced with a dilemma. The only other entrances to the ship were on its underside and that meant that they were underwater. This meant that getting to them would require him to dive into the open sea without a life jacket or any breathing equipment. However, he could think of no other option and so he undid his safety harness, knowing that the trailing syntherope line would only get in his way and then returned to the side of the ship before leaping over it.

Vorn resurfaced and gasped for air, clinging onto the side of the *Silver Hawk*. He could feel the current trying to pull him away from the ship and part of him wanted to simply climb back out of the water. But he knew that his only hope of getting into the ship lay with submerging again and he took a deep breath before diving back beneath the surface. Underwater without a mask, Vorn's eyes would not focus properly and he made his way towards the cargo hatch by feel alone and upon finding this closed as well he felt for the controls to open it from the outside. However, like the top hatch this had been sealed to prevent it from being opened from the outside and so Vorn was forced to make his way back to the side of the ship where he could surface and take another breath.

With two hatches down there was only one possibility remaining for Vorn to be able to get back inside the ship, the access ramp. This led almost directly into the lounge area and leaving it open for too long would risk flooding the ship and sending it straight to the bottom of the ocean which was why it had not been used by the dive team. However, faced with no other options Vorn pulled himself around the Silver Hawk's hull until he reached the escape pod located behind the cockpit module where the ramp was located. Then he took another deep breath and submerged, guiding himself to the manual control to the access ramp and entering his code. Just as he had hoped this entry point was not sealed. Unlike the others, having been closed already the karkarodon had not wasted any time in sealing it from the inside.

Vorn waited as the access ramp started to lower and water flowed into the compartment inside. As soon as the gap between ramp and hull was wide enough Vorn swam through and surfaced, sucking air into his lungs before he brought his hand down on the nearby ramp control to close it again before the *Silver Hawk* took on too much water.

As soon as the door leading to the lounge slid open Vorn heard the sound of blaster fire coming from the direction of the cockpit and he crept out of the ramp compartment and looked around. There was no-one in the lounge itself but he could just about see Tharun lay slumped against a bulkhead in the corridor leading to the cockpit. Quickly he darted across the lounge towards the crew cabins and went into his own where he quickly retrieved his blaster rifle and loaded it. Unfolding the stock he braced the weapon in his shoulder and then headed back towards the cockpit, keeping his weapon held at the ready.

He paused when he saw the karkarodon trying to shoot its way into the cockpit, waiting to see whether it was aware of his presence. But when it failed to turn around Vorn smiled.

“Did you forget about me?” he asked loudly and the karkarodon whirled around to face him. With his weapon already aimed at the alien Vorn pulled the trigger of his rifle and kept it held down, sending a sustained burst of powerful energy blasts into the alien's chest until it collapsed at his feet and Tharun's blaster clattered from its dead hand, “I'll take that as a 'yes' then shall I?” Vorn added as he lowered his rifle and then knelt to check on Tharun.

“Are you sure we're going the right way?” Cass asked as she continued to follow Jaysica through the darkened corridors of the star destroyer.

“Of course I am. Look, this next turning will be the medical section.” Jaysica replied.

“Then why does that sign over there point to the hangar?” Cass said and she pointed to a sign pointing the way to several key areas of the ship, none of which were the medical section and Jaysica frowned and sighed.

“Then we are lost. Wait here.” she told Cass, “I'm going to take a look around and see if I can figure out where we are. I need you to be my point of reference.”

“Okay, but don't take too long okay?” Cass said as Jaysica walked away and left her alone.

Waiting at the junction for Jaysica to return, Cass rapidly became bored and she sat down against one of the walls. With nothing to keep her attention she began to slowly switch her glow rod off and on, holding it out at different angles so she could watch the difference in the shadows. She continued doing this until she switched off the glow rod and found that she was not plunged into pitch blackness. At first she considered the



possibility that it was Jaysica returning but the light was coming from a different passageway to the one that the other rebel had gone down. It was still possible that Jaysica had managed to circle all the way around but Cass could not be certain.

Then she heard the sound of a deep voice, followed by another. Both voices spoke in an alien language and this proved to Cass that it was not Jaysica returning. Instinctively she raised her blaster and aimed it down the the corridor but then she considered her position. There were at least two karkarodons approaching her and she was armed only with a lightweight sporting blaster that had six shots in its power cell and no spare ammunition. As Cass saw it she had two choices open to her, hide or flee. But neither of these felt right to her and she desperately wanted some way of fighting them with a reasonable chance of survival.

With the blaster still pointing in the direction the karkarodons were approaching from, Cass backed away until she came to an open doorway and glanced through it. The chamber on the other side of the doorway was a stormtrooper barracks and Cass could see their armoured helmets lined up on top of lockers containing the armour that had been abandoned here when the star destroyer's marine contingent had evacuated the ship. At the far end of the room she spotted a ladder leading up to another level above this one and all of a sudden Cass smiled as she had an idea on how to get the karkarodons close enough for to stand a good chance of shooting them.

In the corridor outside the two karkarodons advanced, searching for any signs of anyone else aboard the star destroyer. Their two rebel prisoners had not given them any ideas of where their friends were hidden or how many of them there were.

"Hello?" they suddenly heard a voice call out from the darkness, "Is that you? You can't just leave me tied up like this. Please just let me go and I promise I won't tell anyone you were here."

The karkarodons looked at one another and then strode towards the source of the voice.

"Hello?" Cass called out again, "Please, untie me."

The karkarodons reached the doorway into the barracks at this point and shone their glow rods into the room where they saw Cass standing with her back to the ladder at the far end of the room with her arms apparently wrapped around it behind her. Blinking as the karkarodons' glow rods were shone directly at her she averted her gaze and blinked.

"You're not them." she said, "Quickly, untie me before they come back. They're rebels." and she banged her hand against the ladder behind her.

The karkarodons looked at one another again and then one of them started to approach her, picking up speed as he came.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Cass said as the karkarodon broke into a run.

The alien roared as it charged and extended his arm out in front of him. But before he could get within reach of the supposedly helpless Cass she suddenly took her arms from behind her back and raised her blaster. She fired before the karkarodon could react, putting a shot into his shoulder then another into the centre of his chest and a third into his head.

As the karkarodon fell dead Cass turned towards the second alien still standing in the doorway and fired her blaster again. However, this time the blaster bolt missed its target and instead struck the door frame. In response to this attack the karkarodon let out a roar and charged at her. Cass fired again and this time the shot struck the karkarodon in his side, causing him to break stride for a moment as he let out another roar, this one of pain. Then she fired her sixth and final shot only to have this one also fail to stop the karkarodon as it struck the alien in the shoulder.

Lashing out with his uninjured arm, the karkarodon knocked Cass's now useless blaster from her hand and it slid across the floor into the darkness. Then he reached out and grabbed her by the throat before lifting her up off the floor and roared directly into her face. Cass felt the karkarodon's grip tighten around her throat and she kicked her legs as she clawed at the alien's hand in an attempt to free herself. But the alien was too strong and she could not break his grip or land a strong enough blow with her bare feet to get him to release her.

"Let her go!" Jaysica's voice called out from behind the karkarodon and the alien turned his head to see her now standing in the doorway with her hold out blaster aimed directly at him. Spinning around the karkarodon held Cass up between him and Jaysica but the small size of the teenager compared to the alien meant that his legs were still exposed beneath her and Jaysica lowered her aim before she fired. The relatively low powered blaster bolt struck the karkarodon in one of his knees and although this was not enough to kill him it did cause him to collapse as the joint was destroyed by the attack. As he fell he finally let go of Cass and she rolled out of Jaysica's line of fire, allowing her to target the karkarodon more clearly as she advanced on him, still firing her hold out blaster until it was empty of ammunition.

"Cass are you okay?" Jaysica asked, looking down at her and Cass nodded.

"I think so." she croaked as Jaysica helped her back to her feet, "But I used all my ammunition to take out just one of these things."

Jaysica sighed, looking at her own blaster.

"Me too." she said, "I don't know how we're going to rescue the others now. We'll have to go back to the

*Silver Hawk* and get some better blasters but that will take ages and they may be gone by the time we get back.”

Spying her own blaster where it had come to rest, Cass walked over to it and picked it up. It was then that she noticed it had been stopped when it struck a blast door that was still sealed and she frowned.

“Jaysica,” she said, “this is a stormtrooper barracks, right?”

“Well it looks like one.” Jaysica agreed as she looked around at the rows of helmets.

“So what sort of room in a stormtrooper barracks would need an armoured door?” Cass asked and Jaysica smiled.

“An armoury.” she said.

## 6.

Jaysica and Cass struggled along the corridors of the star destroyer, each of them holding a blaster rifle with its stock folded in one hand while they wore bandoliers of extra ammunition over their swimsuits, had blaster pistols holstered on their thighs and dragged a long crate marked with the circular emblem of the Galactic Empire behind them. They paused every so often to check their position in the star destroyer and they soon found themselves approaching the section of the ship where the modular garrison base was stored where they heard the sounds of cutting equipment at work.

"I think this is it." Jaysica whispered as she set down her crate, "Let's get these things unpacked."

"Have you ever used one of these before?" Cass asked as she watched Jaysica open the crate to reveal a long tubular blaster with a fixed stock and wide barrel.

"No." Jaysica replied, "But how hard can it be?" and she frowned as she lifted the weapon out of the crate, "I don't see why they call this a 'light' repeating blaster, it's really heavy." she added, "Now unpack yours while I check out what's up ahead. Don't worry though, I'll be back." and then she raised the bulky weapon to point forwards as she started to advance along the corridor towards the source of the noise.

Reaching the doorway that looked out over the partially flooded chamber where the karkarodons were at work Jaysica saw that they were removing containers from the storage hold they had already forced open and were stacking them near to the water line. Then just a few metres away from this she saw Kara and Tobis tied to the ladder and she sighed.

"Oh Tobis, I'm coming to rescue you." she said to herself softly.

Then she heard movement from behind her and struggled to turn the repeating blaster around.

"It's only me." Cass said softly as she struggled under the weight of her own repeating blaster, "So what do we do now?" and Jaysica smiled.

"What else?" she replied, "We kick ass and look really hot doing it."

Kara winced as she tugged at the cable ties binding her wrists.

"That, err, that's not a good idea." Tobis said, "You – you'll just make them cut into your skin."

"They're already digging into my skin." Kara replied, "At this rate I'll be a door prize with no hands in some hutt palace by the end of the week."

"Oh, err, I'm sure we'll find some way out." Tobis said and he looked around, hoping that some way of getting free would present itself.

"Yeah right. How can you know that?" Kara said, frowning as Tobis happened to look up and see someone in a bright yellow swimsuit standing in the same doorway he and Kara had been brought into the chamber through.

"I, err, I just have a good feeling about it." he said, smiling just as the first burst of blaster fire erupted from the walkway.

Designed specifically for fully automatic fire at long range the two light repeating blasters were ideally suited to firing down from the walkway at the karkarodons and with her first sustained burst Jaysica shot three of the aliens dead in just a few seconds. The drawback was that the heavy weapon depleted its power cell just as quickly as it was capable of firing and Jaysica now had to reload.

"Watch your rate of fire." she told Cass, "Short bursts only."

"Got it." Cass said before she unleashed a burst of fire at another trio of karkarodons, killing one while the other two dived for cover.

The two young women then took turns in firing at the karkarodons while both Kara and Tobis tried to duck as the blaster bolts flew across the chamber but were limited in how low they could get by the plastic ties that kept their arms threaded through the rungs of the ladder they were tied to.

The leader of the karkarodons yelled out to his men and then charged directly towards the walkway only for Cass to turn her weapon on him and a burst of powerful energy blasts ripped through his chest before Cass turned her attention back to the two karkarodons still hiding after her first attack. Firing at the crates they were using for cover Cass fired several short bursts, sufficient to blast right through the crates and kill the karkarodons without them needing to break cover first. Then as she was forced to stop to reload Jaysica took over again and gunned down another two of the karkarodons who had tried to run for the water.

"Did you just shoot them in the back?" Cass asked as she locked a new power cell into place.

"Tobis is down there." Jaysica replied, "If we let them hide in the water they could attack us while we try and free him."

Cass then looked back over the edge of the walkway and frowned.

"Where did they go?" she asked, "I saw at least two more."

"They must be down there somewhere." Jaysica replied, "Look again."

All of a sudden there was a roar as a karkarodon who had managed to sneak close enough to climb the steps up to the walkway loomed over the two women and swung a fist at Jaysica. Squealing she rolled aside and tried to lift her repeating blaster high enough to shoot at the karkarodon. But the alien was able to grab hold of the barrel of the bulky weapon and he held it pointed away from his body. But Jaysica noticed that his position was somewhat precarious and she lashed out with her foot, kicking one of the karkarodon's legs out from under him and he tumbled back down the steps before Jaysica was able to line up her blaster on him and fire.

This left only one karkarodon to deal with and he was heading for the two rebel prisoners with one of the powered cutting tools in his hands, intending to use them as a shield to hide behind while he escaped.

"Down here!" Kara called out when she saw the alien advancing towards them and both Jaysica and Cass turned their weapons towards the final karkarodon and opened fire, catching him in a fierce volley of energy blasts that tore him apart.

"We did it!" Jaysica exclaimed to Cass, "Come on, let's go free Tobis. But bring your blasters, there may be more karkarodons down there."

Still tied to the ladder, Kara and Tobis watched Jaysica and Cass descend the stairs laden with weapons.

"I don't believe it." Kara said in response to the sight of Jaysica wearing just a swimsuit but carrying enough weapons for three people. Then just as she was reached the bottom step Jaysica slipped and squealed as she landed face down on the floor at the bottom of the steps and Kara smiled, "No wait, now I do."

With Jeeves inactive Vorn sat in the hold cradling his rifle as he watched the cargo hatch. All of a sudden a helmeted head broke the surface and Vorn smiled as he recognised his wife. Getting up he reached down to help Kara out of the water and watched as she removed her helmet. Then both of them looked into one another's faces and they spoke at the same time.

"You are not going to believe the day I've had."