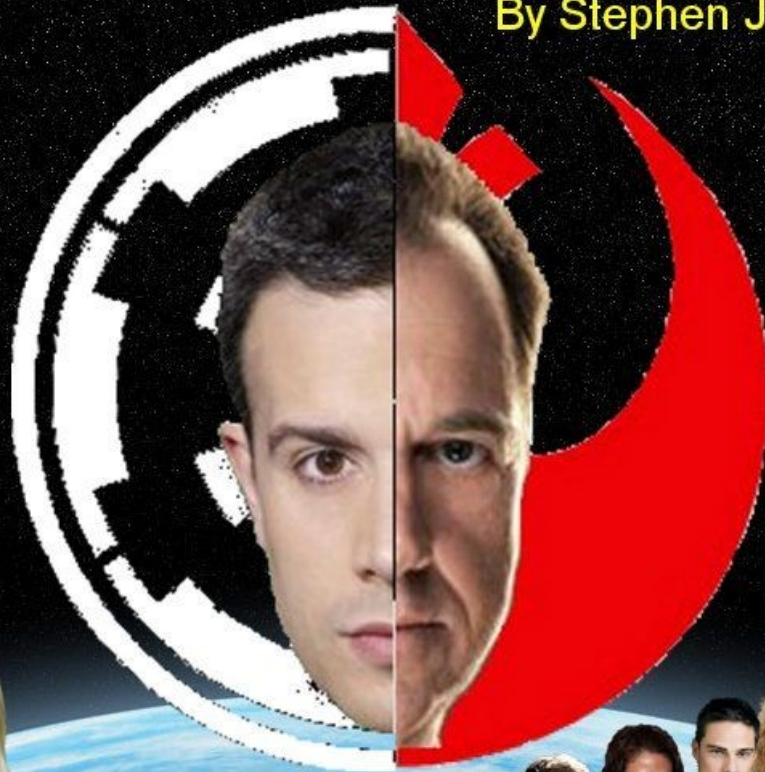


STAR WARS

8-06: Expanding the Fleet

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 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...

EXPANDING THE FLEET

DESPITE RECENT SUCCESSES, THE ALLIANCE IS STILL HEAVILY OUTNUMBERED BY THE IMPERIAL FLEET AND ANY SHIPS THAT THEY CAN OBTAIN WILL BE PUT TO GOOD USE. THIS MAKES THE CHANCE TO STEAL AN ENTIRE FLEET OF CAPITAL SHIPS AN OPPORTUNITY TOO GOOD TO MISS...

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

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1.

The shipyard was located in open space on the outer edge of a system in the region known as the Mining Belt. Largely devoid of habitable worlds this region contributed massive natural resources to the sector's economy and many of the sector's largest industrial facilities were to be found here. Operated by Kurrad Industries, the most successful private company in the sector, the shipyard was dedicated to the construction and servicing of large transport ships and vessels thousands of metres long could be accommodated in its vast dry docks. But there were more than just commercial vessels present at the shipyard. Occupying a volume of space that was several thousand kilometres away from the vast structure were just over fifty warships, all of which dated back to the Clone Wars and even the smallest of them was still more than eight hundred metres long. At the close of the galaxy wide conflict all of the warships now drifting near the shipyards had been in the hands of the newly formed Galactic Empire and they were supposed to have been scuttled by having them set to jump through hyperspace into a star. However, the individual responsible for programming the jump had instead set them to jump into interstellar space and then gone on to treat them as a source of spare parts that he could sell to anyone who wanted them. But when the local Imperial forces required replacement parts for their remaining venator-class star destroyers they had been able to locate and salvage them all. The old Republic vessels had been brought here to be stored until they were needed while as part of the deal with Kurrad Industries the former Separatist vessels became the property of the company to either be turned back into commercial vessels for use by the company's shipping arm or reconditioned and sold to local forces who were authorised to possess them. But now it was this collection of obsolete warships that brought the shipyard's latest visitors to the system.

The *Trading Dream* was a lucrehulk-class battleship, converted by the Trade Federation from an ordinary freighter in the years before the Clone Wars. Now it served as a key part in the naval forces of the Alliance to Restore the Republic in the sector as both a fighter carrier and also a transport ship capable of carrying vast numbers of troops and equipment. Prior to travelling to the system the *Trading Dream's* transponder had been modified to make it appear to be a different lucrehulk-class vessel, the *Golden Empress*. This vessel was a self contained mining, refining and manufacturing ship that normally operated on the far side of the sector in the Shadow Worlds. Recently however, the *Golden Empress* had also fallen into the hands of the rebellion but this fact was not yet known to the Empire and so the ship's appearance would not raise any alarms.

"Lucrehulk-class vessel this is dock control, state your purpose for being here." a voice spoke moments after the *Trading Dream* returned to realspace a relatively short distance away from the shipyard and the captain of the ship, a neimoidian called Kav Kaaro, turned to look at a nearby human officer.

"Colonel Larcus, would you like to respond?" he asked.

"Thank you, yes." Lieutenant Colonel Vorn Larcus III replied and he walked over to the nearest communication panel. Vorn commanded a small rebel field team and it was this team that would be responsible for carrying out most of the mission that had brought them here," Dock control this is the *Golden Empress*. Out reactor is malfunctioning and we are unable to fashion replacement parts. We have need of your services." Vorn told the shipyard and then there was a brief pause.

"Understood *Golden Empress*. Hold your position and be advised that current waiting time for assessment is sixteen hours." the dock controller replied.

"Understood control." Vorn said with a smile, "We are coming to a stop and will await further instructions." and then he turned off the communications.

"All stop." Captain Kaaro called out before turning towards Vorn again, "Well colonel, it's up to you now." he said.

Vorn walked towards the front of the bridge where two more members of his team were stood staring out of them, using macrobinoculars to study the lifeless warships. One of these was the former smuggler Mace Grayle, the owner and captain of the YT-1300 class freighter *Silver Hawk*. Ordinarily Vorn's team was carried by his ship but on this occasion the larger lucrehulk had been determined to be of more use. Beside Mace stood his adoptive daughter, Cass, who was still trying to learn everything she could from her father about being a freighter pilot and a member of the rebellion.

"So how do they look?" Vorn asked as he stood beside the pair.

"Big." Cass replied, "I can make out details that I know the size of and they're tiny in comparison to the ships themselves."

"That's why we're here." Vorn said, "Those ships will go a long way to redressing some of the imbalance in the sector between our forces and the Imperial navy."

"I don't see any signs of external damage colonel." Mace commented, "All the hulls look unmarked. Not even any carbon scoring."

"How is that possible?" Cass asked, "Surely they must have been in a battle before they were supposed to be scuttled."

"Not necessarily. The Republic ships would have been repaired after any engagements and the Separatist ships could have simply been subjected to the shutdown signal sent when their side surrendered." Mace said.

"May I see?" Vorn asked and he held out his hand towards Cass who handed him the macrobinoculars, "No signs of life?" he added as he raised the macrobinoculars to his face.

"Nothing." Mace said, "My guess is that they're waiting until someone has a need for them."

"Like us?" Vorn said and both he and Mace smiled.

"Yeah, kind of – Wait. I see something." he said.

"Where?" Vorn said, turning to look in the same direction as Mace.

"Just coming between those two venators."

"I see it." Vorn said as between the two out of date star destroyer he saw something else. Appearing much smaller than the two warships Vorn knew that what he was looking at was still a hundred and fifty metres tall and about half that in diameter, "A hunter killer probot."

Hunter killer probots looked like vastly oversized Imperial probe droids but they were much more than this. Designed to make up for the lack of manned customs and patrol vessels the massive droids were designed to be able to engage outlaw vessels and if they were small enough use a combination of ion cannons and tractor beams to first disable and then drag them into their internal hangars where they and their occupants could be kept until a manned vessel could arrive to carry out a boarding action.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Mace commented.

"How many are there?" Captain Kaaro asked and he approached the rebels standing by the viewport.

"I only see the one right now." Vorn answered.

"There's bound to be more." Mace said, "I've never known the Empire deploy them on their own. They're too slow and easy to spot for one to effective on its own. My guess is that they're set up to detain intruders poking around the warships and carry them back to the shipyard for the security forces there to deal with."

"We'll need to deal with them when the time comes." Vorn commented and he lowered his macrobinoculars before looking at Captain Kaaro, "What do you think?" he asked.

"That droid is no match for my ship colonel." the neimoidian replied, "But if there are more hidden among the target vessels it may be difficult to engage them without risking the very ships we are here to obtain."

"Then it looks like we've got another objective." Vorn said, "As well as making sure we can steal those ships we also need to find a way of disabling those droids."

"Good job we're good at what we do then isn't it?" Mace responded with a smile.

The rest of Vorn's rebel team was waiting aboard the *Silver Hawk* in one of the *Trading Dream's* vast hangars.

"So what's the story boss?" Kara Larcus, Vorn's young wife and the team's medic asked when he appeared.

"The ship's are here," Vorn replied, "and they look operational as well."

"So the information in that R-three was good then?" the large man in military style clothing sat beside Kara said. This was Tharun Verser, a former mercenary.

"Not quite." Mace answered.

"Tell them about the probot." Cass said.

"Probot?" the other young woman present said, "What does a probe droid matter?"

"Wrong sort of probot I'm afraid Jaysica." Vorn said.

"Oh. Err." the final rebel began. This was Tobis Dorfus, the *Silver Hawk's* engineer, "You, err, you mean a hunter killer?"

"That's right." Mace said. "We've just seen the one but there are bound to be others."

"They could be a problem." Tharun said, "They'll be able to swallow our shuttles before we can crews aboard those ships."

"Nice of intelligence to warn us about them." Kara commented.

"Yes well we knew that the amount of information in the droid we captured was vast. It's not really surprising that there are still things that intelligence hasn't got to yet." Vorn said.

"So are we still going ahead with the mission?" Jaysica asked.

"Of course we are." Kara said before Vorn or Mace could reply, "The boss isn't going to back down just because of a droid. Are you boss?"

"No." Vorn said, "The stakes are just too high for that. Those ships would give our fleet a much better chance of challenging the Imperial navy in the sector. We can't just walk away now. Hopefully when we board the shipyard to get the launch codes for the ships we'll be able to find a way of shutting down the droids as well."

"That's kind of a big assumption colonel." Tharun said.

"I know, but it's the only chance we've got right now." Vorn said in agreement, "First things first though, we need to get aboard the shipyard itself."

2.

The *Silver Hawk* rose off the hangar deck and hovered in the air under power from its repulsorlifts only. The freighter was aligned to point towards the large hangar doors and in the cockpit Mace and Vorn waited, watching the view outside the hangar and waiting for the shipyard structure to appear. At the same time the sound of the repulsorlift engines grew louder as Mace steadily built up the power he was directing into them without letting any of it out.

"What are they waiting for?" Mace said, "If I keep on building up power like this then we either go or blow up." "I doubt that Captain Kaaro wants us exploding in his hangar." Vorn replied.

Well he's got a funny way of showing it." Mace said and then Vorn pointed through the cockpit canopy.

"Look," he said, "the ship's turning."

"Okay everybody, hang on back there." Mace announced over the intercom, "We're about to go."

Back in the ship's lounge the other rebels strapped themselves into their seats.

"How many times have you done this?" Cass asked.

"Including this one?" Tharun asked in response and Cass nodded, "Once." Tharun told her.

"But Tobis has calculated everything very carefully." Jaysica added, "He knows what he's doing. Don't you Tobis?"

"Oh, err, well, I suppose so." Tobis replied.

"Stand by." Mace's voice then told them, "Three... Two..."

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." Cass said, gripping her seat tightly.

"One!" Mace exclaimed and all of a sudden the *Silver Hawk* lurched forwards as Mace released all of the stored energy in the repulsorlifts in one rapid burst, pressing all of the rebels back into their seats before the ship's inertial compensators kicked in. Predictably, the result of this was that the *Silver Hawk* shot rapidly out of the *Trading Dream's* hangar bay and hurtled towards the shipyards. However, rather than engaging the *Silver Hawk's* ion drive to maintain the ship's thrust in zero gravity Mace left the main engines shut down, relying entirely on the built up momentum provided by the repulsorlifts to keep them moving towards the shipyard. With the vast majority of the *Silver Hawk's* systems shut down the vessel radiated almost no energy at all and what was being produced was easily overshadowed by the emissions of the numerous larger ships waiting to dock at the shipyard. An active scan would have detected the ship but the sheer size of the shipyard created vast blind spots that the rebels had plotted prior to launch and the *Silver Hawk's* trajectory kept it within one of these shadows.

Watched through the cockpit canopy the shipyard grew in size until it filled almost the entire field of view and only then did Mace fire the *Silver Hawk's* manoeuvring thrusters to bring the ship to a halt before it could crash into the shipyard and adjusted its facing to set down on the hull.

"I told you it would work." Mace said, smiling as he looked at Vorn. Then he activated the intercom again, "Okay Kara, we're up." he said.

With the *Silver Hawk* clamped against the shipyard the rebels still needed to be able to move to it from their vessel. The shape of the freighter's hull meant that the cargo hatch in the lower hull could not be placed directly against the shipyard and the rebels needed to create a pressurised corridor between the two. To achieve this they had brought along rolls of lightweight plastic sheeting and a spray epoxy adhesive that had been attached to Tobis's R5 astromech droid, Harvey.

"Okay let's get this over with." Kara said as she sealed her vacc suit's helmet over her head and Mace started the de-pressurisation process, emptying all of the air out of the *Silver Hawk's* cargo hold before opening the hatch.

Climbing down through the hatch, Mace and Kara stood on the hull of the shipyard and started to construct a barrier between the two hulls out of the plastic sheeting, securing it with tape all around. This was accomplished quickly but the rebels were not finished yet. The plastic sheeting was too flimsy to maintain a pressurised environment and the tape could be guaranteed to create an air tight seal. However, the spray epoxy could be used to achieve this.

"Harvey you're up." Mace said after he and Kara had climbed back into the hold and the droid chirped before rolling right up to the hatch. Then it tilted its body downwards and the nozzle of its fire extinguisher appeared from inside its body and released a jet of epoxy. Striking the plastic sheet, this rapidly hardened to form a rigid shell that was sealed against the two hulls. Harvey continued spraying, moving around the hatch to cover all angles until all of the plastic sheet was covered. At this point Harvey chirped again, straightening up and backing away from the hatch.

"Let's see if it's worked shall we?" Mace said, standing beside the pressurisation control panel and then he activated the air pumps to slowly increase the pressure, watching the gauge closely, "That's one quarter." he

said. Then moments later he added, "One half." and he halted the process.

Kara held up a strip of the plastic and watched to see if it would pick up a breeze caused by air escaping.

"Looking good." she said, smiling at Mace and he nodded in reply before reactivating the air pumps and bringing the pressure up to full, at which point he and Kara removed their helmets, "Okay you can come in now." Kara told the other rebels as she opened the door that led back into the lounge, "Harvey's established a good seal so Tobis can get cutting while I go change. Boss, want to give me a hand?"

"Are the seals on your suit stuck?" Vorn asked as he checked the power cell in his rifle.

"No." Kara replied as she walked past him, "I just love it when you undress me." and Vorn smiled.

"I better go make sure she changes quickly." Vorn commented before hurrying after Kara.

Then Tharun looked at Mace and smiled.

"Before you ask captain, no I won't help you out of your suit." he said.

"Good thing too sergeant." Mace replied, "I doubt either of our wives would appreciate it."

The first stage to creating a breach in the hull of the shipyard was to cut a small hole in it that would tell the rebels where they would be entering it. Burning through the hull with a cutting torch, Tobis created a hole the size of the palm of his hand before he peered through it. As well as allowing Tobis to see into the shipyard the hole permitted sound from inside the shipyard to escape and the rebels were relieved to hear the significant noise produced by heavy machinery that would mask their activities here.

"What can you see Tobis?" Jaysica asked from above him.

The *Silver Hawk* was attached to the side of the shipyard and so even though from Tobis's perspective he was looking downwards the view through the hole was instead horizontal

"Oh, err, a corridor." Tobis replied, "But, err, I think we'll need lines to help get through. We're pretty high up."

"Just so long as the coast is clear lad." Tharun said as she stood cradling his heavy rifle.

"It is." Tobis said and he climbed back into the hold.

"Is it my turn then?" Jaysica asked and Tobis nodded.

"Err, yes." he replied.

Using the cutting torch to create a hole large enough for the rebels to pass through was impractical. It would have required one of them to be sat on the section of hull that they were trying to cut through and would likely result in their falling through the hole as soon as it was created. The only practical solution was to use explosives and that was where Jaysica came in.

The team's demolitions specialist, Jaysica jumped down through the hatch to fix a flexible shaped charge in a ring against the shipyard's hull before pressing a wireless detonator into it and then climbed back into the hold just as Vorn, Mace and Kara entered the room.

"Everything set?" Vorn asked and Tharun nodded.

"The little lady just set the charge colonel." he said.

"Good. Then please do trigger it." Vorn said.

Even though the shaped charge was designed to project its explosive power towards the shipyard's hull only there would inevitably be some back blast and in the confines of the *Silver Hawk's* hold that could be extremely dangerous to the rebels so before the charge was triggered Tobis closed the cargo hatch to act as a shield.

"Ready." he said and Jaysica smiled as she took out her comlink and used it to send the triggering signal to the detonator.

The sound of the explosion was still audible through the sealed hatch but the blast was effectively contained on the other side.

"Won't someone have heard that?" Cass asked,

"Not likely kid." Tharun said, "The racket being made by all the machinery on the other side would have drowned it out to anyone that wasn't in the same room."

"Well let's see what we've got shall we?" Mace asked and he walked over to the cargo hatch and pointed his weapon at it. Known as a deck sweeper, the bulky carbine's flared barrel gave a clue to its method of operation. Rather than firing a concentrated bolt of energy it fired an expanding pulse that could incapacitate large groups of beings in confined spaces such as those found aboard starships and space stations.

Tobis then opened the cargo hatch again and Mace found himself looking along the corridor that the rebels had penetrated, though from his point of view it appeared as if he was staring down a vertical shaft, "Clear." he said.

"Okay let's go." Jaysica said and before anyone could stop her she jumped down onto what remained of the shipyard's hull and started to climb through the hole.

"Oh, err, Jaysica that's not the right way-" Tobis began when he saw that Jaysica had got the orientation of the corridor wrong and was in fact climbing in upside down. However, his warning came too late and the moment that the shipyard's own artificial gravity took over from that aboard the *Silver Hawk* Jaysica was suddenly dragged down to the floor of the corridor and she squealed as she fell.

"Mind that first step little lady." Tharun said while fixing a syntherope line to one of the four columns surrounding the cargo hatch.

"That's not funny." Jaysica replied as she picked herself up.

"Oh yes it was." Kara said as she too set up a line and climbed through the hole into the shipyard.

"You have something?" the shipyard's watch officer said when she was summoned to one of the traffic control stations.

"Perhaps." the controller replied, "Look at this." and he replayed a short recording of sensor data. This had been taken from one of the many passive sensor arrays that littered the exterior of the shipyard. Much cheaper and requiring less power to operate, there were enough to provide all round coverage as opposed to the more expensive active sensors.

"What am I looking at?" the watch officer asked.

"Local thermal imaging. See here? That's the freighter *Tol Bar* just coming out of hyperspace and firing her ion drive to enter the holding pattern."

"So?"

"So there aren't supposed to be any intervening objects between them and us but by the time the heat from their ion drive reached us there was an irregularity in the trace."

"What sort of irregularity?"

"A cool spot right here." the controller said and he paused the replay and pointed at the display in front of them, "It's not much but it's definitely there, a drop of about thirty degrees from the rest of the thermal plume. It's as if there's something there."

"Did radar pick anything up?"

"No ma'am. But the sensors that detected the drop are located in an active blind spot."

"Stang." the duty officer hissed.

"It could just have been a piece of debris caught up in the *Tol Bar's* wake and pulled through hyperspace with it."

"Without coming loose after the jump event? I don't think so. I've got a bad feeling about this. See if any of the other controllers spotted anything. I'm going to alert security. If that object was a ship trying to sneak through our perimeter then we could have uninvited guests."

3.

Despite being a civilian facility there was still an Imperial military presence at the shipyard. In addition to the hunter killer probots watching for any signs of unauthorised vessels approaching the facility there was a small force of naval fleet troopers and stormtrooper marines present to provide internal security. In theory there were present to process anyone detained by the probots but in practice they spent most of their time dealing with petty crimes such as theft and brawling among the workers and the officer present when the shipyard's duty officer stepped out of the turbolift looked up in surprise at her.

"Miss Tannon." he said, "What brings you down here from the tower?"

"Hopefully a waste of time Captain Venit." she replied and she held out a datapad to the officer.

"What am I looking at?" he asked, unable to decipher anything from what looked to him like random blobs of colour.

"That's a false colour image taken by our passive sensors." Tannon explained, "You see that different coloured spot in the middle?"

"Yes, right here."

"That's it. Well that is caused by something passing between us and the freighter *Tol Bar*. Only there shouldn't have been anything there. We know the location of every bit of local debris within ten million kilometres and the freighter shouldn't have been able to drag anything all the way through hyperspace. My best guess is that that is a ship running silent to get past our defences."

"What sort of ship?" Captain Venit asked.

"Impossible to tell. But it's small, no more than forty or fifty metres long. Too small to be carrying an invasion force but big enough to be carrying a reasonable amount of contraband."

"You suspect smugglers?" the captain said and Tannon nodded.

"We know that there's black market being run here but we always assumed that the goods were being smuggled in by couriers recruited from among the labour force. Maybe we were wrong and they're bring the stuff in in bulk."

"I'll need to know where this ship went." Captain Venit said as he returned the datapad and walked over to a locker at the side of the room.

"I'm not sure how accurate I can be." Tannon replied, watching the officer open the locker and remove a blaster in a holster that he then fixed to his belt.

"A rough guess is good enough Miss Tannon. After all there are only so many access points to the station."

"How big is this place?" Cass asked as the team moved through the corridors of the shipyard accompanied by their three droids, Harvey, a gold coloured protocol droid called Jeeves and a box shaped mouse droid known as Penny. The rebels had penetrated the shipyard's hull in a sector that was fully automated and they had yet to encounter any of the crew, either organic or droids.

"Oh, err, the schematics suggest forty thousand metres by-" Tobis began.

"It's big okay? Far too big for us to be walking everywhere. Can we just leave it at that?" Kara interrupted.

Then she looked at Vorn and added, "So boss, how much further until we get to where we're going?"

"Well if I'm reading this map right there ought to be a turbolift just up ahead." Vorn replied, "We can use that to get us to the command section."

The turbolift was located right where Vorn expected it to be and the rebels waited while the car they summoned made its way across the shipyard to them. Turbolift cars travelled very rapidly and the fact that this one took more than a minute to arrive demonstrated not only that the shipyard was very large but also that there was no-one else in this section of it or there would have been more cars on hand close by.

"So where's the best place to head for Tobis?" Mace asked when the rebels boarded the turbolift car. Most turbolifts used a simple panel covered in push buttons to select a destination but the massive size of the shipyard meant that the turbolifts in it instead used a touched screen that passengers could use to scroll around a complete map of the facility and select where they wanted to go. The turbolift car itself would then calculate the most efficient route, avoiding other such cars along the way.

"Oh, err, let me see." Tobis replied and he took out his datapad and called up a copy of the blueprint of the shipyard that the team was working from at the same time as he stood in front of the turbolift's control panel, "Err, I think this ought to do." he added and he indicated a point on the schematic, "There's an access to one of the main ventilation systems that runs past the turbolift shaft right here." and he moved his finger across the schematic slightly.

"Are you sure you can stop the car at the right point?" Vorn asked.

"Oh, err, no. But Harvey can." Tobis replied and he looked down at his droid. Then in response Harvey emitted an abrupt whistle.

"Now now Harvey." Jeeves said, "Lieutenant Colonel Larcus was just making sure. There's no need to be so rude."

"Just get him plugged in." Mace said and Tobis nodded before removing an access panel located beneath the touch screen, revealing the control circuits for the turbolift car. Harvey then rolled up to the open panel and extended an access probe that the little droid then used to connect to the circuitry before letting out another stream of electronic chirps.

"Harvey indicates that he is ready Sergeant Dorfus." Jeeves said to Tobis, "You may proceed when ready." and Tobis tapped the touch screen.

Instantly the turbolift car accelerated away, speeding through the network of shafts towards the main command and control section of the shipyard. However, before it could reach the destination selected by Tobis, Harvey used the connection linking the astromech to the control circuit to bring the turbolift car to an abrupt halt and the rebels were forced to steady themselves against the walls and one another to prevent themselves from falling over.

"Stang lad!" Tharun exclaimed, "Couldn't you get him to give us some warning before he does that again?" and Tobis smiled nervously.

"Never mind that now." Mace responded, "Give me a hand with this." and he stepped up to the doors of the turbolift car and pressed his hand up against one of them. Tharun joined him by the doors and placed his hands on the other door before both rebels tried dragging them apart. At first this was hard going, with no hand holds available and the rebels being forced to rely on the friction between their hands on the doors only. But as soon as the gap was wide enough both Mace and Tharun inserted their fingers into it and they were able to pull the doors apart instantly to reveal the shaft outside.

"Okay this is where we split up." Vorn said, "Jeeves, take Harvey and Penny to the main control section and get Harvey plugged into the main computer network there. The rest of us will be waiting for your signal."

"Of course Colonel Larcus sir. But I'm only an interpreter, not an espionage droid." Jeeves replied.

"Well congratulations Jeeves," Kara said, "you've just been promoted."

"Miss Tannon I have an anomaly." one of the command staff called out and she turned around to face him. The man was sat at a minor control station, one with responsibility for monitoring the functioning of the shipyard's basic utility systems such as power, water and turbolifts. But given the possibility of intruders aboard the facility she had given instructions for her staff to report even the most minor deviations in any system.

"Let me see." she said as she walked over to the console where the man was sat.

"Here, turbolift shaft trill seven. A car halted mid journey for just under two minutes and then continued on its way."

"Where to?"

"It's heading this way. Station aurek nineteen."

"Was there a loss of power?"

"No ma'am. The cause of the interruption wasn't anything external."

"Okay I'll see to it. Let me know if there are any other unexplained disruptions to the turbolifts." Tannon said and she activated a nearby intercom panel, "Captain Venit do you read me?" she transmitted.

"Reading you Miss Tannon. Go ahead." the captain replied.

"We may have a situation in the command section. Can you get to turbolift station aurek nineteen?" Tannon asked.

"Affirmative, I can be there with a squad in two minutes."

"Good. Do it. Tannon out."

The turbolift car came to a more gentle halt when it reached the destination Tobis had selected and the doors slid open immediately.

"Freeze!" Venit yelled, aiming his blaster into the turbolift car while the stormtroopers around him did likewise.

"Goodness gracious me!" Jeeves responded and the droid raised its hands into the air, "Don't shoot. Don't shoot."

"What are you doing in there?" Venit demanded, still aiming his blaster at Jeeves while he and the stormtroopers completely ignored the mouse droid that rolled out of the turbolift car and zoomed off down the corridor.

"I'm afraid that my companion here is malfunctioning." Jeeves said, indicating Harvey, "He's taken to plugging into computer access ports at random and freezing their systems. He even disabled the turbolift before we could get here. If it's alright by you I'd like to take him down to maintenance."

"Maintenance isn't in this section." Venit pointed out.

"Of course it isn't. But this was the first place I could get us to where we could continue on foot rather than risk my companion causing any further disruptions to the turbolift network."

Venit frowned.

“Get going.” he said, “We don't have time to waste on faulty droids, the shipyard is on intruder alert. If that astromech causes any further trouble then you needn't bother about maintenance because I'll have it blasted and the pieces thrown out of an air lock.”

Harvey responded by producing a rude sounding noise and Jeeves struck the top of the astromech's tapered head.

“Now now, I've warned you about that before. There's no need for that sort of language.”

4.

There were fourteen flashes of light in rapid succession as the line of blastboats exited hyperspace and flew directly towards the shipyard. Fast and very heavily armed, the blastboats were among the smallest of hyperspace capable warships operated by the Empire and groups of them were often used to launch rapid strikes against enemy capital ships, exploiting their superior manoeuvrability to evade defensive fire. But they also made excellent vessels for pursuing fleeing ships before they could jump to hyperspace and when seemingly faced by smugglers they were an excellent choice of vessel to deploy in a seek and destroy role. "Attention Kurrad Industries control, this is skirmish line trill herf xesh one-one-three-eight responding to your request for aid. State the nature of your emergency." the line captain transmitted from the cockpit of the lead blastboat.

"Imperial line this is watch officer Tannon. We suspect that we have been boarded by black marketeers." Tannon responded from the control centre.

"Be advised watch officer, we are not carrying marine units." the line captain said.

"Understood. We have our own internal security force captain." Tannon said, "But we require assistance tracking down their vessel. Our hunter killer droids are required to remain on station with the warships we have been contracted to maintain."

"Copy that watch officer. We'll commence search operations immediately. Advise all local traffic to follow our instructions."

"Confirmed captain. We'll spread the word. Control out." Tannon said before closing the channel. Then she looked at the comscan officer beside her, "You better warn everyone to watch what they do." she said, "The last thing we need is the navy blowing away paying customers."

The arrival of the Imperial navy line was also observed from the bridge of the *Trading Dream* and Captain Kaaro studied the readouts of the ships closely.

"Skipray blastboats." he said, "How many are there?"

"Fourteen captain, looks like a standard skirmish line." his comscan operator told him.

"That doesn't make sense." Captain Kaaro said, "If they knew we were here the navy would have sent a more powerful force to attack us."

"Captain the Imperial vessels are not heading towards us, they're turning towards the space station itself."

"Their arrival can't be a coincidence. The station crew must have detected Colonel Larcus's transport and summoned them here. Can we contact the colonel? We'll never complete our mission with those out there, they'll cut our shuttles to pieces before they can reach their targets."

"Negative captain. The colonel's team will have penetrated the shipyard by now and any signal powerful enough to reach them will be detected."

"Then it's out of our hands now." Captain Kaaro said, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

Despite the opportunity to be able to move around the shipyard unseen the living rebels did not spend any longer in the turbolift shaft than was necessary, the risk of being struck by a fast moving turbolift car was far too great for that. However, the detailed schematics of the facility that they possessed had allowed Tobis to pinpoint a location where the stations extensive ventilation and utility system ran next to the shaft, linking to it via a maintenance access hatch that was not even kept locked.

On most starships and space stations the ventilation ducts were cramped and the only way for an adult human to move along them was to crawl along on hands and knees. But the designers of the shipyard had always intended the ventilation system to double up as a place where the various conduits that were needed to carry power, data lines and water around the station could be kept out of sight as well and as such they were relatively spacious. Tharun's height meant that he still had to stoop slightly but even he found moving along the ducts much easier than usual.

The size of the utility ducts did present one problem to the rebels however, thanks to their size and the fact that very few people would ever enter them, they did offer useful hiding places for anyone doing something that they were not supposed to be doing. Therefore, the rebels had to be alert for the presence of shipyard crewmen conducting illicit activity and be prepared to either find a way around them or alternatively attack them.

"What's taking the droids so long?" Mace said.

"This is a very big station." Vorn replied.

"If you ask me Jeeves probably got lost." Kara commented.

"I don't know what you're complaining about Harvey," Jeeves said as the droids approached the shipyard's

command centre, "it is not as if we were permanently lost." and in response the astromech beside Jeeves produced a sudden rude noise.

Ahead of them Penny had already entered the command centre and was circling it, using a built in holographic camera to record what was happening at each control station. As was normal with mouse droids the command staff ignored Penny's presence entirely. Then as soon as the other two rebel droids appeared Penny rushed towards them and let out a series of quiet whistles.

"The Imperial navy? Here?" Jeeves exclaimed, "Oh my. We must inform the others."

"What are those two droids doing here?" Tannon said when she looked towards the door and saw Jeeves and Harvey but as the rest of the command crew had done earlier ignored the presence of Penny.

"Us?" Jeeves responded, "Oh dear. As I inform your security staff my companion is malfunctioning. I'm afraid that he took a wrong turn on the way to maintenance." and at that point Harvey produced another abrupt sound, "How rude." Jeeves said.

"Just get out of here." Tannon ordered.

"Of course mistress." Jeeves replied before the protocol droid and Harvey both turned to leave. Meanwhile Penny darted away to hide in a corner of the command centre.

Jeeves and Harvey travelled a short distance from the control centre until they reached an empty office and Jeeves closed the door behind them after they entered it. Once they were not being observed a hatch opened in Harvey's cylindrical body and a grasping claw emerged holding a comlink.

"Thank you Harvey." Jeeves said, taking the comlink and activating it, "Lieutenant Colonel Larcus sir, this is Jeeves. Can you read me?"

"At last." Tharun said as Vorn reached for his comlink.

"I read you Jeeves. Go ahead." Vorn responded to his droid's transmission.

"Colonel Larcus sir I have terrible news." Jeeves said.

"What's wrong?" Vorn asked, "Can't you get to the control centre?"

"We already managed that sir and Penny is still there. But she informed us that the Imperial navy has arrived in response to a summons from the command staff of this facility. I'm afraid that our presence has been discovered sir."

"Oh kriff." Kara said, scowling, "Now what do we do?"

"Jeeves, what sort of ships are we talking about?" Vorn said.

"Penny reported a single line of fourteen skipray blastboats sir." Jeeves told him.

"Colonel those things will take our ships apart before they can get to the cruisers we're after." Mace pointed out.

"I know." Vorn said, frowning. Then he smiled.

"I know that look." Kara said, also smiling, "The boss has an idea."

"Yes I do." Vorn said and he looked at Tobis, "Tobis rather than try to shut down those hunter killer droids out there could you get them to engage the blastboats?"

"Oh. Err. Maybe. I think so." Tobis replied, "But I would need to see how the, err, IFF matrix is configured."

Vorn nodded.

"Okay, because I want to see if we can use those droids to deal with the navy. It'll be a damned sight easier than trying to take them out with the *Silver Hawk* and *Trading Dream*."

"But the *Trading Dream*'s a battleship isn't it?" Cass asked, "Can't that deal with a few small ships?"

"Eventually kid, yeah it can." Tharun replied.

"But it would give itself away in the process and in the time it took for the *Trading Dream* to take out an entire line of blastboats the navy could respond with real capital ships of its own. All it takes is for one star destroyer or a line of light cruisers to turn up and this party's over."

"Oh, okay, I get it." Cass said.

"First things first though. We came here for those warships and we need to make sure that they can be flown."

"Err, the secure storage is just up ahead." Tobis said, checking his datapad and he pointed ahead of where the rebels were stood. Tobis then led them to where there was a ventilation grill set near the floor of the utility duct they were using to move around the shipyard. Looking through this the rebels could see that on the other side there was a room filled with electronics. But rather than being complete devices hooked up to whatever system they were supposed to be a part of, it consisted of hundreds of individual circuit boards lined up in ranks.

"Err, those are them." Tobis said, "The main command boards for the ships here."

The starships being built and serviced at the shipyard were extremely valuable and to prevent anyone from removing them without authorisation the primary circuit boards that connected the helm and navigation control stations to the main computer had been removed. Although the boards for ships of a particular class were physically interchangeable each one had a specific serial number encoded on the main processor and without this number the ship's computer would reject commands sent to it. Removing the boards thus

prevented anyone from taking the ships no matter how good they were at slicing into secure computer systems, the information they needed simply was not there. Getting around this restriction was not impossible, but the time it would take was more than the rebels had at their disposal. They wanted to power up warships and fly them away in a few minutes, not a few days of rebuilding the computer core and this made the control boards essential to them.

The rebels knocked the vent grill out of its mounting and dropped down into the seemingly deserted room and then spread out to make sure that they really were alone. Tharun and Mace then positioned themselves next to the door to make sure that they would not be disturbed and the other rebels began to search the shelves for the control boards they needed. Each board was labelled with the name and class of the vessel it had been taken from, making identifying the correct boards simple.

"Over here." Jaysica said gleefully when she found the row of boards that had obviously been taken from the warships that the rebels had come to steal, "I've found them." and Tobis rushed to see for himself.

"Well Tobis?" Vorn asked.

"Oh, err, yes sir." he replied, "These are the ones we need."

"So what are you waiting for?" Kara said, "Get those numbers."

One at a time, Tobis removed the circuit boards from the shelf Jaysica had found and connected them to the portable computer he had brought along with him. This was loaded with software that mimicked the behaviour of a starship computer core and as such when the circuit boards were plugged into it they promptly identified themselves using their unique serial numbers and Tobis was able to build up a list of the serial numbers for each ship before returning the boards to the shelf to leave no trace that they had ever been there. However, when Tobis was about half way through the boards he suddenly paused and stared at the screen of his computer.

"Tobis what's wrong?" Jaysica asked from just behind him.

"Oh, err, I think the colonel ought to see this." he replied and he turned towards Vorn.

"I heard." Vorn said, "What's wrong?"

"Err, nothing really." Tobis said, "But this board doesn't come from one of the warships outside."

"So it's from a transport." Kara said, "Forget it."

"Oh, err, no. It's still from a warship, but it must be somewhere inside the station in a dry dock." Tobis explained.

"What's so special about it?" Vorn asked.

"Err, it's a CC-seventy-seven hundred. The *Refractor*." Tobis said and Vorn's eye's widened. The Corellian Engineering Corporation CC-7700 frigate was a precursor to the Empire's current generation of interdicator heavy cruisers that used massive artificial gravity well projectors to drag ships out of hyperspace. Far less effective than the more modern interditors, a CC-7700 was nevertheless a valuable ship that the rebellion could make good use of.

"A seventy-seven hundred here?" Mace said when he overheard this, "Colonel we can't pass this up. With that ship the Alliance could-

"Yes I know what the Alliance could do with it." Vorn said before Mace could finished, "Tobis, we're taking that control circuit with us."

"Boss are you saying what I think you're saying?" Kara said.

"I'm saying that we're going to steal that ship as well." Vorn replied, "And by 'we' I mean us personally."

"What about the *Silver Hawk* and getting those other serial numbers to the *Trading Dream*?" Mace asked.

"You and Cass can take copies of the serial numbers back to the *Silver Hawk* and leave in her." Vorn said, "But I'll need everyone else to fly the frigate out of here. Kara you'll do the actual flying while I navigate. Tobis will make sure that the ship's flyable and Tharun will back us up if there are any guards on duty."

"One problem boss." Kara said, "We don't have a clue where this frigate is or what state it's in."

"I know that." Vorn replied, " But I know someone who can find out." and he took out his comlink, "Jeeves are you there?" he signalled.

There was a short pause but then Jeeves's voice responded.

"Oh yes Colonel Larcus sir, I am right here." the droid said and this was followed by a short burst of chirp and whistles, "Well of course you are here as well Harvey. But the colonel did not ask about you specifically so there was no reason for me to mention you."

"Actually it's Harvey we need." Vorn said and he heard more whistling.

"No Harvey you did not tell me so." Jeeves said before replying to Vorn, "Of course Colonel Larcus sir. Do please go ahead."

"Jeeves we need Harvey to plug into the station's computer and locate the dry dock holding the frigate *Refractor*. We need to know whether she can be flown." Vorn said.

"Of course sir. We will get right on it and inform you as soon as we have the information." Jeeves replied.

"Good, we'll be waiting for your signal. Vorn out."

Computer access ports were located all around the main operations section of the shipyard and so Jeeves

and Harvey did not have far to travel before they encountered one that Harvey could connect to. Simply connecting to the computer network did not give the astromech droid total access to all of the information contained within it. Even restricted information could in theory be accessed given enough time but on this occasion what the droids needed to know was not considered restricted.

Searching for the name *Refractor* in the servicing database produced a dry dock number and Harvey chirped to communicate this to Jeeves. In turn the protocol droid checked to see whether anyone was paying attention to the two droids and then activated the comlink.

"Sir are you there?" Jeeves signalled, taking care not to use Vorn's rank or name just in case it was overheard.

"Right here." Vorn's voice replied.

"Sir the Refractor is located in dry dock forty-two. The service report currently flags her as being space worthy and approved for travel through hyperspace."

"Excellent. Can you find your way there?"

"I think so sir." Jeeves answered.

"Good. Then get Penny and meet us there. We'll be there once we've dealt with the hunter killers outside." Vorn said and then without signing off he just shut down the comlink.

5.

"This is where we part company then." Vorn said, "Mace, you and Cass need to take the serial numbers back to the *Silver Hawk* and get that information to Captain Kaaro so that his people can program new boards. Tell them that the signal to commence seizing the ships will be when the hunter killers engage the navy ships out there. We'll take care of that and then head for the *Refractor*."

"Yes colonel." Mace replied and then he looked at Cass and added, "Come on then, let's go."

Both groups of rebels returned to the utility ducts to make their way to their respective destinations. In the case of Mace and Cass this was just a quiet section of the station close enough that they could walk there in a short time before exiting the ducts and catching a turbolift back to the automated area where the *Silver Hawk* was docked. On the other hand the rest of the rebels headed for the shipyard's defence suite.

Being a civilian facility the control of the hunter killer probots was not directed from the main command centre. Instead the systems used to issue commands to the starship sized droids was located in the Imperial controlled security section and ironically having the station staff aware that there were intruders aboard now worked in favour of the rebels. Whereas if the station had not been on alert there would have been the entire security contingent present in this section, now only a skeleton staff remained while the bulk of the troops were searching the outlying areas of the shipyard for them.

Exiting the utility ducts only a few metres away from the entrance to the security section the rebels hurried along the otherwise empty corridor until they reached the large doorway and Vorn risked a quick look around into the security section control room.

"There's just one guard." he said softly.

"So how do you want to do this colonel?" Tharun asked, "Shall I see if I can take the shot?"

"No. If he sees you first he'll trigger the alarm and we need to avoid that at all costs. I think that for once we should do things more openly. Here, take this and wait here." and then he handed his rifle to Tharun, took a deep breath and then calmly just walked through the doorway. Noticing Vorn, the guard looked up from his control station.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Larcus, Colonel Larcus." Vorn replied sternly as he halted right in front of the guard and stood up straight, "I'm here to order you to stand down lieutenant."

"Why aren't you in uniform colonel?" the lieutenant asked, frowning.

"Frankly because it's highly likely that if you'd seen my Alliance uniform you'd already have sounded the alarm." Vorn said and the guard's eyes widened before he reached for his blaster. However, Vorn was prepared for this and he already had one hand on the compact hold out blaster in his jacket pocket and he drew and fired before the guard could get his weapon out of its holster, "Boring conversation anyway." he muttered right before a stormtrooper appeared in a nearby doorway and levelled his weapon.

"Boss look out!" Kara exclaimed from where she was watching and before the stormtrooper could react she fired a short burst from the carbine she held that sent the armoured soldier falling backwards.

"Quick! Get in here." Vorn commanded as he dragged the lieutenant's body away from the control station and took his place, quickly studying the consoles to determine which button would drop the blast door to seal the security section off from the rest of the shipyard. A blaster bolt passed close by when another of the security staff responded to the sound of gunfire and Vorn ducked beneath the level of the console, aware that he was only still alive because the guard had not had enough time to take aim properly. But before the guard could make a second attempt a single shot from Tharun's weapon blasted its way right through his chest.

"Thank you sergeant." Vorn said as he got back to his feet and sealed the blast door, "Now if you and Kara wouldn't mind making sure that there are not going to be any more interruptions I'll stay here while Tobis deals with those droids.

"On it colonel." Tharun replied and he charged towards the doorway through which the other guards had appeared. This led to a short corridor lined with holding cells and another control station at the far end that was unmanned now that the guard who had been stationed there was dead. Tharun hurried to the other control station while Kara remained behind to cover him and he checked what the console had to say. There was no indication that any signals had been sent from the control station recently so it was unlikely that the guard on duty here had been able to raise the alarm. The console also told Tharun that there were several occupied cells and he checked the surveillance cameras for each of them to make certain that there were no further guards hiding in any of them who could emerge unexpectedly and take the rebels by surprise.

"Colonel we've got three prisoners back here." he called out.

"Should we release them?" Jaysica asked, looking at Vorn.

"Does the system say what they're being held for?" Vorn said.

"No sir. This console just gives names and employee numbers." Tharun answered.

"Then leave them where they are. We can't take the risk that they'll turn on us." Vorn said. Then he looked at Tobis, "How are you going?" he asked.

Tobis was now studying the control consoles along one wall of the room. These were mainly dedicated to processing security footage from all over the shipyard but there was also a secure communication system built into it that could be used to communicate beyond the shipyard itself without needing to go through the shipyard's primary communications antenna. Obviously meant to allow the Imperial personnel to send for help in the event of an uprising by the workers, it was this system that Vorn hoped would enable his team to take control of the hunter killer probots outside.

"Oh, err, I've found the data feeds from the droids over here." Tobis replied and he moved to show Vorn where the information being sent back to the station was being processed.

"According to this there are eight of them." Vorn noted.

"Err, yes sir. There are, err, two more but they're, err, they're not activate at the moment." Tobis said.

"Then we'll just have to hope that eight are enough." Vorn responded, "Now what about taking control of them?"

"Err, I think that I can send them commands from here." Tobis said and he returned to where he had been standing.

"What sort of command are you going to send then Tobis?" Jaysica asked.

"I, err, I was thinking about adjusting their IFF system to treat Imperial navy transponders as hostile." Tobis said and he looked at Vorn for confirmation that his idea was acceptable.

"Sounds like a plan to me." Vorn replied, "Get right on it."

Exiting the turbolift back in the automated section of the shipyard, Mace and Cass hurried towards where the *Silver Hawk* was still clamped to the side of its hull.

"So what's going to happen to all of these ships when this is over with dad?" Cass asked as she followed Mace.

"The Alliance will add them to its fleet." Mace answered, "Why, what did you think would happen?"

"I meant who would the Alliance put in command of them? Thinking about all the warships you've already help capture for them don't you think it would be only fair if they offered to make you a fleet captain? Vorn as well." Cass said and Mace shrugged.

"You'd have to check with the colonel on that. Of course there was the plan that he'd have been given command of the star destroyer *Primarch* when it commanding officer defected and brought his ship with him but that fell through when it was destroyed before the Alliance could take possession of the ship. Still, we did get about thirty thousand new recruits out of it. That's where we're still drawing most of our new fleet recruits from now."

"So would-" Cass began before Mace suddenly halted as he was about to round the last corner that would bring them to the *Silver Hawk* and he ducked back behind it.

"Get back!" he hissed, drawing his blaster.

"What's wrong?" Cass asked quietly as she unslung her own blaster carbine.

"Stormtroopers, looks like an entire squad." Mace whispered.

"Well can't you use the decksweeper on them?" Cass suggested but Mace shook his head.

"They're too far away." he told her, "The decksweeper may be good for close up work but its range is really limited and the corridors in this place are just too long."

"So what do we do now?" Cass asked and Mace peered around the corner cautiously.

The stormtroopers were gathered at the far end of the corridor, right where the hole Jaysica had blown in the hull was located. The only thing stopping them from seeing the hole was a large sheet of thin plastic covered in metallic paint to resemble the surrounding wall that the rebels had taped to the wall to cover it. But all it would take would be for one of the stormtroopers to realise that they had found the breach in the hull would be for one of them to try leaning on the sheet so that it gave way.

"Dad?" Cass added when Mace failed to respond.

"Shush, I'm thinking." he told her. Then he looked around and saw one of the grills leading to the utility ducts and smiled, "Here," he said to Cass, handing her the datapad that contained all of the control board serial numbers, "take this and my decksweeper and give me your carbine. Then get in that vent."

"But why? What are you going to do?" Cass asked as she swapped her carbine for the datapad and the bulky decksweeper.

"I'm going to shoot at those stormtroopers." Mace told her, "Then I'm going to run like hell and lead them back this way. If you get the chance to take them all out in one go with the decksweeper then do. But if not I want you to let them past and get aboard the *Silver Hawk* while I draw the stormtroopers away. The information on that datapad has got to reach the *Trading Dream*."

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

With his daughter safely hidden inside the duct Mace took up a position at the corner and checked the

carbine he was now armed with. The power cell read full and with a flick of a switch Mace set it to fully automatic before unfolding the stock and bracing it against his shoulder. Then he suddenly spun around the corner, aimed the blaster towards the squad of stormtroopers and opened fire. The burst of energy blasts took two of the squad off their feet and Mace was relieved that neither of them fell into the sheet concealing the hole in the hull. Then rather than continue firing and risk giving the stormtroopers the chance to return fire Mace pulled back around the corner and waited until he heard the sound of armoured feet as they started to give chase, at which point Mace started to run as well. From inside the duct Cass also heard the sound of the stormtroopers running after Mace and she pointed the decksweeper at the vent. Shortly after she saw the white armoured forms of the stormtroopers as they ran past and Cass prepared to fire. But the stormtrooper squad was not moving in a tight clump that allowed Cass to get all of them in the decksweeper's sights at once. Instead they were moving in two lines with significant spacing between them and by the time the last of the stormtroopers was visible the lead soldiers had already gone far enough past the vent that she could not see them. Cass lowered the decksweeper and it was only then that she realised that she had been holding her breath all the time and she finally exhaled. Cass waited as the sound of the stormtroopers running became quieter until she decided to leave the duct. Carefully she pushed the grill out of the way enough that she could slip back out into the corridor and looked in both directions to confirm that she was alone. Then she ran around the corner and down the corridor towards the hole in the hull providing access to the *Silver Hawk*. Peeling back one corner of the sheet, Cass crawled through the hole and pulled herself up into the hold of the light freighter, taking care not to allow the differing artificial gravity fields to cause her to fall. Only when she was fully inside the ship did Cass get back to her feet and run towards the cockpit when she sat down in the pilot's seat and plugged the datapad into the main console. "Trading Dream this is *Silver Hawk*. Do you read me?" she transmitted, using a tight beam signal directed towards the waiting rebel battleship to try and avoid detection by any of the nearby Imperial navy ships. "*Silver Hawk*, this is *Trading Dream*. Go ahead." a voice replied. "I've got the serial numbers for the control boards." Cass said, "I'm sending the information now." and she selected the file of control board serial numbers that identified the vessels they were meant for on the datapad and uploaded it to the *Silver Hawk's* transmitter. "Confirmed *Silver Hawk*. We have the data." "There's another ship in a dry dock that Colonel Larcus is taking a team to seize. They also intend to turn the hunter killer probots on the Imperial navy ships that have arrived. You should wait until that happens before launching." Cass added. "Understood *Silver Hawk*. We will wait for the probots to act. *Trading Dream* out." Cass sat back as the channel went dead and it was only then that she realised that she had no idea what she was supposed to do next.

Aboard the *Trading Dream* Captain Kaaro activated the intercom to connect him with the main hangar. "Colonel Collis are you there?" he asked. "Right here captain." the colonel replied. Colonel Collis commanded the Alliance's special forces in the sector and a large number of his men had been assigned to this mission. "Colonel Larcus's team have sent us the data we need and we will have the replacement boards ready in ten minutes. The colonel's team also have a plan to deal with the probots and blastboats. You need to be ready to leave as soon as that is put into effect." "Understood captain, I'll get things started now." Colonel Collis replied and then he looked around to where his men sat waiting for orders, "Move you bunch of nerf herders!" he yelled, "The Empire isn't going to overthrow itself just so you can all get some more beauty sleep. I said move, move, move!"

6.

Two Imperial navy fleet troopers stood guard outside the dry dock that held the *Refractor*. Because the dry dock required a large space door the utility ducts did not provide any access to the inside of it even though the atmosphere was contained using both a large physical door as well as a magnetic field for use when the door was open, the consequences of a failure in both would be catastrophic if it was connected to the same ventilation and life support system as the rest of the shipyard. Therefore, the rebels had no choice but to tackle the guards head on.

"Ready?" Vorn asked and Tharun nodded.

"Ready colonel." he said.

"Good. Then let's go. We shoot and we run. Tobis and that control board have to reach the frigate." Vorn said and he broke into a run, charging around the corner.

As soon as Vorn appeared with his rifle on display the two guards turned towards him and started to draw their weapons. But they were too slow to prevent Vorn firing and his first shot hit the nearest guard in the chest. The second would have just about been able to draw his blaster before Vorn could adjust his aim and fire again but Tharun appeared behind his commanding officer and fired past him, hitting the second guard while his weapon was still only half way out of its holster.

"Come on." Vorn said, waving the other rebels on as he dashed towards the hatchway leading to the frigate. This was blocked by a large blast door and when Vorn tried to open it nothing happened, "Stang, it's sealed." he hissed.

"So what now boss?" Kara asked.

"I'll see if I can override it." Jaysica said. But before she could attempt to access the control circuitry there was a shout from further down the corridor.

"Colonel Larcus sir, it is such a relief to see you still functional." Jeeves called out and Jaysica smiled as Penny zoomed towards her.

"Penny!" she exclaimed, "You're safe."

"Quick, Harvey get over here and open this door." Vorn said and the astromech droid rolled up to the door and plugged into the computer port beside it. The droid then chirped for a few seconds as it interfaced with the computer and the blast door promptly slid open.

"Harvey indicates that the ship is currently empty." Jeeves said, "He also says that he has initialised the life support systems remotely but that propulsion and other key systems remain locked down."

"That's alright Jeeves." Vorn replied, "Tobis can take care of that."

The rebels hurried through the blast door into a passageway that led straight up to an air lock of the *Refractor*, which opened as soon as Vorn pressed the controls.

"Tobis, take Jaysica and Harvey and head for engineering." Vorn said, "Tharun, stay here and shoot anyone that tries to get aboard okay?"

"Got it colonel." Tharun replied.

"Good. Kara, Jeeves, you're with me. Tobis I'll need that board." Vorn said.

"Oh, err, right. Yes." Tobis replied and he handed the control board to Vorn. Then the rebels split up further, heading for where they could be most useful.

Cass turned around in surprise when she heard someone running towards the cockpit and she aimed her blaster through the doorway.

"Whoa!" Mace exclaimed, "I'm on your side remember?"

"Dad!" Cass cried out, "You made it."

"Of course I did. I just doubled back on myself and ducked under that sheet. I bet those stormtroopers ran right past it without even realising. Now the cargo hatch is sealed, so where do we stand?"

"I sent the information to the *Trading Dream* just like I was told to. Then I thought I'd wait for you to get back and tell me what we do next."

"We wait. We need those hunter killer probots and blastboats dealt with just as much as the shuttles do."

Mace said, "Now get out of my seat and let me prep the ship for flight."

One of the control stations in the *Refractor's* bridge was open to reveal the empty slot where the command circuit had been removed from and Vorn rushed up to this and inserted the circuit, pushing it down until he felt it click into place. Then he closed the panel and took out his comlink.

"Tobis the circuit's in. Can you bring the ship online?"

"Err, yes sir. The reactor is already powering up. I'll start the engine firing sequence."

"What about those droids?" Vorn asked.

"Err, I make it ninety seconds." Tobis replied and Vorn smiled.

"It's show time." he said.

"Then let me drive." Kara said as she headed for the helm station and sat down just in time to see the control console in front of her come to life.

"I've got navigation." Vorn said, "I'll plot us a jump to the rendezvous point."

"Excuse me for asking Colonel Larcus sir, but what should I do?" Jeeves asked.

"Stay out of the way for now." Vorn told the droid.

"And stay quiet." Kara added, "I need to be able to concentrate on this. I'm more used to a starfighter than a frigate."

On the bridge of the *Trading Dream*, Captain Kaaro watched the sensor display being used to track the hunter killer probots as they moved between the warships that the rebels were here to steal when all of a sudden one of his comscan operators called out.

"HKs moving out of position." he said and Captain Kaaro saw that all eight of the droids had suddenly altered course, heading towards the shipyard itself and the line of blastboats that was searching for the *Silver Hawk*.

Then he looked around out of the viewports at the front of the bridge and was just in time to see a sudden pulse of blue light as the first of the hunter killer probots opened fire on a nearby blastboat. The ion cannon blast struck the blastboat and it suddenly started to tumble. Then the front of the droid opened and the disabled blastboat was caught in a tractor beam that dragged it into the holding area inside the droid.

"Now!" Captain Kaaro ordered, "Launch the shuttles!"

With the blastboats suddenly occupied with trying to avoid being disabled and captured by the hunter killer droids that had unexpectedly gone rogue, a swarm of small transport vessels of various classes emerged from the *Trading Dream's* hangars and flew towards the rows of lifeless warships. Aboard each of these was a team of rebel technicians, pilot, navigators and commandos ready to seize control of the warships. There were two shuttles assigned to each warship and they landed as close to the bridge and engineering sections of their target as they could, the flight teams in one shuttle rushing to install the control circuit while a team of engineers from the other went to bring the reactors on line.

While the transports were in flight Mace powered up the *Silver Hawk's* ion drive and released the ship's docking clamps. Breaking away from the hull of the shipyard suddenly exposed the section where the hull had been penetrated to vacuum and as fragments of epoxy tumbled through space behind the *Silver Hawk* they were suddenly pushed further away by the sudden escape of air.

"Decompression alarm!" one of the station's command staff called out, "We're venting air."

"Has one of those droids shot at us?" Tannon asked as she started to panic. In rapid succession she had been informed that all of the hunter killer probots that were supposed to be standing guard over the warships that Kurrad Industries had been contracted to take care of had broken away from their pre-programmed patrol stations and then that they had begun to fire on the Imperial navy line that was searching for the suspected smuggling ship. Then a swarm of vessels had been launched from a ship that was supposed to be awaiting repairs that were not responding to any instructions from her flight controllers. Now the shipyard itself had taken damage.

"Negative, the droids are still only firing at the navy vessels. But I am picking up a ship heading away from us. Perhaps the smuggling ship has detached without sealing whatever access point it used first."

"Perhaps? You think?" Tannon responded, "What else could go wrong today?"

Then a klaxon sounded.

"Emergency in dry dock forty-two. Someone is stealing the *Refractor*."

Tannon sighed and bowed her head.

"Oh kriff." she said, "I am so getting fired for this."

"Here goes nothing boss." Kara said as she increased the power to the *Refractor's* engines and the frigate started to move towards the open external dry dock doors.

"Kara, I think they know what we're up to." Vorn said as he saw the doors start to slowly slide shut.

"Don't worry boss. Escaping from a hangar is like running over a big animal that run into the path of a speeder. Best thing to do is speed up." and Kara brought the *Refractor's* ion drives up to full power, propelling the ship out of the dry dock and leaving behind her a massive energy wave that tore through the structure of the shipyard in the local area.

As the frigate made its escape into open space there was a flash of light from dead ahead and for a moment Vorn thought that he was seeing one of the hunter killer probots opening fire. But this was followed by a similar flash from close by to where the first had come from and then there was a third and Vorn realised what he was looking at.

"They've done it." he said, "They're jumping away."

"Great boss. Now how about us?" Kara asked.

"Hang on while I upload the jump co-ordinate into the navigation computer." Vorn said before Mace's voice spoke over the communication system.

"Refractor this is *Silver Hawk*, what's your status?"

"All systems go captain." Vorn answered, "We're almost ready to jump. What about you?"

"We're ready to go as well, just wanted to make sure that you didn't need a pick up."

"No we're fine. We'll see you at the rendezvous point. *Refractor* out." Vorn said and then he looked at Kara,

"Okay Kara you should be good to go." he told her and she smiled.

"Watch this." she said as she threw the lever that controlled the frigates hyperdrive and the stars outside blurred as the ship suddenly jumped into hyperspace.